

# Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory  
Committee - EES

# 442

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**Request to be heard?:** Yes

**Full Name:** Steven Andrew Stagg

**Organisation:**

**Affected property:**

**Attachment 1:** Kalbar\_Inquiry\_Le

**Attachment 2:**

**Attachment 3:**

**Comments:** See attached submission

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

My name is Steven Stagg. I am a resident and business owner in Bairnsdale. East Gippsland is blessed with some of the best natural assets on the planet. Mountains, rural hamlets, lush pastures, fresh produce, unspoilt beaches, forests, rivers and of course the biggest inland waterway system in the southern hemisphere- the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site. It is precisely why people choose to live here and equally why tourists choose to visit. My young family and I spend much of our time fishing, paddle boarding, hiking and swimming. We are engrossed in our surroundings as are so many other residents in the area. Our lifestyles define who we are and propagate our existence.

I am writing this letter to convey my strongest opposition to the proposed Kalbar Fingerboards mine site. I am not against mines in general but I'm dumbfounded by the suggested geographical location of the Kalbar Site. Any submission that the mine can coexist with the vital and established horticultural businesses that surround the area is either intellectually disingenuous or treating all concerned parties with contempt. Furthermore, ignoring the very real and potentially devastating effects on the Mitchell River & Ramsar Gippsland Lakes Site is unacceptable. In my opinion, the EES does not at all reflect the true potential impact of this mine, instead only presenting a best case scenario. Below are the specifics of my opposition to this project.

- Over 85% of land holders within a 3km radius do not want this mine. There is no social licence for it to be approved. Arguably, the only advocates for this project are people who stand to profit.

- Drought is a common occurrence in our region. The river desperately relies on excess rain events to flush out the river/lake system for regeneration. Kalbar require 3 billion litres of water annually. For many years now our horticultural industries are increasingly put on stage restrictions. Kalbar's water requirements will exacerbate the already precarious and tough circumstances our farmers deal with. This competition for water could easily be the demise of established businesses.

- The dust (by Kalbar's own admission) could hinder vegetation and potentially have a catastrophic impact on the businesses in the area. Kalbar have stated they cannot suppress all the dust; especially in high weather conditions. The mine sites proximity to our farms make these risks a very real prospect. The markets that buy the vegetables from the Lindenow Valley are part of the Quality Assurance Program and will not except contamination (especially silica). The risk to their crops and therefore the thousands of workers who rely on such industries is absolutely unacceptable. Even the perception alone of a

massive mine next to Victoria's Vegetable Bowl could kill our green-clean vegetable image.

- The tailings dam will contain waste and flocculants which can be very harmful to aquatic life. The EES states this risk to be low and yet the document contains no details about the dam- so how can it be low? There are many documented examples (Benambra) of tailings leaching into rivers directly and via aquifers. This is a serious risk to our rivers/lakes and the many who depend on their health.

- The Lindenow Valley (Victoria's food bowl) is 500 meters downwind from the mine. It employs up 1,500 people on the Lindenow flats directly (thousands more indirectly), compared to the estimated 200 short-term jobs to be created by Kalbar, most of which will likely be fly-in fly-out workers.

- If the huge amounts of water Kalbar requires was redirected to our already established agricultural production, it would create many more long-term jobs compared to the minimal short term jobs for the mine. According to the National Farmers Federation statistics, every agricultural job create 4.2 indirect jobs. Kalbar's website claims one mining job creates one indirect job.

- The mine site's proximity to the heritage listed Mitchell River is offensive. Some 350 metres from the river's edge is an absolutely unacceptable risk. The crystalline silica dust which will invariably deposit in the river (over many years) poses a tremendous risk to the ecology and our recreational fishing industry (which is essential to our seasonal tourism). Moreover, leaching from mine tailings is a serious issues that has been manifestly mismanaged by operators and its regulators. The EES can in no way guarantee exactly how the heavy metals and silica dust will ultimately affect the river and the subsequent Gippsland Lakes Ramsar Site.

