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Anti-mine motion on the shelf

"We've got once chance to get this right, so let's get it right the first time."

These are the words of East Gippsland Shire councillor John White following his retraction of an intended notice of motion slated for tomorrow night's monthly council meeting.

Cr White was seeking support for council to take a stance in "strongly opposing" the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Mining Project.

However, at last Wednesday's briefing between councillors and chief executive officer, Gary Gaffney, in the lead up to tomorrow night's public meeting, Cr White told the *Advertiser* it was clear he would not garner enough support at this point in time.

"My motion had been tabled, but with no support from the councillors, except maybe one, I felt I had to pull it, though I know the Glenaladale groups (Mine Free Glenaladale) will be disappointed," Cr White said.

"Several said that they couldn't make a decision until all the information has been gathered and I understand that, but I did tell them on Wednesday that they needed to get off their backsides and organise visits to other sites.

"I'm not anti-mining. If they decided they wanted to mine on my farm, they could. I wouldn't necessarily like it, but I would have no reason not to. But where they are looking to mine at the Fingerboards, it will have such negative impact.

"East Gippsland has a reputation as being clean and green, and we want to retain that image.

"We need to broaden our horizons and look beyond the Fingerboards."

Cr White's proposed motion was on behalf of East Gippsland Community Action Group (EGCAG), whose executive consists of unsuccessful council candidates George Neophytou (president), Janiece Grenfell (vice president) and Jeanette Wagner (secretary), and Mine Free Glenaladale.

The intention is to request council take a position of strongly opposing the proposed mining project and as part of this to write to all relevant State Government ministers, Federal Member for Gippsland, Darren Chester, and State Member for Gippsland East, Tim Bull, stating their concern that potential dangers inherent in the project far outweigh any benefits, not only for East Gippsland but for the whole state of Victoria.

EGCAG and Mine Free Glenaladale claim the mining project will jeopardise East Gippsland's clean, green image, its livestock and vegetable production, tourism and healthy environment.

The groups raise issues regarding heavy metals and radioactive materials, soil and dust contamination, water consumption, contamination of the Mitchell and Perry rivers, potential destruction of the vegetable food bowl industry, degradation of the environment, rehabilitation and jobs.

Cr White said the EGCAG and Mine Free Glenaladale groups are passionate about the issue and he "feels sorry for the people that I couldn't commit at this point in time".

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'It's time to take a stand'

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"But I could see it wouldn't be supported and with time being of the essence, if it didn't get the support this time it wouldn't be brought back to council for another three meetings.

"At least this way we can work on getting the support and bring it back for the first council meeting next year, in February," he said.

"If it fails, council doesn't have to write any letters. EGCAG and Minefree Glenaladale are passionate about this issue, but letters to government will have a lot more bang from council than letters from the local groups.

"I want to give this a red hot go. I haven't refused to table the motion, just postpone it. Now it's council's job to get up and gather all the information needed to make the decision."

EGCAG president, George Neophytou, says a mineral sands open cut mine is not compatible with existing farming uses.

"Why jeopardise about 2000 jobs in the food industry in our region alone, on the basis the mine 'may' employ up to 80 jobs (that is for the life of the mine around 20 years)?" he said.

"Arable land would be resumed for mining instead of food production and adjacent lands and beyond impacted by the mining operations.

"The Australian Institute, in its paper, *Dark Side of the Boom (Victoria)* July 2017, produces some alarming figures on the mining industry's track record on rehabilitation.

"The Institute states Victoria has up to 150 operating mines and 122 in care and maintenance, but only one mine has been fully rehabilitated."

Though he says this one mine has not been confirmed and is of contention.

"Bonds held for rehabilitation of all mines is \$160 million with estimates to complete of \$938 million," he said.

Sharon Clerke, of Mine Free Glenaladale, said it's time for the East Gippsland Shire Council to make a stand.

"Councillors need to push home the fact that East Gippsland stands for a clean, green image and food bowl and will not be opened up to a mining capital," Ms Clerke said.

"Don't leave this too late."

"The East Gippsland community needs to know where their councillors sit, whether for or against this mine. That's their right."

Ms Clerke said the "appalling" record of mine rehabilitation across the state "is just one of the numerous bases for the community's justified concerns about the proximity of the proposed mineral sands mine to the Mitchell River flats food bowl, the sensitive Mitchell and Perry rivers which feed into the Gippsland Lakes, and significant tourism routes".

"Many in the community voted for these councillors due to their stance on this mine, their statements can still be viewed on the Minefree Glenaladale blog."

In December last year, the Minister for Planning required Kalbar Resources to prepare an Environment Effects Statement (EES) to assess the potential environmental effects of The Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project.

Draft scoping requirements for this EES were on public exhibition from September 13 to October 6, during which time public comments were invited.

An inter-agency technical reference group has been convened to advise Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and the proponent, Kalbar Resources, on scoping and adequacy of the EES studies and documentation, as well as coordination of the EES process with other statutory processes for the project.