

# Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory  
Committee - EES

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Request to be heard?: No

**Full Name:** Richard Hugh Davies

**Organisation:**

**Affected property:** [REDACTED]

**Attachment 1:** KALBAR\_\_E.docx

**Attachment 2:**

**Attachment 3:**

**Comments:** see attached submission

## ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS SUBMISSION

Kalbar Sand Mining Project. The Fingerboards

My wife and I moved to Bairnsdale three years ago because we both liked the people, the nearby Bush and the nearby rivers and Gippsland lakes so much. Much of what drew us to this area is now being seriously threatened by the sand mining Fingerboard Project being developed by Kalbar. In terms of public relations, the company have proved highly professional and effective. But the planning of the location of the project and focus on the long-term effects on the environment has been sadly much less diligent, much more superficial.

### LOCATION

The proposed open cut sand mine will be located only 350 metres from the Mitchell river (around the distance of a middle-sized suburban street). Clearly this nearness of the mine vastly increases any risks from any pollution due to flooding of the tailing's dams or of the groundwater. There is also the danger of contamination by dust carried by the high winds East Gippsland is so very prone to.

### WATER (local needs for a critical resource)

Kalbar proposes to take 3 thousand million litres every year from the Mitchell River. This during a period of "green drought" that has afflicted Bairnsdale and most of East Gippsland for several Years lately. There is no likelihood given continuing climate change affected South East Victoria, that these drought conditions will significantly alter.

Bairnsdale is highly dependant on the supply of water from the Mitchell for many reasons.

It is obviously the main provider of water to the residents of the city including drinking, gardens, washing etc.

Farmers around Glenaladale also obviously need large amounts but have been refused the extra that they need. During fire seasons naturally there is a very high priority and demand on all local sources of water including from the Mitchell River.

It is important to also note that the volume of water flowing into the Mitchell has in recent years been greatly reduced. Figures provided by East Gippsland Water show that daily inflow is less than half the 5-yearly average.

### GROUND WATER

The Kalbar E.E statement claims that due to their precautions and the "aqua retardant" quality of the local geology in the mine area, the risk of toxic contaminants getting into the groundwater and Spreading to nearby river systems is 'negligible' (? Check K's ref.). Many local farmers and other residents are sceptical of the validity of this due to the number of gullies and sand like soils in the large neighbouring areas to the mining site.

### ECONOMIC EFFECTS

The economic effects on Bairnsdale, Glenaladale, Lindenow and possibly East Gippsland in general are hard to calculate in advance but are potentially devastating. Bairnsdale and the abovementioned towns and region are heavily dependent on Tourism, Agriculture and Fishing to sustain businesses and livelihoods. There are many motels, caravan parks, apartments and related hospitality businesses in Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance and Paynesville that rely on the influx of visitors in holiday periods to keep going. Any further degradation to the health of the Lakes and the

rivers, such as the Mitchell that flow into them could of could seriously affect such tourism. A leading representative of the regional recreational Fishers expressed grave concerns and opposition to the proposed sand mine during an East Gippsland Council meeting I attended about a year ago.

The current health of the Lakes is already concerning. A paper by Professor Graham Harris, which I will very briefly quote, strongly emphasizes this concern” lakes that now suffer habitat loss ,salt ingress and the destruction of freshwater wetlands, increased nutrient loadings ,overfishing and various kinds of pollution. The Gippsland Lakes have all these problems and more.” (“A dying shame- Australian coastal freshwater lakes “Harris G 2006.)

Any more pollution contributing toxic material due to sand mining getting into the Mitchell River or the neighbouring ground water would clearly make matters worse for the Lakes, potentially for fishing and also for tourism in the region.

## BIODIVERSITY

The assumption that underlies the categorising of biodiversity into encompassing all non- human flora and fauna to the term was always highly debatable. The more so these days in our world of climate change and the Covid -19 virus pandemic. The possible toxic adverse effects of exposure to rare earths on animals and plants could well apply to human health as well.

“Possible contaminants cause negative effects on aquatic and terrestrial organisms, as well as humans. In some cases they increase the mortality rates of aquatic and terrestrial organisms and Some of the radionuclides are metals contaminants are even classified by International and federal Health agencies as human carcinogens”. (“ Toxicological Evaluations of Rare Earths...” Science Direct 2013).

In general, the experts involved in the Environmental Impacts Report claim that impacts such as the potential dangers of Rare Earths, such as Radiation, are minimal or mitigated (by Kalbar’s planned actions). However, what is consistently overlooked or ignored is the high probability of unforeseen events and unintended consequences. The mining of these rare earths is proposed to continue for 20 years. The reassurances that the risk of radiation to workers and the environment in general is as currently measured not above normal are well and good.

However there remain questions of the possibility of the gradual higher levels due to concentrations build up in the rivers and neighbouring areas of the mine carried by dust during the regular high winds we experience. During the increasingly dry summers that are now occurring in S.E. Victoria such dust whether depositing radioactive materials, silicates or other toxic rare earths poses an ongoing risk that should not be ignored.

## IMPACTS LISTED IN THE REPORT

It is noteworthy that the Kalbar report itself states a number of threatened species in the project area that will be affected to a” low or moderate” degree (their terms). Those listed include the Grey-headed fluing fox; the Yellow-bellied sheath tail bat; and the Masked owl. A large amount of habitat for all species will be cleared including over 11 hectares (about 45 acres) of state listed Forest Red Gum and” grassy woodland”.

## CONCLUSION.

The Fingerboard -Kalbar sand mining project plan is full of uncertainties, as to how it will effectively deal with recognized and unrecognized environmental problems that will impact our region, if it is approved. The reckless, badly chosen location of the proposed sand mine so very close to the Mitchell River and other waterways is the prime example of so many potential unintended consequences. The

statement that the site of the project is “remote” is patently false, disingenuous. It is not remote from nearby farms, nor from Lindenow and in the context of dust or water transported pollutants, not far enough from Bairnsdale where many of us live.

The mitigating measures put forth in the report to deal with the local conditions are far from fail safe and do not take sufficiently into account factors such as climate change, possible flooding events and dry, drought-like springs and summers. Kalbar states that the mining is to continue for a period of 20 years. That is a very long period in which much can and probably will go seriously wrong. The strong possibility of serious flooding occurring during that time is just one example.

A number of scientific articles I have read emphasise the danger of acids; heavy metals (such as cadmium) or carbonite minerals getting into nearby waterways or the radioactive rare earths like thorium. An even worse possibility is that such risky elements end up in the food chain.

I have many other concerns about the inherent dangers of some of the rare earth materials to which our region and environment may well be exposed to but I am trying to keep this submission concise. Both my wife and I are just two of hundreds of others in the region who oppose the Sand Mine. We have attended many meetings at the Shire Council and elsewhere where such opposition has been diversely and passionately expressed.

The risks to the local economy, the farming and above all to the fishing and general health of the rivers and Lakes of East Gippsland are much too great. Please, take the long view of protecting these iconic, much loved natural assets ahead of some short term, questionable gain.

Richard Davies    Bairnsdale 