

# **SCOTTISH COMMUNITIES AND TRANSITION MINERAL MINING**

Summary and recommendations for policy makers



**January 2025**

# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

In a collaborative study by Friends of the Earth Scotland and Edinburgh University, interviews were conducted with people from Scotland on their concerns about transition mineral mining happening near them. We spoke to people in Aberdeenshire, Dumfries and Galloway and the Highlands, where mining companies have started looking for transition minerals.

## Key recommendations

- 1** All policy makers, especially Councillors, MSPs and MPs representing local communities affected by transition mineral mining in Scotland, must take their responsibilities to communities seriously. They must represent the interests of their communities, not the companies that seek to profit from them.
- 2** MSPs should call on the Scottish Government to develop due diligence guidance for mining companies operating in Scotland that puts early, comprehensive and clear community consultation at the center of decision making. Local Development Plans should include a requirement to consult throughout mining projects, including consultation at the exploration phase.
- 3** The UK Government must amend its Critical Mineral Strategy to prioritise demand reduction and community consultation.

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**I feel like the whole community is in the dark.**

Aberdeenshire local person

**The lack of honesty and openness that the company displayed did them no favours whatsoever.**

Local resident from Dumfries and Galloway

**I think the Council has a responsibility. I think the Scottish Government has a responsibility. I think the UK Government has a responsibility.**

A local person from Ellon, Aberdeenshire

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# DEMAND FOR TRANSITION MINERALS IS GROWING

Transition minerals, such as lithium, cobalt and nickel, are required for the energy transition away from fossil fuels. Demand for these minerals is rapidly increasing globally as they are required for green technologies, such as wind turbine motors and batteries for electric vehicles. Demand often outstrips supply so disruptions, price volatility and geopolitical concerns are common. Expanding domestic supply is a key priority in the UK's 2023 Critical Mineral Strategy and the suitability of sites in Scotland have been reviewed by the British Geological Survey.

Globally, mining for transition minerals creates serious and extensive social and environmental harm. People across the world are fighting to resist corporate powers seeking to extract the valuable minerals from the land they live on.

In Scotland, although transition mineral mining is only at the exploration stage, this research shows that the pattern of harm is already being repeated here. We document the concerns of communities facing transition mineral mining exploration in Scotland.

## SCOTTISH CASE STUDIES

### Arthrath, near Ellon, Aberdeenshire

Set up in 2018, Scottish company Aberdeen Minerals Ltd. are exploring for nickel, copper and cobalt. In 2024, an international mining company called Central Asia Metals Plc invested £3m, making it the largest shareholder in the company. Central Asia Metals Plc was involved in a mining dam failure in Macedonia in 2020.

Exploratory drilling is focused on the Arthrath site, near Ellon, which is part of the largest nickel deposit site in the UK.



*Aberdeen Minerals Ltd. exploratory drilling site in Arthrath, Aberdeenshire in February 2023*



## SCOTTISH CASE STUDIES

### Blackcraig, Dumfries and Galloway



*Community Council members on a site visit to the Dumfries and Galloway mining site*

British company, JDH Exploration, holds three exploration licenses in Dumfries and Galloway over an area of approximately 750 km<sup>2</sup>. In 2022, the company was taken over by Walkabout Resources, an Australian based mining company with projects in Tanzania, Namibia and Northern Ireland. In Scotland, JDH/Walkabout Resources are looking for lead, zinc, copper, nickel, gold and silver.

The site is found within Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere. The local group 'Galloway against mining' has over 1000 members.

### Gairloch near Loch Maree, Northwest Highlands

Canadian company, Galantas Gold are conducting exploratory drilling for zinc, copper, lead, silver and gold in Gairloch, in the Highlands. The site is found within the Wester Ross Biosphere management zone and nearby Loch Maree is a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a National Nature Reserve.

The Ross-shire Journal reported that residents felt "kept in the dark" and that Gairloch Community Councillors said they had hoped for better communication from the company.

