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Report

Critical Habitat Assessment for the Rincon Project

Rev0 – September 2025

Environmental Resources Management Argentina S.A. (ERM) was contracted by Rio Tinto to conduct a Critical Habitat Assessment (CHA) for the Rincon Project ("the Project"). The Project consists of brine extraction from the Salar del Rincon, using Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE) technology, to produce lithium carbonate (Li2CO3).

The CHA was developed to determine whether any species or habitats within the Salar de Rincon Basin meet the Critical Habitat criteria outlined in International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standard 6 (PS6) Guidance Note (2019). These criteria include the presence of: (i) threatened species (Critically Endangered or Endangered); (ii) endemic or restricted-range species; (iii) migratory or congregatory species; (iv) highly threatened and/or unique ecosystems; and/or (v) areas associated with key evolutionary processes. The assessment was conducted within an Ecologically Appropriate Area of Analysis (EAAA), which defines the spatial scope for evaluating the presence of Critical Habitat.

Species classified as Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN), potential restricted-range species, and migratory or congregatory species, or regional priority species classified as VU (i.e., such as flamingos) were assessed using data from the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, and relevant literature; of these, 19 species were identified as being potential Critical Habitat species. These species were further assessed via expert consultation and implementation of additional field surveys undertaken in November 2024 through April 2025 evaluated using the Critical Habitat criteria outlined in the IFC Guidance Note 6: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources (June 2019).

The additional studies identified two to three potentially new *Liolaemus* species; *Liolaemus sp. AC*, composed of two subpopulations: *Liolaemus sp. A* and *Liolaemus sp. C*. These two subpopulations may represent two separate species, currently referred to as *Liolaemus sp. A* and *Liolaemus sp. C*, respectively. Another possible new species, *Liolaemus sp. B*— was also recorded during the field survey; however, this species occurs outside the basin and was excluded from further CH assessment.

Because these are unconfirmed newly described species, the final taxonomic status, geographic distribution, and abundance for these species will be updated through further studies. Therefore, CH status is assessed using data collected through August 2025 *and is not considered final at this time*.

The CHA finds three known species of *Liolaemus* (*Liolaemus multicolour, Liolaemus porosus*, *Liolaemus scrocchi)* and one to two newly described *Liolaemus* species; *Liolaemus sp. AC* (or *Liolaemus sp. A* and *Liolaemus sp. C*) qualify as Critical Biodiversity Values according to Criterion 2 (restricted-range species) thresholds.

In addition, Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EMEs) occurring within the EAAA meet thresholds for Criterion 2 (range-restricted species), Criterion 4 (Endangered and threatened ecosystems), and Criterion 5 (Unique evolutionary processes).
The CH biodiversity values are described below:

- *Liolaemus sp. AC* is newly described endemic and restricted-range lizard whose taxonomic status is currently under study. It was recorded in the Salar de Rincon Basin and EAAA during field studies conducted by experts Dr. Cristian Abdala and Dr. Marcos Paz in November 2024 and February-March 2025. *Liolaemus sp. AC* reaches Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds. Liolaemus sp. AC, may be two distinct species: *Liolaemus sp. A* and *Liolaemus sp. C* (see bullets below). It is possible that this species could further be divided into two subspecies or species:

  - Liolaemus sp. A is an endemic and restricted-range lizard and a new species for science. This species (if confirmed as being taxonomically distinct) meets Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds.

  - Liolaemus sp. C is an endemic and restricted-range lizard, new species for science If confirmed as a being taxonomically distinct, it meets Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds.

- *Liolaemus multicolour* is an endemic and restricted-range lizard. Recorded in the EAAA in November 2024 and February-March 2025, this species meets Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds.

- *Liolaemus porosus* is an endemic and restricted-range lizard. Recorded in the EAAA during November 2024 and February-March 2025, this species meets Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds.

- *Liolaemus scrocchi* is an endemic and restricted-range lizard. Recorded in the EAAA during November 2024 and February-March 2025, this species meets Critical Habitat Criterion 2 thresholds.

- Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EMEs) contain microorganisms that tolerate extreme conditions such as hypersaline habitats. EMEs meet Critical Habitat Criterion 2[1], Criterion 4, and Criterion 5.

The Project Footprint overlaps with the distribution and habitat of the following Critical species:

[1] Although EME communities and species have not fully been identified, it is possible that micro-endemism occurs. Therefore, based on the precautionary principle, EME's will be considered as Criterion 2 triggering.

- Liolaemus sp. AC.
- Liolaemus multicolour.
- Liolaemus scrocchi.

The Project Area of Direct Influence (ADI) overlaps with these as a Critical Biodiversity value:

- Habitats containing EMEs.

Additionally, 12 species that do not qualify as Critical Habitat triggering species are categorized as priority species and are of conservation concern for the Project. These include:

- The vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna)*, Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe),* Chilean flamingo (*Phoenicopterus chilensis*), Horned Coot (*Fulica cornuta*), Puna Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus jamesi*), and the Andean Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus andinus)*, which are also considered a priority for the Los Andes National Reserve.
- The Lesser Rhea (*Rhea pennata*), Condor (*Vultur gryphus*), Andean cat (*Leopardus jacobita*), the Short-tailed Chinchilla (*Chinchilla chinchilla*), Shipton's Mountain Cavy (*Microcavia shiptoni*), and Atacama Water Frog (*Telmatobius atacamensis*).

The Salar de Rincon Basin overlaps with the National Protected Area (NPA) 'Los Andes Natural Wildlife Reserve', whose objective is to restore and/or maintain the viability of Puna's flagship species and maintain key ecosystem functions of high-altitude wetlands, salt flats, and EMEs.

To comply with IFC PS6 the Project is implementing:

- A Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) with specific measures for *Liolaemus* spp. mitigation (designed in collaboration with species experts).
- A Research and Management Plan for EMEs.
- A Biodiversity Action Plan that outlines a Net Gain strategy for Critical Biodiversity Values.

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
AOO	Area Of Occupancy
ADI	Area of Direct Influence
AII	Area of Indirect Influence
CHA	Critical Habitat Assessment
CHS	Critical Habitat Screening
CONICET	Consejo Nacional de Investigations Científicas y Técnicas (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research)
CR	Critically Endangered
DEM	Digital Elevation Model
DLE	Direct Lithium Extraction
EAAA	Ecologically Appropriate Area of Analysis
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
EMEs	Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems
EN	Endangered
EOO	Extent Of Occurrence
ERM	Environmental Resources Management Argentina S.A.
FWSF	Filtered Waste Storage Facility
GBIF	Global Biodiversity Information Facility
GeoCAT	IUCN Geospatial Conservation Assessment Tool
GIS	Geographic Information System
ha	hectares
HDPE	high-density polyethylene
IBAT	Integrated Biodiversity Management Tool
IDE	Infraestructura de datos espaciales de Chile
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IGN	Instituto Geográfico Nacional
INIQUI-CONICET	Instituto de Investigaciones para la Industria Química-Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
k	Kilometres
k^2	Square kilometres
Ktpa	Thousand tonnes per annum
kV	Kilovolt
LAgS	Water and Soil Laboratory
LC	Least Concern
Li2CO3	Lithium carbonate
m	metres
mm	millimetres
m^3/h	Cubic meters per hour
masl	Metres above sea level
NG	Net Gain
NNL	No Net Loss
NPA	National Protected Area
NT	Near Threatened
PFAs	Points and Flexible Areas
PS6	Performance Standard 6
RMPL	Rincon Mining PTY Limited
RNFSLA	Reserva Natural de Fauna Silvestre Los Andes
SADI	Argentine Interconnection System
SBDF	Spent Brine Disposal Facility
SCG	Social Capital Group
TAP	Potable drinking water treatment
tpa	Tonnes per annum
UAVs	unmanned aerial vehicles
µm	micrometres
UNSA	Universidad Nacional de Salta

µS/cm	Micro Siemens per centimetre
VU	Vulnerable

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

ERM Argentina S.A. was contracted by Rio Tinto to develop a Critical Habitat Assessment (CHA) for the lithium extraction project in Salar del Rincon, known as the Rincon Project (the Project). The Project is in the Salar del Rincon Basin, Los Andes Department, Salta Province, Argentina, at an altitude of 3,725 meters above sea level (masl) and covers a total of 829 square kilometres (km^2) (Figure 1). Rincon Mining PTY Limited (RMPL) is the holder of the mining concession for lithium extraction. RMPL was acquired by Rio Tinto in March 2022.

The Salar del Rincon Basin is within the biogeographic region known as the Argentinean Puna, which is characterized by extreme aridity, low rainfall, low temperatures in winter, and large thermal amplitudes at any time of the year (ADY Resources Limited, 2007). The Salar del Rincon is divided into two distinct vegetational sectors; azonal vegetation, which includes highland wetlands (vegas), and zonal vegetation, which includes flora adapted to nutrient-poor soils and arid conditions.

The high salinity, aridity, cold, and altitude have generated a diversity of ecological niches, resulting in the presence of endemic species of flora and fauna. Among these, lizard species belonging to the genus *Liolaemus* are noteworthy. The basin is also characterized by the presence of aquatic habitats that are the temporary home of migratory species, including flamingos (*Phoenicoparrus andinus, Phoenicoparrus jamesi, Phoenicopterus chilensis),* and the Horned Coot *(Fulica cornuta*). Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EMEs) may occur in salt flats, high altitude lakes and waterbodies.

In addition, species typical of the high Andean Puna such as Vicuña (*Vicugna vicugna*), the Highland tuco tuco (*Ctenomys opimus*), Culpeo fox (*Lycalopex culpaeus*), Vizcacha (*Lagidium viscacia*), and Lesser Rhea (*Rhea pennata*) also occur in the Salar del Rincon Basin.

As part of this assessment, Natural, Modified, or Critical Habitat (CH) classification was undertaken following IFC PS6 guidance. Natural Habitats were identified based on the presence of native vegetation, minimal human disturbance, and intact ecological processes. Modified Habitats were characterized by identifying areas that have undergone significant human alteration, such as agricultural development, urbanization, or infrastructure, which have led to changes in species composition and ecosystem function. Critical Habitats were delineated by evaluating the presence of endangered or endemic species, key biodiversity areas, and habitats essential for species survival, or areas associated with key evolutionary processes.

Potential CH biodiversity values were identified and evaluated through expert assessment and additional field studies within the Salar de Rincon to determine whether they met CH criteria and thresholds.

This document is divided into seven chapters as follows:

- Chapter 1 contains the Introduction and Project background, main objectives, information sources, and a summary of national and lender requirements.
- Chapter 2 describes the Project, its facilities, and Area of Influence.
- Chapter 3 includes the Critical Habitat Assessment, and a summary of results.
- Chapter 4 describes Critical Habitats and losses.
- Chapter 5 indicates the PS6 requirements for Natural and Critical Habitat.
- Chapter 6 summarizes the current Project alignment status according to PS6 requirements for Natural and Critical Habitat and details the next steps and recommendations on the additional measures to be taken to ensure compliance with the standard.
- Chapter 7 proposes the next steps for further alignment with PS6.
- Chapter 8 includes the references.

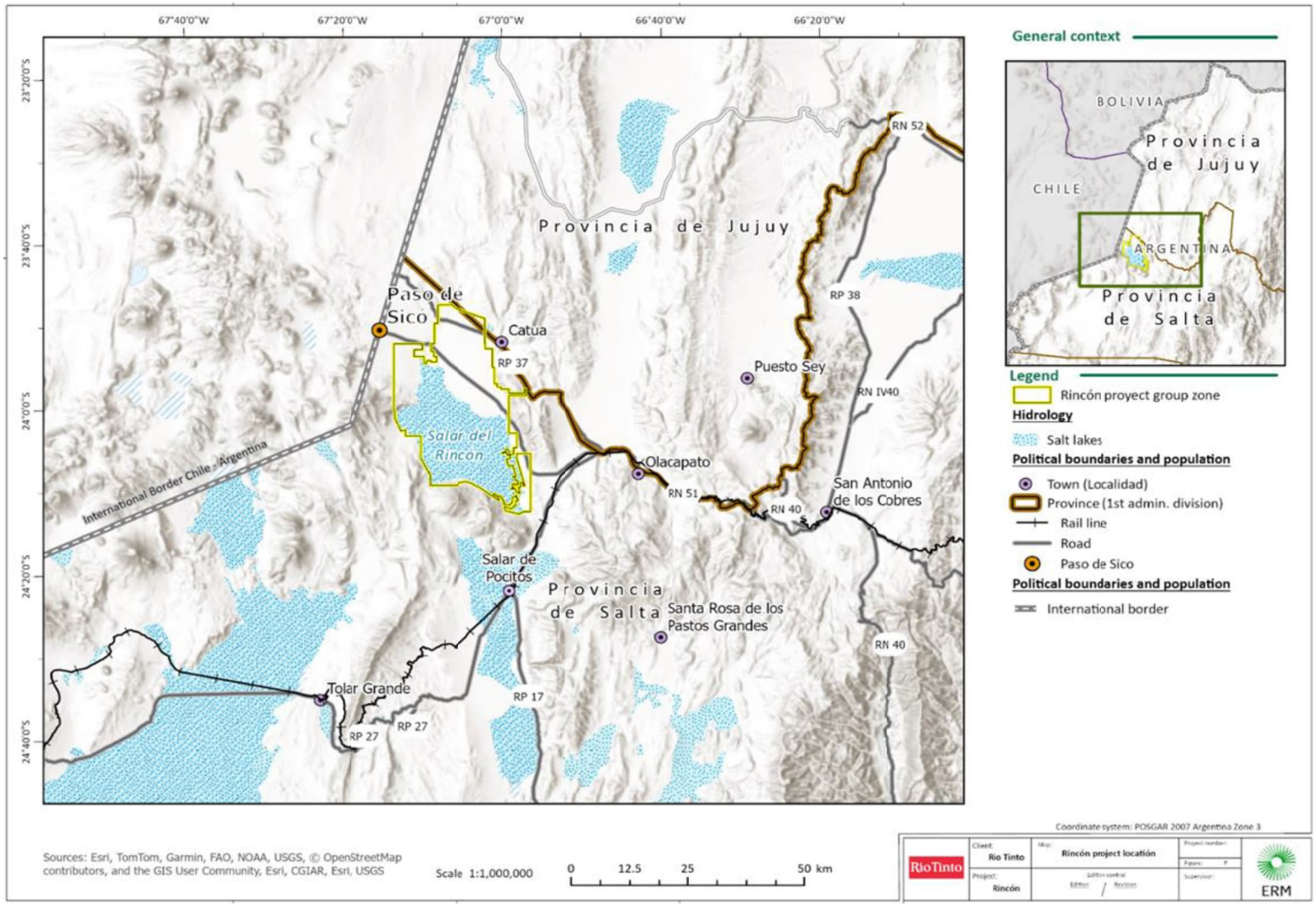


Figure 1: Project location

1.2 Objectives

The objectives of this Critical Habitat Assessment are to:

- Evaluate the Project area (i.e., Salar de Rincon Basin) for presence of Critical Habitat-triggering biodiversity values using criteria defined in IFC PS6, *Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Living Natural Resources*, and its associated Guidance Note.
- Identify and map Natural and Critical Habitats within the Project's Area of Influence.
- Review project alignment with IFC PS6 concerning identified Natural and Critical Habitat biodiversity values.
- Outline the next steps needed for the Project to further align with IFC PS6 requirements and attain No Net Loss (NNL) for loss of Natural Habitat, or Net Gain (NG) for Critical Habitat values.

1.3 Documents and Databases Reviewed

For the development of this CHA, the following documents and databases and databases were reviewed:

- ADY Resources Limited. 2007. Environmental Technical Report "*Proyecto Rincon – Fase de Exploración*".
- AUSENCO. 2018. Environmental Technical Report "*Actualización Proyecto Salar de Rincon*".
- EC & Asociados. 2022. Environmental Technical Report "*Construcción de nuevo campamento*".
- EC & Asociados. 2022. Environmental Impact Report Adendum "*Planta Rincon Rápido 3000 tpa. Proyecto Rincon*".
- EC & Asociados. 2022. Environmental Impact Report "*Construcción de Pista de Aterrizaje*".
- Energie. 2023. Environmental and Social Impact Assessment "*Rincon Litio 33kV Power Supply*".
- EC & Asociados. 2024. Environmental Impact Report "*Proyecto Rincon 50Ktpa*" (2024 ESIA).
- EC & Asociados. 2024. Environmental Impact Report "*Etapa de Explotación Cantera Rococo*".
- EC & Asociados. 2024. Environmental Impact Report "*Etapa de Explotación Cantera Sapito*".
- Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT) Report (generated in September 2024).
- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List (IUCN 2025. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 2025-1. <https://www.iucnredlist.org>).
- Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF https://www.gbif.org/, accessed May 2025).
- Integral Management and Development Plan Los Andes Wildlife Natural Reserve, Laguna Socompa Wildlife Refuge and Tolar Grande Wildlife Refuge (*Resolución* No. 428/18).
- IFC. 2019. International Finance Corporation's Guidance Note 6: Biodiversity and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources.

1.4 Legal Framework

1.4.1 National Framework and Lender Requirements

The Project is required to comply with all relevant national and local environmental laws and regulations described in Table 1.

Table 1. National Compliance

Law/Regulation	Topic	Description
National Law Nº 25.675 – Environmental General Law	General	Sets the basis for the Argentinian National State to manage environmental matters and to enforce the law's dispositions.
National Law Nº 20.284 – Atmospheric Contamination Law	Air	Sets the guidelines that should be applied to all emission sources located in the federal jurisdiction.
National Law N° 25.688 – Water Environmental Management Regime	Water	Establishes the basis for water preservation and rational use. It also declares basins to be of environmental importance.
Provincial Law Nº 7.070 – Environmental Protection	General	Establishes the rules governing the relationship between people and environment, including ecosystems, biodiversity, natural resources, species genetics, natural monuments and landscapes.
Provincial Decree Nº 3.133 – Soil Conservation and Sustainable Recovery	Soil	Declares of public interest the use, conservation and recovery of the soil.
Provincial Law Nº 7.101 – Provincial Protected Area System	Protected areas	Constitutes a legal framework for conservation, development, planification and management of natural areas of the province.
Provincial Law Nº 6.709 – Vicuña Conservation	Fauna	Prohibits hunting and possession of individuals of the species *Vicugna vicugna* and declares several departments as Reserve Area.
Provincial Law Nº 5.513 – Wildlife Protection	Fauna	Declares of public interest the propagation, conservation, repopulation and utilization of wild fauna. Also, it adds controls to hunting and fishing.
National Decree Nº 666/1997 – National Executive Power	Fauna	Defines the national conservation categories for native fauna.
National Resolution E 795/2017 – Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Fauna	Defines the national conservation categories for native birdlife species.
National Resolution E 316/2021 – Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Fauna	Defines the national conservation categories for native mammal species.
National Resolution 1055/2013 – Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development	Fauna	Defines the national conservation categories for native reptiles and amphibian species.
Provincial Decree Nº 308 – Los Andes Natural Wildlife Reserve	Protected areas	Creates the Los Andes Natural Wildlife Reserve in Los Andes Department.
Provincial Law Nº 7.017 – Salta Province's Water Code	Water	Controls water's special usage, such as irrigation or industrial.
Municipal Ordinance Nº 05 – Environment Code	General	Creates a municipal/departmental (San Antonio de los Cobres) code that establishes the regulations and norms for the environment conservation, protection and development in the jurisdiction.

1.4.2 Lender Requirements

The lenders require the Project to be aligned with the following standards:

- International Finance Corporation (IFC) Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability (2012).
- IFC Performance Standard 6 (PS6) and its associated Guidance Note: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Management of Living Natural Resources (2019).
- IFC General EHS Guidelines (2007).

As a primary requirement, IFC PS6 indicates the application of the mitigation hierarchy to avoid impacts, to the extent possible, on Natural Habitat or Critical Habitat by sitting Projects in Modified (non-Critical) Habitats or Natural Habitats of lesser value by conducting an analysis of alternatives or avoiding activities during sensitive periods of the life cycle of species of concern. In addition to avoiding Natural and Critical Habitat to the extent possible, a Project must minimize impacts, restore habitats, and apply equivalent offset measures, which should only be considered after appropriate prevention, minimisation, and restoration measures have been implemented.

In non-Critical Natural Habitats, NNL of biodiversity should be attained for biodiversity values, while in Critical Habitat, a NG of biodiversity is required.

1.5 Definitions

Critical Habitat: Areas of high biodiversity value, such as: (i) habitats of significant importance for the survival of threatened or Critically endangered species; (ii) habitats of significant importance for the survival of endemic species or species restricted to certain areas; (iii) habitats that support the survival of globally significant concentrations of migratory or congregating species; (iv) unique or highly threatened ecosystems; or (v) areas associated with key evolutionary processes.

Endemic or geographically restricted species: For the purposes of IFC Guidance Note 6, the term "endemic" is defined as "geographically restricted". This means that the species has a limited extent of occurrence (EOO).

- In the case of terrestrial vertebrates and plants, geographically restricted species are defined as those species with an EOO of less than 50,000km^2. In the case of marine systems, geographically restricted species are provisionally considered those with an EOO of less than 100,000km^2.
- In the case of coastal, riverine and other aquatic species in habitats that do not exceed 200 kilometres (km) in width at any point (e.g., rivers), geographically restricted species are defined as those with a global distribution equal to or less than a linear geographic extent of 500km (i.e., the maximum distance between two occupied locations).

Migratory species: Migratory species are all those species in which a significant proportion of their members move cyclically and predictably from one geographic area to another (even within the same ecosystem).

Modified Habitats: are areas that may contain a large proportion of plant and/or animal species of non-native origin, and/or where human activity has substantially modified an area's primary ecological functions and species composition. Modified Habitats may include areas managed for agriculture, forest plantations, reclaimed coastal zones, and reclaimed wetlands.

Natural Habitats: are areas composed of viable assemblages of plant and/or animal species of largely native origin, and/or where human activity has not essentially modified an area's primary ecological functions and species composition.

IUCN Red List: This list represents a checklist of taxa that has been subject to an extinction risk assessment using the categories and criteria of the IUCN. Categorisation criteria include: A) population decline (past, current or projected); B) geographic range size (including fragmentation and fluctuations); C) small population size (decline and fluctuations); D) very small population or restricted distribution; and E) quantitative analysis of extinction risk. The protection categories are broken down from these indicators:

- **Data Deficient (DD):** A taxon is DD when there is inadequate information to make a direct or indirect assessment of its extinction risk, based on its distribution or population status. A taxon in this category could be better studied, and its biology well known, but appropriate information on abundance and/or distribution is lacking.

- **Least Concern (LC):** a taxon is LC when it has been assessed against the IUCN Red List criteria and does not qualify as CR, EN, VU or NT.

- **Near Threatened (NT):** a taxon that does not meet the criteria for EN or VU but is close to meeting them or may qualify for one of the risk categories in the near future.

- **Vulnerable (VU):** a taxon that meets any of the criteria A - E for VU and is therefore considered to face a high risk of extinction in the wild.

- **Endangered (EN, Endangered):** a taxon that meets any of the criteria A - E for EN, and is therefore considered to face a very high risk of extinction in the wild.

- **Critically Endangered (EN):** a taxon that meets any of the criteria A - E for CR and is therefore considered to face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild.

- **Extinct in the Wild (EW):** A taxon is considered EW when it is known to survive only in cultivation, captivity, or as a naturalized population outside the historical distribution. A taxon is considered presumed extinct in the wild when exhaustive surveys in known or expected habitat, at appropriate times (hourly, seasonal, annual), throughout its historical distribution, have failed to record an individual. Sampling should occur at a period appropriate to the taxon's life cycle and life form.

- **Extinct (EX):** a taxon is considered extinct when there is no reasonable doubt that the last individual has died. A taxon is considered presumed extinct when exhaustive surveys in known or expected habitat, at appropriate times (hourly, seasonal, annual), throughout its historical distribution, have failed to record an individual. Sampling should occur at a period appropriate to the taxon's life cycle and life form.

Decree 666/97 – Conservation of Wildlife: the Argentinian Government established its own classification in addition to the IUCN categorization on the Red List of Threatened Species. The categories are described below:

- **Not Evaluated (NE):** a taxon that has not been assessed for a category assignment.

- **Insufficiently known (IC):** a taxon that can't be assigned to any category due to lack of information about its threat level.

- **Not Threatened (NA):** a taxon that isn't threatened or its risk of extinction is considered low.

- **Vulnerable (VU):** a taxon that isn't endangered or threatened but can be at risk because of its decreasing population number, its geographic distribution or other factors.

- **Threatened (AM):** a taxon that is susceptible to becoming endangered because of hunting, habitat loss/fragmentation or other factors.

- **Endangered (EP):** a taxon that is immediately at risk of extinction and its survival would be unlikely if its regression factors were still acting.

These categories were cross referenced to those established by the IUCN in 2021 by the Argentinean Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development's Resolution 316. Table 2 shows the equivalence.

Table 2. Conservation Categories for IUCN and Argentina

IUCN		**Argentina**	
Extinct	EX	-	-
Extinct in the Wild	EW	-	-
Critically Endangered	CR	-	-
Endangered	EN	En Peligro de Extinción (Endangered)	EP
Vulnerable	VU	Amenazada (Threatened)	AM
Near Threatened	NT	Vulnerable (Vulnerable)	VU
Least Concern	LC	No Amenazada (Not Threatened)	NA
Data Deficient	DD	Insuficientemente conocido (Insufficiently known)	IC
Not Evaluated	NE	No Evaluado (Not Assessed)	DE

Source: National Decree Nº 666/1997; IUCN

1.6 Limitations and Assumptions

The following section outlines the key assumptions and limitations of this study. These considerations are essential for interpreting the scope, applicability, and potential constraints of the findings presented herein.

- The species categorisation is based on the current classifications provided by the IUCN and national legislation.

- The Project and the description of the facilities (including the footprint areas) are updated as of the submission of this report. This information has been updated according to the reviewed Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) with the shapefiles shared by Rio Tinto in 2025 (Section 2.1.9). As the Project progresses, further updates may be required.

- Groundwater and other hydrogeological models and Area of Influence correspond to the most recent available data and analyses, and further updates may be required.

- EMEs are the subject of ongoing research by Rio Tinto, and the current CHA includes information collected as of June 2025.

- *Liolaemus* spp. exhibit taxonomic uncertainties that may affect species-level assessments and CH status. During expert consultations and field surveys conducted in 2025, two to three potential and previously undescribed species were identified. As taxonomic and additional field studies progress, taxonomy and CH status will be updated. The current report is taking a conservative and precautionary approach to CH identification and considers data collected through August 2025.

- In addition to taxonomic uncertainties, data on preferred habitats and full geographic distribution for *Liolaemus* species is scarce, so that it is likely that current geographic distributions may increase with further data. This may result in adjustment of CH designations for some species.

- This assessment does not include any fieldwork or data collection in Chile, which could influence species distribution estimates.

2 Project Description

The Project consists of brine extraction from the Salar del Rincon, using Direct Lithium Extraction (DLE) technology, to produce lithium carbonate (Li_2CO_3). The DLE process supports water conservation, reduces waste, and produces lithium carbonate more consistently than other methods (2024 ESIA).

2.1 Project Facilities

The Project facilities or Project footprint cover an area of 3,324.3 hectares (ha), as described in the following sections.

2.1.1 Process Plants

The Project will have two lithium carbonate (Li_2CO_3) production plants, which are described below.

- **3 thousand tonnes per annum (Ktpa) Lithium Carbonate (R3000) Plant (3Ktpa Plant)**: This is a small commercial demonstration plant to produce 3Ktpa battery-grade lithium carbonate (Li_2CO_3) from the brine of the Salar de Rincon. R3000 (approved through Resolution No. 009/2023) it will have a useful life of 4 years and is the preliminary step to the construction and operation of the larger scale 50Ktpa Plant.

