

### Submission to Central West Investigation

I make reference to the “CENTRAL WEST INVESTIGATION” by VEAC. Firstly since I live in the township of Lancefield and am a frequent visitor and user of the COBAW state forest I would like to offer some criticism as to why the proposals to alter the state forest classification have not been widely publicised. As a regular user, I have seen no signage or notification at either of the main entrances for people that actually use and visit this State Forest. No bush user’s that I asked during visits to the state forest knew anything about this. This includes trail bike riders, bush walkers, horse riders, recreational hunters and 4wd drivers. To this end I have found others who have discovered this investigation only through special interest websites and I myself only through social media. I would consider this a very poor process of public notification and consultation.

As a regular visitor and user of the COBAW State Forest since the mid 1980’s, I have seen a gradual but small increase in visitors. Mainly 4wd drivers that have been locked out of other areas that have been re classified as some kind of parks. This is another major concern of re classifying the COBAW State Forest and from time to time trail bike riders. However, making reference to section 7.2.4 of the draught proposal paper under the heading of significant species I find it warming that VEAC were able to identify some of the listed species and that the resilience of these species is truly remarkable. This after having survived a very large bush fire that was created by DELWP and left to burn out of control in October 2015 where over 3000 hectares of public and private land was destroyed. It also shows that the current arrangement of bush users and wild life can comfortably coexist without any kind of unnecessary government interference.

Also under the same heading VEAC state that Koalas were absent during their investigation which leads me to ponder how much time VEAC spent being a part of this state forest since I regularly see Koalas even since the afore mentioned bush fire. VEAC also state that there is a lack of fox control. I attribute this statement to be due to the fact there is no registered 1080 poisoning in place by government organizations and not because they identified foxes during their visit. However the statement of no fox control is erroneous as foxes are frequently shot by “recreational hunters” whilst hunting feral animals including wild dogs. While out pig hunting, the juvenile wild dog pictured below was shot on Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> Sep at a small water catchment adjacent to Ridge Rd in the Cobaw state forest where 2 dogs were sighted, the other is still at large.



If it wasn't for the efforts of recreational hunters, these dangerous pests would never be sought out and eradicated as they typically don't take baits. To blindly suggest, as is stated on CWI-DPP Factsheet 8 page 1, note 10, that recreational hunting be allowed if it's part of an authorised control program is a complete cop out. Wild dogs aren't foxes. Anyone that knows anything about wild dogs knows they simply don't wait to be sighted. People blundering through the bush closely supervised by equally blundering government officials is evidence that VEAC have spent little time observing the two main offenders that predate on the "significant" species mentioned. When we opened this dog up to check on the stomach contents to see what it had been preying on, we found the partially digested remains of what we thought was a small Koala, possibly ripped from its mothers back during a jaunt across the ground to another tree.

Further to that, VEAC has recommended that the COBAW state forest be reclassified as a "CONSERVATION PARK" under revised part 2 section "B" VEAC have stated that "resource uses generally not permitted are recreational hunting and use of firearms". This statement can't be correct as the eradication of feral animals that were never supposed to be there in the first place cannot be considered a forest resource. If this lunacy is allowed to be legislated then VEAC would remove one and probably the only key element that has led to VEAC being able to sight "significant animals" during their visit to the COBAW state forest. That is the "recreational hunter" and this will open the door for carnage by wild dogs and foxes of the animals they claim to be protecting by this reclassification. If you remove recreational hunting, given the conservationist nature of most recreational hunters, this will cause more carnage than VEAC realises. It is unclear why VEAC would seek to disbar recreational hunters from "ANY" forest, park, reserve, bushland etc. I can't imagine a "conservation park" that had vicious wild dogs roaming it would be too popular with tourists or the "broader community". That they are supposed to be driven from these areas of bush because have had a change of title. The broader community, in the case of the COBAW state forest are the current bush users themselves. I have personally had experience with wild dogs whilst deer hunting in the Wonnangatta Valley, which is in detail in a submission in the control of invasive species.

During my travels to work in Geelong each day, I drive the length of COBAW state forest on the southern side, along Three Chain Road. Three weeks ago I was fortunate to have not collided with a medium size Sambar Deer hind. It is evident to me at least, that this confirms the many alleged sightings of deer in the COBAW state forest at just about every corner, as well as confirmation that deer population is increasing on the surrounding private properties as well as the COBAW state forest. I could not find anywhere in the VEAC draught where deer have been mentioned in the COBAW state forest. This state forest should remain a state forest and recreational hunters should not be kicked out of it, and in my considered opinion should be added to the Victorian Deer hunting maps as recognised deer habitat and NOT made a conservation park.

## SUMMARY

The negligible public consultation to the intent of change of status or zoning to the COBAW state forest is alarming. The significant species found by VEAC in the COBAW state forest appear to be coexisting quite well with the current arrangement of bush users in spite of government induced bush fires. However it is curious that VEAC have not listed the sighting deer or wild dogs in their report. There is no logging potential in the state forest probably because of the steeply undulating terrain and nor is not a recognised prospecting area. Any change of land title / classification thereby precluding recreational hunters has the potential to adversely affect native fauna populations.

- Lack of real consultation of the general public leading to lack of trust in VEAC.
- The VEAC report on the COBAW state forest is inconclusive since invasive fauna and pest species have not been declared nor dealt with.
- Recreational hunters control invasive wild animals such as pigs, foxes, wild dogs, wild cats, and deer.
- Recreational hunting should be included in any land management plan.
- The draught plan for the Cobaw state forest appears to be more aligned with conservationist ideology and green bureaucracy rather than a real world action plan for the future of resident native fauna.
- Given the subject matter of the draught plan it would appear VEAC have produced it (the plan) in the best interests of the Victorian state government of the day rather than in the long term best interests of the land, the users of the state forest or the indigenous flora and fauna.

Submitted by John Dol –