

Submission to the Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements

Victorian Rogaining Association Inc (VRA) [REDACTED] July 2019

The VRA makes the following submission to the process of modernisation of Victorian RFAs.

Consultation questions

1. What changes have you seen in the RFA regions?

We have had continued access to state forests throughout the RFA regions. We use forest most of all in the West region, with more limited use in the Central Highlands, North East and Gippsland regions.

While we have maintained access, we have found the process of obtaining permits for our events becoming more burdensome, with land managers such as DELWP requiring significant documentation. A recent permit application ran to more than 300 pages, including attachments.

2. What should the Victorian RFAs aim to achieve over the next 20 years?

Members of the VRA have various views regarding the balance between economic usage and conservation of forests covered by the RFAs. The VRA does not represent a view about such overall matters but wants to see 1) continued access to forests on reasonable and non burdensome terms and 2) effective invasive weed management. While these matters are more relevant to management plans of forests, these outcomes should be acknowledged in the RFAs.

3. How could the potential improvements in Section 4 of the Independent Consultation Paper help modernise the Victorian RFAs?
 - a. **Recognise all forest values:** The VRA holds 8 to 10 events each year with total participation around 3,000 people per year. Most of these events are in either exclusively or mostly state forests. The majority are in forests covered by RFAs. A UK study¹ found that people that participate in sport generates economic value from between £11,400 per person (badminton) and £45,800 per person (health and fitness). A value for regaining in Australia is not known, but would be suspected to be in the upper part of the range due to the high level of fitness exhibited in regaining. This is value being contributed to the Victorian community significantly through the use of forests covered by RFAs
 - b. **Conserve forest biodiversity and maintain ecosystem health:** The VRA has found that poor ecosystem health, represented by the widespread presence of invasive species such as blackberry, reduces the regaining experience.
 - c. **Promote Traditional Owner rights and partnership:** The VRA is supportive of acknowledgements of traditional owners. We also understand that pre European settlement management of the land was more effective.

¹ Understanding the drivers, impact and value of engagement in culture and sport. case July 2010

- d. Address climate change and other large-scale disturbances:** The VRA calls for effective fire management of RFA forests to minimise the risk of large scale catastrophic fires, even at the cost of some increases risks in prescribed burning. The VRA lost its old permanent course at Mt Disappointment during the 2009 Black Saturday fires. Regrowth from the fire at that location is too thick for regaining to be practical.
 - e. Support the Victorian Government's efforts to improve forest management planning:** As identified above, the VRA does not want additional complexity and hurdles placed on its access to forests covered by the RFAs – specifically increased complexity and documentation on permit applications. The VRA would also be opposed to any measures in restricting its access to forests if any kind of forest reference areas would be introduced similar to those that now exist in parks and reserves managed by Parks Victoria.
 - f. Identify research priorities:** The VRA sees that research to improve fire management and invasive weed species are key priorities.
4. What are the potential improvements you think should be made that are not described?
None.
5. Do you have any views on which potential improvements are most important?
Access to state forests on terms no more burdensome than now is the VRA's most important concern. This means that any improvements that protect or enhance our access to state forests are most important to us.