



JUNE 2019

Central West Investigation

Final Report



Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was established in 2001 under the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001. It provides the State Government of Victoria with independent advice on protection and management of the environment and natural resources of public land.

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Published by the Victorian Environmental Assessment
Council
2 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, 3000
June 2019

Also published on www.veac.vic.gov.au

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Printed by Finsbury Green
The report is printed on Ecostar Laser
Design by Kate Mansell Design Studio
ISBN 978-1-76077-643-5 (Print)
ISBN 978-1-76077-644-2 (pdf/online/MS word)

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Geoff Park (pages 30, 40, 70)

Foreword



Council members (left to right): *Joanne Duncan, Anna Kilborn, Janine Haddow (Chairperson), Charles Meredith, Geoffrey Wescott*

In March 2017 the Victorian government requested the Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) to carry out an investigation into public land in the central west of Victoria, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests (the investigation area) and to make recommendations for the future balanced use and appropriate management to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values of the forests.

The investigation area, comprising some 161,200 hectares of public land at the southern end of Australia's Great Dividing Range, includes important native forests that contain the headwaters of seven of Victoria's major rivers, habitat for 380 rare or threatened species, forest-based industries and a wide range of recreational activities.

VEAC's investigation found the central west forests to be highly valued and that there is common ground among the community for restoring forest health so they are more resilient to the impacts of climate change, population pressures, and habitat fragmentation and deterioration.

VEAC's final recommendations reflect the challenge of balancing the many and sometimes competing demands on the central west forests in the context of pressures of climate change and Victoria's growing population.

These final recommendations represent a balanced outcome; the investigation has been rigorous, based on analysis of scientific, social and economic information together with the knowledge and views of the Traditional Owners and the Victorian community.

Finally the Council would like to express its appreciation to everyone who generously gave their time and shared their knowledge, insights and passion for the forests. In particular Traditional Owners, the Community Reference Group, local councils and government agencies, and the thousands of individuals and organisations who made the time to write submissions and attend community drop-in sessions, site meetings and field visits.

I encourage you to read the explanatory eight-page summary document and fact sheets which are available on the VEAC website at www.veac.vic.gov.au.

Janine Haddow, Chairperson

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal Victorians

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council pays its respects to Victoria's Aboriginal peoples, Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners and acknowledges their rich cultural and intrinsic connections to Country. Council recognises that the land is of spiritual, cultural, environmental and economic importance to Aboriginal people and values their contribution and interest in the management of land and natural resources.

Council is pleased to have been able to partner with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (under the terms of their Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the State) in the Aboriginal community engagement component of this investigation. Council notes that the Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation has now entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement, and that several other Traditional Owner groups with interests in the Central West Investigation area are undertaking negotiations towards achieving similar agreements.

Council values the co-operation and goodwill of the Djandak project team and the representatives of Traditional Owner groups who participated in the investigation. VEAC acknowledges that some Aboriginal people did not have adequate opportunity to engage in the investigation for a range of reasons.

Council members appreciated hearing from Traditional Owners about their aspirations for Country and a range of specific land management issues. We support the implementation of Traditional Owners' agreements, Country Plans and management processes as they relate to public land in the investigation area.

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Executive summary

The Great Dividing Range runs south from Cape York for 3500 kilometres before ending in the Central West Investigation area where mountain ranges and low hills separate the plains of northern and southwestern Victoria. The public land on these ranges and hills supports most of the native vegetation that remains in this largely cleared landscape and the only mountain forests in western Victoria north of the Otway Ranges. As a result, public land is critical for the industries, recreational pursuits and distinctive natural values that rely on these forests.

Over many tens of thousands of years of occupation, Aboriginal people have developed profound connections with their Country in central west Victoria. Today, Traditional Owners continue this relationship and have a cultural responsibility for Caring for Country that involves protecting land, waterways and natural resources from harm.

There have been many changes in the 30 or more years since the public land use in most of the Central West Investigation area was last assessed by VEAC's predecessors, the Land Conservation Council and the Environment Conservation Council. Increased recognition and protection of Traditional Owner rights and interests in Crown land in Victoria fundamentally changed following the High Court's 1992 'Mabo' decision which overturned the concept of terra nullius. Victoria's increasing population – especially in the outer fringes of metropolitan Melbourne and around some regional centres – will continue to place pressure on public land in the investigation area. While there remain some significant resource uses in the area, the uses of public land have shifted towards recreation and conservation.

An expert intergovernmental report released in May 2019 warns of a global decline in nature happening at rates that are unprecedented in human history. Climate change has placed additional pressure on natural values, and the ecosystem services and recreational opportunities they underpin. This highlights the critical role that the forested public lands of the investigation area play in protecting the headwaters of eight major river systems that supply water to significant wetlands and consumers across a large part of western Victoria.

VEAC's recommendations are intended to establish a framework to address these major challenges in the decades ahead.

Scope of the investigation

In March 2017 the Victorian government asked VEAC to carry out an investigation into public land in the central west of Victoria, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests.

The purpose of the Central West Investigation is to:

- identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values, and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land
- make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

The full terms of reference are provided in section 1.2 of this report.

The Central West Investigation area is 403,815 hectares in total of which 161,215 hectares or 40 per cent is public land. The investigation area is made up of three separate blocks.

- The Mount Cole–Pyrenees block (165,790 hectares) covers two large tracts of public land on the Pyrenees Range near Avoca and the Mount Cole Range near Beaufort, as well as smaller patches of state forest nearby. Around 33 per cent of this block or 54,760 hectares is public land.
- The Wellsford block east of Bendigo contains 7,340 hectares of public land, almost all of which is the Wellsford State Forest.
- The Wombat–Macedon block (228,770 hectares) contains the large tract of public land extending from west of Hepburn Springs to Mount Macedon and Long Forest near Melton, and also includes several smaller forest patches. Some 43 per cent (99,110 hectares) of this block is public land.

The investigation began in April 2017 and a draft proposals paper was released for public comment in August 2018. This final report was submitted to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in June 2019.

Consultation process

VEAC used a variety of measures to inform, consult with and involve a wide range of stakeholders across the three blocks of the investigation area during the development of its recommendations to government. The objectives were to ensure that interested people heard about the investigation, obtained information about it and were encouraged to participate – especially through making written submissions.

The Aboriginal Community Engagement Project was carried out by Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation (trading as Djandak) in partnership with VEAC. The six Traditional Owner groups and Registered Aboriginal Parties in the investigation area were initially invited to provide appropriate information on cultural values, opinion of Country condition, and aspirations for each of the investigation blocks. Following the publication of the draft proposals paper, whole day on-Country field trips were offered to assist Traditional Owners to become familiar with the issues being addressed by the investigation and consider their input, before further discussion in a half-day workshops.

A Community Reference Group, consisting of members representing a broad range of interests related to the investigation, met five times during the investigation, and provided advice to the council.

There were two submission periods for the Central West Investigation. VEAC received 643 submissions in the first round of consultation which commenced with the advertisement of the notice of investigation on 21 June 2017 and closed on 21 August 2017. The second consultation process began with the publication of the draft proposals paper on 31 August 2018 and was extended to close on 10 December 2018. Almost 2700 written submissions on the draft proposals paper were received.

During both consultation periods, community drop-in sessions were held at locations across the investigation area to provide the opportunity for anyone with an interest in public land in the investigation area to talk about the investigation directly with VEAC. More than 200 people attended five drop-in sessions in the first consultation period, and about 450 people attended the eight drop-in sessions and public meetings held by VEAC after the release of the draft proposals paper. VEAC also met with agencies and businesses that operate in the investigation area and responded to many requests to meet (often on site) with local resident and community groups, recreation organisations, friends/Landcare groups, businesses and conservation organisations.

Key issues

Traditional Owner interests

Traditional Owners expressed a preference for park or reserve categories that protect the cultural and natural values of Country and limit activities with major impacts such as timber harvesting and earth resource extraction, while ensuring that the public has access to public land to enjoy low-impact recreational activities. Some groups emphasised the cultural importance of rivers and requested that headwaters be protected. Traditional Owners want to be respected and resourced to undertake joint management planning and on-ground management activities on Country.

Ecosystem representation in protected areas

The investigation area is notable for its poor representation of ecosystems in protected areas. The creation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas is a major factor in the development of council's recommendations. Bioregional Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) are the units for assessing ecosystem representation. Of 107 bioregional EVCs in the investigation area, there are 37 EVCs with significant shortfalls against the nationally agreed targets for protected area representation.

Threatened species

The investigation area supports a substantial proportion of Victoria's biodiversity, including approximately 380 rare or threatened species. VEAC commissioned strategic biodiversity values analyses to rank public land areas across the investigation area according to their ability to support rare and threatened species. High-ranking areas are those that most efficiently capture the most suitable habitat for a greater number of rare and threatened species.

Recreation

Along with nature conservation, recreation – and associated tourism – is now the major use of public land in the Central West Investigation area and recreational use is expected to continue to increase, particularly in the light of population growth in Melbourne and regional cities and towns. Recreational activities such as four wheel driving, trail bike riding, horse riding, mountain bike riding, bushwalking, nature study and prospecting are very popular in many parts of the investigation area. Campers seek a range of opportunities including large open areas and small sites dispersed in the forest, and some people camp with dogs or horses.

Resource uses

Apart from tourism, the main industries on public land in the investigation area are apiculture (beekeeping), timber harvesting, mining, quarrying and licensed grazing. The main recreational activities that extract resources from public land in the investigation area are prospecting, hunting and firewood collection. Many local residents collect firewood because they want an affordable source of fuel for domestic heating and cooking.

Headwaters, climate change and landscape connectivity

The forests of the investigation area contain the headwaters of several of western Victoria's major rivers, including the Wimmera, Loddon, Campaspe, Coliban, Maribyrnong, Moorabool and Werribee-Lerderderg rivers. Public land plays a key role in maintaining biodiversity both within and outside the large forest blocks. Small and dispersed areas of native vegetation in cleared landscapes have a significant role in maintaining landscape connectivity and are under increasing pressure from the effects of habitat fragmentation and climate change. An expert intergovernmental report released in May 2019 warns of a global decline in nature happening at rates that are unprecedented in human history.

Changes since the draft proposals paper

VEAC carefully considered the information provided in submissions on the draft proposals paper and from discussions with stakeholders and the community, and has made some significant changes to its recommendations to address issues where possible and to respond to new or more detailed information.

The need to restore the forests in the investigation area to a more natural structure and condition is a passionately held and widely agreed view of the community, particularly for the Wombat forest. VEAC is now recommending an independent research study to determine the most effective restoration treatments for forests whose structure, composition and ecological function have been altered by a history of intensive logging. The primary objectives would be to restore ecological health in regrowth forests, which would include providing high-quality habitat for the many plants and animals that rely on these forests, and particularly rare and threatened species that have been affected by alterations in forest condition. The research would build on relevant existing ecological and silvicultural research. In addition to biodiversity outcomes, the

benefits of healthy forests include water production and carbon storage, and increased resilience to projected changes in climate.

Changes made from the draft to the final recommendations for the Wombat–Macedon block result in an increase of 3583 hectares to regional parks in key recreational or residential areas to address community input regarding access to a wider range of or more intensive recreational activities. There is a corresponding reduction in the extent of the recommended national park.

Changes have been made to the recommendations for national park, regional park and state forest in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block resulting in an additional 3099 hectares of state forest and a reduction of 2149 hectares of regional park in the Pyrenees, and an additional 1378 hectares of national park in the Mount Cole forest. These changes provide more opportunities for some recreational activities and domestic firewood collection, and improve protection of key natural values based on some new information.

In the Wellsford block the draft recommendation for the nature reserve is replaced by a recommended addition to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park. This change, which provides for horse riding to be allowed, addresses local community concerns about recreational access, and responds to local community preferences for the natural values of the area to be protected in a national park.



Summary of major recommendations

Overall, the final recommendations propose an increase of 58,115 hectares in protected areas (national park, conservation park, nature reserve, bushland reserve, heritage river) – see the table below for areas in each public land use category. This is a major contribution towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system in Victoria – a key consideration for the investigation and specified in section 18 of the VEAC Act. The recommendations also provide a framework to:

- strengthen recognition of the role, cultural values and aspirations of Traditional Owners in public land use and management
- cater for increasing recreational use in a way that minimises conflicts between uses and protects the natural values on which they depend
- protect key areas for threatened species conservation
- improve landscape connectivity, the protection of key headwaters, and buffer the effects of climate change.

National parks and conservation parks

Wombat–Lerderderg National Park – establishment of a large new national park from existing state park and state forest capturing a significant amount of the largely-intact landscape and high strategic biodiversity values of the Wombat forest.

Pyrenees National Park – establishment of a new national park from existing nature reserves and state forest over the southern flanks of the Pyrenees range.

Mount Buangor National Park – establishment of a new national park from existing state park and some adjoining state forest.

Greater Bendigo National Park – addition of a substantial proportion of the Wellsford forest to the existing national park nearby but outside the investigation area.

Hepburn and Cobaw conservation parks – establishment of two new conservation parks from state forest northwest of Daylesford and at Cobaw.

Regional parks

The recommended addition of 19,728 hectares of regional park would increase the amount of public land being managed primarily for recreation, generally in the areas of highest recreational activity near towns. In the Wombat–Macedon ranges the recommended suite of regional parks

around the new Wombat–Lerderderg National Park would maintain a variety of recreational uses available to local residents and visitors. Similarly, the recommended new Pyrenees Regional Park and addition to the Bendigo Regional Park complement the recommended national parks in those areas. Domestic firewood collection would also be allowed to remain in some of the recommended new regional parks, with a proposed phase out period of 10 years.

Nature reserves and bushland reserves

The recommendations include 30 new and expanded nature reserves and bushland reserves comprising areas with significant natural values, or with important contributions to landscape connectivity or ecosystem representation in protected areas.

State forests

The final recommendations would reduce the amount of state forest in the investigation area by 77,377 hectares, with the remaining 11,901 hectares of state forest available for timber harvesting and a wider range of recreational uses. State forest blocks recommended to be retained are located in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block: approximately 56 per cent of Mount Cole State Forest, 21 per cent of the Pyrenees State Forest, all of the existing Mount Lonarch, Trawalla–Andrews and Musical Gully–Camp Hill state forests, and 42 per cent of Glenmona State Forest.

Other public land

There are substantial areas of public land with well-established uses that are recommended to remain unchanged. These include many smaller areas of public land across the investigation area, and dedicated uses such as water production reserves, community use reserves, and utilities and government services reserves. Notable examples are Hanging Rock Reserve and all existing historic reserves.

Other recommendations

Thirteen general recommendations are made to address implementation, resourcing and specific policy and management issues.

Summary of draft recommendations for each public land use category

Public land use category	Total area (ha)		Change
	Current	Recommended	
National park, State park	22,967	73,113	50,146
Conservation park	0	5246	5246
Regional park	5264	24,992	19,728
Nature reserve	6703	8051	1348
Bushland reserve	1047	2808	1761
Historic reserve	1507	1507	0
State forest	89,278	11,901	-77,377
Water frontage, beds and banks reserve	1933	1893	-40
Water production reserve	6635	6514	-121
Community use reserve	1607	1146	-461
Utilities and government services reserve	17,080	17,033	-47
Land leased or licensed for plantation purposes, Plantation	6724	6585	-139
Uncategorised public land	468	424	-44
Total extent of public land	161,213	161,213	0
Total extent of investigation area (private and public land)	403,815	403,815	0
Heritage river overlay	5166	5442	276
Reference area overlay	1202	1202	0

Summary of uses and implications

Social and economic implications

VEAC commissioned an independent social and economic analysis of the final recommendations for the Central West Investigation area. Section 1.6 of this report includes a discussion of the analyses (cost benefit analysis and the economic activity framework) and the broad implications of the recommendations. The report of the analysis is available on VEAC's website.

The cost-benefit analysis found that the economic benefits to the Victorian community of implementation of VEAC's recommendations are likely to be high, while the economic costs of implementation of VEAC's recommendations are likely to be modest. The results indicate that there may be substantial net benefits of implementing VEAC recommendations conservatively estimated in the order of \$247 million present value over 30 years. VEAC acknowledges

that the benefits of conservation accrue to the broader community whereas costs accrue to specific individuals or groups in the community.

The potential impacts of implementing VEAC recommendations on regional economies was found to relate to the reduction in timber milling and commercial firewood production. There will be minimal regional economic impacts related to potentially displaced recreational uses.

Traditional Owner interests

The recommendations largely support Traditional Owner values and aspirations, providing significant protection for tangible and intangible cultural values associated with Country. Park and reserve categories provide a foundation for Traditional Owners to care for Country, for example through joint management arrangements under Recognition and Settlement Agreements with the State. VEAC recommends that the government consider legislative changes to the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* that would enable future changes to Aboriginal title land by agreement of the parties (e.g. to include additions to the current Hepburn Regional Park). Engagement with Traditional Owners will be important in achieving the objectives of VEAC's recommendations, and there is a clear need for genuine partnerships and funding to enable Aboriginal people to collaborate in implementation activities and land management processes.

Ecosystem representation in protected areas

Of the 37 EVCs currently with significant (greater than 50 hectares) shortfalls against the nationally agreed targets for protected area representation, the recommendations would result in targets being met or almost met for 12 bioregional EVCs. Many of these EVCs currently have representation shortfalls of many thousands of hectares e.g. Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Grassy Dry Forest. For a further ten EVCs, while representation targets would not be met, significant additions are recommended. For another 21 EVCs ecosystem representation targets would not be met. Most of these EVCs are found along roadsides and in riparian areas in small, isolated patches.

Threatened species

The recommendations would add a large part of the most important habitat for rare and threatened species in the Central West Investigation area to Victoria's protected area system.

The recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park captures a large part of the highest-ranking strategic biodiversity values (most likely to support the most rare and threatened species) in the investigation area, from both the regional and statewide perspectives. Other large and mostly contiguous high-ranking areas of rare and threatened species habitat are included in the recommended Pyrenees National Park and Hepburn Conservation Park. Almost half of the Wellsford block – most of which ranks highly in the statewide analysis – would be encompassed by the recommended addition to the Greater Bendigo National Park.

Recreation

Many recreational uses would be unaffected by the recommendations for new parks and reserves; for example legal four wheel driving, trail bike riding and hang gliding. Horse riding and dispersed camping can be accommodated in parts of the recommended new national parks, while dogs on lead could be permitted in specified visitor areas and a limited number of specified tracks. Hunting would be restricted to state forests in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block and, with the recommended revocation of the game sanctuary, now be allowed at Mount Cole. Prospecting would be excluded from the small number of old goldfields that are currently used in the recommended new national or conservation parks. Key prospecting areas have been included in the recommended regional parks where feasible.

Resource uses

While national parks are exempt from new exploration and mining licences, existing exploration, mining and quarrying tenements would not be affected by the recommendations. New geological modelling suggests that there could be increased gold potential at depth particularly in the Wellsford block.

Existing bee sites and more than 94 per cent of grazing licences in the investigation area would not be affected by the recommendations.

The recommendations have significant implications for wood product harvesting in the investigation area although the impacts vary across the investigation area.

In the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block, the impacts of the recommendations are likely to be similar to those of the draft recommendations, although VEAC is now recommending some 1700 hectares additional state forest. In the box-ironbark forests of Wellsford, parts of the Pyrenees and Glenmona north – comprising around ten per cent of the box-ironbark resource in the Bendigo Forest Management Area – harvesting would cease other than for some domestic firewood in the recommended Bendigo Regional Park addition (phased out over 10 years) and, for all products, in box-ironbark forests of the recommended Pyrenees State Forest. Harvesting would cease elsewhere in the Pyrenees, and in Wombat and other smaller forests nearby other than for some subsidiary products.

While little information is available on current domestic firewood collection, the recommended areas where domestic firewood collection would generally be permitted (some new regional parks, with a phase out over ten years, and all recommended state forests) amount to about 30 per cent of the current state forest area, suggesting a 70 per cent reduction in domestic firewood supply.

Headwaters, climate change and landscape connectivity

Across the investigation area VEAC has recommended about 20 small areas for additional protection as new nature reserves or bushland reserves. These remnants support threatened species, threatened vegetation communities or other significant natural values and contribute to habitat connectivity in the more heavily cleared landscapes between the large blocks of public land.

The recommendations for Wombat–Lerderderg National Park and the adjacent regional parks provide improved water supply security for the headwaters of several of western Victoria's most significant rivers.

1. Introduction

In March 2017 the Victorian government asked the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to carry out an investigation into public land in the central west of Victoria, including the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range forests.

The purpose of the Central West Investigation is to:

- identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values, and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land
- make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

VEAC sought public comment on the notice of investigation in June 2017 and received more than 640 written submissions.

In August 2018 VEAC released the draft proposals paper for the Central West Investigation. Following the release of the report there was an extended second submission period of 102 days. In addition to receiving written submissions, VEAC met with local communities and residents, businesses, local councils, state government agencies and land managers, and organisations representing conservation and recreation interests. An Aboriginal community engagement project was established in partnership with Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. The information gathered from all engagement and consultation activities has been considered in developing the final recommendations. A consultation summary was published on VEAC's website in April 2019.

1.1 Background to the investigation

The Central West Investigation area is 403,815 hectares in total of which 161,215 hectares or 40 per cent is public land. The investigation area is made up of three separate blocks (see figure 1.1):

- the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block (165,790 hectares) covering two large tracts of public land on the Pyrenees Range to the north near Avoca and the Mount Cole Range to the south near Beaufort as well as several smaller state forest patches and various small units in the areas surrounding these ranges (especially to the east and south). Approximately 33 per cent or 54,760 hectares of this block is public land
- the Wellsford block (9,260 hectares) east of Bendigo. About 79 per cent or 7,340 hectares of this block is public land, almost all being the Wellsford State Forest

- the Wombat–Macedon block (228,770 hectares) centred on the large tract of public land extending from west of Hepburn Springs to Mount Macedon and Long Forest near Melton. Some 43 per cent or 99,110 hectares of this block is public land.

Across these blocks there are some 249,610 hectares of native vegetation, which represents 62 per cent of the extent of native vegetation at the time of European settlement. A little over half of this remaining native vegetation (145,570 hectares) is on public land, 90 per cent of which supports native vegetation.

Over many tens of thousands of years of occupation, Aboriginal people have developed profound connections with their Country in central west Victoria. Today, Traditional Owners continue this relationship and have a cultural responsibility for caring for Country that involves protecting land, waterways and natural resources from harm.

In their Country Plan, Dja Dja Wurrung People describe their Country as 'more than just the landscape, it is more than what is visible to the eye – it is a living entity, which holds the stories of creation and histories that cannot be erased'.

VEAC's predecessors conducted systematic studies and investigations of public land in the current investigation area between 1977 and 2001, making recommendations for all public land and providing the framework for the way in which public land is classified and used today. The major reports are:

- North Central Area final recommendations (LCC 1981)
- Ballarat Study Area final recommendations (LCC 1982)
- Melbourne Area, District 1 Review final recommendations (LCC 1987)
- Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation final report (ECC 2001).

In addition, the comprehensive regional assessment for the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement (RFA) in 2000 covers most of the forested public land in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block and the Wombat–Macedon block. The Wellsford block is not part of the West Victoria RFA area or part of any of Victoria's other four RFA regions. The West Victoria RFA built on the LCC public land use framework and provided for the addition of some areas of forest to the conservation reserve system; in the current investigation area, for example, the Pyrete Range

was added to the Lerderderg State Park. The Australian and Victorian governments are currently engaged in a process to extend and modernise the Victorian RFAs.

A major community forest management initiative began for the Wombat State Forest in 2002 but was discontinued in 2006 for a variety of reasons and is generally considered to have failed.

There have been significant changes in the use and management of public land since the above reviews and initiatives which make the current investigation timely. For example, legal recognition and protection of Traditional Owner rights and interests in Crown land fundamentally changed after the 1992 High Court decision overturned the concept of terra nullius. In Victoria, as well as determinations of native title, agreements under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* facilitate the formal involvement of Traditional Owners in land management, planning, access and the use of natural resources.

Over the past 20 years, use of public land in the Central West Investigation area has shifted

towards recreation and conservation. As Victoria's population increases, especially in nearby metropolitan Melbourne, changing patterns of use place pressure on public land. Climate change places additional pressure on biodiversity and the ecosystem services provided by public land. An expert intergovernmental report released in May 2019 warns of a global decline in nature happening at rates that are unprecedented in human history.

1.2 Terms of reference

On 20 March 2017 the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, requested that VEAC carry out an investigation into public land in central west Victoria.

In November 2016, prior to the formal request, the Victorian government invited public comments on the proposed terms of reference and area for the investigation. Twenty submissions were received and a statement of how comments received on the proposed terms of reference were dealt with was tabled in Parliament as required under the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act*

Terms of reference

Pursuant to section 15 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change hereby requests the Council to carry out an investigation into public land in the vicinity of the Wombat, Wellsford, Mount Cole and Pyrenees Range Forests within the area shown on the accompanying map.

The purpose of the Central West Investigation is to:

- (a) identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land in the specified area; and
- (b) make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

In addition to the considerations in section 18 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Council must take into account the following matters:

- i. relevant State Government policies and strategies, Ministerial statements and reports by the Victorian Auditor-General; and
- ii. relevant regional programs, strategies and plans.

The Council must also consult with the relevant Traditional Owner Group Entities and any other relevant Traditional Owner groups in the specified area, particularly where the area is subject to an agreement under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. This includes the area covered by the Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement.

A draft proposals paper and a final report are to be prepared, allowing for two public submission periods during the investigation.

The Council must report on the completed investigation within two years from the commencement date.*

*Extended to 14 June 2019

2001 (VEAC Act) on 23 March 2017. The final terms of reference (below) were also tabled in Parliament on 23 March 2017.

A business plan and budget were prepared for the investigation as required under the VEAC Act and submitted to the Minister on 18 April 2017. Resources were approved by the Minister on 28 May 2017.

In October 2018 the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change granted an extension for the completion of the investigation to June 2019 due to the extended public consultation period on the draft proposals paper.

1.3 Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

The VEAC Act came into operation in December 2001. This act repealed the *Environment Conservation Council Act 1997* and established VEAC to conduct investigations and make recommendations relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land.

VEAC is a successor organisation to the Land Conservation Council (LCC), established in 1971, and the Environment Conservation Council (ECC), which replaced the LCC in 1997. Several amendments to the VEAC Act came into operation in September 2016. The amendments established a process by which VEAC can provide advice and assessments, in addition to being able to carry out investigations. The amended act allows for VEAC to provide advice or carry out assessments on matters that, because of their limited scale or scope or their technical nature, might not require an investigation.

Public land is defined in the VEAC Act. It excludes private freehold land, land owned by local councils and Commonwealth land. VEAC does not make recommendations for private land, local council freehold land or Commonwealth land. However, VEAC reports include information on all land, where relevant, to provide a context for consideration of public land. Public land use categories and maps of freehold public authority land are shown in appendices 1 and 2 respectively of the draft proposals paper.

The current five members appointed to VEAC are Ms Janine Hadow (Chairperson), Ms Joanne Duncan, Ms Anna Kilborn, Dr Charles Meredith and Dr Geoffrey Wescott. Ms Hadow commenced as Chairperson in September 2017, replacing the Hon Phil Honeywood who served as Chairperson

from May 2012. The current Council thanks Mr Honeywood for his significant contribution in the establishment phase of this investigation.

A brief biography of each of the current Council members can be found on VEAC's website at www.veac.vic.gov.au. Council is supported by a small research and policy team and administrative secretariat. The VEAC Act requires the Council to consult with departments and public authorities, and requires departments and public authorities to give practicable assistance to the Council in carrying out investigations. VEAC papers and reports are prepared independently.

The Council conducts its affairs in accordance with the VEAC Act. In particular, section 18 specifies that 'Council must have regard to the following considerations in carrying out an investigation and in making recommendations to the Minister –

- a. the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- b. the need to conserve and protect biological diversity;
- c. the need to conserve and protect any areas which have ecological, natural, landscape or cultural interest or significance, recreational value or geological or geomorphological significance;
- d. the need to provide for the creation and preservation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of parks and reserves within the State of Victoria;
- e. the existence of any international treaty ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia which is relevant to the investigation;
- f. any agreement at a national, interstate or local government level into which the Government of Victoria has entered, or under which the Government of Victoria has undertaken any obligation in conjunction with the Commonwealth, a State, Territory or municipal council, which relates to the subject matter of the investigation;
- g. the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations;
- h. any existing or proposed use of the environment or natural resources.'

1.4 The investigation process

The process for the Central West Investigation is formally specified in the VEAC Act and in the terms of reference for the investigation. The process and timelines are shown in figure 1.2 and include two formal submission periods, each a minimum of 60 days. The second submission period commenced with the publication of the draft proposals paper and was extended beyond the minimum 60-day period to close on 10 December 2018 (a total of 102 days) to provide people with more opportunity to respond to the draft recommendations. A list of written submissions received in the first and second submission periods is available on VEAC's website at <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation/submissions>.

VEAC established a Community Reference Group for the investigation in accordance with section 13 of the VEAC Act. The group is made up of representatives for a broad range of interests related to the investigation, with Mr Ian Harris as independent chair. Members are listed on the inside front cover of this final report. The group has met four times to date: October 2017, February 2018, August 2018 and March 2019. There have been many follow-up discussions with members of the group. The Community Reference Group has greatly assisted VEAC in understanding the issues and stakeholders involved in the investigation.

In addition to many visits to the investigation area for meetings and consultations, Council members also made seven field inspections of public land in the investigation area. During these trips, Council met with public land managers and stakeholders and familiarised themselves with the values and uses of the area.

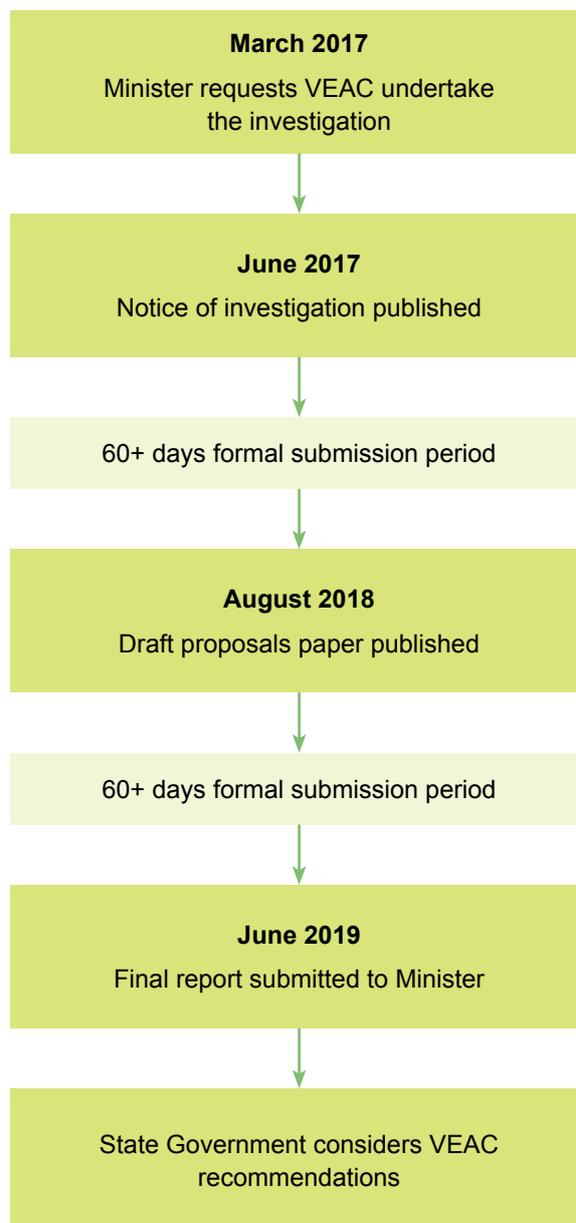
1.5 Commissioned work

In addition to the compilation and analysis of information from published reports, government departments, stakeholders and written submissions, VEAC commissioned several projects to fill specific information gaps or to inform key aspects of the investigation.

Chapter 1 of the draft proposals paper included summaries of the following five projects commissioned prior to publication of the draft proposals paper for the investigation:

- Aboriginal community engagement project (stage 1)
- Sites of geological significance
- Strategic biodiversity values analysis

Figure 1.2 Investigation process and timelines



- Socioeconomic profiles
- Economic assessment of the current contribution of timber harvesting to local and regional economies.

