

PARK WATCH



VNPA AGENDA FOR PARKS
SUPPORT GROWS FOR GREAT FOREST NP
ALPS UPDATE
ANGER AT QUARANTINE STATION
MARINE AND COASTAL CONSERVATION
VEGETATION RULES DON'T WORK
WORLD PARKS CONGRESS

DECEMBER 2014 NO 259



**VICTORIAN
NATIONAL PARKS
ASSOCIATION**
Be part of nature



Be part of nature

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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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DESIGN Mary Ferlin **PRINTING** Adams Print

FRONT COVER

The 26 October protest at the Point Nepean Quarantine Station. Protestors made their feelings crystal clear about state government plans to lease the Station for an exclusive resort development. See story p. 12. Photo: courtesy Matthew Mackay, Inner Light Photography.

BACK COVER

Pieman Falls is one of the Alpine National Park's inspiring natural features. Photo: Mary Ferlin.

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From the President

Well, it's the end of another difficult year. I'd like to thank all our staff and volunteers for their magnificent work under trying and challenging circumstances, and wish you all a happy Christmas. I also welcome the new members on the Council.

And of course, with the virtual disappearance of government grants for ecological projects, we wouldn't be here at all except for the generosity of you, our donors, our regular Giving Naturally supporters and our members. Thank you all.

A lot of effort went again this year towards manning the barricades to protect our parks and natural areas from exploitation, neglect and virtual privatisation. It's to be hoped that we're over the worst and that those in power in 2015 will be a little kinder to our natural environment.

We have also had some very positive achievements over the last 12 months. For example, our fourth nature conservation review, the most comprehensive yet, will guide our strategic direction for many years. And if past reviews are anything to go by, it will have an influence on government directions as well.

Its priorities for conservation of natural values on land and in rivers and marine areas, together with recommendations for institutional changes, should provoke considerable thought.

In November, Matt Ruchel and I represented Victoria in Sydney at the conference of the National Parks Associations Council. There was a very positive mood despite the pressure being put on the natural environment in most of the states.

We met the new Commonwealth Endangered Species Commissioner, Gregory Andrews. His outline of how he had been able to influence several decisions for better protection of threatened species was very positive.

We also had a presentation on how to make natural areas more visited and more loved by the general public. The new website www.sixfoottrack.com has information and videos to inspire and make them comfortable about the outdoors.

The use of the website has more than doubled, to over 18,000, in a year. That's the sort of success we should try to emulate. People protect the things they know and love.

Next year will no doubt be equally challenging, but there is so much we can do to inspire people to visit, enjoy, learn to love and then to protect our beautiful natural areas.

I wish you all a happy and positive new year. • PW

Russell Costello, VNPA President

Thanks to the State Election Volunteer Team!

In the lead-up to the State Election the VNPA asked for volunteers to help with campaigning and raising awareness about conservation issues.

In Melbourne our campaign focused on the proposed Great Forest National Park. We thank the Wilderness Society for its invaluable support throughout the campaign.

In the Bendigo area, the focus was the Wellsford Forest, under threat from logging and firewood collection. Other regional volunteers had leaflets calling for further action on park protection and the proper management of national parks throughout Victoria.

More than 50 enthusiastic volunteers helped out, distributing over 30,000 leaflets throughout Victoria by letterboxing, and face-to-face at Melbourne stations and in the CBD.

It was particularly rewarding to be able to campaign in a number of marginal electorates, including Bentleigh, Bendigo East, Carrum, Eltham, Melbourne, Mordialloc, Morwell, Mulgrave and Prahran.

The VNPA says a big 'thank you' to all our State Election volunteers, and we look forward to doing the same in future elections!

Thanks to Jillian Van, Caroline Durre, Patricia Carden, Christine Connelly, Kirsten Anderson, Janet McColl, Robyn Jenkins, Pam Habersberger, Ruth Muir, David Ogilvie, Simon Martin, Deb Neumann, Cathy Mann, Elsie Carter, Ann Williamson, Keith Graham, Merrill Jusuf, Richard Halford, Elizabeth Lloyd, Peter Hogan, Janet Nixon, Jill Carr, Warwick Sprawson, Pam Lloyd, Fiona Ward, Di Lancashire, Meredith Budge, Margaret Sawyer, Elizabeth Spring, Ron Smith, Evelyn Feller, SP Kwan, Pam Rowley, Geoff Collis, Rachel Ralli, Bob Warren, Malie Prasad, Carol Challis, Ruth Gallant, Michael Darroch, Lisa Cox, Simon Perrin, Kate Constance, Rod Webster, Denis Nagle and Susie Kumar.

Tilly Reynolds and Yasmin Kelsall,
State Election Campaign
Administrative Assistants.



From the Editor

By the time you receive this *Park Watch* the election result should be known. Whatever the result, let's hope for a much more positive approach to the natural environment from the next government than from the last.

Many thanks to our contributors to this *Park Watch* and over the past year, and to our capable designer Mary Ferlin. And I send best wishes for Christmas and the New Year to all our members, supporters and other readers. • PW

Michael Howes



Broad support for national parks

VNPA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL** REPORTS ON A RECENT SURVEY, AND SETS OUT THE VNPA'S POLICY AGENDA FOR PARKS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT.

Victorians strongly support their national parks. A statewide survey in October showed that:

- 89% of Victorians support the state having a comprehensive network of national parks and other conservation reserves across land and sea.
- 96% recognise the importance of national parks for conserving nature and protecting native wildlife. 69% consider them very important.
- 81% of respondents support increasing funding for protecting nature, including threatened species and national parks across Victoria.
- 56% agree that privately-owned commercial developments with 99-year private leases should not be allowed in Victoria's national parks. Only 17% thought they should be allowed.
- 47% thought there should be more national parks in Victoria; just 2% thought there should be fewer parks.

- 42% said they would be more likely to vote for a party that was committed to increasing funding and staff in national parks. Only 3% said this would make them less likely to vote for such a party.

National parks and the conservation estate are the cornerstone of our efforts to protect nature. In addition, they have major economic benefits, annually generating **\$1.02 billion** through park tourism, **\$330 million** worth of water-related services, and **\$180 million** in avoided health costs.

The parks and reserves also provide invaluable rest and recreation for millions of Victorians and visitors – each year there are 96 million visits to places managed by Parks Victoria, including 35 million to national parks.

Our national parks and other conservation areas cover around 17% of the state and 5% of our marine waters, yet less than 0.6% of the State Government budget is spent on them.

The total cost of managing Victoria's parks is about the same as one cup of coffee per citizen per month.

In recent years the integrity of Victoria's national parks and other protected areas has been undermined by actions like the following:

- changing national park legislation to allow two-thirds of Victoria's national parks (including the Quarantine Station in Point Nepean National Park) to be opened for 99-year leases for private development
- cutting 120 staff from Parks Victoria
- attempting to reintroduce cattle grazing into the Alpine National Park under the guise of a (flawed) 'scientific trial'
- agreeing to open up an additional 25,000 hectares of national park to prospecting and fossicking
- attempting to re-introduce large-scale logging in red gum parks under the guise of ecological thinning.

We hope for a much more positive approach to parks and conservation from the next Victorian government. • PW



PHOTO: COURTESY TOM PARKES, 37° SOUTH DESIGN

*The Pinnacle, Grampians National Park (Gariwerd).
As well as their vital role in protecting nature, national parks
have important human health, social and economic benefits.*

A ten-point agenda for national parks

The VNPA has developed a policy agenda that aims to reduce threats to national parks and the conservation estate, strengthen park management and make progress towards completing a comprehensive and adequate public reserve system which protects the 'jewels in the crown' of our natural areas – our national parks and others conservation reserves.

1. Complete the national park and reserve system to protect high conservation value species and habitats.

- Create a new Great Forest National Park to protect Leadbeater's Possum, improve our water catchments, and provide a magnificent new tall forest recreation area close to Melbourne
- Undertake Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigations to improve protection for the Wombat and Wellsford state forests and high conservation value public land in SW Victoria
- Establish VEAC's proposed Murray River Park.

2. Ban once and for all the return of cattle grazing to the Alpine National Park.

3. Reverse the legislation allowing 99-year private leases in parks and encourage tourism developments adjacent to parks, with a new nature-based tourism framework and strategy that protects the integrity of parks.

4. Promote the parks and encourage the Victorian community to use them by investing in a package of appropriate and sensitive recreational infrastructure and programs.

- Focus on appropriate visitor infrastructure for key parks, including improved signage and facilities, appropriate access points, fairer camping fees and visitor-friendly on-line information, promotion and education.
- Include a high-profile program of opportunities for all Victorians, especially young people, to engage in parks through recreation, adventure and volunteering.

5. Establish a strategic plan for the future of our park and reserve system that recognises and communicates the important role parks play in our society.

- Establish a strategic blueprint which highlights the role and value of parks, gaps in the park estate, strategic visitor infrastructure, and key challenges such as management responses to invasive species and climate change impacts.
- Establish a best-practice bushfire management policy that protects human lives and the environment.

6. Build a stronger park management agency

- Change legislation so that Parks Victoria reports directly to the Minister for the Environment.
- Consider expanding Parks Victoria to include some key policy functions such as wildlife and threatened species management across the state.

7. Strictly control damaging fossicking and prospecting in national parks

- Strengthen the National Parks Act to restrict and control damaging fossicking and prospecting in national parks.
- Introduce new regulations to reduce the impacts of fossicking and prospecting on all public land.

8. Rule out expanded hunting in national parks

- Rule out open licensing for hunting in national parks. Commit to minimising the ecological impact of invasive game species such as deer.
- Amend the Wildlife Act to remove deer as a protected game species, except in designated areas.
- Implement a policy promoting deer-free areas, which will be targeted for removal or population control, such as Melbourne's water catchments, Wilsons Promontory National Park, Grampians National Park and other highly vulnerable areas.

9. Establish science-based national park and nature conservation management

- Establish an expanded high-profile scientific committee to advise on key threats and strategies to ensure best practice approaches to park management.
- Establish a new scientific research hub, ensuring Victoria remains a world leader in innovative approaches to conservation and agricultural land management.

10. Ensure adequate and effective funding to manage threats to parks.

- Establish a pest eradication program to ensure secure ongoing funding which targets key environmental pest plants and animals. Current opportunistic funding can be wasted when long-term programs falter.
- Include a focus on regional jobs to undertake environmental management programs • PW



Support growing for new park

SHORTLY BEFORE THE STATE ELECTION, 30 ENVIRONMENTAL, SCIENTIFIC AND RECREATION GROUPS CALLED ON VICTORIAN POLITICIANS TO SUPPORT THE PROPOSED GREAT FOREST NATIONAL PARK.

PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM

A Great Forest National Park would protect Victoria's Mountain Ash forests and their wildlife, and be a tourist drawcard.

Support for the park proposal also came from inspirational naturalist and filmmaker Sir David Attenborough. Sir David said in a written statement:

"The maintenance of an intact ecological system is the only way to ensure the continued existence of biodiversity, safeguard water supplies and provide spiritual nourishment for ourselves and future generations. It is for these reasons, and for the survival of the critically endangered Leadbeater's Possum, that I support the creation of the Great Forest National Park for Victoria."

The call was backed by Dr Jane Goodall, DBE, founder of the Jane Goodall Institute and UN Messenger of Peace. She said:

"Over thousands of years, nature has provided the resources that have helped us to survive and flourish. Now, in a time of need, we must help nature to survive. The Great Forest National Park is a project to secure the future of a threatened ecosystem. If we act now, we will be ensuring the forest can continue to provide services that support us – clean water, fresh air and storage of carbon."

"If we fail now, what future will we have chosen for our grandchildren and their grandchildren? Please join me in supporting the creation of the Great Forest National Park."

The 30 environmental, conservation, recreation and scientific groups, representing more than 50,000 Victorians, released a Joint Statement calling on all political parties and candidates contesting the state election to clearly commit to the creation of the park in the Yarra Ranges and Central Highlands.

The groups, including the Royal Society of Victoria, the VNPA, the Australian Conservation Foundation and the Wilderness Society, also released new polling showing that 89% of Victorians supported the proposal for a new national park in the Yarra Ranges.

This showed an increase in support for the park proposal since October, when an earlier poll showed 64% of Victorians supported it.

The Great Forest National Park would take in the Yarra Ranges and the Central Highlands, home to the world's

tallest hardwood trees, the Mountain Ash, the Southern Hemisphere's equivalent to Californian Redwoods. These forests are also the only home of Victoria's fauna emblem, the endangered Leadbeater's (or Fairy) Possum.

The proposed park would add 355,000 hectares to existing national parks and reserves. It would stretch from Kinglake across the Yarra Ranges to Mt Baw Baw and north up to Lake Eildon, protecting forests around the tourism hubs of Healesville and Warburton.

"There is overwhelming community support for national parks, and a new national park less than 90 minutes from Melbourne will protect forest-dependent wildlife such as gliders, owls, parrots and bats, as well as Leadbeater's Possum," said Amelia Young, Victorian Campaigns Manager for the Wilderness Society.

"Sir David Attenborough's support for the Great Forest National Park shows the global interest in the plight of Victoria's animal emblem, Leadbeater's Possum."

The Royal Society of Victoria joined the calls for urgent action to save Leadbeater's Possum.



PHOTO: STEVE MEACHER



The new park would give much improved protection for the threatened Leadbeater's Possum.

PHOTO: STEVE KUITER, WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHICS

Tourists don't come to see the aftermath of logging operations.

Society President Dr Bill Birch AM stated: "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 strongly supports the establishment of a new national park that preserves the required habitat for this critically endangered animal."

Sarah Rees, Director of Healesville-based group MyEnvironment, said: "The Great Forest National Park will generate new, sustainable long-term employment. It will host a range of activities such as bike riding,

bushwalking, bird watching, four wheel driving, camping and eco-tourism, and deliver a suite of new economic opportunities for our communities."

Yarra Riverkeepers spokesperson Ian Penrose: "The forested catchments supply more than 90% of Melbourne's drinking water. The Great Forest National Park will secure Melbourne's domestic water supply catchments as well as the headwaters of the Goulburn and Broken rivers."

Environment Victoria Chief Executive Mark Wakeham: "These forests

have significant carbon value that will be protected if logging ceases. There is potential for a Forest Carbon Project to secure the environmental and economic benefit of the rich carbon value of these forests."

Matt Ruchel, VNPA Executive Director: "Our surveys have found that 89% of Victorians support a comprehensive network of national parks and other conservation reserves across land and sea, and 96% recognise the importance of national parks for conserving nature and protecting native wildlife. Now we need a new one in the Central Highlands." • PW

National park will help secure jobs and economic growth

The Great Forest National Park plan will help secure jobs at Australian Paper's Maryvale mill over the long term and generate new jobs in the region.