- **50Ktpa Lithium Carbonate Plant (50Ktpa Plant)**: This plant has a production capacity of 50Ktpa of battery-grade lithium carbonate, organised into two production trains of 25Ktpa each. It is expected to operate for 40 years. The plant includes several processing areas, each dedicated to a specific stage of brine treatment and lithium carbonate production.

The raw brine is extracted and transported to the plant, where it undergoes the process shown in Figure 2:

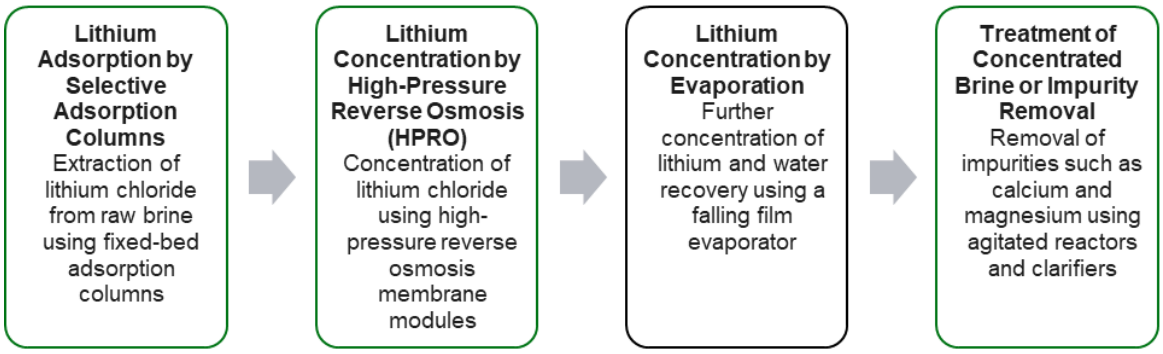


Figure 2: Plant process

The plant will be equipped with advanced control and monitoring systems that ensure process efficiency and safety, as well as support infrastructure such as compressed air generation and distribution systems, water treatment, and waste management.

2.1.2 System for Supplying Brine from Wells

The brine supply system for both plants is designed to extract and transport raw brine from the wells to the processing plant. This system includes the following facilities:

- **Brine wells**. Will consist of 150 brine extraction wells, comprising the existing PW1 well platform of 60 metres (m) x 80m (0.48ha) and 149 projected wells in 50m x 50m platforms (37.3ha). These wells will be equipped with vertical turbine pumps made from corrosion-resistant materials such as stainless steel. The pumps are designed to handle large volumes of brine, ensuring a constant flow to the plant.

- **Brine pipes**. Brine will be transported through a network of high-strength pipes, which will be buried to protect them from extreme environmental conditions and minimize visual impact.

Additionally, in the platforms, the system will include intermediate pumping stations and storage tanks to regulate the flow and pressure of the brine, ensuring efficient and continuous operation (Brine Transfer Ponds). The infrastructure also includes automated monitoring and control systems that allow real-time supervision of the pumps and pipes, detecting any anomalies and facilitating preventive maintenance.

Brine will be extracted from the reservoir through the following extraction wells:

- Halite Fractured Aquifer, with an average flow rate of 500 cubic meters per hour (m^3/h).

- Black Sands Aquifer, with an average flow rate of $45m^3/h$.

2.1.3 System for Supplying Raw Water from Wells

The raw water supply system for industrial use from wells is essential for the operation of the processing plant, providing the necessary water for various stages of lithium processing. This system will be located in the Catua Formation and includes the following facilities:

- **Freshwater wells.** Consists of a network of 36 extraction wells (4 existing wells and 32 projected ones), each equipped with high-capacity submersible pumps. The pumps are designed to operate efficiently under the specific geological conditions of the site, extracting water from deep aquifers. The average flow rate will be $36m^3/h$ per well.

- **Freshwater pipes.** The raw water will be transported through high-density polyethylene (HDPE) and coated steel pipes, which will be buried to protect them from the weather and reduce the risk of damage, like the brine extraction wells.

The platforms include storage tanks and pumping stations that will regulate the flow and pressure of the water, ensuring a constant and reliable supply.

Additionally, advanced monitoring and control systems will be implemented for real-time supervision of the pumps and pipes, detecting any issues and facilitating preventive maintenance. This system will be designed to minimize environmental impact, using technologies that optimize water use and reduce energy consumption.

2.1.4 Spent Brine Disposal Facility

The Spent Brine Disposal Facility (SBDF) is designed to contain the volumes of spent brine generated during the lithium extraction process, characterized by the depletion of lithium and its high concentration of dissolved solids and components such as sodium chloride and magnesium chloride. The dimensions of the SBDF are 2,400ha to be developed in two stages and a maximum height of 13.6m.

The SBDF will be situated in the northwest of the Salar, an area with low permeability and good load-bearing capacity. The embankment will be constructed using halite and material from the borrow area. The design includes a geosynthetic liner on the internal slope of the embankment to mitigate infiltration and erosion. The foundation preparation involves the removal of topsoil, soil conditioning, and compaction.

The SBDF design includes storage cells that allow for the controlled evaporation of the brine, facilitating the crystallization of dissolved solids. Construction will be carried out in two stages, with embankments and impermeabilization systems to reduce infiltration. The facility will have a capacity of 28Ktpa and 53Ktpa. The spent brine will be transported from the 50Ktpa and 3Ktpa plants through 710 millimetres (mm) and 355mm diameter pipelines, respectively.

The SBDF will include water management measures such as drainage and rainwater collection systems, continuous monitoring to ensure structural stability and operational efficiency, maintenance of free edges, spillways, and runoff diversions.

2.1.5 Filtered Waste Storage Facility

The Filtered Waste Storage Facility (FWSF) is designed to store solid waste generated during the brine treatment process. This waste, primarily composed of magnesium hydroxide and calcium carbonate, is generated as sludge during the lithium carbonate purification process.

The FWSF will constitute one cell of 13.15ha. This will be equipped with impermeability and drainage systems to prevent changes in soil and groundwater quality. The waste will be transported to the FWSF by trucks and spread in the cells using earth-moving equipment. Water management in the FWSF includes runoff collection and controlled evaporation of surface water.

2.1.6 Quarries

Two quarries will be utilised, one for finer materials (clay), and another for coarser materials.

2.1.7 Internal Roads

The Project has a network of existing roads and plans to construct additional internal roads with a width of 7m. The existing roads under Rio Tinto's responsibility are those located within the company's concession area and do not include state-managed routes (i.e., national, provincial, or secondary roads under government jurisdiction). Two categories of roads are identified: Type 1) Roads located in the raw water and brine well area, which do not require heavy traffic; and Type 2) Roads corresponding to those distributed in the disposal storage area, electrical substation, and processing plants, where traffic will be heavy.

2.1.8 Batch Plant

A batch plant will be used during the construction stage, which is designed to produce large volumes of high-quality concrete, ensuring that work is carried out efficiently and safely.

2.1.9 Power Line

The Project proposes the construction and operation of a 33 kilovolt (kV) medium-voltage line. The primary objective is to facilitate the transmission of electricity from the La Puna transformer station, which is currently connected to the Argentine Interconnection System (SADI), to the Project's internal distribution system.

The trajectory of the voltage line is situated along the eastern periphery of National Route No. 51, exhibiting a lack of intersecting routes. In certain sections, it is positioned in parallel alignment with the 345kV ultra-high voltage line, ensuring adherence to the requisite safety distances.

To calculate the area of the power line over the soil, the information provided by Rio Tinto in June 2025 was used. The approximate area of each tower is 0.817 square metre (m²) (1.02m diameter). With an estimated total of 251 towers (on average a 120m of span according to the shapefiles sent by Rio Tinto in June 2025), the total area is approximately 0.0001km² in the Salar del Rincon Basin. An additional, parallel power line of 33kV is projected.

2.1.10 Reserved Laydown Area

Temporary use areas for stockpiling materials during construction.

2.1.11 Airstrip

An airstrip will facilitate the transportation of personnel and supplies. It consists of a runway, entrance road, an internal circulation road, and a perimeter fence. Currently, the airstrip is operational.

2.1.12 Camps

Camps provide accommodation and basic services for workers. The camps are designed to be comfortable and safe, with modern and well-equipped facilities. Camps are currently under construction. The camps are being built in stages; the first stage, which will include a camp that can house 500 people, will be constructed in two phases while a second and third phase will include construction that will enable and additional 1,500 and 400 people to be housed, respectively.

2.1.13 Other Projected Facilities: Control Gatehouse and New Evaporation Ponds

Additional facilities which were not included in any of the Environmental Impact Reports include a control gatehouse and evaporation ponds. The new evaporation ponds will receive water from the treated sewage effluent and reject water from the potable drinking water treatment (TAP) plant.

2.1.14 Berms

Berms will be constructed around the following facilities:

- Camps (security trench, defensive and security berm and E1 berm).
- 50Ktpa Plant (Defensive and security berm and E1 berm).
- 3Ktpa Plant (E3 berm).
- FWSF (E2 berm).
- SBDF (SBDF berm).
- Berm construction has two main objectives: 1) creation of a safety barrier; and 2) protection against potential flooding.

2.1.15 Legacy Facilities

These facilities refer to the evaporation ponds inherited from ADY Resources Limited, a previous lithium project. Rio Tinto will not utilise these facilities, and they are not included in the assessment as Rio Tinto will restore the areas.

2.2 Area of Influence of the Project

The Area of Influence (AoI) for the Project was delineated using as a reference "The Guide for the Preparation of Environmental Impact Assessment", updated in November 2023 by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Argentina. This guide defines the AoI as: "*The geographical area where the Project exerts positive or negative impacts on environmental receptors, and whose management the proponent must respond to. For better definition, it is divided into areas of direct influence (ADI) and area of indirect influence (AII), allowing for the proper establishment of direct and indirect impacts generated by the project.*" (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development of the Republic of Argentina, 2023).

This area includes the Salar de Rincon Basin, an endorheic system where environmental interactions are confined to the basin. It includes nearby communities such as Catua, Olacapato, Estación Salar de Pocitos in the Direct Social Area of Influence, and farther away, San Antonio de los Cobres in the Indirect Social Area of Influence (2024 ESIA).

The ADI delineation considered potential impacts on soil, air, water, flora, fauna, as well as socioeconomic and cultural aspects. The identification and classification of ecosystem services were also an integral part of this evaluation, highlighting areas of importance within the region (2024 ESIA).

2.2.1 Area of Direct Influence

The ADI includes the area directly affected by the operational footprint of the Project, the baseline environmental and social data, as well as the results of air quality, noise, and groundwater modelling. The impact footprints of the Project were overlaid in a Geographic Information System (GIS) with all relevant environmental data to delineate the Area of Direct Influence (ADI). This spatial analysis allowed for the identification of the ADI's extent, which covers approximately 115,668ha.

Ten vegetation and soil cover types were identified within the ADI. Three of them comprise 90% of the ADI total area; these are Shrub steppe (vegetation; 45,194.00ha), Salt crust (soil cover; 42,213.80ha), and Peladar (mostly soil cover; 18,698.00ha).

Other vegetation and soil cover types present in smaller proportions include Mixed steppe (4,595.00ha), Grass steppe (3,212.00ha), Hydric grassland (471.00ha), Halophytic vegetation referred to as "*Saline vega*[2]

[2] The term "saline vega" does not represent a vega in its traditional use, but rather refers to halophyllic vegetation.

(479.20ha), Tolar (183.00ha), and Vega wetlands (20.00ha), as well as water bodies that include the Rincon Lagoon (28.00ha).

Modified land covers are limited in extent and include previously installed solar power parks (370.00ha) and access roads (204.00ha), jointly representing less than 1% of the ADI (Table 3).

Table 3. Vegetation and other Soil types within the ADI and AII

Vegetation and other soil cover types	Area of Direct Influence (ha)	Area of Indirect Influence (ha)	Total (ha)
Grass steppe	3,212.00	600.20	3,812.20
Hydric grassland	471.00	600.20	1,071.20
Mixed steppe	4,595.00	372.30	4,967.30
Peladar	18,698.00	3,145.70	21,843.70
Saline vega	479.20	84.23	563.43
Salt crust	42,213.80	705.20	42,919.00
Shrub steppe	45,194.00	9,560.20	54,754.20
Tolar	183.00	87.10	270.10
Vega	20.00	9.10	29.10
Water bodies	28.00	1.50	29.50
Solar park	370.00	9.10	379.10
Access road	204.00	0.00	204.00
Total	**115,668.00**	**15,174.83**	**130,842.83**

The Project footprint covers 3,300.62ha mostly occurring within the salt-crust of which 2,901.10ha, and will contain the SBDF, brine wells, and Sapito quarry. The 3Ktpa and 50Ktpa plants are located adjacent to the salt crust, mostly occurring in areas of extremely scarce vegetation known as Peladar. Peladar will also overlap with access roads, the FWSF, and the Rococó quarry, covering a total of 324.90ha of this vegetation cover type. The SBDF (Cell B) will overlap with 5.10ha of Saline vega and 1,108.00ha of Salt crust (Table 4 and Figure 3).

2.2.2 Area of Indirect Influence

The AII is defined as the geographical area where possible indirect impacts of the Project are foreseen. To delimit this area, a margin based on hydrogeological, geological, and morphological criteria was used to determine the maximum extent of hydrogeological and geological units from which groundwater will be extracted. Geological maps, geomorphological maps, and high-resolution satellite images were assessed. The AII is 15,174.80ha and includes areas that belong to the sequence of rocks and sediments deposited in the pre-existing central lake, and sequences of recent sediments in the alluvial fans (Table 3).

Vegetation types and other soil cover types within the AII are dominated by Shrub steppe, which covers 9,560.20ha. This is followed by Peladar at 3,145.70ha, and salt crust at 705.20ha. Other vegetation types present include Grass steppe (600.20ha), Mixed steppe (372.30ha), Hydric grassland (471.00ha), and smaller extents of Halophytic vegetation (Saline vegas) (84.23ha), Tolar (87.10ha), and Vegas (9.10ha). Aquatic habitats such as water bodies are minimally represented, covering only 1.50ha of the AII (Table 4).

Table 4. Project Footprint Overlap with each Vegetation Type

Project facilities	Total Project footprint area (ha)	Hydric grassland area (ha)	Peladar area (ha)	Halophytic vegetation (Saline Vega) area (ha)	Salt crust area (ha)	Shrub steppe area (ha)	Tolar area (ha)	Grass steppe area (ha)	Water bodies area (ha)	Mixed steppe area (ha)	Vega Area (ha)
3Kpta Plant	58.20	3.00	51.00	0.00	0.00	0.40	3.80	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
50Ktpa Plant	18.10	0.00	18.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Airstrips	61.10	0.00	61.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Batch plant	1.10	0.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Brine transfer ponds	4.30	0.30	0.00	0.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Camp*	18.00	0.00	18.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Control gatehouse	0.10	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Defensive and security berm	1.78	0.00	1.78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
E1 Berm	1.97	0.00	1.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
E2 Berm	2.49	0.00	2.11	0.00	0.00	0.29	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
E3 Berm	1.20	0.00	0.92	0.00	0.00	0.12	0.17	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Existing brine well	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.48	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Existing freshwater wells	0.27	0.00	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Existing roads	466.71	0.43	92.48	1.60	354.18	17.08	0.95	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Filtered Waste Storage Facility (FWSF)	13.15	0.00	4.15	0.00	0.00	8.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Freshwater wells	6.00	0.00	5.90	0.00	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
New evaporation ponds	11.28	0.00	4.39	0.00	0.00	3.69	3.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pipeline brine 50Ktpa	21.72	0.07	0.28	0.00	21.33	0.03	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pipeline freshwater 3Ktpa	0.24	0.00	0.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pipeline freshwater 50Ktpa	0.60	0.00	0.47	0.00	0.00	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Project facilities	Total Project footprint area (ha)	Hydric grassland area (ha)	Peladar area (ha)	Halophytic vegetation (Saline Vega) area (ha)	Salt crust area (ha)	Shrub steppe area (ha)	Tolar area (ha)	Grass steppe area (ha)	Water bodies area (ha)	Mixed steppe area (ha)	Vega Area (ha)
Pipeline SBDF 3Ktpa	0.62	0.00	0.09	0.00	0.44	0.07	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Pipeline SBDF 50Ktpa	2.37	0.00	0.89	0.02	1.46	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Projected brine wells	37.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	37.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Projected roads[a]	18.20	0.10	11.00	0.00	5.00	2.00	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Projected power lines[b]	0.03	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Reserved laydown area	8.00	0.00	8.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Rococó quarry	62.57	0.42	40.89	0.00	0.00	21.27	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Sapito quarry	31.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	31.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
SBDF Berm	10.63	0.00	0.00	0.13	10.51	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Security trench	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Spent Brine Disposal Facilities (Cell A)	1,327.50	0.40	0.00	0.10	1,327.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Spent Brine Disposal Facilities (Cell B)	1,113.16	0.00	0.00	5.16	1,108.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	**3,300.61**	**4.72**	**324.94**	**7.00**	**2,901.13**	**53.49**	**9.34**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**	**0.00**

Existing facilities

* 900-bed capacity camp completed (additional construction of the 1500-bed camp underway).

Source: 2024 ESIA; .kmz files sent by Rio Tinto in June 2025, and Vegetation types based on Dynamik (2025).
Notes: a) 7m (width), calculated based on Chapter 3: Project Description (ESIA, 2024).
b) This includes both power lines, considering the second a mirror of the first one.

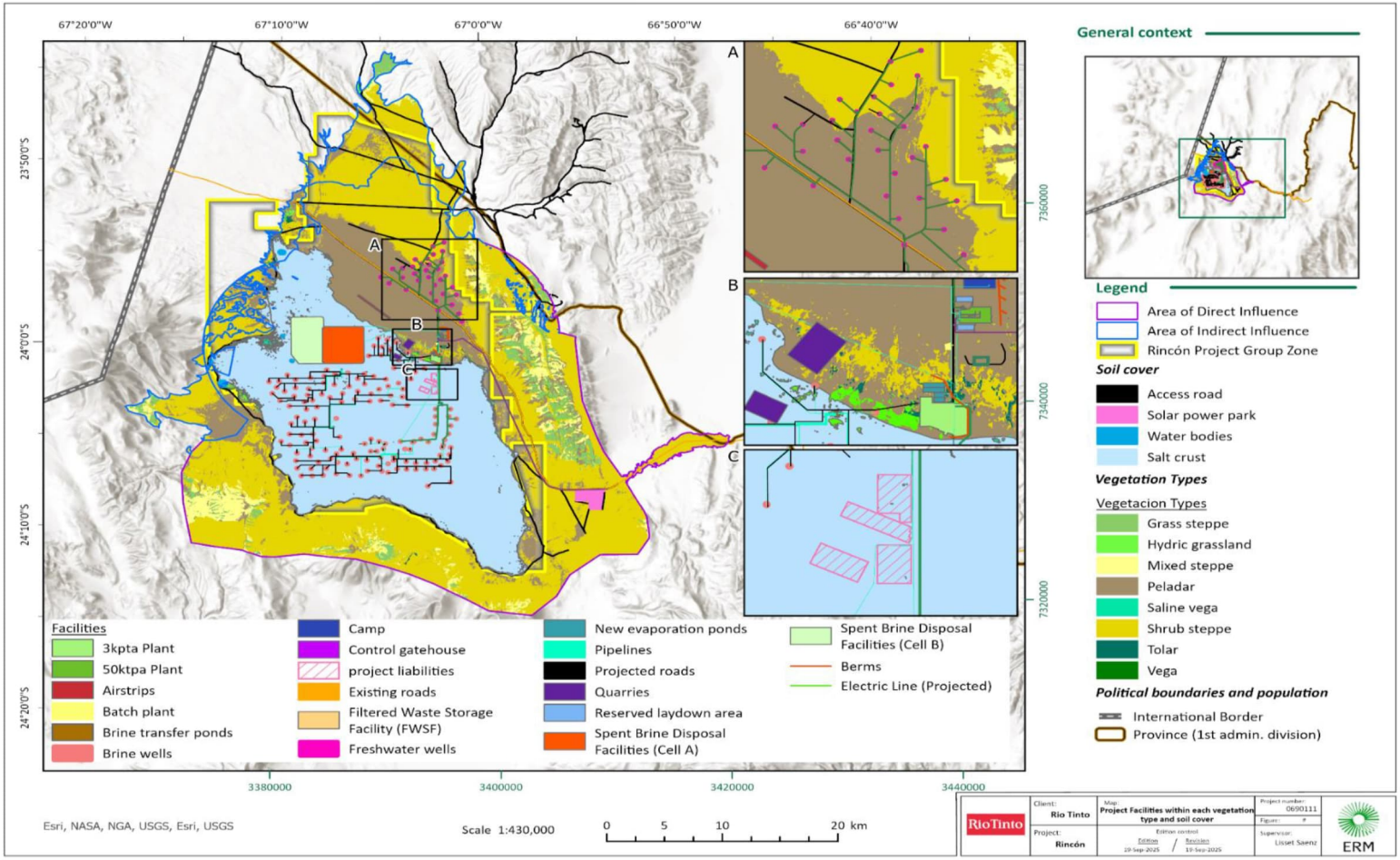


Figure 3: Project Footprint Areas of Direct (IN RED) and Indirect (IN BLUE) Influence for the Project

3 Critical Habitat Assessment

The first step undertaken during this CHA was a desktop evaluation to identify biodiversity values that could potentially meet CH thresholds and species or ecosystems of conservation concern. Once these biodiversity values were identified, expert consultations and additional field surveys were undertaken to obtain data on their habitat utilization, population, and CH status; then CH thresholds were assessed.

3.1 Critical Habitat Definition and Thresholds

Critical Habitat is defined in paragraph 16 of IFC PS6 (2012) as an area of high biodiversity value, including: (i) habitat of significant importance to Critically Endangered and/or Endangered species; (ii) habitat of significant important to endemic and/or congregatory species; (iii) habitat supporting globally significant concentrations of migratory species; (iv) highly threatened and/or unique ecosystems; and/or (v) areas associated with key evolutionary processes.

Critical Habitat criteria were assessed using the thresholds detailed in Guidance Note 6 (GN 6). Quantitative thresholds are used to assign Critical Habitat, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Critical Habitat Criteria, Description and Thresholds

Criteria	Description	Thresholds
Criterion 1 (C1): Critically Endangered and Endangered Species	Species threatened with global extinction and listed as CR and EN on the IUCN *Red List of Threatened Species* shall be considered as part of Criterion 1. Critically Endangered species face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. Endangered species face a very high risk of extinction in the wild. The inclusion in Criterion 1 of species that are listed nationally/regionally as CR or EN in countries that adhere to IUCN guidance shall be determined on a project-by-project basis in consultation with competent professionals.	(a) Areas that support globally important concentrations of an IUCN Red-listed EN or CR species (≥ 0.5% of the global population AND ≥ 5 reproductive units of a CR or EN species). (b) Areas that support globally important concentrations of an IUCN Red-listed Vulnerable (VU) species, the loss of which would result in the change of the IUCN Red List status to EN or CR and meet the thresholds in Criterion 1(a). (c) As appropriate, areas containing important concentrations of a nationally or regionally listed EN or CR species.
Criterion 2 (C2): Endemic and restricted-range species	For purposes of this Guidance Note, the term endemic is defined as restricted range. Restricted range refers to a limited EOO. For terrestrial vertebrates and plants, restricted-range species are defined as those species that have an EOO less than 50,000km^2.	Areas that regularly hold ≥10% of the global population size AND ≥10 reproductive units of a species.
Criterion 3 (C3): Migratory and congregatory species	Migratory species are defined as any species of which a significant proportion of its members cyclically and predictably move from one geographical area to another (including within the same ecosystem). Congregatory species are defined as species whose	(a) Areas known to sustain, on a cyclical or otherwise regular basis, ≥ 1 percent of the global population of a migratory

Criteria	Description	Thresholds
	individuals gather in large groups on a cyclical or otherwise regular and/or predictable basis.	or congregatory species at any point of the species' lifecycle. (b) Areas that predictably support ≥10 percent of the global population of a species during periods of environmental stress.
Criterion 4 (C4): Highly threatened ecosystems and/or unique	The IUCN is developing a Red List of Ecosystems, following an approach similar to the Red List for Threatened Species. The client should use the Red List of Ecosystems where formal IUCN assessments have been performed. Where formal IUCN assessments have not been performed, the client may use assessments using systematic methods at the national/regional level, carried out by governmental bodies, recognized academic institutions and/or other relevant qualified organizations (including internationally recognized NGOs).	a) Areas representing ≥5% of the global extent of an ecosystem type meeting the criteria for IUCN status of CR or EN. b) Other areas not yet assessed by IUCN but determined to be of high priority for conservation by regional or national systematic conservation planning.
Criterion 5 (C5): Key evolutionary processes	Guidance Standard 6 details Critical Habitat criteria and thresholds, based on relative vulnerability (degree of threat) and irreplaceability (rarity or uniqueness). Evolutionary processes are often strongly influenced by the structural attributes of a region, such as its topography, geology, soil, and climate over a period. Guidance Note 6 provides the following examples of spatial features that are associated with evolutionary processes: Landscapes with high spatial heterogeneity that drive speciation as species naturally select based on their ability to adapt and diversify. Environmental gradients, also known as ecotones, produce a transitional habitat that has been associated with the process of speciation and high genetic and species diversity. Edaphic interfaces that are specific juxtapositions of soil types (e.g. serpentine outcrops, limestone and gypsum deposits), have led to the formation of unique plant communities characterized by both rarity and endemism. Connectivity between habitats (e.g. biological corridors) that ensures migration and gene flow of the species, which is especially important in fragmented habitats and for the conservation of metapopulations. This also includes biological corridors along altitudinal and climatic gradients and from "top to coast". Sites of demonstrated importance for adaptation to climate change for either species or ecosystems.	Criterion 5 is generally considered to be highly dependent on scientific knowledge and would therefore be triggered in areas that have already been investigated or where significant research results are available that indicate the potential or existence of unique evolutionary processes.
Other Criteria: Additional high-biodiversity areas	Projects that are located within internationally and/or nationally recognized areas of high biodiversity value may require a critical habitat assessment. These areas are: • IUCN Category 1 and 2 Protected Areas. • Areas required for the reintroduction of CR and EN species and/or sites required by	

Criteria	Description	Thresholds
	species during periods of stress, such as flood, drought or fire. • Ramsar sites that meet Criterion 1 (CR species only), Criterion 5 (regularly support 20,000 or more waterbirds) and Criterion 6 (regularly support 1% of the individuals in a population of a waterbird species or subspecies). • Key Biodiversity Areas designated for CR species, endemic species or range-restricted species, and migratory species or species that form congregations. • Important Bird Areas (IBAs) with criteria A1 (globally threatened species), A2 (range-restricted species), and A4 (congregations of species). • A1: sites are defined as holding significant numbers of globally threatened species, or other species of global conservation concern. • A2: sites are known or thought to hold a significant component of a restricted range species. • A4: the site is known or thought to hold congregations of ≥1% of the global population of one or more species on a regular or predictable basis. • Ecosystems of special significance to EN or CR species for the purpose of climate change adaptation. • Concentrations of vulnerable species (VU) where there may be uncertainty about their categorization. • Areas with high levels of species diversity. • World Heritage Sites.	

Source: IFC (Guidance Note 6), 2019.

2.4. Study Area: Ecologically Appropriate Area of Analysis

The Salar del Rincon Basin served as an Ecologically Appropriate Area of Analysis (EAAA) for the CHA. The Salar de Rincon Basin is an endorheic watershed[3], 266,253ha in size, in which water entering (whether from rainfall or snowmelt) flows both on the surface and subsurface from the basin edges towards its center. At the core of the basin lies its main water-receiving body, the Salar del Rincon.

