

15 September, 2018

Robin Ford

VEAC
GPO Box 527
Melbourne VIC 3001

Re :- Submission on the VEAC draft proposals paper for future use of public land in the central west of Victoria.

To the VEAC Chairman and Board;

My name is Robin Ford and I would like to make a submission regarding the draft proposal paper for the future use of public land in the central west region of Victoria. I live in an area covered by this proposal and use many different forms of public land for a range of activities. As a user of public land and as a member of local community groups that use public land, such as CFA and Landcare, I feel that I am entitled to make a submission on some topics.

It is pleasing to see many of the recommendations put forward in this document. Increasing levels of protection for public land by changing their classification from state park to conservation and national park seems to be a positive step. At the landscape level these should be positive changes. I was also pleased to see fairly extensive consultation and inclusion of local indigenous groups and the wider community. While the bigger picture is positive, there are some issues I have regarding the document.

It appears there is little comment regarding fire management of these areas. The management of both wildfire and fuel reduction burning is likely to be the most important practices affecting the ecology of public land. Recommendations regarding appropriate fire activities need to be made. Fire management is a complex area, but VEAC is independent of government it should be free to make recommendations in line with the best scientific information available. Poor fire management has occurred in the past and we need to undertake the best practices while protecting life and property. Incorrect and overuse of fire can lead to more problems in the future.

Another concern I have is regarding resources. It seems unclear what additional funds and human resources would be made available to achieve increased management and protection. There needs to be clear recommendations on this issue, otherwise the changes outlined might be in name only. A change from State to National Park can not be effectively achieved without increased staff and funding for the relevant land management agencies.

I also have some points on a more local level regarding the Cobaw State forest. The recommendation in the draft document is for the Cobaw State Forest to become Conservation Park. This on the surface is a positive change, but I do have concerns with the type of activities that would or would not be allowed under the change in classification. The most concerning is that trail

bikes would still be allowed in the park. The sandy soils of this park are particularly vulnerable to erosion, and past abuse of the site by trial bike has led to significant erosion. While they are supposed to stay on formed roads, it is obvious that they do not and are unlikely to in the future. This erosive process impacts flora, fauna and water quality, not to mention the noise and other impacts. Trail bikes should be excluded from this particular park. At the same time some lower impact activities such as camping, horse riding and dog walking would be guaranteed inclusion. These activities do have their issues, but are much less damaging to the park than motor bikes. Allowing these activities to continue keeps the community involved with the park and gives an overall sense of ownership and care for the area. People need to use the area to value it. Could it be recommended to allow these activities to continue. If left up to the management agency to designate areas for these activities I fear they will simply never nominate areas. Similarly, it is noted that shooting would be excluded. Again this is an activity that has possible negative impacts on the park, but there is an element of pest animal control that would be lost. Can some specific recommendation be made regarding pest animal control strategies or some sort of open season to control pest animals in the park, while protecting other users.

I also wish to discuss the smaller public reserves in the area. Particularly those along the Deep Creek and its tributaries. This is an important water way containing threatened species, that has been impacted by land clearing and changed land use. Pockets of public land along these water ways need to be protected and managed effectively. I hope that a recommendation specific to these sites could be made by VEAC. Some of these areas are current reserves, but others are managed by private land holders. Some appear to be with no legal right such as an area known as Deep Creek K18 Stream side Reserve, a 11 acres site currently used for grazing, while others are lease holders of public land. I hope the importance of these sites can be acknowledged. As leases of public land come to an end they should not be renewed, but returned to public reserves allowing for revegetation and rehabilitation.

Lastly I wish to discuss a specific area of public land located at the Lancefield Park in Lancefield. This site has a range of recreational facilities and activities, but is still a public land space. There is an area at the back of this park that has been identified as containing deposits of Mega Fauna bones (fossils) as well as aboriginal artefacts. The area is currently under threat from a range of inappropriate activities, such as drainage works, earth moving and land fill material deposited on site. This important cultural and scientific site needs to be protected in some way. Any additional protection of this site would be very worthwhile.

Consideration of this submission would be greatly appreciated.

Kind regards
Robin Ford