

PARK WATCH



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CONTROLLING FERAL DEER
NATUREWATCH 10TH ANNIVERSARY
FIRE INQUIRY FALLS SHORT
INTRODUCING PARKS VICTORIA CEO
LAKE TYRES STATE PARK

SEPTEMBER 2017 NO 270



VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION
Be part of nature



Be part of nature

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VNPA'S VISION

The Victorian National Parks Association vision is to ensure Victoria is a place with a diverse and healthy natural environment that is protected, respected and enjoyed by all.

EDITOR

Meg Sobey

GETTING INVOLVED IN VNPA

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. You can:

- make a donation
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- leave a bequest to VNPA in your will.

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You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email meg@vnpa.org.au. Articles may be submitted by email, on disk or as hard copy. Include your contact details and brief biographical information. Photos, maps and drawings are needed too. Digital photos should be 300dpi and around 8cm by 12cm.

COPY DEADLINE for December 2017 *Park Watch* is 23 October.

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FRONT COVER

An iconic Victorian scene – The Twelve Apostles. But is much of our state's unique coastal character being lost under the onslaught of development? See from page 5. Photo: Maarten Danial Flickr CC.

BACK COVER

Kelp gulls, Port Fairy. Photo: Ed Dunens Flickr CC.

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From the President

In 1833 English economist William Foster Lloyd coined the term 'Tragedy of the Commons' to describe the situation in which shared resources are hijacked for the benefit of a few resulting in overuse and degradation of the resource that all depend on. This concept was never more relevant than today as our natural environment succumbs to pressures from all directions.

Our national parks and other areas of high conservation value are seen as fair game by developers, harvesters and extractors. There are constant proposals put to government suggesting ways that private individuals can make a dollar out of our most valuable natural areas. Obtaining access to publicly-owned resources is seen as a cheap option for get-rich-quick schemes. And when a development fails, as is so often the case with these proposals, it is the wider public that bears the true costs, if not now, then certainly down the track.

Private developments on public land also tend to pass on other costs to the public; the provision of infrastructure such as roads or water treatment, impacts of pollution or the denial of access to public land.

The native forest logging industry is one sector where costs are transferred to the public in the form of roads, forest regeneration and fire control, while private operators make a profit based on under-priced access to a scarce resource. Even while it is acknowledged that the forests of the Central Highlands are running out of wood, parts of the industry continue to push for access to forests in the west of the state and to pass on the costs to the public.

Over recent months we have seen a number of proposals which seek to price out or limit public access to parts of national parks for the benefit of private operators. You will be familiar with those examples that have been written up in Park Watch: Falls Creek to Hotham Crossing, The Prom boat tours and the Buffalo Chalet redevelopment and skywalk which amounts to privatisation of part of the national park.

The continued and now licensed (read state-sanctioned) use of the Belfast Coastal Reserve as a racehorse training track, even as the Warrnambool Racing Club opens a purpose-built sand track, is yet another example (see page 5).

There are many other inappropriate uses and developments on public land along Victoria's coast (explored in depth from page 6).

Perhaps the most striking is the special deal done to save the Heyfield sawmill, the state paying around \$50 million for half a saw mill, almost double what the existing owners paid only a few years ago. A classic case of privatising the profits and socialising the losses, for an industry with profound impacts on nature, threatened species and dependence on an already declining, high-risk fire-prone resource.

Instead of giving air to these (and undoubtedly many future) proposals, our government should be properly funding our parks, and protecting our natural areas. By this I mean that there should be sufficient funding to meet the conservation needs of the parks to ensure that our plants and animals survive into the future and sufficient funding to provide the necessary

infrastructure and staff in order for the public to fully appreciate and enjoy our parks. When parks have well maintained walking tracks and well-resourced information centres they are visited and appreciated by the public. As a result of this investment people visit parks more and consequently spend more time in nearby towns where they buy more from local businesses which employ more local people. This is the way in which the economy of regional areas benefits from our parks. It is also an effective way of ensuring that the wider community understands the need to protect nature and supports our parks system.

In July I attended the 20th Anniversary of Project Hindmarsh. This has been one of the largest tree planting and habitat restoration efforts in Victoria and shows an impressive commitment of local landholders and conservation-minded people from across the state. VNPA has been involved since the start thanks to the efforts of John Stirling, back when he was VNPA vice-president and helped with the planning before the first tree was put in the ground. Over the years around 750 VNPA volunteers have travelled to the Wimmera to plant trees along roadsides and on private property; amounting to around 3000 days of work. On behalf of the VNPA I would like to express my thanks to John and also to all the volunteers and landholders who have contributed to this project. After 20 years the work has not finished though; I hope to see you at next year's planting weekend. • PW

Euan Moore, VNPA President

Annual General Meeting

VNPA's 65th Annual General Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 10 October 2017** at 7pm in the Ground Floor Meeting Room, 60 Leicester Street, Carlton.

RSVP essential by Thursday 5 October, email vnpa@vnpa.org.au.

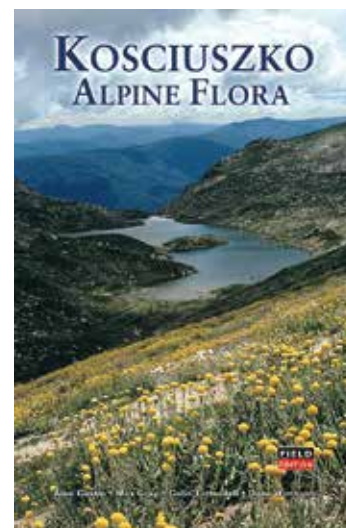
The alpine area's renowned guide to plants is available again!

The Field Edition of *Kosciuszko Alpine Flora* is back in print to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service. While this excellent book focuses on the 212 flowering plants and ferns of Kosciuszko National Park, most of the plants can also be found in Victoria's Alpine National Park.

This is a rare chance for readers who love the mountains to get a copy of this classic field guide, as three of its distinguished authors, Colin Totterdell, Dane Wimbush and Max Gray are deceased. Happily the fourth, Alec Costin, lives to know that his knowledge continues to be shared in this great work. • PW

Kosciuszko Alpine Flora: Field Edition

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Take action on horses hurting hoodies

VNPA MARINE AND COASTAL COORDINATOR CHRIS SMYTH GIVES AN UPDATE AND CALLS ON PARK WATCH READERS TO HELP STOP OUR BEACHES BECOMING RACETRACKS.



Despite barely 50 hooded plovers left in the Belfast Coastal Reserve, and a disastrous breeding season just passed, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has issued a licence to the Warrnambool Racing Club for commercial horse training right on the beach.

This could be the first step in the state government's privatisation of public beaches and their management. It will certainly set a terrible precedent in coastal policy – today racehorses, tomorrow dune buggies, trail bikes, etc. And like Belfast, located between Port Fairy and Warrnambool, there are many other reserves along the coast without specific regulations to effectively manage them and prevent inappropriate uses.

The legal failings of the Victorian Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, when she approved the licensing approach in November 2016 were outlined in the March 2017 *Park Watch*. They still apply with the final issuing of the licence.

The minister used the wrong clause in the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act* and failed to insist that the Warrnambool Racing Club apply for consent under

the *Coastal Management Act*. But even if she had followed the correct approach, our legal advice is that the use of the reserve for commercial racehorse training is inconsistent with both clauses. The purpose of the reserve is to protect the coastline and its natural and cultural values, and support passive recreation – racehorses pounding up and down beaches are inconsistent with that purpose.

As well as the legal failings, there has been a lack of transparency in the government's process. VNPA has had to submit a freedom of information request to DELWP for copies of the licence to the Warrnambool Racing Club. We have also requested the 2012 application by the Warrnambool Horse Trail Riders Club for consent to use the reserve under the *Coastal Management Act*, and the consent given. It turns out that this small club had to submit an application for a one-off trail riding event, while it appears that the Warrnambool Racing Club was not required to do the same for intensively using the reserve every day of the year.

The Andrews Government has claimed that licensing commercial horse training is the best way to protect hooded plovers. Even if that were the case – and it's not – community

monitoring has shown that interim conditions for racehorses using the reserve have been regularly breached. Even after the issuing of the licence in June, there was a further breach at Golfies Beach between Killarney and Port Fairy in July.

In a significant victory for the local community's ongoing campaign to remove racehorses from the reserve, the Shire of Moyne banned commercial horse training from a small section at Killarney Beach in March 2017. The next campaign target is the removal of racehorses from the entire reserve, and for it becoming a protected area under the *National Parks Act*. • PW

YOU CAN HELP SAVE THE HOODIES

Please complete the postcard included with this issue of *Park Watch*, return it to us and we will present it to the ministers who are turning our beaches into racetracks.

COOKIE CUTTER COASTS

VICTORIAN COASTAL TOWNS AND COASTAL PUBLIC LAND ARE BEGINNING TO LOOK THE SAME, AND IT'S KILLING THE COAST, ACCORDING TO CHRIS SMYTH.

Like many before them, a Victorian family is spending the summer holidays driving along the Victorian coast.

'Are we there yet?'
'Nearly, we're just passing through Rye.'
'Are you sure, Mum, I thought it was Rosebud?'
'Nah, it's Ocean Grove.'
'Nope, you're all wrong, it's Torquay.'

Our holidaying family could be excused for confusing Victoria's coastal towns – they're beginning to look similar. And if any points of difference do surface, developers, the boating sector, tourist agencies and councils, supported by the state government, will demand that their town gets what the others already have.

This is by no means new. The Victorian coast has been under pressure for decades, the result of population growth, the sea-change phenomenon, increased leisure time and affluence, the influence of vested interests, and poor planning and management. But with every new development, a little more of the coast is lost – death by a thousand cuts.

The one-time coastal villages of Ocean Grove and Torquay are now designated growth areas and dormitory suburbs of Geelong. A continuous urban strip

runs from Safety Beach to Portsea, and recent rezonings for development along the Port Campbell coast will lock in more of the same – linear coastal development.

In what were once small towns, chain stores are replacing local shops, new buildings are pushing aside heritage ones, streetscapes are losing their village appeal, and rural land is being swallowed by urban expansion.

Torquay was a quiet little coastal town a few decades ago but from 2001 to 2013 it grew by 67 per cent and may reach 28,000 by 2040. Planners are now proposing five-storey buildings to accommodate the growth and reorient the town centre towards the foreshore.

A foreshore, a wetland, an iconic beach and a river mouth

The narrow foreshore reserve from Safety Beach to Portsea is littered with camping areas, car parks, buildings, timber groynes, jetties and boat ramps. At Rye, the Mornington Peninsula Shire has just approved a fourth boat ramp, this one for launching jet-skis. Community concerns about the loss of public open space, and the environmental, safety and amenity impacts of the ramp and its jet-ski use, were ignored.

The Karaaf wetlands and saltmarsh are on the edge of the Thompson Creek

estuary between Torquay and Breamlea. Recognised as a nationally significant wetland, they are known habitat for the critically endangered orange-bellied parrot and a range of international and resident wader birds. But Torquay continues to grow, and its northern growth front (it is also expanding west) will place huge pressure on the wetlands as polluted stormwater drains into them.

Just a few kilometres down the coast is the internationally iconic Bells Beach. Tourist development in its hinterland and view shed has just been given the tick by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal after the local community and Surf Coast Shire had rejected it. This could be the thin edge of the wedge for Bells Beach.

Further west, at the mouth of the Gellibrand River in Princetown, the Shire of Corangamite recently approved a huge tourist resort development on a sand spit and floodplain (following on from 10 coastal rezonings for tourist development it approved between Princetown and Peterborough several years ago). The Victorian Coastal Strategy frowns upon development of low-lying coastal land, but that hasn't stopped all levels of government supporting it.

Urbanisation and tourist developments are creating 'cookie cutter' coasts and increasing the demands on the narrow and fragile strip of publicly owned coastal land.

Fans of the popular ABC TV series, Sea Change, will recognise the program's 'court house' at the end of the Williamstown Beach. A sea change is also underway along the Victorian coast but lacks the romance of the TV show.



Left: There are many buildings along the coast that take no heed of the biblical advice about the 'foolish man who built his house on the sand'.

Below: A rapidly expanding Torquay threatens the nearby Karaaf wetlands with stormwater pollution.



Coastal nature versus coastal development

Victoria prides itself that 96 per cent of land abutting the high-water mark is publicly owned, with two-thirds of it in protected areas managed by Parks Victoria. But beyond these park boundaries, public foreshore reserves extend barely 20 metres back from the high-water mark.

The development of these narrow foreshore reserves has cleared coastal

nature and replaced public open space with facilities for exclusive access for special interest groups. While coastal freehold land is valued at a premium, public coastal land is generally seen as free. Why would you have paid market price for freehold land when you have been able to use public coastal land for bowling greens, tennis courts, angling, yacht and surf life-saving clubhouses, cabins and boating and other infrastructure and maybe get government funding as well?

Marinas, boat ramps and harbours are multiplying. A harbour with multi-storey tourist and residential accommodation is well under way at the mouth of the Werribee River. The Beaumaris Motor Yacht Squadron wishes to expand its operations and bury more of an internationally renowned fossil site, and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has proposed new marinas and boat ramps at Point Henry in the Moolap framework plan.



In 1962, an aerial survey of Port Phillip Bay identified just 1,208 recreational boats. By 2014 there were 172,000 registered boats in Victoria, with nearly 70 per cent used on Port Phillip Bay and Westernport. The boating industry has publicly stated it wants more ramps and more parking, and the Victorian government will likely deliver as it strives to increase angler numbers by 30 per cent to one million. With the closure of Port Phillip Bay to commercial netting, the impact of recreational fishing requires ongoing scrutiny. But there is no rigorous monitoring or ecological sustainability assessment of angling and the associated boating activity and infrastructure.

Redevelopment of the Queenscliff and Sorrento ferry terminals, and a likely new car ferry service between Stony Point and San Remo, all part of plans to link the Great Ocean Road and South Gippsland, will add more pressure on that section of coast.

