REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)

Towards a Fair Water Footprint in the mining sector: a global stocktake of mining supply chains and implications for shared water security

2 February 2026

Terms of Reference (TOR) and Request for Proposals (RFPs) - Fair Water Footprints Programme

Consultant to conduct a study entitled: Towards a Fair Water Footprint in the mining sector: a global stocktake of mining supply chains and implications for shared water security

1. About Water Witness International and Fair Water Footprints

Water Witness International (WWI) is an International Non-Governmental Organisation based in Edinburgh, Scotland. WWI leads action, research and advocacy for a fair water future so that all people can access the water they need to thrive, and are protected against floods, drought, pollution, ecosystem degradation and water conflict. Working with global civil society partners and vulnerable communities, WWI stands at the sharp end of the global water crisis to shine a light on its impacts, understand its root causes and activate an effective response. Since 2009, we have been working to improve water security by driving improved water governance, practice and investment.

WWI co-leads the Fair Water Footprints programme - a global initiative uniting governments, businesses, financial institutions, and civil society to trigger action and investment on water and climate risks in global supply chains. It aims to reshape the political economy of water through trade, policy, incentives, and knowledge, making water stewardship a business norm for sustainable, resilient, and inclusive growth. This initiative builds on the Glasgow Declaration for Fair Water Footprints, launched at COP26 in 2021, which commits Signatories to ensuring fair, sustainable, and resilient water footprints by 2030.

A Fair Water Footprint is defined as one which demonstrates: **zero water pollution, sustainable water withdrawals, nature protection and restoration, universal WASH access, and drought, flood and conflict resilience.** The programme seeks to: 1) Generate and share knowledge for systemic change; 2) Empower communities and civil society organisations 3) Strengthen governance and accountability for responsible water use in key supply chains and markets. By 2030 we aim to establish water stewardship as the business norm in high-risk supply chains, and to improve water security for over 20 million vulnerable people, and to trigger transformative change in governance, policy and practice.

With Funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Fair Water Footprints is one of three innovative approaches contributing to the Just Transition for Water Security Programme.

2. Background to the study

Demand for metals and minerals including those needed for the clean energy transition is booming, while good governance for shared water security is failing to keep pace. Mining is one of the world's most water-dependent industries, with significant implications for water quality, sustainable and equitable water resource use, access to safe water for local communities, ecosystem services and climate resilient economic development. An adequate global supply of metals and critical minerals is needed to support the energy transition in order to meet urgent goals for climate mitigation. However, many of these resources are found in regions already facing profound water stress and water insecurity, where stubborn governance, capacity, infrastructure and financing challenges persist alongside highly sensitive ecosystems and highly vulnerable communities (Kunz, 2020). At the local scale, mining can significantly alter hydrological systems, reducing water availability for local communities and exacerbating water stress in already vulnerable regions (Meißner, 2021). Recent estimates show that approximately 16% of the world's critical mineral mines are in regions already experiencing high or extreme high levels of water stress (Lakshman, 2024). Water pollution produces significant toxic environmental consequences for communities (Cacciuttolo, Cano and Custodio, 2023). The interactions between growing demand and spiralling water challenges underscores the need for identifying how policies, practices and incentives can be adapted to embed sustainable, equitable and resilient water use at the heart of the global trade in metals and minerals – to improve responsible sourcing and to ensure a Fair Water Footprint across producer and consumer countries.

3. Objectives and guiding questions

The overarching objective is to equip WWI, our partners and wider stakeholders with an up-to-date evidence-based overview of the global mining and minerals sector, it's performance in relation to sustainable water use, key trading relationships, trends, relevant initiatives, governance frameworks, networks and stakeholders. In turn this will be used to guide engagement over the next 3-5 years to trigger, facilitate and support improved performance for sustainable, resilient and equitable water use and governance.

To deliver against this objective, the consultant will provide a global stocktake of the mining and minerals sector and priorities for shared water security across the sector's supply chain. The global stocktake will inform strategic engagement for FWF by identifying opportunities to drive improved governance and collective action at multiple scales, so that meeting the planets future metal and mineral needs does not come at the cost of exacerbated and accelerated water insecurity.

The consultant will provide:

1. **Sector stocktake and trends**: A contemporary understanding of major metal and mineral resource deposits, production and trade, producer, processing and end-consumer nations, supply chain relationships, and key trends over a projected 20- and 50-year timescale.
    a. Focusing on priority metals and critical minerals, provide an illustrated and tabulated understanding of:
        i. Key resource deposits by country
        ii. Current and potential future production volumes (producing country)
        iii. By producing country, what is the value of this production, economically, as proportion of GDP, total trade/expert revenue, employment and livelihoods (current and future)
        iv. Destination - where are they going (buyers) and for what use (processing and consumer countries)
        v. Indicators/metrics of development, governance, corruption, social, economic, environmental and water security contexts of production by country.
    b. Considering current and future demand, what are the linkages and flows between Artisanal Small-Scale Mining (ASM) and global trade in metals and minerals supply chains? What proportion of global demand is being met by ASM – for which minerals/metals, and where?

2. **Water use and impacts:** An up-to-date understanding of the water-related implications of global metal and mineral production, and processing:
    a. How sophisticated and reliable is water footprint data and assessment for key metals and minerals, what does it tell us, and what are the current limitations to characterising and tracking the water footprint(s) of the sector? Where water footprint data is available – can these be used to supplement the tables produced in Part 1?
    b. A brief summary of the water needs, impacts and implications of production across the main metals and minerals of interest, signposting key references for further information.
    c. A summary of key incidents and case studies which are indicative of the water-related challenges facing the sector – including both incoming and outgoing water risks and impacts. Where appropriate annotated by country, metal/mineral etc.

