

# Yellingbo Investigation

FINAL REPORT



July 2013

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## VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COUNCIL

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was established under the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*. It provides the State Government of Victoria with independent advice on protection and management of the environment and natural resources of public land.

The five Council members are:

Hon. Phil Honeywood (*Chairperson*)  
Mr Ian Harris  
Dr Charles Meredith  
Mr Ian Munro PSM  
Ms Angela Reidy

### Community Reference Group

The Yellingbo Investigation Community Reference Group is independently chaired by Mr Don Saunders.

Membership consists of:

Mr Ben Cullen, *Trust for Nature*  
Mr David Finger, *Victorian Farmers Federation*  
Mr Phil Ingamells, *Victorian National Parks Association*  
Aunty Diane Kerr, *Wurundjeri Tribe Land & Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc*  
Mr Jeff Latter, *Woori Yallock Creek Park Alliance*  
Ms Dianne Luc, *Yarra Valley Equestrian Landcare Group*  
Ms Sharon Merritt, *Country Fire Authority*  
Mr Euan Moore, *Birdlife Australia*  
Ms Irene Pearey, *Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Landcare Network*  
Ms Mary-Kate Hockey (Mr Adam Shalekoff to May 2012),  
*Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority*  
Mr Marty White, *Yarra Ranges Council*

### Contact details

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council  
Level 6, 8 Nicholson Street  
PO Box 500  
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002  
Phone (03) 9637 9902 or  
1800 134 803 (toll-free from landline)  
Email [veac@depi.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@depi.vic.gov.au)

**[www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au)**



Victorian  
Environmental  
Assessment  
Council

31 July 2013

The Hon Ryan Smith MP  
Minister for Environment and Climate Change  
8 Nicholson St  
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Minister

#### **YELLINGBO INVESTIGATION**

In accordance with the requirements of Section 23 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) is pleased to submit to you the report on the Yellingbo Investigation and copies of each submission received in relation to the investigation.

I extend my appreciation to my fellow Council members, past members and VEAC's staff for their contributions to this investigation. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance to Council throughout the investigation from an active and knowledgeable Community Reference Group, and representatives of local councils and government agencies.

Yours sincerely

Phil Honeywood  
**Chairperson**

8 Nicholson Street  
PO Box 500  
East Melbourne  
VIC Australia 3002

T 03 9637 9902  
F 03 9637 8024  
Toll Free 1800 134 603  
E [veac@dse.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@dse.vic.gov.au)  
[www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au)

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Assessment Council on (03) 9637 9902 or 1800 134 803 toll-free  
from landlines Australia-wide, or email [veac@depi.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@depi.vic.gov.au)

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**Acknowledgment of Country**

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council acknowledges and pays its respects to Victoria's Native Title Holders and Traditional Owners within the investigation area, and the rich cultural and intrinsic connection they have to Country. The Council also recognises and acknowledges the contribution and interest of other Aboriginal peoples and organisations in the management of land and natural resources.

# Foreword

The Yellingbo investigation area, positioned on the outer fringe of Melbourne, is typical of many stressed and fragmented landscapes across Victoria. Unlike these other areas, here the presence of three State fauna and flora emblems has mobilised both community and government conservation actions over many decades. The modest size of this investigation area and limited extent of public land means that the substantial community interest and the diverse range of issues addressed in this investigation can be overlooked. While this hard work has successfully arrested the decline and averted the extinction of species such as the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum, substantial ecological threats persist. Only half of the original vegetation remains, in a patchy distribution across the investigation area and mostly on private land, making conservation management both complex and difficult. There are significant ongoing challenges to maintaining habitat and wild populations of the iconic threatened fauna species in the small and geographically separated areas of public land.

While it is an appropriate time to consider new approaches to reduce habitat fragmentation and to arrest biodiversity decline, the real challenge for VEAC has been to find ways to most effectively assist and strengthen the excellent work currently being carried out. The key element of the final recommendations is the establishment of an overarching State Emblems Conservation Area under a new schedule of the *National Parks Act 1975*. Establishment of the conservation area will bring together and coordinate existing and future nature conservation activities on public land and thereby maximise the overall effectiveness of the work, increase its profile and build further support. To coordinate and promote public land management and biodiversity programs in the conservation area, Council has retained its recommendation for an overarching committee, the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee. In response to the views received on the draft proposals paper, it has broadened the representation to include community representatives and more clearly articulated its coordinating role and accountabilities.



Council members (left to right):  
Charles Meredith, Phil Honeywood (Chairperson),  
Ian Harris, Angela Reidy, Ian Munro

A group of conservation reserves – mostly existing or expanded nature conservation reserves and natural features reserves – make up the recommended State Emblems Conservation Area. Haining education area has also been included with a view to developing this site for a greater range of community, education and conservation activities.

Council considers that its recommendations may have broader application to other fragmented landscapes, most of which lack the public profile and recognition afforded by the emblematic threatened fauna species in the Yellingbo investigation area.

Council thanks everyone who participated in public consultation: the Community Reference Group, local councils and government agencies, and the individuals and organisations who made written submissions or engaged in constructive discussions throughout the investigation. The current Council members also thank recent past members for their important contribution during the initial eight months of this investigation. Finally, Council wishes to acknowledge the generous sharing of information by knowledgeable and enthusiastic individuals, representatives of community organisations and land managers in this area, to whom we are indebted.

Phil Honeywood  
Chairperson

# Structure of the report

This report is the second and final report for the Yellingbo Investigation. A discussion paper was not required for this investigation. The draft proposals paper published for public comment in December 2012 included information about biodiversity, ecological and other values, cultural heritage and demography, and the current extent and uses of public land. The draft proposals paper also identified major issues and future threats to biodiversity and ecological values, and outlined the relevant community and government programs in the investigation area related to protection of biodiversity and natural values. This material is not repeated in the final report, but sufficient information is provided to establish the context and rationale for the recommendations. For more detailed information readers should refer to the draft proposals paper.

This final report has three sections:

## Section 1

Section 1 provides background on the investigation and explains the role of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC). It also outlines the terms of reference and other matters to be taken into account in the investigation, and describes the investigation's timeframes and processes.

## Section 2

Section 2 describes the consultation process, and summarises the issues raised in submissions and community forums following the release of the draft proposals paper. It includes Council's response to the major comments, issues and proposals presented to it during the investigation, and provides a summary of the resulting changes to the draft recommendations.

## Section 3

Section 3 reports on the rationale for the final recommendations and presents the recommendations.

## Appendix

The appendix contains a list of written submissions received during the two formal submission periods for the investigation.

## Map

A map showing the final recommendations for public land use is inserted in the back pocket of this report.



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**Map A**  
Yellingbo Investigation final recommendations for public land use  
[Click here to view the map online](#) 



# Executive summary

In August 2011, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to investigate public land in the Yellingbo area, focusing on its biodiversity and ecological values and arrangements to conserve and enhance these values.

## Scope of the investigation

The purposes of the investigation are to:

- a identify the biodiversity and ecological values in the specified area
- b identify the current and likely future threats to these values and opportunities to reduce or remove these threats; and
- c make recommendations for appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the biodiversity and ecological values.

The full terms of reference are provided in [section 1.3](#).

## Consultation process

More than 70 submissions were received in response to the notice of investigation published in November 2011 and 79 submissions in response to the draft proposals paper published in December 2012. The submissions can be viewed on VEAC's website.

A Community Reference Group was established for the investigation and has met six times including a workshop in March 2012 which was attended by a wider group of stakeholders. The membership of the Community Reference Group is listed on the [inside front cover](#) of this report.

The public consultation process is described in more detail and the issues raised are explored in [section 2](#).

In preparing this final report, VEAC also sought assistance from government agencies, community organisations and interested individuals, particularly Yarra Ranges Council, Melbourne Water, Zoos Victoria, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. Council is extremely grateful for the assistance of all people and organisations who have contributed to the investigation.

## Final recommendations

The limited extent of public land, especially land that is not strongly committed to an existing use, and its highly fragmented configuration, constrains options for VEAC to recommend extensive changes to the current allocation of land to the various public land use categories. Nonetheless, Council strongly supports the community's call for significant change for management arrangements to conserve and enhance biodiversity values in the investigation area.

VEAC has retained the vision for nature conservation in the Yellingbo area outlined in the draft proposals paper—a coordinated and unified area of public land spanning much of the investigation area, where nature conservation is a primary management objective. The recommended State Emblems Conservation Area provides a robust, clear and better coordinated arrangement for stakeholders and for the conservation of natural values. Full details of this model, and its rationale and implications, are provided in [section 3](#).

In summary, VEAC is recommending an approach that brings together land managed for nature conservation and protection and enhancement of natural values in two main categories in the State Emblems Conservation Area—nature conservation reserve and natural features reserve. To ensure long-term security, the land in the State Emblems Conservation Area is recommended to be included as the first item in a new Schedule Four A 'Conservation landscapes' to the *National Parks Act 1975*. This approach eliminates any uncertainty relating to public land use categories, provides flexibility to include other areas of Crown land and is able to immediately apply a consistent set of regulations using that Act. In addition, the recommendations provide for collaborative arrangements where appropriate such as management agreements with public authorities and, for streamside reserves, conservation agreements with adjoining landholders. The final recommendations in this report cover the land to be included in the State Emblems Conservation Area, and the establishment and operation of a State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee comprising key government agencies and community representatives to coordinate and oversee public land and biodiversity programs, but not to directly manage the land. The Coordinating Committee is recommended to be established using Section 12 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* and includes four community representatives and an independent chairperson. Using this mechanism will enable the committee to also consider at the appropriate time ways in which to encourage complementary management on adjacent private land.

In addition to the recommendations for the State Emblems Conservation Area, there are several other recommendations addressing various other issues.

The recommendations are listed below (see [section 3](#) for full text). They may be divided into three groups:

- recommendations that apply generally across the investigation area: R1-R4
- recommendations that apply to the State Emblems Conservation Area: R5-R6
- recommendations that apply to specific public land use categories (A-G) within or outside the State Emblems Conservation Area, or specific public land units (e.g. A1-A3, C1-C9, E1)

The implications of the recommendations for public land use categories are documented in the table overleaf.

### Summary of final recommendations

General recommendations	
R1	Implementation resources
R2	Resources for ongoing land management
R3	Interim management and minor boundary adjustments
R4	Boundary identification
R5	State Emblems Conservation Area
R6	State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee
A	Nature conservation reserves
B	Trust for Nature protected areas
C	Natural features reserves
D	Services and utilities areas
E	Community use areas
F	Regional park, state forest, historic and cultural features reserves
G	Uncategorised public land
Recommendations for specific public land units	
A1	State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve
A2	Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve
A3	Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve
C1-C8	Streamside reserves
C9	Wright Forest Bushland Reserve
E1	Haining Education Area

### Summary of final recommendations for each public land use category

Public land use categories	Area (hectares)		
	Current	Draft proposals paper	Final report
Nature conservation reserve	1489	1999	2049
Trust for Nature protected area	14	14	10
Natural features (conservation) reserve	332	205	899
<i>Natural and scenic features reserve</i>	0.1	0.1	6
<i>Bushland reserve</i>	311	184	189
<i>Streamside reserve</i>	21	21	704
Natural features (other) reserve	874	776	41
<i>Stream frontage (including stream beds and banks)</i>	873.7	776	41
<i>Natural features reserve (general)</i>	0.3	0.3	0.3
Water production area	0.4	0.4	0.4
Community use area	601	323	320
Historic and cultural features reserve	46	46	46
State forest	2.4	2.4	2.4
Regional park	19	19	19
Services and utilities area	2593	2586	2586
<i>Road</i>	2373	2366	2366
<i>Water and sewerage services</i>	207	207	207
<i>Other services and utilities areas</i>	13	13	13
Uncategorised public land	18	18	12
<b>Total extent of public land in the investigation area</b>	<b>5990</b>	<b>5990</b>	<b>5986</b>
<b>Total extent of investigation area (all private and public land)</b>	<b>51,370</b>	<b>51,370</b>	<b>51,370</b>

Note:

Much of the public land in the investigation area is recommended to be managed under the State Emblems Conservation Area (recommendation R5). This includes land in different categories including some where no change in public land use category is recommended i.e. a change in management arrangements is recommended but not necessarily a change in category.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Yellingbo investigation area (51,370 hectares) is located in the Upper Yarra Valley and centred on Yellingbo township, about 50 kilometres east of Melbourne (figure 1.2). It encompasses the valleys and low hills between the prominent peaks of the Dandenong and Yarra ranges. The towns of Woori Yallock, Launching Place, Yarra Junction, Hoddles Creek, Cockatoo, Emerald, Monbulk and Seville are in the investigation area. Lilydale, Healesville, Warburton and Gembrook lie just outside the boundary. Most of the investigation area is within the municipality of the Yarra Ranges Council with approximately 12 per cent of the southern area within Cardinia Shire. Most of the investigation area, on the periphery of Melbourne (the peri-urban area), is within the largest of Melbourne's 12 designated Green Wedges—the Yarra Valley, Yarra and Dandenong Ranges Green Wedge.

Demographic change in peri-urban settings brings a range of challenges for planning and land management authorities. Within the investigation area there are conflicting trends, with increasing demand for housing and residential development in the areas closer to Melbourne, yet an overall forecast of a decreasing or very low population growth for the Yarra Ranges local government area in the short to medium term. Current community aspirations appear to reflect a high level of environmental awareness and a desire for an active role in environmental stewardship and improving the natural environment.

The extent of public land in the investigation area is limited, comprising some 11 per cent (5990 hectares) of the entire investigation area, but there are significant tracts of state forest, and national and regional parks immediately adjoining the area.

Past clearing for agriculture has been most intense in the western part of the investigation area, particularly on the highly productive eastern slopes of the Dandenong Ranges. About half of the original vegetation remains across the entire investigation area, although this is patchy

in distribution. Only 13 per cent of this 24,600 hectares of remaining native vegetation is on public land, i.e. some 87 per cent of the remaining vegetation is on private land.

The Yarra River, declared a heritage river area under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992*, crosses the investigation area from Millgrove to near Healesville. It is joined by several major northerly flowing tributaries—Woori Yallock, Cockatoo, and Hoddles creeks and Little Yarra River—that drain nearby ranges and meander into a broad alluvial plain. In many instances, narrow corridors adjoining these streams are almost the only public land retained. These ribbons of vegetation provide some physical connection across the landscape. Away from streams, most of this landscape was developed for agriculture in the 1870s and 1880s. Hydrological changes caused by this land use have affected the quality of the remnant native vegetation, often resulting in 'die back' of vegetation in swampy low-lying environments. In turn, the fauna populations that once occupied these areas have significantly declined or become locally extinct.

