Fingerboards Critical Minerals and Rare Earths Project
Community Reference Group (CRG)
18 Mar 2025 Meeting Notes

Meeting Date: Tuesday, 18 March 2025
Meeting Time: 12:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Meeting Location: Lindenow Pub & Fingerboards Project Area
Independent Chair: John Mitchell
Recorded by: Gippsland Critical Minerals (GCM)

GCM Project Team Attendees: Michelle Wood, Stefan Wolmarans, Ryan Leslie, Janet Robertson, Murray Holland, Piers Grove, Bryan Chadwick

CRG Member Attendees: Alfred Chown, Andrew Sheridan, Cr Geoff Wells (Wellington Shire), Jillian Stewart, Joshua Nelson, Lionel Rose, Peter Robinson, Tess Coverdale, Trevor Hancock

CRG Member Apologies: David Radford, John Alexander, Simon Padfield, Vesna Rendulic

Attachments:

- CRG Presentation Slides (18 March 2025)
- CRG MW notes Updated 18 March 2025

1. Welcome & Acknowledgement of Country

The meeting commenced at 12:00 PM with a Welcome from John Mitchell, CRG Chair, followed by Acknowledgement of Country and additional words from Michelle Wood, CEO of Gippsland Critical Minerals (GCM). Michelle acknowledged the Gunaikurnai People as the Traditional Custodians of the land encompassing the proposed Fingerboards Project area and paid respects to their Elders past and present.

Michelle outlined the purpose of the day: to share the latest project developments, introduce the new project team, and commence a more robust phase of community engagement. Michelle emphasised that GCM is at the very preliminary stages of the design process and that quoted dates and figures are as accurate as possible but can change in time with market and design changes.

2. Introductions

John Mitchell invited CRG members and project representatives to introduce themselves, share their backgrounds, and articulate their interests in the project. Key points included:

- Diverse representation, including local farmers, business owners, a council member, and former mining professionals.
- Several members expressed scepticism, based on previous experiences with Kalbar Resources and a desire for genuine transparency.
- Acknowledgement from participants of the complexity of the project and a shared goal of fact-based dialogue.
- Multiple members raised the need for protection of farming land, community wellbeing, and environmental assets such as the Mitchell River.

The Chair reinforced that the CRG is a forum for respectful, informed discussions, where all views - supportive or critical - are valid and encouraged.

3. Review of Terms of Reference

The Chair reviewed the Terms of Reference, noting:

- The CRG serves as an advisory group, not a decision-making body.
- It is designed to facilitate two-way communication between GCM and the community.
- Feedback and recommendations will be documented and made transparent.

He emphasised the importance of an audit trail to ensure accountability and invited members to flag concerns throughout the process. No objections were raised to the Terms of Reference.

4. Role of the CRG

Ryan Leslie (Project Director – Community & Stakeholder Engagement) highlighted the CRG's function:

- Act as a sounding board for project plans and updates.
- Provide community insight to inform project design.
- Ensure community voices are captured, understood, and addressed.

Ryan acknowledged the farming families, with many being intergenerational with local landmarks being named after them, that are directly impacted by this project.

Michelle and John encouraged members to approach their role as both contributors and conduits for broader community sentiment, reinforcing the project's goal of iterative, transparent development.

John stated that, while not everyone will agree with each other, it's important to be factually informed and arrive at a shared understanding.

5. Mineral Sands Mining Overview

Presenter: Stefan Wolmarans (Project Director – Technical)

Stefan introduced his engineering and mining background, particularly in mineral sands mining in Australia and Africa. Stefan stated that he's looking forward to creating a design that meets all the challenges and balances the environmental, social, and economic needs of the community.

Stefan presented an overview of mineral sands mining and its global context:

- **Definition of Critical Minerals:** Vital to renewable energy, defence, and modern technologies.
- **Types of Minerals:** Zircon, titanium minerals (rutile, ilmenite), and rare earth elements (e.g., dysprosium, Terbium).
- **Market Trends:** Demand surges in sectors like EVs, wind turbines, and ceramics, with annual growth forecasts of 8-11% for Rare Earth Elements (REEs) and titanium minerals.
- **Geological Context:** Fingerboards deposit was formed 5 million years ago, and the Haunted Hills Formation was laid down over that.
- **Heavy minerals** are not **heavy metals.** Heavy metals like lead and mercury are toxic**.** Heavy minerals are not toxic. Heavy minerals are so much heavier than the quartz (sand) so the term is used relative to the quartz.
- **Extraction Process:**
    - Uses mobile mining units and slurry pumping to a processing plant.
    - Backfilling occurs at the same time as with excavation to minimise environmental footprint.
    - Using gravity, the slurry is passed through spiral concentrators, which are like helical troughs. Heavy minerals (HMC) move to the inside of the spiral due to their higher density. Lighter quartz sand (tailings) flows to the outside.

- The process is wet and enclosed, which helps with dust suppression.
- Tailings (non-valuable sand and fines) are returned to the mine voids and used in rehabilitation. There will be no above-ground tailing dams.
- Centrifuges, as proposed in 2021, will no longer be used.
- Only ~5% of extracted ore is product (Heavy Mineral Concentrate or HMC); the rest is returned as tailings into the mine voids.

