

# Transforming contracting for rehabilitation on Country

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## Abstract

*Western Australia's Abandoned Mines Program (AMP), funded through the Mining Rehabilitation Fund (MRF), has matured over the past decade from a strategic initiative into a robust on-ground delivery program that generates social, economic and environmental outcomes alongside physical risk reduction at abandoned mine sites. The program's approach to project delivery combines sustained engagement with traditional owners while enhancing local economic participation. From projects adjacent to regional towns to some of Western Australia's most remote locations, the AMP demonstrates how respectful relationships and innovative contracting can create meaningful pathways for Indigenous employment, training and local business involvement.*

*Across regional and remote areas, the AMP integrates requirements for Indigenous participation and Aboriginal business engagement into all stages of project development and delivery. This approach has enabled skills-based pathways, including on Country training linked to nationally recognised qualifications. Abandoned mine projects such as Ellendale and Safer Shafts for Towns illustrate the strength of this model, where strategic partnerships have delivered high levels of Indigenous employment and accredited operator training while supporting community connection to on Country and long-term capability building.*

*Central to AMP's practice is a commitment to relationships built on trust, time and transparency. Meaningful information sharing, open communication and consistent engagement with elders and Aboriginal organisations support early identification of local priorities and contribute to strengthened project outcomes. This collaborative model demonstrates how rehabilitation delivered on Country can act as a catalyst for broader social and economic benefits while also ensuring works remain aligned with community expectations and regional development aspirations.*

*This paper reflects on the AMP's growth, lessons learned and the evolving project delivery model. It argues that the AMP offers a compelling pathway for inclusive, future-focused rehabilitation that maintains resource access and security while delivering long-term value for both people and place.*

**Keywords:** *abandoned mines, contracting and procurement, Indigenous participation, mine closure, on Country delivery, rehabilitation*

## 1 Introduction

Western Australia's rich mining history has left a legacy of abandoned mine features distributed across a wide range of landscapes. These features present ongoing risks to public safety, environmental values and cultural heritage, particularly in regional and remote areas where historic mining activity occurred prior to contemporary closure and rehabilitation standards. Addressing this legacy requires approaches that extend beyond technical risk mitigation to recognise Country as a living cultural system and acknowledge the rights, authority and knowledge of traditional owners.

Traditional owners are Australian Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples with ongoing cultural authority, spiritual affiliations and responsibilities for specific lands and waters. For these communities, Country encompasses more than a physical landscape; it is an interconnected system of land, waters, culture, spirituality and law,

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and the relationships that bind people to place (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS] 2020). In this context, working on Country is not simply operating within a geographic area but involves engaging with these relationships, respecting Indigenous cultural authority and supporting ongoing connection to place.

The Mining Rehabilitation Fund (MRF), established under the *Mining Rehabilitation Fund Act 2012* (MRFA; Government of Western Australia 2012), is an industry levy-funded mechanism that ensures the cost of rehabilitating abandoned mines in Western Australia is not borne by the broader community. The MRF applies specifically to legacy and abandoned mine sites and does not fund rehabilitation associated with active mining operations or approved mine closure plans. Delivered through the Department of Mining, Petroleum and Exploration's (DMPE) Abandoned Mines Program (AMP), it supports a risk-based, prioritised approach to managing abandoned mine sites once all other rehabilitation pathways have been exhausted. Consistent with the Abandoned Mines Policy (Department of Mines and Petroleum [DMP] 2016), this mandate focuses on identifying and mitigating high-priority risks to public safety and the environment rather than undertaking comprehensive mine closure planning. Since its establishment, the AMP has evolved from a technically focused program addressing discrete high-risk features into a mature program delivering complex rehabilitation projects across Western Australia (Department of Mines, Petroleum and Exploration [DMPE] 2025; Read et al. 2024).