Development pressure has been mounting in the Point Lonsdale-Queenscliff area. The Borough of Queenscliff was keen to develop both the Point Lonsdale Lighthouse Reserve and Shortland's Bluff with high impact tourist accommodation. When huge community opposition forced the council to back down on the Point Lonsdale proposal, its development focus became the public land at Shortland's Bluff. In preparing its plans to build 10 double-storey dwellings for tourists, it has ignored the Victorian Coastal Strategy and the 79 per cent of respondents who opposed the development in a council-run community survey.

The Borough has received a significant grant from the federal government for construction of the dwellings – although local federal member for Corangamite, Sarah Henderson, has publicly called for the dwellings to be built elsewhere – and is seeking further funds from the Victorian Government. Community opposition to the development continues to build.

Covering the cost of management by developing coastal public land, reducing open space and often damaging coastal nature, has been a common and long-standing approach in Victoria.

DELWP the problem, not the solution

The conservation and ecologically sustainable use of coastal public land should be the focus of DELWP, the state's environment department – but often it's part of the problem.

Racehorses are still pounding the beaches in the Belfast Coastal Reserve between Warrnambool and Port Fairy because DELWP believes it to be the best way to protect threatened hooded plovers that live and breed there. That belief is so strong that the department has issued a licence for the use of the reserve by commercial horse trainers. That's bad news for plovers, along with the many beachgoers whose safety and enjoyment are now at serious risk.

The commercial horse training is being overseen by the Warrnambool Racing Club, the holder of the licence, beginning what could be effective privatisation of coastal management in Victoria (the recent announcement by the Victorian Fisheries Authority

that all beaches and marine waters would be open to commercial pipi harvesting indicates that future coastal management could be in the hands of the resource exploiters).

Few of Victoria's many coastal reserves have regulations that can prevent such damaging activities from occurring. Today it is horse training, but next week it could be dune buggies, trail bikes and...?

Meanwhile in Geelong, DELWP has devised a plan to develop a new urban growth centre at Point Henry, the site of the now-closed Alcoa aluminium smelter, and to subdivide the rural-urban buffer zone and build large marinas. The draft plan has proposed limited protection for the Moolap wetlands, which attract thousands of threatened migratory birds each year, and largely ignores the seagrass meadows surrounding Point Henry, some of the largest in Port Phillip Bay. The housing and tourist development proposals within the draft plan would extend linear coastal development in the region, something entirely inconsistent with the Victorian Coastal Strategy. The Moolap wetlands, Point Henry Coastal Reserve and the seagrass meadows should, like the above example, become a protected area under the *National Parks Act*.

The Ridley Corporation owns part of the Moolap wetlands and leases the rest that is public land. The company has proposed a canal estate there, something that the draft plan has not ruled out (or in). It's time for the Victorian Government to adopt a policy that bans canal estates in Victoria.



Legislation old and new

During the heady days after the 1995 *Coastal Management Act* and the preparation of successive Victorian coastal strategies, there was hope that pressure on the coast would be eased. But coastal development continues apace.

At the 2014 state election, the then Labor opposition made the following commitment:

"We will establish a new Marine and Coastal Act, bringing together all management and protections under the one system."

The Andrews Government is now preparing that new legislation, but it could be too little too late; the coastal squeeze will continue and cause the further loss of coastal nature.

Same old same old

With 'cookie cutter' coasts, our holidaying family should be able to predict with some accuracy what they will find at each of their stops.

'I reckon there'll be a boat ramp, maybe a marina and probably a sea wall.

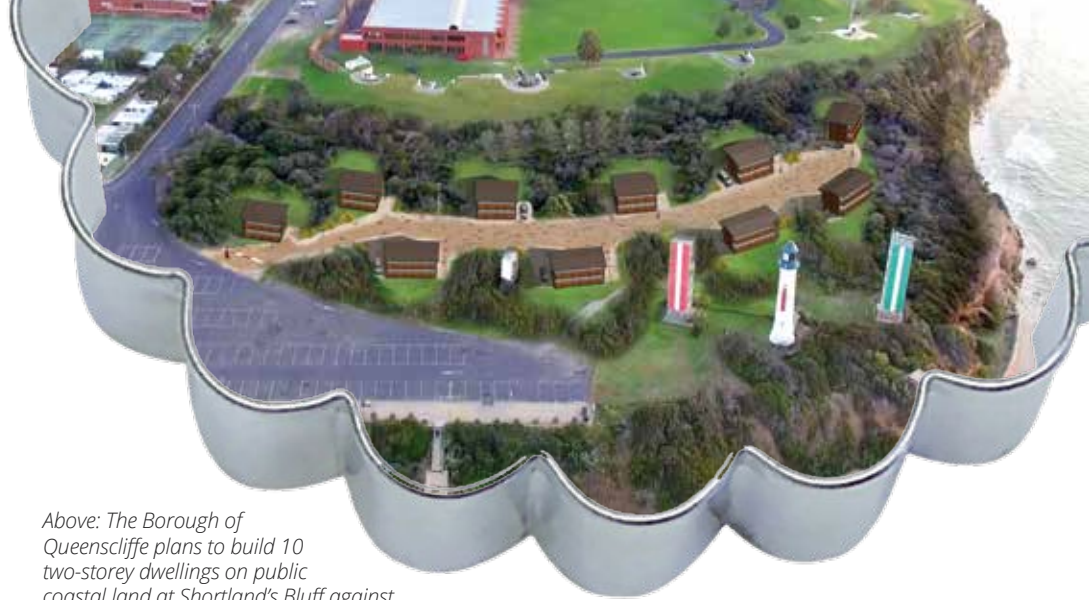
'Don't forget the camping grounds and car parks on the foreshore.

'Yeah, and there'll be a tonne of buildings and houses close to the beach and not much bush.'

'Great, that means we can stop anywhere, it's all the same.'

It's time our holidaying family had something different to experience and enjoy along the coast. But that will require robust policy and legislative reform, something that successive state governments have failed to do. • PW

Development too close to the shoreline has fragmented coastal nature but is now at risk from sea level rises associated with climate change. The construction of sea walls to defend development is becoming a growth industry and will further impact nature.



Above: The Borough of Queenscliffe plans to build 10 two-storey dwellings on public coastal land at Shortland's Bluff against the wishes of the community and the provisions of the Victorian Coastal Strategy. Artist's impression from Friends of Point Lonsdale Lighthouse Reserve facebook page.

Key coastal reforms that are needed

- 1** Establish a marine and coastal act that is underpinned by the principles of ecologically sustainable development, ecosystem-based management and marine spatial planning; covers the planning and management of all activities on coastal crown land and in coastal waters (the government's current process excludes fisheries and ports), and creates a marine and coastal authority.

The marine and coastal authority would prepare five-yearly marine and coastal strategies and 10-yearly regional marine and coastal plans, oversee the work of marine and coastal committees, and monitor and report on the performance of existing government agencies against the objectives of the strategy and plans. Traditional Owners would be given an ongoing and key role in marine and coastal planning and management.
- 2** Establish a well-funded coastal biolinks project to reduce the fragmentation of coastal nature on coastal public and private land and, where possible, acquire freehold land abutting the high-water mark to increase public ownership of the coast.
- 3** Establish well-resourced marine and coastal committees through the merger of existing coastal committees of management. The new committees would manage coastal crown land and coastal waters (out to 200 metres) and be modelled on the successful Great Ocean Road Committee and Barwon Coast Committee. To ensure local community support, the government should explore how mergers could be incentivised, such as through targeted funding.
- 4** Conduct a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) review of all Victorian coastal reserves. The review would analyse the natural, cultural and social values of each reserve and the regulations applying to each one. The review would also identify those with significant conservation values that should become protected areas under the *National Parks Act* to be managed by Parks Victoria, and those areas of high recreational use that should be managed by the new marine and coastal committees.
- 5** End the moratorium on the creation of new marine national parks and sanctuaries. Have VEAC conduct an investigation into filling the network's gaps and implement its recommendations.

VNPA's *Nature Conservation Review* and the detailed report *The Coast is Unclear* have many more actions needed to reform Victoria's marine and coastal policy and legislation and protect and expand coastal nature. You can download them from the VNPA website: www.vnpa.org.au/publications.



PHOTO: CORANGAMITE CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

X shows the development sites and road underwater during a flooding event caused from a wave surge. Heavy catchment rainfall would greatly extend flooding.

High-risk coastal resort on floodplain

A \$9-MILLION RESORT DEVELOPMENT ON A SAND-SPIT FLOODPLAIN AT THE MOUTH OF THE GELLIBRAND RIVER IN PRINCETOWN, AND ADJOINING THE GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK, HAS UNFORTUNATELY BEEN SUPPORTED BY ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, WRITES MARION MANIFOLD.

The state government appears to have encouraged the resort's approval by the Corangamite Shire Council, and the federal government has backed it with a \$650,000 grant.

The flood plain will present an unacceptable risk to the low-lying resort, which in turn will threaten the fragile estuary containing endangered and threatened species including Latham's snipe, Australasian bittern, southern brown bandicoot and Australian grayling.

The proposal is for an 18-room residential 'eco'-lodge, 20 cabins elevated on stilts, a restaurant, café, 2 swimming pools/day spa, lookout tower, cycling and walking trails, boardwalks, jetty pontoon/boat ramp and an estimated 278-vehicle car park. The resort will require the use of Crown Land "to create road access and walking tracks".

The Shire of Corangamite, the approval authority, actually recognises that: "The site is susceptible to flooding" and the floor levels of all buildings will be required to be higher than 3.5 metres, achieved by placing them on stumps. There are also community concerns regarding the leeching potential of the sewer and waste water system and potential for catastrophe in floods.

The Great Ocean Road Region Landscape Assessment Study lists the area as of state significance with a landscape objective "to protect the valley floor from development". The Victorian Coastal Strategy states the need to avoid development in low-lying areas. Part of the area has an Environmental Significance Overlay "for the protection of watercourses, water bodies, and wetlands".

Decision-makers must take into account the effects of climate change and the precautionary principle: the combined effects of rising seas, storm surge, extreme rainfall events, and flooding. But this responsibility appears to have been ignored.

The state government must insist on an independent Coastal Hazard Vulnerability Assessment and an Environmental Effects Statement to assess the potential for flooding risk, and risks to the community and the environment. • PW

Please write to the state government urging full assessment of this development:
daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au

For further details contact
 Marion Manifold, Secretary,
 Port Campbell Community Group Inc
 on mmanifold@anson.com.au

Scuttling Australia's marine conservation leadership

RATHER THAN CONTINUING AND ENHANCING AUSTRALIA'S WORLD LEADERSHIP IN MARINE CONSERVATION, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS SENDING US TO THE END OF THE LINE, SAYS VNPA'S CHRIS SMYTH.

In a world first, the Turnbull Government announced plans to wind back protection of Australia's oceans when it released new draft management plans for marine reserves established by the Gillard Government.

It shouldn't be this way. Although the reserves created in 2012 and their management plans released in 2013 weren't perfect, they were hailed around the world as a significant benchmark to which other nations should aspire.

But with the election of an Abbott Government committed to reviewing and rewriting the management plans,

the white-anting process began. On 21 July this year the new set of draft management plans was released.

The plans propose draconian cutbacks to marine national park zones (i.e. no-take areas), especially in the Coral Sea Marine Reserve, where they have been cut by 53 per cent. Another six marine parks would have their marine national park zones cut by from between 42 and 73 per cent, and for two these zones would disappear. If implemented, the draft management plans would leave 16 of the 44 marine parks established in 2012 without any no-take areas.

In proposing these severe cuts, the Turnbull Government has pandered to the commercial and recreational fishing lobbies rather than use a science-based approach. The science is clear, the world needs more marine national park zones, not less, if we are to adequately protect our oceans. In turn, healthy oceans will sustain our lifestyles and livelihoods.

But these plans are just proposals. They can and must be resisted before they become law by passage through federal Parliament. You can help. Find out how by going to the Save our Marine Life Alliance website www.saveourmarinelife.org.au. VNPA is a proud member of the alliance. • PW



Osprey Reef in the Coral Sea is a mecca for divers. But it now faces severe cuts to its protection that will allow fishing for sharks and other species.



PHOTO: ZAC WALKER

Sambar deer wallow in the Hollands Knob Reference Area, Bogong High Plains.

A RECENT INQUIRY INTO THE CONTROL OF INVASIVE ANIMALS ON CROWN LAND CAME UP WITH SOME SENSIBLE RECOMMENDATIONS, SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

PEST ANIMALS GET MORE THAN A GLANCE

There are many alien beasts rampaging through the bush: cats, dogs, pigs, goats and horses are all making a mess of things in various ways.

But none of them are increasing their havoc as rapidly as feral deer.

Though the number of deer in Victoria is hard to quantify (they are secretive by nature) some estimates now put the population at around one million.

There are several types of deer running feral through the state – sambar, rusa, hog, red, fallow and chital – and they all cause damage. But sambar deer remain the biggest problem.

For more than a decade now, sambar deer have been listed as a threatening process under Victoria's *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*. A dozen ecological communities are seriously impacted by them, and many already threatened plants including buff hazelwood, Maiden's wattle and prickly tree-fern are now suffering the added impact of deer.

Deer wallow in wetland areas, creating large mud pools where once there was a creek edge, a mossy area or a spongy sphagnum-covered peat bed. They also browse selectively on many plants, and they can actually ringbark trees by rubbing their antlers on them.

Many threatened plants and plant communities in the Alpine National Park are now affected, especially those highly sensitive areas above the tree-line, and the remarkable grassy plain and wetland areas dotted throughout the eastern alps.

Deer have even impacted two valuable long-term research plots on the high plains where protective fences which once excluded cattle have been removed (though those fences would have offered little protection from the more agile deer).

Sambar stags (but no females yet) have now been sighted in Wilsons Promontory National Park, potentially adding considerably to the existing impact of the park's well-established hog deer.

The Victorian Parliament's Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee recently completed its Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land. The committee was strongly lobbied by recreational shooters, who claimed that increasing their access to areas of public land, especially national parks, could help solve the deer problem.

However the inquiry made it clear that though the number of deer reported to be harvested by amateur hunters was remarkable – 70,000 killed in 2015 – deer populations and territories continue to expand. The inquiry also found there were serious concerns with illegal hunting on private land, and noted that the claim by recreational hunters that they contributed around \$440 million annually to the Victorian economy was questionable.

