

National Parks Advisory Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



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Front cover:
Cemetery Bight, Mallacoota Inlet, Croajingolong National Park
Image courtesy of Parks Victoria.

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Foreword

It is with pleasure that we provide the Annual Report of the National Parks Advisory Council to the minister, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

The council met three times in 2019-20 and participated in one field trip to the proposed Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park. The council's meeting schedule and ability to meet was significantly impacted in the past year by the 2019-20 bushfire period and the COVID-19 pandemic and a brief interregnum while the council was reappointed.

During 2019-20 Council formally advised the minister on a number of matters for which advice was required under the *National Parks Act 1975* in accordance with sections 11(1)(a) and 19G. Such advice – referenced elsewhere in this report – forms a critical part of the council's business and requires detailed consideration following input from public servants. Council wishes to place on record its thanks for the nature of the advice it has received from these officials over the course of its current, now completed, three-year term.

During the year, council received informative briefings and had discussions on these and a range of other matters to support its work, including key issues which relate generally to the state of the parks' system such as climate change and adaptation, and problems with feral animals, especially horses and deer.

Over summer 2019-20, as Council was completing its previous term and receiving advice of its reappointment in March 2020, the parks' estate was subject to enormous damage from the catastrophic and unprecedented fires which affected so much of Victoria, and then, in March 2020, the impact of COVID-19 began to unfold on the community. Council acknowledges first and foremost the loss of life and property which occurred through the fires and the enormous damage which is still being assessed within the parks' estate to natural and cultural heritage values, infrastructure and visitor and tourism icons. Recovery from the fires will be a significant part of future planning and budget requirements, as will developing further preparedness for future events.

On being reappointed Council received a comprehensive briefing on both the 2019-20 fires and the impacts of COVID-19 on the parks' estate, and, with respect to the latter in particular on revenue loss from closure of visitation opportunities.

The extent of damage to the parks' estate and to key values, including in areas which have seldom before seen fire is truly staggering. Council will be paying particular attention to this in coming years.

Council welcomed being reappointed by the minister in March 2020 which has enabled continuity in the strategic objectives which council has been formulating.

Council continues to take a particular interest in matters raised in previous annual reports and through regular briefings, including:

- the impact of tourism in parks, noting its positive role in the state and regional economies, as well as the need to manage parks consistent with the primary object of the *National Parks Act*, being preservation and protection, and the use of those parks
- the welcome development and progress of Joint Management Plans and joint management activities with Traditional Owner groups across the state
- support for the removal of feral horses from key parks including the Alpine and Barmah national parks, where detailed scientifically-based strategies have been developed
- support for the draft Victorian Deer Control Strategy. Council is highly aware that a rapid increase in the range and abundance of deer populations is a significant issue for the ecological integrity of parks, and the experience of park users and the broader community. This is particularly so in fire ravaged areas, and Council is most supportive of the Victorian Government progressing its strategy framework and series of actions to address the significant impacts of deer on the environment, agriculture, Aboriginal cultural heritage and public safety

- a briefing on the establishment of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority where governance and land management arrangements in relation to the Authority were considered, including particularly for parks under the *National Parks Act*. Council confirmed the principle that existing national park assets in Victoria should be managed by Parks Victoria.
- the government's response to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's Central West recommendations for increases in the parks' estate
- the Western Grassland Reserves, where Council developed principles for further discussion regarding the development, management and promotion of the reserves. Council has also noted that the important additions to them provide a wonderful opportunity for profiling national parks, and natural and cultural heritage, in a culturally and economically diverse part of Melbourne where open space is at a premium.

Council has been particularly well supported in its work by DELWP and Parks Victoria, and continues to benefit from the participation as observers and contributors at council meetings of the respective representatives of the department (Ms Sarah Crute) and Parks Victoria (Mr Matthew Jackson).

My thanks to members of the council who have contributed to the council's deliberations and fulfilled their role, and to Executive Officer Sylvie Bideau for her continued support.



Doug Humann AM

Convenor

31 August 2020

The council

The National Parks Advisory Council is established under section 10 of the *National Parks Act 1975* (the Act). In 2019-20, the responsible minister was the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change.

Statutory responsibilities

Under section 11 of the Act the functions of the council are to:

- advise the minister generally in relation to the administration of the Act and on particular matters in relation to that administration on which its advice is sought by the minister
- advise the minister on any proposed excision from a park referred to it by the minister
- submit to the minister within three months after each year ending on 30 June a report on the performance of its functions during that year.

