

# Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory  
Committee - EES

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**Request to be heard?:** Yes

**Full Name:** Jessica Clare Roberts

**Organisation:**

**Affected property:**

**Attachment 1:** EES\_Submission.d

**Attachment 2:**

**Attachment 3:**

**Comments:** See attached submission

Dear Enquiry and Advisory Committee members,

I am writing this submission about the EES for the Fingerboards mineral sands mine project as I strongly oppose the mine as it is a highly inappropriate location due to the natural surrounds and proximity to the Mitchell River and the Ramsar listed Gippsland Lakes. The potential environmental and ecological impact on our area is, in my opinion, not worth the risks. Some of my major concerns include the proposed water usage, impact on existing agriculture and tourism industries and the disregard for the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

I have lived in East Gippsland for 20 years, I love the diversity of nature that we are so lucky to live nearby; the rivers, national parks including forests and temperate rainforests, Lakes, beaches, the mountains. I love kayaking, hiking and camping. I live within 60km and work within 35km of the proposed site, however if this mine is allowed to go ahead I will be even more directly affected by the potential expansion of the mine operations to Mossface which is less than 5km from my home. I refer to our property often as my little piece of paradise, paradise being the entirety of East Gippsland. I chose to move here 20 years ago and am raising my children here as I think we are very fortunate to live in our natural surroundings. I worry about the impact on land values, future health of community members and I want to protect the environment for the future of my children and their children.

Kalbar Operations Pty Ltd have stated that over 3 billion litres of water (3GL) is required annually for up to 15 years. This advised amount has changed over the years, can you guarantee that they won't increase this estimate once the mine is up and running? There are competing uses of this water. Water is particularly paramount to the existing vegetable growing industries but also other agriculture including cropping, sheep, beef and dairy enterprises; industries that contribute significantly to the local economy unlike the mine that will in fact not deliver many local jobs at all and only provide economic benefits to an international company.

Due to the bushfires in the direct area of the proposed mine in 2014 and the expansive bushfires throughout East Gippsland in 2019/2020 it is also at the forefront of my mind that we need to reserve water for future protection from bushfires not be giving it away to a water guzzling mine. The reason the mine will need to use so much water is in the treatment but also, and quite significantly in my mind, is for dust suppression. Toxic dust.

Kalbar have admitted they will be mining radioactive substances and the dust once these minerals are brought to the surface and turned to dust will disperse throughout the environment posing not only a risk of contaminating our waterways but detrimental effects on human health. The full analysis of the ore body has not been disclosed. I don't trust the EES, commissioned by Kalbar, to give us a full and true indication of the health risks. Can you ensure this information is fully disclosed and closely examined for the risks to health? You members, have a duty of care to the local people and I implore you to not add to the cancer burden of the community by approval of this mine. Other potential health risks include lung disease from respirable silica.

Kalbar cannot fully mitigate the risk of the dust, full of contaminations such as silica and heavy metals blowing over the local vegetation and farming land, it has been proven that this can lead to bioaccumulation of heavy metals in soil and pasture for many kilometres around mine sites that can lead to elevated readings in livestock and native animals.

We need water to survive. The science indicates that with climate change we will continue to have more extreme weather events, similar to the recent drought, we can expect more severe and long

lasting droughts for which we need to reserve and be careful for which uses we allocate the precious water we do have.

In my mind it is not a question of if, but when will the surrounding waterways be contaminated by the mine. As with drought, due to climate change we will see more frequent and severe flooding. In the event of a flood the 90 hectare tailings dam will inevitably release the tailings waste and the flocculants used to treat the tailings into the nearby creeks and the Perry and Mitchell Rivers which in turn feed into the Gippsland Lakes. Even without a flood there is a risk of the waste and chemicals leaching from the huge dam into groundwater, bores and aquifers. The Lakes are Ramsar protected and should they not also be protected as per the State Environment Protection Policy (Water) developed by the Victorian Government? What about protecting the associated fish and birdlife? And Australia's unique icon, the Platypus?

