Leigh Creek Community Views -
A summary

Social aspects and opportunities of the
closure of Leigh Creek Coal Mine and Port
Augusta Power Station
This summary documents the outcomes of engagement undertaken with stakeholders and communities and forms part of the broader South Australian Government commitment to work closely with these regions as mining closes and there is a transition to a post-mining future.

The Upper Spencer Gulf and Outback Community Engagement Team undertook a program of community engagement from 12 June to 30 September 2015. The purpose of this work was to support affected workers and communities and to identify options and opportunities for the future of Leigh Creek and the surrounding region.

Alinta Energy is committed to supporting their employees and the welfare of their families and is providing additional support services to assist during the transition to closure.

### Services provided in Leigh Creek
- Water supply from Aroona Dam to Leigh Creek, Lyndhurst and Copley
- Wastewater and septic management
- Electricity and backup power generators
- Garbage collection and dump management
- Public toilets, parks and playgrounds
- War Memorial
- Cemetery
- Emergency services
- Hospital
- Police Station
- Leigh Creek Airport (Aerodrome)
- Leigh Creek Area School
- Library
- Recreation facilities, including an Olympic size swimming pool
- Movie cinema
- Gymnasium
- Sporting and recreation clubs
- Daily school bus that services the regional communities of Nepabunna and Copley
- A central shopping precinct where privately owned businesses such as Foodland, Liz’ Open Cut Cafe and Visitors Centre, and the Newsagency/Post Office are located
- The Leigh Creek Tavern and Motel (currently owned and managed by Alinta Energy)
- Other businesses located in Leigh Creek include Leigh Creek South Motors, Leigh Creek Caravan Park (run by the Progress Association) and the Bottle Recycling Depot run by a private owner.

### About Leigh Creek
Leigh Creek is a well established community with a strong identity. A large proportion of its 500 plus residents have been living in the town for more than 30 years, some having relocated to Leigh Creek from elsewhere in the region. Leigh Creek also offers an attractive lifestyle, good quality housing, amenity, and a range of essential and non-essential services which are greatly valued by the existing Leigh Creek residents and the population of the surrounding regional settlements and stations.

The Upper Spencer Gulf and Outback Community Engagement Team would like to acknowledge and thank the Adnyamathanha people, Traditional Owners and communities; the Leigh Creek Coal Mine and Power Station employees; the Alinta Energy Management Teams in Leigh Creek and Port Augusta; the local businesses; residents and communities of the Upper Spencer Gulf and Outback; government agencies and service providers for their time in engaging with our Team and for their contribution to this report summary.

### Acknowledgement

The South Australian Government, through the Department of State Development (DSD), established the Upper Spencer Gulf and Outback Community Engagement Team, following Alinta Energy’s decision, on 11 June 2015, to cease operations at the Leigh Creek Coal Mine and Port Augusta Power Station.

This summary documents the outcomes of engagement undertaken with stakeholders and communities and forms part of the broader South Australian Government commitment to work closely with these regions as mining closes and there is a transition to a post-mining future.

There are approximately 440 Alinta Energy employees that are affected by this decision, as well as many businesses, regional communities and service providers.
Community engagement

A range of meetings have been held throughout the engagement program. The type of meetings varied to suit the needs of the community and to ensure best possible feedback collation of the many views and opinions.

The types of meetings included:
- Business owner interviews and meetings
- Community events
- One-on-one meetings
- Phone interviews
- Service provider meetings
- Specific interest group meetings

Communities and stakeholders involved in the engagement program included:
- Adnyamathanha Traditional Lands Association (ATLA)
- Alinta Energy employees and Management Team
- Businesses: Leigh Creek and the Region
- Flinders Ranges Council
- Leigh Creek and regional service providers such as South Australia Police, Health Services, Leigh Creek Area School
- Leigh Creek residents
- Leigh Creek and surrounding communities: individuals, residents, families and community groups/Progress Associations from:
  - Arkaroola
  - Beltana
  - Blinman
  - Copley
  - Farina
  - Iga Warta
  - Innamincka
  - Lyndhurst
  - Marree
  - Nepabunna
  - Parachilna
  - Outback Communities Authority and other regional bodies
  - Station owners/managers

11 June 2015

Alinta Energy announced its Flinders Operations in Port Augusta (Northern & Playford B Power Stations) and Leigh Creek Coal Mine will not operate beyond March 2018, and may close earlier (but not before March 2016), as its continuing operation had become increasingly uneconomic.

30 July 2015

Alinta Energy announced a revised timeframe for closure of its Flinders Operations stating that the Power Station would not operate beyond March 2017.

19 August 2015

Minister for Manufacturing and Innovation, Kyam Maher, announced $1 million State Government investment into job creation and support initiatives for Upper Spencer Gulf and Outback region.

28 September 2015

Minister for Manufacturing and Innovation, Kyam Maher announced the Government’s commitment to providing services to Leigh Creek until at least July 2018 noting that Leigh Creek is an important service centre for the Outback region.