In addition to these functions, the minister is required to seek advice from the council in relation to the granting of:

- certain leases within parks (sections 19G, 30AAA, 30AAAC, 31AA, 31AABB, 32CA and 32CC of the Act)
- consents in relation to various earth resources tenements and operations within parks (section 40(3) of the Act).

The Act

The Act governs the protection, use and management of Victoria's parks system. It provides a strong framework for ensuring that the uses and management of the parks are compatible with the long-term maintenance of their natural and cultural values.

The parks system

As at 30 June 2020 there were 139 parks and other areas with a total area of approximately 3.46 million hectares managed under various provisions of the Act. These areas comprised 45 national parks, 3 wilderness parks, 26 state parks, 13 marine national parks, 11 marine sanctuaries, 11 marine and/or coastal parks or reserves, 15 other parks and reserves, and 15 non-scheduled areas. In addition, there were 19 wilderness zones and 22 remote and natural areas located within 13 national parks, and 4 designated water supply catchment areas within 3 national parks.

Membership

The council consists of eight members with specific skills and experience, appointed by the Governor in Council:

- two people with skills or experience relating to the preservation and the protection of parks
- one who is a professor or teacher of ecology at a university in Victoria
- one with experience in local government who resides in a municipality in which there is a park
- four (at least two of whom reside outside of the metropolitan area) with experience with matters affecting the interests of the community.

Current members

The members of the council on 30 June 2020 were:

Mr Douglas Humann AM (Convenor)

Mr Humann has almost 40 years of leadership experience in the non-government sector across Australia, working principally with environmental NGOs, as well as indigenous groups and natural resource management authorities. Mr Humann is the current Chairman of Landcare Australia. He has a particular interest in and experience with public, private and indigenous protected areas in Australia and overseas. He was CEO of Bush Heritage Australia (1997-2011) and led the Victorian National Parks Association (1990-97). Mr Humann runs his own consultancy and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Mr Adam McLean (Member)

Mr McLean has been a practising lawyer for over 29 years – 21 years as a barrister. Mr McLean specialises in native title and land rights, industrial relations, and board governance and has also advised many traditional owner groups in their negotiations for Aboriginal owned and co-managed national parks and reserves in Victoria, NSW and QLD. Before law, Mr McLean gained an honours degree in zoology and during completion of his honours thesis surveyed Point Nepean Army Reserve. Mr McLean was raised in the Mornington Peninsula and has a keen interest in conservation, parks and reserves.

Mr Michael Fendley (Member)

Mr Fendley lives on a small farm near Dunkeld in western Victoria. He has a life-long interest in Victoria's parks and environment, studying ecology and environmental planning at university before becoming one of the first environment officers for local government in Australia. He was Conservation Manager for Birds Australia (now Birdlife Australia), member of seven threatened-species recovery teams, CEO of the Victorian National Parks Association during the creation of the Marine and Box-Ironbark parks systems, Manager of the Green Steps Program at Monash University and Manager Sustainability Programs for DSE (now DELWP) in Barwon-South West.

Ms Anna Foley (Member)

Ms Foley is an experienced environmental advisor with a background in ecology, statutory planning, heritage and community engagement. She is the Regional Operations Manager at Trust for Nature, overseeing a protected area network of more than 100,000 hectares. Prior to this role Ms Foley was the Conservation Manager at the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), regularly appearing at Planning Panels and VCAT to advocate for natural and cultural heritage protection. Ms Foley is an alternate member of the Heritage Council of Victoria and a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee, as well as volunteering for the National Trust.

Ms Judy Dixon (Member)

Ms Dixon is a rural resident and Director of JADE Comm, a business specialising in delivery of training, strategic project and communication services. Ms Dixon has extensive experience working in the local government sector across communications, tourism, economic development and organisational development. Her focus is on partnerships and initiatives that strategically contribute toward destination sustainability and within that context is currently working to achieve Mansfield Autism Statewide Services' masterplan development of a therapeutic care farm. Ms Dixon is a former member of the Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council, Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board and past President of Mansfield Secondary College. Her interests include horse riding and snow skiing.

