

**Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project**  
**Fast Track Application FTAA-2507-1089**

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Bendigo's story started with the gold rush in the 1800's – it was the richest quartz reef gold strike in New Zealand. It drew people from all over the world with promise of prosperity. After the gold rush finished many people stayed, settled and this established the start of the communities we have today.

**Bendigo – Our Sacred Place**

When I was given the opportunity to buy Bendigo from the Lucas family in the late 1970s, it was always known to me to be a vast iconic property known for being drought prone and experiencing more than its fair share of the rabbit plague that was affecting many Central Otago high country properties. Bendigo Station was originally 11,000 hectares. Today after tenure review we own 8,645 hectares with grazing rights to the balance of the land that was put into conservation estate.

Bendigo has been sacred to me and my family for forty-seven years. The Perriam family have been honored to be the custodians of Bendigo Station since 1979 and we have never taken it for granted. We were given the right to be custodians of one of New Zealand's most iconic treasured properties, not just owners, and with that comes a duty: to influence Bendigo's future direction responsibly, so it continues to serve New Zealand long after we're gone. It has been an incredible opportunity despite the challenges.

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**Lessons From the Clyde Dam**

I know what it feels like to be forced off your land for the supposed national good. In the 1970's before coming to Bendigo I was farming on our third-generation family farm at Lowburn. My farm was compulsorily acquired and I had to stand and watch as bulldozers

flattened century-old trees and our farm disappeared beneath the rising waters of Lake Dunstan. Communities were uprooted, relocated and a lot of history may have drowned but it was not lost.

While they were dark days for me personally out of them came growth, prosperity and new opportunities. Cromwell flourished, highways were built, tourism, industry and new, larger and diverse communities followed.

Sometimes, loss is the price of growth and sometimes you have to give something to gain something in return.

The lessons from the Clyde Dam project shaped me. “You can fight change, or you can shape it”.

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### **Landscape Change at Bendigo**

Bendigo Station has always been a place of change. From the early days of pastoral farming in the 1800's to gold mining then back to pastoral farming where the land was cleared by root raking, burning and then over sown and fertilized with the advent of aerial topdressing. The rabbit plagues of the 1970's and 1980's desecrated the land and removed much of the vegetation. Even today much of the land still struggles to retain vegetation and those not around in those days think that the landscape as it looks now is its natural state. This is far from the truth as the land had so much more potential before rabbits arrived and it is uneconomic to try and regenerate this land for pastoral farming. The land that Santana Minerals plans to mine is the meanest part of our Bendigo Station farm. It was also devastated by rabbits, it has lower fertility, its dry in the summer and cold in the winter.

Since I have farmed at Bendigo, we have invested heavily in irrigation which utilized many of the old 100-year mining water rights. This has transformed parts the farm with over 500 hectares spray irrigated and over 600 hectares irrigated for horticulture and viticulture. The abundance of irrigation water in the Clutha Basin has allowed me to developed water schemes for viticulture, horticulture and residential development at Bendigo. I was responsible for putting in and developing these irrigation schemes, I am a still a shareholder in these schemes and I own three of the vineyards at Bendigo along with residential land earmarked for future subdivision so I understand the water and the land probably better than others from a practical point of view having lived and worked this land for the last forty-seven years.

Given the ever-changing landscape at Bendigo and in Central Otago I don't believe this application is about Landscape issues as Bendigo has gone from pastoral farming to gold mining and back to more intensive irrigated farming, horticulture, viticulture and residential property. There is even now a dairy grazing and dairy farming operation in the Thompsons Gorge right below the mine sight. The land which would be mined changed from its natural state in the 1800's and the land around it has also changed many times to other more productive and profitable uses with water.

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### **Bendigo – Our Families Story – “The strength is in the struggle”**

My late wife Heather and I bought up our family at Bendigo and my three children and their families all still live and work at Bendigo and are part of the Tarras community. We invested what farming profits we had back into the farm and opened the land up to the public by working with Department of Conservation and the government to help create, protect and look after the Bendigo Historic Reserve and Kanuka conservation parks totaling over 1700 hectares. As far as ecology goes these conservation parks are unique, open to the public and far outweigh any ecological or conservation properties contained within the proposed mine site if they were explored as much as the mine site has been over the last three years. If The Department of Conservation had funds to study and invest in these areas the Bendigo Conservation areas would show a greater range of diversity in ecology and fauna. These areas are also the most visited by the public and showcase the historic mining history of the area.

Over time at Bendigo through our investment in water and our ability to keep an open mind as to the opportunities that new people and new ideas can bring, the hard work and vigilance bore fruit. The barren dry slopes became some of Central Otago's greatest wine country. We continued to restore historic buildings, opened trails, and provided public access to the land. Thousands of visitors now walk, bike, or just sit on a rock, absorbing the story of the land. The majority of all this activity and development is quite some distance from the proposed mine site with the vineyards and recreation areas all at least 7 km away.

I never sold any of Bendigo's land to people I didn't think would enhance or add value to Bendigo, Tarras or the local community. I am proud of the people who have come to Bendigo and bought new ways of working or looking after the land, from the Viticulture, Horticulture, commercial operations and residents who now live and work at Bendigo.

When detractors of the proposed mine say that much of the wealth will go offshore or it will only employ foreign workers. I find this a bit narrow minded when New Zealand's

economy relies on sending our products offshore to get paid for them and most of our businesses are funded or supported by foreign owned banks. Furthermore, Bendigo has a huge number of backpackers and RSE workers who support the horticulture and viticulture industries already and without these overseas workers they would not be viable or able to get their crops harvested.

