

Development and permitting of an underground mine at Cowal Gold Operations

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ABSTRACT

The GRE46 Underground Project lies beneath the environmentally unique and culturally endowed shore of Lake Cowal. The ore body is open both along strike and at depth and is currently defined to a strike length of 1.5km and depth of 800m. The Warraga exploration decline commenced in March 2019 and represents the first stage of the Project, which is expected to underpin production at Cowal Gold Operations (CGO) for a period exceeding 10 years.

Mining operations at Cowal commenced in 2005, following a period of over 20 years of exploration and permitting. In 2015 Evolution Mining (Cowal) Pty Limited (Evolution) acquired the operation from Barrick Gold Ltd (“Barrick”). Barrick had a life of mine plan that anticipated a cessation of operations in 2024 at a processing rate not exceeding 7.5 Mtpa. Evolution have grown the regional endowment considerably and have a currently approved mine life out to 2032 with a currently approved maximum processing rate of 9.8 Mtpa.

This paper examines the history, current status and future path of one part of that plan, the GRE-46 Underground Project. Topics for discussion include discovery, Mineral Resource growth under different ownership philosophies, planning, permitting and commissioning of an exploration decline and bulk sampling project, and integration with the possible future mine.

Environmental sensitivities affecting regulatory approvals, timeframes, technical challenges, opportunities and solutions are discussed, along with the path required to fast-track production from the existing 14Mt, 1.4Moz Mineral Resource while complying with the requirements of modern, responsible project development stewardship.