Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information

What are we doing?

VEAC has been asked to provide some advice to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change on information that it holds about decisions on public land use and any technical issues that need to be resolved to improve the dataset.

VEACRecs25 is a linked GIS map and database containing information on formal government decisions for the use of public land.

Context

Everyone is likely to be familiar with public land, even if they don't use this terminology. In Victoria, it's the forests, national parks, beaches and coastal waters, lakes and stream frontages, and many smaller areas of land like nature reserves, recreation reserves and land used to provide services like water, sewerage and telecommunications. Roads in Victoria are almost all public land.

Most people engage with Victoria's public land by visiting it and using it: for their daily activities, for specific pursuits, or for longer visits or holidays. Others work on public land in sectors that include mining, forestry, commercial fishing, tourism, education and research, and land management.

Public land in Victoria is classified in different ways which reflect both the characteristics of the land and decisions successive governments have made about what the land can be used for. These classifications are backed up through legislation and regulations.

With a few exceptions such as some closed water catchments, public land can be used for many different activities. State forests might be used for timber production but are also visited for camping and hunting. National parks are designated to protect nature but also have large numbers of visitors enjoying many different forms of recreation.

How the community wants to use public land changes over time and governments review their decisions regularly. These decisions need to be maintained in an up to date record.

Victoria is unique in Australia in using an independent body to review public land and make recommendations to government about its use. Originally the Land Conservation Council, now VEAC, maintains a record of recommendations on all Victoria's public land, the geographical or spatial boundaries of each public land unit, and the most recent decisions made by government.

Why is it important?

The dataset (named VEACRecs25) is an important tool to ensure Victoria has an accurate record of agreed public land use to help land managers and the community understand the purpose for which public land is to be managed.

For land managers to manage public land according to government decisions and to have the best regulatory tools to do this effectively, it's essential that VEAC's dataset is up to date and the boundaries for each land unit are accurate. It's also important for transparency for the public to have access to this information in an accessible and easily understood format.

What have we done so far?

We are progressively validating the long list of land units in batches based on the amount of work required and the likely requirements of users. Several modifications to the VEACRecs25 dataset have been identified, including some providing improved functionality.

Improvements to data structure will provide for better integration and comparison with other public land information sources and will support current legislative reforms and government programs. A more detailed description of the work program, technical tasks and progress so far is provided below.

Are there any interim findings?

The VEACRecs25 dataset has more than 83,000 records and contains information on 8 million hectares of public land. National, state and wilderness parks comprise 41 per cent by area and state forests 40 per cent.

There are some differences in the information held by VEAC and that in DELWP's statewide Crown land data maintained by Land Use Victoria (DELWP). Understanding and

addressing any significant discrepancies is underway.

Land held in freehold title by public authorities (such as government departments and agencies) makes up around one per cent of the area in the VEACRecs25 dataset. Much of this area is classified as water production reservoirs or government services such as schools, railways, or other infrastructure.

The following broad types of uncategorised public land have been identified:

- areas specifically recommended by VEAC or its predecessors as uncategorised public land

- public land with no formal assessment of use (unassessed; unreserved; or with a broad reservation type such as 'public purposes').

What's next?

- Continue VEACRecs25 data validation and rollout of updates to information structure

- Consult with users to identify any additional functionality and useability improvements

- Update presentation of information used by government land managers including some new material or information

- Develop public communications material about how public land use decisions are formally made.

Contact details

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
Level 39, 2 Lonsdale St
GPO Box 527
Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

Phone (03) 9637 9902 or 1800 134 803

Email veac@delwp.vic.gov.au

www.veac.vic.gov.au

Source information

VicMap Property (cadastre)
Vicmap is the state's foundational spatial data. Vicmap Property is Victoria's cadastral map base that provides information about land parcels and property details. The database is continuously maintained with information from authoritative sources within local and state governments.

VEACRecs25
VEACRecs25 is a dataset maintained by VEAC that provides a spatial representation of public land use decisions of the Victorian government or Parliament, including a record of the government-accepted recommendations of VEAC and its predecessors (the Environment Conservation Council and the Land Conservation Council). VEACRecs25 is a key tool to help land managers and the community understand the purpose for which public land is to be managed.

Public Land Management (PLM)
spatial datasets for Victoria
PLM25 contains 30+ fields with detailed information on public land. PLM25 holds information from Parks and Reserves Information Management System (PRIMS) for parks and reserves, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) and Land Information Management System (LIMS) for other public land.

Landfolio
DELWP's new Crown Land Information Platform launched in May 2020. The system is designed to support more than 35 administration tasks including the reservation of land, appointing and managing delegated land managers, issuing and managing leases and licences and conducting native title assessments. The system manages more than 110,000 Crown parcels, 13,000 reserves, 1,200 delegated land managers and more than 45,000 licences and leases.

VOTS
A land administration system that holds the electronic register for the State of Victoria under the Torrens title system of land administration, including providing functionality for registering transactions affecting freehold land. Victoria's online land titles register (VOTS) has also been utilised to store Crown land information.

