

PRESENTATION TO THE IAC INQUIRY INTO THE FINGERBOARDS  
SAND MINE BY DAWN STUBBS  
REPRESENTING CARE (Concerned Artists Resisting Extinction)

I would like to acknowledge the Brabalung of the Gunnai Kurnai nation as the traditional owners of the land that we stand on here today and the land that will be impacted by the proposed mine.

Now let's be honest... if this mine proposal was taking place 80-100 ago, we wouldn't even be holding any discussions. Kalbar would just take over the land no questions asked. I'm sure when coal was discovered in Latrobe Valley it would have been welcomed with open arms by everyone needing electricity. Fast forward 100 or so years and we have found out the pitfalls of that discovery. Now with communications through the media, we are aware of the impacts that mining has caused. You could say we have become what could be described as a bit gun-shy when it comes to mining and so we have been demanding more checks and balances of the likes of this eco-wrecking industry.

I'm sure the Mining Industry trust rate would be somewhere in the region of our Politicians, which I think most people know how low that is. Especially after the fight we put in for years against the Coal Seam Gas industry, and the recent Rio Tinto destruction of the **Juukan Gorge rock shelters**.

Between Developers, native timber harvesting, and now this bloody mine, the unabated development on an ever growing scale seems to conveniently neglect the ecosystems that in nearly every case are the loser. Especially when we have Governments that are determined to water down green tape. Our federal environment minister this week was more concerned with loss of jobs than the loss of the Great Barrier Reef.

The Lindenow Valley and the surrounds of the proposed mine site is home to numerous farms, many of which have been in families for generations, and these intergenerational associations have long standing relationships with the shared environment that they call home... Several of these farms have nurtured significant natural heritage sites that are home to important biodiversity, or should I say what's left of the biodiversity left for wildlife.

The ideal of growth at any cost, has seen Australia become the most destructive developed Country on the Planet... a title that should make us hang our collective heads in shame... and it's this and several myths that I will address in my presentation.

Anyone that thinks this mine won't contaminate the Mitchell River is 'whistling dixie'. If you want to see what out of control industries can do, I would advise reading Richard Flannagan's new book 'TOXIC', about the takeover of Tasmania by greedy industrial Salmon Farming.

The Mitchell River is the water source for Bairnsdale and if this mine goes ahead, we are playing nothing but Russian Roulette with the lives of the people that live there.

Loss of water... land acquisitions... contamination of the Mitchell River and the Ramsar listed Wetlands... are all of concern to me just as much as it is to all the other submissions. But these issues have been well covered by more expert witnesses than myself, so I won't be addressing those concerns.

My passions have always been centred on our wildlife... I live on 63 acres just down from Providence Ponds. We have lived there for 40 years... and during that time my husband and I ran the Australian Wildlife Art Gallery.

Our 63 acres has never been cleared and is classified as being in the rare grassy red gum plains. As a wildlife painter for much of that time I have studied the local wildlife and consider myself an enthusiastic citizen scientist.

Two years ago, out of frustration, I pursued the idea of an Artist's Movement, inspired into action by the impending catastrophe facing this continent... SPECIES LOSS.

With the catch phrase "We are not Politicians, so we will speak through our art" Concerned Artists Resisting Extinction (CARE) was formed. We now have more than 100 artists that tell the stories about our rapid Flora and Fauna decline. We exhibit together when and where we can. It's through our groups collective passion that I speak today.

Let's face some facts... if it wasn't for opposition, this mine would be well and truly up and running by now. Kalbar doesn't care about the farming community, the water, or the Ramsah listed wetlands... the 700 or so hollow bearing trees that are home to the wildlife that is proposed to be removed...

Its only driving force is Money...

It has proven how low it will stoop to get this... Weaselling into backing children's football matches, giving out show bags at field days, putting out full page adds in the local newspapers. All of which is quite legal and above board, but it's when that financial influence has a bearing on the opposite views that play out in our local newspapers and conveniently go missing... that seems a touch biased to our group. Sadly, one of my letters to the editor about wombats conveniently disappeared.

The only reason why this long, ridiculously repetitive, overblown Environmental Effects Statement has been done, is because the company has been forced to do so by law.

Yes, this is just one more mine we might say. But we keep on chewing up **the planet** making excuses like offsets, while robbing coming generations by killing off their future...

There has been plenty of myths bandied around since that day 7 years ago, when about 15 of us hastily met at the Fingerboards, within hours of finding out that some company had slyly moved in to wreak havoc on our pristine valley. It's these myths that I would like to pull apart...

### **Let me start by talking about DEWLP...**

The Flora and Fauna report by Environment and Heritage Partners references DELWP over and over again, as have representatives of Kalbar...

