

# PARK WATCH



LOGGING IN WOMBAT FOREST  
MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACK HEARING  
FUNDING FUTURE FOR NATIONAL PARKS  
CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE ACTION  
BASS COAST VISION IGNORES WOODLANDS  
VNPA YOUTH TEAM  
ADVENTURES BY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

JUNE 2022 NO 289



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION  
*Be part of nature*





Be part of nature



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#### OUR VISION

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

Everyone can help in the conservation of Victoria's wild and beautiful places. To find out how you can help, visit [www.vnpa.org.au/support](http://www.vnpa.org.au/support) or call us on (03) 9341 6500.

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#### FRONT COVER

Local conservationists are devastated by VicForests logging in the Wombat Forest – the same forest that the Victorian Government committed to protecting in a national park. Photo by Sandy Scheltema.

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Authorised by Matt Ruchel, Executive Director,  
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The Victorian National Parks Association acknowledges the many First Peoples of the area now known as Victoria, honours their continuing connection to, and caring for, Country, and supports Traditional Owner joint-management of parks and public land for conservation of natural and cultural heritage. Our office is located on traditional land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We offer our respect to Elders past, present and future.

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## From the President



Welcome to the June edition of *Park Watch*.

The hearings related to the proposed mountain bike track in the Yarra Ranges National Park, near Warburton, concluded in April. VNPA staff, our expert witnesses, local conservation groups and concerned citizens strongly objected to the weak evidence and justifications for this monumental intrusion into the protected area. The proposal even invades the long-protected water catchments for Melbourne. Such was the strength of the case against the proposal that the closing address from the proponents appeared to concede as they ceased debating the issues and focussed on individuals. It is a lamentable situation where the community must waste scarce resources to continually fight for protected areas when the responsible authorities should have killed the idea at conception. Turn to pages 10-11.

In 2021, we welcomed the state government's announcement that over 50,000 hectares of public lands would be protected as national parks and conservation reserves in the central west region of Victoria. The stings in the tail of this announcement were the allowance of logging in certain areas designated to become national parks, and the lack of protection for large old trees. What's worse is that now this has been dramatically expanded to logging in the Wombat Forest, where under the guise of 'salvage logging' rules, VicForests have increased its operations by hundreds of hectares. Some 175 new areas were tacked on to existing coupes – over 80 in the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, totalling 4000 hectares across Wombat Forest and surrounds.

It is difficult to understand how the VEAC recommendations for areas that have the natural values consistent with being assigned national park status, can be undermined by the state government permitting these same areas to be logged, thus annihilating many of the natural values which are supposed to be protected. Wombat Forest is of great concern given the many threatened species, such as Greater Gliders, which reside there. It might take 100 years or more for these forests to recover from the logging, if they recover at all. Read all about the issue on pages 6-9.

The recent 2022 Victorian state budget said little about conservation or Parks Victoria. Apparently, announcements in relation to nature conservation will be made as part of the election campaign towards the end of 2022. VNPA has been campaigning for at least 1 per cent of the state budget to be assigned to Parks Victoria. Our Executive Director Matt Ruchel has been closely examining the minutiae of the budget papers for signs of funding for nature (see pages 17-19).

Over the past months I have been able to visit numerous national parks and conservation reserves in Victoria, Tasmania and NSW. Many parks looked unseasonably green, which was related to the widespread rain related to the La Niña event. Many parks in central Victoria showed the signs of past logging and gold mining, often with forests of spindly coppice regrowth. Such areas need active restoration and careful management to enable large old trees and the forest understory to develop, but this needs to be done thoughtfully and carefully to avoid doing more damage than

good. Along the Murray River many forests showed the signs of long-term water stress. There are proposals in the wings for large scale engineering works as "offsets" to enable the clawback of environmental water for irrigation. It appears that large areas designated for the Red Gum national parks a decade ago will be sacrificed, and the forest will likely die over coming decades due to lack of "environmental water" flows.

I would like to acknowledge the long and thoughtful contributions of Ann Birrell, who recently retired from the Council and committees. Ann has chaired our Governance Committee for many years and brought her passion and experience to that challenging role. We thank her for these contributions and wish her well with her many other activities. We are therefore looking for a new Chair for our Governance Committee, preferably with legal training, and for members of our other committees. Please see page 4 for further details.

As mentioned in the last *Park Watch*, this year marks the 70th anniversary of the VNPA. We look forward to our members and supporters participating in our celebrations in the second half of the year. In the meantime, we invite you to share your best national parks photos with us and support our work by purchasing greeting cards and making a tax-deductible donation – please see page 5 for further information.

As we all recommit to the VNPA for the next decade, I hope you will join us in supporting VNPA activities into the future. • PW

Bruce McGregor, VNPA President

## Join a committee

Our Council is supported by a number of active sub-committees that harness the enthusiasm of members and staff on key areas. Each committee meets 4-6 committee times per year. We need a new Convenor for our Governance Committee, preferably with legal training, and we're also keen to recruit new members for other committees. The committees are:

- Finance
- Governance, Legal and Policy
- Conservation and Campaigns
- Marketing and Community Engagement
- Bushwalking and Activities Group (BWAG)

To find out more please contact us at [vnpa@vnpa.org.au](mailto:vnpa@vnpa.org.au) or call 03 9341 6500

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## Annual General Meeting – Advanced Notice

VNPA's 70th Annual General Meeting will be held on **Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 6.30pm.** Location and format to be confirmed.

## Nominations for VNPA Council are now open

Nominations for the VNPA Council are now open to members who would like to participate in the governance of the organisation. The Council play an important role in the life of VNPA – establishing policy guidelines, approving annual budgets and undertaking strategic planning for the association. Elected councillors are unpaid volunteers and are asked to participate in six Council meetings and relevant committees (usually around two hours each) over the course of the calendar year. The Annual General Meeting elects the volunteer Council and includes a president, vice-president, honorary secretary, honorary treasurer and up to nine councillors. We are particularly keen to recruit Council members with legal, fundraising and outdoor activity experience.

To nominate for Council, you must be a current financial member and indicate your intentions by writing to the Executive Director Matt Ruchel, via [matruchel@vnpa.org.au](mailto:matruchel@vnpa.org.au) by 5pm on Tuesday 13 September 2022. For more information on our Council, please visit [vnpa.org.au/about](http://vnpa.org.au/about)

## BWAG update

We are currently evaluating 'Where to now?' for our volunteer-led bushwalking and activities program. The program has not been forgotten, and work behind the scenes is active.

To find out about any future activities, join the mailing list at [vnpa.org.au/bwag-sign-up](http://vnpa.org.au/bwag-sign-up)

## Staff update

Welcome back to Caitlin Griffith, Manager Community Learning and Engagement, who returned from long service leave after an amazing nature adventure around Australia with her family. Thanks very much to NatureWatch Coordinator Sera Blair and Conservation Project Officer Nicole Mertens for covering Caitlin's role.

Welcome back also to Heath Rickard, Finance and Operations Manager, who has also returned from long service leave after enjoying a break from his computer screen and spending time with his family. Thanks to Simon O'Connor and Carol Chin for covering Heath's role.



VICTORIAN  
NATIONAL PARKS  
ASSOCIATION

# 70 years protecting nature

Thanks to the support from you, the VNPA community, this year we celebrate 70 years of protecting nature together.

We've got a few plans to mark this special milestone with you, including:

- Special features on the 70th anniversary in September and December editions of Park Watch, including celebrating our community and the important achievements we've made together for nature and national parks.
- Associate Professor Don Garden, historian and valued VNPA member, is generously giving his time to compile the next chapter of our organisation's fascinating history of achievements and the people involved. While Don's writing the next instalment you can re-visit the VNPA history he wrote for 1952-1992 [vnpa.org.au/publications/conservation-journeys-a-short-history-of-the-vnpa](http://vnpa.org.au/publications/conservation-journeys-a-short-history-of-the-vnpa)

We'd love you to get involved in celebrating with us, and we invite you to take part in all or one of the following:



### 1. Send in your photos of you, your friends and your family enjoying Victoria's national parks

We're producing a special video of our supporters enjoying Victoria's national parks, many of which you helped create. We'd like photos from the 1950s until 2022.

Upload your photos at [vnpa.org.au/photos](http://vnpa.org.au/photos)

If you have old photos, you can scan them or take a digital photo of them with your phone, or if you prefer, you can fill in the form enclosed and send in your hard copy photos using the form and reply paid envelope provided (we'll return your photos after we've scanned them).



Please send in your photos like this one by Ann Crawford at the Prom in 1963.

### 2. Order your 70th-anniversary pack of greeting cards

Support the protection of nature and celebrate 70 years by ordering your pack of greeting cards and envelopes featuring Victorian nature. One pack of 10 cards costs \$49, including postage. The inside of the cards will be blank.

Please order by 1 September 2022, and we will post them out to you in early October.

Order your cards at [vnpa.org.au/cards](http://vnpa.org.au/cards)

Or use the form and reply paid envelope enclosed.

### 3. Make a donation

As a VNPA supporter, you've helped achieve great things throughout our history! Now we need your help so you still have your parks in 70 years' time.

Please make a donation to defend your parks and nature – now and in the future.

Donate at [vnpa.org.au/7-challenges](http://vnpa.org.au/7-challenges)

Phone 03 9341 6500 or use the form and reply paid envelope enclosed.





PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA

## Promises smashed

VICFORESTS ARE UNLEASHED IN THE WOMBAT FOREST, CUTTING UP THE PROPOSED NATIONAL PARK, WRITES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR **MATT RUCHEL**.

Last year we welcomed the Andrews Government's commitment for a 24,000-hectare addition to create a new Wombat-Lerderderg National Park, and a number of nearby regional parks. While we were pleased there had finally been a commitment, we were also concerned about the areas identified for logging despite the future protections. The Andrews Government sanctioned continual logging in the proposed regional parks and in 17 existing areas in the proposed new national park (eight coupes up to 2029 and nine coupes up to 2024). We also remained concerned that there was no implementation timeline for legislation or specific funding for the new parks.

Now all that has been thrown out as VicForests rolls out the logging machinery for their "Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan": their plan to log large parts of the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park and surrounds.

But this is not a clean-up operation – this is a smash-up operation. Under the guise of "salvage logging" rules, the state-owned logging agency has expanded its logging operations by hundreds of hectares. Some 175 new areas were tacked on to existing logging coupes – over 80 in the proposed national and regional parks – totalling 4000 hectares across Wombat Forest and surrounds (see map).

The release of the so-called "Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan" is unprecedented. It purports to deal with trees damaged by storms last year, but goes much further in practice, entrenching logging coupes for up to three years. The fallen trees, if indeed this is the only target, will be used for sawlogs if they haven't been on the ground too long already, otherwise they are destined for pulp and firewood.

Adding dozens of logging coupes to this popular forest is a clear breach of last year's firm commitments by the Andrews Government to log only a small area of the soon-to-be protected areas. Even then, logging areas of proposed national parks was questionable.

We understand that this "Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan" is in addition to plans being proposed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Forest Fire Management Victoria, which aim to clear logs up to 100 metres on either side of roads.

Logging has commenced in at least one coupe at Babbington Hill in the Wombat Forest. Local conservationists, including Wombat Forestcare, are extremely upset, with over 100 people inspecting the site as a protest on Good Friday.

Local conservationists feel betrayed by the destruction.

Once habitat, trees are now destined for sawlogs, pulp or firewood.

While a highly targeted and sensitive clean-up operation after the storms was expected and likely needed in some places, this is essentially a snatch and grab, well beyond anything envisaged. This destruction needs to stop immediately, and any clean-up implemented should be only what is necessary, carefully thought through, and properly planned.

It's a broken promise by the Andrews Government. And it is a gross abuse of our national park-worthy native forests.

Wombat Forest is an essential home for threatened wildlife, such as the Greater Glider, Powerful Owl, and Brush-tailed Phascogale, among many others. This move to exploit critical habitat conflicts with the Andrews Government's recognition of the importance of protecting Victoria's remaining native forests.

There is also concern about 500 hectares of new logging areas in Cobaw State Forest, which was proposed as a conservation reserve (see top right of map).

VNPA and Wombat Forestcare are calling on the Andrews Government to cancel the Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan, and create the promised new parks immediately. • PW

The Dja Warrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung are the Traditional Owners of areas of the Wombat Forest.

We've put together talking points so you can call Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio, to voice your disapproval: [vnpa.org.au/stop-wombat-pulp](https://vnpa.org.au/stop-wombat-pulp)

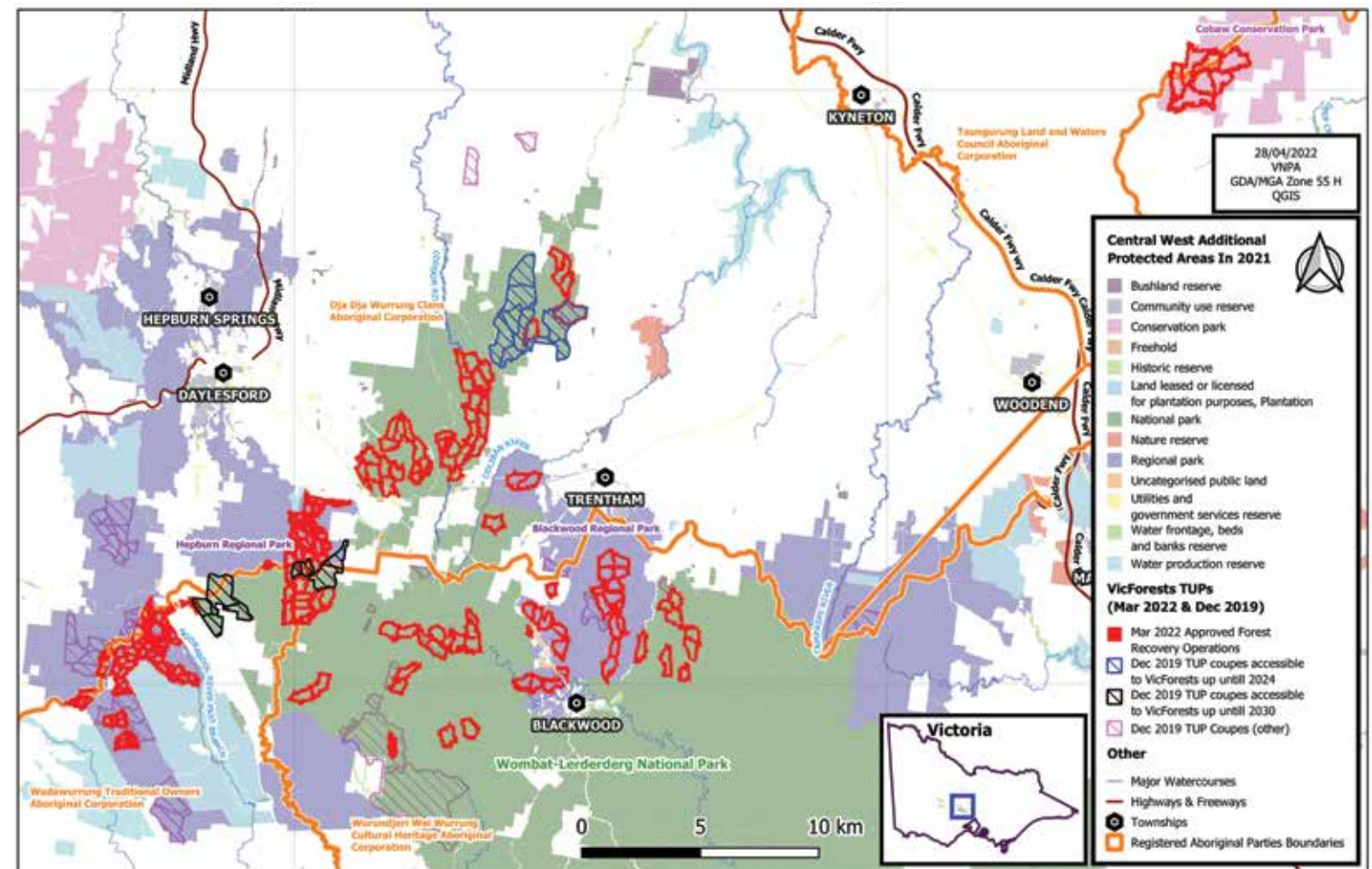


PHOTO: SANDY SCHELTEMA



PHOTO: WOMBAT FORESTCARE

**Logging in the Wombat Forest** Red areas existing coupes, blue areas new Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan coupes.







