

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

766

Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Honor May Waller

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: EES_Submission_

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: see attached submission

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

I am writing in response to the Environmental Effects Statement (EES) released by Kalbar Operation Pty Ltd regarding their Finger Boards Mineral Sands Project. I strongly object to this project because it is an inappropriate place to site an open pit mine. The EES describes an open pit mine with close proximity to the Mitchell River, poor soil structure for building dams, and the potential to detrimentally impact well established and profitable businesses in the Glenaladale, Woodglen and Lindenow regions. The mines proximity to the Mitchell River (less than 500 meters), Bairnsdale's main water source and one of the few undammed major rivers in Australia, makes it an inappropriate place to have an open pit mine. The soil structure is not amenable to building dams and the risk of a tailings and sediments dam failing is high. This would contaminate the Mitchell river and Perry River catchments and eventually the Gippsland lakes. The mine is going to be a large open pit mine which will destroy several arable farms and put at risk the well established vegetable and tourist industry which already contribute millions of dollars to Victoria's economy. This EES demonstrates a mine that does not align with the economic, social and environmental objectives of the state of Victoria

My Connection to the proposed Mine Site

I grew up at [REDACTED] displayed in Image 1. It will be adjacent to Kalbars proposed open pit mine (image 1). My father (Ewan Waller) still lives there and runs 600 merino sheep on this property and two other properties on Chettles rd and Friday Creek Rd which are also close to the mine site. It was my home for 20 years and is still a safe haven I enjoy regularly. I really hope my daughter will get to experience the area the way I did. When I was not helping with the cows and sheep on our farm, most days as a child and teenager I spent time riding horses with friends throughout the proposed mine area. We regularly rode along Fernbank-Glenaladale Rd, Chettles Rd, Honeysuckle Rd and Bairnsdale-Dargo Rd. I regularly ran the Fernbank Glenaladale Rd from our house to the Finger Boards and back, often at night. I grew up in the Woodglen community which had a strong network of families that supported each other with child minding and social activities. My family regularly attended and had a blast at the Glen cricket club social events. I worked at Glen Valley Produce, Bonnacord Quality Produce, and for Phil and Debbie Hammond over a number of years. These are all farms vegetable farms on the Woodglen flats that are heavily reliant on the Mitchell River for irrigation of their crops. Daily activities on these farms involved planting, picking, processing and packing broccoli, sweet corn, onions, carrots, capsicums, cabbages and beans. This region has provided me the best start to life I could ask for and I have gone on to become

Submission regarding the EES for Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mine Project by Honor Waller

a successful Veterinary Surgeon who has contributed to regional areas such as Yarram, Heyfield, Drouin and Traralgon since graduating from Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga in 2011. I am currently working at Yarram Veterinary Centre, own and run a 350 cow dairy farm near Foster with my partner and am raising our 2 year old daughter.

