

National Parks Advisory Council

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23

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Front page photo:
Quarantine Station, Point Nepean National Park
Image courtesy of Parks Victoria.

Back Page photo:
Twelve Apostles, Port Campbell National Park



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Foreword

It is with pleasure that I provide the Annual Report of the National Parks Advisory Council (Council) to the Minister, Ingrid Stitt MP, Minister for Environment.

The Council met four times in 2022–23 and formally advised the Minister on two matters for which advice was sought under the *National Parks Act 1975*. These were:

- the grant of a proposed five year lease to Corangamite Shire Council over part of the Port Campbell National Park for the construction, operation and maintenance of a shared use trail
- the grant of a 21 year lease to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation over the disused Parks Victoria visitor building and rangers' office in the Budj Bim National Park for the purposes of the operation and management of a cultural interpretation centre

In supporting each of these proposals, Council made various recommendations to the Minister. Such advice is an important function of the Council, formed with careful consideration following briefings on each topic.

During the year, Council also received informative briefings on a range of matters to support its work and understanding of park management issues.

These included:

- regular updates on the National Park Feral Horse Program, in particular the removal of feral horses from the Alpine and Barmah National Parks
- the Wilsons Promontory Landscape Management Plan

- the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing Project, a proposed extended multi-day 57-kilometre walk through the spectacular Alpine region from Falls Creek to Mt Hotham
- the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination Project to establish up to 177 kilometres of trails within areas of State Forest and the Yarra Ranges National Park surrounding the township of Warburton
- proposed new public land legislation which will operate alongside the Act

Council notes its appreciation for the presentations it has received from officers during the year.

Council maintains its interest in the positive impacts of tourism in parks, the need to preserve and protect parks in accordance with the Act, the progress of Joint Management Plans and joint management activities with Traditional Owner groups, and conservation activities including feral herbivore control and bushfire recovery actions.

Council is of the view that lease terms should include strong measures to mitigate environmental risks, as well as clear monitoring processes and rehabilitation strategies to ensure a balance between conservation, cultural values, and recreational demand.

Council was well supported in its work by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Parks Victoria (PV), and continues to benefit from the participation as observers and contributors at Council meetings of representatives of both organisations. Special thanks to Dan Meehan and Cassie Elder at DEECA who provided secretariat support over the past year.

My sincere thanks to the members of the Council for their input in the Council's deliberations. For those members whose service to Council concluded this financial year, I take this opportunity to particularly thank you for sharing your expertise, insights and always bringing a curious and respectful approach to your role as Council members. The Council and Victoria's parks estate have benefitted greatly from your contributions.



Anna Foley

Convenor

7 September 2023



Camping on the Falls Creek to Hotham alpine crossing.

The Council

The National Parks Advisory Council (Council) is established under section 10 of *National Parks Act 1975* (the Act). In 2022–23 the responsible Ministers were the Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Ingrid Stitt MP, Minister for Environment.

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



Grampians National Park

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 2023, there were 139 parks and other areas, with a total area of approximately 3.47 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, 14 other parks and reserves, 1 landscape conservation area (comprising seven component areas) 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

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 protection of parks
- one who is a professor and 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

Members:

Anna Foley (Convenor)

[1 July 2022–30 June 2023]

Anna is an experienced environmental advisor with a background in ecology, statutory planning, heritage, and community engagement. She is the Strategic Projects Manager at Trust for Nature, working on strategic initiatives to protect a private land conservation network of more than 100,000 hectares.

Prior to this role Anna was the Conservation Manager at the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) advocating for natural and cultural heritage protection.

She is a Council Member of the Heritage Council of Victoria, a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Tracey Costello (Member)

[1 July 2023–6 June 2023]

Tracey lives on Phillip Island and is currently Chief Operating Officer of VETASSESS, a skills assessment authority. She is an accomplished strategic leader with a breadth and depth of finance and governance experience across corporate, government and non-government organisations including 10 years with a leading consultancy and more than six years as a senior executive in local and state government, including as Chief Financial Officer of Phillip Island Nature Parks.

She holds a Masters degree in Fraud and Financial Crime from Charles Sturt University; is a Chartered Accountant (CA); and a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Associate Professor Ursula de Jong (Member)

[1 July 2022–30 June 2023]

Ursula is Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Built Environment, at Deakin University, Geelong. She is a Research Associate of HOME, a Deakin University Research Hub, providing evidence-based, community-tailored housing and social inclusion strategies.