The basin is delimited by several geographic barriers: volcanoes to the south (Pocitos, del Medio and Tul Tul; 5,033masl, 4,835masl, and 5,265masl, respectively), mountain ranges to the west (Cerros Oscuro (5,155masl) and Rincon (5,594masl), and to the east (Guayaos (4,800masl), Cerro Arizaro Chico (4,520masl), Cordón del Carmen (4,660masl), Cerros Siberia (4,800masl), and Caballo (4,820masl)). The northern boundary corresponds to the contiguous sierras of the Loj Loj (4,480masl) and Cerro Bolsón (4,640masl) (SEGEMAR, 2022, p.25). These boundaries define the EAAA for both terrestrial and aquatic species.

To obtain detailed knowledge regarding the basin, A Digital Elevation Model (DEM) with a spatial resolution of 12.5m, combined with terrain analysis was created to identify surface runoff channels and delineate the basin. A high-resolution vegetation type map of the Salar de Rincon Basin was generated using different sources of geospatial information, including satellite images, field data (point-quadrat surveys), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and automatic flights for photogrammetric surveys.

The resulting data were analysed and modelled using advanced machine learning techniques to generate a layer with the Vegetation types and other soil types of the Salar del Rincon Basin. Details on methods and results of the vegetation mapping can be found in the *"Reporte técnico Mapeo de coberturas y usos de suelo mediante la implementación de un modelo de Machine Learning – Cuenca del Salar de Rincon"* (Dynamik, 2025a) and in "*Implementación de Modelo Predictivo Existente al Sector Sureste y Norte del Área de Estudio"* (Dynamik, 2025b).

Eight vegetation types and two other soil types[4] (Table 6; Figure 4) were identified. The primary habitat type is peladar (areas of little to no vegetation) followed by shrub and grass steppe. These Natural Habitats cover 240,470.10ha (99.7% of the total area of the Salar del Rincon Basin). Modified Habitats, which are areas previously disturbed (interventions unrelated to the Project) total 808.10ha (0.33% of the total area of the Salar del Rincon Basin) and include existing facilities such as access roads, a power line and a solar park

[3] Endorheic watershed: geographic area with no river outflow to the ocean.

[4] Other soil types refer to areas devoid of terrestrial vegetation (i.e. water bodies and salt crust)

(Dynamik, 2025 a, b). Current and further fieldwork is being undertaken to ground-truth and validate vegetation types and as this information is obtained, vegetation maps will be updated.

The access roads refer to the National Route 51, which crosses the northeastern edge of the salt flat and reaches the Chilean boundary, and Provincial Route 37, which runs along the same northeastern sector, 14km away from the salt flat. The power line is a high-voltage line next to National Route 51 and near the salt flat. Adjacent to the power line, a 370ha solar park developed by Neoen provides solar power to the electrical network.

Due to technical and jurisdictional limitations, only the Argentinian portion of the basin was mapped in this way; the Chilean portion (370.88km^2) of the basin was mapped using the Territorial Information System of the National Forestry Corporation (CONAF, Spanish acronym) of Chile that uses the Regional Vegetation Cadaster Cards, which include land uses and sub-uses of vegetation of the Antofagasta Region. Equivalencies between Chilean land uses and Argentinean Vegetation types are presented in Table 7. It should be noted that the Chilean portion does not overlap with either the ADI or the AII.

3.2 Identification of Potential Critical Biodiversity Values

Existing information from biological baseline data in the ESIAs, other documents related to the Project, and the Integrated Biodiversity Assessment Tool (IBAT, 2024) were reviewed to identify potentially occurring species within a 50km radius of the Project. This exercise generated a preliminary list of approximately 324 species.

The list was then filtered by removing species that were not in any one of the following categories: Critically Endangered (CR), Endangered (EN) (IUCN and Argentine legislation (Decree 666/97), endemic, or in migratory/congregatory species category (included Vulnerable (VU) species), which reduced the list to 116 species. Finally, species that are non-migratory, non-congregatory, broadly distributed, and not classified under any conservation category were excluded from the analysis.

This process resulted in a list of 19 species identified as potential Critical Biodiversity Values; three migratory birds, three reptiles, one amphibian, two mammals, and ten plant species (these 19 species were further evaluated using publicly available information (such as the GBIF and scientific articles), expert assessment (including additional field studies), and a threshold-based Critical Habitat Analysis.

In addition to the above species, Criterion 4 (unique and threatened ecosystems) as well as Criterion 5 (Key evolutionary processes) were assessed according to thresholds established for Critical Habitat.

In June 2023, Rio Tinto conducted the first survey of EMEs in the Salar del Rincon with researchers from INIQUI-CONICET confirming they do occur within the Salar de Rincon. Although EMEs are currently not assessed under IUCN standards, they were identified as potential CH triggers.

Finally, protected and internationally recognized areas were also assessed under the Other Critical Habitat Criterion Table 8.

The 19 potential CH species were further evaluated using publicly available information (such as the GBIF and scientific articles), expert assessment (including additional field studies), and a threshold-based Critical Habitat Assessment.

In addition to the above species, Criterion 4 (unique and threatened ecosystems) as well as Criterion 5 (Key evolutionary processes) were assessed according to thresholds established for Critical Habitat.

Finally, protected and internationally recognized areas were also assessed under the Other Critical Habitat Criterion.

Table 6. Vegetation and Soil Cover types within Salar Rincon Basin or the EAAA

Vegetation and other soil cover types	Description	Argentinean Area within the Salar de Rincon Basin (ha)	Chilean area within the Salar de Rincon Basin (ha)	Total within the Salar de Rincon Basin (ha)	Percentage (%) ***
Natural Habitat					
Vega	This wetland ecosystem is characterised by plants with a high capacity for retaining water and elevated primary productivity. These formations develop where the presence of surface water or subterranean water ensures the hydric saturation of the soil. This ecosystem has 70% vegetation cover. Some of the species' presence are *Oxychloe andine*, *Zameioscirpus atacamensis*, *Carex* spp.	798.00	0.00	798.00	0.33
Halophytic transition vegetation (Classified as Saline vega in the specialist report)	Plant communities adapted to the highly saline soils and arid conditions in the transition areas of salt flats and other types of vegetation. It is characterized by low flower richness and the dominance of halophytic species. It has more than 10% of vegetation cover. It's composed of *Frankenia triandra, Distichlis* sp., *Salicornia pulvinata* and *Lycium humile.* Although Dynamic includes "vega" in the name of this vegetation type, these are transitional, halophytic habitats.	588.16	0.00	588.16	0.24
Hydric grassland	Plant communities that develop in areas with high water availability, such as the margins of lagoons and permanent water courses. These ecosystems fulfill a fundamental role in sustaining the local biodiversity since they provide refuge and food for a diverse group of species of fauna, contribute to the stabilization of the soil and water regulation. It has a +50% vegetation cover. It is composed of the genera *Deschampsia, Distichlis, Festuca, Puccinellia* and *Triglochin* sp.	1180.00	0.00	1180.00	0.49
Tolar	Plant communities of Shrub steppe that grow in locations with underground humidity, and act as indicators of phreatic layers in the landscape. It has more than 30% of vegetation cover. It's composed of *Parastrephia lucida* and *Parastrephia quadrahularis* and other species that could be found in Hydric grassland, Saline vega and Steppes.	665.00	0.00	665.00	0.28
Shrub steppe	Plant communities with a scattered distribution of shrubs, leaving large areas of bare ground between them. It has more than 5% of vegetation cover. The genres present in the area are *Adesmia, Ephedra, Atriplex, Aloysia, Baccharis* and *Senecio.*	70088.00	0.00	70088.00	29.15
Grass steppe	Vegetation formation with a low vegetation coverage and homogeneous structure. It is dominated by grass plants adapted to arid soils. It has more than 10% of vegetation cover. The genres present in the area are *Festuca, Pappostipa, Cinnagrostis* and *Deschampsia.*	43620.00	0.00	43620.00	18.14
Mixed steppe	Includes both grass and shrub steppe with +10% vegetation cover. The plant genera present in this area are *Aloysia, Baccharis, Cinnagrostis, Festuca, Pappostipa, Werneria* and *Maihuenopsis*	26224.00	2919.00	29143.00	12.12
Peladar	Characterised by extremely low vegetation cover (up to 5% or lower) or by the total absence of vascular vegetation and the presence of areas with scarce vegetation. This area has soils with poor organic matter and a high salinity concentration.	42168.00	9278.00	51446.00	21.39
Water bodies	All surface water bodies registered to date in the Salar del Rincon Basin. Including Rincon Lagoon, Negra Lagoon, Ojos de Agua A, B1, and B2 and the surface water body in the northern sector of the Salar.	35.00	0.00	35.00	0.01
Salt Crust	Cementing layer of soil and salt that forms on the surface or interior of soil when salt crystals bond with soil particles, due to intense evaporation and little precipitation.	42904.94	2.00	42906.9	17.83
Total area of Natural Habitat		**228,271.10**	**12,199.00**	**240,470.20**	**100%**
Modified Habitat					
Existing power line	High tension power line that crosses the salt flat alongside the National Route 51.	3.00*	0.05*	3.05	0.37
Existing access roads	These roads are part of the national roads of Argentina and provincial roads of Salta.	411.00**	24.05	435	53.8
Altiplano 200 Solar Park	208 megawatt peak (MWP) capacity Altiplano 200 Solar Park developed by Neoen.	370	0	370	45.8
Total of Modified Habitat		**784**	**24.05**	**808.05**	**100%**

Sources: Dynamik (2025), IGN Argentina, IDE Chile.

Note: * estimated area of each tower= 0.0002km^2 (Argentina = 121 towers, Chile = 2 towers) **width for national and provincial Argentinian routes = 0.008km, width Route 23 of Chile = 0.03km and width Route B-357 = 0.006km of Chile; *** $\frac{Vegation\ or\ soil\ type\ area\ x\ 100}{Total\ Natural\ or\ Total\ Modified\ area}$

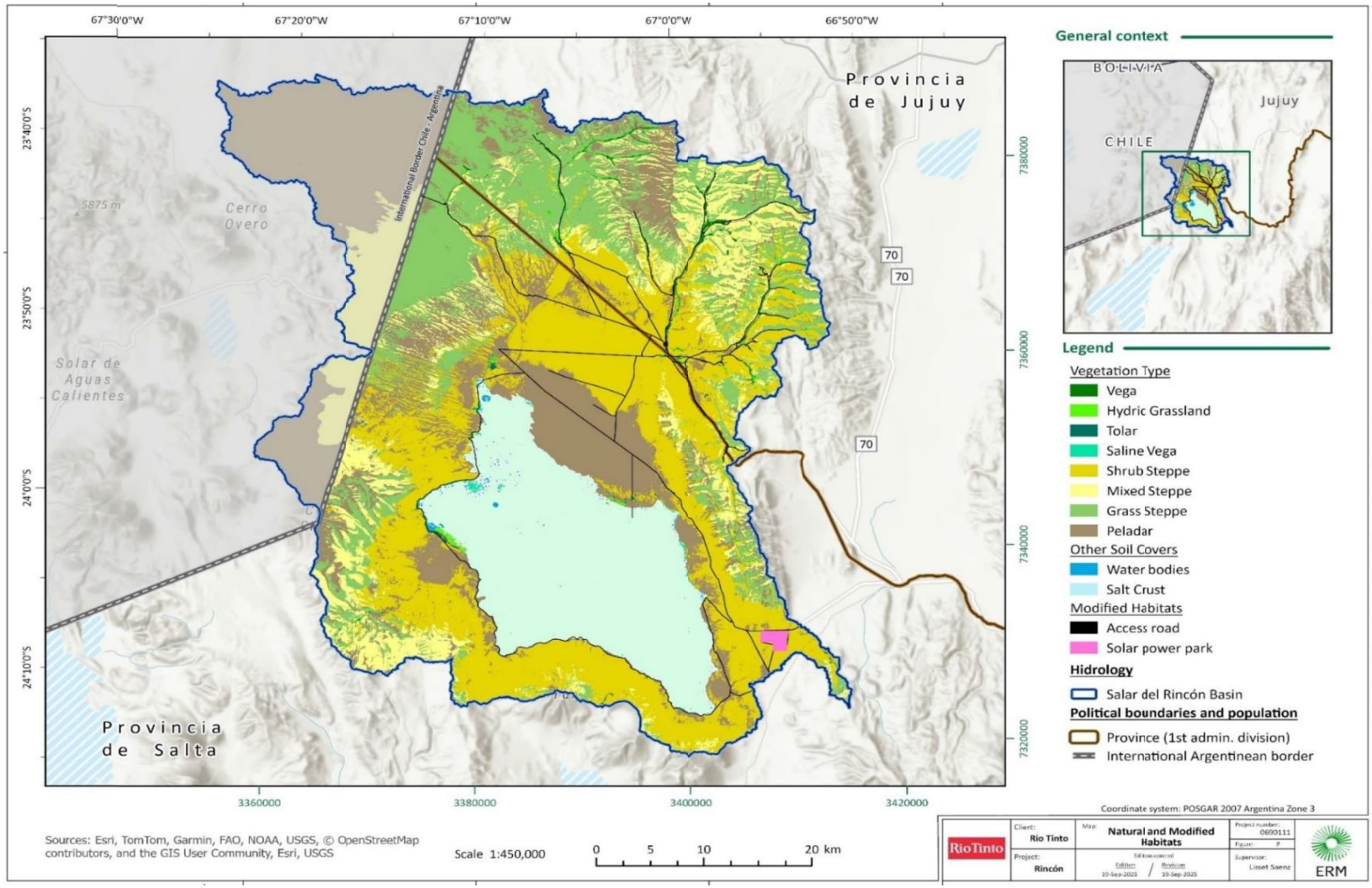


Figure 4: Natural and modified habitats within the Salar Rincon basin

Table 7. Equivalences between Chilean Land Cover and Argentinean Vegetation Types and other Soil types

Chilean classification soil cover type	**Chilean classification soil Cover Sub-type**	**Argentinean equivalent**
Grasslands and Shrublands (Refers to herbaceous, shrub and shrub-herb formations. They are subdivided according to the predominant biological type (grasses or shrubs) and their dominant species).	**Shrubland – Grassland**: Shrubland is combined with shrub species, and at some level of dominance there should be mainly meadow species.	Mixed steppe
Wetlands (Correspond to extensions of marshes, swamps and peat bogs or, in general, surfaces covered with water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, stagnant or flowing, fresh, brackish or salty. Included are extensions of marine water whose depth at low tide does not exceed 6 meters. Also included in this category are meadows and wetlands due to their hydromorphism).	**Vegas**: soils with flooded moisture plants such as the plants of Junco genus. They are not very rich in organic matter, unless the sedimentation process has finished, and they can evolve like any terrestrial soil. Even so, lush vegetation is established in them, thanks to the mineral richness of their young soils and the good water supply. The vegetation associated with a vega also presents species adapted to the temporary excess of water and can be more exuberant than the neighboring vegetation on better drained soils, especially in dry climates (areas with reed beds).	Hydric Grassland, vegas
Areas with little or no vegetation (This category includes those sectors whose vegetation cover does not reach a minimum of 10% vegetation cover.	Lands above the altitudinal limit of vegetation	Peladar
	Salar: A salar is a surface lake whose sediments are dominated by salts (borates, chlorides, nitrates, sulphates, etc.). Salts are precipitated by strong evaporation, which in the long term is always greater than the inflow of water into the basin).	Salt crust

Source: Vegetation Resources and Land Use Cadaster Cartography Manual (Catalán, et al.; 2022).

Table 8. Potential Critical Biodiversity values subject to expert assessment and additional field surveys

Taxonomic Group and Species	Common name	Conservation category		Criteria against which the species were assessed		
		Argentina	IUCN	1	2	3
Birds						
Phoenicoparrus andinus	Andean Flamingo	AM	VU			X
Phoenicoparrus jamesi	Puna Flamingo	AM	NT			X
Fulica cornuta	Horned Coot	AM	NT			X
Reptiles						
Liolaemus cazianiae		VU	LC		X	
Liolaemus multicolour		NA	LC		X	
Liolaemus scrocchii		NA	LC		X	
Amphibians						
Telmatobius atacamensis	Atacama water frog	AM	CR	X	X	
Mammals						
Chinchilla chinchilla	Chinchilla	EP	EN	X		
Microcavia shiptoni	Shipton's Mountain Cavy	NT	LC		X	
Flora						
Erythranthe depressa	Monkeyflower	NE	NE		X	
Euphorbia amandi		NE	NE		X	
Evolvulus sericeus		NE	NE		X	
Fabiana punensis	Tola	NE	NE		X	
Frankenia triandra		NE	NE		X	
Lycium humile			LC		X	
Maihueniopsis hypogaea		NE	NE		X	
Senecio filaginoides		NE	NE		X	
Senecio viridis		NE	NE		X	
Urmenetea atacamensis		NE	NE		X	

3.3 Non-Critical Priority Species and Habitats

Priority species are those that, while not meeting the criteria to trigger Critical Habitat designation, are still of conservation concern for the Project (Table 9). For these species, monitoring protocols are being prepared by specialists to as part of the Project Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP).

Table 9. Priority Habitat and species for Rincon Project

Species	Common name	Conservation category
Phoenicopterus chilensis	Chilean flamingo	NT
Phoenicoparrus andinus	Andean flamingo	VU
Rhea pennata	Lesser Rhea	LC
Vultur gryphus	Condor	VU
Fulica cornuta	Hornet coot	NT
Leopardus jacobita	Andean cat	EN
Vicugna vicugna	Vicuña	LC
Lama guanicoe	Guanaco	LC
Chinchila chinchilla	Chinchilla	EN
*Urmenetea atacamensis**	-	-
Vegas wetlands	-	-

* This flora species is being designated as a priority species due to its proximity to meeting the threshold set for Criterion 2 of Critical Habitat (Restricted-range species).

The vegas wetlands are a priority habitat identified for the Los Andes National Reserve and the Project. Rio Tinto, along with researchers from IMBIV-CONICET and Geobiota consultants, is currently conducting studies to characterise and understand the hydrogeology of the vegas within the Salar de Rincon.

3.4 Critical Habitat Determination

Potential Critical Biodiversity Values were assessed to determine whether they met the population thresholds defined in IFC PS6. This assessment involved expert consultations, additional field surveys, and laboratory analyses (to clarify taxonomic uncertainty for *Liolaemus* lizards).

Expert Consultation
To further assess potential CH biodiversity values, Rio Tinto contracted species experts who provided advisory services, created CH species survey protocols, conducted additional field and laboratory studies, and assisted with the determination of Critical Habitat. A summary of the expert consultation and additional field studies is presented in Section 4.

3.5 Summary of Additional Field Surveys and Research on Potential Critical Biodiversity Values

In late 2024 and early 2025, species experts carried out additional field surveys and studies. Species or taxonomic groups assessed were species belonging to the genus *Liolaemus*, Flamingos (*Phoenicoparrus andinus, Phoenicoparrus jamesi, Phoenicopterus chilensis*), Horned Coot (*Fulica cornuta*), Chinchilla (*Chinchilla chinchilla*), Shipton's Mountain Cavy (*Microcavia shiptoni*), Atacama Water Frog (*Telmatobius atacamensis*), Extremophiles, and Endemic Flora.

The following sections present a summary of the studies carried out for these species.

3.5.1 *Liolaemus* Spp. Studies

Dr. Abdala and Dr. Paz and ERM conducted field surveys in November 2024 and February - March 2025 to identify *Liolaemus* species and determine their spatial distribution in the Salar del Rincon basin and surrounding areas, their habitat, and define their EAAA. They also assessed the taxonomic classification of these species using morphological and molecular (genetic) analysis.

Field Survey Results and Identification of New Species
The first field survey (November 2024) identified six known species and four that had an affinity with *L. cazianiae* (i.e., differs from the original, but it might still fall within the expected range of variation for that species), based on morphological characteristics.

A second survey was undertaken in February-March 2024 which indicated that five known *Liolaemus* species occur within the Salar del Rincon Basin (*L. multicolour*, *L. ornatus*, *L. porosus*, *L. puna*, and *L. scrocchii*) while one species previously recorded occurs outside Salar del Rincon Basin (*L. cazianiae)*. Because of the taxonomic uncertainty regarding *L. cazianiae* and the four *aff.* varieties, during the second survey, tissue samples were collected and a molecular genetic analysis undertaken. A consensus hypothesis that combines both molecular and morphological data for *L. cazianiae aff*. varieties, indicates that the four species with affinity for *L. cazianae* may comprise two to three new species (one or two species occurring within the Salar de Rincon Basin and one occurring outside the basin). Species experts presented a taxonomic hypothesis comprising two scenarios:

- **Scenario 1**: A single new species (referred to as *Liolaemus* sp. AC) may occur on both sides of the Salar del Rincon Basin (Figure 5).

- **Scenario 2**: Two distinct species—*Liolaemus* sp. A and *Liolaemus* sp. C — with smaller, non-overlapping ranges of distribution, each on one side of the Salar del Rincon Basin (Figure 6 and Figure 7).

Table 10. List of experts consulted

Taxa/group	Experts consulted	Consultation results
Liolaemus spp.	Dr. Cristian Abdala and Dr. Marcos Paz. Dr. Abdala described more than 60 species of lizards including multiple species of Salar del Rincon basin. Dr. Paz has described multiple species of lizards in Argentina and Bolivia including some species in Rincon basin surroundings.	Dr. Cristian Abdala and Dr. Marcos Paz were consulted in September 2024, regarding *Liolaemus* species in Salar del Rincon basin. In this consultation, Dr. Abdala pointed out that the genus *Liolaemus* is very diverse and presents microendemisms, thus some geographic ranges are not updated in the IUCN web page. Taxonomical determination based on visual or morphological surveys are usually not sufficient, so he recommended conducting field surveys in summer season to identify species present in the Salar del Rincon Basin and their geographic distribution. Following Dr. Abdala recommendations, field surveys were conducted in November 2024 and February/March 2025. A summary of the *Liolaemus* spp. studies is detailed in Section 3.3.2.1.
Phoenicoparrus andinus "Andean Flamingo", *P. jamesi* "Puna Flamingo" and *Fulica cornuta* "Horned Coot"	Dr. Enrique Derlindati is a professor of Conservation Biology and Community Ecology at Salta National University. He has several scientific publications and studies of Flamingos in South America and *Fulica* sp.	Dr. Enrique Derlindati was consulted in September 2024. The Salar del Rincon Basin could be, historically, an important congregation area for Flamingos and nesting area for Horned Coot. Dr. Derlindati recommended conducting at least three field surveys during summer in one year. and using Flamingos' historical population data from the simultaneous international censuses, determining if these species, along with Horned Coot, trigger Critical Habitat. Following Dr. Derlindati recommendations, field surveys were conducted in January, February and March 2025. The global population data from the simultaneous international censuses of Flamingos in 2020 was used to conduct critical habitat analysis. For a summary of the Flamingos and Horned Coot studies, refer to Section 3.5.2.
Chinchilla chinchilla "Chinchilla" *Microcavia shiptoni* "Shipton's Mountain Cavy"	Alejandro Pietrek and team. Dr. Pietrek is a population biologist part of the IBIGEO-CONICET- UNSA interested in conservation and management of animal populations, with studies in mountains of Tierra del Fuego, the Atlantic rainforest and the High Andes to investigate the endemic fauna of wetlands, high meadows, and volcanic outcrops. He has established a research program focused on poorly known and threatened species, such as the short-tailed chinchilla, that inhabit remote areas of the High Andes.	Dr. Alejandro Pietrek and his team were contacted in October 2024. Dr. Pietrek mentioned that the Salar del Rincon basin has the appropriate geomorphological characteristics for Chinchilla habitat, consisting of burrows or rock crevices of volcanic origin. Regarding Shipton's Mountain Cavy, limited information is available on this species. He also recommended using a combination of camera traps and faeces molecular analysis. Following Dr. Pietrek recommendations, field surveys were conducted in February and March 2025. For a summary of the field survey studies, refer to Section 3.3.2.5.
Telmatobius atacamensis	Dr. Rebeca Acosta (CONICET) and team are experts on amphibians having several scientific papers on *Telmatobius atacamensis* population and ecology such as "Critical microendemism: spatial scales and environmental drivers in the field detection of the Atacama water frog" (Alvarez et al, 2024).	Dr. Acosta and his team were contacted in October 2024. According to the experts, *T. atacamensis* is restricted to the San Antonio de Los Cobres and Los Patos rivers, flowing into Salinas Grandes, with a recent finding in Santa Rosa de Los Pastos Grandes. Dr. Acosta believes it is unlikely to be found in the Rincon basin, although other *Telmatobius* species may be present, particularly in Bailabuena Creek, east of the salt flat. Dr. Acosta recommended a field survey to assess the presence of other *Telmatobius* species. Following Dr. Acosta recommendations, field surveys were conducted in February and March 2025. For a summary of the field survey studies, refer to Section 3.3.2.6.
Endemic flora (11 species)	Dr. Soledad Cuello y Dr. Julieta Carrilla. Both are biologists from Tucuman University. They have conducted several studies of native and endemic flora species of the High Andes, Puna Regions and high-altitude saline wetlands.	Dr. Cuello and Dr. Carrilla were contacted in January 2025 There is little information about the endemic species recorded in the project area with respect to their population status and geographic range. There is no information on their EOO to define whether these endemic species are restricted range (EOO less than 50,000 km^2). Dr. Cuello and Dr. Carrilla recommended conducting field surveys during summer to assess and confirm the presence and distribution of endemic flora in the Salar del Rincon basin. Following Dr. Carrilla recommendations, field surveys were conducted in March 2025. For a summary of the field survey studies, refer to Section 3.3.2.4.
Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems	Veronica Irazusta and Veronica Rajal Dr. Irazusta has over 10 years of experience in the microbiology field and has led various projects researching extremophiles in Argentina. Dr. Rajal has over 20 years of experience in the microbiology field and has held the position of leading investigator at CONICET since 2020.	Dr. Irazusta and Dr. Rajal are part of the INIQUI Laboratory – CONICET and were contacted in September 2024. The experts stressed the importance of extremophiles, noting that they are vital for primary production and ecosystem functionality, so it is essential to conduct field studies to map extremophile sites. They recommended evaluating the annual dynamics of the microbiome of the environments found to identify the microorganisms, through DNA analysis, and the possible natural seasonal variations. Field surveys are in process (refer to Section 3.3.2.3). To date, field surveys have been conducted in December 2024, March 2025, and April 2025. Winter surveys are pending.