The biodiversity and ecological values of the investigation area have been transformed markedly since settlement. The current remnant of the original landscape in public ownership is now a stronghold for endangered species. Three nationally threatened animals are found within the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve (661 hectares): helmeted honeyeater, Leadbeater's possum and growling grass frog as well as the only remaining patch (200 hectares) of the Sedge-rich *Eucalyptus camphora* Swamp vegetation community. The threatened fauna species are listed under both the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. This core area of high conservation values on public land has been expanded by substantial land purchase and donation over the past 40 years. Many other nearby areas of high conservation value on private land are managed in a sympathetic or complementary way through, for example, Trust for Nature covenants, Land for Wildlife and Yarra4Life initiatives. The natural values on land outside the public land estate are important in providing context

## 1.2

## The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

for this investigation, particularly when most land in the investigation area is private land. Managers of private land will continue to play a significant role in the conservation of biodiversity values in this and other fragmented landscapes.

An extensive network of community organisations such as Friends groups and Landcare organisations have been working over many decades to improve the natural values of the region on both public and private land. Volunteer labour has also, over more than 40 years, substantially contributed to revegetation, weed and pest animal control, fencing and other targeted conservation actions across the spectrum of land uses and land tenures. Despite the long history of community conservation activities and stewardship of the natural environment, substantial ecological threats remain and there are significant challenges in maintaining the dwindling habitat and wild populations of iconic threatened species in this area.

Even though there is a small proportion of public land in the investigation area, additional conservation measures can be implemented on public land, and assigning land to an appropriate public land use category and managing accordingly remains one of the most secure and achievable options for protecting and enhancing ecological values. Often, relatively small areas of public land can play a disproportionately important role in achieving conservation outcomes. This is particularly the case where public stream frontages and roadsides form physical connections, habitat corridors or linkages between large vegetated blocks and across substantially cleared landscapes. Voluntary private conservation efforts can also be directed towards strengthening narrow public land corridors to improve ecological and biodiversity values across a wider context, particularly as most of the remaining native vegetation within the investigation area is on private land.

The fragmented nature of the public land significantly adds to the complexity and difficulties in managing land for conservation, especially land located on the fringe of Melbourne. Far from being unique in this aspect, the Yellingbo investigation provides a microcosm of peri-urban characteristics and pressures. The conservation approaches proposed in this report are likely to be applicable to similar fragmented landscapes across Victoria.

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was established in 2001 to conduct investigations and make recommendations relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land. The *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* (VEAC Act) repealed the *Environment Conservation Council Act 1997*.

The current five members appointed to VEAC are the Hon Phil Honeywood (Chairperson), Mr Ian Harris, Dr Charles Meredith, Mr Ian Munro and Ms Angela Reidy. A brief biography of each of the current Council members can be found on VEAC's website at [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au).

The Council conducts investigations in accordance with the VEAC Act. In particular, section 18 specifies that "Council must have regard to the following considerations in carrying out an investigation and in making recommendations to the Minister—

- a the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- b the need to conserve and protect biological diversity;
- c the need to conserve and protect any areas which have ecological, natural, landscape or cultural interest or significance, recreational value or geological or geomorphological significance;
- d the need to provide for the creation and preservation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of parks and reserves within Victoria;
- e the existence of any international treaty ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia which is relevant to the investigation;
- f any agreement at a national, interstate or local government level into which the Government of Victoria has entered, or under which the Government of Victoria has undertaken any obligation in conjunction with the Commonwealth, a State, Territory or municipal council, which relates to the subject matter of the investigation;
- g the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations;
- h any existing or proposed use of the environment or natural resources."

The VEAC Act requires VEAC to consult with departments and public authorities, and requires departments and public authorities to give practicable assistance to the Council in carrying out investigations. However, VEAC papers and reports are prepared independently.

## 1.3

## The Yellingbo Investigation

In August 2011, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Ryan Smith MP, requested that VEAC undertake an investigation into public land in the vicinity of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. The terms of reference are presented overleaf and specify three investigation purposes emphasising biodiversity and ecological values. There was limited scope to explore other public land values such as recreation and economic uses, except where these relate to environmental considerations.

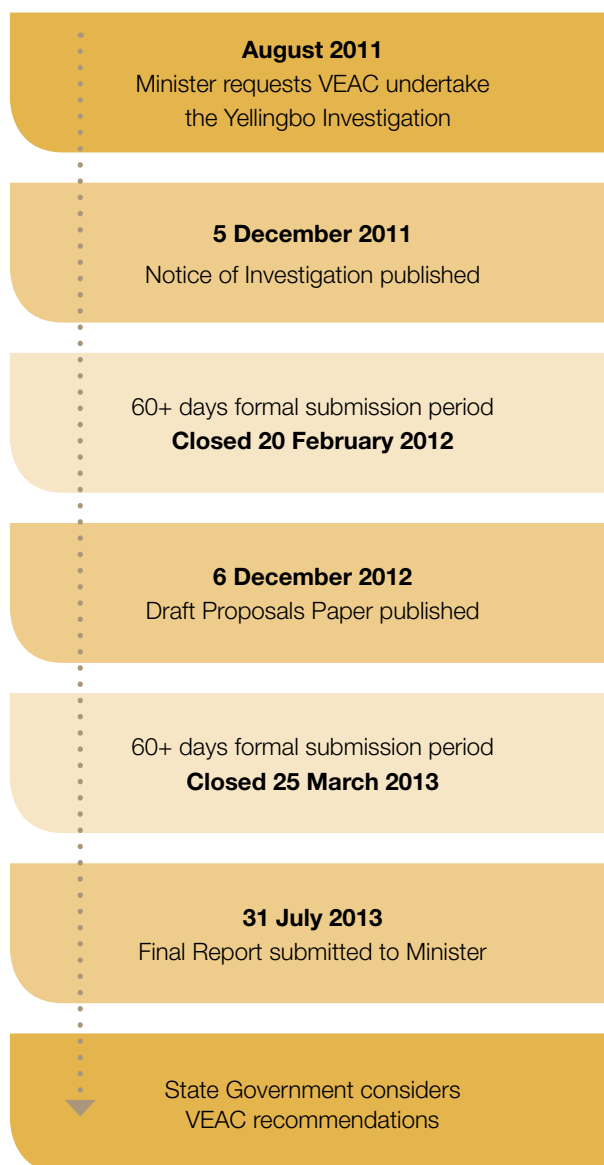
VEAC is also required to take into account relevant government policies, strategies, programs and plans, as well as those matters described in the VEAC Act (see section 1.2).

The process for the Yellingbo Investigation is formally specified in the VEAC Act and the terms of reference for the investigation. The terms of reference specified that VEAC is to prepare a draft proposals paper and submit a final report, and that a discussion paper is not to be prepared. The investigation process is shown schematically in figure 1.1. On 25 July 2012, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change granted an extension of time for completion of the investigation from 25 February 2013 to 31 July 2013. Two public consultation periods (each a minimum of 60 days) calling for written submissions have been completed, the second commencing with the publication of a draft proposals paper for public comment.

Seventy three submissions were received in response to the Notice of Investigation. Seventy nine submissions were received in response to the draft proposals paper. Submissions on the draft proposals paper can be viewed on VEAC's website. These submissions contain valuable information and perspectives on the investigation, and have formed a major input to the investigation. In addition, VEAC has established a Community Reference Group which has met six times, on one occasion, in an expanded key stakeholder and public land manager workshop; and has held several meetings and discussions with stakeholders over the course of the investigation. A summary of matters raised in public consultation is provided in section 2.

**Figure 1.1**

Investigation process and timeline







## TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 15 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Environment and Climate Change hereby requests the Council to carry out an investigation into public land in the vicinity of the Yellingbo Conservation Reserve<sup>1</sup>.

The purpose of the Yellingbo investigation is to:

- (a) identify the biodiversity and ecological values in the specified area;
- (b) identify the current and likely future threats to these values and opportunities to reduce or remove these threats; and
- (c) make recommendations for appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the biodiversity and ecological values.

In addition to the considerations in section 18 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Council must take into account the following matters:

- (i) relevant State Government policies and strategies, Ministerial statements and reports by the Victorian Auditor-General; and
- (ii) relevant regional programs, strategies and plans; and
- (iii) the option of consolidating land status.

A draft proposals paper and a final report are to be prepared, allowing two public submission periods. A separate discussion paper is not to be prepared.

The Council must report on the completed investigation by 31 July 2013\*.

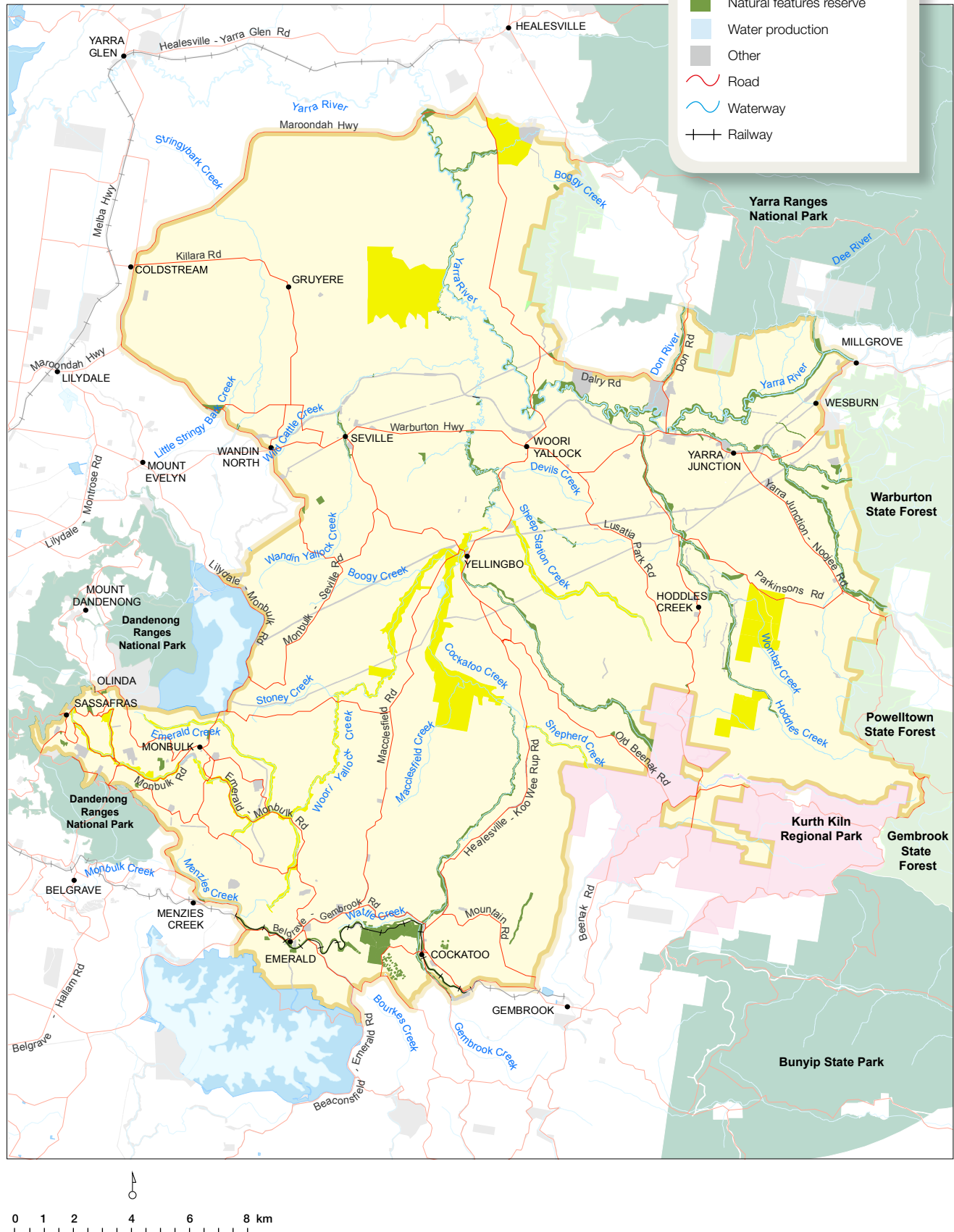
<sup>1</sup> For this investigation the area concerned includes multiple separate areas of public land located between (but excluding) Dandenong Ranges National Park, Yarra Ranges National Park, Warburton and Powelltown State Forest, Kurth Kiln Regional Parks, Cardinia and Silvan Reservoirs and water production areas within the boundary specified on the attached map of the investigation area. The public land includes the following areas that are accepted government recommendations from the Land Conservation Council Melbourne Area District 2:

- (i) Warramate Hills, Yellingbo and Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserves,
- (ii) natural features reserves including (streams and frontages, Streamside area and Bushland areas); and
- (iii) Hoddles Creek and Haining Farm Education Areas.

\* The date for completion of the investigation was extended from 25 February to 31 July 2013.

**Figure 1.2**

The Yellingbo investigation area is characterised by the low proportion and fragmented nature of public land compared to surrounding areas





## 2 Community and stakeholder consultation



Throughout the Yellingbo Investigation VEAC sought input from community organisations, government agencies, landholders and interested individuals. This consultation involved both structured and informal processes. The formal structured processes included two written submission periods and the establishment of a community reference group.

Less formal consultation included meetings with government agencies and community organisations throughout the investigation period. In addition, three 'open house' forums were conducted after the release of the draft proposals paper where a total of approximately 60 interested people met and discussed aspects of the investigation directly with VEAC members and staff.

### 2.1

### Written submissions

During the two formal consultation periods for the investigation, written submissions were received from individuals, statewide and local conservation groups, recreation groups, industry groups, local government, landholders, fire agencies and government agencies. Submissions are a valuable resource and Council is very grateful for the time and effort taken in their preparation. Submissions can be viewed on VEAC's website at [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au).

VEAC received 73 written submissions following advertising of the Notice of Investigation in December 2011. The associated brochure containing key discussion points and an overview of the investigation area was posted or emailed to approximately 500 contacts.

Seventy-nine submissions were received in response to the draft proposals paper released for comment in December 2012. The draft proposals paper was widely distributed throughout the investigation area. Approximately half the submissions were from organisations and groups, with almost 20 per cent (15) from local community conservation, Landcare, Friends or recreation groups reflecting the high level of interest in conservation in this region. Eleven submissions were received from local and regional CFA groups who raised issues around fire management. The comments, issues and proposals in submissions are described in section 2.3.

## 2.2

## Community Reference Group

Section 13 of the VEAC Act requires a Community Reference Group to be established for each investigation. The group is made up of a broad range of interests related to the investigation, and provides advice and input to VEAC on many issues. Members of the Community Reference Group for the Yellingbo Investigation are listed on the inside front cover of this final report.

Over the course of six meetings, the group provided advice and input to VEAC on many aspects of the investigation. The group made a particularly valuable contribution in advising on community views and assisting Council with advice on ways to best engage the local community. It was also an important source of information on the history of public land use in the investigation area, with many of the organisations represented having a long association with public land and, in particular, threatened species management.

As described more fully in section 1.7 of the draft proposals paper, the second meeting of the Community Reference Group took the form of a workshop in Woori Yallock with 23 people from public land management agencies and community groups attending.

Additional and follow-up discussions were held with various community groups and government agencies, including those responsible for natural resource programs and public land management across the investigation area.