The reports are available on VEAC's website.

For the final report, VEAC commissioned work in two key areas: completion of the Aboriginal community engagement project and an assessment of the social and economic implications of implementing VEAC's final recommendations. The projects are summarised below and the full reports are available on the VEAC website.

Aboriginal community engagement project

The Aboriginal community engagement project was established with the purpose of actively approaching Traditional Owner groups (including Registered Aboriginal Parties) in the investigation area to seek their views on all relevant issues, especially appropriate management and ways to conserve and enhance natural and cultural values. The project included a learning and capacity-building component that supports Aboriginal peoples' rights and aspirations to improve their economic, cultural and social standing.

VEAC formed a partnership with Dja Dja Wurrung Enterprises Pty Ltd (trading as Djandak) to run the project. The aim of stage 1 was to provide VEAC with appropriate information on cultural values, opinion of Country condition, and aspirations for each of the investigation blocks to inform the draft proposals paper. The outputs from the range of stage 1 engagement activities included advice on key issues and high-level recommendations for future management of each block in the investigation area.

Stage 2 of the project sought feedback on the draft proposals paper from all six Traditional Owner groups. The stage 2 engagement process offered each group a whole day onCountry field trip to assist Traditional Owners to become familiar with the issues being addressed by the draft recommendations and consider their input, before further discussion in a half-day workshop. Djandak consultants engaged with four of the groups (Barengi Gadjin (Wotjobaluk people), Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri) and VEAC's Aboriginal project officer consulted directly with representatives of Eastern Maar and Wadawurrung Traditional Owners. Through the stage 2 engagement activities, Traditional Owners re-emphasised the key points from stage 1 and added some detail about particular areas and activities of concern.

VEAC recognises and appreciates the efforts made by all parties to contribute to the investigation as resourcing allowed, and acknowledges the relatively short timelines. Details of Djandak's engagement activities, information and outcomes are documented in their project reports (stage 1 and stage 2) available on the VEAC website.

Social and economic assessment of implications of implementing final recommendations

Gillespie Economics was commissioned to provide an assessment of the social and economic implications of implementing the

final recommendations for public land in the investigation area.

The assessment built on the two baseline economic projects commissioned for the draft proposals paper listed above.

The full report is available from VEAC's website and summarised in section 1.6.

The social and economic assessment included:

- a) an assessment of the current costs and benefits of public land and how those costs and benefits are distributed
- b) an assessment of the costs and benefits of VEAC's final recommendations and how those costs and benefits are distributed
- c) an economic baseline and/or a review of the available information on the economic value of the industries and recreational and other activities in the investigation area
- d) an assessment of the social implications of VEAC's recommendations, with attention to implications for regional townships and communities.

1.6 Economic and social assessments

As part of its task of making recommendations on the use of public land and resources, VEAC must take into account economic and social values. VEAC also seeks to balance local, regional, state and national interests as well as the those of present and future generations.

Whilst there are several ways to assess social and economic implications of VEAC's recommendations, most methods have limitations. In particular, social and environmental impacts are difficult to incorporate in most analyses and there is a tendency to focus on readily identifiable impacts which are likely to be short-term financial losses or gains. For example, how costs and benefits are distributed amongst different groups in society is an important consideration for governments, but is not easily assessed.

Many cost-benefit analyses also struggle with 'pricing' environmental values although there is no doubt that, as a society, we place a high value on them. While socio-economic analyses are useful ways to structure the assessment of resource issues, no technique can express, aggregate, weigh and compare the values of all the costs and benefits associated with alternative uses of land, water or resources. Although there is continued development of techniques to inform and assist policy-makers, there is no single methodology that eliminates the

need for governments to interpret community values and goals when making final judgements about public land and resource use options.

In addition to formal analyses, information on the potential social and economic implications of the recommendations has been gained through Traditional Owner engagement, written submissions and discussions with community groups, businesses and individuals, local councils and government agencies. This information, although often qualitative rather than quantitative, has been extremely useful in developing and reviewing recommendations, and in enhancing Council's understanding of use of the central west forests.

Summary of social and economic implications

The social and economic analysis of VEAC's final recommendations involved two components:

- a cost-benefit analysis – the 'economic' component of the assessment, calculating the total economic values of implementation of the recommendations for the Victorian economy
- an analysis of regional economic activity impacts – the 'social' component of the assessment, calculating the effect on economic stimulus to the regional economy as a result of changed expenditure in the region from implementation of the recommendations.

Cost-benefit analysis is the Victorian government's preferred economic evaluation method for investment decisions in relation to economic and social infrastructure. It provides a robust method for evaluating the costs and benefits (including both market and non-market impacts) of a project or policy change in today's dollars to society as a whole. The estimated net benefits and any significant impacts that cannot be valued, are used to help decision-makers assess options and make decisions about implementation.

The implications for the Victorian economy and for regional economic activity are distinct and both are key considerations for government decision making. The report documents some significant constraints on the assessment, particularly in relation to the availability of primary data to value the potential environmental and cultural benefits; and few or no data on current usage levels for recreational activities, forest productivity, and domestic firewood collection and demand.

As a result of these constraints there are some uncertainties around the numerical estimates for any given impact. Nonetheless, for both the cost-

benefit analysis and the regional economic activity analysis, the broad results are clear about the likely social and economic impacts of the implementation of VEAC's recommendations, as shown below.

For the cost-benefit analysis the consultants conservatively estimate a net benefit to the Victorian economy of \$247 million present value over 30 years. The gross benefit (\$270 million) accrues from the improved protection of native vegetation as a result of the recommendations. The consultants were not able to quantify potentially substantial benefits from flora and fauna species protection, Aboriginal heritage and cultural values (tangible and intangible) and water quality and quantity regulation. The estimated likely costs (\$22 million total present value, over 30 years) mostly result from impacts on wood product harvesting, and recreational prospecting, hunting and dog walking.

The consultants focused on changes to costs and benefits likely to result from implementation of VEAC recommendations. Use and non-use values that would not change from current trajectories under the VEAC recommendations were not quantified.

The potential impacts of implementing VEAC recommendations on regional economies relates to the reduction in timber milling and commercial firewood production. Timber industry employment in the combined six local government areas (LGAs) in the investigation area (Pyrenees, Central Goldfields, Greater Bendigo, Hepburn, Moorabool and Macedon Ranges) is 61 direct full-time equivalents (less than one per cent of regional employment), many of whom also utilise state forests outside the investigation area. These are upper limits of potential impacts as VEAC is recommending areas remain available for timber harvesting within the investigation area. There will be minimal regional economic impacts associated with implementation of VEAC recommendations on displaced recreational uses of the forests by residents or displaced uses by visitors and tourists.

As with the cost benefit analysis, the regional economic analysis focused on changes likely to result from the recommendations and did not quantify economic activity that will not or is not likely to change e.g. recreational activity, commercial uses such as apiculture, and tourism and events related to public land sites such as Hanging Rock. The economic activity associated with the unaffected activities may collectively be orders of magnitude greater than of those activities that may be affected.

1.7 Consultation summary

An overview of the input from the first consultation period was provided in chapter 3 of the draft proposals paper. The chapter was a summary of the major issues, comments and proposals submitted to VEAC for consideration in preparing the draft proposals paper.

The second consultation process extended from the publication of the draft proposals paper on 31 August 2018 to the close of submissions on 10 December 2018. During this time, VEAC:

- received almost 2700 written submissions
- convened six drop-in sessions in regional towns and Melbourne, and two public meetings in the investigation area
- briefed key stakeholders in Melbourne and in the investigation area including local councils, land managers and Traditional Owners
- met with numerous stakeholders – often on site – to understand and discuss their particular issues
- undertook follow-up field inspections where necessary
- accepted all invitations to address meetings such as regular or special meetings of community groups
- responded to numerous information requests by phone, email and via social media.

In April 2019 VEAC published a consultation summary which described the activities and feedback from both the first and second consultation periods for the investigation. The summary provided a full account of the engagement program and the information, perspectives and opinions it yielded. The consultation summary is available on VEAC's website.

Such an extensive consultation program yielded a considerable amount of information and often passionate input and Council is very grateful for these contributions.

1.8 Summary of changes since the draft proposals paper

Following public consultation on the draft proposals paper, VEAC has made some significant changes to its recommendations as well as a number of smaller changes. The full list of final recommendations highlighting changes since the draft proposals paper is presented the following table. Many of the changes and the reasons for them are covered in more detail in the relevant sections of the report.

Changes to general recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reason
R1 Aboriginal place names	A stronger level of engagement is recommended	Responds to feedback through Aboriginal community engagement project
R2 Additional resources	Additional resourcing is recommended for Traditional Owners to participate in a range of implementation processes and for detailed management planning	Responds to feedback through Aboriginal community engagement project and community feedback
R3 Assistance for adversely affected individuals and businesses	No change	
R4 Manage land in accordance with accepted recommendations	No change	
R5 Allow flexibility for minor boundary adjustments	No change	
R6 Simplifying reservation procedures	No change	
R7 Allow future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves	No change	
R8 Game sanctuary revocation	No change	
R9 Landscape connectivity	Minor adjustments	Responds to feedback from land managers
R10 Catchment management for water production and water quality	Minor adjustments	Responds to feedback from submissions
R11 Domestic firewood access	Minor adjustments	Responds to feedback from land managers

Final recommendation	Change	Reason
NEW R12 Ecological restoration study	New recommendation to support land managers to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes	Responds to widespread support for ecological restoration of altered forests
NEW R13 Fire research and management	New recommendation for continuation of research into fire management	Responds to issues raised in submissions
A National parks	Minor changes	Clarification or corrections
B Conservation parks	Minor changes	Clarification or corrections
C Regional parks	Specifies development of park management plans	Responds to feedback from land managers and stakeholders
D – N Nature reserves; bushland reserves; historic reserves; state forests; stream frontage, beds and banks reserves; water production reserves; community use reserves; utilities and government services reserves; uncategorised public land; land leased or licensed for plantations, and plantations; reference areas	Minor changes	Clarification
O Heritage rivers (overlay)	Generalised	Recommended heritage river areas are now dealt with in the relevant block chapters

Changes to national parks recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
A1 Mount Buangor National Park	Addition of 1379 hectares (formerly part of G4 Mount Cole State Forest)	Increases protection for significant natural values and provides for compatible recreational activities
A2 Pyrenees National Park	Removal of 950 hectares to G1 Pyrenees State Forest (see below)	Retains area of state forest to provide for timber harvesting and to provide for greater recreational opportunities
A3 Wombat–Lerderderg National Park	Removal of 3300 hectares to regional parks C3 – C6 (see below)	Provides for greater range of recreational activities, particularly around townships
A4 Greater Bendigo National Park (addition)	Replaces draft recommendation D8 Wellsford Nature Reserve	Responds to feedback for extra protection for Wellsford forest. Provides more opportunities for recreation, including horse riding

Changes to conservation parks recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
B1 Hepburn Conservation Park	No change	
B2 Cobaw Conservation Park	No change	

Changes to regional parks recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
C1 Pyrenees Regional Park	Removal of 2149 hectares to G1 Pyrenees State Forest (see below)	Retains area of state forest to provide for timber harvesting and to provide for greater recreational opportunities
C2 Bendigo Regional Park (addition)	No change	
C3 Hepburn Regional Park (addition)	Addition of a further 1890 hectares (formerly part of proposed A3 Wombat–Lerderderg National Park)	Responds to community feedback to for greater recreational opportunities
C4 Spargo Creek Regional Park	New 1693 hectares regional park from proposed national park and community use area	Responds to community feedback to provide for greater recreational opportunities

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
C5 Blackwood Regional Park	Proposed Wombat Regional Park divided into two separate regional parks – C5 (3707 hectares) and C6	Strengthens link to location and improves management planning for new regional park
C6 Fingerpost Regional Park	Proposed Wombat Regional Park divided into two separate regional parks – C5 and C6 (5442 hectares)	Strengthens link to location and improves management planning for new regional park
C7 Macedon Regional Park	Renumbered – no change	

Nature reserves recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
D1 – D7	No change	
D8 – D14	Renumbered – no change	
D15 Black Forest Nature Reserve	Proposed Black Forest Nature Reserve to be split into two separate nature reserves – D15 (124 hectares) and D16	Strengthens link to location and improves management planning for new nature reserve
D16 Slaty Creek Nature Reserve	Proposed Black Forest Nature Reserve to be split into two separate nature reserves – D15 and D16 (139 hectares)	Strengthens link to location and improves management planning for new nature reserve
D17 – D18	No change	

Changes to bushland reserves recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
E1 – E88	No change	

Changes to historic reserves recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
F1 – F13	No change	

Changes to state forests recommendations

Final recommendation	Change	Reasons
G1 Pyrenees State Forest	New recommendation – addition of 3099 hectares from previously recommended A2 Pyrenees National Park and C1 Pyrenees Regional Park	Retains area of state forest to provide for timber harvesting and wider range of recreational activities
G2 Mount Lonarch State Forest	Renumbered – no change	
G3 Trawalla–Andrews State Forest	Renumbered – no change	
G4 Musical Gully–Camp Hill State Forest	Renumbered – no change	
G5 Mount Cole State Forest	Removal of 1379 hectares to A1 Mount Buangor National Park Renumbered	Increases protection for significant natural values and provides for compatible recreational activities
G6 Glenmona State Forest	Renumbered – no change	

2. General recommendations

Policy and management issues identified for the investigation are addressed in this chapter in a series of general recommendations.

Recommendations for specific areas of public land are presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5 for the Mount Cole–Pyrenees, Wellsford and Wombat–Macedon blocks respectively.

Section 2.1 is in two parts: implementation and resourcing recommendations are followed by recommendations addressing specific policy or management issues.

Section 2.2 provides general recommendations for each public land use category or public land use overlay, setting out how the land should be used and, broadly, permitted and excluded activities.

2.1 Policy and management recommendations

2.1.1 Implementation of recommendations

There is an obligation under section 26A of the VEAC Act for government, through its ministers, departments or public authorities, to take actions to implement government-accepted VEAC recommendations. VEAC recognises that implementation of its recommendations and ongoing management of public land will require additional resources to meet community expectations and successfully transition to new arrangements.

Additional engagement with Traditional Owners and the broader community will also be important in accomplishing the changes recommended in this report.

Aboriginal place names

Recognition and settlement agreements (RSAs) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* confer a range of rights and responsibilities on both government and Traditional Owners. In this investigation area, both the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC) and Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (TCAC) have entered into RSAs with the State. Other

Traditional Owner groups are likely to enter into RSA negotiations in the future.

Land Use Activity Agreements under RSAs provide Traditional Owners with an opportunity to have input or give their agreement to certain activities taking place on Crown land. Advisory activities include changes to land status such as declaring new parks or reserves, and management plans prepared under the *National Parks Act 1975*.

In accordance with protocols under RSAs, both with DDWCAC and TCAC and other Traditional Owner groups within the investigation area in the future, and in line with current government policy on engaging with Traditional Owners, VEAC recommends that government collaborates with the relevant Traditional Owner groups in naming any new parks and reserves in RSA areas. This reflects general feedback from Traditional Owners about involvement in decision-making processes and their support for draft recommendation R1.

RECOMMENDATION

Aboriginal place names

R1 Government collaborates with relevant Traditional Owner groups regarding the naming of recommended new parks and reserves.

Implementation and resourcing

In addition to resourcing for establishment of new parks and reserves (including legislation, staffing and operational funding), key implementation issues include:

- increased engagement of Traditional Owner groups in the implementation of these recommendations
- developing a process to assess and, where appropriate, assist any individuals and local businesses adversely affected by the recommendations



- detailed management planning where required especially for parks with high current or projected visitor use
- community engagement and planning for domestic firewood access and changes to the pattern and distribution of some recreation activities across the investigation area.

A minor adjustment to recommendation R2 has been made to address feedback from Traditional Owners, who have emphasised the need for genuine partnerships and funding to enable them to collaborate in implementation processes including planning, land management and visitor education activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Additional resources

R2 Government allocates:

(a) adequate financial and staff resources for implementation of these recommendations to ensure that the objectives of the report and recommendations are achieved

(b) adequate resourcing of Traditional Owner groups to engage in implementation activities and to collaborate with government in land management

(c) adequate resources for management planning, including fine-scale planning for recreational activities involving consultation with users and other stakeholders.

Assistance for adversely affected individuals and businesses

R3 Government establishes a process to evaluate the impacts on individuals and businesses of implementing recommendations in this report and provides assistance to minimise any effects where required.

Interim management and minor boundary adjustments

R4 Upon government acceptance of VEAC's recommendations, relevant land be managed in accordance with those recommendations.

R5 Implementation of recommendations allows flexibility for minor boundary adjustments.

Simplifying Crown land boundary definition

The requirement for field survey of reserve boundaries has a significant impact on formal implementation of government-accepted LCC, ECC and VEAC recommendations through to reservation, especially for areas reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*. Where the boundaries of recommendations are related to cadastral boundaries or readily identifiable natural features, the need for field survey may be minimised. However, in some instances, a further site review and field survey may be required to align the boundary of the recommended area to the cadastre and avoid any legal ambiguity.

The Office of Surveyor-General Victoria has also implemented methods of minimising field survey, such as the use of abutments and Global Navigation Satellite System-derived coordinates to define boundaries, and is continuing to explore other methods utilising new survey technologies and techniques thus reducing the need for field surveys to define reserve boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION

Simplifying reservation procedures

R6 Priority be given to minimising field survey where possible and simplifying boundary definition and preparation of gazettal plans to implement government-accepted recommendations, with site survey if required to resolve specific management issues.

2.1.2 Policy and management

The following recommendations address a range of issues identified by VEAC or raised in consultation and by stakeholders.

Traditional Owner Settlement Act

The *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* does not provide for future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves through changes to public land use classification of these areas or boundary adjustments. For example, the act does not currently provide for the public land use classification to be changed for Hepburn Regional Park or additions to be made to the park, even with the agreement of the Traditional Owners and the state government.

Council considers that an amendment to this process would be of benefit in the future as boundary issues arise and as changes in land uses of Aboriginal title land may occur.

RECOMMENDATION

Allowing future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves

R7 Government considers legislative amendments to the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* that provide for a process allowing future changes to Aboriginal title land by agreement of the parties. Such amendments should include provisions for additions, boundary adjustments and changes to public land use classification.

Game sanctuary

There is ambiguity relating to the legal status of hunting in the game sanctuary declared in the 1920s under the *Game Act 1915* (a precursor to the existing *Wildlife Act 1975*) for the Mount Cole state forests and possibly other areas. Legal opinion is divided as to whether the sanctuary was technically revoked by provisions establishing the Game Act in 1958 and the current Wildlife Act as there are no carry-over provisions for sanctuaries in current legislation. Currently public land managers do not permit recreational deer hunting in these areas because of this legal uncertainty.

There is strong anecdotal evidence that wild deer are expanding their range and increasing their density in Victoria. Hunting organisations have called for more areas of public land in Victoria to be made available for licensed recreational deer hunters.

Local residents raised concerns for the safety of other users if hunting with high-powered

firearms increased as a result of removing the game sanctuary, particularly around the popular Beeripmo Walk and the nearby education camp. A change to recommendation A1 Mount Buangor National Park since the draft proposals paper means that this area is now included in the recommended national park and firearms would be prohibited. In the areas recommended to remain as state forest, Council's view is that there is insufficient justification for retaining the game sanctuary, and the legally ambiguous exclusion of deer hunting would continue to cause difficulties for land managers and be an exception to the general situation of allowing deer hunting in state forests.

Accordingly, Council recommends that the legal ambiguity be resolved by removal of game sanctuary status to permit recreational deer hunting in the state forests recommended to be retained in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block of the investigation area. Recreational hunting of deer species is permitted in state forests recommended in this report (see general recommendation G). It is noted that land managers may undertake organised control programs for deer and other invasive species in parks and reserves.

RECOMMENDATION

Game sanctuary revocation

R8 To ensure there is no ambiguity, any game sanctuaries in the investigation area declared under the *Game Act 1915* be revoked.



Landscape connectivity

VEAC received many submissions and other advice from stakeholders about the important role of public land in the matrix of habitats across the largely cleared landscapes of central west Victoria. Habitat fragmentation is a key threat to many species of plants and animals, particularly those that require large areas to provide food resources at the right time, such as Victoria's threatened community of woodland birds. There are many small blocks of public land, including vegetated waterways scattered across the investigation area, that help to connect patches of habitat and increase their role in nature conservation.

VEAC recognises the need to improve habitat quality and connectivity for many native species by protecting the small public land blocks and also enhancing native vegetation on strategically important areas of private land. There is already considerable work being done towards this end including, for example, Trust for Nature projects, community-based initiatives such as the Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance and government programs through catchment management authorities. Council considers that it is important that public land with native vegetation should play a leading role in improving landscape connectivity.

RECOMMENDATION

Landscape connectivity

R9 That small blocks (nature reserves, bushland reserves, stream frontage, bed and banks reserves and road reserves) be managed to maximise their ecological function and value to native species that depend on habitat connectivity, through planning partnerships between Traditional Owners, community groups, government, catchment management authorities, Trust for Nature and private land managers.

Maintaining catchment condition and services

With increasing population and a warmer and drier climate, it is critical that water resources are secured into the future. Water for Victoria (the Water Plan) sets out a long-term strategy for management of Victoria's water resources to overcome the challenges of climate change and population growth. VEAC has heard from stakeholders and the community about the importance of water supply and quality across the investigation area.

Maintaining forested water supply catchments is an important way in which the goals of the Water Plan can be met. Public land forests, vegetated stream frontages and wetlands improve water quality by filtering water, thereby reducing the amount of soil sediment, pollutants and organic matter that would otherwise be released into our waterways. When ecosystems are degraded or disturbed (e.g. through loss of vegetation cover, trampling, damage to riparian areas by recreational activities, overgrazing, weed invasion, introduction of pathogens or large-scale fires), water quality is often reduced. Some of the greatest impacts on water quality are from fire and roading. As part of the implementation of this recommendation, VEAC supports the use of management planning to protect forested water supply catchments against threats to catchment condition.

Maintaining or improving catchment condition also significantly lowers downstream water supply costs. Coliban Water assessed (using DTF's Investment Framework for Environmental Resources standards) the value of forested public land in the upper Coliban River using a benefit-cost analysis method. The results showed that for every dollar spent on improving the condition of source catchments and waterways, a benefit of \$1.67 is achieved, particularly in downstream treatment costs. There are also potentially significant unquantified longer-term benefits.

The Central West Investigation area contains several water supply catchments and water storage reservoirs as well as the headwaters of many rivers, particularly in the Wombat-Macedon block. The two larger blocks of the investigation area are bisected by the east-west oriented watershed of the Great Dividing Range, with some rivers flowing in a southerly direction to the coast (Hopkins, Werribee, Lerderderg and Moorabool rivers) and others inland into the extensive Murray-Darling Basin system (Avoca, Loddon, Campaspe and Coliban rivers). Rivers originating in parts of the Mount Cole and Pyrenees ranges also flow west into the Wimmera catchment basin which terminates with inland lakes (e.g. Lake Hindmarsh). The upper Wimmera River catchment was identified as a high priority project for investment in both the Water Plan and the Wimmera Regional Delivery Plan (2013-2018).

Given the importance of these water supplies to this region, it is important to ensure the catchments are managed in a way that maintains a reliable supply of high-quality water. Important water supply areas are included in recommended new

national parks, regional parks and heritage river area and protection of water quality and yield should be explicitly recognised in the management of these new parks and heritage river area.

RECOMMENDATION

Catchment management for water production and water quality

R10 Management priorities for national, conservation and regional parks, and heritage river areas include the protection of water quality and yield.

Domestic firewood collection

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) conducts two domestic firewood collection seasons (autumn and spring) in state forests each year for the public to obtain free firewood. The location of designated firewood collection sites in which selected trees have been felled by DELWP's contractors is made available through DELWP's website and at regional offices throughout the state. Each person is eligible to collect two cubic metres of firewood per day during the collection season. A total of 16 cubic metres may be collected per household each financial year. It is estimated that a typical household uses less than 6 cubic metres per year. It is illegal to remove standing trees, or sell firewood obtained from domestic collection areas, or collect firewood for use in a commercial enterprise.

In 2011 the Victorian government removed the requirement for a permit or licence to collect domestic firewood from public land. The absence of data previously derived from permit numbers makes it difficult to determine volumes of firewood collected in recent years, and the demographics of people undertaking this activity in the investigation area. In addition, publication of the collection areas via the DELWP website means that there is no longer a requirement to attend a DELWP office to obtain collection site information, and regional staff have limited opportunity to engage with the community on issues associated with firewood collection more generally. Land managers have indicated that there has been an increasing volume of firewood taken over a shorter time period with collectors travelling some distance to access this resource.

Collection of domestic firewood was raised as an issue in written submissions, by stakeholders and in public consultation. Research undertaken by DELWP for the Northern Victoria Firewood and

Home Heating Project suggests that some rural communities are reliant on firewood as a principal low-cost heating source. Several proposals were made to retain domestic firewood collection in specific forests (mostly Wombat State Forest) or the investigation area in general. Others stated that domestic firewood collection should not be allowed in various state forests, especially Wellsford State Forest. The reintroduction of domestic firewood collection permits was also proposed as a way of ensuring the local community has preferential access to this resource and as a way to monitor collection patterns on public land. It was also noted that domestic firewood provided on public land is in competition with commercial operations provided by plantations and woodlots on private land.

Recent information about the preferences of Victorians in relation to firewood collection indicates that the majority of people choose the site to collect firewood based on proximity to where they live, and support priority access for local residents or for those without access to reticulated gas.

DELWP advise that there is some evidence that the current supply of firewood does not meet the requirements of the public at a statewide level. Shortly after the release of the draft proposals paper DELWP released its refreshed strategic policy for domestic firewood management, which enables the application of tools at a local scale to prioritise firewood access to those with the greatest need, in locations where demand exceeds supply. The policy prioritises supply to local communities and groups with limited or no access to reticulated gas who depend on firewood for energy needs, particularly for heating and cooking.

While VEAC acknowledges the demand for firewood from public land does not appear to be satisfied at present and may be increasing, and welcomes DELWP's refreshed policy directions and priorities, it considers that continuing to supply this demand from forests in the investigation area is not likely to be sustainable in the long term. VEAC therefore recommends that in some of the new regional parks or additions, an exception be made to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection during a phase-out period of ten years as an interim measure during which time alternative options are developed (see the recommendations for individual regional parks in chapters 3, 4 and 5). Collection would be restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest. Council notes that existing park management practices prioritise community access to excess debris from science-

based forest health programs.

VEAC recommends that domestic firewood supply from public forests in the investigation area be targeted to local communities most reliant on this resource, especially people on low incomes and without access to mains gas for heating and cooking. Data collected as part of the process of targeting supply in this way would also support compliance activities to discourage illegal collection of large volumes of wood.

RECOMMENDATION

Domestic firewood access

R11 Government implements processes that prioritise access to domestic firewood on public land in the investigation area to local communities most reliant on this resource.

Ecological restoration study

A large majority of submissions expressed concern about the ecological condition of forests in the Wombat, Mount Cole and/or Wellsford areas as a result of their history of intensive timber harvesting, which has left many areas of very dense regrowth. Stakeholders identified the need to actively manage these altered forests to enable them to recover relatively quickly and to a higher quality than would be likely if they are left alone. The Wombat community forestry management project in the early 2000s attempted to determine an agreed approach to silvicultural thinning of dense regrowth with the aim of increasing growth rates in remaining trees, potentially for future selective harvesting.

The practical driver for this recommendation is the need to provide land managers – particularly of the large recommended national and regional parks – with clear guidance on how to efficiently restore the ecological health of altered forests, thereby supporting the achievement of outcomes relating to the protection of natural and Aboriginal cultural values.

The primary focus of an ecological restoration program would be to achieve biodiversity outcomes including the provision of high-quality habitat for the many plants and animals that rely on these forests, and particularly rare and threatened species that have been affected by alterations in forest condition. In addition, the study should consider opportunities to maximise water production and carbon sequestration outcomes (as co-benefits) where possible.

The specific objectives of the treatment programs should be based on Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) benchmarks. EVCs are the standard unit for classifying vegetation types in Victoria. They are described through a combination of floristics, lifeforms and ecological characteristics. Each EVC benchmark expresses the attributes of high-quality vegetation in terms of a subset of typical species in a specific bioregion. They have been developed to assess the vegetation quality of EVCs at the site scale.

A practical research study would build on relevant silviculture research (for timber stand improvement) and ecological thinning research (for improved vegetation structure and composition). An example of the latter is the box-ironbark ecological thinning trial in north central Victoria which commenced in 2003 as a result of a recommendation from the ECC Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation. While some aspects of that trial will be relevant, those ecosystems are very different from the wetter mixed species forests in the Wombat–Macedon and Mount Cole–Pyrenees blocks. Other relevant research includes water production in Victorian catchments, and carbon sequestration research (including data collected from the Wombat forest).

The Central West Victoria ecological restoration study should be informed by experts in forest science, ecological science, hydrology, carbon sequestration, weeds and pathogens, and fire management. Predictive modelling could help assess the likely outcomes of different management strategies (from ‘do nothing’ to combinations of activities such as thinning, burning and supplementary planting for understorey diversity) in different regrowth stages, in conjunction with field trials.

The outputs of the study would include practical management techniques for the main types of regrowth forest in the recommended parks, to inform park management programs. The results of the study will enable the costs and benefits of ecological restoration of the recommended parks to be estimated.

RECOMMENDATION

Ecological restoration study

R12 Government establishes an independent research study to determine the most effective restoration treatments for forests whose structure, composition and ecological function have been altered by a history of intensive logging.

Notes:

The primary objectives would be to achieve Ecological Vegetation Class benchmarks and restore ecological health in regrowth forests.

Biodiversity conservation outcomes are to be prioritised, while also identifying opportunities for maximising water production and carbon sequestration co-benefits.

Outputs of the study would include practical guidance for managers of the recommended parks.

Fire management and research

VEAC heard the concerns of stakeholders about various aspects of fire management on public land in the investigation area, including the ability of current strategies and approaches to protect communities (especially those surrounded by parks or state forests), the appropriateness of current fuel reduction burning regimes for some native plants and animals, promotion of Aboriginal fire (cool burning) approaches, thinning to reduce fire risk (especially in regrowth forests) and the need for further research to be undertaken to determine best practice fire management.

Under the *Forests Act 1958*, DELWP is responsible for bushfire risk management on the land that DELWP and Parks Victoria manage, and on protected public land as described in the Act. DELWP manages bushfire risk according to the *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land 2012* (the Code). The two main objectives outlined in the Code are to:

- minimise the impact of major bushfires on human life, communities, essential and community infrastructure, industries, the economy and the environment; human life will be afforded priority over all other considerations
- maintain or improve the resilience of natural ecosystems and their ability to deliver services such as biodiversity, water, carbon storage and forest products.

The arrangements for bushfire management in Victoria have changed significantly in recent years.

Safer Together is Victoria's new approach to bushfire management and includes a risk reduction target for bushfire management rather than a hectare-based target for planned burning. As a part of *Safer Together*, bushfire risk and risk reduction strategies are considered for the whole landscape, regardless of land tenure (including public and private land).

Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) is the lead agency for bushfire management on public land. FFMVic includes staff from DELWP, Parks Victoria, VicForests and Melbourne Water. Fuel management on private land is carried out through a partnership with the Country Fire Authority, local communities, FFMVic as relevant, and other stakeholders.

VEAC supports the incorporation of multi-objective fire management programs in parks, including ecological and Aboriginal fire (cool burning) management, and recommends that fire research programs continue.

RECOMMENDATION

Fire management and research

R13 That:

(a) bushfire risk in parks and reserves continue to be managed as at present, regardless of land tenure, under DELWP's strategic risk-based approach and according to the *Code of Practice for Bushfire Management on Public Land*

(b) research into improved fire management approaches continue on public land in the investigation area.