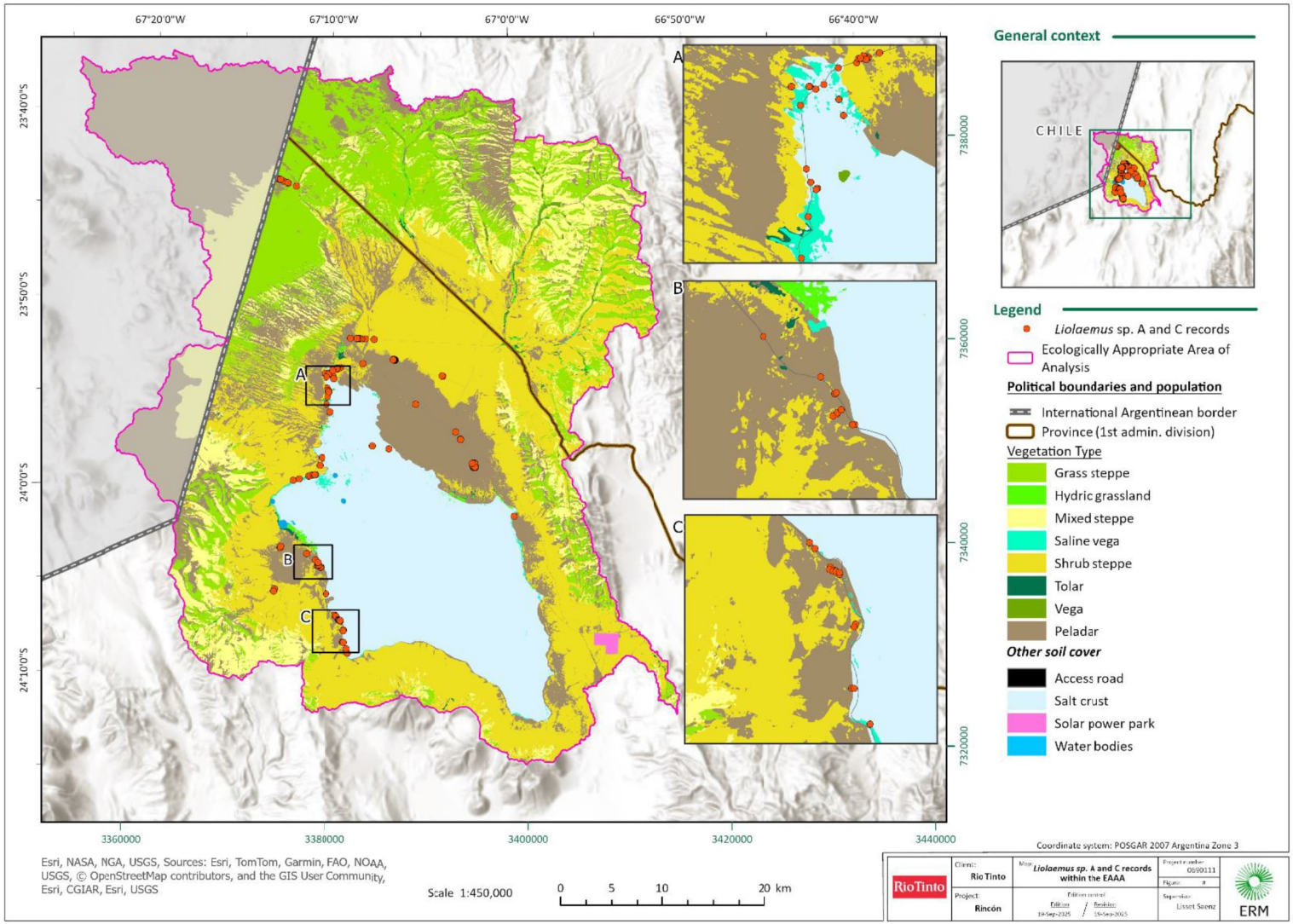


Figure 5: Liolaemus sp. AC 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

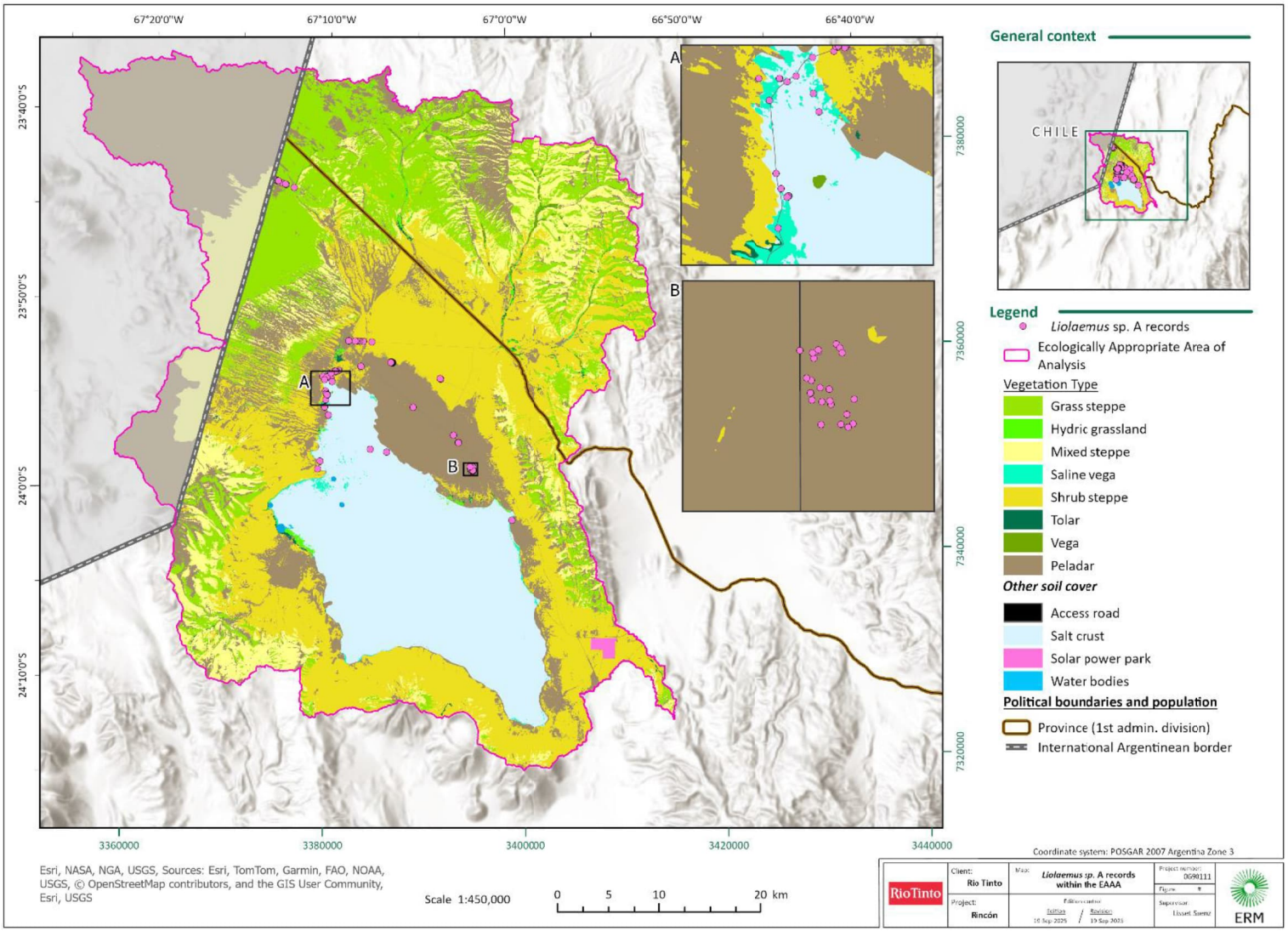


Figure 6: Liolaemus sp. A. 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

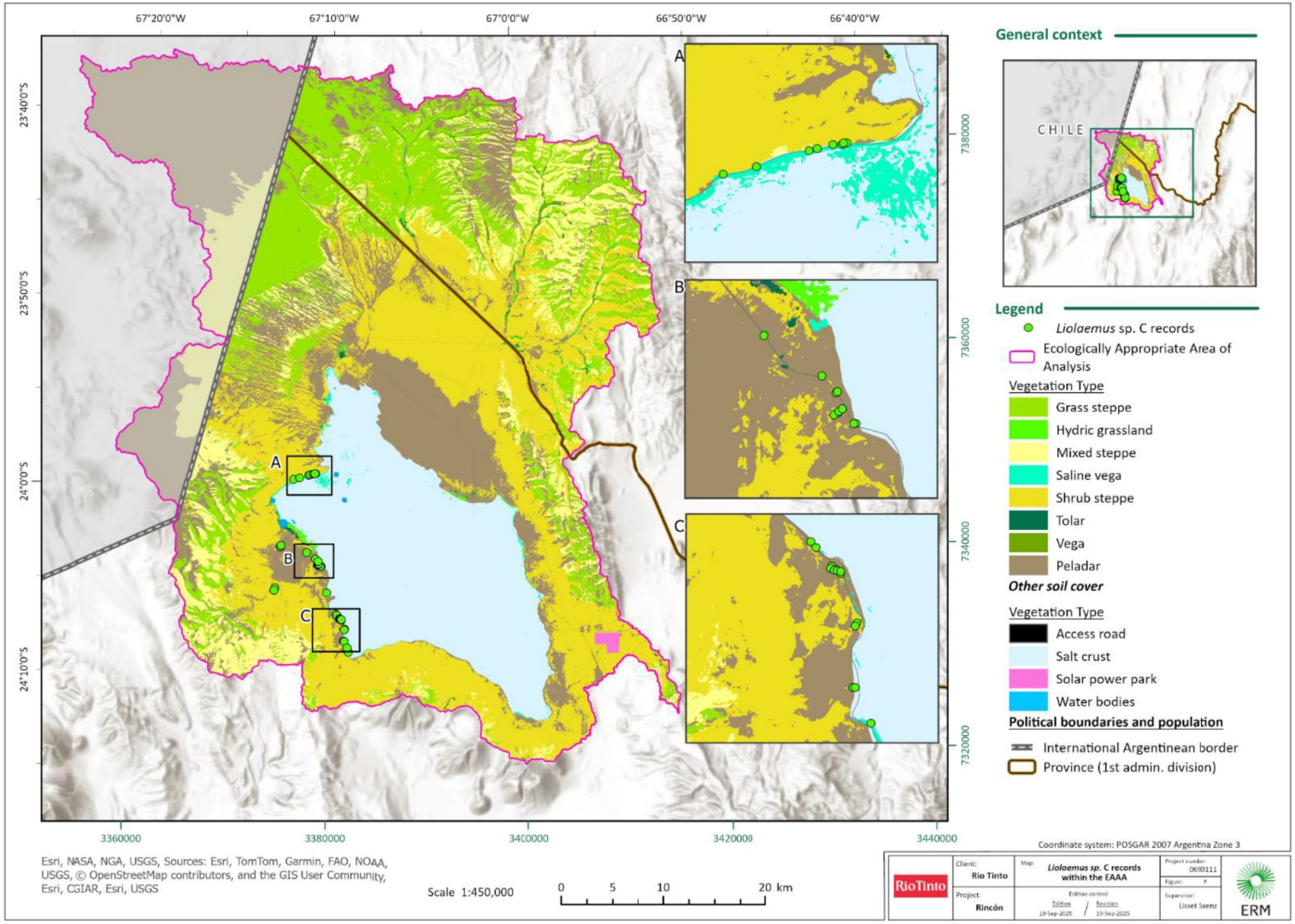


Figure 7: Liolaemus sp. C 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

Another possible new species—known for now as *Liolaemus* sp. B—was also recorded during the field survey; however, this species occurs outside the basin and was excluded from further CH assessment.

Table 11 presents species records from field surveys. *Liolaemus multicolour* and *Liolaemus* sp. AC had the highest number of records, with 111 and 176 individuals, respectively (see Figure 8 and Figure 5). These species were mostly recorded in shrub steppe (56 individuals for *L. multicolour* and 21 for *Liolaemus sp. AC*) and Peladar (23 for *Liolaemus multicolour* and 111 for *Liolaemus sp. AC*). *Liolaemus. scrocchii*, found in the Salar del Rincon Basin, utilised a broader range of microhabitats, with 22 individuals recorded (Figure 9).

Additionally, two individuals of *Liolaemus. porosus* were observed in the Grass steppe near the Argentinian-Chilean international border (Figure 10). *Liolaemus puna* was the only species recorded in the vega wetland habitat, while 4 individuals of *Liolaemus ornatus* were found in both the Shrub steppe and the Hydric grassland.

Based on observed habitat utilization, a specific habitat category called "Salt crust edge" was defined for *Liolaemus* species. This zone includes a 50m band of salt crust surrounding vegetated areas. As a result, only *Liolaemus scrocchii* and *Liolaemus* sp. AC were recorded near the interior of the salt crust, with 2 and 1 individuals, respectively.

Currently, additional field studies and molecular studies are being undertaken, which will help clarify the taxonomic status of *Liolaemus* spp. within the Salar de Rincon. Therefore, the current taxonomic hypotheses are considered preliminary and subject to confirmation. The current CHA is considering a conservative and precautionary approach by assessing all proposed taxonomic hypotheses as if they were full species; however, these hypotheses will be updated once additional data is available.

Given that the known species are little studied, the IUCN Geospatial Conservation Assessment Tool[5] (GeoCAT) was used to estimate the EOO and both local and global Area of Occupancy (AOO) for *Liolaemus* species lacking sufficient data (Abdala and Paz, 2025). GeoCAT calculates the AOO in accordance with IUCN Red List guidelines. The tool overlays a standardized grid composed of 2km × 2km cells, onto georeferenced occurrence data for a given species. Each cell that contains at least one occurrence point is considered occupied, regardless of the number of records within it. The total AOO is then computed by multiplying the number of occupied cells by the area of each cell (usually 4km²). For this assessment, the global AOO was calculated using the historical data of each species provided by the specialist and the GBIF available data. To calculate the local AOO, the historical and the results of the specialist surveys in the EAAA were used as a proxy of the local population.

Table 12 presents the EOO and AOO for each species, along with their classification as restricted-range species according to IFC PS6 (i.e., less than 50,000km²). Most of the assessed *Liolaemus* species are considered restricted range, except for *L. puna* and *L. ornatus*.

3.5.2 *Phoenicoparrus andinus* (Andean Flamingo), *Phoenicoparrus jamesi* (Puna Flamingo), and *Fulica Cornuta* (Horned coot) studies

Dr. Enrique Derlindati and ERM conducted field surveys (January, February, and March 2025) and a detailed desktop assessment for Andean Flamingo (*Phenicoparrus andinus*), Puna Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus jamesi*) and Horned Coot (*Fulica cornuta*)

According to observations made by Dr. Derlindati (Derlindati, 2025), Horned Coots use Laguna Rincon as a feeding and nesting site. During January 2025, five nests were recorded in Rincon Lagoon. The Andean Flamingo uses the Rincon Lagoon and a superficial water body located at the northern sector of the Salar (discovered in November 2024) as feeding sites. In the Rincon Lagoon and the water body in the northern of the Salar, 29 and 56 individuals were recorded, respectively (Table 13). Although the Puna Flamingo was not observed during 2024, 22 individuals were recorded in November 2022 (EC & Asociados. 2024. Environmental Impact Report “Proyecto Rincon 50Ktpa” (2024 ESIA).

[5] Bachman S, Moat J, Hill AW, de la Torre J, Scott B (2011) Supporting Red List threat assessments with GeoCAT: geospatial conservation assessment tool. In: Smith V, Penev L (Eds) e-Infrastructures for data publishing in biodiversity science. ZooKeys 150: 117–126. doi: 10.3897/zookeys.150.2109.

Table 11. *Liolaemus* species records within the Ecologically Appropriate Area of Analysis

Vegetation type	***Liolaemus multicolour***	***Liolaemus ornatus***	***Liolaemus puna***	***Liolaemus porosus***	***Liolaemus scrocchii***	***Liolaemus* sp. AC**	***Liolaemus* sp. A**	***Liolaemus* sp. C**
Peladar	23	0	0	0	9	111	91	20
Halophytic Vegetation (Saline Vega)	10	0	3	0	3	14	8	6
Salt crust edge	5	0	0	0	1	12	9	3
Salt crust interior	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0
Shrub steppe	56	2	4	0	2	21	11	10
Mixed steppe	1	0	2	0	3	0	0	0
Grass steppe	7	0	0	2	2	16	16	0
Tolar	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hydric Grassland	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vega	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	111	4	10	2	22	176	137	39

These are species records, not estimates of abundance.

Table 12. EOO and AOO Assessment for *Liolaemus* species

Species/population	EOO (km^2)	Restricted range species	Prior to field studies * Global AOO (km^2)	Prior to field studies* Local AOO (km^2)	Updated** Global AOO (km^2)	Updated** Local AOO (km^2)	Occurs within the Salar de Rincon Basin	Occurs within ADI	Occurs within Project Footprint
Liolaemus cazianiae	1,808.68	Yes	28	NA	-	-	No	No	No
Liolaemus multicolour	34,429.00	Yes	224	20	340	116	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liolaemus ornatus	551,958.00	No	236	0	244	8	Yes	No	No
Liolaemus porosus	165.18	Yes	12	0	20	8	Yes	Yes	No
Liolaemus puna	313,593.00	No	256	16	224	24	Yes	No	No
Liolaemus scrocchii	31,054.00	Yes	116	16	160	40	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liolaemus sp. A*	252.42	Yes	NA	NA	76	76	Yes	Yes	Yes
Liolaemus sp. B*	4.50	Yes	NA	NA	20	20	No	No	No
Liolaemus sp. C*	43.87	Yes	NA	NA	124	124	Yes	Yes	No
Liolaemus sp. AC*	391.22	Yes	NA	NA	128	128	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Prior: GBIF and historical records of the species provided by the specialist were used.
**Updated: GBIF, the historical records of the species, and the November 2024 and March 2025 records provided by the specialist were used.
NA = Not applicable. As these species are new to science, historical data were not available.
Note: * Unknown species new to science

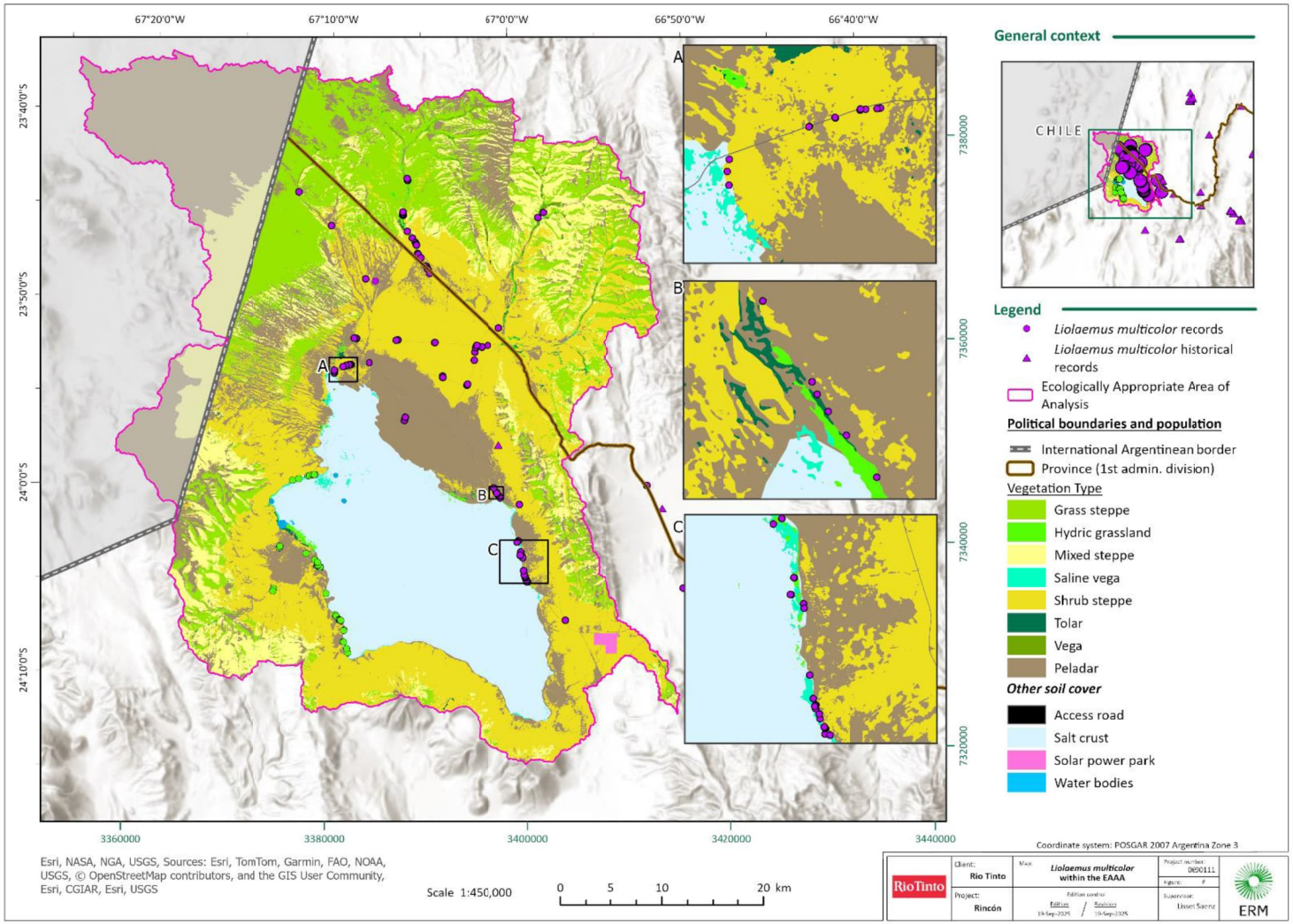


Figure 8: *Liolaemus multicolour* 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

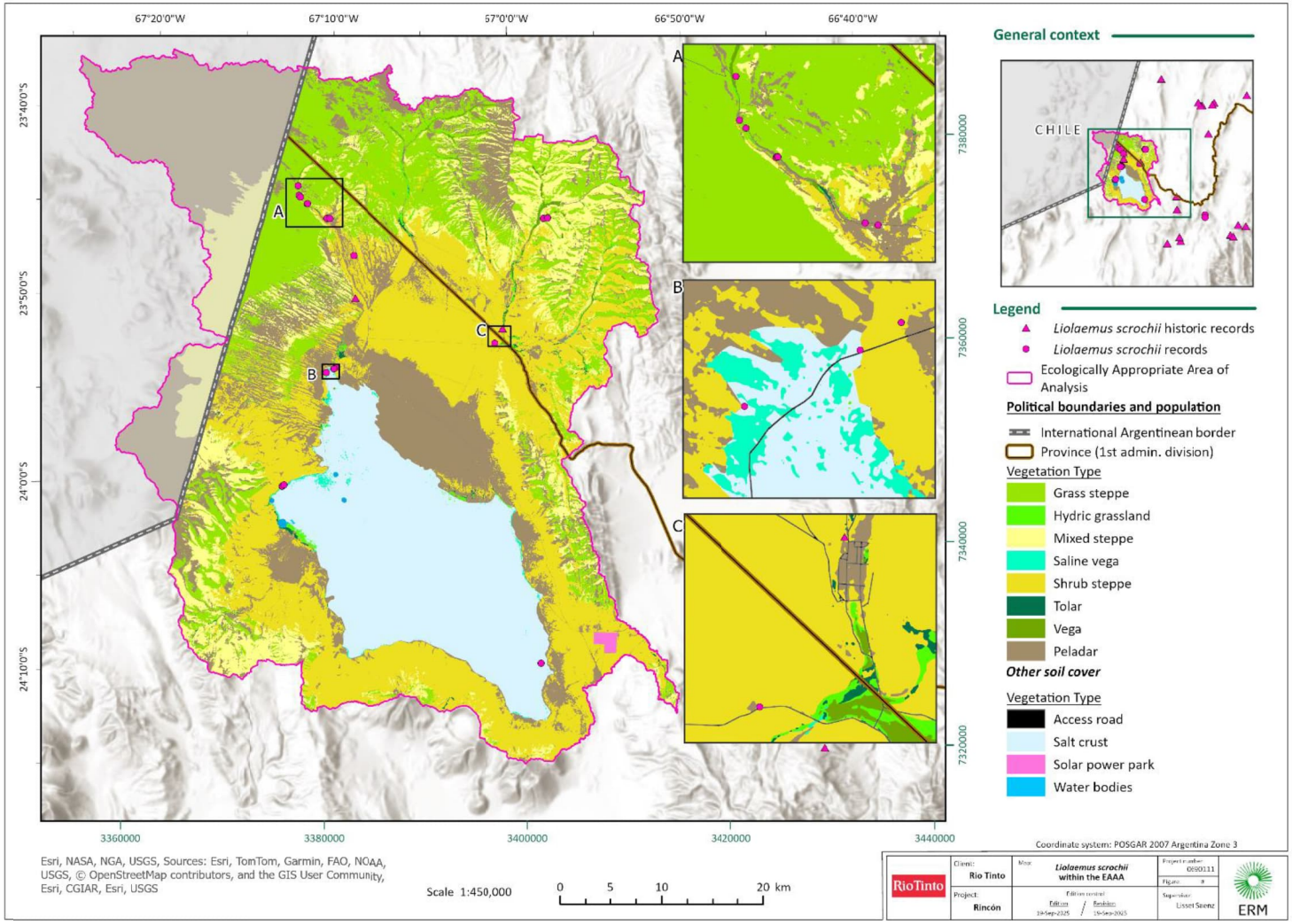


Figure 9: *Liolaemus scrocchi* 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

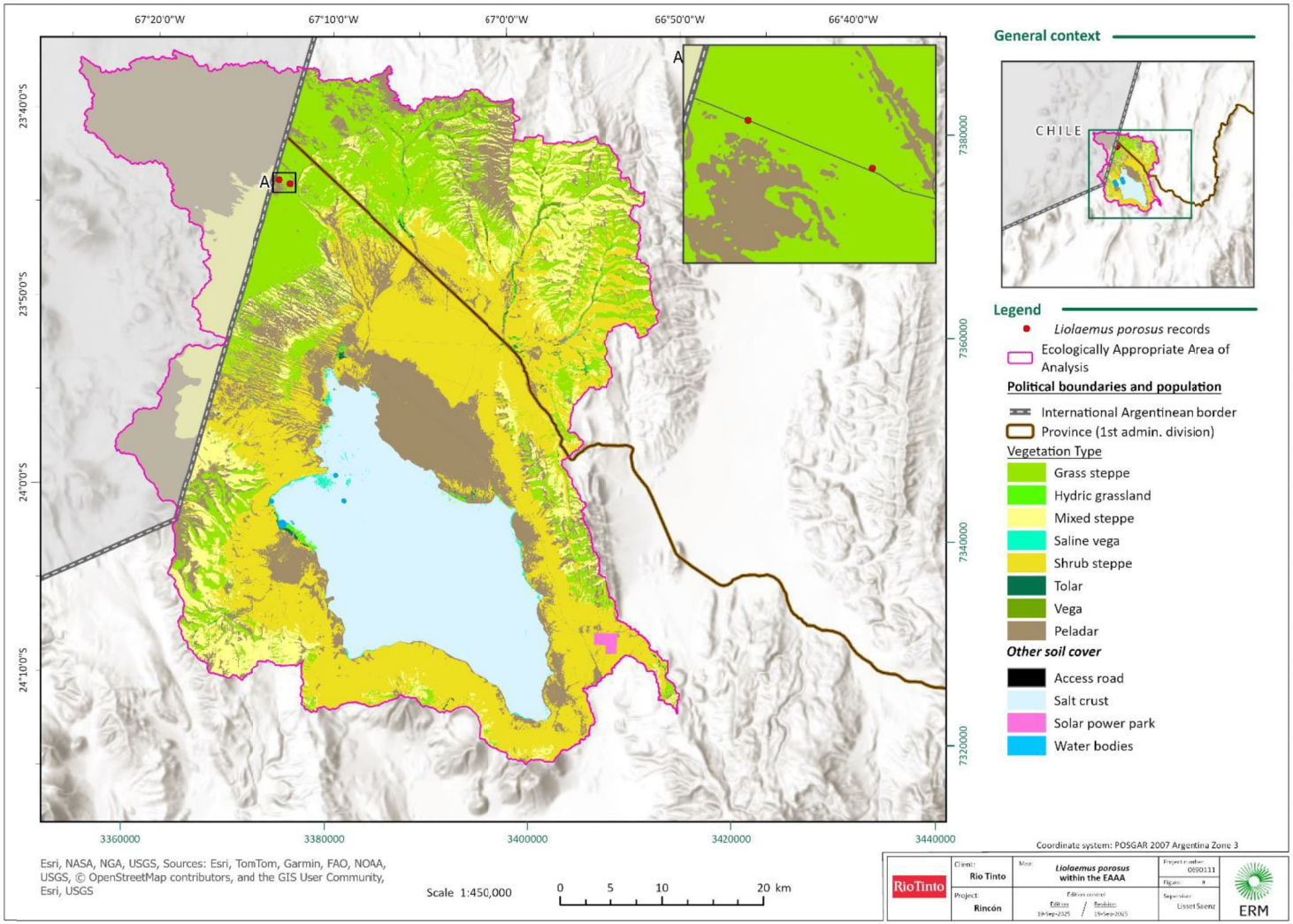


Figure 10: Liolaemus porosus 2024-2025 field survey records within the Salar Rincon Basin EAAA

