

Submission Cover Sheet

Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project Inquiry and Advisory
Committee - EES

713

Request to be heard?: Yes

Full Name: Rick and Jenny Robertson

Organisation:

Affected property:

Attachment 1: RobertsonKalbarS

Attachment 2:

Attachment 3:

Comments: See attached submission

Dear Inquiry and Advisory Committee members,

We are writing this submission to the EES for the proposed Mineral Sands Mine project at Glenaladale, because we strongly oppose it.

My husband and I run a 1000 ha grazing property at Bengworden which has been in the family for over 70 years. We love what we do and have had many challenges, major droughts, bushfires and worsening climate conditions. Through these challenges we have had to change how we manage our business, our pastures, livestock and people.

We are concerned that the mine could impact not just the local area but all farms that access water from the aquifers and the beautiful RAMSAR listed Gippsland Lakes. We completely rely on water from the aquifer for our stock needs, as do many other farmers. The uncertainty of how the bore field will be affected could impact and could destroy our business.

We believe that the mine should not go ahead as it puts us all at risk.

This is not because we oppose development, it is because we believe the risks are too high and it is an entirely inappropriate area to mine.

The area is one of Victoria's important food bowls, many of the families have been living and working in the Mitchell Valley for generations and have invested substantial resources to progress their businesses, with the benefits of flowing to the wider community. The agricultural industry of the Mitchell Valley and particularly the vegetable industry are a corner stone of the economic success of the East Gippsland Region. Produce from the Mitchell River Valley is exported nationally and internationally. It creates an extensive social and economic benefit through its production and supply chains, locally and regionally. Can we afford to risk its reputation and the clean, green image? This image of being clean and green will be difficult to maintain if a mine is situated next door. We don't want to eat vegetables that are possibly contaminated by contaminated dust from the mine site, we don't want to expose our families to that risk. Would you?

Kalbar have identified approximately 30 households as directly in the 2km zone with the potential to be affected by the serious negative impacts of the contaminants carried in the wind. If the zone is taken from the external boundaries of the mine it is our understanding from locals that there are approximately 80 households that will be affected.

These are not abstract numbers but real families. Not only will people living in the operational zones of the proposed mine be affected by the 'dust' and its possible negative health impacts but also the noise levels and increased heavy vehicle access to the proposed mine have the potential to impact negatively on mental health and wellbeing. People are already experiencing high levels of anxiety in relation to the proposal particularly in relation

to their way of life, the impacts on their businesses from possible dust contamination and its negative impact on people's health. The government has a duty of care to the local regional communities to safeguard their health and wellbeing. Kalbar is a company that is owned offshore and does not have the best interests of the community at heart.

The EES had not fully covered this.

It is well known locally that strong winds are very common year round and during dry, hot days they are very damaging. It is hard to believe that our very precious resource (water) will be for constantly wetting down the mine site, to be at the expense of being available for producing food. These two industries are not meant to compete side by side for this resource. The wind station used for reporting is in a known wind shadow area in a gully. Hardly representative of the possible impacts that wind will have on the mine site out in the open. The risk of contaminated dust on a very hot windy day has not been fully examined and this is negligent. No amount of watering will be able to negate this, but if we are wrong, is that a reasonable use for that water?

Kalbar has identified 3MG as the water allocation required for their mining operation. (The scoping study undertaken by Oresome Australia Pty Ltd identified a water requirement of 4.6 GL- 6.2GL)

Our understanding is that Kalbar proposes to take the majority of the water from the Mitchell River and pump additional ground water to manage mining operations. The Mitchell River already has tight water allocations and current license holders often have reductions in their water allocations based on river flow.

Where is the water going to come from?

The EES assumes the water can be retained in holding dams. The ability of the river flow to meet the pumping capacity to fill holding dams is questionable.

Questions also need to consider the security of the dam itself. Recycling water from mine operations also has issues. All dams leach water. Locally a large dam designed to collect excess water flow due to flood has had liners replaced.

There is potential for seepage from the tailings dam to enter our aquifers along with impurities.

There is also a high risk that extreme weather conditions will cause the dams to breach thus increasing the negative impact of major flood events. It is proposed to dam off 9 gullies which currently drain into the Mitchell River. The volume of water from these if breached during a major flood event would be disastrous. With a changing climate these risks are amplified.

How good are the proposed engineering structures; how robust and safe are the dams?

The second option to access groundwater is also questionable.

Our aquifers are fully allocated and many farmers rely on these aquifers outside the proposed project area for irrigation and livestock. Gippsland Water has advised us that no application for a license has been sought by Kalbar. Also the interface between the aquifers and the river is unknown.

Where will they purchase 1GL of groundwater water? Who will sell water rights when their own agricultural practise depends on the resource? There is already fierce competition for water.

The EES does not fully recognise the fragile nature of the landscape surrounding and within the mine area or the complex biodiversity of the area and that the risk of human error is often the greatest one. The 700 mature trees which will be removed, many of them over 300 years old are irreplaceable by new plantings, just another loss to the regions biodiversity. These trees should be treated as national treasures, as they are a majestic part of the beautiful Glenaladale area. They provide important habitat to birdlife, hollows taking over 80 years to create. This cannot be recreated within several lifetimes.

We do not believe the impact of the proposed mine on the Providence Ponds Catchment and Perry River has been honestly acknowledged either. The Perry River is a unique 'chain of ponds,' supported by shallow aquifers which are dependent on ground water and susceptible to contamination by mining activities through both wind and potential leaching.

The proposed water use for the mine if allocated to agriculture would create much greater economic benefit for the region than the mine and avoid the social and environmental degradation inherent in the Kalbar proposal.

As Landholders we are constrained by complex regulations if making changes to landscape function. We would not be allowed to destroy 3-400 year old red gums or very precious water courses without intense oversight by the relevant authorities.

It appears that Kalbar operates on the assumption that these planning requirements will not be an issue.

It is unacceptable to allow for compulsory acquisition of private land to be used by the mine for infrastructure that is located outside the mining project boundary for: water pipelines, bore pumps, bore field, roadworks, new powerlines, easements, rail siding and vegetation removal.

Why isn't this part of the mine project area?

Why has the Lindenow and District Community Plan been ignored?

What role has the East Gippsland Shire played in the EES process?

What consideration has been given to the impact of the proposed mine on the Gippsland Lakes and the Ramsar site?

Kalbar claims that they will fully reclaim the mined area, this historically has rarely happened. For example the Benambra Mine, the Balmoral Douglas mine where toxic waste has been left behind.

We find it difficult to accept the potential benefits to the region of the mine as propounded by Kalbar when Rio Tinto Pty Ltd past Tenant holders of the Glenaladale Mineral deposits determined not to mine as did Oresome Australia Pty Ltd. Both mining companies decided not to proceed. We understand these decisions were based on financial and environmental considerations.

Why would Kalbar consider this proposal?

We believe the Panel has a duty of care to ensure that the community and the surrounding environment that they live in is not sacrificed as a result of the proposed mining operations. We believe that the risk to people, agriculture, tourism and the environment is too high to endorse the further development of the proposed mine. There is a very real perception that our community, our environment, our businesses are not important, undervalued and expendable if this mine were to proceed. Now is the time to examine the real pros and cons of what the real value is to the local communities very seriously. We have already been through enough.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read our very serious concerns and the opportunity to make a submission

Yours sincerely

Rick and Jenny Robertson