

# Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory  
Committee - EES

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**Request to be heard?:** No - but please email me a copy of the  
Timetable and any Directions

**Full Name:** Jennifer Louise Cox

**Organisation:**

**Affected property:**

**Attachment 1:**

**Attachment 2:**

**Attachment 3:**

**Comments:** Please see attached document.

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

I am writing this submission regarding the EES for the Fingerboards mineral sands mine project. I have been following the development of this proposal for several years now. I strongly oppose the plan to create this mine and hope that you will also agree that it is grossly inappropriate to allow this project to go ahead.

I have been living in various parts of East Gippsland for the past 20 years after growing up in central Victoria and spending some years living by the Murray River. Whilst living in Central Victoria I was very familiar with the beauty of the national parks and waterways of the Surf Coast and with Northern Victoria, but East Gippsland was totally unknown to me and like another world away. Places like Bairnsdale were just a far-away place on the weather map that I had no idea about. I think this is probably the case for many Victorians who have not yet had reason to come this way. However, since life has brought me here and I have spent time getting to know the area I have grown to love East Gippsland for its National Parks, its beautiful waterways, fresh air and peaceful rural views. It has taken a long time as a single mum to be in a position to get out of the rental cycle and to be in my own home at last. I love the place I have chosen and the lifestyle it offers to my young children and we hope to enjoy it for many years to come.

My heart sinks at the thought of this area being opened up to mining.

Although I accept that with the modern way of living mines are necessary, I cannot accept that mining is acceptable here.

Considering the nature of the proposed location of the mine, I believe the risks to the environment and to the health of the community as far too great to be able to proceed. As with many beautiful bush filled areas, the East Gippsland community is already quite divided by the timber industry. Adding a mine to this mix will only add more divide and is already having a negative impact on the cohesiveness of the community and the mental health of landholders faced with the prospect of putting their livelihoods and plans for their properties on hold for the next 20 years.

There are landholders in the Glenaladale area who recognise the impact of colonial land clearing and the fragility of the landscape and its fragmented bushland and habitat. These passionate land holders have already started working towards rehabilitating their properties and reconnecting habitat areas, while remnant bushland, native grasses and seed trees still exist there. This landscape and its fauna cannot afford the removal of these mature trees which provide seed for migratory birds such as black cockatoos and hollows for locally rare sugar gliders and the endangered swifts parrot. A mine will set back the progress of improving this landscape not only for the 20 year duration of the mine, that could have seen many trees grow quite tall, but for the hundreds of years it takes for these trees to replace the seed and hollow bearing ones that will be removed if the mine goes ahead. With the current state of the world regarding climate change and species decline, we need to be planning to plant trees, not to remove them, particularly not for a cause that poses further risks to other aspects of the environment.

One of my biggest concerns regarding the mine revolves around water, with so many aspects it is hard to know where to begin. To allocate such a vast amount of water (at least

3GL) from the heritage listed Mitchell River, which runs into the Ramsar listed Gippsland Lakes system and from the aquifer, for the purposes of dust suppression and mining practices is unacceptable. The Lakes system and its aquatic life is already under stress and natural water flows should not be tampered with to this extent. With the likelihood of drought increasing with climate change we cannot waste this precious resource on dust suppression when it is needed for the production of food.

Some time ago I spoke with a representative from Kalbar who told me that the mine would not be deep enough to impact underground water. However, I have also spoken to farmers whose families have lived on the land at the mine site for generations. They tell me of spring fed dams that they rely on to water their stock during times of drought when all the other dams are dry. I cannot imagine how it could be possible to recreate such an asset once it has been disturbed by mining and believe this to be a critical and irreplaceable loss for the landholder.

If you have seen the landscape of the mine footprint, you will know that it has many steep hills and gullies, all working as a catchment for the nearby river. It is implausible to even imagine being able to put this back together effectively after mining has removed so much of its structure and integrity. Even within the Landscape Aesthetics and Visuals section of the EES there is a projected image of the site after rehabilitation which shows the land sloping in the opposite direction to how it currently falls.

I also do not have confidence that the tailings dams created for the mine will be sound enough to guarantee they do not fail or overflow. The leaking Benambra Mine is just one example of how these dams cannot be guaranteed. I believe that being so close to the Mitchell River, it would be foolishly careless to allow the construction of such a dam. As climate change develops we not only become more prone to drought but also to other major weather events such as torrential rains and flooding. During my time in East Gippsland I have seen several major flood events, where usually dry gullies turn to small rivers within an afternoon. It is hard for us to foresee the effects of climate change and the extreme weather events we may be faced with; however, it is well known that they are likely to become more severe and more frequent. If this mine were to proceed I would be praying every time we had such an event that their dams do hold, as the consequences of a tailings dam collapse in this location would be devastating for both the Mitchell and Perry Rivers, the lakes system, the aquifer and the vegetable industry downstream. We see images of such devastation happening to rivers due to mining in other parts of the world, I believe it is negligent to even consider the construction of such risky infrastructure so close to a river in such an undulating environment.

