

# Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory  
Committee - EES

# 481

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Request to be heard?: No

**Full Name:** John E Semple

**Organisation:**

**Affected property:** [REDACTED]

**Attachment 1:** J\_Semple\_Respon

**Attachment 2:**

**Attachment 3:**

**Comments:** see attached submission

EES Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

My name is John Semple and I am 71 years of age, a retired railway signalling engineer. My wife and I moved to Bairnsdale in 2013 after almost 40 years living in Bendigo. We chose this part of East Gippsland because of the climate and the environment. We spend a lot of time working with a local Landcare group planting all sorts of indigenous plants on our small slice of Australia.

I am most concerned about Kalbar's proposed Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mine at nearby Glenaladale, west of Bairnsdale, because of the following reasons -

1. **Pollution of our environment.** According to the EES the mine is apparently intended to operate 24 hours per day, 7 days per week for 20 years. The documents released by Kalbar Pty Ltd estimate the mine will be around 45 metres deep. Dust generated as the minerals and overburden are removed will be blown by the strong winds regularly experienced in this region exposing the population of Bairnsdale, nearby towns and other more isolated communities to this hazard. Kalbar has stated that they will wet down the mine area to minimise dust, but dust will still be on the move. This dust will settle on the vegetable farms just across the river, making the vegetables unfit for market. The dust will settle on residents, in the Mitchell River which then feeds into the Gippsland Lakes, into the town water supply and into drinking water tanks. We will not be able to escape it. We will be eating, drinking and breathing it all day, every day, for 20 years and most probably longer given the fact of known mining pollution cases.

Kalbar has given some winds speed statistics which after living in the area for seven years I feel are not accurate. But here are some others, all from the Bureau of Meteorology website. These are the maximum wind speeds for both Bairnsdale and East Sale Airport for the months of August, September and October 2020.

Bairnsdale highest wind speed

8/10/2020 – 69km/h from the WNW

3/09/2020 – 65km/h from NNW

27/08/2020 – 98km/h from SW.

### East Sale Airport highest wind speed

09/10/2020 – 69km/h from W

21/09/2020 – 80km/h from NNW

27/08/2020 – 94km/h from W

At one of Kalbar's Community Information Sessions residents were told that the mine operations would stop on days of high wind. This has never been written in any document I have seen and I cannot imagine a multi-million dollar mine operation stopping for the day, or the week, or the month just because the local residents do not want to be covered in the dust being produced by the mine. We know the mining industry doesn't stop once started.

Just how serious is Kalbar about controlling the dust to stop residents being affected by the minerals that will be unearthed?

The mine is far too close to the RAMSAR listed Gippsland Lakes. The lakes have suffered greatly from industrial pollution and in recent times with the dirty water run off after the Hazelwood fires and the 2019/2020 summer bushfires. Now the water that flows into the lakes is in danger of major pollution from a possible mineral sands mine. What happens if the proposed large tailings dam, which is to sit above the Mitchell River and opposite the vegetable farms, leaks or breaks after a major wet weather event? Too late to be sorry then.

There is also the major threat of air pollution from all the diesel vehicles that are used in the construction and the day to day operation of the mine. There will be a huge increase in traffic on the area's roads from workers' vehicles and the B doubles accessing the mine area, plus, of course, the diesel earth moving machinery working on site.

2. **Pollution of the nearby vegetable farms.** Right across the river is a thriving vegetable industry, an industry that has been well supported locally for many years, and that also provides employment for the residents of this area. Any dust blown from the mine will contaminate this valuable and viable industry, possibly putting farmers out of business. Well, who would like their vegetables dusted with silica or one of the other equally objectionable mineral sands that will be flying around?

