

Mr Jeff Floyd,
Chair of the Board, Parks Victoria
info@parks.vic.gov.au

Dear Sir,

I am writing in response to the Temporary Protection Zones recently put in place at Taipan Wall and Bundaleer in Gariwerd / the Grampians National Park, and in regard to the set-aside determinations made in February 2019.

As a rock climber and recreational park user, I am respectfully requesting that you:

- Consider a fine-grained approach to cultural heritage protection as part of the draft Greater Gariwerd Land Management Plan, an approach that does not permanently exclude rock climbers from areas such as Taipan Wall;
- Prioritise the process of cultural heritage assessments in Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and expedite the reopening of those crags where cultural heritage has not been found, as is consistent with Parks Victoria's obligations under the *Parks Act 2018*.

The Victorian climbing community understands and appreciates Parks Victoria's legal obligation to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage on the land it manages. However, we have long argued for a more granular, crag-sector-by-crag-sector approach that does not exclude our user group from 551 square kilometres of the Park. Such approaches have been successfully employed elsewhere in Australia—including the Plaque Area at Mt Arapiles—as well as overseas. I write in support of the Victorian Climbing Club's request that you consider them.

Taipan Wall is perhaps the most significant climbing wall in Australia, a test-piece for elite climbers and an internationally renowned drawcard. Its temporary closure is a real blow to the Australian climbing community, especially climbers in Victoria who are already struggling with the loss of hundreds of valued climbing areas under the set-aside determinations, with no resolution to date. We hope that it will be possible for cultural heritage protection and climbing to co-exist at Taipan Wall, and would welcome the opportunity to inform this process.

In instances where cultural heritage assessments have been carried out in SPAs and no cultural heritage has been found (78% of sites assessed) and where there are no environmental sensitivities likely to be significantly impacted by climbing, we respectfully request that these sites be reopened. This is in accordance with the *Parks Victoria Act 2018* Statement of Obligations. It is also concordant with the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, which states that, "Despite the existence of the Aboriginal place or object, the owner, occupier or other person is entitled to the use and enjoyment of the land to the extent that the person does not contravene section 27 or 28" (i.e. does not cause harm to these places or objects)—section 25 (2).

Contrary to the vilification climbers have been subject to, our community has a history of working with land owners and managers to protect both cultural and environmental heritage. In 2007/8, at the recently closed Bundaleer, VCC members voluntarily assisted Parks Victoria staff in creating a boardwalk and signage to protect the cultural heritage located there. This is one of numerous past collaborations. We believe such collaborations are an integral part of preserving the places we love for and look forward to continuing this work with Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria in the future.

I appreciate your time and look forward to your considered response.

Regards,