

# Abundant Resources Absent Data

Measuring the Openness of Australian Listed Mining,  
Oil and Gas Companies on the African Continent



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## BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

As a country rich in natural resources, Australia has a long history of extractive industries. Amongst our staple high production of gold and coal, Australia notably also produces 47% of the world's rutile, 29% of its bauxite and a quarter of the [globe's iron ore](#). When it starts producing the Gorgon offshore Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) project is expected to see Australia surpass Qatar as the world's [largest exporter of LNG](#). Australian extractive companies also have a dominant presence internationally, and our global extractive presence is on par with countries such as Canada and the UK. However, unlike Canada and the UK, Australia has no domestic legislation that requires extractive companies publicly report their payments on a country by country or project by project basis. Despite signalling its commitment to join the EITI in 2016, Australia is yet to apply for candidacy. Payment data on Australian companies and their international and domestic operations, particularly to the project level, is therefore difficult to find or simply unavailable.

Along with little payment reporting, there is also no publicly available data collected by the Government on the location or number of Australian companies' overseas operations. The only comprehensive research available on Australia's global extractive footprint is a 2015 report from the Centre for Exploration Targeting which states that Australia outranks the UK, Canada, and China, by number of extractive companies operating on the African continent. This claim has been repeated by the [Australian government](#), however no information is provided to verify this claim. The project and company count of Australian activities in Africa as stated by the Australian Government, the Centre for Exploration Targeting, and

the [Australian extractive industry](#) bodies also varies significantly.

In this context, Publish What You Pay (PWYP) Australia set out to establish if we could confirm the company and project figures claimed by using publicly available data from extractive companies listed on the Australian Stock Exchange (ASX). Given the limited availability of data in Australia, we also wanted to create an open data set of the projects that were found as a resource for civil society.

## METHODOLOGY

### FINDING & GETTING THE DATA

Every company that lists on the Australian stock exchange (ASX) must upload annual, half yearly and quarterly reports to the [ASX website](#). For this reason it is the most up to date place to find information on ASX listed extractives companies and was chosen as the source of data, rather than company websites which can be infrequently updated.

The data had to be collected manually for a number of reasons. During the research process, PWYP Australia discovered the ASX had strict (yet unpublished) rules on how data uploaded on the site could be used, which included the prohibition of scraping or reproducing any information.

There is also no standardised reporting required by companies to the ASX and numerous companies reported in scanned PDF. These inhibitors lengthened the data collection for the report to 6 weeks as the data had to be sourced from each individual company Annual Report uploaded on to the ASX website.

### CLEANING THE DATA

The ASX website contains a downloadable Excel spreadsheet of all listed companies ordered by company name, ASX code, and industry grouping. Companies involved in extractive activities are categorised under the industry grouping of 'energy' or 'materials'. Filtering the data to just include these two groupings established an initial cohort of 885 companies.

Companies that were de-listed at the time of the data collection were excluded, as were those who were not involved in commercial extractive activities.

168 companies were removed under this classification leaving 717 ASX listed companies for analysis.

Each of the 717 company Annual Reports then had to be checked manually to determine where on the globe they reported project activity.

139 of the 717 ASX listed companies (19.3%) were found to have operations on the African continent, and this meant the region had the highest concentration of ASX companies.

While we now had a list of companies, tracking their projects was more challenging. There is no one definition of 'project' for extractive companies in Australian law, and Australia does not have a requirement for project level reporting.

The definition of project as outlined in the Canadian ESTMA law was used as much as possible to guide what was included. PWYP Australia developed a spreadsheet which recorded data by:

- Company name
- ASX code
- ASX group
- Country
- Project
- Region
- Commodity

## ANALYSING, VISUALISING & PRESENTING THE DATA

Once the data collection was complete, it was then mapped to show the geographic spread of ASX listed companies projects, with additional key findings visualised using [Piktochart](#) and [RAW](#). Accompanying the visual representations was a written analysis of the patterns, trends, and gaps, identified through the data to paint a comprehensive picture of ASX listed extractive companies and their presence on the African continent.

The graphics and the contextual analysis of the data were collated and published online and in print in a report entitled '[Abundant Resources, Absent Data: Measuring the Openness of Australian Listed Mining, Oil and Gas Companies on the African Continent](#).'

