



10 December 2018

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
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Re: VEAC Central West Investigation

Dear Sir/Madam,

We are pleased to make a submission in support of the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) Central West Investigation which proposes new protection of public land in Wombat forest, Wellsford forest, Pyrenees Range forest and other smaller public land parcels in the region. We do however have concerns regarding Mount Cole being retained as a State Forest subject to logging, and we urge VEAC to reconsider protections for this landscape, as outlined below.

The National Trust of Australia (Victoria) is the state's largest community-based heritage advocacy organisation actively working towards conserving and protecting our heritage for future generations to enjoy, representing 28,000 members across Victoria. The National Trust maintains a Heritage Register of Significant Places, including buildings, landscapes, gardens and trees. Within the VEAC Central West investigation area we have classified the Lerderderg State Park (file no. L10184) at State level, and the Long Forest (file no. L10180) at Regional level.

As Victoria's premier heritage and conservation organisation, the National Trust has an interest in ensuring that the wide range of natural, cultural, social and Indigenous heritage values of the State are protected and respected, contributing to strong, vibrant and prosperous communities.

The draft recommendation exhibited made additions of close to 50,000 hectares of new national parks, 18,000 hectares of regional parks, and over 11,000 hectares of new conservation, nature and bushland reserves. The assessment of these areas demonstrates that these landscapes are worthy of this protection, and we strongly support the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

We do however note that Mount Cole is largely being retained as a State Forest subject to logging. The values of Mount Cole include geological and geomorphological sites, Montane Plateau and Herb-rich Foothill Forest vegetation type, rare or threatened species including the endangered Mount Cole grevillea, and the headwaters of the Wimmera River. We also note that Mount Cole is a location highly visited for recreational activities, including the Berripmo Walk. The landscape will likely be an important climate change refuge for species movement and survival. The National Trust urges VEAC to reconsider protections for this landscape, or commit to reviewing this landscape within the next 5-10 years.

The National Trust recognises that a long process of community consultation has informed the recommendations of the VEAC Central West report, including a Community Reference Group, community drop-in sessions, opportunities for making written submissions, meetings and field

visits with public land managers and key stakeholders. We are also pleased to see a partnership project with Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation which has facilitated engagement with Traditional Owner Groups, and that following this second stage of consultation that further feedback from these communities will inform the final VEAC recommendations.

We support the recommendation of the report with regard to strengthening and recognising of the role, cultural values and aspirations of Traditional Owners in public land use, management and place naming. This will be an ongoing process of meaningful consultation and engagement, and we encourage VEAC to ensure that public land managers are well resourced to continue this important work.

We support the draft recommendation regarding implementation and resourcing, particularly with regard to financial and staff resources. Management planning should be undertaken for each park, recognising the complexities of managing the multiple uses of the place. Ongoing and well-resourced management of these places will be essential in ensuring that the objectives and recommendations of the VEAC Central West are achieved.

Overall the National Trust commends VEAC for undertaking the Central West Investigation and for the recommendations of new protections for public land, with the exception of Mount Cole where we encourage further protection. We recognise that this review of the Central West area was well overdue, and that the recommendations account for the needs of communities facing the challenges of growing populations and climate change. These new parks will protect Victoria's biodiversity while providing communities with opportunities to connect and engage with our important natural, cultural and Indigenous heritage.

Should you have any questions regarding our submission I can be contacted on 96569823 or at jessica.hood@nattrust.com.au.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jessica Hood', written in a cursive style.

Dr Jessica Hood
Community Advocate Environmental Heritage
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)