

Santana Bendigo Ophir mine application under Fast Track Approvals Act

Statement of Simon Gibbard and Nicola Mulvena

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1. We thank the panel for inviting us to comment on this application that will considerably affect our health our lives and potentially our future livelihood.
2. My wife and I have been living on Thomson Gorge road since 2011. We are one of the residents closest to the proposed mine site and on the access road to the mine.
3. I (Simon) have been employed in the mining and underground tunnelling industry for 38 years, and worked in many international mine locations. I started work as a young man in 1985, and spent 8 years as an underground supervisor and narrow vein air-leg miner at the Oceana Gold Macraes mine from 2011-2018. During many years of my working life I have lived in on site mine accommodation. I am currently employed on a contract as an underground construction supervisor working in Victoria Australia.
4. Nicola, with my part time support, runs an olive grove and olive oil business from our land on Thomson Gorge Road. Our extra virgin olive oil brand is called Squeaky Hinge, and is sold exclusively to some of the highest quality restaurants and retail outlets in NZ. It is a very high quality product with a uniquely local vibrant spicy flavour profile. It is spray free and grown using organic principles. We market this product specifically on our growing location in Tarras. We believe the flavour profile of our olive oil is mostly due to our unique soils and microclimate, most importantly the clean air and clean water that we use to irrigate our olive trees. We rely on this pristine environment in our branding and selling of Squeaky Hinge Olive Oil. Our website lists further information: <https://www.squeakyhinge.co.nz/>
5. Our water bore is part of a local irrigation scheme: Ardgour Pipeline Limited, of which I am a director. We have had a meeting with Santana to discuss their interest in water from our scheme and a share transfer as part of their purchase of Ardgour Station land, some of which is part of our local scheme. We are very concerned how the mine will affect the long term water quality of our aquifer. Most mines I have worked on pollute the surrounding waterways.
6. We purchased our property as a young olive grove with the intention to develop this into our privately owned business to generate income post my mining career retirement. We have also grown up two boys (now adults) on our property and the Shepherds and Rise and Shine creek valleys, with much time spent as a family hiking, camping, swimming in the Thomson creek waterfalls, dirt biking and watching and hunting deer. We have a very strong affiliation with the local area and know it very well.
7. Having in depth personal experience in the mining sector for several decades gives me a highly relevant insight into what we can expect from the Santana mine. Over the past few years I have

had one meeting with Mr. Damian Spring and several with Mr. Paul Miles, the Santana General Manager, whom I know from previous employment.

8. Nicola and I are VERY concerned about many aspects of the mine proposal, as well as the experience of this company and its plans for both the mine and relationship with the local Thomson Gorge road resident community. I will list the major areas of concern as follows.
9. Santana have told us that our underground water will remain "safe", as the ground they want to mine is "un-fractured". However, at the Macraes underground mine, which has an almost exact same underground fractured schist rock profile, the rock can go from dry areas and turn into underground rain forests, gushing in through faults from the surface into the underground mine areas. I am highly concerned that in the Santana mine there will be extensive seepage and pollution of the aquifer system that we rely on for our drinking and irrigation water.
10. I have seen first hand the polluted waterways and dust covered soils that surround most mine tailings dams, open pits and processing plants, including at Macraes. Santana claim that the water will all be treated and the dust won't travel beyond the mine site, but that has never been my experience in any mine I have worked at. It's just not the reality.
11. The dust that comes from most open pit mines is a very fine silica dust that drifts, and is not easily suppressed by water. At Macraes we had many days with fine dust covering the surrounding mine areas you could kick around with your boots. The dust finds its way everywhere. Santana claims that we live too far from the mine site to be affected and that the wind does not blow our way, but there are many days where the easterly blows massively through our orchard and our valley. (We are less than five minutes drive to the mine site).
12. We have been shown an early Santana water quality report that stated there is a good chance our aquifer will become polluted over time and that we may need an alternative potable water supply in time to come. We have no idea how this will affect our olive grove, and if this water supply would also be usable for irrigation. In any case, it would be a disaster for our business if it became known that the mine is polluting our local aquifer.
13. Our quiet rural gravel road has already become a dust bowl with Santana traffic. For some reason CODC has approved early works, and our mature trees have now all been cut down, high voltage power poles erected, the road widened and grass verges removed to install a new chorus cable. Our gates, fence and letterbox that apparently sat on the council strip have all been removed, and after complaints reinstated by the Santana contractor. The grass verge we had was hydro seeded but not sufficiently watered, so we now have a dust bowl. CODC has said this is a Santana contractor problem and we are again having to sort this out ourselves. Our contact with both the council and Santana has been appalling. All we get is an occasional pamphlet in the letter box, but no proper community meetings, just drop in sessions at the local hall where they give us superficial answers.

14. Santana say that most mine workers will travel by bus and the traffic will be minimal. They also say there will be 500+ vehicles on our road daily. At most mines I have worked where we had buses, most people wanted the freedom to travel in their own cars, or share cars with work colleagues. The mine maintenance days saw a huge increase in traffic and turned the local roads into dust bowls, as the mine came to a total stand still and all the maintenance work would have to get done in a few days. There would be huge trucks, cranes, many more people than normal, and this would happen around twice a year. The quiet rural character of the area will all be gone when this mine starts blasting the rock and run their huge noisy mills.
15. Santana have also told us there will be a workers caravan park on site for some of the workers. In most overseas mines they no longer have caravan facilities, as they have found those to become very problematic and attract a poor working class that badly affects the local community. Excessive alcohol, drugs and sex worker activities are common in these camps, and most mines now have proper accommodation facilities with strict rules in place.
16. From the contact we have had with Mr. Damian Spring, we have no confidence that he is of good character or even particularly experienced at running a large open cast gold mine project. Santana have already broken the rules several times doing unconsented activities. They have no interest to engage with the Tarras locals who will be directly affected at all or listen to our concerns and give us honest answers. We also have little faith in CODC and ORC being able to control them. They simply don't have the experience or the resources.
17. Several of us along Thomson Gorge road have had our properties for sale for a long time. Our own property has been on the market from April - Dec 2025. We had many open home days but whenever we got someone interested, they ask about the mine, and when told, they immediately lose interest. Our realestate agent told us the mine was the problem and putting people off. There is no question that it is almost impossible now to sell our properties. When we asked Santana, they told us our property values are likely to go up because of the mine, and that it is too early for us to worry about that.
18. For all of these reasons we ask that you very carefully evaluate the Santana proposal, and that you decline it for the huge environmental impacts it will cause. Being so directly affected we feel we are able to comment personally on the impact this will have not only on our environment with water contamination, dust pollution covering everything from our fruit trees, ponds, vegetable gardens house and buildings, as well as importantly, the air that we breathe. 24/7 noise pollution, heavy traffic and the loss of our spectacular night sky from the huge halo of light from the mine, but also on both our physical and mental health. If you do approve the mine we would ask that we have some way to get compensation that matches the loss and disruption to our lives, business and our home.
19. The obvious risk to the wider Clutha River catchment is our primary concern. The potential for toxic leaching into our aquifers and waterways is a catastrophic risk to the downstream environment. Protecting these vital water systems from potential contamination must be the priority over any short term mining gain.

20. Thank you for reading our submission.