

## **Submission in Response to: Central West Investigation – Draft Proposals Paper**

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I am a gold prospector who uses a hand held detector to fossick for gold. Together with my wife, we do day trips to the bush all around Victoria on a weekly basis and have a wonderful time swinging the detector hoping to find that elusive nugget.

We spend a considerable amount of time doing research before each trip, delving into the history of an area, topology and geological features, previous diggings and major finds.

This is a wonderful hobby, enhanced by the fact that currently, there is good choice in the areas around Victoria where you are permitted to fossick for gold. Many of these areas are fascinating from a historical perspective and we feel privileged to have access to the areas that figured so prominently during the gold rush, some 160 years ago.

I have read the above mentioned Draft Proposals Paper in detail and I am extremely concerned as follows:

In the Draft Proposals Paper, mining and exploration is lumped in together with metal detecting and prospecting, yet there are massive differences in these groups of activities that must be taken into account, otherwise the recommendations contained within the Paper are based on an incorrect premise and do not make sense.

By way of attempting to define these activities:

(a) Mining and exploration typically involves a team of people doing detailed and complex ground surveys followed by drilling, shafting, sampling and extraction. These activities are labour intensive, involve heavy machinery, can have significant environmental impacts and are generally run as a commercial operation.

(b) Metal detecting on the other hand typically involves use of a handheld device (metal detector) to scan a preferred area, until a target is detected, then digging a small hole by hand to recover a target, filling in the hole by hand and moving on, to search for the next possible target. Prospecting typically involves the use of a metal detector designed to search for gold or the use of gold pans or gold sluices to wash shovel fulls of dirt with the objective of finding a target in the sandy residue. Both metal detecting and prospecting are very popular recreational activities.

In both metal detecting and prospecting, the environmental impact is negligible and in many cases non-existent.

Additionally, metal detecting and prospecting delivers significant economic benefit to Victorian product and service providers who are in close proximity to the public land used for such hobbies. For example metal detectorists and prospectors spend money in local motels, caravan parks, hotels, general stores, cafes, supermarkets, petrol stations and equipment suppliers. I know this from personal experience and from other fellow metal detectorists and prospectors.

Therefore, it is absolutely incorrect to consider mining and exploration and metal detecting and prospecting as a homogeneous set of activities because they simply are not. There are vast differences in terms of scale, investment and environmental impact.

Because your Draft Proposals Paper does not distinguish or define these activities, the logic used in developing your recommendations is flawed, resulting in metal detectorists and prospectors being unfairly penalised and potentially denied access to vast tracts of public land for no logical reason. This is discriminatory and simply wrong and when coupled with the amalgamation of State Parks into National Parks massively reduces the available area for metal detectorists and prospectors to pursue their recreational hobby.

Therefore, I propose as follows:

(a) that VEAC work with the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria (PMAV) to define mining and exploration activities as distinct from metal detecting and prospecting activities and then amend the Draft Proposals Paper to clearly identify this difference.

(b) that because metal detecting and prospecting is a family oriented hobby enjoyed by thousands of people in Victoria and a significant aspect of the hobby is the historical geographic location of old gold diggings, the available areas to detect and prospect not be further reduced or shrunk by the reclassification of public land.

(b) that the Draft Recommendations for National Parks on page 63 of the Draft Proposals Paper be revised. I request here that you consider distinguishing metal detecting and prospecting from mining and exploration in section (c)(iv) and make metal detecting and prospecting an allowed activity under section (b) of the recommendation, because of its negligible environmental impact and positive economic impact to local communities.

Thank you for giving this submission due consideration.  
Christopher de la Harpe