

# India's ICMM Breakthrough: Why This Moment Matters For Sustainable Mining

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When a country earns a seat at the world's most influential mining leadership table, it's more than a company milestone, it's a national inflection point. India's entry into the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) signals that the world's largest democracy is ready to help set, not just follow the global rules of responsible mining.

ICMM is a CEO-led leadership group of major mining and metals companies that defines global benchmarks for responsible mining by setting high standards in ESG performance, safer workplaces, reduced environmental impact, and stronger social outcomes. Its Mining Principles are among the most rigorous globally, backed by site-level validation and credible public disclosure far beyond typical policy commitments. With Hindustan Zinc which is the world's largest integrated zinc producer & one of the top 5 silver producers globally, joining ICMM alongside global giants like BHP, Rio Tinto, Anglo American, and Newmont, India has earned a place on the global stage of responsible mining and sustainable development.

## Why this membership elevates India's competitive edge

Earning a place in ICMM is not an ordinary recognition, it represents one of the most stringent entry protocols in the global mining sector. ICMM requires companies to demonstrate real alignment with its mining principles in practice. These include:

**Governance and Transparency:** Auditable systems for ethical conduct, anti-bribery, and public ESG reporting.

**Environmental Stewardship:** Decarbonisation roadmaps, biodiversity protection, water stewardship, and circular economy practices.

**Tailings and Safety Management:** Full compliance with the Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM), developed with UNEP and PRI.

**Human Rights and Communities:** Respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights, fair labour practices, gender inclusion, and active community engagement.

**Independent Validation:** Third-party, site-level assessments with results made public for accountability.

It is particularly remarkable given that domestic mining protocols, while evolving, are not yet as stringent as these international benchmarks. This sets a new standard for India's mining industry and this commitment to sustainability and ethical standards, backed by independent validation, aligns the company with evolving global expectations and strengthens its position in the international market.

## A bigger stage, and higher bar for India

The timing is auspicious. India has pledged a long-term pathway to net-zero by 2070, with nearer-term goals of 500 GW of non-fossil capacity and 50% renewable power by 2030, alongside emissions reductions. These commitments are reshaping expectations for heavy industry, including metals and mining. ICMM alignment helps translate these macro goals into credible, auditable practice at the mine gate and smelter stack. With global mining giants like Hindustan Zinc, Rio Tinto, and BHP committing to net-zero by 2050 or sooner, the industry is collectively raising the bar for sustainable growth.

In recent years, a tripartite effort involving Indian companies, global mineral buyers, civil society, international agencies like the ILO, and state governments such as Jharkhand has worked to make mica supply chains more transparent and responsible through a sectoral master plan for sustainable mining. The ICMM breakthrough provides India with a global platform to showcase such initiatives, underscoring that we have already begun taking concerted steps and view mining through a global ESG lens. This experience where Decent Work and the "Social" pillar of ESG are embedded into supply chains illustrates how documentation and master plans from India can serve as examples for other member countries to adapt in their local contexts, driving the global ESG agenda and enabling meaningful action on the ground.

Equally important is tailings safety, a defining issue for the sector. ICMM, together with UNEP and PRI, co-developed the Global Industry Standard on Tailings Management (GISTM), which sets the benchmark across the asset lifecycle, from site selection to closure, with provisions on disclosure and emergency preparedness. India's ICMM foothold brings direct participation in this framework, strengthening the country's voice in how tailings risks are governed worldwide.

### **Convergence with India's own reforms**

The Sustainable Development Framework (SDF) and the Star Rating of Mines scheme, administered by the Ministry of Mines and verified by the Indian Bureau of Mines, are pushing operators toward better environmental performance, community engagement, and reclamation practices. Recent data show a steady rise in compliant and top-rated mines, reflecting a sector that is beginning to internalize sustainability as core practice rather than peripheral compliance.

At the same time, India is moving decisively to secure critical minerals, from lithium and cobalt to rare earths, via policy changes, a proposed national minerals exchange, and enabling state-backed overseas acquisitions. This is not just industrial policy; it's climate and security policy, ensuring reliable inputs for clean energy, electronics, and defence while guarding against supply shocks. Aligning such an ambitious build-out with ICMM's principles reduces the risk that speed comes at the expense of safeguards.

### **Beyond corporate recognition**

The benefits extend beyond Hindustan Zinc's milestone. This membership signals a broader shift, that Indian industry is now prepared to align with global best practices in sustainability. It reinforces the country's attractiveness as an investment destination at a time when the world is looking to diversify supply chains and secure responsibly sourced critical minerals for the clean energy transition.

By meeting ICMM's high bar, India has proven it can contribute meaningfully to shaping global mining standards. This achievement should be seen not just as recognition of one company's practices, but as a moment of national pride and a marker of India's rising role in the future of sustainable mining.

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