## 2.3

## Overview of comments and issues raised in public consultation

The following section broadly summarises a range of comments and issues raised during consultation, with particular focus on comments received in response to the draft recommendations in the draft proposals paper. Responses to the main issues and comments are discussed in section 2.4 and changes to the draft recommendations are summarised in section 2.5.

### State Emblems Conservation Area

VEAC's draft proposals paper outlined a two-tiered State Emblems Conservation Area (draft recommendation R4) and management committee comprising key public land managers and government agencies (draft recommendation R5), established under a formal agreement (draft recommendation R6). This proposal received a varied response. Overall, although there was limited opposition to the proposal, there was also no strong support particularly from those that would have a key role in implementation.

#### Two-tier approach

Whilst the concept of a two-tiered State Emblems Conservation Area comprising core and supplementary areas was generally supported, many stakeholders felt this proposal required more clarity as it was seen to be overly complex. Many submitters were concerned that the overall approach would lead to poor resourcing for management of the supplementary area and that there was unlikely to be a process established for increasing conservation protection in the future.

Some submissions proposed that the State Emblems Conservation Area be included as a park scheduled on the *National Parks Act 1975* or in a nature conservation reserve. Many considered that the State Emblems Conservation Area and State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve should be scheduled on the National Parks Act, both in recognition of the threatened species present and to afford a high level of legislative protection for those values. The status and legislative provisions afforded by the National Parks Act were also seen as a mechanism that permitted application of consistent regulations, and that would allow for local government and private land to be voluntarily managed under similar provisions. Clarity was sought that existing public land managers would remain in place and retain statutory responsibilities under the proposed model.

There was some confusion associated with the naming of a State Emblems Conservation Area and a State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve, and whether the additional layer of a conservation area would add to rather than reduce complexity and uncertainty.

### Management committee and agreement

Many submissions endorsed the concept of a management committee as a way of achieving better coordinated management of public land. A number of comments and suggestions were provided in relation to strengthening the role of the committee and these included:

- ✦ the instrument under which the committee would be formed and the role of the committee if it was not directly managing land
- ✦ provision for support or resourcing
- ✦ the importance of participation by local government, including Cardinia Shire Council
- ✦ the appointment process for committee members
- ✦ the need for the management committee to have a single point of contact over time rather than being hosted on a revolving basis by key agencies
- ✦ conservation of threatened species and their habitat on public land.

### Public land units

The recommended inclusion of Beenak Bushland Reserve, Hoddles Creek Education Area and some stream frontages in the State Emblems Conservation Area Nature Conservation Reserve (draft recommendation A1) was widely supported. Proposals were also made for additional areas to be included in the nature conservation reserve or core area.

Zoos Victoria proposed that Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve (draft recommendation A2) be excluded from the State Emblems Conservation Area for clarity and to ensure they retained management accountability without the confusion of an overarching committee. There were some suggestions regarding the future use of Haining Farm near Launching Place and Wright Forest Bushland Reserve.

In addition to comments on the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area discussed above, several submissions suggested that greater protection be provided or more areas be added to the conservation reserve system. These views were entwined with proposals for conservation of threatened species, particularly for areas to be established as a nature conservation reserve or a park under the *National Parks Act 1975*.

### Biodiversity and ecological values

The identification of potential habitat and re-introduction sites for the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum was seen as an important issue. For some stakeholders, proposals were warranted specifying the management of the existing habitat at Cockatoo Swamp and research into its hydrology as future priority actions.

Comments were also received about the appropriate legislative recognition of the natural values present in this region. It was highlighted that the key fauna species (helmeted honeyeater and Leadbeater's possum) found in the Cockatoo Swamp area are protected under federal legislation, but the hosting habitat of Sedge-rich *Eucalyptus camphora* Swamp community confined to this area is not afforded the same level of protection. VEAC was asked to ensure that more appropriate federal recognition of this habitat is achieved in addition to its longstanding listing on the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

### Recreational uses

Dog walking and horse riding are excluded activities in nature conservation reserves (draft recommendation A (c)). In keeping with the primary purpose of conservation of native flora and fauna, these provisions apply generally across Victoria for nature conservation reserves; with a small number of exceptions, particularly in more urban or residential areas (e.g. The Pines Flora and Fauna Reserve near Frankston). Many comments were received about the proposed exclusion of dog walking in the Menzies and Sassafras creeks stream frontages between Emerald and Monbulk area.

Some submissions proposed that horse riding be permitted in existing nature conservation reserves and also in areas proposed as additions to nature conservation reserves. Others stated that there should be no horse riding in nature conservation reserves, and that bridle trails should be provided instead on other public land such as roadsides, where appropriate.

Some stakeholders promoted recreational access to specific areas of existing nature conservation reserves as a way to both improve public land management and fulfil a role of active community use and enjoyment of all public land areas. On the other hand, it was noted that the close proximity of the Yellingbo investigation area to Melbourne's expanding population means that public land managers are under pressure to provide for an increasing number of people seeking recreation and a broader range of leisure opportunities. Some submitters

considered that recreational access should not be granted in areas of existing or potential habitat for the threatened helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum, and their potential habitat. For these stakeholders, protection of these iconic threatened species means no recreational access should be permitted to Cockatoo Swamp or elsewhere in the existing Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

### Public land management

There was general agreement that public land management in this area requires more resources to achieve the conservation and public land management aspirations of the community.

There was some concern about the implementation of general recommendations relating to minor boundary adjustments (draft recommendation R3(b)). Mapping stream frontage boundaries between public and private land was identified as an area that is extremely complex at a detailed level, and that current land title mapping may not accurately reflect Crown land boundaries in many places. The proposed flexibility to make minor alterations to boundaries, typically in the order of several metres when further investigation reveals a more practical alignment or to exclude an access road for example, was misunderstood to suggest that more substantial changes could be made at the time of reservation. Some submitters called for additional consultation if boundaries are to be altered.

Several comments were made that sufficient resources must be specifically provided to facilitate the implementation of draft recommendation R3(c) relating to survey of land tenure boundaries particularly along stream frontages, and including those areas traversed by major roads or thoroughfares.

Many comments were received relating to fire planning and fire preparedness on public land, particularly on reducing fuel loads and potential hazard to adjoining land owners and private land assets. The protection of fire-sensitive threatened species in the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve was also raised. The preservation of human life and property was promoted as a priority that should be reinforced with land management agencies.

VEAC's proposal to remove grazing from public land stream frontages and include many of these areas in the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area was generally regarded as a pragmatic approach to the difficulties

associated with conservation land management in a fragmented landscape, although some were concerned that there would be poor management of these areas once grazing licences ended. There was also concern that fencing along stream frontages to exclude grazing and provide alternative off-stream water supply would inhibit emergency fire fighting efforts through reduced access to water sources. Council heard that many people were willing to be involved in conservation efforts along streams, and broadly that there was enthusiasm for an improved conservation approach to stream frontage management.

Some submissions asked VEAC to explore ways to encourage private land conservation, protection of streams with private frontage, or investigate planning scheme approaches to improve landscape-scale conservation outcomes.

### Other general recommendations

Many comments were received about permitted and excluded activities in the general recommendations for nature conservation reserves and natural features reserves (i.e. draft recommendations A and C). There was some concern about the general land use recommendations for nature conservation reserves (which are applied across most of Victoria), and specifically the categorisation of these areas as restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990* (draft recommendation A(b)(ii)) which allows for searching for minerals or stone in these reserves. Submissions argued that this was inappropriate because of the important biodiversity values. Some extended this argument to natural features reserves and in particular stream frontages and bushland reserves which are also categorised as restricted Crown land for mineral resources purposes.

## Current public land use mapping

While many people found the maps of public land use for the investigation area useful and informative, some comments were received proposing a range of minor changes to the way in which the current use of some areas was depicted. These included:

- ✦ consolidation of Wright Forest Bushland Reserve and adjoining relatively smaller areas also described as Natural Features Reserve - Bushland reserve
- ✦ Yarra Bridge reserve to be shown as a separate area of the Yarra River Natural Features Reserves (stream frontage), and
- ✦ Monbulk scout hall and Nathania Springs Creek Bushland Reserve: minor boundary issues to accommodate expansion of the scout hall and facilities at this site.

Some people commented that the name of the investigation area was too geographically specific and many stakeholders may not have engaged with the Yellingbo Investigation because it was not perceived as part of their area of interest.

A number of groups and individuals called for the inclusion of local government-owned land in VEAC's investigation mapping. This proposal focused particularly on areas with high conservation value, and argued that these areas should be broadly included because of their importance in the landscape, despite being outside the definition of public land under the VEAC Act.

## Corrections and clarifications

There were several minor factual errors identified in the draft proposals paper. For example, the State government's Urban Fringe Weed Management Initiative is for \$4 million statewide, of which some \$1 million is allocated for the Dandenong Ranges National Park. In addition the Judith Eardley Save Wildlife Fund has donated over \$2 million to conservation projects. Some recreational uses were also clarified. Parks Victoria advised that horse riding is not permitted in Wright Forest currently, while dog walking on-lead currently occurs in part of Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve along Menzies Creek and is an important leisure activity for some local residents.

New information since publication of the draft proposals paper has led to a number of minor public land use mapping corrections. An example is an area along Ox Creek near Cockatoo deemed reserved for the purpose of "conservation of an area of natural interest or beauty". This area has been corrected from uncategorised public land to reflect the reservation purpose and is now shown as Ox Creek Scenic Reserve.

Since publication of the draft proposals paper, Trust For Nature has advised that its Emerald property has been subdivided with a portion sold and most transferred to Cardinia Shire for management as a conservation area. Local government owned land is not public land under the VEAC Act and therefore this site must be removed from the public land use mapping, despite any covenant or agreement made to manage the site for conservation purposes. Trust For Nature has also asked for other corrections to the general recommendations for Trust For Nature's protected areas be to aligned with their current management requirements under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. Trust For Nature described an additional area of some 1200 hectares of private land with conservation covenants meeting the standard of private protected areas.



## 2.4

Response to major issues or  
proposals raised in submissions

Presented below is Council's response in general terms to the major issues or proposals raised during community consultation, grouped under three headings. Resultant changes to the draft recommendations are summarised in section 2.5, but for the detailed recommendations and rationale go to section 3 of this report.

### State Emblems Conservation Area

As described above, many people endorsed the concept of a coordinated management body, but sought clarity about the detailed operation or composition of the proposed committee, or proposed changes to the areas under the proposed conservation area. In this final report VEAC has focused on reducing the complexity of future public land use and clarifying roles for the proposed committee members. The operation and roles of the committee are more clearly described, acknowledging that it is a coordinating committee that can include community representation as well as public land managers. Under the draft recommendations there was confusion about where accountability for land management decisions resided. In the final recommendations some of these responsibilities are more clearly allocated to on-ground land managers, and it is envisaged that there will be less operational resourcing required for the committee thus reducing the need for a hosting organisation or the rotation of that obligation.

The two-tiered conservation area appears to create some confusion. In particular the complexity of land in the supplementary area placed too much responsibility on the coordinating committee for decision making about future public land use. This introduced an unnecessary level of confusion, notably for stream frontages. VEAC's final recommendations remove the differentiation between core and supplementary areas, and present most public land within the State Emblems Conservation Area as nature conservation reserves or streamside reserves.

In addition, the State Emblems Conservation Area incorporating existing or amended Crown land reserves, is recommended to be added to a new or amended schedule to the National Parks Act (similar to the existing Schedule Four) thus providing a higher profile for this area and for immediate application of regulations under the Act.

This approach is considered to be the most suitable means to encompass the fragmented nature of the public land estate, whilst recognising the high nature conservation values and the need for a formal mechanism to ensure integrated management.

### Threatened species and their habitat on public land

Throughout the investigation period it has been clear that both the community and government agencies are extremely concerned about the threats to the natural values and threatened species in this region. Many are troubled by a perceived lack of progress with biodiversity conservation. After a concerted effort for many decades to "save the helmeted honeyeater from extinction", thousands of volunteer hours contributed, a captive breeding program, and release of birds at Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and other locations, recovery is still not assured. Additional habitat for this endangered species has been acquired, stands of vegetation replanted, and yet habitat condition continues to decline at Cockatoo Swamp, the last remaining wild refuge of both animals. However, it is clear that without the concerted effort over this period, these species and possibly others would have become extinct.

What is apparent, through the decline of species and vegetation communities, is that the entire catchment and broader landscape are under significant ecological stress. VEAC's approach has been to propose a framework where land and natural resource managers can work collectively and pool resources to achieve maximum on-ground benefits. This approach of integrating land and water management, as well as land in various tenures has been adopted by many natural resource management bodies, one of which is the Yarra4Life model operating largely over private land in the investigation area. In this landscape with little public land, Council's view is that it is only through integrated management across tenure and throughout the catchment that aspirations to improve the plight of the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum can be achieved in the long term. As most of the remnant vegetation in the investigation area is on private land, traditional conservation approaches which rely largely on government land managers for biodiversity protection are unlikely to achieve the desired ecological outcomes. A more collaborative cross-tenure approach appears to be the best way to improve conservation outcomes in fragmented landscapes. The recommended State Emblems Conservation Area provides a framework upon which to secure a future for biodiversity and natural values.

In response to the draft proposals paper many people identified specific additions to the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area or for increased conservation protection by inclusion in the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve. A particular focus was Hoddles Creek stream frontage, Wright Forest Bushland

Reserve (approximately 110 hectares) and other smaller bushland reserves that were not included in the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve and some which were not part of the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area. Advocates for the inclusion of these areas in a nature conservation reserve cite the presence of threatened species and other biodiversity values, high quality or remnant vegetation, and the large size of Wright Forest in particular as values that warrant a higher level of conservation protection.

Currently Wright Forest is a focus for community recreation and hosts a section of the Emerald - Cockatoo multi-purpose recreation trail used for walking, dog walking on lead, and cycling. Dog walking on lead remains a popular activity with visitors to this area. In addition, demographic change is likely to increase demand for an expanding range of recreational activities at Wright Forest, some of which may be generally not permitted in nature conservation reserves, but have little impact on the existing natural values.

The upper reaches of Hoddles Creek and Wet Lead Creek stream frontage are well vegetated and form a corridor or biolink to the Hoddles Creek Education Area. Because of the strategic importance of this linkage and high quality natural values including the presence of threatened flora species and vegetation communities, this area warrants additional protection in a nature conservation reserve.

Some areas promoted for higher conservation protection require additional community consultation and the natural values present do not appear to be under immediate threat from the existing uses or management. Some areas are already in a form of conservation reserve (i.e. bushland reserve) and most are already managed in a way that protects and enhances biodiversity values.

Displacement of existing use, such as stock grazing or recreational activities, and the adequacy of current management arrangements were considered by VEAC, weighed against the current level of conservation protection afforded the natural values, before formulating the final recommendations.

## Public land management

A significant number of comments focused on the need for adequate resourcing for public land managers to improve on-ground outcomes such as fire preparedness, pest plant and animal control, restoration of riparian land by fencing and removal of grazing, and improved compliance with regulations. The proximity of this investigation area to the devastating 2009 Black Saturday fires continues to influence concerns regarding fire preparedness.

