

12 August 2026

To: ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

**Re: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR
GUIDELINE: SUBTERRANEAN FAUNA**

Introduction

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking feedback on the application of the guidance material for the environmental factor Subterranean Fauna, including the *Environmental Factor Guideline: Subterranean Fauna (2016)* and the *Technical Guidance – Subterranean Fauna Surveys for Environmental Impact Assessment (2021)*.

In particular feedback is sought relating to:

- experiences applying the current guidance documents;
- areas where guidance may be unclear, ambiguous or difficult to implement;
- observations regarding survey expectations and assessment requirements;
- perspectives on the use of habitat connectivity, surrogates and other lines of evidence in environmental impact assessment; and
- opportunities to improve clarity, consistency, proportionality and regulatory efficiency while maintaining environmental protection outcomes.

About AMEC

AMEC is a national industry association representing over 550 member companies across Australia, with over half invested in Western Australia (WA). Our members are mineral explorers, emerging miners, producers, and a wide range of businesses working in and for the industry. Collectively, AMEC's member companies account for over \$100 billion of the mineral exploration and mining sector's capital value.

Mineral exploration and mining make a critical contribution to Australia's economy, directly employing over 314,000 people. In 2025-26, the industry generated \$383 billion in resource exports, invested \$3.95 billion in exploration expenditure to discover future mines (2025), and collectively paid over \$59.4 billion in royalties and taxes.

General Comments

The feedback contained within this submission, is primarily aimed at, and based on, the practical application of the *Technical Guidance – Subterranean Fauna Surveys for Environmental Impact Assessment 2021* (draft technical guidance), based on current practices.

In practice, consultants within the industry report that technical and regulatory guidance provided by the State Government often serves as a minimum expectation rather than a consistent assessment standard. Members have noted that repeated requests for further information are increasingly common, highlighting the need for clearer and more consistent guidance.

The draft technical guidance does recognise uncertainty, adaptive survey design, habitat connectivity and multiple lines of evidence. The draft technical guidance contains flexibility for expert and assessment discretion but does not sufficiently outline the constraint to how that discretion is translated into requests for further information.

Proponents do not complain about receiving a request for further information, more that there are multiple requests. These requests can be from multiple government agencies, throughout the assessment journey.

Survey Expectations and Assessment Requirements

The draft technical guidance does state that “site-specific circumstances may require deviation from the methodology outlined in the document. In the case of any deviation, the appropriate agency or agencies should be consulted to discuss the adequacy of the survey design and techniques.” It also contains detailed explanations of what constitutes basic, detailed and targeted surveys. The draft technical guidance also recognises that significant knowledge gaps remain regarding subterranean fauna biology.

As raised above, members have raised concerns that, although draft technical guidance and other policy documents acknowledge knowledge gaps and deviations in methodologies, in practice there are often multiple rounds of further information requested, and requests for additional surveys frequently arise after the completion of detailed surveys.

The assessment of applications should include application of significant knowledge gaps, not just an acknowledgement of such gaps to be stated within guidance documents. This is not so much a problem identified with the draft technical guidance, but with the implementation and application in decision-making.

Most importantly, survey adequacy should be determined by considering, in addition to the number of sampling events or specimens collected, whether further survey is likely to materially change the assessment outcome.

Evidentiary Thresholds

The review of these documents presents an opportunity to strengthen the application of a risk-based approach, with survey effort proportionate to the environmental values, potential impacts and level of uncertainty. Proportionality to both uncertainty and potential environmental consequence should be applied by regulatory agencies in their assessments. A sliding scale for survey design and implementation could be adopted, recognising differences in:

- level of detail;

- Survey intensity and effort; and
- Number of survey events or phases.

The absence of clear decision thresholds means that survey expectations can continue to expand as new information becomes available.

Overall, the technical guidance is supported, the framework should move towards risk-based, fit-for-purpose survey requirements, rather than progressively increasing survey effort in response to residual uncertainty. The objective should be maintaining strong environmental protection while providing greater certainty and efficiency for proponents.

Recommendations

The draft technical guidance establishes clear objectives and a useful survey framework. The significant gaps of knowledge that can lead to requests for additional information and surveys is acknowledged through-out the draft technical guidance.

The requests for further information should transparently document the reasons for requiring further information or additional surveys. The assessment conclusions should transparently document the available evidence, areas of uncertainty, and management or monitoring. Clearer decision-making criteria would improve consistency, predictability and regulatory efficiency.

Regional context, regional geological mapping and regional-scale surveys are referenced throughout the technical guidance. Regional planning will support the rollout of important projects and improved environmental outcomes. The State Government needs to ensure that the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation is funded to undertake regional planning, as this will ensure that the acknowledged knowledge gaps will be addressed.

Concluding remarks

AMEC welcomes the opportunity to consult on the Environmental Factor Guideline: Subterranean Fauna. How this fauna is surveyed and considered in environmental surveys has been contentious. Ensuring transparent guidance that allows for proportionality and materiality is needed.

If appropriate, we are happy to discuss further with the Department, as the drafting of this guidance is important for our industry.

For further information contact:

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