

Contact

East Gippsland Newspapers

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Mine risks

Sir,- I was concerned when I read Mr Kastelyn's limited level of understanding of the risks of open cut mineral sand mining (*Advertiser*, August 22).

Initially I supported Iluka Resources' Douglas Mineral Sand Mine in our community.

Be alarmed! Be aware! We were promised 'world's best practice' mining with a moving footprint between one-and-a-half to three kilometres long. The radioactive mining waste was to be buried deeper and dispersed as it naturally occurred, reducing risk to our community from radiation, especially radon gas and radium pollution through leachate. Dust was to be controlled through the use of water and resins to stabilise bare surfaces.

The EES process appeared sound and the first WorkPlan supported and was consistent with what we were promised. However, it proved not to be worth the paper it was written on. What has occurred, without appropriate consultation, consecutive WorkPlans were presented directly opposing what the EES stated:

1. There was no moving footprint. Mining ceased four-and-a-half years ago and the whole site of 14.5km was open and with no rehabilitation.

2. The radioactive wastes were concentrated in pits near the separation plant, to the extent of hills being formed where there was once a drainage line.

3. Monazite was being dumped in Pit 23 without meeting the 140:1 co-disposal criteria to alleviate the radioactivity.

4. One farmer had monazite blow over his residence and sheds: this forced the Health Department to have a 'clean-up' with roofs, tanks etc., having to be industrially cleaned. We know the Geiger counter got very excited, but were never given hard figures of how radioactive the material was. The farmer was concerned and kept a sample of the material in a bag in his machinery shed. The only other person he informed of its presence was an individual from the Health Department. The bag disappeared.

5. In wind events, the area would become blanketed in red dust. On several occasions the local fire tower mistook the dust as a fire. This dust deposited all over our community for up to 5-6km.

6. High volume dust monitors only operated one in seven days. Not surprisingly they missed these events as there was only about a 15 per cent chance of monitoring them. However, the 24/7 dust deposition monitors did pick up large volumes of dust that contained elevated levels of radiation, this indicates there would be an increase in risk of cancer to our community.

7. Residents were forced to clean out tanks and spouting about twice a year. The Health Department on one occasion tested the water; it measured up to one-third the allowable level for radiation in drinking water. The roof that had twice the surface area had twice the radiation. Had the tanks not been so regularly cleaned and or stirred up, I am sure they would have exceeded the limit as radium attaches strongly to dust.

Our experience is opposite to Mr Kastelyn's. Sand mining has disadvantaged our community. More in a future edition.

Yours etc.,

Ian Ross,

Kanagulk Landcare Group president.

To find out about the proposed mineral sands mine at the Fingerboards contact:

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No bonanza

(*Bairnsdale Advertiser*, Letter to the Editor, Friday 4th November 2016)

Sir,- Response to Bob Kastelyn (*Advertiser*, August 22, 2016) part two.

From our experience it is simple: the system of mine regulation is broken. The EES and first work plan were sound and endorsed but were not followed. As regulators DEDJTR and DHHS have failed in their 'duty of care' to our community.

We have formally complained to the Mining Warden who requested an independent audit of the mine's operations. Instead of undergoing an independent audit, DEDJTR appointed personnel to audit their own work and — surprise, surprise — reported there was no issue.

The benefits to the local area are very limited with sand mining. There is short-term employment while the resource lasts and extra economy while the mine is in operation.

However, farmland that has been purchased by the mining company is left depleted and unproductive. Once mining companies have stripped the asset and moved on they are in no hurry to return once productive land to its former state (delay of rehabilitation is euphemistically referred to as 'cost deferral' in the industry.)

Communities are destroyed by compulsory acquisition, people leaving because they cannot tolerate living near a mine and remaining residents left have to put up with the loss of and quality of life, including the elevated risk of cancers from radioactive material.

On this point, our Landcare group purchased its own radon gas monitors from the Australian Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency. They recorded over three months, effectively measuring and calculated, with only 50 per cent exposure, over one-and-a-half times the allowable public dose rate for radiation. Farming people who live and work on site would be at least 80 per cent exposure.

The wealth created evaporates away from the community at the mine. Over a billion dollars of profit was taken out of the Douglas mine, yet our community remains as one of the poorer socio-economic regions in Australia.

The wealth goes to the shareholders, in capital cities, superannuation companies, investment funds etc. Do not expect a local bonanza.

Mr Kastelyn's recollection is very much at odds with the lived experience of our community. Sand mining does not create sustainable communities or sustainable agriculture.

Dust is only one of the many problems associated with it and it does create a significant health risk when inappropriate management occurs.

Yours etc.,
Ian Ross,
President /Kanagulk Landcare Group

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