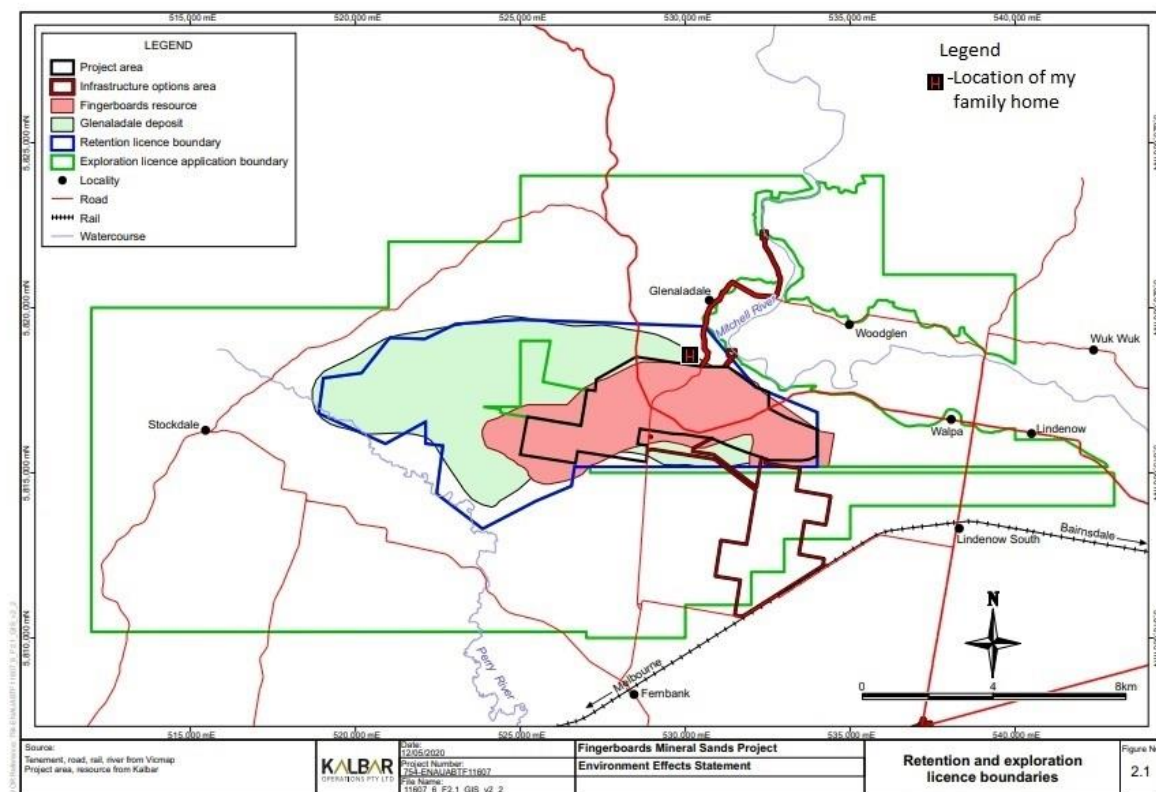


Image 1 - Location of family home in relation to Finger Boards mine area (Source: Finger Boards Mineral Sands Project: Environmental Effects Statement. Edited by Honor Waller)

How the project could affect Established Businesses

From 'as soon as I was useful' years old I have been helping out on my parents farm, my uncles farm and friends farms in the Woodglen area. When I was 15 I immediately started working in the Woodglen community for Glen Valley Produce and Phil and Debbie Hammond. It gave me a sense of pride and accomplishment to be able to earn and spend my own money, whilst instilling a strong work ethic which has stayed with me. It also gave me an insight into what a powerhouse the vegetable industry on the Woodglen and Lindenow flats is. At the time, year around these family

farms supported 5 to 15 workers directly through jobs on farm. They also supported many other jobs indirectly through the logistics supply chain with truck drivers, warehouse workers, administration officers, mechanical engineers and many others being used to service these farms.

I went on to work at Bonnacord Quality Produce in my gap year and during my time at university on the summer holidays. It is a massive family owned multigenerational business that employs hundreds of people locally in their vegetable growing business. They also have their own trucking company and a large herd of beef cattle as a natural progression to servicing their vegetable business and reducing their organic waste.

Bonnacord Quality Produce have thousands of acres along the Woodglen and Lindenow flats and contribute in a major way to the East Gippsland economy. They, like the previous farms mentioned, are heavily reliant on the irrigation water supplied by the Mitchell River system. These family owned businesses are well established and resilient. They have grown since I worked for them and rely on the Woodglen flats and Mitchell River to continue to grow vegetables. They have a clean and green image that would be tarnished if dust from the mine contaminated the vegetables. The Mitchell River is vital to their ongoing success. Any contamination of the Mitchell River with heavy metals, hazardous materials or chemical spills is untenable and would have devastating impacts to the farms (and people) all along the Mitchell River that rely on it for irrigation water and drinking water.