She is an Honorary Research Fellow in Deakin's School of Architecture and Built Environment, Architecture Vacancy Lab.

Ursula is an architectural historian and a researcher of place and was lead investigator on the recently completed Australia Research Council Sea Change Linkage Grant (2011–2016) which considered the impact of change on the coastal communities of Sorrento and Queenscliff in Victoria.

Ursula is Director of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), a member of the National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council (NLAAC) and President of the Nepean Conservation Group which has cared for the local environment since 1973 and oversees twenty local Friends' Groups on the tip of the Mornington Peninsula, two in the MPNP and one in PNNP. In 2017 she was appointed Chair of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Judy Dixon (Member)

[1 July 2022–6 June 2023]

Judy is a rural resident and Director of JADE Comm, a business specialising in delivery of training, strategic project and communication services.

She 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.

Judy 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. This is her fourth term on the Council and she is also a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Professor (Research) David Jones (Member)

*[7 June 2023–30 June 2023] **

David is an experienced planner, landscape architect and academic. Over a 40 year period he has worked at and for several councils, universities and Aboriginal Corporations in South Australia and Victoria.

With qualifications and expertise in regional planning, urban design, landscape architecture, cultural heritage management, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, he has taught, researched, published and practised in these disciplines and has an applied understanding of evolution and application of Victoria's legislative conservation systems, instruments and planning schemes.

Currently Professor (Research) at the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, he recently had oversight of all Strategic Planning and Urban Design operations of the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation that embraces Geelong (Djilang), Ballarat (Ballaarat) and western Melbourne (Naarm) regions.

Dr Marie Keatley (Member)

*[7 June 2023–30 June 2023] **

Marie holds a PhD in eucalypt flowering ecology from the University of Melbourne. She is a lecturer at RMIT University with research interests in ecology including phenology, vegetation ecology, botany, climate change as well as citizen science.

She also brings to the council many years of experience in park management, having worked for Parks Victoria. Through this work she has extensive knowledge of Victorian flora, plant conservation and landscape ecology.

At the international level, she has contributed to studies on the impacts of climate on plant flowering ecology, particularly of the southern hemisphere.

Marie is a member of the Executive Board of the International Society of Biometeorology and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the International Journal of Biometeorology and was one of the founders of ClimateWatch, Australia's citizen science

phenological observation network. She lives in regional Victoria.

Dr Michael Looker (Member)

*[7 June 2023–30 June 2023] **

Michael is a scientist by background with over 30 years experience in conservation program development and public open space management. He is currently Chair of the Conservation Coaches Network (CCNet) global board.

He previously held roles with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as Director of TNC's Australia program, where he partnered with local NGOs and Government on large-scale conservation initiatives and established a Corporate Conservation Council to forge a closer alliance between business and conservation. He also developed close working relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations supporting their aspirations in looking after country.

Prior to this, he was Director of the Aotearoa New Zealand Program, a two-year assignment to establish one of the Conservancy's newest country programs and also held the role of Senior Advisor to the "Conservation in Partnership with Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities" global program with a primary focus on sustainable financing for community led conservation programs.

Prior to joining TNC, Michael served as the Director of Trust for Nature, Victoria. Under Michael's leadership, the Trust acquired Ned's Corner Station, the largest private conservation purchase in Victoria.

He was previously a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Horticulture at The University of Melbourne, Burnley Campus, as well as Superintendent of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Adam McLean (Member)

[1 July 2022–6 June 2023]

Adam has been a practising lawyer for over 30 years, 22 years as a barrister specialising in native title and land rights, industrial relations and board governance. He has advised many traditional owner groups in their negotiations for Aboriginal owned and co-managed

national parks and reserves in Victoria, NSW and Queensland.

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 on the Mornington Peninsula and has a keen interest in conservation, parks and reserves.

Dr Mary Jane Rogers (Member)

[1 July 2022–30 June 2023]

Mary Jane 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.

She has a strong scientific background in plant biology and physiology and in science quality and delivery and brings to the council many years of experience in natural resource management issues and their effects on the rural community. This is her third term on the Council and she is also a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Mark Reeves (Member)

*[7 June 2023–30 June 2023] **

Mark has a BA (Recreation), Grad. Dip Ed. (Outdoor & Phys. Ed.), Post Grad Dip (Org. Change), MACE, FACEL, and is the founding Principal of The School for Student Leadership, also known as The Alpine School. Since 1999 the school has expanded from one to four campuses and has also operated programs in Guangdong Province, China.