Mapshare
A corporate web mapping platform with access to a wide variety of interactive maps published by various DELWP businesses. Maps can be restricted to internal use or made accessible to external users.

Progress on technical tasks

The summary presented here provides more detailed descriptions of progress on technical tasks. These are arranged against the specific advice requested in the terms of reference on issues and gaps in the VEACRecs25 dataset and how the tool could be improved.

ACCURATE RECORD OF PUBLIC LAND USE

- data validation and initial data structure changes commenced
- comparison with other sources undertaken (e.g. DELWP's PLM25 Crown land data)

Data validation progress (by area)

73%
National Parks Act schedule areas

40%
Crown Land (Reserves) Act schedule areas

5%
Other Crown Land

0.01%
Public authority land
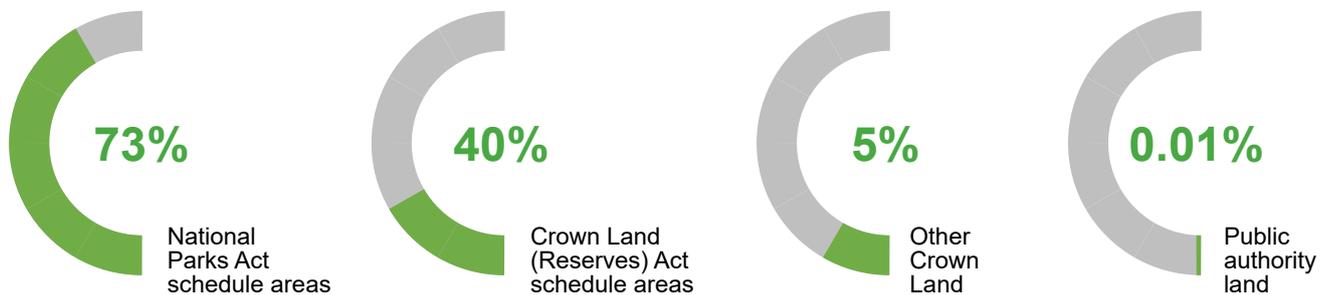
VEACRecs25
7.99 million hectares
83,000 records

43% National Parks Act areas (by area)

57% Other public land (by area)

PLM25
8.00 million hectares
113,450 records

43% National Parks Act areas (by area)

57% Other crown land (by area)

CLARIFICATION AND USEABILITY

- investigate additional structural changes for dataset
- seek and test user feedback
- provide accessible information about how public land use is assigned

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UNCATEGORISED PUBLIC LAND

- broad types identified
- dependent on data validation processes

Areas of public land use categories in the VEACRecs25 dataset

0.01% Uncategorised public land

41% National parks

40% State forest
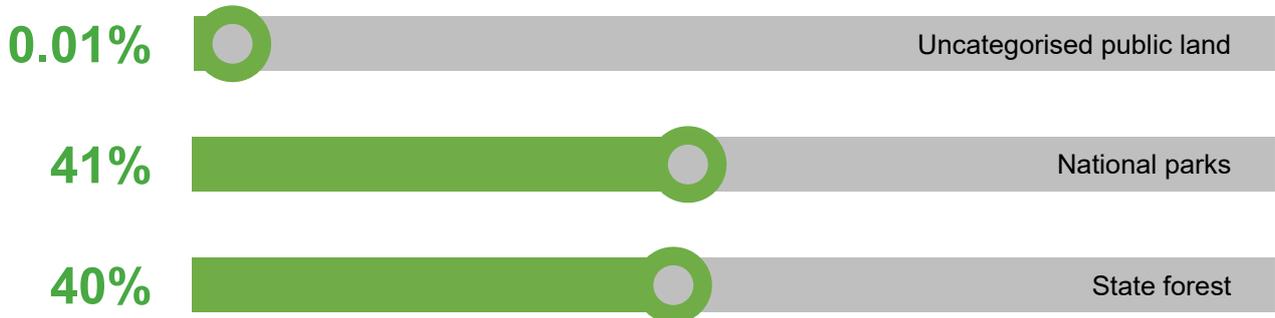
FUNCTIONALITY IMPROVEMENTS

Data structure
Introducing 'land units' approach grouping areas of the same public land use category

Clarity about land use classifications and decisions

Including reasons why parcels are split into different uses

Accessibility
Improving use of existing data field

Addition of new data fields to assist users and simplify analysis

Integration
Improve integration with other information systems

(i.e., DELWPs VOTS, PLM25 and Landfolio)

ACCESSIBLE ARCHIVE*

Website refresh
Refresh of VEAC's website architecture to accommodate improved archiving of information (completed March 2021)

Additional Information
Additional information made available on VEAC's website

Addition of historic source materials

Digital transformation
Prepare digital copies of detailed plans of formal land use decisions

*VEAC's website provides an accessible online repository of relevant information sources for government land use decisions represented in VEACRecs25

OTHER ISSUES OR GAPS

Integration
Explore ways to integrate the VEACRecs25 dataset into other relevant Crown land registers

User feedback
Investigate other ways to support land managers

Communications
Develop materials to improve community understanding of how public land use decisions are made

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