

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

509

Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Tom Lightfoot
Organisation: B&H Lightfoot and sons
Affected property: [REDACTED]
Attachment 1: EES_Submission_T
Attachment 2:
Attachment 3:
Comments: See attached submission

29/10/2020

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

Thankyou for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the EES for the Fingerboards Mineral Sands mining proposal.

I would like to start by registering my strong objection to this proposal. I own and run a business in close proximity to the proposed mine site and I believe that the detrimental effects potentially posed by this mine are unacceptable not only for my own business, but the East Gippsland region as a whole. I make my objections based primarily around three factors, dust, water security, and tourism security.

My family business began in the Lindenow Valley some 25 years ago as a Vineyard supplying wineries with grapes. In 2008, our attention was turned from producing grapes solely for other wineries to purchase, to establishing our own winery and producing our own wine. This shift was made purely because of the demand for Gippsland grapes and wine. Such was the esteem the region was beginning to be regarded in, it made sense to capitalize on that ourselves.

The subsequent success of the winery has meant that we are now the biggest producer of wine in Gippsland employing 8 full time staff and 6 casual staff. We also employ seasonal workers throughout the year. This has grown out of a reputation for the quality of East Gippsland produce and the unspoiled image of the area, as well as the ability to produce high quality wine grapes. The potential for the business to grow and employ more people and contribute more to the area's economy is, I believe, under threat from the prospect of a large, open cut, mineral sands mine. The major threats to my business as I see it, comes down to three main factors which I will outline below.

1. Dust

The large amounts of dust generated by this mine can potentially pose multiple threats to our business. The area around the Fingerboards and Lindenow are prone to very strong westerly winds, which puts us, the towns of Walpa and Lindenow, and the entire horticultural industry in the direct path of that dust. The exact composition of that dust I feel has not been made available by Kalbar, for reasons I am not sure. The potential hazard of that dust is debatable, but what is certain is that it will cover crops along the length of the Lindenow Valley including our grapes, as well as our Cellar Door and any customers enjoying our venue. The effect of the dust on our grapes is potentially considerable. Contrary to Kalbar's EES report, wineries DO NOT wash grapes prior to processing and fermenting. This is a practice unheard of and completely impractical in reality. It is almost inconceivable where they came up with the notion that this was an option. It is certainly not grounded in any kind of basic research, which begs the question on what other matters uneducated assumptions were made and passed off as viable options/solutions.

2. Water Security

Water security is of the upmost importance to agriculture worldwide. The Lindenow Valley is no exception. The reputation of the area as a major Australian food bowl, is well deserved. If the production of this food is placed under threat by a Mineral Sands mine, it would seem to me a very

short sighted and poor decision. The amount of water Kalbar says it needs to operate the mine is significant. 3 gigalitres of water required to process ore and suppress dust means 3 gigalitres less for the Mitchell River catchment and the Gippsland Lakes. The Mitchell River irrigators that already rely on the system do so knowing that the Summer months are often unreliable, and pumping restrictions are the norm, not the exception. I'm told it is the same for those who use the aquifers. It would seem that the water required by Kalbar for processing as well as dust suppression is not an option, but a necessity, and must be available no matter what conditions the year provides. Even in drought years the mine presumably must continue to operate, and I can only assume this is at the expense of all other river users. While Kalbar says they will construct a dam and fill it using a winter-fill license, this also will come at the expense of the existing irrigators. What happens in the years when river flows are insufficient to allow winter fill pumping (More than 1400ML per day flow)?

My concerns around water security extend to the water source impacted on by the operation of the mine. The Mitchell River is the lifeblood of a large horticultural industry, as well as our grape growing and winemaking operation. Any potential contamination of this water source would be catastrophic to not only our business, but also the food production for a large section of our country. Kalbar say they will construct an enormous tailings dam to contain their waste. This dam will be built on a plateau on ground with no clay for containment. A plastic lined dam by its nature has a finite lifespan which poses an unacceptable risk to the river system it threatens. The proposed damming of 19 gullies and creeks further threatens the health and viability of the river system and the lakes that it sustains.

3. Tourism Security

This gets me to the third of my concerns. My business relies heavily on tourism. Tourism not only as people visiting our Cellar Door and Vineyard, but people visiting the region as a whole. Some of these tourists directly benefit us. People enjoying a wine at the many Pubs and Restaurants, Cafes and Bars, Hotels and Clubs. The major attractions that draws people to our region are the beautiful natural assets. The remote bushland and alpine regions are stunning (although badly burnt recently) - but no single attraction bigger than the Gippsland Lakes. The Gippsland Lakes that are largely influenced by the Mitchell River. While it is not the only river to flow into the lakes, it is the biggest and the only unimpeded river.

The Lakes are the lifeblood of our region, providing large economic and employment opportunities, mostly through tourism. Any degradation of their quality, either perceived or real, would have a devastating effect on the East Gippsland people. Any accident from the mine that led to contamination of the river, and subsequently the lakes, would be inexcusable.

Whilst I appreciate that jobs are essential to a growing economy, I feel that the jobs claimed to be offered by Kalbar (less than 200 I believe) are far outweighed by the current and potential employment provided by a healthy horticultural industry and tourism sector.

The EES report, as well as other information provided by Kalbar lacks any real substance on the real dangers and potential harm caused by this mine. Dismissing some issues, and claiming others are "Low Risk" is simplifying and glossing over major issues.

Issues like:

What happens if the river is polluted by the mine, and as such unusable by irrigators?

What happens if the polluted river pollutes the Gippsland Lakes, and who compensates the thousands of people who's livelihoods are either directly or indirectly linked to them?

What compensation is available to businesses detrimentally effected by mining operations?

What compensation is available to people detrimentally effected by mining operations?

Given mining's appalling track record, what assurances can be given that rehabilitation of any mine site would occur, and not just put into caretaker mode?

It is with all this in mind that I register my objection to this proposal. I am firmly of the belief that this mine is being considered in a totally inappropriate area, where too many already thriving businesses and livelihoods will be jeopardized. I don't believe I am making this objection on any kind of NIMBY basis, but as a genuine fear for my region as a whole. I understand that Mineral Sands are an important raw material that we all use in everyday life, and if this was the only deposit in the world then so be it. However, as other deposits exist around Australia and some in already heavily mined regions, it seems more appropriate for the Mineral Sands be mined where there is less at stake for so many other interested parties.

I thank the panel for giving me the opportunity to express my concerns, and hope they take my submission in good faith.

Tom Lightfoot