

VEAC SECOND ROUND SUBMISSION

CENTRAL WEST INVESTIGATION

In my considered opinion the proposed VEAC recommendations should not be transmitted to Government in its current form as its serious shortcomings would adversely affect both the environment and all the surrounding public and private lands long into the future.

1. The 208 pages of the recommendations report is not worth the paper on which it has been published. It serves only to justify the positions of the committee members and detracts from more important issues.
2. It proclaims an ideological position rather than practical solutions to the reality that faces Victoria.
3. The 'Key Issues' considered in the Draft Proposals Paper indicate VEAC's desired outcomes rather than logical outcomes from an unbiased investigation from unbiased investigators. There are no or limited facts or research to back up their many claims and wish-lists.
4. The increasing Victorian population requires public lands to be even more accessible for the health-giving benefits that all the stakeholders can currently obtain. The stakeholders are all Victorians.
5. VEAC is determined that more control of Public lands is held by Traditional Owners. Whilst transferring land control to these groups may provide will provide employment activities for some of them, there is no demonstrated proof that they will be better at 'restoring' the land than the current responsible bodies and neighbours to these forests.
6. The transfer of land control to these groups sets up a situation where a few thousand of the current population restricts the enjoyment of the millions majority who do not claim aboriginal heritage. Aboriginal groups have already limited further access for certain activities. Where is the equity? There is no balance that the Investigation remit required. And why should the first recommendation of this report be that new aboriginal names be produced for existing parks or forests?
7. Significant parts of the forests are regrowth. They do not represent the claimed original ecosystems. 'Pre-1750' landscapes are a considered fabrication. Climatic changes and human population growth since then may not or will not represent this theoretical device.

8. Water sourcing from the forests is a 'red-herring' issue. National Park or Regional Park status for the existing forests will have minimal change in water run-off to current forest management activities. Climate change has and is having a greater effect. The Victorian population and water authorities will in future increasingly depend on existing water resource reuse rather than expecting larger stream flows by land status changes.
9. Most of this report contains biodiversity and land values as originally claimed by the VNPA, accepted by VEAC, and published in this VEAC Investigation as fact. Landscape fragmentation leading to connectivity issues is not proven. Increased tree planting on private properties to lessen wind speeds and soil moisture loss are alleviating this theoretical issue.
10. A major fault with this Report is the under-estimation of climate change. To a large extent, climate change has been treated as if it is outside the term of reference of this report. Thus, all the limited comments about climate change are 'wishy-washy' suggestions of 'some effects', 'projected to', 'likely to' that do not acknowledge reality. Climate change does change enduring habitat for birds and animals. They do move to more livable regions when their present environments encourage them.
11. The essential nature of VEAC is to be seen as 'protecting our environment'. Better and balanced use of our natural environment is a theoretically logical outcome. Creation of new or larger National Parks and Regional Parks is a too simplistic approach. Past Australian experience is that however well-intentioned such changes are made, there have been less resources and less money per hectare spent on them compared to averages of current expenditure. Furthermore, there is less ownership and concern by their forest neighbours as concern for them has been transferred to others. This last aspect is of great concern. Also, there is no proof that the often claimed 'eco-tourism' will replace reduced local community's economies. It is all 'wishful thinking'.
12. I can see no justifiable reason why the changes in forest classification or usage of them be introduced. They create more bureaucratic rules for a resource reduced public service.
13. Landscape fragmentation is of theoretical significance. Increasingly private lands are being revegetated to lessen wind speeds to retain field soil moisture.

14. A most important shortcoming of the recommendations is the lack of recognition in the impact of introduced species and their effect on the study areas. Again, this factor seems to be minimized in the outcome of the Investigation. Feral animals – deer, pigs, foxes and rabbits are increasingly making changes to current biodiversity. Other government departments and their studies recognize these facts. Feral cats have recently been officially declared to be a major problem. They have been proved to decimate smaller invertebrates and lower nesting woodland birds.
15. It is not in the perceived interests of VEAC to carefully consider the full impact of both climate change and feral species. Where are their control recommendations as a priority? Those fast adapting invasive ‘weed’ species to changed forests has brief comment.
16. The implementations of this Investigation have long enduring consequences for the State of Victoria. This flawed ‘study’ will create adverse results with additional collateral damage to the areas VEAC wishes to protect.
17. The financial cost of the Recommendations is not presented. As the remit appears not to provide any economic guidelines or implementation budgets, all recommendations can only be interpreted as theoretical. Many of the outcomes may be well-intentioned or desired but their logical production will be controlled by existing budgets and priorities. The Chairperson’s statement that ‘the Government would provide adequate funding for the final recommendations’ has no transparent support. The second and third recommendations asks the government for substantial funding and resourcing of VEAC’s recommendations. Why should the Government accept this report without having a disclosed idea of the implementation cost and timelines for the recommendations?
18. Most previous submissions requested more study (and thus more expenditure, presumably from the public purse). The existing authorities and local councils are financially constrained currently.

I could go on, but this is enough for now to demonstrate how unwise this VEAC Recommendation is.

Wallace Young, 10th December, 2018