2.2 General recommendations for public land use categories

This investigation used the revised public land use categories from VEAC's *Statewide Assessment of Public Land Final Report* (2017). Public land use categories shown on map A and listed in table 6.1 follow the revised classification scheme as far as possible. An outline of the revised scheme is provided in appendix 1 of the draft proposals paper, showing how it aligns with the previous categories and sub-categories. The revised classification scheme has been broadly accepted by government, together with VEAC's recommendations to rewrite Victoria's public land legislation. The revised public land use categories are expected to be included in the relevant new

or amended legislation. In the meantime, where it is relevant, VEAC has indicated in the following general recommendations the current legislation for the public land use category.

Presented below and framed as general recommendations are the purposes and objectives for each public land use category together with activities that are permitted and not permitted. As part of the modernisation of public land use, each category explicitly states that one of the purposes is to protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values.

Where a change from the existing on-ground public land use is recommended for this investigation, it is identified by a unique identification code shown on map A, and listed in appendix 1. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 – covering the Mount Cole–Pyrenees, Wellsford, and Wombat–Macedon blocks respectively – provide a more detailed discussion for each of the specific locations to which these recommended changes apply.

Those less well known, uncontroversial or widespread smaller areas of public land for which no change is proposed, or where the recommendation largely confirms existing use or reservation purpose (i.e. for Crown land) are generally not allocated a specific recommendation number but are clearly depicted on map A (e.g. water frontage, beds and banks reserve; water production reserves; community use reserves; utilities and government services reserves).

In addition to the public land use categories outlined above, there are two types of public land use overlays in the Central West Investigation area: reference areas and heritage river areas. Existing areas are described below and cross-referenced in the chapters for the blocks in which specific areas are located (chapters 3 and 5). VEAC recommends that existing overlays continue for all previously identified reference areas and the Lerderderg River Heritage Area. See chapter 3 for the recommended addition to the existing Wimmera River Heritage Area (recommendation O1).



A. National parks

National parks, state parks and wilderness parks are the foundation of Victoria's protected area system. They are set aside primarily to protect natural values while also providing a diverse range of opportunities for enjoyment, education, recreation and inspiration in a natural setting. They are usually extensive areas, often of national significance, with outstanding natural values and diverse land types and ecological communities contributing to the representativeness of Victoria's protected area system. Harvesting of forest products, extractive activities, grazing by domestic stock, hunting and firearms are not consistent with national park objectives and are generally not allowed. National, state and wilderness parks are exempt from exploration and mining under mineral resources legislation, except for permits and licences issued prior to the establishment of the park.

National parks can attract very high visitor numbers and a wide range of passive and active recreational activities are undertaken, including wildlife and nature observation (including birdwatching), bushwalking, orienteering, sightseeing, picnicking, camping, canoeing and kayaking, bike riding, car touring, mountain and trail biking, fishing, beekeeping at designated sites, environmental education and research. With so many uses and values to protect, careful management planning and zoning of activities in parks is usually required to minimise potential conflicts.

National parks are generally, though not always, larger than state parks but the two categories of parks are otherwise established and managed for the same objectives under the *National Parks Act 1975*. Although national and state parks have the same management intent and level of protection, the objectives of national parks are generally better understood by the public and park visitors. During its recent Statewide Assessment of Public Land, VEAC found that state parks are routinely confused with state forests. For this reason, VEAC recommended that the categories of national park and state park be consolidated. When this is fully implemented, the existing 26 state parks in Victoria will become national parks. There is no change to existing uses in this process. Existing signage and information materials are expected to gradually be updated to reflect this change as they are due for renewal, accompanied by a community information program.

In the recommendations for the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block and the Wombat–Macedon block,

in chapters 3 and 5 respectively, the two existing state parks in the investigation area – Mount Buangor (2498 ha) and Lerderderg (20,469 ha) – are recommended to be incorporated into expanded national parks and a new national park is recommended in the Pyrenees range. An addition to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park has been recommended for part of the Wellsford forest.

As well as the general recommendations below, which apply to all recommended national parks, specific recommendations may apply to individual parks.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for national parks

A That national parks shown on map A (numbered A1 to A4) and described in chapters 3, 4 and 5:

(a) be used to:

- i. permanently protect the natural environment and natural biodiversity along with underlying ecological structure and supporting environmental processes
- ii. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- iii. protect historic sites and values
- iv. provide for ecologically sustainable scientific, educational, inspirational, recreational and visitor opportunities consistent with conserving those values

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- i. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- ii. camping in designated campgrounds and other areas specified by the land manager
- iii. car touring, including four wheel driving, on formed roads and tracks that are open to the public
- iv. trail bike riding on formed roads and tracks that are open to the public
- v. mountain biking and cycling on formed roads and tracks that are open to the public, and on other tracks and paths specified by the land manager
- vi. horse riding on roads and tracks specified by the land manager (see note 1)
- vii. recreational fishing
- viii. apiculture at licensed sites
- ix. research, subject to permit

(c) exclude the following activities:

- i. harvesting of forest products (see note 2)
- ii. grazing by domestic stock
- iii. recreational hunting and use of firearms (see note 3)
- iv. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- v. exploration and mining, other than continuation of operations within existing permits and licences, as approved
- vi. dog walking, except as specified by the land manager (see note 4)

(d) include unused road reserves adjoining parks where appropriate

(e) be added to Schedule 2 to the *National Parks Act 1975*.

Notes:

1. Camping with horses, and grazing and feeding of horses is not permitted.
2. Ecological thinning may be carried out where required for ecological or management purposes: for example, subject to clearly defined, transparent and scientifically supported objectives, to restore ecosystems or to return them to a condition more closely resembling their natural condition.
3. Hunting and use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.
4. Dogs on lead may be permitted in specified visitor areas and along a limited number of specified tracks, in accordance with management plans.
5. Practical access should continue to be provided to existing private land holdings surrounded by the national parks.

B. Conservation parks

Like national parks, conservation parks are part of the protected area system under the National Parks Act, and conserve public land with significant natural and cultural features, including threatened flora and fauna, landscape or other conservation values. In contrast with national parks, the land in conservation parks tends to be less extensive, may be linear in shape such as coastal parks and, depending on their particular character, may be more resilient to a range of compatible uses, particularly a greater range of or more intensive recreational activities.

Conservation parks allow for a range of recreational activities that are consistent with the protection of their particular values: wildlife and nature observation (including birdwatching), bushwalking, orienteering, sightseeing, picnicking, camping, canoeing and kayaking, bike riding, four wheel driving, trail bike riding, cycling and mountain biking, fishing, beekeeping at designated sites, environmental education and research. Compared with national parks, activities such as horse riding (on formed roads and designated trails) may be more widely allowed in conservation parks as specified in park management plans, subject to the local circumstances.

Arising from VEAC's recent Statewide Assessment of Public Land, this public land use category groups together several parks and reserves from across the state with both high conservation and recreation or other values. This category includes 10 of the existing 18 'other parks' listed on Schedule 3 of the National Parks Act. There are no changed uses arising from this grouping of existing areas in this public land use category, and VEAC recommended that local names may be retained for many of these parks. Resource uses generally not permitted in conservation parks include harvesting of forest products, extractive uses, grazing by domestic stock and recreational hunting and use of firearms. Conservation parks are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent required for exploration, mining and searching.

No existing conservation parks are found in the Central West Investigation area. Two new areas are recommended in the Wombat–Macedon block of the investigation area: Hepburn Conservation Park and Cobaw Conservation Park (see chapter 5).



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for conservation parks

B That conservation parks shown on map A (numbered B1 and B2) and described in chapter 5:

(a) be used to:

- i. permanently protect and restore the natural environment and natural biodiversity
- ii. protect features of natural, cultural or scientific interest
- iii. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- iv. enable public recreational and educational use consistent with conserving those values and features above

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- i. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- ii. camping in designated campgrounds and other areas specified by the land manager
- iii. car touring, including four wheel driving, on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- iv. trail bike riding on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- v. mountain bike riding and cycling, on formed roads and tracks open to the public, and on other tracks and paths specified by the land manager
- vi. horse riding on formed roads and tracks specified by the land manager (see note 1)
- vii. recreational fishing
- viii. apiculture at licensed sites
- ix. research, subject to permit

(c) exclude the following activities:

- i. harvesting of forest products (see note 2)
- ii. grazing by domestic stock
- iii. recreational hunting and use of firearms (see note 3)
- iv. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- v. dog walking, except as specified by the land manager (see note 4)

(d) include unused road reserves adjoining parks where appropriate

(e) be added to Schedule 3 to the *National Parks Act 1975*.

Notes:

1. Camping with horses, and grazing and feeding of horses is not permitted.
2. Ecological thinning may be carried out where required for ecological or management purposes, for example, subject to clearly defined, transparent and scientifically supported objectives, to restore ecosystems or to return them to a condition more closely resembling their natural condition.
3. Hunting and use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.
4. Dogs on lead may be permitted in specified visitor areas and along a limited number of specified tracks, in accordance with management plans.
5. Practical access should continue to be provided to existing private land holdings surrounded by the conservation parks.

C. Regional parks

Regional parks provide extensive areas of natural or semi-natural land close to population centres, major tourist routes or in areas otherwise easily accessible to large numbers of people. Closer to Melbourne, regional parks may also incorporate areas of highly modified open space, including revegetated areas, landscaped areas similar to parklands and gardens, former farmland and historic buildings. Regional parks provide for informal recreation for large numbers of people in natural or semi-natural surroundings. Recreational objectives are generally given priority over nature conservation objectives, although significant sites with high conservation values will be protected.

While regional parks vary in their specific values and characteristics, they typically provide an environment where residents and visitors can enjoy a broader range of activities (including dog walking and overnight camping with horses) than are usually allowed in national and conservation parks. Where compatible with recreation, minor resource extraction activities, such as metal detecting and prospecting may also be permitted. These extractive uses are assessed by the land manager for each park and vary depending upon local circumstances and the values present. Regional parks are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent required for exploration, mining and searching.

Arising from VEAC's recent Statewide Assessment of Public Land, this public land use category includes existing regional, metropolitan and forest parks, and some of the 'other parks' in Schedule 3 of the National Parks Act that were not included in the conservation park category. Regional parks are not part of the protected area system because of the management priority for recreation use.

There are two existing regional parks in the Central West Investigation area: Hepburn Regional Park (Aboriginal title) and Macedon Regional Park. Immediately adjoining the Wellsford Block to the west is Bendigo Regional Park which forms a popular parkland surrounding the city of Bendigo.

Recommendations presented in chapters 3, 4 and 5 describe changes relating to the three existing regional parks (including additions to the adjoining Bendigo Regional Park) and new regional parks in the Pyrenees and Wombat forests. These new regional parks will accommodate a broader range of and more intensive recreational uses than would be allowed in the recommended national parks.

In the recommended new Spargo Creek, Blackwood and Fingerpost regional parks in the Wombat–Macedon block and the addition to Bendigo Regional Park in the Wellsford block, the recommendations include an exception to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection (see individual regional park recommendations in chapters 3 and 5). This is recommended to be an interim measure for a phase-out period of ten years, during which time alternative options are developed (see recommendation R11 in section 2.1).

Recommendations for regional parks include the preparation of park management plans to ensure that the values and uses of the parks are protected and enhanced in the future (see individual regional park recommendations in chapters 3, 4 and 5). Many stakeholders and submissions pointed out the need for this more detailed planning to address potentially conflicting uses in these parks.

Hepburn Regional Park, over which Aboriginal title has been granted, has a special status and no changes can be made to the boundaries and category of the land under current legislation (see recommendations R7 earlier in this chapter and C3 in chapter 5). A joint management plan has been prepared for the Dja Dja Wurrung parks by the Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for regional parks (see note 1)

C That regional parks shown on map A (numbered C1 to C7) and described in chapters 3, 4 and 5:

(a) be used to:

- i. provide opportunities for informal recreation for large numbers of people associated with the enjoyment of natural or semi-natural surroundings or semi-natural open space
- ii. protect natural and semi-natural landscapes and scenic values
- iii. protect natural biodiversity to the extent consistent with the above
- iv. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- v. if specified for individual parks, provide for minor resource extraction not incompatible with all of the above, excluding sawlog and pulpwood harvesting

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- i. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- ii. camping (see note 2)
- iii. car touring, including four wheel driving, on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- iv. trail bike riding on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- v. mountain bike riding and cycling on formed roads and tracks open to the public, and on other tracks and paths specified by the land manager
- vi. dog walking
- vii. horse riding on formed roads and tracks specified by the land manager (see note 3)
- viii. recreational fishing
- ix. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- x. apiculture at licensed sites
- xi. research, subject to permit

(c) exclude the following activities:

- i. harvesting of forest products, except where domestic firewood collection zones are specifically identified
- ii. grazing by domestic stock
- iii. recreational hunting and use of firearms (see note 4)

(d) unused road reserves be added to adjoining parks where appropriate

(e) a management plan be prepared for each park

(f) the parks be reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*.

Notes:

1. The general recommendations do not apply to the existing Hepburn Regional Park, over which Aboriginal title has been granted. The Hepburn Regional Park is managed according to the provisions of the Crown Land (Reserves) Act that applied at the time of the grant of Aboriginal title and the Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks; the management framework is similar to these general recommendations for regional parks.
2. While camping is generally allowed in regional parks, it may not be provided in individual parks depending on the characteristics of the land and the patterns of recreation and visitor use.
3. Camping with horses may be permitted in individual parks.
4. Hunting and use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.
5. Practical access should continue to be provided to existing private land holdings surrounded by the regional parks.

D. Nature reserves

Some areas of public land are highly significant for threatened flora or fauna (or both), ecosystems, geological or geomorphological values, and have limited recreational use. Nature reserves as a public land use category was established in VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land (2017) and includes the previous category of nature conservation reserve and two natural features reserve sub-categories of cave, and geological and geomorphological features area, that respectively host these significant natural values.

Nature reserves differ from national parks in that they are generally smaller, often protect specific features, and have a lower level of recreation. Most of the existing reserves in the Central West Investigation area were set aside to conserve nature and may comprise a small area hosting rare or threatened species, or larger areas with plant associations that have specific conservation significance. In the past these areas were generally known as flora reserves, or flora and fauna reserves.

Timber production, stock grazing and resource extraction are not permitted in nature reserves. Intensive recreation is generally excluded, although this can depend on the values of each site. Nature reserves are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent

required for exploration, mining and searching. Compatible education, scientific study and informal recreation is permitted in some nature reserves, depending upon the resilience of the values to be protected. For example, many geological features and many caves may provide for some compatible recreation use.

There are 11 existing nature reserves in the Central West Investigation area ranging in size from Landsborough Nature Conservation Reserve (3380 hectares) to the tiny Macedon (Margaret Street) Flora Reserve. One reserve hosts a site of geological significance at the Bacchus Marsh Trench Nature Reserve (2 hectares).

The final recommendations retain seven of the existing nature reserves unchanged and expand nature reserves at Long Forest by approximately 20 hectares and Ben Major significantly by around 2410 hectares to a total area of some 3230 hectares. VEAC recommends that the two areas that make up the largest existing nature reserve at Landsborough are both included in the recommended Pyrenees National Park (recommendation A2). There are nine new nature reserves proposed; see chapters 3, 4 and 5 for detailed descriptions of these areas.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for nature reserves

D That nature reserves shown on map A (numbered D1 to D18) and described in chapters 3, 4 and 5 according to their specific characteristics:

(a) be used to:

- i. protect significant natural ecosystems, species and/or geodiversity features
- ii. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- iii. provide for low levels of recreational use consistent with strict protection and conservation of those values

(b) generally permit the following activities, where compatible with (a):

- i. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- ii. car touring including four wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain bike riding and cycling on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- iii. apiculture at licensed sites
- iv. exploration and mining for minerals and searching for and extraction of stone resources subject to the consent of the Crown land minister under the relevant legislation (see note 2)

(c) exclude the following activities:

- i. grazing of domestic stock (see note 3)
- ii. harvesting of forest products
- iii. recreational hunting and use of firearms (see note 4)
- iv. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- v. dog walking (see note 5)
- vi. horse riding

(d) be permanently reserved for conservation purposes under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*.

Notes:

1. These general recommendations generally apply for the land use category. Exceptions to these may apply to specific reserves in special circumstances.
2. Exploration and mining provisions arise from nature reserves being 'restricted Crown land' under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.
3. Grazing may be contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control. Off-stream watering can be provided for, where appropriate.
4. Hunting and the use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.
5. On-lead dog walking can continue at D13 Bacchus Marsh Trench Nature Reserve, in accordance with management planning.

E. Bushland reserves

Bushland reserves are typically small, naturally vegetated Crown land reserves in otherwise largely cleared landscapes. They often contain natural features worthy of protection or have landscape or scenic significance. The new bushland reserve category was established in VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land (2017) and comprises those sub-categories of natural features reserve considered part of the protected area system: bushland area, natural and scenic features area and streamside area. Consultation with a broad range of stakeholders indicated that the category 'bushland reserve' was generally better understood than 'natural features reserve,' and captures the nature of the land more clearly. As a result of this aggregation, bushland reserves also include former streamside areas and hilltop areas with ready access, including developed lookouts, picnic areas and visitor facilities (former natural and scenic features areas).

Some of these areas were originally used to provide camping and watering areas for stock. They now play an important role in maintaining habitat connectivity in fragmented landscapes. Although individual bushland reserves are unlikely to contain highly significant natural values, they maintain the distinctive Australian character of the countryside and provide diversity in the landscape. This is particularly the case in areas of intensive agriculture and broad-scale land clearing. Where bushland reserves are accessible, they may also provide opportunities for passive recreation in relatively natural surroundings, although they are generally not developed for active or intensive recreation uses. Those reserves previously comprising streamside areas are typically in scenic and accessible locations adjoining rivers and streams, often where a wider section of public land is intersected by a road or stream crossing. Originally set aside for passive recreation such as picnicking and camping, these areas are also ecologically important, protecting riparian vegetation along watercourses and providing important ecosystem services.

Bushland reserves are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent required for exploration, mining and searching.

Many of the proposed and existing bushland areas in this investigation area reflect a history of past land use (e.g. stock watering or gravel reserves). Although these areas typically do not have highly

significant values, remnant native vegetation and wetlands are of increasing importance for nature conservation. Ecosystem services and landscape function provided by smaller areas of vegetated public land, including bushland reserves, will be more important in the future under increasing ecosystem stresses from projected climate change and the long-lasting impacts of habitat fragmentation (see recommendation R9 relating to landscape connectivity).

There are 69 existing bushland reserves in the Central West Investigation area largely identified in previous LCC and ECC investigations as former natural feature reserve subcategories: 51 bushland areas, four natural and scenic reserves, and 14 streamside areas. While many of these are small reserves, most are larger than one hectare with the largest being Ben More Bushland Reserve (137 hectares) and Lauriston Bushland Reserve (210 hectares). All existing areas are retained as bushland reserves.

There are 19 recommended new bushland reserves, and these are described in chapters 3 and 5.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for bushland reserves

E That bushland reserves shown on map A (numbered E1 to E88) and described in chapters 3 and 5 according to their specific characteristics:

(a) be used to:

- i. protect and restore species and habitats including remnant vegetation and areas with value as habitat linkages
- ii. protect and maintain scenic features and landscapes
- iii. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- iv. provide for educational and recreational opportunities and controlled low-intensity exploitation of natural resources not incompatible with the above

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- i. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- ii. car touring including four wheel driving, trail bike riding, mountain bike riding and cycling on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- iii. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- iv. apiculture at licensed sites
- v. exploration for minerals and mining, subject to decisions on particular cases (see note 2)
- vi. horse riding
- vii. dog walking as specified by the land manager

(c) exclude the following activities:

- i. grazing of domestic stock (see note 3)
- ii. harvesting of forest products
- iii. recreational hunting and use of firearms (see note 4)

(d) be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*.

Notes:

1. These general recommendations generally apply for the land use category. Exceptions to these may apply to specific reserves in special circumstances.
2. Exploration and mining provisions arise from bushland reserves being 'restricted Crown land' under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.
3. Grazing may be contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control. Off-stream watering can be provided for, where appropriate.
4. Hunting and the use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.

F. Historic reserves

This investigation area has extensive gold mining and timber harvesting history, as well as a long and rich Aboriginal history. Many townships and settlements have rapidly appeared and disappeared in areas of abundant natural resources, and layers of cultural heritage can be seen at many sites. Work is being undertaken to identify places that share Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal significance. A joint working group of the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and the Heritage Council of Victoria established in 2013 seeks to enhance the recognition of Aboriginal and shared cultural heritage values to better reflect Victoria's history.

Several studies have been undertaken across the region to identify and assess historical and cultural heritage values, including studies by VEAC's predecessors. Many areas of public land host historically significant places that are managed as part of a broad range of uses and values. In an area adjoining the Central West Investigation area, Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park provides a unique and highly significant cultural landscape with protection and management under the National Parks Act. Both historic reserves and the national heritage park are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent required for exploration, mining and searching.

Historic reserves are areas of public land containing important relics or historical associations ranging from large areas with several historic themes represented to small reserves that may illustrate a single theme. This land

use category permits a broad range of uses, depending upon the specific identified values and how resilient the historic fabric is to the type of use. Historic reserves generally encourage visitor use and public access and, for infrastructure or buildings, re-use for a new compatible purpose. For many of the larger historic mining landscapes across the state there is also a public safety requirement to be balanced with providing public access to view and appreciate heritage. For public land managers, heritage protection issues can also arise where historic mining areas are revisited in a search for new resources utilising more advanced exploration and extraction techniques.

VEAC's Historic Places Investigation (2016) found that collectively historic places on public land have been neglected and there is significant potential for financial liability, particularly for historic buildings and infrastructure on public land. In some circumstances, an absence of active management is an acceptable way of dealing with intangible heritage or places to be retained as ruins. In other instances, aging built assets such as historic buildings can become unsafe for re-use by the community and will readily fall further into disrepair if unoccupied.

Across this investigation area, there are 12 small township historic reserves containing historic buildings, and two larger reserves covering historic gold mining landscapes: Cornish Hill in Daylesford (46 hectares), and Percydale Historic Reserve (1457 hectares) located in the Pyrenees range comprising one of the larger historic reserves across the state. No changes are proposed for these existing historic reserves.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for historic reserves

F That historic reserves shown on map A (numbered F1 to F13) and described in chapters 3 and 5 according to their specific characteristics:

(a) be used to:

- i. protect places, features and objects of historic cultural interest
- ii. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- iii. provide for recreation and education associated with appreciation and understanding of the history of the place, feature or object
- iv. provide for controlled low-intensity exploitation of natural resources not incompatible with all the above and, where relevant (see note 1):

(b) areas with remnant natural vegetation or habitat value be protected

(c) searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority be permitted

(d) apiculture at licensed sites be permitted

(d) low impact exploration for minerals and mining be permitted, subject to consideration of the impact on values in (a) for each application or case

(e) timber harvesting be excluded

(f) grazing be excluded (see note 2)

(g) adjoining unused road reserves be included, where appropriate

(h) if not already appropriately reserved, be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*.

Notes:

1. Not all sites contain values suitable for recreation or other uses described above.
2. Grazing may be contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control.

G. State forests

Across Victoria state forests comprise some two-thirds of public land. These extensive areas of native forest and other vegetation are a major source of hardwood timber and other forest products, as well as supporting biodiversity and a broad range of recreational uses.

State forests retain many areas with important natural and cultural values. Many of these values are identified in forest management planning through zoning or informal forest reserves, or management prescriptions. These planning tools integrate conservation of important natural or cultural values with timber harvesting and resource extraction. As large vegetated areas of public land, state forests also provide important ecosystem services including protection of water supply catchments, provision of threatened species habitat and landscape connectivity.

VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land (2017) identified that state forests are currently managed under both the Forests Act and the Land Act, depending on whether the area is reserved forest or unreserved Crown land. To reduce this complexity, it was recommended that all state forest be administered under one act and be reserved under a single land tenure with the provisions currently applying to reserved forest.

Recreation is an important use of state forests, including camping, horse riding, four wheel driving, car rallies, trail bike riding, mountain biking and recreational hunting.

Firewood for local communities was an issue frequently raised in community consultation and written submissions (see recommendation R11 in section 2.1 above). Domestic firewood will continue to be made available in state forests within the investigation area recommended to be retained. Council acknowledges the reduction in the area of state forest arising from draft recommendations in this report will reduce the available area and volume for domestic firewood collection, and has recommended that domestic firewood continue to be available over a phase-out period of ten years in some specified areas of the proposed new regional parks in the Wombat forest and Pyrenees range and the recommended regional park addition in the Wellsford forest (see recommendations C2.

Commercial harvesting of timber will continue in the Mount Cole State Forest, Pyrenees State Forest and some other state forests in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for state forests

G That state forests shown on map A (numbered G1 to G6) and described in chapters 3 and 5:

(a) be used to:

- i. provide for ecologically sustainable production of hardwood timber and other forest products
- ii. supply water and protect catchments and streams
- iii. protect natural biodiversity, scenic and landscape values, and historic cultural values
- iv. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- v. provide for public recreational and educational uses where this does not conflict with the above

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- i. harvesting of forest products, including domestic firewood collection where identified by the land manager
- ii. bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- iii. camping including dispersed camping
- iv. car touring, including four wheel driving, on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- v. trail bike riding on formed roads and tracks open to the public
- vi. mountain bike riding and cycling on formed roads and tracks open to the public, and on other tracks and paths specified by the land manager
- vii. horse riding on formed roads and tracks and overnight camping with horses
- viii. dog walking and overnight camping with dogs
- ix. recreational hunting and use of firearms
- x. recreational fishing
- xi. searching for minerals under a miner's right or tourist fossicking authority
- xii. apiculture at licensed sites
- xiii. licensed grazing by domestic stock
- xiv. mineral exploration and mining
- xv. extraction of gravel, sand, or road-making materials
- xvi. research, subject to permit.

H. Water frontage, beds and banks reserves

Most Crown water frontages outside large blocks of public land are located in largely cleared catchments and were set aside in 1881. The water frontage generally comprises a linear area of land adjacent to a waterway or lake, and the stream bed and banks. Crown reserves are typically 20 or 40 metres average width along major rivers and their tributaries; however, some land alienated before 1881 includes stream frontages and stream beds within private land. In some areas, public land adjoining streams is within state forest or parks.

In some areas the beds and banks of watercourses (those that form a boundary between allotments) may be the only land deemed to have remained Crown land (under the Water Act 1905 and subsequent Acts). Discontinuous public water frontages occur on several major rivers and streams across the region including the Wimmera, Avoca, Loddon, Campaspe and Coliban rivers.

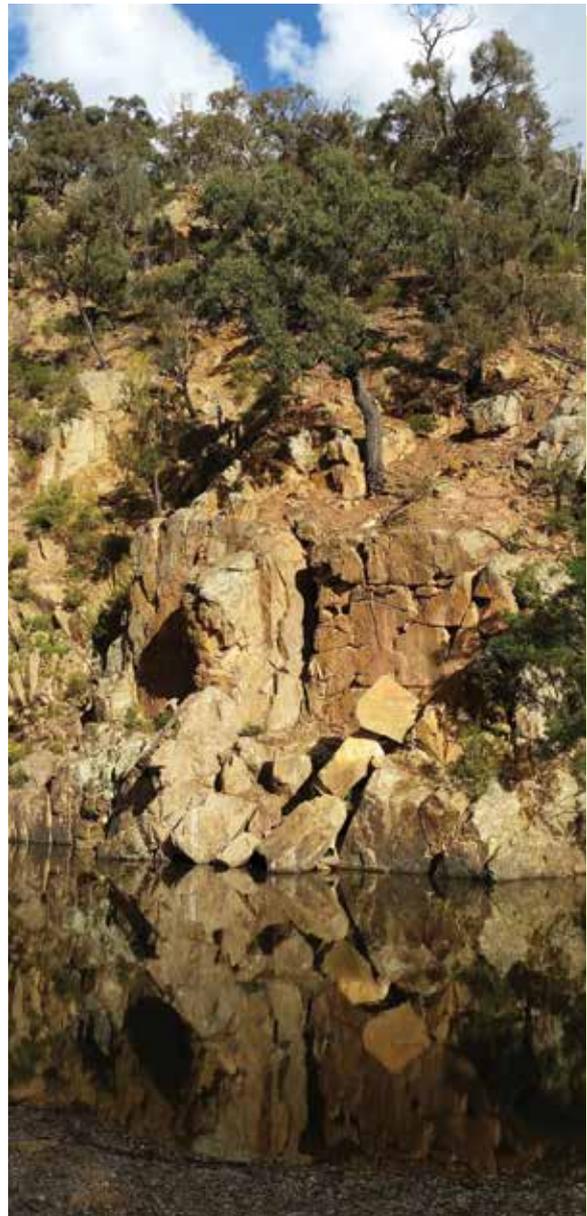
The total area of Crown water frontages statewide is estimated as some 100,000 hectares. In the Central West Investigation area there are approximately 1893 hectares of Crown water frontages with much of this area held under grazing licence or, in some locations, riparian management licence. Crown land water frontage licences are typically issued for five-year periods with the next scheduled renewal due in October 2019.

There are costs associated with grazing of water frontages. Unrestricted stock access to rivers is the principal cause of degradation of river frontages. Recognition of the environmental values of riparian (river or stream frontage) land grew in the 1970s and increased further in the 1980s, and there have been substantial changes in the management of grazing on water frontages. Water frontage licences were traditionally issued for grazing but are now also issued for riparian management, to recognise that all or part of the frontage is being managed to protect and improve the riparian environment. The condition of riparian vegetation is a major determinant of in-stream habitat and water quality.

Water frontages are a distinctive part of the landscape and are both biologically and agriculturally productive. Often the main or the only linkages between larger remnants of native vegetation in heavily cleared or degraded landscapes, these narrow corridors provide avenues for plants and animals and their populations to migrate, disperse and intermingle. In addition, stream frontages support ecosystems

generally not found elsewhere, such as riparian forests and swamps, and they often support more species in greater abundance than other parts of the landscape. This may be important as climate change leads to changes in the distribution of habitats available to flora and fauna.

Water frontage, beds and banks reserves are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* with ministerial consent required for exploration, mining and searching.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for water frontage, beds and banks reserves

H That water frontage, beds and banks reserves shown on map A:

(a) be used to:

- i. protect and restore native vegetation and habitat for native fauna
- ii. protect adjoining land from erosion, and provide for flood passage
- iii. protect water quality
- iv. where necessary provide for the passage of artificial flows of water stored within the catchment or transferred from other catchments
- v. protect scenic and landscape values, and historic cultural values
- vi. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- vii. provide opportunities for public recreational and educational uses

(b) generally permit the following activities at a level that does not conflict with (a):

- i. licensed grazing by domestic stock
- ii. recreational hunting of game species where appropriate
- iii. where a Riparian Conservation Licence has been issued for a Crown land frontage, recreational use by the public for activities such as walking, nature observation or fishing
- iv. sand and gravel extraction where this is consistent with (a) above, and where necessary for bed and bank stability

(c) programs to gradually restore frontages on currently grazed, degraded, eroded or salt-affected streambanks, where frontage vegetation is degraded or not regenerating and to protect natural, cultural, recreational and scenic values or water quality be implemented by catchment management authorities, in cooperation with adjoining landholders

(d) water frontage, beds and banks reserves be managed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, in conjunction with landholders and community groups (with appropriate management responsibilities assigned through licensing or appointment as committees of management).

I. Water production reserves

Land in the catchment of or adjacent to a water supply storage reservoir or offtake is described as water production reserve. This includes current water production areas, water storage, water distribution and some drainage areas. Across this region, areas used for water supply and production are a mixture of Crown land and public authority freehold land. Regardless of the underlying land tenure, these areas of public land provide an important and ongoing resource for the community. The state's water authorities and corporations manage these water supply areas to ensure the community and industry have access to high quality water. Any other uses are permitted by the manager on a case-by-case basis and only where they do not compromise the primary purpose.

The general recommendations for water production reserves presented here do not impede the site-specific decisions made by water authorities for each of these water reservoirs and catchment areas in line with relevant legislation such as the Safe Drinking Water Act 2003. In addition, any

Crown land reserved for public purposes included in this public land use category is to be managed primarily for water supply and production.