As reflected in the MRF Yearly Report 2024–25 (DMPE 2025), this program maturity has been accompanied by a shift in how rehabilitation projects are planned and delivered. With increased MRF capacity and a growing pipeline of works, the AMP now enables place-based rehabilitation that integrates environmental repair, cultural values, stakeholder perspectives and local participation. Projects are developed and delivered in consultation with traditional owners, land managers and regional communities, recognising that rehabilitation undertaken on Country has social and cultural dimensions that extend beyond physical landform stability.

This shift aligns with the principles articulated in the Abandoned Mines Policy (DMP 2016) and the draft refreshed Abandoned Mines Policy 2026 (DMPE 2026a), which emphasise risk-based prioritisation while also requiring consideration of cultural, heritage, environmental and economic values. It also aligns with whole-of-government priorities including the Western Australian Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy (Government of Western Australia 2021) and related procurement policies (Department of Treasury and Finance 2025; Department of Energy, Mines, Industrial Regulation and Safety 2024), which seek to expand Aboriginal economic participation and support the growth of Aboriginal businesses through government contracting. Together these policy settings provide the enabling framework for the AMP to embed Indigenous participation across planning, procurement and delivery.

Central to this evolution has been the use of contracting as the primary mechanism through which Indigenous participation is operationalised. Rehabilitation contracts increasingly incorporate requirements for Indigenous employment, training and Aboriginal business engagement, supported by sustained relationships with traditional owners and Aboriginal organisations. In practice, contractors become delivery partners, responsible not only for technical rehabilitation outcomes but for working respectfully on Country, providing culturally safe workplaces and supporting capability development aligned with community aspirations.

The AMP's approach to engagement and delivery is informed by ethical principles consistent with the AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS] 2020). While the AMP is not a research program, its work on Country involves sustained interaction with Indigenous knowledge systems, cultural authority and community priorities. Accordingly, program delivery emphasises Indigenous self-determination, respect for leadership structures, transparency in decision-making and the pursuit of enduring benefits, rather than short-term or transactional engagement.

## 2 Evolution of the Abandoned Mines Program: from policy intent to on-ground delivery

The AMP, launched in 2015, was established to operationalise the state's response to the legacy of abandoned mine features across Western Australia, where more than 150 years of mining activity has resulted in tens of thousands of features posing risks to public safety, the environment and surrounding land use. Enabled under the MRFA, the program was intentionally structured as a long-term initiative, with early delivery constrained by the gradual accumulation of industry levy contributions required to enable sustained on-ground works. As the MRF balance grew, the program progressed from an initial set of pilot projects towards a broader portfolio of rehabilitation works across regional Western Australia.

The early Abandoned Mines Prioritisation Framework developed in accordance with the objectives and principles of the Abandoned Mines Policy (DMP 2016), drew on the Abandoned Mines Inventory, comprising more than 190,000 abandoned mine features (Ormsby et al. 2003), to identify and compare safety and environmental risks. As discussed in Read et al. (2024), retrospective appraisal identified divergence between prioritisation outputs and the sites ultimately progressed to delivery. This divergence reflected practical considerations associated with developing cost-effective and impactful projects around individual high-risk features, particularly where multiple features of the same risk category (e.g. shafts) were present and better addressed through aggregated or site-based rehabilitation approaches.

As the scale and complexity of the AMP increased, these observations prompted a formal review of the prioritisation approach in 2024. The revised framework retains a strong focus on public safety and environmental risk while more explicitly accommodating cultural, social and economic considerations relevant to rehabilitation on Country, as well as practical delivery constraints. This provides a more transparent and robust basis for sequencing rehabilitation works across the AMP's contemporary portfolio, which by 2025 comprised 9 active project locations, investigative works and projects in planning across regional Western Australia.

Over the past decade, stakeholder engagement has become a central driver of project success within the AMP (DMPE 2025). Sustained engagement with traditional owners and local communities has evolved alongside the program, shaping project scope, sequencing and delivery approaches rather than being treated as a discrete or ancillary activity. This maturation has enabled the AMP to support local opportunities through Aboriginal business participation, on Country employment and training outcomes, while strengthening alignment with community priorities and reducing delivery risk in complex and remote contexts.