They seem to believe that that department is the 'be all' for species information. This department time and time again has ignored the science, and let's not forget, that its DEWLP who hands out the grants to private environmental researchers, which I'm sure would never influence their decisions.

After the 2019/20 fires that wiped out more than 3 billion of our wildlife, DEWLP instead of preserving the remnants that was left for struggling and starving wildlife, have shown nothing but contempt... they have instead sent their army in to burn and bulldoze most of what was left.

The power brokers in that Department arrogantly ignore the experts like Professor David Lyndenmyer from ANU Fenner School Canberra and leading fire behaviour scientist Dr Phil Zylstra. I was at a community meeting just last week when they admitted burning glossy black cockatoo habitat by accident. They also admit not having the money to do pre-burn surveys. Even in a budget of 500 million, the idea **seems to be** "so long as we burn our quota it doesn't matter how much wildlife is affected"...

Just imagine what they would do to me, if I took a family of Blue Wrens to the steps of Parliament and burnt them alive... and yet that's precisely what this much trusted department does when they light up the bush during their spring burns.

**Professor Lyndenmyer and Dr Zylstra**, as well as Chief fire officers have repeatedly warned about these fire practices making our forests more and more susceptible to wild fires... so I'm sorry that I don't hold a great deal of respect for this gung-ho department when it comes to looking after our wildlife.

Citizen Scientists like me, and the artists from CARE, invest time and shared knowledge about what is happening in the bush, because we passionately believe in saving whatever is left... Many of the CARE Artists have built up a knowledge base over years of observation. A knowledge that is only now being tapped into through visual shared messages. Ken Free is a sculptor and a keen Birder, and I submit photos and maps of powerful owls he has taken, as well as information about this species from Dr Rohan Bilney, who has recorded powerful owls along Iguana Creek...

### **Now let's talk about offsets.**

The 77 page Thesis by Fenner School ANU researcher Brooke Connors 2019 states in conclusion:

*“Assessing the effectiveness of biodiversity offsetting policies remains profoundly complicated... Robust evaluations of offsetting policies are only possible if sufficient data is collected and managed correctly... Without these efforts, detecting the overall outcomes of offsetting policies through time, and thus determining whether they are better than no intervention at all, will remain difficult...”*

Mr Brendan Sydes from Environmental Justice explains it perfectly when he says...

*“I am strongly opposed to the use of offsets under the EPBC ACT, especially in the manner in which they are utilised at the moment... The whole concept of offsets is deeply flawed and in fact at odds with a regulatory system that is supposed to protect biodiversity...”*

In Layman's terms this basically translates to...

Offsets were invented to make it look like developers, mining, land clearing for housing, industry, timber operations etc, etc, were exchanging one vegetation for another... in nearly all cases means the trading-off of our wildlife... for money.

And it beggars belief that this EES has been passed in with nothing set in place... The only thing that I have heard was, that Kalbar are negotiating with local land holders about the flawed idea of using nest boxes as offsets... Without the constant monitoring of nest boxes, the idea soon collapses. In most cases where nest boxes are erected without constant monitoring, they are usually taken over by introduced bee colonies or introduced birds.

Recent research has shown that they are only used by the more common wildlife, especially if erected onto that lone tree in the middle of a paddock.

Research has also shown that natural hollows, especially in the case of a living tree that takes up moisture from its roots, are well insulated... unlike artificial nest boxes, that prove to be cold in winter, and warm in summer.

In an empirically-validated, independent study by five internationally-recognised environmental policy researchers, biodiversity offsets were found to be the lowest performing and least well governed of a range of market-based environmental policy instruments (Cadman, Eastwood et al.2015, pp. 135-205)

They state: Biodiversity offsets do not work, for a number of reasons.

- 1) There is no net gain of bio-diversity by clearing habitation and swapping it for somewhere else...  
**(land-clearing is always land-clearing)**
- 2) It is not possible to ever replicate like for like...  
**(all ecosystems are unique)**

- 3) In Australia and overseas Offsets are open to fraud, and have been issued against asset types that are not even the same...  
**(ex forest for wetlands, etc)**
- 4) Biodiversity offsets are the only environmental market-mechanism that incentivises environmental destruction  
**(cf. carbon offsets, where there have to be demonstrable emissions reductions) ...**

**I'd now like to talk about the species NOT LISTED in the flora and fauna report...**

I waded through the flora and fauna report by Environment and Heritage Partners, and I apologise if I have missed the species that I believe weren't covered in the report, or if they were dismissed as being unimportant... It's not exactly like reading 'Gone with the Wind'...