"This visionary proposal will save Mountain Ash forests as well as delivering jobs and economic growth to regions still recovering from the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires," said The Wilderness Society's Amelia Young.

"The current forestry model is clearly not working. Job numbers in the Victorian forestry industry have dropped 10% in three years because of international competition, the collapse of native wood stock, and consumers' increasing demands for sustainable wood products."

Australian Paper has posted losses of more than \$100 million over the past three years, according to ASIC reports.

A report commissioned by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries shows the number of jobs in Victoria's forestry industries

dropped by 10.9% from 2009 to 2012. It also found that fewer than 20% of wood primary-processing jobs in Victoria depend on native forest logging. The majority already use plantation wood.

There is more than enough plantation wood available to meet the needs of Australian Paper's Maryvale mill, which is owned by Japanese paper giant Nippon Paper.

Tourism, on the other hand, is a boon for the local economy. Yarra Ranges Tourism says the region attracted 4.67 million visitors in 2012.

The Yarra Valley's wineries are well known, yet twice as many people visit the region for its forests. 12% of visitors head to the wineries, while 24% visit the area for bushwalking or rainforest walks, according to Tourism Victoria.

"The Great Forest National Park proposal will boost tourism in the region as well as jobs and the regional economy," said Ms Young. "Tourists don't want to visit clear-felled forests."

Already the plan has attracted tourism proposals, including a tree-canopy zip-line tour in Toolangi, an elevated tree-top walkway near Lake Mountain to encourage summer tourism, and a world-class five-day overland walking track from Healesville through Marysville to Eildon.

The success of these proposals hinges on the creation of the Great Forest National Park because national parks boost the numbers of visitors to regional Victoria.

Local business knows that native forest logging harms the regional economy. That's why more than 100 regional businesses, representing hundreds of employees in the area proposed for the Great Forest National Park, have already publicly supported its creation.

"We recommend that the government establish the Great Forest National Park to boost new jobs in the region, and at the same time set up an Industry Taskforce to help secure existing jobs at the Maryvale paper mill," Ms Young concluded.



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMIELLS

Alpine grazing's last hurrah?



Above: The Wonnangatta Valley was once a farm but has not been grazed by cattle for over 30 years.

Left: The Pale Golden Moths orchid is listed as threatened both State and Federally.

Below: One of the many healthy Wonnangatta wetlands, a home for plants, native fish and invertebrates. They would be severely impacted by cattle grazing.



PHOTOS: PHIL INGAMIELLS

PARK PROTECTION
CAMPAIGNER **PHIL INGAMIELLS**
REPORTS ON PREPARATIONS
FOR THE COURT CASE ON
ALPINE CATTLE GRAZING.

In the week following Melbourne Cup Day a team of biologists made their way to the beautiful Wonnangatta Valley, deep in the heart of Victoria's Alpine National Park, to conduct a flora and fauna survey for the VNPA.

It was our version of the survey the state government should have done before it started its alpine cattle grazing trial there. Without any baseline data, it can't assess whether the cattle would do any damage to the valley's remarkable natural systems, even though that is one of the objectives of the 'trial'.

As I write this, the results of the survey aren't in, but the preliminary evidence is compelling.

We already knew that the grazing trial (designed to show if a combination of burning and grazing

will reduce the fire risk to the valley) is sited bang on top of the largest known population of a nationally threatened plant, the Pale Golden Moths orchid (*Diuris ochroma*).

But what should also be evident when the full results of the survey come in is that the series of wetlands throughout the length of the Wonnangatta Valley are mostly in excellent condition.

Moreover the Wonnangatta River, which makes its way along the northern edge of the valley, is also in fine condition with a great array of native fish, eels and Gippsland Spiny Crayfish.

Ungrazed now for over 30 years, it seems the valley is recovering well from its early history of cattle grazing.

There are still problems in the valley. Blackberries are rife, and despite the efforts of troops of recreational deer hunters (they make up the majority of visitors to the valley), Sambar Deer are rampant and trampling some of the wetland areas.

But it seems as if the ecological burns Parks Victoria has been conducting there have increased the extent of native grasslands, the critical habitat for the orchid. With a small boost in management funding, many other problems in the valley could also be addressed.

The VNPA, with lawyers Environmental Justice Australia, is challenging the legality of the Victorian Government's Wonnangatta Valley cattle grazing trial in the Supreme Court, and the case is due to be heard on 18 March 2015.

We'll be arguing that bringing cattle into the Alpine National Park is contrary to Victoria's National Parks Act.

If Labor wins government in Victoria there will be no need to hold the case: the cattle will be removed. But if the Coalition hangs on, we are hoping the case will clarify the authority of Victoria's National Parks Act, not only bringing an end to cattle grazing but discouraging any future attempts to ignore or subvert the protection given to national parks by law. • PW



Volunteers comb the High Plains for hawkweed.

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Join the 2014-15 Falls Creek hawkweed volunteer program!

Native to Europe, hawkweeds have recently become naturalised on mainland Australia.

Hawkweeds are highly invasive plants and spread quickly by runners and roots. Forming dense mats that out-compete native vegetation, they can cause major environmental damage in alpine and sub-alpine areas, and are considered a significant threat to the Victorian alps.

Participating in volunteer surveys is a great way to help protect the alps, as well as a fantastic opportunity to enjoy the magnificent alpine environment.

Accommodation for volunteers will be provided at Falls Creek Alpine Resort. Transport to and from survey areas will also be provided.

Dates for the 2014-15 season are:

Session 1: Monday 15 – Friday 19 December

Session 2: Saturday 27 – Wednesday 31 December

Session 3: Monday 5 – Friday 9 January

Session 4: Monday 12 – Friday 16 January

Session 5: Monday 19 – Friday 23 January

To express interest in the program, please contact the Hawkweed Team at Parks Victoria. Phone **5754 4693**, or email hawkweed@parks.vic.gov.au

'Help the Alps' weekend 27 February – 2 March 2015

The VNPA's alpine volunteer weekend is on again next year.

We'll be helping remove invasive willows and/or hawkweeds from the Bogong High Plains area of the Alpine National Park.

Volunteer numbers are strictly limited to 20 people this time. It's important that applicants are fit enough to handle walking in the alpine conditions, and are available for the full 2½ working days of the program:

- Arrive at Howmans Gap on Friday evening 27 February
- Work on Saturday 28 February, Sunday 1 March and the morning of Monday 2 March
- Return home on the Monday afternoon.

Accommodation costs and food for the duration will be supplied by Parks Victoria, but participants will need to cover the cost of the journey to and from Howmans Gap (near Falls Creek).

Previous participants are encouraged to come to this event, as experienced weeders make great team leaders and team members.

Please email the VNPA at vnpa@vnpa.org.au or call the office on **(03) 9347 5188** for more information and a registration form.

We look forward to having you on board for another great 'Help the Alps' weekend!

Phil Ingamells

A busy year for NatureWatch

CHRISTINE CONNELLY REFLECTS ON HER YEAR AT THE VNPA, FILLING IN FOR CAITLIN GRIFFITH AS NATUREWATCH COORDINATOR.

This has been a very enjoyable year – largely because of the incredible energy and eagerness that NatureWatch volunteers bring to both monitoring activities and office tasks.

It's inspiring too to watch our partner community groups in action. They've really taken on the NatureWatch monitoring projects with enthusiasm.

Caught on Camera

When we set up the motion-sensing cameras we never quite know what will turn up in the collection of photographs. It's always exciting when we retrieve the cameras and take that first sneak peek at the species we've 'caught.'

I was particularly thrilled this year to discover the photographs of the threatened Brush-tailed Phascogale (or Tuan) in Wombat State Forest, and the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot in Bunyip State Park. It's great to know that these species are hanging on in the areas we're monitoring.

I'd like to thank all the people who have made another year of Caught on Camera possible. We had an eager collection of volunteers helping with setting up and retrieving the cameras and managing the equipment.

Our office volunteers have also put in a fantastic effort, going through the thousands of photographs and identifying the species in each one.

We've finished sorting the images collected from Wombat State Forest over March to June and have recorded 11 native and four introduced mammal species, and nine native and one



PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY



Above: Members of the Bunyip State Park volunteer team.

Left: An echidna investigates a bait station in Bunyip state Park.

introduced bird species. We recorded mostly the same species as last year, although this year we added Koala and Common Brushtail Possum to the list.

We're still going through the data from the Hindmarsh and Bunyip State Park projects – stay tuned for details!

Grass-tree monitoring

We've been carrying out surveys of grass-trees to investigate the spread of *Phytophthora* dieback in Brisbane Ranges National Park since 2007. We monitor about every second year. We had monitoring days in autumn and spring and a great turnout of volunteers to all activities.

The spring participants were particularly lucky: there were plenty of orchids and other lovely wildflowers to admire. We also found that Grass-trees were regrowing in one of the *Phytophthora*-infected study plots – an encouraging sign.

Grassland threatened species

This year, NatureWatch volunteers assisted the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) with a survey of the threatened Plains Yam Daisy. The volunteers covered three hectares at Kalkallo Common and counted 94 plants, a significant increase from the 30 recorded in 2011. This was a fantastic confirmation that MCMC's management actions are having a positive effect.

Over summer the NatureWatch team will be spending more time in the grasslands around Melbourne to monitor Growling Grass Frogs and Golden Sun Moths. If you'd like to get involved, email us at naturewatch@vnpa.org.au or phone me on 9341 6510. • PW

Thanks to all the volunteers and community groups that helped to make NatureWatch possible in 2014. In particular I want to acknowledge the efforts of Gayle Osborne and Eddie Schambre of Wombat Forestcare, Steve Hemphill and Iestyn Hosking (Hindmarsh Landcare Network) and Volunteering Western Victoria volunteers, Ian Harkness and Jasper Hails of the Friends of Bunyip State Park, Colin Cook from Friends of Brisbane Ranges National Park, and Ann Williamson and others for all their hard work assisting in the office.



*Grass-tree monitoring,
Brisbane Ranges National Park.*

PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY



*Christine Connelly (left) and volunteer
Sandra at Wombat State Forest
community training day.*

PHOTO: NATUREWATCH



*Lestyn Hosking of Hindmarsh
Landcare Network sets up a camera
at bankmecu's Minimag property.*

PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY



*Grass-tree monitoring,
Brisbane Ranges
National Park.*

PHOTO: CHRISTINE CONNELLY

Grampians Peaks Trail – the state of play

Both major political parties in Victoria have committed funds for the Grampian Peaks Trail, a 144 km walk from Mt Zero to Dunkeld.

Labor's commitment includes a \$19 million investment to build new tracks, boardwalks, bridges and hiker camps, and upgrade existing facilities.

The Coalition's \$10 million commitment would fund a new 1.2km track from Borough Huts to Barbican Rocks Hiker Camp. It would also fund planning and construction of a new 24-person camp at Barbican Rocks, as well as planning for up to 40km of track from Borough Huts to Jimmy Creek.

The Coalition says it will try to find matching investment of \$10 million from the Federal Government's \$1 billion Stronger Regions Fund to extend the trail.

The final master plan for the Grampians Peaks Trail is not yet publicly available, making it impossible to determine if it still includes a proposal for up to seven privately-owned lodges or cottages to be built along the trail.

The VNPA supports the concept of the Peaks Trail in principle, pending further detailed planning and environmental assessment, but we are firmly opposed to private lodges.

We do not accept the need for, or desirability of, commercial development of built facilities, presumably with leases of up to 99 years, within national parks. Indeed we strongly oppose that idea. • PW

The race to privatise our national parks

Part of the Quarantine Station with the former officer cadet school parade ground, the historic 1840s Shepherd's Hut (right) and a quarantine hospital in the background.



PHOTO: CHRIS SMYTH

MARINE AND COASTAL SPECIALIST **CHRIS SMYTH** REPORTS ON MELBOURNE CUP DAY 2014. THE DAY A HORSE RACE STOPS THE NATION? WELL ... ALMOST.

The Napthine government spent Cup Day racing to complete and sign a deal that would hand over management control and virtual ownership of a large slice of Point Nepean National Park to a Portsea property developer.

By the 6.00pm start of the State Election Handicap – i.e. the beginning of ‘caretaker mode’ for the government – the deal had been done.

The following day it was quietly announced on the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) website.

According to the website, the deal involved the signing of a lease agreement. But there was no lease for downloading.

Nor was there any mention of lease conditions other than that it was for 50 years – with an option to extend it to 99 years – and covered 64 hectares of the national park, including the Quarantine Station and an extensive area of threatened coastal moonah woodland.

Also missing from the DEPI website was information on the rent to be paid by the developer, whether or not an environmental bond had been set, and what quantifiable benefits would flow to the national park and the community.

How the scale, exclusivity and nature of the Point Leisure Group

development could be considered consistent with the National Parks Act, other environmental legislation and the protection of Point Nepean remained without explanation.

By failing to release details of the lease conditions, the government added to the confusion surrounding the development, especially on the potential for land subdivision and height limits on new buildings.

According to the DEPI website, the lease restricts building heights to no higher than the existing ones. That may be so, but such provisions could be easily amended by another deal behind closed doors.

Apparently subdivision will be prevented by an amendment to the local planning scheme but for no given reason the government has shelved it.

The Point Leisure Group's proposals were revealed in July when it was chosen as the Napthine government's preferred proponent to develop Point Nepean National Park.

The company's well-spun, glossy and colourful Concept Plan described in glowing terms how the heritage buildings of the Quarantine Station would be transformed into an exclusive health and wellness retreat with luxury spas and 5-star hotel accommodation.

Not promoted were the inevitable restrictions on public access required

to allow paying customers their private enjoyments. A people's park would become a private park for those who could afford it.

As part of an estimated \$100m investment, a series of spa pools linked by boardwalks would be carved from several hectares of the threatened coastal moonah woodland behind the Quarantine Station.

The spa waters would come from a bore to be drilled deep underground within the national park, while heritage buildings would be used for luxury indoor spas, pools, bathing and additional accommodation.

The discovery of geothermal water is critical to the developer's 'business case', although no 'business plan' for the project has ever been released. Without the water, the DEPI website said the lease would not proceed.

The \$100m investment and the construction of geothermal spa pools were key to the Napthine government choosing the Point Leisure Group and justifying the very long lease. Mysteriously, that investment had shrunk to \$40m by the time of the deal's announcement, but the long lease remains. It is virtually freehold and could be on-sold.

