

Victorian Caravan Parks Association

Response of the Victorian Caravan Parks Association to the Statewide Assessment of Public Land Draft Proposals Paper - August 2016.



4 November 2016

The Victorian Caravan Parks Association appreciates the opportunity to comment on this paper.

General comments

The Victorian Caravan Parks Association Inc. (VicParks) is the peak industry body for owners, managers and lessees of caravan parks in Victoria. Its members are predominantly regionally based, and the industry forms an important component in the supply of both regional tourist and regional residential accommodation.

Caravan parks are a growing source of affordable tourist accommodation; the year-on-year growth of the manufacture of RVs and caravan/campervans is testimony to the continuing love affair of the public with outdoor recreational holidays. Caravan parks that are located near beaches, lakes, parks and waterways are by far the most sought-after destinations by both Victorian and interstate visitors, with the emerging market of international travellers now starting to value the open space and freedom that caravan park accommodation offers.

Caravan park operators are typically professional business owners seeking long term, sustainable profitability and are less focussed on short term, speculative capital growth. Many see themselves as protectors of the environment in which their businesses operate, and have great respect for the land they occupy. The industry has concern that any further proposed changes to the legislation governing the caravan park industry may create an increasing administrative burden and create uncertainty for park operators and customers alike.

Response to Issues Raised in the Paper

1. Membership of the Community Reference Group of VEAC

VicParks represents the owners of more than 384 caravan park businesses across the state, mostly in regional areas, 91 of which operate their businesses on Crown Land. It is therefore surprising and disappointing that the association is not represented on the CRG. Other land-user groups with perhaps lesser claims to an interest in the terms of reference of the Draft Paper have been included in the CRG; and there appears to be a relative imbalance of tourism-related expertise. Given that tourism forms a major plank in the ambitions of the Andrews Government to grow regional economies and increase employment opportunities, this is surprising and disappointing.

The Draft Report correctly notes the economic value of tourism to the state coffers, and the importance of public land as the basis for much nature-based tourism. The VicParks Strategic Plan developed in 2013 by *nem Australia* has estimated the contribution of Victorian caravan park businesses to the local Victorian economy to be approximately \$450 million per annum.

2. Role of Volunteer-based Committees and Council Personnel in the Tendering Process for Crown Land Leases

Ninety-one VicParks members conduct their caravan park business on Crown Land reserves that are leased for 21-year periods from the Crown. The leasing process is managed by a wide variety of delegated bodies that include local Councils, Committees of Management, Water Boards and occasionally local boating/fishing associations. The tendering process for leases is not well -

understood or well-managed across the state, and as a result there is a high degree of inconsistency and confusion around the process.

This uncertainty impacts on current lessees who have put much work and capital investment into the park over the 21-year lease period, and cannot be confident that this effort will be recognised in the competitive tendering process required by the current State guidelines. The net effect can be the loss to the people of Victoria of an experienced park operator who understands the local environment, understands the local flora and fauna, and enjoys introducing the park to people of Victoria and visitors to the state.

VicParks advocates for a simpler tendering policy and consistent application of the policy by delegated bodies. Volunteer-based Committees give their time and commitment in a variety of ways, but their expertise may not be in the interpretation of government tendering processes. Similarly, Council personnel may not always have developed experience and confidence in their role in the tendering process, and may need assistance to ensure an equitable outcome.

We advocate that specific training be provided for their involvement in this role, or alternatively that experienced persons be available to mentor the Committees through the process.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this paper. Please contact me for any further clarification or discussion on 03 9372 3420, or elizabeth.white@vicparks.com.au



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