**In my readings of the flora and faunas report, I found no mention of SUGAR GLIDERS. A recent discovery by Professor Sue Carthew finds that SUGAR GLIDERS are in fact represented by three distinct species... According to Professor Cremona from Charles Darwin University, this discovery by Professor Sue Carthew is not only a significant contribution to science but has important conservation implications.**

The other species that seemed to be missing from the report were

- Feathertail Gliders...
- Brown Antechinus...
- Native Rats...
- several species of Micro Bats...
- Native water rats called Rakari's, which can be found at several of the ponds sites as well as Iguana Creek...
- Jacky Lizards or dragons...
- Blue Tongue Lizards...
- and Lace Monitors...

Several CARE artists surveyed remnant vegetation with permission by one of the impacted farms, where we photographed a Sugar Glider or Kreffts Glider next to a hollow.

On our property we also have both Feathertail Gliders and Sugar Gliders. These gliders are common in this area and would be abundant in the hollow bearing tree's that are going to be removed for this mine...

I am totally sick of the idea that talking about the impact of this mine and the hundreds of deaths it will cause is seen as just trivial compared to the financial benefit to the community...

Which brings me to the old 'Jobs at any cost' Syndrome...

**JOBS, JOBS, JOBS,**

No matter what, make sure we create Jobs... I'm afraid Jobs wont matter once our natural resources are buggered... Kalbar keeps on talking about the 200 or so jobs that will be created, never mind the job losses that will be effected if the vegetable industry is contaminated... and I don't believe for one minute that it will never be contaminated.

The thousands of people employed in the Tourism industry have enough on their plate with the idea of a warming planet, and the ongoing impacts of droughts, fires, floods and pandemic on their operations... Why add to their prospects the chance of a down-stream contamination of the Mitchell River and Gippsland Lakes System from this proposed operation. Recent flooding in the region should act as a wake-up call to everyone employed in the tourism sector to the risks involved...

Maybe Kalbar will be able to retrain them along with the vegetable industry workers...

And I hope **Kalbar's** 200 workers have a strong stomach...

The amount of Wombat Burrows that are on and around the mine site, tell us the animals are in the hundreds there, and will need to be killed **for the operation to proceed**. I have asked the Proponent of the mine how they intend to euthanize all these animals. It's usually dealt with a bit of a chuckle, as if I'm bringing up a subject that is comical to say the least, with the attitude that *"This is big Business girly, worrying about wombats is the least of our worries"*

There is a small army of wildlife carers throughout Australia that rely on donations to raise orphaned Wombats. One I spoke to this week told me that a small baby Wombat comes to her weighing between 500gms and 1kg... it takes approximately 18 months to 2 years to rear and costs between \$2000-\$3000 for each wombat...

**I wonder what price we should put on all these dead wombats?...**

To help illustrate the problem with the principle of "JOBS AT ANY COST", I'd like to share with you a little told story from our natural history books...

Today its thought that there are between 87,000 and 331,000 wild koalas left nationally... Records show that between 1888 and 1918, **4,098,276** koala pelts passed through London auction houses. In 1901, 400,000 pelts were shipped from Adelaide to the USA.

A further 2 million followed by 2 more million were sent to the USA between 1919 and 1924... The animal was declared functionally extinct in South Australia by 1912...

But here's the punch line... This slaughter finished in what was called black August, when the then Queensland Labour Government declared open season on the animal... and within those thirty-one days, 10,000 men, desperate for jobs, went out and slaughtered **800,000** of the animals...

A total of more than **8 million** of the species was wiped out within 40 years...

Ironically, a lot of the revenue from the pelts was then used in conservation projects to protect the last remaining populations. The Koalas in Queensland today are descendants of the Victorian Koalas given to Queensland after they wiped out their own populations... And to add insult to injury, **false** rumours went around that it was the first nations people that had hunted them...

It is believed that Koalas, on recent trajectory, will be extinct in the wild through habitat loss by 2050...

The idea of Kalbar's 200 Jobs leaves a bitter taste in one's mouth...

On reading David Attenborough's latest book 'A LIFE ON OUR PLANET', **my thoughts turn to future generations...** He describes a phenomenon, where what we grow up with, is taken as what we believe was all that was ever there...

My Grandchildren will never know what it was like driving on a rainy night seeing the millions of frogs picked up in the headlights covering the road as we worried about squashing them... and in Summer how we needed to wash all the insects from the windscreens... All quietly disappeared without notice...

If this mining project gets the go ahead, and the company thinks its going to be able to destroy the ecosystems and wildlife near that valley, its going to have a sad awakening. And that's a promise... I wouldn't underestimate the dedication of the local farmers, tourism operators, and wildlife enthusiasts.

**We stand as a united front...** and for one reason or another, you'll be poking at a very big dragon.