Another government selling point was the extent and condition of the area that would be affected by the development. The Premier claimed on ABC Radio in October that just 17 hectares, or 3% of the national park, would be leased, that very



Left: Threatened coastal moonah woodland would be cleared as part of the proposed development.

Right: Quarantine Station protestors on 26 October were of all ages and backgrounds.



few people visited the park, and that the heritage buildings were dilapidated and falling down.

In fact, the lease covers 64 hectares and represents around 20% of the park's accessible area, excluding the land containing unexploded ordnance.

With the return of the Quarantine Station to Victoria in 2009, and its opening to the public by Parks Victoria, visitor numbers are rising and rival those of the Prom.

In recent years \$40 million of Commonwealth and State funds have been used to repair the heritage buildings, upgrade water, power and sewerage, and improve roads, car parking and visitor amenities.

Point Nepean National Park and its buildings have never looked so good. But that huge public investment will now be gifted to the developer.

Giving management control and virtual ownership of the leased area to Point Leisure Group adds an unnecessary layer of management and dismantles what the community had long fought for: a unified national park managed by Parks Victoria.

At the same time, Parks Victoria rangers would be banished from Point Nepean to the agency's Rosebud office, 20 km away.

In the future, privatised management is likely to extend beyond the lease boundary. The Point Leisure Group has

already expressed interest in Gunners Cottage, Fort Nepean and Pearce Barracks further west.

Other developers will be encouraged by the Napthine government's policy on tourism investment in national parks that regards the remainder of Point Nepean National Park as 'open for business'.

Environment Minister Ryan Smith believes that having a Portsea property developer manage a large area of Point Nepean National Park will result in a considerable saving for taxpayers.

This could be the first step in privatising the management of national parks across Victoria. Today Point Nepean, tomorrow the Prom and the Grampians. • PW

Protecting our seas and shores into the future

IN SEPTEMBER *PARK WATCH* WE PRESENTED AN OVERVIEW OF THE VNPA'S NEW NATURE CONSERVATION REVIEW (NCR). VNPA VOLUNTEER **EVELYN FELLER** HAS NOW SUMMARISED CHAPTER 2 OF THE REVIEW, WHICH COVERS MARINE AND COASTAL ECOSYSTEMS.

Marine ecosystems reviewed are those in waters under Victorian government jurisdiction extending 5.5 km seaward from the high water mark, and coastal ecosystems are those on land within 500 metres of the shoreline.

Values

Victorian marine waters are at the confluence of three biographic provinces, so they are more species-rich than most other temperate seas worldwide; nearly 90% of species in many marine groups are unique.

The coast also has high habitat diversity, with 95 vegetation classes – almost a third of Victoria's total.

Our coast is important in social and economic terms. 84% of the population visited the coast in 2011. The value of coastal economic activities like ports and tourism is about \$10 billion a year; that of coastal 'services' such as storm protection is about \$8.4 billion.

Existing protection

In 2002, Victoria established the world's first biologically representative system of marine protected areas, declaring 13 marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries that protect 5.3% of state waters.

Although 37% of the 500m coastal strip is in parks and other conservation areas, many ecosystems still lack protection. There are five Ramsar wetland sites near the coast, as well as 20 Important Bird Areas (IBAs), but these have no legal status.



Senator Wrasse (above) and sponge at Pope's Eye, Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park.



PHOTOS: JULIAN FINN

Major threats

Many marine and coastal species are considered threatened, but the status of most marine life is poorly known.

Major threats to marine and coastal ecosystems are climate change, habitat loss and degradation (e.g. coastal development), dysfunctional biological interactions (e.g. invasive species and algal blooms), over-exploitation (fishing) and changes in disturbance regimes (e.g. fire and hydrology). Catchment degradation also has serious impacts on coastal and marine habitats.

Strengthening protection for these ecosystems is essential to protect biodiversity and to foster their resilience and adaptation to rapid climate change. Recent environmental changes that are probably due (at least in part) to climate change include:

- increased salinity in Port Phillip Bay
- persistent decline of seagrass beds in southern Port Phillip Bay
- almost complete loss of string kelp forests

Conservation gaps, priorities and recommendations

Section 2.4 of the full NCR has a detailed analysis of Victoria's marine bioregions. Site-specific recommendations are listed for protecting currently undesignated areas and ecosystems not in existing protected areas.

Knowledge gaps

Knowledge of biodiversity and ecology is particularly lacking for Victoria's marine habitats. Much of Victoria's marine biodiversity is yet to be described and some yet to be discovered, so marine taxonomy requires a considerable boost.

Apart from species exploited for fishing and aquaculture, little is known about even the basic biology and ecology of most marine life. We need systematic data collection, with field sampling and taxonomic expertise and support.

Recommendations

- Prepare and implement a marine and coastal research strategy and action plan.
- Establish a long-term scientific and monitoring program, with a systematic biodiversity assessment program for marine national parks, sanctuaries and other coastal and marine environments.
- Establish a marine and coastal research and information hub to address knowledge gaps, promote research and act as a clearing house for information and advice.

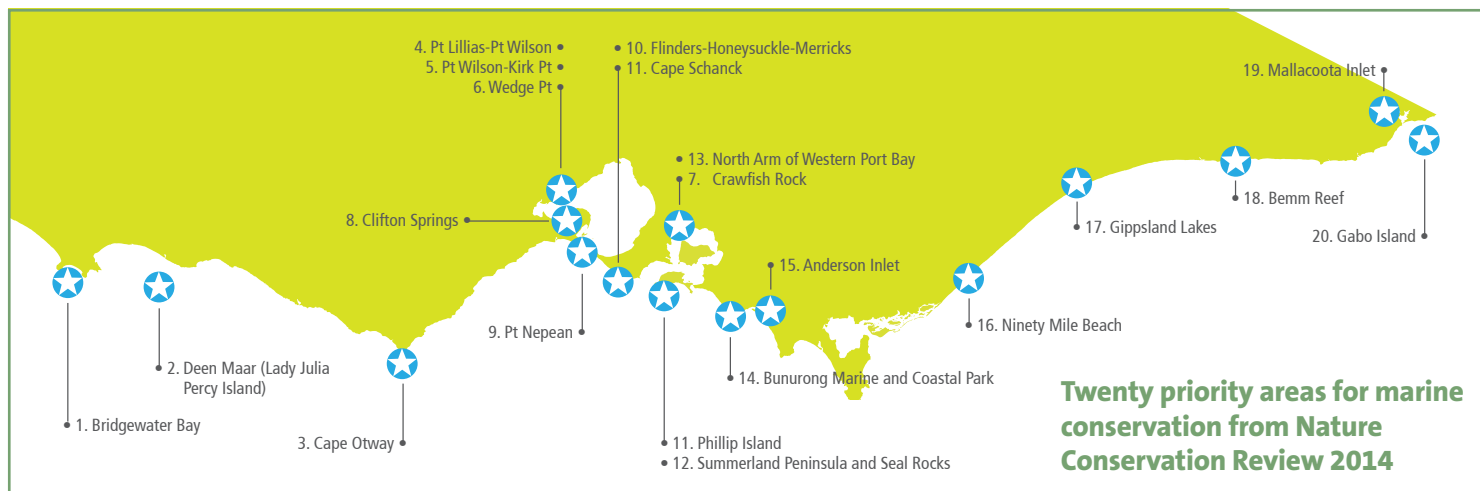
The existing park network

It is 12 years since a network of highly protected areas was established in Victorian waters. But these areas are inadequate to protect the values they were established for, or to achieve the goal of a comprehensive, adequate and representative network. Many ecologists consider that strict protection of 30% of marine ecosystems is the minimum needed.

Substantial coastal areas lack effective protection due to development pressures, insecure tenure and inadequate management.

Recommendations

- Commission VEAC or a similar body to investigate marine and coastal biodiversity and recommend areas for new or expanded marine national parks and sanctuaries.
- Implement all outstanding recommendations of the 2011 inquiry by Victoria's Auditor-General into the environmental management of marine protected areas.



- Establish a coastal private land conservation program with a fund to buy, lease or covenant private land abutting coastal public land reserves or the high water mark for protection and conservation.
- Strengthen protection of Crown land reserves.
- Expand and strengthen BushBroker, CoastalTender and saltmarsh protection programs.
- Commission an independent review of infrastructure in and adjacent to coastal national parks and Crown land with the aim of relocating or removing unnecessary infrastructure or managing it to minimise impacts on nature.
- Ensure that any infrastructure is ecologically sustainable.
- Identify where settlements and nature can move given rising sea levels, and include this information in plans.
- Introduce a new vegetation restoration overlay to state planning provisions to protect a 100-200m buffer around coastal land.

Priorities for protecting bays, inlets and estuaries

These areas are affected by conditions in local catchments and far upstream. With both high values and high threats, they warrant a special conservation focus.

The two largest bays, Port Phillip and Western Port, have internationally significant values at risk from major industrial enterprises and catchment pressures.

Recommendations

- Establish a Two Bays Board for strategic oversight of the health of these bays and their catchments.

- Develop a program of clear measurable improvement targets, monitoring and public reporting that includes a 'state of the bays' report.
- Establish a boat carrying capacity for bays and estuaries, and set boat limits accordingly.
- Develop a shorebird protection program.

Deficiencies in governance

In 2011 the Victorian Auditor-General found that policy, staff expertise, effective management and integrated planning were all lacking for marine protected areas.

Recommendations

- Develop a Marine and Coastal Planning and Management Act as a basis for implementing ecosystem-based management of all marine and coastal waters.
- Establish a Marine and Coastal Authority to develop a framework for ecologically sustainable, ecosystem-based management of all human uses and impacts on Victoria's seas and coasts.

Deficiencies in biosecurity and fishery management

Current approaches to invasive species tend to be more reactive than proactive, focusing on a few harmful species and prioritising short-term commercial interests. The Auditor-General found that the environment was ill-prepared to respond to new incursions of marine pests.

There has been no rigorous evaluation of the ecosystem effects of fishing, its sustainability and impact on critical habitats such as fish nurseries, and little monitoring or management of the impacts of recreational fishing.

Recommendations

- Develop a marine pest biosecurity plan with a strong prevention focus.
- Implement ecosystem-based management of commercial and recreational fisheries and conduct location-specific ecological risk assessments.
- Improve enforcement of fishing laws, focusing on illegal fishing in protected areas.
- Allocate a substantial proportion of fishing licensing fees to support long-term fish habitat recovery projects. • PW

For details of all the 42 recommendations for marine and coastal ecosystems, see the full NCR report at www.vnpa.org.au

Reef Watch update

Because of a funding shortfall and staff changes, the VNPA is not able to coordinate a full Great Victorian Fish Count (GVFC) this year.

Instead, with the support of Parks Victoria, a selection of Fish Count sites will be available in marine national parks and sanctuaries.

From 7 to 20 December 2014, Parks Victoria is working with local groups to undertake GVFC surveys in places including the Mushroom Reef, Barwon Bluff, Ricketts Point, Jawbone, Point Cooke and Merri marine sanctuaries.

Parks Victoria-led GVFC activities will be snorkelling only and managed by qualified and experienced staff or contractors.

For more information, contact Shannon.Hurley@parks.vic.gov.au. Where possible, marine ranger staff will advise about local opportunities, dates, locations and times.

We hope to return to a full Reef Watch program in future years.

Restoring the bay's lost reefs

Looking across Port Phillip Bay to Melbourne from Clifton Springs near Portarlington. The Bay is the site for the shellfish restoration program.

DR JAMES FITZSIMONS, DIRECTOR OF CONSERVATION (AUSTRALIA PROGRAM) WITH THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, REPORTS ON AN EXCITING CONSERVATION PROJECT IN PORT PHILLIP BAY.

Mussel reef in Gippsland Lakes – what the mussel reefs of Port Phillip Bay would have looked like 40-50 years ago.

PHOTO: IYNE HALE/THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

PHOTO: DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND PRIMARY INDUSTRIES (DEPI)

Southern Australia's bays and estuaries are important temperate habitats. They teem with unique species such as handfish, seahorses and seadragons, and are a natural playground for swimming, fishing and sailing.

However, the health of our bays and estuaries is under threat. Around the world there are more recorded extinctions in estuaries than in any other marine ecosystem.

The harvesting of native flat oysters from the 1880s, followed by decades of mussel and scallop dredging, saw Port Phillip Bay's shallow fringing shellfish reefs all but wiped out. Most of these commercial fisheries have now gone, but so have most of the shellfish reefs.

But now a new program to restore the reefs is now underway.

The project was initiated by the Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club, whose members noticed the loss of healthy reefs as recently as the early 1980s.

The pilot project will see The Nature Conservancy (TNC) form a partnership with Fisheries Victoria and the Albert Park club with the aim of restoring shellfish reefs at Geelong, Hobsons Bay and Chelsea.

Fisheries Victoria will raise native flat oysters at its Queenscliff hatchery. These will then be used to re-establish reefs in the Port Phillip Bay area, boosting fish numbers, improving water filtration and increasing recreational fishing opportunities.

Farewell Simon and Wendy

The VNPA is sorry to lose marine and coastal campaigner Simon Branigan, who has taken up the position of Estuaries Conservation Coordinator with the Nature Conservancy. Simon has done a fantastic job over the past 4½ years and we wish him well in his new role.

We're also sorry to say goodbye to Wendy Roberts, who has been working with the VNPA on marine conservation since 2002. She has coordinated the Reef Watch program and the Great Victorian Fish Count for much of that time and has done a terrific job in creatively raising the profile of marine values and conservation. We wish her all the best for the future.

TNC recently published *Shellfish Reefs at Risk*, a global report which concluded that "shellfish reefs are the most imperilled marine habitat on earth". The report gives comprehensive evidence that reefs are functionally extinct in many areas, particularly in Australia, North America and Europe. Globally, 85% of oyster reefs have been completely lost.

But around the world, there's considerable progress in restoring estuarine reefs that increase biodiversity, improve fishery productivity and filter the water. The Port Phillip restoration will be an Australian first, but will be informed by the experience of The Nature Conservancy in North America, where around 100 shellfish reef projects have been undertaken.

Over the next five years, as part of its Great Southern Seascapes program, TNC plans to dramatically accelerate estuarine conservation in southern Australia with initiatives to address the impact of sea level rise on coastal habitats such as saltmarsh and mangroves, and completing in-water restoration.

Working with a wide range of government departments, Australian scientists, fishing clubs and conservation groups, the program will focus on habitat restoration, both in the water and on the coast, and encourage local people to get involved through different volunteer activities. • PW

Port proposals questioned



The Orange-bellied Parrot is one of many species that would be adversely affected by the Bay West project.