How the Finger Boards Project will affect the Mitchell River and by extension the Businesses and Native Flora and Fauna that rely on it

The Mitchell River catchment and Perry River catchment are at risk from the Fingerboards project. The EES refers to sediment runoff being less than 941 mg/L (almost 1%) during storm events and that spillway discharges will be allowed (for reference saline is 0.9% sodium chloride). Water from dams on site will also be released into the Mitchell (EES chapter 9, page 40). They conservatively estimate an increase in dust in the air of 11% after dust mitigation strategies at the mine. Seepage from tailings dams will get into the groundwater. A lot of these chemicals and elements will end up in the Mitchell River, and from there into the Gippsland Lakes. They will include a mix of heavy metals, radionuclides, processing chemicals and debris from the mine site.

The temporary tailings storage facility (dam) would house fines tailings from the mining process. Although labelled as temporary the tailings dam would have a life of 5 years, and as other mines in caretaker mode have shown this time of usage could be extended indefinitely. The EES labels a tailings dam failing as low risk, but it would have extreme impacts on waterways downstream which are the Perry River and Mitchell River. Sediment would smother habitats and contaminate the water leading to increased flora and fauna deaths. The effects would be ongoing for up to 20 years. Not only would this affect native flora and fauna, but it would contaminate the irrigation and drinking water drawn from the Mitchell River by many families and family farms.

The EES repeatedly refers to harvesting winterfill from the Mitchell River and surface water from the mine site. They need 3 million litres of water annually to conduct operations. This will limit the available water for the established vegetable industry to use, and reduce environmental flows needed in the Mitchell River annually to help turn over water in the Gippsland lakes. The former issue will directly affect the amount of vegetables that these vegetable businesses can grow resulting in decreased direct and indirect jobs supported by the vegetable industry. The latter issue will have a large effect on the tourist industry and possibly commercial fishing industry. It will potentially also greatly reduce the biodiversity in the fragile Gippsland Lakes environment by the increasing salinity and nutrient loads in the Gippsland lakes and decreasing oxygen levels. This happens during natural droughts due lack of rainfall. Any man made droughts that will affect the Gippsland Lakes from excessive winterfill harvesting need to be avoided. Fish kill events are rare along the Mitchell River currently. Reducing the availability of water into the Mitchell River through excessive pumping and surface water catchment will increase the likelihood that nutrient concentration will increase and oxygen levels decrease in the Mitchell River and Gippsland lakes, creating a poor environment for fish to survive.

Fairness of the EES submission process

The way Kalbar has presented the EES is very flawed. The EES is over ten thousand pages long with tables that are unreadable due to their small print size (for example see pages 7- 12 in Attachment F: Risk Report). The general public should not have to wade through thousands of pages of diatribe to determine the effect the project will have on their community. An open and transparent process should be followed as Kalbar should have nothing to hide. Making parts of a document unreadable is a dishonest way to present data, blatantly undermining the ability of the community to weigh up facts for and against the project.

Conclusion

Historically Victoria only has one mine that has been successfully rehabilitated and there are currently hundreds of mines in caretaker mode or abandoned around the state. The tailings dam leaking into the Tambo River at the previously abandoned Benambra mine in East Gippsland, is a reminder of the onus on state government to clean up after mining companies have taken their profits and abandoned their mines. This mine was rehabilitated at a cost of \$7 million to tax payers. The transition of the Iluka mine in the Horsham region into a radioactive material holding facility highlights the potential great cost these mining projects can have on future generations of Victorian families. The chances of the open pit mine at the Fingerboards being fully rehabilitated is less than 0.5% if you look at past performance.

The Finger Boards Mineral Sands project is not compatible with the economic, social and environmental objectives of the state of Victoria. Kalbar should be denied the right to mine a finite resource when the activity risks so much to our community and the established profitable businesses currently operating in the Glenaladale and Woodglen regions.

Thank you for reading my submission.

Kind Regard,

Honor Waller BVSc