

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

900

Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Robert Sparks

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1:

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

Submission for the EES of Kalbar Operations Ltd and proposal for an open cut mineral sands mine at the Fingerboards in East Gippsland Shire.

Background

In 2012 Kalbar, having developed and won approval for a Bauxite mine in Indonesia sold the mine and with its almost \$30million profit bought Rio Tinto's Glenaladale Mineral Sands Mine project in 2013 [Kalbar website]The Project had been sold to Metallica Minerals/ Oresome Resources.

Several direct Stakeholders at the time who are the same landowners affected by the project today, report that the regional managers and employees of those early companies who had relinquished the project claiming it was unsuitable due to its location, were open and understanding unlike those of Kalbar Resources, and would explain exactly what they were intending to do and regularly gave progress reports and discussed the project requirements. Unlike Kalbar Resources, their conduct was professional, courteous and considerate at all times. After the 2014 bushfires, although Rio no longer owned the Project, one of their field officers who had had a good rapport with the local Glenaladale community organised Rio Tinto to donate \$30,000 to the Bushfire Recovery in 2014.

The field officers, as they were called, were aware of the proximity of the vegetable growing area and said that a buffer zone of properties would be purchased around the horticulture area to protect the vegetable crops in the Lindenow Valley. Several of the direct stakeholders, involved at that time, have commented on the differences in the behaviour of these past Project owners and Kalbar Resources representatives. In particular they have remarked on the lack of knowledge of Kalbar about the region, its ignorance of community dynamics, of local traditions, interests, lifestyle values, appreciation of the environment especially the Mitchell River and the Lakes, the experience and local knowledge of the farmers and their plans for the future.

When Kalbar arrived in 2014, having purchased the project from Metallica/Oresome in 2013, and informed the community about their intentions to develop an open cut mineral sands mine, the predominant concern of the residents was how much water would be required for the mine, where the water would be sourced from, and the implication of an open cut mine so close to the river and the Lindenow Valley vegetable crops. Yet Kalbar CEO at the time, Rob Bishop and their Geologist Neil O'Loughlin spent the whole of the first few public meetings presenting a geology lesson with beautiful slides of how and why mineral sands are formed. The participants filled the hall yet they left feeling frustrated and disgruntled at having none of their concerns addressed and no clear understanding of what the project involved or how it would affect them.

On Kalbar's original map of the project area the Mitchell River and the vegetable crops were not even shown until community pressure forced Kalbar to revise their map and include the iconic and heritage listed Mitchell River. Kalbar's responses to questions about water and the major aspects of the project they outlined were superficial and apparently not based on any comprehensive environmental considerations. The local and wider community had to listen to countless solutions offered by Kalbar over the years about how Kalbar would source the water required - their first solution being to fill a mine void with winter fill water from the Mitchell River, followed by their suggestion of a pipe line from the Latrobe Aquifer, using managed Aquifers and others. One by ^{one} Kalbar has realised these solutions as being inadequate and the latest and last proposal is water sourced from the Mitchell River, a multi hectare bore field, and a system of 19 dams groundwater on the gullies of three creeks which flow into the Mitchell River and help keep the river water healthy with flows to flush the system and prevent excessive salinity. No local farmer would even dare ask the CMA for permission to dam a gully that would reduce the flow of water into other farmers' dams - which Kalbar's dams will definitely do.

At their last Community meeting Victor Hugo, the CEO dismissed further questions about the source of water by informing the community that it didn't matter anyway because Kalbar could get approval for the

mine without having to already have permission in place for how it would obtain the required water. When opposition to the project grew to include thousands of people in East Gippsland [petition in opposition to the mine project presented to Parliament with about 5,000 signatures of the local and Community and the communities surrounding Bairnsdale] Kalbar tried to halt discussion and stop further opposition by telling them that all the information would be in the EES and people shouldn't be discussing the issues concerning the mine until they had read the EES. At that time Kalbar's response to difficult questions was "it will be in the EES". Victor Hugo wrote a letter to the Bairnsdale Advertiser, the local newspaper ~~to~~ to stifle comment about the mine and went to the East Gippsland Shire Council to tell them not to support the Community's request to the Councillors to express the Community's concerns about the project. Yet, contradictory to this, EES guidelines as explained by Kalbar's consultant Coffey at a meeting in July 2016 suggested that the proponent should be consulting with the community during this time, guiding the community in discussions so that they are kept abreast of the proponent's plans.

It is important to mention also that since their arrival in our area Kalbar have specially selected staff who hold positions of influence in the East Gippsland Shire so that they can advocate on behalf of the proponent - such as being a Board Member of an influential organisation, holding a position in the East Gippsland Shire Council or a position as a consultant in a Government Authority. As these people have a financial interest in the project it would seem to be a conflict of interest that they use their positions to persuade people to trust in a project that has the potential to adversely impact many other members of their own community. This doesn't reflect well on the integrity of the proponent or its staff.

