

Environmental Approvals, Speed Dating and Achieving Happily Ever After

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Abstract

Speed dating has become popular in recent years as a novel way for singles to meet each other. Arguably it increases chances of finding a romantically compatible mate as first impressions are often permanent. Some may find lifelong love after five short minutes.

The environmental approvals process can be analogous with speed dating in the sense that you need to put yourself out there to meet and greet your regulators and get the most for your buck. If it goes well, the reportedly elusive “happily ever after” can be achieved. Legislation and approval procedures rapidly change and to keep abreast of current knowledge, you need to remain attentive and receptive. It pays to find out early in the assessment process who you need to engage with and which officers will have involvement or will be responsible for assessment of your project. The Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) have designated Environmental Officers for Minerals Fields and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) has multiple regional and Perth based divisions that may be involved with individual mining projects. If you are complacent, your date book may not include all the people you need to engage with, you may be at the wrong place wondering what you have done to deserve a no show, or you may miss the bell ringing to tell you that you are moving onto a brand new officer. Life happens and things change.

This presentation will explore the current environmental assessment process in WA for mining projects with lessons learnt in particular from the Sandfire Resources NL DeGrussa Copper Project. Gaining approvals in a timely manner should not be thought of as akin to finding a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. You just need a good treasure map to get you started, a team of committed and flexible people to go looking with, set realistic goals and then hold on tight and enjoy the ride to get to happy ever after.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the environmental assessment process in Western Australia for mining projects that are assessed under the *Mining Act 1978* and Part V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* by the Department of Mines and Petroleum (DMP) and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Lessons learnt from one of the fastest developing mining projects in Australia, Sandfire Resources NL (Sandfire) DeGrussa Copper Project, are highlighted. The staged approach utilised by Sandfire is discussed with focus on regulator consultation during the environmental approvals process and its similarity to speed dating. Speed dating and timely approvals can be successful, but it needs repeated effort, effective communication and perseverance. If it goes well, the reportedly elusive “happily ever after” can be achieved.

Sandfire Resources NL

Sandfire is an Australian resource company with ownership of the DeGrussa Copper Project in Western Australia. In April 2009, Sandfire discovered the high grade DeGrussa volcanogenic massive sulphide (VMS) copper gold deposit in the north-eastern part of their Doolgunna tenement package. Initial drilling returned some of the best intersections seen in the Western Australia mining industry in recent times. Since this time, Sandfire has completed more than 200,000 metres of diamond drilling resulting in delineation of the DeGrussa deposit, the underlying Conductor 1 deposit, the adjacent Conductor 4 and Conductor 5 deposits.

The DeGrussa Project is located in the Doolgunna area approximately 900 kilometres north-east of Perth and 150 kilometres north of the regional mining hub of Meekatharra. The project is being developed as an open pit and underground mine and is set to become Western Australia’s biggest copper mine with total resources of 652,000t of contained copper and 742,000oz of gold. Mine life is estimated to be seven years based on the four high grade VMS lenses discovered to date with potential to extend this life through ongoing exploration.

Sandfire became Australia’s newest copper-gold producer with first ore mined at their DeGrussa Copper Project in February 2012. The DeGrussa Project is one of Australia’s fastest moving mine developments – less than three years after drilling the first discovery hole in April 2009, Sandfire completed definitive feasibility studies, obtained the required environmental approvals and mined its first Direct Shipping Ore (DSO) from their open pit in February 2012.

Development of the DeGrussa Project involved construction of an open pit mine, underground mine, copper flotation plant, Integrated Waste Landform (IWL) including a fully lined Tailings Storage Facility (TSF) and ancillary infrastructure including a borefield, power station, mining camp and airstrip. Construction of the DeGrussa operations including the open pit and underground mine, commenced just two years after the orebody discovery, on 15 April 2011. Construction is on track to be completed by Q3, 2012.

The success of the DeGrussa development can be linked to the close involvement of the Sandfire construction and mining teams to the environmental approvals process. Commitments made through this process were placed within tenders, schedules, policies and procedures and personnel at all levels of the organisation were aware of their environmental obligations.

Staged Approvals

Why was This Approach Taken?

The DeGrussa Project was aimed to be a fast tracked project from exploration to first development and production of saleable product. In the early stages of project development, the environmental team sat down with the Sandfire management team to identify the various components of the project. The timeframes required for construction and operation of each component was understood and a timeline was established for interlinking development. The likely regulatory approval needs for each component, information requirements (scientific and engineering), potential constraints and resources were considered. This led to the decision to use a staged approach to obtain necessary approvals.

