

We have been landowners adjoining the Wellsford State Forest for 24 years and would like to take this opportunity to offer comment on the VEAC Central West Investigation Draft Proposal Paper issued for public comment August 2018.

In our initial review of the draft proposal paper we have identified the following issues:

- Inadequate notification to affected landowners in the immediate area of proposed changes, reasons for proposed changes and assessment of unintended consequences (collateral damage) that the proposed changes in classification will inflict.
- The Terms of Reference appear to create the potential for a disproportionate focus on creating new conservation reserves to achieve some overall percent objective established by State Environmental Department.
- Evaluation of forest classifications should take account of full social and recreational, as well as, environmental uses of the forest.
- The boundaries should take into account areas adjacent to current private land and the effects both recreational and commercial to the affected people that utilise and care for the forest on a regular basis.
- The classification boundaries should take into account effects from changed forest management practices, e.g. burn offs, road maintenance and feral animal control, that could affect the safety and well being of landowners adjacent to the forest.

The process for investigation is fundamentally flawed as it only requires VEAC to publish notice in local papers. If a landowner wants to make changes to private land in the area, they are required to post notification of proposed changes at the property and notify landowners that may be affected by post to allow for comments/objections. Many of the adjacent landowners to the Wellsford State forest were not even aware of the extensive nature of the investigation and proposal until the initial period for submissions was closing at the end of October 2018. Even though the submission period has been extended until 10 December 2018, this does not provide adequate time to fully understand and assess the proposal. Initial review of the proposal document does not even make it clear exactly where the proposed boundaries are as they do not appear to follow existing dirt roads in the area. At one point the proposed boundary between the Regional Park and the Nature Reserve appears to split Spice Road at Box Road, however, Box Road does not even intersect with Spice Road. ***Without sign posting in the area how is the effect of the proposal meant to be fully assessed on the several existing and non-existent roads that would intersect these two boundaries?***

In 2001, the Environmental Conservation Council (VEAC's predecessor) recommended that Wellsford State forest be retained under the Stat forest classification. In 2008, the Bendigo Forest Management Plan concluded that biodiversity values could be adequately protected under State forest management. Therefore, any recommendation by VEAC for a change in classification would require significant basis outlining changes in condition or circumstances. This must include risks to landowners and users (recreational, tourists, domestic wood collection, etc). All tradeoffs must be considered before public land use is restricted to the general public, not just reliance on meeting some quota.

The Wellsford State forest is regularly used by local residents and tourists for a multitude of purposes. These include: bushwalking, nature studies, bird watching, dog walking, horse riding, four wheel driving, motorcycle riding, domestic wood collection, etc. Those undertaking these activities appear to be conscience of and considerate of the environmental impact of their activities. It is our observation that horse riders, dog walkers, bushwalkers, etc confine themselves to the made dirt forest tracks, with the exception of some motorcycle riders. These activities, as well as domestic firewood collection are well managed under the current classification as a State Forest. ***Therefore, why has this area even been included in the investigation in the first place?***

The people living the areas adjacent to or within the Wellsford State forest area have purchased their properties precisely because of the access to the forest for themselves and their children. It is predominately an area of small holdings with horse agistment and small farm animals. Most of these landowners have dogs and many collect fallen wood for domestic use by permit within current guidelines. The proposal specifies areas directly adjacent to private property that would effectively restrict people from even taking their horses or dogs outside their gate to get to an area where these animals are allowed. This would significantly diminish the commercial value of the property. ***What compensation is the State proposing to property owners for this degradation in lifestyle and resale values?***

Under the current management as a State Forest DELWP maintains the forest tracks, undertakes feral animal control and conducts controlled burns in the Wellsford forest. If this is no longer undertaken, or is reduced, it presents a significant bushfire risk to homeowners lives and the lives of their livestock. Not to mention the degradation to the environment caused by feral foxes, rabbits and deer. As Brumby's are non existant in the Wellsford State forest block, they are not a problem.

In conclusion, the draft recommendations to re-classify the Wellsford State forest to a combination/ split between inclusion in the Bendigo Regional Park and Wellsford Nature Reserve appear to be unwarranted and do not take into consideration the unintended consequences (collateral damage) to local landowners and recreational users who have great respect for the natural environment that surrounds them. The proposed split in the area is confusing at best and appears to be arbitrary focusing more on meeting classification percentage targets than practicality. The current well managed system, as noted in your proposal, by DELWP, Greater Bendigo Council and CFA, of BMO's and WMO's and permits is more than adequate to meet and resolve any issues which may arise now or in the future. Consultation with Fosterville mining reveals that the intended usage of their lease is underground and specific timber harvesting of Ironbark, flowering Box or old growth trees is controlled by a BMS and permits. These issues are of no concern, neither in the past or for the future.

Thank you in advance for considering our submission,

Edward and Nancy Allen