My family will continue to live and work at Bendigo and we plan to continue investing in the land. We have no issues with farming and living next to a gold mine. We have already given them easements for power and water we have found them to be trust worthy and honest.

When two geologists turned up at Bendigo nine years ago, like everyone that comes to Bendigo we welcomed them and let them have a look around. People had been trying to find economic gold deposits on Bendigo ever since the last miners left in the early 1900's. With new technology and a bit of luck the discoveries they made were beyond ours and their wildest dreams and when this progressed to something real and economic that became of value my first instinct was to say no to the miners given the stigma that goes with large scale mining. With advice we decided to give them access and only to ever lease the land rather than sell it to them should it ever become viable. That way I could keep control and ensure that Bendigo and the local communities were protected from risks of mining.

Over the years as the project grew and grew, I realized that this opportunity was too big for a farmer to control. I realized that these geologists, scientists and mining people were experts in their field, they were honest and up front and transparent about their intentions and so in the end I chose trust over control. Trust that the mining company, the local, regional and central government would put in place robust conditions on modern mining practices. Trust that the conditions I have personally set with Santana will be honored into the future and a hope that the land will be returned to the people at the end of the project.

So, this is why, after vowing never to sell that I have chosen to let the experts and our local, regional and central government take over control of the mining land which is only 10% of Bendigo Station, to provide for more than just one family but for hundreds of thousands of New Zealanders.

The decision to sell 700 hectares hasn't been easy. But I believe it is right.

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## **Water and Compliance Monitoring**

I believe the biggest issues for the panel to consider are water quality and the control over the gold mining company so as to minimize the risk and provide comfort and safeguards to the public and local communities in the future. I would hope that the panel would impose conditions or legislate and put in place a watchdog / group that oversees and enforces these conditions.

I have read the fast-track application submissions, signed off on the rehabilitation plan and my family would be keen to buy back or graze and continue farming the land upon mine closure. While not an expert I am comfortable that the dam construction and the capture, recycling and treatment of water from the mined area will be sufficient to give us comfort to carry on living, working and developing Bendigo and to farm it in the future post mine. We would happily still love to graze the land around the mine during its' operation if the opportunity arose and it was feasible to do so. We see this as no different to our current arrangements with the viticulture industry at Bendigo where we still graze vineyards and cherry orchards when appropriate and we work alongside them sharing water, road and other infrastructure.

The majority of water that is used for irrigation at Bendigo comes from either bores from beside the Clutha River or the Bendigo aquifer which sits below our irrigated flat land. There is plenty of it as it is a green zone for new consents. The water is not guaranteed as potable and we have filters and UV treatment on our water takes. The water already has minute traces of minerals (including arsenic, aluminum, iron and is high in calcium) Iron and Calcium causes issues with our irrigation infrastructure at times. The water is regarded as hard water but it is clean and none of the trace elements are considered dangerous but they are naturally occurring and have been there ever since we have been at Bendigo and none of my family or our livestock have ever had any issues with the water quality.

We would hope that if the panel approves a mine that they put the appropriate conditions, controls and a watchdog group that monitors those conditions and controls into the future so that everybody is protected and comforted by the decision.

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### **The Scale of Opportunity**

The opportunity of this gold mine is extraordinary. Billions of dollars into the NZ and Otago economy. This is without question the greatest opportunity and this isn't just money on paper. It's hospitals, Its rescue helicopters, It's modern roads and infrastructure.

Like viticulture and horticulture new development will bring about new opportunities, new people and communities and our struggling community of Tarras badly needs an injection of people and funds to help it grow back to when it had a vibrant community with sports teams, full schools and churches. The current makeup of people in the district does not seem to be sustainable for our little Tarras community and it has been in decline for a number of years despite Central Otago being one of the fastest growing regions in New Zealand. The opportunity from an economic perspective is not in question we have always known there is gold in the hills and we welcome the opportunity that a gold mine will bring to this region and New Zealand.

People may say that I have a vested interest in supporting the gold mine application given I have agreed to sell them the land. Certainly, there will be a greater opportunity for me to carry on supporting social investment opportunities than there is from farming this land.

I am heartened to see Santana Minerals already employing many locals and investing millions into the local economy, they have shown support for many local charitable and community causes which is what I believe all businesses should do if they are able.

Indeed, my family has a charitable trust to put funds back into the community, into health and the services our people need. We are also continuing to invest in Bendigo and Tarras. While we might be selling 10% of our farm land, we are already developing more sustainable pastoral irrigation and more opportunities for people to live at Bendigo. The Perriam family are not going anywhere, my two sons Stew and Daniel will continue to farm and grow specialized merino wool at Bendigo which is sold direct by my daughter in law Sarahs fashion shop Devold in Wanaka and my daughter Christina will continue to run a high-end Merino fashion business from Tarras and invest in and upgrade of the Tarras Village.

“Our ancestors sacrificed so we could live here. Now it’s our turn to make sure the next generation has what they need to thrive.”

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## **Returning the Land to the People**

Through selling the land my position is clear: when mining ends, the land must be rehabilitated and returned to the people of New Zealand as a public park.

Just as we created Kanuka Park, Welsh Town, and Logantown public reserves, this land should be added to the chain of spaces New Zealanders can enjoy and explore, free of charge.

Imagine future generations walking, running and biking through landscapes that tell every chapter of Bendigo's story: gold, merino, wine, Shrek, and back to gold again in a public space for all.

This is continuity, not destruction.