

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

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Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Wendy and Rod Gardiner

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: Submission_to_IA

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

Dear Inquiry and advisory committee members, we are writing this submission about the EES for the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mine Project and we strongly oppose the mine for the reasons outlined below.

We are retired teachers who moved to East Gippsland for work in 1996 to enable ourselves and our teenage children to enjoy the benefits of growing up and living in an environment that is pollution-free, gives easy access to the outdoors and nature and facilitates a strong sense of community connectedness. One of our children, now grown up and married, moved back here as an adult to provide the same benefits for her children (our grandchildren). We are concerned that the proposed Mineral Sands Mine will detrimentally affect the quality of life for our entire family and will badly affect the local environment.

Since 1996, we have spent all but 7 years living in Paynesville. During those 7 years we retained ownership of our property and were regular visitors to it.

On retiring 6.5 years ago we returned to live permanently in Paynesville. Since then we have taken a keen interest in the development of the proposed Mineral Sands Mine at Fingerboards and have watched with increasing alarm, the continual re-shaping of the proposal and its boundaries, including the frequent changes in personnel at Kalbar Resources and the majority ownership of their parent company. We have found this to be quite alarming:-

With ever changing company owners, directors, and managers, we are left feeling extremely concerned about the veracity of information that is provided to the community in regards to the proposed mine. How can we be confident that vital information is passed on and understood by the new people each time a change in Management is made? It was particularly alarming to find that the company had made an error of over \$140,000,000 meaning that they were not, as thought, a majority foreign owned company, but a majority Australian owned company. How can we have any confidence that this company is competent to manage a project with so many potential impacts upon the community and environment if they can make such a significant error in accounting?

Thus, we eagerly awaited the arrival of the EES in order to carefully analyse our concerns. There is a monumental amount of information within the EES and, having explored the statement we have found nothing to allay our concerns or to answer our questions. During the limited time that the public has been given to examine the EES, we have found and listed the following major concerns:-

How can we be sure that sites of cultural significance to indigenous people will be retained and cared for? (This in light of the recent monumental damage recently created by BHP) We have been unable to identify any statement that gives us confidence that the Indigenous Community will be continually consulted in any real sense.

Where are the guarantees that rehabilitation will actually take place once the mine is decommissioned? Given world wide disregard for this work by mining companies in general, we are very sceptical that this will effectively take place.

What requirements have been placed around the construction of the temporary tailings dams and how can the risks associated with tailings storage be identified as “low” when the report has presented no evidence about how they will be constructed? We are very concerned that strategies to ENSURE that there is no leaching of toxins and flocculants are not clearly defined in the report, leaving an open field for error. Further, we have been unable to find any information about what will happen to the water from these storage facilities (containing flocculants and possible toxins) when the mine is decommissioned. This is a grave concern.

We are appalled that, in an environment such as ours, there is a plan to compulsory acquire properties from owners who are unwilling to sell. It is bad enough to do this in city areas where people only have to move to a new house. But in a farming community, compulsory acquisition takes away not just a house, but a career as well. How is a farmer supposed to make a living when his or her livelihood is taken away?

On examination of the Mitigation Register, we have become extremely concerned. In the table of assessments, a consequence is described as “*major*” if the impact is deemed to be significant. However, below the table, there is a statement which says *a major impact does not necessarily mean that the impact is significant*. A matrix is provided that indicates that if an extreme issue is not very very likely to occur, then the consequence is diminished. However, our concern is that our environment is very fragile. Climate change, native habitat degradation and poor/overuse of natural resources over the last century are all pointing to an untenable future. In our opinion, diminishing a level of consequence because it is deemed unlikely to occur indicates a reprehensible approach to caring for the environment. As young people have been telling us for a couple of years now, there is no planet B. We have to look after the one we have, so even a small risk that native flora and fauna will be seriously affected by the proposed mine is too great a risk.

Also on the table of mitigation assessment, there is a column which is entitled “residual risk” We are very concerned that this column will be seen as the most important outcome. Residual risk is said to assume that “additional” mitigation is implemented. What is the status of these additional measures? Are they a requirement before the mine can go ahead, or are they simply a “suggestion”?

Is it reasonable to state that 788 new trees will be planted to offset the endangered red-gum woodland of some 760 mature trees that will fall victim to the Mine? New trees will take decades to grow, and their viability will depend highly on how well they are managed during the first few years. Observing any tree plantings for roadside vegetation by local councils demonstrates that all have a percentage failure rate, regardless of how much they are tended, so we do not think so.

Is it reasonable to approve the mine if the area of EVC lost is “small compared to the total area in the region”? What if dozens of industrial proposals made the same claim? At what point would “minor” suddenly become “too much”? And who then takes responsibility for

ensuring that the region maintains a significant level of EVC? The risk that the Fingerboards project could be the first of many similar claims in the area is, in our opinion, a risk too great.

We noted that 16 dams will be constructed on creeks that feed directly into the Mitchell river. Whilst not all of these creeks are permanent, when they do run, they provide vital water to the Mitchell river and subsequently, the Gippsland Lakes. The EES enumerates the amount of water that will be taken from the Mitchell River and the Latrobe Aquifer to operate the mine, but it is unclear in the EES as to whether the count includes water from these dammed creeks that will no longer be available to the river. Has the organisation that conducted the EES actually measured this loss? As local residents we know that rain events in the area of the proposed mine can be infrequent but when they happen, they can be significant, causing sudden water flows that fall as quickly as they rise.

In the natural order of things, those intermittent and significant flows are important to the continual balance of the rivers and lakes system. Clearly, damming those creeks will stop any such water from reaching the end point of the Gippsland Lakes. The rivers and lakes of East Gippsland are essential to tourism, which sustains our region. Any diminution of their quality puts this industry at risk.

It is true that rainfall measurements were taken following random rain events during 2020. However, the vast majority of continual monitoring was conducted towards the end of a significant period of drought. 2020 is shaping up to be one of the wettest in recent years and we can only guess as to what will happen next year and beyond. Typically, East Gippsland deals with major flooding every 8 - 10 years, this means that there will be at least two more periods like 2020 in the life of the mine. These natural events are also important for the ecological balance of our rivers and lakes system. What will happen to those 16 dams during such events. When or if they overflow, the water will spill into the river. What then happens to the residues that the dams are designed to contain?

When talking about air quality control the EES states: *"Dust deposition levels above these values should be used as a trigger to review dust management practices to ensure nuisance dust impacts can be addressed in a timely manner"* (From Appendix A009 Page 79). We worry that this is then too late, the dust has already reached too high a level before mitigation can occur. Dust does travel vast distances and contamination and health risks are a real concern here. The Woodglen Reservoir where domestic and commercial water is stored for the whole Shire is 3.5kms downwind from the mine. What are the contamination risks? (Those on tank water living near the mine are also at risk of water contamination).

The predominant activity to the east of the mine site is an already established, large scale agricultural and horticultural activity particularly vegetable growing. The EES states: *"Predominant westerly winds, which will mean worst-affected receptors are likely to be located to the east of mining activities"*. (From Appendix A009 Page 33) We know from living in this area that wind is regularly stronger than forecast and occurs frequently during the year. We worry that this would mean that trigger points for mitigating dust will be reached

frequently but that damage will have already have occurred. Consequently the vegetable farming areas and townships to the east of the site will be under threat before any action can take place.

Yours

Rod and Wendy Gardiner