This progression aligns with global leading practice articulated in the International Council on Mining and Metals' Integrated Mine Closure: Good Practice Guide (International Council on Mining and Metals), which emphasises early and continuous stakeholder engagement, integration of social considerations, and risk-opportunity assessment throughout the life cycle of mine closure and rehabilitation activities.

## 3 Indigenous participation as a core program principle

The AMP integrates Indigenous engagement across all phases of project development: planning, procurement, contracting, execution and post-work evaluation. This integrated approach is consistent with emerging research demonstrating that Indigenous-led and Indigenous-partnered land management can strengthen rehabilitation outcomes, improve cultural alignment and enhance long-term ecological stewardship when engagement is sustained, well-resourced and embedded within delivery models (Barnes et al. 2020; Barnes et al. 2025).

Consistent with the AMP strategy (DMPE 2026b), Indigenous engagement is positioned as a core enabler of effective risk reduction rather than a standalone objective. The strategy emphasises heritage and community considerations as integral to prioritisation, project design and delivery quality, supported by standardised engagement processes, measurable participation outcomes and transparent reporting. Within this

framework, Indigenous participation contributes directly to collaborative delivery, improved project outcomes and strengthened long-term stewardship of rehabilitated sites.

Key mechanisms through which Indigenous participation is operationalised in the AMP include:

- contractual Indigenous participation requirements linked to employment, training and local procurement
- establishment and maintenance of positive relationships with Aboriginal corporations and local cultural authorities
- on Country training pathways linked to nationally recognised qualifications, enabling community members to build competencies relevant to rehabilitation and land management works
- culturally informed work protocols that support heritage protection and, where appropriate, the integration of traditional ecological knowledge alongside Western technical approaches.

These mechanisms directly address longstanding barriers to Aboriginal participation in mining and rehabilitation identified in national studies, including limited access to place-based employment pathways, episodic or late-stage engagement, and insufficient recognition of Indigenous land management expertise within technical work scopes (Barnes et al. 2020).

## 4 Approach and use of case studies

This paper adopts a practice-based approach to examine how Indigenous participation is operationalised by the AMP through contracting and delivery. Given the applied nature of the program and its evolution over time, case studies are used to illustrate how policy intent and program principles have translated into on-ground outcomes delivered on Country.

Two case studies have been selected to demonstrate the transferability of the AMP's approach across different project scales, contract types and delivery contexts:

1. the Ellendale stage 1 rehabilitation earthworks contract, representing a large-scale, multiseason construction project
2. the Safer Shafts for Towns – Yalgoo geotechnical contract, representing a smaller-scale, short-duration consultancy engagement.

These selected examples were purposefully selected as they reflect contrasting delivery models and procurement contexts while applying a consistent framework for Indigenous participation through procurement, contracting and engagement. Together they provide insight into how participation outcomes can be embedded within both complex earthworks and technical advisory scopes.

Information presented draws on internal program data, contract reporting and project-level outcomes, supplemented by reflective analysis from program delivery. The case studies are not intended to be exhaustive evaluations but rather illustrative cases that demonstrate key mechanisms, contracting approaches, enabling factors and insights from the rehabilitation of abandoned mine features in Western Australia.

## 5 Ellendale case study: transforming rehabilitation delivery on Country

### 5.1 Ellendale site context

The Ellendale case study illustrates how the AMP's contracting framework has been applied in a large-scale, multiseason rehabilitation context.

The AMP Ellendale project is located on Bunuba native title lands in the West Kimberley, approximately 140 km east-southeast of Derby in Western Australia (Figure 1). The former diamond mine comprises 2 pit voids (E4 and E9), waste rock landforms, tailings storage facilities, and associated disturbance from

infrastructure and stockpiling. Mining occurred between 2002 and 2015, with the site declared an abandoned mine site under the MRFA in December 2015 (DMPE 2026c).