JOSH BOWELL

# Logging Greater Glider homes

AS VICFORESTS LOG THE WOMBAT FOREST, WE RELEASE NEW MONITORING RESULTS SHOWING THESE AREAS ARE HABITAT TO ALREADY THREATENED GREATER GLIDERS, WRITES **MATT RUCHEL**.

New survey work by VNPA citizen scientists has revealed high densities of Australia's largest gliding marsupial in scheduled logging areas in the Wombat Forest.

In total, 40 Greater Gliders, one Powerful Owl, four Koalas, one Southern Boobook Owl, one Feathertail Glider and seven Ringtail Possums were recorded during our recent spotlighting surveys.

The results meet the thresholds for protection under the Victorian Government's Action Statement for the Greater Glider 2019 – that is, a Greater Glider density equal to or greater than five individuals per spotlight kilometre.

While the rules for Greater Glider protection are relatively weak, the Action Statement requires that VicForests must retain at least 40 per cent of the basal area (number and size of tree stems/trunks) of eucalypts across each logging coupe, prioritising live, hollow-bearing trees.

The results again highlight the value of the Wombat Forest and why it should be a national park.

Of the 40 Greater Gliders recorded across three survey nights, 37 were located within VicForests' existing logging coupes in the proposed Wombat-Lerderderg National Park. The Victorian Government is allowing this logging to continue until 2024.

And now Greater Glider habitat is also being logged under VicForests' "Forest Recovery Timber Utilisation Plan", as written about in the previous article 'Promises smashed'.

Even though they made it through the destructive winds, these threatened animals now have to survive the logging machinery in their remaining habitat.

VNPA is calling for no further logging to take place in these coupes.

To add insult to injury, the Wombat Forest and any other forests west of the Hume Highway are currently not able to be independently surveyed by the Office of the Conservation Regulator, as the state government's Forest Survey Program undertaking pre-logging surveys is only funded in the east of the state.

Greater Gliders have been detected in high densities in the Wombat Forest – directly in logging coupes.

This is one of the reasons why VNPA conducted our own citizen science surveys in the Wombat Forest.

Greater Gliders have seen significant declines in key areas across Victoria over the last 20 years. Much of their suitable habitat within our state was impacted by the 2019-2020 fires. Wombat Forest is the only population of Greater Gliders west of Melbourne. The nearest population is in the Central Highlands, approximately 80 kilometres away.

A joint VNPA and Wombat Forestcare report released in 2020 *Wombat Forest, A Greater Refuge for Gliders* showed that Greater Glider population in Wombat Forest is large and regionally significant. Estimated densities are similar to those in East Gippsland and the Strathbogie Ranges, where the significance of Greater Glider populations has been acknowledged, and protections have been implemented through Immediate Protection Areas (for more on this topic, turn to pages 14-15).

We have lodged our Threatened Species Detection Report ([vnpa.org.au/publication/detection-report-wombat-forest](https://vnpa.org.au/publication/detection-report-wombat-forest)) on the Greater Glider survey with the Minister for Environment and the Office of the Conservation Regulator. But the only real way the Andrews Government can put an end to logging is to deliver on their promise for a new national park by passing the legislation as soon as possible. • PW

Greater Glider habitat is being logged by VicForests.

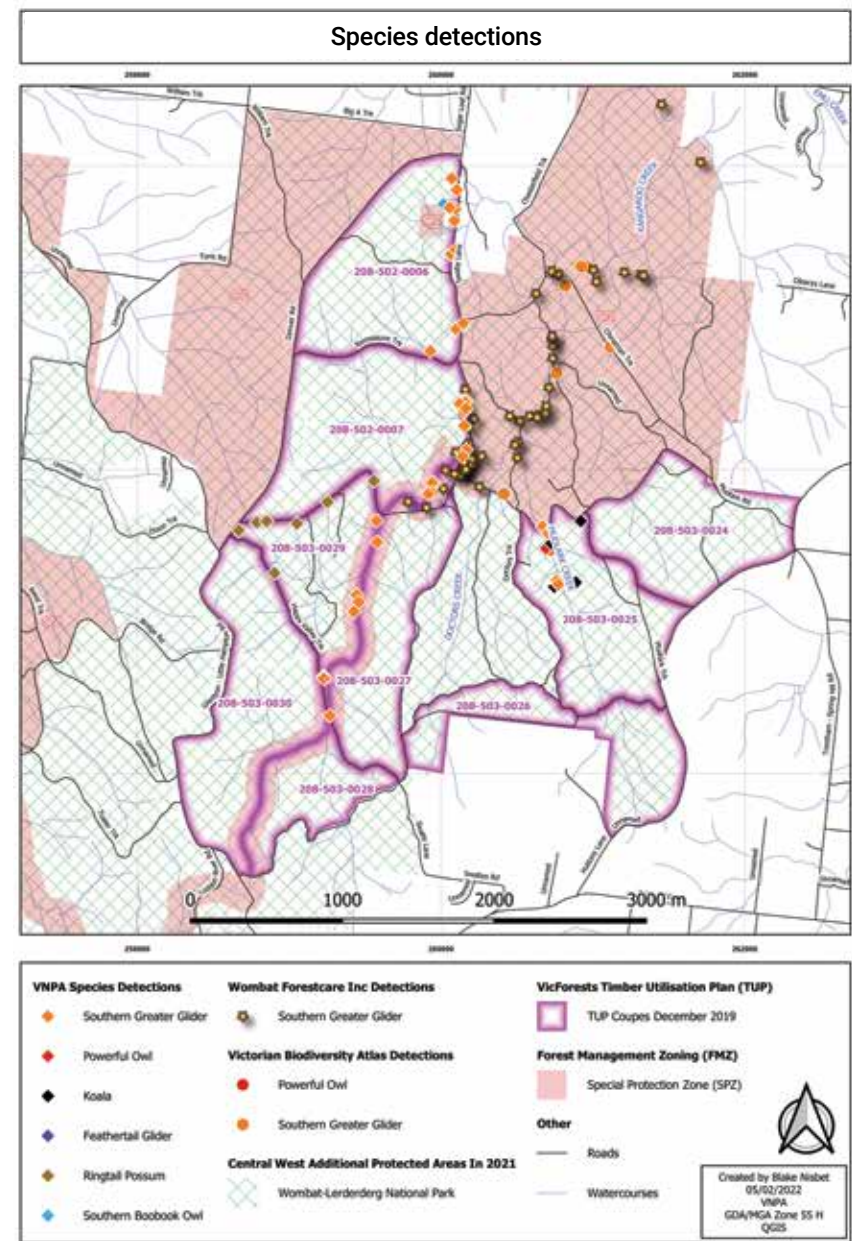


PHOTO: WOMBAT FORESTCARE



# Over the handlebars

THE CAMPAIGN TO DEFEND THE YARRA RANGES NATIONAL PARK, ON WURUNDJERI LAND, FROM KILOMETRES OF INAPPROPRIATE MOUNTAIN BIKE TRACK ROLLS ON, WRITES CAMPAIGNER **JORDAN CROOK**.

In mid-April, the public inquiry into the Warburton mountain bike tracks concluded four weeks of hearings from expert witnesses, community members, concerned organisations and mountain bike enthusiasts.

What came through loud and clear from the verbal submissions on the Environment Effects Statement to the Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) is that the track network within the Yarra Ranges National Park (approximately 12 per cent of the total proposed tracks proposed for the project) is both a great risk to the park and the values it protects, and is not supported by community members, ecologists and land managers.

Instead of dealing with a raft of issues raised by the VNPA as well as Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria and the CFA in its closing submission, the Yarra Ranges Council got personal.

Issues such as the risk of Myrtle Wilt infection impacting one of the best intact stands of Cool Temperate Rainforest in the state, intrusion into the closed water catchments and impact on the critically endangered Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly were brushed aside as the Council attacked expert witnesses, government departments, and even its own experts.



PHOTO: ISTOCK

The beautiful Cool Temperate Rainforest of Yarra Ranges National Park, with its ancient Myrtle Beech and tree ferns and pristine waters, should be protected for all.

The closing statement by Council was an almost hysterical attack on anyone who in any way questioned the project and the need for a small group of cyclists to speed down a hill at any ecological cost.

The Council's pleas of 'trust us, and if damage occurs, we will fix it – even if it knocks out the last remaining individuals of a critically endangered population' showed they really don't understand the fragility and importance of the area they are seeking to clear and build their track.

This was further demonstrated by the fact that the impact of climate change was hardly mentioned in any of the Council's expert reports. The national park is already feeling the stress of a warming climate. Yet the summit of Mount Donna Buang can be a climate refuge for a range of species and ecosystems if it is managed appropriately. But that doesn't include putting a bike track right through it. That would also only contribute even more stress brought about by

the fragmentation of intact areas of habitat, the introduction of new pathogens, the spread of pest animal species like foxes and cats along tracks, and damage to water quality.

The Council has spent hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of taxpayer and ratepayer money so far to plan tracks that only a handful of people will use inside the park due to the track's "heroic" and steeply downhill nature.

We have been telling them since 2015 that the plan was not appropriate in this section of the national park and that the legislation and park management plans have always clearly shown that to be the case.

To continue to push for tracks within the Yarra Ranges National Park, clearing significant amounts of Cool Temperate Rainforest and the range of other issues they will create, is disappointing and tarnishes the great work the Yarra Ranges Council does in other environmental areas.

Breaking into a protected area, damaging its natural values, and potentially causing the extinction of endemic wildlife for a quick thrill and a quick buck is not appropriate in 2022. The rest of the 144-kilometre track proposed for outside of the park is viable and can likely proceed, but there is a stubborn persistence to try an encroach into the national park, seemingly at any cost.

VNPA has put in significant effort and resources to defend the Yarra Ranges National Park. At the hearings, our legal team, backed up by expert witnesses, clearly demonstrated that the Council's proposal to force bike tracks into the national park:

- Doesn't align with the Yarra Ranges National Park Management Plan or the reasons the park was given national park status.
- Didn't address the increased threats and impacts climate change will have on the park and its wildlife.

- Conflicts with the role of the *National Parks Act 1975* in protecting ecosystems and facilitating passive recreation in the park.
- Will likely cause damage and harm to the critically endangered Mountain Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly and one of the most intact patches of Cool Temperate Rainforest in Victoria.
- Will encroach into Melbourne's long-closed water catchments.

Right now, the Inquiry and Advisory Committee (IAC) is making its way through thousands of written submissions and reports about the proposed track network. It will deliver its findings to the Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne within 40 days after the closing of the hearings on 7 April. After that the Planning Minister will have 25 days to make his decision.

But it doesn't stop there. Even if the Planning Minister gives the project the go-ahead, there are still more steps necessary. A new park management

plan would be needed to be developed and a clear decision by Park Victoria's Board, and ultimately approval from the state Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio on the advice of the National Parks Advisory Committee to allow the track. It also needs additional funding and possibly a legislative change to weaken the National Parks Act.

Stage 2 of the project, the section of track proposed in the park, is still unfunded. If it proceeds, it will, according to Parks Victoria, require both permits and a lease under the National Parks Act. A lease will essentially carve a strip through the national park to be managed by the Yarra Range Council using ratepayers' money for up to 20 years. If the management of the bike track is outsourced to a private operator or fees are charged for use, that will open up even more issues around existing government policy on the privatisation and commercialisation of national parks. The process and project have already set very bad precedents for national park management and should never have gone this far.

If you have not already, please take action by calling on the decision-makers to protect our Yarra Ranges National Park: [vnpa.org.au/warburton](http://vnpa.org.au/warburton)





PHOTO: EDDIE TSURLIN

THE MOUNT DONNA BUANG WINGLESS STONEFLY MAY BE FLIGHTLESS, BUT IT IS FLYING IN THE FACE OF AN ENVIRONMENTALLY DAMAGING PLAN. BY CAMPAIGNERS **JORDAN CROOK** AND **BEN LAWRENCE**.

The summit of Mount Donna Buang, on the lands of the Wurundjeri people, is home to one of the two species of wingless stonefly found in Australia, and the only species in Victoria. Living within some of the lushest refuges of the Yarra Ranges National Park, the Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly, *Riekoperla darlingtoni*, is emblematic of the fragile alpine ecosystem of Mount Donna Buang and the ecological integrity of the Upper Yarra area.

All known populations of this rare stonefly species have been recorded within four kilometres of the summit, in the ephemeral freshwater streams that trickle down the ridges and slopes between Mount Donna Buang, Mount Victoria and Ben Cairn.

Over the past few years, conservationists have expressed concern that a mountain bike track network through the national park, one section of the proposed Warburton Mountain Bike Destination project, would tear up critical stonefly habitat and put this critically endangered species at risk. With the project's environmental assessment due to be completed in August, its impacts on this internationally-listed threatened species are now facing increasing scrutiny from conservation groups in Victoria and abroad (read previous article 'Over the handlebars').