7 October 2015

Alinta Energy confirmed that its Flinders Operations will close on 31 March 2016. The Port Augusta Power Stations will cease generation on 31 March 2016, while the Leigh Creek Coal Mine will cease mining on 17 November 2015.

13 October 2015

Dr Jane Lomax-Smith is appointed to oversee a Request for Information (RFI) process to identify private sector interest, ideas and tourism opportunities for Leigh Creek. The RFI process will run from November 2015 - January 2016.

Community feedback - results and findings

Results from the community engagement process have confirmed that there is a reliance and dependence on the services currently provided at Leigh Creek in the surrounding region. This particularly applies to the approximately 500 residents living in small communities and on properties between Hawker and Marree.

The community and stakeholder engagement program has identified the following issues of interest to residents of Leigh Creek, surrounding communities and the region, businesses and other entities.

Education

In the Leigh Creek Area School, approximately 65 students are currently from Alinta Energy families. After Alinta Energy closes its operations, it is estimated there will be between 45 – 50 students that would continue to require an area school service.

The school is well located geographically between Hawker and Marree and is accessible by both these communities and the smaller towns nearby. If the school services in Leigh Creek were to close, this would result in significant additional travel to access education, making it untenable for many.

The school currently has access to water and wastewater services, a community library and quality sporting and recreational infrastructure not offered at other sites.

The educational opportunity offered at Leigh Creek is highly valued and unique for the region. The Department for Education and Child Development provide bus services for Leigh Creek Area School, travelling to outlying communities such as Nepabunna, Copley and Beltana.

These communities are concerned about the future accessibility to education if the daily school bus service does not continue as some parents and guardians are not able to transport their children each day to Leigh Creek Area School.

Health

The regional community views the health service in Leigh Creek as a critical service that must be maintained. This view is consistent throughout the Region.

Regional communities are also concerned that if there are no health services available in Leigh Creek, they would need to travel as far as Hawker or Port Augusta, which are already reaching capacity and may not be able to cater for additional population.

It is likely that demand for ambulance services will be unaffected when Leigh Creek coal mine closes as the workload is predominately external to the actual township. Irrespective of what happens in the future, the ambulance service requires some form of clinic to be available, preferably located at Leigh Creek, which has close proximity to the airstrip.

Volunteers from the surrounding community will also be supported to extend the provision of emergency services once the mine closes.

Police

It was highlighted that there are genuine concerns for community safety if there is no police presence in the region. The South Australian Police (SAPOL) has indicated in order to fulfill their commitment to public safety, crime and criminal justice services and road safety, the continued presence of police will remain at this time as police service not only Leigh Creek but other communities in the region. If Leigh Creek is not maintained as a service centre, SAPOL would need to re-evaluate their model of service delivery for the area, taking into consideration logistical and other issues associated with any new locality.

Adnyamathanha community

The traditional lands of the Adnyamathanha people are the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. Adnyamathanha communities feel that mine rehabilitation is vital to the restoration of their culture, heritage and story. They wish to be engaged for the rehabilitation contract to ensure it is undertaken in a way that is culturally appropriate.

The Adnyamathanha communities also have an interest in the future use of housing in Leigh Creek. The community view that housing could be made available in the town for elderly members of the Aboriginal community so they can be closer to health services, and parents with children can be closer to education. ATLA has requested that the SA Government consider them for a management role of the Leigh Creek Township.

The Aboriginal communities, particularly at Copley, Iga Warta and Nepabunna, have a strong reliance on Leigh Creek health services and they are concerned about what they will do if the services close. They have noticed the need to consider options to maintain a doctor in the area.

The Aboriginal communities also rely heavily on Leigh Creek for the provision of groceries from the Foodland and access to water, power, Internet, transport and emergency services and are looking to see how these services can be maintained into the future.
Essential services

If there is no sustainable future for the township of Leigh Creek, the supply of water and power are still required by residents and communities in the local area.

Local business

The engagement Program has identified there is a heavy reliance on Leigh Creek retail services by local residents, station owners and staff and the region generally. The retail outlets provide services for communities as far as Innamincka. There are limited other options to obtain fresh groceries and full post office services in the area.

However the uncertainty of Leigh Creek’s future is making it difficult for business owners to plan ahead. Local businesses provide employment for nearly 60 people, on a full-time, part-time or casual basis but these staff will be hard to retain if conditions become more uncertain.

A timely commitment to Leigh Creek’s future will help the businesses decide on their strategy going forward. If no plan for the future of the town is forthcoming, it is likely some business owners will leave the area. Developing a future for the town will allow business owners to make considered decisions around whether to invest, downsell or seize their business as a viable concern.

Loss of skilled labour

Pastoralists have expressed concern over loss of skilled labour as some engage mine workers on their days off to assist in grazing activities which has been economically beneficial as well as convenient. When mine workers leave, there may be a shortfall in labour which may impact on costs and operation.