Some of the largest water production reserves in the investigation area hosting water storage areas are located in the Wombat–Macedon block:

- Merrimu (32,215 ML), Rosslynne (25,365 ML) and Pykes Creek (22,120 ML) reservoirs managed by Southern Rural Water
- Upper Coliban (37,770 ML), Lauriston (19,790 ML) and Malmsbury (part of 12,035 ML) reservoirs managed by Coliban Water
- Bostock (7455 ML) and Korweinguboorra (2325 ML) reservoirs managed by Barwon Water
- Moorabool (5900 ML) Reservoir managed by Central Highlands Water.

Recommendation R10 (see section 2.1) addresses more broadly the importance of protecting forested public land in the investigation area as a means of meeting the goals of Victoria's Water Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for water production reserves

I That water production reserves including storage areas, diversion works and associated facilities shown on map A:

(a) be used to:

- i. protect water supply and operation of the water supply system
- ii. protect and restore habitat for native flora and fauna, including their requirements for food, passage/movement and reproduction
- iii. protect features of historic interest
- iv. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- v. provide for appropriate recreational activities and levels of use as determined by the land manager
- vi. provide for flood passage and drainage requirements of adjacent land and, where necessary provide for the passage of artificial flows of water stored within the catchment or transferred from other catchments
- vii. maintain streams in a stable condition using environmentally sound techniques

(b) adjoining unused road reserves be included, where appropriate

(c) Crown land which is not already appropriately reserved be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* for water supply or water distribution and drainage purposes and be managed by the appropriate water authority

(d) public authority freehold land be managed in accordance with the above.

J. Community use reserves

This broad grouping of public land uses comprises both developed facilities and open space areas for community use such as organised sports and recreation, environmental education, campgrounds including youth or school camps, rail trails, local parklands and gardens, picnic areas or roadside stops, and mineral springs. Community use reserves also include built structures in many townships such as state schools and education facilities, public halls and other publicly accessible community buildings such as libraries, mechanics institutes and scout or guide halls.

Community use reserves may be a mixture of Crown land and freehold land owned by state government agencies or departments and sometimes by local councils. In many locations these areas are managed seamlessly by local government, or by the local community as a Crown land committee of management.

Some larger or undeveloped areas of community use reserves may also contain areas of native vegetation, rare or threatened species or culturally important values. The Central West Investigation area hosts several important examples, notably Hanging Rock (see chapter 5).

RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for community use reserves

J That community use reserves shown on map A, according to their specific characteristics:

(a) be used to:

- i. promote appropriate use of the land by the community
- ii. provide means of access by the general public where compatible with (i)
- iii. provide facilities for community use
- iv. protect the landscape, the natural environment and features of cultural significance where compatible with the above
- v. protect the rights and interests of Traditional Owners, native title holders and Aboriginal Victorians, and their cultural values
- vi. provide for a specific use (for example: parkland and garden, recreation, recreation trail, school, public building, environmental education, mineral springs)

(b) features of cultural significance, natural surroundings and the local character and quality of the landscape be maintained or restored where relevant, and where compatible with (a)

(c) harvesting of forest products, hunting, and stone extraction as defined in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* be excluded

(d) adjoining unused road reserves be included, where appropriate

(e) Crown land which is not already appropriately reserved be reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*

(f) public authority freehold land be managed in accordance with the above.

Note:

1. Where appropriate, a committee of management may be appointed or continue to manage community use reserves in accordance with the general recommendations J.

K. Utilities and government services reserves

Public land provides a major contribution to delivery of government services, particularly utilities and essential services such as transport infrastructure. Public utilities and government services include: roads and railways; electricity and gas installations; communications and survey fixtures; supply of earth resources including minerals, stone, gravel and sand; hospitals; police stations and court houses; water and sewerage services; correctional services and cemeteries.

Across the Central West Investigation area, some 17,080 hectares is currently allocated to these uses, more than 82 per cent of which are road reserves. Land used primarily for utilities and services often have significant secondary uses, particularly for nature conservation and recreation (e.g. roadside vegetation or compatible recreation uses).



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for utilities and government services reserves

K That utilities and government services reserves for purposes such as transport, electricity and gas, communications, cemeteries, water, sewerage and earth resources as shown on map A:

(a) be used to:

- i. provide for the provision of the public utility or government service
- ii. provide for a specific use (for example: road, railway, port, airport, municipal building, government office or depot, hospital, prison, production of stone, gravel or sand, cemeteries and crematoria)

(b) new services, or utility sites and easements or lines, not be sited in or across national parks, conservation parks or nature reserves

(c) railways, roadsides and other service and utility sites be managed to protect natural values including remnant native vegetation and habitat, Aboriginal cultural heritage values and historic heritage values, as far as practical

(d) road reserves identified as supporting native vegetation of high conservation significance (including for connectivity) be managed to protect, improve and where practical enhance their biodiversity values

(e) complementary community uses be allowed at the discretion of the relevant utility or government agency

(f) should public land used for utilities and government service purposes no longer be required, it be assessed for its natural, recreational and cultural heritage values, and capability for other public uses.

Notes:

1. Not all roads and unused road reserves may be distinguishable on map A.
2. There are numerous government roads across the investigation area that contain remnant native vegetation. These should be managed to protect this vegetation, as required under relevant legislation, and where it does not interfere with the primary objective of the road for transport.

L. Uncategorized public land

Uncategorised public land is a broad category for which no specific use is recommended. It may include land with no primary use identified in the categories described above, land that is not well known and requiring assessment to determine if public land attributes are present, or it may be land no longer required for a discontinued use. It may include residual areas of plantation land not subject to a lease or licence, and revegetation areas.

Uncategorised public land is subject to assessment to determine if any public land attributes are present on the site, and either assigned to an appropriate land manager or disposed of through sale. DELWP carries out assessments of Crown land parcels which may be unreserved or reserved for an obsolete purpose. Public land attributes are the resources (or natural, recreational, heritage

or scenic values) present on a site that would generally require its retention as Crown land. Crown land that has minimal or no such values or resources is considered surplus to government needs and may be disposed of. In certain circumstances, and after native title assessments have been made, this may be undertaken as sale or as a land exchange for nearby freehold land that has high values.

The *Victorian Government Land Transactions Policy 2016* and the *Victorian Government Strategic Crown Land Assessment Policy 2016* provide the framework for the sale of surplus government land.

RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for uncategorised public land

L That public land other than that recommended for specific uses in this report, or subject to previous government-accepted specific land use recommendations:

- (a) be uncategorised public land
- (b) existing legal use and tenure continue for the time being
- (c) Crown land be assessed and either:
 - i. retained and assigned to a Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning land manager if it has public land values, or
 - ii. disposed of if assessed as having no public land values and as being surplus to current and future community needs
- (d) surplus public authority land be:
 - i. assessed for its potential to meet alternative public uses
 - ii. retained as public land where certain public land values are identified, or
 - iii. disposed of if assessed as having no public land values and as being surplus to current and future community needs.

M. Land leased or licensed for plantation purposes, and plantation

Across the investigation area there are over 6600 hectares of public land used for softwood plantations, including some small areas for school plantations.

The vast majority of this area comprises softwood plantations of the former Victorian Plantations Corporation (VPC). In 1998 VPC was sold to HVP Plantations, including a licence to the land vested with VPC granting HVP the right to operate a plantation business on that land in perpetuity. The former VPC land remains Crown land and, for completeness, the land is mapped and included in the total area of public land. However, given the perpetual nature of the licence, no recommendations are made over the land which has effectively been privatised.

Across Victoria there are many small areas, typically established as Crown land reserves but also by a range of other mechanisms, that remain as school plantations. The areas were set aside many years ago and delegated to the Minister for Education. In the Central West Investigation area there are more than a dozen school plantations occupying a total of some 65 hectares.



RECOMMENDATION

General recommendation for land leased or licensed for plantations, and plantations

M That plantations shown on map A continue under present use and management.

Notes:

1. Former VPC land licensed to HVP Plantations with the right to operate a plantation business in perpetuity are beyond the scope of these recommendations.
2. Some 139 hectares of leased Macedon plantation land is scheduled to be harvested and returned to the Crown for inclusion in the Macedon Regional Park (see recommendation C7).

Public land use overlays

In addition to the general recommendations for public land use categories provided above, public land use overlays govern the management of specific areas and values on public land. Designations under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* and the *Reference Areas Act 1978* apply in the Central West Investigation area and are described below. There are no recommended changes to the existing overlays.



N. Reference areas

Reference areas are relatively small areas of public land containing viable samples of one or more land types that are relatively undisturbed. Reference areas recommended by VEAC and its predecessors the LCC and ECC, and accepted by government, are proclaimed under the Reference Areas Act 1978 to maintain natural systems as a scientific reference to enable comparative study of modified and unmodified lands. The primary management objective provides for natural processes to continue undisturbed as far as possible. There are 144 reference areas in Victoria.

There are five existing reference areas in the investigation area, all in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion. Four areas overly existing state parks (see map A). Musk Creek Reference Area is within the existing Wombat State Forest and recommended as the new Wombat–Lerderderg National Park (see recommendation A3 and map A). Table 4.1 in the draft proposals paper updated the information for the existing reference areas in the investigation area in terms of the ecological vegetation classes (EVCs) represented.

RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for reference areas

N That the following areas totalling 1202 hectares shown on map A (numbered N1 to N5) be used as reference areas proclaimed under the Reference Areas Act 1978:

N1 Buangor (69 hectares)

N2 Musk Creek (91 hectares)

N3 Ruths Gully (261 hectares)

N4 Ah Kows Gully (475 hectares)

N5 Pyrete Range (306 hectares)

O. Heritage rivers

Heritage river areas are proclaimed under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* to protect those river corridors with outstanding values for current and future generations. The criteria to be met are outstanding scenic, recreational, cultural and ecological values.

There is an existing heritage river in the investigation area along the Lerderderg River (see recommendation O2 in chapter 5). VEAC recommends a new heritage river area along the upper reaches of the Wimmera River in Mount Cole forest (see recommendation O1 in chapter 3).

RECOMMENDATION

General recommendations for heritage rivers

O That the areas shown on map A be used as heritage river areas in accordance with the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992*.



3. Mount Cole–Pyrenees block

3.1 Overview

The Mount Cole–Pyrenees block lies approximately 200 kilometres west of Melbourne and is dominated by two ranges with the Pyrenees to the north and Mount Cole and Mount Buangor to the south (see figure 3.1). Between these ranges lie flatter, largely cleared land with several small areas of public land and state forests to the east and south of the block.

Mount Cole State Forest is situated northwest of Beaufort and is a one-hour drive from Ballarat. There are several picnic and camping areas throughout the forest and it is a popular location for a range of activities including bushwalking, camping, horse riding, four wheel driving and cycling. The forest abuts the Mount Buangor State Park where visitors can also enjoy low impact activities such as picnicking, bushwalking and camping at designated spots. The Pyrenees State Forest is located further north and a greater distance from regional hubs and Melbourne, and so offers a more remote visitor experience while still providing many picnic and camping options. The area is increasingly recognised as a wine growing region, with visitors often combining recreation with visiting vineyards on the northern side of the range.

The southern or Mount Cole section of the block has a wetter climate and contains more productive forests for timber. Extensive timber harvesting occurred from the 1850s to the 1910s when cutting ceased due to over-harvesting. Although harvesting resumed in the 1940s, much of the regrowth from the early 1900s remains uncut. Although early prospectors worked across the landscape most gold mining occurred in the Raglan goldfield between Beaufort and the Mount Cole State Forest, and remains of this mining can be seen in this area, e.g. at Musical Gully.

The northern part of this block is characteristic of the Goldfields bioregion with low hills and alluvial plains mixed with higher ranges such as the Pyrenees. Relatively poor soils, lower rainfall

and steep slopes make this area less productive for timber, although the forests were heavily cut for gold mining from the 1850s. Many remnants of gold mining can still be found in the forest, particularly around the Percydale Historic Reserve.

The Mount Cole–Pyrenees block has a total area of 165,788 hectares, of which approximately 54,760 hectares or 33 per cent is public land. The main public land units of the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block are:

- Pyrenees Range State Forest (14,765 hectares)
- Mount Cole State Forest (8909 hectares)
- Landsborough Nature Reserve (3380 hectares)
- Mount Buangor State Park (2498 hectares)
- Ben Major State Forest (1852 hectares)
- Waterloo State Forest (1695 hectares)
- Glenmona State Forest (1694 hectares)
- Percydale Historic Reserve (1457 hectares)
- Mount Lonarch State Forest (1161 hectares)
- Landsborough Hill Nature Reserve (1063 hectares)
- Trawalla and Andrews state forests (1062 hectares)
- Ben Major Nature Reserve (820 hectares)
- Musical Gully and Camp Hill state forests (833 hectares).

The LCC's North Central Study made recommendations over the northern section of the block including the Pyrenees and Glenmona state forests and the Percydale Historic Reserve. Mount Cole area and the surrounding forests were covered in the LCC's 1982 Ballarat Study which recommended the Mount Buangor State Park and the existing Ben Major Flora Reserve. Much of the Pyrenees State Forest and surrounding area were reviewed in ECC's Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation (2001); the southern side of the Pyrenees State Forest was not included in this investigation.



The Mount Cole–Pyrenees block is an area of interest for several Traditional Owner groups. There is some complexity in boundaries for these groups as well as significant areas of shared interests (see section 5.2 of the draft proposals paper). The Djandak reports are available on VEAC’s website and contain the details of the Aboriginal community engagement project activities and outcomes.

The Mount Cole–Pyrenees block falls within the Rural City of Ararat, Pyrenees Shire and Central Goldfields Shire.

Further information on values and current uses of public land in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block are documented in chapter 5 of the draft proposals paper.

3.2 Community views

The wide range of views that VEAC heard during stakeholder engagement activities are summarised in the consultation summary published in April 2019 and available on VEAC’s website. Also see section 1.

For the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block, issues that received consideration included:

- Traditional Owner concerns for the protection of the Wimmera River and Fiery Creek and their catchments
- new information regarding natural values in the area, including the location of patches of Mount Cole Grevillea and older forests
- impacts of draft recommendations on local timber mills and their sawlog supply, and the provision of domestic firewood
- popularity and continuing access to the area for many recreational activities, in particular four wheel driving, hunting, trail biking, horse riding, car rallies, prospecting, hang gliding and paragliding, as well as outdoor education
- concerns for protection of the Beeripmo walk
- implications of the revocation of the Mount Cole game sanctuary and increased deer hunting on other bush users and adjacent landholders.

In this final report, VEAC has recommended that some important values in the Mount Cole forest (such as Mount Cole Grevillea habitat, older forest patches, the west-flowing upper reach of the Wimmera River and the Beeripmo walking track) be protected through further additions of 1378 hectares to the previously recommended additions of 1406 hectares to the existing Mount Buangor State Park.

Protection of the Wimmera River along the eastern boundary of the Mount Cole forest is recommended through an addition to the existing Wimmera River Heritage Area (outside the investigation area).

To maintain the opportunity for commercial timber harvesting in the area, 3099 hectares in the Pyrenees forest is now recommended to be retained as state forest (compared with the draft recommendations) and the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park and Pyrenees National Park have been reduced in size.

3.3 Final recommendations

The final recommendations for the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block have been developed in order to balance conservation of natural and cultural values with the demand for recreation, continued commercial timber harvesting and some domestic firewood collection.

National parks are recommended on the southern and western slopes of the Pyrenees and at Mount Buangor where additions to the current state park around Buckingham Creek, the Beeripmo walking track and upper headwaters of the Wimmera River will create the Mount Buangor National Park.

Significant areas of state forest are recommended to be retained at Mount Cole, the Pyrenees range, Mount Lonarch, Musical Gully and Camp Hill, Trawalla and Andrews and part of Glenmona. These state forests would continue to allow for commercial timber harvesting and a wide range of recreational activities including deer hunting, with the recommended removal of the game sanctuary at Mount Cole.

On the northern side of the Pyrenees the recommended regional park and the existing Percydale Historic Reserve would allow for most recreational activities including those not permitted in national parks such as recreational prospecting. In addition, the state forest would continue to provide for commercial timber harvesting, domestic firewood collection, recreational prospecting and hunting.

A bushland reserve of approximately 100 hectares is recommended for the northern half of Glenmona forest in addition to 16 smaller bushland reserves across the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block. These bushland reserves will provide vital linkages between the larger intact patches of native vegetation in the block.

These recommendations, along with those for smaller blocks of public land in the block, are shown on map A and detailed below.

The recommendations make a significant contribution to achieving a comprehensive, adequate and representative reserve system by increasing the protection of a number of priority Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs):

- in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion – Herb-rich Foothill Forest (4971 hectares added to protected areas, mostly in the recommended Pyrenees and Mount Buangor national parks), Grassy Dry Forest (4333 hectares, mostly in the recommended Pyrenees National Park and additions to the Ben Major Nature Reserve) and Grassy Dry Forest/Heathy Dry Forest Complex (1548 hectares, mostly in the recommended Waterloo Nature Reserve)
- in the Goldfields bioregion – Grassy Dry Forest (4539 hectares, mostly in the recommended Pyrenees National Park) and Herb-rich Foothill Forest (567 hectares, mostly in the recommended Pyrenees National Park).
- The recommendations also substantially improve protected area representation of several other priority EVCs:
- in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion – Valley Grassy Forest (170 hectares, mostly in the recommended additions to the Ben Major Nature Reserve) and Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland (117 hectares, mostly in the recommended Waterloo Nature Reserve)
- in the Goldfields bioregion – Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland (186 hectares, mostly in the recommended Pyrenees National Park).

Most recreational activities will continue to be allowed in the recommended national parks. Higher-impact recreational activities or extractive uses will be able to continue in the recommended regional park, the existing historic reserve and/or areas of state forest. See fact sheets and other materials on VEAC's website for more information.

New national park areas would not be available for new extractive, exploration or mining licences. Existing extractive, mining and exploration licences in new national park areas would continue, according to the provisions in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* and the *National Parks Act 1975*.

In 2017, the Victorian government broadly accepted the recommendation in VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land for rationalising and consolidating the system of public land use categories. The new categories have been adopted in the following recommendations.

Of particular relevance for this investigation are the following statewide changes:

- revised national park category includes national park, state park, wilderness park
- new conservation park category includes many National Parks Act Schedule 3 'other parks'
- revised regional park category includes regional park, metropolitan park, forest park
- revised nature reserve category includes nature conservation reserve and natural features reserve sub-category geological and geomorphological features area
- revised bushland reserve category includes natural features reserve sub-categories bushland area, natural and scenic features area, and streamside area.

The recommendations for the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block are provided below.

A1 Mount Buangor National Park

The recommended Mount Buangor National Park covers an area of 5282 hectares and includes the existing Mount Buangor State Park (2498 hectares) and an addition of 2784 hectares (31 per cent) of adjoining Mount Cole State Forest. This would extend the area of the existing state park to the north west around Buckingham Creek, and to the east around and south of the upper headwaters of the Wimmera River to cover the entire Beeripmo walking track. The park would also protect natural values such as the endangered Mount Cole Grevillea which occurs in the current Mount Buangor State Park and in the Fiery Creek catchment.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The six bee sites in the existing state park and eight bee sites in the recommended additional area (which together would form the new Mount Buangor National Park) would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

Any existing extractive, mining or exploration licences at the time of establishment of the recommended Mount Buangor National Park would continue. The recommended national park would be exempt from new exploration and mining licences, except as provided for in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act* and the *National Parks Act*.

There are no current earth resource tenements in the recommended Mount Buangor National Park. Part of the area (Wimmera catchment and the upper reaches of adjacent catchments to the south) is subject to an application for an exploration licence; the total area subject to application extends from Elmhurst almost to Lexton.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended Mount Buangor National Park. These activities are currently not allowed in the existing state park or special protection zones of the existing state forest.

The recommended national park contains forests that are generally of high value for sawlog harvesting over the next 20 years. Lower elevations are generally only suitable for firewood. Around 20 per cent of these forests are currently in special protection zones.

Grazing

There are currently no licences for grazing in the area of the recommended Mount Buangor National Park.

Recreation

Recreational hunting and prospecting would not be allowed in the recommended Mount Buangor National Park. These activities are not permitted in the existing state park meaning that the changes to these uses are limited to the new national park areas (currently part of the Mount Cole State Forest). As with the rest of the Mount Cole forest, the recommended national park is of little interest for prospecting and deer hunting is currently not permitted, although VEAC is recommending that it be permitted in the recommended area of Mount Cole State Forest to be retained (see recommendation G5 on page 62).

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding; that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning. Council expects that most of the current network of roads remains open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

Hang gliding and paragliding would not be affected by the recommended Mount Buangor National Park.

Activities involving non-native animals, such as horse riding and dog walking, are generally non-conforming uses in national parks but are

accommodated in specific areas set aside in some national parks. Council envisages that these activities be allowed to continue in specific designated areas within the national park additions, determined through management planning that involves public consultation, with dogs restricted to limited specific areas (such as near particular picnic areas or places near adjoining residents with few alternatives for exercising dogs) and horse riding more widely permitted on roads and tracks open to the public. Some sections of car rallies may be partially accommodated in the national park according to current legislation and policies.

RECOMMENDATION

A1 Mount Buangor National Park

That the area of 5282 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for national parks on page 29.

A2 Pyrenees National Park

The recommended Pyrenees National Park covers 15,126 hectares of land on the southern and western flanks of the Pyrenees range. The steep slopes, rugged gullies and generally poor vehicle access in the recommended park make for a large area of relatively undisturbed mixed species forests with extensive patches of mature eucalypts. The new park would protect a significant area of the under-represented Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Grassy Dry Forest EVCs, as well as populations of the highly restricted Pyrenees gum among many other threatened species.



Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The 28 bee sites in the recommended Pyrenees National Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There are two current exploration licences covering the easternmost parts of the recommended Pyrenees National Park. Two applications for exploration licences cover the remainder of the recommended national park.

Extractive, mining and exploration licences current at the time of establishment of the recommended national park would continue and be renewable subject to Government approval unless they lapse. The recommended Pyrenees National Park would be exempt from new extractive, exploration and mining licences.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest produce) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended Pyrenees National Park other than in coupes that have been cut but not harvested at the time of park establishment, where completion of the coupes – that is, collection of wood on the ground – would be allowed for up to two years after park establishment. Domestic firewood collection could also be allowed for the same period from areas recently commercially harvested where there is remaining firewood.

Domestic firewood would be available from the nearby area of 3099 hectares recommended to be retained as the Pyrenees State Forest.

The forests recommended for the Pyrenees National Park are generally low to medium value for sawlogs although there are some patches of higher value forests, mostly at higher elevations. Some of these patches are in remote areas and of low strategic value for wood products. The remoteness and steepness of many areas also reduces their suitability for domestic firewood.

Grazing

There is one licence for grazing covering 1.9 hectares in the area of the recommended Pyrenees National Park located on the southern side of the Pyrenees range north of Glenpatrick. Grazing by domestic stock would not be allowed in the national park and this licence would be terminated.

Recreation

Recreational hunting and prospecting would not be

allowed in the recommended Pyrenees National Park. The most prospective parts of the Pyrenees Range are in the adjoining recommended regional park, state forest and historic reserve where prospecting would be allowed. Hunting would be allowed in the recommended state forest.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding; that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning. Council expects that most of the current network of roads remains open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

Competitive sections of car rallies are generally not allowed in national parks, but transport sections through the recommended national park would be allowed. There are substantial areas of state forest, regional park and bushland reserve in the block where competitive sections of car rallies can occur subject to existing provisions for permitting such events.

While not always allowed in national parks, horse riding would be accommodated in the recommended park on roads and tracks in specific areas subject to management planning. Horse riding will also be allowed to continue in adjacent areas such as the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park and parts of the Pyrenees forest recommended to be retained as state forest.

Dog walking would generally not be allowed in the Pyrenees National Park, with ample alternative opportunities nearby on other public land. For example, the Cameron Track campground (located on the boundary between the recommended national park and state forest) will be retained in the existing state forest allowing for camping with dogs and other uses that are currently enjoyed at the campground. Dogs may be allowed on lead in a restricted number of visitor areas, if specified through management planning.

RECOMMENDATION

A2 Pyrenees National Park

That:

(a) the area of 15,126 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for national parks on page 29 and

(b) domestic firewood collection cease after the current domestic firewood coupes are completed.

C1 Pyrenees Regional Park

The recommended Pyrenees Regional Park (2016 hectares, reduced from 4165 hectares in the draft recommendations) is located on the northern slopes of the current Pyrenees State Forest and consists mostly of depleted forest EVCs within the Goldfields bioregion. It will continue to provide access to a wide range of popular recreational opportunities in the area such as prospecting, dog walking and car rallies.

The draft recommendations proposed that domestic firewood collection and some harvesting of minor forest produce be allowed in the regional park. As a result of the availability of 3099 hectares of adjoining state forest in these final recommendations it is now recommended that wood product harvesting not be permitted in the recommended regional park, except to complete current domestic firewood coupes.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The three bee sites in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

Two current exploration licences cover small areas of the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park (on the eastern side) and an application has been lodged for an exploration licence that would cover most of the rest of the recommended new regional park. There are no mining licences in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park.

Any existing earth resource tenements in the recommended new regional park would continue unchanged. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park other than in coupes that have been cut but not harvested at the time of park establishment, where completion of the coupes – that is, collection of wood on the ground – would be allowed for up to two years after park establishment. Domestic firewood would be

available from the adjacent area of some 3099 hectares recommended to be retained as the Pyrenees State Forest.

The area recommended as regional park ranges from more productive mixed species forests at higher elevations to less productive but more valuable box-ironbark forests at lower elevations. The latter includes some favoured areas for firewood, while the higher forests are preferred for sawlogs but of lesser value than the areas recommended to be retained as Pyrenees State Forest.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park.

Recreation

Recreational hunting would not be allowed in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park. All other existing recreational uses, including recreational prospecting and horse riding, would be permitted.

The Waterfalls Picnic Area and the Frasers Trail Bike Visitor Area are both included in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park so that most of the current uses of these facilities can continue.

RECOMMENDATION

C1 Pyrenees Regional Park

That:

- (a) the area of 2016 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and
- (b) domestic firewood collection cease after the current domestic firewood coupes are completed.

D1 Existing nature reserve

RECOMMENDATION

D1 Lexton Nature Reserve

That the area of 260 hectares shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D2 – D7 New nature reserves and addition to existing nature reserve

D2 Ben Nevis Nature Reserve

The recommended Ben Nevis Nature Reserve contains the spectacular rocky northern flanks and peaks of the Mount Cole range. It consists of 1088 hectares (about 12 per cent) of the current Mount Cole State Forest. Most of the recommended reserve is currently designated Special Protection Zone, and there are no records of harvesting on DELWP's logging history maps.

Nearly half of the recommended nature reserve is high priority Grassy Dry Forest EVC, with smaller areas of threatened Hills Herb-rich Woodland and Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland EVCs along the lower edges. These habitats support threatened animals such as powerful owl and brush-tailed phascogale. Rare and threatened flora species include shiny tea-tree which is confined to rocky outcrops on Ben Nevis, Mount Buangor, Mount Langi Ghiran and the Grampians.

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Ben Nevis Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – one existing bee site is unaffected
- earth resources – no current tenements although an exploration licence immediately abuts reserve along its border with private land; new tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act
- grazing – no current licences for grazing; no new licences would be granted
- recreational activities such as picnicking, hang gliding, paragliding, bushwalking
- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Ben Nevis Nature Reserve:

- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection, noting that there has been very little harvesting of wood products in the area in recent decades
- horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting.

RECOMMENDATION

D2 Ben Nevis Nature Reserve

That the area of 1088 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D3 Moonambel South Nature Reserve

The recommended 53 hectare Moonambel South Nature Reserve protects one of the largest areas of currently uncategorised public land in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block. The recommended reserve supports good quality Goldfields dry forest vegetation on a steep, somewhat rocky ridge, with endangered Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland EVC along the lower western side.

The recommended nature reserve is well connected with other vegetated areas (including smaller bushland reserves and the Middle Creek corridor) in the landscape. It provides an important habitat 'stepping stone' between the Pyrenees range and Kara Kara National Park and Redbank Nature Conservation Reserve to the north for the threatened Victorian temperate woodland bird community.

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Moonambel South Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – currently no bee sites
- earth resources – currently one application for an exploration licence and no other tenements; earth resource tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.
- grazing – no current licences for grazing; no new licences would be granted
- recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study, bushwalking
- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

- The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Moonambel South Nature Reserve:
- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection, noting that there has been

no recorded harvesting of wood products in the area in recent decades if at all

- horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting, noting that there is little known current use.

RECOMMENDATION

D3 Moonambel South Nature Reserve

That the area of 53 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D4 Tanwood South Nature Reserve

The recommended Tanwood South Nature Reserve is situated on the edge of an arm of the Victorian Volcanic Plains bioregion that extends along the flatter parts of the Avoca River valley. The recommended reserve contains five hectares of Grassy Woodland EVC which is endangered in this bioregion, with remnants mostly confined to productive private land in the district.

The high quality vegetation is dominated by mature eucalypts and features important habitat elements such as hollows, large fallen logs and organic litter on the forest floor. The recommended reserve is less than two kilometres from Percydale Historic Reserve, and forms part of a mosaic of remnant vegetation between the Pyrenees and Kara Kara ranges that provides habitat for species comprising the threatened Victorian temperate woodland bird community.

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Tanwood South Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – one existing bee site is unaffected
- earth resources – no current tenements; new tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act
- grazing – no current licences for grazing; no new licences would be granted
- recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study, bushwalking
- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off

road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Tanwood South Nature Reserve:

- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection, noting that there has been no recorded harvesting of wood products in the area in recent decades if at all
- horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting, noting that there is little known current use.

RECOMMENDATION

D4 Tanwood South Nature Reserve

That the area of five hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.



D5 Ben Major Nature Reserve

The existing 820 hectare Ben Major Flora Reserve is contiguous with Chute State Forest (also known as Fortes Bush – 557 hectares) and Ben Major State Forest (1852 hectares). Most of Ben Major State Forest is designated Special Protection Zone with the remainder Special Management Zone. The northern part of Chute State Forest is Special Protection Zone. Timber values are generally lower than on the Mount Cole and Mount Lonarch ranges to the west.

The recommended 3229 hectare Ben Major Nature Reserve adds the Chute and Ben Major state forests to the existing flora reserve. The entire area displays a consistent vegetation pattern dominated by the high priority Grassy Dry Forest EVC with smaller areas of threatened Valley Grassy Forest. Ben Major State Forest also has one of the largest patches of threatened Hills Herb-rich Woodland remaining on public land in the district, and areas of mature forest with a very old and long-unburnt austral grasstree understorey. Rare and threatened species include Ben Major grevillea which is extremely limited in its distribution, Yarra gum and powerful owl.

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Ben Major Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – 11 existing bee sites are unaffected
- earth resources – one current exploration licence covering the southwest corner of the recommended nature reserve and an application for an exploration licence over the remainder; tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act
- recreational activities such as picnicking, hang gliding, paragliding, bushwalking
- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Ben Major Nature Reserve:

- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection
- horse riding, dog walking, recreational prospecting and hunting

- grazing – there are three current water frontage licences in the southwest corner of the recommended additions to the nature reserve; no new licences would be granted.

Competitive sections of car rallies are generally not allowed in nature reserves, but transport sections through the recommended nature reserve would be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

D5 Ben Major Nature Reserve

That the area of 3229 hectares shown on map A including additions totalling 2409 hectares be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D6 Waterloo Nature Reserve

The Waterloo State Forest is a small steep range covered mainly with depleted Grassy/Heathy Dry Forest Complex vegetation. It features a suite of parallel valleys that fall west onto the plain and support the endangered Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland EVC. It forms the eastern edge of the cluster of vegetated ranges in the Beaufort district, with particularly close links to Ben Major State Forest.

The recommendation to recategorise the 1695 hectare Waterloo State Forest to nature reserve reflects the current special protection zone over the whole area. The forest has not been well surveyed for biodiversity but powerful owl has been recorded here.

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Waterloo Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – four existing bee sites are unaffected
- earth resources – one current exploration licence covering the west side of the recommended nature reserve and an application for an exploration licence over the northern part; tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act
- grazing – no current licences for grazing; no new licences would be granted
- recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study, bushwalking

- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Waterloo Nature Reserve:

- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection
- horse riding, dog walking, recreational prospecting and hunting.