### The sensitive stonefly

The distribution of the Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly covers key

conservation areas of the Yarra Ranges National Park. It lives in seasonal streams and weak trickles of melted snow that meander through montane forest dominated by Alpine Ash, Eucalyptus *delegatensis* and Shining Gum, *E. nitens*, and patches of Cool Temperate Rainforest, characterised by Myrtle Beech.

The stonefly was previously thought to occur within a one-kilometre radius of the summit of Mount Donna Buang, until investigations in 2019 and 2021 located new populations to the west and east of Mount Donna Buang along the Donna Buang Road and between Mount Donna Buang and Mount Victoria, expanding their known home range. Conducted using eDNA technology, these surveys have prompted calls for further targeted surveys to determine the full extent of their geographical distribution.

Like other Plecoptera (stoneflies), *R. darlingtoni* are dependent on high quality freshwater habitat and extremely sensitive to any habitat alteration. The Mount Donna Wingless Stonefly is unique because of the combination of its flightlessness, the length of its life cycle (two to three years) and a specialised ability to survive a range of climatic extremes, making this species especially important for our understanding of invertebrates and their resilience to climate change.

As the streams dry up in warmer months, the stonefly digs into moist

ground to burrow. They come to the surface when the trickles begin to flow again and emerge in August, taking shelter in the rolled-up bark of Alpine Ash, and in winter, they traverse snow. This responsiveness of growth and emergence times to fluctuations in environmental conditions is key to their adaption to the temperature extremes that occur around the summit of Mount Donna Buang. The nymph (sub-adult aquatic stage) takes around two and a half years to mature into an adult. It grows to about 12 millimetres in body length, with long antennae. Adults are thought to only survive for around six weeks, and feed on lichen, bark, rotten wood and plant tissue in vegetation close by to streams.

### Specialisation

*R. darlingtoni* was first described in 1968 by the German entomologist Joachim Illies, from specimens collected in 1931 by the American entomologist, field naturalist and curator PJ Darlington Jnr, after whom the stonefly was named. Subsequent expeditions have unsuccessfully searched other Australian alpine environments, including Mount Kosciusko, for evidence of this species. Joachim Illies attributes the lack of Plecoptera in other high elevation ranges in Australia to the far more extended and variable climatic conditions on the Victorian ranges, which he believed may have offered a large scale of possible refuges for cool-adapted and specialised stoneflies during the climatic changes of the Pleistocene.

### Preserving habitat

According to a recent study, a downward trend generally observed across the population between 2005-2019, including declines of over 90 per cent between 2005 and 2006, has likely been caused by reduced rainfall and increased climate variability. The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act* (FFG Act) Action Statement for *R. darlingtoni* emphasises that specific management actions are essential to the long-term survival of the stonefly, however many of these could be undermined by cumulative impacts to the stonefly's habitat expected during construction and operation of the mountain bike trail network.

The stonefly's very particular habitat requirements render it vulnerable to any alteration to stream patterns and surface soil structure, pollutant runoff, or even minor damage to vegetation along stream courses. Spread of the pathogen Myrtle Wilt, caused by stem or branch wounds to Myrtle Beech trees during construction of the track network, could significantly impair the function of the ecosystem that sustains the stonefly. The proposed mitigation measures include micro-siting and elevated trail structures; however, the Proponent's own risk assessment acknowledges that these would still be insufficient to curb the cumulative effect of these threatening processes on the stonefly's habitat.

### Conservation status

In 2017, *Riekoperla darlingtoni* was added to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species, due to an extremely limited distribution and a continuing decline in the number of mature individuals observed between 2005 and 2012. The IUCN has also assigned the Yarra Ranges National Park as an IUCN Category II (National Parks), reflecting the conservation value of protecting this extraordinary, cool-adapted ecosystem.

The stonefly is still yet to receive listing under Commonwealth legislation, despite the IUCN listing, and even though it has been nominated twice. The first nomination was rejected as its population was solely in a protected area and was not under direct threat. It was nominated again in 2020; however, the federal environment department is still in

the process of assessing the many species impacted by the 2019/20 bushfires. With changes to the FFG Act in 2021, *R. darlingtoni* was listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria under the Common Assessment Method, which is the same method used under national law. The FFG Threatened Species Assessment concludes, "The known population is very small and isolated and at risk from on-going climate change, fire and grazing, such that there is increased extinction risk and little or no probability of recolonisation should the populations become extinct."

VNPA understands that Victoria's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is yet to finalise and submit the assessment process for the federal listing process, due to resource constraints.

### Keeping the future of the park on the right track

Given the scale of the mountain bike track and visitation expected, centring environmental conservation will be crucial to the health of the national park and the success of the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination project over the long term. The idea of nature appreciation has loomed large in the project's branding and public image to date. Proceeding to damage ecosystems within the national park, let alone facilitating the loss of an internationally-listed species, would reflect poorly on the project and Warburton's attraction as a tourism destination. Given the frequent emphasis on user experience and associated economic benefits for Warburton, it would serve the Yarra Ranges Council well to ensure it heeds the advice of experts about protecting the ecological integrity of the national park and the project area, and to modify the track network accordingly. • PW



The Mount Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly take shelter in the rolled-up bark of Alpine Ash. Found only in this area around Mount Donna Buang, it is extremely sensitive to habitat disturbance.



PHOTOS: JORDAN CROOK



# “Immediate” Protection Areas creep along

TWO ASSESSMENT REPORTS HAVE FINALLY BEEN RELEASED FOR THE FORESTS OF MIRBOO NORTH AND THE STRATHBOGIE RANGES, WRITES MATT RUCHEL.

The forest of Mirboo North.

PHOTO: GRACE ADAMO

First announced in November 2019 as part of the Victorian Forestry Plan to transition out of native forest logging by 2030, the Andrews Government’s proposed Immediate Protection Areas to cover about 140,000 hectares of state forest across the Central Highlands, East Gippsland, Mirboo North and the Strathbogie Ranges. While 96,000 hectares of coupes were immediately taken off the logging schedule, well over two years on this protection is still not formalised with legislation (read ‘Commitment issues’ in March 2022 *Park Watch*).

In 2022, the process to actually formalise the status of these areas continues very slowly.

The Andrews Government finally announced in late 2021 that the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) would undertake assessments of the values of the areas identified for the IPAs, and an Eminent Panel For Community Engagement (EPCE) will carry out a community consultation on the future uses of state forests in eastern Victoria.

VEAC’s assessments have primarily been desktop exercises, with just one report for Mirboo North and one for the Strathbogie Ranges released to date. They can be found at [www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigations-assessments/current-assessments](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigations-assessments/current-assessments)

While Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges have been assessed first, the Central Highlands and East Gippsland are likely to follow later in 2022. Unless protected under the law and their land tenure changed, these areas could again be subject to logging (for instance if a change of state government were to occur).

## Mirboo North IPA

The proposed Mirboo North IPA is on Gunaikurnai Country. It is a small area of state forest (approximately 440 hectares) located north of the Mirboo North township in the Strzelecki Ranges, about 130 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. The Strzelecki Ranges is one of the most heavily cleared bioregions in Victoria, retaining less

than one-third of the original extent of native vegetation and one of the lowest proportions in the protected area system at 1.5 per cent. Much of the surrounding landscape is used for agriculture.

The Mirboo North State Forest provides habitat critical for the survival of many animals and plants threatened with extinction; Greater Gliders, Powerful Owls, Burrowing Crayfish, Lace Monitors, Superb Lyrebirds and the Platypus all call it home.

There has been an active campaign by locals, supported by the VNPA, called Preserve our Forests Mirboo North, and the group *has produced an extensive report on the values of the area* (see [vnpa.org.au/mirboo-north-forests](http://vnpa.org.au/mirboo-north-forests)).

The VEAC assessment report for Mirboo North concludes that given the very small size of the proposed IPA, designating it as a ‘regional park’ is considered the most appropriate land use category. It fits well into the landscape, with similar forest in the contiguous block of the Mirboo North Regional Park. It affords protection of the high natural values from sawlog and pulpwood logging, while facilitating continued use of the forest for a broad range of activities. It also provides management continuity and simplifies land boundaries to support public understanding of allowed activities. As a regional park, though, it would not be considered part of the formal protected area system.

However, the VEAC findings are equivocal, noting that “if size and management viability were not a consideration the land use category commensurate with the identified values of the Mirboo North IPA is conservation park. As a conservation park, under-represented EVCs in the Strzelecki Ranges bioregion would be added to the protected area system and the IPA would be managed for the protection of its natural values, while allowing an appropriate level of access and a range of recreational activities valued by the community”.

As part of the VEAC assessment process, the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC) assessed the area.

The GLaWAC section of the report points out that while GLaWAC has joint management over ten parks and reserves under the Gunaikurnai and Victorian Government Joint Management Plan, the model for management of the Mirboo North IPA may eventually be influenced by the Victorian Government’s current review of public land and plans to create a new Public Land Act. These potential changes are important and may open the door for different management models as the VEAC assessment progresses.

GLaWAC makes clear that they are not in favour of the Mirboo North IPA moving under the *National Parks Act 1975*, and notes in the report that “since the Victorian government is in the process of reviewing public land, any lasting decision on the Mirboo North IPA should not pre-empt those opportunities. For that purpose, GLaWAC would seek for the Mirboo North IPA to continue to be managed under existing State legislation”.

## Strathbogie Ranges IPA

The proposed Strathbogie Ranges IPA is on Taungurung Country and comprises the entire Strathbogie State Forest. It is located about 120 kilometres north-east of Melbourne, east of the Hume Highway at Euroa. The IPA would cover approximately 24,000 hectares of public land, currently classified as state forest, of which 5,000 hectares are a Special Protection Zone.

The area is a hotspot for Greater Gliders and a range of other threatened species, including Eastern Horseshoe Bat, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Powerful Owl, Murray Spiny Crayfish, Grey Rice-flower, Tall Leafy Greenhood, and Hairy Hop-bush.

There has been a long-running and active campaign by the Save Our Strathbogie Forest (SOSF) ([www.strathbogiesustainableforests.wordpress.com](http://www.strathbogiesustainableforests.wordpress.com)) to protect the area from logging and other threats, which VNPA has supported.

According to the VEAC assessment report for the Strathbogie Ranges, a ‘conservation park’ is considered the most appropriate public land use category commensurate with the values of the central and northern parts of the proposed Strathbogie Ranges IPA. For the remaining south-western part of the IPA, ‘forest park’ is considered the most appropriate land use category.

Areas of the IPA in a conservation park would be subject to additional conservation measures and would be managed for the protection of their natural and cultural values, while allowing access for a range of recreational activities. Important threatened species habitat, including many large, hollow-bearing trees, would receive a higher level of protection. All under-represented Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC), including those in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion in the northern part of the IPA and in the east near Lake Nillahcootie, would be added to the formal protected area system.

According to VEAC, a forest park in the south-western part of the IPA would facilitate continued use of the forest for a broad range of activities and could accommodate firewood collection, hunting, mining and recreational prospecting.

A rapid biocultural assessment of the Strathbogie Landscape was undertaken by Taungurung Land and Waters Council (TLaWC) and is published in the VEAC assessment report.

According to the report, Taungurung favour continued management of the Strathbogie Ranges IPA under the three existing Crown Land Acts until the new Public Lands Act is passed and the rights it provides Traditional Owners are better understood. Interim planning, management and governance arrangements that support Taungurung rights and interests and that are enabled in the Victorian Traditional Owner Cultural Landscapes Strategy are proposed. Creating a forest park under the *Forest Act 1958* and appointment of TLaWC as a Committee of Management will improve Taungurung rights to govern areas within the Strathbogie Cultural Landscape while navigating planned legislative change.

The VEAC assessments are one of the inputs into the process, and each Traditional Owner group is also represented on Eminent Panel For Community Engagement. • PW



A Rufous Fantail among the trees. Photo: Grace Adamo.



# New models for public land management

THE VEAC ASSESSMENT FOR PROPOSED IMMEDIATE PROTECTION AREAS RAISES THE ASPIRATIONS OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS.

The aspirations of Traditional Owners for control and use of public land must be respected and the questions around which model best suits will need to be an ongoing conversation.

The Committee of Management model, pointed to in the VEAC IPA assessment reports (see previous article), is still widely used for a lot of public land across Victoria, especially for coastal campgrounds and urban parks. However, it is not without challenges.

One of the motivators for the foundation of the VNPA in the 1950s was that the places called national parks, like Wilson Promontory National Park, were managed by Committees of Management, who were generally cash strapped and government outliers. This created a tension where extractive uses such as logging and grazing were required to fund management and infrastructure. This perverse tension was one of the bases of our aim to encourage a centralised and consolidated conservation management agency, ideally properly funded by the state.

Under the current legislative models, the challenge to ensure access to consistent resources for management will be faced by any Committee of Management, whether Traditional Owners or otherwise.

Victoria's proposed public land reforms are a salient feature of the VEAC assessment reports for the IPAs. Following the Statewide Assessment of Public Land by VEAC in 2017, the Andrews Government

is proposing to replace three existing Crown Land Acts (*the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, Forests Act 1958 and Land Act 1958*) with a new Public Land Act. The new Public Land Act will operate alongside the *National Parks Act 1975*, which will continue to protect significant parts of Victoria's diverse natural environment.

Current legislation relating to public land does not recognise the significance of Traditional Owners' connection with land and waters as fundamental to identity and culture, and it does not support self-determination. An important reason cited by the state government for wanting to review and update the legislation is to recognise, enable and support self-determination for Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal Victorians.

A range of current public land categories or tenures will be merged. While the Andrews Government has committed that "...proposed reforms will not change any current land uses..." there will be some changes to names and possibly purposes of different types of reserves. For example, the title of 'state park', long confused with 'state forest', will be removed and these areas renamed national parks or other types of reserves in the National Park Act. New 'conservation park' and 'nature

park' categories will be introduced into the National Park Act and cover some of the existing flora and fauna reserves and nature conservation reserves. The new Public Land Act will consolidate 16 other reserve types, including state forest, bushland reserves, coastal reserves, and alpine resorts.

A consultation paper for the review was released in 2021 ([www.engage.vic.gov.au/renewing-victorias-public-land-legislation](http://www.engage.vic.gov.au/renewing-victorias-public-land-legislation)) and VNPA provided detailed input. We understand legislation is being drafted and could be completed this year, or early in the next term of government (depending, of course, on who wins). However, what is not clear from the consultation paper is the different models proposed to encourage Traditional Owner management or control, as to date the only formal joint management arrangements have been under or via the National Parks Act.

VNPA will continue to closely monitor these important developments, continue working closely with local groups, and seek to get final recommendations that support aspirations of Traditional Owners and strong protection and management for Victoria's special natural places. • PW



Scenes on the Lyrebird Forest Walk in Mirboo North.



PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Funding for the conservation estate is always a tension between infrastructure projects and ecological programs.

## Funding future for national parks

THE RECENT STATE BUDGET DOES NOT MEET NATURE'S NEEDS, WRITES **MATT RUCHEL**.

Australians support better funding and management of prime protected areas and national parks, and two recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiries also recommended significant increases in funding for parks.

A recent national poll by the National Parks Australia Council, of which VNPA is a member, found that 85 per cent of Australians support an increase in government funding for national parks management, and a similar number (83 per cent) support an increase in government funding for staff and rangers for national parks management.

It's not one-eyed either. Across the political spectrum, support is high for an increase in funding for national park management, with support from nine in ten Labor (92 per cent) and Greens (91 per cent) voters, four out of five (78 per cent) Coalition voters, and 78 per cent for 'other' voters.

Across the board, 93 per cent of those said a policy for better funding for the management of national parks and conservation would make them more likely to vote for a political party at the next federal or state election.

For more detail on this polling, read 'Majority rules' in *Park Watch* March 2022.

Parks Victoria's total funding in 2020-2021 was \$337 million, significantly up from \$256 million in 2019-2020 (up \$81 million), a 32 per cent increase overall. This was largely from government grants, which according to the Parks Victoria Annual Report were:

"...\$35.4 million higher than budgeted. This additional income primarily relates to funding received in 2020-21 to deliver programs over the next few years to assist Victoria to recover and

revitalise its tourism economy from the combined effects of bushfires and the COVID pandemic."

Core conservation estate funding (for parks management and staffing) increased by \$21 million in 2020-2021, but there were also significant additional grants, including over \$40 million in special grant projects. What is unclear in the Parks Victoria Annual Report, and the state budget generally, is that it is very hard to tell the difference between investment in infrastructure projects and what is spent on ecological programs. While the two can be linked, it is not always the case that the former benefits the latter.

The \$23 million Wilsons Prom Revitalisation project, for example, was welcomed by the VNPA (read 'The Prom as sanctuary' in *Park Watch* December 2019). This program

*Continued overleaf*





PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

Parks need active management – control of pests and weeds and managing visitor impacts are just some of the many necessary tasks.

*Continued from previous page*

includes the installation of a ten-kilometre exclusion fence at the Prom will support efforts to turn the national park into a 50,000-hectare sanctuary, keeping destructive species out of the park, and supporting the recovery and re-establishment of native animals, plants and habitats. This is obviously an ecological program, but the funding also includes a lot to spend on infrastructure projects, including:

- an upgrade of the Tidal River Visitor and Education Centre
- improved carpark and traffic management
- three accommodation units outside the northern park boundary
- two accommodation units at Tidal River in existing accommodation areas
- a new Telegraph Saddle trail to connect Tidal River and Mount Oberon

While the state budget's direct government funding for parks went up substantially, much of it was for infrastructure.

However, the contribution from the other key plank of Parks Victoria funding, the Parks and Reserves Trust, went down slightly. The Parks and Reserves Trust is funded by a parks charge included on the water, sewerage and drainage bills of residential and commercial properties since 1958. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) distributes it to Parks Victoria and other entities such as Melbourne's zoos, the Royal Botanic Gardens and the Shrine of Remembrance for the management and maintenance of metropolitan parks, gardens, trails and waterways. While a very important source of revenue, it has issues.

This funding is tied largely to the management of parks in and around metropolitan Melbourne. While it is a significant amount, roughly 30-40 per cent of Parks Victoria's total funding, it can only be spent on a small proportion of the parks estate (less than 1 per cent of land area). The second issue is the levy is only collected on some Melbourne residents, those within the old Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) boundaries, which has been abolished for 30 years, and the city has now well outgrown.

### So how much funding do parks really need?

You might as well ask how long is a piece of string... the answer is probably as much as they can get.

As we live in the most cleared state in Australia, even our largest parks still suffer from fragmentation impacts and an onslaught of feral species. This is getting worse under climate change. Parks need active management – control of the many pest plants and animals, managing visitor impacts, habitat restoration, fire management, not to mention ecological monitoring and managing threatened species with specific needs.

One way of calculating it is a 'bottom up' approach, identifying the values and the threats, prioritising management actions, and then costing them. This would be an ideal approach, and Parks Victoria has done some of this work through its Conservation Action Plans (CAPs) which cover eighteen parks landscapes across the state. The costing of actions identified in the

plans has yet to be done, but would be an important exercise.

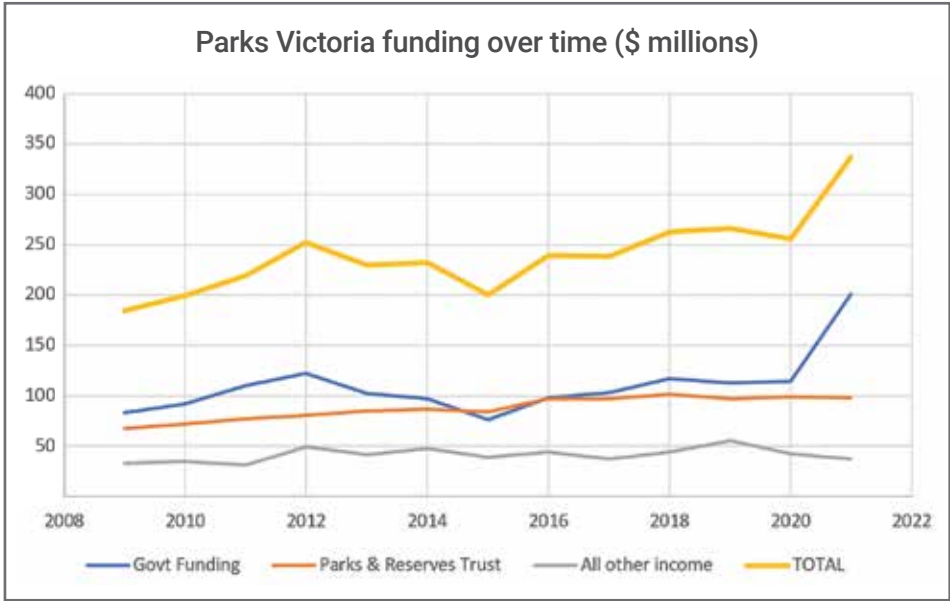
Another option is to look at contribution and role in the life of the state that parks play, and from that, determine a fair proportion. National parks and other conservation reserves contribute more than \$2.5 billion to the state economy through visitation and avoided health costs of at least \$200 million per year, not to mention many hundreds of millions in ecological services such as water quality, water production, pollination and more. In addition, they protect whole habitats for many native species.

Total Victorian state expenditure is expected to be \$90 billion in 2020-21. On that basis, Parks Victoria receives about 0.37 per cent of the annual state budget, to manage 18 per cent of our land areas and 5 per cent of our marine waters. We have campaigned for Parks Victoria to get at least 1 per cent of state expenditure – a seemingly small percentage but which would more than double its current budget. However, others have now gone further in their recommendations.

The recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline recommended Parks Victoria funding to be increased to 1 per cent of Gross State Product (GSP). GSP is a measurement of a state's output; it is the sum of value added from all industries in the state. GSP is the state counterpart to the nation's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Victorian Gross State Product was forecast to be about \$445 billion in 2020-2021, of which one per cent would be roughly \$4.5 billion annually.

The Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee noted:

"...widespread concerns regarding the ability of Parks Victoria and other public land managers to undertake active and adaptive management of the State's parks and reserves within current funding frameworks. While funding allocations have increased from previous years, there are significant challenges in managing the parks estate, including in relation to the rapid effects of climate change. It



is imperative that these protected areas are effectively managed in order to conserve and restore Victoria's precious biodiversity. In light of the need for transformative change to reverse the current trajectory of ecosystem decline, the Committee considers that further increased funding for Parks Victoria to undertake active and adaptive land management in the State's parks and reserves is crucial".

#### Recommendation 37:

That the Victorian Government increase funding for Parks Victoria to undertake action and adaptive land management in the State's parks and reserves, and consider increasing this funding to 1% of Gross State Product.

We would certainly expect some high-quality park management with that sort of money, but it does illustrate the quantum of the challenge if we are to keep our state healthy after a couple of hundred years of decline, and the impact of climate change on natural systems. Let's hope the Victorian Government is listening – its response to the report is due in May (not yet released at the time of writing).

A different Parliamentary Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations, released on the 9 February this year, also raised the funding issue. The Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee found that "...there is a strong case for a significant and

on-going funding increase in real terms, for Parks Victoria". While this Committee was more focused on "asset maintenance" and urban growth areas, the recommendation is nevertheless important.

#### Finding 38:

The Committee considers that there is a strong case for a significant and ongoing funding increase, in real terms, for Parks Victoria. This increase should be sufficient to enable Parks Victoria to meet the growing costs of its asset maintenance and recurrent programs in Melbourne's growth area local government areas.

#### Recommendation 40:

That the Victorian Government review the provision of funding to Parks Victoria to meet the growing costs of its asset maintenance and recurrent programs.

Budget discussions and economic metrics focus on health, education, transport and law and order. The environment and our care for it barely get a mention these days. But using a simple economic metric such as the proportion of state expenditure can have real value. Similar metrics are used often in the national context to talk about defence spending or foreign aid – in this case, it would be in defence of our unique natural areas and in aid of our threatened species.

We'll keep advocating for our national parks and protected areas get the funding that is their fair share. • PW



# Friends with co-benefits

NATURE CONSERVATION AND CLIMATE ACTION  
CAN WORK TOGETHER FOR BETTER OUTCOMES  
FOR BOTH, EXPLAINS NATURE CONSERVATION  
OFFICER ELIZABETH MORISON.

Cheetham Wetlands in Port Phillip Bay.  
Restoration across forests and coastlines  
maximise the co-benefits of nature  
conservation and climate action.

It's time for an update – lots has happened since I last wrote about climate change and nature.

At the end of February 2022, our upstairs neighbours New South Wales and Queensland got pummelled by rain, that turned into floods, that swallowed ecosystems and communities, wreaking havoc all along the coast between Sydney and Brisbane.

That same week, the second of three reports that form the Sixth Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was released. It outlined the current state of play for impacts, vulnerability and adaptation to climate change. It showed that human-induced climate change, especially more frequent and intense extreme events, has already had huge consequences for nature, especially for unique and threatened systems. Then, in early April, the third report was released, presenting climate change mitigation opportunities.

These followed the first report, which laid out the scientific basis for our current understanding of climate change. You might recall from the December 2021 edition of Park Watch, I explained why the United Nations had dubbed the report a 'Code Red for Humanity', and how Victoria's climate policies responded to that warning (hint: they didn't). I also argued that the best way to strengthen our pathway to our net zero by 2050 target is to phase out fossil fuels, and native forest logging.

Although much has happened, this conclusion remains unchanged. In fact, the co-benefits of fossil fuel mitigation with nature conservation were championed as rationale for the best responses to climate change throughout the impacts, vulnerability and adaptation report and the mitigation report.

Both new reports ground climate science in its interactions with ecosystems and biodiversity: as global warming changes the climate baseline, and extremes fluctuate further outside of natural variability, environmental conditions will reach and exceed the resilience and adaptation limits of wildlife. Climate impacts and risk exacerbate trends of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation.

Already heat waves on land and in marine ecosystems have driven local species extinctions and mass mortality events. For example, at just 2°C of marine temperature increase, kelp forests die and cannot recover. Kelp forests are found throughout Victoria's rocky reef ecosystems and provide the primary habitat for iconic marine animals like the striking Senator Wrasse, kaleidoscopic Giant Cuttlefish and wonderful Weedy Seadragon. When the kelp forests die, the fish leave, and the rock platforms are left open to colonisation by invasive species, or worse, empty of marine life. Other impacts being felt in Victoria include: catastrophic bushfire seasons like we saw in 2019-20, which killed many of East Gippsland's hollow-bearing trees that provide habitat for our most iconic arboreal mammals; sea level rise and storm surges turning dunes

to plains in Port Fairy; and reduced snowfall leading to a decline in alpine biodiversity in Alpine National Park. Each of these scenarios jeopardises the ecosystem's ability to support wildlife and capture and store carbon dioxide.

As climate change progresses, the impacts will shift further towards being irreversible, and nature will need to adapt. In Victoria, this might look like biodiversity declines in hotspots like the Southern Ocean, desertification and deteriorating ecosystem health, shifts in seasonal timing, or species distribution towards cooler climate, poleward or to higher elevations in mountain regions. And things only get more complex when risks interact and compound. When heat and drought occur together, vast areas of forest can die. When sea level rise, storm surge, and heavy rainfall occur together, flooding can suffocate coastal ecosystems and cause groundwater salinisation, reducing the ability of the surviving plants to recover, and reducing the resilience of animals further up the food chain.

At 1.5°C of global warming, moderate impacts are predicted for nature. At 2°C, ecosystems and biodiversity will experience high impacts. Right now, we are on track for warming between 2.4°C (on the pledged pathway) and 2.7°C (under current global policies). At this level of warming, by the end of the century, up to a third of all terrestrial species could face very high risk of extinction. At 3°C of warming, risk of extinction for endemic species in biodiversity hotspots could increase tenfold.

These are unacceptable risks, especially for Victoria's marine ecosystems, up to 70 per cent of which are endemic to the Southern Ocean.

The good news? With every increment of reduced global warming, threats to biodiversity decrease significantly. At 2°C warming, the portion of terrestrial species facing risk of extinction drops to 18 per cent, and at 1.5°C, just 14 per cent of terrestrial species are likely to be threatened with climate-related extinction.

This is where the opportunities lie to maximise the co-benefits of nature conservation and climate action. If implemented with justice and equity for communities in mind, combined strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote biodiversity can enhance the success of each goal. The mitigation report named improved forest management and reforestation as the best current examples to promote enhanced outcomes for nature and carbon sequestration in plants. It also identified soil carbon, and coastal wetland management and restoration as huge opportunities in sequestering blue carbon, and protecting inland habitat from coastal erosion and storm surges from extreme weather and sea level rise. And lucky for us, Victoria is rich with forests and coastlines that can offer these co-benefits!

I know what you're thinking. There's a lot to do!

But do you know what I'm thinking? Now, we can do it together with our allies in the climate movement. What an exciting time to be part of this community working towards nature conservation and climate action! • PW

PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA





Southern Brown Bandicoots and other wildlife should be the only ones digging up sand in the Western Port Woodlands.

PHOTO: STEVE DUKE, FLICKR CC

## Sand in their eyes

AFTER A LONG WAIT, THE STATE GOVERNMENT HAS RELEASED THEIR DRAFT POLICY ON THE FUTURE VISION FOR THE BASS COAST AREA. BUT IT ENTIRELY OVERLOOKS SOME VERY SPECIAL NATURAL VALUES, WRITES **JORDAN CROOK**.

