

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS

South Gippsland Area
District 2

Special Investigation
GELLIONS RUN

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GOVERNMENT OF VICTORIA

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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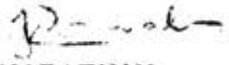
SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA, DISTRICT 2

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

GELLIONS RUN

These Proposed Recommendations are published to allow all who are interested the opportunity to comment by making written submissions to the Land Conservation Council.

All such submissions received on or before Monday 6 April, 1981 will be considered by the Council before Final Recommendations are made on the use of public land in the Gellions Run area.


I. KUNARATNAM
Secretary

PROPOSED
RECOMMENDATIONS

SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA,
DISTRICT 2

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION
GELLIONS RUN

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL
MELBOURNE, FEBRUARY, 1981

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INTRODUCTION

The Land Conservation Council, Victoria, established by the *Land Conservation Act* 1970, carries out investigations and makes recommendations to the Minister for Conservation on the balanced use of public land throughout the State.

In January, 1981 the Land Conservation Council was directed to make an investigation of Gellions Run according to the following Order in Council:

"Whereas it is provided in Section 8 of the *Land Conservation Act* 1970, that where the Governor in Council is of the opinion that an investigation and recommendation of the Land Conservation Council in relation to any particular district or area of Victoria is necessary or expedient and the said Council may be required to make such investigation and recommendation within such time as is fixed by the Governor in Council.

And given that the Land Conservation Council has commenced an investigation on the South Gippsland area, District 2, has published a descriptive report, and has called for and received submissions on the use of public land in that area, as required under Section 9 of the *Land Conservation Act* 1970.

Now therefore, His Excellency, the Governor of the State of Victoria by and with the advice of the Executive Council thereof, hereby requires the Land Conservation Council to complete separately its investigation of all public land within the hatched area on the plan hereunder (Gellions Run in the Parish of Alberton West), and the adjacent foreshore to High Water Mark (all of which lies within South Gippsland area, District 2), and to make recommendations by the eleventh day of May 1981 on the best use of this land, bearing in mind its potential for coal utilization."

Procedure

The proposed recommendations for Gellions Run form part of a three-stage process. The first stage - a factual report describing the resources and forms of land use in the South Gippsland area, District 2 - was published on 6 October, 1980. In the following 60 days the Council received 267 written submissions from the general public and interested bodies on the future use of the public land in the area; many of these submissions referred to Gellions Run. The Land Conservation Council has considered these submissions.

Copies of these proposed recommendations are available to the public and are automatically distributed to those who made submissions on land use in South Gippsland area, District 2.

Publication of these recommendations will be followed by another 60-day period during which the Council invites further submissions. All these submissions will be carefully considered and the Council will then make its final recommendations to the Minister for Conservation.

Proposed recommendations for the remainder of the South Gippsland area, District 2 will be published at a later date.

BROWN COAL

In its special investigation of Gellions Run, Council has been mindful of the coal resources which underlie much of this public land and which form part of the Gelliondale coalfield. It is also aware of recent proposals for private industry to exploit these resources. The following notes on coal utilization are provided to expand on that information already published in Council's descriptive resources report for the South Gippsland area, District 2.

Importance

Brown coal is the major source of primary energy available

in Victoria. Production from the Latrobe Valley for power generation alone is at present about 34 million tonnes (Mt) per year and growth in consumption has been maintained at about 6.5% since the State Electricity Commission commenced operations in 1919. The total brown coal resource is about 116,240 Mt, of which about 37,000 Mt is economic according to criteria adopted by the Brown Coal Resources Inter-Departmental Committee in July 1977. Although reserves of economically winnable brown coal in Gippsland are large by world standards they are nevertheless finite and, assuming a sustained growth in consumption of only 5%, existing economic resources could be exhausted within 100 years.

If all projects for power generation, oil from coal, and other schemes now under consideration by the Brown Coal Council should come to fruition, growth rates for coal production over the next 20 to 30 years are likely to exceed 5% per annum.

