

My submission into VEAC's Central West Investigation draft proposal paper

As a long term bush user I am extremely concerned with VEAC's Central West investigation draft proposal paper.

Changing the status of parks in the Central West region to National Parks and State Parks which will stop bush users access totally to some of these parks and severely restrict access to other parks is a backward step and will negatively impact surrounding communities. I find these recommendations incredible considering our present situation in Victoria. Currently we have three thousand people per week moving to Victoria, one hundred and fifty six thousand each year and our state population has already reached five million. Keep closing parks and this fast growing population will have no where to go to enjoy outdoor recreational activities.

Health Benefits

On one hand the government is encouraging outdoor activities to keep fit and healthy then on the other hand shutting down all these parks (which doesn't make sense) We have a large population of older retired people a big percentage of these retirees have no interests and are declining mentally and physically. Encouraging them to join some bush users group and get out in the fresh air and get exercise could only have positive affects on their health and wellbeing. Spending time in the bush is great for mental health. Our current generation of young people have been raised having access to computers, computer games, iPads and mobile phones. More reasons to keep our parks open and accessible to all activities otherwise we finish up with nation of house dwellers, with no knowledge of the bush and how to care for it and learn to basic survival skills.

In comparison if the golfing community had half of the golf clubs closed down and then had to make do with what course were left it would cause a riot. The truth is this is what is happening to the bush users. Don't tell me its because we are destroying the bush. To build golf courses how many thousands of hectares of Victorian bush land has been cleared displacing flora and fauna just so people can play golf. Bush users aren't cutting down tress and clearing all the vegetation to make fairways, golfers enjoy there hobbies without interference, it would be great if bush users enjoy the same respect.

Habitat Concerns

In reference to your concerns over the diminishing numbers of certain flora and fauna species. I believe there is a seed bank. Wouldn't it be wise to gather seed of these endangered species for back up? In the case of endangered fauna, captive breeding has worked for different species in the past. We have plenty of Zoo's to take on these projects. As for old tree nesting sites how hard would it be to design all weather nest boxes with sloping rooves so feral cats and other predators can not sit on top of the boxes and kill the occupants when they emerge. The nest boxes could be affixed to trees in designated areas by forestry workers or parks Victoria, solving the problems of nesting habitats.

Prospecting

Another story that seems to be circulating is the Hobby prospector is a threat to the Traditional Owners Cultural Sites and Artifacts. To my knowledge all of the Traditional owners tools and artifacts were made of natural and animal products e.g. stone, wood, skin, bone, feathers, shells and others. We use detectors which will only detect metal. The only way we will find artifacts is with our eyes the same as any other bush users would. With respect get off our case. As for holes left open in the bush, yes there are minority of idiots who don't back fill their holes but that doesn't mean that the rest of us who do the right thing should be penalised. That's like saying we have a small number of hooners on the roads so the answer is stop everyone using the road. Animals and birds are responsible for a lot of the open holes as a result of foraging for food. Maybe we need people who can tell the difference between one hole and another instead of jumping to conclusions. Check out the ground after a flock of cockies have dug it up looking for plant bulbs.

Economy and Tourism

Change the status of these parks and you can be assured it will have a devastating effect on the economy of the towns in the region. Some of these towns are barely surviving now. Bush users come up to these country towns several times a year and put money into the local economy. Collectively bush users would spend millions of dollars annually in these towns. If you think eco tourism is going to be the answer you are definitely on the wrong tram. If there not coming in there thousands now do you think changing the parks to national and state parks is going to be the answer. Currently bush users spend their money in all these small towns on various items as they travel around pursuing their activities. Particular over seas tourist groups mostly go on organised tours on buses owned by these ethnic groups. ethnic buses, driven by ethnic drivers, ethnic tour guides and stop off at designated spots and purchase their food from shop that cater to their dietary requirements. They don't stop in all the small towns around the state and buy all the necessities or stay in the caravan parks and motels. It would be smart to promote tourism as an add on to the already huge bush users tourism, not cruisify what we already have to bet on a long shot.