The Gippsland Lakes and other natural assets in our area play a significant role in our tourism industry – boating, fishing, water sports and recreation. Just like the agriculture industries, the tourism industry that already exists should be protected and enhanced rather than providing a green light to the mine which has the significant potential to ruin existing tourism. Who will want to travel to an area that has toxic dust and a great big scar on the scenery? This would be a significant financial disaster to the region.

The maximum life of the mine is 15 years, the life of existing agriculture and tourism industries is indefinite and should be protected and enhanced. The risks to our community if this mine were to go ahead is huge and wide reaching. Socio-economic risk to community is real, the mine could in fact result in loss of jobs in our local economy rather than the weak argument by Kalbar that they will bring jobs to our community. I work as a Victim Support worker, there is significant Family Violence and crimes against the person already committed in our area, if the mine contaminates our natural environment and we do see the damage to and loss of existing industries there will be further economic strain and in my view this will lead to increased crime in our area.

Kalbar Operations has stated they will cut down many hundreds of mature trees that currently provide shelter for livestock and native animals. The trees are an important support for biodiversity in the area, including rare and endangered species. Adequate surveys have not been undertaken to determine what species could be impacted in the directly impacted and adjoining areas of native habitat. The removal of these trees will cause significant damage to habitat and our local environment. The offset requirements for the company are in no way adequate and cannot replace the loss of habitat and destruction of visual amenity. Many of these trees have been around for 100's of years and any that are planted in replacement will not grow to the same size as the existing trees in my lifetime, nor possibly the lifetime of my children.

The ancient trees that are poised to be cut down are also a significant part of the cultural connection to the land, air and water of our traditional owners of the land; the Gunaikurnai people which include the Brataualung, Brayakaulung, Brabralung, Krauatungalung and Tatungalung family clans that have occupied the land for more than 25,000 years. The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Corporation and the Bairnsdale Koori Youth Council have unequivocally stated their position against Kalbar. We must respect their Native Title and their views against the proposed mine as disregarding them is yet a further step away from reconciliation.

East Gippsland, the directly affected area and nearby areas are "home to some of the oldest and most substantial cultural significant sites within Australia; rock formation, ceremonial sites and training and hunting grounds found in and around Glenaladale are extremely meaningful to our

Gunaikurnai people” as stated by Casey Ritchie of the Bairnsdale Koori Youth Council at an East Gippsland Shire meeting in 2019. I was there to witness this most powerful statement and stand with the Gunaikurnai people in their plea to preserve these sites and want to see the continuation of their rich cultural history rather than have Kalbar continue to divide our community.

The life of the mine is estimated at 15 years and there is no guarantee of full rehabilitation. It rarely happens and even if it did it would take many more than 15 years to return the area to pre-existing condition. There are many examples of areas being left with a toxic waste dump such as the Douglas Mine at Balmoral in Western Victoria. A more local example is of the Benambra Mine that operated between 1992 and 1996 until the company operating it went into Administration, full rehabilitation of that site has not happened to this day, 24 years and \$7 million dollars of taxpayer’s money later, and in the meantime there has been significant toxins released from the tailings dam into the Tambo River and subsequently the Gippsland Lakes.

Can you guarantee the cost of rehabilitation won’t be left to the community? There are many examples where the rehabilitation bonds placed on companies have been grossly inadequate to cover the costs even if the company is still in existence and made responsible at the end of the project.

The Amendment to the East Gippsland Planning Scheme has been made without community consultation. Why isn’t this a matter for the East Gippsland Shire Council to determine? The amendment allows for compulsory acquisition of private land to be used for Kalbar infrastructure that will be located outside the mining project boundary for water pipelines, bore pumps, roadworks and rail siding. This will in fact increase the area of the mine project area and result in further vegetation removal and loss of visual amenity. Why wasn’t this included in the mine project area? The EES therefore does not paint a comprehensive picture of the extent of the mine, the loss of habitat, irreversible destruction of environment, flora, fauna and aesthetics of the area.

Thank you to the members of Enquiry and Advisory Committee for the opportunity to make a submission and air my extensive concerns for our environment and community should this mining project be approved.

Jessica Clare Roberts.