Council acknowledges that existing fire management procedures operate on both land management unit and landscape scales. There is no proposal or intention to alter these processes, nor to be specific or prescriptive about fire preparedness on public land in the investigation area. The significant expertise to address both the fire hazard reduction and the ecological requirements of the area exists within the current responsible public land management agencies and requires a detailed level of planning and investigation not within the scope of VEAC's investigation process. There are no recommendations to change existing responsibilities in relation to fire management.

## 2.5

Changes to the  
draft recommendations

The major changes to the draft recommendations published in the draft proposals paper relate to the establishment and coordination arrangements of the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area. The changes are summarised in table 2.1 below. For the details of the final recommendations and rationale go to [section 3](#). The recommendations for the two-stage removal of water frontage grazing from the reserves

within the State Emblems Conservation Area are unchanged from the draft proposals paper.

Changes to general recommendations on specific issues or that apply to specific public land use categories (A-G) within or outside the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area, or for specific public land units (e.g. A1-A3, C1-9, E1) are also summarised in table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

Summary of changes to recommendations since the draft proposals paper

Final report recommendations	Change	Reason
<b>Implementation of recommendations</b>		
<b>R1</b> Implementation resources	No change	
<b>R2</b> Resources for ongoing management	Addition of reference to fire preparedness	Responds to concerns raised in submissions
<b>R3</b> Interim management and minor boundary adjustments	Reference to boundary survey clarified and moved to separate recommendation	Reduces confusion regarding what is meant by boundary survey. Nomenclature clarified in discussion with Office of Surveyor-General Victoria
<b>R4</b> Boundary identification	As above	As above
<b>Integrating public land management for nature conservation</b>		
<b>R5</b> State Emblems Conservation Area	Designation of 'core' and 'supplementary' areas has been removed	Responds to concerns raised by stakeholders about complexity. Differentiation now achieved with existing public land use categories: mostly nature conservation reserves (equivalent to 'core') and streamside reserves and bushland reserves (equivalent to 'supplementary')
	Crown land reserves in the conservation area proposed to be added to a new or amended schedule of the National Parks Act, and park regulations applied	Responds to stakeholder concerns about clarity and certainty for the proposed conservation area. Schedule Four or a similar new schedule Four A provides flexibility for Crown land reserves of different types across a landscape (nature conservation reserves, bushland reserves, streamside reserves) to be managed as an integrated unit under the National Parks Act and for the immediate application of park regulations
	National Parks Act to be amended if required to provide, within the conservation area, for management agreements with a public authority and to provide for adjacent landholders to manage water frontages under conservation agreements	Reinforces collaborative management within the conservation area by providing for Zoos Victoria to continue to manage Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve, and for landholders to manage adjacent water frontages under conservation agreements, similar to riparian or conservation licences
	Recommendation for a formal management agreement has been removed	No longer required, management direction and roles clearly defined



Final report recommendations	Change	Reason
<b>Integrating public land management for nature conservation</b>		
<b>R6</b> State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee	Management committee has been renamed a coordinating committee, and is proposed to be established under the <i>Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987</i> (CFL Act)	Responds to input from community organisations and government agencies and improves clarity. Section 12 of the CFL Act provides specifically for many of the functions envisaged for the coordinating committee
	Proposed membership now includes Cardinia Shire Council four community representatives, and an independent chairperson	Responds to input from community
	Recommendation for hosting of committee to be rotated amongst agencies has been removed	Not supported by community or agencies
	Recommendation for advisory groups has been removed	Community representation is now recommended on the committee. Committee will determine its own requirements for additional advisory groups
<b>A Nature conservation reserves</b>		
<b>A1</b> State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve	Removal of 195 hectares comprising existing Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve and 48 hectares of stream frontages along Emerald and Menzies creeks to be recommended as an expanded Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation A3)  Addition of approximately 52 hectares of Hoddles and Wet Lead creeks stream frontage upstream of Black Leather Creek Road	Responds to concerns raised about reduced opportunities for on-lead dog walking and/or solid fuel BBQs which are permitted in the recommended Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve  Incorporates additional areas with high natural values and provides improved connectivity with nearby large blocks of public land
<b>A2</b> Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve	No change	
<b>A3</b> Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve	Existing Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve retained rather than incorporated into State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve  Inclusion in this reserve of proposed nature conservation reserve additions of Kallista Bushland Reserve (at Beagleys Bridge), Sassafras Creek Bushland Reserve, Sassafras Creek Reserve and approximately 48 hectares of stream frontages along Emerald and Menzies creeks included in this reserve	Responds to concerns raised about reduced opportunities for on-lead dog walking and/or solid fuel BBQs by allowing these recreational uses in this nature conservation reserve and at the land manager's discretion

Final report recommendations	Change	Reason
<b>B Trust for Nature protected areas</b>		
	Emerald property removed (4 hectares)  Reference to <i>Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972</i> included in general recommendations	Site removed from mapping when transferred to local government for management for conservation purposes (i.e. no longer public land)
<b>C Natural features reserves</b>		
<b>C1</b> Yarra River Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve	Responds to comments in submissions and reflects natural values. Reduces complexity relating to previous proposals for core and supplementary areas
<b>C2</b> Hoddles Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage and Hoddles Creek Bushland Reserve to new streamside reserve	
<b>C3</b> Cockatoo Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve	
<b>C4</b> McCrae Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve	
<b>C5</b> Woori Yallock Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve. Includes the existing Woori Yallock Creek Streamside Reserve at the junction with Old Warburton Highway	
<b>C6</b> Yarra River - Badger Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve. Includes the existing Yarra River (Everard Park) Streamside Reserve	
<b>C7</b> Little Yarra River Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve	
<b>C8</b> Britannia Creek Streamside Reserve	Change from stream frontage to new streamside reserve	Allows for consolidation of land use and land management, and for a broader range of recreational activities
<b>C9</b> Wright Forest Bushland Reserve	Addition of 5.5 hectares of western bank of Cockatoo Creek and consolidation of adjoining areas reserved for conservation purposes or LCC recommendations for bushland reserve	
<b>C</b> Other natural features reserves	Addition of Ox Creek (Tymon Road) Scenic Reserve (6 hectares) and Avonsleigh Common Bushland Reserve (0.7 hectares)	Correction to current public land use mapping

Final report recommendations	Change	Reason
<b>D Services and utilities areas</b>		
	Cockatoo Community Health Centre (0.2 hectares) corrected to be shown as Services and Utilities area – municipal buildings and services	Correction to current public land use mapping
<b>E Community use areas</b>		
<b>E</b> General recommendations	Inclusion of general recommendations for Community Use Areas  Small area subject to Land Conservation Council approved recommendations for bushland reserve included in Wright Forest Bushland Reserve	To permit detailed recommendations for Haining Park Education Area  Correction to current public land use mapping
<b>E1</b> Haining Education Area	Removal from Schedule 3 of <i>National Parks Act 1975</i> and permanently reserve under <i>Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978</i> for the purposes of 'public education about environmental sustainability and habitat restoration'  Addition to new or amended schedule of the <i>National Parks Act 1975</i> as part of State Emblems Conservation Area	Provides opportunity for expanded role in community education and increases profile of potential biodiversity and ecological values
<b>F Regional park, state forest and historic and cultural features reserves</b>		
	No change	
<b>G Uncategorized public land</b>		
	Area of 6 hectares at Ox Creek (Tymon Road) now shown as Natural Features Reserve – scenic reserve  Cockatoo Community Health Centre corrected to be shown as Services and Utilities area – municipal buildings and services	Corrections to current public land use mapping

# 3 Final recommendations



The focus of this investigation is on recommendations for appropriate management arrangements to conserve and enhance the biodiversity and ecological values in the Yellingbo area. The draft proposals paper for the investigation was released in December 2012 and described public land use, biodiversity and ecological values, cultural heritage, and relevant community and government programs and activities. The draft proposals paper also presented draft recommendations for public comment.

Despite the limited extent of public land in the Yellingbo investigation area and its highly fragmented configuration across the landscape, some parts of the investigation area retain nationally significant biodiversity values such as the helmeted honeyeater, lowland Leadbeater's possum and other threatened species. The remnant native vegetation on public land is largely made up of 16 Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), 11 of which are threatened (three of these endangered) and another two are classified as depleted.

Public land plays a vital community role. Not all public land can provide for all activities or uses but, in aggregate, public land is expected to provide for the range of uses at least at some locations. Scenic landscapes, proximity to Melbourne and a changing resident population make the Yellingbo investigation area popular for recreation and tourism. Outside road reserves, however, most public land is already strongly committed to nature conservation or broadly to protection of natural values, and there are therefore limited options to provide for additional activities on existing sites.

Addition of land to protected areas such as parks and nature conservation reserves is an important mechanism for achieving biodiversity protection on public land. However, the threats to natural values in this urban fringe landscape are complex, and inherently difficult for any single land manager to resolve. Given the highly significant values present in this area, VEAC has looked for new ways to improve overall management for conservation purposes in addition to including areas of high natural or connectivity value to protected areas. The Council has also sought to build on the impressive collaboration that already exists between the community, local government and state government agencies to protect biodiversity.

Presented on the following pages are general recommendations that apply to all or the majority of the investigation area, prefixed R (sections 3.1 and 3.2). Recommendations for specific public land use categories, prefixed A to G (sections 3.3 to 3.9), follow and are shown on map A (inside back pocket).

## 3.1

Implementation of  
recommendations

This investigation was initiated largely in response to the difficulties experienced by both land managers and volunteers in managing fragmented landscapes with highly significant conservation values. The complexity of the public land estate and of the administrative arrangements for managing natural resources and biodiversity programs is difficult to communicate, and can become an obstacle to resolving on-ground management issues. The recommendations presented here propose a model for land management that seeks to enhance the contribution made currently by multiple land and natural resource managers, through a coordinated approach of shared responsibility. Having all the relevant land and biodiversity managers on a coordinating committee can greatly improve results by pooling the wealth of experience and resources available to each.

The issue of under-resourcing of public land management was raised in all forms of community consultation during the investigation. However, simply doing more of what is currently being done is unlikely to improve the overall outcome for Yellingbo's emblematic threatened species and other natural values. Implementation of VEAC's recommendations will require some initial additional resourcing which Council believes will be more than recouped as the implementation takes effect.

Land management activities other than those directed to nature conservation also require adequate resourcing. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission acknowledged that a greater level of land management is required to respond to an increasing threat of bushfire, particularly in peri-urban areas. For public land managers to appropriately address the threat, documented fire management plans and improved fire preparedness are required, which are unlikely to be achieved with largely the same level of resourcing. VEAC recommends additional resources be allocated to establish the recommended land management changes described here, to deliver meaningful protection and enhancement of biodiversity and ecological values.

The large number of existing policies, programs and grant schemes for stream frontages reflects the importance of these areas for biodiversity conservation and river health. However, in administrative terms stream frontages can be problematic with waterways changing course and the public-private land boundary often requiring re-identification. Boundary survey is seldom undertaken outside conservation areas such as national parks because of the expense, time required and a shortage of licensed surveyors within government. VEAC recommends that boundary identification using graphical/digital means be given high priority, especially for streamside reserves,

to assist with the implementation of recommendations and provide clarity for land managers and other stakeholders. On-site survey is expected to be required only to resolve specific difficult management issues initially identified by graphical/digital or other means.

GENERAL  
RECOMMENDATIONS

## Implementation resources

R1

Government allocates adequate financial and staff resources for implementation of these recommendations and ensures that the objectives of the report and recommendations are achieved.

## Resources for ongoing land management

R2

Government allocates additional resources to address current and future public land management needs in the investigation area, with priority given to biodiversity conservation, pest plant and animal control, fire management planning and fire preparedness, and on-ground staff presence particularly with a view to improving current levels of compliance with regulations.

## Interim management and minor boundary adjustments

R3

Upon government acceptance of the recommendations in this report that:

- (a) relevant land be managed in accordance with accepted recommendations
- (b) subsequent implementation of the recommendations allow flexibility for minor boundary adjustments.

## Boundary identification

R4

Upon government acceptance of the recommendations in this report that priority be given to the identification of public land boundaries by graphical/digital means, especially for reserves along streams, with on-site survey if required to resolve specific management issues.



## 3.2

Integrating public land management  
for nature conservation

The Yellingbo investigation area supports a range of significant and, in some cases, unique ecological values but these values are under considerable threat from sources such as pest plants and animals, altered hydrology, potentially inappropriate fire regimes, eucalypt dieback and other consequences of declining native vegetation condition. This is despite a long history and very high level of community and government support for a broad range of nature conservation activities in this area. Although these activities have prevented the loss of many ecological values and species — notably the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum — there is still no clear trend for an overall improvement in the health of biodiversity across the area.

There is a need to refocus and reinvigorate on-ground work for nature conservation: to increase the profile of nature conservation in the area, to strengthen the productive but generally informal cooperation between groups working in this area, to improve the cohesion of the diverse range of activities and groups, and to provide a focus to attract external support additional to that currently provided by the active community groups.

In VEAC's draft proposals paper, land managed for nature conservation in a variety of public land use categories was recommended to be brought together within an overarching State Emblems Conservation Area. This approach reflected a multi-tenure management model adopted in some urban 'parklands' (e.g. Merri Creek Parklands, Barwon River Parklands). For the Yellingbo investigation area, the vision was for nature conservation to be the primary management objective for public land within the conservation area. The draft recommendations outlined two tiers of land within the State Emblems Conservation Area depending upon the current or potential nature conservation values or values for ecological connectivity: a core area and a supplementary area. Each of these areas was made up of a number of public land units and categories. By drawing together land under several tenures and managers, the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area was intended to achieve clearer, more robust and better coordinated arrangements for the conservation of biodiversity and natural values.

A management committee of key government agencies and organisations involved in management of public land and biodiversity programs was recommended to oversee and direct management of the State Emblems Conservation Area. The committee was proposed to be established under a formal management agreement between the member organisations. The roles proposed for the management committee included a range of public land management coordination tasks as well as oversight

of the progressive implementation of public land changes to improve nature conservation along key streams. A combination of progressive changes in public land use category was recommended, from stream frontage either to nature conservation reserve or management under riparian licences and Melbourne Water's stream frontage management agreements. Exclusion of grazing from stream frontages was recommended to occur by 2018 across the entire State Emblems Conservation Area and in some priority areas within two years. To support the management committee an advisory group of community representatives spanning the range of interests across the investigation area was proposed.

There has been little direct opposition to the draft recommendations. However, while both community and government agency responses were supportive of the high level vision, the proposed mechanism to deliver the on-ground outcomes was seen as confusing, overly complex and requiring a high level of explanation (see sections 2.2 and 2.3).

Some submissions and comments to VEAC during community forums again called for a State Emblems Park under the *National Parks Act 1975* to address the complexity and reflect the importance of the natural values in this area. Other input, including advice from the Community Reference Group for the investigation, supported the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve and State Emblems Conservation Area, but identified advantages of the National Parks Act such as the status that land under this legislation is afforded in the broader community and the ability to apply regulations under the Act.