The inquiry did suggest that there might be options for opening further areas to hunting, but handballed that question to the Victorian Environmental assessment Council to resolve in the future, when further information might be available.

More importantly though, it firmly recognised the need to control deer populations, saying that professional pest control agencies should be employed in both the planning and implementation of control programs.

Parks Victoria has been running a number of trials in recent years, working with accredited amateurs in strategic hunting programs (quite different to recreational hunting) in places like the Dandenongs, Wilsons Promontory and the high plains of the Alpine National Park. These closely supervised exercises have been producing good initial results, but have not yet resulted in any full-scale implementation of a deer control strategy.

The trial on the Bogong High Plains is designed to compare the effectiveness of accredited amateurs with that of trained and well-equipped professionals. It's ongoing, but has already shown a reduced population and subsequent reduced impact around the Jaithmathangs. The inquiry rightly supported the evidence-based approach of Parks Victoria. Parks Victoria has long been advocating an 'adaptive management' approach, whereby monitoring the effectiveness of management programs allows them to change management techniques and priorities. However with a pest problem as severe and widespread as deer, the agency should not have to wait several years for a trial to be completed before it initiates real management action. We need strong control programs now.

Substantial action on deer will cost, of course, but the government is obligated by its own legislation to resource pest control. So perhaps the most important recommendation from the inquiry is number 28: "That ... the Government guarantee long-term recurrent funding for invasive animal control". The emphasis there is on 'long-term', with the inquiry recognising that short-term pest management programs are inevitably ineffective.

Among other recommendations:

- The Victorian Government should seek urgent federal funding for research into new techniques for controlling deer.
- Recreational hunters should be encouraged to target female deer as well as stags.
- Pest management should be strategically planned across all public and private land boundaries.
- Cats should be listed as 'pest animals', removing current obstructions to their control.
- The government should educate Victorians about the problems caused by pest animals.
- The government should publicly report on the effectiveness of pest control programs each year.

They also sensibly recommended that pest management programs should be coordinated by a single government agency, but declined to recommend one. In the past that responsibility has fallen to the agricultural sector, leaving environmental management a very poor cousin. Public land pest management should surely remain with DELWP.



Sambar Deer sightings from 1959 (top), 1989 (centre) and 2015 (bottom).

From Department of Economic Development, Jobs Transport and Resources, Distribution of Sambar Deer Rusa Deer and Sika Deer in Victoria (2015).

The final report (available on the Victorian Parliament's website) is a fairly comprehensive document. Some issues, like the control of feral horses, were not dealt with at length, perhaps because the control of horses in the Alpine and Barmah national parks is currently being exhaustively planned by Parks Victoria.

The extent of pest animal invasions is, in most instances, growing. It might be time to invest in the growing suite of new research areas, such as genetic controls. The inquiry didn't go there, but it should have. It seems unlikely that the techniques of last century, such as shooting, trapping and baiting, will by themselves bring lasting relief to our great natural heritage. • PW

VNPA are calling on the Victorian Government to urgently come up with a well-funded, strategic control and containment plan to deal with deer invasions across the state.



Sambar deer, Bogong High Plains, Alpine National Park.

PHOTO: ZAC WALKER

Celebrating 10 years of NatureWatch!

OUR NATUREWATCH PROGRAM, AND THE PROGRAM'S ORIGINAL COORDINATOR CAITLIN GRIFFITH, REACHED A MAJOR TEN YEAR MILESTONE IN JULY.

In 2007 an inspired group of VNPA members and supporters along with Caitlin revamped the VNPA program Park Mates, which involved volunteers monitoring the state's parks facilities. What they developed was a community-led biodiversity monitoring program to tackle local conservation issues across Victoria – NatureWatch.

It's been a fantastic decade of partnerships, projects, citizen-science and conservation!

We would like to acknowledge the outstanding work of those on the original NatureWatch advisory group. And we're exceptionally grateful for the efforts of

all our hard-working, enthusiastic volunteers over the years. In particular, our team leaders and office volunteers who, ultimately, are responsible for keeping the program running.

Caitlin remembers Ann Stokie, from the advisory group, who in one meeting said "what we need is to make sure it is a program that brings together scientists, land managers and community to develop and run projects together. Like a triangle". She held her hands up in a triangle shape.

We proudly use this model of a triangle to develop our NatureWatch projects.





Using the 'triangle model', we've:

- Worked closely with several community groups, the Friends of Brisbane Ranges, Friends of the Prom, Wombat Forestcare, Friends of Bunyip State Park, Hindmarsh Landcare Network and others.
- Developed scientifically robust projects with the Arthur Rylah Institute, Eco Insights, Biosis Research, Deakin University and Museums Victoria.
- Had fantastic support from participating land managers, Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, City of Whittlesea as well as many private land owners. • PW

"It's incredibly inspiring to see the community involved in doing high quality science. The volunteers are enthusiastic and willing to learn and contribute, and I'm always learning something new from locals about their 'patch'."

Christine Connelly, current NatureWatch coordinator

"A real highlight of NatureWatch is the potential of bringing together skills from scientists, community groups and land managers to create projects with meaningful outcomes."

Caitlin Griffith, previous NatureWatch coordinator, current manager of community learning and engagement

"The NatureWatch Caught on Camera project has meant we've been able to work together to collect huge amounts of data on mammals. We are excited about developing Communities Listening for Nature in Wombat State Forest too."

Gayle Osborne, Wombat Forestcare

"Having NatureWatch Grass-tree Monitoring in the Brisbane Ranges National Park helped us understand more about what was happening to grass-trees. In addition it meant that a range of volunteers learnt about dieback disease and how to minimise the spread."

Des Peters, Parks Victoria



1998-2006

**VNPA PARK GUARDIANS/PARK MATES
DEVELOPED AND RUN BY VNPA**

VNPA members, friends groups and other interested community members were trained to assess the general quality of the information and facilities of a park.



22 July 2007

NATUREWATCH LAUNCHES

NatureWatch launches in the Brisbane Ranges National Park, with a focus on monitoring biodiversity.



September 2007

GRASS-TREES

Monitoring of grass-tree health in the Brisbane Ranges National Park begins, with Deakin University, Friends of Brisbane Ranges and local Parks Victoria staff support.

IMAGE: JUDY LOCKE



2013

PROJECT HINDMARSH

Caught on Camera monitoring project established in Hindmarsh region to tie-in with 15 years of Project Hindmarsh.



2012

POINT ADDIS

NatureWatch supports the establishment of grass-tree monitoring at Point Addis.

IMAGE: FRIENDS OF POINT ADDIS



2012

CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Caught on Camera monitoring project launched in Wombat State Forest, then Bunyip State Park.



2013

ONE YEAR REPORTS

One year reports released for Caught on Camera in Bunyip State Park and Wombat State Forest. First brush-tailed phascogale detected in Wombat forest.



2014

HIGHLIGHT ON WEST

One year report released for Caught on Camera at Hindmarsh, monitoring at Bank Australia's conservation reserves.



2008

VOLUNTEER LEADERS

A leadership program develops with the support and guidance of Bernie Fox and inspiration from the VNPA bushwalking and activities group's leadership training.



2008

GOLDEN SUN MOTH

Monitoring of threatened golden sun moth begins at Derrimut Grassland Reserve.

IMAGE: BRIAN BAINBRIDGE



2009

WILSONS PROMONTORY

Monitoring of grass-tree health starts in Wilson's Promontory National Park, and one year report on grass-tree monitoring in Brisbane Ranges National Park released.

IMAGE: FRIENDS OF THE PROM



2011

GRASSLAND THREATENED SPECIES

Growing grass frog and striped legless lizard monitoring are added to golden sun moth monitoring to create a Grassland Threatened Species monitoring project.

IMAGE: GGF - BEAU MENEY



2009

GRAMPIANS WITH DEAKIN

NatureWatch project supports fire and fauna monitoring work in Grampians-Gariwerd National Park, led by Deakin University and Parks Victoria, later inspiring our own camera trapping project.



2009

CELEBRATING GRASSLANDS

Grassland community day held at Pinkerton Forest and Mulla Mulla Grassland.

IMAGE: IT'S A WILDLIFE



2015

CITIZEN SCIENCE

NatureWatch presented at inaugural Australian Citizen Science Association conference in Canberra.



2016

LISTENING FOR NATURE

Communities Listening for Nature project launched, in partnership with Museums Victoria, using bioacoustics to monitor birds and establish a Victorian bird-call library.

IMAGE: MUSEUMS VICTORIA/DAVID PAUL



2017

TEN YEARS

NatureWatch reaches its tenth anniversary! Ten years of data collected for grass-tree monitoring. Five years of Caught on Camera monitoring in Wombat State Forest and Bunyip State Park.



Leaving only the ASH

THE ANDREWS GOVERNMENT IS TORN BETWEEN HELPING A GROUP OF WORKERS IN A SMALL COUNTRY TOWN FIGHTING FOR THEIR JOBS AND CAVING IN TO A GROUP OF MELBOURNE INVESTORS HAPPY FOR TAXPAYERS TO RELIEVE THEM OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES, WRITES MICHAEL SPENCER.

The problem for the Andrews Government is that if it caves in to pressure over the Heyfield sawmill, what is the precedent that will be set? Why shouldn't it then help workers at milk factories in northern Victoria, or any other rural business facing closure?

Heyfield's claims for government assistance are weaker than most. When Australian Sustainable Hardwoods (ASH) bought the Heyfield sawmill from Gunns Limited in 2012, it was already damaged goods.

The mill was sold in 2004 for approximately \$80 million, then again for approximately \$100 million to Tasmanian company Gunns in 2009. ASH bought the mill in 2012 for a knockdown price of \$29 million. There was also the outstanding debt to VicForests that was paid, but it is not clear who settled the debt.

Gunns built its business on native forest logging in Tasmania and plantations for woodchip. But when woodchip prices dropped and markets turned away from controversial native forest products, Gunns, with its high gearing and exposure to woodchips, was in trouble.

The company hadn't paid its bills for the log supply from VicForests, and decided to sell those parts of its business that were dependent on native forest logging.

It was a distress sale by Gunns. But anyone who spent a minute doing



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

due diligence would have known that the resource the mill relied on was depleting, and depleting seriously.

Heyfield mill doesn't use just any native hardwood. As the acronym implies, its business is built around the tallest of all flowering plants, *Eucalyptus regnans*, commonly known as mountain ash, found in the cool, high rainfall areas of Victoria's Central Highlands.

Victoria's ash forests were hammered during European settlement and many areas that remained were burnt in the 1939 bushfires. For the ash species, foresters specify a rotation time between harvesting as upwards of 80 years.

With 1939 bushfire areas not expected to be available until the 2020s, there was always going to be a gap in supply as existing stocks of ash depleted. The situation was made even worse by the 2003, 2006 and 2009 bushfires.

In a report for the Department of Primary Industries in 2007, consultants URS said: "The impact of the recent [2006] bushfires adds uncertainty to the sector with the likelihood of a substantial reduction in sustainable volumes".

After the 2009 fires that hit the ash forests hard, VicForests CEO David Pollard wrote: "It is our view that while existing sawlog and pulp log contractual commitments can be met, overall, the industry in Victoria is on a vector of long term contraction and that there will be an increasing dependence on lower quality forest until regrowth forest matures to sufficient size in about 30 years. Employment will continue to be a

concern of ours along with available log volumes and varying qualities" (Annual Report 2009).

By 2013, when Victoria's state forests were largely handed over to VicForests by the then Minister Peter Walsh, the valuation, based on the net present value of anticipated future income from the sale of timber (40 million m3) was only \$10 million.

ASH recognised that new investment in the plant was required at acquisition. It was quick to access taxpayer funds with the then Liberal National Party Government contributing \$650,000 to a \$2.5 million re-tooling project only months later.

ASH is now apparently offering the business to taxpayers for \$40–\$50 million according to media reports. Such a purchase must be subjected to a transparent and rigorous cost-benefit analysis that should also consider the opportunity/cost of native forest logging.

The forest industry has an unfortunate reputation for having its hand in the pockets of taxpayers. In 1895, an inquiry found forest management in Victoria was in "an extraordinary state of backwardness". It said: "reasons for this [backwardness] were political and centre in the disregard of the general public weal where this clashes with the monetary profits of individuals and classes who can exert a direct Parliamentary influence".

Let's hope Victoria has progressed since then. • P/W

Michael Spencer is a Business, Law and Taxation research fellow at Monash University.

Chipping away

AN UPDATE ON FORESTS AND FOREST AND WOODLAND ISSUES ACROSS VICTORIA.

Western forests at risk

Our report *Western Forests and Woodlands at Risk* was released in June, highlighting the impact of proposed VicForests logging schedule on almost 50,000 hectares of state forest across the west of Victoria.

VicForests has now released a final Timber Utilisation Plan, which changed little from the draft version. There was a reduction of 1,121 hectares in the Portland Forest Management Area (FMA) and a rebadging of the proposed 7,720 hazardous tree removal and salvage logging (3,484 hectares in Horsham FMA, 4,244 hectares in the Midlands FMA) to be called “forest management operations”.

Three coupes in the Portland FMA with south-eastern red-tailed black-cockatoo records have been removed, but at least seven coupes in the Horsham FMA with records of this endangered species remain in the final plan. Coupes still remain with records of dozens of endangered and threatened plants and animal species.

The whole arrangement of giving VicForests control of logging in the west is a policy mess. This Timber Utilisation Plan is the first to be published since the state-owned logging agency controversially took over management for logging in western Victoria on the eve of the 2014 election. Such a move had previously been opposed by the previous Labor Brumby Government, and we are perplexed that this last moment initiative has not been reversed by the Andrews Government.