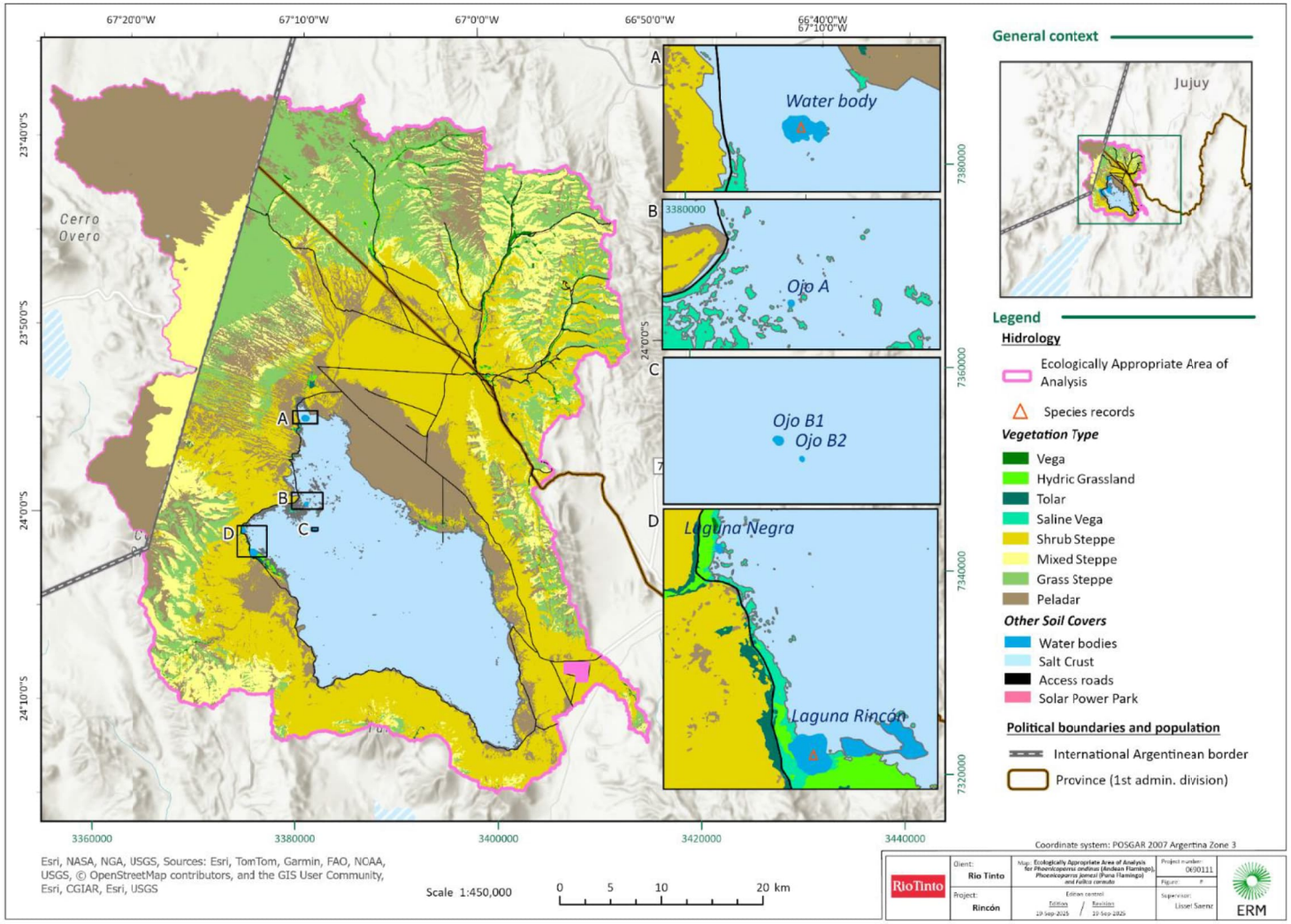


Figure 11: *Phoenicoparrus andinus* (Andean Flamingo), *Phoenicoparrus jamesi* (Puna Flamingo) and *Fulica cornuta* records within the EAAA

Table 13. Flamingos and Horned Coot records in the Salar Rincon Basin during the surveys of 2025

Species	Rincon Lagoon			Negra Lagoon			Superficial water body at the northern sector of the Salar		
	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25	Jan 25	Feb 25	Mar 25
Phoenicoparrus andinus	29	1	0	0	0	0	56	0	0
Phoenicoparrus jamesi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Phoenicopterus chilensis	71	34	28	0	0	0	2	0	0
Fulica cornuta	11	13	11	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Derlindati, 2025

In addition, occasional sightings of individuals of Andean Flamingo have been recorded in the "Ojos de Agua" within the Salar and its southeastern sector.

The Andean and Puna flamingos mainly feed on diatoms, which dominate their diet according to multiple studies (Frau et al. 2021; Hurlbert, 1982; Hurlbert & Chang, 1983; Mascitti, 1998; Mascitti & Kravetz, 2002; Ortiz et al. 2020; Tobar et al. 2012). In the high Andes, Andean Flamingos mainly feed by filtering larger diatoms (over 80 micrometres (µm) in length), whereas Puna Flamingos primarily consume smaller diatoms (under 60µm in length; Hurlbert 1982). Another factor influencing feeding habits in *P. andinus* and *P. jamesi* is foraging depth, resulting in *P. jamesi* preferring shallow water bodies and *P. andinus* presenting more flexibility and selecting equally deep or shallow waters (Mascitti & Castañera, 2006; Mascitti, 2001; Caziani & Derlindati, 2000).

The Project has been conducting on-site limnology analysis for the Laguna Rincon: the data collected encompasses 2022, 2023, 2024, and 2025 surveys performed for the ESIA and the R3000 pilot plant's EMP (Environmental Management Plan). Benthic algae (phytobenthos) have been the best-represented assemblage while diatoms have been the dominant group amongst the benthic communities in every survey conducted during this period.

Regarding feeding habits and the limnological data obtained in field surveys are consistent enough to determine that the Rincon Lagoon and the superficial water body at the northern sector of the salar are feeding sites for flamingo species (Derlindati, 2025). No records of nesting sites were identified in the zone during all campaigns executed (including historical campaigns from previous ESIAs from the initial owners (ADY Resources Limited).

3.5.3 Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EME) Studies

Extremophile organisms are those adapted to live optimally under extreme conditions, such as high salt concentrations, extreme temperatures, intense solar radiation, low nutrient availability, atmospheric pressure, and high acidity, among other adverse conditions (Phillippot et al. 2021). These organisms, capable of thriving in extreme environments, are mainly prokaryotes (from the domains *Bacteria* and *Archaea* - unicellular organisms without cellular nuclei, whose first findings were in extreme environments), but can also include unicellular eukaryotic organisms (whose cells contain a defined nucleus and other organelles surrounded by membranes) such as diatoms, fungi, and protozoa (Phillippot et al. 2021). These microorganisms not only tolerate extreme conditions but depend on them to survive (Gupta et al. 2014).

EMEs in the EAAA are shown in Figure 12.

When these microorganisms proliferate in association with minerals or induce their precipitation, they form organo-sedimentary structures (structures generated by the interaction between microorganisms and the surrounding sediments, serving as microhabitat, protection and source of nutrients), known as EMEs. The formation of these structures varies, giving rise to different types of EMEs such as unilaminar and multilaminar microbial mats, microbialites (the lithified form of microbial mats), biofilms, stromatolites, endoevaporites, among others.

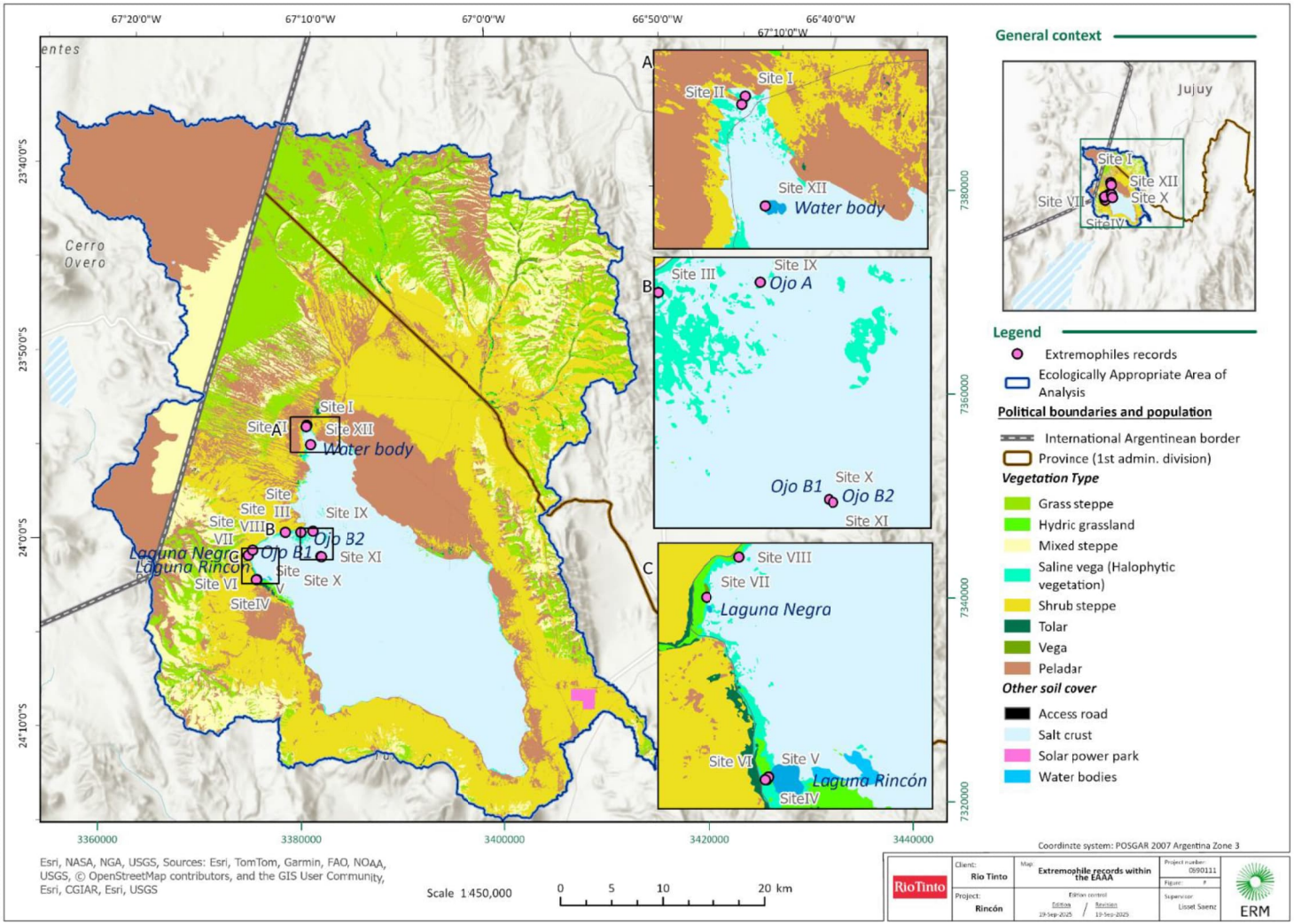


Figure 12: Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EME) in the EAAA

The EMEs found in Salar del Rincon include microbial mats, microbialites, and biofilms. This diversification has been fostered by thousands of years over the extreme environmental conditions in the hypersaline water bodies of the Puna region (conditions such as high levels of UV radiation, extreme aridity, pronounced daily and seasonal temperature fluctuations, and low atmospheric pressure due to altitude).

To characterize these EMEs, ERM and researchers from INIQUI-CONICET have conducted multiple field campaigns aimed at identifying and documenting their presence and ecological attributes. The following section presents the main findings from these efforts.

3.5.3.1. Field Studies Summary of Methods and Results

In June 2023, researchers from the Water and Soil Laboratory (LAgS), INIQUI – CONICET-UNSa, performed the baseline of the 50Ktpa Rincon Project, focusing on EMEs from Salar del Rincon. During this initial survey, samples of water, sediments, and microbial mats were collected from various locations across the Salar. For microbial mats in particular, physicochemical parameters were measured, and microbiological analyses were performed.

The study revealed a high diversity of microbial ecosystems, including both single-layered and multilayered microbial mats and biofilms, as well as microscopic life forms previously unreported in the region. Both autotrophic microorganisms (that produce their own food from photosynthesis) and heterotrophic microorganisms (that degrade organic matter produced by autotrophs) were recorded. A large diversity of filamentous cyanobacteria (which provide structural support for the microbial mats) and diatoms were recognized, and the presence of protozoa was detected. In March 2024, three water bodies containing extremophiles were also identified (named Ojos de Agua A, B1 and B2), which comprise deep hypersaline water bodies with circular morphologies and evaporitic margins.

The results of this campaign concluded that the study site includes a great diversity of microbial ecosystems, with the presence of biofilms, unilaminar and multilaminar microbial mats, and microbialites.

Based on these results, INIQUI researchers proposed that the Salar del Rincon qualifies as a conservation area between Categories II and III, according to the "*Guía para la Conservación y Monitoreo de Ecosistemas Microbianos. Extremófilos (EME): Tapetes Microbianos, Microbialitos y Endoevaporitas*" (2017), whose descriptions are detailed below:

- **Category II**: Features two types of EMEs. This includes more complex multilayer microbial mats, potentially accompanied by calcium carbonate lithifications (microbialites) or calcium sulfate precipitates (evaporites).

- **Category III**: Includes three or more types of EMEs. These highly complex ecosystems may feature microbial mats, microbialites or evaporites, phytomicrobialites, and other microbialite forms such as oncolites. Ecosystems in this category require the highest levels of protection, as the environmental conditions supporting such EME diversity are both more complex and more vulnerable to disturbance. The "Ojos del Rincon" falls into this category.

Microbial mats samples were collected from different sites of the Salar del Rincon to perform massive sequencing and build genomic libraries of the extremophile organisms of the Salar del Rincon. This sequencing revealed the phylogeny, taxonomy and abundance of species in the microbial communities of the different samples. The data showed that the extremophile communities include a high taxonomic diversity of both bacteria and archaea. In general, in all the samples studied, the alpha diversity values represented by Shannon's and Simpson's diversity indices were high. This reflects ecosystems or communities with complex and balanced structures. In general, wide phylogenetic distances between samples were observed, which corresponds to diversity and dissimilarity between EMEs. Findings suggest that some taxa may be restricted to the "Ojos de Agua" or the broader Salar del Rincon Basin but further research is required to identify and describe these species and determine their degree of endemism.

The analysis also revealed the presence of microorganisms that could not be identified at the species level due to the absence of matches in international genetic sequence databases, which reinforces the hypothesis of as-yet undescribed microbial diversity in this type of environment.

3.5.3.2. Monitoring of EMEs

The first monitoring survey was conducted in December 2024. This survey was carried out in spring and focused on the three Ojos de Agua and on effluents from the project's pilot plant (brine depleted and reverse osmosis reject water), the latter will make it possible to assess the resilience of the extremophiles under conditions of potential exposure to the effluent. The results of this monitoring showed that Ojos de Agua has biofilms, multilamellar microbial mats, microbialites and oncolites. Protists, cyanobacteria, and diatoms; and furthermore, that the EMEs from Salar del Rincon have a high spatial variability and harbor a unique biological diversity.

3.5.3.3. Endemic Flora Studies

Dr. Soledad Cuello and Dr. Julieta Carrilla, botanists from CONICET, assessed endemic flora within the Salar del Rincon Basin and conducted field surveys during April 2025.

Field surveys were conducted in March 2025 and consisted of 31 sampling sites widely distributed among Salar del Rincon Basin. They implemented the Points and Flexible Areas (PFAs) sampling methodology following Halloy, et al. (2011). This methodology is useful for representative surveys of plant communities over large areas, capturing community composition, live and dead coverage, and detection of inconspicuous and rare species.

Thirty-four species were recorded, of which 11 are restricted to Puna habitats: *Artemisia copa*, *Fabiana punensis*, *Ocyroe armata*, *Senecio veridis*, *Cumulopuntia boliviana*, *Urmenetea atacamensis*, *Euphorbia amandi*, *Frankenia triandra*, *Lycium humile*, *Nicotiana petunoides*, and *Erythranthes luteus*. However, the only restricted-range flora species identified was *Urmenetea atacamensis,* (Asteraceae family). The EOO for this species was estimated at less than 50,000km^2, which triggered a more detailed CH review. The EAAA of *U. atacamensis* is presented below.

Using field data, literature review, GIS and satellite imagery platforms, along with a Maxent algorithm (which allows the generation of potential species distribution maps), the experts developed a distribution model for this species. The modelling area was defined by applying a 15km buffer around the points where species were recorded. To capture the environmental conditions that influence the distribution and growth of species in the Puna, the model included vegetation, topography, climate, and soil, with spatial resolutions ranging from 10m to 250m.

Figure 13 shows the proposed distribution of *Urmenetea atacamensis* in the EAAA.

3.5.3.4. Chinchilla Chinchilla and Microcavia Shiptoni Studies

Dr. Alejandro Pietrek conducted two field surveys (February and March 2024). Both the Chinchilla and Shipton's Mountain Cavy utilize rocky outcrops, so before the first survey and using GIS and satellite imagery platforms (Gorelick et al. 2017), 135 rocky outcrops were identified. Those located at more than 4,000masl. and surrounded by a herbaceous or mixed steppe were prioritized for surveys as these are preferred by Chinchillas (Tirado et al. 2012).

Two team members conducted 200-m transects to identify communal latrines of *Lagidium viscacia* (chinchillon), *Chinchilla chinchilla,* and potential latrines of Shipton's Mountain Cavy, collecting fecal samples for molecular analysis. Latrine sites were selected based on size and strategic location. A total of 25 camera traps were deployed, 13 on the eastern side and 12 on the western side of the Salar and remained in place for approximately 30 days to monitor the presence and activity of target species.

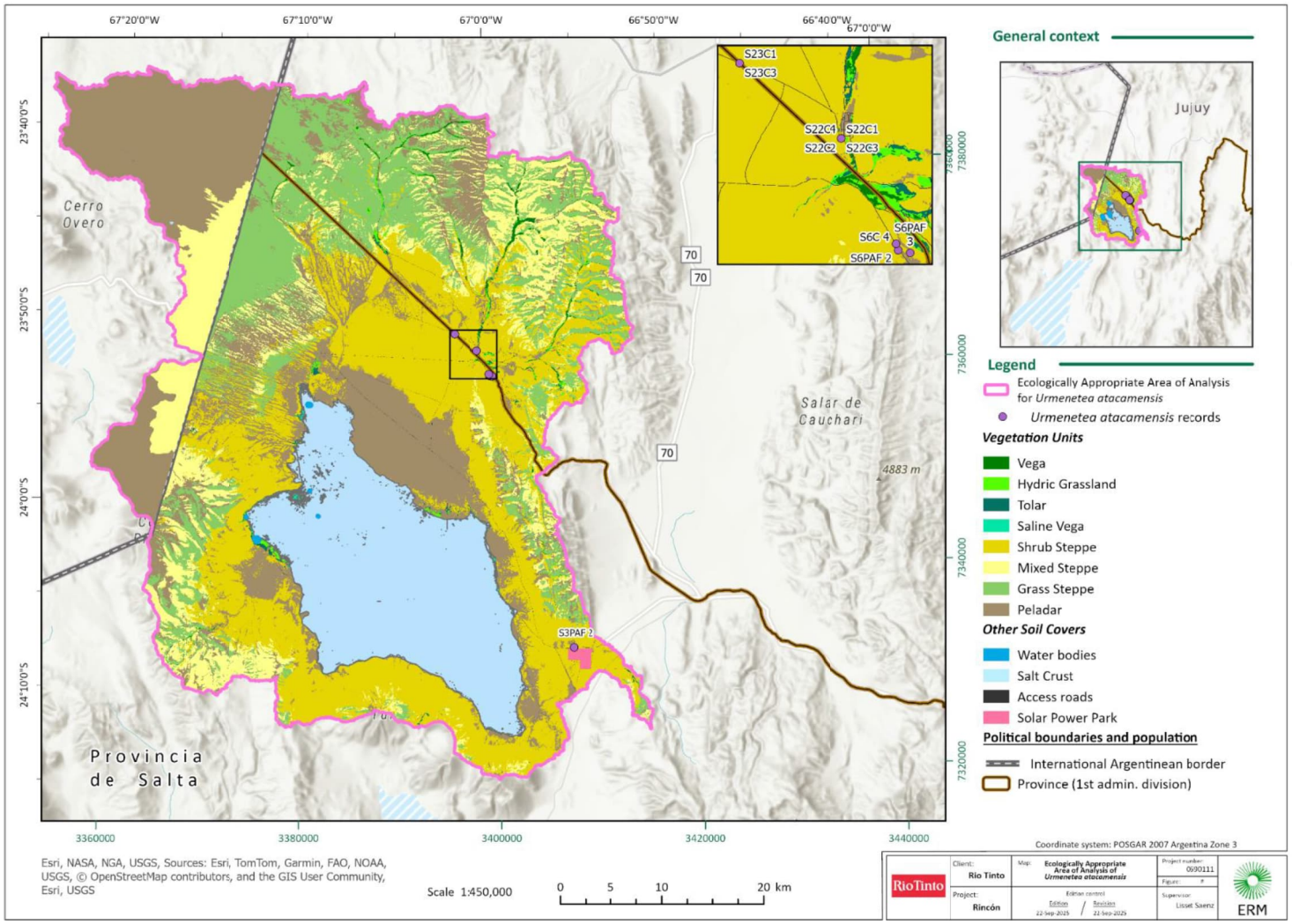


Figure 13: *Urmenetea Atacamensis* within the EAAA

The cameras recorded 913 photos, of which 37.6% (344) did not capture any individuals. The most photographed species was the Chinchilla rat (*Abrocoma cinerea*), followed by the Punta de Vacas leaf-eared mouse (*Phyllotis vaccarum*), another smaller saxicolous nocturnal rodent. The straight-billed curlew (*Ochetorhynchus ruficaudus*) was the third most photographed species. The Chinchillon or Viscacha (*Lagidium viscacia*) was recorded 40 times. Neither of the two target species (*Chinchilla chinchilla* and *Microcavia shiptoni)* was detected.

Molecular data obtained from faecal samples confirmed the presence of three rodent species that cohabit the rocky outcrops of the Rincon basin; the Chinchillon (*Lagidium viscacia*), Chinchilla rat (*Abrocoma cinerea*) and the Cuis puneño (*Galea comes*), a species present in the provinces of Salta and Jujuy (Secretaría de Ambiente y Desarrollo Sustentable de la Nación & SAREM, 2019).

Field surveys, camera traps or molecular analysis did not detect *Microcavia shiptoni* or *Chinchilla chinchilla*, *(*see specific studies of these species (Pietrek et al. 2025). Small and medium size mammals will be monitored during construction and operations, and if *M. shiptoni* or *C. chinchilla* are detected, CH status will be reassessed with the help of experts.

3.5.3.5. Telmatobius Atacamensis (Puna Frog) Studies

Josue Resina, Rolando Vera, and Sofia Castro, Salta University researchers, conducted two field surveys (February and March 2025) to assess the population status and distribution of *Telmatobius atacamensis,* and describe the populations based on morphological characters, which are present in the Salar del Rincon Basin.

Thirteen sites previously identified using Google Earth and the Vegetation Type Map developed by Dynamik (2025) were visited, and for 30 minutes, the three researchers conducted exhaustive searches for individuals by means of the visual encounter technique using a fine mesh net. In addition, a range of physical-chemical and biological variables were recorded to characterise the habitats (e.g., pH, conductivity, temperature, depth and dissolved oxygen, type of flora, associated fauna).

No individuals were recorded during the field surveys. The researchers noted that several environments exhibited characteristics potentially suitable for *Telmatobius* populations but were dry or exhibited low water levels at the time of the survey. Therefore, this species will be included in the BMEP to ensure ongoing monitoring and assessment if present.

For details of the study of the *Telmatobius* spp. population (Resina et al. 2025).

3.5.4 CH Threshold Assessment

Using data from the publicly available scientific literature, project reports, field studies, and expert input, CH status was assessed using IFC PS6 thresholds. IFC PS6 GN65 states that when estimates of a species global and/or local population are not available, expert opinion should be used to determine the significance of potential critical habitat. Proxies of population size (e.g., EOO, AOO) can also be used to assess local vs. global significance, although area proxies are of lower resolution and can result in inaccurate determinations.

The CH assessment in this report relies on both expert and threshold assessments, using proxies when necessary for local vs. global comparisons. Local vs global variables with highest resolution were chosen based on availability of data (i.e., from greater to least resolution population, suitable habitat as identified by experts/literature; AOO, EOO); in most cases, area estimates served as proxies for population estimates and threshold calculations. Where possible, the local AOO was compared to the global AOO; but where no information existed for areas of suitable habitat or an AOO, the EAAA was used as a proxy for the local population, and the EOO was used as a proxy for the global population.

As for many species, population and/or taxonomic status and geographic distribution are unclear and studies are ongoing, it is anticipated that this CHA will require an update.

3.5.4.1. Criterion 1: Critically endangered or endangered species

Two potential Critical Biodiversity values categorized as EN and CR (Chinchilla and Atacama water frog; Criterion 1a), and two VU (Andean flamingo, Andean condor) were assessed in the EAAA against appropriate Criterion 1 thresholds (Table 14).

Table 14. Critical Biodiversity Values determination - Criterion 1

Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)
Mammals			
Chinchilla chinchilla "Chinchilla" IUCN Red List: EN Argentinian legislation: EP EOO: 513427.3	The Chinchilla is adapted to extreme zones. This species lives in burrows or rocky crevices, usually in arid areas, and is strictly nocturnal. Its diet is herbivorous and specialized, including frugivorous, granivorous, and folivorous components, and they tend to form colonies (Cirignoli, 2019). According to IUCN (2024), this species has a wide geographical range, however, populations may be highly fragmented. Valladares *et al.* (2012) locate colonies of this species in the Andean zone of Antofagasta and the Parque Nacional Nevado Tres Cruces in Atacama. These species have been found in the Atacama region and near other salt flats in Chile through work for ESIAs of other mining projects[6]. Small populations were found in the northwestern Argentinian provinces of Catamarca, Jujuy, and Salta. Diaz & Barquez (2007) recorded specimens found in the highlands of Jujuy province but failed to find any extant populations in 5 years of searching (Spotorno & Patton, 2015. Recent studies have shown the presence of *C. chinchilla* near Socompá vulcan (Pietrek et al. 2022) and the town of Antofalla (Croce et al. 2023). There may be populations persisting on the border of Bolivia with Chile, in an isolated region with a low human population. The geographic range of Chinchilla overlaps with the EAAA (IBAT, 2024); however, the species was not recorded during the field surveys conducted by Rio Tinto for the ESIA baseline (50Ktpa LCE Plant). The Salar del Rincon Basin also contains Rocky areas (Roquedales) throughout the southern and western sectors that can potentially serve as refuge for the species, which uses cracks and crevices to establish its colonies. The nearest record of the chinchilla belongs to Ortiz et al. (2010) where they found remains in the pellets of *Bubo magellanicus* in Las Cuevas, Salta, almost 90km from Rincon salt flat. These pellets were collected from 1999 to 2005. Currently, there are no findings or populations assessments of these species in the region. Because it is a species considered a conservation target for the Los Andes Regional Reserve (Secretaría de Ambiente, 2017). Two field surveys during March and April 2025 were conducted to assess the presence of the species in the Salar del Rincon basin. Three sites were selected based on the species' optimal habitat characteristics, namely, areas with a high density of volcanic rock surfaces, which enable the formation of rocky outcrops, surrounded by herbaceous steppe. The methodology included surveying rocky outcrops, identification of possible *C. chinchilla* latrines, installation of 13 camera traps for one month near the latrines, and molecular analysis of faeces. Additionally, raptor pellets found in one of the surveyed sites were collected, and their content was subsequently identified. None of these methods yielded positive results for the presence of *Chinchilla*.	Based on the vegetation types identified by Dynamik the Chinchilla specialist selected possible suitable habitat within the Salar del Rincon basin for the species (55ha). This area was compared against the species' global Area of Occupancy (AOO), estimated at 50,000 ha (Roach & Kennerley, 2016). The suitable habitat in the EAAA overlaps 0.11% of the species' global known AOO, which is below the 0.5% threshold under Criterion 1a required to designate the species as Critical Habitat value. Based on field surveys and scientific literature, it is unlikely that the species currently occurs in the Salar del Rincon basin. However, the species will be included in the Biodiversity Plans as a priority species.	No The species does not meet the threshold of <0.5% to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 1a.
Amphibians			
Telmatobius atacamensis "Atacama Water Frog" IUCN Red List: CR Argentinian legislation: EN	*T. atacamensis* is categorized as Critically Endangered (CR) in the IUCN Red List and as Threatened in the National legislation. *Telmatobius atacamensis* is a micro-endemic frog species that occurs at elevations between 3,800masl and 3,945masl. This species occurs in a restricted area of the Puna of Salta Province, in northern Argentina. It only occurs in Los Patos and San Antonio rivers in the San Antonio de los Cobres locality (Acosta et al. 2019) and was recently found in Santa Rosa de los Pastos Grandes (Acosta et al. 2024), 50km away from the Salar del Rincon basin. Its estimated extent of occurrence (EOO) is 27km², and its area of occupancy (AOO) is 8km² (IUCN, 2019). The type of habitat appropriate for the development of this species is characterized by a narrow range of electrical conductivity, a wide range of water temperatures, and alkaline pH. This species cannot survive in modified habitats (Acosta et al. 2019).	The known EOO (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, 2019) and the Salar del Rincon basin (EAAA) do not overlap, and the species was not recorded within the EAAA. As a precaution, this species will be included in the Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for continued assessment.	No The species does not meet the threshold of <0.5% to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 1a

[6] Project Salares Lithium Company "Salares 7" and the Salares Norte Mining from Gold Fields Salares Norte Company.

Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)
	It has not been recorded in Pastos Grandes since 1989. Due to the ongoing decline in the extent and quality of habitat, the population is suspected to be decreasing. *T. atacamensis*, is a species that occurs more than 50km away from the Salar de Rincon, and it's geographic distribution does not overlap with the Project area. Additionally, there have been no records in GBIF of this species in areas near the salt flat. In the interview with Dr. Acosta, she pointed out that other Telmatobius species may be found in the water bodies of the Salar del Rincon basin. To corroborate the presence or absence of the species, researchers from Salta University conducted two field surveys in February and March 2025 to investigate the presence of *Telmatobius atacamensis* or related species in the Salar del Rincon basin. Thirteen sites were surveyed using visual encounter techniques, and habitat variables were recorded. No individuals of the species *Telmatobius atacamensis* were observed. The field indicates that Telmatobius atacamensis and other Telmatobius species are not likely to occur in the Salar de Rincon Basin.		
Phoenicoparrus andinus "Andean Flamingo" IUCN Red List: VU Argentinian legislation: AM	*P. andinus* occurs on the high Andean plateaus of Peru, Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina. It breeds at several localities, notably Laguna Colorada and other salt-lakes in southwestern Bolivia, Laguna de Salinas and Salar de Atacama. According to the IUCN Red List, the species is categorized as Vulnerable (VU), and according to Argentinian legislation, is Threatened (AM). The population probably declined rapidly during the 20th century Is largely restricted to high mountain alkaline and salt-lakes, at 2,300-4,500 masl. It breeds colonially, laying only one egg (BirdLife International, 2020). It is a full migrant and congregatory species. Historical records from previous studies (ADY 2007, ADY 2014, ESIA PR 2022), reported between 1 and 42 individuals in Laguna Rincon of *Phoenicoparrus andinus* (Andean Flamingo). To verify its current abundance, targeted field surveys were conducted in January, February, and March 2025 by Dr. Enrique Derlindati. The highest count was 29 individuals in Laguna Rincon and 56 in a previously undocumented water body to the north, both recorded in January. Subsequent surveys recorded only 1–2 individuals.	When compared to the global population estimate of 78,000 individuals (Marconi et al. 2020) against the local population in the Salar del Rincon basin, the observed local population represents 0.11%. These findings suggest that the population of *P. andinus* does not represent a significant portion of the global population. Although Criterion 1b does not include numerical thresholds, given its global distribution, the flamingo population is not expected to be impacted to a degree that would result in a change in its IUCN Red List status from Vulnerable (VU) to Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR).	No The species does not meet the threshold to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 1b.
Vultur gryphus "Andean Condor" IUCN Red List: VU Argentinian legislation: AM EOO: 8,520,000	*Vultur gryphus* (Andean Condor) ranges along the Andes from Colombia to Chile and Argentina, with vagrant occurrences in Venezuela, Paraguay, and Brazil. Populations are especially rare in the northern part of its range, and the species may no longer be resident in Venezuela. Reintroduction efforts using rescued and captive-bred individuals have been carried out in Colombia, Chile, and Argentina. Naturally scarce, the global population is estimated at around 10,000 individuals (6,700 mature), though this is likely a maximum estimate. Chile and Argentina may each host up to 2,000 individuals, with some overlap. The largest known population is in northwest Patagonia, with approximately 300 individuals, including 200 mature birds (BirdLife, 2020). *Vultur gryphus* was identified as potentially present in the Salar del Rincon basin. Currently, the species has not been observed during field surveys conducted by Rio Tinto for the ESIA baseline (50 ktpa LCE Plant). Additionally, no historical records were found in the GBIF database for the area. Based on this evidence, the species is not considered to be impacted by the Project.	Based on the known EOO and the availability and considering the full EAAA as a suitable habitat for the species (2,662.5km^2), the area could potentially support approximately **0.03 %** of the EOO. Although Criterion 1b does not include numerical thresholds, given its global distribution, the flamingo population is not expected to be impacted to a degree that would result in a change in its IUCN Red List status from Vulnerable (VU) to Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR).	No The species does not meet the threshold to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 1b

3.5.4.2. Criterion 2: Restricted-range species

Eleven potential Critical Biodiversity values either confirmed or suspected to have restricted distributions (i.e., extent of occurrence ≤ 50,000km²), were assessed against the thresholds established for Criterion 2. Of these, six to seven species qualify for CH status according to Criterion 2 thresholds (Table 15).

Those species that do qualify for CH status are *Liolaemus multicolour, Liolaemus porosus*, *Liolaemus scrocchi*, *Liolaemus* sp. AC (Scenario 1); or *Liolaemus sp. A* and *Liolaemus* sp. *C* (Scenario 2); and EMEs.

3.5.4.3. Criterion 3: Migratory and/or Congregatory species

Critical Habitat thresholds for Criterion 3 were not attained for the Horned coot (*Fulica cornuta*), Andean Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus andinus*) or Puna Flamingo (*Phoenicoparrus jamesi*) (Table 16).

3.5.4.4. Criterion 4: Highly Threatened or Unique Ecosystems

A review of the IUCN Red List of Ecosystems indicates that to date, no highly threatened or unique ecosystem listed, overlaps with the Project's EAAA (Figure 14). However, only a subset of Argentinian Ecosystems has been evaluated, and a limited part of this information has been populated into the IUCN database. It is not possible to determine which ecosystems have already been assessed, so the result of the search for threatened ecosystems in Argentina may be incomplete for the area that includes the EAAA. According to GN80, Criterion 4 also includes areas not yet assessed by IUCN but considered to be of high-conservation priority in regional, or national, systematic conservation planning.

Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems are considered Critical Habitat under Criterion 4.

The EMEs harbor high biological diversity from different domains (Extreme Bacteria and Archaea) and contribute significantly to net primary productivity, biogeochemical cycling, carbon storage, and gas exchange in saline basins (Martínez-Alonso & Gaju, 2005; Madigan et al. 2015; Contreras & Farías, 2017). The Plan Integral de Manejo de Desarrollo de la Reserva Natural de Fauna Silvestre Los Andes (RNFSLA), Refugio Provincial de Vida Silvestre Laguna Socompa y Refugio Provincial de Vida Silvestre Ojos de Mar de Tolar Grande (Resolución 48/18), considers EMEs as sites of high conservation and scientific value that have been declared Provincial Wildlife Refuges as nested protected areas within the Los Andes Reserve.

The RNFSLA considers EMEs as emblematic environments and one of its most threatened conservation values. Within the objectives of the Natural Heritage Plan, Objective E1-1 proposes to address and establish effective conservation strategies for communities and populations of key, endemic, unique, and critically endangered species (among which the extremophile community is included) to ensure their long-term viability.

3.5.4.5. Criterion 5: Key Evolutionary Processes

As defined in GN81 of the Guidance Note 6 (2019), structural attributes of a region, such as topography, geology, soil, temperature, and vegetation, individually or in combination, can shape evolutionary processes by influencing species distribution, ecological interactions, and adaptive traits. These factors contribute to the development of unique regional biodiversity patterns and ecological functions.

The application of this criterion is primarily focused on regions that have been previously investigated and are either known or assumed to be associated with unique evolutionary processes. Criterion 5 considers spatial features that are unique or idiosyncratic to the landscape and are associated with genetically distinct populations or subpopulations of plant and animal species.

The Puna region is distinguished by its unique geographical features, including high-altitude Andean lakes. These are characterised by elevated levels of exposure to ultraviolet radiation, high salinity, low oxygen levels, oligotrophic (low nutrients) conditions, and significant daily temperature range (Farías et al. 2014; Albarracín et al. 2015). The interplay between extreme environmental conditions and favourable local geological and geomorphological features promotes the development of closed-basin lakes and mineral-rich groundwater Ojos de Agua, particularly enriched in carbonates.

Table 15. Critical Biodiversity values determination - Criterion 2

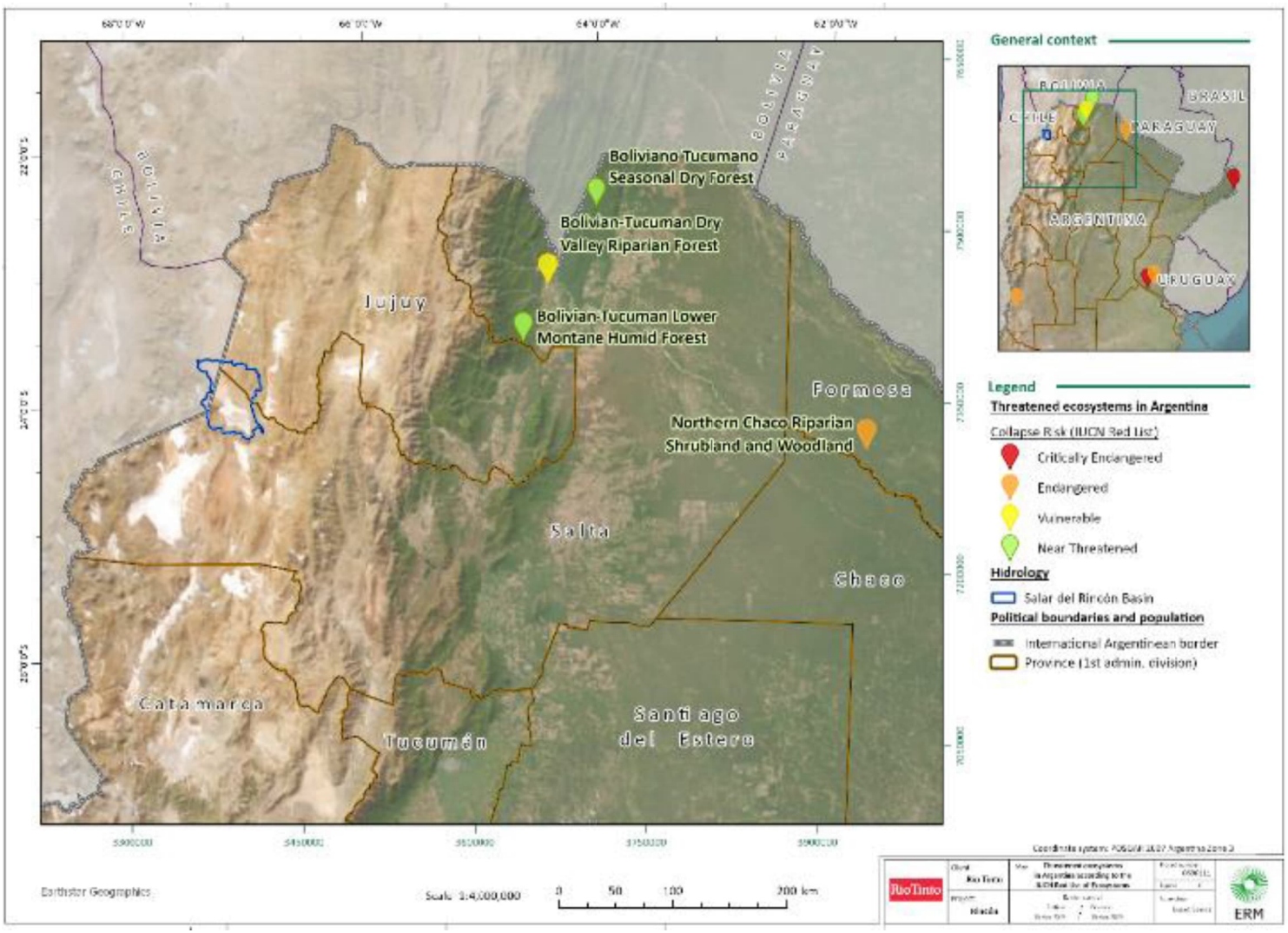
Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)
Plants			
Urmenetea atacamensis EOO[2]=27,069km^2	*Urmenetea atacamensis* is a perennial herbaceous species endemic to the high Andean regions of northwestern Argentina and northern Chile (Pozner, s.f.). In Argentina, it is distributed across the provinces of Catamarca, Jujuy, and Salta, within the Puna biogeographic region. The species is adapted to arid, high-altitude environments, ranging from 2,400masl to 4,000masl. Dr. Soledad Cuello and Dr. Julieta Carrilla were contracted to evaluate the populations of endemic flora in the Salar del Rincon basin and estimate the EOO of the registered endemic species in the Salar del Rincon basin. A summary of the field survey is presented in Section 3.3.2.4. The study found that *U. atacamensis* occurs at very low densities within the Salar del Rincon basin, approximately one individual in 2m^2 average coverage, and appears highly scattered.	The EOO estimated by the specialist is 27,069km^2. The EAAA overlaps 9% of the EOO estimated, which is below the 10% threshold (using EAAA as a proxy for population) under Criterion 2 required to trigger Critical Habitat designation.	No The species does not meet the threshold of 10% to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 2. This species is being designated as a priority species due to its proximity to meeting the threshold set for Criterion 2.
Mammals			
Microcavia shiptoni Shipton's Mountain Cavy EOO[1]=39,758km^2	*M. shiptoni* is a species that inhabits grasslands and shrublands, between 3,000masl and 4,000masl. This species is endemic to the northeast of Argentina in the provinces of Salta, Tucumán, and Catamarca. Its EOO is slightly over 20,000km² and it is present in fewer than 10 localities (Latcher & Roach, 2020). This species occurs in the Parque Nacional Los Cardones (Salta). The EOO of this species extends near to the Salar del Rincon. It inhabits areas with shrubby steppe, with *Baccharis*, *Fabiana* and *Adesmia* as the dominant genera. The conservation status of this species is Least concern (LC) according to IUCN Red List and Near Threatened according to National legislation. This species faces several threats due to habitat degradation caused by overgrazing, which heavily impacts rocky outcrops used for foraging. The natural vegetation has also been affected by burning and firewood collection. Recently, mega-mining activities have polluted the water bodies and poorly drained areas that could serve as habitats for this species (Teta et al. 2022). According to IBAT results, *Microcavia shiptoni* could be present in the EAAA. There is no record of this species in the different field surveys previously conducted by Rincon. Because limited information is available for this, Rio Tinto decided to conduct two field surveys during March and April 2025, to seek to confirm the presence of the species in the Salar del Rincon Basin. Three sites were selected based on the species' optimal habitat characteristics, namely, areas with a high density of volcanic rock surfaces, which enable the formation of rocky outcrops, surrounded by herbaceous steppe. A summary of the field survey is presented in Section 3.3.2.5.	Based on field surveys and in conjunction with scientific literature, it can be affirmed that the species does not occur in the Salar del Rincon basin. Additionally, if the EAAA of the species overlaps 6.97% of the EOO, it does not meet the 10% threshold to trigger Critical Habitat designation under Criterion 2.	No The species does not meet the threshold of 10% to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 2.
Amphibians			
Telmatobius atacamensis Atacama water frog EOO[1]= 26.72 km^2	*T. atacamensis* is categorized as Critically Endangered (CR) in the IUCN Red List and as Threatened in the National legislation. *Telmatobius atacamensis* is a micro-endemic frog species that occurs at elevations between 3,800masl and 3,945masl. This species occurs in a restricted area of the Puna of Salta Province, in northern Argentina. It only occurs in Los Patos and San Antonio rivers in the San Antonio de los Cobres locality (Acosta et al. 2019) and was recently found in Santa Rosa de los Pastos Grandes (Acosta et al. 2024), 50km away from the Salar del Rincon Basin. Its estimated EOO is 27km², and its AOO is 8km² (IUCN, 2019). The type of habitat appropriate for the development of this species is characterized by a narrow range of electrical conductivity, a wide range of water temperatures, and alkaline pH. This species cannot survive in modified habitats (Acosta et al. 2019). It has not been recorded in the locality since 1989. Due to the ongoing decline in the extent and quality of habitat, the population is suspected to be decreasing.	The known EOO (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, 2019) and the Salar del Rincon basin (EAAA) do not overlap, and the species was not recorded within the EAAA. As a precaution, this species will be included in the Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for continued assessment.	No The species does not meet the threshold of 10 % to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 2.

Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)
	T. atacamensis, is a species that appears more than 50km away from the Salar de Rincon, and the IBAT screening has not recorded it. Likewise, it would not be present in the EAAA. Additionally, there have been no records in GBIF of this species in areas near the salt flat. Thus, its distribution is quite limited, appearing in water bodies with certain particular characteristics. To corroborate the presence or absence of the species, researchers from Salta University conducted two field surveys in February and March 2025 to investigate the presence of *Telmatobius atacamensis* or related species in the Salar del Rincon Basin. Thirteen sites were surveyed using visual encounter techniques, and habitat variables were recorded. No individuals of the species *Telmatobius atacamensis* were observed; however, some sites showed potentially suitable habitat conditions, though they were dry or had low water levels at the time. The field indicates that *Telmatobius atacamensis* and other *Telmatobius* species are not likely to occur in the Salar de Rincon Basin.		
Reptiles			
*Liolaemus cazianiae** EOO=2,054.66km^2	According to its original description, *Liolaemus cazianae* is distributed in the province of Salta: the southwestern sector of Salar de Arizaro region, west of Cauchari, Tolar Grande (Ojo de Mar and Los Colorados), and Socompa (Lobo et al. 2010; Paz et al. 2013). Data collected during field campaigns will support an extension of the species' known distribution range to the north. *L. cazianiae* inhabits in salar adjacent areas within the Puna region. The specific microhabitat consists of halophyte plants from *Parastrephia* genus, as they serve as refugee for the species. *Liolaemus cazianiae* was initially identified as a potential Critical Biodiversity value based on records from IBAT and Paz et al. (2013). However, a review of its historical distribution indicates that the species' known range does not overlap with the Salar del Rincon Basin. During the November 2024 and March 2025 field surveys with the specialists, it was confirmed that *Liolaemus cazianiae* is not present in the Salar del Rincon basin. The species was recorded at a site located approximately 20km from the basin boundary.	The known EOO (IUCN SSC Amphibian Specialist Group, 2019) and the Salar del Rincon basin (EAAA) do not overlap, and the species was not recorded within the EAAA. As a precaution, this species will be included in the Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan for continued assessment.	The species does not meet the threshold of 10% to trigger Critical Habitat under Criterion 2.
Liolaemus multicolour EOO=34,429.01km^2	*Liolaemus multicolour* is distributed in Jujuy (Abrapampa, Cauchari, Cochinoca, Chorcan, Ichillo, Susques) and Salta (Salinas Grandes, Olacapato Chico, San Antonio de los Cobres, Santa Rosa de los Pastos Grandes). *L. multicolour* is a very versatile species and can inhabit a wide variety of environments. As a generalist, the species has been registered in all slope types, different Vegetation types (steppe, peladar, wetlands, deserts, and salar borders). In the study area, *L. multicolour* prefers the eastern sectors of Salar del Rincon, where mixed steppes with the dominance of *Adesmia horrida* and the presence of *A. desertycola*, *Senecio viridis*, *Parastrephia lucida,* and *Fabiana punensis.* The species can also be associated with inactive burrows. *L. multicolour* was recorded in November 2024 and February 2025 during field surveys conducted by Dr Abdala, one of the most abundant *Liolaemus* species.	Using the estimated global Area of Occupancy (AOO) of 340km² as a proxy for the global population, and the updated local AOO of 116km² as a proxy for the local population, it is estimated that the local AOO overlaps 34% of AOO. **This value meets the 10% threshold defined under Criterion 2 for Critical Habitat designation.**	Yes Critical Habitat triggering species
Liolaemus porosus EOO=165.18km^2	*Liolaemus porosus* is mainly found near the Socompa Vulcan, Salta, above 3,600masl. and historically on Provincial Route Nº 160. Data collected during field campaigns will support an extension of the species' known distribution range to the north. In the field, individuals were recorded using rodents' caves as refuges or hiding under rocks. During field surveys conducted by Dr Abdala in 2025, individuals of *L. porosus* were recorded on the Huaitiquina sector, north of the Salar del Rincon.	Using the estimated global Area of Occupancy (AOO) of 20km² as a proxy for the global population, and the historical local AOO of 8km² as a proxy for the local population, it is estimated that the local AOO overlaps 40% of the AOO. **This value meets the 10 % threshold defined under Criterion 2 for Critical Habitat designation.**	Yes Critical Habitat triggering species
Liolaemus scrocchi EOO = 31,054.00km^2	*Liolaemus scrocchi* is located in Jujuy (Susques, Abra de Pives, Serranías de Chañi, Chorcan, Abdón Castro Tolay, Sey, Sierra de Aguilar) and Salta (Abra del Acay, Olacapato, Santa Rosa de los Pastos Grandes, Huaytiquina, Vega Chuculaqui, Vega Bequeville y Mina Tincalayo), above 3,000masl.	Using the estimated global Area of Occupancy (AOO) of 160km² as a proxy for the global population, and the historical local	Yes Critical Habitat triggering species

Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)
	L. scrocchi uses a wide range of microhabitats, including burrows in clay and sandy surfaces, vega sectors, Peladar and Salar-edge sites. According to previous field survey records, *Liolaemus scrocchi* (1 individual recorded in 2023) was designated as a probable trigger species in the Screening Phase. Subsequent surveys conducted by Dr Abdala recorded 5 individuals in November 2024 and 15 individuals in February 2025 of *L. scrocchi*.	AOO of 40km² as a proxy for the local population, it is estimated that local AOO overlaps with 25% of the global AOO. **This value meets the 10% threshold defined under Criterion 2 for Critical Habitat designation**.	
Liolaemus sp. A EOO=252.42 km^2	*Liolaemus* sp. A is a non-identified species to date, so the information gathered is only based on what has been observed in field surveys carried out by Dr Abdala. This species shows a strong relation with the Vegetation types that characterize the area, defined mainly by *Aloysia dereticola* steppes. Another notable aspect is that this species does not seem to coexist with another *Liolaemus* species, which make the density calculation and data extrapolation easier. The density calculation was estimated at 98 individuals/ha. This species was not registered in previous surveys, either because it was not sighted or because it was confused with other Liolaemus species. *Liolaemus sp.* A was recorded by Dr Abdala during field surveys in the northern sector of the Salar del Rincon basin, including Huaytiquina and near the project's footprint. A total of 36 specimens were recorded in November 2024, and 96 individuals were sighted in February 2025. The field survey methods and results are detailed in 3.3.2.1. Refer to Section 4.1 for potential impacts insights and Section 7.1 for next steps and recommendations for further alignment with PS6.	*Liolaemus* sp. A's EOO (242.42km) overlaps completely with the EAAA (100%). **This species triggers criterion 2 for Critical Habitat**.	Yes Critical Habitat triggering species
Liolaemus sp. C EOO=43.87	*Liolaemus* sp. C is a non-identified species to date, so the information gathered is only based on what has been observed in field surveys carried out by Dr Abdala. This species was not registered in previous surveys, either because it was not sighted or because it was confused with another *Liolaemus* species.	The *Liolaemus* sp. A's EOO overlaps most of the EAAA (76.31%). Therefore, **this species does trigger criterion 2 for Critical Habitat**.	Yes Critical Habitat triggering species
Liolaemus sp. AC EOO=391.22	*Liolaemus* sp. AC is related to the specific scenario where *Liolaemus* sp. A and *Liolaemus* sp. C are populations belonging to the same species.	If *Liolaemus sp. AC* Therefore, the *Liolaemus sp. AC* species would trigger criterion 2 for Critical Habitat.	Yes Critical triggering species
Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EMEs)	While many species were not identified, unique lineages and result suggest micro-endemisms may occur.	Although EME communities and species have not fully been identified at the species level, it is possible that micro-endemism occurs. Therefore, based on the precautionary principle, **EME's will be considered as a Criterion 2 biodiversity value.**	Yes Critical habitat triggering biodiversity value (based on the precautionary principle)

Table 16. Potential Critical biodiversity values determination - Criterion 3

Scientific name	Species information	Critical Habitat Determination	Critical Habitat (Yes / No)	
Birds				
Fulica cornuta Horned coot IUCN status: • Congregatory and dispersive. • Not a Migrant.	*F. cornuta*, also known as the horned coot, is a species known from a few high-altitude Andean lakes in South-west Bolivia, north Chile, and north-west Argentina. A total of 8,988 individuals were counted in Argentina in 1995. It inhabits Andean lakes, with dense submerged aquatic plants, primarily at 3,000- 5,200 masl but as low as 2,000 in harsh water (BirdLife International, 2016b). It is a congregatory species. According to the IUCN Red List, the species is categorized as Near Threatened (NT) and according to Argentinian legislation, is Threatened (AM). The only impact detected is the frequent informal visits by people (employees of mining companies, contractors, and tourists), which can alter the behaviour of this species during critical periods such as breeding (Caziani et al. 2001).In the ADY 2014, ESIA PR 2022 and PMA R3000 2024 surveys, ERM registered up to 7 specimens of *F. cornuta* in Laguna Rincon, located on the salt flat western border. Also, GBIF presents multiple records in the area for this species. Based on this preliminary information, *F. cornuta* was considered as an unlikely trigger species in the Screening phase. To verify the abundance of *F. cornuta* in Laguna Rincon and other relevant water bodies for the species, field surveys were conducted in 2025 by the specialist Dr Enrique Derlindati. The study areas were visited in the months of January, February and March where fixed-point surveys were carried out along the coastline. The results showed an abundance that ranged between 11 and 13 individuals in Laguna Rincon. Moreover, 3 to 4 nesting sites were identified during surveys. A summary of the field survey is presented in Section 3.3.2.2. Subsequent surveys conducted within the context of R3000 Management Plan revealed an abundance of 17 individuals in March 2025.	The number of individuals recorded in Laguna Rincon was compared with the global population size, estimated at around 10,000 individuals (BirdLife International, 2016). The EAAA supports less than 1% of the *Fulica cornuta* Global population (0.28% considering the most precautionary scenario). **Therefore, this species does not trigger Criterion 3 for Critical Habitat.**	No Does not meet threshold.
Phoenicoparrus andinus Andean Flamingo IUCN status: • Congregatory and dispersive. • Full Migrant.	*P. andinus* occurs on the high Andean plateaus of Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina. It breeds at several localities, notably Laguna Colorada and other salt-lakes in southwestern Bolivia, Laguna de Salinas, and Salar de Atacama. According to the IUCN Red List, the species is categorized as Vulnerable (VU), and according to Argentinian legislation, it is Threatened (AM). The population probably declined rapidly during the 20th century. It is largely restricted to high mountain alkaline and salt-lakes, at 2,300-4,500 masl It breeds colonially, laying only one egg (BirdLife International, 2020). It is a full migrant and congregatory species. The records of *Phoenicopterus andinus* were varying through the studies carried out by ERM (ADY 2007, ADY 2014, ESIA PR 2022), showing abundances from 1 to 42 individuals. Also, GBIF presents multiple records in the area. Considering the information obtained, *P. andinus* was categorized as a possible trigger species in the Screening phase. To verify the abundance of *P. andinus* in Laguna Rincon and other relevant water bodies for the species, field surveys were conducted in 2025 by the specialist Dr Enrique Derlindati. The study areas were visited in the months of January, February and March where fixed-point surveys were carried out along the coastline. The results showed the highest abundance in January, with 29 individuals recorded in Laguna Rincon and 56 individuals recorded in an unprecedented site, a water body sector in the northern part of the basin. Surveys in later months recorded 1 to 2 individuals. A summary of the field survey is presented in the Section 3.5.2.	The number of individuals in the water body and Laguna Rincon was compared with the latest published global population data from the Simultaneous Flamingo Census, estimated at 78,000 individuals (Marconi et al. 2020). The Andean Flamingo population in the EAAA is less than 1% of the global population (0.11%). **Therefore, this species does not trigger Criterion 3 for Critical Habitat.**	No Does not meet threshold.
Phoenicoparrus jamesi Puna Flamingo IUCN status: ▪ Congregatory and dispersive. ▪ Full Migrant.	*P. jamesi* occurs on the high Andean plateaus of Peru, Chile, Bolivia and Argentina with small numbers occurring around the lowland Laguna Mar Chiquita, Argentina. It is found mainly on saline lakes in the high Andean plateaus, where it feeds mainly on diatoms, but is also a partial elevational migrant which moves to lower altitudes lakes in the non-breeding season. (BirdLife International, 2016c). According to the IUCN Red List, the species is categorized as Near Threatened (NT) and according to Argentinian legislation, is Threatened (AM). The population probably declined rapidly during the 20th century, however since the 1990s the trend has been positive but since their habitat is under degradation and habitat loss is expected to decline. It is a full migrant and congregatory species. 24 *Phoenicoparrus jamesi* individuals were registered for ESIA PR in 2022 surveys and 5 individuals were registered for PMA R3000 in 2024 monitoring surveys in Laguna Rincon. Also, GBIF has multiple records in the area. According to this information, P. *jamesi* was considered as a possible trigger species in the Screening phase. To verify the abundance of *P. jamesi* in Laguna Rincon and other relevant water bodies for the species, field surveys were conducted in 2025 by the specialist Dr Enrique Derlindati. The study areas were visited in January, February and March, where fixed-point surveys were carried out along the coastline. There was no evidence of *P. jamesi* at any sites visited. A summary of the field survey is presented in Section 3.3.2.2.	The number of individuals registered in Laguna Rincon in November 2022 was compared with the global population published in the Simultaneous Flamingo Census, estimated at 154,000 individuals (Marconi et al. 2020). Puna Flamingo population in the EAAA constitutes less than 1% of the global population (0.02%). **Therefore, this species does not meet the criteria for Critical Habitat under Criterion 3.**	No Does not meet threshold.