It is clear that all economically winnable coal will eventually be required for electricity generation, liquid fuels, synthetic natural gas, or chemical and metallurgical feedstocks.

Definition of Economically Winnable Coal and Planning Measures to Protect the Coal

In June 1975 the Executive Council adopted Statement of Planning Policy No. 9 (Central Gippsland : Brown coal deposits in the context of overall resources). The policy is directed primarily to the planning of land use and development, necessary for the conservation and utilization of the Central Gippsland brown coal deposits. Clause 2.1 of the policy states that:

"Deposits of economically winnable brown coal and areas designated as containing them shall be protected to maintain their potential for extraction. In the rest of the Policy Area provision for the extraction and utilization of such deposits shall be a primary planning

consideration. At every stage of development of the coal resources due account shall nevertheless be taken of other principal resources and activities in the Policy Area."

In June 1976 an interdepartmental committee entitled the Brown Coal Resources Inter-Departmental Committee (BCRIC) was established by the Ministers for Planning and Minerals and Energy.

In pursuance of its first term of reference the BCRIC developed the following criteria for defining economically winnable brown coal:

1. The top of the uppermost seam must be within 90 m of ground surface
2. Separate or single coal seams must exceed 15 m in thickness
3. The coal-to-overburden thickness ratio must exceed 0.5:1 calculated either to the base of the coal seam, or where the coal continues to a greater depth, to a maximum depth of 200 m below ground surface. For this purpose, coal seams more than 15 m thick are considered as coal and seams less than 15 m thick are rated as overburden

These criteria were used to identify the Nominal Coal Protection Boundary, which defines the area containing the economically winnable coal, and includes provision for open cut batters and an operational zone 250 m wide. The Committee recommended the protection of some 83,000 ha of land containing about 35,000 Mt (since revised to 37,000 Mt) of economically winnable brown coal in Central Gippsland.

The BCRIC report was adopted by Cabinet on 31 March 1978 and the then Minister for Planning announced the Government's intention of protecting the coal areas by interim planning measures. An Interim Development Order administered by the Town and Country Planning Board was formally introduced on

12 April 1978. In June 1978 the Board issued planning guidelines aimed primarily at minimizing future development over the coal and restricting land use to agriculture and forestry wherever possible. On 20 December, 1978 the Interim Development Order was amended to create a provisional SEC area, embracing coal fields required for electricity generation, and non-SEC areas. The Gelliondale coalfield is outside the provisional SEC area.

The planning controls exercised by the Town and Country Planning Board under the Interim Development Order were transferred to the relevant municipalities on 12 March, 1980. Planning for the Gelliondale coalfield is now administered by the Shire of Alberton and, at the western extremity, the Shire of South Gippsland.

Gelliondale coalfield

At Gelliondale 2,800 Mt of economically winnable brown coal lies within the Nominal Coal Protection Boundary and coal extends offshore beneath Corner Inlet (see Map A). The Modified Coal Protection Boundary shown on this map represents an approximation of the Nominal Coal Protection Boundary along existing allotment boundaries and the coastline of Corner Inlet.

As stated earlier, coal from this field is not required for SEC power generation purposes; it does however, have potential for other uses. Private industry has recently put forward a proposal for a feasibility study into the establishment of a coal liquefaction or other form of conversion plant at Gelliondale. Coal for such an industry would be mined from beneath Gellions Run, as well as from privately owned land.

Map A also shows the relationship of public land to the coalfield. Economically winnable coal extends to the coast, much of it beneath public land, and continues offshore. Attention is drawn to the fact that it may eventually be necessary to win all of this coal. It is recognized

however, that mining in the coastal area would involve formidable engineering problems and costs. Decisions regarding the eventual winning of this coal can be deferred until it is demonstrated that the coal is required.

In the light of these factors it is considered that in the foreseeable future no mining should take place within about 1 kilometre of the coast. Telegraph Road forms an acceptable approximation to the northern limit of this proposed coastal strip.

