

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council VEAC
Central West Investigation

SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT PROPOSALS PAPER

As a regular recreational user (bushwalker, photographer) in all of the public areas subject to this review, resident and ratepayer of the subject Hepburn Shire municipal area, and as an Australian who cares about the sort of world we are leaving for tomorrow, I **strongly support** the proposed establishment of each of the new National Parks and Conservation Parks as contained in the recommendations – including:

National parks and conservation parks

Wombat-Lerderderg National Park – as recommended.

Pyrenees National Park – as recommended.

Mount Buangor National Park – as recommended.

Hepburn and Cobaw conservation parks – as recommended.

Comment: As an Australian who cares about the future we are creating today, I strongly support and commend the establishment of the proposed national parks as recommended in the draft.

I also wish to table my appreciation for the considerable degree of research that has led to the production of these recommendations.

As a recreational user of all of the public areas that are subject to this review - I and my many fellow bushwalkers - spend money in each location with regard to services including eateries, accommodation, wineries etc. We are particularly concerned that high impact activities, ie hunting, trail bike damage/noise and destructive 4WD use all significantly degrade these critically valuable remnant locations of natural heritage.

To myself and countless fellow members of the international bushwalking/photography fraternity who frequent these important natural locations subject to this review, hunting is particularly inconsistent with the intrinsic values extant in such important places of remnant natural heritage and recreation.

Given the high likelihood that hunting will inevitably entail the destruction of native fauna (either intentionally or otherwise) and the distinct possibility that it may lead to the injury or death of innocent park users, hunting as an activity is particularly ill advised in such locations of high natural heritage and eco-tourism values. Specifically, I note the

increasingly urgent need to avert further species loss. Australia is one of seven countries responsible for more than half of global biodiversity loss. 1.

Our places of natural remnant native forest are incredibly important and extremely valuable and will only become more so as climate change, serious water security issues, and species loss impact globally.

Pristine places of natural heritage which have been adequately protected from destructive and inappropriate uses will become increasingly valuable and internationally important on multiple fronts spanning the socio-economic to environmental and educational.

Land managers and policy makers with sufficient foresight to conserve and protect such truly critical natural assets today are to be acknowledged for helping to sure up a future worth having tomorrow.

Regional Parks Nature Reserves and Bushland Reserves

As a regular recreational user of all of the public areas subject to this review I also ***strongly support*** the establishment of the proposed additional **Regional Parks, Nature Reserves and Bushland Reserves** as recommended in the draft. See Comment Above.

Nature Reserves and Bushland Reserves

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State Forests

With 80 percent of subject state forests recommended to be retained (mainly around the Mount Cole, Mount Lonarch, Beaufort and Glenmona areas) ideally these state forest blocks should also be afforded greater protections into the near future to avoid degradation typically associated with logging and other high impact uses. The transition out of native natural remnant forests and into plantations in order to meet timber harvesting needs is critically important in light of the concerning degree of natural habitat loss and associated native species loss which has occurred in Australia since European settlement.

As a nation we are losing faunal and floral species at an alarming rate and habitat destruction and hunting are significantly contributing to this undesirable trend. Our nation's rich biological diversity has seriously declined since European settlement.

Some 29 Australian mammals have become extinct over the past 200 years. Sadly, other taxonomic groups have fared little better.²

General Comment:

Legislation (*and, importantly, the active enforcement of it – with real penalties for transgressions*) in order to conserve our places of intact natural heritage are critically important for numerous reasons. These include the truly urgent need to avert further native species loss; addressing the significant challenges of climate change; protecting our naturally occurring carbon sinks; protecting our water security/our vital natural water harvesting assets; protecting our remnant places of immense intrinsic natural heritage value for future generations; pristine intact natural forests will become increasingly valuable eco-tourism assets in a world increasingly devoid of them.

Hundreds of scientists have expressed alarm at Australia's increasing rate of destruction of native vegetation and called for governments to take action to stop habitat loss.³ Legislating to create new National Parks and other conservation reserves is a commendable measure to address these critical concerns.

With regard to the high importance of natural forests in combating the impacts of climate change: Analysis done using the Australian government's public native forest model suggests that stopping all harvesting in the public native forest estate would generate in the order of 38 million tonnes of potential credits (that is, the equivalent of 38 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions avoided) each year in the short to medium term. ⁴

With regard to the high importance of natural forests in addressing water security challenges: By 2025, 1.8 billion people will be living in regions with absolute water scarcity and two-thirds of the world's population may experience water-stress conditions. Forests capture and store water and can play an important role in providing drinking water for millions of people.⁵

Forest ecosystems in Victoria are highly diverse and have important values with regard to carbon storage, ensuring water security, maintaining biodiversity and habitat, and socio-economic uses. ⁶

Footnotes/Resources

1.<http://www.abc.net.au/news/science/2017-10-26/australia-biodiversity-loss-conservation/8987696>

2.<http://www.wwf.org.au/what-we-do/species#gs.4E3VxfA>

3. <https://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/science-tech/habitat-destruction-dire-threat-australia%E2%80%99s-wildlife-scientists-warn>
4. <https://theconversation.com/native-forests-can-help-hit-emissions-targets-if-we-leave-them-alone-44849>
5. <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/53391/icode/>
6. <https://ecosystemforest.unimelb.edu.au/research/research-programs/integrated-forest-ecosystem-research-ifer>

Submission re: VEAC Central West Investigation Draft Proposals Paper

A. This submission formally tables solid and strategic support for the creation of new and expanded National Park status for three areas as detailed in the Draft Proposals including:

1. The Wombat-Lerderderg National Park
2. The Pyrenees National Park
3. The Mount Buangor National Park

B. This submission formally tables strong support for improved protection for forest ecosystems and the habitat of more than 350 threatened species as detailed in the Draft Proposals ***as a matter of urgency and international importance in light of current rates of biodiversity and species loss and habitat degradation and loss as observable on a national and global scale, with Australia recording one of the worst rates of mammalian species extinction world-wide.***

c. This submission formally calls for a review - in the near future – to examine opportunities for ***strengthening and upgrading protections*** for forests in the areas of **Mount Cole, Mount Lonarch, Beaufort and Glenmona.**

Specifically, this submission calls for a review which would investigate the feasibility of upgrading the protection status for these areas, as recommended in the Draft Proposals, from State Forest to that of National Park status (for each of the Mount Cole, Mount Lonarch, Beaufort and Glenmona areas).

The harvesting of “timber” (ie: critically important breeding habitat) is a cause of serious ecosystem degradation and depletion at a time when the conservation of Australia’s and Victoria’s remnant natural habitat is critically important in order to avoid current high rates of biodiversity loss and species extinctions, and also to protect our strategically important water harvesting assets and natural carbon absorption assets. The latter is particularly of obvious value as responsible global leaders and policy makers world-wide strive to address the significant challenge of climate change which poses considerable threats to all sectors of society.

This submission also formally notes and tables the observed significant disappointment of tourists who encounter so-called “managed” forests with their sad, mutilated profiles of ravaged and exploited trees when what they actually wanted to see was a real, un-desecrated, intact and pristine native forest – an absolute jewel in the crown for any smart state seeking to shore up its future eco-tourism potential worth many (smart) \$Millions to a savvy and progressive economy.