**Figure 1 Location of the Abandoned Mines Program Ellendale project**

Ellendale represents the largest single rehabilitation investment delivered through the MRF to date (DMPE 2024; DMPE 2025). The stage 1 rehabilitation earthworks followed the successful completion of the site-wide clean-up and deconstruction works in late 2022 (DMPE 2023) and was focused on addressing significant public safety risks associated with pit voids and landform instability while maintaining access to potential future resources. The staged, multiseason nature of the works created an opportunity to trial and refine contracting approaches that integrate rehabilitation delivery with Indigenous participation and capability development on Country.

## 5.2 Ellendale stage 1 earthworks contract design

The stage 1 earthworks procurement was deliberately structured to integrate technical rehabilitation outcomes with Indigenous participation objectives. As outlined in the MRF Yearly Report 2022–23 (DMPE 2023), tender documentation required proponents to demonstrate capability in large-scale earthworks and landform stabilisation, alongside identification of local spend opportunities within the Shire of Derby/West Kimberley and establishment of an Indigenous trainee program linked to on Country delivery.

Importantly, the scope was developed to allow tenderers to demonstrate what was achievable in practice in relation to Indigenous participation and trainee pathways, recognising that capacity, scale and delivery models can vary significantly across contractors. Rather than prescribing uniform or minimum participation quotas, the AMP's approach enabled tenderers to articulate how Indigenous employment and training could be embedded within their proposed delivery models.

This procurement approach operationalised the participation mechanisms outlined in section 3, embedding Indigenous employment, training and local engagement as core components of contract delivery rather than ancillary requirements. It also reflected lessons from earlier AMP projects, particularly the importance of understanding local market capacity before setting participation requirements.

The scale and duration of the Ellendale stage 1 works, ultimately delivered across 3 dry seasons following flooding in the Fitzroy catchment over the 2022–2023 summer, required proponents to demonstrate their

capacity to engage with traditional owners and local communities, establish and manage a remote site camp, and deliver a complex rehabilitation earthworks contract in a highly seasonal environment.

### 5.3 Contract award and delivery partnership

Following an open tender competitive tender process, the stage 1 earthworks contract was awarded in May 2023 to an Aboriginal-owned business, Buru Rehab Pty Ltd. The contract award reflected alignment between the complexity of the rehabilitation scope and Buru Rehab's demonstrated capability in delivering large-scale rehabilitation works while supporting Indigenous employment, training and cultural leadership.

Site possession was granted under section 10(2) of the MRFA, authorising Buru Rehab and its subcontractors to access the abandoned mine site for the duration of the contract. Mobilisation included the establishment of a self-contained site camp, refurbished airstrip access and on Country induction processes developed in consultation with Bunuba representatives. Flooding across the Fitzroy catchment during the 2022–2023 wet season necessitated resequencing of works and the extension of delivery across 3 dry seasons, reinforcing the importance of a delivery model able to maintain workforce continuity, training progression and community relationships over time.

### 5.4 Stage 1 rehabilitation earthworks delivery outcomes

#### 5.4.1 *Landform rehabilitation*

Across the 2023–2025 delivery period, stage 1 earthworks focused on mitigating immediate safety risks while stabilising priority landforms. Works included construction of approximately 5.4 km of safety bunding around the E9 and E4 pit voids to prevent inadvertent access, and rehabilitation of more than 200 ha of disturbance footprint, including large-scale reprofiling and stabilisation of constructed landforms (DMPE 2024, 2025). These works reduced risk while maintaining access to potential future resources, consistent with the AMP's mandate to manage risk without unnecessarily sterilising mineral value and aligned with the objectives of the AMP.

#### 5.4.2 *Indigenous employment, participation and leadership*

Across the life of the stage 1 contract (2023–2025), Indigenous participation was sustained at levels exceeding typical industry benchmarks. Approximately 37% of all labour hours (around 57,300 hours) were worked by Indigenous personnel across the contract. During peak production periods, Indigenous participation reached 81% of machinery operators, with Indigenous personnel comprising 75% of the project leadership team by 2025. These outcomes reflect deliberate progression of Indigenous personnel into supervisory and leadership roles.

