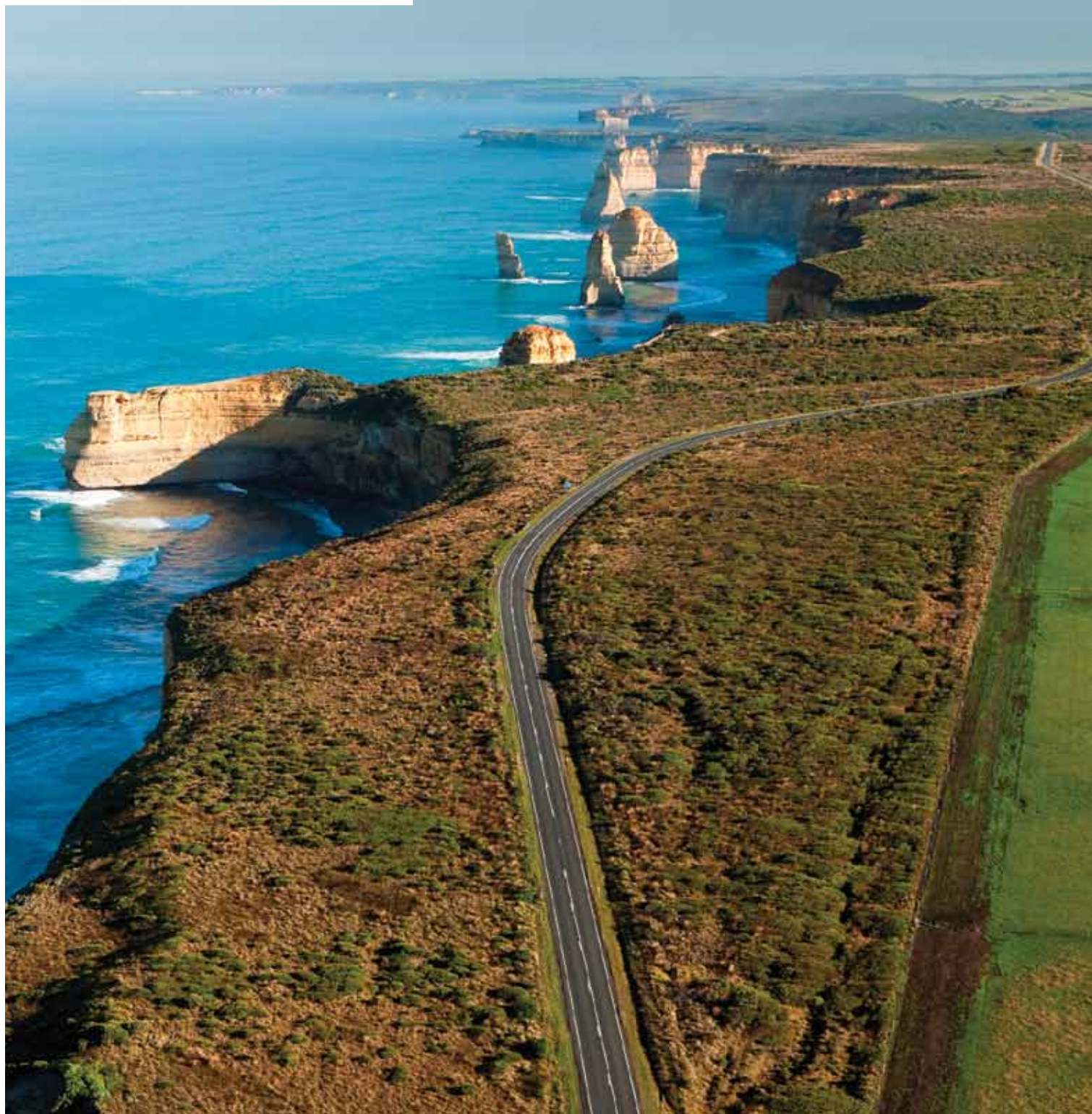


PARK WATCH



COASTAL NATURE UNDER THREAT
STATE ELECTION
CAMPERS ARE NOT JUST USERS
GREAT FOREST NP
START WITH THE GRASSLANDS
SHARING NATURE WITH CHILDREN
ALPS CATTLE UPDATE

MARCH 2014 NO 256



**VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION**
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STOP PRESS

Many thanks to the 240 VNPA members and friends who completed the recent Parks Victoria survey and chose to make a \$10 donation to the VNPA – a great grand total of \$2,400!

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We share a vision of Victoria as a place with a diverse, secure and healthy natural environment cared for and appreciated by all.

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You're always welcome to contact the editor to discuss ideas for articles. Phone the VNPA or email michaelh@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.

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FRONT COVER

Victorians love their coast but it faces many threats. This aerial view of the Port Campbell NP coastline shows the narrow strip of national park between farmland and the sea, highlighting the pressures of visitor numbers, access and potential developments on the park. Photo courtesy Parks Victoria.

BACK COVER

Come to the Forests Forever Easter camp at Goongerah, East Gippsland – still happening despite the February fires.

Park Watch ISSN 1324-4361

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From the President

I was wrong

Well, I suppose my optimism in the December *Park Watch* about this government's environmental program was a bit silly. You may remember I reviewed the many fine environmental achievements of past Coalition governments from the time of Henry Bolte on, as well as those of Labor governments.

I expressed hope that this being an election year, the good things for the environment would start to flow. I was wrong.

As a Yuletide gift to developers, the Minister for Planning covertly released the new native vegetation controls, and nobbled the checks and balance provided by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) in the past.

In this *Park Watch*, Brendan Sydes, Executive Officer at the Environment Defenders Office, explains how and why our native vegetation protection regulations in Victoria have been weakened.

The thing that strikes me as so stupid about the new 'no net gain' policy is that the significance of native vegetation has to be assessed using DEPI's new statewide computer-generated mapping, full of inaccuracies and totally unreliable at site scale.

I call them 'Enid Blyton' maps, although that famous author had nothing to do with them. Her fiction was high quality and at least children could believe it.

This unchecked mapping places countless areas of important vegetation, including recognised State biosites and mapped sites of ecological significance, as either being *not native vegetation* or *low risk-based pathway vegetation* with the lowest level of protection.

On the other hand, cropping paddocks, schoolyards and developed areas like Melbourne Airport are just as likely to be given the highest level of protection. Here, developers would have to go through the maximum level of ecological hoops, whether there's any native vegetation present or not.

Most of our large, magnificent, 400 to 600-year-old paddock trees do not show up on the computer mapping. Those that are alone or sparsely scattered across the volcanic and northern plains are afforded little or no protection at all and require minimal offsets. It's a travesty.

The regulations will guide local government to say 'Yes' to up to 90% of the clearing applications they receive. Even if they know there is vegetation important to their community, they cannot use that fact. It's like something

out of the comedy *Little Britain* – "Computer says no!" Only this time it's 'yes' and it's not funny. We now have easy clearing and ineffective offsets.

The Victorian Opposition supported a Greens motion in the Victorian Upper House to disallow the native vegetation regulations as bad for the environment, and also a botched policy.

Unfortunately, the motion failed because the Napthine Government has control, albeit by a slim majority, in both Houses of Parliament.

It's a sharp reminder in this election year that, whichever way we vote, we need to make sure the Upper House in the State Parliament is a strong house of review, not just a rubber stamp. • PW

Russell Costello, VNPA President

From the Editor

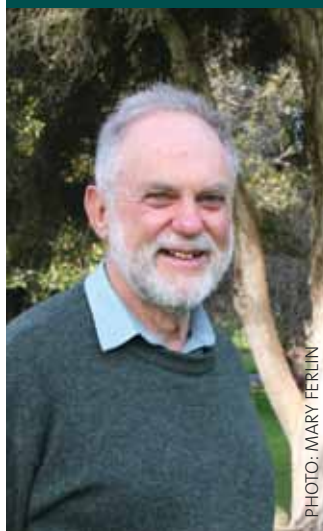


PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

Welcome to the first *Park Watch* for 2014!

At the start of this Victorian election year Chris Smyth highlights threats to our coast, Matt Ruchel reviews the sad state of our environmental policies and we reinforce the need for a new national park in the Central Highlands.

Bill Garner shows that campers are not just 'users' while Ian Lunt and Adrian Marshall describe new approaches to valuing native grassland remnants.

We also focus on sharing nature with children to avoid 'nature deficit disorder' and review Victoria's 2013 State of the Environment report. And there's much more.

Many thanks to all our contributors, with a special mention of renowned photographer and VNPA member Francis Reiss, who has written about a new walk at Mallacoota and whose photographs are on display at Box Hill Town Hall. See p. 38. • PW

Michael Howes



The sad state of Victoria's environmental policy

PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

Much of Victoria's farmland has weeds, dead trees and few signs of regeneration. We need robust regulations to protect habitat and vegetation on private land.

The November 2010 state election, which the Coalition won unexpectedly, now seems a distant memory. The Coalition won by just one seat, but in some ways more importantly it also got control of the Upper House.

It's now 2014, so it's important to reflect on Victoria's progress on environmental issues over the last three and a bit years.

The 2010 election was light on environmental policy from both major parties. The Coalition in particular failed to release any comprehensive environment policy at all before the poll, even though they had said they would.

The policy they did release included the return of cattle grazing to Victoria's Alpine National Park, which was pursued somewhat hamfistedly but with vigour from their first few months in office.

The attempt to return cattle to the park under the guise of a scientific trial – often compared to a domestic version of Japanese whaling – used science to dress up what was widely seen as a political or economic move to support cattlemen mates.

The trial was so poorly constructed and delivered that it was easy for the federal Labor government to block the move. The state tried to ignore national environmental laws, then took the unprecedented step of challenging the decision in the Federal Court. It lost the case.

What's worse is that the state hasn't given up, launching a new bid in November 2013 with many of the same flaws. (See Phil Ingamells' article on p. 16 for details.)

At the last election, the Coalition did commit to retaining the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), also backed by Labor, and retaining Catchment Management Authorities in their current form. The VNPA welcomed both commitments.

One of the government's few firm conservation commitments made before the last election was to undertake two new VEAC inquiries. One, on marine parks, has commenced; the second, on freshwater-dependent ecosystems, wetlands, rivers, estuaries and groundwater, has been dropped, with no substantive reason given.

While the Napthine Government did provide increased resources for landcare and local on-ground activities, the lack of any policy framework opened the way for a range of radical and regressive policies to be pulled out of the bottom drawer, brushed off and re-launched under the guise of 'Environmental Partnerships'.

The Partnerships policy was released two years after the Coalition gained office. It did two things. First, it packaged up most of the routine environmental functions of government and previous programs and its agencies as some sort of policy framework, and secondly, it made a series of radical backward-looking policy commitments affecting the integrity of parks, our approach to native vegetation, and cuts to the public service, particularly to Parks Victoria.

Minister Ryan Smith gave an insight into the government's approach in the media release launching the policy in November 2012. He said:

"Unlike the policies of others, it does not set goals and targets that are uncosted, have no chance of being met, or ignore the real issues of jobs and cost of living concerns. It's not about locking up Victoria's environment so no one can enjoy it."



Alpine NP near Mt McKay after the 2003 fires. Cattle were removed from all burnt areas shortly afterwards, and from the park completely in 2005.



The same place in December 2013. Good recovery in the absence of cattle, but Snow Gum regeneration is slow.

PHOTOS: KAREN ALEXANDER

In other words, commit to nothing that a government can be made accountable for or measured against. Since the policy has been released, we have had glossy updates issued in early November 2013: 'Environmental Partnerships – One Year On'. We assume we'll get another of these a few weeks out from this year's election.

Of the raft of backward steps, a couple are worth special notice.

The gutting of the state's native vegetation regulations is particularly significant. This was presented under the guise of 'effectively designed environmental regulation', which is seemingly current policy-speak for watering down regulation. (See Brendan Sydes' article on p. 10.)

The new regulations, now in place, are widely criticised by ecologists and community groups alike. In a joint statement, 105 ecologists and scientists and 70 community-based environment groups from across Victoria have expressed fears that the new regulations will lead to more land clearing and damage threatened species habitat.

It's not just ecologists and the community who are concerned. The independent Sustainability Commissioner's 2013 State of the Environment Report highlighted an on-going loss of native vegetation: "... losses in native vegetation extent from clearance on private land are likely to have exceeded gains from revegetation and natural regeneration".

So like federal attempts to wind back national environmental laws, the idea that these streamlining exercises will "... get better outcomes for the environment" is hollow. In fact, the opposite will be the case, in our view and that of many others.

One consistent failing of the Victorian government over the last three years has been a failure to listen or seek advice. This was never truer than in the drafting of the native vegetation regulations, where the outcomes of consultation and specialist advice were ignored.

Likewise, the Premier and Environment Minister have largely refused to meet with peak environment groups, with the exception of a couple of brief meetings in the Coalition's first months in office.

The second area of radical 'reform' dressed up in the Environmental Partnerships policy has been the opening up of parks for potential commercial development. On Easter Sunday in 2013, the government revealed a new policy including proposed amendments to the National Parks Act 1975 allowing 99-year leases in two-thirds of the National Parks estate.

This was passed by virtue of the government's majority in the Upper House. The move was innocuously described in the Partnerships policy as about "Developing new guidelines to support appropriate environmentally sensitive private sector tourism investment in national parks".

The policy and the move to change legislation to allow 99-year leases were attacked by conservation groups and many others. An open letter by 25 eminent Victorians, including a former governor and Nobel prize winners, stated:

"The most insidious of all these intrusive uses are the proposals of the Victorian government to lease areas within our national parks for up to ninety-nine years to encourage commercial development by private corporations. Government policy that starts the journey of incremental privatisation and commercialisation of national parks would be a betrayal of public trust."

Neither changes to native vegetation rules nor changing legislation to open parks for commercial development were election promises, but the Coalition Government went ahead anyway. Cattle grazing in the Alpine National Park was an election promise, though a bad idea, and the government has pursued it vigorously – even in the face of widespread criticism and critique.

It appears that the political trick these days, especially when it comes to the environment, is to say as little as possible and dress up policy with heavy spin, gobbledygook and glossy documents.