We urge everyone to call on Victorian Minister for Environment Lily D'Ambrosio and Minister for Agriculture Jaala Pulford to protect these fragmented forests and woodlands in the west of our state: www.vnpa.org.au/protect-action/protect-our-western-forests



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

Central West Investigation

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) has completed its first round of consultation on the investigation into state forest in the central west. The investigation covers public land in the vicinity of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests. VNPA's submission can be viewed at www.vnpa.org.au/publication-category/submissions

Regional Forest Agreements outdated

Underlying all these activities is the review of Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs). These agreements have essentially stitched up special treatment for forest industry for the last 20 years, exempting it from Federal environment laws and creating complex frameworks of codes and regulations which appear to be largely ignored.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between Victoria and the Commonwealth in May 2016, outlining the process for review of the RFAs. The review was supposed to be completed by seven to eight months from the MOU signing – by early 2018 – but not a lot appears to have happened. Evidence by a senior Victoria official to a recent parliamentary inquiry was that “we are really only at the early stages with the Commonwealth about what that might look like. It is difficult to say at this stage what the exact process will be ...”

In 2010 the *Independent Review on Progress with Implementation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements Final Report* recommended: “... consideration of cancelling the West Victoria RFA ...”

VNPA recently co-signed a letter with more than twenty other state and regional conservation groups to relevant state and federal ministers, outlining opposition to renewal of RFAs across the whole of Victoria as “... they have clearly failed to deliver either environmental protection or sustainable resource certainty for industry”. • PW

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Landscapes transformed

2017 was another successful year for two annual community planting events VNPA partners on – Project Hindmarsh and Grow West.

Project Hindmarsh celebrated its 20th anniversary (see June *Park Watch*) on 7-9 July, with volunteers planting 12,000 trees and shrubs across four sites in the Wimmera. On 16 July Grow West volunteers gathered in Darley, Bacchus Marsh to plant 600 trees in a former landfill site.

Thank you everyone in our community who rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty at either event!

Caring for country

John Stirling, a VNPA life member, was key to our organisation becoming involved in both Project Hindmarsh and Grow West from the very start. He shares the highlights from his many years on these projects.

"I have lived in both city and country locations throughout my life but have always been inspired by the wonders of nature, whether it be a spectacular panorama or some intimate gem such as a rainbow bee-eater. Sadly in my lifetime I have witnessed rapid natural environmental deterioration. My concern led me to become actively involved in tackling those issues I felt strongly about.

"I gave my wife Ruth (also a VNPA life member) a VNPA membership as a birthday/Christmas present in the early 1980s. We both first became involved in BWAG activities. In 1991 I was invited to fill a casual VNPA Council vacancy, so I remained on Council for 16 years, including several as vice-president.

"My friend Rob Youl, then Landcare Australia advisor, invited me to attend a meeting in Nhill in 1995 to discuss the concept of Project Hindmarsh. Not only was I impressed by the enthusiasm and vision at this meeting, I saw the chance for VNPA to address the preservation of Victoria's biodiversity beyond the reaches of national parks and nature reserves – we needed a global view of both public and private land. When the idea of Grow West arose a few years later, due to the way VNPA volunteers embraced Project Hindmarsh, it was logical to also participate that project.

"Thousands of trees have been planted each year at both Project Hindmarsh and Grow West – these areas have been transformed. The land appears healthier and there has also been a marked improvement in the increase of native flora and fauna.

"My greatest highlight has been the enthusiasm of VNPA volunteers who work side by side with locals with the aim to improve the natural environment. It has also been encouraging to see the influence VNPA has had on rural communities in positively changing attitudes in order to care for our country.

"There is no greater reward than to actively participate in projects such as Project Hindmarsh and Grow West. To contribute in nurturing nature is to leave an important legacy for future generations, not to mention the overall benefits of preserving our very fragile environment." • PW

John Stirling has seen 20 years of growth with Project Hindmarsh.





President's Report

Euan Moore

*Hundreds of nature-lovers created
a love letter to parks in May.*



On behalf of the entire VNPA council I would like to thank you, our members and supporters. Without your support – whether it be financial,

volunteering, indicating to politicians that you agree with our position or a range of other ways – we could not and would not achieve as much as we have over the past year.

This has been another very busy year with threats to our natural environment coming from many directions. The Forest Industry Taskforce which occupied an inordinate amount of our director's time eventually fell over without achieving a resolution. The industry is still pushing for unsustainable amounts of timber, from the Central Highlands, Gippsland and more recently from the western forests. While all this has been going on we have also seen proposals for inappropriate developments in national parks and coastal areas such as Point Henry and the Belfast Coast.

This year we campaigned on invasive species which threaten our parks and the wider environment including private land. Deer are a major pest across much of the state but continue to be somewhat protected as a game animal. In the high country and along the Murray feral horses are causing damage to fragile ecosystems while poisonous salamanders have invaded some Melbourne waterways. The threat from invasive species is, like the development threat, relentless and ongoing.

The role of nature in community wellbeing and child hood development continues to be increasingly recognised. VNPA has known this for a long time

and it is embedded in our Strategic Plan, our organisational vision and increasingly in our projects. The fact that Victorian Government Biodiversity 2037 plan has an almost identical in sentiment to our own vision and objectives is in many ways a seismic shift in government approach.

An exciting development has been the piloting of our new Wild Families program. The aim is to get parents with families of predominately primary school aged children out and exploring the bush in a fun way. Encouraging kids to become familiar with and have fun in the bush and to learn about native plants and animals is essential training for our next generation of conservationists.

Under the sea, we're thrilled to have our ReefWatch program back in action. The 2016 Great Victorian Fish Count saw more than 400 divers take part, and many sightings of the blue groper. We are involved with the ongoing project to restore the oyster beds in Port Phillip Bay, which will result in major improvements to habitat and water quality. ReefWatch also took part in a world first salvage and restoration of the sponge gardens on Blairgowrie Pier when the old pier was replaced with a new structure.

Back on land, our NatureWatch program continues to grow and mature, with the original Grass-tree Monitoring project passing the 10 year milestone. Through our Caught on Camera project, we're seeing a diversity of bird and mammal species in the Wombat State Forest and Bunyip State Park. Other projects, such as our newer Listening for Nature project are also starting to collect valuable data on the health of some of our most endangered species.

We have been working closely with communities groups and the City of Bendigo, through our Bushland Ambassadors project. The project has been so popular the booklet for residents outlining how to be a good neighbour to bushland has been reprinted.

As a community based organisation in our 65th year, there is always more to do, but we hope our efforts to engage the community will both inform our policy and practice and influence and inspire others to actively care for nature. People need nature, but nature also needs people.

This year also saw the redevelopment of the VNPA website. This was a critical project as our old website was running on obsolete software and lacked adequate technical support. Our new website is a vast improvement both in look and features. It is a testament to the amount of work put in by staff and volunteers as well as the developers to get it up and running. It will continue to improve as more content is added.

I would like to thank the staff for their hard work throughout the year and especially to Matt Ruchel (executive director) and Caitlin Griffith (former NatureWatch coordinator/ now manager community engagement and learning) who both celebrate a decade at VNPA. We welcome Meg Sobey, who has taken on the role of publications and online coordinator, which includes editing Park Watch. Many thanks to Sarah Day who did a sterling job coordinating the forest conservation groups and organising the Great Forest Picnic.

It is also important to acknowledge the hard work of councillors and the council committees which provide an opportunity for volunteers to work with staff on the seemingly never ending stream of projects, submissions, issues and concerns that we deal with on a day to day basis. It has been a pleasure working with you all.



Our Wild Families program officially launched this year.

The Year in Review

Executive Director Matt Ruchel



I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone in our community for supporting the Victorian National Park Association in the past 12

months. Together this past financial year we've continued to give Victoria's natural environment a strong community voice. Some of this year's achievements include:

- Following years of work with local groups, we were delighted to see the long-awaited **addition of the Anglesea Heathland into the Great Otway National Park**. We've also presented detailed submissions calling for the protection of important wetlands at (near Geelong) and establishment of a new *Marine and Coastal Act* for Victoria.
- We've continued to push for **more funding for national parks**, including the delivery of a petition to the Andrews Government. We've helped get an increase in parks funding, but as you would know, more is needed. We're also continuing to highlight the many threats parks face from pest plants and animals, and fire.
- We were invited to work with the state government on Victoria's new statewide biodiversity plan, *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*, the first in 20 years. We're also working to improve the native vegetation clearing rules, which are critical for protecting remaining habitat on private land.
- We've continued to **oppose inappropriate commercial developments** in our national parks; and we've presented detailed submissions and public commentary on the new master plan for Pt Nepean National Park, the poorly conceived Hotham to Falls Track, the proposed commercial jet boat tours at Wilsons Promontory, and the bid for massive development at Mt Buffalo National Park.
- The **fight for our forests continues across both the east and the west** of state. We continue to work with others to push for a Great Forest National Park in the east, and in May gathered more than 400 people to create a huge 'We ♥ Parks' human sign on top of Mount Donna Buang to make the message clear. We've also presented the impacts of proposed logging in our *Western Forests and Woodlands at Risk* report. With colleagues, we've successfully pushed for the commencement of a new independent Victorian Environmental Assessment Investigation on the Wombat, Mt Cole, Pyrenees and Wellsford state forests in central western Victoria – we believe these state forests are worthy of being protected under the *National Parks Act*.
- Along the coast we're continuing to work with local groups to **campaign the environment and racing ministers**

Bushwalking and Activities Group

The Bushwalking and Activities Group had a full program this year, providing a wide variety of opportunities to experience our natural environment.

We held over 200 activities and social events involving an estimated 2,000 participants. Our program included day walks, walk talk & gawks, base camps, easy going ambles, bus excursions, overnight pack carry hikes, under 35s walks, family walks, meetup walks, bike rides, bring a friend for free walks, social nights, dinners and conservation events.

Our monthly Social Nights, as usual, were very popular with engaging and informative speakers.

Congratulations to Larysa Kucan for yet again organising interesting excursions by bus.

BWAGers participated in a broad range of conservation activities: Project Hindmarsh, Grow West Community planting day, Malleefowl Survey, Forests Forever Camp, Boneseeding and Rabbit Warren and Weed Survey at Hattah.

This is all thanks to our dedicated volunteers. We are proud to acknowledge their contribution as walk leaders, emergency contacts, leader mentors, meetup coordinators, excursion organisers, event coordinators and committee members.

The BWAG Program's new format, introduced last year, continues in popularity and can also be downloaded from the VNPA website.

The Committee welcomed two new members, Lisa Sulinski as Secretary and Ellen Finlay who will take over the activities program. All the Committee perform invaluable functions: Rob Argent as Treasurer, Gayle Davey as program manager, Deb Henry as VNPA Council liaison and Social events and David Moore as U35 liaison and publicity.

Finally, a personal thank you to the BWAG Committee. Their amazing efforts make all this happen.

Terese Dalman (Convenor)



PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY

NatureWatch citizen-science in action.

to change the unacceptable use of beaches at Belfast Coastal Reserve (near Warrnambool) by commercial horse trainers, and the associated impacts on tiny beach-nesting hooded plovers. Horses and hooded plovers don't mix, and we've found this is likely an unlawful use of this important area.

- Our regular publication *Park Watch*, our website, email updates and alerts and social media have kept our community up-to-date with conservation issues in our state. We have also engaged regularly in the media to reach wider audiences on matters of importance.

These are just some of the many successes we achieved last financial year. We are very grateful for the commitment and contributions made by our financial donors, supporters, members, volunteers, partners, council, committees and staff. We rely on, and very much appreciate, all your on-going work and support in striving to protect Victoria's natural areas. We look forward to another successful year in 2017-2018.

Excursions Group

The Excursions Group, led by volunteer leaders, conducted 11 coach trips in 2016-2017. All the trips were well attended with a total of 400 members and visitors.

We visited the You Yangs, Skipton, the Otway Fly, Cranbourne Botanic Gardens, Mirboo North and Tarra Bulga National Park. On these trips our members enjoyed walks in national and state parks and along rail trails. Other activities included visiting farmers' markets and historic homes.

VNPA has been using the services of McKenzies coaches since the early 1960s. Their expert bus drivers contribute greatly to the success of the excursions.

Many thanks to all the trip leaders and all who participated in our excursions this year.

Larysa Kucan (Convenor)

COUNCIL

President: Euan Moore (Convenor Executive; Finance; Conservation & Campaigns; Marketing & Community Engagement; Governance, Policy & Legal; Website Working Group)
Vice President: Bruce McGregor (Convenor Conservation & Campaigns; Executive; Finance)
Secretary: Mike Forster (Executive; Finance; Governance, Policy & Legal)
Treasurer: Gary Allan (Convenor Finance; Executive; Governance, Policy & Legal)
 Lara Bickford (Convenor Marketing & Community Engagement; Executive)
 Ann Birrell (Convenor Governance, Policy & Legal; Executive)
 Jan Brueggemeier (from May 2017)
 Russell Costello (Conservation & Campaigns, Website Working Group)
 Michael Feller (Convenor Policy Working Group, Conservation & Campaigns)
 Deborah Henry (Bushwalking & Activities Group, Executive, Website Working Group)
 Dianne Marshall (Marketing & Community Engagement)
 Gerard McPhee (Conservation & Campaigns; Finance; Governance, Policy & Legal)
 James Thyer

Note: Committee memberships in brackets

VOLUNTEERS

Administration Assistants: Reg Elder, Colette Findlay, Margaret Hattersley, Joan McDonald, Raimonne McCutchan, Graham Trigg and Fredrick Tropp-Asher.

Bushwalking & Activity Group: Terese Dalman (convenor), Rob Argent, Gayle Davey, Deb Henry, David Moore, Lisa Sulinski, Ellen Finlay.

Bushwalking & Activity Leaders: we are grateful for the hard work of all our volunteer leaders.

Council Committees: the following volunteers (other than VNPA Councillors and staff) have been members of VNPA committees and working groups: Terese Dalman, Evelyn Feller, Tracy-Ann Hooley, Maelor Himbury, Greg Jones, John Kotsiaris, Joan Lindros, Bernie Mace, Kyle Matheson, Darren McClelland, Steve Platt, John Renowden, Libby Smith, Charles Street.

Events: thank you to all the volunteers who helped at the Great Forest Picnic, Wild Families Launch, Living next to nature launch and other events.

Excursions: Larysa Kucan (convenor), Jan Lacey.

Grow West & Project Hindmarsh: John Stirling and Terese Dalman plus VNPA planters.

