

# Fingerboards Project Newsletter



## Good jobs. Stronger Businesses. Real local opportunities.

Over 2025, Gippsland Critical Minerals went back to the drawing board to redesign and rescope the Fingerboards project, providing stronger environmental safeguards, clearer accountability, and a sharper focus on delivering benefits locally.

That redesign has now been completed and forms the basis of the EES Referral that has been accepted by the Victorian Minister for Planning, and we are awaiting guidance on the next stage in the environmental assessment process.

But, there's still more to be done. We're getting on with refining the mine plan and sequencing, progressing tailings and rehabilitation design and developing our water strategy.

We know this detail is important and getting it right reduces impacts, improves restoration outcomes and gives everyone greater confidence in how the project will operate.

One of the things that many community members asked for in submissions made during the 2021 process was rehabilitation trials conducted in conditions that replicated how mining would occur. We are responding to that ask.

The Mining and Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit (MRDP) allows us to trial our mining methods, rehabilitation approach and stronger environmental safeguards at small scale before any broader operations, providing clear evidence for the community and regulators about how the project will perform.

At the same time, the MRDP is already delivering local benefits. More than \$1 million is flowing to East Gippsland businesses, supporting local jobs, businesses and contractors while this work is underway.

Transparency is a priority, including being open about the studies we are conducting, where and when are conducting them and who is conducting them. We have prioritised putting this information on social in real time, so if you see work happening in your area you are fully informed about what we are doing.

We've launched a new website and virtual office,

making project information, technical studies, reports and updates easier to access, no matter where you are. This digital platform is designed to support informed conversations and ensure the community can engage directly with the facts. If digital platforms are not for you, be sure to drop into our office or just give us a call.

We're focused on ensuring the project delivers lasting benefits to the region, guided by the local community and landowners who know what the region needs best.

To ensure we capture all views, our team will increasingly be present in local community hotspots, making it easier than ever to connect with us, ask questions and share feedback without needing to attend a formal session.

Soon, we'll be kicking off workshops on community benefits too, so you can have your say about how you want the region to benefit from this incredible resource of critical minerals.

And it is an incredible resource deposit.

Just this month, the Fingerboards Project was highlighted in the Federal Government's new Australian Critical Minerals Prospectus, drawing attention to nation's leading critical minerals projects. It also highlights the opportunity and potential of this project.

I am always happy to answer your questions, including difficult ones. We're committed to doing this properly and delivering a project we can all be proud of.

### GCM CEO Michelle Wood



# Backing local capability: Riley Earthmoving at Fingerboards

Riley Earthmoving joins Whelans in sharing more than \$1 million in procurement contracts now flowing to East Gippsland businesses, with works on the Mining and Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit (MRDP) set to begin in coming weeks.

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Operating in East Gippsland for more than 40 years, Riley Earthmoving brings deep regional experience and an expectation that major projects are undertaken with care for both the environment and the community.

Project Manager Paul Cox at Riley Earthmoving said the work underway should be understood in a broader regional context.

“The Fingerboards Project has the potential to support long-term benefits for East Gippsland, not just through direct employment, but through the wider economic and social activity that comes with sustained investment over time,” he said.

“For the region, one of the most important outcomes is the opportunity it creates for young people to build professional careers in engineering, surveying, geotechnical, environmental and safety roles without having to leave East Gippsland to do so.”

Since announcing the MRDP, Gippsland Critical Minerals has received strong interest from locals seeking job and supplier opportunities. Anyone considering a career or working with the project is encouraged to register their interest at [gippslandcriticalminerals.com/jobs-suppliers](http://gippslandcriticalminerals.com/jobs-suppliers).



## Studies underway: proof, not promises

A key activity for our baseline monitoring and studies over the last two months has been our ecology surveys.

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The summer ecology surveys, conducted by GHD, surveyed covering summer-flowering plants, threatened species and broader fauna assessments. Zoologists have installed refuge tiles for lizards and skinks and have undertaken frog call-playback surveys and nocturnal spotlighting to better understand species presence and habitat use.

At the same time, specialists from DBH Radiation have installed additional baseline radiation monitoring equipment near the Mining and Rehabilitation Demonstration Pit.

