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Critical minerals giant TNG announces major change to Darwin Harbour project

Critical Minerals giant TNG has announced a major change to its major project – junking plans for a TIVAN processing plant at Darwin Harbour and building a green hydrogen plant instead.

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CRITICAL Minerals giant TNG has announced a major change to its major project – junking plans for a TIVAN processing plant at Darwin Harbour and building a green hydrogen plant instead.

TNG announced on Monday the processing plant will instead be built at the company's Mt Peake mine site, about 230km north of Alice Springs.

The change followed a review which identified a gas processing model that would allow the company to bypass Darwin Harbour and return to its first choice site.

The \$800m Mount Peake vanadium-titanium-iron mine is the largest critical minerals project in the world and has federal and Territory government major project status.

The project is forecast to generate 500 jobs during mine construction and more than 200 jobs during operation of the mine, plus another 1200 jobs during construction and 400 refinery jobs.

Since submitting its environmental impact statement in 2019, TNG has twice been requested by the NTEPA to provide additional information, most recently in April when it sought answers to a further 23 additional issues.



Artist's impression of TNG's Mount Peake mine. Picture: Supplied

TNG managing director Paul Burton said gas, not red tape, was the reason for the company's shift.

"The decision to move is not based on anything to do with the Northern Territory government or the Northern Territory environmental protection agency," he said.

"We triggered a review earlier in the year as a result of relooking at Mt Peake as an integrated site because it was originally considered we would have the processing plant down there (Mt Peake). Everything down there.

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"There were two hurdles at that stage. One was enough water; we assessed there wasn't enough water for a combined processing and beneficiation plant at that time and the other one was gas. Our engineers at the time advised they didn't think there was enough gas in that existing pipeline for the process plant as it was then."

Fast forward to 2021, and both factors have been resolved. "During the environmental process we addressed stakeholder concerns about water run-off going into Darwin Harbor by including into our plant a water recycling process," Mr Burton said.

"Now obviously this added to the capital expenditure, but it would resolve the environmental issues The environmental process helped that as well by introducing a water treatment plant.

“We’d never thought about a water treatment plant in the past to overcome a potential water shortage down at the Mt Peake mine site.”



TNG's Mount Peake vanadium-titanium-iron project. Picture: Supplied

During the FEED engineering evaluation process, TNG was able to reduce its overall gas requirements which enabled them to ditch Darwin Harbour for the desert. “We had an expert consultant who deals with gas nationwide look at our project, look at the availability and their advice there was indeed there was enough gas in that pipeline and enough quality to take on a complete integrated facility.”

Those two factors and ongoing concerns around permits to operate in Darwin Harbour swung the company firmly back to Mt Peake.

“First of all we’re not building two plants now; a big plant in Darwin and a big plant down there, down at the mine site,” he said.

“Now with respect to timing, of course there’s going to be some additional work we need to do but we’re rapidly onto it. We have an environmental licence down there already so we can just build on that to integrate the plant.

“The mining licence importantly down there is very large and it has enough room for a processing plant and is a license for us to mine, beneficiate and process, so the mine itself is very good for us. We also cut out a lot of logistical costs by not having a rail running up and down to Darwin and bringing waste back.”

But instead of cutting ties with the Middle Arm site, TNG has requested it retain occupancy as it partners Malaysian green energy company AGV Energy and Technology to develop the country’s first HySustain green hydrogen plant.

“We’ve gone into a joint venture with a Malaysian group who are very advanced with their own system called AGV-HySustain who had big offtake agreements with Asian countries, including Japan,” Mr Burton said.

“They really wanted a partner in Australia so we fitted it into our overall plan because building a big project like this in today’s environmental concerns, you have to have plans for being a net-zero carbon producer so green hydrogen is one of the ways for us to go and what we hope and we have not gone onto this blindly.”



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