Forest Forever Easter Ecology Camp: VNPA volunteers supporting Environment East Gippsland (convenors Jill Redwood & Lizzi Jodell) included Euan Moore, Jenny Rolland, Terese Dalman, Tracey-Ann Hooley, Clive Eddington, Doug Palmer, Andrew McCutcheon, Ann Birrell, Garry van Dijk, Wilma van Dijk, Mike Forster, Susan Forster and other volunteers.

Mapping and GIS: Tony Hampton.

Native Vegetation & Grasslands: Andrew Booth, Adrian Marshall, Rowan Ewing, Oliver Field.

NatureWatch: (*Office volunteers*) Genie Fleming, David Forbes, Fiona Kealy, Catherine McNicol Madeleine Tierney, (*Team leaders*) Chris Bonnici, Merrin Butler, Colin Cook, David De Angelis, Jasper Hails, Michael Longmore, Julia Pickwick, Paul Strickland, Garry van Dijk, Wilma van Dijk, Ian Vaskess, Lynda Wilson, (*Equipment management*) Eddie Schambre.

Publications & Photography: Emma Barnett, Jenny Barnett, Melanie Dalman, Mark Darragh, Bette Devine, Geoff Durham, Evelyn Feller, Michael Howes, Euan Moore, Jenny Norvick, Paul Sinclair, Bernard Slattery, David Tatnall, Peter Vaughan, Marcel van Regteren Altena, Mark Webber (Hexacam), and many other photographers and authors.

Park Watch Mailout Team: Pamela Ashcroft, Mem Alexander, Colin Clarke, David Ellison, Jan Gay, Brian Groom, Jo Groom, Margaret Hattersley, Leonie Hudson, Ann Jacobs, Keith Lloyd, Margot Marasco, Ian McDonald, Sheina Nicholls, Joan Phillips, Mary-Lou Phillips, Barbara Prouse, Lorraine Ratcliffe, Phil Ratcliffe, Graham Trigg, Pat Witt.

Research Assistants: Evelyn Feller, Shannon Hurley, John Kotsiaris, Geoff Lacey, Dianne Marshall, Isidora Veljovic, and many in the scientific and conservation community.

EMPLOYEES

Executive Director: Matt Ruchel

Park Watch Editor (to April 2017),

Marine and Coastal Coordinator: Chris Smyth

Parks Protection Project Officer: Phil Ingamells

Fundraising Manager: Emily Clough

Supporter Development: Amelia Easdale

Finance & Operations Manager: Heath Rickard

Administration Officer:

Charlotte Kandelaars

Administration Assistants:

Irina De Loche, Tilly Reynolds

Manager, Community Engagement and Learning: Caitlin Griffith

NatureWatch Coordinator: Christine Connelly

ReefWatch Coordinator: Kade Mills

Park Watch Editor/Publications Officer (to Feb 2017): Michael Howes

Publications and Online Coordinator (from April 2017): Meg Sobey

Forest Conservation Groups Coordinator, Conservation Projects Coordinator (to April 2017): Sarah Day

Consultants: Mary Ferlin (*Park Watch* design), John Sampson (design and communications), James Vincent (events).

Financial Report

Abridged Audited Special Purpose Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2017.

Statement by Members of the Council

The members of the Council have determined that the Association is not a reporting entity and in our opinion the abridged special purpose financial report set out below presents a true and fair view of the financial position of VNPA as at 30 June 2017 and its performance for the year ended on that date.

At the date of this statement there are reasonable grounds to believe that the VNPA will be able to pay its debts as and when they fall due for payment.

This statement is made in accordance with a resolution of the Council and is signed for and on behalf of the Council by:

Gary Allan (Treasurer) & Euan Moore (Vice-President) dated this 7th day of September 2017.

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2017		
REVENUE	2017	2016
Operating Activities	\$	\$
Appeals, Donations & Bequests	901,062	847,239
Grants & Sponsorship	207,017	146,132
Membership Fees	98,223	106,806
Interest income & Sundry Sales	49,799	78,357
Total Income	1,256,101	1,178,534
EXPENDITURE		
Employment Expenses	864,327	737,767
Campaigns, Projects, Activities & Education	125,868	112,693
Office & Administration	157,043	150,624
Printing/Publications/Web	68,513	65,010
Accommodation & Insurance	102,556	91,592
Total Expenses	1,318,307	1,157,686
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS BEFORE TRANSFERS (TO) FROM RESERVE FUNDS	(62,206)	20,848
Transfers from (to) Reserve Funds	27,800	(25,000)
OPERATING (DEFICIT) SURPLUS AFTER TRANSFERS FROM (TO) RESERVE FUNDS	(34,406)	(4,152)

VNPA - ACTIVITIES ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2017		
The operating accounts for the Bushwalking Group have not been consolidated into the general accounts above and are reported separately as follows:	2017	2016
	\$	\$
Opening Bank Account Balance	4,217	5,465
Income	6,100	9,010
Expenditure	(123)	(2,258)
Funds Contributed to VNPA	(4,000)	(8,000)
CLOSING BANK ACCOUNT BALANCE	6,194	4,217

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 30 JUNE 2017		
ASSETS	2017	2016
Current	\$	\$
Cash and Cash Equivalents	1,107,925	1,122,984
Receivables and Inventory	16,275	7,188
Total Current Assets	1,124,200	1,130,172
Non-Current		
Fixed Assets at Written Down Value	67,894	36,479
TOTAL ASSETS	1,192,094	1,166,651
LIABILITIES		
Current and Non-Current	556,522	468,873
TOTAL LIABILITIES	556,522	468,873
NET ASSETS	635,572	697,778
Funded by:		
TOTAL ASSOCIATION FUNDS	635,572	697,778

NOTE: Independent Audit Report: As in previous years, the Auditor's have issued a qualified Audit Opinion on the annual financial statements on the basis that it is not feasible for organisations such as VNPA to implement accounting controls over all cash collections from donations prior to their initial processing in the accounting records.

The full Independent Auditor's Report will be tabled at the forthcoming Annual General Meeting as part of the Audited Financial Statements and the full text of the Report will be available at www.vnpa.org.au.

Supporters, donors & partners

VNPA's work to protect Victoria's natural places is only possible thanks to the support of dedicated and generous donors and partners. Our key supporters are listed below.

DONORS:

Anonymous
The Arnold Foundation
Bank Australia
Coastcare Victoria
Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
The Dara Foundation
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
Equity Trustees Limited
Gras Foundation Trust
Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife
Loftus-Hills Fund, a charitable fund of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation
Melliodora Fund, sub-fund of the Australian Communities Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
Malcolm Shore
Tree Pot

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Albert Park Yacht Club
Belfast Coastal Reserve Action Group
Bendigo and District Environment Council
Bendigo Family Nature Group
Bendigo Field Naturalists Club
Bendigo Sustainability Group
Birdlife Australia

Coastcare Victoria
City of Boroondara
City of Greater Bendigo
Deakin University
Dive 2U
Earthcare St Kilda
Ecology Australia
Environmental Justice Australia
Environment Victoria
Far West Friends of the Hooded Plover
Flora Fauna Research Collective
Friends of Bunyip State Park
Friends of Brisbane Ranges National Park
Friends of Mount Worth State Park
Friends of the Prom
Geelong Environment Council
Geelong Field Naturalists Club
Greening Australia
Grow West
Hindmarsh Landcare Network
Hobsons Bay City Council
Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care Group
Killarney Coastcare
La Trobe University
Macedon Ranges Shire Council
Mandurang Strathfieldsay Landcare Network
Marine Care Point Cooke
Marine Care Rickett's Point
Merri Creek Management Committee

Mid Loddon Conservation Management Network
Mount Worth & District Landcare Group
Museums Victoria
Northern Bendigo Landcare Group
Parks Victoria
Practical Ecology
Queenscliff Environment Forum
Queenscliff Community Association
Sheepwash Creek Landcare Group
The Royal Society of Victoria
The University of Melbourne
The Wilderness Society (Victoria)
Under the Radar Abbotsford Group
Woodend Landcare
Wombat Forestcare
Yarra City Council
Great Forest Picnic: Warburton Environment, Warburton Habitat Tree, Friends of Leadbeater's Possum, Knitting Nannas of Toolangi and Save Mt St Leonard Community Campaign, The Wilderness Society Victoria, Environment East Gippsland and Goongerah Environment Centre, Nicole Paris (MC) Holy Cow Chai Tent, The Anecdote (band).
Forest Conservation Caucus: group and individual members.
VicNature2050: VNPA co-hosted VicNature2050 with The Royal Society of Victoria, Arthur Rylah Institute, La Trobe University, Greening Australia, Bio 21 Institute, University of Melbourne and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

the fire inquiry we could have had

VICTORIA'S RECENT PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO
FIRE SEASON PREPAREDNESS MISSED THE MARK,
SAYS PHIL INGAMELLS.

When Neil Comrie, tasked with monitoring the implementation of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's recommendations, reported that the five per cent annual planned burn target wasn't working, he added an important point that seems to have been forgotten.

He said that a fuel reduction burn program shouldn't be considered in isolation from all other fire management recommendations made by the Commission.

There are three stages of a bushfire – three intervention points – that each call for a range of strategies and actions,

appropriate investment and routine reassessment of management effectiveness.

The first stage is the *ignition* point; the middle stage is the *bushfire* and its fuel levels; and the final, regrettable stage is the *impact* on lives and infrastructure.

The middle stage, particularly the business of fuel levels, is the only aspect of bushfire management that routinely invites public consultation and discussion, and it is the only management area on which the government systematically reports back to the public.



A fire broke out at Quarry Road in the Dandenong Ranges on Black Saturday 2009, but a fortuitously located helicopter extinguished it immediately. There has been no assessment of the likely path of this fire through the Dandenongs, or the considerable cost in lives and money if that intervention hadn't happened. (The picture was taken in 2016).



MANAGING THE THREE STAGES OF A BUSHFIRE

Every government fuel management report released since 2013 has recognised a failure to adequately protect the public: indeed, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) stated target is to reduce the fire risk to communities by only 30 per cent. Under Black Saturday conditions, when fires quickly rise to the tree canopy, the potential risk reduction from fuel management would be even less.

Also, most fuel reduction burns are only effective for around three to four years, so they can only be truly effective where frequent burning is feasible, such as in certain ecosystems or close to settlements.

The same fuel management reports have also acknowledged a failure to protect the environment. Around half of Victoria's natural areas are already below the 'tolerable fire interval', the point at which any further fire will seriously degrade them. According to DELWP's oddly cavalier assessment of the incapacity of its fire program to protect the environment, "the risks arising from this non-achievement are manageable".

It might be good to look at some other options, as Mr Comrie suggested. Thankfully one such option has had some recent attention.

Managing a fire's point of ignition

If a water-bombing aircraft can get to the start of a fire within 10 to 15 minutes of ignition, there is a very good chance the fire can be stopped in its tracks. For this reason, these aircraft are now sensibly called in by Victoria's emergency management as soon as a fire is notified. Previously, ground crews were sent in to make an initial assessment, losing critical time.

Victoria has also increased its investment in deployment of aircraft, lifting annual expenditure to around \$26 million. That means some areas are quite well protected now: in the Dandenongs area, for example, up to five aircraft, including two 'Elvis' S-64 aircranes, can potentially reach a fire within 12 minutes.

But not all areas of Victoria have that level of response capacity, and vulnerable communities generally have no say in, or knowledge of, where aircraft are stationed. Deploying aircraft is expensive, but not nearly as expensive as fires when they take hold: Black Saturday cost 173 lives and around \$4.4 billion.

Unfortunately there has never been an assessment of the lives and money saved by Black Saturday's most successful intervention. In an event that should be far more widely known, a helicopter put out a fire at its ignition point in Ferntree Gully. Had that blaze escaped, it could have brought terrible havoc to the Dandenongs (see picture on preceding page).

If we increase our capacity for rapid attack across Victoria we can greatly increase public safety, and take the pressure off Victoria's over-burnt native ecosystems.

There are still things we can do to help avoid ignition altogether. The Royal Commission's recommendation to bury power lines was largely dismissed, but a more viable plan might be to move towards local power generation, something many communities are doing anyway. Increased surveillance of areas where fire-bugs are known to operate can also prevent fires starting.



An aerial attack can stop a bushfire in its tracks.

PHOTO: DSE

Managing impacts

We will continue to have bushfires, especially under a warming climate. So managing the point of impact on lives and property is another important consideration, and it is human lives that remain our overriding priority.

According to Emergency Management Victoria, there are only two truly effective ways to be safe in the face of a large fire: leave the day before, or take refuge in a well-designed, on-site bushfire shelter.

The Royal Commission saw that the need for approved design standards for private bushfire shelters was so compelling it put out an urgent preliminary report on the subject. Though those standards were quickly established, little or nothing has been done to inform the community. Private bushfire shelters could and should be mandated for all new buildings in fire-prone areas, and encouraged for existing buildings through grants, low-interest loans or other means.

The Royal Commission also recommended a buy-back of land where homes were lost on Black Saturday. Many people took up that offer, but since then any number of houses have sprung up adjacent to those abandoned blocks. Though mandated building standards have improved, building in fire-prone areas continues unimpeded.

And while countries such as Canada successfully employ compulsory evacuation in the face of fire, no such capacity exists in Victoria, where the right to defend a home is considered sacrosanct. One idea might be to only extend the right to stay and fight under extreme conditions to pre-registered physically fit people with a defensible home and a private bushfire shelter. Anything less endangers not just the lives of home-owners, but the lives of volunteer firefighters trying to protect them.

Protecting the bush

If we employ demonstratively effective measures at either end of the bushfire journey – the ignition point and the impact point – we can reduce the incidence of fire, and contribute greatly to public safety.

That leaves us in a far better position to set up a planned burning program that no longer carries unreasonable expectations for community protection.

It will allow a fuel management program that has a far better chance of aligning burn plans with ecological outcomes. And it leaves us open to new and evolving research, including studies showing that some ‘fuel reduction’ burns are actually generating a more flammable vegetation type.

It allows us to burn with more consideration for asthma sufferers, bee keepers and wine producers, all of whom are compromised by the current public expectations for fuel management.