Several submissions highlighted the critical role of native vegetation on private land in supporting management for nature conservation given the highly fragmented nature of the public land, and suggested a number of ways in which conservation efforts could be integrated across the whole landscape. Fire organisations highlighted the roles of Integrated Fire Management Planning committees at regional and municipal levels, and the need for integrated management of public land for nature conservation to consider impacts on the ability of fire services to combat fire both within the public land and on adjoining private land. Local brigades and groups in particular were concerned to ensure that the preservation of life and property is a requirement of management.

## State Emblems Conservation Area

VEAC has carefully considered the views of stakeholders, the Community Reference Group and the broader community and is recommending a modified version of the State Emblems Conservation Area. VEAC considers that the addition of the State Emblems Conservation Area and its constituent reserves to an appropriate schedule under the *National Parks Act 1975*, together with amendments to the Act to enable management agreements over the land if appropriate, achieves the following:

- ✦ affords greater recognition of the importance of the natural values of this area
- ✦ delivers certainty of land tenure from the outset
- ✦ enables collaborative management if appropriate
- ✦ establishes a mechanism to apply and enforce regulations across each reserve
- ✦ provides a clear focus for conservation efforts on adjacent private land and local government land.

VEAC envisages the State Emblems Conservation Area becoming widely known as the key platform for nature conservation in the fragmented landscapes between the Yarra and Dandenong Ranges. The conservation area and its coordinating committee will serve as a focus to invigorate and thereby attract greater support for management for nature conservation by government organisations and the wider community. The National Parks Act, through the inclusion of land in Schedule Four, provides a means to manage Crown land reserves under specified provisions of the Act and regulations under the Act which apply to the land 'as though it were a park'. In recognition of the significance of this area, however, and as an opportunity to explore wider application of this model of integrated conservation management to other areas across the state, a new Schedule Four A with similar provisions to that of Schedule Four, is recommended to be established for 'Conservation Landscapes', of which the State Emblems Conservation Area would be the first. Amendments are recommended to the National Parks Act to enable management agreements to be established for land in this schedule, recognising the benefits that collaborative management can provide in fragmented landscapes. Management agreements are envisaged to be for discrete areas and strictly limited to public authorities with an existing role in land or biodiversity management, such as local government and Zoos Victoria, and to landholders adjacent to stream frontages under conditions similar to a riparian management licence.

The State Emblems Conservation Area brings together almost 3000 hectares of public land with high current or potential value for nature conservation (see [figure 3.1](#) and [table 3.1](#)). Each area is recommended to be permanently reserved using the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, for the purposes appropriate to the land use category, described collectively as the State Emblems Conservation Area and included on a new or amended schedule of the National Parks Act. The strength of this approach is its flexibility to incorporate different land use categories across a landscape of high conservation values. The recommended State Emblems Conservation Area is made up of:

- ✦ nature conservation reserves:
  - new State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation A1)
  - existing Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve which will continue to be managed by Zoos Victoria (recommendation A2)
  - expanded Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation A3)
- ✦ natural features reserves:
  - new streamside reserves along the priority stream frontages of the Yarra River upstream of Warramate Hills (recommendation C1) and lower Hoddles Creek (including Hoddles Creek Bushland Reserve) and Wet Lead Creek (recommendation C2) where grazing is recommended to be phased out within two years.
  - new streamside reserves along remaining key stream frontages (recommendations C3-8) where grazing is recommended to be phased out by the end of 2018
  - expanded Wright Forest Bushland Reserve (recommendation C9)
- ✦ existing Haining Park Education Area (recommendation E1).

Most of this land is currently managed at least partly for protection of natural values but inclusion in an overarching conservation area will give primacy to and recognition of the importance of management to enhance biodiversity values. The centrepiece of the conservation area is the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation A1) which hosts the most important threatened fauna populations in the investigation area. The Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve has been retained as a separate reserve (recommendation A3) in order to provide for dog walking in the Emerald area. The Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve is retained as a separate reserve to allow for Zoos Victoria to continue to manage the land (recommendation A2).

## Box 3.1

## Management direction

The State Emblems Conservation Area will be managed in an integrated way to achieve the long-term security of biodiversity and other natural values across the landscape, by improving ecological resilience and connectivity, restoring habitat for emblematic threatened species, and enhancing community appreciation and involvement in the protection of these values. Management of the State Emblems Conservation Area will be complemented by biodiversity conservation programs on private land.

Freehold land such as local government owned bushland reserves, Trust for Nature owned land, and private land with Trust for Nature covenants, are important areas which can be managed to augment conservation efforts on public land. The fragmentation of native vegetation in the area, and the configuration of public land in small blocks and linear reserves, means that it is essential to encourage complementary management of native vegetation adjacent to the public land where possible.

The recommended coordinating committee for the State Emblems Conservation Area is described in more detail below, including roles and responsibilities of the member organisations (table 3.2), and the governance arrangements under the recommended model.

## RECOMMENDATION

R5

## State Emblems Conservation Area

That a State Emblems Conservation Area be designated to include the 2940 hectare area shown on figure 3.1 and in table 3.1, and that this area:

- (a) provide for integrated management of the component land for the overall protection or enhancement of biodiversity and ecological values
- (b) be managed in accordance with directions set out in box 3.1 which form a part of this recommendation, and
- (c) be managed under section 19B and 19F of the *National Parks Act 1975* and added to a new Schedule Four A 'Conservation Landscapes' created for the protection of fragmented public land within specified landscapes and for the integrated management of the designated land for nature conservation (also see note 1)

and that:

- (d) the individual public land units listed in table 3.1 be reserved according to the recommendations A, C and E applying specifically or generally to the relevant designated public land use category

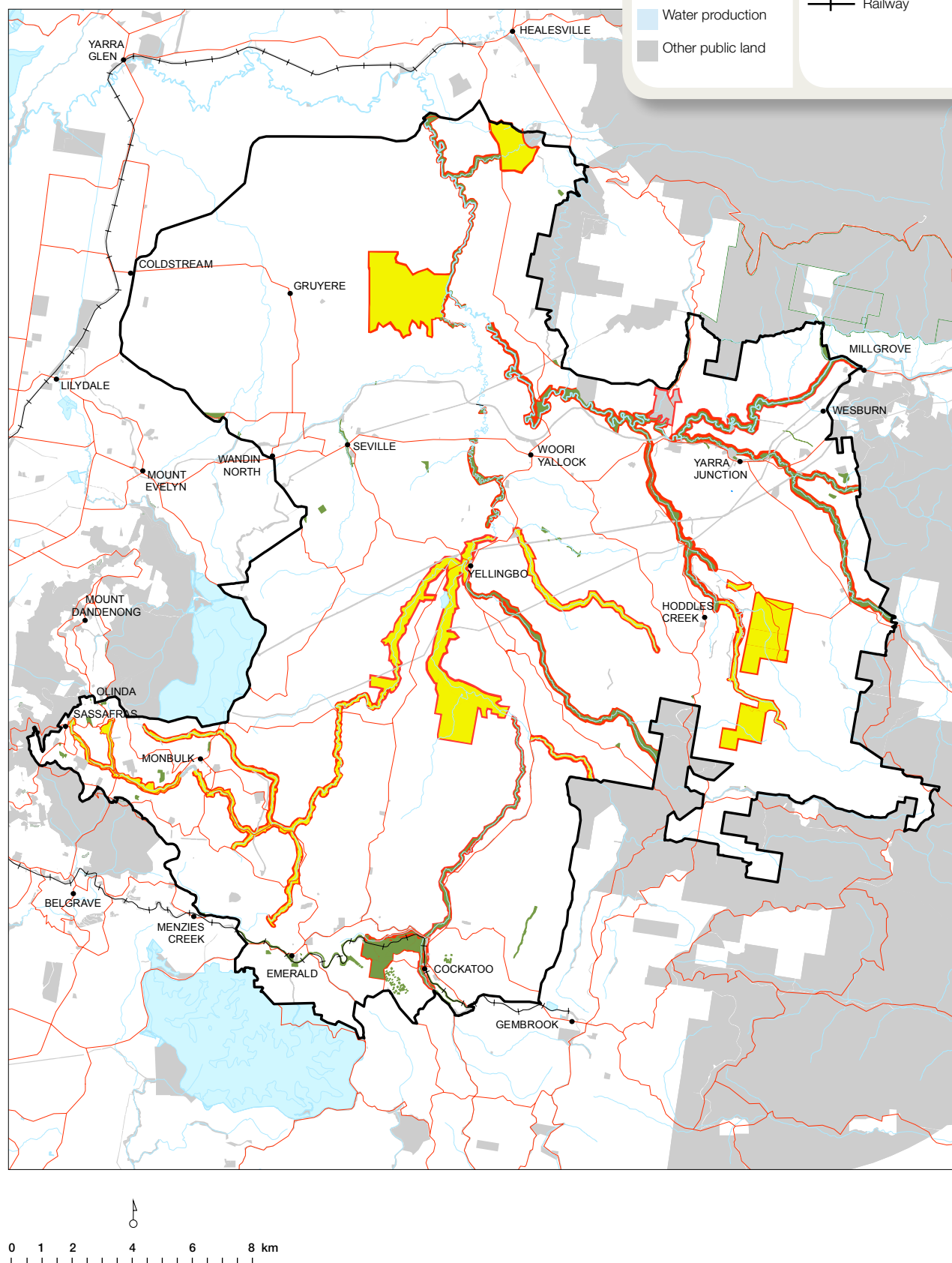
- (e) the *National Parks Act 1975* be amended if required to allow for:
  - (i) management agreements with public authorities to manage specified land included on Schedule Four A (recommendation R5(d), above), and
  - (ii) conservation agreements with adjacent landholders, for land on Schedule Four A (recommendation R5(d), above) within 100 metres of both a permanent waterway and the private land boundary
- (f) such agreements be made as appropriate for land specified in recommendations A2, C1 to C8 and E1, and
- (g) the relevant public land managers continue to have direct management responsibility for the respective public land units, including where that relates to broader scale planning responsibilities such as fire management and planning.

Note:

- 1. Provisions of the *National Parks Act 1975* and the regulations under the Act are to apply to the land in the State Emblems Conservation Area.



**Figure 3.1**  
Simplified representation of the recommended  
State Emblems Conservation Area



**Table 3.1**

Summary of public land units in the recommended State Emblems Conservation Area

Current public land unit	Area (ha)	Recommended public land unit	Implications for Crown land licences
Yellingbo NCR and some abutting unused roads	668	A1 State Emblems NCR	Crown land licences to be cancelled upon implementation.
Warramate Hills NCR and adjoining Woori Yallock Creek and Yarra River SFs	497	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Hoddles Creek Education Area	278	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Beenak Bushland Area	126	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Upper Hoddles Creek and Wet Lead Creek SFs	52	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Woori Yallock Creek SF between Yellingbo and Sassafras Creek NCRs	25	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Shepherd Creek SF	16	A1 State Emblems NCR	
Coranderrk NCR	144	A2 Coranderrk NCR	
Sassafras Creek NCR and Kallista Bushland Reserve (at Beagleys Bridge), Sassafras Creek Bushland Reserve and Sassafras Creek Reserve (consolidation)	195	A3 Sassafras Creek NCR	
Menzies Creek SF	15	A3 Sassafras Creek NCR	
Emerald Creek SF	33	A3 Sassafras Creek NCR	
Yarra River SF upstream of Warramate Hills NCR	247	C1 Yarra River Streamside Reserve	Crown land water frontage (grazing) licences to be converted to riparian management or surrendered within two years.
Lower Hoddles and Wet Lead Creeks SFs, and Hoddles Creek Bushland Reserve	63	C2 Hoddles Creek Streamside Reserve	
Cockatoo Creek SF	73	C3 Cockatoo Creek Streamside Reserve	Crown land water frontage (grazing) licences to be converted to riparian management or surrendered by the end of 2018.
McCrae Creek SF	90	C4 McCrae Creek Streamside Reserve	
Woori Yallock Creek SF downstream of Yellingbo NCR	33	C5 Woori Yallock Creek Streamside Reserve	
Badger Creek and Yarra River SFs downstream of Warramate Hills NCR, Yarra River Streamside Reserve (Everald Park)	62	C6 Yarra River-Badger Creek Streamside Reserve	
Little Yarra River SF	100	C7 Little Yarra Streamside Reserve	
Britannia Creek SF	27	C8 Britannia Creek Streamside Reserve	NA
Wright Forest Bushland Reserve and adjoining Cockatoo Creek SF	126	C9 Wright Forest Bushland Reserve	
Haining (Farm) Park Education Area	69	E1 Haining Education Area (see note 1)	NA
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2940</b>		

Abbreviations: SF: natural features reserve – stream frontage; NCR: nature conservation reserve

Notes:

1. Haining Park is recommended to be removed from Schedule 3 and added to a new Schedule 4A of the *National Parks Act 1975* (see recommendation E1).

## State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee

In the draft proposals paper, VEAC recommended that a management committee for the State Emblems Conservation Area be established through a formal management agreement of the key parties involved in public land management and biodiversity programs. Community and stakeholder comments during public consultation on the draft proposals paper reflected a level of confusion and uncertainty about this model and the role of the management committee. The form the management agreement might take was not clear to many stakeholders, and several expressed a preference for using existing legislative provisions for establishing committees. Uncertainty about the operational role of existing land managers and the role of the proposed management committee was evident during public consultation and discussion with key stakeholders, including with the agencies proposed as members. Additional questions were raised regarding resourcing, responsibilities for hosting and staffing levels.

VEAC has amended its recommendations for the committee to address these concerns by:

- ✦ clearly defining the role of the committee, and differentiating it from the roles and responsibilities of the member organisations (see [box 3.2](#) and [table 3.2](#))
- ✦ renaming the committee the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee, to clarify that the committee does not have a direct land management role
- ✦ adding a representative from Cardinia Shire Council to the committee
- ✦ recommending an independent chairperson be appointed to convene the committee
- ✦ providing for four community representatives on the committee to be nominated by local government (three by Yarra Ranges Council and one by Cardinia Shire Council)
- ✦ recommending that the committee be established under section 12 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*.

The draft recommendation for a separate community advisory group has been removed in this final report. Instead, community representation covering the range of interests and landscapes in the conservation area is now recommended on the coordinating committee. VEAC is recommending that four community representatives be appointed to the coordinating committee to represent the range of interests across the investigation area. The community representatives are proposed to be nominated by Yarra Ranges Council (three members) and Cardinia Shire Council (one member). It is envisaged that the coordinating committee would be able to convene other advisory groups if required, such as for research, education or promotion. To raise the public profile of the State Emblems Conservation Area, VEAC also recommends that the Minister appoint a suitable independent chairperson to convene the coordinating committee.

Establishment of the committee under the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* extends the potential scope of the committee to land management and biodiversity programs on private land, in addition to its role relating to the State Emblems Conservation Area.

