

Meeting notes

Meeting: Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) Meeting 3

Date: Friday 24 April 2020

Location: Online meeting due to health restrictions

Independent Chair: Mark Dingle (Deloitte)

Parks Victoria staff: Maria Pizzi (Director Managing Country Together), Josh Chikuse (Manager Park Management Planning), James Hackel (Park Management Planner), Ian Foletta (Park Management Planner), Koel Wrigley (Stakeholder Engagement Advisor)

Parks Victoria observers: Mathew Jackson (Chief Executive Officer), Annette Vickery (Parks Victoria Board), John Pandazopoulos (Parks Victoria Board), Carol Nichols (Director Ministerial Services)

Participating organisations:

- Victorian National Parks Association
- DELWP FFR Regional
- Outdoors Victoria
- Grampians Tourism
- Bushwalking Victoria
- Rock-climbing Founding Council
- Four Wheel Drive Victoria
- Friends of Grampians Gariwerd
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council
- Aboriginal Victoria

Apologies: Stuart Hughes (Director Park Planning)

The below meeting notes have been prepared to reflect the major themes of the discussion during the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) meeting for the Greater Gariwerd (Grampians) Landscape Management Plan (the plan), and will be made publicly available from <https://engage.vic.gov.au/grampians-management-plan>. Organisations participating in the SRG are encouraged to share meeting notes with their community.

Due to the current health situation, this meeting was run online using Microsoft Teams meetings. The meeting was split into two sessions, two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon.

MORNING SESSION

Welcome and introductions

- The group was welcomed by Mark Dingle, the independent chair (the chair), and each member asked to introduce themselves. There were several people who were replacing another representative for this meeting, so they were new to the group.

- The chair began the meeting by reiterating the role of the SRG and the overall project governance framework, and then outlined the agenda for the meeting.
- The online meeting format was run through and confirmed with participants. To note there were two SRG members who had challenges with their technology for the first hour of the meeting. The issues were resolved, and the presentation was shared with them.

Overview of planning activities since meeting 1

- An overview of the activities that have occurred since the first SRG meeting was presented. Activities included:
 - Meeting notes from the first meeting have been publicly released – available on Engage Victoria
 - Meeting notes from the second meeting have been publicly released
 - Consultation Summary Report has been publicly released – available on Engage Victoria
 - Completed Tangible Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Field Assessment of priority climbing areas
 - Completed Visitor Experience Framework internal workshops
 - Completed Natural Values and Impacts analysis
 - Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Values Draft Report (includes intangible values) submitted for review
 - Preparing Options Analysis for the Project Control Group
- The different types of legislation that apply to the Grampians Landscape was summarised, particularly the National Parks Act (1975). It was reiterated that the plan must be developed to comply with this legislation. The key legislation that applies to the landscape is:
 - National Parks Act 1975
 - Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978
 - Wildlife (State Game Reserve) Regulations 2014
 - Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006
 - National Heritage Listing – (Commonwealth) Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

Presentation on the values that have been mapped for the development of the plan

- Several Parks Victoria staff members gave a presentation explaining what values mapping and assessments have taken place over the last six months to inform the development of the plan. These included:
 - Highest value areas for biodiversity
 - Critical habitats for listed fauna
 - Refugia for drought, fire and climate change
 - Listed flora species and vegetation communities
 - Environmental impact assessments at rock climbing sites
 - Assessments of places in the Grampians National Parks for tangible heritage values