- **Safety and Environmental Aspects:**
  - Naturally occurring radioactive materials (NORMs) are present at low levels, well within regulatory limits.
  - Materials remain in mineral form, non-soluble, and safe to handle on site.
  - Noise will be within regulatory limits.

Key Discussion Points:

- Concern about dust and noise.
- Support for local processing and economic diversification.
- Interest in soil rehabilitation, soil horizons and water filtration, water usage, and project footprint.
- Dust modelling – local input / knowledge on wind would help make modelling more realistic.
- Resource location in relation to the Mitchell River.
- Average depth of ore and overburden thickness.
- Comparison with other projects (e.g., Donald, Goschen).

GCM provided scientific context, referenced industry standards, and offered to provide follow-up information and site maps.

6. Project Overview & Key Changes

Presenter: Michelle Wood (CEO)

Michelle introduced the restructured GCM team and the new direction for the project. Key topics included:

- **Company Background:**
  - Michelle's background in strategy and governance.
  - Shareholders include Rezir (Australian-based) and Appian (UK private equity).
- **Strategic Relevance:**
  - Project aligns with Australia's sovereign supply chain priorities.
  - Supports AUKUS alliance and Victoria's Critical Minerals Roadmap.
- **Economic Contributions:**
  - ~300 long-term jobs per annum over 22 years.
  - ~$90M/year to Victorian economy.
  - ~$140M in royalties to the State Government over 22 years.
  - Note: the economic figures above are dependent on market prices at the time.
- **Retention Licence Renewal:**
  - Granted in October 2024 (RL2023 and RL2026).
  - Strict conditions included a new 1.5km buffer from sensitive receptors, fencing off of gully systems, and a formalised community engagement plan.
- **Current Project Phase:**
  - Pre-EES phase: redesign and early engagement underway.
  - Formal EES referral due December 2025.
  - Project milestones are tied to retention licence conditions and reported quarterly to the Victorian Government (documented in the presentation slides).

- **Key Project Changes:**
    - 1.5km Buffer Zone & Gully Conservation Areas
    - Slowing the Ore Mining Rate
    - Smaller Active Mining Area
    - Less On-Surface Trucks
    - New Rehabilitation Strategy & Demonstration Pit
    - Examining options for new process plant location and new rail siding
    - New Water Strategy
    - Long-term Community Water Security
    - Improved Tailings Management Strategy
    - Storage Shed for Concentrate
    - Prioritising Australian Processing
    - Road relocations reduced, Fingerboards intersection retained

Key Discussion Points: Members welcomed the redesign approach but flagged concerns about:

- Past community division and lingering mistrust.
- Public communication creating perceptions of premature approval.
- Clarity and transparency regarding design changes.

Michelle committed to publishing presentations, providing written answers to technical queries, and meeting directly with concerned individuals where appropriate.

7. Engagement & Community Benefits

Presenter: Ryan Leslie (Community & Stakeholder Engagement)

Ryan introduced the evolving engagement strategy and community benefit principles:

- **Engagement Plan:**
    - The focus over the next 2-3 months is to:
        - engage directly with landholders and near neighbours that are directly impacted by the proposal; and
        - generate information and tools, such as a new navigation-friendly website and a 3D visualisation of the mine, to make clear concept designs and proposals for broader community review and feedback.
    - The Webinar Information and Listening Sessions will be held on:
        - 26 March at 1.00-1.45pm
        - 27 March at 5.30-6.15pm.
    - Commencing mid-June, a community roadshow will also be held at locations across East Gippsland and Wellington Council areas. Current plans include:
        - Saturday, 14 June in Bairnsdale
        - Saturday, 21 June in Lindenow
        - Saturday, 28 June in Sale
        - Saturday, 5 July in Stratford
    - More intensive engagement activities including attendance at public events will occur in the second half of 2025 (to be scheduled).
- **Benefit-Sharing Goals:**
    - Prioritise local procurement and employment.
    - Support skills development, including opportunities for young people.
    - Co-design aspects of the benefits framework with the community.
    - Working together with the farming sector to secure long-term water security for East Gippsland.

Key Discussion Points: Key community themes collected included:

- Calls for inclusion of more impacted farmers in the CRG.
- The need to develop a register of sensitive receptors and understand the impact on them.
- GCM is planning on utilising Industry Capability Network to manage tendering of work packages. The new GCM website will, in the shorter term, allow local businesses to express interest in being part of the supply chain.

8. Project Site Visit

Stefan Wolmarans took CRG members to visit the site of the proposed Demonstration Pit. Members appreciated the visual context and asked questions about soil profiles, hydrology, dam design & construction, vegetation impact, and ore accessibility.