PHOTO: J.J. HARRISON, CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE

MATT RUCHEL AND SIMON BRANIGAN EXAMINE THE DIFFERENT PLANS OF VICTORIAN LABOR AND THE COALITION FOR NEW PORTS.

Major infrastructure proposals often create political divisions. Parties hedge their bets on what they consider is the best vote winner, often with limited strategic or expert oversight.

The debate about a new international container port in Victoria is no different.

On one side of politics is the Coalition government backing the development of a new megaport at Hastings in Western Port. On the other stands Labor, pitching its flag on the western shoreline of Port Phillip Bay. This is known as Bay West.

Both port development options are environmental disasters in waiting, requiring substantial dredging and probable clearing of important marine and coastal habitat.

The exact part of the Port Phillip shoreline Labor plans to develop is still unclear. One option could be Department of Defence land near Point Wilson. This would include a giant hook-shaped pier extending about 8km into the sea.

The pier would be just south of Lake Borrie, a Ramsar wetland that is home to hundreds of bird species, some of them threatened.

Natural wonders

Port Phillip's western shoreline has one of Australia's richest saltmarshes and extensive seagrass meadows. That's why

it has been identified as a priority area for better management and protection.

Its flora is of national significance, and the fauna of international significance. It hosts significant Australian populations of the Pacific Golden Plover, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper, Double-banded Plover, Red-necked Avocet and other birds.

The site is also significant for the Orange-bellied Parrot as winter habitat, and is home to breeding colonies of the Fairy Tern and Pied Cormorant. It also has rich underwater diversity.

Failed proposals

The western shoreline of Port Phillip Bay was assessed in detail in the 1990s for two major developments: the relocation of the Cooke Island bulk chemical terminal, and an expanded armaments complex for the Navy. Both failed environmental and practicality tests.

The 1994 Report of the Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry for the proposed East Coast Armaments Complex (ECAC) at Point Wilson highlighted risks to water quality, disturbance to birds and mammals, and spread of contaminants.

Politics gone wrong

Both major political parties have been putting the cart before the horse.

Questions remain about the real need for a new or massively expanded port in Victoria.

The theory that mega container ships will be coming to Melbourne was recently debunked by the Victoria University-based Supply Chain Advisory Network (see Park Watch Sept. 2014). This expert think-tank argued that markets, not government policies, dictate the size and port destinations of ships.

What we need is an independent strategic assessment of Victoria's future port capacity and demand, including the option of consolidating existing ports in Geelong and Melbourne. This assessment needs to be thoroughly reviewed through an open public process which puts all the issues on the table and has linkages to national transport and freight planning.

Victoria has already spent millions of dollars on deepening the Port Phillip channel to the Port of Melbourne. If we do need a new port, which some shipping experts question, where should it be? Can we expand existing ports in a sensitive way, rather than building a whole new mega port? • PW

Labor port update

The document *Victorian Labor's Plan for Jobs and Growth*, released during the election campaign, states that:

"A future Victorian Labor Government will direct Infrastructure Victoria to conduct a comprehensive and transparent cost benefit analysis to test Bay West against all other possible siting alternatives. This study will include the long-term freight and logistics needs of the state (including future bulk capacity needs at Hastings)."

This document is one of the few to state the probable ultimate motivation for trying to move the port: urban renewal and real estate. It says: "A Bay West port project would be undertaken without the need to develop the Port of Hastings as a container port and with awareness that ultimately container trade currently operating through the Port of Melbourne could be accommodated at the single port at Bay West. This has the potential to free up 510 hectares of current Port of Melbourne land for long term future urban renewal purposes."



*Children play on cliff edge lookout,
Port Campbell headland.*



Port Campbell Developments on a fragile coast

MARION MANIFOLD, SECRETARY OF THE PORT CAMPBELL COMMUNITY GROUP INC, EXPLAINS HOW RECENT PLANS FOR THE COAST SEEM TO FORGET ITS FRAGILITY.

Port Campbell's limestone cliffs are being promoted as a world-class tourist destination and a place for developments, but planners seem to lack understanding and consideration of the limestone environment's fragility and risks.

Nor does there appear to be a long-term vision to protect the landscape and so ensure the coast remains an attractive tourism destination into the future.

In Port Campbell township, planners appear to have ignored a geotechnical hazard zone when approving a dwelling on the headland. There have been two recent major cliff collapses only 50 metres from this house, which is approximately 40m from a large cavern and 25m from karst tunnels.

In addition, permit conditions appear not to have been upheld. The dwelling appears to have had inadequate geotests, and experts have queried its structural integrity in this area that is prone to gale-force winds.

The community is dismayed at the height of the house. Two balconies and the lounge overlook the headland's

magnificent scenic walk and the historic Beacon Steps lookout. This will have long-term repercussions for the community and the town's tourism.

Master Plan

The new Shipwreck Coast Master Plan (see box) seeks to gain a higher tourism 'yield' and proposes private development within the national park. This appears unnecessary, as a recent C30 amendment opened up ten large sites (over 1000 hectares on 28 km of coast) for tourism development on private land adjoining the national park.

The economic yield of the area could be better increased by promoting longer stays in the whole South West Region, which includes the entire Great Ocean Road – with Lorne, Apollo Bay, Warrnambool and Port Fairy – plus the Glenelg region and the Grampians, and inland towns such as Camperdown, rather than just promoting the Shipwreck Coast. The answer lies in marketing the broader area.

The Plan also proposes a private tourism development – now reported to be a geothermal spa resort – on an ecologically fragile piece of

Commonwealth land surrounded by national park. This development should not be allowed when an adjoining C30 site is available.

The Plan suggests some interesting and dramatic concepts, but it does not seem to reasonably consider the geotechnical risks or how the wild, untouched scenic landscape values and biodiversity of this environmentally sensitive landscape will be protected.

Twelve Apostles

A large cantilevered viewing platform is proposed at the Twelve Apostles. One would think that the problems of bedding such a large structure into an area known to have caverns and a recent major cliff collapse, and potential for further catastrophic collapses, would be a major concern. The viewing platform collapse at New Zealand's Cave Creek in a limestone area should also be considered.

As well, it is proposed to carve another set of steps into the 60 m high cliffs near the existing Gibson Steps. The current steps are in an area of high water drainage with sinkhole features nearby. It would seem a high risk to encourage more people to walk on the beach at the base of these unstable cliffs.

The Plan shows developments and walkways around sinkholes promoted as bird-watching areas, yet these sinkholes are dry most of the year and most have no birdlife, even in winter.



While the current stairs to the beach at Loch Ard Gorge may need some improvement, the proposed large stepped ramp appears grossly over scale. A shelter proposed at the top of the Gorge is a visual intrusion on the landscape and seems unnecessary; visitors spend only a few minutes at this lookout, which does not warrant a shelter. People should be advised to come prepared for experiencing the sometimes wild elements which are part of the attraction of this coast.

The proposal for a large stepped viewing platform on Port Campbell's low eastern bay cliffs, looking like an Olympic pool stadium, appears to ignore the fact that any footings will fragment the limestone, interrupt the natural drainage and accelerate erosion of an already fragile area.

Urbanising the landscape

The Plan seems to urbanise the landscape with pods, bus shuttle shelters, viewing platforms and rest areas which would destroy the scenic and environmental values of the landscape that visitors come to see, as well as adding to the management issues of what appears to be an already understaffed national park.

Even now there seems to be inadequate infrastructure to support the park's needs. The Twelve Apostles visitor centre has to truck water in, and water from the septic treatment ponds appears to seep into the karst landscape, which may hasten the development of cavities and voids.

Above centre:
Major cliff collapse in 2010 at Murphies, about 8km west of Port Campbell near London Bridge (which itself 'fell down' in 1990).

Above right:
Twelve Apostles walkway collapse, September 2011.

Right: New house being built in unstable cliff area.



The Plan consultants acknowledge that climate change and ocean acidification may accelerate erosion of the coast. This needs more investigation before government funding is committed to infrastructure, as many of the plans may be not feasible or realistic in the short or long term.

More experienced geotechnical advice is required so that planners can better understand the risks of development near these fragile cliffs. Better planning is also needed to stop the visual intrusion of developments on this national-listed and state-listed heritage landscape. • PW

Shipwreck Coast Master Plan

The Shipwreck Coast is defined as the 28km of coastline from Princetown to Boat Bay west of Peterborough.

The new Master Plan proposes a "long-term strategic framework to guide the protection of the coast, improvement of the visitor opportunities and facilities and to strengthen the local economy through sustainable tourism", and aims to increase tourism 'yield' and overnight stays. It also investigated "how the visitor experiences at key sites can be improved to a world class standard".

It was prepared for Parks Victoria by McGregor Coxall (Melbourne) in association with a number of other planning and design consultants. Partners included Tourism Victoria, and Corangamite and Moyne Shires.



Presenting the World Parks Congress

PHIL INGAMELLS TRIES TO SUMMARISE EVENTS AT SYDNEY'S RECENT BIG CONSERVATION BRAINSTORM.

I've never been to a World Parks Congress before, and I probably never will again. The next one might be in Russia in 10 years' time, and that's a long way off in time, distance and life experiences.

As someone predicted, by the end of the week-long mega-meet-up I'd just managed to work out how I should have approached it from the start. That's hardly surprising, with 6,000 participants, eight topic streams to choose from, a dozen or more events happening simultaneously and a couple of football fields' worth of display stands.

I was left elated, dismayed, deeply moved and deeply worried, somehow all at once.

There were definitely some highlights.

Above all, it was a rare and memorable experience to spend a week among so many people who understand and

care about the nature conservation predicament.

Any time I found a spare seat at a bench to have lunch or grab a coffee I found myself talking to people wrestling with extraordinary problems, such as the landscape planner charged with restoring the tsunami-hit Japanese coast, or the Frenchman attempting to mend his country's colonial legacy in Africa's rainforests.

There was the deeply moving presence of the Pacific Islanders. They had sailed for 60 days to the congress in traditional vakas (large outrigger canoes) to highlight the climate-changed-induced rising seas drowning their various worlds.

They filled the vast congress stage with song and dance, and hosted one of the best-attended pavilions of the week.

And there was NASA, the USA's remarkable space agency, and its affable

Applied Sciences Program director. Their capability to monitor changes in the earth's natural areas, to map things like ocean currents, bushfires or deforestation, is remarkable.

They were there to make it known that this information is freely available and accessible to all (try googling TerraLook). While America's gun lobby may be the ugliest expression of that country's commitment to freedoms, NASA's philosophy of planet-wide access to its research and information systems might well be the finest.

But I was dismayed at and ashamed by the performance of our federal politicians.

Before the most environmentally astute audience she will ever front, Julie Bishop vacuously boasted that Australia was leading the world in coral reef management. It didn't go down well.

And Greg Hunt's promise to appoint a Threatened Species Commissioner was framed as an 'announcement' even though



Pacific performers welcoming the vakas (large outrigger canoes) to Sydney.

PHOTO: COURTESY AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

Our ministers were easily upstaged by the representatives of several small and resource-poor African states who spoke with integrity, and offered impressive advances in protected areas.

Leaving aside many mainstream events, I opted to follow the Climate Change stream.

Though our natural areas make a crucial contribution to climate change mitigation, they are paradoxically already being impacted on by climate changes.

There were some interesting angles on giving resilience to ecosystems.

Robert Young from the University of Western Carolina warned us about 'climate adaption as a threat to ecosystems', citing US disaster funding to protect coastal communities from storm surges. The big budget program was severely compromising more-or-less natural changes in the USA's coastline by opting for massive protective barriers along the coast.

CSIRO's Mike Dunlop pointed out that we will have to deal with large magnitude changes to ecosystems, but they will differ over space and time. And through all of this, there will be a fair degree of uncertainty.

His colleague Alistair Hobday added that we have to move from a 'preserve and protect' mentality, to a 'facilitate change' mindset. Managers must become ecosystem engineers.

I think they were the only ones to raise the option of increasing genetic variability on-site as an alternative to developing connectivity corridors between isolated ecosystems.

And would the calls for triage, for setting priorities on what we might (and might not) be able to save, be confounded by the beautiful line from Gunditjmara spokesman Damien Bell: "Gunditjmara country includes all living things – none better than the other"?

Tasmanian lawyer Phillipa McCormack warned that we must define our management objectives with precision, pointing out that of 87 Victorian and Tasmanian park management plans,

only 27 mentioned climate change, just eight had specific prescriptions and only one offered a definition of resilience.

An advisor to President Obama also asked for sharper language, renaming climate change 'sudden climatic change syndrome'.

And a young South African talked of the village elder who, pointing to the now-dried landscape, said: "My childhood was not like this". It was important, he said, to tell such stories.

Two early speakers shone some light on this difficult path. Indigenous leader Pat Dodson said that if we don't live with respect for what we have been given, we are doomed. He added that to achieve anything, we must be truthful above all.

Then, as if on cue, Achim Steiner, the articulate director of the United Nations Environment Program, took the stage, saying that it was no longer appropriate to see protected areas as the last line of defence for threatened species.

We should confidently spread the word that national parks and other conservation reserves are actually at the front line in the fight for economic and social wellbeing. Indeed, the evidence is that they have been for some time.

We are experiencing one of the most avaricious periods in human history, he said, and our politicians have been slow to understand the significance of the ecological argument.

He asked us to "speak truth to power".

There were many big and small recommendations from the congress. The most compelling might be the call to move beyond currently accepted protected area targets: 17% of terrestrial systems and 10% of marine areas by 2020.

It seems we may need 30% of the world's oceans and, eventually, up to 50% of terrestrial areas protected in the long term. And we have a huge job to increase park management resources and effectiveness. • PW

The World Parks Congress's official 'Promise of Sydney', and more, can be found on the congress website www.worldparkscongress.org



PHOTO: PHIL INGAMMELS

Achim Steiner, Director of the United Nations Environment Program, addresses the World Parks Congress in Sydney.

it's been around for years, and his luckless commissioner only has a mandate to protect mammals. The commissioner's appointment is actually a downgrading of federal responsibility to protect all nationally threatened species and threatened ecosystems, but he trumpeted it as a world-leading initiative.

Kakadu National Park, Australia's largest.
We need to make sure parks are actually
protecting wildlife from threats.

Time to fix park targets

BOB PRESSEY, PROFESSOR IN CONSERVATION PLANNING AT JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY, AND **EUAN RITCHIE**, SENIOR LECTURER IN ECOLOGY AT DEAKIN UNIVERSITY, EXAMINE WHY ESTABLISHING MORE PARKS IS NOT PREVENTING ANIMAL AND PLANT EXTINCTIONS. THIS IS AN EDITED VERSION OF THEIR ARTICLE IN *THE CONVERSATION*, 11 NOVEMBER 2014.