## RECOMMENDATION

R6

### State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee

That:

- (a) a State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee be established to oversee and coordinate land management for nature conservation and biodiversity programs in the State Emblems Conservation Area, set strategic directions and policies, provide guidance for land management, and increase the profile of the biodiversity and ecological values of the area and their protection;

and that

- (b) the coordinating committee be established under section 12 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*
- (c) the Coordinating Committee be made up of 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, and four community representatives: three nominated by Yarra Ranges Council and one nominated by Cardinia Shire Council
- (d) a convener, who is not from one of the member organisations, be appointed to act as independent chairperson, and
- (e) the role of the committee outlined in box 3.2, which forms part of this recommendation, be the basis for the formal functions of the committee.



An ambitious and multidisciplinary program of actions is required to realise the management direction of the State Emblems Conservation Area. The role of the coordinating committee is discussed below and summarised in box 3.2.

Several key elements of land management for biodiversity require significant coordinated involvement from two or more of the interests represented on the committee: pest plant and animal control, threatened species recovery, revegetation, riparian land management, and research and planning for the management of hydrology. As highlighted in the draft proposals paper, there is already impressive informal cooperation between organisations working on some of these issues, mostly close to the level of on-ground delivery. These efforts will be enhanced and formalised through the coordinating committee and extended to activities where there is little coordination at present. It is envisaged that coordination will be reflected in rolling three-year action plans for the State Emblems Conservation Area.

The coordinating committee also has an important role to play through monitoring the implementation of management actions and regularly reporting on them against specified targets.

For issues that arise at the regional level requiring engagement from a number of the interests represented on the committee (e.g. planning for bushfire control, tourism, recreation, revegetation, and pest plants and animals), the coordinating committee will often be the best point of engagement and liaison for external stakeholders on matters relating to land management for biodiversity.

## Box 3.2

**Role of the State Emblems Conservation  
Area Coordinating Committee**

- ✦ Coordination of land and biodiversity management activities of member organisations
- ✦ Monitoring and reporting of activities
- ✦ Providing a point of contact for external organisations and community
- ✦ Involving the community in management
- ✦ Establishing partnerships
- ✦ Seeking and managing additional funding for programs and activities
- ✦ Generating communications and publicity materials
- ✦ Advocating and negotiating for nature conservation in the region
- ✦ Encouraging complementary management on private land
- ✦ Establishing long-term management direction

Resourcing of land management for biodiversity can be enhanced by identifying alignments with potential partners (e.g. state and federal governments, non-government supporters, local business and community organisations) and working towards establishing mutually beneficial partnerships. The committee should be established in such a way that it is able to be the recipient of grants, as well as coordinate funding applications.

The fragmented nature of public land in the conservation area, together with the multiplicity of stakeholders, may present a disjointed and confusing face to outsiders and compromise the potential for individual organisations to promote land management for biodiversity beyond their own ambits. By bringing the key players together, the coordinating committee can more readily take on the tasks of profile raising, generating communications and educational materials, publicity and advocacy.

With the establishment of a clear identity, the coordinating committee will become the first contact point for most stakeholders, particularly for new and emerging issues where existing relationships are not established. As a result, over time the coordinating committee will be well placed to facilitate communications and community consultation on relevant issues.

The establishment of the committee under the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987* and the composition of its membership means that it is well placed to explore models for integrated management of whole landscape, and encourage complementary management of private land adjacent to the conservation area.

It is envisaged that the initial directions and priorities for both the coordinating committee and land management for nature conservation will change over time, and a key role for the committee will be ongoing refinement of strategic direction and re-assessment of priorities.

**Table 3.2**

Relevant roles of organisations represented on the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee

Actions	Current and ongoing responsibilities
Land and waterway management	Parks Victoria, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Melbourne Water, Zoos Victoria as Committee of Management for Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve, Trust for Nature, local councils
Fire management and planning	Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Country Fire Authority, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, local councils
Land status changes e.g. boundary survey, legislation, reservation and gazettal	Department of Environment and Primary Industries,
Conversion of water frontage (grazing) licences to conservation management	Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Melbourne Water
Biodiversity management, especially threatened species	Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Zoos Victoria, Parks Victoria
Establishment of committees, governance	Department of Environment and Primary Industries
Pest plant and animal control	Local councils, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Department of Environment and Primary Industries
Management of surface and groundwater hydrology	Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria
Management of recreational uses	Parks Victoria, local councils
Road management	VicRoads, Parks Victoria, local councils
Conservation and natural resource management on private land	Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Trust for Nature, local councils, Melbourne Water, Department of Environment and Primary Industries



## 3.3

## Nature conservation reserves

Nature conservation reserves, formerly known as flora/fauna reserves, contain some of Victoria's most important biodiversity values. In these reserves nature conservation is the primary objective and protection of natural values is given the highest management priority. Other uses are permitted only if compatible with this primary objective. This has meant that for some reserves public access is not provided in order to protect the natural values. This is the case for much of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve where limiting disturbance to the threatened species is a critical management issue, and also for Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve where there is limited public access. Many natural values in nature conservation reserves are not represented elsewhere, while opportunities for other uses of public land are more widespread.

Nationally and internationally, national parks have multiple objectives providing for nature conservation, often in extensive landscapes, but also providing for compatible recreation in this setting with the consequent expectation of relatively high levels of visitor access. Many national and similar parks in Victoria are well recognised tourist attractions and among the most visited public land areas in Victoria (e.g. Dandenong Ranges National Park). Large areas of national and other parks and state forests have been set aside for conservation and recreation immediately adjacent to the investigation area.

Because of the limited extent and fragmented nature of the public land estate in the Yellingbo investigation area, Council's view is that nature conservation reserve is the most appropriate category to protect its important ecological values. However, some non-conforming recreational uses are allowed to continue in specified areas. These are discussed below for the relevant reserve.

In general terms, community comments supported the application of nature conservation reserve for the protection of natural values in the investigation area. Many submissions supported proposed additions to conservation areas and suggested more areas for protection. Other submissions sought access for recreational activities such as dog walking and horse riding, and issues relating to fire hazard and fire preparedness. There was some opposition to the proposed ban on solid fuel fires at existing picnic areas (e.g. Avard Picnic Ground, near Emerald) in the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve.

A number of submissions and comments opposed exploration for minerals or stone resources in nature conservation reserves. It was argued that there should be no searching for minerals or stone in these reserves because of their important biodiversity values. This

argument was extended to stream frontages and bushland reserves which are restricted Crown land under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*. VEAC has retained this clause for consistency with the longstanding statewide designation of nature conservation reserves as restricted Crown land, but notes that because of the highly threatened status of the species in this region, such exploration should not be encouraged at this location.

### Application of regulations

Making regulations for each specific reserve under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* is a time-consuming process. The existing nature conservation reserves in the investigation area do not have a consistent set of regulations covering all the current area, the situation made more complex because part of Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve is also subject to provisions of the *Wildlife Act 1975*.

As a result, it is difficult for land managers to control detrimental activities. In addition, some areas within existing Government-accepted nature conservation reserves have not yet been appropriately reserved, largely due to complexity in administrative processes and land tenure.

Uncertainty about the application of current regulations has hindered land management leading to an erosion of community values and integrity of the existing reserves. The need to pursue enforcement by costly and time-consuming prosecution through the courts has also been an impediment for land and waterway managers. With such highly threatened natural values present in this area, it is important to have all available land management tools at the disposal of land managers.

Many stakeholders had strong concerns that the recommendation in the draft proposals paper specifically providing for the development and application of regulations for nature conservation reserves was not sufficient to overcome these longstanding issues. Some also considered the development of specific regulations to be an inefficient use of scarce resources.

VEAC's recommendation that the components of the State Emblems Conservation Area including all recommended nature conservation reserves be included in a schedule of the *National Parks Act 1975* (see recommendation R5) addresses these concerns, as the regulations under that Act can be immediately applied across this important conservation landscape.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

A

### General recommendations for nature conservation reserves

That the nature conservation reserves numbered A1 to A3, as shown on map A:

(a) be used to:

- (i) conserve and protect species, communities or habitats of indigenous flora and fauna
- (ii) provide for educational and scientific study, where consistent with (i) above
- (iii) provide for recreation by small numbers of people, at the discretion of the land manager and where consistent with (i) above
- (iv) identify and protect cultural heritage values, where consistent with (i) above,

(b) generally permit the following activities, where compatible with (a):

- (i) bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- (ii) for Crown land, exploration and mining for minerals and searching for and extraction of stone resources subject to the consent of the Crown land Minister under the relevant legislation (see note 2),

(c) exclude the following activities:

- (i) grazing of domestic stock (see note 3)
- (ii) harvesting of forest products
- (iii) hunting and use of firearms (see note 4)
- (iv) solid fuel fires at any time of year (see note 5)
- (v) dog walking (see note 6)
- (vi) horse riding,

- (d) be permanently reserved for conservation purposes under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and included in a new schedule Four A 'Conservation landscapes' of the *National Parks Act 1975* as part of the State Emblems Conservation Area in accordance with recommendation R5(d).

Notes:

1. The above management objectives and land use recommendations are those that generally apply for the land use category. Exceptions to these may apply to specific reserves in special circumstances.
2. Exploration and mining provisions arise from nature conservation reserves being 'restricted Crown land' under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.
3. Grazing may be contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control but current licences in the recommended nature conservation reserves as shown on map A should cease as soon as possible, and grazing (if any) removed from these areas.
4. Hunting and the use of firearms may be authorised by the land manager as part of a pest animal control program.
5. Fire may be utilised as a land management tool, including for public safety, where compatible with ecological values. Existing picnic and barbecue facilities may be retained at Avard Park, at the discretion of the land manager and in accordance with management planning.
6. On-lead dog walking is permitted to continue only along Menzies Creek in recommended A3 Sassafra Creek Nature Conservation Reserve, and in accordance with management planning for that reserve.



## A1 State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve

The recommended State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve forms the main part of the State Emblems Conservation Area. It consolidates the existing Yellingbo and Warramate Hills nature conservation reserves and other significant blocks of native vegetation in the area including Hoddles Creek Education Area and Beenak Bushland Reserve, together with the stream frontages that link them.

Community input mainly focused on which areas were proposed as conservation reserve additions to the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve, and the ability and responsibility of land managers to shift further areas into nature conservation reserves. Many proposed that all public land in the State Emblems Conservation Area be recommended as nature conservation reserve. Some people commented on the proposed two-tiered approach of the State Emblems Conservation Area by suggesting which additional areas should be in nature conservation reserves while many were concerned that the approach would lead to poor resourcing for land management for areas outside the main nature conservation reserve.

The inclusion of Beenak Bushland Reserve, Hoddles Creek Education Area and some stream frontages in the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation A1) was widely supported. Many people proposed further additions such as sections of stream frontage at Hoddles, Cockatoo, and McCrae creeks, Wright Forest Bushland Reserve, two bushland reserves near Monbulk and Olinda, specific areas of local government land and some smaller bushland or stream frontage areas.

Many comments were received relating to fire planning and fire preparedness on public land, particularly in the vicinity of Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. These focused mostly on reducing fuel loads and potential hazards to adjoining land owners and private land assets as well as the protection of threatened species. The preservation of human life was promoted as the highest priority in land management decision-making. Many written submissions proposed a greater level of participation of fire agencies in public land management to achieve an improvement in fire management, and sought to clarify the roles of existing agencies in the proposed State Emblems Conservation Area. A fire management plan for the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve is currently in draft form. Council considers that finalisation and publication of this plan will assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities, and should be completed as soon as possible.



Many people considered that the State Emblems Conservation Area and State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve should be scheduled on the *National Parks Act 1975*, both in recognition of the importance of the threatened species present and to afford a high level of legislative protection for those values. The status and legislative provisions afforded by the National Parks Act was also seen as a mechanism that permitted ready application of regulations, and for local government land to be managed collaboratively under the provisions of this Act.

Following consultation with the community, Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve and areas proposed as additions in the vicinity of Emerald and Monbulk, are now recommended as a separate reserve (see recommendation A3 below) rather than as part of the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve. This approach allows on-lead dog walking and solid fuel barbecues to continue in restricted areas around Monbulk to Emerald where different arrangements could apply. These activities are generally not allowed in nature conservation reserves in Victoria.

The State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve consolidates the following existing public land units:

- ✦ Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve (661 hectares) and 7 hectares of adjoining unused road reserve.
- ✦ Warramate Hills Nature Conservation Reserve (490 hectares) and 7.3 hectares of adjoining natural features reserve – stream frontage along the Yarra River and Woori Yallock Creek.
- ✦ Hoddles Creek Education Area (278 hectares). Extensive investigation of the natural values of this area has been undertaken by the Friends of Hoddles Creek, indicating amongst other significant values the presence of Cool Temperate Rainforest, and very high quality native vegetation throughout most of the block. Perhaps because of its relative inaccessibility the area attracts very little visitation at all, and certainly not the large school groups for which education areas are primarily intended. A relatively small amount of horse riding may be displaced by making this area nature conservation reserve. This activity will continue to be available along public road reserves crossing this area (i.e. Pioneer and Parkinsons roads).
- ✦ Beenak Bushland Reserve (126 hectares) is another relatively inaccessible area investigated by the Friends of Hoddles Creek where increased conservation protection is likely to have little if any effect on other current uses.
- ✦ existing Natural features reserve – stream frontages along:
  - the entire length of Shepherd Creek within the investigation area and the Woori Yallock Creek between the existing Yellingbo and Sassafras Creek nature conservation reserves. These frontages have been the focus of a program by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and Melbourne Water to remove grazing in preparation for management for ecological values.
  - upper sections of Hoddles and Wet Lead Creeks upstream of Black Leather Creek Road which have excellent natural values, including both threatened vegetation communities and plant species, and provides connectivity or biolinks with the larger blocks of public land in this area.

## RECOMMENDATION

A1

### State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve

That

- (a) the area of 1662 hectares shown on map A as the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature conservation reserves

and

- (b) this area be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6 and directions set by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee.

Notes:

1. To facilitate community education and awareness of nature conservation issues, and to provide for landscape revegetation or restoration, the nursery and education centre at Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve may continue to operate within the reserve, at the discretion of the land manager.
2. The fire management plan for the area of the current Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve should be finalised as soon as possible.

## A2 Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve

The existing Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve (144 hectares) is located to the north of the recommended State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve and is managed by Zoos Victoria as a Committee of Management. It has limited public access and other specific management arrangements relating to its close proximity to Healesville Sanctuary.

Community views were supportive of Zoos Victoria's continuing management of this nature conservation reserve and of its inclusion in the broader framework of the State Emblems Conservation Area. Zoos Victoria proposed that Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve be excluded from the State Emblems Conservation Area for clarity around management accountability.

Council has retained this reserve as a separate entity from the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve but considers that Coranderrk plays an important part in the broader public land network of the State Emblems Conservation Area managed for nature conservation. For these reasons, this area is recommended as part of the State Emblems Conservation Area, and is likely to play a key role in the protection of the threatened species within the Yellingbo investigation area. On-ground management is recommended to remain with Zoos Victoria in accordance with recommendation R5(e)(i).