Some of the issues that led to the decision to use a staged approach included:

- Requirement to construct a camp early in the project to allow future works to be undertaken in a timely manner. The DeGrussa site is remote and the small exploration camp was insufficient to allow construction of the open cut mine, underground mine and ore processing facilities in the timeframes Sandfire required. Camp construction needed to commence before design for other components of the project were likely to be finalised.
- Granting of tenure had not been completed for all aspects of the project and the timing was not always well aligned with development of environmental assessment applications. Some aspects of the project were split from the more encompassing Mining Proposals because of tenure related issues. Separation of the borefield aspects into separate Mining Proposals allowed later submission of those aspects without delaying assessment of other key aspects.
- Parts of the project were located on previous pastoral leases recently converted to Unallocated Crown Land (UCL) as part of the DEC led pastoral lease buyback. Other parts of the project were on an active pastoral lease. Considerable confusion was encountered regarding the conservation status of the area of UCL given it is currently managed by DEC, but has not had its land use formally changed to any conservation related purpose. This affected the need for Clearing Permits and assessment of Mining Proposals by the Environmental Management Branch (EMB) of DEC as well as by DMP.
- Timeframes to obtain scientific and engineering information necessary to support various applications. Tailings characterisation studies identified potentially acid forming tailings would be produced. This information led to a requirement for detailed engineering for a fully lined TSF. Few facilities of this type had been designed and operated successfully in Australia. The TSF required considerable co-operation between the design engineers, Sandfire project management team, Sandfire operations team and MBS Environmental to ensure a design was developed that would satisfy the full range of requirements during construction, operation

and post closure. The time required to complete this work was identified to be a significant hold point for the project. This led to the decision to separate the TSF construction and operation from other project components for both the Mining Proposal and Works Approval processes.

- Differing information needs of various regulatory agencies. Whilst sufficient details were available for preparation of a Mining Proposal for the copper processing plant, insufficient information was available at the same time for preparation of a Works Approval document. This led to differing subject matter in the Stage 1 and 2 Mining Proposals compared to the Stage 1 and 2 Work Approvals.

Pros

Benefits of the staged development approach were:

- Construction could commence rapidly. This was very important to Sandfire.
- Assessment could occur concurrently to project development on longer lead time items.
- More efficient deployment of resources for the project. The environmental team focused on aspects where work was complete whilst other aspects were still under development.
- It allowed Sandfire access to project funds once key approvals were received.
- Increased project flexibility. As changes were made to some aspects of the project, the outcomes were able to be fed through to the other aspects still under development.

Cons

Difficulties associated with using a staged approach were:

- Defining logical and practical boundaries for each stage and maintaining these across the various applications and regulatory authorities. There needed to be a good reason for separation and this needed to be able to be justified to the project management team and to other stakeholders.
- Regulator apprehension. The large number of assessment documents presented and the status of each was a concern to some, particularly where new people entered the assessment process once it was underway.
- Regulator exhaustion. The staged approach resulted in six separate Mining Proposals, three Works Approval applications and three Clearing Permit applications.
- Staging required preparation of a large number of environmental documents in a relatively short period of time. This placed pressure on both the MBS and Sandfire project teams to ensure all documents were technically correct, addressed various stakeholder concerns and were of a consistently high standard.
- Maintaining consistency across all project documentation. A large number of environmental commitments were made in the various documents. Care was required to ensure these were not contradictory, were applicable to the actual assessment document being prepared, were

achievable and compliance could be tracked by the Operations Environmental Manager during project construction and operation.

- The rapid pace of document development resulted in rework of some documents as documents were being prepared in advance of completion of all technical studies. The large amount of experience in both the MBS and Sandfire teams allowed anticipation of likely engineering and environmental requirements, however this needed to be backed up by results of scientific and engineering studies. Changes to other aspects of the project design occasionally had ramifications resulting in the need to rework some documents.
- Ability to be highly flexible, responsive and accommodating to project change.

This detailed planning could be compared to defining what you want in a potential mate. Speed dating, internet dating or a blind date may be more successful if you know what you want. Some people may start the process with no idea; it may fizzle out quickly due to different ideas and wants. Some people may not know the boundaries. Often it is just good to get out there and talk to people so you can work out what you want. Well prepared ideas can be engineered into strategic plans that can be implemented into successful relationships and projects!