AgriQulture Consulting has also been on site, inspecting paddocks and meeting with local farmers. These visits inform the agriculture and horticulture impact assessment and help build a practical understanding of local land use, planning and rehabilitation, combining local knowledge with technical analysis.

Technical studies led by AECOM are also underway, including a detailed economic assessment by KordaMentha and a comprehensive soils assessment by SLR Consulting.

“As this work progresses, the focus is on building a robust, site-specific evidence base that can be independently tested and scrutinised,” said Bryan Chadwick, Technical Director at AECOM.

“These studies are about understanding local conditions properly and making sure decisions are informed by data gathered on the ground.”

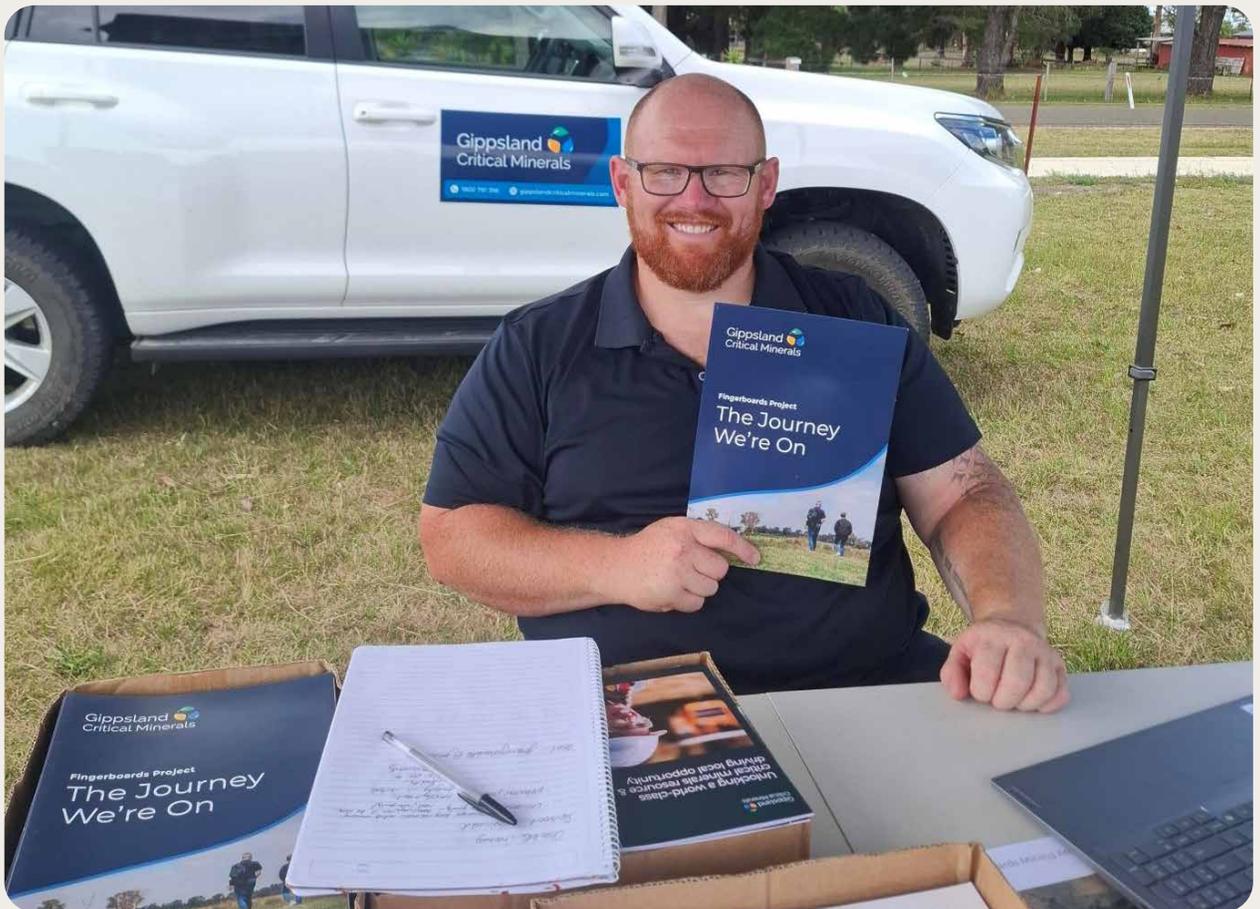
Some of the technical studies are detailed. They will be released as part of the environmental assessment process, we'll release them publicly and host 'Ask the Expert' sessions so community members can speak directly with the specialists and ask questions.