## A3 Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve

In the draft proposals paper the existing Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve was recommended as part of the broader State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve. Public consultation revealed two currently popular recreational activities in this area that do not fit within the strict purposes of nature conservation: dog walking and solid fuel fires at Avard Picnic Ground on Menzies Creek near Emerald. In this final report Council has retained Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve as a separate entity in order to provide for these recreational uses within the Dandenong Ranges area only. This change acknowledges the limited range of other options for such activities in this region where roadsides are often narrow and cannot be accessed for walking trails.

The recommended A3 Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve consolidates the existing nature conservation reserves and other significant blocks of native vegetation in the area with linking stream frontages and some smaller areas of adjoining public land. This includes Emerald and Menzies creeks upstream of the existing Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve and some small contiguous reserves.

## RECOMMENDATION

A2

### Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve

That

- (a) the area of 144 hectares shown on map A as the Coranderrk Nature Conservation Reserve be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature conservation reserves, except that
  - (b) public access and recreation including bushwalking, nature observation, heritage appreciation and picnicking may continue to be limited at the discretion of the land manager;
- and
- (c) this area be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6 and directions set by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee.

Note:

- 1. Zoos Victoria should continue to manage this nature conservation reserve.

A3

### Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve

That

- (a) the area of 243 hectares shown on map A as the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve be used in accordance with the general recommendations for nature conservation reserves;
- and
- (b) this area be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6 and directions set by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee.

Notes:

- 1. On-lead dog walking is permitted to continue along Menzies Creek, and in accordance with management planning.
- 2. Existing barbecue facilities may be retained at Avard Picnic Ground at the land manager's discretion.

## 3.4

## Trust for Nature protected areas

Trust for Nature retains and manages one property Wanderslore (10 hectares) near Launching Place in the investigation area and another 22 hectare property nearby at Pakenham Upper (Harbury). Wanderslore is managed with biodiversity conservation as the primary objective. Such land forms part of the public land protected area system, as reflected in the following recommendations. Since publication of the draft proposals paper, the 4.2 hectare Trust for Nature-owned property near Emerald has mostly been transferred to local government for management for conservation purposes and thus is not considered public land under the VEAC Act.

The Trust for Nature requested that the general recommendations reflect the management requirements in accordance with the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. Most community comments on the proposed inclusion of Trust for Nature land in the State Emblems Conservation Area were positive. However changes in the final recommendations relating to the inclusion of the conservation area on a schedule of the National Parks Act means that a revised approach is required for Trust for Nature owned land. Complementary management of freehold land adjacent to the State Emblems Conservation Area is encouraged.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## B

**General recommendations for Trust for Nature protected areas**

That the Trust for Nature protected areas as shown on map A, according to their specific values:

(a) be used to:

- (i) conserve and protect species, communities or habitats of indigenous flora and fauna
- (ii) provide for educational and scientific study, where consistent with (i) above
- (iii) provide for recreation by small numbers of people at the discretion of the land manager, where consistent with (i) above
- (iv) identify and protect cultural heritage values, where consistent with (i) above;

(b) continue to be managed by Trust for Nature in accordance with the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*, and:

- (i) should these areas no longer be required by Trust For Nature, that the areas be transferred to the Crown or other government agency; and
- (ii) be permanently reserved for conservation purposes under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* or protected through another appropriate mechanism such as a conservation covenant.

## 3.5

## Natural features reserves

While the natural values of natural features reserves are not as significant as those of national parks and nature conservation reserves, these areas nonetheless provide for protection of remnant native vegetation and habitat together with opportunities for education and passive recreation. Sub-categories of natural features reserves are grouped into those usually considered part of the protected area system—bushland reserves, natural and scenic features areas, and streamside reserves—and those that are not, of which stream frontages are the main example in the investigation area.

Substantial areas of existing natural features reserves were proposed in the draft recommendations to be included in the State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve including Beenak Bushland Reserve (126 hectares) and stream frontages to Woori Yallock Creek (25 hectares), Shepherd Creek (15 hectares), Menzies Creek (15 hectares) and Emerald Creek (33 hectares). As described in [section 3.3](#) above, some of these areas are now recommended as parts of the three nature conservation reserves in the State Emblems Conservation Area.

Community views largely advocated additional areas to be included in the nature conservation reserve such as Wright Forest Bushland Reserve, two bushland reserves near Monbulk and Olinda, some small bushland reserves hosting Emerald star bush near Emerald, and stream frontages particularly at Cockatoo, McCrae and Hoddles creeks.

Consolidation of Wright Forest Bushland Reserve and adjoining relatively smaller areas also described as bushland reserves was important for some people, as was the inclusion of all these areas in a nature conservation reserve. Values include the presence of threatened species and other biodiversity values (mostly not specified), high quality or remnant vegetation, and the large size of Wright Forest.

Wright Forest Bushland Reserve is an existing protected area and forms a focus for community recreation by hosting a section of the Emerald-Cockatoo multi-purpose recreation trail used for walking, dog walking on-lead, and cycling. Council believes that current recreational use has the potential to increase. The natural values at Wright Forest are not particularly threatened by the existing management or use and this area is currently considered a protected area or conservation reserve. VEAC's view is that increasing conservation protection by including this area in a nature conservation reserve would impact local community uses with little benefit to natural values.

In contrast, substantial areas of stream frontage reserves are used for cattle grazing. These areas are some of the most important corridors for protection of natural values in the Yellingbo investigation area. Many stakeholders asked VEAC to provide greater clarity and greater conservation protection for these areas in the State Emblems Conservation Area. Listed below are the key waterways that provide a framework for protection of natural values in this fragmented landscape. Immediate inclusion of these areas in a protected area – streamside reserves recommendations C1 to C8 – and removal of grazing are key elements of Council's vision for a conservation landscape comprising riparian land as protected areas.

A small number of mapping corrections have been made since publication of the draft proposals paper including Ox Creek near Cockatoo now shown as Ox Creek Scenic Reserve, and the consolidation of Wright Forest Bushland Reserve with adjoining bushland reserves. The adjoining Cockatoo Creek Stream Frontage is recommended as an addition to Wright Forest for consolidation (recommendation C9). Some people advocated that Yarra Bridge Reserve should be a separate area to the Yarra River stream frontage. This area is now included in the new Yarra River Streamside Reserve (recommendation C1).

A summary of the recommended approach to stream frontages is provided in [box 3.3](#). A comprehensive list of the streamside reserves and other natural features reserves included the State Emblems Conservation Area is provided in [table 3.1](#) and illustrated in [figure 3.1](#). Other isolated and small natural features reserves are not included in the State Emblems Conservation Area.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### C

#### General recommendations for natural features reserves

That the natural features reserves, as shown on map A, according to their specific characteristics:

(a) be used to:

- (i) protect natural features and values
- (ii) protect and restore areas with remnant vegetation or habitat value and conserve indigenous flora and fauna
- (iii) protect water quality where appropriate
- (iv) protect historic and Aboriginal cultural heritage features, values and sites
- (v) provide opportunities for education and recreation, at levels consistent with (i) to (iv) above
- (vi) maintain scenic features and the character and quality of the local landscapes
- (vii) preserve features of geological or geomorphological interest;

(b) generally permit the following activities:

- (i) exploration for minerals and mining, subject to decisions on particular cases
- (ii) prospecting and apiculture;

(c) exclude the following activities:

- (i) timber harvesting
- (ii) domestic stock grazing in bushland and streamside reserves and in stream frontages under riparian management or conservation licences or agreements (see notes 1 to 4);

and

- (d) include adjoining unused road reserves where appropriate ecological or recreational values and minimal impacts on other uses are identified

- (e) be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* if not already appropriately reserved; or be managed in accordance with the above, if public authority owned land;

and that

- (f) any licences permitting grazing that are subject to transfer through sale of nearby private land should not be renewed.

Notes:

1. All water frontage grazing licences are recommended to be phased out by the end of 2018 on streamside reserves (see recommendations C1-C8).
2. Grazing may be contracted for ecological or management purposes such as targeted weed control.
3. Unless previously agreed otherwise under the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program, all future changes to licences including those recommended here (such as conversion to a landholder conservation agreement) should align with the public-private land boundaries.
4. The removal of licensed grazing does not necessarily compel the removal of stock watering; off-stream watering can be provided for, where appropriate.
5. Emerald Bushland Reserve (Hogan Park) no longer has a BMX track as referred to in the relevant LCC Melbourne District 2 Review recommendations.

### C1-C8 Streamside reserves

For many people the draft recommendations relating to stream frontages caused significant confusion. In particular the application of public land use categories was felt to be unclear and relied on the proposed management committee to determine which parts were nature conservation reserves or stream frontages; the mechanisms for land use changes were unclear and required a set of complex administrative processes for the new committee. This task would have detracted from the collaborative land management coordination that is the core role for this body.

In the revised approach outlined in recommendations R5 and R6, it is recommended that strategically important public land along streams, outside those areas identified as nature conservation reserves, be natural features reserves - streamside reserves, with no phase-in period for the public land use change.

Removal of grazing is recommended to occur in two stages, depending on the locality (see table 3.1). For high priority streamside reserves with the most important natural values, grazing is recommended to be removed within two years. These streamside reserves are located along the Yarra River upstream of Warramate Hills and Hoddles Creek (recommendations C1 and C2). The Yarra River is designated a heritage river within the investigation area. Both the Yarra River and Hoddles Creek (including the minor tributary Wet Lead Creek) have a range of important natural values with largely intact upper catchments.

For the remaining new streamside reserves, grazing is recommended to be removed by the end of 2018 (recommendations C3-C8). In some places these reserves include existing small streamside reserves or bushland reserves (e.g. existing Woori Yallock Creek and Yarra River streamside reserves, and Hoddles Creek Bushland Reserve will be part of new streamside reserves). For many of these areas, significant work is required to restore ecological health and riparian vegetation. Some waterways have been a focus for Melbourne Water's stream frontage management program (e.g. McCrae Creek) and are well on their way to restoring significant biological linkages. Other areas are degraded and require removal of grazing through fencing out stock, bank stabilisation, pest plant and animal control, revegetation and other measures. In some places along streams, the public land is discontinuous or very narrow, and collaborative programs that work with adjoining land owners would provide the most effective mechanism to restore ecological health (e.g. Yarra4Life).



The approach recommended here retains provisions for adjoining land owners to play a role in land management if they desire through landholder conservation agreements similar to riparian or conservation licences. Streamside reserves will offer the greatest opportunity for involvement of adjoining owners in conservation land management and will form a focus for collaborative approaches to be guided by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee.

### Box 3.3

#### Recommended approach to public land along streams

In summary, VEAC is recommending that most stream frontages (formally 'Natural features reserve – stream frontage') meeting the following criteria be included in the State Emblems Conservation Area (recommendation R5) as protected areas, either as streamside reserves or nature conservation reserves:

- ✦ support significant biodiversity values
- ✦ form part of a habitat corridor, or have the potential to do so
- ✦ subject to other existing measures for protection (e.g. heritage river)
- ✦ contribute to the consolidation of land status
- ✦ where the preceding attributes are currently under threat or are vulnerable to future threats.

This means most of the current stream frontages and other public land along waterways are:

- (i) part of nature conservation reserves (recommendations A1-A3) where any licences are to be cancelled upon acceptance of these recommendations:
  - ✦ the Woori Yallock Creek (between the existing Yellingbo and Sassafras Creek nature conservation reserves)
  - ✦ Menzies Creek (upstream of Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve)
  - ✦ Emerald Creek (upstream of Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve)
  - ✦ Shepherd Creek (entire length within the investigation area)
  - ✦ Hoddles Creek and Wet Lead Creek (upstream of Black Leather Creek Road)

or

- (ii) streamside reserves where current water frontage (grazing) licences are recommended to be surrendered or converted to landholder conservation agreements within two years (recommendations C1 and C2):

- ✦ Yarra River from the existing Warramate Hills Nature Conservation Reserve upstream to Millgrove (recommendation C1)
- ✦ Hoddles Creek and Wet Lead Creek (downstream of Black Leather Creek Road) including Hoddles Creek Bushland Reserve (recommendation C2);

or

- (iii) streamside reserves where current water frontage (grazing) licences which are recommended to be surrendered or converted to landholder conservation agreements by the end of 2018 (recommendations C3-C8):

- ✦ Cockatoo Creek (entire length within the investigation area except that area added to Wright Forest Bushland Reserve) (recommendation C3)
- ✦ McCrae Creek (entire length within the investigation area; recommendation C4)
- ✦ Woori Yallock Creek (downstream of Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve) including the existing Woori Yallock Creek Streamside Reserve (recommendation C5)
- ✦ Yarra River and Badger Creek (downstream of the Warramate Hills Nature Conservation Reserve) including the existing Yarra River (Everard Park) Streamside Reserve (recommendation C6)
- ✦ Little Yarra River (entire length within the investigation area; recommendation C7)
- ✦ Britannia Creek (entire length within the investigation area; recommendation C8).

This approach is intended to augment and support Melbourne Water's ongoing Stream Frontage Management Program which works with landholders to assist with activities to improve frontage management e.g. fencing, bank stabilisation, pest control, provision of off-stream watering. Such assistance would be available where water frontage (grazing) licences are converted to landholder conservation agreements in accordance with the recommendations in this final report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### C1-C8 Streamside reserves

That

- (a) the area of 695 hectares shown on map A as streamside reserves and labelled C1 to C8 be used in accordance with the general recommendations for natural features reserves

and

- (b) be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and included in a new Schedule Four A 'Conservation landscapes' of the *National Parks Act 1975* as part of the State Emblems Conservation Area in accordance with recommendation R5(d)

- (c) be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6 and directions set by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee

and that

- (c) domestic stock grazing be excluded along the Yarra River upstream of the existing Warramate Hills Nature Conservation Reserve (recommendation C1) and the lower Hoddles and Wet Lead Creeks (recommendation C2) from two years of the date of government acceptance of these recommendations through either conversion to landholder conservation agreement in accordance with recommendation R5(e)(ii) with grazing excluded or surrender of licences, with agreement boundaries to follow cadastral boundaries,

- (d) domestic stock grazing be excluded along the streamside reserves C3-C8 by the end of 2018 through either conversion to landholder conservation agreement in accordance with recommendation R5(e)(ii) with grazing excluded or surrender of licences, with agreement boundaries to follow cadastral boundaries (see note).

Note:

1. The term of any licences permitting grazing should be converted to annual until phased out in 2018.

### C9 Wright Forest Bushland Reserve

Wright Forest is an area of high quality remnant vegetation in the Cockatoo area. There are a number of important natural values at this location including the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* listed Emerald star bush. The Emerald-Cockatoo multipurpose recreation trail crosses the reserve and is a popular destination for dog walking on-lead, walking and cycling. Horse riding is not permitted in this reserve. Demographic change is likely to increase demand for an expanding range of recreational activities at Wright Forest.

