FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

South Gippsland Area
District 2

Special Investigation
GELLIONS RUN

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL, VICTORIA
MELBOURNE, MAY, 1981

FINAL
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SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA,
DISTRICT 2

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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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

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 considered these submissions and published proposed recommendations for Gellions Run on 5 February, 1981. The Council received a further 57 submissions, and considered these when preparing the final recommendations.

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 that underlie much of this public land and form part of the Gelliondale coal-field. It is also aware of recent proposals outlined by private industry to exploit these resources. Notes on coal utilization in Victoria are provided in Appendix 1, to expand on the information already published in Council's descriptive resources report for the South Gippsland area, District 2.

At present the use of land overlying coal deposits in Gippsland is controlled by an Interim Development Order, which has provisionally delineated coal-fields required by the State Electricity Commission (SEC) for power generation, and those available for other purposes. The Gelliondale coal-field lies 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 coal-field is now administered by the Shire of Alberton and, at the western extremity, the Shire of South Gippsland.

Gelliondale coal-field

At Gelliondale 5,600 million tonnes (Mt) of economically winnable brown coal lies within the Nominal Coal Protection Boundary and coal extends offshore beneath Corner Inlet (see the map included in Appendix 1). 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.

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.

The map also shows the relation of public land to the coal-field. Economically winnable coal extends to the coast, much of it beneath public land, and continues offshore. It is recognized, however, that mining in the coastal area would involve formidable engineering problems and costs.

NATURAL FEATURES

Gellions Run and its associated shoreline cover some 3,200 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 delineated in Appendix 2.

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 extensive salt marshes. Manna gum--spear grass-tree woodland occurs mainly on the north and west of Gellions Run, as do the heaths. There are wetlands in many parts of the Run, the largest being in the north. Small areas of closed scrub are found throughout the Run.

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

The following five faunal habitats listed in the descriptive report on the South Gippsland area, District 2, occur on Gellions Run:

general forest habitat
coastal communities
heathland
wetlands
ocean and estuary

A wide variety of birds inhabit the general forest habitat. Nectar-eating and seed-eating birds utilize the numerous stands of saw banksia. Heathlands provide many species with winter supplies of either nectar or seeds. The larger wetlands are semi-permanent and support populations of water-birds and predatory birds. The mudflats beyond the salt marshes are feeding grounds for a number of migratory waders.

The general forest habitat, coastal communities, and heath-lands support populations of a number of species of native mammals and the introduced hog deer. The rare swamp ante-chinus is found in similar coastal communities elsewhere, but has not yet been recorded on Gellions Run.

FIRE HAZARDS

Due to the highly flammable nature of the vegetation on Gellions Run and the effects of strong coastal winds, the fire risk is high and a number of severe fires have occurred over the years, some of which have burnt to the coastline.

Activities such as the construction and maintenance of access tracks and the continuation of fuel-reduction burning are therefore important considerations in the use and management of this land.

RECREATION

Recreational pursuits on Gellions Run include nature study, camping on the coast, duck-shooting, 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 salt marsh 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. Heaths, sedgelands, woodlands of manna gum with an understorey of spear grass-tree, and aquatic communities also occur in the reserve.

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 salt marsh and mangroves with such an extensive hinterland (in places more than a kilometre wide) of undisturbed native vegetation.

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

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 fuel-reduction burning will be carried out where necessary.

Burning may also be necessary to maintain certain of the vegetation types, including heaths. Attempts should be made to co-ordinate burning for this purpose with protection burning.

Vermin and noxious weeds within this flora reserve will be controlled and will remain the responsibility of the Department of Crown Lands and Survey.

Recommendation

That the area of 1,650 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.

Notes: 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.

B. UNCOMMITTED LAND

B1 Gellions Run

Council believes that the northern part of Gellions Run should continue to be uncommitted land until the government has determined plans for the utilization of the Gelliondale coal-field. 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.

