

Subject: Submission on Central West Investigation
To: veac@delwp.vic.gov.au
From: Martin O'Brien (ecologist/ornithologist)

Dear VEAC team,

Thankyou for providing the opportunity to make a submission on the current recommendations for this investigation area. I offer this information as an ornithologist and cycle tourist who has visited a number of the public land blocks in the study area over the last 35 years.

I provide the following response in support of your good work in recommending an increase in the conservation reserve system for the central west study area. This recommendations are sorely needed and hopefully will assist in the 'environmental resilience' that is required as a result of the expected climate change scenario we can expect into the future.

The main thrust of my submission is to

- address some queries and apparent errors in the appendices
- identify reasons for substantially increasing the boundary of Mount Cole block and VEAC recommendations for this area from a threatened species management point of view.

I believe that by carefully examining the distribution of habitat and records of the following threatened bird and marsupial species recorded within the Mt Buangor-Mt Cole block, a convincing argument can be made in support of extending the boundary of the proposed Mt Buangor National Park to include the vegetated area east of the main Mt Cole Road (ie. block G4 map D in the draft recommendations). This is clearly one of the 'Key Issues' as per section 3.4 of the report.

A. Threatened species management and park boundaries

a. Powerful Owl

As Council is no doubt aware this somewhat iconic forest species requires large blocks of habitat for foraging, roosting and breeding (eg. ~ 500ha territories in East Gippsland habitat). Careful examination of the species records (Victorian Biodiversity Atlas, VBA) for the Mt Buangor-Mt Cole block shows that approximately 90% of the sightings in the VBA data fall into the Mt Cole State Forest (G4) while only a handful fall within the proposed Mt Buangor National Park.

b. Square-tailed Kite

In a similar way > 85% of the Square-tailed Kite records also fall into the state forest block than the proposed national park block.

c. White-throated Needletail

Listed recently under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act this 'speedster of the sky' is in steep decline with the population visiting Australia falling some 80% at traditional Victorian locations (Scientific Advisory Committee assessment). It is thus critical for all (foraging) habitats to be appropriately conserved at the highest level possible (the species does not breed in Australia). Although there appears to be just a single VBA record of this rare aerial bird for the area in question, this also falls into the state forest rather than the proposed park block.

d. Hooded Robin

Another Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act-listed species this woodland robin is also in the *Victorian Temperate Woodland Bird Community (BC)*. The main reasons for its decline across Victoria appear to be the loss of habitat complexity (especially loss of coarse woody debris), and the size of suitable remnant blocks of the required dimension. For example the species may

now be extinct at Chiltern, a 5000ha reserve, an alarming outcome if proved correct. Thus all blocks of suitable habitat in the central west investigation area need to be retained to have some likelihood of conserving species and in addition further potential 'future habitat' needs to be harnessed via the conservation reserve system to enable the possibility of managing species into a new 'climate change' scenario.

e. Speckled Warbler

Like the Hooded Robin the Speckled Warbler appears to have a single record for this area. The species is also a taxon in the BC and similarly has complex habitat requirements of large habitat areas with specific micro-habitat features that provide foraging, refuge and breeding.

f. Brush-tailed Phascogale

This unique and rare woodland marsupial has been recorded 15 times in the block. Over 80% of the records are from the eastern (Mt Cole) state forest section. Again, to conserve the species appropriately the Mt Cole (G4) block needs to be part of a recommended national park for this area.

B. Appendices issues

As a general comment I think it wise to 'proof' these types of appendices utilising the knowledge of skilled biologists. This is because a number of seemingly odd plant and animal records appear in Appendix 7. These could give a false impression to those unfamiliar with the 'normal' distribution of species in the state.

Appendix 7

Page 193 – I understand that Bacchus Marsh Wattle has now been formally added to the Threatened List of the FFG Act.

Page 194 – Cobberas Grevillea. This appears to be an aberrant record for a taxon that is normally found only in eastern Victoria (?).

Page 196 – wondering if the Mt Cole Grevillea is a listed species in the state (?). The Mount Hope Grevillea would not be expected to occur in the study area I would have thought (?).

Page 200 – The Wombat Bossiaea is a FFG-listed species

An up to date list of the taxa on the Threatened List of the FFG Act can be obtained from the Scientific Advisory Committee Secretary Kylie McNicol (Kylie works at DELWP office 222 Lonsdale Street).

As I am keen to be kept informed of progress on your investigation please feel free to contact me as required.

I look forward to the wise use of this area and the appropriate conservation management this will entail.

Cheers,

Martin O'Brien
Melbourne