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Dyurrite/Mt Arapiles. ED DUNENS

SUBMISSION TO

Dyurrite Cultural Landscape Management Plan Amendment

Victorian National Parks Association

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Submission to the Dyurrite Cultural Landscape Management Plan Amendment from the Victorian National Parks Association

The Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the Dyurrite Cultural Landscape- Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, and Jupagulk Peoples.

VNPA also acknowledges the impact on Parks Victoria staff and Traditional Owners' health, wellbeing and safety due to the bullying and aggressive response from some sections of the media, small sections of the rock-climbing community and fringe political interests.

VNPA is an independent member-based organisation, working to improve protection of Victoria's biodiversity and natural areas, across land and sea. VNPA has been actively working to protect Victoria's wildlife and biodiversity for over 70 years.

Overall, VNPA supports the recalibration of the Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park to preserve and protect tangible and non-tangible First Nations heritage sites as well as sites of ecological importance such as threatened species habitat.

VNPA does hold great concerns about the need to update not just amend the current management plan for the Mt Arapiles Management Unit section of the park to include new park values, legislative changes and new data.

The park is currently managed over two management plans; *Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park has two Management Plans Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park (Tooan Block) August 1998, Amended May 2015 and Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park (Mt Arapiles Management Unit) Management Plan, June 1991*. Approximately 20% of the park is not covered by either of the management plans.

Below we will make further comments and suggestions on the proposed changes needed for the Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park Management Plan.

Land Management Context

Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles-Toooan State Park is a Schedule II National Park which is defined as “Large natural or near-natural areas protecting large-scale ecological processes with characteristic species and ecosystems, which also have environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities¹”.

This designation is legislated through the *National Parks Act 1975* with cultural values also protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

The park is recognised in the Commonwealths National Reserves System (NRS) as shown in the table below from the Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (2022)

Terrestrial Protected Areas in Victoria (2022)							
Type	Name	Type Code	IUCN Category	Gazetted Area (ha)	¹ Total Area (ha)	Declared	Latest Gazetted
State Park	Mount Arapiles-Toooan	SP	II	7,455	7,457	17/12/1987	12/10/2004

Table 1. Collaborative Australian Protected Areas Database (2022)

The park was recommended for protection following the Land Conservation Council’s South-Western Area, District 2, Final Recommendations in 1982, that proposed the area be protected as a State Park due to the important native vegetation, high number of endemic and threatened plants and animals, recreational pursuits, geomorphic uniqueness and as an important geographic “link between the open scrub areas of the Little Desert, the Grampians ranges, and the woodlands, scrub, and stringybark forests in the south-west of the State”².

The Mitre Rock section of the park was recommended for addition to the park in 1986 following an investigation by the Land Conservation Council for the Wimmera Area to provide opportunities for recreation and education and to conserve and protect the local ecosystem and native plants and animals³.

The park is within the Wimmera bioregion with the actual mountain of Mount Arapiles being within the Greater Grampians bioregion.

¹ Dudley, N. (Editor) (2008). Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. x + 86pp. WITH Stolton, S., P. Shadie and N. Dudley (2013). IUCN WCPA Best Practice Guidance on Recognising Protected Areas and Assigning Management Categories and Governance Types, Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 21, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. xxxpp.

² SOUTH-WESTERN AREA DISTRICT 2 FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, Land Conservation Council May 1982

³ WIMMERA AREA FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS, Land Conservation Council November 1986

In the 1980s, former VNPA president Geoff Durham visited the park and encouraged locals to start a friends group under the Victorian Environment Friends Network⁴.

The Friends of Arapiles continue to do great conservation work such as weed removal and planting of indigenous plants.

Improved interpretive signage and communication

Improved interpretive signage at the site will allow visitors to understand and appreciate the many values the park protects and why the park was declared and how people behaviours and actions should mirror the significance of the area they are visiting.

The role of interpretation of park values to visitors is not just important for improving visitor behaviours but also critical to deepening visitors appreciation of the park but also spark a greater level of awe and wonder of the values but as Hvenegaard et al.(2009) states “*Finally, interpretation provides challenges or opportunities to act on this new sense of respect, benefiting the ecological integrity of national parks and the surrounding environments*”.