Participation evolved across delivery phases as work transitioned from lower-risk activities, such as safety bund construction and open-area rehabilitation, to more complex, high-intensity landform reprofiling and load-and-haul campaigns. During these phases, experienced operators were temporarily introduced to maintain safety and productivity; however, trained personnel progressively backfilled these roles in subsequent seasons. This staged approach demonstrated the practical value of capability-based progression rather than fixed participation quotas.

Recruitment processes supported by Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation (BDAC), combined with the appointment of respected and experienced Indigenous leaders, contributed to culturally safe work environments. While not all recruits remained employed on the project, reflecting broader social, cultural and personal factors, 8 Bunuba trainees returned for more than one season, indicating sustained workforce engagement. Of these participants, one progressed to full-time employment in the Pilbara, and 5 have continued into the stage 2 contract, demonstrating ongoing employment pathways beyond the stage 1 works.

### 5.4.3 *The Ellendale Bunuba trainee program: evolution and outcomes*

Central to the Ellendale delivery model was the Bunuba Trainee Program, delivered by Buru Rehab in partnership with the BDAC. The program provided culturally informed (where training was under the guidance of Indigenous trainers, with integration of cultural protocols and culturally safe learning environments) on Country training aligned with live rehabilitation works and nationally recognised machinery-operation qualifications.

The Ellendale Bunuba Trainee Program evolved significantly over the life of the stage 1 earthworks contract. Originally designed to support a cohort of 12 Bunuba trainees, the program expanded in response to the scale and duration of works across 3 dry seasons. This created opportunities for both structured traineeships and formal recognition of existing skills among the wider Indigenous workforce.

By project completion, 16 had graduated the Ellendale Bunuba Trainee Program, exceeding initial projections. A further 15 Indigenous personnel attained nationally recognised Certificates of Attainment through upskilling and recognition of competency. In total, 31 Indigenous individuals received nationally recognised machinery-operation certifications, collectively achieving 70 nationally recognised certifications of competency across plant including dozers, excavators, graders, articulated dump trucks and watercarts. Notably, 16 participants attained multiple competencies, reflecting progressive skills development across successive work fronts.

Training delivery adapted in parallel with project evolution. Early works (2023–2024) enabled trainees to develop skills within lower-risk, discrete work packages under close supervision. As operations shifted in 2025 to large-scale load-and-haul activities, trainees were progressively integrated into production crews alongside experienced operators while continuing structured assessment and mentoring.

This model supported capability-based progression, with 8 trainees transitioning into operational roles. It also demonstrates that training outcomes can be sustained within high-productivity environments when supported by appropriate supervisions, mentoring and culturally safe work practices, and while maintaining workforce continuity beyond the project.

### 5.4.4 *Economic outcomes*

Stage 1 also generated substantial local economic benefits, including opportunities for other Aboriginal businesses. Contract reporting indicates 16% of the contract spend (AUD 8.4M) was directed to other Aboriginal businesses in support of delivering the contract. Additionally, 21% of the contract spend was through local Kimberley businesses (AUD 10.9M) over the contract period, supporting supply chain development alongside workforce participation. These outcomes align with broader whole-of-government objectives for regional economic participation and demonstrate how rehabilitation contracts can contribute to local economic resilience when participation is embedded from procurement through delivery.

## 5.5 Program significance and transferability

The success of the Ellendale stage 1 model was not linear. Within the Australian market, relatively few Aboriginal-owned businesses have experience delivering large-scale, complex rehabilitation contracts. Enabling participation therefore required flexibility within project frameworks to support the development of contractor capability, systems and delivery processes over time.