# Community engagement: staying informed and involved

As we head into the new year, we're continuing the ways we already engage with the community, while also adding some new opportunities to help people stay informed and involved in the Fingerboards Project.

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Alongside our regular drop-in sessions, our office in Bairnsdale and our new website and virtual office, you'll start to see me and members of the GCM team out in higher-traffic places, like shopping areas and local community spaces.

The idea is to make it easier for people to connect with us as part of their normal day. We want to come to you, not the other way around.

You can stop by while you're out and about, ask a question, share your views, or just get an update on where things are at. As a lifelong Gippslander,

I love this place like you do and want to hear from all parts of our great community, your voice matters!

These visits are informal and open to everyone. There's no presentation and no need to register. You're welcome to drop in during the advertised times and stay for as long or as little as suits you – see you there.

**Community and Stakeholder Lead,  
Mick Harrington**



## Come and talk with us



Upcoming drop-in sessions

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### **Sale**

Wednesday 18 March, 9-11am  
Sale Shopping Precinct  
(Gippsland Centre)

### **Bairnsdale**

Friday 27 March, 9-11am  
Bairnsdale Shopping Precinct  
(Eastwood)

### **Bairnsdale**

Friday, 10 April and Saturday, 11 April,  
9 am – 4 pm  
East Gippsland Field Days Event

### **Fernbank**

Wednesday, 15 April, 5-7 pm  
Fernbank Hall

### **Lindenow South**

Thursday, 16 April, 5-7 pm  
Lindenow South  
Recreation Reserve

### **Next webinar:**

Thursday, 2 April, 4-5 pm

## Investing in local leadership

GCM is sponsoring a Community Scholarship to support local people to participate in the Gippsland Community Leadership Program.

Delivered in partnership with the Committee for Gippsland, the scholarship funds one full place in the 2026 program and is designed to remove cost as a barrier for people who want to contribute to their community's future.



# Critical Minerals Timeline: How We Got Here

<b>1970s-1980s</b> <b>Foundations of China's dominance</b>	China identifies rare earths as a strategic sector and begins long-term, state-backed investment across mining, processing, and downstream capability.
<b>1990s</b> <b>Western retreat</b>	US processing facilities begin shutting down as China market share shifted with low-cost rare earths. Australia's critical minerals industry remains embryonic.
<b>2000-2010</b> <b>China gains supply chain control</b>	China consolidates majority processing and magnet supply across entire rare earth value chain, from mining through to magnets. Australia begins positioning as a non-Chinese alternative, but global attention remains low.
<b>2010</b> <b>Geopolitical wake-up call</b>	China restricts rare earth exports during a maritime dispute with Japan, triggering sharp price spikes and exposing global supply chain vulnerability.
<b>2011-2015</b> <b>Restart attempts</b>	Restart efforts in the US struggled and ultimately failed in the mid-2010s, while Australia established itself as the major non-Chinese supplier.
<b>2017 - 2020</b> <b>US alarm bells</b>	US national security concern sharpened, with the US Government publishing its Critical Minerals List in 2018 and defence agencies repeatedly warning about dependence on China-dominated supply chains and single-points-of-failure in critical materials.
<b>2019</b> <b>Australia's first national Critical Minerals Strategy Launches</b>	Australia-US critical minerals cooperation is real, with a US-Australia Plan of Action referenced publicly by 2020 (AUSMIN).
<b>2020-2023</b> <b>Demand accelerates</b>	EV's, renewable energy and defence applications drive rapid growth in demand. Governments move to diversify supply chains away from China, with Australia emerging as a key partner.
<b>2023-2025</b> <b>Trade and security tensions reshape markets</b>	US tariffs, Chinese export controls and escalating counter-measures pull rare earths into national security policy and force rapid supply chain diversification.
<b>2025</b> <b>Australia-US cooperation intensifies</b>	Formal partnerships and financing frameworks back trusted producers to secure allied supply of critical minerals.

## Stay Connected

We're committed to open engagement and transparency. Whether you have a question, a suggestion, or simply want to learn more, please get in touch.