The northern area of Gellions Run has a high value for flora conservation, particularly when considered in conjunction with the area to the south.

The proposed recommendations made reference to a particular association occurring in this area. The two major species in this association are manna gum and prickly tea-tree. Both species are quite common on Gellions Run and elsewhere in the State and further investigation has indicated that their occurrence together in one small area may be due to man-made changes in that locality.

Recommendation

That the area of 1,525 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) 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

(c) maintain natural features of land until such time as the underlying deposits of brown coal need to be utilized

that

(d) 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 recognizes that:

- any future mining plans will, under existing mining legislation and administrative practice, necessarily include an assessment of the post-mining condition of the land and proposals for its rehabilitation

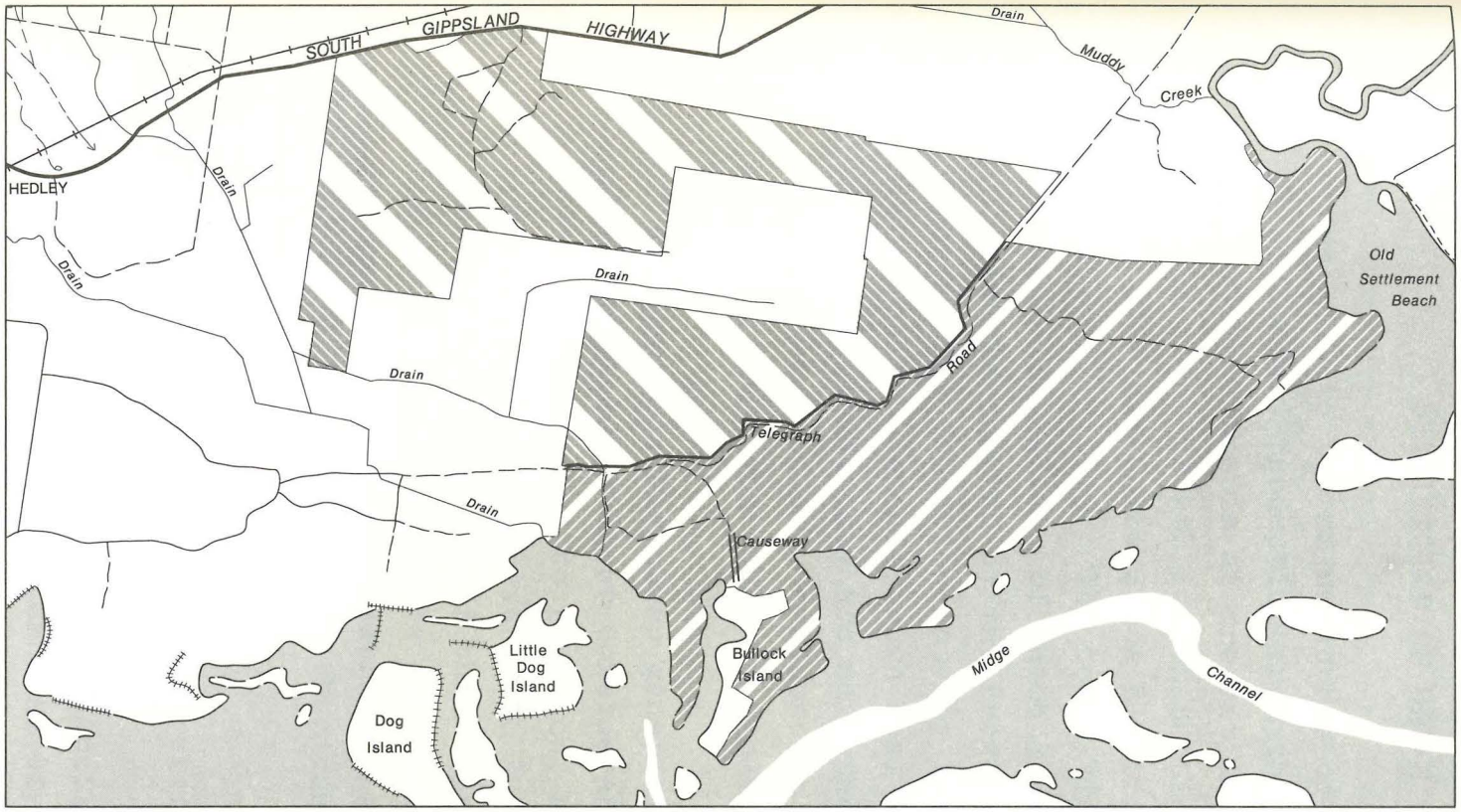
- in Victoria the typically thick seams of brown coal and the deficiency of overburden make it impossible for more than a small proportion of mined land to be returned to its original state; most brown coal open cuts will eventually be lakes

