

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

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Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Alan John Broughton

Organisation: Organic Agriculture Association Inc.

Affected property:

Attachment 1: OAA_response_to

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

Organic Agriculture Association Inc

Response to proposed Fingerboards mineral sands mine EES

The Organic Agriculture Association has a membership of 150 people, mainly in Gippsland and concentrated in East Gippsland. It operates from the Organic Information and Resource Centre [REDACTED] in Bairnsdale, where it runs a library, seed bank, weekly produce swap and bookstall. Members include full time farmers, part time farmers and home producers. The Association was established in 1984.

Our organisation opposes the proposed mine. While there are several organic farms close to the mine site, our concerns are not just about the impact on organic growers, but on other food producers and the general public too.

The assurances in the EES that there will be no problems for residents and food producers cannot be relied on. The track record of mining operations in general in Australia and of Australian companies operating overseas is abysmal. Monitoring of regulations by the EPA is poor, and when the operations are brought to task it is cheaper to pay the fines and carry on as before. It is often the general public and environmental activists that do the monitoring jobs that the EPA does not adequately do. Rehabilitation of mine sites is rare – when the mine is worked out it is sometimes put into caretaker mode indefinitely, or the company declares bankruptcy. Tailings dam breaches occur. Lead contamination of Port Pirie and Mt Isa are well known about.

Our chief concerns are about water availability and contamination, and dust.

Irrigation should receive priority in water usage. If it is left to the market, as proposed, it is likely that irrigators will miss out altogether in drought or be forced to pay higher prices to compete with the mine. This is not acceptable. There are already water shortages for irrigators in droughts. Capturing winter flow for the mine use will further reduce the amount of fresh water entering the Gippsland Lakes system, which is already too high in salt from low flows.

The extra 3 gegalitres of water poured onto a confined area will seep into the aquifers, taking soluble contaminants with it, which will end up in bores or the Mitchell River.

The risk of tailings dam burst poses immense dangers to the Perry River and Mitchell River ecosystems and consequently that of the Gippsland Lakes. The quality of water for irrigation and urban reticulation would be destroyed for the long term.

We are not confident that dust will not be an issue. One dust monitoring station is insufficient. There should be several, whose locations are determined by the landholders, not the mining company. Assurances that dust-producing works will cease on windy days is hard to believe – that would mean severely curtailed operations from August to December at least.

Contamination of dust with radioactive and heavy metal particles could be much greater than the negligible amounts predicted. They will be washed into the soil to damage soil biological life and be taken up by plant roots. Some are likely to be absorbed by the plant leaves themselves directly. Pasture, of course, is not washed before livestock harvest it. Organic standards have much stricter limits on acceptable heavy metals in both soil and produce than

national standards (10% of FSANZ standards). Dust will also blow over residences and rainwater tanks over a large area. Bairnsdale is in line for a strong north-westerly.

We do not believe that the proposed mine should be approved.