

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

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Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Jillian Thio

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: Glenaladale_mine

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: see attached submission

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee Members,

I write this submission in regard to the EES for the Fingerboards mineral sands mine in East Gippsland in order to express my strong opposition to the project. There are many reasons for my disapproval, including my great concerns that the proposed inappropriately placed mine will have negative impacts on the wellbeing of our unique environmental assets; will risk the immediate and ongoing health and prosperity of my community; will be detrimental to Victoria's vital agricultural/horticultural and tourism industries; and is culturally insensitive and unacceptable to the Traditional Owners of Gunaikurnai country.

I have lived in Bairnsdale, East Gippsland, for more than 30 years. The mine will affect me personally, my community, and ultimately all Victorians. I hope the Committee are aware that the Gippsland Lakes system, including surrounding wetlands, are one of Victoria's greatest natural assets and a valuable tourist draw. My property abuts the MacLeod Morass wetlands, part of the Gippsland Lakes water system. The MacLeod Morass is protected under international Ramsar agreements and is globally recognised for the ecological value of the wetlands. It is vital that this unique, priceless habitat be protected as a home for native birds and animals; as a major breeding site for wetland birds; and as a refuge for seasonal migratory birds.

- **Water security**

Water is a precious and limited resource in East Gippsland, as it is in most of Australia. Stage 1 water restriction for all Mitchell River water customers were only lifted on 1 July 2020 (Media Release from East Gippsland Water, 24 June 2020) and we are still on Permanent Water Saving Rules. According to that same Media Release, the amount of water flowing down the Mitchell River is conditional on the "increasing volatility of our climate". Last year, local vegetable growers were faced with a total ban on accessing water from the struggling Mitchell River due to one of our region's warmest and driest periods on record. A spokesperson from East Gippsland Water also stated in the local newspaper (East Gippsland News, 27 February, 2019) that, "it's clear we are facing an increasingly unpredictable long-term climate and water outlook".

The mining proponent, Kalbar Operations Pty Ltd, state that for processing and dust suppression their mine will require over 3 billion of litres of water annually (for a period of more than 15 years). This water is proposed to come the Mitchell River and also from a huge

1,000 hectares bore field which is outside the mine boundary. Water in the aquifers is not an unlimited resource and drawing large amounts of water from this source may potentially cause widespread environmental damage, not only in East Gippsland Shire but also Wellington Shire - and perhaps beyond. What will be the long-term environmental impacts on drawing significant amounts of water from the aquifer? Why should the mine be allowed access to precious water from the Mitchell River while local people, agriculture, and the environment endure water shortages and restrictions?

- **Contamination of water, air, soil and food**

The mine not only has the potential to substantially diminish water flows into the Gippsland Lakes system thus endangering the ecosystem, but there is also considerable danger of contamination of our waterways, soil, and food from toxic airborne dust and/or from hazardous materials leaching, leaking, or escaping from the mine's tailings dam. The mine is 350m from the Mitchell River. Bairnsdale's domestic water supply, the Woodglen Reservoir, is only 3.5km from the mine.

We, the East Gippsland community, have recently experienced months of breathing smoke laden air because of the bushfires, the long-term health effects of which are yet to be known. Kalbar Operations Pty Ltd has acknowledged that they will be mining radioactive substances including rare-earths, which will be crushed, generating dust. Dust, like smoke, can travel considerable distances. Has the level of risk to people/animals developing health problems, including lung diseases and cancers, been seriously addressed, considering that the analysis of the ore body has not been fully disclosed and we do not know what the laboratory was asked to analyse for the EES? What ethical value does the Committee feel is adequate for people's health and wellbeing?

Tailings are the trash of the mining process. There will be a 90 hectares tailings dam located above both the Mitchell and Perry Rivers. This tailings dam will contain mine waste and chemicals used to treat the tailings, all of which have safety warnings as being harmful to aquatic life. Our area, including both rivers, are prone to flooding. What would be the outcome if floods wash toxic materials from the tailings dam into our rivers, creeks and aquifers?

