



VEAC Central West Investigation second round submission, December 2018.

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Dear VEAC members,

I recognise that the VEAC is obliged to meet criteria as set out in the terms of reference and some land status changes will be necessary to meet these.

The draft recommendation to significantly change park structures while achieving government agreed target strategic biodiversity values (SBV's) will in many cases, due to their associated restrictions exclude many current users from over 79,000 hectares of rezoned public land with major negative impacts on both the forests and local communities.

These biodiversity sites in many cases exist under the current management while not necessarily meeting agreed on paper targets. An expansion of Special Protection Zones (SPZ's) I believe would have been a better outcome and meet the terms of reference. Additionally there has been no review of current management plans or activities to confirm current SBV's have been preserved after the previous reviews covering parts of this investigation area.

As a regular local user of Wombat-Macedon block I have many concerns (which can also be extrapolated to the Mount Cole-Pyrenees and Wellsford blocks which I also visit 2 or 3 times a year) with the draft and recommendations.

The SBV's appear to have been modelled from previous investigation data combined with first round submissions and include potential locations. There appears to be no corroboration studies with current values to confirm the modelling is accurate, some of the data is now dating back 20 years. The inclusion of potential habitat zones I see as an overstep of the review criteria particularly with no current data available.

While a socioeconomic study of the regions was undertaken (Table 2.1) part 2.3.2 referred to current users from outside the localized regions, the economic value these visitors bring currently are not noted in the draft document as per the VEAC Act, section 18- C,G & H. Recreational, social, economic and cultural values for the affected users have not been tabled in the draft and thus appears to not have been considered for deriving the recommended outcomes.

All 3 of the blocks see many visitor numbers including horse riders, motor bike and four wheel drive groups/clubs, hunters and prospectors that with the current draft recommendations would see their current access reduced or removed. There are regular interstate visitors who prospect, four wheel drive and ride motor bikes as an annual 1 to 6 week holiday who provide an income stream for the local townships, this is in addition to working Victorian based users who visit on weekends and also take annual leave in the areas. The business owners I've spoken to are expecting an economic downturn if the draft recommendations happen. In some cases the visitors recreational activity will no longer be permitted or not viable so the tourism numbers will be greatly reduced, no business owner I spoken to concedes National Park status will increase visitor numbers and some concedes it would end a currently viable business. The on flow of these closing business to the local townships viability will have social and economic impacts. Recommendation 3 recognises this is an issue while falling short of giving a quantifiable current status.

With the proposed structure change to National Park from State Forrest for over 32,000 hectares there are other repercussions that need to be considered also due to management regulations.

Fire wood which is currently accessed for domestic use after coppicing will no longer be available, instead being left and thus increase fuel loads in bush fire situations. This increases the vulnerability of communities such as Blakeville, Spargo Creek, Blackwood and others who are surrounded by Wombat State Forest where the current removal of coppiced timber and controlled burns play a key roll in fire management strategies. The proposed

rezoned Wombat Regional Park will see domestic fire wood being sought after at similar levels as now with many homes reliant on wood heaters in winter with a large reduction in approved collection zones. Anecdotal evidence suggests illegal domestic fire wood collection may increase if suitable collection zones are not found within the proposed 9,149 hectare Wombat Regional Park (which equates to half the area of the current Lerderderg State Park) that is currently State Forest.

Prospecting, being a low impact activity conducted mostly on former disturbed ground I feel should be allowed to continue as is currently available within the regulations for anyone who holds a current miners right. Currently there is access to areas within 9 National Parks and I would like to see this extended to include any changes this review recommends noting that most of the headwaters within the Wombat State Forest are already on the exempt list(no go zones).

Table 7.2 lists trail bike riding and four wheel driving as being permitted on formed roads and vehicle tracks while they are not allowed off road. The current management displayed by Parks Victoria in the Lerderderg State Park of closing non-gazetted formed tracks if extended to the proposed National Park will lead to heavier use of the smaller Regional Park's which will have greater localized environmental impact. The definitions off a "vehicle track" and "off road" is not explained in the draft and was not able to be clarified at the drop in session I attended, many concenter off road as using a vehicle track while staying off native vegetation. Access to current formed former fire break tracks that are used and maintained mostly by locals and four wheel drive enthusiasts surround most of the smaller townships and locals concenter them vital. Most of these tracks are not gazetted and form a key role in allowing rapid response CFA units to attend to a forest fire. Blackwood (and surrounds) as an example is recognised as being an Extreme Bushfire Risk community and benefit from allowing the CFA to be able to, for example, access a lightning strike that can be contained quickly by using these tracks.