Outcome

Table 1 summarises the approvals documentation prepared, dates submitted and when approvals were received. To date there have been six Mining Proposals, three Clearing Permits (and one addendum) and three Works Approvals approved.

Table 1: Sandfire Resources NL DMP and DEC Approvals

Approval Type	Date Submitted	Date Approved
Mining Proposals		
Accommodation Camp and Borrow Pit	8/12/2010	21/03/2011
Stage 1: Open pit, underground mine, boxcut, waste rock dump, power plant, fuel farm, workshops, processing plant, minor rock dump, administrative buildings, concrete batch plant, crusher, water storage facilities, dewatering infrastructure, explosives magazine, landfill and access/haul roads.	21/12/2010	14/04/2011
Stage 2: Tailings Storage Facility (TSF) within an Integrated Waste Landform (IWL) and associated tailings pipeline, paste plant, ROM Pad, process water pond.	3/05/2011	3/08/2011
Airstrip	13/05/2011	26/08/2011
Borefield	10/08/2011	26/08/2011
Borefield Addendum	30/09/2011	29/11/2011
Clearing Permits		
DeGrussa Project Development (242 ha)	10/10/2010	17/02/2011
Amendment to DeGrussa Project Development (302 ha – an increase of 60 ha)	11/05/2011	14/07/2011
Airstrip (70 ha)	13/05/2011	14/07/2011
Borefield (18 ha)	25/07/2011	22/09/2011
Work Approvals		
Exploration Landfill	4/12/2010	11/11/2010
Stage 1: DeGrussa landfill, crusher, sewerage, dewatering, batch plant.	8/12/2010	7/07/2011
Stage 2: Processing plant, tailings pipeline and TSF, paste plant.	6/05/2011	27/01/2011

The net result of the staged approach was that Sandfire achieved its stated objective of rapid development of the DeGrussa Project. Obtaining necessary environmental approvals did not cause delay to project schedules and allowed the project development team to commence construction on time and with clear and effective environmental requirements.

Regulator Interaction

Is it Needed in the World of Online Submissions?

We often under estimate the importance of meeting people in person as our world is increasingly moving towards online social interaction. Many are keen to put a profile up on internet dating websites, but not so keen on speed dating. Putting yourself out there to meet people requires taking a risk on personal interaction. It can be exciting and daunting at the same time. Meeting people face to face often provides greater benefits in the long term, allows us to interpret tone and body language, and minimises the risk of misunderstanding between both parties. This is just as important for regulatory interaction as for dating.

Regulator interaction is paramount to obtaining any environmental approval and it is important to meet regulators well before the submission point. DEC only accepts online applications for Works Approvals, however you can submit Mining Proposals to DMP either electronically through the Environmental Assessment and Regulatory System (EARS) or in hard copies.

DEC requires the submission of an Application Enquiry Form with a brief summary of the proposed works. Once endorsed, a Scoping Meeting is required with the DEC licensing officer, preferably face to face in their region, to discuss the main issues and the content of the application to be submitted.

DMP does not require any formalised form prior to submission of a Clearing Permit or Mining Proposal, but it is invaluable to meet (or at the very least, phone) to discuss the proposal with the Environmental Officer responsible for the region. This enables the Environmental Officer to provide input into the content of the proposal and importantly develops a relationship early in the process.

Greenfields versus Existing Operations

Regulatory interaction is particularly important for emerging companies such as Sandfire which developed from an exploration to a mining company and for greenfields projects where introduction of the project to DMP and DEC is valuable to enable them to understand the project they may assess. This may not be as important with existing operations where an existing relationship with regulatory officers is in place. With the constant change in personnel in both regulatory agencies and mining companies, it is valuable to discuss and document any proposed amendments or expansion with Environmental Officers to understand future plans.

Who Do I Consult With?

Once the likely approval needs were identified for Sandfire, a list of stakeholders was developed. These included regulatory agencies (both regional and Perth based officers), local government, pastoral lease holders, adjoining tenement holders, indigenous stakeholders, Main Roads, Port Authorities and local communities potentially affected by road transport of product. Individuals within each stakeholder group were contacted to confirm likely interest in the project and to establish a way for ongoing contact. Correct identification of stakeholder's interest in the project is important, just as selecting a potential mate and making sure they are interested, is important too.