In Australia and internationally tailings dams have a bleak history of failing or leaching/leaking. For example, the tailings dam at the Mount Polley mine in western Canada failed in 2014, buried a creek and poured into Quesnel Lake, home to one-third of British

Columbia's Fraser River sockeye salmon. This environmental disaster shocked mining engineers around the world as many considered Canada a leader in developing rules to prevent such failures. It wasn't supposed to be able to happen. But it did. There are many more examples, including close to home where the Stockman mine tailings dam at Benambra is leaking contaminated water into Straight Creek and the Tambo River (which flows into the Gippsland Lakes). Considering the risk of tailings dam failure are historically high, why are there no details in the EES for the dam construction? What measures will be in place to dismantle the tailings dam at the end of the mine's working life?

The vegetable growing industry in the fertile Lindenow Valley is only 500m downwind from the mine. The Lindenow Valley is a major food producer for Australia and export. In addition to the mine being in competition with horticulture for water and workers, there is a risk of contamination of vegetables via air, water or soil, with the potential to destroy proven and profitable industries and long term employers. As the mine is a relatively short-term operation, is it worth jeopardizing an established and vital food producing Victorian industry?

- **Rehabilitation**

What happens once the "project" is over? It is estimated that Australia has over 60,000 abandoned mines that remain hazards, with only a handful having been rehabilitated. Australia has a very poor history of mine restoration and rehabilitation costs are high. Kalbar, by its own admission, has no mining experience and no rehabilitation experience. Will the rehabilitation bond for this mine be adequate to cover costs? Could the mine be put into "monitor/care and maintain" mode for an indefinite time? If Kalbar fails in its duty to rehabilitate the mine site, will we, the taxpayers, have to pay?

More than 700 mature trees and other habitat will have to be removed for mine operations, affecting wildlife and the landscape. Why have the EES technical studies not comprehensively surveyed the area to ascertain the full environmental risks involved?

- **Respect for Traditional Owners**

I respect and uphold the rights and views of the Traditional Owners of Gunaikurnai country who oppose the mine; and ask that any decision regarding the mine site not disrespect or undermine their deep spiritual connection and responsibility to care for country. This is of great importance to me. The mining industry has an appalling record in regard to respecting aboriginal heritage sites, for example the recent destruction by Rio Tinto of the

Juukan Gorge, which earned worldwide condemnation. Will the voices of the Traditional Owners of Gunaikurnai country be heard and respected?

- **Respect for residents of East Gippsland**

Kalbar states it intends the mine to operate 24 hours a day 7 days a week. There is pre-existing residential and agricultural land use close to the mine. I know many of the mine's close neighbours are stressed, feel disempowered and bullied, and I have serious concerns for their health and wellbeing. This is not how we treat our friends and neighbours. This is not the lifestyle we expect in East Gippsland. Why should people living close to the mine have their life disrupted by noise, potential pollutants, and additional traffic? Why should we, the residents of Bairnsdale and surrounds, accept exposure to risks that may adversely affect our physical and mental health, and alter the lifestyle we expect?

In response to the Draft Planning Scheme Amendment – Attachment C in the EES: it is totally unacceptable to allow compulsory acquisition of any private land to be used by the mine for infrastructure that is located outside the mining project boundary for any purpose including for water pipelines, bore pumps, bore fields, roadworks, new powerlines, easements, rail sidings and vegetation removal. Why wasn't this part of the mine project area? Why isn't this a matter for the East Gippsland Council to determine?

I am upset and angered by the mine concept and have attended many well attended meetings (several of them presented by Kalbar as public information sessions). From information presented at these meetings, and other sources, I find that I have absolutely no faith in the ability of Kalbar to safely proceed with the mine. The Fingerboards sands mine is inappropriately located and has negligible support from the people of East Gippsland.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this project.

Jill Thio