

Meeting notes

Meeting: Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park Advisory Group

Date: Wednesday 22 April 2020

Location: Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Parks Victoria staff: Jason Borg (Regional Director Western Victoria and Meeting Chairperson), Jamey Staples (District Manager South West), Zoe Wilkinson (Area Chief Ranger Wimmera), Peter Hawker (Ranger Team Leader Wimmera)

Advisory Group Members: Jacqui Norris, Kate Dooley, Mark Gould, Paula Toal, Keith Lockwood, Mary French, Louise Shepherd, John Uebergang

These meeting notes have been prepared to reflect the major themes of the discussion during the meeting. Advisory Group (AG) members are encouraged to share and discuss these meeting notes with the broader interested community.

Welcome, Acknowledgement of Country and Introductions

- The group were welcomed by Jason Borg, Chair for this meeting. Jason made an Acknowledgment of Country and paid respects to Elders, past, present and emerging, noting that Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park is on the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergai and Jupagulk Peoples.
The Chair then asked AG members to introduce themselves, noting that 4 members of the group are returning members and 4 are new members.

Terms of Reference and Aspirations of Advisory Group Members

- The Chair began the meeting by reiterating the role of the Advisory Group and the governance and operating arrangements as set out in the Terms of Reference, made available as part of the Expression of Interest process.
- The Chair highlighted Section 4 of the Terms of Reference where the purpose of the Advisory Group is set out. The Chair asked members to comment on this and to share their thoughts and aspirations for the Advisory Group for this new 3-year term. The key points members made are summarised below:
 - There was general support and agreement from all AG members for the objectives and purpose of the AG as set out in the Terms of Reference.
 - AG members expressed their interest in working out a mechanism for getting feedback from the community through the Advisory Group to PV. In relation to this a question was asked whether AG members could share the information made available to the group with the wider interested community. The Chair confirmed that this was to be encouraged was consistent with the purpose of

the Group. The Chair noted that, on occasions, there may be the need to share information with the group in confidence and that in these cases this would be clearly communicated to the group.

- Several AG members made reference to how cultural heritage protection and access changes had been handled in the Grampians – Gariwerd National Park over the past year. A common theme expressed by members was that communication with stakeholders by PV was handled poorly. A number of AG members stated they are strongly motivated to avoid the situation that played out in the Grampians happening again at Mount Arapiles.
- Several AG members acknowledged that this is key point in the history of the Mount. There was acknowledgement that this is a difficult time but also a time of great opportunities. AG members acknowledged that there are likely to be changes in management of the park and access. AG members would like to play an active role in ensuring a better process occurs for future changes in management and access at Mount Arapiles.
- One AG member talked their desire to see opportunities to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the park particularly for their young children who love Mount Arapiles.
- Regarding cultural heritage protection it was noted that there has been a strong focus by PV on the legislative basis for these management and access changes to date. AG members expressed a desire for PV to take a far greater proactive role in community education to raise awareness and understanding of cultural heritage and the rights of indigenous peoples. Ideally this would ensure that park visits are enriched through learning about and experiencing the cultural heritage of the park. It was acknowledged that Traditional Owners may wish to not share specific details of cultural heritage and that is understood and should be respected.
- Several AG members talked about having a vision for the park being looked after and protected for everyone. Several AG members commented that they believe through good management natural and cultural values and recreation can co-exist. It was pointed out that there are opportunities for the Victorian Climbing Club (VCC) CliffCare to work with PV and this group to demonstrate best practice in stewardship in looking after significant places.
- AG members expressed aspirations for BGLC to be actively involved in Advisory Group meetings at some point in future, whilst acknowledging that the group would need to reach out in an appropriate way to facilitate this.
- An AG member commented that there needs to be respect for all cultures, for example recognition that the pine trees of Centenary Park have local cultural heritage significance. Noting that the Terms of Reference for the group make reference to a shared vision and collaboration between PV, BGLC and the AG we need the footprints to go ahead on this journey together.
- Several AG members expressed excitement that the indigenous heritage of Arapiles is being acknowledged however recognising that it will be a slow process of learning and walking together.
- It was suggested that there were potential opportunities for the group to be advocates for Traditional Owners.
- AG members recognised that other elements of park management continue to be an important ongoing focus such as maintenance of tracks and search and rescue response capability.
- An AG member noted that in previous years there have been collaborative environmental programs such as revegetation of roads reserves connecting to Mitre Rock and Arapiles. There was interest

expressed in re-invigoration of these types of programs. It was suggested that the recently re-activated Natimuk Urban Landcare could be an ideal partner for these kinds of initiatives.

- Concerns were raised about limited funding being available for the maintenance of facilities such as the campground.
- Concerns were raised that waiting for cultural heritage assessments could lead to missing out on future potential funding allocations for the campground.
- An AG member noted that there has been substantial growth in rock climbing guiding activities at Arapiles over the last 20 years or so and shared that they had a strong interest in working on the sustainability of the rock climbing guiding industry to ensure that natural and cultural values are protected without excluding all recreational activity.

The Chair then responded to the group's aspirations sharing their perspectives and aspirations on behalf of Parks Victoria. This is summarised below:

- I see my role is helping to bring communities closer to both the management of the park and to the TOs of the land. Currently PV is in the middle. PV is working to bring the TOs and Communities closer together in the hope of building strong relationships, direct communication and collaboration.
- Ideally there needs to be a shared vision and a celebration of cultural heritage. This will hopefully lead to a position where people can use and enjoy the park whilst these values are protected. There is work to be done by this group with PV to increase understanding and bring the community closer together. As many of the group have said this won't happen overnight. You can't develop trusting relationships overnight.
- BGLC have said to us they want to develop long term respectful relationships with the community. BGLC are starting this process through working on the relationship with the Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network (GWRN), which is very encouraging to hear.
- In protecting cultural heritage we need to be adaptable and flexible and most importantly we need to listen to what the TOs have to say and learn what is important and why.
- There has been a lot of talk about co management and joint management. Just to confirm that the park is already co-managed by PV and BGLC. At some stage into the future, PV anticipates that as an outcome to the Traditional Owner Settlement Act negotiations happening between BGLC and the State Government, this will result in formal joint management of the park. This essentially means equal decision-making power to both PV and BGLC and a change of governance arrangements to a Management Board for the park. With this future in mind it is in everyone's interest that we work on genuine relationships and supporting BGLC on the path to joint management.

Park Management Report

- A summary report of recent and upcoming park management activities at Mount Arapiles-Toosan State Park was presented. This report covered off on environmental, cultural heritage protection and visitor and asset management programs. The report was circulated to the group directly after the meeting.

- A question was asked regarding the process for engaging an Archaeologist to undertake cultural heritage assessments. The Chair advised that they would follow up on this detail and respond after this meeting.

Wrap up and actions for next meeting

- It was confirmed that the Park Management Report presented by PV is to be circulated to the group.
- It was discussed and agreed that Advisory Group Contact Email and Phone Numbers are to be circulated to all AG members.
- It was confirmed that group emails will be used for sharing information and discussion amongst the group and Parks Victoria between meetings.
- It was discussed and agreed that two further meetings are planned in 2020 with July and November identified as potential timing. A date in July will be proposed by Parks Victoria nearer the time.