



Newham & District Landcare Group

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Website: <https://newhamlandcare.info/>

6 December 2018

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
GPO Box 527
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Sir / Madam

Response to VEAC's Central West investigation's draft proposals paper

Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) commends the draft proposals paper as a comprehensive and useful source of information. It is a well-researched reference document about public land in central west Victoria.

The paper is long, and for some the scientific or environmental policy language may be difficult to read; the tables have many footnotes that say "conditionally allowed" with clauses such as "as specified by the land manager". A plain English shorter version of the final report may be useful and deflect some of the opposition that has been evident.

NDLG supports the recommendations generally and addresses more specifically **Part 7 Wombat – Macedon Block**. The recommendations for this area improve both recreational use and enhanced protection for flora and fauna.

However, we find that the paper is not clear about the criteria used to inform recommended changes to park classifications or allowable activities, which means recommendations could be seen as conflicting. An example is allowing four-wheel driving and trail bike riding throughout the proposed reserve system, but these are activities which damage natural systems, negatively impact wildlife activity, and conflict with passive recreational activities. What is needed is review and recommendations on appropriate locations for recreational activities which prioritise biodiversity values.

NDLG recommends that VEAC review the park classifications, and also review the allowable activities within each park to ensure both re-enforce each other and minimise conflicting uses.

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As mentioned in our original submission to VEAC in August 2017, NDLG is one of many Landcare groups energetically working on programs relating to biodiversity and catchment management, with biolinks and water quality being major foci. We work on both public and private land. It is public land that provides the framework for rebuilding connectivity across a central Victorian landscape that is largely cleared. Our original submission addressed the Cobaw Forest, Macedon Regional Park and Hanging Rock Reserve, stressing the importance of the latter within the Campaspe-Maribyrnong Headwaters Biolink, our major strategic focus. The Campaspe-Maribyrnong Headwaters Biolink is a key area within Victoria as a whole, enabling connectivity between the Wombat Forest and the Great Eastern Ranges Initiative. To support on-ground works in this Biolink area, NDLG since 2005 has secured and administered funding grants in the order of \$450,000.

NDLG's website outlines our many activities. These include hosting social, education and training events for the community, plant propagation, planting events, roadside weed management in conjunction with the Macedon Ranges Shire Council, funding environmental programs for Newham Primary School, quarterly newsletters...

Our work would be magnified with even greater opportunities for community engagement and education by enhanced protection of our surrounding environment.

Wombat-Lerdederg National Park

NDLG supports the recommendations for the Wombat State Forest (for national, regional and conservation parks), which improve both recreational use and enhanced protection for flora and fauna.

NDLG supports the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park

As central Victoria's largest block of remnant native vegetation, Wombat State Forest and surrounding bushland are one of the most significant areas for biodiversity in central Victoria - it is critically important to protect it from logging and mining. We reiterate our remarks above about the need to review park classifications and allowable recreational activities.

Cobaw Conservation Park

NDLG in our 2017 submission recommended that "the Cobaw State Forest be protected under the National Parks Act 1995 to reflect its high conservation values and as part of a vital link of landscape connectivity in central Victoria's fragmented landscape." This was due to the forest being almost totally comprised of threatened vegetation types with the depleted Herb-rich Foothill Forest widespread and the vulnerable Valley Grassy Forest also common. Both these vegetation types are under-represented in the conservation reserve

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system. In a surrounding landscape that is largely cleared it vital habitat for a diverse range of native flora and fauna, including threatened species (which include Eastern Pygmy-possum, Powerful Owl, Brush-tailed Phascogale and Brown Treecreeper (south-eastern ssp.); the Weak Daisy (*Brachyscome debilis*).

We acknowledge the popularity of four-wheel driving and trail bike riding, and that the Cobaws are under increasing pressure due to proximity to Melbourne and its northern suburban spread. Therefore, we find the recommendation to change its status to a Conservation Park to “provide effective habitat for woodland birds and threatened species” (p144) incompatible with the damage caused by current recreational use – for example massive erosion caused on illegal and mapped tracks by trail bike riding and camping.

We support the recommendation for a Cobaw Conservation Reserve, with reservations about allowable activities.

Four-wheel driving and trail bike riding should be limited to formed roads and tracks in locations specified by the land manager.

An enforcement presence should be maintained on holidays and weekends.

Cameras are increasingly used for wildlife monitoring. **NDLG recommends consideration of concealed cameras on public land for monitoring compliance.**

Macedon Regional Park

NDLG once again recommends that the Macedon Regional Park be protected under the National Parks Act 1995 to reflect its high conservation values and as part of a vital link of landscape connectivity in central Victoria’s fragmented landscape.

Protecting over 2000 hectares of native vegetation near the southern end of the Great Dividing Range, the Park’s altitude and size give it the capacity to be a significant refuge for native species. Significant and unique remnant vegetation at the top of the range and tall eucalypts on the south side are unique and under considerable threat from climate change.

As the Draft Proposals paper discusses, MRR is a significant tourism drawcard, and is also highly valued by the local community. We argue that reclassifying to National Park status would enhance visitor attraction, boost community pride and provide greater opportunities for education programs and learning experiences.