He has worked with Catholic, Independent and Government sectors, local government and private industry in his career spanning 35 years.

As well as academic studies at Melbourne University and Phillip Institute of Technology, he has technical training and qualifications including in outdoor pursuits from the National Mountaineering and Water sports School, North Wales, UK.

Mark received a Churchill Fellowship in 2010 and researched the adolescent rite of passage

and received a Citation from the Gippsland Chapter of ACE for developing and running programs that enhance physical development, wellbeing and self-esteem.

He has published and contributed to titles including *Surviving, Thriving and Reviving in Adolescence* (Springer pub. 2016) and became a Fellow of the Australian College of Educational Leadership in 2015.

He is a local government councillor in East Gippsland Shire having been Mayor from 2013-2014 and again in 2021-2023. He was elected Chair of One-Gippsland in February 2023.

Chris Rose (Member)

[1 July 2022–6 June 2023]

Chris 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 State and local government in Victoria, 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 and ecotourism development.

Dr Mariyam Zulfa (Member)

*[7 June 2023–30 June 2023] **

Mariyam is a former Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture of the Maldives and a founding member of Maldives Policy Advocacy Caucus (MPAC). She is a tourism industry expert, with her doctoral thesis based on the competitiveness of small islands tourism.

She is a qualified town-planner with a BA in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of South Australia. Mariyam worked for many years as a town-planner in the Office of Physical Planning and Design and

was Director of the Selected Islands Development Unit in the Maldives government.

She has worked on many significant government projects including community relocation and tourism planning and has advised the Maldives National Planning Council on approving tourism and economic development projects. She is passionate about education and issues affecting people and the environment.

She brings strong legal research skills and interests in constitutional law, having been admitted to practice as a lawyer by the Supreme Court of Western Australia. After moving to Melbourne Mariyam continued her education in Public and International Law at Melbourne University.

Mariyam has extensive experience both in the private and public sectors including consulting on international development projects through Deloitte's.

Observers – DEECA and Parks Victoria
[1 July 2022–30 June 2023]

Recognising the critical role which Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Parks Victoria play in decisions regarding Victoria's parks, representatives of these two organisations attend and participate in meetings as observers but do not have any decision-making responsibilities.

Council has benefitted from participation by Lisa Opray and David Sheehan as the representatives of DEECA and Matthew Jackson, Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria.

**** These members served from 7 June to 30 June within the 2022-23 reporting period and did not attend any meetings or make any recommendations mentioned within this report.***



Yarra Ranges National Park



Wilsons Promontory National Park



Discovery tents – Point Nepean National Park
Image Courtesy 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 regular briefings by Parks Victoria and DEECA staff.

Council meetings

Meeting No. 299 **5 September 2022**

Meeting No. 300 **5 December 2022**

Meeting No. 301 **6 March 2023**

Meeting No. 302 **22 May 2023**

Advice to the Minister

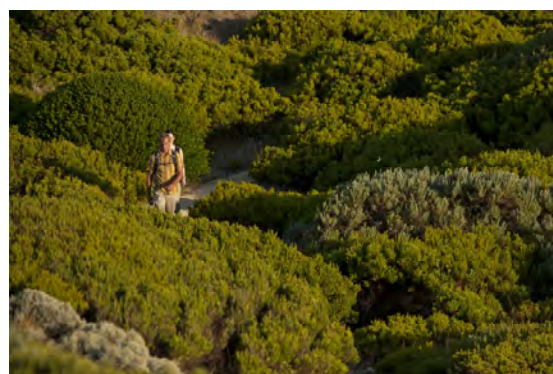
The Council met four times in 2022–23 and formally advised the Minister on two matters for which advice was sought under section 19G of the the Act.

These were:

- the grant of a proposed five year lease to Corangamite Shire Council over part of the Port Campbell National Park for the construction, operation and maintenance of a shared use trail
- the grant of a 21 year lease to Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation over the disused Parks Victoria visitor building and rangers' office in the Budj Bim National Park for the purposes of the operation and management of a cultural interpretation centre

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

| Member | Number of meetings attended |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Anna Foley (Convenor) | 4 out of 4 |
| Tracey Costello | 3 out of 4 |
| Associate Professor Ursula de Jong | 3 out of 4 |
| Judy Dixon | 4 out of 4 |
| Adam McLean | 3 out of 4 |
| Dr Mary-Jane Rogers | 4 out of 4 |
| Chris Rose | 2 out of 4 |