- Aboriginal rock art sites impact assessments in the Grampians National Parks Special Protection Areas
- Aboriginal cultural heritage values assessment
- SRG members overall expressed their appreciation for work that had been done in the assessments and putting it together to present to the SRG. In particular, SRG members found the extensive environmental mapping informative.
- SRG members made the following comments and questions throughout the presentation:
 - It would be great to improve riparian vegetation outside the national park and in the areas as part of the whole of the landscape region.
 - How have the natural values changed over the last 100 years? Have they improved? The landscape is still recovering from the legacy of past land uses for example wood harvesting, many of which continued right up to when the national parks were established a few decades ago. The landscape is also recovering from severe fire and flood over the previous decades. There are however many success stories, such as the re-introduction of the Brush-Tailed Rock-Wallaby, and the landscape scale pest control for foxes, deer and goats which are reducing the threat to species and habitats.
 - Is water harvesting in the park recognised in the plan as a major threat to environmental values? The water harvesting in the Glenelg catchment may have significant seasonal impacts on the Glenelg River flows. Water harvesting and the need for collaboration with CMAs and water authorities will be recognised in the draft management plan.
 - Were the environmental impacts assessed at rock climbing sites extrapolated from these eight sites to all 200? The response is yes, the average impact across the eight sites was extrapolated to estimate the total impact across 200 sites.
 - Do the results of assessments for tangible heritage mean that tangible Aboriginal cultural heritage sites that were not rediscovered have now been lost, damaged, or just no longer exist? The response to this was it is varied, some sites will have been damaged and lost, however some sites could have been buried or covered up over time. Events such as fire can result in the rediscovery of tangible heritage values. Aboriginal places are also revealed through routine assessments conducted by Parks Victoria working in partnership with Traditional Owners.
 - Through the rock art site assessment, there seems to be very few sites that have evidence of impacts from climbing - only 5 of 72? is that right? Do you have more information on this please? The presentation provides specific information about impact on cultural values on eight cultural places. The presentation also provided information about the rehabilitation of impacts on cultural heritage in the eight areas called the “eight focus areas.” Some of the impacts are specific to climbing for example, chalking, bolting and some from general from human activities for example, litter and some from unidentified sources and disturbance to rock shelters. The information in the presentation was intended to illustrate the impacts that have been observed rather than to provide a comprehensive picture of all impacts on all cultural places assessed.
 - It would be good if the plan captured the impact of visitor infrastructure on natural and cultural values in the landscape? The draft management plan will consider the impact of

proposed visitor infrastructure. Parks Victoria seeks to counterbalances the impacts from new visitor infrastructure with a no-net-loss principle balanced across the estate. This approach is also supported by state-wide requirements for vegetation removal offsets that apply to new infrastructure.

Presentation about the Visitor Experience Framework

- A presentation was provided by Parks Victoria about the Visitor Engagement Framework (VEF). A VEF is a framework to determine what visitor experiences to provide and where to invest. It captures knowledge about the diversity of visitor experiences offered and sets priorities about where resources should be invested to support visitation.
- SRG members had several questions about the VEF process:
 - Have you used current visitor numbers to inform proposed experiences and will numbers be presented?
The VEF considers current and anticipated use of areas. Future use is difficult to define as changes in technology changes how people learn about areas (Instagram) and access them (cheaper, lightweight gear) and it is hard to know what new technology there will be in the future.
 - Will the visitor experiences work projections for future visitor growth, particularly in the central area? How does management of the visitor experience areas build in environmental protection?
The VEF allows us to see where visitors are and what they are doing and compare that with where environmental and cultural values are and how those activities may impact those values. We can therefore tailor a response to specific areas.
 - Feedback of the consultation was dispersal of visitors, is this being considered?
Dispersal of visitors is being considered and planning will look at how and where to provide for that. The VEAs allow us to direct this dispersal so that values can be protected.
 - If we disperse visitors throughout the park - will this mean that areas of higher biodiversity and wilderness value are visited more and potentially put at risk from weeds and pests?
The draft management plan will consider the impact of proposed visitor infrastructure. Parks Victoria seeks to counterbalances the impacts from new visitor infrastructure with a no-net-loss principle balanced across the estate.
 - There are unsealed roads that run through the park, would having sealed roads provide better dispersal options e.g. Mt Zero Rd and could help with quicker emergency response. Does Parks Victoria have any views on such roads, and do you address this in the plan?
Sealing roads does change visitor dispersal, which in turn changes visitor experiences – generally from a less visited, remote bush experience to a more visited experience with more infrastructure to cater for larger numbers of people. The VEF recognises that remote experiences are valued. The aim is to provide a range of experiences where possible.

Discussion about management zone options

- Parks Victoria explained how all the information that had been shown so far will be used to inform a review of the current management zones. It was explained that there are several different management zoning options that can be applied in different ways.
- There was a short discussion between SRG members about whether the default zone for the landscape should be conservation zone to match the purpose of a national park, but also the need to have zoning to allow commercial activity in the park. There was further discussion about this in the afternoon session which is summarized in the following pages.