Competitive sections of car rallies are generally not allowed in nature reserves, but transport sections through the recommended nature reserve would be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

D6 Waterloo Nature Reserve

That the area of 1696 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D7 Rosyth South Nature Reserve

The recommended Rosyth South Nature Reserve contains 13 hectares of Grassy Woodland EVC which is threatened in the Goldfields bioregion; this is one of the largest blocks remaining on public land. It is in very good condition with a well-developed woodland structure, mature eucalypts with hollows, large dead hollow trees still standing, a sparse grassy understorey and a good fallen wood and litter layer on the ground. An ephemeral creek bed runs through the recommended reserve and feeds a small dam on private land adjacent to the northeast corner of the block.

The recommended reserve provides an important 'stepping stone' of mature grassy woodland in the Bet Bet Creek catchment, complementing the dry forest vegetation types to the east (Lexton Nature Reserve) and west (Ben More and Amphitheatre bushland reserves).

Current uses and implications

There would be very little or no change to the following uses in the area of the recommended Rosyth South Nature Reserve:

- apiculture – no existing bee sites
- earth resources – no current tenements; new

tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act

- grazing – no current licences for grazing; no new licences would be granted
- recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study, bushwalking
- access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The following uses would not be allowed in the recommended Rosyth South Nature Reserve:

- commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection, noting that there has been no recorded wood product harvesting in the area in recent decades if at all
- horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting, noting that there is little known current use.

RECOMMENDATION

D7 Rosyth South Nature Reserve

That the area of 13 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.



E1 – E30 Existing bushland reserves

The 30 existing bushland reserves E1 to E30 (see appendix 1 for complete list) in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block contain native vegetation and natural values in a largely cleared landscape. They range in size from 0.6 to 137 hectares and provide valuable habitat connectivity between larger intact areas of public land.

RECOMMENDATION

E1 – E30 Bushland reserves

That the areas totalling 572 hectares shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for bushland reserves on page 37.

E31 – E48 New bushland reserves

Eighteen new bushland reserves are recommended, 16 of which are 10 hectares or smaller (see appendix 1 for complete list). Most of the smaller recommended bushland reserves are currently uncategorised public land with important natural values such as depleted EVCs and remnant vegetation.

The largest new bushland reserve is the recommended Glenmona Forest Bushland Reserve (E36) north of the Pyrenees Highway at 984 hectares. About 139 hectares of the recommended reserve is currently in three special protection zones in the state forest. The Glenmona forest area is mostly box-ironbark forest with under-represented woodland EVCs along creek lines and two Large Old Tree Sites. The southern half of the forest is recommended to remain as state forest.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

Existing bee sites in the recommended new bushland reserves would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

Any existing earth resource tenements in the recommended new bushland reserves would continue unchanged. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended new bushland reserves, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended new bushland reserves. The exception to this would be in the recommended Glenmona Forest Bushland Reserve for coupes that have been cut but not harvested at the time of reserve establishment, where completion of the coupes – that is, collection of wood on the ground – would be allowed for up to two years after park establishment. Domestic firewood would be available from some 11,900 hectares recommended to be retained as state forest in the block.

Grazing

Grazing of domestic stock is generally not allowed in bushland reserves (except where contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control) and existing licences for grazing, including water frontage licences, would be terminated.

Recreation

Most recreational activities (including horse riding and recreational prospecting) would be able to continue in the recommended bushland reserves. Recreational hunting would not be allowed in the new bushland reserves. In larger bushland reserves, camping may be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

E31 – E48 Bushland reserves

That the areas totalling 1081 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for bushland reserves on page 37.



F1 – F4 Existing historic reserves

There are currently four historic reserves in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block, including the Percydale Historic Reserve (1457 hectares). The remaining three historic reserves are the former Avoca and Beaufort courthouses and former Avoca police residence and magazine. See appendix 1 for details.

RECOMMENDATION

F1 – F4 Historic reserves

That the areas totalling 1458 hectares shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for historic reserves on page 39.

G1 – G6 State forest

Council recommends retention of areas of state forest in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block to provide for timber harvesting and a range of recreational activities including some, such as prospecting, that are not compatible with protected areas.

Mount Cole provides some of the most productive forests for timber harvesting in this region and is popular with many recreational users. VEAC's recommendations retain more than 50 per cent (or 5037 hectares) of Mount Cole State Forest and most of the areas zoned for timber production. The recommended revocation of the Mount Cole game sanctuary removes the prohibition on hunting and will provide increased opportunities for deer hunting in the state forest. Areas most intensively used for recreation and outdoor education are now mostly included in the recommended national park where hunting and firearms are not allowed.

The final recommendations have been changed since the draft proposals paper and now retain 3099 hectares of state forest in the Pyrenees range, helping to supply commercial sawlogs and minor forest produce and domestic firewood in the area.

Other state forests that are recommended to be retained are Mount Lonarch, Musical Gully-Camp Hill, Trawalla-Andrews and the southern section of Glenmona forest. See appendix 1 for the complete list.

RECOMMENDATION

G1 – G6 State forest

That:

- (a) state forest totalling 11,901 hectares shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for state forests on page 41 and
- (b) in accordance with recommendation R8, the Mount Cole Game Sanctuary be revoked and deer hunting be allowed.

H Water frontage, beds and banks reserves

These reserves are described in detail in section 2.2 on page 42 of the draft proposals paper for the investigation, and generally comprise a linear area of land adjacent to a waterway or lake, and the stream or lake bed and banks. There are 1092 hectares of existing water frontage, beds and banks reserves in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block which are recommended to be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

H Water frontage, beds and banks reserves

That that the existing water frontage, beds and banks reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for water frontage, beds and banks reserves on page 43.

I Water production reserves

Water production reserves include water storage areas. There are 138 hectares of water production reserves in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block which are recommended to be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

I Water production reserves

That the existing water production reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for water production reserves on page 44.

J Community use reserves

Community use reserves are primarily used for recreation, education and other community purposes including buildings in public use such as schools, public halls, libraries and museums. There are 48 existing community use areas covering a total of 307 hectares in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block which are recommended to be retained: 20 recreation reserves, ten parklands and gardens reserves, and 18 buildings in public use. Community use areas are described in more detail in section 2.2 on page 45 of the draft proposals paper for the investigation.

RECOMMENDATION

J Community use reserves

That the existing community reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for community use reserves on page 45.

K Existing utilities and government services reserves

Public land supports public utilities and essential services such as transport, energy, water and sewerage, waste disposal, telecommunications and government services. There are numerous utilities and government services located on public land, such as roads and railway lines, government offices and depots, hospitals, prisons, cemeteries, communications installations, drainage and sewerage works. Some areas with a primary utilities or services purpose such as road and rail reserves have significant biodiversity values and make a major contribution to ecological connectivity, especially in predominantly cleared landscapes. Where practical and safe, some utilities and government services areas may also be used for recreation or other complementary community purposes. For example, recreation trails may be constructed along easements, pipelines or roadsides.

In the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block, there are 2148 hectares of existing utilities and government services reserves, and an estimated 5338 hectares of government road reserves.

RECOMMENDATION

K Utilities and government services reserves

That that the existing utilities and government services reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for utilities and government services reserves on page 46.

L Uncategorized public land

Uncategorised public land is public land for which no specific use is recommended (see section 2.2 on page 47 for more details). There are approximately 160 hectares of remaining uncategorised public land in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block for which VEAC is not making specific land use recommendations. It includes land that, after assessment, may be disposed of if it has no public land values and is surplus to current and future community needs. It may include public authority freehold land.

RECOMMENDATION

L Uncategorized public land

That the existing uncategorised public land shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for uncategorised public land on page 47.

M Plantations

Plantations are described in section 2.2 on page 48 of the draft proposals paper for the investigation, including a description of the status of licensed HVP Plantations land. There are 1760 hectares of plantation land in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block, mostly licensed HVP land. There are seven school plantations ranging in size from less than one hectare to 17 hectares.

RECOMMENDATION

M Plantations

That the existing plantations shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for plantations on page 48.

Note: The recommendation does not apply to licensed HVP plantation land (see section 2.2 on page 48).

Public land use overlays: reference area

There is one existing reference area in the Mount Cole–Pyrenees block of 69 hectares located in the Mount Buangor State Park (see map A, recommendation N1). Recommendations for existing reference areas are in section 2.2 on page 49.

Public land use overlays: heritage river area

O1 Wimmera River Heritage Area (addition)

During consultation on the draft proposals paper, VEAC heard about the importance of the Wimmera River both for Aboriginal cultural values and ecological values. Traditional Owners emphasised the cultural importance of the Wimmera River and proposed increased protection for the river and its headwaters. Many stakeholders argued that the Wimmera River and its headwaters be protected to improve stream condition, to protect instream biodiversity and to reduce protected area shortfalls for underrepresented EVCs.

As a result Council is making a new recommendation for an addition to the existing Wimmera River Heritage Area near the eastern boundary of the Mount Cole forest. The existing Wimmera Heritage River Area runs along the river starting about 100 kilometres downstream from investigation area and terminates approximately 200 kilometres further downstream at Lake Agnes in Wyperfeld National Park. The recommended addition covers a seven kilometre reach in the existing Mount Cole State Forest – from the source of the river to the point where it leaves the state forest. It includes the beds and banks and extends for 200 metres on both sides of the river or to the nearest private land boundary, whichever is closer to the river. The uppermost three kilometres of the recommended addition to the heritage river area overlies the recommended addition to the Mount Buangor National Park, and the four kilometre reach downstream overlies the current and recommended Mount Cole State Forest.

Complementing this protection, smaller tributaries of the Wimmera River are protected in the recommended Pyrenees National Park (A2), Ben Nevis Nature Reserve (D2) and western side of Mount Buangor National Park (A1).

Current uses and implications

The current uses and implications for the part of recommended river heritage area overlying the recommended Mount Buangor National Park are covered on page 54. That part of the river heritage area in the recommended Mount Cole State Forest is currently special protection zone which partly explains why there are relatively few current uses and implications of this recommendation – there is no harvesting of wood products, licensed grazing or water diversions, a single existing bee site, and the recommended area forms only a small part of a large application for an exploration licence. The only implications of the recommended change would be that no new water diversions would be permitted and new earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) in the area overlying state forest would be subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.

The *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* provides for a management plan to be prepared for all or part of a heritage river area.

RECOMMENDATION

O1 Wimmera River Heritage Area (addition)

That the area of 277 hectares shown on map A be added to the Wimmera River Heritage Area described in Part 6 on Schedule 1 of the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* and be used as a heritage river area, and a management plan be prepared for the addition in partnership with Traditional Owners.



4. Wellsford block

4.1 Overview

Land use history in the Wellsford block is typical of that across the goldfields of northern Victoria: alienation of Crown land to private ownership of the flatter, wetter areas with better soils, predominantly for agriculture, and retention as Crown land of the areas with poorer soils – generally drier, not as flat, rockier or more gravelly and often gold bearing. Apart from being of lesser interest for farming, initially areas were retained as Crown land to mitigate over-cutting of forests needed to supply wood for mining purposes, to line shafts, power boilers and so on. With the decline of mining, the forests were principally used to produce wood for a wider range of uses such as sawlogs, railway sleepers and firewood. Recent decades have seen recreation and nature conservation emerge as major uses of these public lands.

As a result of this history, public land in the Wellsford block sits on the slightly more elevated terrain in the middle of the block, surrounded by private land on the flatter, more fertile terrain, and extending up the creek valleys that drain from the forest such as Yankee and Five Mile creeks to the north and Kangaroo Creek to the south. Public land and native vegetation in the block are largely coincident, with little native vegetation on private land – mostly adjoining the public land, particularly in the upper reaches of the incising creek valleys.

The Wellsford block (see figure 4.1) covers 9262 hectares, as follows:

- Wellsford State Forest (7100 hectares)
- Bagshot Water Reserve (3 hectares)
- various road reserves (241 hectares)
- private land (1918 hectares)

The current categorisation of public land units is as recommended in the ECC Box-Ironbark final report in 2001 (although the uncategorised public land and road reserves were not specifically identified), reaffirming the LCC North Central final recommendations of 1981. In other parts of the Bendigo area ECC recommendations resulted in significant changes to public land use, notably the establishment of Greater Bendigo National Park (17,000 hectares) and Bendigo Regional Park (8800 hectares), as well as a variety of state forests, nature reserves and other smaller units (see figure 4.1).

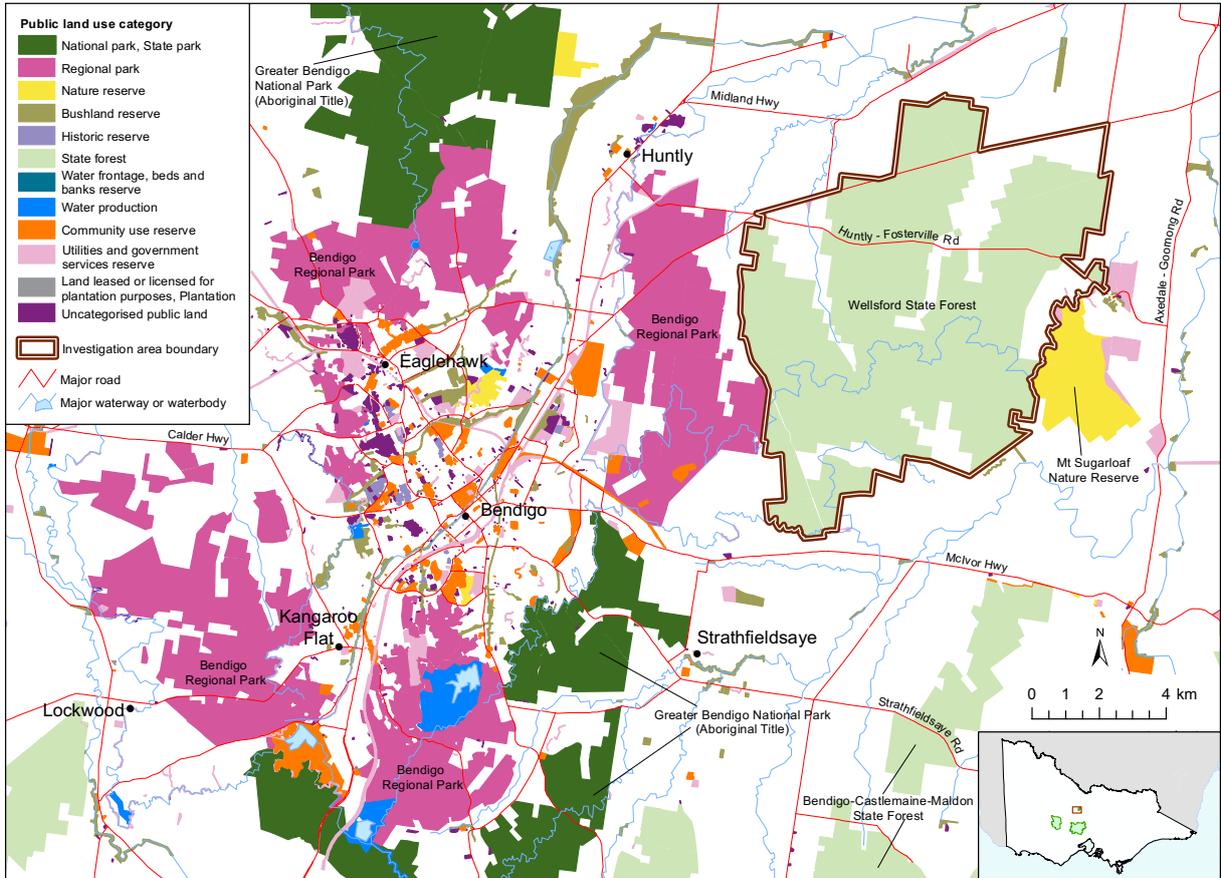
The Wellsford block is situated entirely within the Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA) area. Dja Dja Wurrung hold Aboriginal title over the nearby Greater Bendigo National Park, one of six parks and reserves granted as Aboriginal title to be jointly managed in partnership with the State. The Djandak reports for this investigation are available on VEAC's website and contain the details of the Aboriginal community engagement project activities and outcomes.

The Wellsford block lies within the City of Greater Bendigo.

Values and current uses of public land in the Wellsford block are documented in chapter 6 of the draft proposals paper for the investigation.



Figure 4.1 Wellsford block in the context of the public lands surrounding Bendigo



4.2 Community views

The wide range of views that VEAC heard during stakeholder engagement activities are summarised in the consultation summary published in April 2019 and available on VEAC's website. Also see section 1.7 of this report.

For the Wellsford block, issues that received consideration included:

- Traditional Owner values and interests
- natural values and biodiversity of the area
- concerns from adjacent landholders around impacts of draft recommendations on ongoing recreational use (especially horse riding and dog walking), businesses and use of rural properties
- dog sledding events
- domestic firewood cutting and collection.

In this final report, VEAC has replaced the draft recommendation for the nature reserve with a recommended addition to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park. This change, which provides for horse riding to be allowed, addresses local community concerns about recreational access, and responds to local community preferences for the natural values of the area to be protected in a national park.

4.3 Final recommendations

There is considerable overlap of the key areas for natural values with recreational uses in the Wellsford block, making it challenging to accommodate the range of interests and community views.

VEAC's final recommendations are for the addition of almost half of the Wellsford forest (the eastern and northern parts) to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park, and the larger remaining area to be added to the existing Bendigo Regional Park (both existing land units located adjacent to the Wellsford forest and outside of the investigation area). Compared to the recommendations in the draft proposals paper, the recommended regional park is unchanged in extent and the area recommended as national park is identical to that of the previously recommended nature reserve. The change from nature reserve to national park partially addresses community input seeking national park status for the whole block and provides greater scope for horse riding and – to a more limited extent – dog walking in this area of high environmental value.

As with the draft recommendations, the intention of these recommendations is to focus protection

of key natural values and compatible recreation in the recommended national park and a broader range of recreational activities in the recommended regional park. The recommendations would improve protection of a range of natural values, focusing on those that are most under threat and most difficult to protect by other means: the most concentrated areas of habitat for many key threatened species, all mapped large old tree sites and fauna refuge sites and all individually identified large old trees (and their surrounding habitat).

The recommendations also improve protected area representation in the Goldfields bioregion of Box Ironbark Forest (addition of 3037 hectares) and Grassy Woodland (48 hectares) EVCs. See VEAC's website for a full account of EVC representation in relation to the final recommendations.

This recommended increase in protection accords with the aspirations of the Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owners. By separating key areas with high natural values to some extent in the recommended national park, these recommendations facilitate focusing more intensive recreational activities in the recommended regional park. Future planning and on-ground management and development of infrastructure would have the goal of accommodating increased recreational use of the forest and reduced conflict with natural values and between recreational users.

VEAC has recommended that some of the new regional parks in the investigation area, including this addition in the Wellsford block, allow for some domestic firewood collection (not usually allowed in regional parks) over a ten-year phase out period with collection targeted to local users and restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest. The recommended phase-out provides a period of time during which alternative arrangements can be made.

The main impacts of these recommendations would be the cessation of commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products), a reduction over time in the availability of domestic firewood, removal of licensed grazing from two areas (45 hectares in total), and the cessation of some activities in the recommended addition in the national park such as dog sledding, prospecting and recreational hunting.

The recommendations would have no impact on water production, unused road licences, educational uses, apiculture and a range of recreational activities compatible with national

parcs, such as bushwalking, forest driving, camping and nature study. Horse riding and limited dog walking could continue subject to management planning, and mining and exploration could continue under existing tenements while they remain current. As the medium-sized trees in the recommended regional park and national park mature over the long term, there would be benefits from increased nectar production for apiarists as well as the diverse range of nectarivorous animals that depend on this resource.

The final recommendations for the Wellsford block are provided below.

A3 Greater Bendigo National Park (addition)

The recommended addition to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park encompasses most of the highest strategic biodiversity values in this block and responds to community feedback both for national park status and ongoing recreational access for activities such as horse riding. It would maintain existing public land units already understood by the community and simplifies management arrangements in the area.

Threatened species habitat would be protected in the recommended national park addition. Key species include the brush-tailed phascogale, lace monitor, Ausfeld's and whirrakee wattles and a range of woodland birds such as swift parrot, chestnut-rumped heathwren, brown tree creeper, hooded robin, speckled warbler and crested bellbird. The few remaining large trees in this block and their associated habitat features especially fallen timber and open, patchy forest structure would be protected. The addition of large areas of Box Ironbark Forest EVC to the protected area system through the national park additions would meet the notional targets for this widespread EVC. Importantly, it would do so in one of the largest, best condition box-ironbark forests in Victoria. The recommended additions to the national park would also improve protected area representation of several highly depleted EVCs that occur in small patches near the periphery of the forest.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The eight existing bee sites distributed across the recommended addition to the Greater Bendigo National Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

Mining and exploration licences current at the time

of establishment of the recommended national park addition would continue and be renewable subject to Government approval unless they lapse. The recommended addition to the Greater Bendigo National Park would be exempt from new exploration and mining licences. Currently two exploration licences cover more than half the recommended addition, and part of the Fosterville gold mining licence – but not the open pit itself – extends into the northeast corner of the block. There are currently no earth resource tenements in the area around the mining licence which is about 24 per cent of the Wellsford block. This area is currently under review and is scheduled to be available for licences in 2019. This review is in response to recent recognition of increased mineral potential of this area and it is not VEAC's intention that it be interrupted by implementation of this recommendation.

It is recommended that the addition to the national park be reserved to a depth of 100 metres (consistent with most of the existing Greater Bendigo National Park), to allow for approved underground mining beyond this depth. While new exploration and mining licences would not be allowed in the park, mining under the recommended park may require some infrastructure (notably air shafts and vents) within the park. Such infrastructure should be kept to a minimum, but not unreasonably excluded.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended addition to Greater Bendigo National Park.

The value of these forests for sawlogs varies from medium to high, tending to increase further south. There has been relatively little harvesting in recent decades.

Grazing

Addition to the Greater Bendigo National Park would result in the termination of the two grazing licences (totalling about 45 hectares) in the relevant area.

Recreation and tourism

Many popular recreational activities in the area including picnicking, forest driving, nature study, bushwalking and orienteering are not affected by national park status and would continue.

There would be no change to access for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle

riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

Recreational hunting and prospecting would not be allowed in the recommended national park addition.

Activities involving non-native animals, such as horse riding and dog walking, are generally non-conforming uses in national parks but are accommodated as exceptions in specific areas set aside in some national parks. It is recommended that horse riding continue to be permitted broadly on roads and tracks within the recommended addition to the national park, subject to management planning that may need to address the protection of specific values or potential conflicts between horse riding and some recreational activities such as trail bike riding.

It is recommended that dogs continue to be allowed on lead in a restricted number of designated visitor areas, along a limited number of roads and tracks as specified through management planning.

Some sections of car rallies may be partially accommodated in the national park according to current legislation and policies.

RECOMMENDATION

A3 Greater Bendigo National Park (addition)

That the area of 3152 hectares shown on map A, to a depth of 100 metres, be added to the existing Greater Bendigo National Park beyond the investigation area and be used in accordance with the general recommendations for national parks on page 29.

Note: It is intended that the provisions associated with the 100 metre depth limit in much of the existing Greater Bendigo National Park apply to this recommended addition.

C2 Bendigo Regional Park (addition)

The recommended addition of a large part of the Wellsford forest to the adjoining Bendigo Regional Park would expand the recreational opportunities of this popular regional park into an area that, with additional facilities and increased promotion, interpretation and education, has the potential for increased recreational opportunities. Other than recreational hunting all existing recreational uses could continue. Some domestic firewood collection would continue during a ten-year phase out period

from areas carefully selected to improve the ecological structure of the forest. Supply would be prioritised for local communities most reliant on the resource (see recommendation R11).

The recommended regional park addition also includes several important natural and historic values such as habitat for threatened species, underrepresented EVCs and the Gonyah old distillery site. The regional park would require careful planning, particularly to protect values susceptible to disturbance from the recreational activities for which the park is recommended.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The ten existing bee sites distributed across the recommended addition to the Bendigo Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

Two current exploration licences covering almost all of the recommended addition to the Bendigo Regional Park can continue subject to Government approval. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended addition to the regional park, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended regional park addition.

Recreation and tourism

Most activities currently taking place in the Wellsford forest would continue unaffected by this recommendation. Recreational prospecting, horse riding, car rallying, defence training and dog walking would continue. There would be no change to access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding – that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads and tracks as specified through management planning; off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land in the state.

Recreational hunting would not be allowed in the recommended addition to the regional park.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest products) would not be allowed in the recommended additions to Bendigo Regional Park.

The forests recommended for Bendigo Regional Park are of high value for sawlog production, although many areas have been recently harvested and will not be suitable for harvest again for at least several decades.

The final recommendation includes an exception to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection as part of a ten-year phase-out process with collection targeted to local users most reliant on the resource, and restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest.



RECOMMENDATION

C2 Bendigo Regional Park (addition)

That

(a) the area of 3950 hectares shown on map A be added to the existing Bendigo Regional Park beyond the investigation area and be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and

(b) up until June 2029, domestic firewood collection be allowed in areas where this will promote the growth of large trees and improve ecological condition, but not be extended to existing parts of the Bendigo Regional Park beyond the Central West Investigation area.

M Existing utilities and government services reserves

There are 244 hectares of existing utilities and government services reserves in the Wellsford block: 241 hectares of road reserves (used and unused) and the 3.3 hectare Bagshot Water Reserve. VEAC is recommending that existing public land use continue in these areas.

RECOMMENDATION

M Utilities and government services reserves

That the utilities and government services reserves shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for utilities and government services reserves on page 46.



5. Wombat–Macedon block

5.1 Overview

The public land in the Wombat–Macedon block includes the largest and most varied of the forests scattered between the Grampians and eastern highlands, all of which are now separated from each other by cleared private land. The Wombat–Macedon block is linked to Mount Disappointment to the east, and a number of species in the block are at their extreme western limit.

The Wombat–Macedon block is an important water catchment and supply area. The Great Dividing Range forms the watershed or boundary between the drainage basins of rivers which drain inland to the Murray-Darling system or southward to Bass Strait, with the Loddon, Coliban and Campaspe rivers flowing inland and the Moorabool, Werribee, Lerderderg and Maribyrnong rivers flowing south to the coast.

While much of the forested area in the Wombat–Macedon block has been heavily logged in the past, there are areas within the block – especially the Wombat State Forest – along creeks, rivers and in gullies or on crests that were too steep or too wet to be logged. These areas have acted as refuge sites for a range of threatened species by providing high value habitat. Large, old trees in these areas provide hollows for birds, possums and gliders and higher volumes of nectar (than that from younger trees) for nectar-feeding native fauna and European honey bees. In recent years, forest regrowth in the surrounding areas and some re-establishment of the natural ecology of the area has made the Wombat–Macedon block valuable as habitat for many species. The damper forest areas are likely to provide even more important habitat refuges for many species under climate change.

The Wombat–Macedon block (see figure 5.1) has a total area of 228,765 hectares and makes up more than half of the Central West Investigation area. Of this total, 43 per cent or 99,115 hectares is public land, mostly contained in the following land units:

- Wombat State Forest (45,170 hectares)

- Lerderderg State Park (20,470 hectares)
- Hepburn Regional Park (3105 hectares)
- Cobaw State Forest (2530 hectares)
- Macedon Regional Park (2160 hectares)
- Bungal State Forest (675 hectares)
- Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve (610 hectares)
- Mount Charlie Flora Reserve (385 hectares)
- Dry Diggings State Forest (230 hectares).

Road reserves make up an additional 8560 hectares of public land in the Wombat–Macedon block and more than 6000 hectares of public land are set aside in water production areas including the Lauriston, Upper Coliban, Rosslynne, Merrimu, Pykes Creek and Bostock reservoirs as well as smaller reservoirs, weirs and diversions.

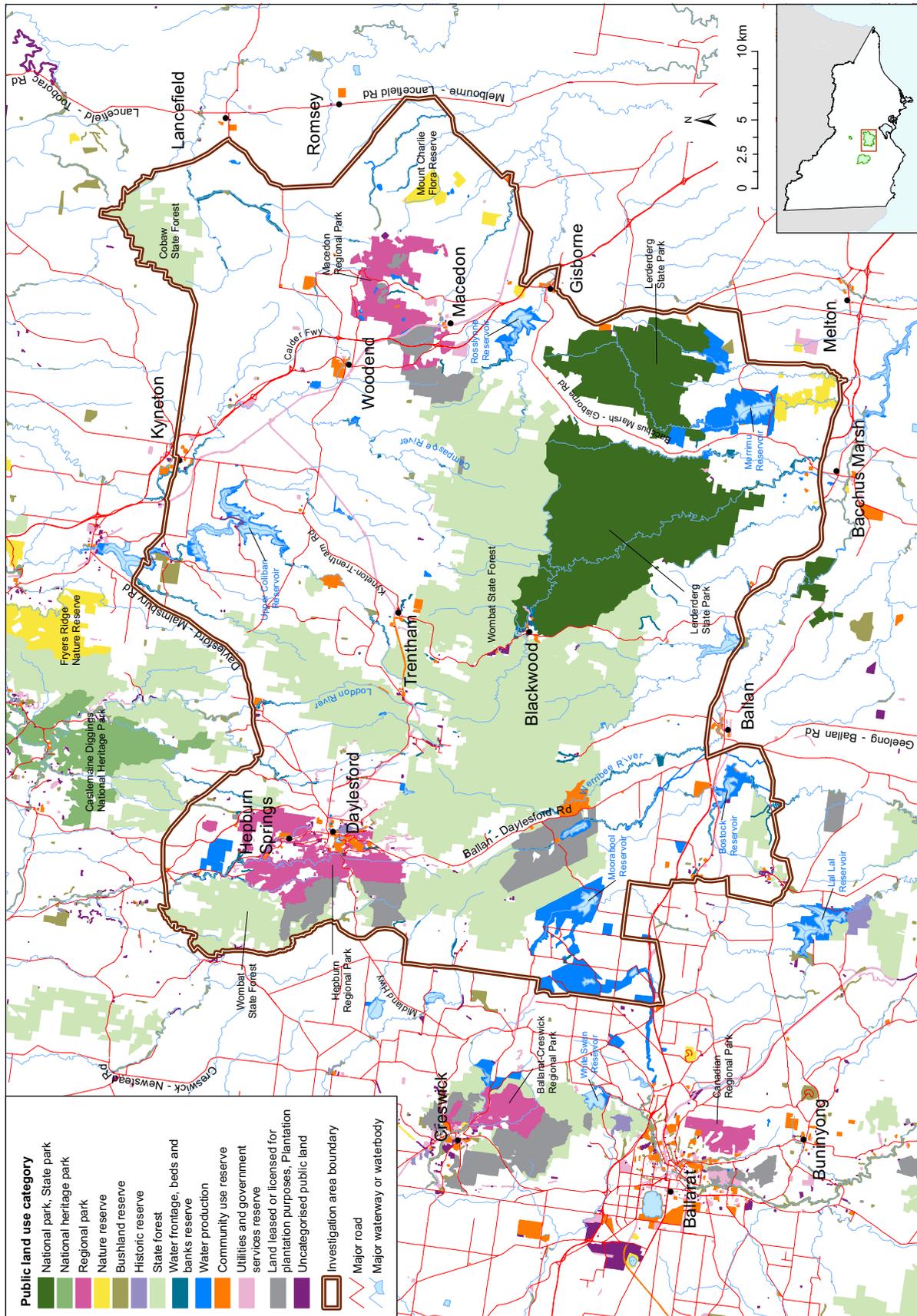
Softwood plantations on public land occur in three clusters located west of Daylesford (1530 hectares), south of Korweinguboorra (1900 hectares) and near Macedon (some 1500 hectares). Other than 140 hectares of leased Crown land forming inliers to the Macedon Regional Park, all the land is former Victorian Plantations Corporation (VPC) land licensed to HVP Plantations with the right to operate a plantation business on that land in perpetuity. Former VPC plantation land remains Crown land but, given the perpetual nature of the rights, no recommendations have been made for the licensed land.

Community use areas (including three education areas), bushland reserves, stream frontages, nature reserves and various other small blocks of land comprise the balance of public land in the Wombat–Macedon block. Public land use overlays in the block include four reference areas and the Lerderderg River Heritage Area.

