

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

652

Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Ewan Waller

Organisation: Yes

Affected property:

Attachment 1: Mine_objection_E

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

FINGERBOARDS MINE INQUIRY

To the Inquiry and Advisory Committee members

I strongly object to this proposed development. It is simply an inappropriate development in what is a settled and peaceful rural district that has strong cultural, historic, social, economic and environmental values. The impacts from the mine will not be manageable and will plague the area for decades if not centuries after the mine has closed.

I am a farmer whose property borders the mine area along the Dargo – Bairnsdale road, the Fernbank – Glenaladale road and Cheetles road. My family is fifth and sixth generation members of the Glenaladale community. The mine will be within 500 m of my home and I will receive no compensation. With the many off site impacts, this mine will most likely 'bully me' out of my family home and farm.

I am also a scientist who has worked in land, forest and bush fire management and have worked from 'on the ground' through to executive level in government. My work experience extends across Australia and overseas including post graduate study in sustainable development and regional and rural development. I have tried to be fair and understanding in studying this proposal but I conclude that this land use is unnecessarily destructive of too many values and a poor option and not the form of 'development' we as a country or society need.

My key concerns with this mining proposal are as follows:

Mine profile

The mine is an operation of digging up the ore and sluicing, then tumbling the material to separate the ore out which is then trucked away to go overseas for processing. The overburden is pushed back in and rehabilitation of the area attempted.

It is in essence a basic and dirty heavy industrial scale operation that applies little advanced technology. It will offer employment mainly for truck drivers.

It has considerable site impacts as the overburden is stripped away and the site trenched to win the ore. The site will 'blow' dust on windy days even with controls and it will be difficult to hold back water when there are heavy rain events particularly storm events. There will be constant light and noise pollution making the area unliveable for locals.

The mine will close in twenty years or earlier when the easily won ore has been exploited and site rehabilitation completed. Droughts and hot dry summers are most likely in this period and successful rehabilitation will be very difficult.

Company credentials

Kalbar has no experience in managing a mineral sand mine operation. While it states it will buy in expertise, we and the overseeing agencies cannot assess the quality of management for this polluting industrial operation.

The EES is a poor unprofessionally prepared document. It is a collection of consultants reports each doctored to down play the impacts or potentially damaging information. The reports are poorly integrated, repetitive and unnecessarily bulky making it hard for all, especially lay readers to follow and fully comprehend.

The EES and the Works Approval carry many issues and uncertainties that are not adequately answered and leave the reader unsure of what is proposed. For example, there are three options proposed for trucking routes. One route is proposed in case the Avon River rail bridge is not completed by 2021. This is simply silly as this work is progressing and the mine if it wins approval (unlikely), it will not be in production at this time anyway. Having three options indicates the mine management has not done the hard analysis on options and may well be playing games using the rail bridge as a distraction. This makes it very difficult for the community to judge the impact of the operation and gives little confidence that the company will operate efficiently, ethically and honestly.

This uncertainty on how the mine may develop means approval realistically cannot be given. For example, it is unclear if the mine management will be able to gain access to private land to mine, build facilities and bring in services. The water required has not been sourced and this is a fundamental resource issue.

The company has not provided enough, if any standards to show the tolerances and performance measures required. The provision of working and exacting standards is a fundamental requirement in quality management. This is a serious deficiency and gives no confidence that there will be sound and effective oversight of the operation.

Government credentials in overseeing mining

Successive Victorian governments have approved as I understand, all but one mining operations despite often strong opposition. This includes similar sand mining operations including the Iluka mineral sands mine at Douglas in western Victoria that has been abandoned leaving a legacy of a massive unfinished work site and dump that is not rehabilitated that continues to daily to pollute the local area. Feedback from the locals is that the noise, vibration and dust was far worse than they were told to expect. They would have opposed the operation on what they now have to endure.

My experience with mining is as a government officer I helped facilitate the development of the Benambra base metal mine. Through poor or non-existent government oversight and involvement, the mines operation has left the state with a toxic legacy and no return. For example, the rehabilitation bond was reduced to an unworkable figure after government intervention, the ore body was stripped of the easily mined high yielding copper, and the state left with a massive toxic tailings dam

that will turn to acid unless a covering of water is maintained. The dam is at the headwaters of the Tambo River that drains directly into the Gippsland lakes. The main beneficiaries of this waste of a precious resource were the company directors who quickly abandon the mine once production became more marginal. There was no government mining expertise applied and the company should have been forced, to take low grade ore and extend the mines life.

