

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

546

Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Robyn Anne Grant

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: EES_submission.d

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: SEE ATTACHED SUBMISSION

Dear Enquiry and Advisory Committee members

As a tourism operator in East Gippsland I am appalled that the Government would give their support for this proposed mineral sands mine. Tourism is a multi-million dollar industry in East Gippsland. In the Glenaladale locality local tourism businesses include Goonawarra Camp, which hosts many school groups with thousands of students and hundreds of guests over a year enjoying the peaceful surrounds, boutique B & Bs, camp park, café, hotel and horse riding. The Mitchell River National Park attracts activities such as white water rafting, kayaking, bird watching, bush walking and camping all adding to the local economy.

I have operated a tourism business in the area for 20 years, visitors stay at our B & B because of the peace and quiet and to enjoy the surrounding environment. Our property is only 9 km from the proposed mine. The noise and other aspects of the mining process will impact our business as the whole ambience of the area will change.

The Mitchell River National Park is a favourite destination for visitors to our region. The gateway to the Park is through the Glenaladale area with its rolling hills and views across to the mountains. If the proposed mine proceeds it will create a wasteland in this scenic area.

Many travellers pass through this area on their way to the Alpine National Park, Dargo High Plains and the Wonnangatta valley.

The proposed mine will have a huge impact on all aspects of the environment including the Heritage listed Mitchell River, RAMSAR listed Gippsland Lakes and Wetlands and the Perry River.

The 3-4 Gigalitres (I believe this to be an under estimation) of Water extraction from the Mitchell River will cause increased salinity levels in the Gippsland Lakes affecting fringing wetlands, fish breeding grounds and migratory species and cause erosion along the banks of the lakes.

Groundwater extraction will affect the Mitchell River and Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems (GDEs). The proponent has failed to identify many of these GDEs and has ignored the importance of these for sustaining agriculture, in times of drought and aiding survival of threatened species.

Runoff from the mine site, despite mitigation measures outlined by the proponent, will cause sediment and toxic radioactive substance to enter the river systems. The proposed mine is only 350 metres from the Mitchell River. A totally unsuitable site for an open cut mineral sands mine.

The Perry River with its unique Chain of Ponds, south west of the mine site will be impacted by mining in its headwaters. Mining is to occur in a pine plantation west of where the proposed tailings dam and processing plant will be situated. This area is a large tributary of Honeysuckle Creek, another Chain of Ponds, which flows into the Perry River. The community and the Government have spent a considerable amount of time and money to restore and protect the Perry River.

Seepage from the tailings dam and in the event of a tailings dam failure both the Perry and Mitchell Rivers will be impacted. The tailings dam is to be built on the headwaters of the Perry River and Mitchell River catchments. The tailings dam is 90 hectares in size with 20 metre walls and built on unstable dispersive soils. Is this going to be a disaster waiting to happen?

One must think of the ramifications if this disaster does occur – farmland, streams, rivers, wetlands and the Gippsland Lakes impacted by a toxic sludge. Lives, businesses and the environment destroyed. We have seen this happen in other countries; Brazil is one of the latest in a series of tailings dam failures.

Locally we have seen the incompetence with the Benambra mine. The tailings dam built on a tributary of the Tambo River has continued to leak into the river catchment, despite Government expenditure in the vicinity of \$7 million to repair the wall. We the Victorian taxpayers have to constantly pay for mistakes that mining companies walk away from and Government regulators refuse to oversee (VAGO report 2020).

If this problem of seepage at the Benambra mine has been ignored since 2006, what faith should we expect to have in the regulators to oversee any issues that might arise with the proposed Fingerboards mine?

The positioning of the proposed mine is in close proximity to the Mitchell River (350 m). Mining is due to begin on a plateau interspersed with steep gullies and tributaries flowing into the Mitchell River. There is no way runoff will be prevented from entering the Mitchell River during an East Coast rain event.

