

VEAC

Central West Investigation

Submission from Bendigo 4WD Club

17 September 2018

The Bendigo 4WD Club represents members who object to the proposed change in status of the State Parks & Reserves within the Central West Investigation Area to National parks.

Our Club comprises hundreds of members (past & present) who since the formation of the Club in 1976 use these reserves to go camping, four wheel driving, exploring, walking, firewood collecting, hunting and recreational prospecting. Our members when visiting these areas privately are often accompanied by their pets and over the years some of our members ridden horses in these areas.

State Forests offer the freedom and opportunity to undertake all these activities in a beautiful, unspoilt environment, but with what we believe to be sufficient controls to ensure their long-term survival and protection.

National Parks by definition introduce increased restrictions and exclusions on use of public lands over and above those that exist for State Parks and reserves. Activities such as managed firewood collecting, access with pets, hunting, dispersed bush camping, access to four-wheel drive tracks and recreational prospecting all would be under threat and quite possibly banned...that is the reality once a National Park is declared.

Even if some of these activities are permitted, history tells us that tracks are suddenly closed; camping is funneled into designated areas destroying the peace and tranquility of remote camping in the first place, camping fees are charged and previously accessible areas are fenced off. Excellent tracks that have been used for decades are 'improved' with graders in the name of better management.

We believe there is little to be gained by changing these parks and reserves to national parks. There are substantial areas in the investigation region that are almost never accessed because of their remoteness. Plants, animals and insects are not under threat from our activities. If they are under threat it is from reduced habitat created by the broader community.

Our Club is a responsible organisation. We are affiliated with Four Wheel Drive Victoria. Our members receive accredited four-wheel drive training and practice minimal impact camping. We care for the environment. We clean it up. We look after it. We repair tracks. We help maintain local environments by removing noxious weeds.

We acknowledge and respect that some areas and sites have significant cultural and heritage values that do deserve increased protection. We totally support this, but do not believe that creating a national park is the answer.

Then there is the economic benefit generated by our Club. When undertaking our activities we support local communities. A convoy of 10 vehicles will have up to 30 people who buy fuel and food in the local towns and villages. We eat at local pubs. We visit and spend money at local wineries, tourist attractions, shops bakeries and cafes. A visit to a bakery in Avoca by the Club generated in excess of \$600 after we had all bought coffee, pastries, pies and bread. Fuel for our vehicles generated more than \$1,000 for local businesses. When 30 people go to the local pub for dinner we

will spend \$1,500 by the time we have all bought our meals and refreshments. Our Club will have trips into these areas five to six times per year. Multiply this by the number of four-wheel drive clubs that all visit these regions and the total economic benefit is huge.

The Central West Region is diverse. Its use as a multipurpose recreational resource needs to be preserved. There are few other regions like it. The region is close to Melbourne, Ballarat and Bendigo. Its retention as a State Forest ensures that the users of these forests are able to carry out their legitimate and diverse recreational pursuits, which if changed to a National Park would cease.

Edgar Burtscher

Bendigo Four Wheel Drive Club.