

In support of my submission (#373) in response to the Environmental Effects Statement for the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project:

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Gunaikurnai people, Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today and the land of the proposed project. I'd like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect to any Gunaikurnai people who may be listening tod

I've never done anything like this before. It's not quite the same as attending a march or a rally, signing a petition or making a donation. It would have been easy to not show up, today. At this stage I doubt whether my attendance will make any difference at all to the outcome of this Project, but I'm here because I love East Gippsland and I care about what happens here – to the land and sky, rivers and lakes, trees and other native flora, and to human and non-human creatures alike. I believe we're all connected, one community.

I'm presenting from the perspective of a concerned, rate paying resident of East Gippsland Shire (noting that the Proponent will *not* be required to pay rates – see TN038 25/6/21). I have no academic qualifications or technical expertise in matters of mining, but I do have strong feelings about this place and this project, and a fair idea of what is at stake should it go ahead.

I've lived in several locations in East Gippsland since 2013, including the past three years in Bruthen which is about 55km north-east of The Fingerboards.

I was born and grew up in Melbourne, but for as long as I can remember I wanted to live in the country. It took me a long time to get here. In 1980s Melbourne, my friends at the Wilderness Society were trying to save old growth forest in East Gippsland. The fight continues to this day. Since my move from Melbourne, I've been compelled to join friends, acquaintances and others who've dedicated, and continue to dedicate, a great deal of time, energy and money towards trying to stop the man-made destruction of what's left of East Gippsland's natural environment – including destruction by clearfell logging, inappropriate burning, feral animals, poisoning and over fishing. Most of these people have lived here for much longer than I have, and they've been at it for years.

Over the past seven years, this project has put more pressure than ever on the people of East Gippsland, and those further afield, who are concerned about protecting our environment. Sometimes it's hard not to feel powerless, helpless and depressed, when these things are happening all around you.

Having volunteered at the Bruthen Arts and Information Centre, I know that people come to this area to enjoy activities such as camping, fishing, hiking, boating, swimming and cycling, all in beautiful surrounds. There's nowhere quite like it. I've lost count of the number of fellow East Gippslanders who've said to me, "We're so lucky to live here." And I agree. We *are* lucky to live here. We want to protect and preserve the area's natural beauty, biodiversity, green spaces, clean air and water, and fertile land. Speaking of fertile land, between 2014 – 2018 I worked in W Tree (100km NE of Bairnsdale) at the Australian headquarters of a volunteer organisation called WWOOF (Willing Workers on Organic Farms). During my time at WWOOF, I spoke with hundreds of hosts (many of whom were farmers) and WWOOFers (backpackers who exchange their labour for food and board). I even went WWOOFing myself, before I worked in the office. So, I have a little experience of farming, and consequently a lot of empathy for farmers. During this Hearing, I've been moved by the submissions of generational farmers and their families who have already been negatively affected by this project, and will continue to be should it proceed. I would like to add my plea in support of theirs.

I have a friend who lives in Glenaladale and works in Bairnsdale. I'm concerned for her welfare and the welfare of her family, should the mine go ahead. They fear that the severe disruption and stress they've experienced over the past seven years will only intensify should the Project be approved. It will mean the end of their way of life, on a beautiful and peaceful property through which the Iguana Creek meanders.

On the way to my friend's place, and to the Mitchell River National Park, where I go hiking, I often stop at The Long Paddock restaurant in Lindenow. The Long Paddock produces excellent meals and prides itself on using local produce. The thought of these special places being ruined by unpleasant views, and noise and dust pollution from an open cut mine, is distressing to say the least.

In my written submission, I pointed out my concerns about a number of things: the various health risks of the project; the risks to our food bowl in the Lindenow Valley; the risks to our water supply; the adverse effects of noise, vibrations and dust; the potential adverse effects to our tourism industry; the destruction of Aboriginal cultural heritage; the loss of significant native and roadside vegetation; the loss of many species of native fauna; potential job losses; and contradictions in the Draft Planning Scheme Amendment.

I'd like to point out that the Proponent's EES Submissions Summary (Tabled Document 25: *Kalbar – EES Submission summary – Response to Direction No. 26 – Issues raised by Submission number*) prepared by Kalbar Operations (in response to IAC Direction 26) under-represented my concerns, and most likely the concerns of others, regarding the effects of the Project on matters including biodiversity, groundwater, water catchment, traffic and transport, agriculture, and human health. (See my email to Amy Selvaraj 29/1/21)

Judging by what I've read (the EES, submissions & tabled documents) and heard (at the Hearing) it seems that this was not the only document prepared by the Proponent that was inaccurate and contained errors and omissions.

I've been unable to tune in to much of the Hearing during the days, so the recordings have been very helpful. My thanks to those responsible for recording and posting these on the IAC website. I have to admit that the expert witness hearings were long, tedious and sometimes incomprehensible to me, but I've found the recordings of individuals and those speaking of behalf of community groups rather riveting, not least for their heartfelt sincerity and forthrightness. This community is articulate, well educated, well informed, and passionate about where they live; often well able to speak on technical matters relating to the Project, unlike myself. I note that the speakers have included a broad spectrum of the community: many farmers and their families, indigenous people whose connection to the land spans millennia, teachers, academics, scientists, project managers, activists, artists, economists, tour guides, business people and veterinarians. A number of their submissions have been comprehensive. I consider *them* the genuine expert witnesses here, and they've not inspired my confidence in this Project. On the contrary, they've confirmed over and over again the reasons for my lack of trust in the Proponent, their EES, and the Project.

The community's lack of confidence in this Project is undeniable, as is the high level of anxiety about it. (No social licence.) The EES and subsequent changes to the Project have only created more uncertainty in the community. How many times during this Hearing has it been pointed out that the EES lacks the necessary specific information to make any reassurances credible or acceptable, and that, if anything, it seems to have shown a lack of knowledge of key facts required for the Project? I haven't been able to keep up with the hundreds of Tabled Documents. It seems that the Proponent is pedaling fast to keep up with all the changes it would need to make to have their project approved. At this stage, it feels like too little, too late.

I know that the Committee has been made aware of these issues repeatedly, and I'm not going to labour the point. Suffice to say that I do oppose the construction of a mineral sands mine in this area and I support the many local residents whose lives and livelihoods would undoubtedly be affected by its construction. I feel strongly that should the project go ahead, it would compromise the wellbeing of our community and environment well beyond acceptable limits.

Thanks to the IAC for the opportunity to present my views at this hearing, today.