

Cam Walker, Friends of the Earth (Melbourne) Inc

## **Comments to the Fingerboards EES - Hearing Inquiry and Advisory Committee**

**Our primary concerns** about this proposal are detailed in our submission, and include the environmental and water impacts, public health concerns and the economic costs of the project.

A key issue is that there are significant risks attached to granting approval to a company with no experience to run such a high impact mine. A number of changes have been proposed to the Project since the EES was released, such as the late introduction of centrifuges because of a major error in the water balance modelling which came about due to data supplied by Kalbar. What other errors could unfold? As centrifuges have never been used in mineral sands mining before the risk of potentially catastrophic consequences with unacceptable impacts is considerable. These facts alone should raise serious doubts about the veracity of his Project which would be situated in a highly sensitive environment.

As we know, Kalbar Operations Pty Ltd is a company that has no mining experience. The mine Project area is on a plateau above the Lindenow flats. The Lindenow Valley is a high-value horticultural production region situated on the banks of the Mitchell River as close as 500 metres from the edge of the proposed mine's boundary.

Victoria is a densely populated State – meaning mining impacts are felt in neighbouring communities - and the lower Mitchell is an important food bowl. From what we know of the looming impacts of climate change, local food producing areas will come under greater stress in coming decades. As noted in the latest [Victorian Climate Projections 2019](#) by CSIRO and DELWP (October 2019), Gippsland faces a number of varying climate risks including '*More frequent and intense heavy rainfalls causing flooding*'. Approving a large mine with substantial water retention requirements would be at odds with the precautionary principle, as extreme weather events pose a risk of local contamination of rivers by polluted water.

The potential environmental and economic impacts have been well documented during these hearings and we won't revisit them in detail here.

### **New details that have emerged during hearings**

I have frequently heard concerns expressed by locals that the project will be expanded if it is approved. The community feared there would be a further 'grab for land' at some stage, and an issue has emerged while the IAC hearings have been underway that suggests this is already the case. How does the community trust that there will be no further applications for expansion in the future?

Kalbar have recently applied to ERR for a mining licence which has expanded the mine project from 1,675 hectares to 2,143 hectares. As was pointed out by Debbie Carruthers in her presentation for Mine-Free Glenaladale, that's an increase of 27% for a project that was already massive in scale. It now puts landholder residences on the mine footprint.

We find it astonishing that Kalbar can apply for a Mining licence at this stage of the EES hearing, and this raises a series of questions

- Where is the assessment of that expanded area for its cultural heritage and biodiversity values?
- People will now be living inside the mine boundary, in the impact zone. How will they be consulted? It would appear that there has been no assessment of the impacts of noise, dust and air quality for those people living on the mine footprint.
- Where is the assessment of these new environmental effects? What influence will that have on the overall impact of the mine?

Because of the obvious power imbalance that exists between miners and landowners, there is often distrust of mining companies. To see this proposed expansion put forward while hearings are still underway will further erode trust in the company and the assessment process.

**Finally I would like to share my experience of the local campaign against this proposal.**

From 2011 to 2018, I worked extensively with rural and regional communities across the south of Victoria who were concerned about the threat posed by conventional and unconventional gas and coal mining. Many of you will be familiar with this campaign. In total, 75 communities declared themselves Coal and/ or gasfield free including 11 rural communities near Bairnsdale. It became a significant issue in the 2018 state election, and a cross party inquiry recommended a moratorium on conventional gas drilling and a permanent ban on fracking.

That campaign saw unprecedented numbers of rural and regional people get involved in community activism. Since then I have worked with communities across the state concerned about gold mining, quarries, vegetation clearance, and many other issues. But I can honestly say that I have never seen a stronger local campaign than is evident in the area around the proposed Kalbar mine.

FoE has partnered with and supported Mine-Free Glenaladale for several years now, through events such as helping to organise a rally on the steps of Parliament in June 2019. We have seen the determination of this community.

There is a deep, very determined opposition to this project, as you have seen throughout these hearings. It is clear to me that Kalbar does not have social license to run this mine and that it will be opposed every step of the way if they are granted approval.

I understand that you need to assess the environmental as well as social impacts of this proposal. The question of social license seems clear to me – there is none. I urge you to listen to the local community and recommend that the state government refuse the planning application for the mine.