

Fingerboards

Critical Minerals Project EES

1. What is the Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project?

The Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project (the project) is a proposed mineral sands mining project by Gippsland Critical Minerals Pty Ltd. It is a new, modified version of the Fingerboards Mineral Sands Project assessed under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* in 2021.

The project is located within the Glenaladale Deposit in East Gippsland, approximately 200 kilometres east of Melbourne and 25 kilometres west of Bairnsdale, on Gunaikurnai Land in the East Gippsland Shire.

The project proposes to develop high-grade deposits of rare-earths and critical minerals over a 22-year operational period. It is expected to include an 18-month construction commencement stage and two to three years of decommissioning and rehabilitation following operations.

The project is expected to produce approximately 280,000 tonnes per year of zircon, rutile, ilmenite and rare-earth-bearing minerals, including monazite and xenotime. Key activities and infrastructure include:

- mining and ore separation.
- tailings and water management.
- progressive rehabilitation of mined land.
- transport of product by rail, including a proposed new rail siding at Fernbank.
- other supporting infrastructure.

2. What is the purpose of the EES scoping requirements?

Scoping is an important stage before an environment effects statement (EES) is prepared. The scoping requirements set out the specific matters to be investigated and documented in the EES.

They provide a framework for a targeted, risk-based and proportionate assessment, helping the proponent focus its investigations on the project's potentially significant environmental effects while still addressing matters needed for statutory decision-making and an integrated assessment.

The final scoping requirements have been issued by the Minister for Planning and are published on the Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project page of the DTP planning website.

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/fingerboards-critical-minerals-project>

3. How are matters categorised in the final scoping requirements?

The Department has reformed its approach to EES scoping to help make assessment processes under the *Environment Effects Act 1978* faster, more efficient and focused.

Under the revised approach, scoping requirements support a targeted, risk-based and proportionate environmental assessment, enabling proponents to focus more on potentially significant environmental effects.

The scoping requirements identify potentially significant effects and categorise matters into three streams to guide the scope and depth of investigation:



- **Stream 1:** matters with the greatest potential for significant environmental effects. These require rigorous, project-specific investigation.
- **Stream 2:** matters with potential for significant environmental effects, including matters that may influence Stream 1 matters, be regionally significant or be relevant to specific approvals. These generally require focused studies.
- **Stream 3:** matters primarily relevant to key statutory approval decisions rather than being likely to have significant environmental effects. These are examined using a proportionate, risk-based approach.

The stream assigned to a matter does not determine whether it will be assessed. All matters are to be considered, including cumulative effects and interactions within and across environmental topics.

4. What matters are identified for assessment in the Fingerboards EES?

Following consideration of submissions on the draft scoping requirements, the final scoping requirements identify biodiversity; catchment values, water sources and hydrology; air quality, noise and vibration; human health risk; Aboriginal cultural heritage; and agriculture and horticulture as Stream 1 (High Priority) matters.

Radiation; rehabilitation and soils; and social are identified as Stream 2 (Priority) matters, while land use and planning; landscape and visual amenity; traffic and transport; and historic heritage are identified as Stream 3 matters.

The categorisation reflects the potential significance of environmental effects and the relevance of each matter to statutory decision-making needed for the project to proceed. Further information about the changes made in response to submissions is provided in section 6 below.

5. Did the public have an opportunity to comment on the draft scoping requirements?

Yes. The draft scoping requirements were exhibited for public comment for 15 business days from 13 August 2026 to 2 September 2026.

DTP received 116 submissions from individuals, community groups, industry and government organisations. The submissions were considered in finalising the scoping requirements. Where submitters provided permission, redacted copies were also provided to the proponent to inform preparation of the EES.

6. What issues were raised in public submissions?

Key issues raised included:

- water availability, security and management.
- potential impacts on agriculture and horticulture.
- dust generation, air quality and human health.
- radiation, including transport of radioactive material.
- mine tailings management and contamination risks.
- landform stability and hydrogeological function.
- social effects, including community mental health and wellbeing.
- Aboriginal cultural heritage and effects on culturally significant sites, waterways and landscapes, as well as historic heritage.
- effects on biodiversity, habitat values and ecosystems.
- effects on the Mitchell, Perry and Macalister River systems and downstream wetlands, including the Gippsland Lakes Ramsar site.



