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## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Stockman Project: Work Plan – Mining Regulator Ignores Risks to Tambo River and Gippsland Lakes.**

On 17 April 2019 the Victorian mining regulator Earth Resources Regulation approved the Work Plan for Round Oak Minerals' Stockman Project located 16km east of Benambra.

Gippsland Environment Group is seriously concerned about the work plan approval which permits the massive expansion of the old Benambra mine tailings dam known as Lake St Barbara. The tailings dam is constructed right across Straight Creek, a tributary of the Tambo River, and currently contains 700,000 tonnes of toxic tailings. The old Benambra copper and zinc mine operated from 1992-96 until mining company Denehurst abandoned the site.

The steep mountainous country of the upper Tambo River is a completely inappropriate location to construct a huge tailings dam on top of an older, much smaller, and potentially unstable dam. The Stockman project will double the height of the dam wall from the current 20 metres high to up to 45m above the valley floor, and increase the surface area from 8 ha to approx 35ha, to store up to another seven million tonnes of toxic tailings.

The original tailings dam was constructed in 1992 of rockfill lined with 2 mm thick geomembrane liner to prevent seepage as there was insufficient local clay available to adequately line the inside of the dam wall. This plastic liner has a lifespan of possibly 30 years. A concrete grout curtain installed at the base of the dam has a lifespan of 2-80 years depending on the acidity of the tailings. The newer HDPE plastic liners have a lifespan of only 100-200 years.

The tailings must remain covered with a minimum of 2 metres of water forever to prevent an acid chain reaction occurring and releasing heavy metals into the downstream waterway. If the 700,000 tonnes of tailings currently in the dam became exposed to the air at any time in the next thousand years the resultant oxidation would produce the equivalent of 20,000 tonnes of zinc. The Stockman Project, which plans to operate for nine years, would produce tenfold that volume of tailings. Heavy metals can cause cancer and acute organ damage.

It is outrageous that government authorities can permit any mining company to massively expand a tailings dam located across a waterway when the historic and future dam wall seepage control measures have such a short lifespan relative to the thousand years or more the toxic tailings must remain quarantined from the Tambo River and Gippsland Lakes.

This is an unconscionable burden to leave for future generations to deal with.



Stockman Project - Work Plan approval will permit Round Oak Minerals to double the height of the dam wall, increasing the dam surface area by almost four-fold, in order to store an additional seven million tonnes of mine waste.

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