

IAC Hearing

29/06/2021

Good afternoon IAC members and thank you for allowing us the opportunity to speak and voice our concerns about the proposed Fingerboards Mineral Sands and Rare Earths Mine.

We are a third generation farming family and we have been farming for over 50 years. We are strongly opposed to this proposed mine for reasons which I will explore with you today. We strongly oppose this mine, the EES and all that Kalbar stands for. We find it offensive that the people who were involved in producing the EES report do not have an understanding of the potential consequences of where the proposed mine is to be situated. Some members of Kalbar's consultancies have never visited the area.

We are a part of the Horticultural Industry in the Lindenow Valley which is known as a Food Bowl to Victoria and that injects over \$150 million dollars a year to the economy. It is here in the Lindenow Valley that over 30% of Victoria's vegetables are grown and sourced. We contribute to the local and state economy and are proud of the business we have built.

Our produce is sought out and highly recognized in the Melbourne and Sydney markets, through our clean green high quality produce which we have been producing for over 50 years. We have worked 7 days a week tirelessly for years to maintain and ensure that we continue to achieve this status. We pride ourselves on providing families throughout Australia with clean fresh wholesome vegetables.

Our farming family produces green beans during the summer months and peas during the winter months. We employ local workers and contractors in our business and we are one of the few vegetable farmers who hire workers to not only sort the vegetables and grade them by hand for the markets, but we also employ workers to hand pick our vegetables. Some of our vegetables are picked and packed straight in the paddock then sent off to the transport trucks, where they will be sent onto the markets. Our staffing numbers can range between 15 – 30 people in the paddocks and another 8 -10 people in our sorting sheds.

We produce 85% of our crops in Lindenow and we rely heavily on the water from the Mitchell River to assist with the growing of our vegetables. Unfortunately water is a scarce commodity in this area and we have been on many restrictions over the years. For the past few years we have had droughts and have been at the mercy of Mother Nature. Last year to ensure that we could sustain our supply and the demands for our vegetables we enlisted a local company to install a bore.

The first attempt was futile and failed as the shallow aquifer was not able to produce water. We tried at a different position on our land and were successful at a deeper level. This whole experience was timely and very expensive, but it was something we had to do to secure a future for our family in farming.

The Lindenow Valley needs to be protected to ensure it will remain a permanent sustainable industry and so that we can continue to provide a safe, clean fresh product to Australians everywhere.

Having a “Rare Earth and Mineral Sands Mine” within the location of The Food Bowl seems to be a contradiction to our clean green fresh principles.

Here are a few of the areas that we are concerned about:

WATER:

Water is the key to life... not only to vegetable farmers but to the **whole** human race. We live in a unique part of Victoria. It is situated within beaches, lakes and rivers; all of which flow into one another. Where we live, we depend solely on the surrounding water for our survival. We use water for irrigation of our crops, washing our clothes, bathing and most importantly drinking. Our drinking water and local fish is derived from the Mitchell River.

Kalbar’s proposed mine has been built on the idea that they will gain access to water and therefore be in a position to actually mine rare earth and mineral sands and use this water to continue mining for years to come.

We find it insulting that farmers who produce food for a nation and who are on consistent restrictions to gain water from the Mitchell River, have to hear that a mining company who has not yet had a successful bore drill line test are stating that they will use scarce water to suppress dust and tailings. We have major concerns that we as farmers will be penalized because a larger mining company may have the finances to obtain water rights we have no access to.

Because Kalbar will be excavating up to 45 metres deep, they have stated they will be destroying the shallow aquifers and once this is ruined there will be no chance ever to repair or correct this.

We are now concerned that if they drill into the deeper aquifer it will cause extra pressure on an already fragile water system. If the constant supply is abused there is a chance that our bore water will become saline and therefore unusable on our crops.

Kalbar has also stated they may consider damming some areas of the mine site to obtain extra water. Once again local farmers have been rejected for applying to do this on their own land, so therefore how can it be that Kalbar is exempt from this? And if they were granted the opportunity to explore this avenue, the side effects of this could be detrimental to the water system and the wildlife of the lakes and rivers if contaminated water were to leak into our water system. The toxic deposits of rare earth and minerals sands ending up in the waterway would ruin not only farmers crops but all things that depend on this water system. We do not know for certain exactly what the health implications will be from what they will be mining.

