

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

724

Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Michelle Barnes

Organisation: Gippsland Community Fire Watch

Affected property:

Attachment 1: GCFW_EES_Submi

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission.



FINGERBOARDS MINERAL SANDS MINE PROPOSAL

SUBMISSION TO THE EES INQUIRY – OCTOBER 2020

To the Inquiry and Advisory Committee members:

Gippsland Community Fire Watch wishes to register strong opposition to Kalbar Operation's Fingerboards mineral sands mine at Glenaladale.

We acknowledge the Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Owners of the country which Kalbar proposes to mine.

We represent over 200 members who live in the Gippsland and East Gippsland regions of eastern Victoria where this mine is proposed. Our members value the wonderful environmental attributes of eastern Victoria and will always advocate for their responsible custodianship and management.

We believe this proposal conflicts with the above stated values. It threatens country and community alike.

This mine will interfere with the healthy function of natural systems and ecosystems. Rivers, catchments, aquifers, water quality, water flows, hydrological processes, air quality, geology and landform, fauna and habitat will be disrupted, degraded, destroyed over the 1675 ha mining / infrastructure area, and far beyond.

The health and economic impacts to people, businesses and the community will be huge. The horticulture industry 500 meters downstream at Lindenow will be contaminated by

toxic radioactive dust, which Kalbar admits will be hard to control. Once the farmer's product is contaminated, they could lose their clean green status, and their \$155 million dollar a year contracts to export fresh veggies all over Australia and the world.

Lindenow is known as 'Victoria's Food Bowl', and employs around 2000 people, with a long-term outlook. Kalbar state their mine may create 200 jobs, however we don't know how many of those will be local, but we DO know they'll be short term. Open-cut mining within 350 meters of the Mitchell River threatens thousands of direct and indirect jobs across East Gippsland in tourism, horticulture, fishing and more. The Ramsar listed Gippsland Lakes 25 km downstream could suffer awful consequences to it's flows and aquatic health, directly impacting all of it's dependent businesses. A toxic, degraded environment is no place to holiday, no place to run a business, and no place live a healthy life.

We have faced some serious environmental challenges over the last few years, including bushfires, drought, and water shortages – all made worse by escalating climate change. The bushfires of 2019-2020 ravaged over 75% of East Gippsland's native forests. Authorities struggled, and in most cases failed to contain these fires – at least not before the damage was already done. Kalbar's open-cut mine proposal threatens to exacerbate these climate impacts, and we could see worsening fires threatening communities in years to come. Mining operations require Kalbar to extract 3 to 4 billion litres from the Mitchell River's winterfill flows, as well as the La Trobe aquifer. This will leave farmers, irrigators, residents and fire fighters in an even more desperate situation.

Natural values within the project area are high, with species of flora, fauna and vegetation communities that are protected at national, state and regional levels. Around 788 mature hollow-bearing trees (HBT) will be destroyed. HBTs provide critical habitat for a wide range of native fauna. Removal of HBTs is listed under the *Flora & Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* as a '*threatening process*'. Loss of HBTs is a serious issue in Australia due to land clearing practices, and they are fast disappearing from the landscape. Hollows take over 120 years to form in these old trees, which is why they can't merely be replaced by offsets - every single one needs to be retained in the landscape.

The project area is of great importance to Gunaikurnai people. Kalbar hasn't consulted properly with Gunaikurnai people, and the EES ignores their input. This mine will desecrate and destroy a significant cultural heritage landscape, along with every artifact, scar tree and burial site in its path. The country at Lindenow / Glenaladale sits in the context of the fertile Mitchell River alluvial plains and grassy woodlands. It was occupied and used heavily by Gunaikurnai tribes prior to colonial invasion, and it contains high densities of archaeological artifacts and irreplaceable cultural heritage values. Gunaikurnai people today are connected to this landscape on many levels – cultural, spiritual and physical.

The general community of Lindenow, Glenaladale, Bairnsdale and surrounding towns will be impacted by dusts generated by mining blowing in on the prevailing westerly winds.

Airborne dusts from mineral sands mining contain a nasty cocktail of chemicals dangerous to human health, including respirable crystalline Silica, Arsenic, Chromium, Thorium, Titanium, Uranium, and Vanadium. Silica dust causes lung disease / cancer. Toxic dust will impact the water supply for Bairnsdale and surrounding towns, which comes from the Mitchell River and is stored in two large dams at Woodglen – just 3.5 km from the mine. This is not the future we want for our community in East Gippsland.

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members, we urge you to reject this inappropriate and dangerous mining proposal.

The EES gives no guarantees of safety, no guarantees the tailings dam won't fail and spill fine tailings, flocculants and heavy metals into our rivers and aquifers, no guarantee that Kalbar will be able control the dust, no guarantee of mine scar rehabilitation, no guarantee that toxic bioaccumulation won't reside in our soils many years from now.

The Fingerboards mine proposal poses too many risks to our way of life, environment, health, economy and long-term future.

Sincerely,

Michelle Barnes

On behalf of **Gippsland Community Fire Watch**