

DELWP,

I am making this submission to register my opinions regarding Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

The timing of this request is very close to the release of the VEAC "Central West Investigation" report. I will focus on this report as the recommendations made, if adopted, would directly impact the ability for DELWP and the Victorian public to manage, access, use and protect these Forests and Parks.

There is widespread public disappointment in the recent VEAC final report recommendations, and I wish to register that myself and the community of recreational bush users of which I am a part of, disagree with most of the recommendations made in the VEAC report. This is extremely relevant to the questions you (DELWP) have asked on Facebook regarding Modernisation of the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

Recreational bush users such as four-wheel drivers, prospectors, hunters, fishers, dirt bike riders, horse trail riders and dog walkers are rightly worried about the future of our recreational activities in Victorian forests, and the negative impact that any restricted access to the Victorian bush will have.

Bush users like myself are frequently out in the bush, and are almost always there alone, camping in a dispersed way. We rarely see others. Our impact on the environment is minimal, but overwhelmingly positive at the same time. Free access to the bush is a way of life, and an extremely important part of maintaining a physical and mental health balance for many Victorians.

Victorians are concerned that VEAC have not performed adequate consultation with public recreational bush users before releasing the latest report. While there was some community consultation, VEAC have elected to disregard the feedback from 64.8% of responses that were opposed to the recommendations. Many of the groups, clubs and organisations who have been consulted by VEAC do not represent the overwhelming majority of public recreational bush users. Many of these groups, clubs and organisations already have special, additional access systems in place within existing Parks where the public are locked out. Government grants are also being received by some of these clubs. The VEAC process of consultation has not accurately represented the general public's wants and needs for open bush access.

In fact, 64.8% of public VEAC responses were opposed to the creation of any new Parks - yet the report ignores the public opinion and evidence provided entirely.

It is not unusual for bush users to remove rubbish or tackle weeds when we find them - in fact this is the usual occurrence. We want access for all and believe that if the bush is locked up and access restricted for fossickers, riders, hunters, four wheel drivers or the like, there will be no-one in the bush at all to keep it healthy.

Invasive pests and weeds currently thrive in the existing locked up Parks we have. The inability for the Public to access, maintain and protect the bush in the Parks has greatly contributed to this being out of control. Parks Victoria and DELWP do not have the resources

to manage the bush effectively. If you venture outside of the small designated campsite areas into the "real bush", the ineffectiveness of the current Parks access restrictions is clear to see.

This is a worrying time for those like myself who care for the bush, live in the bush, work in the bush and relax/find the right life balance in the bush.

Myself and the large community which I am a part of do not want to see any more Parks of any type. The access restrictions placed on Parks of all types do not find the right balance in protecting the environment, or meeting the needs of the public. The current Parks legislation is too restrictive and misaligned with what it aims to protect. Recreational bush users are no longer prepared to become collateral damage in this process, and this is why so many submissions, and petitions opposing the recommendations were received (again, 64.8% of responses are against any further recreational restrictions placed on our Forests and Parks, and are opposed to the creation of any new Parks.)

To summarise, the overwhelming majority of Victorians are opposed to any additional access restrictions for recreational activities in Forests and Parks, and oppose the creation of any new Parks. We also would like for a truly collaborative approach to future public land management, with current access improved, and many existing restrictions removed. The public are willing and prepared to work collaboratively with DELWP to achieve the correct balance between protecting the environment, and providing the appropriate access to recreational bush users. Currently, an effective balance does not exist and will be made significantly worse should any of the VEAC final report recommendations be adopted in any form, in any region across Victoria.

Regards,

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