Aerodrome

The Leigh Creek airport is maintained by Alinta Energy under the lease agreement, and is of a high standard. Ongoing maintenance of it is critical for the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Furthermore, the airport is an emergency stop for cross-country flights, as it is the only airport that can support commercial aircraft.

The aerodrome is also considered essential in creating new tourism opportunities in the region creating greater access for tourists who may be time poor but seeking an outpost experience.

Mine rehabilitation

Under the existing lease conditions, Alinta Energy is required to breach the retention dam wall which will result in the release of water into the existing coal pits. The regional community have indicated they do not want to see this happen. A number of pastoralists and community members prefer for the retention dam to be retained and overflow water restored to its natural course through the construction of a culvert around the mine.

Social infrastructure

The social infrastructure and facilities available in Leigh Creek provide the community and residents with a valued quality of life.

If facilities and infrastructure are lost, the community are concerned this quality of life could diminish as what is available in Leigh Creek cannot easily be replicated elsewhere in the Region. This is particularly true of the library, the swimming pool, produce at the Foodland and school bus service.

If people are to continue to live in Leigh Creek post this time, a decision will need to be made around the plan for housing and how it could be made available.

Over time, the region has become dependent upon the services and facilities offered from Leigh Creek. To maintain the functionality and community stability of the north eastern region of South Australia, the community consider that Leigh Creek will need to transition to a sustainable service centre aligned to the needs of the community.

Actions and opportunities

The closure of the Leigh Creek mine will significantly impact the township of Leigh Creek, however it is apparent that the town does not just serve the employees of Alinta Energy.

Community involvement in a transition plan

Through engagement with the regional community, strong expectations were identified that Leigh Creek should continue to offer services for the region.

The community consider the establishment of a transition plan linked to community engagement will provide the best opportunity to realise opportunities and create viable and sustainable services in the region.

To be effective, this transition should continue to involve the community and will need to consider the various issues, opportunities and social needs of the region together with infrastructure investment and housing availability.

The community is willing to participate in the transition process and consider that tourism and education provide the best short term opportunities to attract people to the region.

Current interdependecies

The engagement program has highlighted the interdependencies between the social services offered from Leigh Creek. If the school and police remain in Leigh Creek for example, there is a requirement for health services.

It is perceived throughout the region that Leigh Creek’s services are indispensable and it is considered by the regional community that it is more economically feasible to retain them at Leigh Creek given the availability of the existing infrastructure capable of supporting these services.

Timing

With the closure of the coal mine, there is opportunity to leverage past investment in the town (resulting in its high quality infrastructure and services) through effective and timely decision making to create a sustainable future for the town and the region.

The community consider that the timing for critical decisions is imperative so as not to lose community interest or miss any opportunity to benefit from Alinta Energy’s required investment in the town over the next three years.

Belief in future opportunities

There is a strong belief amongst the business owners, regional tourism providers and the broader regional community that Leigh Creek is sustainable in the long term future if a structured transition plan is developed to effectively downsize the town to cater for a smaller number of residents/retirees, service providers and tourists.

Leigh Creek has never been marketed as a tourist destination and given the level of amenity and the services on offer, this is an opportunity to be explored.

Next steps

The local and regional community consider the following actions are critical in building a basis for establishing a future for Leigh Creek and the region.

• Working with South Australian Tourism Commission to identify ways in which to promote the region and put Leigh Creek on the map
• Identifying opportunities to access optic fibre cable to the mine to establish an internet service in the town of Leigh Creek
• Seek support from the Government for a future for Leigh Creek beyond July 2018
• Harness the support of community members in the region who are visionary to realise opportunities
• Establish community structures to bring community together in a cohesive way to ensure common objectives are achieved
• Encourage the development of a transparent transition plan
• Assess the opportunities and activate those that are viable. The community has been forthcoming with ideas to keep Leigh Creek viable, mostly based on tourism and education, as well as the potential to attract industries to utilise the existing Alinta Energy infrastructure (both in the township itself and at the coal mine).

In conclusion

Although the community are facing a number of concerns and uncertainties, there is overwhelming support and willingness by the community to work with Government and private investment to create new opportunities and a new vision for Leigh Creek, whilst at the same time ensuring this complements the existing townships and economic activities of the region.

Community feedback - results and findings

- The local and regional community are willing to participate in the transition process and consider that tourism and education provide the best short term opportunities to attract people to the region.
- The community consider the establishment of a transition plan linked to community engagement will provide the best opportunity to realise opportunities and create viable and sustainable services in the region.
- The community is willing to participate in the transition process and consider that tourism and education provide the best short term opportunities to attract people to the region.
- The community consider the establishment of a transition plan linked to community engagement will provide the best opportunity to realise opportunities and create viable and sustainable services in the region.
- The community is willing to participate in the transition process and consider that tourism and education provide the best short term opportunities to attract people to the region.
- The community consider the establishment of a transition plan linked to community engagement will provide the best opportunity to realise opportunities and create viable and sustainable services in the region.