Horse riding in the new proposed National Park areas is banned although there was a possibility of some designated tracks being exempted, the same ones the four wheel drive and motor bikes will be using due to other track closures so not safe for any group. Many people have purchased land next to or near the forest to allow horse ownership with an area to exercise them including riding businesses, the social and economic impact of these people doesn't appear to have been considered.

Hunting is another activity greatly affected by the proposed changes. There are many recreational hunters who help control feral animal numbers while maintaining firearm skill levels for hunting game both within legal and ethical criteria. There is concern from both hunters and non hunters alike that banning hunting will see feral animal numbers increase with increased damage to native vegetation, particularly pigs around the waterways and feral cats preying on protected species thus affecting the SBZ's we all want to protect. There is already a goat eradication programme within Lerderderg State Park, removing the recreational hunters will see goats expand into the larger proposed National and Regional Parks breeding to larger numbers along with the pigs/cats/dogs/foxes/rabbits and deer we currently see in Wombat State Forest, some of which are acknowledged in the draft. Additionally along side any pest eradication programme any potential weed infestation needs be addressed.

As a regular camper in Wombat State Forest I enjoy the flexibility of dispersed camping and utilize this ability to suit my activity. Subject to if I'm looking for a weekend next to water, personal nature studying, prospecting, bush walking or visiting one or more of the regional townships we camp in different sections of the forest using the take it in-take it out principals. Although we no longer have dogs in our household like many forest campers they always accompanied us. I have noted that dog walking and prospecting will be banned in the areas I currently frequent.

Within the proposed National Parks camp site locations would have to be identified with significant money allocated to create each. Recently within Lerderderg State Park \$80'000 was spent on the multiple site 1 toilet block camp ground on Upper Chadwick Track after O'Briens Crossing camp was closed for safety reasons. On each visit there I have campers ask about walking tracks of which none have been provided so they end up walking on the only vehicle access track creating a safety hazard, O'Briens was popular due to the walking tracks and river access however it's 5 kilometres away on a narrow winding dirt road so not bush walking friendly. The Regional Park's will

be the only dog friendly areas for walking and dispersed camping however with the largest at just 9,149Ha these areas will be significantly impacted, they appear to be a sacrificed area even though there is sightings of rare species within the proposed Regional Park's boundaries.

As a regular recreational visitor to both Lerderderg State Park and Wombat State Forest I feel there has been no working knowledge of the areas being reviewed with only 4 committee visits to the review areas being noted in the draft. There also appears to be a lack of representation of the recreational visitors and uses on the community reference group. Appendix 4 referred in part to community consultations with user groups, neither I or anybody I've spoken to knew about the Investigation until the draft proposal was released as evidenced in part 3.1.3 with only 30-50 people attending each of the pre-draft 5 drop in sessions. I would also add no business I know of had or have been contacted to the best of my knowledge for the Central West Investigation.

My recommendations for the final report are;

- Provide the current economic value the public land generates and potential economic consequences of all proposed changes.
- Any recommended changes of land statuses don't commence until full additional costing have been budgeted.
- The draft recommendations to be reviewed with a focus on protecting known(not potential) SBV's by use of current management regimes(SPZ's etc.) rather than the a higher land protection status than required to meet required SPV targets were possible.
- Make a recommendation to investigate the possibility to include private land set aside for conservation with covenants to be included for SBV's (allowing for more a balanced use of public land).
- Make a recommendation to undertake representative studies to confirm computer modelling outcomes are accurate.
- Allow prospecting to continue in all areas currently available within the review areas regardless of any status change.
- Make recommendations to include horse riding and camping in any new park with community representation in future planning for individual park management to allow for a balanced use of public land.
- Implement 5 yearly reviews of any recommendations to ensure management plans are achieving desired outcomes.

Yours sincerely, Kyle Menzies.



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