A Distinctive Areas and Landscapes (DAL) is a process under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* that came into effect in 2018. These amendments allow an area to be declared as a 'distinctive area and landscape'. With this declaration, an enhanced level of planning protection and management is usually installed in the area through tools such as Significant Landscape Overlays (SLOs) and Environmental Significance Overlays (ESOs), to protect those values through planning controls.

So to our disappointment, the draft DAL for the Bass Coast entirely overlooks important remnant native vegetation known locally as the Western Port Woodlands, on the traditional land of the Bunurong people. It instead proposes overlays to protect the cleared paddocks of the Bass Hills, even though the woodlands came up the highest biodiversity values along the Bass Coast.

Is this an incredibly huge oversight by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), or have they got sand in their eyes? Instead of nature protection, the draft report identified the area for sand mining.

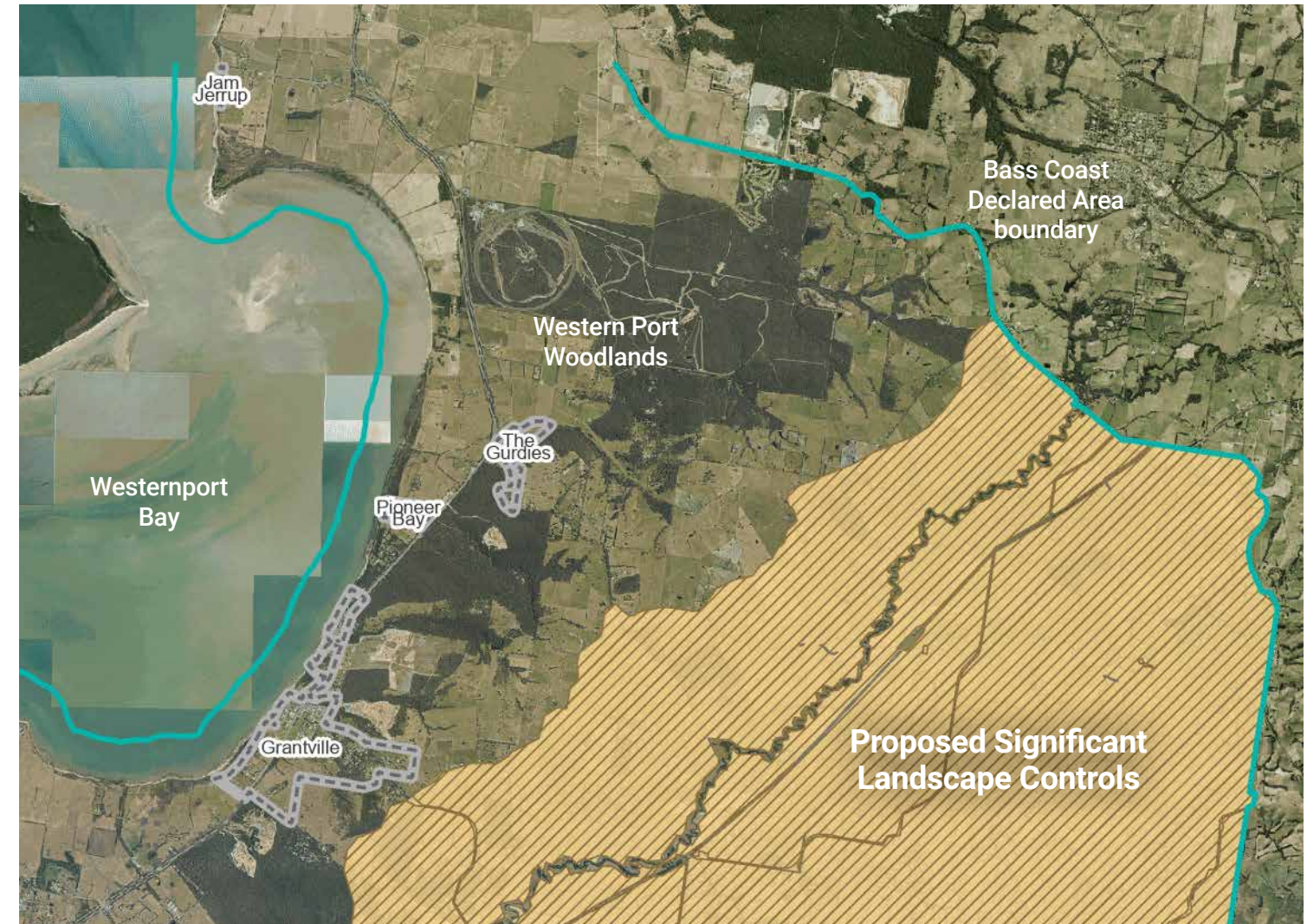
Last year, VNPA and the community group Save Western Port Woodlands produced a report *Western Port Woodlands: Wildlife corridor or sand pit?* This report collated DELWP data of threatened species records, vegetation communities and their status, and current planning overlays. It showed the corridor from Nyora to Grantville is alive with amazing plant and animal life.

One was the only threatened species-listed fungi Tea-tree Fingers (*Hypocreopsis amplexans*). Other threatened species include Southern Brown and Long-nosed Bandicoots and Powerful Owls. Significant outlying populations of Bobucks/Mountain Brush Tail Possums and Koalas also make their home in this string of remnant vegetation.

The Western Port Woodlands is the largest patch of intact coastal woodlands on the Bass Coast in an otherwise heavily cleared landscape. This is highlighted in the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's 2010 Remnant Vegetation Study that found the Gippsland Plain Bioregion is one of the most cleared bioregions in the state, with less than one per cent intact.

Our report also found that planning overlays are scarce across the woodlands, even though their significance is very high. Only one per cent is covered by an Environmental Significance Overlay and only 15 per cent by Significant Landscape Overlay. Meaning the woodlands lack even the most basic protection from mining and inappropriate development.

The DAL makes a lot of statements about the importance of the area and how the new proposed planning controls will fix it. For example, it states: "By managing development, building design and vegetation removal, the proposed landscape planning controls aim to conserve and enhance Bass Coast's



The Proposed Significant Landscape Controls completely miss the Western Port Woodlands even though they have the highest biodiversity values along the Bass Coast.

BASE MAP MAPSHARE.VIC.GOV.AU

*state-significant and regionally significant landscapes. Conserving and enhancing these landscapes will ensure that current and future generations can continue to enjoy them".* Sounds good, right?

The proposed planning controls actually appear to protect none of the important remnant ecological areas around the Western Port Woodlands. It does talk about the importance of biolinks and the need for ecological restoration works in other areas, but essentially ignores the whole string of parks, reserves, and remnant vegetation in this corridor, which are in many ways already a biolink.

This process seems to have completely neglected the Western Port Woodlands and the high values they hold. This 'distinctive area and landscape' must get the protection and recognition it deserves soon – before this wildlife corridor is destroyed by sand mining.

Thank you to everyone that made a submission to the state government to show what a real vision looks like for the Bass Coast environment. • PW

## Community planting events coming up!



PROJECT HINDMARSH. PHOTO: DAVID FLETCHER

### Project Hindmarsh

After a frustrating two year absence, Hindmarsh Landcare Network's planting weekend is back! This year will also be the 25th planting year. The aim is to plant 11,000 trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses at two sites near Dimboola. Seeking volunteers willing to get their hands dirty and have a great weekend.

When: **Friday 1 July to Sunday 3 July**  
Where: Dimboola Showgrounds  
Registrations are open via link at: [hindmarshlandcare.org.au/project-hindmarsh-2022](http://hindmarshlandcare.org.au/project-hindmarsh-2022)

### Grow West

Green thumbs are invited to roll up their sleeves for the annual Grow West Community Planting Day. Help plant 3000 native plants in Melbourne's west, an important opportunity to rejuvenate and restore local landscapes. This year's event will be held at Pelican Point, Hopetoun Park, along the Werribee River.

When: **Sunday 24 July, 9.30am-4pm**  
Where: Pelican Point, Hopetoun Park  
Registrations will open in July through [growwest.com.au](http://growwest.com.au)





PHOTO: ED DUNENS, FLICKR CC

# Cooking Dancing with Brolgas

IAN PENNA WRITES OF THE PLIGHT OF ONE OF OUR MOST ICONIC SPECIES.

I've only seen a few Southern Brolga in the wild. Like most people, I've had to mostly read or watch videos about this intriguing bird.

I now wonder if the beautiful imagery that we see in books and on the internet merely records the last of this iconic species in our small part of this mauled continent? Will the fabulous painting on the Lismore silo by artist Jimmi Buscombe be all that reminds us of the local brolgas?

Brolgas used to be prolific in south-eastern Australia. However, after years of draining their wetlands, shooting, poisoning, fox predation and other impacts, the brolga's conservation status in Victoria recently declined further from threatened to endangered.

According to the SWIFFT website, of the birds seen in DELWP's 2021 Brolga count, nine per cent were less than two years old: "at the lower end of recruitment estimates for Victorian flocks and suggests that breeding success and/or survivorship in the past two years has been relatively low".

While the historical threats to Victoria's brolga remain, a new threat has emerged as the state tries to reduce its carbon-based energy dependence – the expansion of wind farms in western Victoria. While we should all support reducing our dependence on fossil fuels and promoting renewable energy,

we also need to respect the lives of wildlife impacted. Despite the extent of our "sweeping plains", brolga wetlands are in areas targeted by wind energy companies. And it appears some companies have already blown brolgas out of traditional breeding grounds – with more wind farms to come.

For a few years, I watched the campaign for the brolga from the fringes. But last year, I began to read more and talk with brolga advocates. The more I learnt, the more appalled I became: not just at the brolga's plight, but at the many stories of reasonable community concerns being overridden for the benefit of commercial interests and government at the brolga's expense.

However, most alarming is the process being used by Victoria's Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to develop the *Brolga Assessment and Mitigation Standards for wind energy facility permit applications*. Draft standards were released in late 2020, giving the public a month to comment. The final document was due for release in late 2021, but it and the public's submissions are still in the department.

In November 2020, DELWP stated:

"As the renewable energy sector grows and more wind farms are built, we need effective rules to protect native animals like birds and

bats from any potential risk these facilities may pose."

However, the draft standards are fundamentally flawed and provide little confidence in the likely quality of any Final Standards, which will eventually be incorporated into Victoria's planning schemes. Then, it will be extremely difficult to challenge them.

The draft standards are based primarily on data for the movements of a few adult brolgas and chicks at their breeding grounds where there were *no* operating wind turbines. They propose a buffer of 900 metres around nesting grounds surrounded by operating turbines.

DELWP's 'Brolga Standards' staff told me: "The purpose of the breeding habitat buffer is to maximise the potential success of chicks surviving from egg incubation to fledging". However, DELWP does not show that data for the "non-turbine" nesting sites can be applied to "turbine" nesting sites. This problem was clearly identified in comments by a DELWP staffer on an earlier draft of the standards released through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request:

"As I have said repeatedly, [redacted]'s work identifies movements of unfledged chicks within a home range. It does not tell us anything about

Brolgas' avoidance of wind farm infrastructure in choosing nesting sites."

'Brolga Standards' staff responded with "No change to standards":

"With respect to expanding to consider potential disturbance from turbine operation in selecting breeding wetlands, this is a current data limitation. However, there is evidence of Brolga breeding pairs returning to wetlands used in previous years within wind farms..."

A "current data limitation" seriously understates the problem. An FOI request to DELWP could not produce data on known active and successful nesting sites for the Southern Brolga during 2020 and 2021 that are within one kilometre, two kilometres or five kilometres of operating wind farms in Victoria. Nor could it give me a thorough risk analysis of the draft standards. If DELWP has no data on brolgas' selection of nesting sites in relation to operating wind turbines, how can it confidently propose a turbine buffer of 900 metres around nesting sites? Nevertheless, the Executive Director of DELWP's Biodiversity Division approved the draft's 900-metre buffer.

Birdlife Australia also recognised serious weaknesses in the Draft Standards. Its submission on the draft stated:

"The draft Standards will not provide adequate protection for the Victorian Brolga population from the impacts of wind farms. The simplistic combination of 'Brolga no-go flocking sites' and a 'cookie

cutter' approach to buffers at breeding sites indicates that the key objective of the Standards is to facilitate the development of the Victorian wind industry not to protect and recover Victoria's Endangered Brolga population.

While DELWP may know of brolgas returning to wetlands within wind farms, the real question is whether they stay and successfully breed near operating turbines every year. Darlington farmer, mechanical engineer, and brolga advocate Hamish Cumming investigated this issue. In 2014, Hamish integrated data from a consultant's report on brolga movements into and out of the AGL Macarthur Wind Farm with more than 120,000 readings of its energy generation through part of 2013.

He found that while adult brolgas returned to wetlands in the wind farm when turbines were still or turning slowly, they would leave – and even abandon chicks - when the power generation rose above 30 per cent of capacity.

Using this and other information, such as GPS tracking of cranes overseas, concerned citizens are calling for a minimum five-kilometre buffer around breeding wetlands. Hamish estimates that poorly placed wind farms in western Victoria have displaced brolgas from around 50 nesting sites, and there are probably only about 200 breeding pairs left.

We wouldn't eat brolgas, but the way the wind energy industry is expanding with government largesse, many more Victorians when using renewable



PHOTO: IAN PENNA

energy will soon be metaphorically "cooking with brolgas" – that is unless we convince our Premier to require a minimum five-kilometre wind turbine buffer around brolga breeding grounds. Please write to Premier Andrews at [daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:daniel.andrews@parliament.vic.gov.au)

## Note from VNPA:

We support renewable energy and the need to reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere to safe levels, but we cannot accept the current *Brolga Assessment and Mitigation Standards for Wind Energy Facilities' (Draft Standards)* in its current form, due to the weakening of protections for one of our most iconic species... We are disappointed that the draft standards skew in favour of developers and play down the impact on Southern Brolga, an amazing species, still just holding on in south-west Victoria.

The iconic Southern Brolga, with Mount Elephant in western Victoria in the background.



PHOTO: LOUISE THOMAS



Twenty years ago, on 16 November 2002, Victoria's world-first network of marine protected areas was established.

In this edition, as well as the previous and next editions of *Park Watch*, we will show you these marine marvels, look back at their history and forward to their future, share discoveries and learnings, and recognise some of the exceptional individuals and groups who have made substantial contributions.

## Safeguarding our seas

### SNAPSHOT OF THE PAST

In the March *Park Watch*, we looked at the role of marine protected areas, and some of the management challenges. In this edition, we cast our minds back in time to the history of the campaign that led to the creation of Victoria's 24 marine national parks and sanctuaries.