Locals only gained short term employment in basic jobs.

While governments routinely support mining operations despite often strong, objective and expert opposition, informed community groups are now stepping up and using avenues like the courts to oppose inappropriate mining proposals. The community is effectively bypassing out of touch and slow reacting governments. This approach has been successful in halting new coal mine developments. I hope other avenues will be used by this community if government is not courageous and sensible enough to act appropriately on the strong evidence that this is an inappropriate development and land use. That will be unfortunate.

Ability to manage risk

There are many risks with the proposal. The most serious are;

- The mining operation is within 300m of the Mitchell River and virtually hangs out over the lucrative and needed vegetable industry. The mining best practice may contain dust contamination to at best, 90%. Vegetable growers therefore must expect that their products will be contaminated with potentially contaminated dust especially during the hot, dry and very windy summers. There will then be competition for precious river water – to damp down the dust contamination or to irrigate crops.
- Ability to contain water runoff from deluges that are not uncommon in this area. The soils are dispersible and dam banks will be prone to failure that will spill contaminated water directly into the Mitchell River.
- Rehabilitation will be difficult. The area has just experienced four years of the drought rated as the worst in European history and more are expected with climate change making the climate hotter and drier. Dust will blow off the sites where rehabilitation has been attempted and this will continue after the mine closes. It is a continuing pollution problem with the Iluka Western District mine site.
- Truck accident are expected with 80 movements each day off site and many more onsite. The consultants rated this as high risk and the controls that can be imposed are at best basic like heightened training. These B Double trucks are a real risk for the local community.

Real returns for the state and the community

Considering the disruption this operation will cause and the many risks, the returns for the state are minimal and compared to the well-established and prosperous

vegetable industry. The only real beneficiaries are the company directors and ten maybe twenty years employment for mainly truck drivers. The enterprise returns a surprisingly small return and has a short but dramatic and harmful life and a legacy that will well remain for centuries.

There are no benefits for the locals except if they take on say a truck driving job. Those living nearby will be forced to leave as the dust, noise, vibration, lighting and 24-hour traffic will destroy the tranquillity of this peaceful and productive rural area. There are real health concerns from the contaminated and radioactive dust.

The social network and relationships that link this community will be fractured. Families will move away. There will be a constant industrial activity in the middle of the community with rerouted roads, heavy laden trucks and strangers moving continually through the district.

Cultural heritage destruction

Prior to European settlement, the first nation people actively managed Country for food, shelter and cultural needs. There is evidence of their presence all over my farm - axes, chippings and grinding stones. The gullies and creek would have been a rich source of food and the high hills and the plateau provided camp sites, the sea breeze in summer and viewing on what other mobs were doing.

The consultants report on Aboriginal heritage is under done. The mine site would be rich in artefacts if it was properly assessed.

Mining the site will destroy the land and is completely contrary to the Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporations statements in their attitude published in their 'Whole-of-Country' Plan. This plan succinctly shows how this mine is so destructive and out of step with the proper management of the cultural and natural environment.

Everything is connected – the mine destroys not only the land connection of gullies to the river and the roll of the hills but also the spiritual and heritage connection

Every bit matters – all land is important and values exist

Don't wait until its gone – this plan quote says it all – 'when you lose a site it is gone forever. We need to act now to prevent further loss of environmental and cultural values'

Take only what you need – the minerals sought here can be easily sourced elsewhere and through recycling. There is no need for this mine

Seek collective benefits – there are no long term or even mid-term benefits for the community. The community will be left with a destroyed landscape and potentially ongoing pollution from dust and slumping

We have a right to be on our Country – the attitude and concerns of the Traditional Owners must be heard and respected here in what will be the destruction of their Country.

Our Country should be managed in harmony with our traditional ways – the mine is completely destructive to traditional ways and out of step with first nation ways of managing Country.

The ignoring of cultural values of this land and approving its destruction is not consistent with the national direction of protecting our Aboriginal history. This particularly applies to mining as the impacts are irreversible and destructive.

There is no doubt that this site would show a rich long term and varied Aboriginal history if it had been properly assessed. The continual breaking of the bonds of the first nation people with Country is our loss and so destructive and so often unnecessary with limited narrow short-term gains as in this case.

Historical and community loss

The early European settlers (including my ancestors) cleared the land from around one hundred and seventy years ago. The land has been used for grazing and yearly, has produced significant quantities of wool and meat and supported local families and the wider district.

