

VEAC Members,

I would like to start this submission by clearing stating that I'm a multi-generational prospector and also that I'm a scientist that has delivered a number of papers and chaired sessions at International conferences on areas such as Climate Change. I was also fortunate to be a senior member of Australia's largest Sustainability consulting company which was at the forefront of the measurement of environmental and social value.

I would like to take the members to the following sections of the VEAC Act 2001:

Division 1 – 18 Matters to be taken into account in investigations and recommendations. *The Council must have regard to the following considerations in carrying out an investigation and in making recommendations to the Minister—(g) the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations;*

The Draft recommendations do not include an assessment of potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations. I have been advised that this will be undertaken prior to the final submission to government. However, given the major impact the draft recommendations will have particularly in the areas of social and economics, this is a clear failure of the members to follow the requirements of the VEAC Act. Nowhere in the Act does it define that this is not applicable to draft recommendations. In fact, this is a major flaw in the Draft recommendations as not only is this missing, there is no indication of what methodology or scope of any future assessment of these critical factors required under the Act. More importantly the Draft recommendations as published are meaningless if they have a significant social and economic impact to these areas. Myself as a user of the areas subject to the recommendations and a Sustainability Professional would like to review any assessment of the social and economic impact as to its accuracy and applicability as is my right and your duty under the VEAC Act 2001.

I would now like to discuss the purpose and framework as outlined in the Draft Recommendations.

The Purpose:

- Identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values, and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land; and
- Make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

A Framework to:

- Cater for increasing recreational use in a way that minimises conflicts between users and protects the natural values on which they depend.

In relation to the purpose, I again outline that no assessment of social and economic impact has been undertaken. Also, while there is a significant piece on the aboriginal culture, while the European culture is given lip service (I will add to this below). In relation to the Framework. the VEAC members have jumped to a statement of "conflict" rather than look at the current harmonious uses which have added social, economic and environmental benefits to the regions. Without evidence an

investigation should never start on the basis that there is a problem, especially where the Draft recommendations are biased to this point.

These are some of the key areas which the Draft recommendations failed to provide a comprehensive and non-biased view point – taken as a Prospector and an internationally recognised Environmental Scientist:

Social:

- There was basically nothing on European History, especially areas such as the Gold Rush was the birth not only of multi-culturalism but of Australian Culture as we know it today;
- There are multiple prospecting clubs which use these areas. These clubs cater prominently for people over 50 and provide opportunities for healthy exercise in a social setting. These clubs also spend thousands of dollars a year in the local area;
- Especially this time of year these regions get a major influx of prospectors from Queensland and WA (due to the extreme heat) and international visitors going into the northern hemisphere winter. None of this is acknowledged in the Draft Recommendations;
- The vast majority of prospectors who use these areas are from outside the area and have a significant positive impact on tourism and local small businesses; and
- Without the access to these prospectors, local small businesses will fail which would further impact on areas such as rural youth unemployment and depression. These areas have added to the use of illegal drugs and increased rates of suicide in rural areas.

Economics:

- There are a number of towns in these areas that will fail if access is not available to prospectors (and other recreational users). Its typical that over 80% of the caravan parks outside of peak holidays is filled by prospectors and there are also a number of small businesses such as Coiltek Maryborough and Miners Den Bendigo and Day in Ballarat which will also suffer from any proposed limitation of access; and
- Without the people going to these areas the complete breakdown of community services will follow due to the lack of patronage (based on a typical government service-based model).

Environmental:

- A review of the scientific studies produced in the Draft Recommendations is both limited, riddled with mis-truths and scientific fact;
- In the year of 2018 with the number of mobile apps available the government should get some real data to back up any decisions especially where there is a locking up of public assets to the detriment of social, economic and environmental statues of these areas. Every weekend there would be thousands of prospectors in the bush who would be happy to collect real-time, site specific information on the environment to support sustainable use of these areas and add to the environmental knowledge;
- The Draft recommendations failed to recognise the important knowledge that prospectors have: Prospectors are geologists (to find the gold indicators), have to be

botanists (to understand what trees and shrubs grow in which soils and to what depth), and have a great understanding of the local wildlife which we encounter due to our recreation being non-evasive and allowing us close up access to these beautiful animals and their habits. I have produced a short Youtube video to support this – <https://youtu.be/IQMsD1ntlfs> ; and

- There has been no study produced or outlined in the Draft recommendations report that outlines that recreational prospecting (which we have been paying a duty to the crown for 160 years) has any negative impact on any of these areas or other areas in Victoria. In fact, as outlined in my submission, prospectors only have a positive impact when you consider the social, environmental and economics of the draft recommendations.

In relation to Climate Change I have authored national and international industry guidance on the impact our changing climate is having on our environment. I have also trained government planners, environmentalists and engineers on climate change adaptation and assessment. The closing down and restrictions of access to these areas to managed by a major under sourced Parks Department will only lead to more catastrophic fires and unscrutinised access to people such as arsonists and illegal dumpers. The use of the tracks and visibility of having people recreating within the bush ensures that these illegal activities are minimised and that emergency services have clear access to fight any fires that may occur either naturally or by man.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Draft recommendations and your consideration of my submission.

Guy Edgar