Signage must be informative and evidence-based, highlighting the regional significance of the park, its ecological values such as plants and animals that call the place home, the geological history of the park and where safe and appropriate with Traditional Owners connection of the park to their cultural heritage and stories.

There is a need for signage along the tracks in areas of interest to engage visitors around the park at sites of significance and maintain visitor behaviours that protect park values.

In the 21st Century the need to make information accessible and understandable via the internet is warranted, but lacking on Parks Victoria's current website.

Clear and easy access to the walking tracks maps and ParkNotes is not found for Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park or any other reserves or parks in the region.

ParkNotes should be placed on the website for visitors to download on their phones or print off at home, these great resources shouldn't require countless internet searches to find.

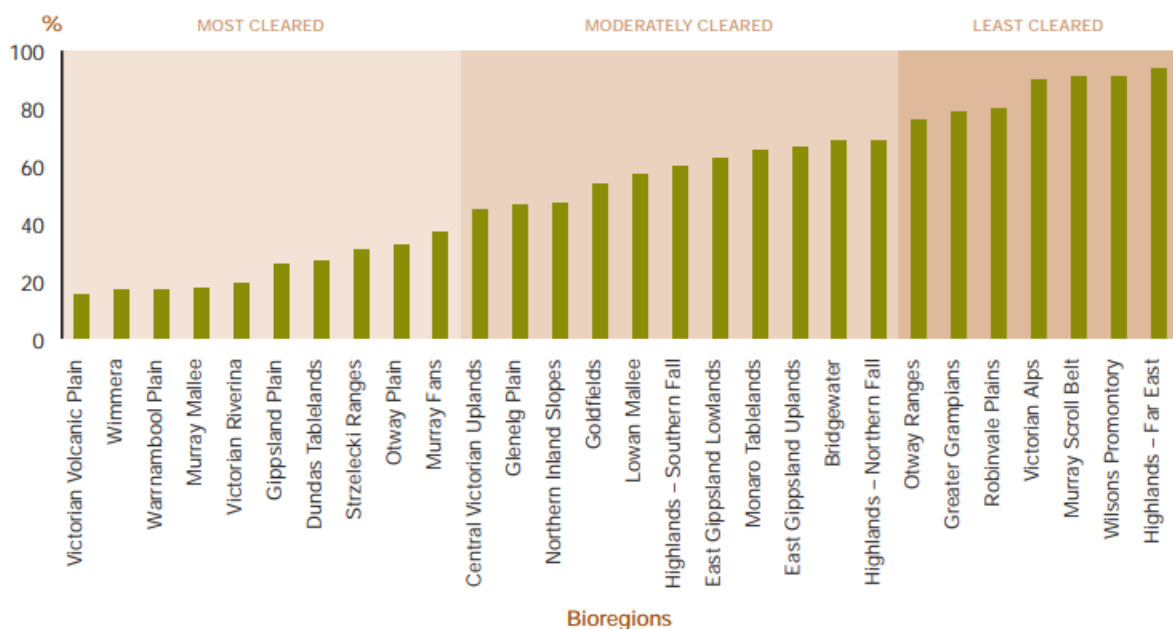
There is a need for an on-going consultation mechanism which is culturally safe for Traditional Owners to engage in and maintains safety of heritage sites that is constructive for non-indigenous stakeholders.

⁴ Letter to editor- Louise Shepherd, Friends of Arapiles/Dyurrite 2024 - <https://theweeklyadvertiser.com.au/articles/letters-arapiles-concerns-a-proud-working-history-blood-bank-blessing-congratulations-nhill/>

It is acknowledged that the amount of funding available and past cuts to the education, interpretation and heritage teams from Parks Victoria has led to poor onsite interpretation and combative consultation process in regard to this current management plan amendments process.

Need to update ecological knowledge of the park

The Wimmera is one of Victoria’s largest bioregions but also the second most heavily cleared with only 1.5% of the bioregion is represented in the conservation reserves⁵.