At Ellendale, contractor capability, project management maturity, workforce stability and supporting systems for scheduling, survey verification and claims evolved substantially over the life of the contract. Early challenges, including staffing turnover, inconsistent planning capability and limited survey maturity, were progressively addressed through collaborative governance, strengthened leadership continuity and refinement of delivery systems. These adaptations were integral to sustaining Indigenous participation and training outcomes alongside the safe delivery of complex rehabilitation works.

A key insight from Ellendale is that multiseason, place-based contracts materially enable Indigenous training and employment outcomes. The ability to retain trainees across seasons, progressively increase task complexity

and absorb short-term productivity impacts without compromising safety or contractual performance was contingent on contract structures that prioritised continuity over short-duration delivery efficiency.

The Ellendale stage 1 rehabilitation earthworks contract represents a step change in how abandoned mine rehabilitation is delivered through the AMP. As reflected in the MRF Yearly Reports (DMPE 2024, 2025), Ellendale demonstrates that Aboriginal business-led delivery of complex, large-scale earthworks is achievable when contracting models are deliberately structured to align risk reduction objectives with workforce and business development.

Importantly, this approach has informed subsequent AMP procurement and delivery. The Ellendale rehabilitation earthworks stage 2 contract awarded in November 2025 incorporates defined requirements for Indigenous employment, accredited on Country training and Aboriginal business participation, ensuring continuity of capability development and community benefit. As a result, Ellendale now provides a reference model for delivering sustained, place-based rehabilitation delivered on Country while integrating Indigenous participation, risk reduction and long-term capability building consistent with the AMP strategy (DMPE 2026b).

These outcomes align with broader research demonstrating that fee-for-service environmental rehabilitation provides a culturally resonant and economically meaningful pathway for Indigenous participation in land management and mine rehabilitation when engagement is embedded in delivery models rather than treated as a discrete activity (Barnes et al. 2020).

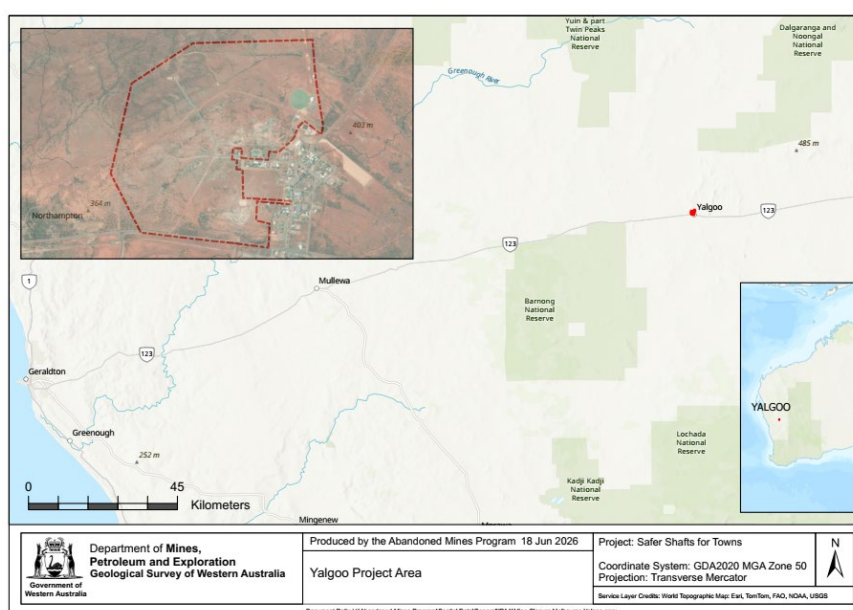
## 6 Safer shafts for towns case study: Yalgoo geotechnical contract

### 6.1 Safer shafts for towns case study context

The Yalgoo case study demonstrates how the same participation framework can be applied within a small-scale, short-duration consultancy contract.

The Safer Shafts for Towns program was established to mitigate public safety risks posed by abandoned mine shafts located in close proximity to regional communities. The project prioritises rehabilitation of abandoned shafts within 1 kilometre of regional centres, recognising the disproportionate risk such features pose to community safety (DMPE 2026c).

