

Dear IAC inquiry members

Thank you for the opportunity to make a presentation to the inquiry.

I am a visual artist who lives in Mallacoota. We previously lived near Dargo but moved when our kids needed to access secondary education. We still own our property near Dargo and visit regularly.

Last year the release of this proposal and short time line for submissions to respond in the IAC process, was not very considerate timing for a lot of East Gippsland residents. As you would be aware 2020 was a challenging time for those of us impacted by the previous summer bushfires and the associated stress of Covid restrictions inhibiting our ability to support one another. I remember feeling over whelmed, emotionally and psychologically exhausted and it was hard to face up to doing anything extra like the task of making a submission.

I did make a submission though because I care about this country and the greater good for our community in East Gippsland.

This project has the potential to permanently damage our environment, destroy the quality of lives for residents in the vicinity and threaten a major food production area and tourism region.

I also feel that the IAC process is flawed because it assesses a proposal compiled over many years by the proponent, with paid employees and contractors, while we as volunteer community members with few resources have 40 days to make sense of all this technical information, to question the validity of the material submitted, assumptions made and gaps in information provided then prepare a submission. All the while dealing with our other responsibilities. Why should the public have to fundraise to resource the investigation of our concerns and have them represented in this process.

An issue that makes this process inadequate is that often there is little or no baseline data available for the biodiversity on the project site, to compare with the data submitted by the proponent. Governments don't employ many people to do biodiversity surveys anymore, especially not on private land. Therefore there is insufficient knowledge to understand what impact the development will have and what we may be losing if it is permitted to proceed.

The consultants conducted their biodiversity surveys at the proposed site within 2 ½ years of the 2014 fires that burnt 75% of the mine area. The land was still regenerating and would not have recovered sufficiently to support a large range of species. They also conducted surveys in the following drought years where we were suffering from the driest years on record. This will not give a fair representation of the biodiversity of the site. In fact recently due to a good season it has been astounding to see the regeneration of native species within the area.

Recent recordings made of a Giant Burrowing frog near the mine site show that there may be other species that have not been identified due to insufficient survey methods and timing.

We regularly travel through the finger boards on the way to our property near Dargo. I can't imagine what it would be like to drive beside an open cut mine on our way up into the mountains. Worrying about which direction the wind will be blowing dust from the mine pit.

The amount of water proposed to be taken out of the river or its ground water is still my main concern. The addition of the centrifuge does not seem to decrease the amount of water required from the river system. If anything it raises more concerns because of the toxic nature of the flocculants used in this process and how they will be prevented from entering the environment when we have severe weather events with flooding rains. Any threat to this river system will impact everything downstream.

Local farmers have reported that there has already been evidence that the water table has lowered in recent years due to the drought. These farmers depend on spring fed dams and any changes to ground water will affect them.

Considering that we are in a time of great uncertainty due to the effects of climate change I cannot understand why we would risk allowing such huge quantities of water to be taken out of a system that so many depend on for survival. What will happen in the next drought? Will there be any water left in the river for Bairnsdale's water supply, the eco systems downstream or for local people to cool down in during hot weather?

I can't understand why people think it is okay to take water out of the river during high flow events. This water is not wasted. It supports the beautiful natural environment along the river banks and Lakes system, which are home to a range of birds, fish and plants evolved to exist on **high** and low water levels for their survival. Some species depend on occasional flooding events during their life cycles.

I feel like I have been here before, when we had to fight to stop a large on river dam being built above the Mitchell National Park 23 years ago. I see that Bon Accord has been allowed to quietly build a massive dam off river since then. No wonder they are keeping quiet on the issue.

This mine should not be justified on the grounds that we need these rare earths for mobile phones and renewable technologies as it is also needed in large quantities to build military hardware like Joint Strike Fighters.

Who stands to benefit from these materials when they are trucked to a railway siding to be taken to the Geelong port by train and exported overseas.

During the mines 15 years of operation the local people and visitors to the area will have the quiet amenity of their lives spoilt by noise, toxic dust and lots of trucks on the roads. The mining company will get rich and the 200 or so jobs will be of short term benefit. We will be left with a degraded site and a depleted river system with the possibility of toxic contamination affecting the surrounding farms that may no longer be suitable for food production.

There are so many reasons why this proposed mine should not be permitted to proceed. This mine does not have a social licence to operate. A majority of farmers and residents in the area do not support this development. The East Gippsland Shire Council does not support it. The tourism industry does not support it. I wish that those with vested interests were not given weight in this discussion.

I want to know when we will value our quality of life and a healthy environment more than money and jobs. Will we have to chop down every tree and dig over all the land before we think we have enough.

For me the bottom line is clean air, clean water, a roof over my head, good relations with my family and friends, meaningful work and a healthy planet to pass on to my grandchildren.

I feel like the Lorax who speaks for the trees in Dr Seuss's book of that name, which was way ahead of its time. Those big old trees on site are worth their weight in gold because nothing is better at taking carbon dioxide out of the air.

This proposal puts all of these values at risk. No job is worth having if it damages the environment. If the environment is damaged we will be impacted at some stage. We are not above or separate from the land we live on.

We have to find somewhere else to mine these minerals because within 500 m of a major river system supporting thousands of people and a large food production area is not worth the risk.

I make this presentation in good faith because I know from my experience in Murrumbidgee how this process can go. I hope that the inquiry members will consider the long term consequences of this proposal and uphold the values that support the greater good for our community and environment.

Yours sincerely Melinda Beacham