Current government-accepted recommendations over the Wombat–Macedon block are mostly from the LCC Melbourne District 1 Review (1987), with some small areas covered by recommendations



Figure 5.1 Wombat–Macedon block: current public land use



from the LCC Ballarat Study (1982), the ECC Box-Ironbark Forests and Woodlands Investigation (2001) and the VEAC Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation (2011). In addition to these studies and investigations, the West Victoria Regional Forest Agreement (2000) resulted in the Pyrete Range in the Wombat State Forest being added to the Lerderderg State Park.

The Wombat–Macedon block is an area of interest for several Traditional Owner groups. The Dja Dja Warrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation’s Recognition and Settlement Agreement (made under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* in 2013) covers northern parts of the Wombat range, and the Hepburn Regional Park is part of the group of Aboriginal title parks and reserves under a joint management plan. Taungurung Clans Aboriginal Corporation’s Recognition and Settlement Agreement (2018) includes the northwestern slopes of the Cobaw range. The Wurundjeri Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Aboriginal Corporation is the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP) for the main section of the Wombat–Macedon ranges. The Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation (trading as Wadawurrung) is the RAP for the southwestern part of the Wombat–Macedon block including the area around Korweinguboora and the Bungal forest. The Djandak reports are available on VEAC’s website and contain the details of the Aboriginal community engagement project activities and outcomes.

Four local government areas cover the Wombat–Macedon block: Hepburn Shire Council (in the northwest of the block), Macedon Ranges Shire Council (in the northeast), Moorabool Shire Council (most of the southern half) and Melton City Council (a very small area in the southeast corner).

The Victorian government has amended the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to recognise and safeguard Victoria’s distinctive areas and landscapes. Under the act, responsible public entities should take best practice measures to protect and conserve the unique features and special characteristics of the declared area, and enhance the conservation of the environment. In September 2018 the Macedon Ranges region became the first distinctive area to be recognised. Substantial parts of the Wombat–Macedon block are included in the declared area.

Further information on the values and current uses of public land in the Wombat–Macedon block are documented in chapter 7 of the draft proposals paper for the investigation.

5.2 Community views

The wide range of views that VEAC heard during stakeholder engagement activities are summarised in the consultation summary published in April 2019 and available on VEAC’s website. Also see section 1.

For the Wombat–Macedon block, issues that received consideration included:

- Traditional Owner preferences for park or reserve categories that protect the cultural and natural values of Country and limit activities with major impacts such as logging and mining in the Wombat–Macedon block
- laying the foundation for healing and a higher level of Traditional Owner involvement in management (e.g. joint management), while ensuring that the public has access to these areas to enjoy recreational activities with low impacts on natural and cultural values
- high biodiversity values including habitat for many threatened species, especially as a refuge under climate change
- high water catchment and supply values in the headwaters of six major rivers
- the extensive use of the Wombat–Macedon block for a wide variety of recreational activities including four wheel driving, trail bike riding, walking dogs, horse riding, mountain bike riding, camping (both designated sites and dispersed forest camping, and sometimes with horses and dogs), prospecting and hunting
- rapidly increasing popularity of some recreational uses largely as a result of urban growth in Melbourne
- potential impacts of national park status on some of these activities, especially dispersed camping and dog walking
- demand for free domestic firewood from public land for residents of towns in the area (e.g. Daylesford, Bullarto, Trentham and Blackwood)
- opposition to further intensive timber harvesting methods and earth resource operations
- need for active restoration of forest structure, diversity and ecological health
- environmental degradation, erosion and waterway sedimentation caused by motorised recreational uses such as trail bike riding and four wheel driving
- safety concerns about recreational hunting, mostly in forested areas that are close to houses.

5.3 Final recommendations

The final recommendations for the Wombat–Macedon block have been developed in response to the combination of high natural values in a largely-intact landscape, the water catchment and supply values of the headwaters of rivers, widespread community opposition to a resumption of sawlog harvesting, high demand for a broad range of uses (recreation and domestic firewood collection) and a rapid intensification of some recreational activities. Pressures on public land in the Wombat–Macedon block – given its proximity to Melbourne – are likely to continue increasing as Victoria’s population grows.

The recommendations include:

- a large national park consisting of the existing Lerderderg State Park and the majority of the existing Wombat State Forest
- two new conservation parks (one north of Daylesford and the other for the existing Cobaw State Forest)
- a substantial addition to Hepburn Regional Park and a small addition to Macedon Regional Park
- three new regional parks in the remaining areas of the existing Wombat State Forest.

These recommendations, along with recommendations for smaller areas of public land in the block, are shown on map A, and detailed in the section below.

The intention of these recommendations is to focus protection of threatened species, under-represented Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) and headwaters of rivers in the recommended national park and conservation parks along with compatible recreation as far as possible, and manage the existing and recommended regional parks for the widest range of recreational activities.

The recommended group of five regional parks around the core Wombat–Lerderderg National Park responds to stakeholder requests to retain more areas for a wider range of recreational opportunities, particularly around townships where local residents and visitors are most likely to use the forests.

Most recreational activities, apart from some high-impact activities or activities that extract natural resources, will continue to be allowed in the recommended national park (see table 5.2). The conservation parks recommended at Hepburn and Cobaw provide more scope for some recreational activities than do national parks. The overall

increased protection of natural values reflects the aspirations of Aboriginal Traditional Owners.

The recommendations make a critical contribution to eliminating shortfalls in protected area representation for the following priority EVCs:

- in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion – Herb-rich Foothill Forest (6839 hectares added to protected areas, mostly in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park and Cobaw Conservation Park), Shrubby Foothill Forest (16,069 hectares mostly in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park), Herb-rich Foothill Forest/Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex (3301 hectares in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park), and three EVCs found in moist areas of the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park: Sedgy Riparian Woodland (470 hectares), Riparian Forest (250 hectares) and Damp Forest (623 hectares)
- in the Goldfields bioregion – Herb-rich Foothill Forest (783 hectares, mostly in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park).
- The recommendations would also substantially improve protected area representation of several other priority EVCs:
 - in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion – Valley Grassy Forest (a total of 704 hectares in the Cobaw Conservation Park and the Black Forest and Slaty Creek nature reserves)
 - in the Goldfields bioregion – Valley Grassy Forest (280 hectares in the Hepburn Conservation Park).

Protection of mature trees in the Wombat–Macedon block would provide increased nectar production for apiarists as well as the diverse range of animals that depend on this resource. Over the long term, it would increase the number of hollows available for hollow-dependent species.

Activities such as dog walking and recreational prospecting would be able to continue across the recommended regional parks. They are located where these recreational activities are already occurring, and aim to accommodate an increasing demand close to major towns.

VEAC has recommended that the new regional parks in the Wombat–Macedon block allow some domestic firewood collection (not usually allowed in regional parks) over a ten-year phase out period with collection targeted to local users and restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the

ecological structure of the forest. The recommended phase-out provides a period of time during which alternative arrangements can be made.

Impacts of these recommendations for the Wombat–Macedon block include the cessation of commercial timber harvesting.

Recreational hunting in the Wombat–Macedon block would be restricted to hunting for pest animals as part of authorised control programs at the discretion of the land manager.

Recommended new national park areas would not be available for new extractive, exploration or mining licences. Existing mining and exploration licences in new national park areas would continue, according to the provisions in the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* and the *National Parks Act 1975*.

No major changes are recommended to the land use classification for the mineral springs reserves in the Wombat–Macedon block. The springs should continue to be managed for a range of natural and recreational values and the ongoing availability of safe mineral water from the mineral springs in accordance with their individual character and setting.

No changes are recommended for the Hanging Rock Reserve. Council notes the 50-year Hanging Rock Strategic Plan was endorsed by the Victorian government in September 2018 and will set the direction to protecting the cultural and environmental values of Hanging Rock.

The recommendations for the Wombat–Macedon block are detailed below.



A4 Wombat–Lerderderg National Park

The recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park covers 49,553 hectares comprised of a large part (29,079 hectares) of the existing Wombat State Forest, the Lerderderg State Park (20,469 hectares) and small areas of in other public land use categories. It contains much of the only largely-intact landscape between the Grampians and the eastern highlands, and the only extensive area of very high Strategic Biodiversity Values (SBVs) in the whole investigation area. The recommended park contains large areas of under-represented EVCs (most notably, Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Herb-rich and Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex). It provides high value habitat for many threatened species such as the small sickle greenhood orchid, wombat bossiaea, square-tailed kite, powerful owl, brush-tailed phascogale and greater glider, and is the largest block of habitat in western Victoria for species such as the red-browed tree creeper, common wombat and mountain brushtail possum.

The headwaters of five of the six major rivers in the existing state forest are included in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park.

State parks and national parks are managed in a similar way under the National Parks Act. Inclusion of the Lerderderg State Park into the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park would maintain existing management and improve public understanding of allowed uses.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are 91 licensed bee sites distributed throughout the recommended national park: 22 in the Bullarto area, 17 in the Barkstead area, two in the Lerderderg State Park, 39 in the area to the west of Lerderderg State Park and 11 in the area on the north side of Lerderderg State Park. They would not be affected by the recommended change.

Earth resources

Existing extractive, mining or exploration licences at the time of establishment of the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park would continue. The area of the existing state park is currently exempt and the recommended new areas of the national park is unavailable for new exploration and mining licences, except as provided for in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act and the National Parks Act.

There are currently six exploration licences over

parts of the recommended national park in areas adjacent to the existing Lerderderg State Park. There are three mining licences totalling 13 hectares in the new areas of the recommended national park. The Earth Resources Division of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions has carried out new modelling to identify potential underground gold resources in central west Victoria. Indicative maps show two major deposits and some minor deposits in the area of the recommended national park.

Grazing

There are currently several small grazing licences on the edges of the recommended national park and on a previously cleared area on Farm Road; they would not continue in the recommended national park.

Wood products

Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest produce) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park.

Approximately 26 per cent (7420 hectares) of state forest recommended for addition to the Lerderderg State Park to create the new national park is Special Protection Zone where timber harvesting is not allowed. Currently there are several commercial firewood cutting operations in the Wombat State Forest, varying in scale from 200 to 1000 cubic metres per annum. There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006.

Domestic firewood collection areas were provided in the autumn 2019 season in the Barkstead area of the recommended national park, and along part of the recommended borders between the national park and regional parks near Leonards Hill and along Firth Road.

Recreation

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding; that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads and tracks as specified through management planning. Council expects that most of the current network of roads would remain open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

Activities involving non-native animals, such as horse riding and dog walking, are generally non-conforming uses in national parks but are accommodated in specific areas set aside in many national parks. Council recommends that these

activities be allowed to continue in designated areas within the national park additions, determined through management planning, with dogs restricted to limited specific areas (such as near particular visitor areas or places near adjoining residents with few alternatives for exercising dogs) and horse riding more widely permitted on roads and tracks open to the public. Some sections of car rallies may be partially accommodated in the national park according to current legislation and policies.

VEAC considers that dispersed forest camping could be allowed in suitable designated areas of the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park, where high natural and cultural values will not be compromised.

RECOMMENDATION

A4 Wombat–Lerderderg National Park

That the area of 49,553 hectares shown on map A including additions of 29,084 hectares to the existing Lerderderg State Park be used in accordance with the general recommendations for national parks on page 29.

B1 Hepburn Conservation Park

The recommended Hepburn Conservation Park, covering an area of 2714 hectares, contains high natural values including significant amounts of two under-represented EVCs (Grassy Dry Forest and Valley Grassy Forest) scattered throughout the area, and records of the threatened brush-tailed phascogale.

The park is contiguous with the Hepburn Regional Park over which Aboriginal title has been granted. Consideration could be given to managing the recommended Hepburn Conservation Park in the context of the joint management plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung appointed land. A future grant of Aboriginal title would be subject to the agreement processes in the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and is outside the scope of VEAC's recommendations.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The eight licensed bee sites in the recommended conservation park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There are two exploration licences covering about two thirds of the recommended conservation park. There are three mining licences covering two hectares, four hectares and 54 hectares. Indicative mapping to identify potential underground gold resources in central west Victoria provided by the Earth Resources Division of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions show a major deposit covering almost half of the recommended conservation park.

New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended Hepburn Conservation Park, subject to the National Parks Act and the provisions in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act applying to restricted Crown land.

Wood products

Seventy per cent (1903 hectares) of the existing state forest recommended as Hepburn Conservation Park is Special Protection Zone where timber harvesting is not allowed. There were no domestic firewood collection areas in the recommended conservation park in autumn 2019.

There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006. Commercial timber harvesting (sawlogs and minor forest produce) and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended Hepburn Conservation Park.

Grazing

There are two grazing licences (of approximately 28 and 18 hectares) in the recommended conservation park; they would not continue in the recommended national park.

Recreation

Horse riding and dog walking would be accommodated in specific areas designated through management planning. Recreational hunting and prospecting would not be allowed in the recommended Hepburn Conservation Park.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycling; that is, on formed roads that are

open to the public and other formed roads and tracks as specified through management planning. Council expects that most of the current network of roads would remain open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

RECOMMENDATION

B1 Hepburn Conservation Park

That the area of 2714 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for conservation parks on page 31.

B2 Cobaw Conservation Park

The recommended Cobaw Conservation Park will protect an area of public land surrounded mostly by cleared land that is sufficiently large (2532 hectares) to provide effective habitat for many woodland birds and threatened species, while also allowing some recreational activities to continue. The area is important for landscape connectivity between central west Victoria and the eastern highlands.

Several under-represented EVCs are present in the recommended park including significant amounts of Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Valley Grassy Forest. Recent mammal surveys recorded high numbers of agile antechinus (an important part of the diet of larger animals like owls and reptiles). Other species recorded include the brush-tailed phascogale, mountain brush-tailed possum and feathertail glider.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The five licensed bee sites in the recommended conservation park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There are no exploration or mining licences over the recommended conservation park. The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions has not identified any gold deposits in this area.

New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be allowed in the recommended Cobaw Conservation Park, subject to the National Parks Act and the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

The entire existing Cobaw State Forest is Special Protection Zone and timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection is currently not permitted.

Commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended park.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended conservation park. No new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Horse riding and dog walking would be accommodated in specific areas designated through management planning. Recreational hunting and prospecting would not be allowed in the recommended Cobaw Conservation Park. Camping would be allowed. Camping with horses and dogs would not be allowed.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding; that is, on formed roads that are open to the public and other formed roads and tracks as specified through management planning. Council expects that most of the current network of roads would remain open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

The roads and tracks in the Cobaw forest are popular for trail bike riding. A visitor area is provided with facilities to park and unload trail bikes and obtain information on where to ride. These facilities will continue to be provided.

RECOMMENDATION

B2 Cobaw Conservation Park

That the area of 2532 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for conservation parks on page 31.

C3 Hepburn Regional Park

Recommended additions to Hepburn Regional Park include three small areas of public land (the Dry Diggings State Forest and two narrow sections located between the Hepburn plantations) and a larger area from Daylesford's Jubilee Lake Holiday Park and Wombat Dam extending south to the Leonards Hill–South Bullarto Road; a total of 2947 hectares.

The existing Hepburn Regional Park has been granted in Aboriginal title to the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. Granting of Aboriginal title to the park additions would be subject to the agreement processes in the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*. More generally, VEAC recommends an amendment to the Traditional Owner Settlement Act that would provide for a process allowing future changes to Aboriginal title land by agreement (see recommendation R7).

As an interim step, the recommended additions could be managed as part of the regional park in the context of the joint management plan for the six parks and reserves (including the existing Hepburn Regional Park) that currently make up the Dja Dja Wurrung appointed land.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The nine licensed bee sites in the recommended additions to Hepburn Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There are three exploration licences covering parts of the recommended additions to the regional park; there are no mining licences.

Existing earth resource tenements in the recommended additions to the regional park would continue. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended additions, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land.

Wood products

Approximately 26 per cent (2345 hectares) of the recommended additions to the regional park is Special Protection Zone in which timber harvesting is currently not allowed.

A domestic firewood collection area was provided along Specimen Hill Track and along the Leonards Hill–South Bullarto Road (which forms the

boundary between the recommended regional park and national park) in autumn 2019.

There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006. Commercial timber harvesting and domestic firewood collection would not be allowed in the recommended additions to Hepburn Regional Park, except for domestic firewood collection in the recommended southern addition for a phase-out period of ten years.

Grazing

There are several small grazing licences on the fringes of the recommended additions to the regional park; they would not continue in the recommended park.

Recreation

The recommended expanded regional park will cater for a broad range of recreational uses including prospecting and dog walking, in addition to the recreational uses allowed in the adjacent recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. Recreational hunting would not be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

C3 Hepburn Regional Park (additions)

That:

- (a) the areas totalling 2947 hectares shown on map A be added to the existing Hepburn Regional Park of 3105 hectares and be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and
- (b) domestic firewood collection be allowed up to June 2029 in the southern addition to the park where it will promote the growth of large trees and improve ecological condition.

Note: The recommendation does not apply to the existing Hepburn Regional Park over which Aboriginal title has been granted (see recommendation C on page 33).

C4 Spargo Creek Regional Park

The recommended new Spargo Creek Regional Park (1693 hectares) includes the existing 309-hectare Spargo Creek Education Area and existing state forest. This will simplify land use categories in the area and assist in managing the recommended regional park. Activities currently carried out in the education area – including fire research – would be accommodated in the recommended regional park.

The recommendation for this new area of regional park includes an exception to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection, to be phased out over 10 years.

Collection would be restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest, with collection targeted to local communities most reliant on this resource.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The three bee sites in the recommended Spargo Creek Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There is one exploration licence covering the majority of the recommended regional park. There are two mining licences covering a total of 42 hectares near Spargo Creek.

Existing earth resource tenements in the recommended new regional park would continue. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be allowed in the recommended Spargo Creek Regional Park, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land.

Wood products

Approximately 26 per cent (2345 hectares) of the recommended regional park is Special Protection Zone where timber harvesting is not allowed and the remainder is Special Management Zone. There was no domestic firewood collection area in the recommended regional park in autumn 2019.

There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006. Commercial timber harvesting would not be allowed in the recommended Spargo Creek Regional Park. Some domestic firewood collection would be allowed over a 10 year phase out period.

Grazing

There is one grazing licence of approximately 28 hectares); it would not continue in the recommended regional park.

Recreation

The recommended regional park will cater for a broad range of recreational uses including prospecting and dog walking, in addition to all the recreational uses allowed in the adjacent recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. Recreational hunting would not be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

C4 Spargo Creek Regional Park

That:

- (a) the area of 1693 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and
- (b) domestic firewood collection be allowed up to June 2029 where it will promote the growth of large trees and improve ecological condition.

C5 Blackwood Regional Park

The recommended new Blackwood Regional Park (3707 hectares) includes parts of the existing Wombat State Forest that are popular for a variety of recreational activities, particularly by residents of and visitors to the main towns of Blackwood and Trentham.

The final recommendation for this new area of regional park includes an exception to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection, to be phased out over 10 years. Collection would be restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest, with collection targeted to local communities most reliant on this resource.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The eight licensed bee sites distributed throughout the recommended Blackwood Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There are two exploration licences covering the majority of the recommended regional park. There is one mining licence near Barrys Reef, covering five hectares. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended Blackwood Regional Park, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

Approximately 26 per cent (2345 hectares) of the area of the recommended regional park is currently Special Protection Zone where timber harvesting is not allowed. There was a domestic firewood collection area on the fringes of the recommended regional park near Trentham in autumn 2019.

There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006. Commercial timber harvesting would not be allowed in the recommended Blackwood Regional Park. Some domestic firewood collection would be allowed over a 10 year phase out period.

Grazing

There are several very small grazing licences around the fringes of the recommended regional park; they would not continue in the recommended regional park.

Recreation

The recommended regional park will cater for a broad range of recreational uses including prospecting and dog walking, in addition to the recreational uses allowed in the adjacent recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. Recreational hunting would not be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

C5 Blackwood Regional Park

That:

- (a) the area of 3707 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and
- (b) domestic firewood collection be allowed up to June 2029 where it will promote the growth of large trees and improve ecological condition.



C6 Fingerpost Regional Park

The recommended new Fingerpost Regional Park (5442 hectares) is based on popular areas for recreational activities including horse riding, camping and mountain bike riding. It contains the popular Firth Park campground and the Wombat Mountain Loop trails.

The recommendation for this new area of regional park includes an exception to the usual uses of regional parks to allow some domestic firewood collection, to be phased out over ten years.

Collection would be restricted to areas carefully selected to contribute to improving the ecological structure of the forest, with collection targeted to local communities most reliant on this resource.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

The 10 licensed bee sites distributed throughout the recommended Fingerpost Regional Park would not be affected by the change.

Earth resources

There is one exploration licence covering the majority of the recommended regional park; there are no mining licences. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be permitted in the recommended Fingerpost Regional Park, subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

Approximately 26 per cent (2345 hectares) of the recommended regional park is Special Protection Zone where timber harvesting is not allowed, and most of the remaining area is Special Management Zone. There was a domestic firewood collection area along Firth Road where it forms the border between the recommended regional and national parks in autumn 2019.

There has been no commercial sawlog harvesting since 2006. Commercial timber harvesting would not be allowed in the recommended Fingerpost Regional Park. Some domestic firewood collection would be allowed over a 10 year phase-out period.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended regional park, and no new licences would be granted.

Recreation

The recommended regional park will cater for a broad range of recreational uses including prospecting and dog walking, in addition to the recreational uses allowed in the adjacent recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. Recreational hunting would not be allowed.

RECOMMENDATION

C6 Fingerpost Regional Park

That:

- (a) the area of 5442 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33 and
- (b) domestic firewood collection be allowed up to June 2029 where it will promote the growth of large trees and improve ecological condition.



C7 Macedon Regional Park

The existing Macedon Regional Park is the centrepiece of the Macedon Ranges tourism region – a major hub for visitors from the surrounding area, elsewhere in Victoria and Australia, and overseas. The landscape and history of the area lend a distinctive character to the visitor experience based around a diversity of attractions on private and public land, including other well-known public land sites such as Hanging Rock and the Memorial Cross.

The existing regional park is recommended to be retained, except for 177 hectares to become the new Black Forest Nature Reserve (see D15) and Slaty Creek Nature Reserve (see D16). After the completion of harvesting and expiry of current leases, 139 hectares of former pine plantations are recommended for addition to the regional park as well as 14 hectares of currently unclassified public land.

A Strategic Management Statement was prepared for the park in 2009. To plan for increasing visitor use VEAC is recommending, as a high priority, that a landscape-focused management plan be developed for the regional park and surrounding areas, through an integrated, multi-agency planning process. The plan should address the following key matters: amenity value and fire management of the monument area (currently managed by a committee of management), management of the pine plantation areas to be handed back to the government, protection of specific areas with high natural values (e.g. very large old trees), Aboriginal cultural heritage, weed management, visitor facilities, visitor management and trails.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are no licensed bee sites in Macedon Regional Park.

Earth resources

There are no exploration or mining licences over the recommended regional park. The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions has not identified any potential gold deposits in this area. New earth resource tenements (including exploration and mining licences) would be subject to the provisions applying to restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

There is no timber harvesting or domestic firewood collection in Macedon Regional Park.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in Macedon Regional Park.

Recreation

The current high levels of recreational use and day visitor use – including sightseeing, picnicking, walking, cycling and horse riding – would continue.

RECOMMENDATION

C7 Macedon Regional Park

That:

- (a) the area of 2134 hectares shown on map A including additions of 14 hectares be used in accordance with the general recommendations for regional parks on page 33
- (b) 139 hectares of pine plantations be added to the regional park once harvesting has been completed and the lease expires, and
- (c) by March 2022, a management plan be prepared in the context of other key sites in the area.

D9 – D14 Existing nature reserves

There are six existing nature reserves in the Wombat–Macedon block which are recommended to be retained, ranging in size from less than a hectare to the Mount Charlie Nature Reserve at 386 hectares (see appendix 1 for the full list). A small addition is recommended for a seventh existing nature reserve (see D19).

Current uses and implications

RECOMMENDATION

D8 – D13 Existing nature reserves

That the areas totalling 570 hectares shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D14 – D18 New nature reserves and addition to existing nature reserve

D14 Tylden Nature Reserve

This recommended new nature reserve consists of the current Tylden South Education Area (111 hectares) and the adjoining portion of Wombat State Forest (131 hectares). The state forest and education area have limited access with few forest tracks and no apparent facilities or infrastructure.

The education area contains high quality mature forest and there is little sign of logging or other recreational use or access. Both the education area and state forest are covered in the significantly under-represented Herb-rich Foothill Forest EVC and smaller corridors of Riparian Forest and Creepline Herb-rich Woodland EVCs along the Coliban River stream frontage and minor waterways.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are no licensed bee sites in the recommended Tylden Nature Reserve.

Earth resources

There is an exploration licence over the recommended Tylden Nature Reserve; there are no mining licences. Indicative mapping provided by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions shows no goldfield over the recommended nature reserve. New tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

Wood products

There is no timber harvesting or domestic firewood collection in the recommended nature reserve. No timber harvesting would be allowed.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended nature reserve; no new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting would not be allowed in the recommended nature reserve. Other recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study and bushwalking would continue to be allowed.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and

bicycle riding: that is, on formed roads open to the public as specified through management planning. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

RECOMMENDATION

D14 Tylden Nature Reserve

That the area of 243 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D15 Black Forest Nature Reserve

The recommended new Black Forest Nature Reserve is the northern portion of the previously recommended nature reserve in this area. It differs from the southern portion in having a higher level of recreational use and a larger number of neighbouring properties. Additional protection with a focus on helping residents and visitors understand the values and permitted uses in the nature reserve is warranted.

The recommended new Black Forest Nature Reserve runs north-south along Black Forest Drive and lies between softwood plantations to the east and west. The recommended nature reserve comprises 124 hectares of public land currently part of the Macedon Regional Park, the western boundary of which is approximately two kilometres to the east.

The recommended new Black Forest Nature Reserve consists of under-represented Valley Grassy Forest, Grassy Forest and Sedgy Riparian Woodland EVCs (Central Victorian Uplands bioregion), for which the protected area representation target is 100 per cent of remaining extent. It would also protect habitat for threatened species such as the powerful owl, black gum, Yarra gum and wiry bossiaea.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There is one licensed bee site in the recommended new Black Forest Nature Reserve which would be unaffected by the recommendation.

Earth resources

There is an exploration licence over a small portion of the recommended nature reserve; there are no mining licences. Indicative mapping provided by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions

shows no goldfield over the recommended nature reserve. New tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land.

Wood products

There is no timber harvesting or domestic firewood collection in the recommended nature reserve. No timber harvesting would be allowed.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended nature reserve; no new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting would not be allowed in the recommended nature reserve. Other recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study and bushwalking would continue to be allowed.

This area is currently popular for recreational activities including trail bike riding and four wheel driving. There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding: that is, on formed roads open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

RECOMMENDATION

D15 Black Forest Nature Reserve

That the area of 124 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D16 Slaty Creek Nature Reserve

The recommended new Slaty Creek Nature Reserve is the southern portion of the previously recommended Black Forest Nature Reserve. Compared with the northern portion (the recommended new Black Forest Nature Reserve) the forest in this area is in very good condition as it is more remote, little used for recreation, and has fewer neighbouring properties most of which are largely covered with native forest.

The recommended Slaty Creek Nature Reserve runs north-south along the Calder Freeway to the west of Macedon township. The recommended nature reserve consists of 53 hectares of public land currently part of the Macedon Regional Park and 85 hectares of VicRoads land classified as utilities and government services. The large Slaty Creek wildlife underpass, which includes some

remnant trees between the two carriageways, provides a connection for many species moving between the forests on either side of the freeway. The VicRoads site may be suitable as a native vegetation offset. VicRoads has commenced discussions with DELWP's Biodiversity Division to provide native vegetation credits in exchange for the gain of 85 hectares of land that it currently owns.

The recommended Slaty Creek Nature Reserve consists of under-represented Valley Grassy Forest and Grassy Forest EVCs (Central Victorian Uplands bioregion), for which the protected area representation target is 100 per cent of remaining extent. Threatened species recorded here include the powerful owl, greater glider, brown toadlet and common dunnart. The recommended reserve would also protect habitat for rare and threatened species such as black gum, Yarra gum, wiry bossiaea and dwarf silver-wattle.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are no licensed bee sites in the recommended Slaty Creek Nature Reserve.

Earth resources

There is an exploration licence over a small portion of the recommended nature reserve. There are mining licences. New tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land.

Wood products

There is no timber harvesting or domestic firewood collection in the recommended nature reserve. No timber harvesting would be allowed.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended nature reserve. No new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Horse riding, dog walking, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting would not be allowed in the recommended nature reserve. Other recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study and bushwalking would continue to be allowed.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding: that is, on formed roads open to the public. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land.

RECOMMENDATION

D16 Slaty Creek Nature Reserve

That the area of 138 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

D17 Lerderderg River Nature Reserve

The recommended Lerderderg River Nature Reserve (4.7 hectares) will protect an important outcrop of Permian age rock in the cliffs, bed and banks downstream of the existing Lerderderg State Park.

The Permian glacial rocks exposed along the Lerderderg River beds at Morven farm in Darley are one of the best places to view rocks of this type on public land in the region. The exposures are of state significance with outcrops extending discontinuously for over 800 metres along the river beds and banks. Although there are other outcrops of Permian age rocks of national and international geological significance in this region, they are either on private land or difficult to access. Due to its accessibility this site has been frequently visited by geologists from overseas.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are no licensed bee sites in the recommended Lerderderg River Nature Reserve.

Earth resources

There is an exploration licence over the recommended Lerderderg River Nature Reserve; there are no mining licences. Indicative mapping provided by the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions shows no goldfield over the recommended nature reserve. New tenements would be subject to the provisions for restricted Crown land.

Wood products

This is not a forested area.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended nature reserve. No new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Horse riding, camping, recreational prospecting and hunting would not be allowed in the recommended nature reserve.

Other recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study and bushwalking would continue to be allowed where they are compatible with the character and natural values of this small site. Melbourne Water has expressed an interest in developing a recreation trail to connect MacKenzie's Flat picnic area in the current Lerderderg State Park to Bacchus Marsh township along the river frontage. A disused recreation trail exists along part of the frontage adjoining a private golf course. A new section of the trail would be required between the golf course and the picnic area.

RECOMMENDATION

D17 Lerderderg River Nature Reserve

That:

- (a) the area of 4.7 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35
- (b) grazing not be permitted and
- (c) infrastructure related to the current water extraction and pumphouse be accommodated.

Note: VEAC supports the development of the recreation trail by Melbourne Water and trail signage highlighting the geological values of this area.

D19 Long Forest Nature Reserve

Twenty hectares of Southern Rural Water land that has been identified as surplus to their operational requirements is recommended for addition to the existing Long Forest Nature Reserve (currently 609 hectares). The recommended addition includes an area of native vegetation with high strategic biodiversity values. Many threatened species of flora and fauna have been recorded at Long Forest including more than half of the threatened Victorian temperate woodland bird community.

RECOMMENDATION

D18 Long Forest Nature Reserve

That the area of 629 hectares, including the additional area of 20 hectares shown on map A, be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature reserves on page 35.

E49 – E87 Existing bushland reserves

The 39 existing bushland reserves E49 to E87 (see appendix 1 for complete list) in the Wombat–Macedon block contain significant remnants of native vegetation situated amongst areas of cleared land or along streams and water frontages. They range in size from 0.3 to 210 hectares and provide vital linkages between larger intact areas as well as valuable habitat in a fragmented landscape.

RECOMMENDATION

E49 – E87 Existing bushland reserves

That the areas totalling 475 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for bushland reserves on page 37.

E88 Bungal Bushland Reserve

The recommended new Bungal Bushland Reserve covering 679 hectares is an isolated area of public land comprising the existing Bungal and Mount Egerton state forests and 0.8 hectare of uncategorised public land in the Mount Egerton township. It is located in the southwest corner of the Wombat–Macedon block, west of Ballan and the Bostock Reservoir.