Our unique natural heritage deserves, and needs, much better. The VNPA is calling on all political parties to have detailed comprehensive policies on all aspects of the environment developed and available well before the November 2014 polls. • PW

Campers are not just users

ALONG WITH THE VNPA AND MOST CAMPERS, **BILL GARNER** – HISTORIAN, PLAYWRIGHT, SCREENWRITER AND CAMPER – OPPOSES THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S PLAN TO IMPOSE OR INCREASE CAMPING FEES IN NATIONAL PARKS.



COLOUR PHOTOS COURTESY BILL GARNER

Bill Garner in his preferred habitat.

The term 'user pays' is one of the uglier expressions in the modern economic lexicon. Its defenders implicitly claim for it some sort of ethical status but in a coded way they are also drawing on the vernacular understanding of a 'user' as someone who selfishly takes more than their share without putting anything back.

Free campers in our national parks are conveniently branded as 'users' who enjoy unfair advantages at the expense of others. Alongside this, the 'fair go' mantra of competitive neutrality is invoked to justify huge increases in camping fees, supposedly in order to protect commercial operators.

Such views reduce campers to nothing more than purchasers of services in a privatised market. This is to totally disregard both the special status of national parks and camping's role as a living expression of our cultural heritage.

So what is this cultural heritage? It is nothing less than a re-enactment of Australia's foundation story. Camping was the way generations of settlers came to know and love this country; it was the way they acquired an understanding of its unique flora and fauna; it was around the campfire that our values of self-reliance and egalitarianism were reinforced. Every time we camp we exercise this tradition.

Campers are not just passive consumers of services but are active agents in sustaining national parks in line with the purposes for which these publicly owned lands were originally reserved. They are, in fact, *custodians* of national parks.

If this were recognised by the government, the management costs camping incurs would have to be balanced against the cultural benefits it provides. As it is, projected costs in the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) suggest considerable 'gold plating' by Parks Victoria in providing services that campers do not actually want.

Many volunteer bodies take an accepted custodianship role: from the various Friends organisations to camp hosts and those bushwalking, field naturalist groups and 4WD clubs whose members volunteer to help maintain the parks. Parks Victoria doesn't just encourage such activity; it depends on it. But ordinary campers too are collaborators in this caring engagement with country.

As well as sustaining the cultural heritage of camping itself, campers help sustain the natural environment, for they tend to be strong environmentalists. The vast majority scrupulously avoid damaging campsites and their surrounds. Most leave sites clean, ready for the next occupants. That is an old tradition.

Such behaviour is not the result of park rules or ranger presence but because campers have a strong interest in preserving places they love. It is also an act of simple decency. When some campers leave a mess, break off branches and so on, no one is more distressed than other campers (just read the online forums on this topic).

The history of camping in Australia is instructive because it shows how campers have adapted. Digging trenches around tents and using saplings to make frames and bush furniture was once normal. But in the past half century camping practice has changed radically, partly with new technology, but also informed by a growing environmental consciousness.

Campers accept that they bear a responsibility for the condition of the bush and everything in it, especially national parks. It is our publicly owned land. And we expect our taxes to pay for the upkeep of it.

Even the government's own Cost Recovery Guidelines recognise that there are some things which should not be expected to recover costs. Cultural heritage is one of them.

As the RIS proclaims, one of the main roles of national parks is to protect cultural heritage. In Australia, camping is a crucial part of that heritage: it connects us to our land and to our past.



Camping involves a lot of sitting and thinking.

A clear manifestation of campers' caring for country is the willing acceptance of 'Leave No Trace'. Although this is publicised by Parks Victoria and encouraged by the absence of rubbish bins, its implementation depends entirely on the goodwill of campers. And it works. It is part of the free camping exchange.

That is the deal: free camping demands responsible camping. Parks Victoria knows this. We are inescapably in this together.

Now consider what happens when you introduce fees based on a 'user pays' principle. The deal is changed. Why should campers take away their own rubbish if someone is extracting a fee from them for services? And even where low fees are mooted, the question still arises as to what the fee might be for.

Traditionally, a basic fee (such as at municipal campgrounds) was levied simply as payment for a place to camp. Ramping up 'service' charges is simply an ideologically driven substitute for applying general taxation revenues, and often a means of blatant cost shifting.

Most campers make it clear that they do not want more or better services. This is not because they wish to avoid paying fees but because they like to do things for themselves.

That is what camping is about. It is not a luxury holiday where everything is done for you. The whole point of camping is that you do it for yourself. Including, where necessary, digging your own toilet.

Quite apart from the financial irrationality of imposing fees that it will cost more to collect than can ever be recovered, raising and introducing fees changes the ethical balance, undermining the shared responsibility for national parks and the natural environment in general.

It's interesting that in the USA, where Leave No Trace originated in the early 1990s, discussion has now extended to the way the policy could point to a much broader notion of citizen participation and environmental responsibility.

In his wonderful book *The Greatest Estate on Earth*, Bill Gammage argues

that if the ecology of this continent is to be sustained, something like the Aboriginal practice of custodianship of country needs to be adopted by settler Australians.

Camping is something that, without cultural appropriation, crosses the settlement divide and connects all of us to country.

With a greater understanding of this shared heritage, campers might come to be seen less as 'users' and more as model citizens for a more sustainable future. • PW

Bill Garner's recent history of Australian camping *Born in a Tent: how camping makes us Australian* (see review on p. 36) is based on his highly awarded PhD thesis *Land of Camps: the ephemeral settlement of Australia*. Currently he is a researcher in Social and Political Sciences at the University of Melbourne.



PHOTO: MUSEUM VICTORIA

Top: Camping in Gippsland, around 1910.

Centre: Field Naturalists' camp in the Upper Yarra, 1906.

Lower: Pioneer settlers in Western Australia.



PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF WA

NEEDED: A new national park

Calls are growing for the establishment of a new Great Forest National Park in Victoria's Central Highlands to protect forests, Melbourne's water catchments, and endangered species from logging.

The VNPA and other environment groups have been joined by the National Trust and Victoria's pre-eminent scientific body the Royal Society to call for urgent and comprehensive action to protect Leadbeater's Possum.

Groups are alarmed at the slow pace of action from an advisory group created to aid the recovery of the endangered possum.

Established in June last year, the Leadbeater's Possum Advisory Group is run by Zoos Victoria and the Victorian Association of Forest Industries. It was expected to report in December, but this has been delayed.

The advisory group has also been charged with developing a plan that preserves and maintains a 'sustainable' timber industry, without questioning or assessing whether the industry as it currently operates is in fact sustainable.

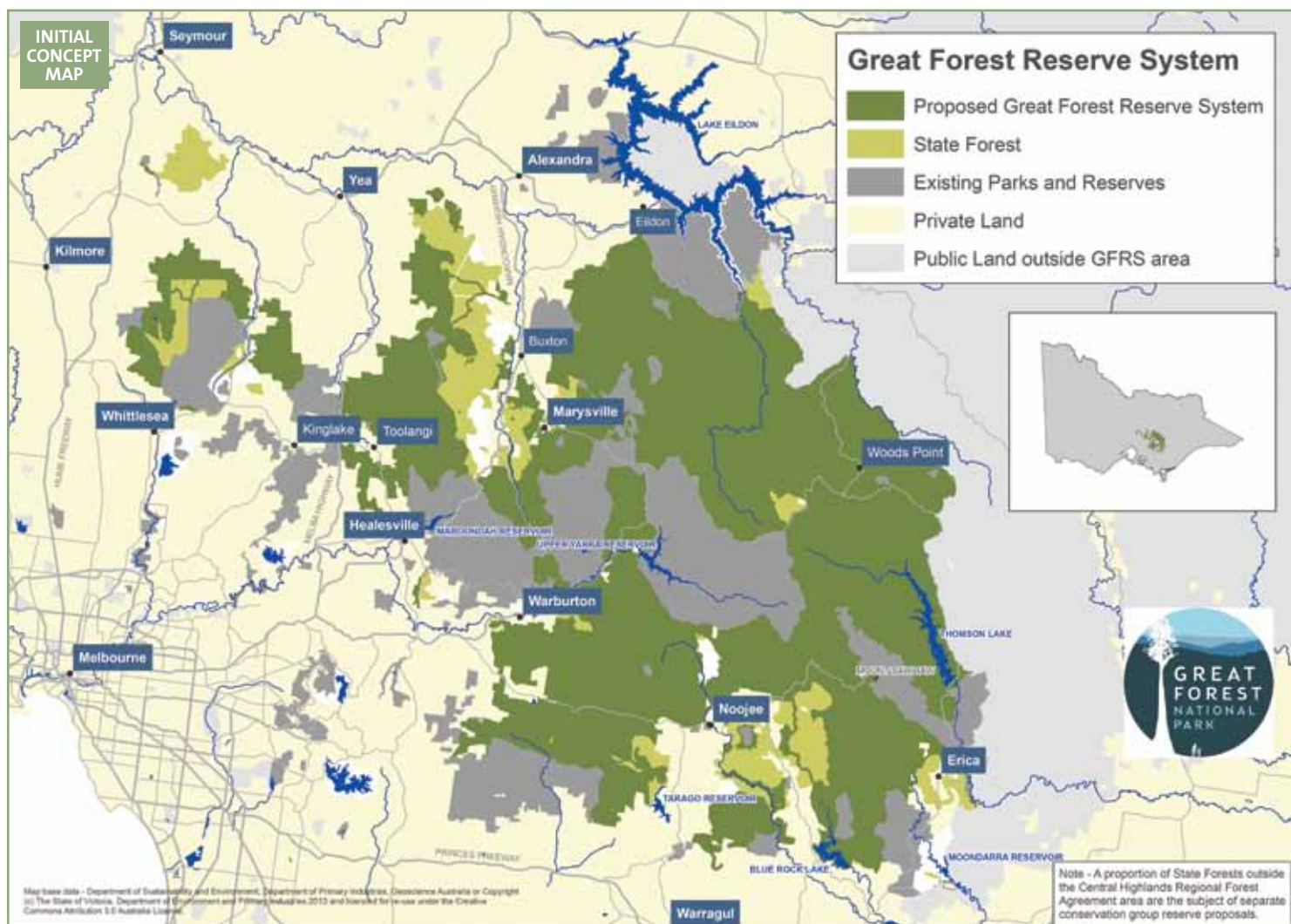
Groups are concerned that some of the expert advice provided to the committee has been watered down or politically interfered with, and that the forestry industry has essentially captured the process. • PW

For more information, and to take action, visit www.greenedge.vnpa.org.au

Matt Ruchel



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL



MAP DEVELOPED BY LOCAL ENVIRONMENT GROUPS AND THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY



The Royal Society of Victoria
Founded 1854
Promotion and Advancement of Science and Technology

11 February 2014

ROYAL SOCIETY OF VICTORIA WANTS ACTION TO SAVE LEADBEATERS POSSUM

The Royal Society of Victoria is joining the calls for urgent action to save the State's faunal emblem, Leadbeater's Possum (*Gymnobelideus leadbeateri*), from extinction.

Australia has the worst record in the world for mammal extinctions, with 27 species recorded as becoming extinct since European settlement. Leadbeater's Possum was also thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1961 in the Central Highlands of Victoria. It is listed as an endangered species through the State's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and is listed internationally on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Animals.

The Society strongly supports the establishment of a new national park that preserves the required habitat for this critically endangered animal. The possum lives in tall eucalypt forests, and to survive requires hollows in old trees. As well, we call for an end to forest practices that are steadily reducing remnant old growth forests in the Central Highlands. This species can only be saved by conservation measures in Victoria.

As Royal Society President, Dr Bill Birch AM states, *"This is an issue that goes to the heart of the Royal Society's role in advocating for a scientific approach to the preservation of biodiversity in Victoria. The Society was a key player in the establishment of the Wilsons Promontory National Park in the late 19th century"*.

The Society urges the government to fast-track the release of the long-awaited report on the status and preservation of Leadbeater's Possum and to rapidly implement any recommendations with respect to maintaining and expanding suitable habitat. The Society also indicates its willingness to be involved in ongoing discussions over any proposed Central Highlands National Park so that all aspects of its scientific significance may be embraced.



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

Much of the Central Highlands is still beautiful pristine bushland and rainforest, though some rehabilitation work will be needed in logged and burnt areas.



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL



PHOTO COURTESY SARAH REES, MYENVIRONMENT

Vegetation clearing gets green light

BRENDAN SYDES, LAWYER AND EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT THE ENVIRONMENT DEFENDERS OFFICE, EXPLAINS HOW AND WHY NATIVE VEGETATION PROTECTION IN VICTORIA HAS BEEN WEAKENED.

You may not have noticed, but on Friday 20 December 2013 the Victorian government gazetted far-reaching changes to Victoria's native vegetation clearing regulations.

The 'permitted clearing regulations' (the Department of Environment and Primary Industry's, or DEPI's, new preferred title for the regulations) represent a significant winding back of the protection of native vegetation in Victoria.

EDO Victoria, the VNPA, and many concerned groups and individuals have worked hard over the last 18 months to point out the problems with the changes. A major issue is the substitution of computer-based mapping for actual on-site assessment of the significance of remnant vegetation.

Under the system ('the blue map of death' as some are calling it), most vegetation in Victoria is classed as 'low priority' and will be allowed to be cleared provided an offset is paid.

In fact, the system could now be more accurately described as an offsetting system rather than a system of native vegetation protection. Under the new system, the policy of 'no net loss' institutionalises a system of exchange that sees ever-dwindling areas of remnant vegetation traded for sometimes highly tenuous gains in the form of improvements to vegetation somewhere else.



PHOTO: VNPA

These remnant strips of roadside vegetation in northern Victoria remind us why effective protection of native vegetation is so vital.

Native vegetation clearing controls were first introduced in Victoria in 1989. Unlike other states, Victoria has always implemented these regulations through planning schemes. What this means in practice is that the native vegetation regulations hang from a very thin thread of a single clause inserted into all local planning schemes in Victoria.

A key feature of these schemes has always been that while permit decisions are, as a matter of formality, made by local councils, the environment department has always been a referral authority for vegetation clearing applications, and so has been ultimately responsible for the decision.

In fact the Department has always been the key decision-making body on clearing permits above a certain threshold. Councils 'refer' clearing applications to the Department, which then decides whether a permit should be issued, and if so on what conditions. Its decision is binding on the council.

This ensures that the responsibilities of key agencies with an interest in the shape and form of land use and development proposals are integrated into the planning permit process.

VicRoads gets to call the shots on issues to do with roads, water

authorities on water supply and drainage. And, at least until recently, DEPI and its predecessors called the shots on vegetation clearing.