Source: IUCN Red List of Ecosystems (https://iucnrle.org/rle-database)

Figure 14: Threatened Ecosystems in Argentina according to the IUCN red list of ecosystems

Within this highly mineralizing environment, the combined action of physicochemical and microbial processes drives carbonate precipitation, ultimately leading to the formation of EMEs (Saona et al. 2020). EMEs host microbial communities with unique genetic and physiological adaptations, such as protective and repair mechanisms to survive in these environments (Rothschild and Mancinelli, 2001). These adaptations are critical for understanding how life evolves under extreme stressors like salinity, temperature, pH, and radiation, providing valuable insights into evolutionary processes and the adaptability of life.

Thus, Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems are considered Critical Habitat biodiversity values under Criterion 5.

3.5.4.6. Other Criteria: Protected and/or internationally recognized areas

The footprint will lie within the 'Los Andes Natural Wildlife Reserve', a Legally Protected Area (LPA) managed by the province of Salta which is considered as a Category VI Protected Area under IUCN guidelines, due to its compatibility with sustainable undertakings. Provincial Reserves 'Alto Andina de la Chinchilla' and 'Olaroz-Cauchari', which overlap with the estimated EAAA, will not be occupied by the Rincon Project. The EAAA also overlaps two Key Biodiversity Areas, 'Vilama-Pululos (also part of the Reserva Provincial Altoandina de la Chinchilla) and 'Olaroz-Cauchari'.

The ADI overlaps 6.41ha of the Reserva Provincial de Fauna y Flora Olaroz – Cauchari, while the AII overlaps 31.01ha of the Reserva Provincial Altoandina de la Chinchilla and 3.18ha of the Reserva Provincial de Fauna y Flora Olaroz – Cauchari. However, the footprint will not intersect with these protected areas. Neither the EAAA nor the project footprint overlaps with Alliance for Zero Extinction areas (AZE) (Figure 15).

Los Andes Fauna Natural Reserve
Los Andes is a Provincial Fauna Reserve created in 1980 by Government of Salta's Decree 308, is in Los Andes Department in Salta Province and covers an area of 15,251.54km^2, approximately. In 2018, Salta's Secretary of Environment approved Resolution 428, which establishes the Reserve's Management and Development Plan (under the guidelines of Provincial Law Nº 7107), turning it into a multi-purpose reserve. Initially, the Reserve was created because of the need for adequate management of High Andean Ecosystems. Its main objectives include:

- To safeguard the water as a resource to life within the reserve, based on the understanding and control of the functioning of the whole water system and its sustainable use.
- To maintain the key ecosystems functioning properly, particularly high-altitude wetlands, salt flats and extremophiles ecosystems.
- To restore and/or maintain the viability of Puna's flagship species population such as Vicugna vicugna, Lama guanicoe, Telmatobius atacamensis, Phoenicopterus chilensis, Phoenicoparrus jamesi and Phoenicoparrus andinus.
- To preserve the Cultural Heritage present in the reserve, especially Qhapag Ñan and other potential archaeological sites, historical building elements and indigenous people's cultural dimension.
- Los Andes' Management and Development Plan divides the reserve into three zones:
- Core or intangible zone: limited just for scientific and educational activities. This zone is not georeferenced due to a lack of information.
- Restricted use zone: only certain activities are allowed, such as traditional livestock farming or tourism.
- Sustainable use zone: all activities are allowed, with restrictions to ensure the application of sustainable practices and reduce unintended effects.

The Project footprint occurs entirely within the Reserve and is located in the sustainable use zone.

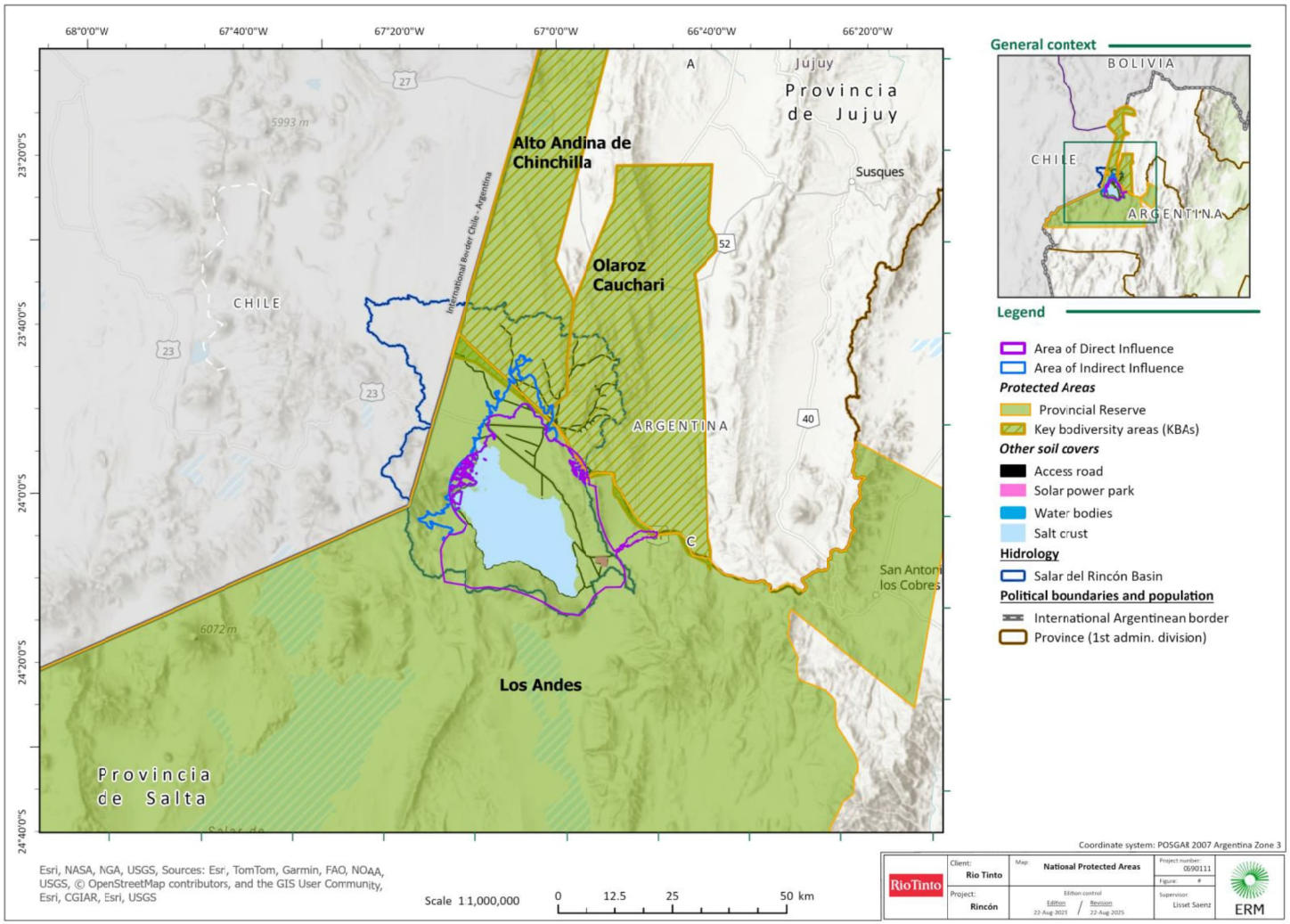


Figure 15: National protected and/or internationally recognized areas

Rio Tinto is complying with the Integral Management and Development Plan for Los Andes Wildlife Natural Reserve (Resolución No. 428/18). As Rincon Project's footprint completely lies in legally protected territory, Rio Tinto must align with paragraph 20 of IFC's PS6 which states that if a project is located within a legally protected area, the client should: i) Demonstrate that the development is legally permitted; ii) act in a matter consistent with recognized management plans; iii) consult protected area sponsors, managers, Affected Communities, Indigenous Peoples and other stakeholders as appropriate; and iv) implement additional programs as appropriate, to promote and enhance conservation aims and effective management of the area.

Provincial Reserve Alto Andina de la Chinchilla and Vilama Lagoon Important Bird Area
The Alto Andina de La Chinchilla Provincial Reserve is a protected region located in northwestern Argentina with an area of approximately 207,315ha. Located along the foothills of the Andes Mountains, the park is home to both grasslands and lagoons. It was created in 1992 by provincial decree No. 2213-E-92.

The EAAA partially covers the southwestern part of this Reserve (34,185ha). The Project ADI does not overlap with this area, but the Project AII does (in the Province of Jujuy; 1.5ha). The Project footprint will not overlap the Reserve (Table 17).

The Alto Andina de la Chinchilla Provincial Reserve is recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA), known as the Vilama Lagoon Complex—a wetland spanning over 1,700km². Part of this area has been designated important site for the conservation of waterbirds, including species such as flamingos and Horned Coots.

Olaroz-Cauchari Fauna and Flora Reserve
The Olaroz-Cauchari Fauna and Flora Reserve, with an area of approximately 3,170.61km^2, was established by the Province of Jujuy in 1981. The objective of its creation is the preservation of biodiversity, especially the protection of Vicuña, Chinchilla, and Lesser Rhea. It is one of the key areas for bird conservation in Argentina and IBA, for species like *P. andinus* and *P. chilensis*.

The EAAA partially covers the southeastern part of the Reserve (287.10km^2). The ADI and AII intersect with the Reserve by 6.41ha and 3.18ha, respectively. There is no overlapping with project footprint (Table 17).

3.5.5 Summary of Results

Four and possibly five Critical Biodiversity Values have been identified as triggering Criterion 2, including:

- *Liolaemus multicolour*.
- *Liolaemus* sp. AC (if shown to be a distinct species).
- *Liolaemus* sp. A and *Liolaemus* sp. C (if shown to be taxonomically distinct from *Liolaemus* sp. AC)
- Liolaemus porosus.
- *Liolaemus scrocchii*.

Additionally, EMEs have been recognized as Critical Biodiversity values under Criterion 2, Criterion 4, and Criterion 5.

The Project footprint overlaps with *Liolaemus multicolour* and *Liolaemus* sp. AC (or only A); and *Liolaemus scrocchi*. *Liolaemus porosus* is found in the AII. EMEs are found within the ADI and AII but do not overlap with the Project footprint (Table 18).

Table 17. Protected and/or internationally recognized areas within the EAAAA, ADI and AII

Name	Designation	IUCN Management category*	WDPA (national protected area)	KBA	Surface within EAAA		Surface within Footprint		Surface within Area of Direct Influence		Surface within Area of Indirect Influence	
					Area (km^2)	Percentage (%)	Area (km^2)	Percentage (%)	Area (km^2)	Percentage (%)	Area (km^2)	Percentage (%)
Los Andes	Nature Wildlife Reserve	VI	yes	no	1661.84	10.9	33.00	100.00	1149.93	7.54	113.2	0.74
Provincial Reserve Alto Andina de la Chinchilla	Provincial Reserve	VI	Yes	Yes, it's an IBA. (Vilama-Pululos Lagoon System)	341.85	16.54	0	0	0	0	31.01	1.5
Olaroz Cauchari	Provincial Fauna Reserve	VI	Yes	Yes, it's an IBA	287.1	9.06	0	0	6.41	0.2	3.18	0.1

Source: IBAT, 2021; IGN, 2025.

Note: KBA= Key Biodiversity Area; WDPA= World Database on Protected Areas; IBA= Important Bird Area; *=IUCN Management category, cannot be used to identify the designation (e.g. National Park) of a given protected area. Instead, the IUCN management category refers to the management objectives of a site. Likewise, in cases where the IUCN management category has not been reported, it cannot be inferred from the designation listed. Type VI category refers to protected area with sustainable use of natural resources.

Table 18. Summary of critical habitat triggering biodiversity values recorded within the project AOI and footprint

Biodiversity values	IUCN Red List categorization	Argentinian legislation status	Criterion					Present in the ADI	Present in the AII	Present in the Project footprint	Number recorded in the ADI	Number recorded in the AII	Commentary
			1	2	3	4	5						
Liolaemus multicolour	LC	Endemic	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	62 individuals	37 individuals	
Liolaemus porosus	LC	Endemic	N	Y	N	N	N	N	N	N	0	0	
Liolaemus scrocchii	LC	Endemic	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	5 individuals	3 individuals	
Liolaemus sp. AC	Unknown	Unknown	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	130 individuals	30 individuals	Taxonomic status pending
Liolaemus sp. A (pending confirmation)	Unknown	Unknown	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	93 individuals	28 individuals	Taxonomic status pending
Liolaemus sp. C (pending confirmation)	Unknown	Unknown	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	N	37 individuals	2 individuals	Taxonomic status pending
Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems	Unknown	Recognized as emblematic environments by RNFSLA*	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	8 sites	4 sites	

Note: N=No, Y=Yes. *RNFSLA=Reserva Natural de Fauna Silvestre Los Andes

Liolaemus sp. AC has not been assessed using IUCN Red List and Argentinian conservation frameworks. It is possible that it could qualify as CR or EN if further surveys do not find additional records outside of the current range. However, according to expert opinion, it is likely that its geographic distribution may increase as additional surveys are conducted. Extremophile bacteria, likewise, have not yet been included as part of the IUCN Red List, but an IUCN specialist group is being formed and they have been identified as a conservation priority under Argentinean regulations.

There are no specific Argentinean regulations regarding EMEs. The “Plan Integral de Manejo de Desarrollo de la Reserva Natural de Fauna Silvestre Los Andes, Refugio Provincial de Vida Silvestre Laguna Socompa y Refugio Provincial de Vida Silvestre Ojos de Mar de Tolar Grande” (Resolución 48/18) which is under Salta Province legislation, considers the EMEs as emblematic and allow only scientific research and environmental education activities in areas where they occur.

4 Critical Habitat Identification

The Salar del Rincon is in an endorheic basin, where the rivers and wetlands that converge there have no outlet to the sea. This hydrogeographic characteristic, together with the climatic and environmental uniqueness of the basin, has favoured the proliferation of life forms specialized in this type of unique system, which justifies its designation as a Critical Habitat, in accordance with paragraph 16 of the PS6[7].

In particular, the species *Liolaemus* sp. AC and *L. porosus* found in the area exhibit narrow eco-physiological adaptations to the prevailing climatic conditions and availability of refuges. Furthermore, *Liolaemus* microhabitats are associated with the presence of plant species such as rica rica (*Aloysia deserticola*) and gallery burrows of the Highland tuco-tuco (*Ctenomys opimus*).

Regarding EMEs, the extreme conditions of the basin (water hypersalinity, wide temperature range (both daily and seasonal), intense solar radiation, scarce nutrients, and low atmospheric pressure) act as environmental constraints that promote the diversification of different types of EMEs (microbial mats, microbialites, oncolites, biofilms) associated with different water bodies in the basin.

To date, five and possibly six (depending on the final taxonomic status of *Liolaemus* sp. AC) Critical Biodiversity Values (*Liolaemus* sp. AC, *Liolaemus porosus*, *Liolaemus multicolour* and *Liolaemus scrocchi*, EMEs) have been identified within the Salar de Rincon Basin.

At this time, the salt-crust interior is not considered Critical Habitat for *Liolaemus* species, as this soil-cover type, has not been found to contain vegetation or characteristics necessary for the persistence of populations in this area.

Table 19. Natural Critical Habitat in the EAAA

Vegetation and other soil cover type	**Area within the EAAA (ha)**
Peladar	51,446.00
Saline vega/Halophytic vegetation	588.20
Salt crust edge	1,276.40
Shrub steppe	70,088.00
Water bodies	35.00
Mixed steppe	29,143.00
Grass steppe	43,620.00
Hydric Grassland	1,180.00
Tolar	665.00
Vega	798.00
Salt crust interior	41,630.60
Total Natural Critical Habitat	**240,470.20**

[7] "Critical habitats are areas with high biodiversity value, including (i) habitat of significant importance to Critically Endangered and/or Endangered11 species; (ii) habitat of significant importance to endemic and/or restricted-range species; (iii) habitat supporting globally significant concentrations of migratory species and/or congregatory species; (iv) highly threatened and/or unique ecosystems; and/or (v) areas associated with key evolutionary processes." (IFC, 2012)

Table 20. Project Footprint overlap with Natural Critical Habitat

Vegetation and other soil types	**Project Footprint (ha)**
Hydric grassland	4.72
Peladar	324.94
Saline Vega (Halophytic vegetation)	7.00
Salt crust edge	0.68
Shrub steppe	53.49
Tolar	9.34
Grass steppe	0.00
Water bodies	0.00
Mixed steppe	0.00
Salt crust interior	2,900.44
Vega	0.00
Total Natural Critical Habitat	3,300.61

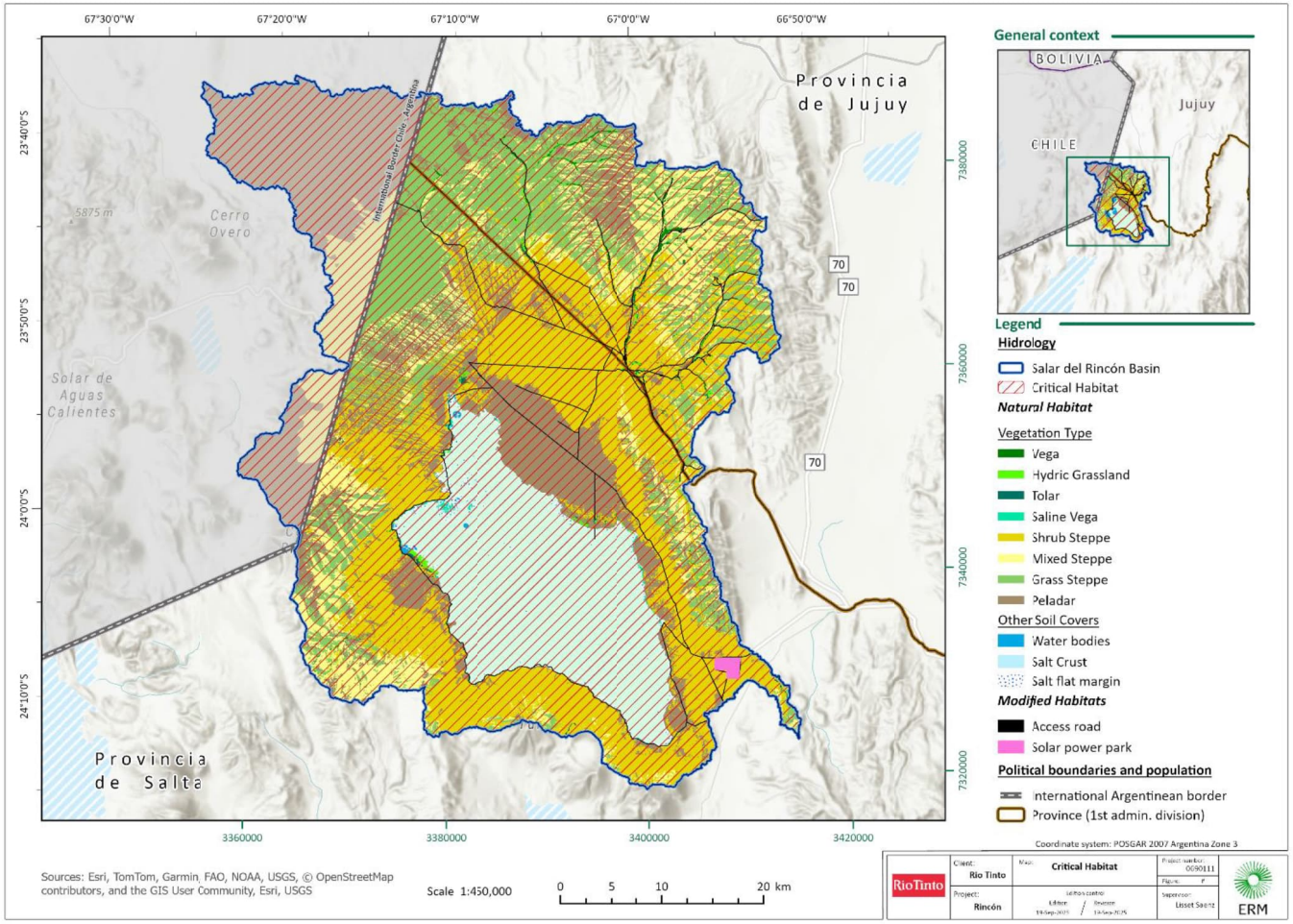


Figure 16: Critical Habitats in the EAAA

4.1 Critical Biodiversity Value: Liolaemus spp. Estimated Losses

Project facilities will affect approximately 324.94 ha of Peladar, 53.49ha of Shrub steppe, 7.00ha of Halophytic vegetation (saline vega), 2,900.40ha of interior Salt crust, 0.68ha of Salt crust edge, 9.34ha of Tolar, and 4.72ha of Hydric grassland (see Table 20) occurring within the EAAA.

Because *Liolaemus* lizards are characterized by low mobility and strong site fidelity (Abdala & Paz, 2025) the most significant adverse impact expected from the Rincon Project is the loss of natural ground cover due to land-clearing activities. In addition to habitat loss, the project may result in habitat fragmentation, primarily through the development of linear infrastructure such as roads and pipeline corridors. Fragmentation disrupts landscape connectivity (Bennett, 2004), isolating populations and impeding individual movement and gene flow. This isolation increases the risk of predation and vehicle collisions during attempted crossings. Experts are assessing this impact and incorporating management measures to minimize fragmentation impacts of the Project.

Noise from machinery and opportunistic predators can trigger stress in lizards, though such exposures are typically brief (Bradley et al. 2022; Mancera et al. 2017). Vehicular dust may reduce stomatal conductance in plants, limiting biomass production and indirectly affecting herbivores and omnivores (Zia-Khan et al. 2015). While these risks are relevant, they are manageable and reversible.

Table 21 summarizes the spatial overlap between the project footprint and *Liolaemus* habitats. Although habitat loss is expected for *Liolaemus scrocchii, Liolaemus porosus, and Liolaemus sp. AC,* these species have been recorded in areas of the Salar del Rincon basin that lie outside the boundaries of the project footprint.

Table 21. Project Footprint habitat loss for *Liolaemus* spp.

Vegetation and soil cover type	**Footprint area (ha)**	***Liolaemus multicolour***	***Liolaemus porosus***	***Liolaemus scrocchii***	***Liolaemus* sp. AC**	***Liolaemus* sp. A**	***Liolaemus* sp. C**
Peladar	324.94	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Halophytic vegetation (saline vega)	7.00	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Salt crust edge	0.68	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Shrub steppe	53.49	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mixed steppe	0	yes	no	yes	no	no	no
Grass steppe	0	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	no
Tolar	9.34	yes	no	no	no	no	no
Hydric Grassland	4.72	yes	no	no	no	no	no
Total	**400.18**						

Source: Abdala & Paz (2025) and shapes sent by Rio Tinto in June 2025.

Although the Project footprint overlaps with the Salt crust, it is devoid of vegetation and is not considered suitable habitat for *Liolaemus* spp.; therefore, footprint impacts to the Salt crust are not considered as a loss for these species.