While we can never know for sure, an extraordinary number of animals and plants are threatened with extinction: up to a third of all mammals and over a tenth of all birds. And the problem is getting worse.

At the same time, we have more land and sea than ever in protected areas ('parks'), more than 200,000 protected areas covering about 15% of the world's land area and 3% of the oceans.

So why are protected areas making so little difference?

One reason is that protected areas are only one of our tools, and will never do the job alone.

Another reason is that protected areas tend to be in the wrong places.

The majority of protected areas are residual leftover areas of the world

pushed to the margins where they least interfere with extractive activities such as agriculture, mining or forestry.

On land, protected areas are mainly remote or high, cold, arid, steep, and infertile. Similar patterns are emerging in the sea.

Residual protected areas, by definition, make the least difference to conservation.

Meanwhile, biodiversity continues to be lost in landscapes and seascapes suitable for clearing, logging, grazing, fishing, and extraction of minerals, oil, and gas.

Residual protection also gives the false appearance of progress because many people equate the number of protected areas and their extent with success.

These figures are only 'good news' if they tell us about the difference these parks make to conservation. They don't.

Yellowstone National Park (USA)
protects bison.



PHOTO: RICH FLYNN, CC-BY-NC-SA

PHOTO: RITA WILLAERT/FICKR

Failing to stop the losses

The most rigorous estimates of the difference made by protected areas are small.

By 2008, only 7% of Costa Rica's much-lauded protected-area system would have been deforested in the absence of protection.

Globally, in 2005, the loss of native vegetation prevented by protected areas was just 3% of their extent.

These numbers get to the very purpose of protected areas. They are small because protected areas are mainly residual.

Aiming for the wrong targets

Protected areas that make little or no difference should be a major concern for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), especially because targets for protection endorsed



Paper Nautilus in Port Phillip Bay. Some Australian marine parks are being opened up for fishing.

PHOTO: JOHN GASKELL, BENEATH OUR BAY

by the Convention on Biological Diversity at best are obscure and at worst encourage the failure of protected areas to make a difference.

The Convention's targets are meant to guide decisions on protected areas to 2020. The only unambiguously quantitative target says nothing about making a difference. It aspires to 17% of land and 10% of the sea under formal protection.

The result has been a rush to proclaim large, remote protected areas where they are easiest to establish and make least difference. The story is familiar in conservation and beyond: provide a simplistic metric that implies success, and it will be manipulated to achieve high scores.

Another of the Convention's targets gets closer to the real purpose of protected areas, but remains problematic: "By 2020, the rate of loss of all natural habitats, is at least halved and where feasible brought close to zero, and degradation and fragmentation [are] significantly reduced."

But there are problems here too. Before we halve the rate of loss, we need to know what the 'baseline' rate of loss is and over what period it should be measured. Should it be measured in the past, when loss might have been slower, or now?

Habitat loss also varies across the world. Does that mean that reduction in loss rates of some areas can offset faster losses elsewhere?

Several kinds of tropical forests, for example, housing most of the world's terrestrial species, are being lost rapidly. For these, even a halving of the rate of loss will mean mass extinction.

Australia setting a bad example

IUCN's mission is hindered by recalcitrant governments.

Australia, as host of the World Parks Congress, showed off its conservation wares. But these are less impressive than when Australia genuinely led global conservation thinking, from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Our protected areas on land, such as those in the host state, are strongly residual. (Claims of an improving trend are based on inadequate data.)

Australia's marine parks are directed more at satisfying total protected area targets than protecting threatened marine biodiversity.

And the only quantitative targets in Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System for protected extent and coverage of regional ecosystems leave plenty of scope for more parks that make little or no difference.

Not content with marginalising protection, Australian governments are weakening what's there. Parks on land are being opened up for livestock grazing, industrial logging, mining, 'conservation hunting', and commercial development.

No-take zones in marine parks are being opened up for fishing. The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is in jeopardy and the plan to fix it is destined to fail.

Four steps to make parks work

Here are four ways for IUCN to lead the way to parks that make a bigger difference:

- Stop using targets that give the illusion of conservation progress, including the number and extent of protected areas. At best they will inadvertently obscure the real signal; at worst they will be used perversely to dress up residual protection.
- Measure success as the difference protected areas make relative to no protection. If saving species is important, evaluating the impact of protected areas is essential.
- Establish an IUCN taskforce to develop ways for evaluating the impact of protected areas, considering both biodiversity and human livelihoods. Assess the impact of current protected areas to provide lessons for management and future planning. And test approaches to setting priorities.
- Develop targets for the impact of protected areas: how much threat should be averted and how much loss should be avoided?

Ultimately, the success of conservation depends on what natural resources are left unexploited by humans so that other species can survive.

Protection that does not avoid the loss of species and ecosystems merely gives the appearance of conservation progress under exploitative business-as-usual.

Real conservation – the kind that makes a difference – depends on IUCN's leadership. Every year of delay means irreversible, avoidable loss of biodiversity. • PW

This article was co-authored by Dr Piero Visconti, Board Member of the European Section of the Society for Conservation Biology in Washington, D.C.

For the original article see <http://theconversation.com/we-have-more-parks-than-ever-so-why-is-wildlife-still-vanishing-34047>

Grow West – many hands make light work

The old adage was demonstrated once again this year on Sunday 20 July, when 200 volunteers planted 5,500 trees in the Rowsley Valley south of Bacchus Marsh.

Yaloak Estate in the valley was again the venue for the annual Grow West community planting day, with volunteers from organisations including the VNPA, the Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee, the Victorian Mobile Landcare Group, and 70 cheerful and hard-working people from India-based charity Dera Sacha Sauda. Many local people from around the district also participated.

Helena Lindorff, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA Environmental Projects Coordinator, said the annual planting day attracts new volunteers as well as regular visitors.

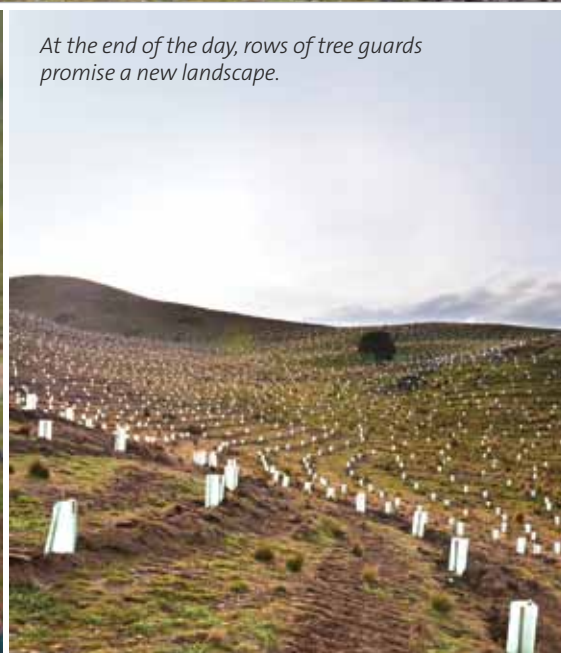
“We are noticing and welcoming the many familiar faces returning each year. They are making it an ‘annual pilgrimage’ to Grow West from the city,” she said.

The Bacchus Marsh Lions Club supplied sustenance and refreshments for the day and Mobile Landcare Group members transported seedlings, tree guards and planters around the steep but compact site.

Unlike some other Grow West planting days, which can be quite cold and wet, this year’s day was mild and pleasant, making it particularly enjoyable and rewarding. • PW



At the end of the day, rows of tree guards promise a new landscape.



A Mallee property transformed

HINDMARSH LANDCARE FACILITATOR **STEVE HEMPHILL** REPORTS ON AN ENERGETIC PLANTING WEEKEND.

The Hindmarsh Landcare Network's 17th annual Project Hindmarsh community planting weekend saw 15,000 trees, shrubs and grasses planted out on Chris and Helena Lindorff's conservation property north of Lake Hindmarsh, transforming the previously partly cleared property into a sea of tree-guards.

The property is between Weddings Reserve and the Birdcage Flora and Fauna Reserve. The revegetation will help to form a native vegetation link between the two reserves. Chris and Helena put in many months of preparation to ensure the best possible conditions for the plants.

The planting weekend, held 15-17 August, was based in Rainbow township, rather than the familiar Little Desert Lodge near Nhill. Around 160 volunteers, including about 100 VNPA members and friends, came from all over Victoria; some even travelled from SA and NSW.

Some people camped out on the Rainbow Showgrounds. Others slept in a scout hall or stayed in the town's motel or hotels. Unfortunately the demands of planting didn't allow time for exploring the town, but we encourage return visits!

Saturday was set aside for planting, but as this could not be completed by the end of the day we continued on the Sunday.

Team Leaders and Assistants, easily spotted in their hi-vis vests, were



Happy planters at Hindmarsh. The kids enjoyed all the activities, whether planting, eating or playing.



PHOTOS: HELENA LINDORFF

allocated to individual groups. The site was divided into 12 sections, each team completing one section before moving to the next.

We were well fed by the catering team from the very active Rainbow community. The food was provided through generous support from Luv-a-Duck and Lowan Foods.

Entertainment on the Saturday night included a fascinating presentation on wild dogs by experienced local trapper by Marg Krelle. Chris Lindorff gave an excellent illustrated talk about his property and its flora and fauna, and local entertainers the Lazy Farmers

Sons and Dave & Ally finished off the night with their music.

The weekend was supported through generous donations and grants from the ACE Radio Network, the Handbury Family Trust, Victorian Landcare and Wimmera CMA. Special thanks go to the Rainbow community for catering for the event and making the visitors welcome, to Nhill SES for providing First Aid, communications and logistical support, and to the VNPA.

We received valuable feedback from participants, and planning is now underway for next year's event. This may see us return to the Nhill district. We'll keep you posted! • PW

Users not happy with new vegetation rules

CHANGES TO VEGETATION CLEARING REGULATIONS INTRODUCED BY THE STATE GOVERNMENT IN DECEMBER 2013 REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT WINDING BACK OF NATIVE VEGETATION PROTECTION. YASMIN KELSALL REPORTS.

Under the 2013 regulations, most native vegetation in Victoria is classified as 'low priority' and is allowed to be cleared providing an offset is paid for.

A major issue with the regulations is the substitution of computer-based mapping for actual on-site assessment of the significance of remnant vegetation.

A recent survey has found that the regulations are problematic for people who use them on a daily basis.

The survey, titled 'Permitted Native Vegetation Regulations – What would you change?' was sent to users of the regulations, primarily focusing on local government and ecological consultants.

A total of 72 responses, 21 of them from local government and 37 from consultants, was received. Local government staff shoulder much of the responsibility under the new policy.

The survey found that:

- 85% of respondents say that the regulations are not working well or are working very badly
- 30% wouldn't keep anything in the new regulations – the highest response for the 'what would you keep?' question.

Key issues that the respondents raised about the new regulations included the following.

- The reliance on inaccurate modelled datasets, combined with the inability to contradict the result (unless you are a landowner), was by far the biggest concern (33%). This is an issue that the VNPA has consistently raised with government also.
- Concerns about the accuracy of specific maps generated by these datasets (18%).

- Large old trees not being specifically valued (15%).
- No on-site assessments to confirm accuracy of the maps (9%).
- Little consideration given to the vegetation type being cleared and how depleted it is (6%).

Comments

Comments from respondents on key areas of concern included:

"The modelling of threatened species and approach to risk has no relation to the real world. What concerns me is that this nonsense is being developed by economists rather than ecologists - i.e. it lacks ecological content, or what was included has been corrupted beyond recognition."

"Little value placed on Large Old Trees. Hollows [are] critical for over 400 fauna species."

"The system fails to adequately identify ecological values consistently or logically, leading to a lack of faith in the process."

"The almost total reliance on offsets is a path to disaster"

"The downgrading of the value of the environment within the legislation... There is now less accountability, not more."

Under the new regulations, local government has been given more administrative work but less control over determining the outcomes of clearing in their 'patch'. Local government has become the key decision-maker as the role of the Department of Environment and Primary Industries has been reduced.

Here are some comments showing local government opinions:

"There needs to be a common sense mechanism whereby if the modelled data is clearly wrong then the regulatory authorities can challenge this ... or not use the modelled data at all."

"Much of responsibility is now placed on local government staff - with State government moving away from the planning permit application process. More resources for local council would be nice - training, staffing, anything."

"Now that local council can't rely on [the regulations] to protect biodiversity, [we] must strengthen [our] Planning Scheme. We just don't have the resources or the Councillor/ Mayoral backing to do this..."

"Regulation is supported with only token enforcement - it only gets the few honest ones."

"The regulations are causing considerable angst [for] officers required to administer [them] and [for] many community members who do not agree with the regulations and see their detrimental impacts in the natural environment and landscape."

The survey results support the VNPA's assertions that Victoria now has a problematic regulatory system that is bad for the environment and has been very poorly implemented as well.

The results show that there are strong grounds for reforming the system – and respondents offered many ideas.

Reforming the system

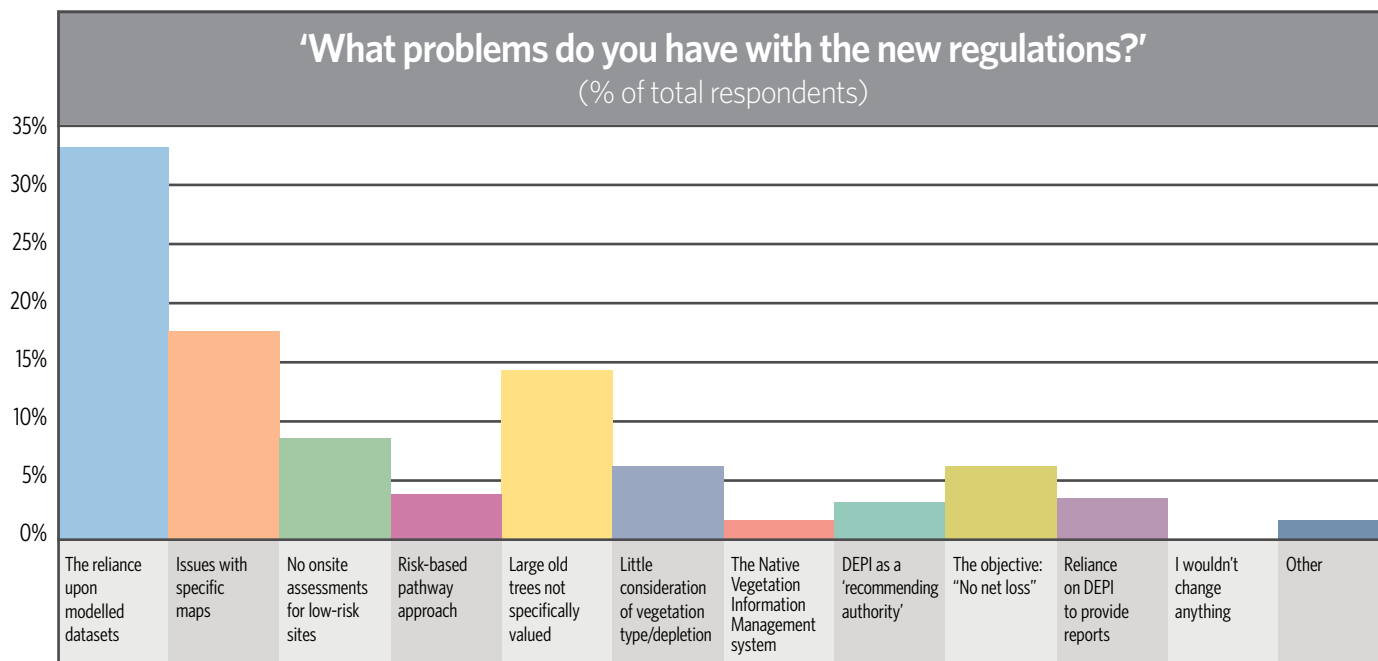
We envisage that reform could occur in two stages:

- first, a number of immediate reforms as short-term 'patches' for key issues
- second, a long-term solution which considers institutional and legislative reform and which would successfully solve native vegetation regulation issues once and for all.