9. Positives & Negatives

CRG members stated the following as positives:

- Recognition of a genuine attempt at a fresh start from GCM.
- Development of a demonstration pit in 2026.
- Greater community involvement in the design and development of the mine and benefit sharing schemes.
- Onshore Australian processing and reducing dependence from China.
- Combining with Agricultural uses.
- 300 trainable jobs and no FIFO strategy.
- Local procurement strategy.
- Will help Lindenow flourish through economic / local business growth (note: Fernbank, Lindenow South, and Walpa will receive local focus).
- GCM has more info now to inform community.
- New team and new project – more info / engagement.
- Potential to bring the community together.
- CRG members can spread the message / benefits with others outside CRG.

CRG members stated the following as negatives:

- Fear of the unknown.
- Former project / previous Kalbar experience, as:
    - Harder to convince others
    - Public meetings will be challenging
    - Past engagement inadequate
- Move away from money motivation – understand local community (284 receptors with mixed views – GCM must consult).
- Both pro and anti-mine feel intimidated to speak their mind in public.
- No East Gippsland Shire Council representative present at CRG to hear information and share their views.

10. Key Takeaways, Interests, & Priorities

The group reflected on the day's information and expressed:

- Recognition of a genuine attempt at a fresh start from GCM.
- A need for more data and visuals on key environmental and social concerns.
- The importance of addressing all 49 IAC recommendations in detail.
- Interest in forming smaller focus groups for particular work streams (e.g., dust monitoring, rehabilitation, mine design).

Some members noted lingering fears stemming from the previous project but expressed cautious optimism about the new approach.

11. Meeting Close & Next Steps

John Mitchell thanked members for their contributions. Michelle encouraged further feedback between meetings and reaffirmed GCM's commitment to open communication.

Next Steps:

- Next CRG meeting (#2) tentatively planned for May (Friday morning preferred). Ryan to organise.
- Meetings #3 and #4 likely to be Aug and Nov respectively. Ryan to organise.
- Suggestions for future meetings agenda times include:
    - Detailed methodology and mining schedule (with AECOM).
        - Mining activity timeline with detail of what properties will be affected at points in time.
    - Update on milestones and progress.
    - Dust and rehabilitation modelling presentations.
    - Composition of the CRG (like more Landcare, Birdlife Aust, FOGL etc)
    - Local employment and local procurement policies
    - Engagement of receptors (landholders within 5km)
    - Water sourcing and management
    - Location and layout of mining and processing infrastructure showing workshops, amenities, storage dams, road networks
    - Number and type of plant and machinery (mining, haulage, ancillary)
    - Noise and dust monitoring, impact assessment, controls and mitigation
        - How ore dust differs from surface dust, the silica content and effects on human health
    - More information on Rare Earth Element downstream processing and processors
    - Rehabilitation
        - Restoration of ground condition
        - Post rehabilitation plans and vegetation

- Gully restoration and weed control
- Nursery tour

- A more extensive tour of the mine area and surrounds
- Plans for a local office

Meeting concluded at: 5:00 PM

12. Key Questions

The following questions were raised during the meeting. Answers to some of the questions raised are detailed in the sections above or the presentation slides. Those questions that aren't answered below will be provided as soon as possible.

Question	Answer
Are you going to mine the Fingerboards Junction?	No, the Fingerboards Junction will be preserved.
What opportunity exists for local workers? Will it be Fly-In-Fly-Out (FIFO)?	It won't be a FIFO operation. At least 85% of the workforce will be local and this percentage will increase throughout the life of the project.
What will be the power supply?	GCM is working with Ausnet on a 22kV power supply that won't compromise other customers including irrigators.
What will be the mine's operating hours?	Mining and mineral processing will occur 24/7 with 2 x 12 hour shifts. Product haulage and rail loading will occur during dayshift only.
How noisy is the (processing) plant?	Noise will be within EPA noise control guidelines. Natural features, barriers, and screening will be in place for noise attenuation and minimisation.
What will be the area of mining activity disturbance at any one time?	The total area to be mined over the life of the project is approximately 1,000 hectares. Two mine panels will operate at one time, each approximately 50 hectares in area.
What is the average depth of overburden?	GCM TO DETAIL
What is the average depth of the ore?	GCM TO DETAIL
To what extent are the soil horizons going to be disturbed and to what extent do you get those horizons back so they do the job they're doing now or we're going to end up with subsidence?	GCM is undertaking work with geologists, hydrogeologists, and agronomists to determine the methodology and mitigations. To validate the rehabilitation methodology and provide learnings for operational stage procedures, GCM will conduct rehabilitation trials and a demonstration pit in 2026 in consultation with the local horticulture and agriculture industry, the local First Nations community and the wider community.
Will you be placing trucks on the road?	The Heavy Mineral Concentrate (HMC) will be hauled on provide roads owned by GCM from the Enclosed HMC stockpile to the rail siding, which will take the HMC to the Port of Melbourne or Port of Geelong. Public roads will not be used to haul product.

Will product be shipped to China?	GCM is prioritising supply of HMC to onshore processors in NT and WA in support of the Australian Government's Critical Minerals Strategy and the Victorian Government's Critical Minerals Roadmap.
Is GCM Chinese-owned.	No, Gippsland Critical Minerals (GCM) is not Chinese owned. GCM is jointly owned by Australian-owned REZir Ltd and Appian Capital Advisory, a UK-based investor in critical minerals projects around the world.