Graph 1 Proportion of native vegetation in fragmented landscapes in each bioregion (VEAC 2011)

Throughout media and briefing documents from Parks Victoria it is mentioned that ecological or environmental surveys have been undertaken in recent year in the Dyurrite/Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park. In this time the updating of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (the FFG Act) has also occurred with more species now added to the list.

As put forward by Parks Victoria in the proposed amendments in this 2024 process, none of the findings from the ecological survey work have been included in the amendments nor has the Table 1. Significant Plants or 6.2.2 Notable wildlife species the

⁵ Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation (VEAC, 2011)

management plan been updated in line with the increased ecological knowledge from survey work conducted as part of this process nor in line with the update of the FFG Act.

According to information on the consultation portal Engage Victoria “*environmental surveys determined the Dyurrite Cultural Landscape has outstanding environmental value. Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park contains regionally significant Ecological Vegetation Classes, a high diversity of plant species, and is home to threatened plants and animals. It is a valuable nature conservation area with 14% of the State’s plant species represented in the Dyurrite area alone.*

The environmental surveys revealed threatened plants including the Skeleton Fork Fern (Psilotum nudum) and the Western Pellitory (Parietaria australis). These species are threatened in Victoria and are predominantly dependent on cliff and rock outcrops for their habitat.”

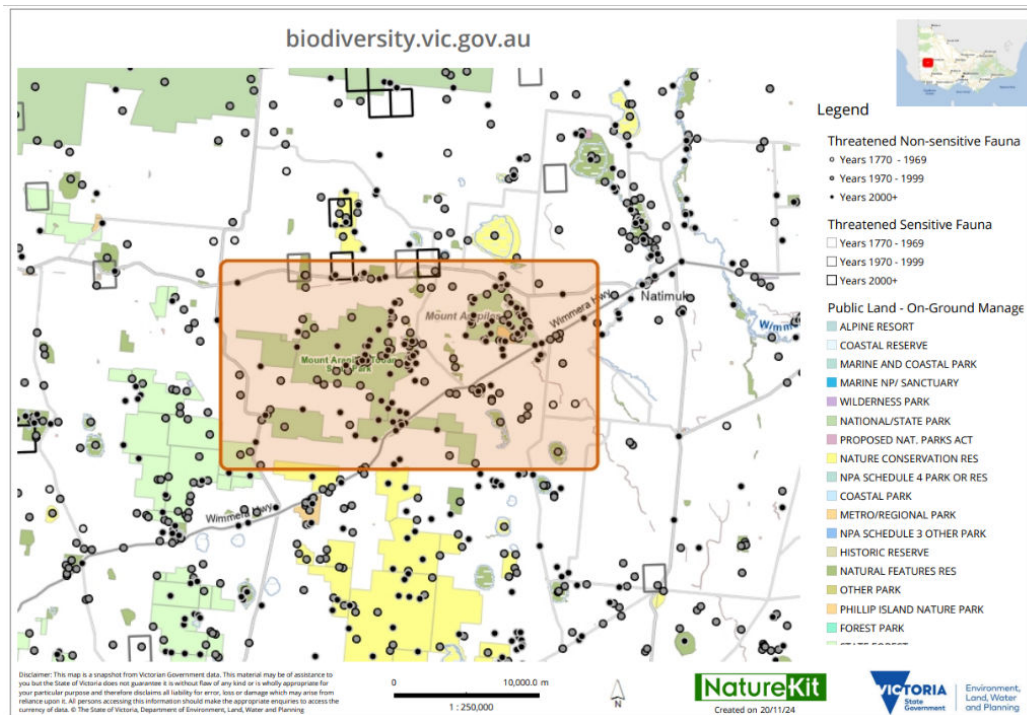
Yet none of this information has been translated into amendments in the park management plan instead referencing a 1990s report by Gullan et al. (6.1.2 Significant plant Species) and only listing “*One bird and one mammal species could be considered as notable*” (6.2.2 Notable wildlife species).

Both sections on Plants and animals remain unchanged from the 1992 Management Plan even though new data has been collected and many species present in the park having their status changed under the FFG Act.

