

The Social and Environmental Dimensions of Critical Minerals in the UK

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Jamie Hinch, Sarah Raymond, Sophus zu Ermgassen, Mike Kendall, Gavin Mudd, Mark Hirons

The social and environmental dimensions of critical minerals in the UK: A policy discussion and evidence review

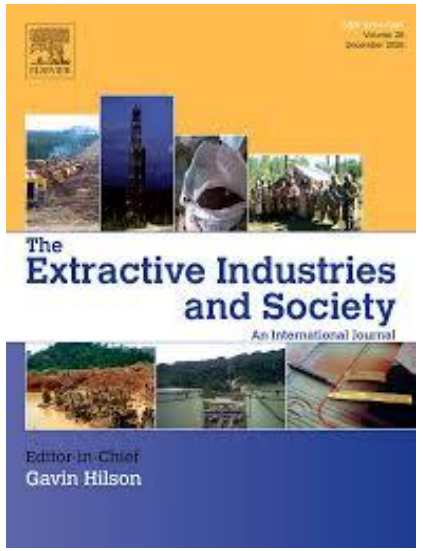
Synthesising evidence and identifying key knowledge gaps

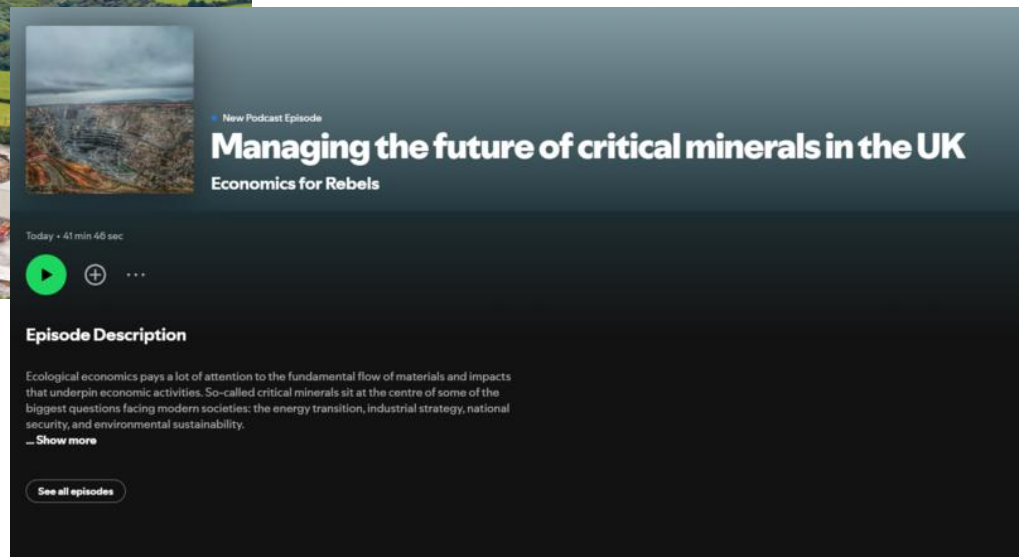
Jamie Hinch, Sarah Raymond, Sophus zu Ermgassen,
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May 2026 | Policy paper | The Agile Initiative