Horse riding

Horse riding in parks is a fairly passive pursuit. Thinking of restricting and banning them from certain areas doesn't make sense. A large number of horse riders don't have large properties and rely on agistng their horses on someone else's property. When they want to go riding load their horses on a float and transport them to a park where they have room to ride on the bush tracks and roads in relative safety from heavy traffic. They can also make a camping weekends of it.

Where is the environmental destruction in this hobby?

Fired wood collection

To restrict the collection of firewood in a large percentage of the current collecting areas is another example of selfish decisions made by people who have all the amietitis at their disposals (i.e gas and electricity). A large number of people live in the bush because they cant afford to live in the city. Free wood collection is one way to save on heating costs. Areas where they plan to have controlled burns should be made available for wood collection as most of the ground timber gets burnt anyway

4 Wheel Driving

Four wheel driving and motor bike riding for some weird reason we don't have to argue their case. For whatever reason they are the chosen ones over all other bush users. I am happy for them and their good fortune. I must ask the question why they have more leniency than the rest of the bush users? These activities have the potential to create more noise pollution and other issues than all the other bush pursuits put together. I agree with them being able to use the bush but I am confused by this decision. I trust it is not the divide and conquer theory get rid of the rest of us first then further down the track you tell four wheel drive association sorry it is your turn to go.

Hunting

Hunting should not be stopped in these parks as the population expansion of feral animals is way out of control. Bush users are being blamed for the decline of flora and fauna. In these parks Foxes, feral cats and wild dogs kill huge numbers of our native animals pigs are also carnivores plus rip up all the ground, destroying plants and spreading unwanted seed. Feral deer because of their size consume huge amounts of vegetation and disperse unwanted seeds in their faeces. Hunters inject substantial money into the country community as well as the Victorian economy when buying all their equipment.

Timber industry

The timber industry is an integral and vital part of the Australian landscape. It employs a huge workforce which in turn leads to employment in spin off industries. They are under strict government regulations and operate within the rules and being mindful of animal habitat. If we support our local timber industry at least we have control over where our timber is taken from and there is a financial benefit. Buy from other countries where the timber in some cases is indiscriminately taken we are then encouraging the mass destruction of precious animal habitats i.e. orangutans. Then we will once more have unhappy conservationists. Harvesting timber from within our own country we have government control, employment and the money stays in our economy. Win win outcome.

Security

Closing parks to bush users creates a situation of not having eyes and ears in the bush for reporting illegal dumping of rubbish, crops of illegal drugs, suspicious activities, arson and any other illegal activity that may take place. Park rangers are unable to cover all these responsibilities in the huge areas of lands they have under their watch. I have been going into the bush for years and have never spoken to a park ranger yet. Have spoken to many bush users. Take us out of the bush who is going to keep watch?

In conclusion

Changing the status quo of these parks will have a negative effect on the small towns in these areas. There would be less bush users which would create a downturn in economy, businesses would suffer, jobs would be lost. People would be forced to leave the towns looking for work the social fabric of these towns would collapse. Tarnagulla is a fine example. The caravan park owner was ordered to put in \$70,000 worth of fire lighting equipment. He could not afford to so closed the park. All the permanent residents of the park moved. Hardly any shops open in Tarnagulla now and it is like a ghost town. Similar

things will happen if shops start to close in other towns. Restrict and hinder the access to bush users you will not save these towns with ecotourism. Add ecotourism to the already flourishing bush users tourism would be a positive move. Bush users are not the problem for the flora and fauna. Changing climate and changing landscape plus the explosion of feral animals are the enemy not bush users. On the contrary we are the custodians.

National Park example

A fine example of how serious having National Parks can be in 1853, It was decided to build parliament house in Spring street. The original design had a dome, when parliament house was built there was not enough money to build the dome. In 1996 the Kennett government and the brumby labour opposition decided to complete the dome. Found out that the matching sandstone came from a quarry in the Grampians. Alas the quarry was in National Park end of story even the government of the day was unable to get the sandstone to finish of an iconic building like parliament house. It is definitely no to anymore National Parks, the current parks are working well and do not need their names changed to some other more restrictive parks.

Yours in opposition

Glynn Hobbs