

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

27

Request to be heard?: No

Full Name: Vincent Michael Grasso

Organisation: Funtastic Fit

Affected property: [REDACTED]

Attachment 1: V.Grasso_Public_S

Attachment 2: V.Grasso_Cover_I

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

A submission to the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory Committee

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

My name is Vince Grasso, I am 33 years old and I have been a resident of Melbourne since 2005, prior to this I was a resident of Cobram Victoria where my family owned and operated fruit orchards since 1958. I have a wife, daughter and another child on the way. I am worried about the fingerboards Mineral Sands project going ahead due to the pervasive impacts it will have on the community and the environment.

I have dedicated my life to public service, I am a client relationship manager at the Australian Taxation Office and was an active member of the Australian Army Reserve between 2011 – 2016. I also actively volunteer at two well-known charities here in Melbourne, Challenge – Supporting Kids with Cancer and Impact for Women – who's mission it is to continue to help women and children fleeing extreme violence at home.

As well as coming from a farming background I have family and friends whom farm in the Lindenow Valley and have frequented the area all my life.

Thanks in advance for taking the time to read this submission.

Your Sincerely,

Vince Grasso

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

I am writing this submission about the EES for the Fingerboards mineral sands mine project (The Mining Project). Upon analysis of the Environment Effects Statement pertinent to the Mining Project and its supporting documentation I have several key concerns regarding its potential approval due to the pervasive impacts it will have on the community and the environment, these are detailed below.

The Lindenow Valley community and farming industry is special to me as I have family and friends who farm there and have frequented the area all my life. My closest friend in the region has been farming in the area since 1981, when his father planted their first crops. As well as this I come from a long line of farmers myself, my family have dedicated their lives over four generations to the primary production industry in Australia. I personally know the struggles of not only primary producers but all members of a regional community area such as Lindenow & District Community.

I have close friends whom grows vegetables, above ground, in the Lindenow valley so when shopping I always check the labels and try to source products from the region. The vegetable industry in the Lindenow Valley is a short distance downwind from the proposed mine site, when the ground is disturbed by the mining process the dust expelled will be a high risk. Kalbar Operations Pty Ltd (Kalbar) states in it's EES "A regulatory standard for dust deposition levels on vegetables does not currently exist" just because one doesn't exist doesn't mean there isn't a moral or ethical obligation to avoid this risk. Kalbar also acknowledges the real risk of the industry experiencing reduced labour access due to competition. Even though Kalbar vows to work with growers to avoid, or reduce the potential for shortages we have seen little evidence to date to support that they will actually make good on such promises.

Kalbar have acknowledged there are radioactive substances being mined including rare-earths. As mentioned earlier it is only when the earth is disturbed by excavation is when the dust is generated and dispersed into the environment. I am concerned about the health risk the Mining Project may cause to not only the families of my close friends who live in the area but for the general wellbeing of all of the members of the Lindenow Community.

I believe Kalbar's conduct has been questionable throughout this process starting from the first survey conducted in 2014 after severe bushfires in the region through to blatantly lying to the community members at meetings. This demonstrates a lack of empathy and shows Kalbar is out of touch when it comes to what really matters to regional communities.

I appreciate Kalbar undertaking the EES however I do not necessarily trust the information contained in it, it is my opinion that the full analysis of the ore body has not been disclosed. We have no idea what the lab was asked to analyse therefore how can we rely on the content? I implore the panel to order the full release of the EES findings including exactly what the parameters of the initial analysis were. There is a duty of care that needs to be satisfied, further there is a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that members of the community are not exposed to illnesses resulting from contaminants from the Mining Project. Contaminants resulting from the mining project may contribute to an increased cancer burden, lung disease and other ailments for members of the general community. The Council's 'Lindenow & District Community Plan' did not foresee a mine in that area, therefore residential and agricultural planning could not take steps to mitigate the potential impacts of the Mining Project.

The Lindenow Valley Farmers heavily rely on waters from the Mitchell river in order to irrigate their crops, the mine is close to the river therefore there is a real risk that the waters will become contaminated. This will not only result in a negative impact on vegetable crops but may also result in negative impacts on the general health of the waters as well as for the marine life that inhabits them. The waters in the area, including Ramsar listed wetland Gippsland Lakes are integral to the local community as it attracts many tourists every year, any impact on the water itself will have a wide spread effect through the community.

There is also the issue of the tailings dam's the Mining Project will require. These contain harmful chemicals which can also pose a risk to marine life. The tailings dams are located on high ground above the Perry and Mitchell Rivers, therefore there is a risk of leaking from the dam. In the event of a 1 in 100-year flood, harmful chemicals could be released into the creeks/ivers, harming aquatic life and aquifers. The risks are considerable and foreseeable given the many examples of dam failures i.e. the Benambra dam failure.

Another issue regarding water and relates to Lindenow Valley farmers is the need of a huge amount of water approx. 3 gigalitres (3 billion litres) per annum for the estimated life of the mine (15 years). Additional to the impact the Mining Project poses to farmer's access to labour services, there is risk Kalbar will also compete with local farmers for water rights. The price of water is already astronomically high in the area, Kalbar becoming a competing bidder in the future will increase the demand in the area therefore almost certainly increasing the price. It will become a case of water not going to who needs it most, it will be based upon who has the bigger chequebook. How can the local farmers compete with Kalbar? They simply cannot.

Kalbar state the water is necessary to control dust (which is a blatant display of how big the dust problem could be). My family friends have recently applied for an additional water right and have been advised that there is no further right available but somehow if the Mining Project is approved there will be an extra 3 gigalitres available? I must ask myself what will the impact of this be on bores, aquifers and most importantly the Mitchell River? I also wonder if we made this "extra" water available to the farmers, would this result in a more positive impact on the region rather than the mining project?

Further environmental damage is bound to occur with the removal of approximately over 700 large mature trees from the mine site. This will definitely pose a risk to local flora which grow as a result of these larger trees and fauna that inhabit them. Once again due to Kalbar's questionable conduct to date, I have serious concerns as to the efforts gone to re the technical studies of the area which formed the basis of Kalbar's opinion on this matter in the EES. It is my belief we can never really quantify risk and potential damages caused. Further no offset Kalbar puts into place to mitigate damage caused can ever address the environmental damage to the mine site.

Another concern for me is that it's highly likely that unknown Aboriginal cultural heritage sites are present. These will be impacted if the Mining Project is approved. Kalbar states in the EES they will develop a cultural heritage management plan including procedures for managing any cultural heritage chance finds. The excavation depth for the Mining Project is approx. 45 metres therefore it will be impossible to avoid destruction of cultural artefacts and heritage.

Thankyou for allowing me to make this submission and for taking the time to read it.

Vince Grasso