

Submission in rejection of the National Park proposal for the Central West Investigation

I am writing this submission in regards to the Central West Investigation by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC). I am concerned at the lack of community consultation that VEAC has displayed throughout the entire investigation. I am also concerned at the composition of the council with their obvious environmental bias and endorsing only one point of view, that of the VNPA. I am certain the council was supposed to be an independent body, there has been no independence of thought shown in their single minded recommendations. The draft proposals paper provides recommendations for new protections of public land in Victoria's central west. I sincerely hope that the flawed investigation regime that we have seen up until this point is completed with more emphasis placed on the effect that any new National Park in the central west will have on the prospects of the towns local to the affected areas, current users of the forests, the health of the forests and in no small way, the effect on Victoria's economy as a whole.

I am **NOT** supportive of the draft recommendations and reject the findings in their entirety.

I totally and completely reject - Three new national parks - Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, Pyrenees National Park, Mount Buangor National Park.

I totally and completely reject - Two new conservation parks at Hepburn and the Cobaw ranges;

I totally and completely reject - Five new regional parks including a new Wellsford Regional Park;

I totally and completely reject - 30 new and expanded bushland reserves.

In addition, I would like to see no change to the current conditions for Mount Cole, where 70 per cent of these forests remain open to sustainable logging.

Support for National Parks is strong among the northern inner suburbs of Melbourne where "friends of the environment". The reality is that the vast majority of these urbanites do not visit the bush anyway and believe that somehow by locking people out these areas will magically be "protected". History has shown and continues to be evident that declaration of a National Park does not mean protection for threatened species indeed the reverse is often true with feral deer, pigs, goats, dogs and cats left to breed unchecked. The forest suffers by not being thinned of diseased or overcrowded re-growth and/or overpopulation of understory flora such as bracken fern leading to the sort of wildfires seen in the Victorian high country just a short time ago and the more recent catastrophic fires in Queensland. The fires cannot be entirely attributed to climate change.

History shows that the economic repercussions are felt in towns like Benalla where, due to environmentalists forced closure of Lake Makoan, many thousands of duck hunters and fishermen go elsewhere and take their money with them. The complete farce and waste of public money that was the Makoan Hub and Cafe at the Winton Wetlands shows that these alleged eco-tourists coming to visit these areas DO NOT EXIST in any numbers.

There are currently over 50 million visits to our National, State and Regional parks every year, and tourists spend \$1.4 billion per year in Victoria related to their visits to parks, adding at least 14,000 jobs to our state's economy. Along with these visitors many tens of thousands more people visit the current state forests and reserves for pursuits such as

Prospecting,
Horse riding,
Trail bike riding,
4 wheel driving,
Hunting,
Mountain bike riding,
Dispersed camping,
Dog walking,
Bee keeping,
Dog sled trials,
Orienteering,
Therapy groups and
Fishers.

There are other users of these areas such as bushwalkers that I have not included in this list as their activities are not so affected as those listed above. Of note is that Bushwalking Victoria go hand in hand with the VNPA and the supposedly independent VEAC.

Prospectors alone in Victoria number 14000 (current miners rites) along with the tens of thousands of people in the groups above, currently visiting these areas spend additional undefined millions, if not billions of dollars in Victoria every year in support and pursuit of their chosen activity. Most, if not all these activities are **severely restricted if not completely banned** in National Parks. That \$ spend, obviously translates into multiple thousands of Victorian jobs in the retail, hospitality, tourist and transport sectors among others. A large proportion of those jobs will be in the affected areas, i.e. small country towns that can ill afford the downturn in trade and subsequent job losses. **The net economic loss to Victoria of creating more National Parks should not be underestimated.**

Whilst on the subject of activity, the governments own studies have shown that Victorians need to become more active. Changing the tenure of these state forests and reserves to National Park will severely restrict if not curtail the activities listed above and force people to; go interstate where the activities are allowed which most cannot afford to do, give up their activity and sell their equipment at massive loss (because no one else can do that activity either), break the law and continue to do the activity which is what a minority will likely do, or, as most will likely do give up the activity and sit on the couch watching netflix while resenting the environmentalist and politicians that enforced this ill conceived folly .

State forests, reserves and parks also provide a raft of environmental services including water filtration, recreation, and health benefits worth many hundreds of millions of dollars every

year and should be left exactly as they are. 4X4 drivers and other bush user groups also maintain tracks by keeping fire breaks open, removing fallen trees and filling in large holes thereby helping emergency services in the event of fire or other emergency. Dispersed campers also help the environment by using fallen wood and or diseased wood for camp fires thereby reducing the fuel load from the forest floor. The majority of bush user groups also aid the environment by removing rubbish from the forest areas. Prospectors in particular remove buried lead and mercury from the forests on almost every visit to these areas.

There is often misinformation being circulated by proponents of National Parks including the board of VEAC and other vested interest groups. The fact is that most of the recreational activities listed above **will be severely affected by the adoption of the VEAC draft report** as it currently stands. National Parks do not allow dispersed camping, prospecting, logging tracks (ungazetted roads) are closed to all traffic, domestic animals are not allowed mans best friend is not allowed, cross country orienteering is banned. Most of the recreational users will be forced into the miniscule areas set aside for "recreation" and camp with the hundreds of others at the "approved camp grounds" causing the degradation and, I am certain, in time, eventual closure of even those areas. Pensioners and the not so well off amongst us are also disadvantaged by National Parks where exorbitant fees are charged to camp in those overcrowded campgrounds.

Finally for the newly elected state labor government. We the people that use these areas every weekend do not want your promised "improved tracks" or "improved campgrounds" or "lower camping fees" what we want is the;

Wombat State Forest to **Remain as they are, public land for public use** as it is now and the,

Pyrenees Range forest, Mount Buangor State Park, St Arnaud Pyrenes State forest, Glenmona State forest, Mount Cole State forest, Ben Major State forest and Waterloo forest to **Remain as they are, Public Land For Public Use** and,

The Cobaw forest to **Remain as it is, Public Land For Public Use** and,

The Wellsford forest to **Remain as it is, Public Land For Public Use**

Yours Sincerely

Frank Davis