

03/12/2018

SUBMISSION TO VEAC CENTRAL WEST INVESTIGATION
Draft proposals paper observations and critique

Dear Council Members,

We wish to express our **objection** to the Draft Proposal which includes Wombat, Wellsford, Mt Cole, the Pyrenees, Ben Major Nature Reserve “etc” and the exclusion of so called “Prospectors” from the declared areas detailed in the VEAC draft proposal.

Whilst it is not our aim here to argue in total against the overall complexity of the draft document, it is our intention to offer an objection to it, in part, namely the exclusion of Prospectors as referred, in the draft document.

In our view it is wrong of the Council to lump part time hobbyist metal detectorists into the same category as industrial mining/prospectors, that do prospecting in the pursuit of commercial quantities of precious metals, gold, within the boundaries of current parks. Your exclusion of true prospectors is beyond our influence
We offer this objection with the following points.

1. At the Bendigo public forum I (Ken) spoke with Councilor “ ” who indicated to me that VEAC see “Prospectors” in the same light as the timber industry, being people who are in the bush to extract and make profit and take financial gain from the parks and forest.

With respect, we challenge this point of view quite vigorously in regard to our activities as persons who, yes, holds a “Miners Right” as required by law, however our activities are far from what one would call extractive and certainly are not for profit.

I and my family ,as so called prospectors, along with all my fellow hobbyist fossickers, do not actually mine, nor do we professionally search for commercial gold bearing lodes with the view to mining such deposits with machinery.

We recall that some years ago during the Box-Ironbark Inquiry (2001) it was concluded, that our hobby of gold detecting with a hand held metal detecting machine was a “low impact activity.”

We are not “Prospectors” in the sense implied by your Councilor “ ”, however we would agree, that in pursuit of our hobby we would hope to have some prospect of finding a small nugget or two every now and then.

As for profit our small gains would never come near what we spend to get there, shop in the towns and get home again.

2. In our view the activity of travelling to our wonderful bush, camping out – perhaps with some friends, enjoying our wonderful Victorian Golden Triangle for a few days, walking about with a detector in hand, getting wonderful physical and mental exercise, away from the normal humdrum of the suburban homebound environment, is just what our Australian way of life is, and always has been all about. IF by chance we happen upon a nugget of gold, that, in our view, is just a bonus.

3. Yes, by law we have to hold a “Miners Right” however we would remind the Council, in support of opening comments that this right states the following :- A Miners Right is for "Recreational prospecting and fossicking involving the use of hand tools e.g. metal detectors, pans and sluices, in the search for gold, gemstones and other minerals." Obviously this miners right states quite clearly the limitations of our hobby activity.

4. Also as part of this submission of objection we would advise that, as part of our casual activity of visiting the bush, we contribute to the Victorian rural local economy by spending money in various ways in each area & town that we visit. This expenditure is in the form of purchasing fuel to get home again, shopping in local stores for food, refreshments, ice, spare parts, camping gear, and from time to time local charities in the form of attending markets, Rallies, Jamborees and the like. We leave hundreds of dollars in each area on each visit. If myself and family & my fellow detectorists get locked out we would ask you to explain to all of the small town businesses, how, even in the long term you plan to replace this economic contribution.

Further to this point we would advise the Council that we have several friends who visit from interstate each year. They regularly come down from NSW into the Golden Triangle and also spend their money, (in thousands) not just for a few days as we do but for weeks at a time. They tell me that they also have their friends that do the same. It is a compound economic argument and is indeed, in our view powerful, and cannot be disregarded.

5. Another aspect of the partial closure of our parks, or at the worst the exclusion of bush users, is the understanding that such closure potentially removes the opportunity for people with mental disability, albeit in many, if not most cases, undeclared or obvious, the opportunity to get away and seek comfort in the serenity of privacy, or perhaps companionship, from time to time. Not to mention the overall health aspect of exercise and general well being.

It would be of great interest we believe to organisations such as Beyond Blue to be made aware of the potential risk to our community with the removal of the opportunity for solitude with freedom of choice in the use of our parks, rather than the proposed strict controls that would result from organised, regulated and restrictive access, to only certain minimal areas that would result from your proposed draconian plans.

In closing we strongly urge that in your deliberations and final draft of the current, and for that matter, all other VEAC inquiries that you do not exclude individual groups or types from our wonderful bush. By all means help us all maintain and manage our parks, but not to the exclusion of the very people that you should be representing, ie:- all of the people of Victoria.

With good management and co-operation, everyones needs can be accommodated without discrimination.

As a solution to accommodate our observations and wishes , we suggest that in the report document, where the word “[Prospector’s](#)” appears in your draft document **that the following words be added** ie:- [\(but not metal detectorists and fossickers as defined in the Victorian Miners Right document & other Australian States equivalent\)](#)

Please accept and act on our observations and recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

Ken & Elizabeth Whittaker

ps. ID details above.