And it allows us to trial Indigenous cool-burning practices, and align them with concerns for climate change, habitat fragmentation and pest plants and animals.

Unfortunately the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness focussed almost entirely on the fuel reduction program. Despite the continuing lack of evidence as to the effectiveness of a hectare burn target, it recommended the re-introduction of the discredited 5 per cent target (it was a 50/50 decision split along party lines, with the chair having a casting vote). It also confusingly recommended continuing the current risk-based approach, an Indigenous fire-stick burning trial and greater concern for animal welfare.

It was not the inquiry we needed. Victoria deserves an evidence-based reassessment of all of our options, at all stages of a fire, before we face Black Saturday conditions again. • PW

Before this area in Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park was given a ‘fuel reduction burn’, it was easy to walk through the open woodland.



Thick growth of Woolly Wattle after the ‘fuel reduction burn’. There is no routine monitoring of the actual effectiveness of fuel reduction burns in Victoria.



More than 1,200 people gathered at
Wilson's Promontory National Park
in 2013 to say no to commercial
developments in parks.

ENVIRONMENTAL CHARITIES UNDER ATTACK – AGAIN

THERE MUST BE A ELECTION LOOMING OR CONSERVATION CAMPAIGNS PROVING TOO SUCCESSFUL (OR BOTH) AS REFORMS AIMED AT CURTAILING THE ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHARITIES IS BACK ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S POLICY AGENDA, WRITES MATT RUCHEL.

The Treasury Department released *Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) Reform Opportunities Discussion Paper* in June this year. The paper raised a series of reforms for the Register of Environmental Organisations, which gives most environmental charities deductible gift recipient status for tax purposes (essentially, donations over \$2 are tax deductible).

Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) tax arrangements are intended to encourage philanthropy and provide support for organisations which deliver goods and services that are of public benefit. DGR concessions were first provided in 1915.

The discussion paper purports to firstly streamline charity administration and regulation and secondly implement the recommendations of the contentious 2016 House of Representatives review of the Register of Environment Organisations.

The problem is it seems to be a thinly veiled attack on environmental advocacy. Some of the proposed reforms aim to ensure that "...these organisations to understand their obligations, particularly for certain types of advocacy," and require environment charities to commit at least 25 per cent of their annual expenditure to "environmental remediation". It also asks if a higher limit, such as 50 per cent, should be considered. It talks of provisions to remove DGR status from any charity that promotes or opposes a political party/candidate, or that undertakes activities that are "contrary to public policy", proposes penalties for "false statements" and a costly review process every five years. It also seems to suggest extending ministerial discretion and regulation powers, and also suggests organisations which have been specifically listed the *Tax Act* (such as the VNPA) should be removed.



VNPA has found the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) processes to be efficient, transparent and helpful. We support proposals for simplified and standardised regulation though an increased role for the ACNC as it is important that any regulator be independent and that process be transparent to maintain public confidence. But these new proposals go further than efficiency and transparency measures.

There has been community-based advocacy for national parks and other protected areas for over 100 years in Victoria. This advocacy has played a key role in creating a network of national parks and conservation reserves across land and sea, as well as a range of other conservation policy initiatives.

The national parks and protected areas estate generates significant benefit to community, protecting nature but also providing respite and recreation to the people who make 98.5 million visits per year to Parks Victoria managed assets. This generates \$1.4 billion per year through parks tourism, and supporting 14,000-20,000 jobs across Victoria.

We are concerned that there is political motivation behind this Inquiry. This concern is underpinned by public statements



PHOTO: CLOUD9 PHOTOGRAPHY (ANDREW NORTH)

made over the past 18 months by the Federal Council of the Liberal Party, Coalition MPs and representatives from the Minerals Council of Australia and the Institute of Public Affairs (IPA), all of which have targeted the advocacy role of Australia's environmental organisations. There have been calls for the removal of tax deductible status for these organisations, and for changes to the Competition and Consumer Act and the Corporations Act to restrict their advocacy.

There is sufficient evidence to warrant fear that the inquiry will be used as an attempt to limit the freedom of speech of advocacy-based environmental organisations; and to ban or restrict deductible gift recipient status for these organisations.

As a fairly conservative organisation, VNPA may not be greatly affected. We proudly advocate for protection and management of national parks, the creation of new national parks, and broader policy discussions around protection of natural heritage and biodiversity. Our model of work does not separate the role of enjoyment, remediation and advocacy for nature, as we see these as

part of the same continuum of concern for our natural heritage. Many people take part in all of these activities, sometimes simultaneously.

Stopping harm, through policy or regulation, is in most cases a more efficient way of protecting the environment than on-ground work aimed at restoration or remediation. Stopping a 200-year-old tree being felled is preferable to planting a new seedling to grow from scratch.

There are plenty of passionate people in our community. While the intent of the changes appears to focus on trying to limit advocacy, the opposite impact may also occur. Removing the incentive to be non-partisan could increase the likelihood that some groups will advocate a specific vote or become more partisan, not less; there will be little benefit for organisations trying to fulfil their purposes in participating in a discriminatory or limiting regulatory framework, even if they have less money.

The VNPA is both an endorsed deductible gift recipient and an environmental organisation listed by name in the *Tax Act*. • PW

SPECIAL SPECIES: GRASS-TREES

Grass-trees are slow growing and may live for up to six hundred years.

Six species can be found in Victoria, and two are present across most of the state, the austral grass-tree and the small grass-tree.

Dead leaves stay attached to the top of the stem and droop down to form a 'skirt', which is an important refuge for wildlife, including antechinus, bandicoots and dunnarts.

The first part of the scientific name, *Xanthorrhoea*, means 'yellow' (*Xanthos*) referring to their characteristic big spikes with creamy yellow-white flowers. Masses of flowers can be seen following fire and in relation to other environmental conditions such as drought.

'*Rhoea*' means 'flowing' and refers to resin in the stem of some species, used by Indigenous Australians as a binding agent or adhesive.

Great places to see grass-trees in Victoria include the Brisbane Ranges, Little Desert, Great Otway, Wilsons Promontory and Grampians national parks.

Grass-trees are highly susceptible to the *Phytophthora cinnamomi* pathogen. Please help keep grass-trees safe – stick to marked tracks and remember to clean and sterilise your walking boots.

VNPA's NatureWatch program has been running its grass-tree monitoring project for 10 years. Find out more at www.vnpa.org.au/programs/naturewatch. • PW



Above: Grass-trees in the Brisbane Ranges.

Right: Scarab beetles take advantage of a grass-tree's prolific flowers.

PHOTO: DES PETERS

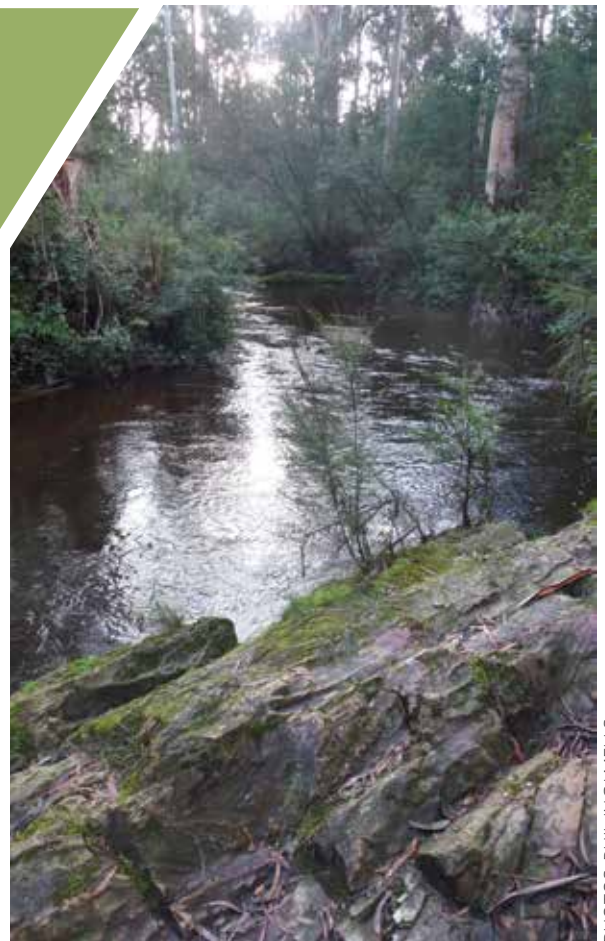




STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC LAND



Would DELWP's cavalier felling of around 300 mature trees in Moondarra State Park, for 'safety reasons', have happened if they understood it had the same protection level as a national park?



Tyers River, Moondarra State Park.

PHOTOS: PHIL INGAMIELLS

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) has produced its final report on the Statewide Assessment of Public Land.

VEAC was asked to look at all current land categories in Victoria, and recommend ways to consolidate and simplify them without altering current levels of protection. It was also asked to "assess the current reservation status of public land" and make an "inventory of the types of values on public land".

It found that, despite the vast array of land classifications in Victoria, our system was not much more complicated than those in other countries. However there was poor alignment of reservation types with legislation, and considerable public confusion over some land categories.

VEAC has recommended the following category consolidation:

- National parks, state parks and wilderness parks should all be classed as 'national parks' (wilderness parks will effectively become a wilderness zone in a national park). This ends one of the most common misunderstandings in land classification: national parks and

state parks have always had the same high level of protection under the *National Parks Act*, yet people often confuse state parks with unprotected state forest.

- 'Conservation park' will include a range of parks in schedule 3 of the *National Parks Act*, such as coastal parks.
- 'National heritage park', currently only applicable to a park in the Castlemaine gold diggings area, will also include areas reserved to protect Aboriginal heritage (though Indigenous heritage and Traditional Owner rights are also increasingly established across many existing parks and reserves in Victoria).
- 'Regional parks' will now include metropolitan and forest parks.
- Lesser park categories include 'nature reserve', 'coastal reserve', 'wildlife and game reserve' among many others.
- Marine park categories are largely unchanged.

The final system is still complicated, but it does end some long-standing confusion. VEAC has asked for the *National Parks Act* to be revised and expanded as a National Parks and

Conservation Reserves Act within five years to accommodate the new categories. There are dangers in opening up the *National Parks Act* for revision, as there are always those looking to wind back conservation protection. The Act has served us very well since 1975; perhaps well drafted amendments could do the trick rather than a major overhaul.

In its assessment of the current reservation status of public land, VEAC identified a need for several important future assessments, including:

- The south west region, Dundas Tablelands and Victorian volcanic plain area
- The Strzelecki Ranges and Gippsland plains
- Central Victorian uplands (this VEAC investigation is now in progress)
- Victoria's marine environment (when current habitat mapping is completed).

VEAC also made a number of recommendations for inventories of public land to be made or updated, including waterway frontages, coastal reserves, and road and rail reserves. • PW

The full report can be found at www.veac.vic.gov.au

Introducing Parks Victoria chief executive Matthew Jackson



PHOTO COURTESY OF PARKS VICTORIA

Matthew Jackson has over 20 years' experience in the not-for-profit conservation and nature-based tourism sectors. He started his career as a zoo keeper at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary in Queensland and working with Queensland Parks and Wildlife. In 2004 he made the move south to Phillip Island Nature Parks as operations manager and in 2010 became CEO, overseeing a wide range of world class conservation programs, including predator control, revegetation, education, monitoring and fire management.

In his new role as CEO of Parks Victoria, he brings this wealth of experience with him.

"I believe that research and science are essential to successful management of park environments, and see the growth in nature based tourism as a means of generating more funds to be spent in parks. There is a balance between the visitor economy and conservation, and it's in the middle.

"It's the diversity in the landscapes of Victorian parks that makes them special. The fact that within two or three hours of the CBD you can be in an Alpine environment, semi-arid bushland, a scenic coastal park, wide grassland plains or rugged mountains. The Twelve Apostles, Wilsons Prom and the Grampians are places of outstanding beauty that have great potential for attracting national and international visitors.

"Port Campbell National Park is a special place for me personally. But

my favourite spot is Maits Rest in the Great Otway NP. It's small and unique, with a great short walk – it's a bit of a hidden gem.

"It's places like this that Victorian's love, and overall there is a strong community push to protect our parks, so that people can go camping, walking and get into nature. There were around 106 million visits last year to our parks. I'd like to see more investment in getting more people out to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits that our parks offer. For Parks Victoria, Healthy Parks Healthy People is the very foundation of how we manage parks in a way that improves the health of both our parks and communities. On the economic side, both directly and indirectly, park visitors contribute around \$2 billion back into the state economy annually, and support more than 20,000 full time jobs.

"One of the biggest challenges is having a sustainable funding model for keeping park infrastructure in good shape and protecting our natural and cultural assets at the same time. In this way we can maintain that balance between a healthy park environment and more park visitors.

"I'm really keen to see more people of all ages and backgrounds visiting our parks, and I think telling them more about our parks, and what Parks Victoria is doing to conserve and protect them, will encourage them to do so.

"On education and interpretation, the recently launched Learning in Nature plan for people accessing parks is a step in the right direction. I'm also committed to redeveloping our online

and social media platforms. Giving people high tech tools leads to greater engagement, greater immersion and appreciation for individual parks. It's also a great way of sharing our science and research programs and how our parks are performing.

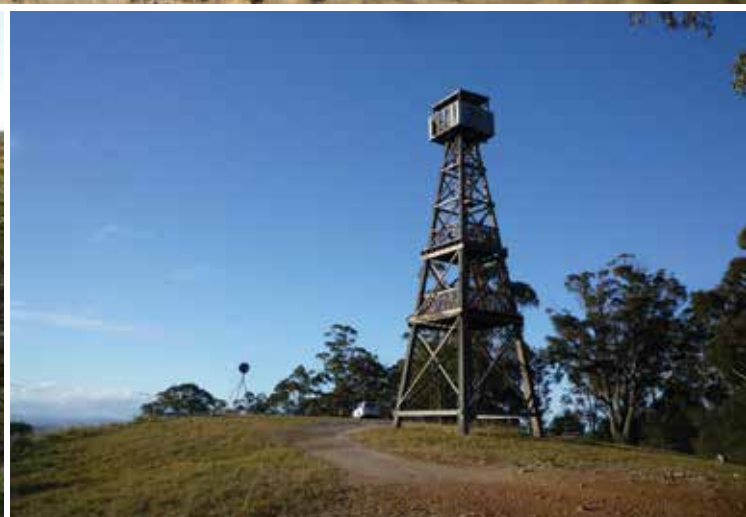
"It's not the number of staff that's important, but the budget announcement of funding for up to sixty new rangers for the next two years is a real boost. Now we have to show that the benefits of investing in parks, and park rangers, is not only essential to protect the estate, but it's also good for the visitor economy and tourism, for our community's health and for developing an appreciation of nature. We also have significant funding to upgrade our asset management system and our entire online and social media platforms so that we can function as a world class park agency.