Dr Mary-Jane Rogers (Member)

Dr Rogers is a rural resident with experience in matters affecting the interests of the community and an active member of the Shepparton/Goulburn Valley community. She is involved in a range of community groups, including in the areas of the environment and community use of parks. Dr Rogers is a part-time research scientist with Agriculture Victoria (Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions) and has a strong scientific background in plant biology and physiology and in science quality and delivery. She brings to the council many years of experience in natural resource management issues and their effects on the rural community. Dr Rogers was previously a member of NPAC from 2010 and is currently a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Associate Professor Ursula de Jong (Member)

Dr de Jong is Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Built Environment, at Deakin University, Geelong. She is Director of GEDI – Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in the School. She is an architectural historian and a researcher of place. Dr de Jong was lead investigator on the recently completed Australia Research Council Sea Change Linkage Grant (2011-16) which considered the impact of change on the coastal communities of Sorrento and Queenscliff in Victoria. Dr de Jong is Deputy Chair of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), a member of the National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council and President of the Nepean Conservation Group which has cared for the local environment since 1973 and oversees nineteen local Friends' Groups on the tip of the Mornington Peninsula, two in the Mornington Peninsula National Park. In 2017 she was appointed Chair of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Mr Chris Rose (Member)

Mr Rose is acknowledged as a world leader and expert in the management of national parks and reserved lands. He has worked in the areas of public land management, tourism and regional development and emergency management and recovery for over 35 years. Mr Rose has held positions in Victorian local government (Shire of Healesville), the Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service, and from 1996 to 2015, in Parks Victoria. His career at Parks Victoria included managing many of the State's outstanding protected areas in various executive roles including 12 months as Acting Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria. He left the sector in 2015 to start his own consulting firm specialising in business strategy development and ecotourism. Mr Rose is a member of the Game Management Authority and a director of the Victorian Fisheries Authority.

The above council members were reappointed by the minister for a further three-year term commencing 31 March 2020.

When the *Parks and Crown Land Legislation Amendment Act 2017* came into force, the Secretary to DELWP (or his or her nominee) and the position formerly known as the Director of National Parks (who was the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria) ceased to be members of the council. However, recognising the critical role which the department and Parks Victoria play in decisions regarding Victoria's parks, these members have been offered observer status to the current council and are welcomed as participants in meetings but they do not have any decision-making responsibilities.

Council has benefited from participation by Ms Sarah Crute as nominee of the Secretary, and Mr Matthew Jackson who is the Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria.

Council activities

Program

Council structures its work program according to its statutory responsibilities, provides advice required on key government investigations, policies and strategies, and fulfils its corporate governance responsibilities.

Council continued to take a close interest in on-ground park management issues through field visits, discussions with Parks Victoria field staff and regular briefings by Parks Victoria and DELWP staff.

During 2019-20 Council held three meetings and conducted one inspection at the proposed Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park in November 2019.

Council meetings

Meeting No. 288	6 August 2019
Meeting No. 289	20 November 2019
Meeting No. 290	21 May 2020

Advice to the Minister

New leases to four surf lifesaving clubs under section 19G of the Act

The Council was requested, in accordance with section 19G of the Act, to advise the minister on the granting of new 21-year leases to the following surf lifesaving clubs:

- Gunnamatta Surf Lifesaving Club, Mornington Peninsula National Park
- Portsea Surf Lifesaving Club, Mornington Peninsula National Park
- Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club, Mornington Peninsula National Park
- Venus Bay Surf Lifesaving Club, Cape Liptrap Coastal Park.

At its meeting on 21 May 2020, Council heard a submission from DELWP on the new policy statement titled 'Occupation and use of Crown land by lifesaving clubs in Victoria' and received a briefing from Parks Victoria on the proposed leases to the above-mentioned clubs.

Council supported the recommendation to grant the new leases for the operation of surf lifesaving clubs. In its deliberations, Council also noted the need for appropriate monitoring and enforcement of the conditions attached to the leases.

New Lease to Grants Kiosk and Tearooms, Dandenong Ranges National Park, under section 19G of the Act

The council was requested, in accordance with section 19G of the Act, to advise the minister on the granting of a new lease over the Grants Kiosk and Tearooms, Dandenong Ranges National Park. At its meeting on 21 May 2020, council considered this lease and heard a submission from Parks Victoria on the granting, following an expression-of-interest process, of a new seven-year lease to the incumbent tenant.

Council supported the recommendation to grant a new seven-year lease, effective from 2020, for the purposes of the operation and management of the Grants Kiosk and Tearooms, the provision of visitor services and general visitor information.

In its deliberations, Council recalled its past consideration of activities at this site, and wishes to record its appreciation to Parks Victoria for its efforts regarding the cessation of bird-feeding by visitors at the site.

New Lease to Melbourne Grammar School over the Breakfast Creek Licola School Camp, Alpine National Park, under section 19G of the Act

The council was requested, in accordance with section 19G of the Act, to advise the minister on the granting of a new lease to Melbourne Grammar School at Breakfast Creek near Licola in the Alpine National Park. At its meeting on 21 May 2020, council considered this lease and heard a submission from Parks Victoria for the granting of a lease to the incumbent tenant, Melbourne Grammar School.