The report was officially launched to coincide with the first day of the annual '[Africa Down Under](#)' conference, an annual event which promotes itself as the largest African mining focused event outside the continent. A soft launch for policy makers was held a day earlier in Canberra as evidence based tool to promote the need for mandatory disclosure legislation to be introduced in Australia.

## PROJECT IMPACT

### RAISING AWARENESS

One of the main obstacles PWYP Australia faced in the data collection process was open and reliable data. Therefore creating a resource that addressed this problem and was freely available to civil society was an important output. This was the rationale for [publishing the data](#) online in an open format in conjunction with the printed data set available in the written report.

Using the data set PWYP Australia had built, ActionAid Australia published a [subsequent report](#) on Australia's coal projects on the African continent and the impacts of an Australian coal project in the Limpopo province of South Africa. PWYP Australia and ActionAid collaborated on the dissemination and promotion of the reports, and held a joint event on the sidelines of the Africa down under conference, attended by Australian and South African civil society and community representatives. The launch of the report was covered with an [exclusive in the Australian press](#).

### SUPPORTING ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

PWYP Australia also used the report for political advocacy, highlighting to policy makers what a mandatory disclosure requirement would cover in the Australian context. Being able to provide evidence of the enormous number of companies and projects that would be captured by the introduction of Australian legislation supported our advocacy on the benefit public, timely, and granular disclosure on ASX listed extractive companies payments would have to improving transparency in the 106 countries in which we found ASX extractive companies operating.

PWYP Australia's ask for policy makers in Australia to introduce a mandatory disclosure policy that would align us to the EU and Canadian laws, was strengthened by being able to demonstrate through this report the lack of transparency around Australian extractive operations and payments in comparison to Canadian or UK listed companies, and how scarce open and reliable data from Australia was.

After years of efforts by civil society include PWYP Australia demonstrating the need for greater transparency of payments to governments, the Australian Labor Party announced the [introduction of mandatory disclosure legislation](#) should they be elected at the next federal election.

## CONCLUSIONS

Data can be used to achieve different goals and have different impacts. The release of the '[Abundant Resources, Absent Data](#)' reinforced our rationale for the introduction of an Australian mandatory disclosure law by providing evidence specific to the country context, and also created a new data resource that is open and free for civil society. The publication of the data had a flow on affect, being used by other civil society organisations to support different, but complementary, advocacy.

PWYP Australia's research allowed us to confirm the claim that Australia did indeed have the largest country presence by extractive company on the African continent.

However, it also identified the knowledge gap Australia exists in, highlighting the unavailability and inaccessibility of the data required to carry out this research due to:

- the lack of legislation requiring project level reporting,
- the level of aggregation allowed under Australian law,
- the closed format in which data is published, and
- the rules the ASX puts on its use.

The report fulfilled its intended outcomes of:

- outlining to policy makers the importance of implementing a mandatory reporting mechanism in which to track Australia's large global extractive footprint and provide



project information to the communities in which Australian companies are operating; and

- creating a resource for civil society on Australian companies and their projects that was open and freely available.

This report was an important part of PWYP Australia ongoing campaign to advocate for the introduction of an Australian mandatory reporting requirement that will align us to the EU and Canadian laws.

**This case study is part of Publish What You Pay's Data Extractors programme, a global initiative which trains PWYP members and activists from across our network to use extractives data.**

This programme aims to create a network of activists who can in turn share their knowledge with local communities. Our goal is to enable citizens all over the world to ensure natural resources are managed for the benefit of society as a whole. The PWYP Data Extractors programme does this by:

**Training** - Data Extractors learn how to find data, analyse it and use it to ask questions of both governments and companies. The programme merges technical skills with activism through hands-on workshops, skills sharing and online learning opportunities

**Connecting** - The programme connects PWYP members from all over the world, facilitating collaboration, mentoring, peer learning and offers an exciting opportunity to create unique projects which are relevant to local concerns.

**Uncovering** - Data Extractors expose discrepancies in company and government reports and payments to expose corrupt practices the resource curse, and raise questions for further investigation.

**Communicating** - Data Extractors can use data to communicate with a variety of stakeholders and engage in decision-making processes that affect them, using evidence-based data.

Through their case studies, the PWYP Data Extractors use examples and data that is publicly available to hold governments and companies to account.

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WORK WITH US TO UNCOVER THE STORIES  
HIDDEN BEHIND EXTRACTIVES DATA!

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