"VNPA as a key partner and one that helps with getting the balance right regarding decisions and directions of park management. Our job is to be an honest and forthright voice on issues such as public access and developments in parks, and I really value VNPA's commitment to evidence based decisions. I'm looking forward to having a closer relationship with VNPA as they share a mutual passion for environment and conservation. VNPA is a great ally for us; we can always agree to disagree on some things, but we both share the same values in protecting Victoria's special places." • PW



Lake Tyers State Park

GEOFF DURHAM EXPLORES
THE ONLY STATE PARK HE HAD
NOT VISITED IN VICTORIA.



It has been a privilege to observe the development of the Victorian parks system over the past 60 years, from the 15 national parks created ad hoc between 1892 and the first *National Parks Act* of 1956, to the present 45 national parks, 26 state parks, three wilderness parks and 26 other parks.

When reporting on Dergholm State Park in 2015 I said it was the only state park I had not visited. I was wrong. I had overlooked Lake Tyers State Park, which was created in September 2012. We spent two glorious sunny days this July exploring the park by car, and were hugely impressed. It was an unexpected, sublime experience.

There is confusion with the name Tyers. Charles James Tyers was appointed Commissioner of Crown Lands for Gippsland in 1843. Named after him is the Tyers River (a tributary of the LaTrobe River); Tyers Park incorporating the Tyers River Gorge; Lake Tyers; Lake Tyers State Park; and Lake Tyers Aboriginal Trust private land (a 237 hectare peninsula into the lake) which was originally the Lake Tyers Mission established in 1863.

Lake Tyers village is 10 kilometres east of Lakes Entrance on the Ninety Mile Beach. It is situated outside the park on the western side of the mouth of the lake, which is often closed by a sand bank, as at present. It has a general store, tavern, camp grounds and rental accommodation.

The park is not well sign-posted along the Princes highway, and apart from the Bataluk Cultural Trail Information Shelter, there is virtually no interpretation. Within the park most tracks are sign-posted but you need a map to get around. You can download the not completely accurate Parks Victoria 'Park Notes' map.

The park is a legacy of the Forests Commission. Most of the 8,680 hectare park was formerly the Forests Commission's Lake Tyers Forest Park created in 1972. There are well-constructed roads and many narrow tracks leading to small water-view car parking and picnic areas. The park contains examples of lowland and coastal sclerophyll forest communities and also warm temperate rainforest and wet gullies. There has been no timber extraction since the middle of the last century and little natural or fuel-reduction fire resulting in fine mixed-species areas with impressive old trees – stringybark, silvertop, ironbark, Gippsland box, blue gum, and mountain grey gum. Indigenous sweet pittosporum and black she-oak are common. There is an interesting understorey with orchids. It also has significant faunal values.

Lake Tyers was formed by the submergence of a stream system less than 10,000 years ago during the world-wide rise in sea level. There are two main serpentine drowned valleys – the Toorloo Arm in the west, and the Nowa Nowa Arm in the east that winds from Nowa Nowa to the coast. The salinity and level of the lake depends on the rainfall in the catchment and whether the entrance bar is open.

The park is of great significance to the Gunai and Kurnai people with much evidence of past occupation and many cultural sites.

In 2010 the Gunai and Kurnai obtained native title to the park and have rights to access and use of the land for traditional purposes within existing laws. The park is jointly managed with Parks Victoria. There is no management plan, though one is being developed by the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Management Board, as is a much needed camping and access strategy. Illegal four-wheel off-track driving for shoreline access, resulting in littering and fires, is a big problem.

The park is in three disjunct blocks. A small block north of Nowa Nowa township on the Princes Highway encompasses the Boggy Creek Gorge and includes Mount Nowa Nowa. Two accessible features are the Mt Nowa Nowa timber fire lookout tower and closer to the town the Boggy Creek Gorge lookout.

The eastern and western blocks are south of the Princes Highway. The western block extends south from Nowa Nowa to the upper reaches of the Toorloo Arm. The eastern block is on the eastern side of the Nowa Nowa Arm and extends to the Ninety Mile Beach with forested slopes leading down to the water. Access to the Ninety Mile Beach is at three points – Pettmans, Gibbs and Glasshouse. Wide, clean, golden sand stretches into sea mist.

The park is very popular with those in-the-know. The only camping areas are in this block – camping is free with no pre-booking. Camping in the designated areas is being enforced. There are few facilities, but fires are permitted where there are fireplaces. There are five camping areas:

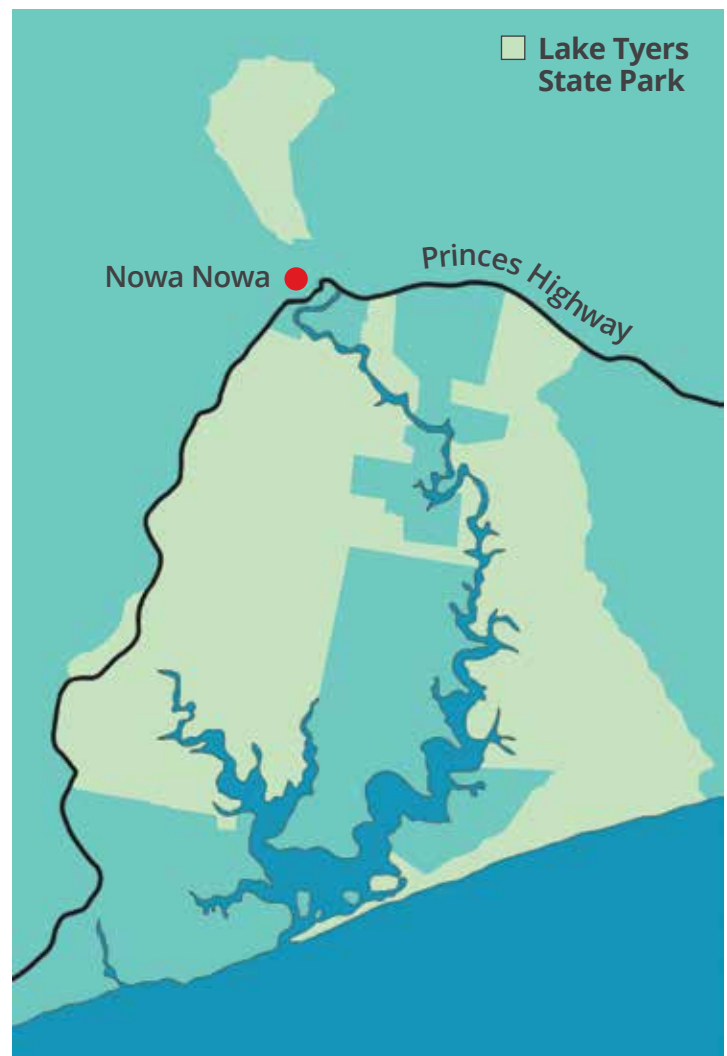
- Pettmans Beach (the only camping area with toilets)
- Glasshouse – a large grassy area, the site of glass insulator factory in 1908/09
- Ironbark
- Camerons Arm No. 1 Track
- Trident Arm

Pettmans and the Glasshouse are suitable for caravans.

The park is notable for its paucity of weeds. At the Glasshouse there are cypress pines and garden escapees. The grass is well grazed. This is yet another park where deer have become a menace with sambar and hog deer, also some fallow deer. Other pests are foxes, dogs, cats, some rabbits and the occasional pig, and mosquito fish.

There are many opportunities for recreation – particularly scenic driving, exploring the sheltered inlets by canoe, cross-country walking, bush camping, fishing, boating and water skiing on one section of the lake.

Lake Tyers State Park is a great park for nature lovers (I have never seen so many blue wrens) and features many delightful picnic areas. It is a wonderful addition to our parks system. • PW



Victorians valuing nature

WHAT DOES THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT HAVE TO SAY ABOUT ENCOURAGING THE COMMUNITY TO VALUE NATURE? CAITLIN GRIFFITH FINDS OUT.

The Victorian Government released a strategy for protecting Victoria's biodiversity in April 2017. This article is the second of a series in Park Watch (see the June 2017 edition), exploring the content and delivery of the Biodiversity 2037 plan.

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 is the first formal statewide, long-term biodiversity plan in two decades, and it contains a range of priorities and initiatives around two main goals.

VISION: VICTORIA'S BIODIVERSITY IS HEALTHY, VALUED AND ACTIVELY CARED FOR

GOAL: Victorians value nature

Victorians understand that their personal wellbeing and the economic wellbeing of the state are dependent on the health of the natural environment.

GOAL: Victoria's natural environment is healthy

Victoria has functioning plant and animal populations, improved habitats and resilient ecosystems, even under climate change.

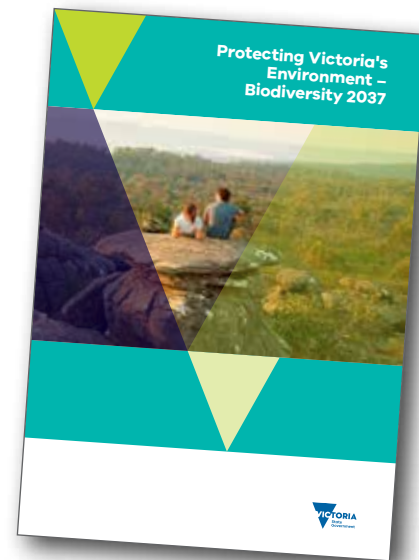
This strategy places significant weight on the importance of Victorians experiencing, learning about and contributing to nature; so much so that one of the two goals is purely about improving how Victorians value nature.

This aligns well with VNPA's vision that: "Victoria is a place with a diverse and healthy natural environment *protected, respected and enjoyed by all.*"

VNPA has long recognised the crucial role of community engagement in working towards a healthy natural environment. In addition to the health and wellbeing benefits to society, we know that people connecting with nature are more likely to become supporters of its protection. We are pleased to see this acknowledged so highly in this strategy.

A key phrase in the strategy is: "Many Victorians already connect to the natural environment and act to protect and manage it. But even more do not."

This underpins that while many Victorians are working hard to care for nature, a much greater effort is required from a larger number of people in a wider variety of ways. Great programs already exist, such as Landcare and Land for Wildlife, and a number of Friends groups have been working in parks for decades. But there are still many in our community who don't get to experience our finest natural areas, and that should change. It is refreshing to see that the state government sees itself as having a greater role in providing both policy leadership and in engaging the community.



Three priorities in the strategy specifically acknowledge the importance of improving engagement with a larger number and cross-section of Victorians.

Priority 3: Raise awareness of all Victorians about the importance of the state's natural environment

Priority 4: Increase the opportunities for all Victorians to have daily connections with nature

Priority 5: Increase opportunities for all Victorians to act to protect biodiversity

All of these priorities must work together if we are to see improvements in our state's biodiversity.

Where to now?

As a result of this strategy, VNPA hopes to see real actions, funding and programs that support and strengthen existing and new work to raise awareness and increase opportunities to connect and protect Victoria's nature.

When it comes to seeing Victoria achieve *Biodiversity 2037* 'Goal 1: Victorians value nature', VNPA would like to see:

- Investment in long-term jobs that enable greater community engagement, learning and care for nature. Funding for staff to carry out this work (in addition to volunteers and community groups) is essential to its success.
- Grants for nature based community groups include not just funding to do on-ground work but also include funding for groups to engage people with nature.
- State government using its significant communication reach to promote positive messages about Victoria's natural values, and the benefits of experiencing and caring for nature.
- Programs that partner with a greater diversity of audiences to develop nature-based engagement, learning and care programs, resources and initiatives that are appropriate and sensitive to the needs of these audiences.
- Strengthened support for all the current initiatives and projects in this space. While funding bodies often like to fund new initiatives, providing support for long-term work is essential for long-term success.
- Generation and sharing of new research and knowledge (e.g. knowledge of barriers to participation in nature based activities) that will support groups and organisations to create new initiatives and actions.

These priorities are all critical to turning the tide on the declining health of Victoria's natural environment. It is still early days, but hopefully now with a state-wide strategy, we will see capacity increase to focus on Victoria's magnificent and unique biodiversity. • PW

Stepping backwards

VOLUNTEER BUSHWALKERS MAY BE IMPACTED BY COMMERCIAL STANDARDS, SAYS BUSHWALKING VICTORIA PRESIDENT PETER CAMPBELL.



Bushwalking is popular activity in Victoria dating back to the late nineteenth century when clubs such as the Bright Alpine Club and The Wallaby Club were formed by people interested in visiting and exploring Victoria's alpine and bush regions. The Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs, now known as Bushwalking Victoria, formed in 1934 as a peak body for bushwalkers in Victoria.

Bushwalking clubs provide safe trips from beginner levels to multi-day hikes and provide opportunities for people to gain experience with and enjoy the significant benefits of bushwalking.

The Bushwalking and Mountaineering Training Advisory Board developed and provided training and a manual for bushwalking leaders for over 35 years. Bushwalking Victoria has operated a volunteer search and rescue section since 1949 and provides leadership training, advice and materials that contribute to bushwalker safety.

A *Bushwalking Adventure Activity Standard* was developed and published by the now defunct Outdoors Recreation Council in 2003. Commercial providers have been required by the Victorian Government to comply with this document to get a tour operator licence and land access permits. Volunteer bushwalkers did not support compliance with this standard

applying to their bushwalking activities and the government has not required compliance for them to date.

In 2015, Outdoors Victoria announced they would develop new national standards (AAAS) for over twenty adventure activities including bushwalking, mountain biking, rock climbing and recreational angling.

