

19th June 2015

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
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**GOULBURN
BROKEN**

CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY

www.gbcma.vic.gov.au

To the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC)

Re: Statewide Assessment of Public Land

The Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is the peak natural resource management body in the Goulburn Broken Catchment to develop and oversee the implementation of the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS). The RCS aims to ensure land and water resources are protected and enhanced, as well as improving the region's social wellbeing, environmental resilience and productive capacity in a sustainable manner.

As part of this commitment, we advocate for the ongoing protection of public land (in this situation Crown land), and recognise its critical value ecologically, socially and culturally. We recognise the strong association that Aboriginal Traditional Owners have with these areas that provide representative areas of natural habitat and ecosystems for biodiversity conservation.

Past recommendations by VEAC and its predecessors have led to changes in the public land use categories within our Catchment. This most notably includes the development of National Parks such as Barmah and Lower Goulburn National Parks, resulting from the River Red Gum Forests Investigation (2008-9). Prior to this was the Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation undertaken in 2001.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment and be involved in discussions about recommendations by VEAC, to determine the appropriateness of the current system of public land use categories.

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Our initial comments, as outlined below are based on three areas identified in the Terms of Reference.

1. An assessment of the current system of public land categories, including options for changing or consolidating the existing categories:

Across the State, there is opportunity to consider the options for consolidating the existing categories to result in a system that is simple and clear, and supports effective and efficient public land management. This is particularly relevant to what has been defined as 'other' public land use category in the supporting material, where 8% of Victoria's public land is comprised of 14 different land use categories.

Most notably for the Goulburn Broken Catchment, the 'uncategorised public land' category warrants further investigation, so that these areas can be categorised for a particular public use. Simplifying/consolidating the public land categories that apply to wetlands, particularly 'water production' areas would also be worth exploring. Other than this, due to two recent reviews (2001 and 2008) the Goulburn Broken CMA public land use categories have been consolidated and simplified.

With any consolidation or simplification, the public land use categories must clearly define the purpose(s) of the public land to ensure the legislation and management arrangements for each land use category are consistent.

Further, changes to public land categories alone are not sufficient to protect natural and cultural values. We strongly advocate for improved public land funding, to ensure management agencies are sufficiently resourced, to implement management actions supported by detailed, science-based management plans.

2. An assessment of the current reservation status of public land:

The Goulburn Broken CMA have noted community concern about the protection of isolated areas better known as 'Bushland Reserves' and the opportunity for community involvement in their management, following their categorisation in 2008-9 as 'Natural Features Reserves'. This resulted in management changes from Committees of Management, resulting in a lack of resources attributed to these reserves, due to a low prioritisation compared to national parks (e.g. Barmah), regional parks (e.g. Echuca Regional Park, Goulburn River south of Shepparton) and larger natural features reserves (e.g. Broken Boosey).

There are a range of status relating to Crown Water Frontages across Victoria that require review, to provide consistent management aligned to the key values of these areas.

3. An inventory of the types of values on public land:

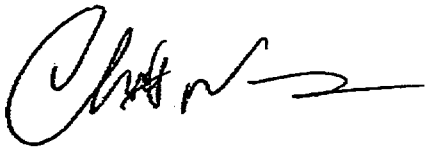
The Goulburn Broken CMA, stakeholders and community have provided input into past assessments such as the VEAC River Red Gums Investigation. This report identifies the breadth of values placed on public land including ecological, cultural, social and economic. For example, the themes that resulted from the River Red Gums Investigation that are representative of the types of public land values included; the provisions of sufficient environmental water (environmental values); increased Indigenous involvement; and the management of sustainable recreation and tourism, domestic stock grazing, pest animals, forestry and fire.

There is further opportunity to review Crown Water Frontage values. We believe that there is much to be gained by a better understanding of the values these areas provide. A good reference for this would be the report titled "A Review of the Management of Riparian Land in Victoria" The Public Land Consultancy 2008.

We welcome further opportunity to be involved in the assessment of public land including an opportunity to discuss this assessment with VEAC.

If you have any questions regarding our response please do not hesitate to contact Steve Wilson (Land and Biodiversity Manager) on (03) 58 22 7700.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Norman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Chris Norman
Chief Executive Officer