Nevertheless it may be possible to make plans to return some mined land to a near-natural state, incorporating these principles:

- rehabilitation to be progressive, as far as is practicable consistent with good mining practice

- native vegetation, including understorey species, to be re-established after initial stabilization

- reasonable measures be taken to stockpile soils for rehabilitation, or otherwise utilize this material



LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL
VICTORIA

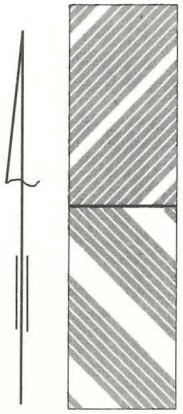
SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA, DISTRICT 2

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION: GELLIONS RUN

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

SCALE 1:75 000

0·75 0 0·5 1 1·5 3·5 KILOMETRES



A. Flora Reserve

B. Uncommitted Land

Compilation information:Yarram 8220 1:100 000

APPENDIX 1

UTILIZATION OF BROWN COAL

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% * since the State Electricity Commission commenced operations in 1919. The total Victorian brown coal resource is about 116,240 Mt, of which 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. If this expected growth occurs, all the economically winnable coal could eventually be required for purposes such as electricity generation, liquid fuels, synthetic natural gas, or chemical and metallurgical feed-stocks.

Definition and Planning Measures for 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:

* Bowen, K.G. Victorian coal resources. *Mines Department, Victoria, Geological Survey Report*, 1975/2.

'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 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 inter-departmental committee entitled the Brown Coal Resources Inter-Departmental Committee (BCRIC) was established by the Ministers for Planning and Minerals and Energy.

In accordance with 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: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.

LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL
VICTORIA

SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA, DISTRICT 2

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION: GELLIONS RUN

GELLIONDALE COAL FIELD

SCALE 1:100 000

1 0 1 2 5 KILOMETRES

Nominal Coal Protection Boundary

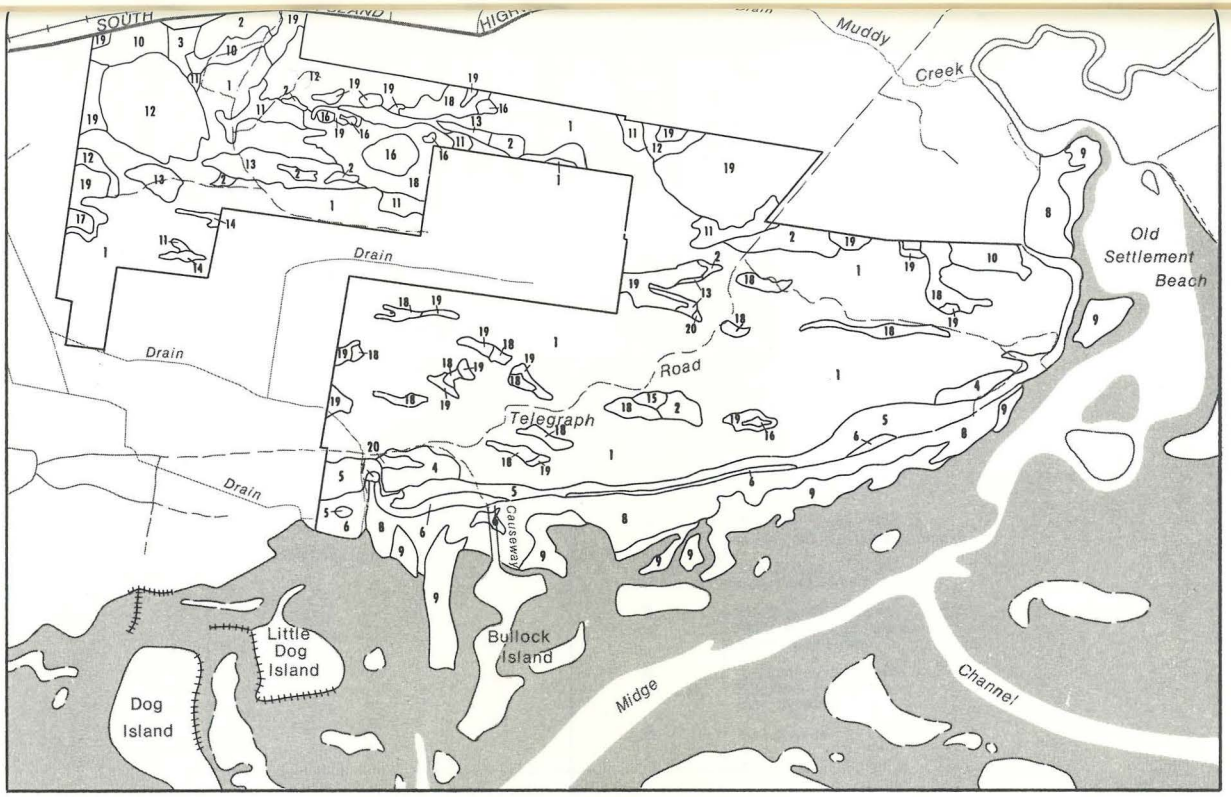
Modified Coal Protection Boundary

Public Land

Exploration Licence 583

Compilation Information: Yarram 8220 1:100 000

APPENDIX 1



LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL

VICTORIA

SOUTH GIPPSLAND AREA, DISTRICT 2

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION: GELLIONS RUN

VEGETATION

SCALE 1:75 000

0·75 0 0·5 1 1·5 3·5 KILOMETRES

Compilation information:Yarram 8220 1:100 000

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2 VEGETATION LEGEND

STRUCTURAL FORM	MAP SYMBOL IN DESCRIPTIVE REPORT	MAP SYMBOL APPENDIX 2	VEGETATION TYPE
OPEN FOREST 1 AND WOODLAND	4c	1	Manna gum--saw banksia woodland
		2	Manna gum woodland with spear grass-tree
		3	Manna gum woodland with prickly tea-tree
	4g	4	Saw banksia woodland with austral grass-tree
COASTAL COMMUNITIES	6b	5	Swamp paper-bark--coast wattle closed scrub
		6	Coast spear-grass open grassland
		7	Knobby club-rush--Australian salt grass open grassland
		8	Shrubby glasswort--beaded glasswort low shrubland
		9	Mangroves
HEATHLAND	7	10	Scrub she-oak--zig-zag bog-rush heath
		11	Spear grass-tree--prickly tea-tree heath
		12	Scrub she-oak--swamp paper-bark heath
		13	Spear grass-tree--scented paper-bark heath
		14	Scented paper-bark--prickly tea-tree heath
		15	Scrub she-oak--spear grass-tree heath
WETLANDS	8	16	Water-ribbons--Typha sp. aquatic community
		17	Coast sword-sedge--Poa labillardieri sedgelands
		18	Baumea sp.--pithy sword-sedge sedgelands
CLOSED SCRUB	8	19	Swamp paper-bark closed scrub
		20	Scented paper-bark closed scrub

32/78