The track record of the Department in actually using its power as a referral authority is a pretty mixed one. However, at the very least, the right of veto gave the Department a leg to

These reforms included changes to the referral authority system to create two categories of referral authority: 'determining referral authorities', which can refuse permits or insist on conditions, and 'recommending referral authorities', which only get to be consulted – they have no decision-making authority, or power to insist on conditions.

And DEPI has become a 'recommending referral authority'.

The EPA, water authorities, VicRoads and others all hold the whip hand for their areas of responsibility as determining referral authorities. But not DEPI.

It's pretty clear that this was not part of the Department's plan. The idea that it might be dealt out of the system in this way certainly did not feature in any of the consultation and discussion that preceded the announcement of the clearing controls.

In retrospect it appears that one of the reasons for the significant delay in introducing the changes last year was disputation between DPCD and DEPI about what sort of referral authority DEPI should be. The outcome of that

disputation is now clear: Planning Minister Guy trumped Environment Minister Smith.

All this is perhaps not surprising. Having streamlined the regulatory system down to something the equivalent of 'computer says "yes"', it was only a short leap to exclude the Department from any significant role in its administration.

But the downgrade is highly significant. Even before the recent changes, Victoria's system of native vegetation regulation was mostly to be found in a sort of legal no-man's-land of quasi-legal documents – manuals, guides, frameworks, practice notes and internal

procedures – rather than a coherent system of 'proper' regulation.

Having the Department at the controls at least brought some semblance of order to the chaos. Now they're on the sidelines, as a consulting and advising 'recommending referral authority'.

What little protection the new streamlined system offers to the tiny proportion of our native vegetation deemed by maps and modelling to be worth designating as significant is now optional as well – just another thing for harried council staff to 'balance' with all the other competing priorities under planning.

This is scary stuff when you realise that these native vegetation controls are basically all there is for protecting habitat on private land in Victoria (and scarier still when you see some of the councils charged with administering these regulations).

DEPI has streamlined the system down to an online database and offsets market, and then found themselves streamlined out of any significant role in the system.

How can this be fixed? One thing that's pretty clear is that we need something better than just grafting biodiversity protection on to the planning system.

Trying to implement effective biodiversity protection within another department's legislative scheme does not work, especially where that legislative scheme's focus is primarily on development facilitation.

It's time to take the protection of remnant vegetation seriously and to develop stand-alone native vegetation legislation for Victoria.

It's only with a stand-alone legislative foundation that we'll get the necessary rigour and accountability to develop a system of native vegetation protection to replace the current travesty otherwise known as 'permitted clearing regulations'. • PW

brendansydes's blog:
www.edovic.org.au/blogs/brendansydes



PHOTO: COURTESY KIRSTY REID/GROW WEST

He's doing his best to plant trees, but how much native vegetation will be left when he's grown up?

stand on. Discussions with enthusiastic permit applicants and recalcitrant councils always occurred in the shadow of the possibility that the Department might refuse to issue the permit, or insist on some stringent conditions.

No more. In a sneaky move, the Department has effectively been dealt out of the picture.

To understand how this happened, you also need to understand that while DEPI was hatching plans to streamline native vegetation, the Department of Planning and Community Development was hatching its own plans to reform the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

Well-designed facilities on native grassland at the Aurora estate near Epping help make the grassland look valued, and make it accessible.

Framing the plains and packaging remnants

PHOTO: JAMES NEWMAN, COURTESY MDG LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

IAN LUNT IS ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES AT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY, ALBURY. THE FOLLOWING REFLECTION ON COMMUNICATING THE VALUES OF NATIVE GRASSLANDS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF A RECENT ARTICLE ON HIS BLOG SITE WWW.IANLUNTECOLOGY.COM

A friend once asked, ‘why do botanists have such terrible gardens?’

Years later, I think I’ve worked out a credible response. It’s partly about scale. The scales at which people see gardens and ecosystems.

Take grasslands for example. Close your eyes and picture an iconic native grassland. What do you see?

A panorama of treeless plains and rolling hills? A reserve or small remnant? Or perhaps a close-up of flowers and grasses?

At which scale did the grassland pop into your head: the landscape, the patch (or reserve) or the individual plant scale?

It’s easy to investigate how botanists do ‘sell’ grasslands to the public, by examining the photographs in field guides, articles and extension booklets.

All the books say that native grasslands are rare, threatened and restricted to small remnants, especially in near-urban areas. But the pictures tell a different story.

It’s customary to start big, at the landscape scale, with breathtaking photographs or historical paintings.

From the landscape scale, the photos in most grassland books skip past the patch scale and dive to the plant scale: to colorful orchids, daisies, lilies and peas. Many of these were photographed in small remnants, but the remnants themselves are usually obscured, hidden by low camera angles.

My grassland books showcase a landscape *without* remnants (the historical vision) and wondrous plants in remnants, but rarely show the remnants themselves. The photographic evidence suggests that grassland aficionados don’t see reserves, patches or remnants as being particularly attractive, inviting or important.

Take the VNPA’s *Plains Wandering*, for example, which I co-wrote. We begin at the landscape scale, then dive to the small scale, with close-ups of iconic plants and animals. The core of the field guide follows, with photos of hundreds of plant species.

The *text* highlights the precarious existence of grasslands in small fragmented remnants, but there are no photos of reserves, remnants or patches in the book.

In selecting our photos, we purposefully magnify the landscape

and the plant scale, and unintentionally obscure the reality of an endangered ecosystem: the reality of remnants, patches, edges, fences, borders and neighbours.

In retrospect, I wonder – where is the point of recognition, contact or engagement, between this idealised ecological view, and the view of a homeowner with a patch of long grass behind the fence? For the uninitiated, the point of contact with an isolated remnant is the patch, not the landscape or plant scale.

I guess this is why my friend thinks botanists have such terrible gardens. Like smokers, we shun the plain packaging and see only the goodies within.

How do we sell our vision to a public who see only the unadorned plain packaging?

Framing the patch

Nearly 20 years ago, Joan Nassauer, a professor of landscape architecture in the USA, wrote a paper called *Messy Ecosystems, Orderly Frames*. This influential article was studied by landscape design students but rarely read by ecologists. Nassauer made the following points.

A walkway (which connects with a lookout tower) at a native grassland at the Stoneyfield estate helps people enjoy the grassland.

In urban areas, remnant vegetation will be accepted by the public if it looks attractive. Aesthetic values are influenced by culture, and don't always correspond with ecological values.

We can give our remnants a make-over in either of two ways. We can argue for the beauty within, or air-brush the beauty without.

Ecologists usually rely on the first approach and plead, 'it may look a bit tatty but it's really rare and important, so please look after it'.

Nassauer promotes the second approach: let's gift-wrap our remnants in an attractive package. Her argument is that the packaging – more than the contents – signifies that the patch belongs in, and is valued by, our society. Orderly frames make 'messy ecosystems' socially acceptable.

We all know that packaging is important. Look at cigarettes. The world of art also epitomizes the importance of framing ('packaging').

Joan Nassauer argued that the best frames are those that reveal human intention, and signify that a patch is being *cared for*. She used the term 'cues to care' to refer to design features that show that patches are valued by people.

These cues include the quality of fencing, whether edges are mown and maintained, and the presence of paths, seats and other signs of human intent. Most people view remnants from a distant road, house or footpath, so many cues to care are on the edges.



PHOTO: ADRIAN MARSHALL

Remnants – or more importantly, the cultural frames around remnants – have to look good from the outside in.

This stuff is old hat for green planners. But many remnants are cared for by people with backgrounds in ecology, not design, and ecologists traditionally argue that knowledge beats presentation. In reality, we need both.

Framing the future

If framing is so important, why are photos of well-presented (or any) patches so rare in grassland books? Why did we ecologists focus on landscape and plant scales, and avoid the framed patch, the packaged remnant?

There weren't many reserves when the first books were written. Most patches had a tenuous future and sagging fences, if any. It's no surprise that we avoided the edges and snapped plants and landscapes instead.

We can't use that excuse any more. In recent decades, grassland

conservationists have made many fantastic wins (and suffered many losses). We have fewer remnants now, but more patches are managed for conservation than ever before. The best remnants provide stellar examples for a new generation of grassland guides, the first of which is about to hit the shelves.

Start with the Grasslands: Design Guidelines to Support Native Grasslands in Urban Areas is a wonderful book written by Adrian Marshall and published by the VNPA. The VNPA is seeking feedback on the draft, so please download it (for free) and enjoy it.

In my view *Start with the Grasslands* is the most innovative and ground-breaking book on urban grassland conservation ever produced in Australia. Most of the content is relevant to any fragmented ecosystem, so if you live near a remnant forest, salt-marsh or heathland, check it out. If you work in conservation planning, you'll enjoy it and learn something new, no matter where you live. • PW

Eugene von Guérard, View of the Gippsland Alps from Bushy Park on the River Avon. In the past, native grasslands have been presented either in sweeping views like this, or by individual plants. But remnants are also important.



IMAGE FROM COMMONSWIKIMEDIA.ORG

Interpretive signs help explain the value and importance of native grasslands, here at Evans St, Sunbury.

Start with the grasslands

PHOTO: ADRIAN MARSHALL

Design guidelines to support native grasslands in urban areas

ADRIAN MARSHALL IS A LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT, WRITER AND EDITOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. HE IS DEVELOPING A GRASSLANDS MANAGEMENT GUIDE, AN IPHONE GRASSLANDS APP AND AN EXPANDED SECOND EDITION OF THE VNPA'S POPULAR FIELD GUIDE *PLAINS WANDERING*.

Our few remaining good-quality native grasslands, a number of which are on Melbourne's western fringe, are under increasing pressure, particularly as the city expands and our population grows.

Remnant grasslands in urban situations are often subject to dumping, weed invasion, 'hooning' and dramatic changes in condition, such as alterations to the natural hydrology. But good design can help!

The new VNPA online guide *Start with the Grasslands* explains how, through strategic planning and design, grasslands can be successfully incorporated into new urban and other developments to maintain and allow landscape connectivity, and to ensure that the impacts of surrounding land-uses on grasslands are minimised.

At the suburban scale, the guide shows how design can be used to promote biodiversity and integration with the community, to show people care, and to make these landscapes more attractive, inviting, engaging and educational.

People need to physically get into grasslands to see what's really going on. They're like rainforests, but in miniature; or like a reef, where you

have to dive in to 'see' and appreciate the environment. Once people do see, they're on the way to becoming the future stewards of these precious landscapes.

Start with the Grasslands, which has been produced in collaboration with the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, also takes what landscape architects, ecologists and on-ground staff have to say, puts forward design guidelines that help make maintenance easier, cheaper and more effective, and offers practical advice on issues such as minimising the impact of weeds and excess nutrient runoff from surrounding land.

Start with the Grasslands has been developed to assist professionals, land managers, Friends groups and all those working in the areas of design, planning and management of grasslands. • PW

The VNPA wishes to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of Adrian Marshall, who was largely responsible for producing *Start with the Grasslands*, with the support and collaboration of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, Victorian Chapter environment group. For more information see www.aila.org.au/victoria



A new sign of intention to care

In 96 colorful pages, Adrian Marshall describes lots of ways to conserve and improve grasslands in urban areas, and to maximize the environmental and social benefits that remnants provide. With over 100 color pictures, the book showcases many examples of great conservation design.

The book is structured around seven principles: (1) start with the grasslands (from the earliest stage of planning), (2) collaborate, (3) integrate, protect, connect, (4) design for maintenance, (5) communicate, (6) let people in, and (7) provide cues to care.

Adrian gives a pithy summary of cues to care – 'The more visible the grassland edge, the more visibly it should be cared for' – and emphasizes the importance of framing and good communication:

Start with the Grasslands reverses the unwritten 'keep out' code of earlier grassland books. It focuses directly on the points of contact between people and ecosystems: on edges, patches, paths and planning.

In doing so, it demonstrates how good design can improve nature conservation and human interactions with nature. If you want valuable information on design and planning, or just want to spend a leisurely hour gazing at beautiful pictures, it's a fantastic publication.

And if you do have a terrible garden, you'll see how to improve it. Focus on the packaging, not just the goodies within. • PW

Ian Lunt

Reclaiming a celestial garden

PARK PROTECTION CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMELLS** REPORTS ON PLANS TO RESTORE THE MOUNT BUFFALO CHALET (CLOSED SINCE 2007), AND ASKS WHO IT WILL BE FOR.

Mount Buffalo National Park was first proclaimed in the 1890s, in response to the notion that the mountain's remarkable natural values were a drawcard for tourists to the region.

At the time the plateau's only building, at Bents Lookout near Buffalo Gorge, was 'Manfield's Chalet', a small slab hut not unlike the traditional cattlemen's huts.

Dubbed the 'Garden of the Gods' the Buffalo Plateau was only reachable by horseback or on foot. Nevertheless, young 'Guide Alice' Manfield would entertain guests at her parents' cosy haunt, and introduce them to the many natural wonders of the plateau.

By 1910, a road led up the granite slopes to a grand new chalet, a single storey building that eventually grew into the Mount Buffalo Chalet we know today.

Over the ensuing years there have been a great many additions and transformations, and I can't help thinking that those 19th century promoters of the park might be dismayed by the hotch-potch of buildings now littering the area.

Thankfully, Parks Victoria has set out on a process to restore the Chalet to

something like its original size. Much of the complex of buildings at the rear of the chalet, many now uninhabitable, will be demolished if Heritage Victoria gives its approval.

The VNPA has lent its support to this process, but we are very worried that this will be simply a step towards a new tourism development.

We are also concerned that this will be driven by the tired-old idea that what parks need is facilities for big-spending tourists.

The park, the Chalet and Lake Catani campground are actually ideally suited to two visitor groups in particular: backpackers and school groups.

According to Tourism Victoria, around 260,000 backpackers currently come to Victoria each year, contributing some \$500 million to the Victorian economy.

Backpackers generally stay longer than other visitors, and have a "higher propensity to disperse into regional Victoria".

Tourism Victoria also says: "Anecdotal evidence suggests that backpackers are

more environmentally sensitive visitors, with travel patterns that are sustainable and less intrusive than other visitor segments".

