

# Sun rises for critical silica sand

**Theo Psaros**



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As the world pursues net zero by 2050, Australia's abundance of critical minerals will contribute significantly – provided we can get them to market.

To achieve net zero the largest contributor will be solar energy, and Queensland has a key raw material in silica sand that's required to make the high-quality glass used in solar panels.

According to the IEA's World Energy Outlook 2023, solar PV capacity will need to reach 6101 gigawatts (GW) by 2030, a fivefold increase (4956GW) on 2022 installed capacity. To put that in perspective, this equates to average annual capacity additions of 620GW a year or adding roughly 11 times the capacity of the Australian NEM globally each year.

At Cape Flattery in Far North Queensland, the region is well known for the supply of high-purity silica sand – a key ingredient used in the manufacture of solar glass, 90 per cent of which is currently and will continue to be made in North Asia.

The booming demand for solar energy will translate into greatly increased demand for export silica sand.

By the end of 2023, Metallica expects exports of silica sand in the Asia Pacific region to reach about 9.5 million tonnes a year (a 33 per cent increase on 2022 levels), and to continue to grow strongly into the next decade.

Our Cape Flattery Silica Sand project is in the right place at the right time with plans to export up to 3 million tonnes a year of this critical mineral and tap into this expected boom in demand.

Our project is next to an existing world-class silica sand project with access to key global markets. Our challenges are getting the approvals in place and having our project exporting as soon as possible to ensure Australia does not miss out on this once-in-a-generation opportunity.

The earlier we are in production, the earlier we are contributing significant employment to the towns of Hope Vale and Cooktown.

A share of the income from our project will also benefit the traditional landowners when jobs become available.

We welcome the state government's focus on designating Cape Flattery a critical mineral zone and we should move quickly. We look forward to expediting the project, which will deliver so many positive outcomes for a vast array of stakeholders.

**Theo Psaros is the executive chairman of Metallica Minerals**