

Submission to VEAC Central West Investigation

Prepared by Mark Hennessy on behalf of Central Highlands Orienteers, 31 October 2018

Following discussions with fellow club members and having attended the consultation session in Woodend, I make this submission on behalf of Central Highlands Orienteers. We thank VEAC for the opportunity to participate in the consultation process.

Club profile

Central Highlands Orienteers was established in 1983 and conducted its first event in July 1983 at Braemar College near Woodend. The club has been active in organising competitions ever since, and has been prominent in leadership of the sport at state level and at Victorian Schools Team level. Members have competed at high levels, with several representing Australia at senior or junior World Orienteering Championships over the past ten years.

As a relatively small but growing club, Central Highlands Orienteers is a solid contributor to the Victorian Orienteering program, typically organising at least one forest-based event per year, and at least six urban events in parks and streets of towns in the Central Highlands. In the past ten years we have organised forest events in the following locations:

- Macedon Regional Park
- Bullengarook (Balt Camp)
- Glenlyon
- Mt Baw Baw
- Glenluce (near Doxa Youth Camp)

In earlier years we have also held forest orienteering events at Lauriston, Braemar College and Rupertswood in Sunbury.

The club collaborates with local secondary schools, many of which have active orienteering programs including Braemar College, Sacred Heart College, Gisborne Secondary College, and many primary schools in the area, of which Macedon Primary School has a long history of achievement in Victorian Primary Schools Championships. These school programs, and Victorian Schools Championships, are an important way of introducing school students to natural environments. Primary School events are often held at Hanging Rock or at Brimbank Park. Orienteering attracts students to experience natural environments, who may not often set foot in a forest.

Value of orienteering as a contribution to the health of people and of our parks

Orienteering is a volunteer-led not-for-profit activity which draws people into our forests, where they navigate a pre-determined course on a map, either on foot or on a pedal cycle. No powered vehicles are used in competition. Orienteering is a low impact activity, and experience shows that within about a week of an event, there is little sign that anyone has been in the forest. We leave it as we found it.

The nature of the sport encourages people to observe land forms and features and to use these as landmarks for navigation. This brings a sense of closeness to the land and an appreciation of key features such as water courses and rock features. Orienteers are in close touch with the land as they walk or run through it.

Orienteers are now becoming more active in giving back to forests, recently volunteering for weed eradication activities and a kangaroo count in forests and parks. We care about the forests for their own sake, not simply as an arena for our sport. We want to be seen as model users of the forest who can be trusted to care for and help protect the forests we visit.

Every few years Victoria hosts a national orienteering carnival, which attracts around 1000 visitors from Australia, New Zealand and beyond for up to a week at a time in regional centres, contributing substantial financial revenue to regional economies. Recent national carnivals have been held near Ballarat, Bendigo and in the Beechworth area.

Comments on the VEAC Draft Proposals Paper August 2018

Central Highlands Orienteers welcomes and supports the Draft Proposals. We are satisfied that, from our point of view, the Draft Proposals provide a good balance between conservation and recreational access to forests in our area.

Whilst we wish to have ongoing recreational access to forest areas close to where our members live, we will continue to liaise with land managers to minimise any potential adverse impacts of our activities. We seek the guidance and permission of land managers regarding suitable areas for our sport, and about sensitive or fragile areas which we should avoid. All of our forest events require permits, and Orienteering Victoria and its clubs are committed to complying with the intent and the letter of the permit conditions of the relevant authorities.

We will seek to foster ongoing working relationships with land managers and traditional owners based on mutual respect and trust.

Mark Hennessy