



New submission for investigation "Investigation into Additional Prospecting Areas in Parks"

veac

to:

veac

08/02/2013 09:41 PM

Hide Details

From: veac@veac.vic.gov.au

To: veac@dse.vic.gov.au,

Prospecting

Sub period: |

No: 235

Submission for the investigation "Investigation into Additional Prospecting Areas in Parks"

Submitted on 08-02-2013

Information provided by the author:

Title: Mr

First Name: Stephen

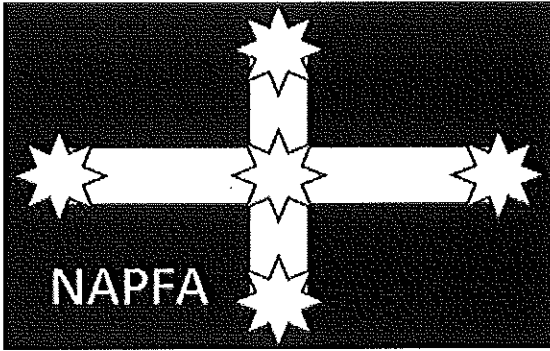
Last Name: Dangaard

Organisation: NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc

Description:

See attached. Pledase confirm that it has been correctly received.

Click [here](#) to review and validate the submission



NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.

Incorporation No: INC 1200398

www.napfa.net

PO Box 2664
Carlingford Court
NSW 2118

"Fights for fairer access to land in NSW and represents the interests of prospectors and fossickers"

Investigation into Additional Prospecting Areas in Parks

Submission by the

NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc

The NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc (NAPFA) commends the Victorian government on initiating this inquiry by the Victorian Environment Assessment Council.

Although our association exists primarily to work on access issues in NSW, our members have a very keen and direct interest in what happens in Victoria because many NSW and ACT fossickers and prospectors regularly spend time in the Victorian gold fields and would welcome any further extension of prospecting areas.

NAPFA fully supports making recreational prospecting a reality in the areas covered by this inquiry i.e. Alpine, Baw Baw, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Lake Eildon, Lind, Mitchell River and Yarra Ranges national parks and Lerderderg State Park.

In particular we have keen interest in the Alpine, Croajingolong, and Errinundra National Parks because of the proximity of these areas to the ACT and Southern NSW. However no areas in Victoria are too far to travel, so all are in scope.

In general terms NAPFA will support the detailed submission that the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria Inc (PMAV) will provide to the inquiry.

In our case we are also motivated by what we have seen as the deterioration in the prospecting and fossicking environment in NSW over the past 20 years with numerous exclusion areas established under the broad banner of 'conservation'. These include rapid declaration of National Parks and State Conservation Areas where recreational fossicking and prospecting is outlawed.

In general the environment for fossickers and prospectors in NSW is very restricted compared to Victoria – which is detrimental to the interests of many communities in NSW and highlights the strategic, comparative advantage that Victoria has in respect of this activity. Victoria should seek to maintain and enhance this difference. NSW of course needs to catch up, but that is another story.

Tourism

Since the days of the gold rushes, fossickers and prospectors have always followed the gold. So it is that our members pack their camping gear, trailers and caravans and head to Victoria on a regular basis. They spend their money in Victoria. They get to enjoy the history, heritage, beauty and hospitality of your goldfields towns.

In so doing they form friendships with Victorian prospectors and put true meaning into the slogans of 'good relations between states' and 'solidarity under the Southern Cross'. They also help to provide diversity of economic opportunity for regional towns that often don't have a lot of other attractions.

Personally in the last 12 months I have made three long week-end trips totalling about 10 days to Victoria to the Rushworth, Castlemaine, Dunolly and Talbot areas. On each occasion myself and my prospecting buddy have spend on average about \$100 per day each in the local area on food, accommodation and other expenses, not including petrol which for a 4WD round trip from Canberra is about \$600 per visit.

We are just two of thousands who cross the border each year. In my case I had never before spent any time in rural Victoria – all my visits to your state being to Melbourne for business. If it was not for your goldfields I would not have visited at all, even though I have lived in the ACT for 30 years.

Environmental recovery

All of the areas that are under examination in this inquiry contain areas of previous known alluvial gold deposits. Such areas are not untouched by their mining history.

Relics remain from this period of our heritage, but natural succession has obscured much evidence of former gold extraction. The goldfields have undergone change from that era and it is unlikely that they would ever return to anything like their original state.

Severe floods that occur from time to time also cause major change in river-beds and are a continuing variable that result in far more extensive change than that created by modern-day prospectors/fossickers using their hand tools. These floods also obliterate the workings left by modern gold-seekers.

It is likely that with so much clearing of farmland around park areas and the increased rates of run-off that can occur as a result, flash floods may be more frequent and destructive in the river-bed and environs.

However the eventual natural recovery of flood-damaged and fossicked areas is an, inconvenient truth for protectionists.