We acknowledge the many First Peoples of the area now known as Victoria and honour their continuing connection to, and caring for, Sea Country.

#### History

The **1970s** marked the start of the process of establishing the early predecessors of today's marine protected areas, mostly known as 'marine reserves', 'marine parks' or 'marine and coastal parks' (some of which are still around today). A well-known example of this was the Harold Holt Marine Reserve system to protect areas in Port Phillip Bay, ~just a few years after the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park was formed. Victoria had 12 marine reserves or coastal parks established between 1979-1991. However, these areas were not actually afforded much protection in reality. Under fisheries legislation, they were 'multi-use reserves', still allowing fishing and other extractive uses.

Through the **1990s**, thanks to the lobbying work of the VNPA and other groups and individuals, the Land Conservation Council (LCC) undertook a statewide investigation into Victoria's

marine areas, which was then was later built on by the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) (both were predecessors of what is now the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council). Significantly, this was the first time that the Victorian coastline and marine waters were investigated as a whole, rather than only focusing on regional areas.

Like many assessments of public land, investigating the values, hearing community views, and making recommendations to government can take considerable time, and be subject to much debate and controversy. This campaign was no different, with significant opposition from the fishing lobby and the oil and gas industry.

After many years, in **2000** the final recommendations for this new network of marine national parks were released in the ECC's Marine, Coastal and Estuarine Investigation Final Report. By this time, the Steve Bracks Labor government was in power and committed to creating the network for Victorian waters.

This was a major milestone, promising a network of highly-protected 'no-take' marine national parks, for the protection of biodiversity, where fishing and other extractive uses are prohibited. There had been single or isolated regional parks established elsewhere but never a network. It was a world-first.

Committing to creating the parks was one thing. Getting the legislation

through parliament was another. The first attempt failed in 2001, as it did not have bipartisan support in parliament. After all the work done to get that far, you can imagine the disappointment. But finally, after tireless efforts by so many, the marine national parks were formally legislated on 16 November **2002**.

It is worth noting that at the time, it was over 100 years since Victoria's first land-based national parks had been established. About 15 per cent of our state's land was protected. With Victoria's marine environment being ripe for resource development, it was well due being given at least the same level of care in the form of stronger protection.

The community campaign for these marine parks and sanctuaries lasted more than ten years and was absolutely pivotal to the success. It took quite some convincing the Victorian public that it was a good idea to have the network of representative protected areas across the coast, particularly in the face of vocal opposing views. It took many groups and individuals coming together collectively for this new vision of marine protection. The VNPA was instrumental in bringing together the campaign, especially with the work of Chris Smyth, the VNPA marine and coastal campaign coordinator from 2000, and Kate Brent and others before that. With the help of Tim Allen, former coordinator of the Coastal Community Network, the science, tourism, and dive

*Continued overleaf*



Continued from previous page

sectors also helped ease government concerns. Underwater photography was used to showcase the hidden wonders below the surface that were unknown to many Victorians, including a front-page splash on the *Herald Sun*.

VNPA gives ongoing gratitude to all in government, community, tourism sectors, environment groups and individuals who helped make our Victorian marine protection legacy. Also to the swimmers, scientists, snorkelers, scuba divers, kayakers, bird watchers, park managers and some fishers who value and stand up for their existence.

The original ECC investigation report that proposed the network of parks stated that:

"... we suspect, that in 20 years from now, Victoria without a system of marine national parks, would be as unthinkable as Victoria today without the Wilsons Prom or Grampians National Parks."

The last polling commissioned by VNPA on marine national parks seems to support this statement, with 81.5 per cent of people supporting having marine national parks and sanctuaries aimed to protect marine habitats (43.9 per cent strongly support, 37.6 per cent support).

While many see it this way, unfortunately, our leaders today do not, with current Andrews Government policy banning any new marine parks. This is shameful, considering there have been expert investigations stating the current network has significant gaps, offers limited protection, and is likely not comprehensive. Once global leaders, we are now well behind other Australian states in marine protections. In the next edition of *Park Watch*, we will speak more about this and what we would like to see looking ahead to the next 20 years to protect Victoria's marine legacy.

Jack Breedon among spectacular annual Spider Crab aggregation event.



Jack takes stunning photography and footage of the incredible world under the waves.



Swimming with Swell Sharks was Jack's most memorable marine life encounter.



PHOTOS: JACK BREEDON

## Local marine champion

SO MUCH HAS BEEN LEARNED ABOUT OUR MARINE ENVIRONMENT OVER THE LAST 20 YEARS, THANKS IN GREAT PART TO THE DEDICATION OF VOLUNTEERS WHO SPEND COUNTLESS HOURS ABOVE OR BELOW THE WATER, EXPLORING, OBSERVING, MONITORING AND SHARING THEIR FINDINGS FAR AND WIDE.

THE SECOND LOCAL MARINE CHAMPION WE WOULD LIKE TO RECOGNISE IS JACK BREEDON.

### Q. How did you first get acquainted with Victoria's marine national parks and sanctuaries?

I was exploring marine parks with mum and dad from early childhood, snorkelling for the first time at Wilsons Prom, rock pooling along the Surf Coast, and picnicking at Point Cooke. As I grew older, I started doing holiday programs with Ecologic and Junior Ranger sessions with Parks Victoria until I could explore these places on my own. By the time I was nine, I had joined my local Friends Group (Jawbone Marine Sanctuary Care).

### Q. Do you have a favourite?

Victoria's marine parks and sanctuaries were chosen to each represent a different habitat type from across the state, each one unique in its own way. Choosing a favourite is hard because they are almost non-comparable.

However, if I had to choose one, it would be Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary. Not just my favourite site in Victoria, but my favourite site I have ever snorkelled or dived. Sitting under the Split Point Lighthouse (the one from Round the Twist) on Victoria's Surf Coast, the weather is often too rough to even contemplate snorkelling or diving. But on that rare day (about five days a year) that the weather is calm enough to get out, it offers spectacular cathedral-like reef structures full of caves, overhangs, swim throughs and valleys. Rolling kelp covers these limestone reefs, while countless colourful invertebrates paint the walls of every shaded space. Sharks and rays are here in abundance (it's the only place in Victoria I know of that I can guarantee seeing a Wobbegong). Port Jackson Sharks can be found in all the caves, while Bronze Whalers and Eagle Rays cruise overhead. Fish are also plentiful here and species normally reserved for scuba diving, like the Blue Devil Fish, can be found here in less than three metres of water. In all my snorkelling and diving (right around the country, including over 100 reefs on the Great Barrier Reef) I have never seen a place as beautiful.

### Q. How has your connection with these marine areas shaped who you are and your desire to care for them?

My entire life has been tethered to Victoria's marine environment and its marine parks. They are the largest part of me and who I am. After school, I went and got myself a degree in marine biology so I could come home and work as a marine ranger in Port Phillip Bay. My next plan is to make films about the incredible world under the waves that is so invisible to so many people who live on its shoreline.

### Q. What has been your best marine life encounter?

Every diver has that species they have heard about and seen photos of, that they would love to experience for themselves. For me in 2017 that was Swell Sharks. If you're unfamiliar with them, they are a small, benthic shark that gets their name from a defence mechanism they share with pufferfish. I'd heard they could be found on the east coast between Wilsons Prom and Port Phillip Heads, and that they were more common during winter. So I headed on down to Bunurong Marine Park in the middle of June. Within 20 minutes of being in the water, they were everywhere. I hadn't needed to go looking, they came to me. Their curiosity, emboldened by their numbers, had them swimming over and under me from every direction. So close I could barely fire off a decent photograph without obstruction from a rogue tail or pectoral fin. I don't think I'd ever felt so welcomed by the ocean before – but maybe my wetsuit just smelt like fish?

### Q. What is one of the best things anyone can do to experience and care for them?

The number one thing you can do is join a Friends Group. Almost all the marine parks and sanctuaries have one. You'll meet other people passionate

about the marine environment, get to participate in citizen science, and have ample opportunity to get you or your family involved. If you aren't sure who is in your local group or where to find one the best place to start is by attending one of VNPA's Great Victorian Fish Counts. These events attract people from all over the state to network and snorkel somewhere new alongside others with invaluable local knowledge. At any one of these events, you'll probably meet people from three or four different Friends Groups.

### Q. What would you like to see in the next 20 years?

I love diving in Victorian Marine Parks and Sanctuaries because of the unique and wonderful marine life. But as nice as they are to visit, only 5.3 per cent of Victorian waters are protected from fishing over the whole 1,868 kilometres of coast. As it stands, they offer very little benefit towards conserving biodiversity and barely provide the function of increasing fisheries productivity and resilience. As harsh as it sounds, they are tokenistic.

Less than a year after Victoria introduced its "world-leading" marine park network, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority blew it out of the water with the rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef (an area larger than the Victorian coast). That multi-use zoning plan protects 33 per cent of all habitat types (not just "examples" like in Victoria) in no take zones and allows for specialised extractive zones that supports recreational and commercial fishers alike. It is time Victoria stepped up its game and shifted to modern, multi-use marine zoning schemes to protect its precious marine environment for generations to come\*. Hopefully, improvements will be made soon so that in 20 years we can look back proudly on 20 years of science-based management and celebrate the way QLD will in 2024.

\*The VNPA has not advocated for multi-use marine zoning schemes for Victoria's marine national parks due to their small size.



# Let's dive under marine protected areas of central Victoria



THE MELBOURNE REGION HAS NINE SPECIAL AREAS FORMALLY PROTECTED IN VICTORIA'S MARINE RESERVE SYSTEM. LET'S TAKE A DIP INTO WHAT YOU MIGHT FIND BELOW IF YOU WERE TO BEACHCOMB, ROCKPOOL RAMBLE, SNORKEL OR DIVE (SEE MAP ABOVE FOR LOCATIONS). WE ALSO REVEAL SOME IMPORTANT WORK BEING DONE BY PARK RANGERS AND VOLUNTEERS.

PORT PHILLIP BAY AND WESTERNPORT BAY ARE WITHIN THE TRADITIONAL SEA COUNTRY OF THE BUNURONG AND THE WADAWURRUNG PEOPLES.

OVER THREE EDITIONS OF *PARK WATCH*, WE WILL TAKE YOU ON AN UNDERWATER TOUR OF VICTORIA'S 24 MARINE NATIONAL PARKS AND SANCTUARIES, TO GIVE YOU A CLOSER LOOK AT WHAT'S BENEATH THE WAVES. WE WILL NOW VISIT THE CENTRAL REGION OF VICTORIA, AFTER STARTING IN THE EAST BACK IN MARCH AND FINISHING WITH THE WEST IN THE NEXT EDITION.

## PORT PHILLIP BAY

### Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary

Located at the mouth of the Barwon River, the eastern half of the reef is basalt and exposed to the river's flow, while the western side is old sandstone influenced by ocean swell. Its kelp forests, sandstone arches, basalt rocks and sponge gardens are home to rays, sea slugs, schools of Zebra Fish and Blue-throated Wrasse.



PHOTO: TESS HOINVILLE

### Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park

Portsea Hole, reaches depths of up to 30 metres and features sponges, soft corals and schooling fish.

Popes Eye, previously an island fort, is now the perfect place to explore the kelp forests and spot nesting gannets.

The reefs at Point Nepean and Point Lonsdale host spectacular wall diving, with caves and swim-throughs that rival the tropical coral reefs.

Swan Bay and Mud Islands are rich in birdlife and seagrass meadows provide habitat for seahorses and juvenile fish to grow before heading out into deeper waters.



PHOTO: TESS HOINVILLE



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

### Jawbone Marine Sanctuary

A pocket of tranquillity beside Williamstown. The largest occurrence of mangroves in Port Phillip Bay, are also the only Victorian mangroves growing on a basalt coast. In the rockpools you might come across bright and beautiful seaweeds, sponges, urchins, crabs and nudibranchs (sea slugs), while migratory sea and shorebirds feed at the mudflats and mangroves.



PHOTO: SHANNON HURLEY

### Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary

Sandy beaches, rocky reefs and mudflats are home to a diversity sponges, urchins, anemones, sharks and rays. The habitats and marine life here are shaped by the basalt cliffs that rise from the seafloor, the remains of a lava flow that poured along these plains thousands of years ago. Lucky snorkellers might even come across large aggregations of Southern Fiddler Rays – a rare and unique sight.



PHOTO: JACK BREEDON

### Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary

Shallow waters covering sandstone reefs, sea caves, and rockpools make this the perfect place to explore both onshore and in the water to see adorable Port Jackson Sharks swimming among seagrass beds, vibrant seaweeds swaying this way and that, or snails of all shapes and sizes grazing on the rock platforms.

## Management and science in marine protected areas

In recent years, northern Port Phillip Bay's Jawbone and Point Cooke marine sanctuaries have seen their largest management challenge in controlling the outbursts in numbers of the Purple Sea Urchin. Although the urchins are native, their numbers are believed to have exploded during the Millennium Drought, and their overgrazing has resulted in the devastation of kelp forests and what is referred to as 'urchin barrens'. The myriad benefits kelp forests provide, from food and shelter for marine biodiversity to driving carbon sequestration, has led to the need for a trial urchin control program. Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment Land, Water, and Planning (DELWP), with the help of Deakin and Melbourne Universities, commercial dive operators and local marine care groups are on a mission to reduce the number of urchins so the kelp can come back. Already the program is showing signs of success. The trial is also showing that the benefits of undertaking the program outweigh the resources invested, making the case for continuing need for funding so that urchin control can be sustained and carried out throughout the sanctuaries.

For southern Port Phillip Bay's Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park, the picture is a little more complicated. Parks Victoria's marine monitoring program for this park has shown:

- Healthy fish populations, with increases in species such as the Bluethroat Wrasse and Horseshoe Leatherjacket. This indicates the benefits of no-take areas for fish populations.
- Greenlip Abalone numbers are higher inside the park than in outside reference areas, but overall have increased on either side of the boundary since the park's establishment.
- Southern Rock Lobster numbers are very low within the park, which could be due to illegal take within the park and heavy fishing outside of it.
- Kelp species are in fair or good condition, but there have been declines in species over the years.
- Seagrass at Swan Bay and Mud Islands is overall healthy with some fluctuations over the years.

*Continued overleaf*



## WESTERNPORT BAY

### Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary

This mushroom-shaped reef reveals itself at low tide, and is the perfect place in calmer weather conditions to explore by rockpooling and snorkelling. The line of rock and reef which stretches out from Flinders Ocean Beach features a series of sheltered bays and pools showcasing a high diversity of marine life such as Weedy Seadragons, Cowfish, Magpie Morwongs, Elephant Fish, and the White Sea Star.