Another area that concerns me greatly is the dust that will be created and what that will mean for the air quality of this whole area. We are already impacted with times of poor air quality in this area due to bushfires and bushfire prevention strategies. I spoke to a friend who spent time in Western Australia working near a sand mine, he couldn't believe the amount of dust that was created from that mine and said that "Bairnsdale won't know what has hit it". This area is prone to very strong winds with gale warnings regularly being issued throughout the year. Upon moving here, I noticed the beautifully mild climate but wow, the wind was like I had never experienced before. I am concerned about these winds creating dust that will be uncontrollable by the mining company. Kalbar has acknowledged that there are radioactive substances being mined, including rare earths. I am aware that the full analysis of the ore body has not yet been disclosed within the EES and I am urging you to

please insist that this is thoroughly investigated and examined to ensure that if this dust blows onto the nearby vegetable farms, into drinking water tanks and reservoirs, people's homes and school playgrounds that you can be truly confident it is not going to be a health concern to any person or animal living not only near the mine site but in any of the surrounding towns. I have heard it mentioned that the mine will not operate on days of extreme wind, however I have also heard residents from other towns affected by mining who say that this is not what happened in their situation.

I worry for the quality of the vegetable produce that is grown just down the road/river from the mine and the effects of dust contamination to these crops that cater for the whole of the state and beyond. I also worry about the water we drink and the air we are to breathe..... now that I have finally found a place to settle with my children am I now going to be responsible for making them live in an environment that could be harmful to our health. I am not alone in feeling this way. I have spoken to expectant parents living in Bairnsdale, who have decided that if the mine goes ahead they will leave the area due to their concerns for their family's health.

Another aspect that is close to my heart is that East Gippsland is an area that is rich in Aboriginal history and culture, much of which has been tragically tainted by massacres and displacement, as in many areas of Australia. East Gippsland was a well populated area before European settlement. Within the footprint of the proposed mine, there are areas of known cultural significance, where scar trees and artifacts have been found. There are also areas that have not yet been fully examined for their archaeological or anthropological significance. The EES states that Aboriginal heritage sites are highly likely to be present and will be impacted. This is unacceptable. Over a year ago, Alan Solomon, a local Gunnai Kurnai man, stood up to speak at a council meeting where there was a proposal to object to the mine. He talked of the massacres and significance of this area to him and to the Aboriginal community and asked that a memorial be placed there instead. I feel it is disrespectful to disregard the areas significance to the Gunnai Kurnai People. Placing a mine where a memorial should be is not showing a commitment to reconciliation which to me is shameful.

There is talk of the mine creating jobs, however with all of the above concerns I ask that you consider all the jobs that will be lost as a result of the mine.

With the risks of dust pollution comes a risk to the vegetable industry, its clean green image and all who it employs, as no one wants to eat dusty, possibly contaminated produce.

With the potential impacts on the river and lakes system along with dusty air and the atmosphere of a mining town, there is a risk to the tourism industry, an industry that already creates employment for the area and has many avenues proposed for its expansion. Many people come from the city to visit this area to enjoy the fresh air and the waterways, for swimming, boating and fishing all of which could be impacted if the waterways are damaged. We should be working to improve the waterways rather than risking their health in this way.

Others visit the area on their way to the snow and the mountains or national parks. It is like a gateway to their holiday but instead of turning off the highway to be greeted by a quiet road with beautifully peaceful rural views their mountain view will very likely be obscured by dust and they will be sharing the road with trucks from the mine.

And what about the farmers, already earning an income from this land. Families that have lived in the area for generations being forced to hand over their land that they have loved

and cared for so that a small number of people can profit from a mine. This is heartbreaking at the best of times but comes at a time when the general population's mental health is already at risk due to the bushfires and to covid. It is not only the landholders in the immediate area that could be affected like this. People who have spent their life savings to build in this area so they can enjoy the views will be disappointed for the next 20 years, people who built or moved to this area for the quiet lifestyle will have mining trucks passing their front gates every day. People will be worried about the quality of the water, the air and the vegetables, even if this is not proven to be a problem. This could all result in people choosing to leave this area rather than move to the area or holiday here.

Life brought me here, but I chose to stay and to make this place a home for my family because of the environment and lifestyle we can have here. My children are only 11 and 13, if the mine goes ahead they will be 31 and 33 before this mine goes away. I have genuine concerns for the impact this mine will have on the health of the environment, the community and of my children if it is allowed to go ahead. I did not spend my life savings and the past 14 years of my life working towards building a home for my children in a mining town. Bairnsdale and its surrounding towns are not mining towns and never should be.

Please hear our heartfelt plea to reject the proposal to create the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mine.

Jennifer Cox