Although we deeply respect the need for changes to protect cultural heritage sites within the park, it is unclear why Parks Victoria has not updated the botanical and zoological knowledge of the site within the management plan amendments.

Undertaking a brief desktop survey of the park using NatureKit a raft of listed threatened records are found within the park. We have outlined these in Table 1. In the Appendix of this submission.

We found that 92 Plants and animals listed under the FFG Act and 16 listed under the Commonwealths *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* are found within the park or within 500 meters. The map of the desktop survey site is below in Map 1.



Map 1. Desktop survey site of the Dyrrite-Mount Arapiles-Toon State Park

Need to update whole management plan

The need for a management plan for the park is within the National Parks Act 1975 under which the park is gazetted. The management plan for Mt Arapiles Unit published in 1991 that is being amended in this process only covers approximately 20% of the park as a whole and does not include the park as a whole.

VNPA has been raising this issue since 1988.⁶

Management Plans and Planning are vital tools in managing park values such as threatened species, water catchment protection, invasive species management, meeting obligations under State, Federal and International laws and agreements and balancing visitation of the park and appropriate recreational uses.

As stated in *Best Practice in Protected Area Management Planning (2000)*;

“The primary purpose of management planning is the interpretation and integration of a range of policies, treaties, strategies, business plans and legislative requirements into a geographical overlay that provides an essential framework to guide management of a particular reserve and assure the public that the area is being responsibly managed”

⁶ Response to the Draft Management Plan for the Mount Arapiles-Toon State Park, VNPA & Janey Coveney, March 1988

Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park is currently managed over two management plans; *Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park has two Management Plans Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park (Tooan Block) August 1998, Amended May 2015 and Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park (Mt Arapiles Management Unit) Management Plan, June 1991.*

The park is included in the Conservation Action Plan for the Wimmera.

Currently 2,397 ha of the park is not covered by the park management plan despite being critical habitat for State and Federally listed wildlife and ecosystems and being a popular recreational area.

There is a strong need to have a management plan that includes the whole of the park to meet legislative requirements of the *National Parks Act* and to manage the many values of the park successfully.

Support Changes to protect cultural heritage values

The original 1991 Management Plan made little to no reference to the cultural heritage values within the park due to a lack of consultation with Traditional owners and lack of access to improved technology that we have today.

Since the 1980s, VNPA has supported the preservation of historical and archaeological features of the park and encouraged land managers to further investigate them⁷

Management Plans	Area covered
Tooan Block Management Plan (2015)	3 550 ha
Mt Arapiles Management Unit	1510 ha
Total	5,060ha
Total area of park	7,457ha
Total of area not covered by management plans	2,397ha

The rediscovery of one of Australia's largest Indigenous stone quarry complexes, as well as rock art dating back thousands of years is an amazing accomplishment by the Baringi Gadjin Land Council and Parks Victoria and is to be commended and supported.

Formalisation of walking and climbing routes in the management plan for the Dyurrite Cultural Landscape (Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park to avoid damage to cultural

⁷ Response to the Draft Management Plan for the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, VNPA & Janey Coveney, March 1988

heritage sites and habitat of endangered plantlife and animals have been needed for decades.

This small and much-loved park is being loved to death by overuse of non-formal tracks damaging recovering native vegetation and habitat as well as the impeding the further recording of cultural heritage sites and their tangible and intangible fabric.

Protection of these cultural heritage sites on public land is vital to understanding how First Peoples have lived in this country for thousands of years, including through dramatic landscape changes such as the Ice Age, and what animals once lived there.

Understanding these adaptations and past land uses can help our society now through understanding how to adapt to rapidly changing climate, reintroduction of lost wildlife species that have since gone extinct as well as understanding past fire regimes.

The rediscovered heritage sites is an amazing step forward in understanding how people lived in the Wimmera region prior to colonisation. It adds extra chapters to the story of this continent and the ongoing connection of Traditional Owners to the park and region.

VNPA supports Traditional Owner joint-management of parks and public land for conservation of natural and cultural heritage.

VNPA also supports the protection of cultural heritage sites and their tangible and intangible fabric under State, Commonwealth laws and International Agreements.

For more information please contact
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