NATURAL FEATURES

Gellions Run was described broadly in the descriptive report on South Gippsland area, District 2. Additional information is now available and is presented below.

Gellions Run and its associated shoreline cover some 3200 ha of coastal plains facing the estuary of the Albert River west of Port Albert. In the south are sand dunes and sand sheets of Pleistocene age, bordered by Recent shoreline sediments associated with the Albert River estuary. Inland from the coastal dunes are flat terraces of Pleistocene age with Recent swamp and marsh deposits in depressions.

A recent study of the vegetation commissioned by the Land Conservation Council supplemented the information published in the descriptive report. The vegetation types are described below and shown on map B.

Structural form	Vegetation type
Open Forest I and Woodland	Comprising: (i) Manna gum--saw banksia woodland (ii) Manna gum woodland with spear grass-tree (iii) Manna gum woodland with prickly tea-tree (iv) Saw banksia with austral grass-tree
Coastal Communities	Comprising: (i) Swamp paper-bark--coast wattle closed scrub (ii) Coast spear-grass open grassland (iii) Knobby club-rush--Aust- ralian salt grass open grassland (iv) Shrubby glass-wort-- beaded glasswort low shrubland (v) Mangroves
Heathland	Comprising: (i) Scrub she-oak--zig-zag bog-rush heath (ii) Spear grass-tree--prickly tea-tree heath

Structural form	Vegetation type
Heathland (cont.)	(iii) Scrub she-oak--swamp paper-bark heath
	(iv) Spear grass-tree--scented paper-bark heath
	(v) Scented paper-bark--prickly tea-tree heath
	(vi) Swamp she-oak--spear grass- tree heath
Wetlands	Comprising: (i) Water-ribbons-- <i>Typha</i> sp. aquatic communities (ii) Coast sword-sedge-- <i>Poa</i> <i>labillardieri</i> sedgelands (iii) <i>Baumea</i> sp.--pithy sword- sedge sedgelands
Closed Scrub	Comprising: (i) Swamp paper-bark closed scrub (ii) Scented paper-bark closed scrub

The predominant vegetation type is manna gum--saw banksia woodland which is distributed throughout the Run. Saw banksia woodlands are located on the dunes just inland from the saltmarshes. Manna gum--spear grass-tree woodland is largely on the north and west of Gellions Run as are the heaths. There are wetlands in many parts of the Run, the largest being in the north. Closed scrub occurs throughout the Run.

Gellions Run is one of the few localities where such a diversity of coastal vegetation communities occurs.

The following five faunal habitats listed in the descriptive report occur on Gellions Run:

General forest habitat

Coastal communities

Heathland

Wetlands

Ocean and estuary

A wide variety of birds occur in the general forest habitat. The numerous stands of saw banksia on Gellions Run are utilized by nectar-eating birds such as lorikeets and honey-eaters and seed-eating species such as yellow-tailed black cockatoos and brush bronzewings. Heathlands provide many species with winter supplies of either nectar or seeds. The larger wetlands carry water at most times and support populations of waterbirds and predatory birds. The mudflats beyond the saltmarshes are feeding grounds for a number of waders, such as the bar-tailed godwit, red knot, red-necked stint and curlew sandpiper, that migrate to Australia each summer from the northern hemisphere, and for uncommon coastal species such as the white-bellied sea-eagle.

The general forest habitat supports populations of echidna, brown antechinus, common wombat, koala, brush-tailed possum, common ringtail, eastern pygmy possum, sugar glider, eastern grey kangaroo, bush rat, and the introduced hog deer. Coastal communities support the brown antechinus, common ringtail, and are a source of food for other species including hog deer. The rare swamp antechinus is found in similar habitats elsewhere, but has not yet been recorded for Gellions Run.

The echidna, brown antechinus, common wombat, eastern grey kangaroo, black wallaby, bush rat and swamp rat have been recorded in the heathlands.