One of the challenges for Sandfire was communication between different groups within regulatory agencies. Regulatory agencies, particularly DEC, are large, with individual branches or divisions having different responsibilities, perspectives and located in geographically different locations. Differing advice was sometimes received during the consultation process and changes in requirements over time did occur. Understanding and managing engagement between and within regulatory agencies can be a challenge for proponents.

Who Does the Consultation and How?

It can often be complex determining who conducts the primary stakeholder consultation with regulators: project owners, consultants or both. There is no right or wrong answer. A designated person was chosen to streamline regulator contact to create consistent dialogue for the Sandfire project. It is important to be open and honest with regulators at all times, and be consistent and transparent. Senior managers within Sandfire remained active in the consultation process and worked closely with MBS and regulators to ensure information needs were satisfied and the assessment process progressed smoothly.

The distance and time required to meet regional regulators face to face can be difficult for people based in Perth. There are short-cuts around this in today's technological world with email, tele-conferencing and video-conferencing very real options. Whilst these methods of communication can be employed, the added benefits of making the effort to visit regulators cannot be underestimated.

Sandfire used a range of consultation methods during the environmental assessment process including face to face meetings, formal presentations, written correspondence, one to one phone calls and tele-conferences. Less formal consultation and communication methods were able to be employed once relationships had been established and individual regulatory officers became more involved with project details.

Ensuring you are understood in speed dating and in the work place is vital. First impressions often do count, so aim to connect.

Regulators can be involved with many significant projects at one time. They can, and do, get overwhelmed with the volume of documents to assess, particularly when a staged approach is used and a large number of documents are received. It is unreasonable to expect regulators to know and understand intricate details of each specific project instantaneously. Like getting to know someone on a date, be keen, but ensure you provide space for information absorption.

The Person I Deal with Keeps Changing

Significant time can be spent liaising with regulators to develop very effective working relationships with individual officers. However, the bell keeps ringing during speed dating and it can also during project development and assessment of applications. Sometimes different officers get assigned to a project mid-way through an assessment, due to change in jobs, fieldwork requirements, leave and simply workloads. Communication and flexibility are the best way to get through these periods. You must be prepared to take the time to brief the new person as best you can regarding the project and its current status, and work towards developing another working relationship. Like dating, speed or otherwise, you may make a lot of new friends and improve your skills along the way. Developing effective working relationships with individual officers that may or may not be present for the duration of a project assessment is never a waste of time or effort.

Benefits of Regulatory Interaction

When a staged approach to environmental assessment was discussed with Sandfire, the need for effective and regular stakeholder interaction was paramount. Benefits of regular regulator consultation were:

- Regulators were given the opportunity to understand the scope of the full DeGrussa Project prior to any impact assessment documents or approval applications being submitted. Given the large number of assessment documents and applications this was important.
- The proposed staging and reasons behind this were able to be clearly explained. This included discussion of the likely timing of submission of the various documents and applications. This assisted regulators with resource management (people and time) for the project and modifications to the proposed staging were able to be made prior to submission.
- Sandfire was able to better understand regulator requirements and likely issues from all the regulatory agencies prior to document submission. This minimised the need for rework of documents after initial submission and minimised the need to formally submit additional information to clarify regulator concerns.
- Assessment timeframes were better understood early on in the project development process and were able to be factored in to the project development schedule by Sandfire.
- Consistent consultation with regulators minimised duplication between departments as the communication process aimed to inform discussion and assessment outcomes.
- Sandfire and their consultants were able to develop effective working relationships with the large number of regulators. Given the number of assessment documents, applications and the complexity of some project components, this was essential to achieve the rapid project development Sandfire aimed for. The open and honest communication allowed development of trust between the proponent and regulators. Sandfire aimed to maintain this relationship during project construction and operations to ensure environmental compliance.

Lessons learnt from Sandfire Resources

Changes in Application of Legislation

Changes in the interpretation and implementation of legislation by regulators are not always well documented or publicised. Prior to mid 2010, Mining Proposals could be approved whilst Clearing Permit applications were still under assessment. This has since changed and the initial Mining Proposal for development of the accommodation camp was not able to be approved until the Clearing Permit was assessed and approved. The significant difference in assessment timeframes between Clearing Permit applications (60 to 90 days) and Mining Proposal submissions (30 days) meant that the project schedule needed to be revised to ensure Clearing Permit Applications were submitted well in advance of Mining Proposals to minimise the risk of delays.

