

21 June 2019

**VEAC's Final Report provides recommendations for the future of the forests of Central West Victoria, improving protection of nature and helping to safeguard against the impacts of population growth and climate change**

Today the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) publicly released its Central West Investigation Final Report with a number of recommendations to support the future of the forests in central west Victoria.

A key recommendation is placing nearly 60,000 hectares of land into protected areas including national park, conservation park, nature reserve and bushland reserves (See Executive Summary attached) The 60,000 hectares is equivalent to around 38 per cent of the total public land located in the central west area.

Under VEAC's recommendations the majority of recreation activities - camping, four-wheel driving, horse and trail bike riding, cycling, mountain bike riding and walking - will continue in the central west forests. Prospecting and hunting will be affected in some areas however there are many places in the investigation area and outside of it for these activities to continue. For example, prospecting will continue in around 80 per cent of the region's known goldfields and hunting continues in the State forests of Mt Cole and the Pyrenees.

The Central West Investigation was requested by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio.

The Final Report is the culmination of an independent, two-year investigation in which VEAC conducted thorough scientific evaluation and consulted extensively with communities and stakeholders in the investigation area. More than 3300 submissions were provided by members of the public helping inform and shape the final recommendations, and VEAC spoke to many hundreds of people at community drop in sessions and stakeholder meetings.

According to VEAC Chair, Janine Haddow, while a number of people expressed a desire for things to stay the same, community members were also clear that the forests were already changing due to increased numbers of visitors and the competing pressures for a wide range of recreational activities.

“Victoria's population growth means more residents and visitors using the forests and decisions need to be taken now to protect the forests from over use,” says Ms Haddow.

“There are also the impacts of climate change affecting water production and increasing bushfire risk. We're also seeing habitat deteriorating putting pressure on a significant number of rare and endangered species.”

## Media Release

VEAC's recommendations protect the most important habitat for about 380 rare or threatened plants and animals and help to meet Victoria's conservation benchmarks for ecosystem protection (currently poorly represented in this area).

With the only large areas of wet forest away from the coast, the Central West forest is the only place in western Victoria for some species such as the **Greater Glider** and others that are found nowhere else in the world, such as the **Mount Cole Grevillea**. The area's dry forests are also crucial for the survival of species such as the **Swift Parrot** and **Brush-tailed Phascogale** – a small relative of the Tasmanian Devil. All of these species are known to have become much rarer in recent decades and some are down to very small numbers in very limited locations.

According to Ms Haddow, Victoria is one of the most cleared States in Australia with more than half of the land now cleared. "Looking after our public land is one of the most effective strategies to protect nature."

During its investigation VEAC also engaged with Traditional Owners who said they wanted to see more protection of forests and for rivers and their headwaters and catchments to be protected. "Country is more than just the landscape ... it is a living entity that holds the story of the creation and histories that cannot be erased" - Dja Dja Wurrung Peoples.

VEAC provides independent and strategic advice relating to the protection and sustainable management of Victoria's environment and natural resources. It is used to provide solutions to complex and contentious issues relating to public land.

The Government has until late February 2020 to consider the recommendations of the Central West Investigation Final Report.

To access the Central West Investigation Final Report and the summary of public submissions please visit [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au)

For media enquiries please contact Lisa Bowman on 0419 386 729

Attached Summary Report

2 Lonsdale Street  
GPO Box 527  
Melbourne  
VIC Australia 3001

T 03 9637 9902  
Toll Free 1800 134 803  
E [veac@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@delwp.vic.gov.au)  
[www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au)

---