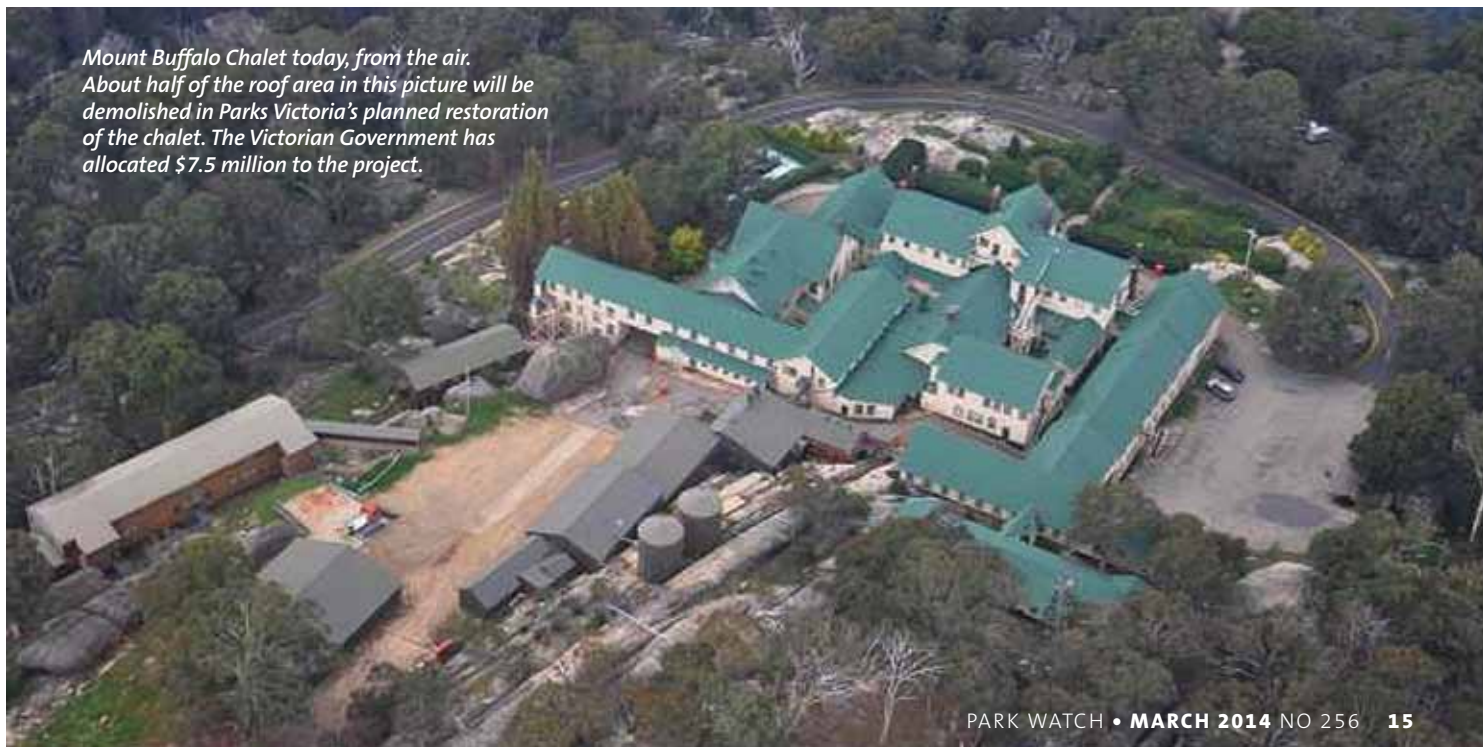
Amid concerns that many young people are not spending enough (or any) time in natural surroundings, the Chalet could also become very popular for schools and other groups as a base for environmental studies, adventure activities and recreation.

Mount Buffalo National Park is well served locally by outdoor adventure tour operators, offering abseiling, underground river tours, canoeing, cross-country skiing, snow-shoe shuffles, nature walks and the best selection of half day and day bushwalks in Victoria.

If a good visitor information centre were also incorporated in the revamped Chalet, the Victorian community and visitors from interstate and overseas could be very well served by one of our oldest, and most loved, national parks.

And what to do in the footprint of the old buildings? Restore the Garden of the Gods, of course! • PW

Mount Buffalo Chalet today, from the air. About half of the roof area in this picture will be demolished in Parks Victoria's planned restoration of the chalet. The Victorian Government has allocated \$7.5 million to the project.



Alpine grazing

How \$50,000 buys
\$1,000,000 ...
or more

Studies have shown that cattle grazing in the alps as a fire abatement practice is not justified on scientific grounds.

PHOTO: © MARY FERLIN

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S ALPINE GRAZING TRIAL IS AN EXPENSIVE FARCE, WASTING VALUABLE FIRE AND LAND MANAGEMENT FUNDS, SAYS PARK PROTECTION PROJECT CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMELLS**.

In the lead-up to the last State election, the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria (MCAV) donated \$50,000 to the Liberal-National coalition.

In turn they won a promise that cattle would be returned to the Alpine National Park, initially under a 'scientific trial' that would, it was claimed, confirm that cattle grazing in the park reduced fire risk in the region.

This leap by the cattlemen and their supporters into the world of science is an odd one, because they have spent the last few decades discrediting the considerable history of alpine science, even trying to harm the reputations of individual scientists.

They have scorned two very sensible peer-reviewed and published studies into the effectiveness of grazing in reducing fire in the high country. Importantly, unlike the current planned 'scientific trial', these studies both measured the impacts of cattle grazing on real bushfires.

Studies

The first study, after the 2002-03 alpine fire, looked at both the occurrence and the severity of fire along 108km of

transect lines in grazed and ungrazed areas of the Bogong High Plains. It found that:

"... whatever effects livestock grazing may have on vegetation cover ... they are likely to be highly localized, with such effects unlikely to translate into landscape-scale reduction of fire occurrence or severity. The use of livestock grazing in Australian alpine environments as a fire abatement practice is not justified on scientific grounds."

The cattlemen complained loudly that the high plains study didn't apply to the whole region, including the wooded lower slopes.

A second paper, however, analysed the considerable amount of remote sensing data (such as satellite imaging) across the alps for both the 2002-03 and 2006-07 fires. It found that:

"... crown scorch was strongly related to vegetation type but there was no evidence that cattle grazing reduced fire severity. There was some evidence that grazing could increase fire severity by possibly changing fuel arrays."

Neither of these very valuable and highly reputable published studies has been mentioned in government documentation justifying the need for the 'scientific trial' promised to the cattlemen.

And, needless to say, while the promised 'trial' can measure grass fuel loads in the immediate location of the study, it can't assess the long-term effects of grazing or the behaviour of a real bushfire in the alps.

And there is another scientific study the Victorian Government avoids mentioning.

In 2004 the then Federal Member for Gippsland, Peter McGauran, handballed \$3 million to the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre (CRC). The media release made it clear that in his opinion cattle grazing significantly minimised the chance of bushfires, and the Bushfire CRC's study would:

"... provide a clear indication to the State Government that grazing for fuel reduction needs to begin immediately to avoid another bushfire season like last year."

That was an odd statement, given that the 2002-03 fire he was referring to raged across the alps when cattle were still in the park. Nevertheless, the Bushfire CRC ran a study for three years, very like the current trial proposed by the Victorian government.

The study ended inconclusively three years later, when the money apparently ran out. Unfortunately no results have ever been published, but the Bushfire CRC's High Fire webpage says:



Botanist Maisie Fawcett (later Maisie Carr) second from left with cattlemen friends, probably in the 1940s.

From Maisie's diary

Maisie's ground-breaking research would confirm the considerable damage done by cattle in the high country. Now extracts from her diary expose some myths about the cattlemen's land management practices, particularly in relation to recent claims that they inherited Aboriginal burning practices.

Maisie's diary and letters are being donated to the State Library of Victoria.

The extract below is from 1947:

"Victor Wraith – Harrierville

"Big men – i.e. Wraiths and Treasures do not burn bush – regard fire as an enemy. Treasures do occasionally burn small patch of scrub, but super it heavily afterwards. In Dargo country fires are lit by small men with up to 100 cattle – these are the men who will duff cattle – they burn out of sheer spite towards bigger men.

"Asked Bill Parkes about this. He says people burn because they get flush of good green grass for the cattle. He admits that they do get grass but scrub too which necessitates further burning. He considers that burning ruins the bush, says it is a habit or mania with these cattle blokes to burn. Family convinced that cattle industry can be continued without burning. Fire is the lazy man's way of clearing his block. Litter and dead stuff is put there by nature to enrich the soil – if you burn it you lose it."

Diary and photo courtesy of Maisie's niece, Marion Manifold.

"... the impact of fire on the vegetation was able to be measured but the effects of grazing were much more gradual. Hence, the combined effects of fire and grazing may take decades to be fully apparent."

2010 election

Given that peer-reviewed published studies have demonstrated that alpine grazing hasn't reduced bushfires in the alps; given the absence of any tested evidence to the contrary; and given the decades of published scientific studies showing cattle grazing damages ecological systems in the Alpine NP, you might be forgiven for thinking the issue was dead and buried.

But there was an election brewing in 2010, and the independent member for Gippsland, Craig Ingram, had been a thorn in the side of the Liberal-National coalition. Was it the cattlemen's \$50,000 donation and their strong connection to the coalition, or was it simply political opportunism? Both, probably, and the coalition went to the election with a promise to the

East Gippsland electorate that it would save them from fire by putting cattle back in the Alpine NP, initially as a 'scientific' trial.

It's hard to estimate how much money has been spent trying to get this 'scientific' trial up and running. Initially (in December 2010, within a few weeks of taking office) the government sent cattle to six sites in the Alpine NP.

There were no scientists involved, and no design for the trial, and by the time highly paid consultants were sent in to work out where the cattle had wandered it was already April, the cattle were out and the consultants got caught in the snow.

Federal involvement

The then Federal Environment Minister Tony Burke, charged with protecting the National Heritage-listed Australian Alps, sensibly called a halt. But the somewhat jaded Victorian Government challenged the decision in a court case that proved embarrassingly unsuccessful and cost Victorians \$200,000.

The Victorian Government has now made a proposal to the new Federal Minister, Greg Hunt, for version 2 of its grazing trial. It's planned for the beautiful but remote Wonnangatta Valley: a relatively low-lying river flat that harbours half the known population of the Pale Golden Moths orchid, a State and Federally listed threatened species.

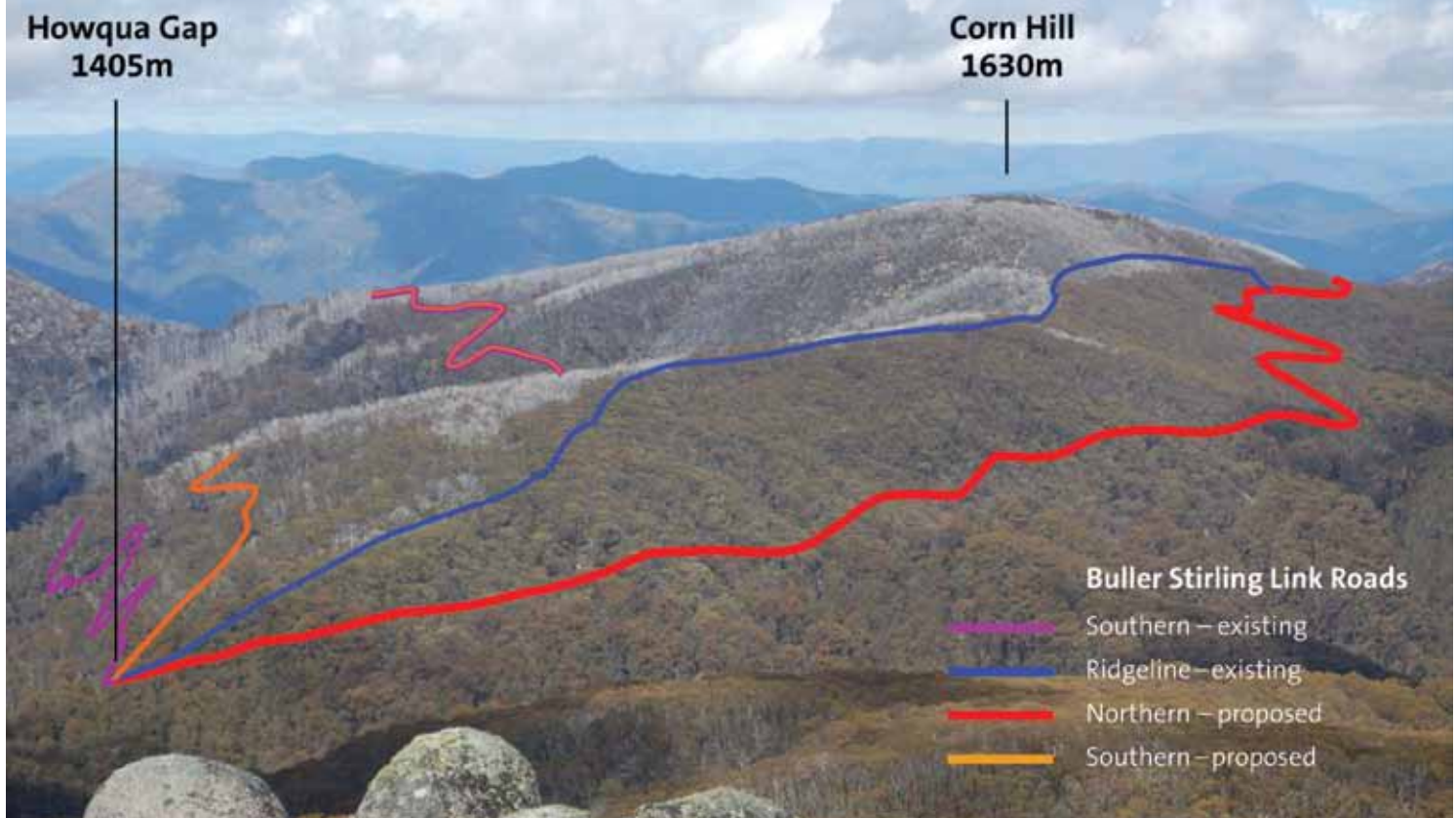
This time the government does at last have an 'experimental design', but it's only a first draft and scientists are still bizarrely absent. The design has no stated author at all!

Initially 60, then 300 cattle are planned for the valley, and though the Wonnangatta river flat is prime habitat for a number of threatened frogs and reptiles, no fauna survey has been done there.