The area is mostly covered by the significantly under-represented Grassy Dry Forest EVC. There are also small areas of Creekline Herb-rich Woodland and Valley Grassy Forest EVCs (both vulnerable) in areas around the Moorabool River (east branch) and the Green Hill Gully.

Current uses and implications

Apiculture

There are no licensed bee sites in the recommended Bungal Bushland Reserve.

Earth resources

There is an exploration licence over most of the recommended bushland reserve. There is also a retention licence over the western portion of the recommended bushland reserve, allowing the holder to retain the rights to a mineral resource, where mining is not yet economically viable or for other reasons. Exploration and mining would continue subject to the provisions of the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act for restricted Crown land.

Wood products

Most of the existing state forest (573 hectares or 84 per cent) is in Special Protection Zones where timber harvesting is not allowed. There is no current timber harvesting or domestic firewood collection in the area of the recommended bushland reserve. Timber harvesting would not be allowed.

Grazing

There are no grazing licences in the recommended bushland reserve. No new licences would be granted.

Recreation

Most recreational activities (including horse riding, dog walking, camping and recreational prospecting) would be able to continue in the recommended bushland reserve. Other recreational activities such as picnicking, nature study and bushwalking would continue to be allowed. Recreational hunting would not be allowed.

There would be no change to the provisions for access for trail bike riding, four wheel driving and bicycle riding: that is, on formed roads open to the public, and other formed roads and tracks as specified through management planning. Off road driving and riding is illegal on almost all public land. Most of the submissions mentioning Bungal/Whipstick were concerned about extensive degradation caused by off-track trail bike riding.

RECOMMENDATION

E88 Bungal Bushland Reserve

That the area of 679 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for bushland reserves on page 37.

F5 – F13 Existing historic reserves

There are currently 13 historic reserves in the investigation area, nine of which are in the Wombat–Macedon block. Historic reserves protect important relics or historical associations. The largest existing historic reserve in this block is the Cornish Hill Historic Reserve (46 hectares). The remaining eight reserves range in size from 0.04 hectares to 1.2 hectares and include several court houses (see appendix 1 for details).

RECOMMENDATION

F5 – F13 Historic reserves

That the existing historic reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for historic reserves on page 39.

H Water frontage, beds and banks reserves

These reserves generally comprise a linear area of land adjacent to a waterway or lake, and the stream bed and banks. There are 801 hectares of existing water frontage, beds and banks reserves in the Wombat–Macedon block which are recommended to be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

H Water frontage, beds and banks reserves

That the existing water frontage, beds and banks reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for water frontage, beds and banks reserves on page 43.

I Water production reserves

Some of the largest water production areas in the investigation area are in the Wombat–Macedon block including nine reservoirs managed by Southern Rural Water, Coliban Water, Barwon Water and Central Highlands Water. There are 6497 hectares of water production reserves in the Wombat–Macedon block which are largely recommended to be retained.

RECOMMENDATION

I Water production reserves

That the existing water production reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for water production reserves on page 44.

J Community use reserves

Community use reserves are primarily used for recreation, education and other community purposes including mineral springs and buildings in public use such as schools, public halls, libraries and museums. There are more than 120 existing community use reserves covering a total of 1292 hectares in the Wombat–Macedon block which are largely recommended to be retained: 11 mineral springs reserves, 37 recreation reserves including Hanging Rock, the Domino (Trentham-Lyonville) rail trail, 22 parklands and gardens reserves including the Macedon Memorial Cross, and many buildings in public use.

Hanging Rock Reserve

The Hanging Rock Reserve (69 hectares) is a recreation reserve that has long provided for recreation uses, such as picnicking, bushwalking and horse-racing, as well as retaining areas of high natural values. The rock massif is a prominent landscape feature and has Aboriginal cultural significance. The site is of national geological significance recognising the unusual volcanic composition and form of the site as well as the outstanding examples of radial cooling joints which subsequently formed the characteristic pinnacles. Ecological values are also important and the reserve contributes to landscape connectivity between the Mount Macedon and Cobaw ranges.

For such a small area, there is a broad range of community uses and values. VEAC considered whether a different land use classification could provide better protection of the natural and cultural values from perceived expanding visitor and tourism uses. On balance, it is recommended that the community use (recreation) reserve classification be retained for Hanging Rock Reserve. VEAC acknowledges that there is a range of natural and cultural values at the site that need to be appropriately managed. An environmental management plan and fire management plan was completed in 2015. The plan provides direction and priorities for environmental and conservation works at the reserve including the East Paddock. Implementation of the plan is underway.

Since the release of the draft proposals paper for the investigation a 50-year Hanging Rock Strategic Plan has been endorsed by the Victorian government. A master plan is still required and is one of the actions in the strategic plan. The strategic plan also outlines a greater involvement for Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups in future

management arrangements. The Macedon Ranges Shire Council is working with DELWP in consultation with the community and stakeholders on the master plan.

It is expected that this planning will provide zoning of uses and values, with guidance for future governance, recreation and tourism development, and protection of natural and cultural values.

RECOMMENDATION

J Community use reserves

That the existing community use reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for community use reserves on page 45.

K Utilities and government services reserves

Public land supports public utilities and essential services such as transport, energy, water and sewerage, waste disposal, telecommunications and government services. There are numerous utilities and government services located on public land, such as roads and railway lines, government offices and depots, hospitals, prisons, cemeteries, communications installations, drainage and sewerage assets. Some areas with a primary utilities or services purpose such as road and rail reserves have significant biodiversity values and make a major contribution to ecological connectivity, especially in predominantly cleared landscapes. Where practical and safe, some utilities and government services areas may also be used for recreation. For example, recreation trails may be constructed along easements, pipelines or roadsides.

In the Wombat–Macedon block, there are 833 hectares of existing utilities and government services reserves, and an estimated 8561 hectares of government road reserves.

RECOMMENDATION

K Utilities and government services reserves

That the existing utilities and government services reserves shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for utilities and government services reserves on page 46.

L Uncategorized public land

Uncategorised public land is public land for which no specific use is recommended (see page 47). There are approximately 263 hectares of remaining uncategorised public land in the Wombat–Macedon block for which VEAC is not making specific land use recommendations. It includes land that, after assessment, may be disposed of if it has no public land values and is surplus to current and future community needs. It may include public authority freehold land.

RECOMMENDATION

L Uncategorized public land

That the existing uncategorised public land shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for uncategorised public land on page 47.

L1 Merrimu Reservoir surplus land

Two areas of land owned by Southern Rural Water and located near the southern end of Merrimu Reservoir, currently categorised as water production areas, have been identified by Southern Rural Water as surplus to operational requirements.

RECOMMENDATION

L1 Uncategorized public land

That the areas totalling approximately 100 hectares shown on map A be used in accordance with the general recommendations for uncategorised public land on page 47.

M Plantations

There are 4825 hectares of plantation land in the Wombat–Macedon block, most of which is licensed to HVP in perpetuity and consequently not covered by these recommendations. HVP currently leases Crown land for four pine plantations (totalling 139 hectares) which form inliers in the Macedon Regional Park. The leased Crown land is distinct from the licensed HVP land described in section 2.2 on page 48. HVP will not be continuing the leases on these plantations once harvesting has been completed in stages over coming years. VEAC recommends that the land be included in the Macedon Regional Park upon completion of harvesting and expiry of the lease (see recommendation C7).

RECOMMENDATION

M Plantations

That the existing plantations shown on map A continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for plantations on page 48.

Note: The recommendation does not apply to licensed HVP plantation land, or to the area recommended for addition to Macedon Regional Park upon completion of harvesting and expiry of the lease (see recommendation C7).

Public land use overlays

Reference areas

There are five reference areas in the investigation area, four of which occur in the Wombat–Macedon block: Musk Creek (91 hectares), Ruths Gully (261 hectares), Ah Kows Gully (475 hectares) and Pyrete Range (306 hectares). Recommendations for existing reference areas are in section 2.2 on page 49.

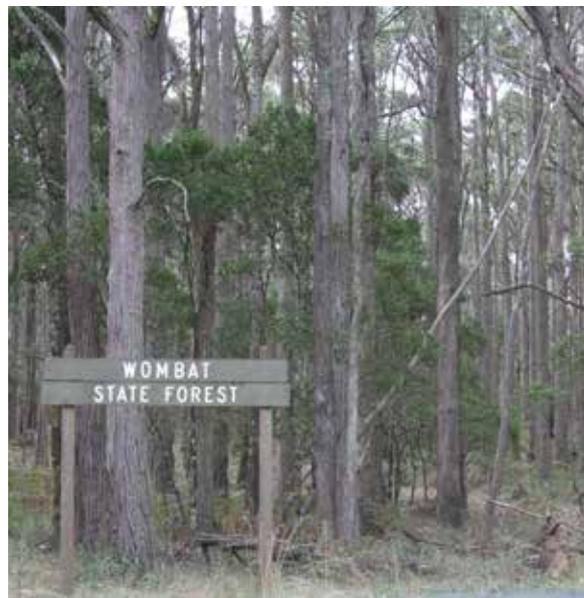
O2 Existing heritage rivers

The Lerderderg River Heritage Area is the only existing heritage river in the investigation area. The LCC's Rivers and Streams Special Investigation (1991) identified the 63-kilometre Lerderderg heritage river corridor (5166 hectares). It extends 18 kilometres from the junction of Crowley and Cooper creeks upstream of Blackwood to Lerderderg State Park, through which it flows for the remaining 45 kilometres. It overlays water frontage, community use reserves and state forest recommended for inclusion in the new Wombat–Lerderderg National Park.

RECOMMENDATION

O2 Lerderderg River Heritage Area

That the existing Lerderderg River Heritage Area shown on map A and described in Part 15 of the Heritage Rivers Act 1992 continue to be used in accordance with the general recommendations for heritage rivers on page 49.



6. Outcomes of final recommendations

This chapter summarises the outcomes of the final recommendations outlined in chapters 2 to 5. The final recommendations have been developed in response to VEAC's analyses of scientific and other key information, engagement with Traditional Owners and to feedback received on the draft proposals paper through written submissions and during consultation with the community, land managers and other government stakeholders. The final recommendations address the requirements of the VEAC Act and the terms of reference, which specify that the purpose of the investigation is to:

- identify and evaluate the condition, natural and biodiversity values, and cultural, social and economic values and the current uses of public land in the investigation area
- make recommendations for the balanced use and appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the natural and cultural values.

The full terms of reference are provided in section 1.2 of this report.

There have been many changes in the 30 or more years since the public land use in most of the Central West Investigation area was last assessed by VEAC's predecessors, the Land Conservation Council and the Environment Conservation Council. Increased recognition and protection of Traditional Owner rights and interests in Crown land in Victoria fundamentally changed following the High Court's 1992 'Mabo' decision overturned the concept of terra nullius. Victoria's increasing population – especially in the outer fringes of metropolitan Melbourne and around some regional centres – will continue to place pressure on public land in the investigation area. While some significant resource uses remain in the area, the uses of public land have shifted towards recreation and conservation.

Climate change has placed additional pressure on natural values, and the ecosystem services and recreational opportunities they underpin.

Climate change highlights the critical role that the forested public lands of the investigation area play in protecting the headwaters of eight major river systems that supply water to significant wetlands and human consumers across a large part of western Victoria.

The final recommendations are intended to establish a framework to address these major challenges in the decades ahead.

6.1 Changes in public land use

The net result of the final recommendations for each public land use category is shown in table 6.1.

The additional areas of national park in the recommended new Pyrenees and Wombat–Lerderderg national parks (the latter including the existing Lerderderg State Park), and the expanded Mount Buangor National Park (currently a state park) and Greater Bendigo National Park total some 47,000 hectares, which would more than triple the extent of national parks in the investigation area. These new national park areas have many of the highest natural values in western Victoria. The two recommended new conservation parks at Hepburn and Cobaw – with a total area of 5246 hectares – also contain outstanding natural values but are smaller than the recommended national parks and will accommodate more recreational use.

The final recommendations also include many new and expanded nature reserves and bushland reserves which would increase the extent of land in these categories by around 1200 hectares and 1750 hectares respectively. These are mostly smaller blocks with high natural values or which make important contributions to landscape connectivity.



Table 6.1 Summary of final recommendations for each public land use category

Public land use category	Total area (hectares)		Change
	Current	Recommended	
National park, State park	22,967	73,113	50,146
Conservation park	0	5246	5246
Regional park	5264	24,992	19,728
Nature reserve	6703	8051	1348
Bushland reserve	1047	2808	1761
Historic reserve	1507	1507	0
State forest	89,278	11,901	-77,377
Water frontage, beds and banks reserve	1933	1893	-40
Water production reserve	6635	6514	-121
Community use reserve	1607	1146	-461
Utilities and government services reserve*	17,080	17,033	-47
Land leased or licensed for plantation purposes, Plantation	6724	6585	-139
Uncategorised public land	468	424	-44
Total extent of public land	161,213	161,213	0
Total extent of investigation area (private and public land)	403,815	403,815	0
Heritage river overlay	5166	5442	276
Reference area overlay	1202	1202	0

*Some 14,000 hectares of utilities and government services reserve is government road reserves

Overall, the final recommendations propose an increase of 58,115 hectares in protected areas (national park, conservation park, nature reserve, bushland reserve). This is a major step towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system in Victoria – a key consideration for the investigation and specified in section 18 of the VEAC Act.

An addition of 19,728 hectares of regional park would increase the amount of public land being managed primarily for recreational use. Areas of highest recreational activity, often close to regional townships, are mostly included in recommended regional parks. These areas would continue to support most existing recreational uses, including prospecting. Domestic firewood collection would also be allowed to remain in

some of the recommended new regional parks or additions to regional parks with a proposed phase out period of 10 years.

The final recommendations would reduce the amount of state forest in the investigation area by 77,377 hectares, with the remaining 11,901 hectares of state forest available for timber harvesting and a wider range of recreational uses, including hunting, mainly around the Pyrenees, Mount Cole, Mount Lonarch, Beaufort and Glenmona areas.

While there are many recommended changes to public land use in this report described in chapters 3, 4 and 5, there are also substantial areas of unchanged public land with well-established uses. These include many smaller areas of public land across the investigation area,

and dedicated uses such as water production reserves, community use reserves, and utilities and government services reserves.

This investigation represents an opportunity to acknowledge and respond to the changes of the past 30 years and to offer a way forward for the balanced use and appropriate management of public land in the Central West Investigation area. The final recommendations are informed by the existing patterns of use, projected patterns and levels of use, Traditional Owners rights and interests, and protection of identified areas of high natural and cultural value.

The sections below summarise the outcomes of the final recommendations in terms of key issues for the investigation.

6.2 Traditional Owner interests

The milestone 2013 Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement enabled the Aboriginal community engagement partnership project between Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (DDWCAC) and VEAC. The partnership has provided a culturally appropriate and important opportunity for Djandak (DDWCAC's commercial arm) to run the project and provide Traditional Owner groups with the opportunity to communicate their cultural values, views and interests, including views on appropriate land management and ways to conserve and enhance cultural values. The information gathered through the project and Traditional Owner Country Plans were considered in VEAC's formulation of final recommendations, in accordance with the terms of reference relating to Traditional Owners.

The proposed new or expanded parks and reserves would provide significant protection for tangible and intangible cultural values that Traditional Owners have identified as under threat. Threats to these values include mining, vegetation clearance, timber harvesting and inappropriate recreation along with a range of broader land management issues such as invasive plants and animals, climate change, and water and catchment management. A particular problem is inappropriate non-culturally inclusive land management such as inappropriate fire regimes.

The addition of the recommended parks and reserves to the protected area system provides a foundation to heal and manage Country in culturally appropriate ways, involving Traditional Owners, into the future (for example, through joint management).

Traditional Owner values are intertwined and often congruent with the natural values and broader cultural, social and economic values that form part of VEAC's assessment. VEAC notes that Traditional Owners support public access to parks and reserves while also having their culture, rights and aspirations recognised and respected in how the land is used and managed.

The Mount Cole range is important to several Traditional Owner groups, including Eastern Maar who are in the advanced stages of negotiations for a Recognition and Settlement Agreement. They would like to see increased protection in this area to protect natural values and also cultural values that have either already been identified or are currently undiscovered. In particular, groups have strong interests in the culturally important Barringi Gadjin (Wimmera River) and its headwaters within the Mount Cole forest.

In its general recommendations, VEAC is recommending that the government provide Traditional Owners a leading role in the naming of the recommended new parks and reserves (see recommendation R1 on page 20), and that government consider legislative amendments to allow future changes to Aboriginal title parks and reserves, where this is agreed by the parties (see recommendation R7 on page 22).

'Healthy Country, healthy people' encapsulates cultural values and aspirations across all Traditional Owner groups. To achieve this, the solid foundation that VEAC's final land use recommendations would provide will need to be accompanied by appropriate involvement and resourcing of Traditional Owners in the policy, planning and management of these parks and reserves (and public land in general), including through any outcomes under the Victorian Traditional Owner Settlement Act and Commonwealth Native Title Act and, potentially, the current treaty negotiation process between the State and Aboriginal Victorians.

6.3 Threatened species

Strategic Biodiversity Values (SBV) analyses ranked all relevant locations for their ability to support rare and threatened species. The highest-ranking areas that capture the most suitable habitat for a greater number of rare and threatened species have been prioritised as additions to the protected area system.

The recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park captures a large part of the highest-ranking areas of rare and threatened species habitat. The statewide analysis shows the area to be among the most important for Victoria’s biodiversity with large and mostly contiguous areas of high value. It is also the most important habitat according to the regional analysis which considers only the public land outside protected areas and highlights opportunities to most efficiently capture additional habitat.

The area of Wellsford forest that is recommended as an addition to the Greater Bendigo National Park has several key and threatened flora and fauna such as Ausfeld’s and whirrakee wattles, the brush-tailed phascogale and lace monitor and woodland birds including the swift parrot, chestnut-rumped heathwren, brown treecreeper, hooded robin, speckled warbler and crested bellbird. Large trees in this part of the Wellsford forest provide important habitat for threatened species. These values will be afforded a higher level of protection in the recommended addition to the national park.

Other large and mostly contiguous high-ranking areas of rare and threatened species habitat identified in the statewide analysis are included in the recommended Pyrenees National Park and Hepburn Conservation Park. The threatened Mount Cole *Grevillea* is currently protected within the existing Mount Buangor State Park. New locations of remaining populations of Mount Cole *Grevillea* have been identified in the Mount Cole forest around Fiery Creek and Cave Hill Creek Camp and will be protected within the recommended addition to the Mount Buangor National Park.

The recommended Bungal Bushland Reserve near Ballan contains a small area identified as high ranking, particularly in the regional SBV analysis. Several recommended nature reserves, such as Ben Nevis, Waterloo and the additions to Ben Major, capture some other smaller but similarly high priority areas. Another smaller yet high-ranking area is in the recommended Glenmona Forest Bushland Reserve.

Overall, the final recommendations would almost triple the protected areas in the Central West

Investigation area and would add a large part of the most important habitat for rare and threatened species to Victoria’s protected area system.

6.4 Ecosystem representation

In accordance with section 18 of the VEAC Act, the creation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of protected areas is a key consideration for the Central West Investigation and has been a major factor in the development of Council’s recommendations. Priority 18 of Victoria’s biodiversity plan Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037 also addresses the requirement for a comprehensive, adequate and representative protected area system.

This section reports on the outcomes of the recommendations in meeting the nationally agreed targets for protected areas, using Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) within bioregions as surrogates for ecosystems.

The basis for this reporting is detailed in section 2.4.2 of the draft proposals paper. In summary, three steps were followed:

- In the 2016 discussion paper for its Statewide Assessment of Public Land, VEAC calculated for every bioregional EVC (every EVC in every bioregion) the percentage occurrence on public land outside current protected areas that would need to be added to the protected area system to meet its notional target. Percentages varied from zero for those EVCs for which the existing protected area system meets the notional target to 100 per cent for those EVCs requiring all of their remaining extent to be added to protected areas to meet the notional target. The targets were determined through an amalgamation of recent agreed approaches, based on the conservation status of each bioregional EVC:
 - a) for rare or endangered EVCs, the target is 100 per cent of their remaining extent (from the JANIS criteria)
 - b) for vulnerable EVCs, the target is 18 per cent of their pre-1750 extent (from the JANIS criteria)
 - c) for all other EVCs, the target is 17 per cent of their pre-1750 extent (from the Aichi Biodiversity Target 11)
- These percentages were then applied to the Central West investigation area. For example, to meet the notional target for Herb-rich Foothill Forest in the Central Victorian Uplands (CVU), 57 per cent of the EVC occurrence on public land

outside current protected areas would need to be added to the protected area system i.e. 57 per cent of that distribution across the bioregion, including to that part of it in the investigation area.

- For practicality, VEAC then converted those percentages into 'shortfalls': the area (in hectares) required to meet the target in the investigation area. The shortfall enables ready differentiation between for example Herb-rich Foothill Forest CVU which has a much lower percentage figure than, for example, Swampy

Riparian Woodland CVU (57 compared to 100 per cent) but a much higher area shortfall (12,021 hectares compared to 148 hectares). In this example, the larger area figure will be more difficult to meet – but more meaningful – than the larger percentage figure.

Overall, 107 bioregional EVCs are found in the investigation area. The recommendations have significant implications for protected area representation of 43 of these EVCs; these implications are summarised in table 6.2.

Table 6.2 Implications of final recommendations for ecosystem (EVC) representation

Column A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) and bioregion name ¹	Extent in Central West Investigation area (hectares)				Shortfall (ha) ²	Shortfall as % of other public land ³	Recommended protected area increase (ha)
	Pre-1750	Private land	Protected area	Other public land			
Ecosystem representation targets met or exceeded							
Herb-rich Foothill Forest GoF	2685	282	146	1903	355	19	1350
Herb-rich Foothill Forest/Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex CVU	5989	519	0	4013	1076	27	3301
Grassy Dry Forest GoF	23,814	5938	3254	10,721	2443	23	5144
Box Ironbark Forest GoF	12,120	1742	480	8774	363	4	4043
Shrubby Foothill Forest CVU	38,692	4525	4129	27,958	2662	10	16,069
Grassy Dry Forest/Heathy Dry Forest Complex CVU	3359	772	0	1628	571	35	1548
Grassy Dry Forest CVU	21,529	7011	1438	8045	3865	48	4989
Sedgy Riparian Woodland GoF	173	33	0	95	31	33	85
Shrubby Dry Forest GoF	230	8	0	156	41	27	134
Hillcrest Herb-rich Woodland GoF	793	255	288	139	6	4	131
Riparian Forest CVU	1133	241	214	555	182	33	282
Damp Forest CVU	2293	448	26	1660	324	20	624
Wet Forest CVU	531	58	49	409	41	10	215
Sedgy Riparian Woodland CVU	2688	857	27	1366	473	35	471
Herb-rich Foothill Forest CVU	71,428	20,031	1147	21,038	12,021	57	11,810
Hills Herb-rich Woodland CVU	1043	328	17	229	193	84	134
Box Ironbark Forest VRi	76	31	0	45	45	100	41
Significant improvements made to ecosystem representation							
Valley Grassy Forest CVU	18,789	7619	404	2619	2619	100	874
Valley Grassy Forest GoF	2271	729	33	891	723	81	281
Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland CVU	3751	1325	87	375	375	100	118
Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland GoF	3763	1366	224	438	438	100	186
Stream Bank Shrubland CVU	1353	265	503	196	37	19	20
Creepline Herb-rich Woodland CVU	1437	461	10	320	265	83	119
Ecosystem targets not met							
Grassy Woodland/Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland Mosaic GoF	13,307	3732	68	1129	1129	100	40
Grassy Woodland/Heathy Dry Forest Complex CVU	14,354	4997	33	785	785	100	1

Column A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) and bioregion name ¹	Extent in Central West Investigation area (hectares)				Shortfall (ha) ²	Shortfall as % of other public land ³	Recommended protected area increase (ha)
	Pre-1750	Private land	Protected area	Other public land			
Box Ironbark Forest CVU	4099	1239	1697	707	684	97	1
Grassy Forest CVU	7481	3464	0	709	709	100	65
Grassy Woodland CVU	11,026	3123	70	619	619	100	3
Plains Grassy Woodland VVP	15,602	2632	8	498	498	100	0
Plains Grassy Woodland CVU	16,109	2158	3	469	469	100	0
Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland/Plains Grassy Woodland Complex CVU	3412	773	8	216	216	100	0
Stream Bank Shrubland GoF	217	25	7	159	159	100	3
Swampy Riparian Woodland CVU	2949	845	0	148	148	100	1
Creekline Herb-rich Woodland GoF	164	27	0	136	136	100	0
Plains Grassy Woodland GoF	1641	397	0	108	108	100	0
Grassy Dry Forest/Heathy Dry Forest Complex GoF	6520	2734	160	96	96	100	3
Creekline Grassy Woodland VVP	661	131	0	88	88	100	0
Plains Woodland VVP	2294	170	0	73	73	100	4
Scoria Cone Woodland GoF	188	15	0	66	66	100	0
Grassy Woodland GoF	15,525	5477	63	968	968	100	185
Plains Grassland VVP	8623	1322	42	370	370	100	0
Creekline Grassy Woodland GoF	2112	643	15	329	329	100	22
Creekline Grassy Woodland CVU	1105	265	3	191	191	100	11

¹ Bioregion abbreviations: CVU = Central Victorian Uplands; GoF = Goldfields; VVP = Victorian Volcanic Plain; VRi = Victorian Riverina

² Shortfall (ha) = the area in hectares that would be required to be acquired from other public land in order for the investigation area to make a proportionate contribution to meeting the shortfall across the bioregion

³ Shortfall as % of other public land = the shortfall (ha) as a percentage of the area of other public land from which that shortfall could be met

Table 6.2 shows that the increase in the protected area system proposed in these recommendations would result in representation targets being met, or nearly met, for 17 bioregional EVCs. Many of the EVCs in this group currently have large representation shortfalls, including Herb-rich Foothill Forest Central Victorian Uplands (CVU), Grassy Dry Forest CVU, Shrubby Foothill Forest CVU and Grassy Dry Forest Goldfields (GoF) with respective current shortfalls of 12,021 hectares, 3865 hectares, 2662 hectares and 2443 hectares. Other key EVCs in this group are Sedgy Riparian Woodland, Riparian Forest and Damp Forest in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park (CVU) which were a key focus for local stakeholders during public consultation.

While the target was not quite achieved for Herb-rich Foothill Forest in the Central Victorian Uplands, there are extensive areas of this EVC in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park and the existing Macedon Regional Park.

The outcome for one EVC – Wet Forest CVU – has changed significantly since the draft recommendations. Further additions of 1378 hectares of the Mount Cole forest to the recommended Mount Buangor National Park (A1) for various reasons incorporates large areas of this EVC into the national park. Now, 215 hectares (rather than 9 hectares) is recommended to be added to protected areas exceeding the shortfall target of 41 hectares.

For all these ecosystems, the recommendations would be a significant advance in their long-term conservation and that of the species they contain.

For a further six EVCs, representation targets would not be met but significant additions are recommended. These include the addition of 118 hectares of Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland in the Central Victorian Uplands bioregion (most of which would be achieved through the recommended Waterloo and Ben Nevis nature

reserves) and another 186 hectares of the same EVC in the Goldfields bioregion (in the recommended Pyrenees National Park).

Important protected area additions to Valley Grassy Forest in both the Central Victorian Uplands (874 hectares) and Goldfields bioregions (281 hectares) are also proposed. Elsewhere, these EVCs – and Stream Bank Shrubland GoF – are found almost entirely in Hepburn Regional Park. Although recommended regional parks are not part of the protected area system, they can also deliver biodiversity conservation outcomes through reduction of potential threats such as timber harvesting and complement the protected area system.

For the other 20 EVCs shown in table 6.2, ecosystem representation targets would not be met through these recommendations. Often this is due to the distribution of the EVC across the investigation area. For instance, a number of these EVCs are found mostly along roadsides and in riparian areas in small, isolated patches. An example of this is Plains Grassy Woodland CVU which covers 469 hectares on public land outside protected areas but is mostly located on road reserves around Woodend, Kyneton and Raglan which would generally not be suitable as protected areas. As a result, few additions to protected areas are proposed for these EVCs.

In cases where under-represented EVCs occur in larger or more consolidated areas than roadsides and riparian patches, VEAC has endeavoured to recommend them as protected areas. For example, Plains Woodland in the Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion is mostly found along water frontages and on roadsides between Avoca and Moonambel; however, the largest consolidated patch of this EVC on public land – a 4.3 hectare triangle – is recommended as a bushland reserve.

Apart from those mentioned above, there are 64 EVCs for which the recommendations have no significant implications. They fall into three main groups corresponding to the reasons why they are not included in table 6.2, as follows:

Seven excluded because their current protected area representation meets the notional targets

- Rocky Chenopod Woodland CVU
- Rocky Outcrop Shrubland/Rocky Outcrop Herbland Mosaic CVU
- Shrubby Dry Forest CVU

- Heathy Dry Forest CVU
- Heathy Woodland CVU
- Rocky Outcrop Shrubland/Rocky Outcrop Herbland/Grassy Dry Forest Complex CVU
- Heathy Dry Forest GoF

15 excluded because their extent on public land outside protected areas is less than one hectare

- Plains Woodland/Plains Grassland Mosaic CVU
- Plains Grassland/Plains Grassy Woodland Mosaic GoF
- Escarpment Shrubland CVU
- Shrubby Foothill Forest VVP
- Aquatic Herbland/Plains Sedgy Wetland Mosaic VVP
- Escarpment Shrubland VVP
- Plains Grassland GoF
- Riparian Forest VVP
- Sandstone Ridge Shrubland GoF
- Box Ironbark Forest VVP
- Rocky Chenopod Woodland VVP
- Heathy Dry Forest VVP
- Grassy Dry Forest/Heathy Dry Forest Complex VVP
- Plains Woodland VRi
- Plains Grassland/Plains Grassy Woodland Mosaic CVU



42 excluded because their representation shortfalls are less than 50 hectares (and more than one hectare)

- Lowland Forest CVU
- Valley Grassy Forest VVP
- Sedgy Riparian Woodland VVP
- Plains Grassland CVU
- Plains Sedgy Wetland VVP
- Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland VVP
- Riparian Woodland CVU
- Grassy Dry Forest VVP
- Grassy Woodland/Heathy Dry Forest Complex VVP
- Red Gum Swamp VVP
- Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland/Creekline Grassy Woodland Mosaic GoF
- Grassy Woodland/Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland Mosaic VVP
- Swamp Scrub CVU
- Riparian Woodland VVP
- Plains Woodland GoF
- Swamp Scrub GoF
- Scoria Cone Woodland CVU
- Hillcrest Herb-rich Woodland CVU
- Grassy Woodland/Heathy Dry Forest Complex GoF
- Plains Woodland/Plains Grassland Mosaic VVP
- Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland/Plains Grassy Woodland Complex GoF
- Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland/Creekline Grassy Woodland Mosaic VRi
- Swamp Scrub VVP
- Creekline Herb-rich Woodland VVP
- Grassy Woodland VVP
- Montane Grassy Woodland CVU
- Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland/Plains Grassy Woodland Complex VVP
- Montane Grassy Woodland/Rocky Outcrop Shrubland/Rocky Outcrop Herbland Mosaic CVU
- Swampy Riparian Woodland VVP
- Plains Grassy Wetland CVU
- Heathy Woodland GoF
- Grassy Woodland VRi
- Grassy Woodland/Alluvial Terraces Herb-rich Woodland Mosaic CVU
- Rocky Outcrop Shrubland/Rocky Outcrop Herbland Mosaic GoF
- Herb-rich Foothill Forest VVP
- Plains Grassland/Plains Grassy Woodland Mosaic VVP
- Stream Bank Shrubland VVP
- Grassy Forest VVP
- Red Gum Swamp CVU
- Wetland Formation CVU
- Plains Grassy Wetland VVP
- Herb-rich Foothill Forest/Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex GoF



6.5 Recreation

Along with nature conservation, recreation is now the major use of public land in the Central West Investigation area and the pressures of recreational uses and climate change are likely to continue to increase in the future. Establishing a platform from which to provide for recreation, without undermining the natural values upon which it depends, has been a major focus for VEAC in developing its final recommendations.