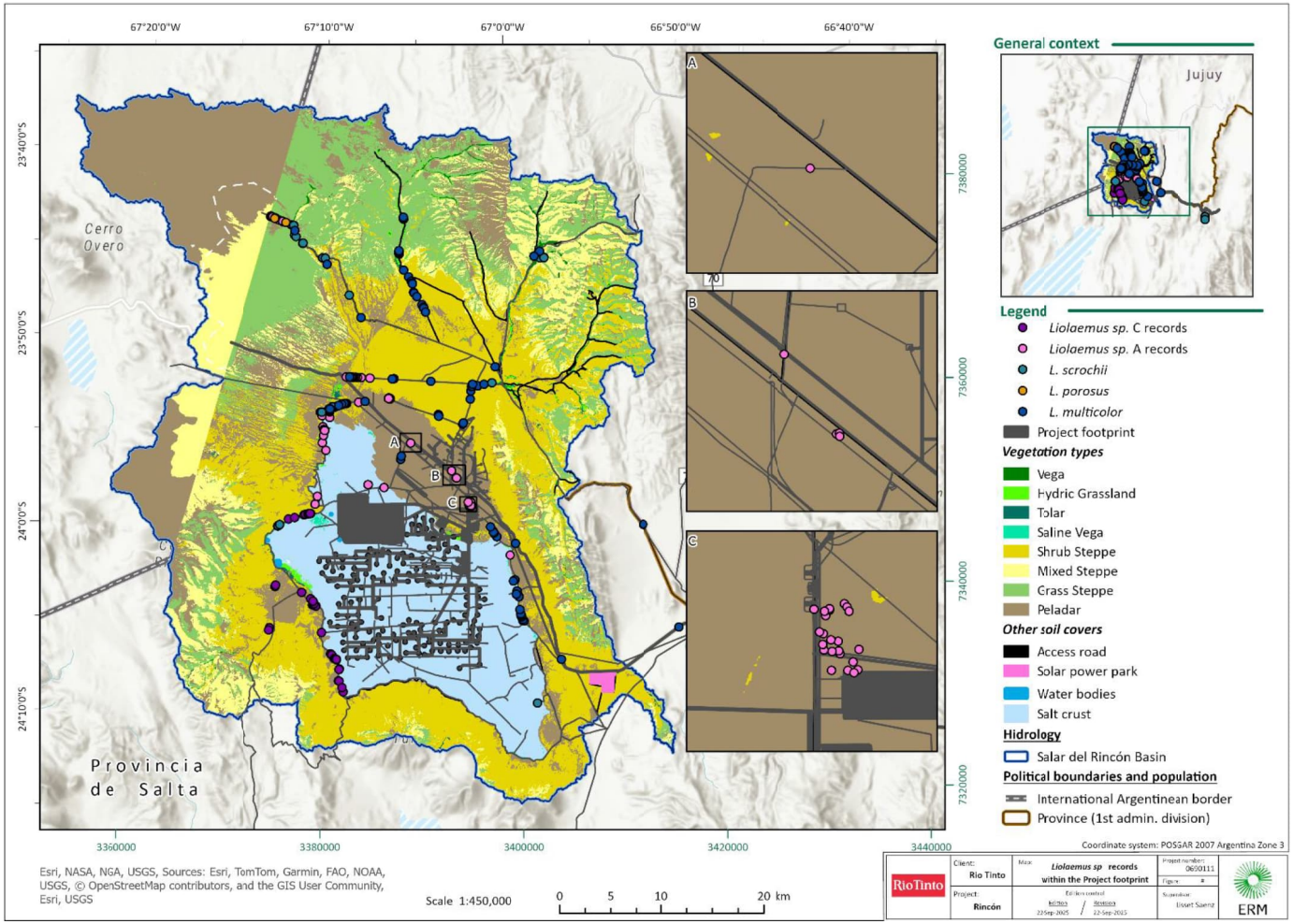


Figure 17: Liolaemus spp. Records in relation to the project footprint

4.2 Critical Biodiversity Value: Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems

EMEs have been recorded in halophytic vegetation along the edge of Rincon Lagoon and near a shallow water pond north of the Salar in addition to the water eyes located within the salt crust (see Section 3.5.3). None of these EME sites overlap with the Project footprint, so losses will not occur. Nevertheless, as they are found within the ADI, an adaptive water management plan and an EME management and monitoring plan will be implemented and form part of the Project BAP.
Areas where EMEs occur include:

- Sites I, VII, and VIII are located in halophytic vegetation (saline vega) while Sites II and III, at the edges of the saline vega (2-4m over the salt crust) with the following features:
  - Sites I and II are shallow ponds fed by groundwater and show constant bubbling from the bottom (Irazusta and Rajal, 2023).
  - Site III consists of geological formations called “gas domes”, which are a particular type of microbiologically induced sedimentary structure and originate from cracks that form in cohesive microbial mats that are found covering a seasonal pond (Irazusta and Rajal, 2023).
- Rincon Lagoon and its edge: west of Laguna del Rincon, there is an area of halophytic vegetation (Site VI) and hydric grassland (Sites IV and V), characterized by the presence of several shallow ponds, where microbial mats are formed (Irazusta and Rajal, 2023).
- Ojos de Agua A, B1, and B2: Sites IX, X, and XI.
- EMEs found near superficial water body north of the Salar: Site XII is a recently discovered water body located north of the Salar in November 2024.

5 IFC PS6 Requirements for Natural and Critical Habitat

5.1 Natural Habitat

Paragraph 14 of IFC PS 6 states that the client should demonstrate in areas of natural habitat that:

- No other viable alternatives within the region exist for development on modified habitat.
- Consultation has established views of stakeholders regarding the conversion of natural habitat.
- Conversion is mitigated according to the mitigation hierarchy. Actions to mitigate impacts can include implementing corridors to minimize habitat fragmentation, restoring habitats, and implementing biodiversity offsets to attain No Net Loss of Biodiversity (NNL). No Net Loss of biodiversity is defined as "*The point at which project-related impacts on biodiversity are balanced by measures taken to avoid and minimize project impacts, undertake on-site restoration and offset significant residual impacts on an appropriate geographic scale*".

The Project is applying the mitigation hierarchy via the implementation of a Biodiversity Management Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan that will include mitigation and offset measures where necessary.

5.2 Critical Habitat

IFC PS6 states that for Critical Habitat, the client will demonstrate that:

- No other viable alternatives exist within the region.
- The project does not lead to measurable adverse impacts on those biodiversity values for which the Critical Habitat was designated and on the ecological processes supporting those values;
- The Project does not lead to a net reduction in the global and/or national/regional population of any Critically Endangered or Endangered species over a reasonable period; and
- A robust, appropriately designed and long-term biodiversity monitoring and evaluation plan is integrated into the client's management program.

As required by paragraph 18 of IFC PS6, Projects in Critical Habitat shall include mitigation and offset measures to attain Net Gain (NG)*: Net gains are additional conservation outcomes that can be achieved for the biodiversity values for which the Critical Habitat was designated.*

6 Project Alignment Status with IFC PS6 Requirements for Natural and Critical Habitat

The sections below list the PS6 requirements for Natural and Critical Habitat and summarize the current Project compliance status.

6.1 Alternatives Analysis

The Project has conducted an Alternatives Analysis for the site layout (2024 ESIA). The analysis considered resource and energy efficiency, access to project facilities, technical engineering issues related to production processes, physicochemical soil and water characteristics and natural habitat for biodiversity.

Taken into consideration during the analysis were location of the processing plant, the technological processes, the management of spent brine, the handling of filtered waste, and the location of brine wells and raw water wells.

For the Processing plant location, the primary consideration was distance to different key project facilities, such as the camp, raw water and brine wells, the SBDF and power line, with a focus on energy and material efficiency. The selection of the final location addressed technical and logistical considerations.

Two lithium carbonate extraction and production processes were considered in the analysis: the Energy Process and the Direct Lithium Adsorption. The Direct Lithium Adsorption was selected due to its higher lithium recovery efficiency and lower energy consumption.

For the brine wells, the main variables evaluated included geology, lithium concentrations and other process-sensitive metals along the water column, geophysical data, distance to the plant, among others. The analysis of these variables enabled the identification of the optimal well layout, in order to optimize both flow rate and concentrations, as well as resource efficiency.

For the raw water wells, one of the most important variables evaluated was salinity, as indicated by electrical conductivity. Modelling considered the use of raw water with conductivity levels of up to 4,000 micro Siemens per centimetre (µS/cm), which allowed the optimisation of the resource ensuring not to transport water from other basins to support the planned production scale. The same approach was applied in terms of energy and input efficiency, aiming to minimize the distance of access roads and pipelines, and to utilise gravity flow from higher elevation points.

Several feasibility studies were conducted as part of the conceptual design of the SBDF, including assessments of technological and site alternatives. From an environmental perspective, the SBDF represents one of the most significant project impacts, as it has a footprint of approximately 24km^2, and is considered a permanent structure at closure. The alternatives analysis for this facility aimed to mitigate these negative effects as much as possible, identifying the most suitable location in the travertine flat region, where infiltration is lower than salt crust. Following the discovery of the Ojos de Agua in the Salar and its proximity with the SBDF, new considerations were made regarding this facility. The SBDF has not been completely relocated, as the travertine formation remains the most suitable option for disposal. However, the facility's design has been adjusted to safeguard the nearby sensitive environments. Cell B of the SBDF was reconfigured to include an environmental buffer zone around the Ojos de Agua. The definition of the buffer areas is based on the observation of changes in land cover and the texture of the surrounding salt crust.

6.2 Public Consultation

The Project maintains a permanent process of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) with the communities within its Area of Influence. This process has included consultation covering all components: communication of the project description for both the 3,000-plant capacity in 2023 and the 50,000-plant capacity in 2024, camps, medium-voltage power lines, and other components required for project operation, as well as their associated impacts and management plans corresponding to each Environmental Impact Study conducted. The Project continues to maintain an open dialogue with the communities.

Most recently, in 2025, a stakeholder consultation process was conducted, led by Rio Tinto and facilitated by the consulting firm Social Capital Group (SCG), with technical support from ERM. This process consisted of a series of participatory workshops held as part of the “Casa Abierta” (Open House) initiative in the communities of Salar de Pocitos (March 26, 2025), Catua (April 9–10, 2025), and Olacapato (April 29, 2025). Invitations and community outreach were managed by the company to ensure participation of puesteros (livestock herders), community leaders, and residents with traditional ecological knowledge of the territory.

During these workshops, previously collected information from interviews and field surveys was validated and supplemented. A dedicated space was provided to explore in depth the use, value, and concerns related to ecosystem services. Thematic banners designed based on prior baseline studies facilitated discussion around key topics including community livestock posts, economic activities, natural resource use, history and culture, and ecosystem services. A significant outcome of the process was the collective development of Natural Resource Maps, which documented ecosystems in use, perceived benefits, associated practices, and threats identified directly by community members. Impacts on natural and Critical Habitats have not yet been shared with communities.

6.3 Application of the Mitigation Hierarchy

The Project is applying the mitigation hierarchy to manage its impacts as part of its Environmental and Social Management Plan. Although a fully PS6-compliant Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) has not yet been developed, the Project has incorporated several biodiversity mitigation measures within the Environmental Management Plan (EMP) included in the ESIA for the 50ktpa Lithium Carbonate Plant. The current EMP outlines a range of actions aimed at avoiding, minimizing, restoring, and monitoring the potential impacts on biodiversity (Table 22). Additional mitigation and compensation measures will be incorporated and clearly described in the forthcoming BMP and Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), considering the findings and recommendations of the CHA.

Liolaemus utilisation of the Project is heterogenous; currently more detailed studies are underway to better understand *Liolaemus* spp. habitat utilization and preferences and define any losses in terms of number of individuals impacted. Currently, the Project includes *Liolaemus* spp. in its biodiversity strategy. The Biodiversity Management and Monitoring Plans will include additional surveys conducted by the species expert to carefully map habitat use and estimate population densities in the EAAA. This will allow for: i) a better estimate of potential loss of individuals in the impact zone; ii) implementation of a rescue and relocation protocol; iii) additional mitigation measures such as micro-routing to avoid impacts; and iv) and in case of significant residual impacts, compensation measures through creation of new habitat and/or protection of existing habitat.

The Project is collaborating with INIQUI, UNSA, and CONICET to conduct further studies on EMEs. The objectives of these studies are to: (i) monitor the annual dynamics of microbiome experiments, identify species, and assess seasonal variation in biophysical parameters; and (ii) conduct salinity concentration experiments to evaluate the environmental resilience of extremophile microbial communities.

These studies are still in progress. However, given the ecological sensitivity of the EMEs and the limited feasibility of compensation, the Project is prioritizing impact avoidance and minimization measures as part of its mitigation hierarchy.

As part of this approach, Rio Tinto is developing an Adaptive Water Management Plan informed by the ongoing refinement of the hydrogeological model. This model integrates chemical data from depleted brine and infiltration rates and is subject to rigorous review by Rio Tinto specialists and external consultants to validate potential impacts.

Additionally, Rio Tinto is developing a Biodiversity Action Plan that includes targeted assessments of the water eyes and EMEs within the RNFSLA, to strengthen conservation measures and ensure long-term protection of these unique ecosystems.

Table 22. Summary of mitigation measures

Mitigation Hierarchy	Current Mitigation Measurement	Current EMP Plan name	Action to be integrated in the Project BMP and BAP
Avoidance: is based on preventing impacts from occurring, such as applying design alternatives that avoid environmentally sensitive areas or areas of high conservation value.	The Project will avoid the opening of new tracks and roads to avoid habitat loss.	Subprogram of Vegetation Management.	
	To manage and prevent aquifer drawdown resulting from processing water demand, the Project has proposed a set of mitigation measures, including engineering measures like: Ditches around the SBDF to intercept and collect potential percolation from the SBDF. Containment walls or berms built with the material excavated from the ditches, to divert surface water from upstream catchments so that it does not encounter the SBDF embankment.	Monitoring Subprogram of Water Management. Monitoring Subprogram of Groundwater.	Adaptive Water Management Plan. Controlled reinjection of brine and brackish water. Implementation of reinjection programs using treated water or brine to help stabilize groundwater levels in sensitive areas.
	To avoid unsustainable rates of aquifer depression due to brine demand, it has been proposed to periodically monitor the characteristics of the raw brine, continuously monitor brine consumption, and record the information on brine characteristics and levels/consumption in a database to keep track of groundwater levels and monitor the physicochemical characteristics of the raw brine.	Monitoring Subprogram of Brine. Closure Planning Program (SBFS design at closure of the Project).	
	To avoid the modification of surface runoff at the edge of the salt flat, it is planned to generate ditches around the SBDF to intercept and collect the eventual percolation coming from the SBDF. If this situation is observed, the captured flow will be pumped back to the SBDF. Retaining walls or parapets will be built with the excavated material from the ditches to divert surface water from upstream basins so that it does not come into contact with the SBDF embankment. While the design of the SBDF assumes the possibility of infiltration, the Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Management Plan already consider the possibility of lower infiltration rates than anticipated. As established in the commitments made to the environmental authority, the disposition and operation of the SBDF will be adapted if monitoring reveals risks to sensitive receptors. This includes redesigning the discharge area, reinforcing low-permeability barriers, improving surface water diversion systems, or implementing additional control measures, in accordance with the principle of continuous improvement The following measures are proposed in the Water Management Subprogram of the EMP: • **Site Preparation**: Each SBDF cell is levelled and compacted to reduce percolation and enhance surface evaporation, preserving the salt flat's naturally low permeability. • **Water Management**: Perimeter drainage channels divert rainwater, minimizing infiltration risks. • **Modular Disposal**: Brine is disposed of in sequential modules, allowing for controlled volumes and easier monitoring of potential filtration.	Water Management Subprogram. Surface Water Monitoring Subprogram.	

Mitigation Hierarchy	Current Mitigation Measurement	Current EMP Plan name	Action to be integrated in the Project BMP and BAP
	• **Adaptive Management**: The environmental plan includes contingency measures such as containment, recovery, or redesign of affected cells, supported by continuous evaluation and regulatory oversight.		
Minimization: measures that reduce an impact's duration, intensity, or extent throughout the application of corrective or mitigation measures.	As part of its mitigation strategy to minimize biodiversity loss, the Project will implement the translocation of priority flora species, selected based on their conservation status. Additionally, a Fauna Rescue and Translocation Plan will be developed and executed to safeguard susceptible species that may be affected by construction and operational activities	Flora Management Subprogram. Fauna Management Subprogram.	Biodiversity Action Plan. Feasibility of rescue-relocation and identification of areas acceptable for the translocation of individuals. Habitat enhancements to improve shelter and refuge conditions for these species. Offset if necessary.
	As an avoidance measure to reduce the risk of wildlife-vehicle collisions, the Project will implement a training and communication plan for workers, enforce vehicle speed limits, and install signage to clearly mark wildlife crossing areas.	Vehicular and Pedestrian Traffic Subprogram Fauna Management Subprogram.	
	To minimize the impact of artificial lighting on wildlife, the Project will implement measures such as regulating light intensity and restricting its use to essential times and locations. Where lighting is necessary, luminaires will be directed downward to reduce disorientation or glare, particularly for bird species	Fauna Management Subprogram.	
Restoration: measures to recover biodiversity values degraded by impacts that could not be avoided or minimized.	The Project will implement a Vegetation Restoration Plan during the closure phase, aimed at rehabilitating areas affected by project activities. As part of the preparatory actions, a seed bank is currently being developed, including experimental trials to assess plant survival and adaptability	Flora Management Subprogram.	Biodiversity Action Plan The project will implement biodiversity offset measures to achieve No Net Loss (NNL) and, where feasible, a Net Gain of biodiversity.
Monitoring: Ongoing process to assess mitigation effectiveness, ensure compliance, and enable adaptive management	The Flora and Fauna Monitoring Subprograms are designed to detect changes in vegetation and wildlife populations, identify the presence of invasive species, and support adaptive management. Monitoring activities are scheduled to take place during two distinct seasons over the first three years of the project, with the possibility of extending the monitoring period if deemed necessary based on the results.	Monitoring Subprogram of Flora. Monitoring subprogram of Fauna. Extremophile Microbial Ecosystems (EME) Monitoring Subprogram.	Biodiversity Action Plan Monitoring of translocated flora and fauna specimens will be implemented to assess the success of any intervention The Biodiversity Monitoring Program will provide data to inform adaptive management strategies, allowing for timely corrective actions if translocation outcomes do not meet biodiversity conservation objectives
	The Project will monitor noise semi-annually to test the effectiveness of mitigation measures, such as the time and space restrictions on activities.	Environmental Noise Monitoring Subprogram.	
	The surface and groundwater quality and level monitoring subprograms establish a monitoring methodology, proposes reference levels according to the conditions of the area of influence, along with sampling points, measurement of flow levels, and measurement of static and dynamic levels. The brine subprogram plans to verify the efficient use of brine, evaluate variations with respect to piezometric levels of brine extraction wells and verify the efficiency of the DLE adsorption process.	Surface Water Quality and Level Monitoring Subprogram. Groundwater Quality and Level Monitoring Subprogram. Brine Monitoring Subprogram.	Adaptive Water Management Plan Real-time monitoring of reinjection effectiveness to ensure environmental and operational performance.

6.4 No significant loss for CH values

Three to four species identified as Critical Habitat Values under Criterion 2—*Liolaemus multicolour* and the newly discovered *Liolaemus* sp. AC (encompassing *Liolaemus* sp. A and *Liolaemus* sp. C)—have been recorded within the Project footprint. Expert opinion suggests that potential impacts on these species can be mitigated through a combination of rescue and translocation efforts to nearby areas, and/or, through habitat creation in Project set-asides. To address residual biodiversity impacts, offset measures are required. Accordingly, potential opportunities for habitat creation and/or protection beyond the Project footprint are being assessed, with an emphasis on delivering measurable Net Gain outcomes for critical biodiversity values.

Evidence from national and international studies supports the effectiveness of lizard translocation if key conditions are met, such as the availability of high-quality, threat-free recipient habitats and high habitat structure. For example, successful mitigation-driven translocations in New Zealand demonstrated population growth within fenced reserves (Romijn & Hartley, 2016). In *L. multimaculatus*, population viability analyses show that supplementation can stabilize small populations when thresholds are met (Kacoliris et al. 2019). Additionally, thermal conditions and vegetation cover are critical for post-release survival, as seen in *L. cuyumhue*, where undisturbed sites supported better thermoregulation and individual persistence (Brizio et al. 2025). These findings reinforce that translocation may be a viable mitigation strategy when guided by ecological thresholds, supported by habitat restoration, and accompanied by long-term monitoring. However, since relocation success is not assured, the Project will evaluate feasibility of relocation for *Liolaemus* spp. while continuing to explore habitat enrichment and offset options.

6.5 Implementation of Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan

The Project will establish a robust, adaptive Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (BMEP), which will be integrated into the existing Environmental Management Program. The BMEP will include targeted monitoring of Critical Biodiversity values, as well as priority species and Natural Habitats. It will define monitoring protocols, metrics, indicators, and targets to support the achievement of No Net Loss (NNL) and/or Net Gain (NG) objectives. Additionally, the BMEP will specify threshold values that will trigger corrective actions when biodiversity outcomes deviate from expected targets.

With regards to the EMEs, the BMEP will monitor activities, and the effectiveness of the management measures related to the EMEs. Additionally, it will incorporate the monitoring of the 'Ojos de Agua' and other EMEs within the Salar del Rincon basin, in compliance with the Integral Management and Development Plan for the Los Andes Wildlife Natural Reserve, Laguna Socompa Wildlife Refuge, and Tolar Grande Wildlife Refuge (Resolution No. 48/18).

6.6 Biodiversity Action Plan

The Project will summarize all mitigation and offset/compensation activities in a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The BAP will consist of biodiversity mitigation measures as found in the current EMP and any updated plans (refer to Section 6.3), as well as the Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (BMEP), which will monitor the effectiveness of the offset program. In addition, the BAP will include additional conservation actions aligned with the priorities of the Los Andes Reserve, to be agreed upon with the relevant authorities as required by PS6.

7 Next Steps for Further Alignment with IFC PS6

7.1 *Liolaemus* Spp.

7.1.1 Develop a *Liolaemus* spp. Management Plan

A *Liolaemus* spp. Management Plan is being developed in collaboration with species experts.

The management plan will include the following:

- Detailed field survey in project footprint and areas over a broader geographic range.

- A field survey will be conducted in the areas in which footprint overlaps and surrounding areas to obtain including population density estimates and habitat use. The information collected from these field surveys will inform: i) an estimate of losses; ii) feasibility/identification of potential relocation sites; and iii) guidance for additional mitigation measures that can include micro-routing of project components (facilities such as wells and access roads) and reduction in habitat fragmentation.

- In addition, field surveys will include areas outside the Project footprint and EAAA to increase knowledge regarding the geographic distributions of *Liolaemus* spp., identify potential offset sites and increase knowledge regarding habitat preferences.

Rescue and Relocation Feasibility and Strategy
Experts will assess the feasibility of implementing a rescue and relocation protocol for *Liolaemus* individuals found within the impact zone. The identification of possible relocation sites will be selected based on habitat suitability, ecological connectivity, and long-term viability for the species.

Creation of additional habitat within the Project concession (i.e., increasing the number of refuges, plant cover or other features) within the Salar de Rincon will be assessed in addition to rescue relocation as a parallel strategy to minimize any project-related losses.

Offset Measures and Habitat Creation
If significant residual impacts are identified, offset strategies will be implemented. These may include the creation or restoration of habitats to offset biodiversity losses and will be guided by species specialists. Studies are currently underway.

Monitoring and Evaluation
Metrics and indicators will be established to monitor the effectiveness of the rescue, relocation, and offset measures, as well as species status within the affected areas.

Additional Mitigation Measures
Additional mitigation actions will be developed. These may include:

- Training for staff and local communities to raise awareness about the importance of *Liolaemus* spp. Adding wildlife measures if needed to the behavioural code of conduct.

- Identify opportunities for minimizing habitat fragmentation. This may include reviewing access road placement/design, establishing crossings (if necessary).

- Continuing research on *Liolaemus* spp. in the EAAA and over their geographic distribution.

Schedule Development
A timeline is being developed implementation of each objective, which may occur simultaneously depending on the nature of the tasks. The detailed field assessment is proposed to begin in October 2025.

7.2 Extremophile Management plan

An extremophile management and mitigation plan, guided by experts, is currently in preparation. The studies proposed in the current EMEs Work Plan, focused on the Ojos de Agua will allow the Project to determine their resilience in case of changes in water quality and/or quantity. These investigations aim to reduce uncertainty regarding the physical, chemical, and biological dynamics of these communities.

The following lines of action are underway:

- Hydraulic connectivity assessments between deep brine aquifers and shallow Ojos de Agua systems to understand vertical and lateral fluxes, using tracer tests, piezometric data, and isotopic analyses.

- Resilience testing under controlled conditions, assessing ecosystem responses to realistic concentrations of process-derived effluents, including reverse osmosis and spent brine to be managed in the SBDF.

- Acquisition of molecular biology equipment and infrastructure, particularly for metagenomic sequencing (e.g., DNA/RNA extraction, library prep, sequencing platforms). This initiative would be developed in partnership with leading research institutions such as INIQUI – UNSA – CONICET.

The above actions adhere to the principles of minimizing environmental risks associated with mining operations and ensuring the protection of habitats and biodiversity values in the Salar del Rincon.

The studies will contribute to the development of sustainable management strategies and support the Comprehensive Management and Development Plan of the Los Andes Multiple-Use Nature Reserve, ensuring compatibility between mining activity and the preservation of these unique ecosystems.

7.3 Hydrogeological Studies to further understand project Risks and potential

As part of the development of the Water Management Roadmap and Strategy for the Project, numerous hydrogeological, environmental, and monitoring studies have been carried out, providing a robust technical foundation. In parallel, a series of future tasks have been identified to further advance the understanding of the hydrogeological system and ensure compatibility of the Project with sensitive ecosystems. The following is a summary of the main completed activities and those planned for the next phases.

Completed Studies and Tasks

- Hydrogeological drilling and testing (over 150 boreholes completed between 1988 and 2024).

- Pumping tests in alluvial fans and black sands aquifers (28 tests, including step and observation well tests).

- Installation and initial monitoring of shallow piezometers in wetlands, lagoons and hand-dug wells (27 piezometers).

- Phase 1 shallow re-injection trials completed (at Vega Unquillar, Rincon Lagoon, and aljibe).

- Isotope monitoring – three sampling campaigns completed (January 2023, July and December 2024).

- Development of an eco-hydrogeological conceptual model with environmental zoning.

- Representative case study at Ojo A, including hydrochemical profiling and geophysical surveys.

- Extremophile ecosystem studies using in-situ microcosms and laboratory analyses.

- Topographic and bathymetric surveys at Rincon Lagoon and Laguna Negra (January 2025).

- Installation of four automated weather stations and initiation of evaporation (dome) measurements.

- Monthly groundwater and surface water monitoring programme initiated in November 2022.

- Electrical conductivity profiling and water quality analysis in wells across the salar and alluvial fans.

- Development of both the conceptual and numerical hydrogeological models (Salar and Catua Fan domains).

Planned studies and future tasks

- Installation of 12 new wells in the Fractured Halite Formation (following DIA approval).
- Continuation and expansion of shallow piezometer monitoring in sensitive ecological areas.
- Phase 3 re-injection trial (black sands using existing infrastructure).
- Phase 4 re-injection trial (dedicated production, injection and monitoring wells).
- Future isotope monitoring campaigns scheduled for summer 2025 and autumn/winter 2026.
- Enhancement of the ecohydrological model with tracer studies, ecological thresholds and climate change scenarios.
- Geochemical modelling of spent brine infiltration from the SBDF.
- Installation of a dedicated monitoring network around the SBDF area (levels and quality).
- Annual recalibration of the numerical hydrogeological model and development of detailed local models (SBDF, Rincon Lagoon, Vega Unquillar).
- Simulation of injection scenarios and incorporation of field test results.
- Development of simplified decision-support models for operational water management, as part of hydrogeological models variables inputs.
- Predictive uncertainty analysis of brine quality and annual lithium mass production.
- Definition and implementation of threshold values and early warning indicators for sensitive water receptors and monitoring wells.

7.4 Priority Species and Habitats

Rio Tinto and ERM are engaging priority species and habitats experts to develop monitoring protocols to be incorporated into the Project BMP. These are listed below:

- *Ctenomys opimus*: population assessment, management plan and monitoring plan.
- *Vicugna vicugna*: population assessment and monitoring plan.
- *Lama guanicoe*: population assessment and monitoring plan.
- *Rhea pennata*: population assessment and monitoring plan.
- *Vultur gryphus*: population and habitat assessment.
- *Fulica cornuta*: population and habitat assessment
- *Chinchilla chinchilla*: population and habitat assessment
- *Telmatobius atacamensis*: population and habitat assessment
- *Leopardus jacobita*: population assessment and monitoring plan.
- Flamingos (Phoenicopterus chilensis, and Phoenicoparrus andinus) and Horned Coot (Fulica cornuta).
- *Urmenetea atacamensis:* population assessment, management and monitoring plan.

- Vegas: In addition to monitoring, studies will include generation of a conceptual model for the understanding of the interaction between soil-water-plant and determination of the maximum descent for plant survival by developing soil suction curves.

Specialists are currently developing survey and monitoring protocols, which will form part of the Project Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan.

7.5 Additional Plans for IFC PS6 alignment

To ensure full compliance with IFC PS6, the Project is developing and implementing the following reports and plans:

- Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP).
- Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).
- Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (BMEP).

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