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## Uproar at \$200m plan to create mineral sands mine in East Gippsland's food bowl

Plans for a mineral sands mine in East Gippsland's food bowl have created a storm over the potential toxic fallout.

Ian Royall

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12 comments



Organic farmer Kane Busch from Busch Organics says the mine is dangerous. Picture: Mark Stewart

Plans to create a mineral sands mine in East Gippsland's food bowl has angered the community amid concerns over contaminated water, dust and noise.

Kalbar Operations wants to establish a 1675ha open mine at Glenaladale, about 20km northwest of Bairnsdale, using water from the Mitchell River.

But vegetable growers, residents and tourism operators fear the mine will damage produce as well as disturb the lakes and waterways which attract tens of thousands of visitors every year.

Kalbar said construction of the \$200 million project would generate about 200 jobs with the same number employed directly on the mine site for its expected 15 to 20-year operation.

The state Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is conducting an assessment of the proposal.

A total of 909 submissions, mostly opposing the mine, were lodged in response to the Environmental Effects Statement.

The next stage is for eight weeks of public hearings starting on February 15, 2021. If approved, mining would start by mid-2022.



The Fingerboards' proposal has angered the community. Source: Mine-Free Glenaladale

A grassroots campaign to stop the mine now has council support with the newly-elected councillors of the East Gippsland Shire objecting to the project.

“Council considers that the technical reports and EES documents have not adequately taken

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into account the impacts of climatic changes and more extreme weather events when

assessing the potential impacts of the proposal on the environment particularly given the

highly significant agricultural land to the east and the Gippsland Lakes,” the council said.

Many applicants were critical of the Environmental Effects Statement itself.

Niki Ford, chief executive of peak body Australian Organic, called for further environmental impact statements to be conducted by an independent authority.

Kane Busch of Busch Organics said the mine site was just 1km from one his company’s vegetable farms.

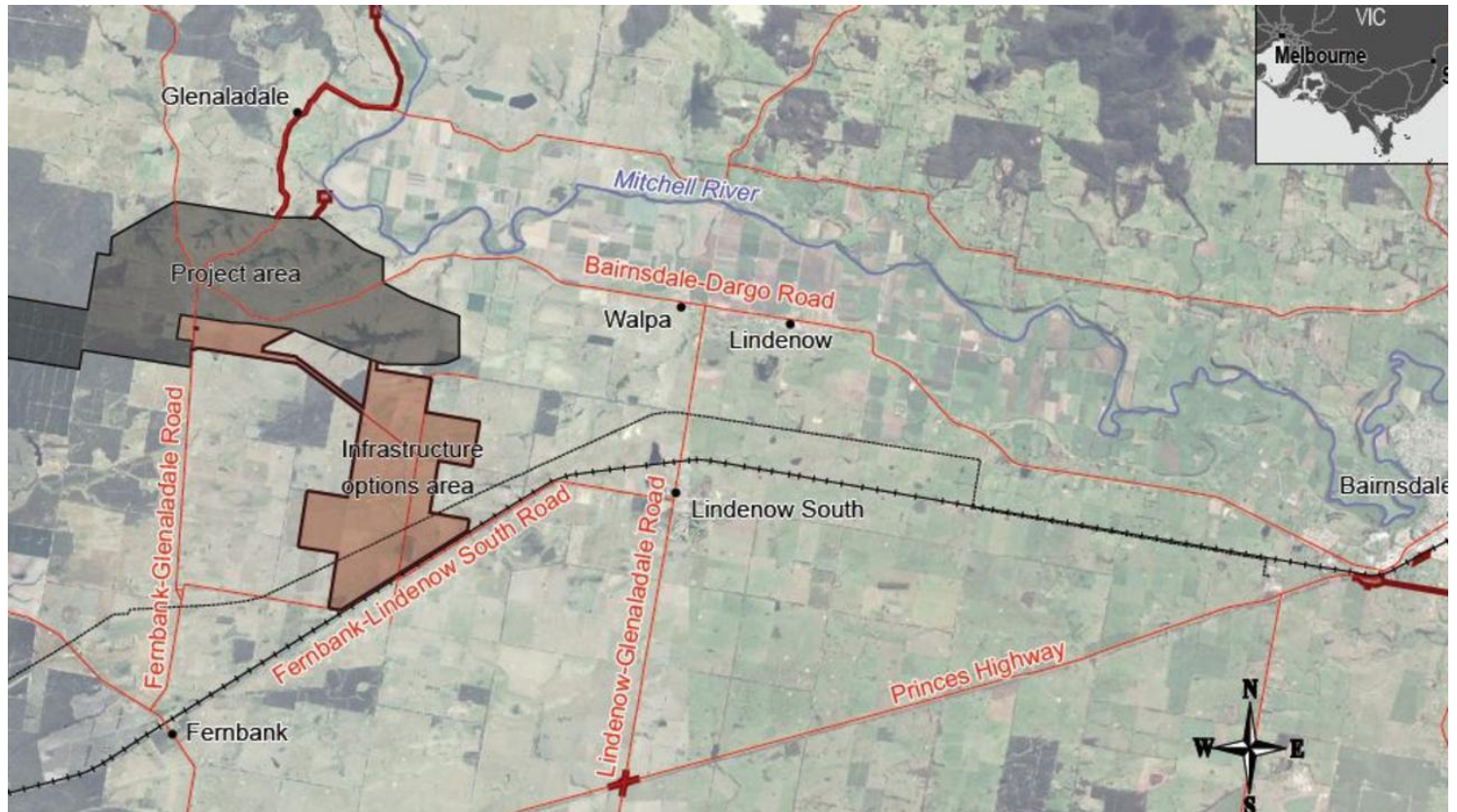
“It’s clear that Kalbar has no social licence to operate a mine in this area,” he said.