PHOTO: JOHN SAMPSON

Farmland near Avoca with single paddock tree and other remnant vegetation. Our surviving native vegetation needs better protection.



These suggestions should be taken on board by whichever party wins the State election.

Short-term updates

Short-term solutions to address the most pressing key issues could easily be developed. Indeed many of the respondents consistently suggested these solutions throughout the survey.

Short-term updates to the system (i.e. within a year) should address the following issues:

- Reliance on modelled datasets and associated issues

Reintroduce on-site assessment for all sites (consider a streamlined assessment for low-risk sites). Use the resulting information to inform decisions. Some of the modelled datasets can still provide useful background information, but they should not be used as the final arbiter.

- Large old trees not being specifically valued

Introduce the identification of large old trees into the assessment methodology and ensure that they are specifically offset.

- Little consideration of the vegetation type being cleared and how depleted it is

Introduce into the decision-making process the consideration of the vegetation's depletion status, and require a like-for-like offset.

Longer-term actions

New legislation that better protects Victoria's biodiversity should be developed. This would include improved regulation of native vegetation clearing.

We need to go beyond the existing idea of 'grafting' a system of nature protection into planning schemes under the Planning and Environment Act. Attempting to ensure effective biodiversity protection within legislation that focuses primarily on facilitating development does not work.

Including native vegetation clearing controls in new stand-alone legislation would ensure that the key biodiversity management tools can be integrated.

The VNPA has developed a number of ideas that would help in developing any future legislation. In relation to native vegetation clearing controls, these include:

- determining the current status of native vegetation across the state, looking at trends and drivers for retention and loss
- conducting an independent audit of the current offset system to determine whether it is delivering the required gains, and, if not, determining methods of ensuring this
- reviewing former vegetation protection processes within Victoria to ensure we retain the best elements of each, and informing any new system by also reviewing other national and international policies
- considering all the benefits of native vegetation, including its role in a changing climate plus social and cultural benefits. • PW



Strathbogie locals want forest management to focus on conservation, recreation, tourism, beekeeping and water supplies, not logging.

Walsh rejects calls to protect Strathbogie forests

In late October, Victorian Nationals deputy leader Peter Walsh brushed aside pleas from residents of the Strathbogie Ranges in NE Victoria for a more balanced approach to managing the area's forests.

Bertram Lobert from the Strathbogie Sustainable Forest Group said Mr Walsh, the Victorian agriculture minister, was asked to improve forest management in response to broad community concerns. Instead he dismissed logging concerns, angering locals.

"People in the Strathbogie area are deeply concerned at VicForests' approach to managing our forests," Mr Lobert said.

"The response so far from Peter Walsh indicates that the Napthine Government is not listening to our concerns."

At a meeting with local candidates for the new state seat of Euroa, residents called for a renewed focus on recreation and tourism, beekeeping and good water management to promote the Strathbogie forests.

"We asked Peter Walsh for an independent inquiry into how the community can maximise benefits from the limited forests that remain after more than 9000 hectares were

lost to pine plantations," Mr Lobert said.

The community was particularly concerned that state logging agency VicForests had failed to properly regenerate areas harvested over the past 10 years.

The minister was shown areas where VicForests had clear-felled forest and left behind weed-infested paddocks that were the opposite of what community Landcare projects were trying to achieve.

"VicForests has shown they can't manage these forests in a responsible and sustainable way, yet Minister Walsh seems to prefer to take his advice from them rather than listen to the community," said Mr Lobert.

"We're particularly angry about statements the minister made in a letter sent to our group, which we feel demonstrates disrespect toward the community.

"To make matters worse, he has confirmed VicForests is expecting the community to fix up their failed regeneration coupe.

"The minister's letter also contains wrong or misleading information."

In his letter the minister claimed:

- **Wood from the Strathbogie is highly sought after by local sawmills.**

Wrong. Most of the wood in areas to be harvested is of poor quality and destined for use as pulp or firewood.

- **VicForests is highly valued in the community and manages forests for multiple benefits.**

Wrong. Experience shows them to be poor land managers who only manage forests for wood (that's their charter).

- **Native forest logging provides employment for thousands of families.**

Wrong. The only forestry jobs in the Strathbogie Ranges are in the pine plantations.

- **VicForests protects important environmental assets and native species.**

Not true. It is well established that native forest logging is a major contributor to pushing endangered species such as Leadbeater's Possum to extinction.

- **VicForests operations in the Strathbogie would meet world standards for forestry.**

Not true. Turning natural forests into weed paddocks, or at best plantations, doesn't meet any standards for good forest management.

Strathbogie locals are demanding that local candidates for the new Euroa electorate promise a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Investigation into the Strathbogie Ranges, and are calling on both the Coalition and the ALP to act on their concerns. • PW
Strathbogie Sustainable Forest Group



PHOTO: COURTESY NICK ROBERTS

Coalition's secret plan to log forests in western Victoria

In November the Coalition government rushed through a plan for VicForests, the state-owned commercial logging company, to gain access to Victorian forests west of the Hume Highway, which were previously off-limits to industrial-scale logging.

This could allow forests such as Mt Cole, Wombat, parts of the Otways, and state forests in the south-west to be opened to commercial-scale logging.

A letter from DEPI to a regional environment group confirmed an amendment to the allocation order transferring all commercial timber harvesting in Victoria from the Department of Environment and Primary Industry (DEPI) to VicForests. Since VicForests was established in 2005, it has had access to timber only in eastern Victoria.

According to the letter the changes came into place on 5 November, one day after the government entered caretaker mode.

The DEPI website confirms the allocation order change on 31 October, just days before caretaker mode began, but gives no information or map outlining the changes.

Since its creation, VicForests has rarely returned a profit, and has required millions of dollars in subsidies to continue operating.

The VNPA's Nick Roberts said: "This is a shocking and secret move to introduce industrial-scale logging in high-conservation value forests of western Victoria in the dying stages of the government. VicForests has never made a profit. Giving them access to western Victoria is not only sneaky, but will cost taxpayers millions."



PHOTO: NICK ROBERTS

Logging in red gum national parks

In a surprise development, the Victorian Government decided late in October to abandon a proposed joint Victoria-NSW red gum logging 'trial'.

The Victorian and NSW governments wanted to trial destructive 'thinning' practices inside red gum national parks, logging River Red Gum trees with mechanical harvesters, building roads and using herbicide in this sensitive environment.

The proposed joint trial would have allowed logging machinery to fell trees in about 400ha of the parks on either side of the Murray River.

Victoria's Department of Environment and Primary Industries did not explain its decision to withdraw from the trials, which were to take place in Barmah National Park in Victoria and the Millewa Forest Park in NSW.

The NSW Government may yet continue with red gum thinning trials in national parks.

Victorian environmental groups said that political pressure probably caused Victoria to abandon the trial. Logging national parks in the lead-up to an election would not have been a good look.

VNPA spokesman Nick Roberts welcomed Victoria's decision.

Libs promise VEAC investigation into Strathbogie forests

Late in November, Victorian Minister for Environment and Climate Change Ryan Smith visited the Strathbogie area with Liberal candidate for Euroa Tony Schneider. The Minister heard and saw first-hand the issues that locals have been discussing for the last 12 months.

In response, he committed the Victorian Liberal Party to an investigation, undertaken by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, into how these last remaining forests in the Strathbogie Ranges can be best managed for the benefit of all stakeholders.

Tony Schneider said: "We need to ensure that our industry and environmental practices are balanced and practical, and all parties were in agreement that a VEAC Review was the appropriate place to start."

Touring Gippsland's great parks

GEOFF DURHAM TAKES US TO TEN NATIONAL PARKS AND OTHER RESERVES IN EASTERN VICTORIA, ALL OF THEM WELL WORTH VISITING. BUT NEW CAMP BOOKING ARRANGEMENTS AND FEES ARE A PROBLEM.

In August this year our annual trip was a car tour of Gippsland, revisiting parks and discovering some new places we hadn't visited.

We weren't camping, but called in at various parks. We were surprised by the lack of people in the parks, even though the weather was favourable.

This article is not about natural and heritage values, or walking and 4WD opportunities, but focuses on visitor access and camping.

Overall, campgrounds were in good condition, with virtually no litter. However, new Parks Victoria camping arrangements began on 1 July.

A lot of planning and money have gone into numbering each campsite and putting up hundreds of signs at strategic points for park camping areas, stating that you have to pre-book (and often pay for) campsites on line or through the Parks Victoria Information Centre (13 1963).

Together with new and increased camping fees, this is causing quite a lot of stress, confusion and anger, often (unfairly) directed at rangers.

Here is a west-to-east selection of some of the places we visited.

Cape Liptrap Coastal Park (4,225 ha) is a mostly very narrow coastal strip from Anderson Inlet at Inverloch to Waratah Bay. There is access to the beach at Venus Bay, to the Lighthouse Reserve at Cape Liptrap, and to a campground just off the beach at Bear Gully via Walkerville.



Top: Corrigan's Bridge, Tarra-Bulga NP. **Lower:** Nyerimilang homestead.

This has 34 sites and some fireplaces, but no firewood or water. Until 1 July camping here was free and very popular with those who knew about it. At Walkerville, a Committee of Management operates a caravan park.

We couldn't resist the call of **Wilsons Promontory National Park**, and spent two nights at Tidal River. Roads in the camping area have been gravelled, some camp sites levelled and grassed, and there has been much revegetation with plants propagated by the Friends of the Prom. But camping fees have increased considerably.

We detoured inland to **Tarra-Bulga National Park** (2,015 ha) on the Grand Ridge Road. There is no camping in this park. The Information Centre at Balook is closed except at weekends and holidays, when it's staffed by Friends of Tarra-Bulga volunteers. Here there are toilets and picnic facilities.

At the Tarra Valley entrance there's informative signage, good picnic facilities and toilets among soaring Mountain Ash and tree-ferns. It's about a half-hour return walk to the modest

Cyathea Falls. From the Bulga entrance picnic area and toilets it's less than an hour's easy return walk to the impressive Corrigan Suspension Bridge across a lush fern gully.

Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park (17,610 ha) extends about 90 km along the Ninety Mile Beach from Seaspray to Lakes Entrance, with designated camping areas behind the foreshore dunes between The Honeysuckles and Paradise Beach.

The Lakes National Park (2,390 ha), on Sperm Whale Head east of Loch Sport, has one camping area with 20 sites at Emu Bight on Lake Victoria. The park office at the entrance is open but with restricted hours. An unusual feature of the park is its 'twig-burning' barbecues.

The gravel road to Point Wilson takes in the neglected Lake Reeve Nature Trail and a lookout. Point Wilson is an interesting spot with good interpretation and picnic facilities, popular with boating people from Paynesville and Metung.

Nyerimilang Heritage Park at Kalimna West, 10 km from Lakes Entrance, is an old favourite. The entrance shop is staffed by the Friends group at weekends. The



PHOTOS: GEOFF DURHAM

Top left: Loo-ernn Track, Tidal River, Wilsons Promontory NP. **Top right:** Tidal River: 'Still glides the stream ...'
Lower left: Agnes Falls. **Lower centre:** cabin at Cape Conran CP. **Lower right:** ancient Myrtle Beech, Tarra-Bulga NP.

homestead area is well maintained and there is a great lookout, and the ambitious East Gippsland Garden has a rotunda with interesting murals and interpretation. The adjacent farm cottage is an instructive contrast to the elegant homestead.

Cape Conran Coastal Park (11,700 ha) extends from Marlo at the mouth of the Snowy River to Cape Conran, and then in a wide strip to Bemm River on Sydenham Inlet. The Banksia Bluff camping area, operated for Parks Victoria by Carla and Josh Puglisi, who live on site, has 135 campsites, a group lodge, seven cabins and four 'Wilderness Retreats'. A ballot for accommodation over the summer holidays is held in June.

Park rangers are hard to come by these days, and it was a pleasure to talk to the enthusiastic, knowledgeable and helpful Josh. We had lunch at the delightful East Cape Picnic Area.

We spent a night in a cabin at the friendly Bemm River Hotel, meeting a lone backpacker walking the Wilderness Coast Walk to Wonboyn in

NSW. From Bemm River a track heads about 8 km west to small campsites with no facilities at Binn Beach, Gunnai Beach and Pearl Point.

Croajingolong National Park (87,500 ha) extends from Sydenham Inlet to Cape Howe on the NSW border. We did not detour off the highway to Point Hicks, as we had stayed at its privately managed lighthouse in 2012. Campsites on the Thurra and Mueller Rivers are managed by the lighthouse.

We did detour down the 34 km 'caravans not recommended' gravel road to Wigan Inlet to find the popular camping area with 24 campsites in good condition. Sites are now pre-booked with no ballot. A volunteer Camp Host is present in holiday periods. It's a beautiful 1½ hour return walk along the inlet to Fly Cove, where George Bass sheltered in 1797.

The next stop was Mallacoota township, with its choice of accommodation and a (no longer open) Parks Victoria office. The contentious Bastion Point breakwater was under construction. In the park, 15 km at the end of a

pot-holed track, Shipwreck Creek camping area has five campsites and a day visitor area above beautiful Shipwreck Beach.