Outdoors Victoria and the AAAS Steering Committee continue to insist that their 'standards' must apply to both commercial and community volunteer groups.

However, the AAAS do not recognise there is difference in the standard of care between leaders of volunteer groups (e.g. a bushwalking club or community group) and commercial operators providing a professional service with paying clients (e.g. guided bushwalks).

If the AAAS do come to apply to volunteer trip leaders, legal liabilities would increase, and increased insurance costs are very likely. The increased compliance burden on voluntary community organisations could lead to many clubs ceasing to operate.

It would be extremely difficult for any volunteer bushwalking leaders to demonstrate meeting National Outdoor Recreation qualifications specified in the AAAS. Competency-based

standards are simply not suitable for volunteer bushwalking leaders.

In addition, volunteer bushwalking leaders may be refused access permits if it is deemed they don't comply with the AAAS.

If AAAS impacts lead to reduced volunteer participation in bushwalking, this would directly contradict Parks Victoria's 'Healthy Parks Healthy People' and the *Biodiversity Strategy 2037* to get more Victorians active and outdoors.

The solution to this problem is very simple – the AAAS must state they do not apply to volunteers.

Volunteer trip leaders will continue to ensure their trips are safe by enhancing and using a variety of resources on topics including trip planning, trip management, leadership, bushcraft, navigation and handling emergencies.

Bushwalking Victoria is also committed to further develop and promulgate the considerable body of knowledge that informs and guides safe and enjoyable bushwalking.

Please consider writing to your local state Member of Parliament about the impacts the AAAS may have on your bushwalking and ask them to ensure that they do not apply to volunteers. You can also sign the Bushwalking Victoria petition: bit.ly/AAAS-petition • PW



Lindsay Crawford OAM

14 SEPT 1926 – 2 JUNE 2017

We celebrate and remember Lindsay Crawford – a dedicated member and supporter of the Victorian National Parks Association and a committed friend of the natural world.

Lindsay Crawford was a well-respected conservationist, senior entomologist and keen photographer. He received his Order of Australia Medal in 2001 for service to the community, particularly through the Youth Hostels Association in Victoria.

Lindsay loved national parks and was long aware of their critical importance to the survival of our flora and fauna.

He became a member of VNPA in 1960, and we have been most fortunate to have the benefit of Lindsay's valuable support for a remarkable 57 years of our organisation's 65 year history.

Lindsay's dedication to nature conservation led him to raise his concerns by making submissions and writing to newspapers advocating for the protection of our state's treasures. Victoria's Alpine region was one of Lindsay's great loves, and he was among those who contributed to Dick Johnson's groundbreaking 1974 book, *The Alps at the Crossroads*. It was the essential catalyst that led to the creation of our great Alpine National Park.

Lindsay was a highly regarded member of the VNPA community, and he and his wife Ann were familiar faces at our organisation's AGMs, picnics, events and various meetings with directors and staff over the years.



National parks were an important part of Lindsay and Ann's lives, and together they visited many of these special places across Victoria, Australia and around the world. Lindsay proposed to Ann by the beautiful Lake Waikaremoana in Te Urewera National Park in New Zealand in 1971. Wilsons Promontory was a particular favourite – they visited many times, with their most recent trip in 2014 to enjoy again the stunning views, wildlife and walks.

Lindsay's love of nature and contribution to conservation will not be forgotten. • PW

Dr Brian David Cuming OAM

1928-2017



Dr Brian Cuming will be sorely missed by the Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council (WPPC) and other environmental groups statewide, including VNPA.

Brian was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 2015 for service to environmental conservation in the Westernport region.

It began in 1978 when members of the WPPC requested Brian's expert assistance as a surface chemist. He immediately became involved in hearings of the House of Representatives oil spills inquiry. In 1985 he encouraged the WPPC committee to save BHP land on the Mornington Peninsula from development, the outcome of which was Warringine Park, a housing development that retained its natural bush with resources for its management.

Brian was the WPPC president from 1987 until 1996, retiring from the committee in 2007. He continued longer with The Devilbend Foundation. Over the years he was involved in numerous projects and submissions, including the proposed Western Mining urea-ammonia fertiliser plant at Crib Point; Seagrass Events of '88, '89 and '90; the Shell-Mobil super-tanker proposal 1992-1995; the Bond family port proposals at The Bluff, and subsequent port expansion proposals.

Nanette Cuming OAM, Brian's wife, remembers Brian first seeing Melbourne Water's map of their proposed sell-off of the decommissioned Devilbend Reservoir (Daangean). The map had the bushland blocks coloured to preserve and the farmland coloured to sell-off like a patchwork quilt, a case in point of the edge effect. Brian

drew on his understanding of the landscape theory of conservation and produced an alternative map where the entire area was retained as a whole instead. WPPC was at the centre of the campaign that achieved this aim and saved Devilbend, a key biodiversity area.

Brian loved environmental philosophy – Gaia, Rachel Carson, James Lovelock, Robert Costanza, triple bottom line and risk-assessment approaches – making for great discussions and a shared vision within the committee.

Brian fulfilled a vital communications role in the WPPC, updating everyone, finding new allies and appearing in the local media.

Simon Branigan, VNPA's then marine campaigner met with the WPPC to cement some of the key evidence that Westernport Bay was not suitable for a major port. After speaking with Brian, VNPA commissioned a redo of Brian's previous oil-spill modelling as well as a study of the effect of oil-spills on birds in Westernport Bay and another on seagrass (available on the WPPC website: www.wppcinc.org).

We have lost a great champion for Westernport and we have lost a special and dear friend. • PW

Karri Giles, WPPC Secretary

ONE FISH TWO FISH RED FISH BLUE FISH!

2016 WAS A FANTASTIC YEAR FOR OUR GREAT VICTORIAN FISH COUNT, REEFWATCH COORDINATOR KADE MILLS REPORTS BACK.

A huge shout out to more than 400 divers and snorkelers that made last year's fish count such a huge success and a whole lot of fun! Over 1,000 fish sightings were entered into the Atlas of Living Australia, recording an impressive snapshot of the unique and diverse marine life found in Victorian waters. It was particularly great to see that the enigmatic blue groper was frequently sighted in our marine protected areas. Read the report on our website: www.vnpa.org.au/publications/2016-great-victorian-fish-count

2017 Great Victorian Fish Count

18 November – 17 December

This year will be the thirteenth Great Victorian Fish Count. Several species of friendly sharks and rays have been added; seeing them is always a highlight on any dive and this will be a great way for us to learn more about these animals (read more on the next page). We are also excited to be offering families opportunities to participate this year through VNPA's Wild Families program.

To register your interest, join the ReefWatch mailing list at www.vnpa.org.au/programs/reefwatch • PW



PHOTOS: PHILLIP WIERZBOWSKI

Sharks and rays, oh my!



PHOTO: ANDREW CHRISTIE

A southern fiddler ray in Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary.

THE 2017 GREAT VICTORIAN FISH COUNT WILL FOR THE FIRST TIME INCLUDE SHARKS AND RAYS. ANDREW CHRISTIE INTRODUCES US TO POINT COOKE MARINE SANCTUARY, A POPULAR HANGOUT FOR THESE FASCINATING CREATURES.

One of Melbourne's best kept secrets

Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary (PCMS) in Melbourne's western suburbs is a 290 hectare marine protected area that must surely be one of Melbourne's best kept secrets. Even during the hottest days of summer, despite the city skyline barely 20 kilometres away, the Point Cook Coastal Park beach is sparsely populated. It seems that very few people know about the (protected) treasures that await those that are keen to don a mask and snorkel and get into the beautiful waters of Port Phillip Bay.

The sharks and rays of Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary

One of the many highlights of PCMS are the shark and rays that are abundant from about October to March each year.

During this time a large assortment of rays can be seen, including southern fiddler rays, stingarees (such as the eastern shovelnose and sparsely spotted stingarees), eagle rays and the massive smooth stingray. The sharks in PCMS are harmless varieties such as Port Jackson and gummy sharks, and while less common, they are magnificent and graceful animals to observe, photograph and film in their natural environment.

A plea for the future

At the time of writing, Wyndham Shire (which includes Point Cook) remains one of the fastest growing municipalities not only in Victoria, but also Australia; the massive increases in urban growth could reasonably be expected to place some considerable stresses on marine environments such as the PCMS. Monitoring by

government agencies, educational institutions and community groups is a must. The continuation of initiatives like VNPA's ReefWatch and the Great Victorian Fish Count into the future will give us a strong idea of how our marine life is coping with the various challenges. • PW

Andrew Christie is president of Marine Care Point Cooke.

Want more information?

For more information, please contact Andrew Christie via email AndrewChristie@melbournepolytechnic.edu.au or phone 9269 1693, and visit the Marine Care Point Cooke Facebook page at www.facebook.com/MarineCarePointCooke

Returning the Kulkyne

BY JOHN BURCH. AVAILABLE VIA
returningthekulkyne@iprimus.com.au
PAPERBACK, 304 PAGES,
RRP \$29.95.



All landscapes have a past, and memories of that past link to prospective futures. Burch's well-researched and well-written history of one of our internationally significant parks is a must read.

The author shows that Victoria's semi-arid zone parks contain the most degraded and depauperate landscapes in the state's parks system.

To a Kulkyne that supported one of Australia's highest densities of Indigenous people, Europeans brought dispossession and a tapestry of failed land-uses (pastoralism, forest exploitation, water for steam engines). Periodic moves to establish closer settlement lapsed, and the land fortuitously remained uncleared, although much woodland was felled for fuel and fencing, or ringbarked and degraded.

Burch details what Europeans envisioned for, and then did to, the landscape. Institutions such as the Victorian Railways and the Forests Commission also brought changes, though their utilitarian needs for the landscape eventually expired through technology, drought and over-grazing by rabbits.

The narrative around the Indigenous people is particularly respectful and insightful. The 1830 smallpox epidemic decimated Indigenous populations along the Murray, including the Kulkyne.

But despite a cultivated myth of 'extinction' and the abuse and theft of artefacts, the Indigenous connection remains.

Burch's narrative shows how prompt actions taken by early bureaucrats gradually slowed as differing views were incorporated. In the mid-20th century, locals like Les Chandler thought national parks should be large and left undisturbed, whereas others envisaged small but fully restored environments complete with mammals.

VNPA, led by stalwarts like Ros Garnet, was involved in the 1960 establishment of the original Hattah Lakes National Park, which absorbed the Kulkyne in 1980 as the views of Victorians on conserving the landscape expanded.

Burch recognises the important role of science. The 19th century expeditions of von Mueller, Kreft, Blandowski and others allow us to understand the rapid and massive loss of mammal species, and later the Royal Australasian Ornithologists Union recorded the importance of bird habitats.

Management changed as scientific and institutional understandings evolved. As the over-abundance of grey kangaroos became apparent, the community came to accept the need for culling. Scientists such as Peter

Sandell (on total grazing pressure) and David Cheal (on vegetation condition) highlighted the magnitude of change and effort required.

Burch points to some lessons of history in chapter 11 and foreshadows a way forward. Although environmental water flows have greatly improved the condition of the 'wet' parts of Hattah-Kulkyne, this should be complemented by additional improvements in the 'dry' areas.

Our understanding of ecological cascades, apex predation and the functional role of mammals in ecology could be brought to bear on this out-of-balance system. Fortunately, a scientific assessment of the desirability and feasibility of restoring the park's mammal population has been given to Parks Victoria.

Burch persuasively concludes that for a more complete 'returning', the future of the Kulkyne can and must include the Traditional Owners. This 'cultural landscape' view is consistent with an ecological perspective – totems such as the wedge-tailed eagle, goanna and dingo bear a remarkable correlation to what we now call apex predators.

Read this book and support the next stages in the 'return of the Kulkyne'. • PW

Review by Ian Mansergh

Wacky Wild Wildflower Wandering

Spring is a lovely time in Victoria to discover the wacky, wild nature of Victorian wildflowers. You don't need to be an expert in wildflowers to find and learn about them. One of the wonderful things about wildflowers is that their wild variety of colours and sizes and wacky shapes are so diverse and inspiring that there is always more to uncover. Have you ever seen a flying duck orchid? They really look like a flying duck! Have you noticed the puffy, bright yellow clusters of flowers on a wattle tree that are starting to burst out everywhere?

Some places will have hundreds of wildflowers in a big rainbow display, while in other areas a close look will be needed to find them because they are well camouflaged, tiny, or even green.

Great places to go wild, wacky, wildflower wandering

Some wonderful national and state parks and reserves to experience wildflowers include (but aren't limited to):

The Grampians-Gariwerd, Wilson's Promontory, Greater Bendigo, Brisbane Ranges, Little Desert, Mount Buangor, Heathcote-Graytown, Beechworth Historic Park, Anglesea Heath and Point Addis in the Greater Otway National Park and in summer the Alpine, Mount Buffalo and Baw Baw national parks.

There are some lovely wildflower wandering locations closer around Melbourne too, including Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve, Long Forest Flora and Fauna Reserve and Warrandyte, Kinglake and Bunyip state parks.

Perhaps choose one or more for weekend family wildflower wanders this Spring?

If you need help looking for a place where there could be wildflowers, a great start



PHOTO: IT'S A WILDLIFE



Flying duck orchid.

PHOTO: LIZ MARTIN



Wattles in flower.

PHOTO: PAM SHEEHAN



PHOTO: IT'S A WILDLIFE

is to check out www.parks.vic.gov.au and search for 'wildflowers'. Your local council website might have suggestions for wildflower spots near you.

Wildflower photography

One great way to build enthusiasm for wildflowers is to try photographing them. Photography can really build on the excitement involved in finding a wildflower and the ability to share that find with others. Some simple tips include using a camera's macro function, choosing a flower that is still

(not blowing in the wind) and keeping steady hands. It can take concentration and effort to get good images, so plenty of encouragement always helps! Another way to creatively enjoy and learn about wildflowers is by painting or drawing them.

For fun wacky wild wildflower wandering activities to do with your family, see our latest Wild Families activity sheet at www.vnpa.org.au/wild-families

Remember to keep wildflowers wild. They are food and home for wildlife. • PW