The EES

This document contains poorly compiled information and is very difficult to read. Although Victor Hugo [former CEO of Kalbar] tried to stop people discussing the project by assuring them that all the answers would be in the EES, there are many issues still not covered in the lengthy documents. I have selected those risks that my wife and I feel strongly about as there are too many (almost 200) to cover them all in this submission:

- Damage due to strong wind and heavy rain: There is no mention of how local weather patterns could impact on the distance dust travels and the consequence to the vegetable crops. Mitigation measures suggested by Kalbar such as using water to suppress the dust won't be effective in stopping dust from settling on the vegetable crops during heavy rain and strong wind, especially gusting winds. The amount of water available for dust suppression is obviously insufficient as Kalbar is still trying to apply for more water from the Mitchell River. Rain will wash sediment into the river and settle downstream on the flats.
- Risk of inadequate rehabilitation There will be huge problems with rehabilitation and it is unlikely that Kalbar will have access to enough good quality topsoil from its stockpiles to use for rehabilitation because it will blow in the wind and with time will lose its nutrient value and water retention properties. The proponent hasn't factored in the impacts of the 2014 bushfires in the region and the ongoing years of severe drought on the soil and existing vegetation. The soil will require fertiliser and although Kalbar says it will add clay to the soil to make it retain moisture more beneficially, that might not be a satisfactory solution because of the change from what the local vegetation is used to.
- Damage to the Tailings Dam: seeping from the tailings dam is very likely to happen and because of its location above the Perry System tailings could seep into the Chain of Ponds which is unique. The West Gippsland Catchment Management has been given two millions dollars funding to enhance, protect and preserve this ecologically important and valuable asset. The mitigation measures suggested by Kalbar reveal a lack of understanding about its importance.
- Damage to People's Health: airborne dust containing invisible particles of Silica will be blown by the strong north west winds onto the roofs of residents houses and pollute their tank water,

dams and pasture. Residents near Iluka's Douglas Mine have told us that they had huge problems with dust. Like Kalbar has promised in the EES, Iluka promised the local residents they would cease operations on very windy days. However when one resident asked them to stop work because of the strong winds he was told he would have to pay 74,000 dollars because that's what it would cost them to suspend mining for a day. Contaminants in the dust could disperse on the vegetable crops and be ingested by consumers. Even if this didn't happen the reputational damage to the Lindenow Valley because of negative public perception could lead to loss of income for their products and loss of employment or many of the workers in this industry.

Kalbar says there is Thoron and radon gas which are radioactive gases which are difficult to capture and control in spite of Kalbar's assurances that tailings and overburden will be placed in the mine void quickly enough every single time to prevent the risk of these gases dispersing. We believe that Kalbar has not demonstrated satisfactorily that it can prevent either its workers or the occupants of the 82 residences within two or so kilometres of the project area from the risk of cancer.

- **Damage to Tourism:** Tourism has always been one of the biggest contributors to the East Gippsland economy and as soon as the Covid restrictions are relaxed we see a strong tourism market. Recently East Gippsland has realised the need to enhance the Tourism opportunities for the area and it has been promoting Adventure Tourism and Eco based Tourism. The Mitchell River National Park, famed for its wilderness appeal, White Water Kayaking, rafting, bushwalking, horse riding and camping as well as exploring the popular den of Nargun, a cultural indigenous site belonging to the Gunaikurna is only four kilometres from the Fingerboards. East Gippsland tourism depends on our natural and beautiful environment. For Kalbar to say that people in Lakes Entrance [over 60 kilometres away] won't see the mine and its impacts is laughable. Recreational fishing will be a thing of the past if aquatic species are impacted by the chemicals in the flocculants that Kalbar intends using in the tailings dam or the excessive amount of sediment that will flow into the Mitchell River or the Algae on the Lakes if too much water is removed from the river for the mine- especially in dry spells which are sure to arrive in the 20 year time frame of the mining operations. Visitors to the Park will pass through the project area on their way and see an industrial type of landscape, bare of trees and with much of the distant views of mountains concealed by earth bunds. There will be above ground water pipes, upgraded tall power poles, noise of scrapers and bulldozers, big double trucks and on windy days, dust blowing from the mine site or the big double trucks on the roads. The 3-4 accommodation businesses close to the project area will probably go out of business as who would want to sleep with the overnight noise from machinery (2 bed and breakfast, Coonawarra Camp often used by school groups, horseriding camps at 'the Barn') which will be disturbing in spite of Kalbar's assurance that all but two residents at certain times won't be impacted by noise that exceeds EPA levels.

We are opposed to Kalbar's project. We believe the few jobs created will be far less than Kalbar claims.

We think the EES has relied on expensive consultants to try to find mitigation strategies to minimise what in fact will be major risks to our region's economy, our community's welfare and wellbeing

and will have a devastating impact on our environment that we will all regret.

B & R. SPARKS