We also 'discovered' two other places in Gippsland that are well worth a visit.

At the small **Agnes Falls Scenic Reserve**, accessible from the South Gippsland Highway at Toora or Welshpool, Parks Victoria has installed a new picnic shelter, tables and toilets. Interpretation signs make the surprising claim that the falls are the highest single-span falls in Victoria.

Signposted on the Princes Highway west of Nowa Nowa is the turn-off to the spectacular timber **Nowa Nowa Trestle Bridge** on the East Gippsland Rail Trail (Bairnsdale to Orbost). You can drive right up to the bridge, and there are toilets and picnic facilities.

The attractions of Gippsland are manifold; only some are described here. Virtually all of East Gippsland's coast is in parks and reserves, and there are many opportunities to appreciate them.

Before a visit, check the Parks Victoria website www.parks.vic.gov.au for up-to-date information and any changes in conditions. • PW

The visionary from Vienna

WARWICK SPRAWSON TELLS HOW ONE MAN HELPED CREATE TASMANIA'S CRADLE MOUNTAIN – LAKE ST CLAIR NATIONAL PARK AND THE FAMOUS OVERLAND TRACK.

In January 1910 an Austrian-born man with a luxuriant black moustache climbed Cradle Mountain.

Looking over the pristine lakes, rugged mountains and buttongrass plains he was smitten by the beauty of the Tasmanian highlands, declaring in his thick accent, 'This must be a national park for the people for all time. It's magnificent, and people must know about it and enjoy it.'

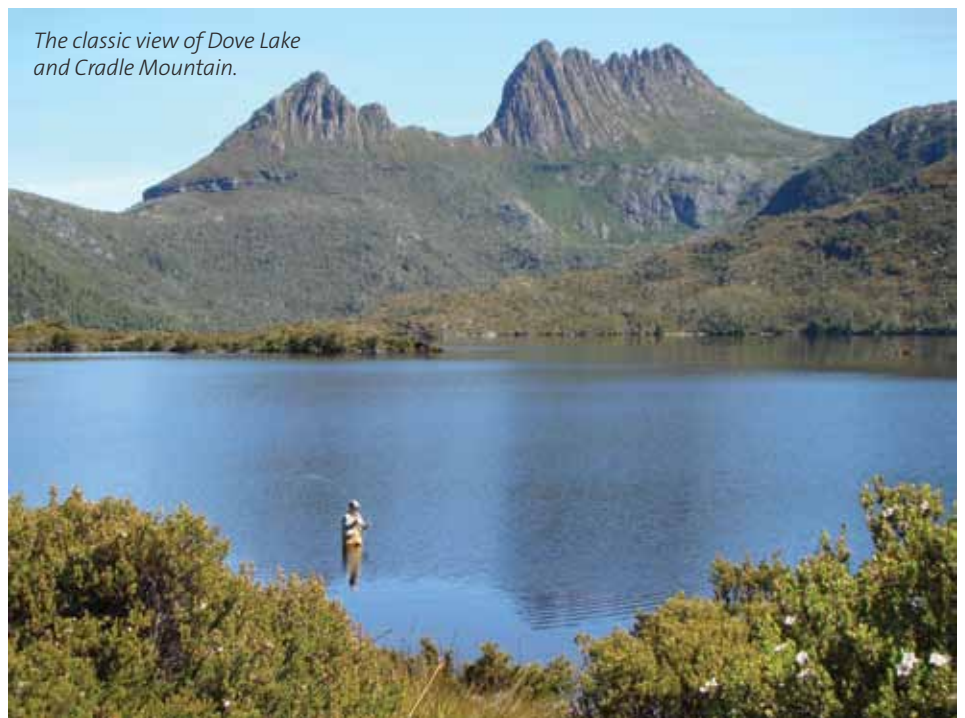
The man was Gustav Weindorfer – known to his friends as Dorfer – who had arrived in Australia in 1900, aged 26, leaving behind a tedious accounting job in Vienna for adventure in a new country.

Gustav had a keen interest in the natural world, and soon after arriving in Australia was exploring the bush around Melbourne as a member of the Victorian Field Naturalists Club. At the club he met Kate Cowle, and began visiting Kate and her sister at home, helping them classify their wildflower collections and singing Austrian folk songs to Kate's piano accompaniment.

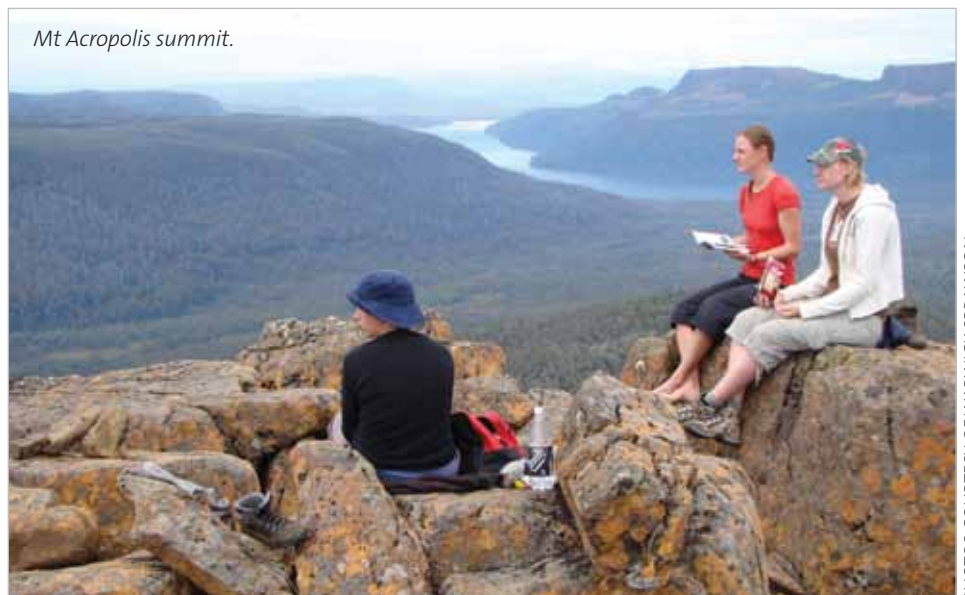
Dorfer was described as tall, strong and engaging, with a particularly impressive handlebar moustache. He and Kate were married in 1906, moving to northern Tasmania where Kate had been born.

His vow on top of Cradle Mountain was no idle pledge. He had seen how the construction of the chateau at Mt Buffalo had led to an influx of visitors and a greater appreciation of the area's natural beauty.

This had ultimately resulted in the establishment of Mt Buffalo National Park in 1898 – one of Australia's first



The classic view of Dove Lake and Cradle Mountain.



Mt Acropolis summit.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WARWICK SPRAWSON

national parks. Dorfer believed if it could be done in Victoria, it could be done in Tasmania.

Kate and Dorfer began to build a chalet near Cradle Mountain. Designed to harmonise with the surrounding landscape, and built from carefully selected King Billy pine from the adjoining forest, he called the building 'Waldheim', meaning 'Forest Home' in his native tongue. The chalet was far from luxurious, with bunks of split timber and hessian, mattresses stuffed with sphagnum moss and logs for chairs.

Just accessing Waldheim was an adventure. The tracks were so bad that horse and cart deliveries had to halt 14 km away, with Gustav carrying heavy items, such as the stove, the rest of the way on his back.

When the basic chalet was finished in 1912, he carved a motto on the wall near the fireplace: 'This is Waldheim, where there is no time and nothing matters.'

At the time, Cradle Valley was only known to a few hunters, trappers and adventurous mountaineers. The establishment of Waldheim began to draw other intrepid visitors to the area to experience the wilderness for themselves, with Gustav acting as guide, host and cook, serving up his home-baked bread, freshly ground coffee, and trademark wombat and garlic stew.

Just as custom was increasing, the First World War erupted. Fear of foreigners became rife and, despite having been an Australian citizen since 1905, Weindorfer became the subject of rumours that he was a spy and that Waldheim was equipped with a radio transmitter to communicate with the enemy.

Buttongrass plain with Mt Olympus near Narcissus Hut.

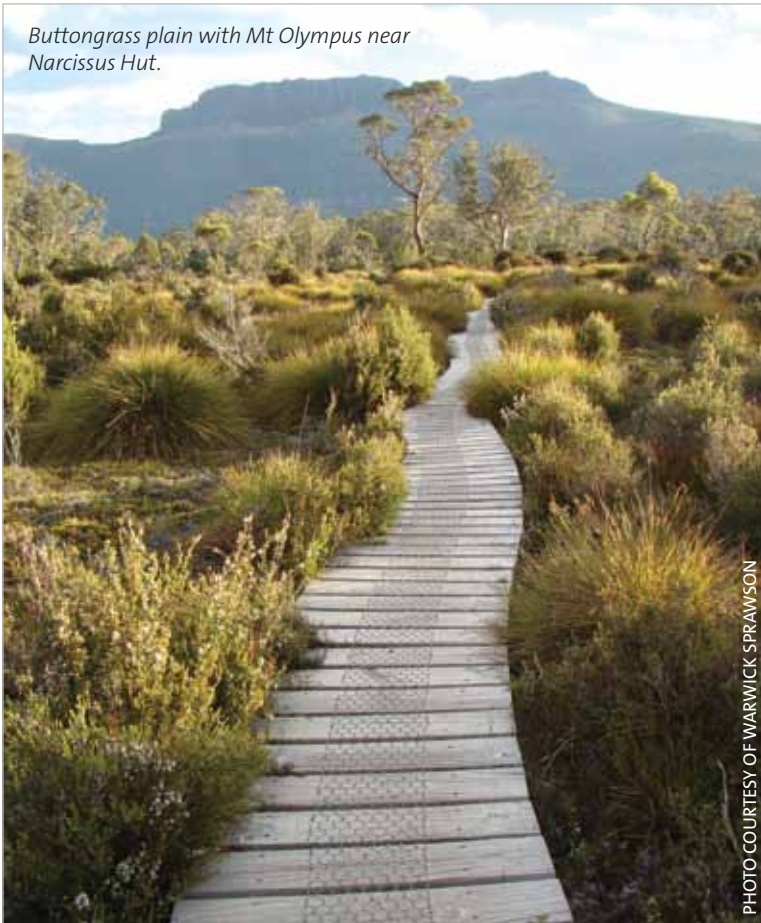


PHOTO COURTESY OF WARWICK SPRAWSON

Hikers near Cradle Mountain, Barn Bluff in background.



Waldheim chalet.



PHOTOS: TASMANIAN ARCHIVE AND HERITAGE OFFICE

A far greater blow was to come: Kate died in 1916 after a prolonged illness. Gustav was heart-broken. Isolated and lonely, he immersed himself in the hard physical work of improving the chalet, drawing solace from the area's beauty.

After the war, visitors began to return to Waldheim, including climber and photographer Frederick Smithies, who visited in 1920. Frederick came to share Gustav's vision for a national park and took many striking photos of the highlands. The two men travelled around Tasmania presenting lantern slides of Frederick's pictures and expounding on the park concept. Largely due to their efforts, a 64,000 hectare 'scenic reserve and wildlife sanctuary' was declared in 1922.

Gustav continued to host and guide visitors, regaling them in the evenings with fireside tales about the grand balls and buildings of Vienna.

In 1930 the board overseeing the reserve employed the former fur-trapper Bert Nichols to blaze a track from Cradle Mountain to Cynthia Bay on the southern shore of Lake St Clair.

Nichols was snub-nosed, stockily built and swore like a pirate from beneath his squashed felt hat. He seemed to be immune to the area's harsh weather,

never bothering with a raincoat even in the worst storms.

After blazing the track, Bert Nichols wrote to the director of the Tasmanian Government Tourist Bureau, Evelyn Temple Emmett, cheekily inviting him to try out the new trail. Emmett took Bert up on his offer and, guided by the former trapper, he and a group of seven friends from the Hobart Bushwalking Club completed the track in the summer of 1931 – the first hikers to walk the Overland Track.

Gustav Weindorfer died in 1932, aged 58, his heart failing as he struggled to kick-start his recalcitrant Indian motorcycle. He was found beside the bike, within site of in sight of his beloved Cradle Mountain, near where the start of the Overland Track begins. He was buried in front of Waldheim, his grave marked with a simple King Billy pine cross bearing the name 'Dorfer'.

After Gustav's death his sister sent everlasting flowers and candles from Austria, requesting that they be placed on his grave on New Year's Day, as was the custom in his homeland.

This tradition still continues today, the Weindorfer Memorial Committee holding a simple commemoration service each New Year's Day to

celebrate Gustav Weindorfer's vision: a vision which has left a legacy not only for all Australians, but for people around the world. • PW

This article originally appeared in *Great Walks* magazine.



Warwick Sprawson is the author of *The Overland Track*, a guidebook to Tasmania's famous hike. The full-colour guidebook includes track notes, maps, flora, fauna and history.

Special offer: For a limited time *Park Watch* readers can receive 10% off the book's usual \$19.95 cover price by visiting www.overlandguide.com and using the promotional code 'vnpa'.



PHOTO: JENNY ROLLAND

Rabbit survey inspires artwork



PHOTO: JENNY ROLLAND

Artist, bushwalker and VNPA member Margaret (Maggie) Bishop (above) had a number of her works included in the exhibition 'Introspectives' at the Inner Space Gallery in Prahran in October.

Several of these works were inspired by her experiences on this year's Hattah Rabbit Survey (see *Park Watch*, Sept. 2014).

The work shown above, 'Helping with the rabbit warren survey, Hattah-Kulkyne National Park' (acrylic on boards) is an aerial landscape painted on 28 tiles and shows the area that was searched for rabbit warrens. Colours and forms illustrate the vegetation and landscape patterns of this part of Victoria. Each tile corresponds to a one km² grid square.

Other works by Margaret included an installation piece, 'Mallee Mandala' (right), inspired by the hanging bark from a mallee tree and the patterns it makes in the sand, and paintings featuring the landforms and vegetation of the Mallee.

'Malleefowl Country' (acrylic on canvas) features aspects of the mallee woodlands lakes and wildlife, while 'Wind' captures the flowing patterns of the soils and vegetation of this area. • PV

Euan Moore and Jenny Rolland



PHOTO: EUAN MOORE



Box-ironbark birds and blooms

Top left and top centre:
The fissured black bark of the ironbarks creates a dramatic landscape.

Top right: Blue Pincushions.

Left: Everlastings add a splash of colour.

PHOTOS: CHRISTINA HILL

VNPA MEMBER AND KEEN WALKER **CHRISTINA HILL** RECENTLY VISITED ONE OF VICTORIA'S NEWER NATIONAL PARKS.