Presentation of the decision-making process and how different options are assessed

- To complete the morning session Parks Victoria presented the process that occurs to consider and weigh up options and how decisions are made. An example, camp fire management, was used as a test to help SRG members understand the steps.
- Parks Victoria also shared that all decisions that are made for the plan, are directed by the vision. The vision is still being finalised and will incorporate the community's feedback during consultation. However, what is already decided is that the Gariwerd Landscape is Traditional Owner Country with cultural meaning for Traditional Owner people. Respecting Traditional Owner cultural connection will be a priority management consideration. This means that all decisions about park management – recreation, the environment, tourism, fire, water – will consider how the decision can recognise, protect and help strengthen Aboriginal cultural connection to the landscape.
- Discussion about the decision-making process was held off until the afternoon session and is therefore reported in the following pages.

AFTERNOON SESSION

The afternoon session focused on listening and recording feedback from SRG members. They were asked to respond to three questions. Their responses have been summarised under each question below. The raw notes (virtually scribed) are also included in the Appendix.

Please note the following dot points are summarised feedback from SRG members, it has not been fact checked nor represents Parks Victoria's view.

What are your general observations on what was presented today?

- There has been a lot of work done to inform the plan, in particular it is good to see the assessments of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.
- Management planning involves preparing for visitor numbers. It is hard to know just how much visitor number will increase over the next 10-15 years, so it is hard for the plan to fully respond.
- Will there need to be a 'limit to growth' in the future (for example permits) to ensure visitation and the subsequent impacts can be managed? There is concern that increasing visitors into the park is detrimental because it is a refuge for native flora and fauna and has high biodiversity value.

- There should be opportunities to look beyond zoning of recreation versus conservation, are there options to use infrastructure and design to allow recreation in areas while protecting the values?
- The plan needs to acknowledge how stakeholders will be engaged if decisions need to be made in the future about changes to access. Groups would rather be engaged early rather than informed once the decision is made.

What management zoning options do you think your stakeholders would find the easiest to understand and follow?

- Victoria is already divided up into zones and uses under the planning scheme, and the purpose of a national park is to protect land for the purpose of conservation. There is a concern that having multiple and different zoning within the national park can affect the overall conservation purpose of the park.
- There is a need to simplify the zoning, as many people do not understand it, for example, the difference between 'conservation' and 'conservation and recreation' zones. Some members pointed out that the community may never completely understand the intricacies of each zone, instead it is important that what activities can occur where is well communicated.
- The park management zones need to consider and align with other adjacent zones for example bushfire management in public land and development zones in surrounding townships such as Halls Gap and Dunkeld.

Do you think the criteria being considered in the options assessment is comprehensive? Have we missed anything?

- General support for the options assessment process and the criteria being considered.
- It would be good to involve experts from recreational groups outside of Parks Victoria in the options assessments.
- For what is missing:
 - Options should include reversing damage and impacts not just managing them due to the conservation value of the park.
 - Options should consider ways infrastructure can minimize impacts so that recreational benefits can be maximized.

Wrap up and actions for next meeting

- The next meeting is planned for later in 2020 when the draft plan has been released for public consultation. The focus of the next meeting will be exploring the plan and the feedback provided by stakeholders and community.

APPENDIX – Images of the raw notes form the afternoon session



Do you think the criteria being considered in the options assessment is comprehensive?

Historical work is valuable to consider

DELWP Good process - but yes likelihood a challenge. Unattended bush fires are regularly. There is always potential, how you weight that together is interesting and challenging.

BWW - It is a comprehensive list. The categories need a little fine tuning - some are impacts some reputation - would be good to see them all the same - outcomes or impacts

Ararat - The decision making process looked good, but weighing up and measuring of the decisions is not completely clear yet.

DELWP - Who does the options assessment? This is done by the planning team with experts within Parks - look into talking to experts outside of Parks Victoria

Rock climbing - look for opportunities to seek external expertise to fill out the assessments, getting input from other groups could be quite enlightening.

Horsham - Very technical and a lot of assumptions - how decision are made needs to be clearer for presentation to the community.

Have we missed anything?

Is there options to consider for infrastructure to minimise impacts so that rec benefits can be maximised?

VNPA - need to reverse the risk not just manage it, because of the conservation importance of a NP. Look into ways to advance that protection.