Council supported the recommendation to grant a new seven-year lease, effective 2020, to Melbourne Grammar School for the purposes of the operation and management of a school campsite for outdoor recreational activities.

In its deliberations, Council noted that:

- the Gunaikurnai Land and Water Aboriginal Corporation as the Registered Aboriginal Party over the site had been consulted about the lease. Council appreciated the Corporation agreeing to the new seven-year lease which will give the corporation time to consider future options for the site; and
- the campsite is also intended for utilisation by members of the community, but it is not clear to Council what the nature and terms of such use are. Nevertheless, Council would like to see the site being publicised as being available for use by community and not-for-profit groups.

Field visits

The council undertook one field trip during 2019-20.

In November 2019, Council members made a field visit to the proposed Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park. The purpose of the trip was for Council to be informed on the long-term vision for the Park, particularly the vision for the development and extension of the George Bass Coastal Walk.

The establishment of a marine and coastal park linking the existing Bunurong Marine Park, Bunurong Coastal Reserve, Punchbowl Reserve and Kilcunda-Harmers Haven Coastal Reserve along 40 kilometres of coastline from San Remo to Inverloch was an election commitment of the Andrews Labor Government in 2018. The new park will be called the Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park.

Council visited several sites in the proposed park and along the proposed walk including Footes Lookout, Punchbowl Beach, Kilcunda East Beach, Powlett River, Fulton Road and Inverloch Surf Beach. Major issues that were discussed included land acquisition, land tenure, council regulations, the narrowness of the walk, potential erosion of the beach and trail, access for dogs and horses, as well as options for the routing of the trail and the implications of these options. The importance of the development of the detailed Infrastructure Plan was also discussed.

The visit was extremely instructive for members to understand the progress and importance of the development of this marine and coastal park and the challenges and benefits of developing the coastal walk. Members were impressed by the thoroughness of the project management and the opportunities for local towns and tourist providers to engage with the new park and walk development process.



Bunurong Marine and Coastal Park – Image courtesy of Dr Mary-Jane Rogers

Attendance at meetings

Attendance at meetings by members in the reporting period was as follows.

	Number of meetings attended
Mr Doug Humann	3 out 3
Mr Adam McLean	3 out 3
Ms Anna Foley	3 out 3
Mr Michael Fendley	2 out 3
Ms Judy Dixon	3 out 3
Mr Chris Rose	2 out 3
Dr Mary-Jane Rogers	3 out 3
Associate Professor Ursula de Jong	2 out 3
DELWP – permanent invitee, non-member – Ms Sarah Crute	2 out 3
Parks Victoria – permanent invitee, non-member – Mr Matthew Jackson	3 out 3

Presentations

The following presentations were made to the council at its meetings during the year.

Title	Presenter	Date
Presentations at meetings		
Presentation on feral and overabundant animals and climate change update	Dr Mark Norman (PV - Chief Conservation Scientist)	6 August 2019
Presentation on VEAC's Central West Final Report and relevant VEAC recommendations in play.	Ms Joan Phillips (VEAC Chief Executive Officer) and Paul Peake (VEAC Senior Project Manager)	6 August 2019
Presentation on Great Ocean Road Taskforce Development	Mr Jason Borg (DELWP - Project Director, Great Ocean Road Management Reform)	6 August 2019
Presentation on the Bass Coast (Yallock-Bulluk) Marine and Coastal Park.	Ms Rinske Poulter (DELWP - Senior Policy Officer)	6 August 2019
Presentation on Traditional Owner agreement negotiations.	Mr Will Philippiadis (DELWP - Manager, Traditional Owner Agreements Unit)	20 November 2019
Presentation on NPAC reappointment process.	Ms Sarah Crute (DELWP - Director, Land Management) and Mr Tim Jansen (DELWP - Policy Analyst)	20 November 2019
Presentation on NPAC's feedback on the land management strategy draft aspiration and statement and guiding Principles.	Mr Matthew Jackson (PV - CEO) and Peter Beaumont (PV - Director, Land Management Strategy)	20 November 2019
Presentation on the policy statement on occupation and use of Crown land for lifesaving clubs.	Ms Sarah Crute (DELWP - Director, Land Management)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new 21 lease to the Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club Inc, in the Mornington Peninsula National Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Mr Damien Darcy (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new 21-year lease to the Portsea Surf Lifesaving Club Inc, in the Mornington Peninsula National Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Mr Damien Darcy (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new 21-year lease to the Gunnamatta Surf Life Saving Club Inc in the Mornington Peninsula National Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Mr Damien Darcy (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new 21-year lease to the Venus Bay Surf Life Saving Club Inc in the Cape Liptrap Coastal Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Mr Damien Darcy (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new lease to the Melbourne Grammar School over the Breakfast Creek Licola School Camp, Alpine National Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Ms Nicole Moore (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020
Presentation on a new lease over the Grants Kiosk and Tearooms, Dandenong Ranges National Park.	Mr John Clark (PV - Director-Commercial) and Ms Nicole Moore (PV - Commercial Team)	21 May 2020