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### Yaringa Marine National Park

This estuary like wetland environment is a birdwatcher's paradise and perfect for exploring the mangroves by canoe.

### Churchill Island Marine National Park

On the eastern shores of Phillip Island and stretching to the northern part of Churchill Island is this paradise for birdlife. Along with Yaringa and French Island marine national parks, Churchill Island Marine National Park is part of Westernport's internationally protected Ramsar wetland area, where you can admire migratory birds which have travelled here from all around the globe to feed, roost and breed in the estuary, mangrove and seagrass habitats.

7

8

PHOTO: MARTIN GRIFFITH

### French Island Marine National Park

Known for its unique seagrass beds, mangroves, saltmarsh communities, and mudflats. The mudflats feed the migratory wader birds, the seagrass beds are a nursery for King George Whiting, Bream and Mullet, and Barralier Island is home to a small colony of Little Penguins which you may find foraging in the surrounding waters.

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## Listening to nature with the family

On your next adventure, try out your nature detective skills by listening closely to your surroundings. You could do this by finding a special place to stay still and listen or taking a listening walk.

So many things make sounds, including birds, insects, water and wind. We can learn a lot about nature by tuning in our ears.

Even scientists use sound to understand what is happening in nature.

You can learn to identify some animals by listening to them. Can you identify a Kookaburra or a Sulphur-crested Cockatoo by their calls?

Sounds from nature can be different at different times of the day. You may hear different things after dark or when you first wake up.

#### Our tips for good listening to nature:

- Take some slow, calm breaths before you start.
- Close your eyes, so your ears become more alert.
- Listen for very little or faraway noises as well as the loud ones.
- Stay quiet for as long as you can. The longer you are quiet, the more animals are likely to come out.

#### Some other things to try while listening to nature:

- Younger children may want to imitate the noise.
- See if you can find what made the noise.
- You can use wildlife identification apps such as PK Birds or Frog ID to identify wildlife calls. (But use your headphones, as playing wildlife calls in the wild can upset local wildlife.)

#### Questions to think about or find the answers to:

- Where is the sound coming from?
- What is making the sound?
- Why is it making the sound?
- Would this sound still be here if there were no people around?

#### Learning about listening to nature online

Did you know that the Victorian National Parks Association is working with scientists at Museums Victoria and local communities to learn about nature by recording wildlife sounds using special scientific equipment called Song Meters. You can listen to some of these recordings at <https://collections.museumsvictoria.com.au/articles/16435>



PHOTO: JENNY BARNETT

Could you identify this bird just by listening to its calls?







**Clockwise from left:**

Getting face to face with marine life in the tide pools of Salmon Rocks.

Youth Team member and ReefWatch intern Consuelo searches for sea slugs on a group snorkel.

Deploying wildlife monitoring equipment for the Life After Fire project.

## From the trees to the sea

OUR REEFWATCH AND NATUREWATCH PROGRAMS TEAMED UP IN MARCH FOR OUR FIRST JOINT EVENT, COMBINING OUR SEA SLUG CENSUS AND LIFE AFTER FIRE PROJECT IN THE CAPE CONRAN AREA ON GUNAİKURNAI COUNTRY. ADDING OUR YOUTH TEAM INTO THE MIX MADE FOR A FABULOUS WEEKEND OF CITIZEN SCIENCE AND CONNECTIONS. OUR TEAMS SHARE THEIR STORY HERE.

We kicked the weekend off with NatureWatch's Life After Fire project, with the program's Sera and Rachel leading evening spotlighting surveys along a trail in Cape Conran Coastal Park. The area had been severely burnt in the 2019--2020 bushfires but showed signs of regrowth, and we were excited to find Ringtail Possums and Bush Rats present in the area. At a second, more remote site, we also spotted an Eastern Pygmy Possum in an unburnt patch. At both sites, we installed motion detection cameras and sound recording devices to collect more information on wildlife over the coming weeks. We look forward to finding out what else our equipment reveals about post-fire species and habitat recovery in Cape Conran.

Our ReefWatch team and Youth Team (see next article) arrived in Marlo on the second night. We all gathered at the Marlo Hotel for a chance to catch up, introduce the VNPA volunteers and meet with the local community. We

had a fantastic turnout – over 40 enthusiastic locals and visitors came together to share stories, connect, learn about VNPA projects, and hear from local sea slug sleuth and event presenter, Holly Baird.

The following day, the coast was calling with beautiful weather for some Sea Slug Census searching in Cape Conran Coastal Park. Locals, VNPA volunteers, and the Youth Team scanned the Salmon Rocks rockpools for sea slugs. Nicole, ReefWatch's resident 'nudi nerd', stopped at the first pool to demonstrate how to search for sea slugs (hint: you stay still and look for tiny things moving with purpose), and miraculously found the first sea slug of the day – an *Elysia coodgeensis*! More sea slugs were spotted and photographed onshore. On the final morning, a group snorkel extended the search underwater in the beautiful ocean pools. Meanwhile, an independent team of SCUBA divers who regularly support the Sea Slug Census surveyed

sea slugs at Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary and Cowrie Bay. They then jetted across to Gabo and Tullaburga Islands in the far east of Victoria, making this the most geographically widespread Census we've hosted to date.

The ease with which these VNPA citizen science projects came together and interacted with the Youth Team was incredibly inspiring and enjoyable. It was fantastic to get to know each other's projects in the field and to partner with the committed people who spend their lives caring for this beautiful part of Victoria. We'll do it again, at Cape Conran or other locations, as we continue to expand and align our community learning, engagement and advocacy programs within VNPA. We hope you will join us on our next joint adventure! • PW

From the VNPA team: Sera and Rachel (NatureWatch), Kade and Nicole (ReefWatch), Liz (Youth Team).





# Making ourselves youthful



## Our Nature Conservation Officer Elizabeth Morison has been busy establishing VNPA's new Youth Team.

The Victorian National Parks Association, over its 70 years, has amassed an impressive and dedicated community of nature advocates. Reflecting on the history of our organisation, and learning about the people who led us here, I felt deeply encouraged by VNPA's ability to connect with people through their shared drive to stand up for Victoria's spectacular ecosystems, from the trees to the seas. It got me thinking about how we might build ourselves up to continue long into the future.

And what does that look like? Inspiring and empowering the next generation of young nature advocates, of course!

Young people have the potential to be present and future drivers of change and are more connected and educated than ever before. And our organisation has a wealth of experience and a long track record of setting its sights on ambitious campaigns – and winning. To me, harnessing and sharing the strengths of both groups sounds like a recipe for success.

So, I set out to gather a group of eight passionate young people, take them out into nature to learn about VNPA, and plan how we might be able to join forces into the future. The Youth Team's first outing headed to Cape Conran on Gunaikurnai Country with the ReefWatch and NatureWatch teams for three days of citizen science, community outreach, and workshops.

## Catherine Prentice, one of the Youth Team, shares her experience:

From 24–26 March, myself and seven other volunteers had the privilege of spending time in Cape Conran gaining valuable field experience, and learning about the difference young people can make in conservation movements and campaigning.

On our first day, we were invited to visit the captivating Krowathunkooloong Keeping Place in Bairnsdale; a museum home to a breathtaking collection of art, artefacts, and Gunaikurnai history. Here we were privileged to speak to Rob and Keith, who described the history and experiences of the Traditional Owners of Gunaikurnai Country, whose land and waters the NatureWatch and Reefwatch teams were conducting their surveys on. It was an incredible opportunity for us to speak with Rob and gain his insight on the importance of conservation to the Gunaikurnai people; caring for Country, and being mindful to never take more from the land than it can replace.

Throughout our stay, our group participated in a number of insightful workshops hosted by VNPA Nature Conservation Officer Elizabeth Morison. Here we were able to learn about the VNPA's role in environmental organising and campaigning, the theory of change, and where young people fit in.

Given time to reflect and share our own personal narratives, it became clear to us how young people can be empowered to take part in conservation efforts and caring

From left to right: Melissa Makarewitsch, Liz Morison, Michael Loo, Consuelo Quevedo, Annie Preston, Kelly Van, Luke Morton, Catherine Prentice, and Sean Dempsey on the Youth Team's trip to Cape Conran Coastal Park.

for Country. Coming from an outdoorsy family myself, I was introduced to much of Victoria's nature at a young age, instilling an appreciation for the native wildlife that continues in my adulthood. Now pursuing a degree in Wildlife and Conservation Biology, it is important for me to learn what opportunities exist for young people in the growing and ever-changing field of conservation and environmental activism.

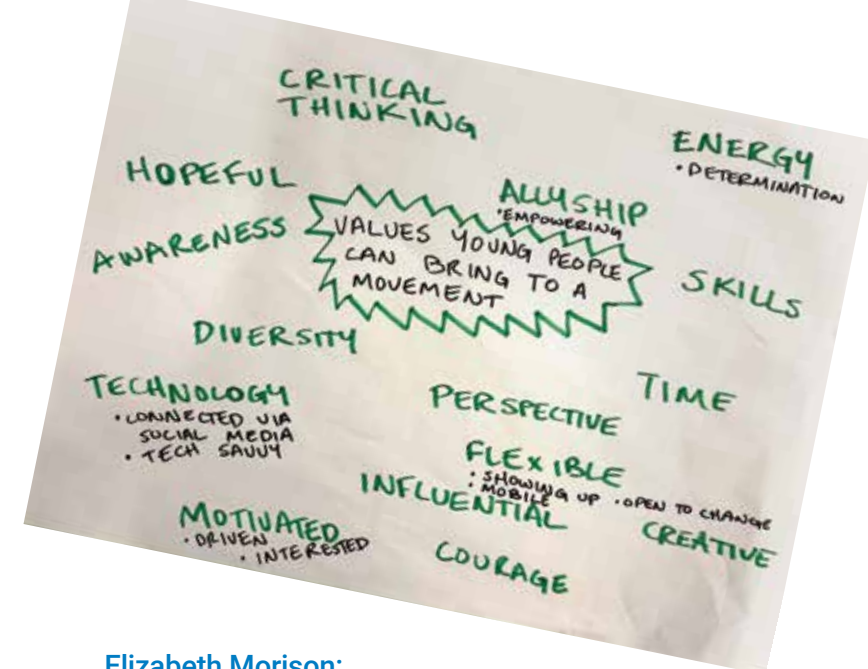
The first day of our trip concluded with an introduction to the ReefWatch and NatureWatch teams, where we were able to learn about the incredible citizen science work. I was particularly captivated by the amazing effort behind the VNPA's Sea Slug Census, which has identified 75 nudibranch species to date along Victoria's coasts.

The morning of our second day was spent volunteering with the ReefWatch team spotting and identifying nudibranchs in a rockpool ramble along Cape Conran Coastal Park. This experience was the most memorable to me, as it provided us with the opportunity to partake in valuable citizen science work, as well as broaden our knowledge and identification skills of marine life. For myself and some of my fellow volunteers, it was our first time spotting nudibranchs, as well as other marine life, including Elephant Snails and Feather Duster Worms.

That evening, we joined the NatureWatch team on a spotlighting survey in a section of forest in Cape Conran Coastal Park. Not only was this a fantastic opportunity to survey a number of arboreal mammals, but we were also fortunate to have use of a thermal imaging camera, on which we were able to spot an adorable Ringtail Possum family moving through the trees.

We spent our last day reflecting on previous workshops. We discussed what young people can bring to conservation movements, including determination, diversity, critical thinking, and perspective. This led us to envision what future youth engagement within the VNPA might look like, and how organisations can empower and upskill youth to organise and campaign themselves. Among our many ideas were providing workshops or webinars to teach young people valuable skills such as networking, policy brief writing, campaigning, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) communication. We also discussed the provision of hands-on, face to face learning in the form of shadowing opportunities, citizen science volunteering, and fun, community-based campaigning get-togethers.

The Youth Team trip was an incredible experience in fieldwork and youth empowerment. I am immensely thankful to the VNPA for providing young people with the opportunity to gain insight from professionals, and develop ideas for our own personal journeys in conservation and environmental activism. It is my hope that the VNPA will continue working with young people to impart valuable skills and knowledge, and empower us in our future endeavours in conservation and activism.



## Elizabeth Morison:

I'm sure you'll agree, Catherine's energy emanates from the page, and her thoughtful reflections show the diversity of experience and depth of perspective she shared and gained from the trip.

Now times that by eight – that's what I got to be a part of!

These young nature advocates are some of the most impressive people I've met. Young people bring so much value to the movements they're part of. From diversity, awareness, allyship and influence to critical thinking, perspective, technology, energy and flexibility, and importantly, creativity, courage and hope – young people are brimming with the attributes a movement needs to succeed.

I am so excited about the possibilities to come from empowering and upskilling young people as part of our organisation. Having spent time with the Youth Team learning, connecting, and brainstorming what the next steps for youth engagement at VNPA might look like, I am sure that this is just the beginning. Now, I'm working behind the scenes to turn our ideas into reality.

So watch this space – there's plenty more to come! • PW



A spotlighting survey was one of the citizen science experiences across the weekend.



# Life After Fire

NATUREWATCH'S **RACHEL NALLIAH** AND **SERA BLAIR** REPORT BACK ON THE FIRST YEAR OF THIS CITIZEN SCIENCE PROJECT.

Life After Fire (LAF) is our newest land-based wildlife monitoring research project in East Gippsland designed to help monitor the recovery of indigenous wildlife and their habitat after the Black Summer fires.

Over three years, we will be conducting research on private and public land across high priority conservation areas. On three-day expeditions our citizen scientists deploy wildlife monitoring equipment in different fire-affected areas.

## On public land

2021 was a challenging inaugural year for this project, with pandemic-related delays, dramatic storms and flooding events interrupting our fieldwork. Despite this, we managed to get this project off the ground and quickly meet our project milestones of setting monitoring equipment at five targeted high priority conservation areas:

- Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve
- Cape Conran Coastal Park
- Mitchell River National Park
- Bentley Plain Natural Features and Scenic Reserve (Nunniong Plains)
- Colquhoun Regional Park

With the help of our intrepid volunteers, we surveyed for a variety of wildlife groups using detection techniques such as motion-sensing cameras, audio recorders, spotlighting, and scat/track surveys. Over just six months last year, we surveyed ten different sites, deployed 50 cameras and 20 audio recorders, and worked with 18 fantastic volunteers.

2022 has had a good start (minus some flooding delays to our schedule) with new sites surveyed in Errinundra National Park and Cape Conran Coastal Park. We may survey along new transects at sites or repeat ones

at different times of the year to broaden our understanding of what wildlife species are present or absent in different fire-affected regions and unburnt refuge areas. Despite some areas of slow vegetation recovery in Errinundra National Park, we saw a variety of species in nearby unburnt forest during spotlight surveys, including a Sugar Glider, Tawny Frogmouth, Mountain Brushtail Possum, Superb Lyrebird, Rufous Fantail, and five Greater Gliders!