Port Campbell National Park



Budj Bim National Park

Presentations

| Title | Presenter | Date |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>Presentations and briefings at meetings</i> | | |
| <i>One year update on the Falls to Hotham Crossing Project</i> | Parks Victoria | 5 September 2022 |
| <i>Warburton Mountain Bike Destination Proposal</i> | Parks Victoria | 5 December 2022 |
| <i>Port Campbell National Park Lease - Stage 1 of the Twelve Apostles Trail Project</i> | Parks Victoria | 5 December 2022 |
| <i>Budj Bim Cultural Centre Lease Proposal</i> | Parks Victoria | 5 December 2022 |
| <i>Update on the Renewal of Victoria's Public Land Legislation</i> | DEECA | 5 December 2022 |
| <i>Update on Point Nepean National Park projects</i> | Parks Victoria | 6 March 2023 |
| <i>Section 40 consent application for exploration in a National Park which was subsequently withdrawn</i> | Parks Victoria | 22 May 2023 |

Expenditure

DEECA provides Council with a part-time Executive Officer and part-time Secretariat Officer to support its work. The table below sets out the expenditure incurred in the operation of the Council.

The costs of the DEECA support staff are included in the DEECA annual report for 2022-23.

Expenditure incurred by Council in undertaking its responsibilities:

| | 2021-22 | 2022-23 |
|--------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Meeting fees | 7,310.00 | 5,549.00 |
| Other operating expenses | 3,822.52 | 2,677.97 |
| Total | 11,132.52 | 8,226.97 |

Consultancies below \$10,000

None

Consultancies above \$10,000

None

Administration

Corporate governance

The Council has adopted the following model DEECA policies and procedures:

- Code of Conduct
- Conflict of Interest
- Meetings and decision-making
- Dispute Resolution
- Gifts, benefits and hospitality
- Performance Assessment

Workforce Data

On 30 June 2023 the Council was supported by two ongoing staff (totaling 0.6 full time equivalent). This is a change from one full time ongoing staff position serving the secretariat in the previous financial year.

DEECA is committed to apply merit and equity principles when appointing staff on behalf of the Council. 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 Disclosure Act 2012 (PID Act) enables people to make a disclosure about corrupt or improper conduct by a public officer or a public body.

The Council 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 Council or its members, officers or employees by contacting IBAC (details below).

DEECA has established procedures for the protection of persons from detrimental action in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure about the Council, its board members, officers or employees.

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

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

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 DEECA 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 by DEECA. The Council follows the merit and equity principles used by DEECA, in accordance with Government directives and the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

Freedom of Information Act 1982

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) allows the public a right of access to documents held by DEECA. The purpose of the FOI Act is to extend as far as possible the right of the community to access information held by government departments, local councils, Ministers and other bodies subject to the FOI Act. An applicant has a right to apply for access to documents held by a department. This comprises documents both created by DEECA or supplied to DEECA by an external organisation or individual, and may also include maps, films, microfiche, photographs,

computer printouts, computer discs, tape recordings and videotapes. Information about the type of material produced by DEECA is available on the DEECA website under its Part II Information Statement.

The FOI Act allows a department to refuse access, either fully or partially, to certain documents or information. Examples of documents that may not be accessed include cabinet documents; some internal working documents; law enforcement documents; documents covered by legal professional privilege, such as legal advice; personal information about other people; and information provided to a department in confidence and information that is confidential under another Act.

Under the FOI Act, the FOI processing time for requests received is 30 days. However, when external consultation is required under ss29, 29A, 31, 31A, 33, 34 or 35, the processing time is 45 days. Processing time may also be extended by periods of 30 days, in consultation with the applicant. With the applicant's agreement this may occur any number of times. However, obtaining an applicant's agreement for an extension cannot occur after the expiry of the timeframe for deciding a request.

If an applicant is not satisfied by a decision made by the Department, under section 49A of the Act, they have the right to seek a review by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC) within 28 days of receiving a decision letter.

Requests for documents in the possession of NPAC should be addressed to:

Freedom of Information Officer
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
GPO Box 527
MELBOURNE VIC 3001
foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au

The cost of an FOI application is \$31.80; however, access charges may also be payable if the document pool is large, and the search for material, time consuming.

Further information is available from the website FOI Online (www.foi.vic.gov.au).

Risk Management

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

An electronic copy of this report will be available on the [DEECA website](#).

National Parks Advisory Council
C/- Land and Environment Policy Division
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
Level 2, 8 Nicholson Street
Melbourne, VIC 3000.