Nick Witherow, lawyer for Environmental Justice Australia which is representing local lobby group Mine-Free Glenaladale, said there was uncertainty around the impact the mine would have in terms of dust and on groundwater.





The proposed mine site is next to the Mitchell River. Source: Mine-Free Glenaladale



Map showing Kalbar Resources' proposed mineral sands mine. Source: Kalbar/EES

“Mitchell River is one of the Victoria’s largest unregulated rivers, it’s not dammed and it’s a natural flowing river that is one of the main tributaries that feeds into the Gippsland Lakes.”

The Mine-Free Glenaladale submission said the mine raised serious risks because it would be operating 24 hours a day and close to where many people live, farm, work and children go to school.

Kalbar chief executive Jozsef Patarica said the company prepared the Environment Effects Statement from studies by independent consultants.

“The EES details how the project has been assessed and designed to eliminate, reduce and mitigate environmental impacts based on scientific evidence.”

Assessment of the EES was now in the hands of the Inquiry and Advisory Committee, he said.

“Kalbar respects the Victorian State government environmental review process which is robust and thorough.”

Other objectors include the South Pines Golf Club at Lindenow South, Friends of the Earth and the Gippsland Environment Group.



The Lindenow-Glenaladale area is fertile farming country.





Community protests continue against Kalbar's proposed mine. Source: Mine-Free Glenaladale

Graeme Hine of Hine Vegetables who has farmed the region for 40 years and said the project should never have even been proposed.

He said the EES study was flawed, incorrect, misleading and environmentally damaging.

“With all the evidence before us this should be given a big NO,” he said.

But Wellington Shire Council, based in Sale and to the west of the proposed site, has given qualified support to the project if certain transport and environmental standards are met.

The Gippsland Lakes are classified as a Ramsar site of importance, an international benchmark which recognises its “outstanding coastal wetland values and features”.

The mine would extract 170 million tonnes of ore to produce minerals such as zircon, ilmenite and rutile for use in communications, transport, medical technology and renewable energy.

Rio Tinto discovered the Glenaladale deposit in 2004 and sold the tenements to Kalbar in 2013.

Kalbar has held more than 20 consultation meetings and sessions with the community during the EES process.

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