**Victorian Government Response to VEAC’s Yellingbo Investigation**

**Q and As**

**What was VEAC asked to investigate?**

* In August 2011, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change requested that the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigate public land in the Yellingbo area.
* VEAC was asked to identify the biodiversity and ecological values in the Yellingbo area; identify the current and likely future threats to these values and opportunities to reduce or remove these threats; and make recommendations for appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the biodiversity and ecological values.

**What did VEAC consider in the investigation?**

* VEAC focused on the biodiversity and ecological values in the Yellingbo area and arrangements to conserve and enhance these values.
* VEAC considered potential environmental, social and economic impacts in its investigation, conducted a scientific study and consulted with community organisations, interested individuals and land managers.
* Details of the investigation itself and a copy of VEAC’s report: *Yellingbo Investigation Final Report* are available on VEAC’s website: [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au) The report details the recommendations made by VEAC.

**What is in the government response?**

* The government supports all of VEAC’s recommendations in full or in principle. Implementation aims to improve the conservation of the area’s significant biodiversity and ecological values, including the endangered helmeted honeyeater and the lowland Leadbeater’s possum.
* The Yellingbo Conservation Area will be established under the *National Parks Act 1975* and a coordinating committee will be set up to better coordinate the management of public land in the area and involve the community.
* Approximately 186 water frontage and grazing licences will be progressively phased out by 2018 in order to improve riparian habitat and river health in the new conservation area, with priority placed on the highest value conservation areas.
* Dog walking and horse riding will be phased out in new nature conservation reserves and the coordinating committee will give consideration to the timetable for this and other details.
* The coordinating committee will advise on the timetable and details to phase out dog walking and horse riding to allow a balance of the social values of the area with conservation and enable people to adjust to the new arrangements.
* We will be working with land holders adjacent to the conservation area to encourage them to enter into conservation agreements and undertake fencing, off stream watering, revegetation and weed control works. This is in response to the community’s interest in continuing to contribute to the management of the Crown frontages.
* VEAC’s recommendations for the various reserves, Trust for Nature Protected Areas and other areas have generally been accepted by the government.

**Why is the Yellingbo Conservation Area being established?**

* The new Yellingbo Conservation Area is being established to assist in the conservation of the area’s significant biodiversity and ecological values, including the endangered helmeted honeyeater and the lowland Leadbeater’s possum.

**When will the new Yellingbo Conservation Area be established?**

* The new Yellingbo Conservation Area will be established after legislation has been amended to enable this. It is expected that this will occur in 2015.

**What areas are included in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Area?**

* The new Yellingbo Conservation Area will apply to public land in the vicinity of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve. Maps of the new areas are available on VEAC’s website: [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au).

**Will I still be able to do recreational activities in the new reserves?**

* Areas that are currently nature conservation reserves: Yellingbo, Warramate Hills, Sassafras Creek, and Coranderrk do not allow hunting, dog walking and horse riding. Other activities such as bushwalking and picnicking are allowed in designated areas and tracks.
* Dog walking and horse riding will be phased out of the new nature conservation reserves: the Hoddles Creek Education Area and the Beenak Bushland Reserve as well as a number of streamside reserves including the Hoddles Creek and Emerald Creek, Menzies Creek, Woori Yallock Creek and Shepard Creek reserves. The coordinating committee will provide advice regarding the timetable.
* The coordinating committee will consider allowing on-lead dog walking and horse riding on formed tracks in areas that do not demonstrate high conservation value.

**How and when will the Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee be established?**

* The Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee will be set up to better coordinate the management of public land in the area and involve the community.
* It is anticipated that the committee will be established in mid 2014.
* The committee will be established under the *Conservation Forests and Lands Act 1987*.

**Who will be on the** **Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee and how will they be appointed?**

* The Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee will include a representative from each of Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Yarra Ranges Council, Cardinia Shire Council, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Zoos Victoria, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Trust for Nature.
* There will be four community representatives who will be nominated by the local councils: three will nominated by Yarra Ranges Council and one nominated by Cardinia Shire Council.
* An independent convener will be appointed by the Minister to coordinate the actions of the coordinating committee and provide advice on its operation and performance as requested.

**As a current holder of a water frontage and/or grazing licence, how will I know if I am affected by the changes?**

* Affected holders of water frontage and/or grazing licences will be notified of any changes by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

**What is VEAC?**

* VEAC is an independent council that conducts investigations and makes recommendations to government on the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources on public land, including Victoria’s coastal waters. VEAC conducts investigations at the request of the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and makes recommendations directly to the Minister.
* VEAC is composed of five members including a chairperson. The members are collectively required to have a range of experience, skills and knowledge in a number of areas related to management of public land and natural resources.
* More information about VEAC and its investigations is on the VEAC website: <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/>