If water runoff from the mine enters our water system, it will not only be animals and crops affected it would be human lives... especially as we drink this water. If we were to use contaminated water on our crops, we would no longer be able to provide our clean green reputation. Contaminated water not only could interfere with the growing aspects of the vegetables but it could also contaminate the soil and ruin the potential to grow future crops. **This would directly ruin our business and our family’s future.**

Dust:

Dust will not be able to be controlled by water that has yet to be obtained by Kalbar. The mining procedure involves digging underground and bringing those substances to the surface. Dust is going to be inevitable. Whether it is from the mining of the soil to the tailings, to the transporting and the moving of vehicles on the proposed mine site, there will be dust; dust which will be impossible to control. Factor into this the strong winds we have in this area, and this is cause for concern for everyone who lives and breathes in air.

We are concerned that Kalbar's one weather monitoring station was put in a known wind shadow, so the true wind conditions haven't been accurately recorded. Why was Kalbar allowed to put their weather monitoring station in that location when community members told them at public meetings that it was in the wrong place? We fear that the real impact of wind and how dust will travel has not been assessed and it will be much worse than Kalbar suggests. We are saddened that Kalbar's experts think that they have a better understanding of the landscape, weather patterns and the environment than some families that have lived in this immediate area for several generations.

The dust produced from mining will contain uranium and thorium and other cancer-causing fine particles which will be hazardous to us farmers and also our staff who will be breathing it in. How can we be sure that these substances will not have a long-term affect on our health? And if they do what will happen to everyone affected by this dust?

How can we send our produce to the markets not knowing if our produce will be contaminated and make people sick? As I have stated before, some of our produce goes directly from our paddocks to the markets and then straight on to households. Everyone who buys produce from us could be contaminated.

We have major concerns about the impact of dust contamination on our produce and we could lose our livelihood which is unacceptable. We are paid after our produce is sold through the markets in Melbourne and Sydney. If the markets don't accept our produce because of unacceptable dust levels we won't be paid. To produce safe clean vegetables, we need to be a season ahead of the game. If our reputation were to be ruined from dust contamination, we would be financially ruined. Our product is requested by name and is traced back to The Lindenow Valley. It would mean the end of our business.

We could not consciously sell produce not knowing if there is a chance that we could be harming another human being. If the Victorian Government were to grant Kalbar this opportunity to mine in this area, who would be accountable for the possibility of widespread contamination? What would happen if the vegetables and beef produced by this area were found to be toxic? Who would pay the price for people's health?

Financial:

For years, farmers have had to juggle running farms making ends meet through floods, droughts and recently COVID. On top of that for the past **6 years** we have been tormented with the prospect that a rare earths and mineral sands mine may be constructed within close proximity to our farms.

The physical, mental, emotional and financial stress this has posed cannot be truly expressed. To live knowing that everything you have worked so hard to build and maintain could be terminated by someone else is a very hard pill to swallow.

Farming is a lifestyle. It is having your heart and soul on a plate for everyone else to judge you by. We farm because we love it and we are good at it. We produce tons of vegetables for Australians to enjoy and we are proud to know we are giving them the best quality we can. Australians love our produce and seek it out.

Recently we have installed a bore; we have purchased new farming machinery and irrigation to ensure a profitable farming future. We depend on the profits of our vegetable business to continue to sustain our lifestyle and that of our children.

The risks involved in this proposed mineral sands mine could possibly permanently ruin our future and future generations of farming in our family. What then?

If our produce is contaminated, or our soil ruined and therefore we can't grow crops on them...Who is liable then? Do we, having lost financially have to try and take Kalbar to court...at a cost to ourselves? We think it is unfair that farmers have had this to contend with as well as all the other pressures that come with farming.

If our business is ruined how are we expected to seek justice and at what cost?

As I have said before East Gippsland is a unique part of the world. We have hill country, beaches and stunning waterways. It is a tourism hotspot, especially during the summer periods. Financially, if the region were to be branded unsafe due to contamination what affect would that have on our local economy.

If the waterways were unsafe to swim in, if the fish were toxic to eat, if the water was unclean to drink or if the air was filled with possible carcinogens...what would we do? Who would be accountable for such a disaster?

The proposed Fingerboards Rare Earths and Mineral Sands Mine is a short-term project that could possibly have long term side effects on a whole community or worse the whole of Australia.

Once again thank you for this opportunity for my husband and myself to express our strong opposition to this proposed mine.

Daniella & Sebastian Lanteri