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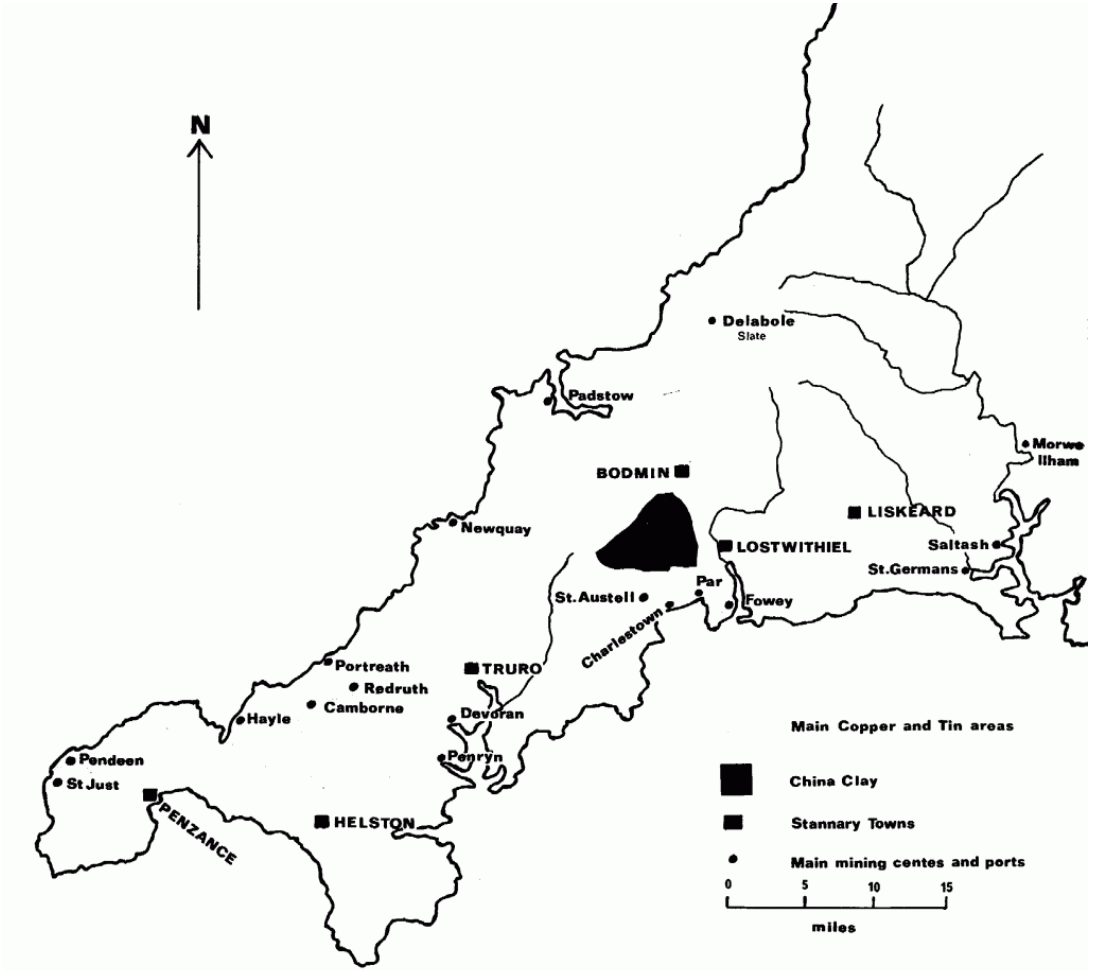






Background




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Delabole
Slate
Padstow
Morwe
Ilham
BODMIN
LISKEARD
Newquay
LOSTWITHIEL
Saltash
St.Germans
Par
St.Austell
Fowey
Charlestown
Portreath
TRURO
Redruth
Camborne
Hayle
Devoran
Penryn
Pendeen
St Just
PENZANCE
HELSTON
Main Copper and Tin areas
China Clay
Stannary Towns
Main mining centes and ports
0
5
10
15
miles


ClayTAWC




TRANSIT



Interdisciplinarity!

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SoGE School of Geography and the Environment

BGS British Geological Survey







Dr Sarah Raymond; Dr Sophus zu Ermgassen; Prof. Mike Kendall; Dr Gavin Mudd; Dr Mark Hirons



What are ‘critical minerals’?

- Critical minerals are a **relative and dynamic** category of materials
- They have **both great economic importance** and **a high risk of supply disruption**
- Important for the energy transition, technological development, defence and security
- Critical minerals supply chains are often dominated by a few countries
- States are responding to this domination through increasing domestic extraction and production, raw material export bans, resource nationalism, and bilateralism