The VNPA is currently preparing an estimate of the cost of implementing the State Government's promise to the cattlemen over the last three years, and it is heading past \$1 million.

It will certainly be a very considerable slice of scarce land management funds in Victoria. • PW

Visual impacts – viewed from Stirling false summit



Above: This is a composite image of Corn Hill showing existing and proposed roads connecting Picnic Table (Mt Buller) and Howqua Gap (Mt Stirling). The photographs were taken from the False Summit of Mt Stirling.

Stirling link road objection continues

VNPA HON. SECRETARY **CHARLES STREET** WARNS OF A RENEWED ROAD PROPOSAL AT MT STIRLING.

In 2008, the Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board applied to build a road from Mt Buller to Mt Stirling, through old growth alpine forest, across the north face of Corn Hill. The VNPA and others stopped it at the time, but now the proposal has been revived. We objected again in 2013.

The principal reason given for building the road is as an emergency access route, especially for bushfires. There seems no logic in this because



people would be driven from the fire protection facilities on Mt Buller through a forest to a forest.

There is already another road around the south side of Corn Hill. It was burned in the bushfire of 2006-07. No road across Corn Hill is safe in the event of alpine bushfire.

We believe the real reason for the road is to make it easier to build accommodation on Mt Stirling, after a simple amendment to the Planning

Scheme. A meeting we had with the alpine authorities, and subsequent exchanges of documents, did not resolve any of our concerns.

This campaign is not just about saving old-growth alpine forest. It is about saving a whole mountain. The VNPA endorses the 2008 review by the State Services Authority, which recommended that Mt Stirling be demerged from Mt Buller and managed by Parks Victoria. • PW

Victoria's coastal nature under threat

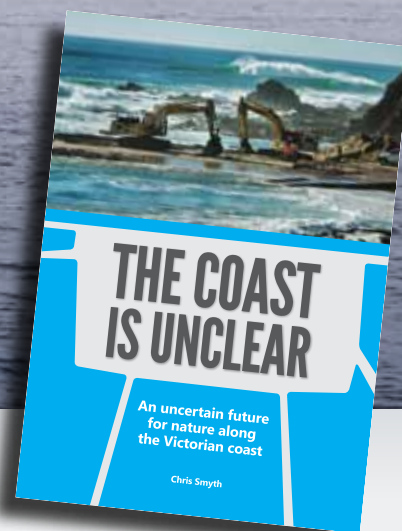


PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANT CHRIS SMYTH IS THE AUTHOR OF THE RECENT VNPA REPORT *THE COAST IS UNCLEAR*. HE SUMMARISES THE REPORT BELOW; THE FULL REPORT IS ON THE VNPA WEBSITE.

Zoom into Victoria. Pan left. Locate Nelson. Zoom in. Zoom out. Pan right. Find Port Campbell. Zoom in. Zoom out. Pan right again. Identify Bells Beach. Zoom in. Zoom out.

Dunes. Roads. Cliffs. Towns. Scrublands. Industry. Wetlands. Ports. Estuaries. Cities. Grasslands. Clubhouses. Woodlands. Cars and car parks. Forests. Breakwaters. Marshes. Marinas. Shrublands. Walls. Heathlands. Tracks.

These are some of the natural and social infrastructure features seen on a virtual journey along the Victorian coast using *Google Earth*, one of the tools used in research for the VNPA's report, *The coast is unclear*, which focuses on the future of Victoria's coastal nature.

Google Earth and vegetation and planning scheme maps, data on current and historical vegetation coverage, strategic planning documents, historical research, media stories and interviews provided the material for the report's narrative.

The key finding is that although Victoria's coastal nature is diverse, and in many places contained within

protected areas, it is under enormous pressure from climate change and from development fed by population growth.

Even where there are protected areas on the coast, they are often long and narrow, accentuating the 'edge effects' from adjoining land uses and leading to habitat loss, pest invasions and indiscriminate access.

'Long and narrow' also describes coastal Crown Land reserves, the summer playground for many Victorians and visitors. These reserves are often only a few metres wide, squeezed between a road and the water's edge, littered with infrastructure and swamped by urban, industrial and tourist development.

The coast is unclear identifies 95 ecological vegetation classes as being within 500 metres of the coast, of which 69 are either 'Endangered' or 'Vulnerable' in at least one of the bioregions in which they occur.

Of the ten bioregions on the coast, the decline of coastal nature is most pronounced on the Warrnambool Plain (between Portland and Princetown), the Otway Plain (largely from Aireys

Inlet to Altona) and the Gippsland Plain (from eastern Melbourne to the Gippsland Lakes).

With Victoria entering a new phase of coastal development, including residential, tourism, industrial and port expansion, the decline in coastal nature is likely to continue, and possibly accelerate following recent amendments to coastal planning zones and native vegetation clearing regulations, and with proposals for commercial tourism development in coastal national parks.

A click away on *Google Earth* are examples of where these issues are already impacting on the Victorian coast. They include the potential loss (at Port Fairy) of the most important Australian habitat for Latham's Snipe, and urban encroachment on the remnant Ramsar wetlands of the Bellarine Peninsula.

At Bells Beach, internationally iconic surfing status brings with it mounting visitor pressure, including daily visits by touring buses and up to 5,000 spectators jostling for a spot to watch surfers battle the waves at the Easter Rip Curl Pro surfing event.

Continued on page 22



1. SOUTH WEST CORNER

SA Border to Narrawong

- **Industrialisation of the coast – wind turbines and other industry, e.g. Alcoa aluminum smelter, Pacific Hydro Portland wind project.**
- Pressure from adjoining agricultural land use on coastal nature e.g. wetland drainage west of Glenelg River mouth.
- **Coastal developments – e.g. Narrawong.**
- Altered coastal processes from Portland Harbour led to erosion of Dutton Way Beach, roads and houses, with the prospect of more houses at risk as housing development continues.

2. SHIPWRECK COAST

Yambuk to Princetown

- **Coastal development threatening species.**
- Threat of large-scale tourism developments in and adjoining conservation reserves e.g. Shipwreck Coast Master Plan and Port Campbell National Park.
- **Development pressure on remaining wetlands e.g. Japanese Snipe at Port Fairy, biodiesel plant at Merri Wetlands.**
- Severe fragmentation of habitats pressuring threatened plants and animals e.g. Yambuk to Port Fairy.
- **Climate change impacts – sea level rise and coastal erosion e.g. East Beach, Port Fairy.**

3. SURFCOAST Apollo Bay to Torquay

- **Population growth and associated coastal development and tourism pressure, e.g. expansion of Geelong towards Torquay.**
- Continued erosion of the values of Bells Beach and surrounds.
- **Major upgrade of Great Ocean Road.**

4. MELBOURNE'S TWO BAYS & PENINSULAS

- **Major Port e.g. Bay West (western Port Phillip Bay) & Port of Hastings expansion in Western Port.**
- Ongoing pressure on remnant coastal nature from urban development and recreational activity e.g. Tootgarook Swamp.
- **Threats to Ramsar sites on the western shoreline of Port Phillip Bay (housing development), Bellarine Peninsula (extensive urbanisation) and Western Port (port expansion, potential oil spills and increased shipping traffic).**
- Loss of habitat in and around Western Port.
- **Climate change: sea level rise, storm surges, erosion and inundation.**

5. BASS COAST

- **Intensification of land use in rural areas adjacent to the coast e.g. tourism development; pressure to increase the size of coastal towns e.g. Cape Paterson ecovillage.**
- Industrialisation of the coast e.g. desalination plant.

6. SOUTH GIPPSLAND

Inverloch to Wilsons Prom & Corners Inlet

- **Intensification of land use in rural areas adjacent to the coast e.g. subdivision into lifestyle allotments behind Cape Liptrap Coastal Park.**
- Port expansion of Port Anthony.
- **Invasive weeds e.g. Spartina in Anderson Inlet.**
- Unsustainable Pipi harvesting along Venus Bay.
- **Visitation pressure on beach-nesting seabirds e.g. hooded plover.**
- Altered coastal processes e.g. levee banks on edges of Anderson Inlet, Corner Inlet.



6

7

8

7. NINETY-MILE BEACH & GIPPSLAND LAKES

- **Major port proposal at McGauran's Beach**
- Lakes turning marine from reduced freshwater flows & increased saltwater intrusion from artificially deepened entrance.
- **Climate change – sea level rise, erosion & inundation of large areas potentially breaching Ninety-mile Beach & causing new entrance to the lakes.**

8. EAST GIPPSLAND

- **Bastion Point boat harbor development destroying coastal habitat.**
- Prescribed burning of fragile remnant habitat at Red Bluff, Lake Tyers Beach.

Spectators at Bells Beach surfing events have an impact on the fragile coastal environment.



PHOTO: COURTESY DARREN NOYES-BROWN

Counting fish Reef Watch style



PHOTO: JARROD BOORD

The 2013 Great Victorian Fish Count was another huge success. Divers and snorkellers counted fish at over 25 sites across the state, though our no-take marine protected areas once again shone in overall fish abundance and diversity.

The count collects valuable information about the distribution of a number of species both inside and outside marine national parks and marine sanctuaries.

A preliminary look at the count shows that Blue-throat Wrasse were seen in high numbers, followed by Zebra Fish, Scalyfin, Magpie Perch and Old Wife.

There were good numbers of Weedy Seadragons at Flinders Pier and a few other locations. However, the Blue Groper stole the show again, the Western variety being spotted at Barwon Bluff MS and the Eastern at Bunurong MNP.

A detailed wrap-up of the count will be released later in March, so stay tuned – but in the meantime, take the plunge while the water's still warm ish!

Wendy Roberts, Simon Branigan

BACKGROUND PHOTO: © MARY FERLIN

VICTORIA'S COASTAL NATURE UNDER THREAT



PHOTO: MATT RUCHEL

The port of Hastings is fairly small at present, but the State Government is planning major developments there.



PHOTO: CLIVE MINTON

Migratory Red-necked Stints at Western Port. The bay is an important Ramsar-listed wading bird habitat.

Continued from page 19

Although by Easter's end there is just one male and one female surfing champion, 'Bells' is fortunate in that throughout the year it has many champions in the recreational surfing community working to restore and protect it.

They are planting shrubs, pulling weeds and advocating management that will protect the site's marine and coastal nature along with the cultural values of both Traditional Owners and recreational surfers.

But their work is not yet done, as the local council and commercial and event interests have yet to embrace that essential 'protection' concept.

Further east, the shallow waters and low-lying shoreline of Western Port exhibit most of the impacts that result from coastal and catchment development.

In the 1960s, then premier Henry Bolte dreamt of it becoming the Ruhr of Victoria, an industrial powerhouse and major shipping port. His dreams may soon be realised if the current Coalition government presses ahead with its plans to expand the Port of Hastings.

Under the plans, shipping traffic is predicted to increase from the current 100 ships per year to 3,000. This will expose Western Port's fragile marine and coastal environment – including

the Phillip Island Nature Parks, home to a Little Penguin colony that is Victoria's most visited tourist attraction, and French Island Marine National Park – to major loss of habitats and damage from oil spills.

Western Port is one of more than 100 bays and estuaries along the Victorian coast that are critical to migratory fish and birds and for commercial and recreational fishing, and are the lifeblood of coastal communities. They are under enormous pressure from population growth, changes in catchment land use, landfill, urban encroachment, declining water quality, loss of habitat, divided agency responsibilities and a general lack of formal protection.

Climate change will also impact on these estuaries and other low-lying coastal areas. Increased flooding and salinity, erosion of barrier dunes, inundation from storm surges, and the removal of beaches, sand dunes, saltmarshes and mangroves could lead to the collapse of ecosystems, a major redistribution of coastal plants and animals, and the breaching of some barrier systems such as the Gippsland Lakes.

Victoria's overly complex and disintegrated framework for coastal planning, protection and management

is simply not up to the task of dealing with these issues.

To maintain, protect and enhance coastal nature, *The coast is unclear* makes more than 150 bioregion-specific and statewide recommendations. They include proposals for new and expanded protected areas, strengthened and consistent application of planning scheme tools, and the merging of committees of management.

Enhancing the protection, maintenance and restoration of coastal nature will require collaborative, well-planned, targeted and adequately resourced actions involving governments, private landowners, public land managers and the community.

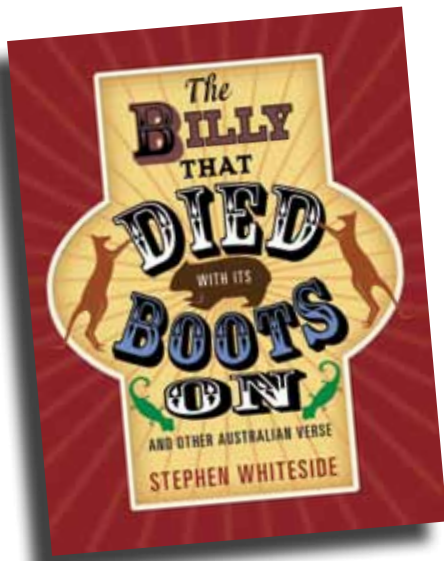
And these actions will need underpinning by the integrated coastal planning, protection and management framework flowing from the report's recommended legislative and institutional reforms, which include the establishment of a Marine and Coastal Authority for Victoria.

Let's hope that in ten years' time, users of *Google Earth* will see that Victoria is turning the tide on the decline of its coastal nature, and that a better future for the coast is clear. • PW

For the full report see
www.reports.vnppa.org.au

WALKING THROUGH A CLOUD

I strolled right through a cloud today, while walking with my dog.
All around me everywhere lay thick and spooky fog.
Clouds are just like fog, of course, at least that's what I've found,
And fog is nothing more than cloud that's lying on the ground!



POSSUMS

There's rustling in the leaves above,
And breathing, too, I think.
An acorn lands upon the shed,
And makes a tinny "plink".



Children's poetry and the great outdoors

MELBOURNE GP AND KEEN SAILOR **STEPHEN WHITESIDE** HAS BEEN WRITING RHYMING VERSE FOR BOTH ADULTS AND CHILDREN FOR MANY YEARS. HIS POEMS ARE WRITTEN TO BE RECITED, OR READ ALOUD.

When I was a boy, my father read me the poems of Banjo Paterson. I loved their cheek, their bounce, their love of life, and their celebration of the Australian bush.