RECREATION

Recreational pursuits on Gellions Run include nature study, camping on the coast, duck shooting on the fresh-water swamps, and the hunting of hog deer.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. FLORA RESERVE

Flora reserves are significant because they contain examples of native vegetation with considerable floristic value in a natural or relatively natural state. They are set aside primarily to conserve species that may be rare or endangered, and other plant associations that are of particular conservation significance.

A1 Gellions Run

This area contains a wide range of coastal vegetation types from tidal mudflats and saltmarsh to woodland. There are relatively few tracks and the vegetation is little disturbed. Especially well represented are manna gum--saw banksia woodlands, mangroves, and closed scrub of swamp paper-bark. Also present are small areas of heath, sedgelands, woodlands of manna gum with an understorey of spear grass-tree, and aquatic communities.

In all, the reserve contains examples of many of the types of coastal vegetation formerly common in the Corner Inlet area but now cleared for various types of development. Nowhere else on the Victorian mainland are there such large areas of saltmarsh and mangroves with such an extensive hinterland (in places over one kilometre wide) of undisturbed native vegetation.

The saltmarshes, mangroves and mudflats are valuable habitat for migratory waders and other coastal species, including the white-bellied sea-eagle. A number of mammal species are present in the woodlands and scrub.

Recommendation

That the area of 1650 ha indicated on the map and described above be used to:

- (a) conserve particular species or associations of native plants

that

- (b) honey production be permitted
- (c) passive recreation such as nature study and picnicking be permitted
- (d) technical investigations be permitted subject to the approval of the land management authority
- (e) grazing be phased out by 1986

and that it be permanently reserved under section 4 of the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act* 1978 and managed by the Department of Crown Lands and Survey.

Note: 1. A management plan for this reserve should be prepared by the management authority in consultation with the Fisheries and Wildlife Division and the Department of Minerals and Energy.

2. Council recognizes that this land overlies substantial reserves of brown coal. Because of the proximity of the deposits to the sea, and the thick overburden, mining of this resource is not envisaged for several decades. The use of this land should be reviewed when there is an established need for the coal and the technical problems of coal mining in this area are overcome.

In this reserve, suppression of fires remains the responsibility of the Forests Commission. Appropriate fire-prevention measures such as maintenance of fire access tracks and protective burning will be carried out where necessary.

Vermin and noxious weeds within this flora reserve will be controlled and will remain the responsibility of the

Department of Crown Lands and Survey.

B. UNCOMMITTED LAND

B1 Gellions Run

Council believes that the northern part of Gellions Run should be left as uncommitted land until Government has determined plans for the utilization of the Gelliondale coalfield. During this period the natural features of the land should be maintained. Access for exploration purposes should be designed in a manner consistent with the need to maintain the natural features of the land until such time as approvals for development are given.

This area has a high value for flora conservation and includes one vegetation association that is not known to occur in existing conservation reserves in Victoria.

Recommendation

That the area of 1525 ha indicated on the map and described above be managed to:

- (a) maintain the capability of the land to meet future demands, in particular the capability for extraction of coal
- (b) maintain natural features of the land until such time as the underlying deposits of brown coal need to be utilized
- (c) produce those goods and services required by the community (such as honey and low-intensity grazing) that can be supplied without seriously reducing the long-term ability of the land to meet future demands

and

- (d) that it be managed in conjunction with the recommended flora reserve until the Government has determined plans for the utilization of the brown coal

and that the land be Crown land withheld from sale and be protected forest under the provision of the *Forests Act* 1958.

Note: Council believes that any future mining plans should include an assessment of the post-mining condition of the land and proposals for its rehabilitation. As far as is practicable, such rehabilitation should incorporate the following principles:

- (1) Rehabilitation to be progressive
- (ii) Native vegetation to be re-established or allowed to re-establish after initial stabilization
- (iii) Mining proposals to take account of the need to facilitate revegetation and to conserve for this purpose existing soils of varying types