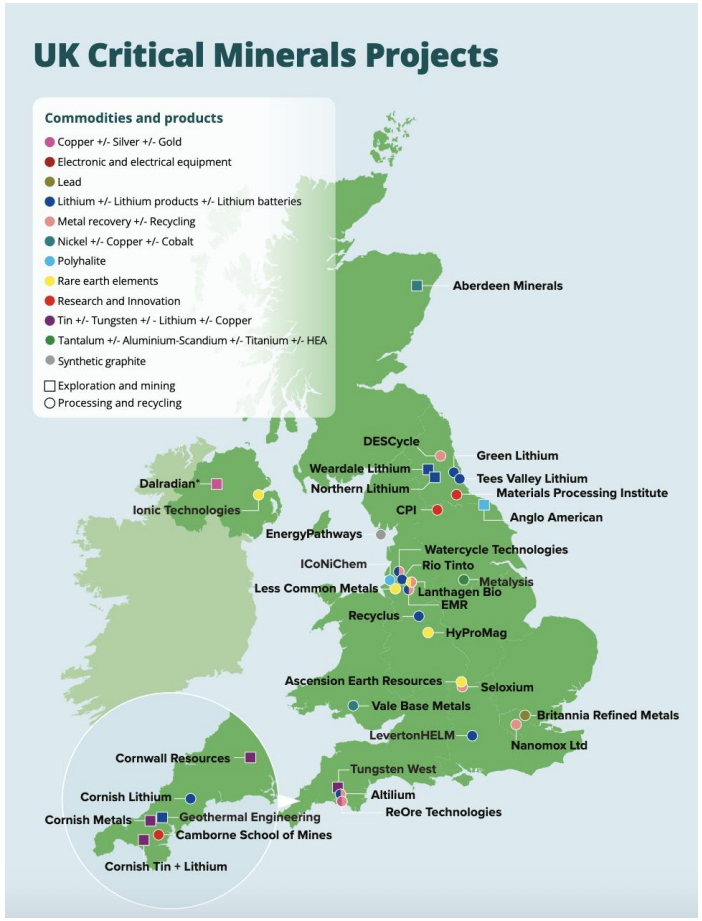




Mining in the UK

Critical Minerals in the UK

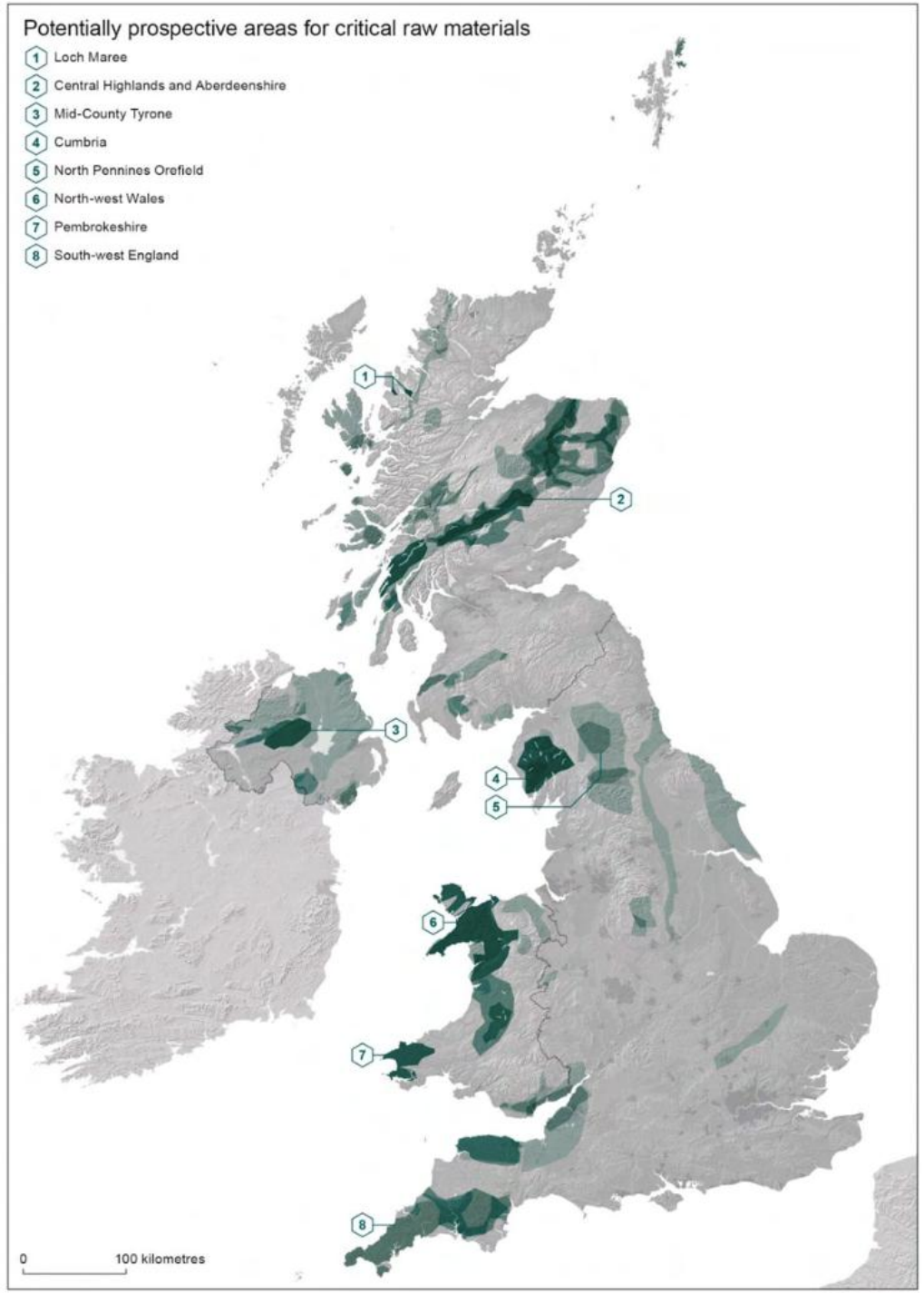




- By 2035, the UK is targeting 10% of annual industrial demand for critical minerals being met through domestic production, and 20% through the recycling of products.