My father had knocked around Australia a bit himself as a lad, and it rubbed off on me. He also introduced me to the Australian bush – trout fishing on the Howqua River, skiing at Mt Buller and Mt Hotham, camping, etc.

I fell in love with the romance of campfire storytelling, and with Australia's rich indigenous flora, fauna, and wide open spaces.

As a young man I visited the Victorian high country frequently. Amongst other feats, I climbed Victoria's highest mountain, Mount Bogong, once a year for nine consecutive years. I found that I never felt more truly myself than when I was in that environment. An extraordinary feeling of goodwill – euphoria, even – washed over me.

It was also around this time that I discovered the poetry of C. J. Dennis. I loved him even more than Banjo Paterson, if that were possible. His characters were more richly drawn, his rhyme schemes

more inventive, and his range of subject matter more diverse.

What particularly enthralled me was that Dennis had written a wonderful collection of poetry for children, 'Book for Kids'. This book has shone like a beacon for me in my life, guiding me safely down through the years.

In 1976, at the age of 21, I started writing my own poetry. In the mid 80s I also started attending, and performing at, folk festivals. I strove – with mixed results – to fashion myself as a 'modern day troubadour'.

I had always had it in mind that one day I would write for children, and in 1990 I finally found the confidence to begin doing so. I attended a conference where a welcome stranger outlined a strategy whereby I might eventually persuade a publisher to accept a collection of my poetry for children – my own 'Book for Kids'.

All of this brings me to the purpose of this article, which is to announce to the world at large that in May this year – 24 years on – a publisher, Walker Books Australia, will indeed publish a collection of my poetry

for children, 'The Billy That Died With Its Boots On' and Other Australian Verse.

It contains about 60 poems, 15 of which have been beautifully illustrated with paper cut designs by first time book illustrator Lauren Merrick, and covers a wide range of themes from the mountains to the ocean, from the house and garden to the street, and from domestic dogs to wild animals and birds.

There are also poems about Australian heroes (young Ned Kelly, Simpson and his donkey), the weather, Christmas and dinosaurs. There's even a poem about Martians!

The poems are primarily directed to children in Grades 5 and 6, but I am sure younger children (and adults!) will also enjoy many of the poems in the book. Indeed, I think it is an ideal book for grandparents to share with their grandchildren.

As much as anything else, the book is my way of trying to keep alive in the next generation of Australians a love of the bush, a love of all things wild and, perhaps above all, a love of storytelling. • PW

Search for *The Billy That Died With Its Boots On* at www.walkerbooks.com.au/Books



More wildlife for the Wimmera?

NEW VNPA NATUREWATCH
COORDINATOR **CHRISTINE
CONNELLY** AND CONSULTANT
SCIENTIST **RICHARD LOYN** REPORT
ON LAST YEAR'S TRIAL OF THE
'CAUGHT ON CAMERA' PROJECT
IN THE HINDMARSH AREA.

'Caught on Camera' involves working with local community groups and scientists to establish community-based monitoring of fauna, using motion-sensing cameras.

In 2013, after successfully establishing a Caught on Camera project in the Wombat State Forest and Bunyip State Park, the NatureWatch team expanded the project's scope and ran a trial in the Wimmera region.

The trial, a collaboration between the VNPA and the Hindmarsh Landcare Network (HLN), was designed to find out what wildlife species are using the areas revegetated under Project Hindmarsh. Many VNPA members and friends have been involved in the annual Hindmarsh planting weekends.

The Wimmera region has been heavily cleared for agriculture and little remnant habitat remains.

Project Hindmarsh has been very successful at helping to revegetate and restore native vegetation on local landowners' properties. However, we don't really know what animals are using the revegetation as habitat.

The Caught on Camera project used camera-trapping to detect wildlife (ground-dwelling mammals and some birds) on selected revegetated properties, and matched benchmarks of cleared land and remnant vegetation.

Local landowners welcomed and supported the project, and five properties were monitored:



PHOTO COURTESY NATUREWATCH

- Mali Dunes, Yanac (MD) – Bernie Fox and Sue Hayman-Fox
- Snape Reserve, Dimboola (SN) – Trust for Nature, Sue and Lindsay Smith
- Tarrangaw, Jeparit (TG) – Mick and Sue Gawith
- Never Never, Gerang Gerung (NN) – Karen Werner
- Gumbinnen, Glenlee (GL) – Phil Henseleit

Altogether 3467 survey images were taken from 629 camera days of camera trapping, and 2976 images of fauna were obtained. The images featured three species of native mammals, four of introduced mammals and 11 native bird species.

Although there is not yet enough data to make definitive inferences, the project revealed some encouraging signs, including:

- Western Grey Kangaroos made substantial use of revegetation
- Common Brushtail Possums were found in revegetation, despite their need for tree hollows which are not expected to develop in planted trees for many decades
- Echidnas, Common Bronzewing and Painted Button-quail were only detected in revegetation, although mostly in low numbers. These woodland species would usually be expected in remnant vegetation, but are clearly making use of the new habitats offered by revegetation. Common Bronzewing and Painted Button-quail are both known to feed on wattle seeds, and these plants are well represented in the revegetation

- White-winged Choughs and White-browed Babbler were both found feeding in revegetation, as well as in remnant vegetation. These are both woodland species whose habitats were greatly reduced by agricultural clearing in the Wimmera.

Habitat assessments showed that revegetation was intermediate in structure between cleared land and remnant vegetation.

The value of revegetation can be expected to increase over time as structural and floristic diversity of habitat develop. This should produce corresponding changes in wildlife populations.

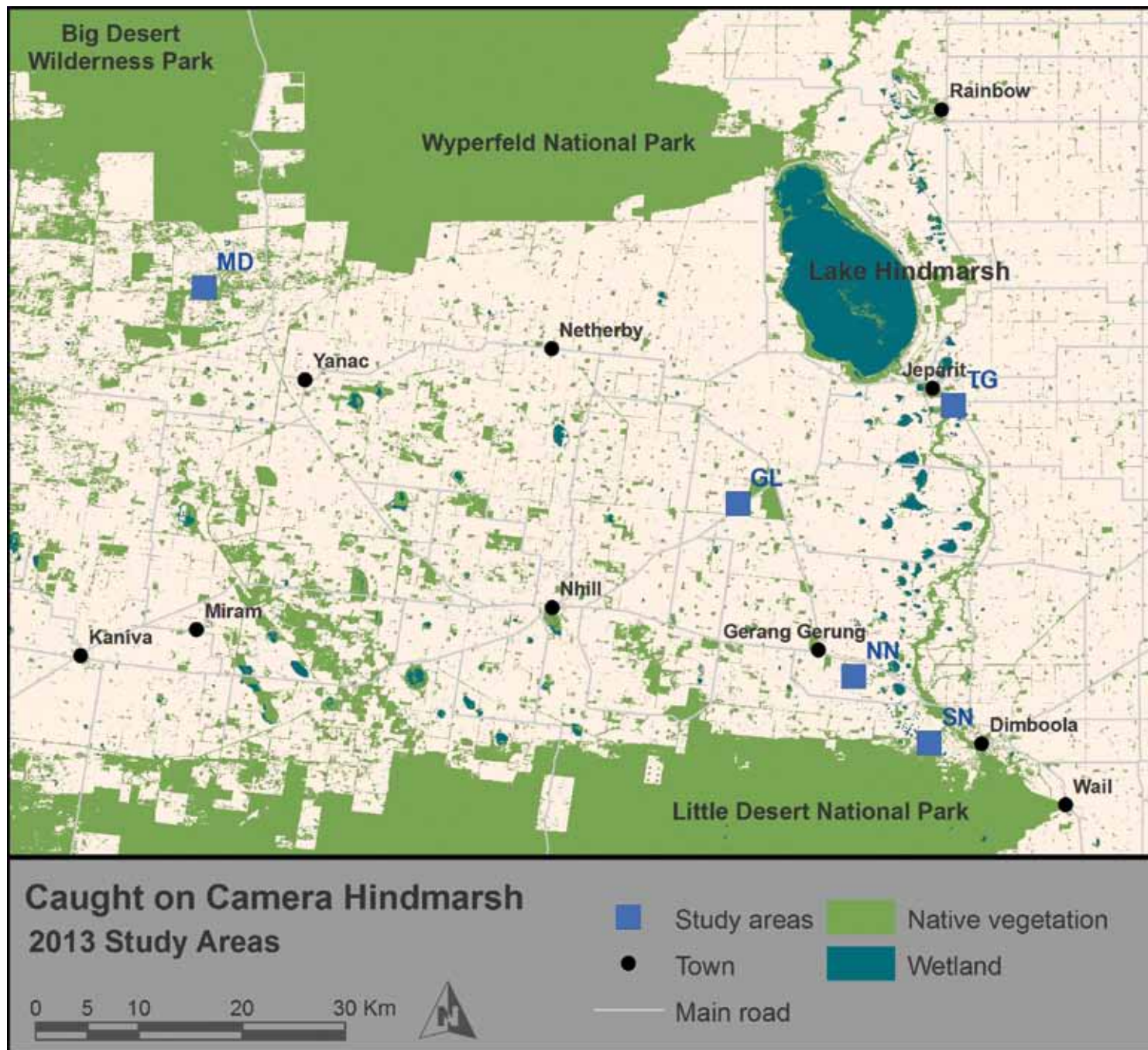
NatureWatch volunteers and local HLN staff worked together on the project, helping to establish the study design and objectives, carrying out camera-monitoring activities and identifying the fauna species in the images.

The trial was very successful and the team is looking forward to running the project again in 2014, expanding the scope to include new properties in the study design, and thus increasing our chances of 'catching' some of the rare small mammals we are hoping to find.

We plan to establish Caught on Camera Hindmarsh as a long-term monitoring project to explore the value of revegetation on private property for wildlife, and monitor how this develops over time.

A detailed report on the project has just been released and is available on the VNPA website.

NatureWatch is always looking for new volunteers, so if you'd like to get involved, please visit the NatureWatch webpage to find out more! Or phone the VNPA. • **PW**



Native mammals

Western Grey Kangaroo
Short-beaked Echidna
Common Brushtail Possum

Exotic mammals

European Hare
European Rabbit
Red Fox
Feral Cat

Native birds

Emu
Malleefowl
Painted Button-quail
Common Bronzewing
White-browed Babbler
Australian Magpie
Grey Currawong
Willie Wagtail
Raven sp.
White-winged Chough
Southern Scrub-robin

Getting involved

There's plenty of opportunities to get involved with NatureWatch in 2014!

Upcoming activities are:

- March-June: Caught on Camera, Wombat State Forest
- April: Grass Tree monitoring, Brisbane Ranges NP
- May-July: Caught on Camera, Hindmarsh

Email christinec@vnpa.org.au for more information, or phone 9341 6510 (Thursday and Friday).

"It's great to see the growing community interest in monitoring and finding out how wildlife responds as we help improve the habitat.

And just as revegetation takes many years to develop, so does monitoring. The important thing with both is to get started! It's good to see we've taken that first step with the Hindmarsh Landcare Network."

Richard Loyn



A Western Grey Kangaroo and two choughs investigate a bait station and camera.



PHOTOS COURTESY NATUREWATCH



FOSSICKERS *get* FOSSICKED

Above: This gravel pile in Reedy Creek, Chiltern Mt Pilot NP, looks innocent enough, but it's actually the result of prospectors digging up the creek bed and washing it through a sluice, using pumped water. VEAC's report pointed out that this activity causes great damage to the structure of creek beds and, in turn, the habitat of streambed fauna.

Right: A powered pump used to wash creek-bed gravel through a sluice. The Victorian Government has said that this activity will no longer be allowed in any national parks.

When the Victorian government asked the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to investigate prospecting in national and state parks, the terms of reference were heavily loaded in the prospectors' favour.

The question wasn't *whether* prospecting should be allowed in parks.

Rather, VEAC was asked to recommend *where* prospecting should take place within eight national parks and one state park where it had previously been banned.

Prospectors, who were already allowed to dig up most parks in the goldfields area of Central Victoria, could potentially move into the Alpine, Baw Baw, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Lake Eildon, Lind, Mitchell River and Yarra Ranges national parks, and Lerderderg State Park.

The inquiry was an apparent victory for Victoria's Prospectors and Miners Association, which had worked behind closed doors to convince the state government that their activities were harmless.

The VEAC investigation, despite being one of the shortest ever (there wasn't even time for a draft report), has nevertheless acted responsibly.

It looked squarely at the impacts of prospecting and fossicking, and whether the activity is compatible with the strong nature conservation objectives of national and state park management.

VEAC received 950 submissions (150 of which were from interstate or overseas!), established a Community Reference Group (the VNPA was represented), conducted site visits to the new parks as well as parks where prospecting was already allowed, and commissioned a scientific review of the likely impacts of prospecting in streams.

The review found that there were significant risks associated with the dispersal of arsenic and mercury deposits from historic mining activities.

There was also the clear potential to spread pathogens such as *Phyophthera* and chytrid fungus and, potentially, myrtle rust.

It also found that significant disturbance of stream beds caused real ecological impacts, including turbidity and the disruption of streambed 'armouring' – the natural protective hardening of a streambed surface – which in turn affects the stability of streams.

Under its terms of reference, VEAC was obliged to recommend prospecting in some new parks, but extended this to a total of 22,339 hectares in the

Alpine and Eildon national parks and Lerderderg State Park, a considerable win for the prospectors but nothing like what they had hoped for.

Errinundra, Baw Baw, Croajingolong, Lind, Mitchell River and Yarra Ranges national parks would thankfully remain out of bounds.

The Victorian government has now accepted these recommendations, and also acted on some of the other issues raised by VEAC.

Prospectors who currently use powered pumps to help sluice mega-shovelfuls of gravel from streambeds will no longer be able to do that in *any* national park, including those goldfields parks where it has been happening for many years.

Reedy Creek in Chiltern Mount Pilot National Park will be one place to benefit greatly from that decision.

The government has also asked for more vigilant control of prospecting and, in one year's time, an assessment of prospecting impacts in parks generally.

The VNPA has long been aware of the considerable damage prospectors do in parks, indeed in many other places across the state, and it is high time a light was shone on these practices.

Somewhat ironically, the prospectors have unwittingly shone that light on themselves. • PW





Spend Easter in a botanical wonderland

"This is the most diverse area of temperate forest I know of on Earth."

Professor David Bellamy

PHOTO: JILL REDWOOD

Exploring a gully at Goongerah.