Yalgoo was selected as one of the initial pilot locations based on the density and risk profile of abandoned shaft features identified through the Abandoned Mines Inventory (Figure 2; Ormsby et al. 2003).



**Figure 2** Location of Yalgoo

While the technical scope of the Yalgoo project was relatively modest compared with large-scale earthworks programs such as Ellendale, it provided an early and deliberate opportunity for the AMP to test how consultancy-scale contracts could still be structured to deliver meaningful Indigenous employment outcomes.

## 6.2 Contract design and procurement approach

For the Yalgoo shafts geotechnical investigation and rehabilitation options study, the AMP embedded Indigenous employment expectations directly into the competitive tender documentation. Rather than prescribing a rigid participation model, proponents were required to demonstrate how they would provide meaningful on Country employment opportunities for Aboriginal people as part of delivering the technical scope.

Consistent with the Aboriginal Procurement Policy (Department of Treasury and Finance 2025) thresholds and recognising the smaller contract value, the AMP adopted a flexible approach focused on the quality of the opportunity rather than the volume of labour. Tenderers were required to:

- commit to employing Indigenous participants during field-based geotechnical investigations
- identify additional supports required to enable participation, including supervision, mentoring and administration
- demonstrate an understanding of how Indigenous employment would be integrated into the delivery of the engineering scope rather than being treated as an add-on.

This approach applies the same contracting principles at a scale appropriate to the project context.

## 6.3 Role of engagement in enabling employment

A key learning from the Safer Shafts for Towns project was that trust-based engagement requires time. The AMP's early and sustained engagement with Yamatji Southern Regional Corporation prior to contract awarding allowed sufficient time for mutual understanding, information sharing and community feedback. This foundation of trusted engagement enabled the AMP to connect the successful consultant with local Yamatji people, supporting collaboration grounded in shared objectives and improved access to employment opportunities.

Engagement was purposefully reciprocal. The AMP was transparent about:

- the nature and timing of the opportunity
- the skills required
- how employment could be accessed.

At the same time, the AMP sought to understand community capacity, preferences and existing ranger programs, allowing employment opportunities to be aligned with local aspirations and availability.

## 6.4 Employment and capability outcomes

Through the WML Consultants geotechnical contract, WML employed 2 Aboriginal field technicians across separate field campaigns totalling 8 days of on Country work. While modest in duration, these roles were embedded directly within the technical delivery of the project and involved active participation in data collection, feature inspection and identification of disturbed ground.

Upon completion of field activities, WML sought to evaluate what, if any, benefits were realised by extending Indigenous employment opportunities over the relatively short field duration. Written feedback was requested from participating Indigenous field technicians at the conclusion of their contracts. This feedback indicated that participants experienced the work as meaningful, valued their contribution to improving community safety, and identified that the skills and experience gained were transferable to future ranger, environmental and remote area work. Participants also reported feeling welcomed as part of a collaborative

field team and being encouraged to ask questions and share local knowledge, reinforcing the importance of culturally safe, inclusive work environments.

## 6.5 Significance for the Abandoned Mines Program delivery model

The Safer Shafts for Towns – Yalgoo case study demonstrates that meaningful Indigenous participation can be achieved within small, short-duration consultancy contracts when participation is deliberately embedded within technical delivery. This finding highlights that outcomes are not dependent on project scale but on how contracts are designed and implemented.

Firstly, the approach is scalable and repeatable. By clearly articulating participation expectations in procurement and aligning opportunities with local capacity through early engagement, the model can be applied across a range of investigative and advisory scopes that are often excluded from participation initiatives.

Secondly, participation was embedded directly within technical work, rather than treated as an adjunct activity. Indigenous field technicians were engaged as part of the geotechnical investigation, contributing to data collection, feature inspection and site understanding. This integration ensured that participation was meaningful, aligned with project objectives and linked to tangible community safety outcomes.