Approach

- Rapid and non-comprehensive evidence review of literature and policy
- Knowns and Unknowns
- Mapping difficulties
- Scalar approach
- Expert consultation





Mining and the Environment

- Onshoring critical mineral mining could lead to increasing pressure on the environment, including through pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation effects. This could build on historic mining pollution in the UK. However, more in-depth research is needed to understand potential impacts and how best to mitigate them.
- Effective mitigation and adherence to environmental planning regulations will be key to sustainable and successful mining but to facilitate this, more streamlined planning and permitting systems are needed.
- The UK is heavily nature-depleted and eventual restoration of critical mineral mines does offer a unique opportunity. This adds to other environmental opportunities of critical minerals such as the creation of a more circular economy.
- Narratives and framing around mining are generally negative amongst the environmental community, potentially masking the vast heterogeneity of impacts, and potential opportunities, associated with mining.

Ensuring a just transition

- Domestic critical minerals operations have a major role to play in the UK's just transition.
- There is an opportunity to provide local employment in critical minerals operations, but these promises must not ignore the questions which remain over access, skills, re-skilling, and automation.
- Ensuring a just transition goes beyond providing jobs; mining provides an opportunity to re-build and re-invigorate physical and social infrastructures.
- Local perspectives of mining are often highly ambivalent, influenced by memory, heritage, and media.
- Operations must be transparent to avoid the spread of misinformation, and the subsequent loss of Social Licence to Operate



Clarifying governance

- Clear, accessible, and transparent governance is needed to ensure the social and environmental opportunities of critical minerals in the UK.
- Attaining NSIP status to acquire a DCO has been one response to the need to streamline the planning and permitting of critical minerals projects. Whilst increasing the likelihood of projects happening and delivering proposed opportunities, NSIP has been criticised for failing to incorporate the perspectives of local communities.
- Critical minerals have been built into the case for Cornish devolution. Whilst this presents bureaucratic questions, devolved power could provide greater benefits for local communities and environments in critical minerals projects.
- Updated and accessible data and evidence regarding mineral rights and geology would improve the likelihood of social and environmental opportunities being achieved

Grounding geopolitics

- Domestic mining is influenced by actors and circumstances far beyond the UK.
- International investment will be essential for supporting UK mining projects. However, this raises questions over how such investment will affect the likelihood of projects delivering local social and environmental benefits.
- The UK has a major opportunity to set higher standards for international mining ESG practises. Greater clarification will be needed as to how this will occur, however.

CENTRAL ASIA WORLD

Social protections overlooked in Mongolia–UK critical minerals cooperation

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Steps without Borders

Home → News → Imerys British Lithium Project Placed Into Care and Maintenance

19 February 2026 Project

IMERYS BRITISH LITHIUM PROJECT PLACED INTO CARE AND MAINTENANCE

Imerys today announces a strategic decision to place its Imerys British Lithium (IBL) project into a care and maintenance phase, suspending active development for the foreseeable future. This decision is driven by capital allocation constraints, and the need to find a long-term partner to support the project.

CornishMetals

LETTER OF INTEREST FROM EXPORT-IMPORT BANK OF THE UNITED STATES

5 February 2026

Cornish Metals plc (AIM: TIN) ("Cornish Metals" or the "Company") is pleased to announce that it has received a non-binding Letter of Interest ("LOI") from the Export-Import Bank of the United States ("EXIM"), outlining potential financing support for the development of the Company's wholly owned and permitted South Crofty tin project in Cornwall, United Kingdom.

Under EXIM's Supply Chain Resiliency Initiative ("SCRI"), the LOI specifies EXIM's capacity to consider up to US$225 million in financing. South Crofty may also qualify for special consideration under EXIM's China and Transformational Exports Program ("CTEP").

South Crofty is Cornish Metals' flagship project and the highest grade known tin deposit in the world that is not currently in operation, with production due to begin in mid-2028. EXIM's potential financing support is linked to South Crofty providing a responsible supply of tin concentrate to the United States, to build more resilient supply chains.

Conclusions

- Taken together, these findings point to a consistent pattern: while the UK has a growing understanding of risks and opportunities in principle, there remains limited clarity on how they will manifest and be navigated in practice. This is not simply a question of evidence gaps… It reflects deeper uncertainties around how knowledge is produced, shared, and used in decision-making.



Next Steps…

- Summary of report published as written evidence on critical minerals, following UK Parliament's Business and Trade Sub-Committee on Economic Security, Arms and Export Controls inquiry into how domestic production and trade can support a secure supply of critical minerals for UK industry, and assessment of the likely impact of the proposals set out in the Government's strategy.
- Live issue… Updated version?
- Develop interdisciplinary collaboration



Thank you!

If you have follow-up questions, please get in touch:
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