'Forests Forever' Easter ecology camp, East Gippsland: it's still on! 18-21 April.

How about spending Easter in the heart of SE Australia's botanical wonderland?

Stretching in an unbroken chain from the ocean to the Alps, East Gippsland's forests are among some of the most ancient and beautiful in the world.

This diverse corner of Australia supports a huge variety of forest types and ecosystems. They store carbon and moderate climate, produce clean water in abundance and of course provide critical habitat for many of Victoria's endangered wildlife.

For decades they have been clearfelled, and the timber mostly woodchipped for export to overseas paper factories.

But this controversial industry, although still operating, is now at a turning point.

Environmental campaigns, legal challenges and changing consumer markets are now all impacting to

transition the woodchip industry out of our native forests and into plantations.

This Easter, VNPA and Environment East Gippsland will be hosting the 2014 Forests Forever ecology camp, where you can explore and learn about these magnificent forests and their history, both before and after European arrival.

You'll be awed by the beauty and complexity of the forests, their antiquity and the size of the remaining giants.

A range of daily activities will be on offer. Expert biologists and walk leaders will guide short and long drives and walks into the forests and rainforests. In the evenings, camp by the Brodribb River beneath peppermint and manna gums, enjoy wholesome homemade soups, spotlight for nightlife or take part in evening botanical entertainment and learn how to save the forests from your own home. And more! • **PW**

Bring camping gear, friends, food and transport, maybe fuel as well – the nearest fuel is 70km away. Please leave pets at home.

Full camp cost: \$60 adults

\$40 concession & teens under 13s free.

Daily cost: \$25 adults

\$15 concession & teens under 13s free.

Email: forestsforever@eastgippsland.net.au
Info: www.eastgippsland.net.au/forestsforever
Phone: Jill Redwood on (03) 5154 0145

Organised by VNPA and Environment East Gippsland.

All proceeds go to help the campaign to save these forests.

Note: extensive areas around Goongerah were burnt in the February fires, but at this stage the camp is still going ahead. It is a great opportunity to find out about the fires and their effects and management. Much of the Errinundra Plateau, and other areas, remain unburnt.

Macalister Creek area along lighthouse track in November 2013, showing restoration after fire and flood.

Restoring the Prom's tracks

PHOTO: MIKE FELLER

VNPA VOLUNTEER **EVELYN FELLER** AND HUSBAND MIKE, A VNPA COUNCILLOR, LIVE AT HEALESVILLE AND ARE ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN LOCAL AND STATEWIDE CONSERVATION ISSUES.

After an inspiring day at the 'Hands off Parks!' event at the Prom last November, my husband Mike and I looked forward to spending the rest of the Cup weekend walking the Sealers, Refuge and Waterloo circuit.

It had been too long since we had done the circuit, and like many people we eagerly looked forward to the reopening of the Sealers track after its trashing by the deluge of March 2011. It was reopened in June 2013.

From the shuttle bus to Telegraph Saddle we saw examples of what would become our enduring memories of this trip – the enormous scale of the devastation caused by the storm, and the incredible efforts of Parks Victoria, VicRoads, contractors and volunteers to restore access to the Prom's much-loved and much-visited areas.

On 22 March 2011 the Prom received more than 370mm of rain in just 24 hours. With severe flooding at Tidal River and the Darby Bridge partly destroyed, over 400 campers had to be rescued in a major air evacuation.

Torrents of water and debris scoured gullies down to the bedrock. Mt Oberon and other Prom mountains still have huge scars, and the Prom entrance road needed extensive stabilisation and rebuilding.

As we headed along the Sealers Cove track, with foggy drizzle through Windy Saddle, we were continually impressed by the work that had been done to rehabilitate the track – as well as the natural recovery of the vegetation.

There had been over 20 major landslides on Sealers Track. We saw where huge boulders suspended above the track had had to be removed or stabilised, and where other boulders had been placed in spots where the track had been gouged out.

As well, there had been track hardening to reduce future erosion, re-routing of the trail around gullies, construction of sturdy new bridges and a lot of step building.

It was obvious that much of this work was done under difficult and hazardous conditions. You can see a You Tube video of some of the work by checking Wilsons Prom Parks Recovery Update 2012.

The extensive boardwalk over Sealers Creek was also damaged by the flood waters and had been repaired.

The hike around the beaches from Sealers to Refuge and Waterloo was still as beautiful as we remembered. And we were impressed by the number of family groups hiking and camping. Hopefully another generation of Prom lovers and

children without a 'nature deficit' will result from their experiences here.

The hard work by Parks Victoria to restore the trail will help ensure these opportunities are available.

We returned to Telegraph Saddle by the jeep track. Macalister Creek, just before you start the climb to the Saddle, was a stark example of how keeping the park accessible is a work in progress.

This area was severely burned by fires in 2005 but had managed to recover. Then this natural recovery was obliterated by the flood. Rocks have now been placed along the creek to help prevent future damage.

In 2011-12 the state budget allocated over \$13 million dollars to flood recovery work, although a significant portion of this went to settling insurance claims.

We learned that more than 200 Prom sites and facilities had been damaged. Some \$600,000 was spent on rehabilitating the Sealers Cove track alone.

Parks Victoria and its associates are to be applauded for their fire and flood restoration efforts across the State. We have seen many such good examples in parks recently, such as at the Zumsteins area of Grampians NP and in Kinglake and Yarra Ranges national parks. • PW



Morwell National Park

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

GEOFF DURHAM VISITED THIS LITTLE-KNOWN PARK RECENTLY
AND FOUND BEAUTIFUL AND VARIED FOREST AND PLEASANT WALKS.

The Strzelecki Ranges, or South Gippsland Hills, have also been called 'The Heartbreak Hills', and with good reason.

W. S. Noble in *A new future for the Heartbreak Hills* (1996) says that they have been "the site of some of the grimmest struggles Australian pioneers ever faced in their attempts to settle the country ... tragic stories of failure, as men and women broke themselves in their battle with a hostile environment".

Noble describes the ranges as "a broken tangle of hills and razor-backed spurs" and says "the eastern ranges seem to follow no pattern as they twist and turn, falling away in slopes of up to 40 degrees".

The VNPA's third Nature Conservation Review (2001) drew attention to complex plantation, native forest and land tenure issues and described the eastern Strzelecki Ranges as "a mosaic of unlogged native forest, logged and replanted native forest, advanced native

regrowth on old farms and planted Mountain Ash in both native forest and abandoned farmland. Mingled with this, largely on the lower slopes, are extensive plantations of introduced pine".

The Review recommended "establishment of a major park system in the Strzelecki Ranges to protect the remaining wet and damp eucalypt forests and cool temperate rainforests of the region".

Only three small fragments of the Strzeleckis are reserved under the National Parks Act at present: Mt Worth State Park (1040 ha) in the west, Tarra-Bulga National Park (2015 ha) in the east, and Morwell National Park (565 ha) in between. All three parks arose out of local community concerns and lobbying.

History

The ranges are named after Polish explorer Paul Strzelecki, who passed

through in 1840. Their Aboriginal connections are recognised by the names 'Tarra', after Charlie Tarra, Strzelecki's native guide, who is reputed to have saved the exploration party from starvation by providing koala meat; 'Bulga', an Aboriginal word for 'mountain'; and 'Morwell', possibly an Aboriginal word for 'woolly possum', though others believe that Commissioner C. J. Tyers took the name from the Morwell Rocks in the River Tamar in Devon.

Billys Creek in Morwell National Park is named after settler Billy Hillier, who died in 1870, possibly speared by Aborigines.

The first reservation of Morwell National Park was in 1966, after 138 ha of land owned by the Quigley family was purchased jointly by the Shire of Morwell and the National Parks Authority. A major reason for the reservation was to preserve the rare epiphytic Butterfly Orchid (*Sarcochilus australis*).



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

A great place for picnics and bird watching.

With extensions, particularly an area around Billys Creek added in 1987, the park now covers 565 ha.

The VNPA's first Nature Conservation Review (1971) said the park was too small and hardly justified the 'national' title. The LCC in 1982 suggested regional park status.

Locals were outraged. In its Final Recommendations the LCC said: "Considerable concern has been expressed at the so-called downgrading of the Morwell National Park. The Council firmly believes that it cannot recommend this area as a national park or any other type of park in view of its established definitions for various park categories. ..." and recommended it become a 283 ha Flora and Fauna Reserve.

However, community representations were successful and Morwell remains a national park.

The park has greatly benefited from the contribution of the Friends of Morwell National Park, formed in 1986. They published 'Flowers and Ferns of Morwell National Park' and conduct annual Koala counts and Butterfly Orchid surveys. Their on-ground work has included weeding, seed collection, propagation, and extensive plantings, particularly along Billys Creek.

Description

The two sections of the park on either side of Jumbuck Road, which runs along the watershed between Fosters Gully to the west and Billys Creek to the east, are quite different.

The Fosters Gully side is forest with magnificent tall eucalypts, 47 species of orchid, and fern gullies including the ephemeral Fosters Creek, also named after an early settler.

By contrast, the Billys Creek side is a very steep gully of former farmland with cleared slopes, much of it weed-infested. Billys Creek is a perennial stream containing platypus.

None of the park is truly pristine, areas having been cleared, grazed and logged, but it demonstrates the remarkable capacity of the bush to regenerate naturally.

Park Notes, with a map of the park showing walking tracks, and the 1998 Management Plan, can be downloaded from Parks Victoria's website www.parks.vic.gov.au. Much more information is available on the excellent Friends of Morwell National Park website.

I know of no other park that has such comprehensive details available on flora, fauna (including invertebrates) and fungus, even slime moulds.

Parks Victoria's rating for 'level of protection' is B, with C for 'level of service'. There is no camping or horse riding in the park.

Flowers and Ferns of Morwell National Park

Colour photographs of 384 species. \$10.00.

Available from the author, Ken Harris – phone 5122 3137.

Facilities and activities

At the Kerry Road entrance to the Foster Gully section there is a small picnic area with barbecues and a new single toilet. From here the easy 2.3 km loop Fosters Gully Nature Walk takes you through an attractive fern gully. The longer Stringybark Ridge Track goes through forest.

The entrance to the Billy Creek section is on Junction Road. It is an easy 4.6 km return walk to the old weir built in 1914 to supply water to Morwell. Other walking tracks are steep.

My most recent visit was in January this year with Ken Harris, past president of the Friends Group. I had not previously appreciated the diversity of eucalypts, including Manna, Mountain Grey and Swamp Gums, Narrow-leaved Peppermint, Apple Box, and stands of Mountain Ash, Blue Gum, Messmate, Silvertop Ash and Prickly Stringybark.

Morwell and Tarra-Bulga National Parks are now linked by the 35.7 km Grand Strzelecki Track, opened in May 2012.

Conceived by local communities, built with bushfire relief funds provided by the Victorian Government and Bendigo Bank and managed entirely by local volunteers, it is promoted as a two-day iconic park-to-park bushwalking experience in the heart of the Strzeleckis. I have not walked the track, but am told it involves wading at numerous creek crossings. • PW

Information for walkers is provided at www.grandstrzeleckitrack.org.au



PHOTO: KAREN ALEXANDER

Victoria: State of the Environment Report 2013

KAREN ALEXANDER, VICTORIA NATURALLY COORDINATOR,
LOOKS AT THIS COMPREHENSIVE AND IMPORTANT REPORT, TITLED 'SCIENCE POLICY PEOPLE'.

Kate Auty, Victoria's Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, likes listening to stories. An unusual quality, one can argue, in a bureaucrat.

The preparation and production of the 2013 State of the Environment (SoE) Report, released last November, reflects her connection to the community and its stories. While research and data analysis were important in its preparation, so was consultation across sectors and the state. And in the final report, case studies illustrate many of the recommendations to state government.

Moreover, the report is not just on biophysical trends but "*a whole of system – social, economic*

and environmental – approach".

Recommendations cover landscapes and connectivity, water, burning, food systems, reducing consumption, sustainable energy and, to reflect the whole-of-system approach, sustainable communities including housing and transport, monitoring, and awareness of ecosystem services.

Previous SoE reports were filled with data and hundreds of recommendations. Although the data is useful (and should be available), Auty's approach is more strategic and more engaged with a wider range of stakeholders (including government). Hopefully, it will have more impact.

Biodiversity

So, biodiversity. You would be right in guessing we're still going backwards and that data is still inadequate.

The status of invertebrates, lichens and fungi remains 'poor', with no update in numbers of introduced species since 2008, no extent of pest plant and animal management and no recent data on salinity, soil structure, erosion or acidification. (Is this deliberate negligence by government?)

The big picture: more than half of our Ecological Vegetation Communities (EVCs) have less than 50% of their total current area protected. (Some EVCs

Left and right: There has been little or no regeneration of Alpine Ash trees since the fires of 2003 and 2013.



PHOTO: KAREN ALEXANDER

have very little of their original area left, so 50% of that may not be much at all).

As species are the building blocks of our plant communities, and of ecosystem services, we can't afford to lose too many. Yet again there is inadequate data, but expert advice says there is an overall decline in threatened species populations (p.71 of the report).

From data that is available it is clear that for long-term protection of species, national parks and other reserves are very important – so they must be well funded.

Private land protection is also vitally necessary, and the area under covenants has increased by 30,000 ha since 2008-12 to 240,000 ha. This is just 0.17% of total private land, a ludicrously small figure given the scale of the climate change problem we are facing.

Threatening processes are once again habitat loss and fragmentation, ongoing degradation of remaining habitat from invasive species, grazing, and inappropriate fire regimes (p.71).

Fire

Fire data is deeply disturbing. Fire regimes are inappropriate for species when areas are burnt too often and the species can't recover and/or flower and seed.

Mountain Ash and Alpine Ash need fire for regeneration, but not too often, as they do not flower and seed after burning until at least 15 years of age

The VNPA is particularly interested in the following recommendations to the Victorian Government:

- No. 2: establish targets for statewide ecological processes and ecosystem function.
- No. 3: protect native vegetation on public and private land by amending permitted clearing regulations.
- No. 4: integrate and sponsor efforts to develop biolinks at different scales.
- No. 7: implement a risk based fire management strategy defining planned burning targets on public and private land, incorporating protection of financial, environmental and cultural assets.
- No. 8: undertake statewide accounting and reporting of the outcomes of planned burning to demonstrate risk reduction to human and ecological communities.