Some of these East Coast rain events we have experienced include:

1988 – 275 ml 6days

1990 – 280 ml 2 days

1990 – 78 ml in 10 minutes, the rain was so heavy there was very little oxygen in the air. People caught out in the rain had difficulty breathing.

1998 – 161 ml 2 days

2007 - 150 ml 2 days and then 146 ml in 2 days a week later

Radioactive substances are contained in disturbed soils. The risks of radioactive air born dust to the environment and human health have not been fully addressed in the EES by the proponent. These effects will be with us for many years to come leaving a legacy for future generations.

The mine is situated very close to where people live. There are eighty-one residences in less than 3 km from the mine site. The number of residences has been under reported by the proponent.

Would you describe this as a remote location as the proponent has stated? The proponent has failed to include Walpa in communities in close proximity of the proposed mine which might be impacted.

Dust will not only affect these residences, dust travels for many kilometers and has the possibility to contaminate areas a long way further east.

In the past we have seen Mallee dust coat the mountains in New Zealand turning them pink. All dust will not be suppressed at the mine site; the proponent has stated this at a community meeting.

The Bairnsdale water storages are 3 km north east from the proposed mine site. A southwesterly wind (the prevailing wind) will blow dust into these water storages. These water storages supply all towns east of the mine site from Walpa to Nowa Nowa including the coastal towns of Paynesville, Metung and Lakes Entrance.

Tank water which supplies domestic drinking water to many households on rural properties in the area will be affected by contaminated dust.

In Kanagulk in Western Victoria radioactive dust contaminated water tanks within 7-8 km of the mine site. These had to be cleaned twice a year.

The Lindenow, Woodglen and Lindenow South Primary Schools will be impacted by dust, noise and traffic from the proposed mine.

Transport options – With 40 round trips per day with heavy haulage vehicles impacts of noise, vibration, traffic congestion and the possibility of accidents are a threat to these urban and rural areas.

Trucking to the Morwell or Bairnsdale rail siding, the route goes through Lindenow South to the Princes Highway. This will require considerable Red Gum vegetation removal for a proposed roundabout where the Lindenow Road joins the highway. There will also be vegetation removal of Grassy Woodland near the Bairnsdale rail siding.

Trucking the ore to Barry's Beach or Corner Inlet will follow the same route to the Princes Highway. The option to ship the ore from Port Anthony in Corner Inlet, a RAMSAR listed site, will impact Corner Inlet as I believe dredging needs to take place to accommodate the ships. There are no handling or storage facilities at Port Anthony so extensive infrastructure will need to be constructed to accommodate the proponents shipping needs. Corner Inlet is an important migratory bird area and should be protected. It is also a popular tourist and recreation destination.

The Fernbank East rail siding is the preferred option. This will impact farmland and listed vegetation species. It could also affect Saplings Morass Reserve which has EPBC listed species, as drainage could be affected.

The area to be destroyed by the Rail Siding at Fernbank is a Significant Vegetation Site fenced off to protect a threatened ecosystem and species The Purple Diuris and Slender Wire Lilly are present at this site as are other grassland species.

The sign on the fence states;

THE VEGETATION OF THIS SITE IS THREATENED
WITH EXTINCTION IN VICTORIA
ALL PLANTS ARE PROTECTED
PLEASE NO GRAZING
NO SLASHING
NO SOIL DISTURBANCE

There is a large stand of Red Gums along the fence line which will be removed. The removal of this vegetation does not seem important to the proponent. Building of a railway siding at this site is unacceptable.

The proposed mine will pose a huge risk to the horticulture industry in the Lindenow valley, which is only 500 metres downwind from the site. This industry employs approximately 3,000 people. If there is contamination this industry will be shutdown, as a zero tolerance applies to contamination of produce. The industry supplies domestic and international markets, with lettuces going to MacDonal's stores throughout Australia. The value of this industry is in excess of \$150 million a year.