The final recommendations amount to some 78,500 hectares of new protected areas and regional parks in places that are currently mostly state forest. The existing protected areas are relatively small (around 20 per cent of the investigation area), so the focus for current management of these small parks and reserves is protection of the natural values rather than heavy recreational use, particularly when there are alternatives in the large areas of state forest nearby. The larger protected area system under these recommendations would provide more flexibility to accommodate uses than the current small parks and reserves, such as dispersed camping in parks, horse riding or dogs in specific designated visitor areas. The relatively tight constraints of the current small protected areas would be unlikely to apply across the much more extensive recommended areas.

Natural values are being impacted now or are likely to be impacted from increasing numbers of visitors to the investigation area and changes for some recreational activities are necessary to preserve these values. VEAC has endeavoured to minimise impacts for users by, for example, recommending regional parks in areas of intensive recreation use (especially uses not usually allowed in protected areas) such as around towns. Regional parks are not part of the protected area system and have a management focus on recreation for large numbers of people in a natural or semi-natural setting.

DELWP's planning and investment for recreation currently aims to balance the experiences of various users as well as the potential impact in the environment. Parks Victoria's planning has similar aims with some activities subject to permits with conditions to protect park values and the experiences of various users. The role of VEAC is to provide strategic advice to government on the future uses of public land. Detailed planning for individual parks and other areas, including fine-scale planning for the recreational use of formed roads and tracks, is the responsibility of public land

managers and is beyond the scope of VEAC's role in this investigation. Park and forest management planning will occur as part of the implementation of government-accepted recommendations. As part of this planning process, land managers will consult with the community to (amongst other things) assist in understanding the user demand for particular facilities including tracks, identify areas with high visitor numbers, and manage potential conflicts between recreational users.

A summary of the allowed activities in the major parks, reserves and state forests recommended in each of the three blocks in the investigation area is provided in fact sheets on VEAC's website. The remainder of this section provides information about the overall implications of the final recommendations for key recreational uses (organised alphabetically). One of the benefits for all recreational users is the increased planning for recreation that is recommended to accompany the new parks and reserves system. This can improve recreational opportunities through better facilities and ensure activities are organised or located to minimise potential conflicts.

In explaining the implications many examples are given of specific uses at particular locations. It should be noted that, in the long term, these are subject to land management decisions. For example, if a campsite is repeatedly damaged by flooding land managers would need to reassess and plan the future of the site, regardless of the assigned public land use category of the site.

Bushwalking

The final recommendations are unlikely to have any significant implications for bushwalking as the activity can be enjoyed across nearly all public land, with the exception of reference areas and some closed catchments.

Bushwalking aligns well with the objectives of national and conservation parks and will benefit from increased planning and facilities in the areas recommended in these categories.

Car rallying

Car rallies have been rising in popularity particularly in Wombat State Forest which provides an expansive network of usable roads and is close to Melbourne, Bendigo and Ballarat. At Wombat forest and around the Pyrenees region, car rallies have provided significant economic and social benefits to the local communities.

Due to their potential impacts and disruptions to other users, car rallies are not well suited

to national parks, depending on the specific characteristics of the area. Sections of a rally occurring in national park are generally, but not always, limited to transport stages. There are examples of competitive sections of rallies remaining in national parks in Victoria where access has been negotiated with the land managers. Where appropriate, competitive sections could be considered within the park management planning process within the recommended national parks.

Camping

Existing campgrounds, and dispersed camping in state forests, would continue to be available in the investigation area, subject to the usual land management considerations.

Dispersed camping will continue to be permitted in the areas of state forest in the Pyrenees forest, at Mount Cole and those around Beaufort. Other activities can be combined with camping in these areas such as camping with dogs and horses, hunting and prospecting.

The recommended Wombat-Lerderderg and Pyrenees national parks are large enough to accommodate dispersed camping in defined zones to be determined by the land manager through management planning. Walk-in camping is currently allowed in some parts of the Lerderderg State Park. There are also further opportunities for dispersed camping within appropriate areas of the recommended new Hepburn and Cobaw conservation parks. Camping with dogs or horses will not be permitted in these areas.

There are no proposed changes to camping at existing regional parks. Subject to management planning that takes into account all recreational and visitor uses, the recommended new Spargo Creek, Blackwood, Fingerpost, and Pyrenees regional parks could accommodate dispersed camping in addition to retaining existing sites such as Werribee River campsite at Spargo Creek. VEAC notes that some existing regional parks such as the Macedon Regional Park have a high level of day visitor use and camping is not appropriate.

Cycling (including mountain biking)

Cycling can occur in all national, conservation and regional parks as well as state forests on formed roads open to the public and on some other formed roads and tracks specified by the land manager. The areas around Woodend and Macedon have seen an increase in the popularity

of cycling and designated bike trails have been developed in consultation with land managers and other recreational users. Some of these trails are currently in existing state forest such as the Wombat Loop tracks at Fingerpost Road and will be incorporated into management planning for the new regional park.

New regional parks and extensions to existing ones are proposed around regional towns and popular tourist areas, for example Hepburn, Trentham, Blakeville, Daylesford and Jubilee Lake. The recommended Pyrenees Regional Park covers the northern slopes near to Avoca and close to local wineries where cycling tours are part of a growing tourism industry in the region.

As the focus for regional parks is for providing recreational opportunities in a natural or semi-natural setting, the creation of dedicated or shared trails and facilities for cycling and mountain biking will be considered through management planning and in the context of other facilities in the region and the state. Unauthorised mountain bike trails can damage natural and cultural values and may also represent a significant risk to riders, as features may not be built to a safe standard.

Dog walking

On-lead dog walking is generally permitted widely in regional parks, bushland reserves and state forests. Regional parks have been recommended near to the townships of Blakeville, Blackwood and Trentham to allow for continued dog walking access for local communities. Some popular camping and picnicking areas have also been included into recommended regional parks, such as the Waterfalls campground in the recommended Pyrenees Regional Park. In the Wombat forest, key recreation areas incorporated into recommended regional parks include Firth Park and Werribee River picnic areas.

Dogs, including camping with dogs, will continue to be allowed within the recommended state forests at Mount Cole and Pyrenees forests, in addition to areas of state forest around Beaufort.

On-lead dog walking is allowed in relatively small designated areas in some national parks. Subject to management planning, the proposed Pyrenees, Mount Buangor and Wombat-Lerderderg national parks could include specified areas where dog walking would be permitted, such as near townships and picnic grounds.

Four wheel driving

Four wheel driving is permitted on formed roads that are open to the public and on other formed roads and tracks as specified by the land manager through management planning. The forests in the investigation area are popular with individuals, groups and for organised events and these activities would be able to continue under the final recommendations.

The provisions for four wheel driving are the same across parks and forests, including national parks. Off road driving is illegal on almost all public land. At times it may be necessary for land managers of parks and state forests to temporarily or permanently close tracks for visitor safety, to protect natural values or to prevent soil erosion.

Horse riding

Individual riding and organised events are popular in many parts of the Wombat, Pyrenees and Mount Cole forests. In addition to state forests, horses are currently allowed in areas of the Lerderderg and Mount Buangor state parks and this access will continue. Organised endurance rides that currently use roads in the existing Mount Cole State Forest and Mount Buangor State Park will also continue in the expanded national park.

In the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg and Pyrenees national parks, additions to the Greater Bendigo National Park, the Mount Buangor National Park and in conservation parks, horses will be allowed on most formed tracks and roads open to the public and other formed roads and tracks subject to management planning which will involve further consultation with users. At times it may be necessary for land managers of parks and state forests to temporarily or permanently close tracks for visitor safety, to protect natural values or to prevent soil erosion.

Recreational hunting

Significant areas of state forest would remain available for recreational hunting at Mount Cole and nearby areas. The recommended revocation of the game sanctuary at this location will now allow for deer hunting to occur in addition to the existing hunting permitted in the area. Within the recommended additions to the Mount Buangor National Park (currently state park) no hunting will be allowed. This will remove potential conflicts of uses, in particular around the Beeripmo walk which is a popular location for walkers and education groups. Hunting is currently prohibited in the area of the existing state park.

Recreational hunting would no longer be allowed in the recommended new national, conservation and regional parks, or in nature reserves and bushland reserves. Hunting for pest animals will be allowed in these areas if part of an authorised control program at the discretion of the land manager.

In the recommended state forest at the Pyrenees and in state forests around Beaufort and Raglan (including Mount Lonarch) recreational hunting will continue.

Nature study

Nature study and birdwatching can occur across all categories of public land and the final recommendations are unlikely to have any significant implications for these activities. As with other recreational activities, better planning for and management of potentially conflicting uses will be beneficial for nature study in the investigation area.



Recreational prospecting

Recreational prospecting is popular in the historic goldfield sites within the investigation area. Old goldfields are concentrated on the northern and eastern slopes of the Pyrenees, and around Avoca, Beaufort, Blackwood and Daylesford. Situated next to the historic gold mining settlement at the Percydale Historic Reserve where prospecting is allowed, the recommended Pyrenees State Forest and Pyrenees Regional Park (around 5000 hectares) would continue to be available for prospecting. Additionally, at the nearby Glenmona Forest Bushland Reserve and Glenmona State Forest east of Avoca prospecting would continue to be allowed. Much of the area of historic goldfields around Beaufort will also have continued access for prospecting in the surrounding state forests.

Recreational prospecting would not be allowed in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park. However, many goldfields in the recommended regional parks in the Wombat forest would remain available for prospecting, including areas around Blakeville and along the lower reaches of the Lerderderg River near Blackwood.

Trail bike riding

Trail bike riding is permitted on formed roads and tracks that are open to the public and other formed roads and tracks as specified by the land manager. The provisions for trail bike riding are the same across parks and forests, including national parks. At times it may be necessary for land managers of parks and state forests to temporarily or permanently close tracks for visitor safety, to protect natural values or to prevent soil erosion.

Registered bikes and licensed riders can continue to use formed roads and tracks open to the public throughout the new regional parks, the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg, Mount Buangor and Pyrenees national parks, the new Hepburn and Cobaw conservation parks and the state forest at Mount Cole and around Beaufort. Other popular locations for trail bike riding in the investigation area include the current Wellsford State Forest where users will be able to continue to ride formed roads and tracks that are open to the public in the recommended additions to the Bendigo Regional Park and the Greater Bendigo National Park. Other formed roads and tracks may be available subject to management planning and further consultation.

6.6 Headwaters, landscape connectivity and climate change

As private land has been largely cleared, the small areas identified for additional protection such as new nature reserves or bushland reserves will play a key role in maintaining biodiversity particularly outside the large forest blocks. Small and dispersed areas of native vegetation in cleared landscapes play a disproportionately greater role in maintaining landscape connectivity and are under increasing pressure from the effects of habitat fragmentation and climate change.

Across the investigation area, approximately 20 small areas have been identified for additional protection as new nature reserves or bushland reserves. These remnants support threatened species or threatened vegetation communities or have been identified as having high strategic habitat value. In other places, existing reserves have been changed by increasing protection of natural values or enhanced by consolidation.

The final recommendations for larger areas, Wombat–Lerderderg National Park, Wombat Regional Park, Mount Buangor National Park provide improved water supply security for the headwaters of several of western Victoria's most significant rivers. These recommended changes in public land use reduce disturbance of both vegetation and soil in the catchment area, enhance water supply and quality, and deliver potentially significant savings for water supply managers. Protection of water supply catchments is particularly important as the effects of climate change alter future rainfall and temperature patterns, and Victoria's population continues to grow. Additionally, the best opportunities for native biodiversity to persist under drier and warmer conditions of climate change will be in the most intact and wetter parts of the landscape.

The section of the Wimmera River that remains in state forest is recommended to be added to the existing Wimmera River Heritage Area (outside the investigation area between Dimboola and into Wyperfeld National Park) providing additional recognition of and protection for natural values and Aboriginal cultural values.

Table 6.3 Implications of final recommendations for grazing licences

Current Crown land licences	Central West Investigation area	Mount Cole–Pyrenees block	Wellsford block	Wombat–Macedon block
Number and area of all licences	1,988 3,375 ha	1,041 2,041 ha	4 50 ha	940 1,283 ha
Grazing and primary production licences	1,682 2,800 ha	965 1,900 ha	4 50 ha	714 943 ha
Licences affected	85 188 ha	7 17 ha	2 45 ha	76 126 ha

6.7 Resource uses

Apiculture

Apiculture is a generally permitted activity across most public land other than reference areas and would continue at licensed sites in the recommended new national parks, conservation parks, regional parks, nature reserves and state forests across the investigation area. In any of these areas, management requirements in the future may necessitate changes at specific locations, particularly where recreational uses may conflict with beekeeping.

Earth resources

Under the final recommendations all current earth resource tenements (extractive industry work authorities, and mining, prospecting and exploration licences) would be able to continue and be renewed.

Where new national parks or additions to existing national or state parks are recommended (covering approximately 50,000 hectares), existing tenements would be permitted to continue and could be renewed, and mining following exploration could be approved subject to the National Parks Act 1975 and the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990. No new exploration or mining would be allowed.

Recommended new nature reserves, conservation parks, regional parks and bushland reserves would become restricted Crown land (approximately 28,000 hectares of additional land). and the provisions for restricted Crown land under the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act would apply.

In the areas of state forest recommended to be retained (some 12,000 hectares) new exploration or mining licences would be allowed in addition to licence renewals.

Crown land licences

Overall, the final recommendations would have a relatively small effect on the large numbers

of Crown land licences across the investigation area. The final recommendations would result in the termination of all or part of 85 licences over an area of some 188 hectares, or less than six per cent by area or number of current licences. Affected licences are located in the recommended new national parks, conservation parks, regional parks, bushland reserves or nature reserves. Around 60 of these licences are held for grazing (including water frontage grazing) or primary production purposes but it is unlikely that all are actually used for grazing.

Water production and supply

The final recommendations would have significant water production benefits particularly in the Wombat forest, which includes part of the headwaters for six major rivers in five catchment basins. These rivers supply water for environmental, industrial, domestic and agricultural uses over a large part of western Victoria from the western suburbs of Melbourne to irrigation districts as far apart as Werribee and Kerang.

The final recommendations would strengthen the protection of these catchments through the establishment of the recommended protection for the Wimmera River at Mount Cole, the Wombat–Lerderderg National Park and Spargo Creek, Blackwood and Fingerpost regional parks at the Wombat forest, and recommendation R10 to prioritise the protection of water quality and yield in the management of all national, conservation and regional parks. The Pyrenees National Park and Pyrenees Regional Park would also provide similar benefits for parts of the Avoca and Wimmera river catchments.

Wood products

The implications of the final recommendations for wood products are difficult to quantify without spatially explicit information about sustainable harvest levels in the years and decades ahead. Assessment is further complicated by

unpredictable variations in markets (particularly home heating) and the large areas beyond the investigation area from which both commercial and domestic operators may also source wood.

Most of the 11,901 hectares recommended to remain as state forest are in the Pyrenees and Mount Cole–Beaufort area. This amounts to a little over 40 per cent of the current extent of state forest in that area. Applying area-based pro rata adjustments to the recommended sustainable harvest level of 2400 cubic metres of sawlogs per year in the 2013 DEPI review of forestry management indicates that there will be close to sufficient supply to the mill at Chute. In terms of fencing and firewood (commercial and domestic) in this area, there is insufficient information to determine the implications of the final recommendations. Applying pro rata the reduction in state forest area, there would be a 60 per cent reduction in availability of these products.

Elsewhere, the implications are clearer in that all commercial harvesting would cease across the Wombat and Wellsford forests and most of the southern slopes of the Pyrenees. Precise figures are not available but the final recommendations would result in reductions of harvest volumes in the order of several hundreds of cubic metres of fencing timbers and several thousands of cubic metres of commercial firewood. VicForests advice is that there would be limited opportunity to relocate. There would also be similar relative levels of reductions for several other products sourced in these areas including bark and wood chop logs.

In terms of sawlogs, there has been very little production of sawlogs from the Pyrenees and none from Wombat forest in recent years. In terms of box-ironbark sawlogs from Wellsford forest and potentially the lower slopes of the Pyrenees, harvesting would cease in these areas. They comprise less than ten per cent of the total box-ironbark state forest estate in Victoria from which licensees can potentially harvest, suggesting a comparable level of reduction in timber volumes produced.

Domestic firewood collection will continue to be available in state forests and will generally be permitted in some of the new regional park areas over a phase-out period of ten years.

Given that no data have been collected on domestic firewood collection in recent years, it is again necessary to estimate implications on a pro rata basis from the extent of reduction in potential harvest area. The recommended state forest and new regional park areas amount to about 30 per

cent of the current state forest estate, suggesting a 70 per cent reduction in domestic firewood supply initially with further reductions after collection in regional parks has been phased out.

6.8 Social and economic implications

Gillespie Economics was commissioned to assess the social and economic implications of VEAC's final recommendations. The full report is available on VEAC's website. An overview of the assessment and its findings is provided in section 1.6 on page 16. Some more detailed information is provided here.

Total economic value includes direct use values, indirect use values (or ecosystem function values) and non-use values. Non-use values comprise option values, quasi-option values, vicarious use values, bequest values and existence value. See the full report of the social and economic analysis on VEAC's website.

The consultants noted some gaps in the information on which the analyses were based. There were few data on current usage levels, particularly for recreational activities. This was a problem for many recreational activities – especially those with a substantial informal component such as individual prospectors, trail bike riders and so on – for which there are no reliable data even on raw visitor numbers, and none on patterns of use or the potential for substitution of alternative destinations. Insufficient data was also a problem for many of the various types of wood product harvesting. Many commercial cutters of minor forest produce such as fence posts and firewood are part-time, operating intermittently and often in forests outside the investigation area (also true for sawmillers) according to changing conditions such as market demand, seasonality and other employment opportunities. Ideally, reliable information on forest productivity would also be available and analysed but it is not efficient for government to collect reliable data for such uses from which it derives so little revenue. Data on domestic firewood are also scant, particularly since the termination of the permits system in 2014. For this activity, a true assessment of demand depends on many other factors well outside VEAC's scope, notably the availability and price of firewood relative to that of other domestic energy sources, and also on the capacity for some users to switch to alternatives.

As detailed in the full report of the analysis, some of these constraints were overcome with

information collected from submissions and discussions with individuals, user groups and land managers, as well as observations from field trips, but for others it was not possible to quantify costs or benefits.

A second constraint was the absence of a primary study to value the potential environmental and cultural benefits of the recommendations. It was not possible for VEAC to commission the costly surveys that would provide the information to reliably quantify the non-use values likely to be generated by the recommendations. In one instance – the non-use values resulting from increased protection of native vegetation – the consultants were able to derive values based on comparable studies elsewhere.

As a result of these constraints there are some uncertainties around the numerical estimates for any given impact. Nonetheless, for both the cost-benefit analysis and the regional economic activity analysis, the broad results are clear about the likely social and economic impacts of the implementation of VEAC's recommendations, as shown below.

For the cost-benefit analysis the consultants conservatively estimate a net benefit to the Victorian economy of \$247 million present value over 30 years. The gross benefit (\$270 million) accrues from the improved protection of native vegetation as a result of the recommendations. The consultants were not able to quantify potentially substantial benefits from flora and fauna species protection, Aboriginal heritage and cultural values (tangible and intangible) and water quality and quantity regulation. The estimated likely costs (\$22 million total present value, over 30 years) mostly result from impacts on wood product harvesting, and recreational prospecting, hunting and dog walking.

The consultants focused on changes to costs and benefits likely to result from implementation of VEAC recommendations. Use and non-use values that would not change from current trajectories under the VEAC recommendations were not quantified.

The potential impacts of implementing VEAC recommendations on regional economies relates to the reduction in timber milling and commercial firewood production. Timber industry employment in the combined six local government areas (LGAs) in the investigation area (Pyrenees, Central Goldfields, Greater Bendigo, Hepburn, Moorabool and Macedon Ranges) is 61 direct full-time equivalents (less than one per cent of regional employment), many of whom also utilise state forests outside the investigation area, and

104 indirect full-time equivalents, who are reliant on native forests in the area to a very small extent. These are upper limits of potential impacts as VEAC is recommending areas remain available for timber harvesting within the investigation area. There will be minimal regional economic impacts associated with implementation of VEAC recommendations on displaced recreational uses of the forests by residents or by visitors and tourists.

As with the cost benefit analysis, the regional economic analysis focused on changes likely to result from the recommendations and did not quantify economic activity that will not, or is not likely to change e.g. commercial uses such as apiculture, and tourism and events related to heavily visited public land sites such as Hanging Rock. The economic activity associated with these activities may collectively be orders of magnitude greater than of those activities potentially affected by the recommendations.

Appendix 1

Recommendations for public land units

The information provided below is a detailed list of individually numbered recommendations described in chapters 3, 4 and 5 as shown on map A (rear pocket). 'Change' refers to a change from current public land use.

Rec ID	Public land use category	Change	Area (hectares)	Block
A National park				
A1	Mount Buangor National Park	new ¹	5282	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
A2	Pyrenees National Park	new	15,126	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
A3	Greater Bendigo National Park (addition to park adjoining investigation area)	new	3152	Wellsford
A4	Wombat–Lerderderg National Park	new ¹	49,553	Wombat–Macedon
B Conservation park				
B1	Hepburn Conservation Park	new	2714	Wombat–Macedon
B2	Cobaw Conservation Park	new	2532	Wombat–Macedon
C Regional park				
C1	Pyrenees Regional Park	new	2016	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
C2	Bendigo Regional Park (addition to park adjoining investigation area)	new	3949	Wellsford
C3	Hepburn Regional Park	addition to existing	6052	Wombat–Macedon
C4	Spargo Creek Regional Park	new	1693	Wombat–Macedon
C5	Blackwood Regional Park	new	3707	Wombat–Macedon
C6	Fingerpost Regional Park	new	5442	Wombat–Macedon
C7	Macedon Regional Park	net reduction	2134	Wombat–Macedon
D Nature reserve				
D1	Lexton Nature Reserve	existing	260	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D2	Ben Nevis Nature Reserve	new	1088	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D3	Moonambel South Nature Reserve	new	53	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D4	Tanwood South Nature Reserve	new	5.0	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D5	Ben Major Nature Reserve	addition to existing	3229	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D6	Waterloo Nature Reserve	new	1695	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D7	Rosyth South Nature Reserve	new	13	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
D8	Macedon (Margaret St) Nature Reserve	existing	0.3	Wombat–Macedon
D9	Gisborne Nature Reserve	existing	47	Wombat–Macedon
D10	Conglomerate Gully Nature Reserve	existing	85	Wombat–Macedon
D11	Mount Charlie Nature Reserve	existing	386	Wombat–Macedon
D12	T Hill Nature Reserve	existing	50	Wombat–Macedon
D13	Bacchus Marsh Trench Nature Reserve	existing	2.0	Wombat–Macedon
D14	Tylden Nature Reserve	new	243	Wombat–Macedon
D15	Black Forest Nature Reserve	new	124	Wombat–Macedon
D16	Slaty Creek Nature Reserve	new	139	Wombat–Macedon
D17	Lerderderg River Nature Reserve	new	4.7	Wombat–Macedon
D18	Long Forest Nature Reserve	addition to existing	629	Wombat–Macedon

Rec ID	Public land use category	Change	Area (hectares)	Block
E Bushland reserve				
E1	Landsborough North Bushland Reserve	existing	11	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E2	Frenchmans School Bushland Reserve	existing	4.7	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E3	Elmhurst Blind Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	0.8	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E4	Sandy Creek (Glenpatrick) Bushland Reserve	existing	7.0	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E5	Glenpatrick Bushland Reserve	existing	13	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E6	Warrenmang Bushland Reserve	existing	11	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E7	Tanwood Bushland Reserve	existing	15	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E8	Percydale Bushland Reserve	existing	8.9	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E9	Yehrip Bushland Reserve	existing	7.2	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E10	No. 1 Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	9.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E11	Porcupine Bushland Reserve	existing	8.8	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E12	Avoca Bushland Reserve (Rutherford St)	existing	0.6	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E13	Avoca Bushland Reserve (Plunkett St)	existing	2.6	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E14	Avoca Rifle Range Bushland Reserve	existing	98	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E15	Glenmona (Avoca) Bushland Reserve	existing	5.0	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E16	Avoca North Bushland Reserve	existing	26	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E17	Glenmona Bushland Reserve	existing	4.3	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E18	Homebush Bushland Reserve	existing	2.3	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E19	Bung Bong Bushland Reserve	existing	12	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E20	Amphitheatre Bushland Reserve	existing	79	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E21	Ben More Bushland Reserve	existing	137	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E22	Granite Hill Bushland Reserve	existing	7.9	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E23	Burbank Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	5.8	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E24	Lexton (Rifle Range) Bushland Reserve	existing	18	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E25	Lexton (Gladston Street) Bushland Reserve	existing	8.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E26	Main Lead (Raglan) Bushland Reserve	existing	12	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E27	Trengoves Track (Chute) Bushland Reserve	existing	15	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E28	Beaufort South Bushland Reserve	existing	6.2	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E29	Baths Road (Beaufort) Bushland Reserve	existing	8.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E30	Snowgums (Beaufort) Bushland Reserve	existing	27	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E31	Warrenmang West Bushland Reserve	new	20	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E32	Warrenmang East Bushland Reserve	new	3.2	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E33	Tanwood South Bushland Reserve	new	4.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E34	Number Two Creek Bushland Reserve	new	5.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E35	Avoca West Bushland Reserve	new	4.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E36	Glenmona Forest Bushland Reserve	new	984	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E37	Glenmona North Bushland Reserve	new	6.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E38	Amphitheatre Creek Bushland Reserve	new	9.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E39	Avoca River West Bushland Reserve	new	5.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E40	Amphitheatre South Bushland Reserve	new	2.8	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E41	Morvells Road (Amphitheatre) Bushland Reserve	new	6.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E42	Green Hill Creek Bushland Reserve	new	4.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E43	Jollys Road (Green Hill Creek) Bushland Reserve	new	0.9	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E44	Avoca–Greenhill Creek Road Bushland Reserve	new	0.7	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E45	Lamplough Reservoir Road Bushland Reserve	new	2.9	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E46	Lamplough Reservoir East Bushland Reserve	new	7.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E47	Lillicur West Bushland Reserve	new	4.0	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
E48	Leys Road (Lexton) Bushland Reserve	new	10	Mount Cole–Pyrenees

Rec ID	Public land use category	Change	Area (hectares)	Block
E49	Franklinford (Jim Crow Creek) Bushland Reserve	existing	5.6	Wombat–Macedon
E50	Franklin Bushland Reserve	existing	0.3	Wombat–Macedon
E51	Jim Crow Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	5.2	Wombat–Macedon
E52	Tarilta Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	25	Wombat–Macedon
E53	Dry Diggings Bushland Reserve	existing	6.2	Wombat–Macedon
E54	Middleton Hill Bushland Reserve	existing	5.0	Wombat–Macedon
E55	Leitches Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	10	Wombat–Macedon
E56	Eganstown Deep Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	29	Wombat–Macedon
E57	Corinella Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	6.5	Wombat–Macedon
E58	Jubilee Lake Scenic Reserve	existing	5.0	Wombat–Macedon
E59	Wombat Bushland Reserve	existing	0.8	Wombat–Macedon
E60	Musk Bushland Reserve	existing	3.0	Wombat–Macedon
E61	Glenlyon Bushland Reserve	existing	5.9	Wombat–Macedon
E62	Burke (former school) Bushland Reserve	existing	2.4	Wombat–Macedon
E63	Denver Bushland Reserve	existing	1.8	Wombat–Macedon
E64	Kangaroo Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	3.6	Wombat–Macedon
E65	Drummond Bushland Reserve	existing	5.2	Wombat–Macedon
E66	Lauriston Bushland Reserve	existing	210	Wombat–Macedon
E67	Burke (Honeysuckle Rd) Bushland Reserve	existing	1.0	Wombat–Macedon
E68	Coliban (Moloneys Lane) Bushland Reserve	existing	3.1	Wombat–Macedon
E69	Coliban River Bushland Reserve	existing	0.7	Wombat–Macedon
E70	Paradise Valley Bushland Reserve	existing	3.4	Wombat–Macedon
E71	Trentham Falls Scenic Reserve	existing	25	Wombat–Macedon
E72	Coliban Road Bushland Reserve	existing	1.8	Wombat–Macedon
E73	Milkingyard Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	1.6	Wombat–Macedon
E74	Trentham East Bushland Reserve	existing	15	Wombat–Macedon
E75	Carlsruhe (Campaspe River) Bushland Reserve	existing	6.1	Wombat–Macedon
E76	Carlsruhe Bushland Reserve	existing	2.2	Wombat–Macedon
E77	Woodend (Dafter Road) Bushland Reserve	existing	4.5	Wombat–Macedon
E78	Twin Bridges (Deep Creek) Bushland Reserve	existing	9.1	Wombat–Macedon
E79	Tunnel Creek (Kerrie) Bushland Reserve	existing	7.6	Wombat–Macedon
E80	Wyberjong Park (Riddells Creek) Bushland Reserve	existing	1.7	Wombat–Macedon
E81	Bolinda Creek Bushland Reserve	existing	2.7	Wombat–Macedon
E82	Gordon North Bushland Reserve	existing	3.0	Wombat–Macedon
E83	Gordon Bushland Reserve	existing	1.3	Wombat–Macedon
E84	Bunding Bushland Reserve	existing	2.4	Wombat–Macedon
E85	Mount Steiglitz Scenic Reserve	existing	0.8	Wombat–Macedon
E86	Coimadai Bushland Reserve	existing	1.4	Wombat–Macedon
E87	Yangardook Bushland Reserve	existing	50	Wombat–Macedon
E88	Bungal Bushland Reserve	new	679	Wombat–Macedon

Rec ID	Public land use category	Change	Area (hectares)	Block
F Historic reserve				
F1	Percydale Historic Reserve	existing	1457	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
F2	Avoca Court House Historic Reserve	existing	0.1	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
F3	Avoca Police Residence and Magazine Historic Reserve	existing	0.5	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
F4	Beaufort Court House Historic Reserve	existing	0.2	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
F5	Daylesford Court House Complex Historic Reserve	existing	0.9	Wombat–Macedon
F6	Cornish Hill Historic Reserve	existing	46	Wombat–Macedon
F7	Trentham Police Camp Historic Reserve	existing	0.3	Wombat–Macedon
F8	Blackwood North Historic Reserve	existing	1.2	Wombat–Macedon
F9	Blackwood Cottage Historic Reserve	existing	0.9	Wombat–Macedon
F10	Blackwood Police Stables Historic Reserve	existing	0.04	Wombat–Macedon
F11	Woodend Court House Historic Reserve	existing	0.1	Wombat–Macedon
F12	Gisborne Court House Historic Reserve	existing	0.2	Wombat–Macedon
F13	Mount Egerton Battery Historic Reserve	existing	0.05	Wombat–Macedon
G State forest				
G1	Pyrenees State Forest	reduced	3099	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
G2	Mount Lonarch State Forest	existing	1161	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
G3	Trawalla–Andrews State Forest	existing	1062	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
G4	Musical Gully–Camp Hill State Forest	existing	833	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
G5	Mount Cole State Forest	reduced	5037	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
G6	Glenmona State Forest	reduced	709	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
H Water frontage, beds and banks reserve				
		existing	1893	all blocks
I Water production reserve				
		existing	6514	all blocks
J Community use reserve				
		existing	1146	all blocks
K Utilities and government services reserve²				
		existing	17,033	all blocks
L Uncategorised public land				
		existing	324	all blocks
L1	Merrimu Reservoir surplus land	new	100	Wombat–Macedon
M Plantation				
		reduced	6585	all blocks
N Reference area				
N1	Buangor Reference Area	existing	69	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
N2	Musk Creek Reference Area	existing	91	Wombat–Macedon
N3	Ruths Gully Reference Area	existing	261	Wombat–Macedon
N4	Ah Kows Gully Reference Area	existing	475	Wombat–Macedon
N5	Pyrete Range Reference Area	existing	306	Wombat–Macedon
O Heritage river				
O1	Wimmera River Heritage Area	new	276	Mount Cole–Pyrenees
O2	Lerderderg River Heritage Area	existing	5166	Wombat–Macedon

¹ A1 Mount Buangor National Park and A4 Wombat–Lerderderg National Park incorporate existing state parks.

² Includes an estimated 14,063 hectares of unparcellised government road prepared using a GIS layer.