# OUR FINDINGS

## Companies are not engaging with communities

Planning policy is set out in the National Planning Framework 4, which states that “throughout the planning system, opportunities are available to engage in development planning and decisions about future development.” This engagement “should be early, collaborative, meaningful and proportionate”. However, Scottish communities feel consultations about local transition mineral exploratory drilling are not conducted in a meaningful and open way. This has led to feelings of disempowerment, isolation and community divisions.

For many locals, witnessing exploration activity happening was the first they knew of mining plans. Exploratory drilling is not usually considered a ‘development’ and therefore there is no legal requirement for planning permission and consultation. However, communities feel excluded and disempowered if they are not consulted before any drilling happens. Even when the activity stops, people worried that companies might come back.

## Politicians are failing to support their constituents

Planning, including for mining, is a fully devolved matter in Scotland but the strategic approach around minerals for the energy transition is led by the UK Government. Politicians appear to be shifting blame to each other rather than addressing the concerns of their constituents. Scottish communities feel that their representatives are not supporting them in their concerns about the impacts of local transition mineral mining.



**The lack of honesty and openness that the company displayed did them no favours whatsoever.**

A local resident from Dumfries and Galloway

**Somehow these companies have to come to the community and say just on a very basic level: we are thinking about this. Not doing all this work for two years and then coming along and saying, we’re going to do this. It automatically gives a feeling of disempowerment.**

A local person from Newton Stewart, Dumfries and Galloway

**We’re just left with uncertainty [...] getting on for three years now.**

A community member from Dumfries and Galloway

**They [the community] don't know what's going on, and I think the Council has a responsibility. I think the Scottish Government has a responsibility. I think the UK Government has a responsibility.**

A local person from Ellon, Aberdeenshire



## Many local people think transition mineral mining will not benefit them

Most community members interviewed opposed transition mineral mining in their area. They understood that mining can exacerbate existing injustices around land ownership and job opportunities. It is clear to them that developments are unlikely to benefit them.

People cared about damage to the natural landscape, environmental degradation and the impacts on tourism. Communities are concerned about mining companies not properly managing waste and toxic substances, which could damage nearby (often protected) waterways and the wider ecosystems.

## Scottish communities want fairer resource use

Scottish communities understand that international resource justice relates to Scotland's excessive material consumption which fuels violations to communities and nature across the world. Many people see demand and consumption reduction as the obvious solution.

People in Scotland and internationally where transition mining is happening are aware that 'green' extraction can be just as problematic as any other form of extraction because it operates in the same system that prioritises economic growth above all else. There are parallels with what people in Scottish communities are saying and others facing conflict from transition mineral mining across the world.

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### The only benefits are for landowners.

A local person from Dumfries and Galloway

**There'd be a general concern that whatever the promises a company makes, they do tend to be a little bit lax on some of those things [environmental/health standards].**

A local person from Wester Ross, the Highlands

### From the international community:

**The problem when you open the door to these companies is that you never know when they might find a place where they want to open up a mine, and that can change your life completely, and the best way to prevent that from happening is to prevent drilling from happening.**

Interviewee from a Spanish community facing transition mineral mining conflict

### Only those who are rich get richer.

Interviewee from a Filipino community facing transition mineral mining conflict

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# CONCLUSIONS

Transition mineral mining exploration is happening in Scotland and communities feel they are not being properly consulted or supported in dealing with its impacts. People report feeling intimidated, disempowered and isolated by improper consultation and engagement from the companies involved.

Local people feel ignored by their political representatives. This is not helped by the lack of clarity on responsibilities between the Scottish and UK Government.

Scottish communities feel that they are not getting a fair share of the benefits from mining activity. They do not trust mining companies to respect nature and people.

People understand that Scotland's excessive material consumption is linked to international resource injustices, even when this is in the name of the green transition, and many are in favour of reducing demand.

Friends of the Earth Scotland are calling for:

- **All policy makers to take their responsibilities to communities facing transition mining conflicts seriously,**
- **Early, comprehensive and clear consultation with communities from companies and requirements from policy makers to do so,**
- **The UK Government to amend its Critical Mineral Strategy to prioritise demand reduction and community consultation.**

This briefing was written by Friends of the Earth Scotland.

For more information, visit [www.foe.scot](http://www.foe.scot) or contact [info@foe.scot](mailto:info@foe.scot)

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