

Statewide Assessment of Public Land

Submission to Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

Mansfield Shire Council



ABSTRACT

Mansfield Shire Council has prepared this submission in support of residents, ratepayers and visitors who value the significance of the public land estate to our destination's sustainability.

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A Destination Approach

The vast tracts of public land – state forest, reserve, resort and national park, when combined with our lakes and rivers, are at the heart of what makes our destination special and attractive to our visitors, residents and part time locals.

Tourism is the key economic driver in Mansfield Shire. Some 60% of the gross industry output of \$372.215m is attributed to tourism and visitors account to 50% of all local retail trade.

Although we have some 7000 commercially available beds in the area, free camping is the way thousands experience the destination. By the river, the lake, on the bluff or beside the trail – people camp in swags, tents, horsefloats, caravans and huts. Camping is back to nature, under the stars, with friends and families, stories made and retold – it’s the complement to whatever activity rocks your boat whether it be bird watching, star gazing, horseriding, river tubing, fishing, hunting, bushwalking, trail bike riding or four wheel driving.

Our visitors experience the destination in many ways; few care for land manager demarcation lines on maps as they are generally of little consequence to their stay. Many tracks, trails and operator enhanced trips wander in, out and on varied land and water manager’s tracts of land. It is this very reason that the destination land and water managers joined together in a destination sustainability project that has at its heart a desire for collaboration and an understanding of how the part affects the whole.

Enhancing the visitor experience

Council notes the State Government has abolished the 99 year leases for national parks and that it opposes in park large scale development.

Council also opposes the notion of large scale development in park but advocates strongly for the need for public and private investment in park, for appropriate small scale 'wilderness' quality accommodation that links iconic tracks and trails for world class multi day experiences for the high yield visitor.

It is critical that Government, across all levels, work together to create an appealing investment environment. Reducing red tape barriers to invest, making the process clear and timely assist. But for the 'game changing' improvements, particularly where public land is concerned, public sector infrastructure investment is needed to lay the foundations for the micro, small and medium sized business investment to follow.

Our public land assets are critically important for the state's social, economic and environmental health and they require investment like any key infrastructure. Many national and international examples exist of user pay systems that invest back into the asset. NSW has a parks fee. South Australia has a 'desert pass'.

Council advocates for a system that is a balance of state funded and user pays that returns sufficient resources to our public land assets (as opposed to consolidated revenue) for whole of life maintenance and enhancement and for enhancing visitor experience, in recognition of their considerable asset base value to visitors and the state.

Part of the equation of strengthening the public land asset is investing in the human resourcing and local governance that leads to better operator and park management cooperation and outcomes for visitors. People on the ground are needed in region.

Response

Mansfield Shire Council welcomes the VEAC Statewide Assessment of Public Land and supports the stated focus being to assist management effectiveness while retaining the current levels of protection underpinning Victoria's public land system.

Council is keen for outcomes of the investigation to:

- Simplify the classifications across the many different land categories
- Provide guidance around effective management models for public land that enable and facilitate local destination input and determination and maximise management synergies
- Resolve the lack of specific regulations for crown land reserves such as the Howqua Hills Historic Area that is managed by Parks Victoria
- Provide clarity of roles for land managers as they relate to DELWP in its policy and strategy role and as an operational land manager
- Identify the gaps in values on public land to ensure adequate representation across the suite of public land
- Increase the labour and capital resource investment in public land to facilitate access and visitor experience
- Recommend dollars raised from users of parks and reserves to be spent on parks and reserves in a net benefit of spend on public land and to be in principle spent back in locations where the yield was generated
- Recommend determination and clarity over public land lease terms
- Identify investment attraction and infrastructure enhancement to shift visitation from low/no yield to one of medium/high yield to be a management performance criterion.

For more information

Mansfield Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public land investigation and invites VEAC to hold an in region consultation opportunity in Mansfield.

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