

No to 'gag'

Sir,- In response to Kalbar Resources (Mine opposition 'premature', *News*, November 22), it is a shame Kalbar considers the community and its representatives should not comment on this very critical proposal for an open cut mineral sands mine at the Fingerboards until the Environmental Effects Statement is distributed.

Kalbar also implies council should not make a decision before the statement is released.

This project and the implications are well documented, the proposal has been in progress for over three years and council is supposed to be the holders of local expertise and knowledge and should be able to make a well-informed decision now.

East Gippsland Community Action Group stands for an open and transparent process, with good governance, and the initiation of the notice of motion is a part of this process. Instead, council took extraordinary steps (we were party to the discussions and are well aware of the efforts to keep the motion off the agenda) until the motion was withdrawn so no public comment/s could be presented at the ordinary meeting, and of course councillors were then not required to vote on the motion.

We wonder why did council refuse to take a position on the Fingerboards mineral sands mine project now? It is important for our representatives to tell us where they stand.

People who have lived in an area all their lives, who are directly impacted, been farming on the land in the subject region for many generations should not be stopped from having input until the statement is released.

Preventing bilateral discussions with the affected community is unfortunate as the community has extensive knowledge about weather conditions, wind velocities and direction, the affect that wind has on dust movement, rainfall, extreme weather events caused by East Coast lows and the intensity of runoff from these events into the Mitchell and Perry rivers, understanding soils and subsoils in the area and how they respond to disturbance, and how easily that these soils can be eroded through misguided management.

The community is concerned about the removal of vegetation, including over 400 mature trees some of which are the oldest in the area, mining within 400 metres of the Mitchell River and the affect that mining to a depth of 40 metres, in some areas, will have on subsurface streams and possible contamination to the Mitchell River (Bairnsdale water supply) and Lakes system.

It is not realistic for Kalbar to state that its open cut mine is compatible with the existing sustainable agricultural industry and will not be a threat to the clean green image of the Fingerboards and East Gippsland as a whole. While Kalbar will mine for only a short term of about 20 years, the community will be left with the impacts upon its clean green reputation, possible degradation to the environment and real costs of rehabilitation (if at all possible to rehabilitate), to name a few externalities.

Yours etc., George Neophytou, East Gippsland Community Action Group president.