

Email to: substantive@fasttrack.govt.nz

Dear Committee Members,

We thank the Committee for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Fast Track proposal by the Bendigo-Ophir Gold Project located in the hills behind our home. We are **strongly against** that approval being granted.

Our general and personal concerns are outlined below:

A. General Concerns:

1. Mine tailings dam. A huge tailings dam in the hills up from the valley where we live is a long-term liability to the local community. However well designed, there is always the risk of a break, or slow leakage into our aquifers. Unexpected events can occur even with safety regulations in place. The discharge of 70 million litres of untreated sewage into the sea at Moa Point in Wellington from a fault at their wastewater plant is just one such recent case. Although Otago is not normally known for strong earthquakes, there are several active fault lines across the region including the Alpine Fault (AF8) in the Southern Alps. The probability of such a major earthquake increases with time. It is not a matter of 'if' it will occur; it is a matter of 'when' it will occur. This would have devastating effects on all communities downstream. A tailings dam will remain far longer than the mine itself. It will remain forever. It is a legacy that we will be leaving future generations who will be obligated to respond to such a catastrophic failure event.

2. Water quality and chemicals. Effects of the mine on our aquifer system and Clutha River is of major concern. Long-term seepage of tailings dams and mine activity into ground waters is a well-documented outcome of mining activity. This may not happen in the short term but can often take decades to show. Macraes mine, for example, which is of very similar rock composition shows continuous underground water leaking into the underlying earth. In addition, the processing plant and haul roads will be located in a narrow contained valley with steep walls on either side on top of the Shepherds Creek bed (which is dry for most of the year but can rapidly flood during infrequent large rain events). Arsenic dust from the processing plant soil pad and haulage roads is likely to exacerbate the quality of the water run off. And whilst there is an International Cyanide Code regulating transport, storage and use of cyanide, we understand that the company is non-committal to subscribing and adhering to this code. Climate change could bring more and larger rain events that may flood or flush contaminated water into our nearby streams and find its way into the aquifers, and the Lindis and Clutha rivers.

3. Dust/arsenic. The mine will generate a large amount of dust, particularly at the open pit during blasting, and on the soil-unloading pad and haul roads. This dust will run into the Shepherds Creek Valley, and wind will move this dust well beyond the mine site, which will not be fully mitigated by dust suppression methods. What makes this important and very concerning is that the winds through and around the Thomson Gorge are very high and it is unclear to us how far the dust plume will reach and affect our air quality. Of particular concern is the high arsenic content of this dust, which at Macraes visibly covers paddocks around the mine site up to 1 km nearby.

4. Noise/blasting. The mine will be noisy in a number of ways and likely to dramatically affect the rural character of our neighborhood. There will be explosive blasting for the open pit and later in the underground mine. The underground blasts will also generate vibrations, as will the crusher and mill that grinds the soil into dust. The mill will be very noisy, as well as traffic noise, which will increase dramatically with workforce assumed to be arriving daily between 5.30-7.30AM and leaving again 5.30-7.30PM. There will be a steady stream of workers and service industry every day. There may also be the horns of the trucks going 24/7 as they are used to signal turns and reversing. On plant maintenance days this traffic volume will be dramatically increased.

5. Workers' camp. The application to erect a workers camp just down the road from us concerns us greatly. There are many published studies of the cultural impact a new mine has on a nearby community. This workers camp will likely consist of an all male workforce from out of town, maybe even overseas, and bring with it a whole range of social ills, including alcohol, drug abuse, and unwanted paid sexual activity. Traffic associated with the workers camp will be day and night. Although Santana claims this will only be a temporary workers camp for the building of the processing plant, we are very concerned this camp may well become more permanent as workers accommodation is in critically short supply in the area.

6. Other concerns. There are a number of other concerns of a broader nature that are not specific to our local community. They include the negative reputational impact on the tourism and wine industry; the impact of substantial use of diesel and electricity on supply and consumer pricing, especially during the current Gulf War; a large water take from the local aquifer; impacts on local flora fauna and biodiversity; the financial impact on local councils to upgrade and maintain various requirements (e.g., roads & services); negative socio-economic impacts on the region (current low regional unemployment and a severe housing shortage); and eventual mine closure and remediation plans and bonds. These are all issues that need to be addressed.

Personal Concerns.

We currently operate two businesses from our property, selling top-grade unsprayed olive oil, and a bnb providing country-style premium accommodation. Since the start of this project, this mine has significantly affected us, and if it is given consent, will do so in a far more detrimental way.

1. Traffic/inconveniences. Thomson Gorge Road was once lined with beautiful tall eucalyptus trees. We, and our bnb guests have often enjoyed walking and cycling along this road. The trees now have been removed to enable road widening and our fences and/or gates have been re-located. We have experienced months of daily traffic increases, and stop and go lights while work has been carried out, disrupting our daily lives, and changing the quiet character of our home and business. We have also been subjected to several 9-hour power cuts during the day to enable cables to be laid for the mine, including days when we had bnb guests.

2. Property values/loss of income. There is no doubt the establishment of a large industrial gold mine and industrial activity will decrease the attractiveness of the area and the value of our properties. For the past 6 months, we have had our property on the market for reasons unrelated to the mine, and there has been little interest.

Prospective buyers want to know whether there will be a mine just up the road with subsequent traffic congestion and noise, or not. This decision and the selling of our property now await a decision from the Committee in 7 months time. In addition, local bookings for the bnb have decreased dramatically resulting in business losses and subsequent loss of income. We have had only one Kiwi family staying with us this summer season. We have had no discussions with Santana with regard to these issues raised, nor have we been offered any compensation for our losses.

3. Mental Health. Due to Points 1 and 2, there is no doubt that our mental health has suffered. The destruction of our landscape, continuous inconvenience, dust, and uncertainty has affected us. Although a decision concerning the mine is yet to be decided by the Committee, the mine infrastructure is being progressed as if it has already been decided. We see it every day, as our environment is changed. We have been offered no support, and our meetings with representatives from Santana have not been particularly cordial.

Professor Geoffrey Kearsley
Dr. Claire Fletcher-Flinn

