

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

687

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

Full Name: David Warren

Organisation:

Affected property: [REDACTED]

Attachment 1: Final_Letter_Agai

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: I David Warren object to the Kalbar mine proposal on the basis of diversion of critical water to the Gippsland Lakes and its wetlands, risks of contamination from the mine directly via dust or from the tailings dam. East Gippsland is trying to rebrand itself as clean and green, food, water and environment. Tourism will be an important economic driver to recovery for an area recently ravaged by fire and drought. Importantly it will be seen as an area to live in. Clean food, access to a healthy fishery, water way and wetlands is paramount to this recovery in the long term. A mine close to Bairnsdale, close the pristine Mitchell River and the expanding food bowl has no place in East Gippsland. Economic benefit should focus on industries other than mining if we are to compete with other regions for economic recovery.

Submission to EES Kalbar Sandmine Glenaladale East Gippsland

My name is David Warren and for nearly 3 years, as President of the Gippsland Lakes Recreational Fishing Alliance (GLFRA), I and other members, were the primary campaigners to remove commercial netting of fish from the Gippsland Lakes. We saw this as a first step to return the Gippsland Lakes to a healthy and abundant fishery. Other steps included seeking alliances with other parties and lobbying government bodies and Federal and State politicians, to ensure that the health of the largest natural estuary in Australia was front and centre. We lobbied, and continue to do so, for increased access to environmental fresh water flows in an era of climate change and to counteract increasing salinity inflows due to deepening of the channels at Lakes Entrance. Our ultimate aim, with no commercial gain to ourselves, was to improve the health of this 370km² Ramsar International listed waterway, with the on flow effects of protecting its wetlands and associated flora and fauna.

I am writing my submission to you opposing Kalbar's proposed development of a mineral sands mine at Glenaladale on the Mitchell River. Our alliance unfortunately does not have the scientific or other resources or to devote to a detailed analysis of the entire EES submission. No doubt there are others who will do so. Our primary concerns are those of contamination and diversion of critical fresh water inflows (already compromised by climate change and competing commercial and residential interests).

On behalf of our "Alliance" I have attended many community meetings conducted by the proponent, Kalbar, including a meeting with GLAWAC, to which I was invited as an observer. I was appalled by the manner in which the meeting was conducted. This provoked me to write to Jane Garrett MP. All these "community meetings" were to presumably engage and inform the community of the project. None of these meetings really provided and exchange of information with true community engagement and as such were not well received by members of those attending. They seemed, from my personal observation merely a "box ticking exercise" by the proponent to meet the requirements of the EES, (of note a process considered flawed by the AG)

I have also attended and made submissions to 2 meeting conducted by the East Gippsland Shire Council. Both of these meetings were attended by over 250 community members with many making thoughtful submissions. On the last occasion the chair made an executive decision on the night to limit presentations to 5 minutes because of the numbers attending. At both these meetings the only submission presented for the project was from Victor Hugo, then CEO, on behalf of Kalbar. I continue to question the true support in the community for this development. It is a concern that "Kalbar" appeared to be trying to sway community support with financial incentives to schools and other "dollar poor" community sporting associations over the last 2 or more years.

At the start of our campaign to end commercial netting on the Gippsland Lakes we were motivated by anecdotal evidence that over the years recreational fishing had declined in the Gippsland Lakes. Previously recreational fishing provided much economic benefit to East Gippsland, directly and indirectly. The impact on businesses that serviced fishing tourism was obvious, not just in Lakes Entrance but in small communities around the Lakes.

We are convinced that after examining much of the data and reports that had been accumulated over decades that the decline of the Gippsland Lakes fishery and environment is man made and exacerbated by poor management practices and developments. Of course climate change will has

and will have an ongoing impact, however with good water management practices this could be mitigated.

Much of the evidence, that which was available, also pointed to environmental issues being a major cause for decline in the aquatic environment of the Gippsland Lakes. The Gippsland Lakes have been degraded and exploited since European settlement by mining developments and projects in the catchment and at the Western end of the Lakes from brown coal and paper manufacture. Agriculture and irrigation have contributed and there seems to be no end to the demands on water either domestically or industrially. Water is a precious resource but so are these Great Lakes.

The commissioning of the Thompson Dam in the 1970's also had significant impact on water flows into the Gippsland Lakes and this impact continues into the present day. This is another reason preventing further diversion of precious water either directly or via aquifers to the Kalbar mine is unacceptable when it is so critical to the health of the lakes and wetlands, which if all functioning in harmony increase aquatic and other life critical to the life cycle of the Lakes. Better health equals more diversity, increase in abundance in fish and yet more reasons for visits to the Gippsland Lakes and surrounds with the increased long term economic benefits locally and to the State.