In March, we linked up with VNPA's ReefWatch program for a joint trip to Cape Conran (see previous articles).



A Long-nosed Bandicoot and Superb Lyrebird caught on camera at Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve.

## Life After Fire Preliminary Results

We are still chipping away at the camera data from 2021 and this year. Here are some results so far:

### Species found on motion-sensing cameras

#### Cabbage Tree Creek Flora Reserve

##### SITE 1 (unburnt)

**Mammal**  
Agile Antechinus  
Bare-nosed Wombat  
Bush Rat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Mountain Brushtail Possum  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Bassian Thrush  
Superb Lyrebird  
Wonga Pigeon  
**Introduced**  
Cat  
Deer sp.  
House Mouse

##### SITE 2 (unburnt)

**Mammal**  
Agile Antechinus  
Bare-nosed Wombat  
Bush Rat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Long-nosed Bandicoot  
Potoroo sp.  
Short-beaked Echidna  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Eastern Yellow Robin  
Superb Lyrebird  
**Introduced**  
Cat  
Deer sp.  
Red fox

#### Cape Conran Coastal Park

##### SITE 1 (patchy burn)

**Mammal**  
Bush Rat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Short-beaked Echidna  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Peregrine Falcon  
**Introduced**  
House Mouse

##### SITE 2 (patchy burn)

**Mammal**  
Agile Antechinus  
Bush Rat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Long-nosed Bandicoot  
Mountain Brushtail Possum  
Potoroo sp.  
Short-beaked Echidna  
Southern Brown Bandicoot  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Grey-shrike Thrush  
Pied Currawong  
Satin Bowerbird  
Superb Lyrebird  
Wonga Pigeon  
**Reptile**  
Lace Monitor  
Snake sp.  
**Introduced**  
Dog

#### Mitchell River National Park

##### SITE 1 (burnt)

**Mammal**  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Eastern Grey Kangaroo  
Short-beaked Echidna  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Australian Magpie  
Laughing Kookaburra  
White-winged Chough  
**Introduced**  
Deer sp.  
European Brown Hare  
Red Fox

##### SITE 2 (burnt)

**Mammal**  
Bare-nosed Wombat  
Common Brushtail Possum  
Mountain Brushtail Possum  
Swamp Wallaby  
**Birds**  
Spotted Quail-thrush  
Wonga Pigeon

## On private land

Following a successful field season in 2021 monitoring wildlife on fire-affected properties, we returned this year to continue to survey wildlife recovery. Adverse weather events and lockdowns slowed our visits, so we still have some cameras in the field and are analysing the data. We revisited some properties and went to new ones around Clifton Creek, Goongerah and Marlo. In addition to surveys, this year we were also able to provide some assistance with habitat recovery in the form of nest boxes and vouchers for indigenous plants. We also built a test 'Bandicoot Bungalow'. We plan to leave cameras on the bungalow for a year to monitor any bandicoot use to see if they can provide quick and inexpensive supplementary nesting sites and protection from predators in areas where natural habitat has been lost.

### Bandicoot Bungalows

Bandicoots live in areas which have a dense understorey cover of grasses and shrubs. After fires, it takes a few years for these plants to regrow enough to provide nesting sites and protection from predators, such as cats and foxes. 'Bandicoot Bungalows' are constructed from a non-treated hardwood pallet staked to the ground. More wooden stakes are inserted into the pallet to create vertical support for layers of logs, sticks, branches, grasses and bunches of leaves. The end result is a large mound of vegetation on top of the pallet. The mound can be 'woven' together with sticks and branches to create a secure framework, or a layer of chicken wire can be added to attach everything. We have left off the wire to keep our bungalow biodegradable, which will also encourage insects and worms for an easy bandicoot snack!



Volunteers proudly show off their 'Bandicoot Bungalow'.

## THANK YOU

Thank you to our enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers who supported the Life After Fire project over the first year. We could not do it without you, and we finish each trip inspired by your willingness to help out and your passion for nature conservation.

Thanks also to local Parks Victoria and DELWP offices for their assistance with field planning and site access.

The Life After Fire project on public land is supported by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

Thank you to all the private landowners who partnered with us on the project this year. It is always a joy to work with you and learn from your experiences.

This year, the Life After Fire project on private land is supported by a Landcare Led Bushfire Recovery Grant.

For project updates or to join future field trips, subscribe to the NatureWatch email list at [vnpa.org.au/naturewatch/sign-up](mailto:vnpa.org.au/naturewatch/sign-up) or like us on Facebook 'NatureWatch – Victorian National Parks Association'.



# Cape Liptrap Coastal Park

GEOFF DURHAM VISITS AN OFT MISSED COASTAL ATTRACTION.

Cape Liptrap lighthouse.

PHOTO: JOHN CARNEY, FLICKR CC

Approximately 95 per cent of Victoria's coastline, including major islands, is in public ownership. Because of good governance, we have avoided a Gold Coast scenario.

The coast of western Victoria is well known – the Great Ocean Road is one of Australia's premier tourist attractions. In eastern Victoria, Wilsons Promontory is another famous attraction. But the rest of the south Gippsland coast is not so well known. Visitors driving along the South Gippsland Highway, in their desire to get to the Prom, ignore the turn-offs to the small coastal settlements to the south. In doing so, they miss Cape Liptrap Coastal Park.

The park extends about 60 kilometres between Point Smythe and Waratah Bay. It was established under the *National Parks Act* in 1997 and its current area is 4,320 hectares. Parks Victoria manages the park from its Foster office.

The park is the on the land of the Krauatungalung and the Boon Wurrung. It has numerous middens,

stone artifact scatters and other significant Aboriginal sites.

In 1798, George Bass, sailing from east to west in a whaleboat, spent three days at what would become Cape Liptrap because of bad weather. The following year, the Lady Nelson was the first ship to sail through the strait from west to east, and its commander James Grant named the cape after his London friend, John Liptrap. Shipwrecks led to the erection of a light. A steel tower lighthouse erected in 1933 was replaced by the present concrete structure in 1952. It is now an unattended light with no ancillary buildings, but the area around it has been landscaped. It is a five-minute walk on a gravelled track from the car park to the lighthouse, where there are picnic tables and viewing platforms with a view below to spectacular fold and fault structures and shore platforms.

The park is a narrow coastal strip with larger areas of bush at Walkerville and Waratah Bay. It has one of the most interesting and

complex geological sequences in Victoria. The most southerly point, Cape Liptrap, is an outstanding coastal feature and a site of national geological and geomorphic significance.

The park has extensive heathland, coastal and forest communities, including 270 species of vascular plants, with ten being threatened species.

There are 30 threatened species of native animals and 17 species of migratory birds in this area. Lyrebirds can be found in the fern gullies.

Pest weeds include Sweet Pittosporum, Box Thorn and Blackberry in gullies and garden escapees. All along the coast is the invasive Sea Spurge. Pest animals include deer, fox, cat, rabbit, European Wasp and Honey Bees. Twelve Hog Deer released at Cape Liptrap by the Acclimatisation Society in 1866 have thrived in the park. Fallow Deer, initially escapees from a deer farm in the 1990s, now outnumber the smaller Hog Deer.



## Clockwise from top:

Rock stacks off the beach; cliff at The Bluff; the remains of one of the lime kilns; the park has extensive heathland, coastal and forest communities; a fold bed of limestone; impression of trilobite.



PHOTO: GEOFF DURHAM, ALL OTHER PHOTOS: LEON COSTERMANS

The local farming community appreciate the park and is supportive, particularly through the South Gippsland Landcare Network. Wombats are a problem for farmers. Landowners are entering into agreements with accredited sporting shooters to control deer on their farms.

Each of the small freehold coastal settlements embedded in the park has its own dead-end road access. There is no coastal road, and most of the park is backed by farmland with no public beach access.

From west to east, the settlements and beach access points are:

- Point Smythe to Venus Bay settlement has Coast Banksia woodland, Tea Tree scrub, heathland and mangroves on Andersons Inlet. The settlement is a typical 1950s getaway with a caravan park that has lots of cabins, some shops and a life saving club house. The beach extends from here to Cape Liptrap with horse-riding on the beach between the South Gippsland Regional Water

Authority outfall pipeline and Arch Rock. There is walk-in camping with no facilities at the end of the closed Six-mile Track, incorrectly named there Five-mile Track on the Parks Victoria Visitor Guide map.

- Bear Gully is misnamed after the Koala. Bear Gully Camp Ground within the park and on the beach has thirty-four numbered spacious tent and caravan sites, many shaded, with one toilet block. There are communal fireplaces – bring your own wood and water. Bookings are required through Parks Victoria online or call 131 963. Nearby, privately owned Bear Gully Coastal Cottages has five two-bedroom and one three-bedroom up-market accommodation.
- Walkerville South has a few secluded houses. Walkerville North has a narrow strip of houses and on the foreshore reserve is a campground run by a local committee. Walkerville is named after W.F. Walker, who shipped quick-lime from here to Melbourne when lime kilns operated from 1875 until 1926.

- Waratah Bay is named after the ship Waratah that sheltered here in 1854. The settlement has houses, a school camp, a caravan park with cabins and a Lifesaving clubhouse, but no shops.

The park is excellent for beach and bushwalking. A feature is the distant views of Wilsons Promontory. When I was there in April this year, the beaches could be described as pristine. There was very little washed-up seaweed and, remarkably, no trash. The beaches are long and gently sloping with rocky sections, some of which can be crossed only at low tide. The beaches from Point Smythe to Cape Liptrap face south-west and at Bear Gully, Walkerville and Waratah Bay, south-east. They are wild and windy in stormy weather. Dogs are permitted on sections of the beach at Venus Bay, between Walkerville North and South and at Waratah Bay.

For walking, cycling, surfing, camping, fishing, boating and a relaxed get-away, the park has much to offer. • PW



# Explorer's corner

## TIPS AND TRICKS FOR GETTING IN TO NATURE

### Adventures by public transport – weekend adventures and multiday hikes



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

The highlight of the MacKenzie Falls Track.

Taking public transport is a great way to minimise your carbon footprint, so is walking, and combining the two can lead to one great adventure. Here, Bianca Jones, a recent Outdoor and Environmental Studies Graduate from La Trobe University, introduces some ideas for weekend adventures and multiday hikes accessible by public transport from Melbourne.

Use Public Transport Victoria's Journey Planner [www.ptv.vic.gov.au](http://www.ptv.vic.gov.au) and make sure you are well prepared with the right gear, maps and experience for your choice of adventure.

#### THE GRAMPIANS-GARIWERD NATIONAL PARK

Halls Gap at the base of the Grampians is accessible by V/Line coach and is very central to the Grampians-Gariwerd, with various loop trails accessible from here. Make sure you go to the Halls Gap Visitors Centre to pick up a map of the Southern Grampians. The Pinnacle Walk is fantastic, as is the MacKenzie Falls Track. You can link the two through a variety of walking tracks.

Various campsites are close to the town, including the caravan park and bush campsites marked on the map. There is also a variety of local accommodation options that are well worth the look.

#### Getting there:

Hop on the Ararat V/Line train to Ararat from Southern Cross Station. From here, there are two options: use the Dimboola V/Line coach from Ararat to Stawell and then the Halls Gap V/Line coach to Halls Gap Information Centre; or use the Warrnambool V/Line coach from Ararat to Halls Gap Information Centre.

#### Park information/maps:

Grampians National Park:  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/grampians-national-park](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/grampians-national-park)

#### GREAT OTWAY NATIONAL PARK

The Great Otway National Park is accessible by public transport. The Surf Coast Walk is a 44-kilometre walk that runs through the park from Torquay to Aireys Inlet and can be broken up into 12 parts, so you can stop and start wherever you please. You can also do sections in day trips, as most of them start and end in towns with V/Line coach stops. Ironbark Basin to Anglesea is a popular section that runs directly through the park and is 9.7 kilometres. Currawong Falls Circuit Track is accessible from Distillery Creek Picnic Area in Aireys Inlet and is wonderful after a bit of rain to see the waterfalls in all their glory. Be wary, as there are some steep sections along this walk, 12 kilometres total.

#### GREATER BENDIGO NATIONAL PARK / CASTLEMAINE DIGGINGS NATIONAL HERITAGE PARK / WOMBAT STATE FOREST ON THE GOLDFIELDS TRACK

These parks and forests are destinations on the 'Goldfields Track', a 210-kilometre track from Creswick/Ballarat to Bendigo for both bushwalkers and mountain bike riders. It is relatively flat to hilly territory. The trail is broken up in to multi-day and shorter sections in proximity to towns with public transport options at Ballarat/Creswick, Daylesford, Castlemaine and Bendigo. They are great ways to explore the bush and towns of central Victoria. The Ballarat/Creswick to Daylesford section is a multiday walk through pastoral land and Wombat State Forest. The Daylesford to Castlemaine section is 61 kilometres and shows changes in environment types and the famous Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. The Castlemaine to Bendigo section shows off Mount Alexander's granite tors and box-ironbark forest.

#### Getting there:

Jump on the V/Line train to Geelong/Waurn Ponds from Southern Cross Station and depart at Geelong. Then onto a V/Line coach towards Apollo Bay. There are several stops along the Great Ocean Road where you can walk to access points along the Surf Coast Walk.

#### Park information/maps:

Great Otway National Park:  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/great-otway-national-park](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/great-otway-national-park)  
Surf Coast Walk:  
[www.surfcoastwalk.com.au](http://www.surfcoastwalk.com.au)

History along the Goldfields Track.



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA

#### Getting there:

Take the Bendigo/Epsom/Eaglehawk/Echuca V/Line train from Southern Cross Station to Castlemaine or Bendigo. There is also a coach from Woodend Station to Daylesford. If planning to start from Creswick, take a Ballarat/Wendouree line train and there are regional coach services to Creswick. The walks themselves often start/conclude at the train/bus stations.

#### Park information/maps:

Goldfields Tracks: [www.goldfieldstrack.com.au](http://www.goldfieldstrack.com.au)  
Greater Bendigo National Park:  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/greater-bendigo-national-park](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/greater-bendigo-national-park)  
Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park:  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/castlemaine-diggings-national-heritage-park](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/castlemaine-diggings-national-heritage-park)  
Mount Alexander Regional Park:  
[www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/mount-alexander-regional-park](http://www.parks.vic.gov.au/places-to-see/parks/mount-alexander-regional-park)



ILLUSTRATIONS BY TRACE BALLA

Coastal walk, ocean views.



PHOTO: PARKS VICTORIA



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