If the park remains as a regional one, we submit that motorised trail bikes and horse riding are incompatible with conservation and water supply values in Management Zone 3 of Macedon Regional Park and recommend they be removed from the list.

Hanging Rock

NDLG recommends that the Hanging Rock Reserve be reclassified as a Nature Reserve to indicate the significance of its natural assets (geological, ecological) and its importance in landscape scale connectivity.

As pointed out in our 2017 submission, HRR is managed by the MRSC Department of Recreation and Sport as a result of its 1987 classification (reserved for water access and recreation). Budget allocations and the focus of management have been sport, recreation and tourism whilst the 'environmental' values of the site have largely been ignored. Since 1987 major advances in the science of biodiversity conservation indicate HRR's importance ecologically (vegetation and habitat values) and as a key component of landscape connectivity between Cobaw State Forest and Macedon Regional Park. It has an inordinately important role in maintaining a resilient landscape which is out of proportion to its size due to the varied habitats that lie within - open grassland, wooded areas and rocky outcrops are all present - and because it lies within a predominately cleared broader landscape that is largely privately owned.

In the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion only 29% of its native vegetation remains, but disproportionate clearing of certain types of vegetation has occurred. Only 2.1% of Plains Grassy Woodlands remains (once 50%) and only 25% of the original extent of Herb Rich Foothill forest. The ecosystems present at HRR are not protected elsewhere in the bioregion.

Reclassification would meet with the directions of the site's new Strategic Plan and existing Environmental Management Plan, available from Macedon Ranges Shire Council.

Woodend Grassland reserve

We support the recommendation made by Woodend Landcare to reclassify Woodend Grassland Reserve as a "Nature Reserve" for the reasons they outlined:

1. The reserve supports one of the most significant remnant grassland areas in the region
2. The area is an isolated remnant surrounded by a substantial population
3. The grassland itself is not suitable for recreation due to significant risk of trampling of vegetation
4. The surrounding areas offer ample space for recreational activities.

Some general comments

- ❖ **Pest plant and animals** are a threat to biodiversity. Their control is an ongoing concern to Macedon Ranges residents, and Landcare groups are very active in weed and rabbit control. Deer, pigs and goats are known problems in the Wombat State Forest, Macedon Regional Park, Cobaw State Forest, and Lerderderg State Park, and intrude onto adjoining private land, causing further damage to agricultural values and native vegetation.

NDLG recommends allocation of additional resources for pest plant and animal control programs on public land.

- ❖ **Roadsides/road reserves** are briefly mentioned as “a significant area of public land” managed by VicRoads or local government(p48). We argue that they deserve better protection due to identification of endangered species, important remnant vegetation and as connectivity corridors. Current management by local government and VicRoads contractors often causes incremental, ongoing damage. **We support the recommendation to “include unused road reserves adjoining parks where appropriate”.**
- ❖ **Land management plans.** NDLG supports recommendations for development of land management plans for parks and reserves with community input, to address fire risk management and include scientific monitoring and citizen science initiatives.
- ❖ **Appendix 7** is a useful list by common name of rare or threatened flora and fauna of the Central West Investigation Area. It would be of even greater benefit if flora was also alphabetically listed by scientific name.

Summary of recommendations

- NDLG recommends that VEAC review park classifications, and review the allowable activities within each park to ensure that both re-enforce each other and minimise conflicting uses.
- NDLG supports the recommendations for the Wombat State Forest, which improve both recreational use and enhanced protection for flora and fauna.
- NDLG supports the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park
- NDLG support the recommendations for a Cobaw Conservation Reserve, with reservations about allowable activities.
- Four-wheel driving and trail bike riding should be limited to formed roads and tracks in locations specified by the land manager. An enforcement presence should be maintained on holidays and weekends.
- NDLG recommends consideration of concealed cameras on public land for monitoring compliance.
- NDLG recommends that the Macedon Regional Park be protected under the National Parks Act 1995 to reflect its high conservation values and as part of a vital link of landscape connectivity in central Victoria’s fragmented landscape.

- NDLH submits that motorised trail bikes and horse riding are incompatible with conservation and water supply values in Management Zone 3 of Macedon Regional Park and recommend they be removed from the list.
- NDLG recommends that the Hanging Rock Reserve be reclassified as a Nature Reserve to indicate the significance of its natural assets (geological, ecological) and its importance in landscape scale connectivity.
- NDLG supports the recommendation made by Woodend Landcare to reclassify Woodend Grassland Reserve as a “Nature Reserve”.
- NDLG recommends allocation of additional resources for pest plant and animal control programs on public land.
- NDLG recommends better protection of roadside reserves.
- NDLG supports the recommendation to “include unused road reserves adjoining parks where appropriate”.
- NDLG supports recommendations for development of land management plans for parks and reserves with community input, to address fire risk management and include scientific monitoring and citizen science initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Central West Investigation Draft Proposals Paper.

Yours sincerely



Helen Scott
Secretary, Newham & District Landcare Group