The environmental issues were undoubtedly linked to water, fresh water. Over the past 50 years there has been a decline in rainfall, which coupled with more and more harvesting of rainfall water in the Gippsland Lakes catchment has resulted in less fresh water flows into the Gippsland Lakes. Excessive dredging of the inner artificial entrance to the Lakes at Lakes Entrance in conjunction with less fresh water flows has contributed the Lakes becoming more saline with considerable impact on fringing vegetation and estuarine species, particularly in the wet lands which are lungs of the Lakes system.

The other issues is pollution. Pollution caused by industrial and agricultural development over 150 years of European exploitation. Much of this still continues. Agricultural demand on water resources is increasing as is domestic demand. The brown coal industry has successfully poisoned the Lakes over 100 years, polluting the LaTrobe River as has the Maryvale paper Mill. Recently PFAS contamination at the Western end of the Lakes has been realised but the impacts have yet to be understood.

Historical mining in the Gippsland Lakes catchment continues to pollute the Lakes with heavy metals and the risk of bioavailability into the food chain of many species. While this contamination is at a lesser rate than 100 years ago, the cumulative effects continue. We do not need to further add to this via the Mitchell River.

Recently on behalf of our alliance, I was an active participant in the development of a "Fishery Recovery Plan for the Gippsland Lakes" developed by the Victorian Fisheries Authority. At the time of my writing the plan has been endorsed by the Minister for Fisheries Melissa Horne and is being circulated for comment.

I find it perplexing that one arm of Government is prepared to embark on a program designed to assist the Gippsland Lakes recover from years of degradation but decisions by others may contribute to further degradation via approval of the Kalbar mine.

The Gippsland Lakes are the largest estuarine waterway in Australia. They are Ramsar listed and have been described as Victoria's jewel in the crown, another reason to visit or stay in East Gippsland. A part of the state that is promoting itself to economic recovery via tourism after years of drought, devastating bush fires and now COVID 19 as being "clean and green".

David Warren. Letter AGAINST the proposed Kalbar mine at Glenaladale, Victoria

A mining project on the pristine Mitchell River adjacent to an important vegetable growing area in the Lindenow Valley and also which supplies fresh water to homes in the region. The risks to the River and consequently the Gippsland Lakes are significant with numerous holding dams proposed at the Fingerboards to harvest water and store toxic tailings. We are not against mining per se however this is the wrong project in the wrong place.

When a traveller approaches East Gippsland, home to the largest pristine wilderness area in the State they pass through the gateway of the LaTrobe Valley. It is an Industrial gateway, servicing an industry on its last legs, an industry from a previous era that has poisoned the Gippsland Lakes from pollution directly and indirectly.

It would be pure folly to continue another large mining development near Bairnsdale which over several decades would continue to pollute the Lakes and harvest precious water. The Gippsland Lakes should be a tourist hot spot for Victoria with associated jobs and economic benefits. COVID 19 has already had an impact on regional areas with property sales increasing and people from Melbourne and other cities looking for a lifestyle change. They want to come for all our pristine environments has to offer.

The demands on an asset like the Gippsland Lakes require very careful management and planning and large mining projects in the catchment of the Gippsland Lakes should be beyond consideration.

The real issue is not whether to have a mine on the Mitchell River. The real issue is can the region afford not to have a healthy vibrant Gippsland Lakes. This regions prosperity in the future will revolve around the Gippsland Lakes and the Wilderness, fresh air, clean water and clean food. The Lakes have been damaged over decades of inappropriate development. There are many community groups and some Government agencies working to repair this damage. Any mine adjacent to the last major undammed river on the Gippsland Lakes is to directly contradict efforts at repair.

The last point I would like to make is that this whole process is hardly a level playing field. Several parliamentary enquiries, a report by the Victorian Auditor General and a report from Environmental Justice Australia have found that the EES process is seriously flawed and does not meet its environmental objectives.

As a community advocate I am aware of the difficulties faced in objecting to projects and activities which we believe to be not in the best interests of the community. As individuals or small community groups you have to deal with Government and Government agencies who often see their role as facilitators for Government. It is very much a "David and Goliath" situation when opposed by companies with extensive financial and technical resources . It is extremely time consuming, emotionally demanding and all too often your contribution is patronisingly ignored. Unlike Government regulators and company executives and employees community members are not remunerated for their effort. It is hardly surprising that many choose not to participate in the political process. We hope this letter provides some support in opposition of the Kalbar mineral sand mine proposal at Glenaladale.

I am prepared to answer any questions and make a verbal submission to the enquiry.

David Warren.

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President East Gippsland Recreational Fishing Alliance.

David Warren. Letter AGAINST the proposed Kalbar mine at Glenaladale, Victoria