The level of project definition needed to develop a project footprint for a Clearing Permit application is much lower than what is needed for a Mining Proposal. For this reason, Clearing Permit applications should be submitted well in advance of Mining Proposals to minimise the risk of project delays.

Differing Assessment Timeframes

DEC work towards a 60 day assessment period for Works Approvals upon online receipt of applications. This does not include the initial application enquiry form or the scoping meeting which ideally should be held in the regional DEC office. There are differences in regions – for example the Midwest office has an internal target of 45 days to assess applications, whilst experience has shown that the Karratha office which handles about 75% of the state's Works Approvals finds it very difficult reaching the 60 day timeframe. There are several “stop the clock” scenarios, including request for more information and invoicing. Invoices can be emailed directly rather than posted, saving valuable time, especially if funds are available to pay application fees by credit card over the phone.

DMP work towards a 30 day assessment period for Mining Proposals, however, it is common to receive feedback that the submission requires further information, or on more complex issues, submission of a revised document. EARS does not allow you to submit revised Mining Proposals online - all revisions must be submitted as two hard and electronic copies with a cover letter proforma. Complex Mining Proposals, such as the Stage 1 and 2 Mining Proposals for Sandfire, required several revisions, partially due to further requests for more information from DMP once initial information was supplied.

Involvement of DEC (EMB) in Mining Proposals and Clearing Permits When on Ex Pastoral Leases

The DeGrussa Project was largely situated on the previous Doolgunna Pastoral Station. The pastoral lease was purchased by the State in 2000 with assistance from the Federal Government with the intent of using the land for conservation purposes. Since purchase of the lease, the land zoning had been changed from Pastoral to Unallocated Crown Land. DEC was managing the land for conservation in practice and the area had been identified as the proposed Doolgunna Conservation Park, but no legal designation of the land for conservation use had been made. No information was publically available to identify why the Doolgunna Conservation Park was proposed by DEC and what the environmental values of significance were in the area Sandfire was proposing to mine.

Discussions between DMP Land Titles and DEC Environmental Management Branch identified conflicting political desires for the land in question. This resulted in confusion in the Mining Proposal assessment process as the role of the Environmental Management Branch of DEC and the applicability of conservation requirements to a mining project were unresolved. A significant complicating factor was the land clearing exemptions applicable to approved mining projects in Regulation 5, Item 20 (Low impact or other mineral or petroleum activities 10 hectare per tenement per financial year) exemption of the *Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation)*

Regulations 2004 are not able to be used for a conservation area. Schedule 5, Clause 2 of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* defines a conservation area as “*land or waters reserved, protected or managed for the purpose of, or purposes including, nature conservation*”. This resulted in additional Clearing Permit applications being required for the borefield tenements. Whilst preparation of the additional Clearing Permit applications was not technically difficult, the 60 to 90 day assessment process had not been factored into the project development schedule and prevented the Mining Proposal being approved until the Clearing Permit was assessed and granted.

If a project is located on an ex-pastoral lease purchased by DEC, the land tenure should be understood. Knowing the level of involvement of DEC in actual land management and consultation with EMB to determine the application of exemptions to Clearing Permit requirements is essential.

Formal Referral by the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA)

The Office of the Environmental Protection Authority (OEPA) and DMP have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on a number of criteria used to determine if a Mining Proposal requires referral to the EPA for assessment under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. However, there are some other issues that are not clear whether referral is required. It is therefore up to the proponent whether to self-refer or hedge that no Decision Making Authority (DMA) will refer the project if assessed under the *Mining Act 1978*. Sandfire encountered this issue as the location of their project on what DEC considered land managed for conservation. The legal tenure of the land is Unallocated Crown Land and Land Titles within DMP considered DEC to have no legal tenure over the land. Early consultation with the OEPA had indicated the EPA had no interest in formally assessing the DeGrussa project under Part IV of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. As this was verbal feedback from a meeting with the Chairman of the EPA, and Sandfire had no formal written advice from the EPA, considerable discussion resulted between DEC and DMP about the need to make a formal referral to the EPA and if so, who this would be done by. Subsequent to DEC (EMB) raising the proposed conservation park issue, the need for involvement of the EPA was revisited at a further meeting between Sandfire and the EPA. Further liaison with OEPA, DMP and DEC resulted in a decision that the project could be assessed under the *Mining Act 1978* and Part V of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. The lack of written documentation from the EPA confirming their view that formal assessment was not required contributed to delays and conflict between other regulatory agencies. Careful considerations should be given to the need to submit a Referral Document to the EPA when potential issues may arise that the current MOU is not clear.