Contamination could shut down other produce markets in Victoria due to perceived risk. We have seen this within the industry before where contamination on a property in a particular area will affect markets elsewhere throughout the state.

Ash from bushfires approximately 70 km away has contaminated vegetables in the past so the risk of dust from a mine only 500 metres away will be a real threat.

The horticulture industry and other current water users will be competing with the proposed mine for water.

Will the horticulture industry be guaranteed supply of water if the proposed mine goes ahead?

Other agriculture industries which include beef, dairy, wool production, fat lambs, vineyards, orchards, and stock fodder, will all be affected by the proposed mine development. Bores used by agricultural producers will also be affected by the extraction of underground water.

Glenaladale and its locality are very important culturally for the Gunaikurnai first nation's people. A cultural heritage overlay exists over some of the project area. Artifacts, scar trees, marker trees and other important cultural heritage items are found in the project area. The native grasses, weaving reeds and traditional foods are still growing in the area. Desecration of Aboriginal sites is totally unacceptable as once destroyed they can never be replaced. Disturbance by agriculture in this area has uncovered many artifacts which have been saved by the landholders, in many cases being handed back to the Gunaikurnai people and displayed in the Keeping Place, the local Aboriginal museum. Artifacts are also returned to country for safe keeping.

The Glenaladale area was severely burnt in 2014. Over 6,000 hectares, three houses, stock, fencing and agriculture infrastructure was destroyed. The ecosystems within the project area are still recovering. The proponent did not fully consider the effect of the bushfire on survey results. They also failed to mention the severe drought that impacted the area from 2017 - 2020. The seasonality of species present was also not considered.

Large bushfires have dominated summers in East Gippsland 2003, 2006-7, 2014 and 2019-20 with so much fire in the landscape it is extremely important to preserve areas now that are currently unburnt. This is necessary for the survival and recolonisation of species.

The 1650 hectares of the project area does not include the infrastructure corridors for haulage roads, power lines and pipelines. The disturbance by the project will be greater than has been acknowledged by the proponent.

Critically endangered EPBC & FFG listed species and ecosystems need protection not destruction from a mine. These ecosystems are under direct threat from excavation and construction and maintenance of infrastructure. The proponent has made little attempt to avoid threatened ecosystems along roadsides.

An independent survey of the environment of the Glenaladale area is needed as field surveys by the proponent failed to identify many species.

Land holders in the area have identified fauna which has not been recorded as they were unaware of Government Data Bases and the importance of these records. Quolls have been seen at the Fingerboards on numerous occasions. The latest sighting was in May-June 2020 within 2 kilometers of the project site.

The loss of over 800 large trees within the landscape will affect many species which use hollows for their survival. These large trees also provide foraging sites for threatened species. To replace these with a few mere seedlings is unfathomable as it will take hundreds of years for these to grow to provide the benefits not just to wildlife but also to domestic stock.

Changes to the Draft Planning Scheme which would allow compulsory acquisition of private land outside of the project area are unacceptable.

The Rehabilitation information in the EES document is almost naïve in its simplicity. It is based on flawed data and denial of the serious threat of tunnel erosion occurring post mine.

The proponent has stated that private land consists of only weeds and non indigenous species. This is not the case as many grassland species and native grasses are present over the farmland, therefore restoration of the land will not be true to what is there now.

The EES documents were extremely difficult to comment on as the information was spread throughout too many of the sections. Print was so small in some sections that it

was unreadable. It had obviously not been proof read as there were so many mistakes in it. In various sections the information was also contradictory.

The risks to the environment, horticulture industry, tourism and the health of the East Gippsland community is too great for this proposed mineral sands mine to be considered. There is no guarantee that this mine will be viable and won't be left abandoned as has happened in other areas of the state.

I thank the panel for the opportunity to make a submission and I would like the opportunity to speak at the panel hearing.

Robyn Grant