Thirdly, the case study demonstrates that effectiveness is independent of contract size or duration. While the total quantum of employment was limited, outcomes were enabled through deliberate contract design, transparent communication of opportunities and relationships that supported Aboriginal people to participate in on Country technical work. Enabling measures including facilitated introductions, appropriate supervision and culturally safe field practices supported effective implementation.

Consistent with the Indigenous participation mechanisms outlined in section 3, the Yalgoo case study reinforces that participation outcomes are most effectively achieved through intentional design and early engagement rather than prescriptive quotas, and can be realised across a diverse range of contract types.

## 7 Lessons learned and future opportunities

The Ellendale stage 1 rehabilitation earthworks and Safer Shafts for Towns – Yalgoo case studies demonstrate that contracting design is an effective mechanism for operationalising Indigenous participation within the AMP, regardless of project scale.

Together, the case studies confirm that participation outcomes are enabled through intentional contract design, early engagement and alignment with community capacity.

A key lesson emerging from both case studies is that Indigenous participation is most effective when embedded within core project delivery, rather than treated as an ancillary or compliance-based requirement. At Ellendale, the scale and duration of the stage 1 earthworks contract enabled multiseason employment, workforce continuity and accredited training pathways. In contrast, the Yalgoo geotechnical contract demonstrates that the same participation mechanisms can be applied proportionately within short-duration, consultancy-scale scopes, enabling Aboriginal people to participate directly in technical work delivering immediate community safety benefits.

In both contexts, outcomes were achieved through clearly articulated participation expectations supported by enabling contractual and engagement mechanisms rather than prescriptive quotas.

The case studies further reinforce the importance of early, transparent and reciprocal engagement as a prerequisite for effective and culturally safe and participation. The AMP's approach emphasises clarity of opportunity, scope and timing, alongside respect for local governance structures and decision-making processes. Early relationship building with traditional owners reduced barriers to participation, informed realistic employment models, and supported alignment between project delivery and community aspirations.

Another key insight is the value of integrating training with active on-ground work rather than delivering it in isolation. Embedding training within rehabilitation delivery enables capability development to occur in real

operational contexts, strengthening skill acquisition, retention and progression. Outcomes achieved at Ellendale, combined with transferable technical experience from Yalgoo, demonstrate that this model can be applied across both large-scale and consultancy-based projects, maintaining workforce relevance while supporting longer-term employment pathways. This finding is consistent with national research indicating that fee-for-service environmental and technical work provides a culturally resonant and economically meaningful pathway for Indigenous participation when training is embedded within delivery (Barnes et al. 2020; Barnes et al. 2025).

Looking forward, these findings highlight opportunities to further strengthen rehabilitation delivery on Country through the AMP. Longer-duration, place-based contracts support deeper capability development and sustained economic participation, particularly in remote locations, while smaller investigative and advisory contracts provide scalable entry points for Indigenous employment when deliberately designed. Together, these delivery models demonstrate that participation outcomes are not constrained by project scale but enabled through consistent application of contracting and engagement mechanisms. Further opportunities include strengthening the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems within project delivery and expanding Aboriginal business participation across rehabilitation supply chains.

## 8 Conclusion

The Western Australian Abandoned Mines Program (AMP) demonstrates that rehabilitation delivered on Country can generate meaningful social, cultural and economic outcomes alongside improved safety and environmental performance when Indigenous participation is deliberately embedded within contracting frameworks. As the program has matured it has shifted from isolated, technically focused interventions towards place-based rehabilitation delivered through structured procurement and sustained engagement.

The Ellendale and Yalgoo case studies illustrate how this approach can be applied across both large-scale construction and consultancy-scale projects, confirming that effective Indigenous participation is not constrained by project size but enabled through intentional design.

Overall, the AMP's experience shows that inclusive rehabilitation is driven by contracting frameworks that align risk reduction with Indigenous participation and capability development, providing a practical model for delivering enduring benefits for both communities and landscapes.

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