- The vast majority of mine operators fail to uphold their obligation to revegetate, leaving local residents to clean up the mess financially and literally. Revegetation is absolutely essential to stabilise the radioactive materials and minimise the potential of groundwater and rivers becoming contaminated. A recent audit by VAGO (2019) found the Earth Resources Regulation (ERR) to be desperately inadequate in administering and enforcing rehabilitation liabilities. Mining companies are acutely aware of these loopholes within the system, and very rarely meet their obligations stated in the Act. Government statistics highlight that of the 150 mines that operated in Victoria, only one mine has ever been assessed as fully rehabilitated. Rehabilitation bonds have been proven to be grossly inadequate. Why would anyone believe that Kalbar are going to meet their legal obligations or improbable commitments stated in the EES?

- Tourism is a huge part of our economy because of the natural assets listed in my introduction. In particular the rivers and lakes are by far the biggest draw-cards with fishing, boating, swimming leading these activities. The perception alone of having a mine right on the edge of the Mitchell River will certainly damage our tourism. Moreover, the physical effects of the radioactive substances could be detrimental to the health of our lake system and therefore our tourism dollar. The mine is at great odds with the healthy image that drives visitors to come to our region. The implications cannot be ignored. Tourism and mining have no place together.

- The mining of rare-earths contain radioactive materials. The airborne crystalline silica dust generated from production is of great concern to not only the local residents, but also the vegetable farmers- some of which are as close to 500 metres away. Silicosis is a very dangerous lung disease. Kalbar have disclosed that dust cannot be completely suppressed and therefore exposing farm workers to toxic dust is a serious OHS matter. A mine of this size not only poses a cancer risk to the residence of Glenaladale but also to the residents of Bairnsdale and beyond. The airborne silica dust is able to travel many kilometres. My family and I swim and eat the fish we catch from the Mitchell River. The EES cannot guarantee that long term exposure to me or my family will not result in cancer. Anyone assessing the viability of the mine has a duty of care to protect the thousands of people who live and work in the area or to ensure they are not exacerbate the cancer burden of the community.

- Farmers are heavily reliant on the fresh water from the Mitchell River to irrigate their crops. If the water becomes contaminated as a result of structural issues with the mine or unpredictable weather events such as floods or high winds, this could cause huge financial and job losses for our region.

- Noise from the mine that operates 24 hours a day will be untenable. I'm highly suspicious of any suggestion that locals will not be affected by this pollution. No mine should operate these hours so close to residence.

- The Woodglen water storage (our drinking water) is 3.5km downwind from the mine. Our water could become contaminated. Kalbar can in no way guarantee the elimination this potential.

- The Fingerboards area is of great historic and indigenous significance. This will quite simply be decimated by the mine. Mitigation measures cannot possibly avoid destruction of artefacts and heritage.

- The government needs to respect the pre-existing residential and agricultural

land use.

Further questions are thus: Is Kalbar allowed to compulsorily acquire private land for infrastructure that is located outside the mining project boundary? Why has the full analysis of ore body not been disclosed? EES cannot possibly ensure the safety to humans and animals.

In summary, I would hope that anyone who reads my submission could easily ascertain my position that mines in general are not the issue, rather the unconscionable geographical location. The rivers and lake systems are essential to our health, lifestyle, tourism, and wellbeing. The Mitchell River Valley produces up to 40% of veggies sent to Melbourne. A huge contributor for the state. The proposed mine site poses such a tremendous risk to our livelihoods, it's hard to conceive how this project is even being considered. There is vastly more to lose rather than gain with the Fingerboards mineral sands mine project. The competition for water and the inevitable impact from the dust on our vegetables, rivers and lakes make this project unfeasible. The potential health risks to our community are unacceptable. If Kalbar had been proposing a different location for this mine that mitigated the obscene risks to our most important industries, I doubt we would even bat an eyelid.

Yours sincerely

Steven Stagg