The Glenaladale community has always prided itself as independent, self-sufficient, with strong leadership and a community that looks after all its members. It has been a leader in Young Farmers, CWA, CFA, Landcare and sport where it won thirteen A Grade premierships in a row during the 1950's and 60's. It had its own primary school (Woodglen) up until the mid-2000's due to strong local action resisting forced closure.

The Fingerboards has always been a meeting place for locals. Cattle and sheep sales were held in community yards. The rabbit trappers would leave their catch to be picked up under the huge old cypress. The Fingerboards has been the staging area for trucks for the recent repeated bush fires. It now has a developed visitor stopping area and has descriptions of the community and natural environment on a notice board. This is rare in rural areas and shows the pride locals have in their district.

The mine will destroy these local connections that hold a rural community together. Even the rerouting of roads will break connections and use. For example, I use the Fernbank-Glenaladale road at least monthly to move sheep to my property along Cheetles road. This will be impossible with the rerouting of the roads and the amount of truck movements.

Many in the community will have to reassess if they want to stay in an area plagued with dust, noise, heavy truck movements and numerous strangers. This will lead to a rapid breakdown of what is an exceptional community that will have to rebuild on a changed and poorer landscape when the mine closes in twenty short years.

Environmental loss

The landscape and the loss of seven hundred old trees simply cannot be replaced. While vegetation can be planted, it will never replace the majestic many hundred-year-old trees. The native ground animals and birds will not have suitable habitat for decades.

The farmers have been progressively replanting native vegetation across Glenaladale. The farm land has been refenced to give better control of grazing as part of preparation for ongoing droughts.

It is expected that there will be ongoing soil slumping after rehabilitation. As well, drainage will have to be redefined and erosion will be expected. The soil micro biota will take decades to re-establish.

The shadow over all rehabilitation is the seasons and extended very dry periods are expected. During these times the soil will blow off the bared areas. It will be impossible to damp down all areas continually for years and with the volumes needed. This will be disastrous for neighbouring homes, farms and especially the very prosperous vegetable industry.

Competition for water and resource allocation

The mine will need extremely high volumes of water to function and this will be ongoing. A simple analysis shows that the water the mine is demanding will bring a far greater return if used for growing more vegetables. More of the plains country could be opened up for this use with the additional water. The needed healthy products would feed into what is already a prosperous clean green industry which has a strong local base in business, management and expertise.

A worrying development that is likely to arise is competition for water in the extremely dry periods that will occur. The mine will be demanding water to alleviate heavy dust movements and the farmers also to keep vegetables alive and growing.

Tarnishing of the regions image

The image of this prosperous East Gippsland region of being 'clean green' is building and well accepted. It is built on the production of vegetables and other natural products like fish, meat, wool and fruit. It is also strongly linked to nature-based tourism that prospers with the Gippsland Lakes, the extensive forest and the alps. The friendly and accommodating East Gippsland community is strongly part of this image and intent on developing the industry. As well, many families are moving to the region to live and 'clean green' image is a strong motivator prompting the move.

Putting an open cut mine in the entry end of the region virtually destroys this image. As well, with adding in the offsite impacts of dust, noise and heavy truck movements compounds the problem. Travellers to the natural and culturally significant Mitchell River National Park will have to travel through the industrial activity of the mine and

avoid heavily laden trucks. The many and increasing number of visitors to Dargo and the alps will also have to drive through the mine area.

There are far better alternatives

Mining is an exploitive industry. In these progressive times and with smart technology, there must be alternatives to simply digging up material and sending it off overseas to be processed. This is 1960's type thinking and approach.

To get these rare materials, surely smart recycling is the first alternative source. The use of smart substitutes must be fostered rather than simply going for the lower cost alternative such as simply digging up more ore.

If mining is the only way, then sites that do the least harm must be exploited. The main driver must not be simply best return for the company directors, rather what is the best for all. There are many sites for these materials around Australia with less site and off-site impacts. Consumers may have pay a slightly more for the high technology equipment.

To manage this industry so all benefit will require strong government direction and control. We definitely cannot afford to repeat the mistakes with this dirty industry like in Western Victoria.

The right decision

This mine cannot be approved based on the objective evidence, the inherent risks and even by questioning the need. I ask that the panel to not approve the development and close of what has been a blight on this area for a decade. It is important that there is closure and conditional approval by trying to fix the poorly presented documents is not given as that will simply prolong what is an unworkable and incompatible development for this area.