(and closer to 20 for Mountain Ash). So two fires within 15 years means there will be no seed for the recovery of those species.

The fires on Mts Feathertop and Hotham in February 2013, just 10 years after the major 2003 fires, have wiped out Alpine Ash regeneration over that area.

Given the fire history of the last decade, the report says that 40% of native vegetation in Victoria is now below minimum Tolerable Fire Intervals (TFIs). And irrespective of levels of planned burning and future fire events, large areas of Victoria will remain below minimum TFIs (p.74).

This places species with life cycles dependent on particular (longer) fire intervals at increased risk.

Further, only 18% of native vegetation assessed was found to be within the required TFI to maintain plant communities, and TFIs could not be calculated for 39% of vegetation because of a lack of documented fire history.

Good news?

Is there any good news? Not much on the natural environment, and there's little point in pretending otherwise.

However, there are good news stories: we do know what to do, and it doesn't cost the earth (unlike the current scenario). And over her five years in the job, Auty has given us numerous case studies and inspiration on many fronts.

Producing this report is the major requirement of the Commissioner's job, and she has achieved her aim of 'informing the community'.

Her second aim: "to influence government to achieve environmental, social, cultural and economic sustainability" may take a little longer, and will need us to get behind it too.

The above is only a very small part of the 2013 SoE report. It's worthwhile reading online (sadly, very few hard copies are available) at www.ces.vic.gov.au

The report was tabled in Parliament on 28 November 2013. The government must table a response to the recommendations within 12 months after this date. • PW

Melbourne's Water Catchments

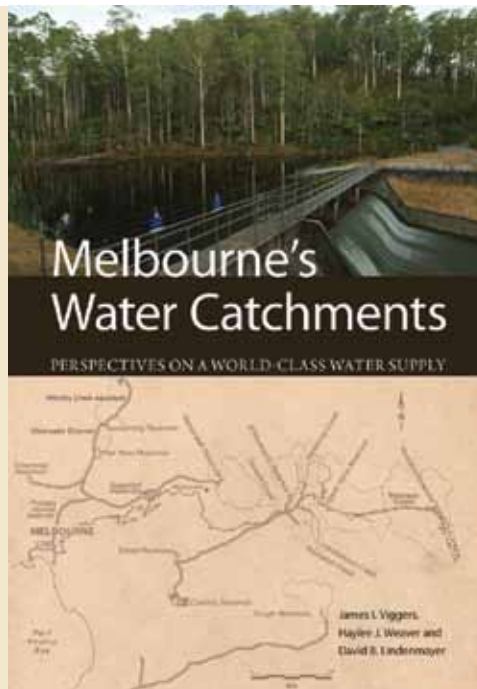
Perspectives on a world-class
water supply

By James I. Viggers, Haylee J. Weaver,
David B. Lindenmayer.

CSIRO Publishing, 2013. Paperback,
144 pages. RRP \$29.95.

Prof. David Lindenmayer has a long-standing interest in the majestic forests of Victoria's Central Highlands. So a book on *Melbourne's water catchments* co-authored by him attracts immediate attention.

Written with former MMBW engineer Jim Viggers and parasitologist Haylee Weaver, *Melbourne's Water Catchments* charts the development of the system of dams, reservoirs pipes and aqueducts that delivers potable water to Melbourne.



Yan Yean dam was constructed off the Plenty River in the 1850s. Human-produced contamination of the reservoir, plus the belief that increased tree cover enhanced rainfall, led to the closure of its catchments to logging and other human activities in 1873.

In the 1880s two aqueducts were built to divert clean mountain water to

Melbourne. The Wallaby Creek aqueduct took water from the Goulburn catchment to Yan Yean; the Maroondah Aqueduct took water from the Watts River to Melbourne's Preston Reservoir.

By the 1891 establishment of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW), Melbourne was receiving gravity-fed water from closed catchments – an excellent (and uncommon) foundation for a city's water supply. This system expanded considerably both before and after the MMBW became Melbourne Water.

In the 1990s, the new Parks Victoria became responsible for MMBW metropolitan and reservoir parks, and Yarra Ranges National Park was established. However, with on-going pressure from the timber industry, industrial logging continues in catchments. The sources of our water-supply are now less rigorously protected than they were over a century ago!

Born in a tent

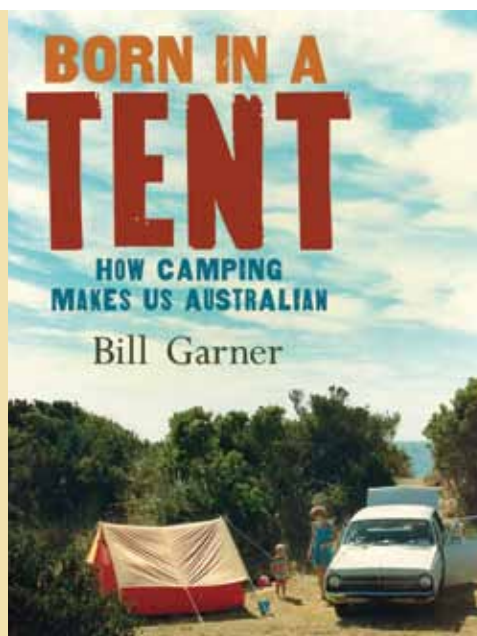
How camping
makes us Australian

By Bill Garner

NewSouth Publishing, 2013.
Paperback, 288 pages. RRP \$39.99.

Just as Geoffrey Blainey in *The Tyranny of Distance* rewrote Australia's history using distance as the key explanatory concept, Bill Garner has rewritten it with tents and camping as the focus.

Even though Garner says that "Australia (and possibly the world) seems to divide into campers and non-campers", he shows that the experience of living in tents has shaped many aspects of Australian history and character. It also helps link Indigenous and European history and experience.



Cartoonist Michael Leunig, who values meditation, resting and quiet, would love this book. "Camping is stopping", Garner says. "It is a rejection of the mad mantra that we must relentlessly keep moving

forward." It brings you into a different and closer relationship with the natural world – and often with other people.

The early years at Port Jackson were largely spent in tents, and for some it was enjoyable. Explorers, gold diggers, selectors, railway builders, artists and field naturalists all lived in tents, sharing news and (sometimes radical) ideas, and learning to improvise and make do. "Camping is a formative part of Australia's cultural heritage", says Garner.

In the 20th century came recreational camping. Garner points out that "until the 1960s, most camping places were on Crown land" and it was understood that "camping was allowed anywhere it was not expressly forbidden". And it was usually free.

Charges began to be levied where facilities developed, particularly as caravans became popular. But many

Protection of catchment forests from logging and other activities has given Melburnians high-quality water and enabled scientists to undertake research on magnificent Mountain Ash forests. The book discusses the effects of fire and logging on the water yield of forested catchments, and Lindenmayer's long-term research in the catchments, but not early MMBW-supported research at Wallaby Creek by John Brookes and David Ashton.

This book reveals the decisions and developments that have shaped Melbourne's water supply for over 170 years, and considers current and future water supply issues, including the North-South Pipeline and the desalination plant.

It is essential reading for Melburnians. • PW

Review by Linden Gillbank, School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne

campers are happy with minimal facilities and don't want 'gold plating' and high fees.

Garner concludes with a discussion of tents in early Canberra and of the Aboriginal tent embassy at Parliament House, and then with a lyrical description of a recent camping trip of his own.

As well as a very readable text, the book has a fantastic collection of relevant paintings and photographs, each of which the author describes and explains. It's also well designed, with clear type, good layout and nice features like the diagonal tent rope at the start of each chapter. And there's a comprehensive bibliography.

I thoroughly recommend this book! • PW

Review by Michael Howes



Above: One of the great views along the Mallacoota coastal walk.

Right: Part of the track is canopied by tea-trees.

Ocean views available to all



PHOTOS: FRANCIS REISS

FRANCIS REISS HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE VNPA AND THE BAYSIDE BUSHWALKING CLUB FOR OVER 20 YEARS. HE FOUND THE WALK HE DESCRIBES HERE PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE, AS HIS OWN WALKING CAPABILITIES ARE NOW LIMITED TO SHORT DISTANCES.

Exceptionally beautiful ocean views, accessed easily and in safety by walkers of any age and people in wheelchairs, are not often encountered.

Yet this is just what Parks Victoria has accomplished with its new extension to an existing coastal walk at Mallacoota.

At 6.6km in length and 350km east of Melbourne, it's hardly a day excursion, but there is much more in Mallacoota itself to enjoy.

Ample holiday accommodation, an interesting and exciting trip to Gabo Island and the Gabo Lighthouse in an abalone diver's speedboat, and a new, and genuinely good, Chinese restaurant owned by a Chinese lady with but little English, are attractions to add to fishing, bird watching and relaxation.

The new track connects up with the Old Coast Road Walking Track in Croajingolong National Park and the existing Mallacoota Coastal Walk, so the total possible length is more than enough for a day. At the other end

you can find good camping facilities at Wingan Inlet.

There are toilets, easy access to a safe swimming beach and barbecue facilities at the start of the new section from Betka beach.

The track, gravel surfaced but wheelchair negotiable most of the way, is virtually flat, and offers magnificent views. A useful feature is that for its whole length it runs parallel with the Betka Road, with plentiful parking spots, making it particularly attractive for anyone with mobility problems.

Even over the recent Christmas period, when Mallacoota township was humming, the track was almost unvisited, perhaps because it is not yet well known.

For those really seeking complete peace and quiet, with only occasionally grunting seals for neighbours, Park Victoria offers overnight accommodation in the Assistant Lighthouse Keeper's cottage on Gabo Island. • PW

Here and there ...

Doug Humann awarded AM

VNPA members, councillors and staff warmly congratulate Doug Humann on his award as Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for significant service to conservation and the environment in the Australia Day honours 2014.

Doug was Director of the VNPA from 1989 to 1997 and is an Honorary Life Member of the Association. He was Chief Executive Officer of Bush Heritage Australia from 1997 to 2011.

Since 2011 he has been Director, Doug Humann and Associates, focusing on natural resource management across Australia, including Indigenous protected areas, and supporting various non-government and Indigenous organisations.

Congratulations to Doug on a well-deserved award! • PW

From an email from Doug Humann to VNPA

I think you know that I wouldn't have become engaged with VNPA in the late 1980s were it not for my father's involvement in the VNPA and my passion for the Alps ...

The gong [AM] is shared widely amongst family and those staff, executives and supporters at VNPA and other places I have worked ... And, as VNPA remains part of my extended family, it is quite a special thing to have VNPA share in the award and to have that sense of family reciprocated with VNPA's hearty congratulations and acknowledgement.

I think it shows real heart and generosity and sense of connectedness, which is so critical in community organisations - or any organisation really.

Boneseeding at Arthurs Seat Saturday 5 April 2014

The annual boneseed pull at the VNPA's Arthurs Seat block is on again. After many years of dedicated work, this will be Marg Hattersley's last stint at organising this important environmental activity.

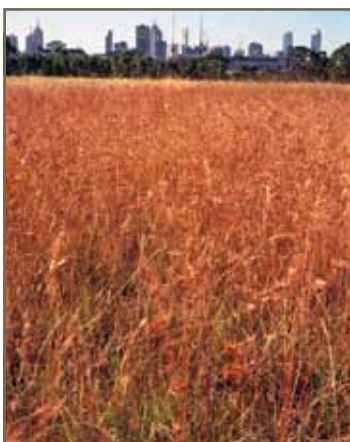
The VNPA sincerely thanks Marg for her efforts, which have seen boneseed infestation greatly reduced.

Come along on 5 April, and also think about anyone you know (including yourself!) who might be willing to take on this rewarding annual task! Please phone or email Marg to let her know if you plan to come. Contact her at marghat@bigpond.com or phone 9578 2554. • PW

From Sue Catterall, BWAG

A big Thank You to all for helping with the BWAG Social Night [12 Feb] Special thanks to Tim and Nick from Backpacking Light for a great talk and gear demo, and to our very own Rob Argent for an interesting and funny talk on how to pack a pack. Thanks also to Geoff Durham for bringing in his 50+ year old canvas tent and Paddy Pallin backpack.

I was overwhelmed by the amount of stuff donated and the need for four tables to display it all! The night was a great success, with over \$300 raised for VNPA. • PW



ROYAL PARK

The Last Summer

*Photographs
by David
Tatnall*

The Last Summer project is a series of large format photographs made in the summer of 2013 – 2014 of Melbourne's Royal Park.

Threatened by the massive East – West road project, this could be the last summer for Royal Park.

www.thelastsummer.org

New photographs will be added to this website regularly during the final month of summer and into autumn 2014.

Exhibition of photographs at
fortyfivedownstairsgallery (45 Flinders Lane)
11 – 22 March 2014.



2014 duck rescue

Once again, eight species of Australian native waterbirds are in desperate need of help.

The Victorian recreational duck shooting season commences on 15 March.

Research shows that at least one in four birds will be wounded. To help these innocent victims, join the Coalition against Duck Shooting rescue team at www.duck.org.au

Meeting times and other information will be forwarded to you. Please phone Lynn on 0414 816 509 with any queries. • PW

On the Sheep's Back photo exhibition

Whitehorse
ARTSPACE



Renowned photojournalist Francis Reiss's photographs of Burren Burren station owner Rex White and his family document a time when our economy rode high 'on the sheep's back'. • PW

Phone 9262 6250 or see www.whitehorseartspace.com.au

5 March to 14 April
Box Hill Town Hall,
1022 Whitehorse Rd,
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Tues–Fri: 10am–4pm.
Sat: 12–4pm.

Walk WA's Cape to Cape track with no roughing it



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Willis's Walkabouts

Kakadu Short Circle
13-26 April 2014



A special trip at a special time of year – **Banggereng**. It's not the Wet and it's not the Dry. The rain clouds have gone. Creeks that will eventually dry to a trickle are still flowing well. Wet season wildflowers can still be found. The land is still green with just a touch of the browning off that is to come.

This trip gives you more time for visiting Aboriginal art sites, birdwatching, botanising and/or simply relaxing than is possible on most of our other trips.

Special offer. I enjoy the trip so much that I guarantee the departure for only three people. Quote this ad and join us and I'll give you a **\$500 discount**. What more can I say?

Russell Willis



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For full details of the 2014 program visit the website or contact Jenny.

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→ OR contact the VNPA on 03 9347 5188.



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