

Rare frog could put brakes on East Gippsland mine plan

A controversial \$200 million mineral sands mine proposed for East Gippsland — which would generate hundreds of jobs — may be stalled over a rare species of frog.



The rare giant burrowing frog. Picture: Alexander Dudley

The rare giant burrowing frog could stand in the way of a proposed \$200 million mineral sands mine in East Gippsland's food bowl.

The frog, listed as vulnerable, has been detected in habitat near the Mitchell River, northwest of Bairnsdale, the site of the planned Fingerboards open-cut mine by Kalbar Operations.

Farmers and residents have told an environment hearing into the project that the landscape would be harmed by the proposed mining, which would be non-stop for years.

The mine would extract and process about 170 million tonnes of ore enriched in zircon, titanium minerals and rare-earth minerals.

Kalbar said the Fingerboards project would create 200 jobs, with another 200 in associated supply services and industries.

Construction of the mine would generate about 200 jobs with the same number employed directly by the mine for its 15 to 20-year operation, the company said.



Bairnsdale farmer Kane Busch says the mine is purely a short-term monetary gain. Picture: Mark Stewart

A two-month environment effects inquiry into the controversial project will end later this month.

Research volunteer Brendan Casey told the inquiry that a population of the frogs, considered vulnerable, had been identified on private land at the Fingerboards location.

But he added that the mining company “does not consider the species exists within the proposed mine area”.

Aaron Organ, of the Ecology and Heritage Partners consultancy, claimed that there was a “low likelihood” of a resident giant burrowing frog population in the project area.

Kalbar said more than 30 specialist studies had been conducted into the potential environmental and socio-economic impacts of its mine project.

Fourth-generation vegetable grower Kane Busch, of Busch Organics from Hillside near Bairnsdale, told the inquiry the mine was merely for a short-term monetary gain.

Busch Organics grows beetroot, broccoli, beans, celery, cabbage and leek on the Mitchell River Flats.



Mr Busch says the frog has been identified on private land near the Fingerboards at Glenaladale.

“One needs to consider how long farmers have worked this land before today, and how long they will continue to do so for generations to come,” Mr Busch told the inquiry.

“Now compare this to the aggressive and short-term impactful and irreversible damaging operations of that of an open-cut mineral sands mine.”

More than 600 documents have been tabled to the inquiry since it began in May.

The latest hearings have been conducted in Bairnsdale and continue this week.

Closing statements are expected to be made on July 22. The inquiry and advisory committee will then have eight weeks to submit its report to the Planning Minister.

If approved, mining could start by mid-2022. The mining will be a 24-hour, 365 days a year operation.