Administration

Corporate governance

The council has adopted and adapted the following DELWP policies and procedures:

- Code of conduct
- Conflict of interest
- Meetings and decision-making
- Dispute resolution
- Gifts, benefits and hospitality
- Performance assessment.

Expenditure

DELWP provides the council with an executive officer to support its work. The Council complied with departmental policies in performing its functions throughout the reporting period. Financial and other information relating to the *Financial Management Act 1994* is included in the department's annual report for 2018-19.

Table 2: The expenditure incurred by the council in undertaking its responsibilities is as follows.

	2018-19	2019-20
Meeting fees	10,820.00	8,104.40
Other operating expenses	15,575.58	12,270.24
Total	\$21,075.58	20,374.64

Consultancies

Consultancies below \$10,000

None

Consultancies above \$10,000

None

Workforce data

As at 30 June 2020 the council secretariat consisted of one staff member:

- Sylvie Bideau – Executive Officer

There was no change in the number of ongoing staff positions in the secretariat from the previous financial year. Council staff is also included in the employment statistics for the DELWP in 2019-20.

The council is committed to apply merit and equity principles when appointing staff. The selection processes ensure that applicants are assessed and evaluated fairly and equitably on the basis of the key selection criteria and other accountabilities without discrimination.

Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012

The Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012 (PID Act) enables people to make a disclosure about corrupt or improper conduct by a public officer or a public body.

NPAC is a public body for the purposes of the PID Act.

What is a public interest disclosure?

A public interest disclosure is a complaint of corrupt or improper conduct or detrimental action by a public officer or a public body.

'Improper or corrupt conduct' involves substantial mismanagement of public resources, risk to public health or safety or the environment, or corruption.

'Detrimental action' is action taken against a person in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure.

How do I make a public interest disclosure?

You can make a public interest disclosure about NPAC or its board members, officers or employees by contacting IBAC (details below).

NPAC is **not** able to receive public interest disclosures.

NPAC has established procedures for the protection of persons from detrimental action in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure about NPAC, its board members, officers or employees. You can access NPAC's procedures on its website at www.delwp.vic.gov.au

Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) Victoria

Address: Level 1, North Tower,
459 Collins Street,
Melbourne Victoria 3000.

Mail: IBAC, GPO Box 24234,
Melbourne Victoria 3001

Internet: www.ibac.vic.gov.au

Phone: 1300 735 135

Email: See the website above for the secure email disclosure process, which also provides for anonymous disclosures.

Compliance with DataVic Access Policy

Consistent with the Victorian Government's DataVic Access Policy (2012), the council intends that data tables that it may produce in the future will be available at <http://data.vic.gov.au/> in machine readable format.

Summary of environmental performance

The council makes use of DELWP offices and facilities to perform its functions and the reporting requirement of the office is met by DELWP and participates fully in a range of environmental programs undertaken by DELWP.

Statement of availability of other information

Any information retained by the Council relating to its activities is available on request, subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Occupational health and safety policy

The council utilises DELWP Occupational Health and Safety policies and procedures.

Public administration employment and conduct principles

Victorian Public Service merit and equity principles are applied in the appointment and management of staff. The NPAC follows the merit and equity principles used by DELWP, in accordance with Government directives and the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

Freedom of Information Act 1982

The council is an agency under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, and it complies with the procedures prescribed under which members of the public may gain access to information held by agencies. A decision to release information is made by an authorised officer.

- Manager FOI, DELWP, on (03)7022 6530

No Freedom of Information requests were made during the 2019-20 reporting period.

An application fee applies. The fee from 1 July 2019 is \$29.60.

Risk management

While the NPAC examines the risks of delivery of its particular work functions and objectives on an ongoing basis, it relies on the DELWP risk management framework and internal audit of financial and other administrative systems which are used by the NPAC's Secretariat. Please refer to the DELWP annual report for further information.

Further copies of this report and information on Council can be obtained from:

Executive Officer
National Parks Advisory Council
c/o Environment and Climate Change Group
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
Level 39 – 2 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000.
www.delwp.vic.gov.au