This was my second visit to Heathcote-Graytown National Park. My first was earlier in the year at the end of the hot, dry summer. I was keen to return to see what it was like in the middle of spring.

I spent most of my time walking some of the tracks near the Dargile picnic area just north of the town of Heathcote.

Heathcote-Graytown NP contains the most extensive tract of box-ironbark forest in Victoria.

Less than 20% remains of Victoria's original box-ironbark forests, which once covered 13% of the state. Since the 1840s grazing, gold mining and logging have destroyed or greatly damaged these forests.

Instead of large old trees, they are dominated by multi-stemmed coppice regrowth. This is certainly true of the Dargile area.

Park Watch readers would have been alarmed to learn in the September edition that 400-year-old Red Ironbarks in the nearby Wellsford Forest are at risk from commercial timber production.

The forest is flat and dry with a sparse but often colourful understorey. The many wildflowers on display in spring included yellow paper daisies, yellow and orange bush peas, blue finger flowers and a variety of other blue and purple flowers. The park is home to numerous orchid species.

There are also large numbers of Xanthorrhoeas (grass-trees), some that are huge and presumably very old. Many had recently flowered and bees were busy enjoying the last of the nectar on offer.

The ironbark trees, whose dark, furrowed bark is such a striking feature across the landscape, dominate the forest. They are truly stunning. But the forest floor is also a feature, resembling a red-orange-green-grey mosaic of leaf litter, moss and rock.

My walk was certainly not a quiet one. There were plenty of birds flying overhead and between the trees, including groups of White-winged

Choughs, whose mournful whistling filled the air.

The forest is home to numerous rare and threatened bird species including the Powerful Owl and Swift Parrot and is terrific for bird watching. A more patient bird watcher than I am would have identified many, many birds the day I visited.

Heathcote-Graytown National Park is only about an hour's drive north of Melbourne, and is well worth a visit. • PW

Congratulations to Adrian Marshall!

Adrian's book *Start with the Grasslands – design guidelines to support native grasslands in urban areas*, described in March 2014 *Park Watch*, has recently received the President's Award in the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects state awards.

BOOK REVIEWS

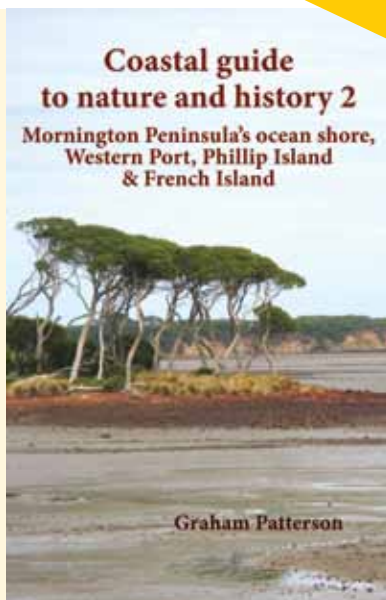
Coastal guide to nature and history 2

Western Port and more

By Graham Patterson
Coastal Guide Books, 2014. RRP \$30.

This excellent book, a sequel to last year's well-received *Coastal guide: Port Phillip Bay*, is for people (especially walkers) who are curious about what they can see along the Western Port coast. And it's another great Christmas present, particularly at the VNPA's special member price!

The book's journey begins on the Mornington Peninsula's ocean shore at Point Nepean, heads east towards Flinders, then takes in all the Western Port coast around to San Remo as well as the shores of Phillip Island and French Island.



This 320 km shoreline includes the cliffs of Cape Schanck and Cape Woolamai and the quiet backwaters at the top of Western Port.

An introductory chapter gives a brief historical overview, and the chapter on geology describes Woolamai's

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\$22.50
(plus postage \$5)

370 million year old Devonian granite as well as the Peninsula's volcanic rocks, and sediments deposited by ancient rivers and seas.

Western Port is renowned for its wildlife. Phillip Island has Little Penguins, seals and Short-tailed Shearwaters. Much of the bay is protected for the migratory wading birds that feed on its vast mudflats.

The chapter on animals and plants will help you identify the species you are most likely to see. And the detailed and attractive maps will keep you on track. • PW

Review by Michael Howes

The Art of Science: remarkable natural history illustrations from Museum Victoria

Book and exhibition by John Kean.
Book published by Museum Victoria
2013, RRP \$50.

The exhibition is in the Melbourne
Museum until 1 February 2015.

If you're interested in scientifically important art, you may have seen paintings by two of John Kean's living artists in a recent exhibition of botanical art. Mali Moir's and Kate Nolan's work was exhibited in *The Art of Botanical Illustration*, presented by the Friends of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Kean has also used material from Museum Victoria's extensive archive of artworks to prepare his book and exhibition.

He helped develop that archive. Some years ago, while researching the artists employed by the Museum's first director, Prof. Frederick McCoy, to illustrate his documentation of Victoria's fauna, John went in search of the originals. In forgotten recesses of the Museum he was thrilled to find drawings and paintings



fortunately protected for over a century from light, moisture and insect damage.

Intricate illustrations by Ludwig Becker and other artists highlight the crucial requirement of scientific art – the accurate representation of an organism, showing the characteristics that are taxonomically important.

The Art of Science spans three centuries.

In the 1700s, Europeans were excited and puzzled by the strange creatures discovered in the 'new world' beyond Europe. Amsterdam welcomed weird specimens brought back by Dutch East India Company ships, and wealthy collectors employed artists to depict them in expensive volumes.

Later, British and French collections and illustrations of Australian animals added to European amazement and expanded zoological taxonomic systems.

Land practices and pests brought by Europeans have since caused the complete or local extinction of animals such as the Pig-footed Bandicoot, which Gerard Krefft illustrated near present-day Mildura in 1857. It has long been presumed extinct. But you can see Krefft's drawing in Kean's exhibition and book – and also Krefft's drawing of the Western Barred Bandicoot, now extinct in inland Australia.

This century, art is still required for the scientific enterprise, especially taxonomy, and scientific art still requires absolute accuracy. Contemporary scientific artists may use modern devices such as electronic tablets and software programs as well as traditional methods.

The Art of Science includes Museum entomologist Ken Walker's computer-aided photomontages of spider and insect heads, and David Collins' computer-generated images of a Mud Shrimp for the taxonomic paper describing it.

If you miss the exhibition (or even if you don't), buy or borrow the book! • PW

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

Top Walks in Victoria

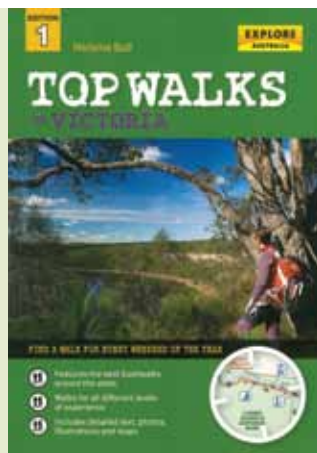
By Melanie Ball

Explore Australia Publishing, 2014.
RRP \$34.95.

Readers of the RACV's magazine *Royalauto* would be familiar with Melanie Ball's writing and photos. She is a regular contributor of articles on walking and cycling, and a talented photographer.

Now she has put together a book of 65 walks in Victoria, or "a walk for every weekend of the year", as the cover promises.

Most of the walks, which are grouped by region (Eastern Ranges, High Country, the Mallee etc.), are in national parks or other reserves –



from Point Nepean to the Alpine, Hattah-Kulkyne to Mitchell River. Four are in the Grampians, three at the Prom and six in the Melbourne area, including the Maribyrnong River, Yarra Bend and Warrandyte.

I'd heard of most of the walks but some were new, like Dock Inlet (Cape Conran CP) and Leanganook (Mt Alexander RP near Castlemaine).

Ball has a brisk, no-nonsense style but can be quite lyrical about special places and features. She's very definite about walkers 'leaving no trace', referring readers to Bushwalking Victoria and relevant websites.

The maps are specifically designed to complement the text, though not intended to replace 'authoritative topographic maps'. They are clear, detailed and interesting.

This book would be an excellent Christmas gift for anyone (perhaps particularly a younger person) interested in walking more and discovering our national parks and other natural areas. And that should surely be most, if not all, Victorians. • PW

Review by **Michael Howes**.

Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary – Intertidal Field Guide

Published by Friends of Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary Inc, 2014. RRP \$6.00 – available from VNPA.



The Sanctuary's Friends group has produced an excellent guide to the plants and animals of the rock platforms that form part of this sanctuary at Aireys Inlet. As

well as clear colour photos of 96 species of intertidal flora and fauna, it has handy safety guides for both rockpool organisms and (human) participants in rockpool rambles.

For more information see www.ferms.org.au • PW



Kings Billabong Field Guide

Published by the Friends of Kings Billabong Park, 2014.

This new guide has descriptions of some 60 of the most common wetland and floodplain plant species in Kings Billabong Park in Mildura.

Each species has photos, descriptions of identification features, and where you might find it. A map of the park showing walking tracks is included.

The printed guide is free and available locally (while stocks last) from the Mildura Tourist Information Centre and other selected locations. • PW

Fungi of the Surf Coast Shire

Published by Angair, 2014.
RRP \$6.00 – available from VNPA.

"When we think of life on Earth we tend to think of the plant and animal kingdoms, but there are whole other kingdoms too. Fungi comprise the largest of these – possibly 10 times as many species as plants ... Without fungi, the Earth would be uninhabitable ..."

So begins the text of this colourful and durable 12-panel brochure, put out by Angair (Friends of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet). It's a concise and useful introduction to the subject, with 84 colour photos of local species.



There's a separate Angair brochure on the indigenous wildlife of Anglesea and Aireys Inlet, and also one on the fungi of the southern Otways. • PW

BWAG Social Nights and Excursions 2015

The VNPA's Bushwalking and Activities Group isn't all bushwalking!

Come along to a BWAG Social Night at 60 Leicester St, Carlton – door opens 7pm and presentations start at 8pm. Enjoy wine, tea or coffee for a \$2 donation. Contact VNPA for more information.

And check out our coach excursions too.

Hovea display, Alpine NP.

PHOTO: MARY FERLIN



WEDNESDAY 11 FEBRUARY The Central Highlands Eden project

Isabella Amouzandeh, DEPI

Isabella explains this project, which focuses on the control of high risk weeds that are threatening biodiversity in the southern Central Highlands of Victoria, including Baw Baw and Yarra Range NPs, Bunyip and Moondarra SPs and state forest.



WEDNESDAY 11 MARCH A foray in the fungal realm

Ecologist and photographer Alison Pouliot

Fungi form a megadiverse yet largely unnoticed kingdom. Their inclusion in the VNPA's 2014 Nature Conservation Review is a welcome sign of change. This illustrated talk will explore conservation issues plus the ecology, natural history, aesthetics and cultural resonances of fungi.



WEDNESDAY 8 APRIL Trivia Night fundraiser

Join us for an entertaining night of trivia and win some great prizes. Come on your own or bring a table of friends (non-members welcome) All proceeds to VNPA. RSVP essential, contact Sue Catterall 0417 526 519, email vnabwag.social@gmail.com or contact the VNPA office.



WEDNESDAY 13 MAY Skiing the Jagungal Wilderness

Kiandra to (almost) Kosciuszko – skiing the Jagungal Wilderness

Presented by Tracey-Ann Hooley.

Join us for an evening of tall tales (but true) from the spectacular Australian Alps in winter.



WEDNESDAY 10 JUNE Mid-year Odd Ball Dinner

After the success of this year's Odd Ball it was decided it should be an annual event. So come and join us! Come to dinner dressed in something formal but with an odd twist. Venue to be advised but will be near public transport. Bookings essential: Sue Catterall 0417 526 519 or vnabwag.social@gmail.com

PHOTO: MARY FERLIN

PHOTO: ALISON POULIOT

PHOTO: FREEIMAGES.COM

PHOTO: TIM FORCEY

PHOTO: FREEIMAGES.COM

VNPA BWAG excursions

The Excursions Group organises a day coach trip or other excursion each month, visiting interesting national or other parks and places with easy short walks. The cost is very reasonable and you can meet or make new friends! Put the dates in your diary now!

For inquiries and bookings contact Larysa Kucan on 9347 3733 or Jan Lacey on 9329 8187.

THURSDAY 29 JANUARY Tramboat excursion on the Maribyrnong

Cruise up Melbourne's other great river, relax and enjoy the scenery and have morning tea and lunch on board. Early bookings welcome. Leader: Larysa Kucan.

SATURDAY 28 FEBRUARY Lorne and Torquay

Easy clifftop walk in Torquay, beach and hinterland walks in Lorne. Leader: Larysa Kucan.

SATURDAY 21 MARCH Baw Baw National Park

Late summer wildflowers should be out as we explore some of the easy walking tracks in the magnificent alpine landscape. Early morning stop in Drouin for Famers' Market. Leaders: Lorraine Benn and Larysa Kucan.

SATURDAY 18 APRIL Mt Buangor State Park

Spectacular views as we walk through a variety of landscapes, including part of the Beeripna Track. Leader: Glenn King.

Explore the best of the BIBBULMUN & BEYOND

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Limited places are now open for walkers to join our annual Bibbulmun & Beyond 9-day guided tour departing Monday 4 May 2015.

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For more information call **(08) 9481 0551**, email events@bibbulmuntrack.org.au or visit www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au to download a dossier and booking form.



Willis's Walkabouts

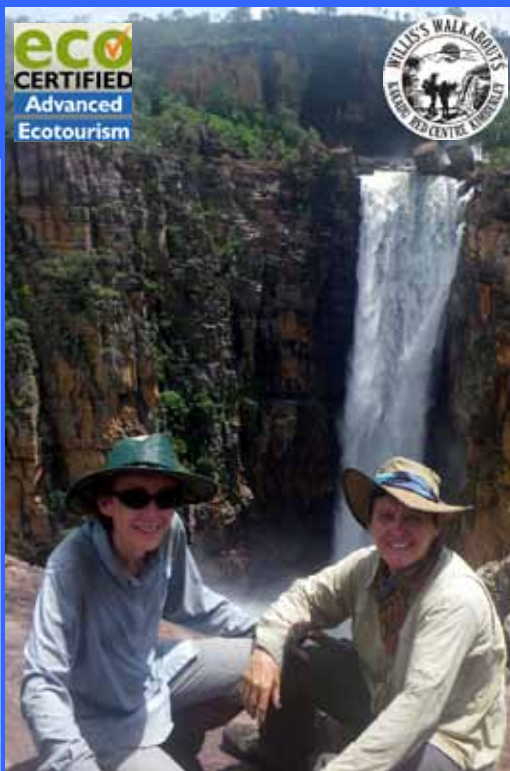
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