The submissions also raised concerns about how the scoping requirements respond to the 2021 Minister's assessment of the previous proposal, whether categorising matters into streams could result in some issues being downgraded or assessed in isolation, and the project's financial viability, including the proponent's capacity to rehabilitate the site in the event of premature mine closure.

7. What changes were made to the final scoping requirements?

The changes made in response to submissions were generally minor and clarified or strengthened matters already included. They included:

- clarifying categorisation of matters into Streams 1, 2 and 3;
- emphasising that all the EES' assessment of matters needs to consider cumulative effects and interactions within and across environmental aspects; and
- minor updates to better define existing environmental values and matters to be investigated.

The most significant changes were:

- Agriculture and horticulture was moved from Stream 2 to Stream 1, recognising the potential for significant indirect effects on regional and state-significant operations outside the project area, including effects on produce quality, water resources, regional reputation and downstream industries.
- The key social issues were clarified to better define potential social and economic effects, including workforce capacity, housing availability, public services, businesses and local economic opportunities; and
- Historic heritage was added as a Stream 3 matter because the procedures and requirements issued for the EES by the Minister for Planning under the Act, require it to be investigated, given uncertainty about the extent and magnitude of potential effects.

For most of the remaining comments changes were not made as the matters were already addressed in the draft scoping requirements.

Some concerns raised in submissions were not addressed in the final scoping requirements because they do not relate to the scope of the matters and environmental effects needing to be examined through the EES.

8. What happens now that the Minister has issued the final scoping requirements?

The final scoping requirements set out the matters the proponent needs to continue to examine through technical studies and document in their EES. The proponent will undertake investigations in consultation with DTP and agencies on the technical reference group established by DTP for this EES at the request of the Minister.

The proponent is also responsible for seeking feedback and informing stakeholders and the community during preparation of the EES, in accordance with its EES consultation plan. The plan is available on the Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project page of DTP's planning website:

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/fingerboards-critical-minerals-project>

When completed to an adequate standard in response to the EES scoping requirements, the proponent's EES will be placed on exhibition for public comment. At the end of the EES process, the Minister will issue an assessment of the significance and acceptability of the environmental effects of the project. The Minister's assessment will inform statutory/approval decisions needed for the project to proceed.



9. Why is an EES required for the Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project?

An EES provides an integrated and transparent assessment of a project that has the potential for significant environmental effects, in order to inform subsequent decision-making required for the project. The EES process enables an understanding of environmental impacts and risks and informs refinement of the project. All relevant statutory decision-makers for required approvals need to consider the Minister's Assessment at the end of the EES process.

On 14 February 2026, the Minister for Planning determined that an EES was required for the project because it has the potential for significant effects on matters including:

- native vegetation, biodiversity and ecological values
- surface water and groundwater, including downstream wetlands and groundwater-dependent ecosystems
- Aboriginal cultural heritage
- air quality, noise and vibration
- agriculture, horticulture and other land uses
- landscape and visual values
- socio-economic values
- traffic and transport, soils and contamination, radiation and historic heritage.

10. What about the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*?

The project was referred to the Commonwealth under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). On 13 May 2026, a delegate for the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment and Water determined that the project is a controlled action (EPBC 2026/10462).

The controlling provisions are Ramsar wetlands, listed threatened species and communities, listed migratory species and nuclear actions.

The Victorian EES process is being undertaken as an accredited assessment under the bilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and Victoria. This allows one assessment process to examine the project's likely impacts and inform both Victorian and Commonwealth decision-making. Commonwealth approval is a separate decision made after the assessment phase.

11. Where can I find more information?

The final scoping requirements, EES consultation plan and future project updates will be available on the Fingerboards Critical Minerals Project page of DTP's planning website:

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/environmental-assessments/browse-projects/referrals/fingerboards-critical-minerals-project>

Questions about the EES process and scoping requirements can be directed to DTP's Impact Assessment Unit:

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