Equally inconvenient is the fact that localized disturbance results in increased diversity of successional stages of recovery over several years. Often those successional stages are utilized by pioneer species of plant and animal that may occur in reduced numbers in mature stages of the vegetation.

Today, in former goldfields that have not been turned into farms and towns, the amount of regrowth of timber is quite amazing. There are many areas where an old stump is surrounded by four or five saplings. This demonstrates that former gold field areas recover under their own timetable – naturally – and are not being adversely affected by the limited and passing environmental effect of today's responsible prospecting/fossicking or severe flood disturbance.

If anything, goldfield reserves in Victoria have helped maintain areas of natural regrowth and have been of benefit to the environment as a whole. Some areas may be even more heavily vegetated now than at the time of the gold rushes and European settlement. Artworks and eye witness accounts from that era show moderately sparse vegetation in areas now heavily timbered.

Responsible prospecting

This is the type of prospecting that today's recreational prospectors undertake. With the odd exception (no different to any other recreational group), prospectors today are people who care strongly about the environment and wish to leave it in better condition for their children and grandchildren. Today's prospectors don't leave piles of tin cans and sheets of iron in the bush like the old timers. We don't fire our muskets at night and create lead pollution. We don't pollute waterways with mercury and cyanide.

Instead we comb through the bush with metal detectors picking up yesterday's junk. We also routinely take our rubbish, and that of others, out of the prospecting areas. For certain there is illegal dumping in areas around towns – but this dumping is not done by prospectors. We are likely to report illegal dumping if we see it – and alert

authorities to other illegal activities in areas that are far from the eyes and the ears of the law.

In a state that is prone to bushfires our tracks into prospecting areas ensure that if fire fighters need to go into areas, then there is a good chance that tracks are navigable through use. We can also report any fires that are in areas, so assisting your fire management regime.

Existing Victorian prospecting laws are already very prescriptive about how fossicking and prospecting can occur. For example the restriction to using hand tools actually means that holes are never very big and can be easily filled in, as they usually are. These operating rules mean that prospecting today is by definition a low impact activity with minor and temporary environmental effect.

This reality is not presently recognized by the restrictions on recreational prospecting in national park areas. The restrictions are based on alarmist arguments that point to eras past when there were no controls or prospecting rules, unlike today.

Effort should be put into the far bigger problems in national parks – like foxes, blackberries, European wasps, feral cats, pigs and goats rather than cracking down on individual citizens who are simply looking for a low cost, low risk, healthy recreational activity.

Biodiversity

This progressive thinking is at odds with doomsday protectionists who insist that 'nothing can change' and that 'environmental values' will be trashed by allowing someone to scratch the ground. In some states this has gone to extremes and is giving environmentalism a bad name for being unreasonable and unbalanced.

The bush is a big place and it is constantly changed by the forces of nature. Natural erosion, trees that fall over in the wind and leave large holes, wombats that tunnel through the ground, floods, fires and rock falls all leave their mark in the bush.

These marks are far more noticeable than the odd scratch mark made by a metal detectorists or a panner who has creviced some dirt from rocks near a creek.

I hear no one complaining about these natural forces, or the scouring and refilling of crevices by water flow!

Prospecting – living heritage – not looking for handouts

And in his proper place, Man is also a natural force. We have evolved and include the ability to prospect for precious metals or gems as part of our natural mining heritage that dates back thousands of years – and 170 or so in Victoria. Prospectors in Victoria have a right to be able to explore their state freely with minimal restriction and the law should assist rather than hinder them.

The very act of prospecting in this day and age continues that long tradition of 'having a go' and continuing a traditional activity. Many prospectors today count old timer miners among their ancestors. The act of prospecting constitutes living heritage that should be celebrated and encouraged like other cultural/heritage activities instead of being pushed into tight, regulated corners.

We have heritage buildings, why not a heritage activity?

From my own observations, prospectors today, both men and women, come from all walks of life. Often for reasons of 'life' they tend to be older people who seek to enjoy a healthy, exciting and potentially rewarding outdoor activity in retirement, although I have also seen at least two family groups – mum dad and the kids enjoying prospecting at Castlemaine.

As our society struggles with obesity and inactivity, surely anything that encourages physical activity by an at risk group should be encouraged in the interest of public health?

This is especially so when this group is not looking for handouts of government money – just the necessary permission to enter areas that are currently denied.

It is surprising the interest and keenness shown by children who want to be shown how to pan for gold. As stated earlier, it should be considered a heritage activity.

Conclusion

NAPFA does not advocate for unrestrained access to genuinely fragile ecosystems in Victoria. However we do strongly recommend that the law strike a fair and reasonable balance between the needs of the environment (which are often grossly overstated by the protectionist industry) and the needs of the community to be able to enjoy the experience and bounty of the bush, including national parks.

For this reason we request that prospecting be allowed in the areas under consideration by this inquiry.

Should the inquiry wish, we would be happy to expand on any matters in this submission to the best of our ability.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Dangaard
President
NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc
8 February, 2013