Role of DEC (EMB) in Assessment of Mining Projects

Some sensitive issues arose during the Mining Proposal and Clearing Permit assessment for Sandfire as DMP requested DEC comment on the application. DEC stated that Sandfire had not sufficiently liaised with their department. This was not intentional – Sandfire had liaised extensively with the Midwest Office of DEC regarding their larger Doolgunna Project (exploration) and had met with them to identify their intention to develop the DeGrussa Project (mining). This included development of a

Conservation Management Plan reviewed by DEC for their exploration activities on the former Doolgunna Pastoral Lease area.

Sandfire had not identified DEC (EMB) as a stakeholder for development of their DeGrussa Project. DEC environmental impact assessment officers in the Midwest Office had not notified Sandfire that consultation with EMB would also be required. Sandfire subsequently found out during the Mining Proposal assessment process that in the case of DEC managed land or where there are sensitive ecological issues, it is important to liaise with the region for exploration activities, but once the decision is made to develop the project into a mining project, it is important to liaise with both EMB and the region. Proponents should not assume information presented to one part of a regulatory agency is shared with other branches or officers. If in doubt, include DEC (EMB) in regulatory consultation unless they notify you otherwise that they do not wish to participate.

Involvement of Environmental Professionals Early in Project Planning and Scheduling

Sandfire achieved its aggressive project development objectives because they recognised the need to involve environmental professionals and engage regulators early in the project development process. Just like dating, sometimes you need to seek the help of friends, put your profile on the net or do something “outside the square” like speed dating. Environmental professionals are often unique in that they have a broad understanding of an entire project rather than just individual components like the mine or processing plant. For the DeGrussa Project, involvement of environmental professionals extended beyond just having input into project development and environmental assessment schedules.

Sandfire actively engaged external environmental professionals with extensive mining, specifically copper mining experience. This allowed focused baseline and engineering studies to be commissioned concurrent with resource definition. Results of these were used as part of the project planning.

Sandfire actively involved environmental personnel in development of environmental requirements at the design stage for the processing plant and IWL including the TSF. Many companies engage environmental professionals too late in the process, when designs are largely complete rather than contributing to a list of specifications for the design engineers. Sandfire ensured environmental personnel were also involved in review of Plant and TSF designs to ensure the required environmental outcomes had been achieved and the manner of achievement was practical, effective and infrastructure was likely to be immediately operated after construction was complete.

Recruitment of an Operations Environmental Manager as the project progressed continued the close involvement of environmental professionals in all facets of project. The broad knowledge of the project allowed the Environmental Manager to identify competing or conflicting resource needs and

potential failures to meet regulatory requirements of voluntary commitments made during the environmental assessment process. The close working relationship between the Operations Environmental Manager and MBS personnel concurrently developing assessment documents and applications ensured all applications were relevant, practical and commitments could be achieved.

Conclusion

A key component of successful work and relationships revolves around communication - talking and listening. Personal interactions between the project team, key stakeholders and regulators are critical to ensure sound project development. The most logical way to obtain a solution may not always be the best way. The final scenario is usually one that takes into account stakeholder views through early engagement to determine and anticipate their needs.

Consistent engagement with follow up and accurate documentation of events will ensure one can keep abreast of changes – because they will happen. Be flexible with changes whilst staying as close as possible to original timeframes. Be adaptable, because sometimes things happen that blow out timeframes and always allow a “buffer” in case blow-outs do happen.

Sandfire was successful in its environmental assessment experience. Necessary approvals were obtained in a timely manner and just as importantly, commitments made to obtain the approvals are being successfully implemented during construction and early stages of the operation. The environmental outcomes Sandfire wants to achieve are being achieved. Success doesn't just happen – there was hard work and commitment from Sandfire, its consultants and regulators. Whilst the similarity to speed dating may seem flippant, when the timeframe from first development to first product exported from site is considered, it can be seen that for this project it was speed dating, and it worked!

Gaining approvals in a timely manner should not be thought of as akin to finding a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. You just need a good treasure map to get you started, a team of committed and flexible people to go looking with, set realistic goals and then hold on tight and enjoy the ride to get to happy ever after.