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# An open letter to the Andrews Government: It's time to act for nature in Central Victoria

We write to you about the importance of implementing recommendations for new National Parks in Central Victoria.

In 2017 the state government requested the respected statutory agency, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), to undertake an investigation into public land in central Victoria. The areas include the public forests of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Ranges.

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the natural and cultural values and make balanced recommendations about how to best conserve and enhance them.<sup>1</sup>

Following the two-year expert investigation, VEAC recommended that large areas (78,229 ha) of these forests become National Parks (50,146 ha), other conservation reserves (8355 ha), and Regional Parks (19,728 ha) to:

- Provide vital habitat for over 370 rare and threatened animal and plant species including Greater Gliders <sup>2</sup>, Powerful Owls <sup>3</sup> and critically endangered endemic plants such as the Mt Cole Grevillea <sup>4</sup>
- Store millions of tonnes of carbon, significantly helping our efforts to mitigate climate change
- Create critical water security for farms and communities, by protecting the headwaters of rivers that flow from these forests
- Support rural and regional visitation and nature-based tourism
- Support joint management of new parks with Traditional Owners

**These recommendations <sup>5</sup> present an incredible opportunity for the Andrews' government to create refuges for threatened animals and plants, protect the headwaters of significant rivers, increase rural and regional tourism, carbon storage and joint management with traditional owners.**

It is now four years since the VEAC investigation began and in that time the long list of threatened species in Victoria has increased.

The VEAC report was tabled in parliament over 18 months ago, yet the Victorian Government has found time to approve mining exploration leases and logging coupes in sensitive wildlife habitat, while ignoring the recommendations and missing legal requirements to respond.

**The response is now 12 months overdue.**

The latest Victorian State of Environment Report highlighted that Victoria's natural environment is under significant stress. Most indicators in this report showed much of Victoria's biodiversity and natural areas to be in a poor and declining condition. <sup>6</sup> With the further devastating impacts of the recent bushfires many native ecosystems, plants and animals are now in further crisis.

The Victorian Government has identified climate change as one of the biggest threats to the future of the State, with warmer and drier conditions projected to have negative consequences for health, infrastructure, agriculture, water, biodiversity, and alpine and coastal areas. The forested areas of this investigation not only store millions of tons of carbon, this increases every year and contributes significantly to the mitigation of climate change.

A survey initiated by Sustainability Victoria showed that nearly 80% of Victorians surveyed are concerned about climate change, with the majority being very concerned.<sup>7</sup> A poll conducted in October 2020 showed that four in five (81%) Melbournians support the proposals to expand National Parks in Victoria, around Daylesford, Woodend, Bendigo and Ballarat. The same poll found that more than half of Melbournians say that COVID-19 restrictions have made them value access to natural areas (56%), and National Parks (52%), across Victoria more. <sup>8</sup>

A recent independent economic assessment of the proposed central west parks shows that new National Parks will return between double to four times what is invested. All scenarios assessed resulted in a net economic gain. For every \$1 invested, there is a potential return of \$2.30 - \$4.80 at the societal level.<sup>9</sup>

New parks will protect wildlife, create economic opportunities, facilitate joint management with Traditional Owners in regional Victoria, and accelerate the post-COVID recovery.

Communities would have new parks to explore. Wildlife would have security and protection. Instead we're losing valuable time, and some of the most unique and vulnerable nature in our state.

Creating new National Parks isn't just about saving wildlife and safeguarding beautiful places. It's about clean air and water, a liveable temperature and people's livelihoods.

The organisations listed below represent hundreds of thousands of Victorians and call on the Andrews State Government to protect these natural areas of central Victoria and immediately accept and implement the VEAC Central West Investigation recommendations.

ACF Community Bendigo District  
Australian Plants Society (Victoria)  
Bacchus Marsh Platypus Alliance  
Ballarat Environment Network  
Bendigo Family Nature Club  
Bendigo Field Naturalists Club  
Bendigo & District Environment Council  
Bendigo Sustainability Group

Biolinks Alliance Inc  
Birdlife Australia  
BirdLife Castlemaine District Branch  
Bush Heritage Australia  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc  
Doctors for the Environment Australia  
Environment Victoria  
Environmental Justice Australia  
Euroa Environment Group  
Field Naturalists Club Ballarat  
Friends of the Earth  
Friends of the Box-Iron Bark Forests  
Friends of the Brisbane Ranges  
Friends of the Canadian Corridor  
Friends of Crusoe Reservoir and No. 7 Park  
Friends of Werribee Gorge and Long Forest Mallee.  
Hepburn Wind  
Humane Society International Australia  
Malmsbury District Landcare  
Moorabool Environment Group  
The National Trust Australia (Victoria)  
Newham & District Landcare Group  
Project Platypus  
Save our Strathbogie Forest  
St Arnaud Field Naturalist Club Inc.  
Strathbogie Ranges CMN  
Trentham Sustainability Group  
The Wilderness Society (Victoria)  
WWF Australia  
Wellsford Forest Conservation Alliance  
Werribee River Association  
Wombat Forestcare Inc.  
Victorian National Parks Association

## References and links

- <sup>1</sup> <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/documents/ToR-with-extended-date.pdf>
- <sup>2</sup> Report Wombat Forest Greater Refuge for Gliders, VNPA & Wombat Forestcare, Feb 2020 <https://vnpa.org.au/greater-gliders-need-a-new-national-park-in-the-wombat-forest/>
- <sup>3</sup> VNPA Mount Cole forest clearfelling critical owl havens; threatened species detection report Mt.Cole State Forest song meter analysis, Feb 2021 <https://vnpa.org.au/powerful-owls-discovered-for-first-time-in-decades-call-for-new-national-park/>
- <sup>4</sup> VNPA Threatened Species Detection Report Mt. Cole State Forest, June 2020 <https://vnpa.org.au/a-rare-discovery/> and [https://vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VNPA\\_Threatened-Species-Detection-Report-Mt-Cole-SF-Archies-Rd-May-2020.pdf](https://vnpa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/VNPA_Threatened-Species-Detection-Report-Mt-Cole-SF-Archies-Rd-May-2020.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation>
- <sup>6</sup> Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Victoria , State of the Environment Report 2018 <https://www.ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018/biodiversity-plants-animals>
- <sup>7</sup> Sustainability Victoria, Victorian Perceptions of Climate Change 2020 <https://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/research-data-and-insights/research/climate-change/victorians-perceptions-of-climate-change>
- <sup>8</sup> Lonergan Research surveyed 1,009 Melbournians aged 18+ between 25 September and 1 October 2020 [https://vnpa.org.au/publications/covid\\_parks\\_polling/](https://vnpa.org.au/publications/covid_parks_polling/)
- <sup>9</sup> Sayers Advisory, New Central Parks West, Economic Assessment, 12 February 2021 <https://vnpa.org.au/new-national-parks-for-central-west-victoria-makes-good-economic-sense-says-new-modelling/>