3. **Global governance mechanisms, initiatives and stakeholders**: Provide a contemporary understanding of global governance mechanisms and initiatives relevant to mitigating and managing the water related impacts and risks to the sector and its supply chains, to include:
    a. Global standards, sector initiatives, transparency and sustainable sourcing programmes.
    b. Trade agreements and World Trade Organisation rules
    c. Reflection on their nature, performance, reach, impact and credibility in relation to water issues and specifically, a review of alignment with the five indicators of FWF and principles within the FWF Declaration.
    d. Stakeholder analysis of major companies, investors, initiatives, governments, NGOs of relevance including (their key interests and relative influence, potential for collaboration and where possible contact details of key individuals).

4. **National governance mechanisms and initiatives:** Provide an overview of how mining in eight priority countries is governed, particularly in relation to water-related risks and impacts – both on paper and in practice
    a. Focusing on a sub-set of countries hereafter referred to as priority countries[1], we want to understand the legislative regimes, initiatives, norms, standard systems shape environmental and social performance. (i.e., indicators of governance, social, economic, environmental and water security status etc)
    b. How effective these governance mechanisms and initiatives are in ensuring sustainable water use within the sectors, and any key strengths and weaknesses which can support learning towards a FWF.

5. **Future priorities for a Fair Water Footprint in the mining and mineral sector.** Drawing on the stocktake, to assess the priority opportunities for advancing sustainable, equitable and resilient water use. Specifically:
    a. What are the major opportunities and constraints for sustainable, resilient and equitable water use, and for improved governance and accountability towards this across the sector?

[1] Priority countries will be agreed between the consultant and Water Witness but will be limited to eight in total.

b. What are the major opportunities, entry points and recommendations for the Fair Water Footprint Initiative to trigger, facilitate and support the sector – towards a Fair water Footprint for mining and minerals.

4. Scope, approach and methodology

The consultant will draw on existing literature, existing studies analysis and datasets, as well as industry reports and their own prior understanding to provide an accurate and up-to-date stocktake within the budget envelope available. Whilst the scope of this work is potentially significant, the consultant will synthesise often readily available existing knowledge, looking at the main commodities of interest from a water risk perspective to address the study objectives.

The consultant will liaise with WWI throughout the study, and in particular, will present findings at a workshop in order to refine and agree the content of section 6.b, ahead of publication. The study will be fully referenced and illustrated with tables, maps and diagrams to enhance easy interpretation, and is intended to be published and made available in the public domain, as a key reference for stakeholders.

5. Deliverables, timelines and budget

The following deliverables are envisaged and will be agreed with the successful consultant across a mutually agreed schedule for delivery.

Deliverables	Description
Detailed workplan	Full workplan including the methodology to be applied, work schedule and timelines
Initial review – Country, metal and mineral prioritization list	Based on initial scoping and assessment by the consultant: this will include the countries, minerals and metals that will be included in the global stocktake in accordance with the objective of the project (based on an assessment of relevance to global trade and water risks)
Draft study / stocktake	Key findings and recommendations presented to WWI and partners in a 1-day workshop to identify recommendations
Final Report and Summary briefing note	Full report and summary synthesis of findings including identification of priority levers for advancing FWF across the mining sector

The consultancy will commence as soon as possible (Feb/March 2026) and the workload is anticipated to be circa 25-30 days for a suitably qualified and experienced consultant or consultant team. The deliverables related to this consultancy will include a full report and briefing summary report highlighting key findings which will be used to guide future engagement.

The consultant shall debrief the focal point at Water Witness International every 2 weeks with the frequency increased or decreased as needed. Dates and timelines for deliverables will be agreed with the successful team though the work will ideally be completed by the end of May 2026.

There is an indicative budget envelope of £21,000 available for this study.

6. Requirements and proposal submission

The consultant(s) shall submit a separate technical and financial proposal detailing their understanding of the assignment, proposed approach and workplan, alongside details of the qualifications, experience and the track record that makes them suitable for the assignment. Contact details of two referees who can attest to the quality and rigor of the consultant's work should be provided. Proposals should also include CVs of the consultant team, detailed roles and responsibilities for those involved, and confirmation of availability to undertake the work.

All proposals shall be submitted by 23rd February 2026 to Charleswight@waterwitness.org and Justinamuchelenje@waterwitness.org. Administrative support and contract management will be led by Justina Muchelenje. All inquiries can be directed to: justinamuchelenje@waterwitness.org.

References

Cacciuttolo, C., Cano, D. and Custodio, M. (2023) 'Socio-Environmental Risks Linked with Mine Tailings Chemical Composition: Promoting Responsible and Safe Mine Tailings Management Considering Copper and Gold Mining Experiences from Chile and Peru', *Toxics*, 11(5), p. 462. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/toxics11050462.

CDP (2019) *In Too Deep: Analysis for institutional investors of critical water security issues facing the metals and mining sector*.

Kunz, N.C. (2020) 'Towards a broadened view of water security in mining regions', *Water Security*, 11, p. 100079. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wasec.2020.100079.

Lakshman, S. (2024) ‘More Critical Minerals Mining Could Strain Water Supplies in Stressed Regions’. Available at: https://www.wri.org/insights/critical-minerals-mining-water-impacts (Accessed: 3 November 2025).

Meißner, S. (2021) ‘The Impact of Metal Mining on Global Water Stress and Regional Carrying Capacities—A GIS-Based Water Impact Assessment’, *Resources*, 10(12), p. 120. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/resources10120120.