3. **Excess use of water.** East Gippsland has been in drought for a number of years. We experienced drought in Bendigo a couple of times; droughts are common in many areas of Australia, we accept that. What we do not accept is that water can be wasted for a mine when it should be used for farms, for food production, the natural environment and for the use of residents. This water used for food production would give a greater return and be far better for East Gippsland's environment.
4. **Removal of Vegetation from Wildlife Corridors.** Indigenous vegetation has been removed regularly since white settlement of this area. We still have some remnants of indigenous vegetation along roads and the rail line. Kalbar's proposal to use Chettles Road to transport mineral sands to a siding at East Fernbank will remove thousands of valuable trees and shrubs that support local fauna and provide a wildlife corridor. Many are mature trees. We cannot afford for this to happen. During the summer of 2019/2020 East Gippsland lost thousands of hectares of native vegetation to bushfires plus thousands, if not millions, of animals and birds. Removal of the wildlife corridor along Chettles Road, Cowells Lane and along the rail line will be yet another devastating blow to the natural environment of this area. It will also show just how poorly the local environment is regarded. Kalbar has stated that they will rebuild the environment after the mine is closed. How can our valuable and fragile flora and fauna wait this long? How many will still be around in 20 years, or will we be mourning yet more species becoming extinct due to western development?
5. **Noise pollution.** Apparently the mine will be operating 24 hours per day, seven days per week for 20 years. Kalbar has stated that noise will be kept to a minimum. This may happen, but I doubt it. But what about the noise of the trucks that will be removing the mineral sands? And add to that the noise of the trains which can already be heard many kilometres away on still nights. The trucks will be driving through what is now quiet farm land all day and all night. This will have a devastating effect on the nearby residents, as well as the wildlife, and create not only noise but disorientating light pollution.
6. **Proposed Economic Benefits.** Kalbar states the mine will provide jobs for locals. The vegetable farms and the current associated industries, such as transport and vegetable processing, already provide jobs for locals, and jobs that the locals are already equipped to handle. This is a predominantly farming

community not a mining community and investment into the current industries would see far more jobs created than proposed by Kalbar. The locals do not have the experience in the mining industry so where will Kalbar find the necessary personnel who have the skills required to operate mining machinery? Will we just end up being another community watching 'fly in, fly out' employees taking their earnings away with them?

7. **Local Infrastructure.** If this proposed mine and groundwater borefield goes ahead the area it impacts will be far greater than just the mining area. The community will face many changes over the life of the mine. Roads in the area will have to be upgraded to cope with the huge, for this area, increase in traffic. Most roads in this area are five or six metres wide - not wide enough for tourists to be facing oncoming fully loaded B doubles. Each day 120 employees in two shifts will be accessing the site. Kalbar say they will be bused. I have worked on many major projects including mining in North Western Australia and have never seen employees bused to a work site. Bused on the worksite but not bused to the worksite. There will be a huge increase in vehicle traffic.

**Who is going to pay for all these road upgrades and regular maintenance?**

Plus, there will also be the changes to road alignments during mining to allow access to the mineral sands. A traffic roundabout and moving the intersections will compromise the safety of the roads and increase travel time through the area.



Chettles Rd (above) and Cowells Lane, currently meandering country lanes about three metres wide, will be destroyed to allow access to the proposed groundwater



Chettles Rd

borefield and proposed East Fernbank railway siding. Without exaggeration thousands of trees will have to be removed for Chettles Rd to be fit for purpose. The proposed rail siding area is a **fenced native vegetation protection reserve** both sides of the rail track and both up and down sides of the Fernbank Lindenow South Rd level crossing. **So, is this area no longer protected??**



The houses close to the proposed rail siding will also face the prospect of major noise and diesel fume pollution day and night. Trucks delivering and loading containers and diesel trains shunting the container wagons are very noisy.



Above – Fernbank Lindenow South Rd level crossing looking east. Proposed rail siding site on the left of photo.

East Gippsland has suffered enough in recent years with three to four years of drought followed by horrendous widespread bushfires. The last thing the East Gippsland environment needs is this proposed Fingerboards Mineral Sands mine. It is not an appropriate development on the banks of the Mitchell River, so close to the main commercial and residential town in East Gippsland, right in the middle of operating farms, adjacent to a major vegetable growing region and so close to the RAMSAR listed Gippsland Lakes. This beautiful region's community will be adversely affected by this mine. The health, economy and environment of this wonderful corner of Australia is at stake.

Please do not approve this mine and cause yet more devastation to our fragile but environmentally important corner of Australia. A working mine in this area is completely inappropriate use of this beautiful landscape.

**The irony of the “Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project” is that the project if allowed to proceed, will obliterate this historic Fingerboards community meeting place.**

Thank you for allowing me the chance to express my considered opinion.

John Semple