

**Geelong Environment Council Inc.(GEC) Submission on VEAC Statewide
Assessment of Public Land.**

5/11/2016

Questions R1

Public land is central to Victoria's nature conservation and the values that must be retained for the general public's full appreciation.

For this reason conservation must be upheld and management functions must be improved to retain the current status of conservation as minimum. If not, conservation areas are to be expanded and management outcomes are to be improved to hedge against the creep of degradation occurring in all areas of our State.

The GEC is appalled at the proposal by VEAC to reduce the category nomenclature of a number of parks, including Metropolitan, Forest and Historic Parks to a designation of 'Recreation'. It is surprising that VEAC has not recognized what will be believed by a section of the community if this occurs and recreation is the major reason for the park's existence.

As examples of degradation and poor management, extensive damage is occurring in both the Great Otway National Park (Eumeralla) and the Otway Forest Park by uncontrolled recreation. Mountain bikes in the former have developed a maze of tracks in addition to existing tracks. The management and approval of these are unregulated and no consultation for the approval of their existence has been provided by VEAC through DEWLP, or any public group other than the Mountain Bike group themselves. In the Otway Forest Park trail bikes have blazed their way through large areas of forest and made many kilometers of new tracks, many of which are deeply eroded. DELWP has spent many thousands of dollars repairing severe damage in some areas and made an effort to keep bikes on named tracks. Subsequently, however, in many circumstances damage that has occurred has been overlooked at many levels.

GEC does support recreational activities as appropriate on genuinely tracks, but this must not be seen to take priority over protection of biodiversity and conservation of the flora and fauna values.

To uphold the real values of conservation in public land which the majority of people use and appreciate means that:

- The review of public land use must not be lower than the current status level of conservation on these lands.
- Where consideration is given to the amalgamation of land into new categories, all Public land amalgamated in the new category must meet at least the highest level of conservation given to the pre-amalgamated categories of land.

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GEC believes that if the word 'recreation' must be included in the name the parks should be called 'Conservation and Recreation' However it does not appear necessary to change the nomenclature at all as the current name is appropriate. For example 'Forest Park' describes what the park is, and the various activities permitted can then be included in Regulations. The term 'Recreation Park' could also include a series of tracks developed purely for recreation with no biodiversity values.

The category 'Natural Features Reserve Wildlife Area' should not be called a Game Reserve. 'Game Reserve' does not convey any wildlife and conservation values. Once again this appears to reduce the public understanding of its wide range of values.

GEC strongly urges that all nomenclature remain unchanged, apart from the additions to 'National Park' category which are appropriate for management and identification purposes.

Questions

R2 The draft recommendation should be withdrawn with nomenclature remaining the same. (apart from National Park additions)

R3 a) Not required b-h are supported

R4 no comment

R5 The revised system is not supported

R6 Forest Parks should be managed under the Land Act rather than the Forest Act

R7- 8 supported

R9 the revised categories are not supported

R10 Supported

R11, 12, 13, Supported

R14 Supported with a greater level of protection and vegetation restoration including riparian, linear and rail reserves

R16, 17, 18 are supported

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R19 Support greater coordination with DELWP and a greater oversee of operations by DELWP.

P13-14 (Discussion paper) GEC supports an inventory of values which could be available to the public.

Public land should not be sold off, but expanded to hedge against actions of:

- Unauthorised use of designated land and lack of management outcomes.
- Increased population and use by the public, community groups and special interest groups
- To encourage expansion in the support of biodiversity and some eco-systems to offset against further losses of these systems.
- Effects of climate change of which there is evidence through weather patterns and impacts on geological land forms including river systems, and losses and changes to vegetation in riparian systems.

Other dot points are supported.

It is recommended that a coastal investigation should take place to identify land with environmental values which if subject to inundation could be replaced by the protection or acquisition of some adjacent land

P37-38 of Report Table3.4 GEC supports

4. Current Reservation Status of Public Land