This area was proposed in the draft recommendations to be part of the State Emblems Conservation Area but not as a nature conservation reserve. Community comments focused on suggesting the addition of Wright Forest Bushland Reserve (approximately 110 hectares) to the proposed State Emblems Nature Conservation Reserve. Advocates cited the presence of threatened species and other biodiversity values, high quality remnant vegetation and the large size of Wright Forest as particular values that warrant a higher level of conservation protection.

Council's view is that Wright Forest is an important focus for local recreation, including activities not generally permitted in nature conservation reserves, and that this use has little impact on the existing natural values. Wright Forest Bushland Reserve is recommended to be consolidated with adjoining areas reserved for conservation purposes and those areas subject to Government-accepted Land Conservation Council Melbourne District 2 Review recommendations for bushland reserve. An additional area of 5.5 hectares located along the western bank of Cockatoo Creek, and abutting the east of the existing bushland reserve, is recommended to be added to the Wright Forest Bushland Reserve. This allows for the consolidation of land use and management. This area is considered by many people to be already part of the reserve.



## 3.6

## Services and utilities areas

## RECOMMENDATION

C9

**Wright Forest Bushland Reserve**

That

- (a) The area of 126 hectares shown on map A as Wright Forest Bushland Reserve be used in accordance with the general recommendations for natural features reserves;
- and
- (b) be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and included in a new Schedule Four A 'Conservation landscapes' of the *National Parks Act 1975* as part of the State Emblems Conservation Area in accordance with recommendation R5(d)
- (c) be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6 and directions set by the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee.

Note:

- 1. On-lead dog walking is allowed to continue as permitted by the land manager.

This category groups public land set aside for a broad range of public utilities: transport (roads, railway); cemeteries; government buildings such as hospitals, nursing homes, health centres, justice services including courts, police or fire stations; water or sewage treatment and easements; survey markers; electricity and gas.

Government road reserves comprise some 38 per cent of all public land in the investigation area, more than land in any other public land use category. The primary purpose of road reserves is for transport and access. VicRoads manages major arterial roads and local government manages other roads. Unmade government roads (often known as unused roads or 'paper roads') may be licensed to an adjoining land owner for grazing or other purposes.

Community consultation generated a number of comments on road reserves and particularly roadside vegetation. Some noted the importance of habitat corridors and vegetated linkages including road reserves, and suggested that these values should be identified for additional protection. A number of submissions noted the potential fire risk that roadside vegetation can pose. Others stated that roadside vegetation should be managed primarily for road user safety with roadside vegetation maintained to promote visibility and safe access and egress, particularly during a bushfire. It was noted that any vegetation removal should be considered in conjunction with local and state planning provisions.

VEAC acknowledges the concern for biodiversity values, fire management, and traffic management and road user safety. The general recommendations for services and utilities areas support these management objectives, noting that the primary purpose for roads is for transport and other uses are secondary to this use. Existing provisions support land managers to make decisions on a case by case basis.



### Box 3.4

#### Native vegetation on road reserves

Road corridors may have high conservation, recreation and landscape values, especially in more urbanised or agricultural landscapes where native vegetation has been largely cleared. Other than stream frontages, vegetated road reserves may provide the most important habitat linkages in cleared or fragmented landscapes.

Many road reserves support native vegetation of high natural value, provide habitat for fauna or contribute to the aesthetic landscape values. Yarra Ranges Council has mapped roadsides of significant natural value, and biodiversity mapping which includes characteristics such as vegetation condition can now provide more information about natural values on road reserves. Together this information provides the opportunity to identify road reserves that warrant special management arrangements for nature conservation. A relatively small proportion of these road reserves may be appropriate for addition to the protected area system and are described in the relevant recommendations in this chapter. For most road reserves, conservation licences and management agreements with appropriate managers such as adjoining landholders and conservation groups are an appropriate mechanism to protect important natural values. Such agreements should involve local government or VicRoads where there are public roads.

Fuel load management on roadside reserves is an issue of community interest, particularly given the impacts of the 2009 Victorian bushfires. The Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission made recommendations regarding roadside management of vegetation in the context of fire and emergency management. In response, a systematic program of bushfire risk assessment is planned for all roadsides in Victoria.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### D

#### General recommendations for services and utilities areas

That

- (a) reserves and easements for public services and utilities such as transport, electricity and gas, communications, cemeteries, water and sewerage as shown on map A be used for those purposes;

and that

- (b) new services, or utility sites and easements or lines, not be sited in or across nature conservation reserves
- (c) railways, roadsides and other service and utility sites be managed to protect natural values including remnant native vegetation and habitat, and Aboriginal cultural heritage values, as far as practical
- (d) road reserves identified as supporting native vegetation of high conservation significance (including for connectivity) be managed to protect, improve and where practical enhance their biodiversity values; and
- (e) should public land used for service or utility purposes no longer be required, it be assessed for its natural, recreational and cultural heritage values, and capability for other public uses.

Notes:

1. Not all roads and unused road reserves may be distinguishable on map A.
2. There are numerous government roads across the investigation area that contain remnant native vegetation. These should be managed to protect this vegetation, as required under relevant legislation, and where it does not interfere with the primary objective of the road for transport.

## 3.7

## Community use areas

Community use areas are used primarily for recreation, education and other specific community purposes. They include land used for environmental education, rail trails, recreation areas such as sport grounds, parklands and gardens and community buildings such as schools, libraries, public halls and community centres. Buildings in this category generally have broader community access than public offices, justice and health related sites categorised as services and utilities areas. They also provide for multiple uses. The management of community use areas is generally delegated to locally based committees of management, particularly local government.

Each sub-category within the community use area category is described in more detail in chapter 3 of the draft proposals paper. Notable community use areas within the investigation area include the Lilydale-Warburton Rail Trail (88 hectares) and Haining education area (69 hectares) (see recommendation E1).

The Lilydale-Warburton Rail Trail extends nearly 40 kilometres from Lilydale to Warburton passing through towns and farmland of the Upper Yarra Valley along the former railway line. The primary purpose of the rail trail is for recreational use, and it is very popular with walkers, cyclists and horse riders. Some historic features of the former railway have been preserved, some areas retain native vegetation, while other areas may be suitable for replanting with native vegetation. Haining education area is described in recommendation E1 below.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## E

**Recommendations for community use areas**

That the community use areas, as shown on map A, according to their specific characteristics:

- (a) be used as recreation areas and trails, parklands and gardens or for education and other community purposes; and
  - (b) provide for a broad range of recreational and leisure activities including organised sport, walking, cycling and picnicking
  - (c) provide for education and public enjoyment in schools, public halls, kindergartens, libraries, museums and other similar areas
  - (d) provide for appropriate facilities
  - (e) maintain or restore features of cultural significance, natural surroundings and the local character and quality of the landscape where relevant, and where compatible with the above
  - (f) exclude harvesting of forest products, hunting and stone extraction,
- and
- (g) if Crown land which is not already appropriately reserved, be reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*, or
  - (h) if public authority land, be managed in accordance with the above.

## Notes:

1. Where appropriate, a committee of management may be appointed or continue to manage community use areas in accordance with the general recommendation E.
2. Some areas contain significant environmental values which should be protected.
3. Monbulk Scout Hall is recommended to be expanded onto a small section of approximately 0.1 hectares of the adjoining Nathania Springs Creek Bushland Reserve. Public land use shown on map A reflects the small excision for community use area – buildings in public use.

## E1 Haining Education Area

In 1974 'Haining' was the first land gifted, as an environmental study site, to the Victorian Conservation Trust. The area is located on typically fertile and productive low-lying floodplain and has been largely cleared for farming. Floodplain forest previously provided habitat for the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum. The working dairy farm has provided an opportunity for school groups to learn about its operations, with up to 1400 students visiting each year. The site is currently included on Schedule Three of the *National Parks Act 1975* and is managed by Parks Victoria through a sharefarming agreement.

Some comments during public consultation asked VEAC to consider whether greater use could be made of the floodplain and riparian land at Haining for nature conservation. Other comments questioned the proposed inclusion of this area in the State Emblems Conservation Area given its predominant farming use.

Council considers that Haining presents a prime opportunity for revegetation with the floodplain forest habitat that supports helmeted honeyeater and Leadbeater's possum. This land is of strategic importance located at the junction of the Don and Yarra rivers. Areas of comparable potential are costly to acquire and there are limited opportunities for such acquisitions. VEAC's view is that education opportunities at Haining can be expanded to include the study and appreciation of threatened species and their habitat, restoration of that habitat, sustainable farming, catchment management and the historic land use of the area. Such a future would greatly improve the contribution of the site to the regional nature conservation effort and to community education about sustainable land management. Council envisages that in the long term the majority of suitable land would be re-vegetated and providing habitat for important re-established helmeted honeyeater and Leadbeater's possum populations.

In summary, the site has the potential to cater for landscape restoration and a wider range of community education opportunities. These purposes align with the role of the State Emblems Conservation Area Coordinating Committee of increasing the profile of the biodiversity and ecological values of the area (recommendation R6). For these reasons, Haining has been retained as a part of the recommended State Emblems Conservation Area and VEAC is recommending the area that the area be moved from Schedule Three to the recommended new Schedule Four A of the *National Parks Act 1975*.

## RECOMMENDATION

E1

### Haining Education Area

That

- (a) the area of 69 hectares shown on map A as Haining Park be used in accordance with the general recommendations for community use areas
- (b) the current use of the area be changed to provide for other forms of land management and educational opportunities with a greater emphasis on sustainability, including improved protection of riparian areas and restoration of habitat for the helmeted honeyeater and lowland Leadbeater's possum,

and that

- (c) this area be removed from Schedule Three of the *National Parks Act 1975* and be permanently reserved under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* for the purposes of public education about environmental sustainability and habitat restoration; and
- (d) this area be included in the recommended new schedule Four A of the *National Parks Act 1975* as part of the State Emblems Conservation Area and be managed in accordance with recommendations R5 and R6.

Note:

Council notes that part of this area (Lot 1907 Don Road) is a small residential block. This site can be disposed of if no public use is identified.

## 3.8

## Regional park, state forest, historic and cultural features reserves

There are a number of public land units, in a variety of existing categories, for which no changes to existing uses and management are recommended, although in some instances minor adjustment of boundaries or formal recognition of existing uses has occurred. VEAC's recommendations for all these different areas are continuation of the application of the relevant government-accepted LCC Melbourne District 2 Review final recommendations. For simplicity and clarity these areas are grouped together in this section. The areas are summarised as follows:

- ✦ 19 hectares of Kurth Kiln Regional Park
- ✦ a 2.4 hectare area of state forest east of Healesville-Koo Wee Rup Road north of Woori Yallock
- ✦ historic and cultural features reserves along the Puffing Billy railway (45 hectares) and the former Yarra Junction railway station (0.6 hectares). Council notes that Puffing Billy Historic Reserve contains important scenic and natural values including biodiversity values.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

## F

### Recommendations for regional park, state forest, historic and cultural features reserves

That the areas shown as regional park, state forest, historic and cultural features reserves on map A, continue to be used and managed in accordance with the relevant government-accepted LCC Melbourne District 2 Review final recommendations for the respective public land use categories.

## 3.9

## Uncategorised public land

Uncategorised public land is a broad category for which no specific use is recommended. In most instances these areas have no clear primary use and, subject to assessment of any public land attributes present on the site, may be either assigned to an appropriate land manager or disposed of through sale.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries carries out these assessments of Crown land parcels. Public land attributes are the resources (or natural, recreational, heritage, scenic or economic values) present on a site that would generally require its retention as Crown land. Crown land that has minimal or no such values or resources is considered surplus to government needs and may be disposed of. In certain circumstances, and after native title assessments have been made, disposal may be undertaken as a land exchange for nearby private land with high public land values.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

## G

**General recommendations for uncategorised public land**

Public land other than that recommended for specific uses in this report, or subject to previous accepted specific land use recommendations:

- (a) be uncategorised public land
- (b) existing legal use and tenure continue for the time being
- (c) Crown land be assessed and either:
  - (i) retained and assigned to a Department of Environment and Primary Industries land manager if it has public land values, or
  - (ii) disposed of if assessed as having no public land values and as being surplus to current and future community needs;
- (d) surplus public authority land be:
  - (i) assessed for its potential to meet alternative public uses
  - (ii) retained as public land where certain public land values are identified; or
  - (iii) disposed of if assessed as having no public land values and as being surplus to current and future community needs.



## 3.10

Implications of recommendations  
for public stream frontages

For most stream frontages, implications of the State Emblems Conservation Area recommendations shown in figure 3.1 and listed in table 3.1 fall into one of the three outcomes below. The small number of exceptions and additional provisions are also detailed below.

**Existing water frontage (grazing) licences**

1. Within the nature conservation reserves (A1-A3) of the State Emblems Conservation Area, 14 licences will be discontinued upon government acceptance of these recommendations. Most of these licensed areas are not grazed.
2. Within two streamside reserves (C1-C2) of the State Emblems Conservation Area totalling 310 hectares, any grazing licences still current after two years from acceptance of recommendations will either be converted to a conservation management agreement (no grazing) or discontinued. Until then no change is recommended other than the additional provisions below, but changes may result from other sources such as the ongoing Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program.
3. Within the other six streamside reserves (C3-C8) of the State Emblems Conservation Area totalling 385 hectares, by the end of 2018, any licences still current will either be converted to a conservation management agreement (no grazing) or discontinued. Until then no change is recommended other than the additional provisions below, but changes may result from other sources such as the ongoing Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program.

**Existing riparian management licences and conservation licences**

1. Any licences in recommended nature conservation reserves (A1-A3) will be terminated upon government acceptance of these recommendations.
2. Any licences in recommended streamside reserves, will either be changed to a conservation management agreement or discontinued:
  - (i) within two years for streamside reserves C1 and C2, or
  - (ii) by the end of 2018 for streamside reserves C3 to C8.

**Unlicensed public stream frontages**

1. Areas of unlicensed stream frontage will be added to the recommended public land use category shown in this report, with any unauthorised occupations to be removed.

**Additional provisions and minor variations to stream frontage implications****Additional provisions**

The following provisions apply across the investigation area:

- ✦ all water frontage (grazing) licences to be converted to annual licences within two years
- ✦ unless previously agreed otherwise under the Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program, all future changes to licences including those recommended here, such as licence surrender or termination or conversion to a different licence type, should as a minimum adhere to public-private land boundaries
- ✦ the removal of licensed grazing does not necessarily compel the removal of stock watering as off-stream watering can be provided for where appropriate.

**Variations relating to water frontage (grazing) licences only**

- ✦ outside the recommended State Emblems Conservation Area, there is no change other than the additional provisions above, but changes may result from other sources such as the ongoing Melbourne Water Stream Frontage Management Program.

# Appendix 1

## Submissions received in response to the Notice of Investigation and Draft Proposals Paper

Organisation	Contact	Submission period no.	
		1	2
Australian Trail Horse Riders Association	Ms Claire Bourke	✓	
Birdlife Australia, Victorian Conservation Committee	Mr Euan Moore; Mr Arthur Carew	✓	✓
Bushwalking Victoria	Mr Chris Towers	✓	✓
Cardinia Shire Council	Mr Garry McQuillan; Mr Martin Teplik	✓	✓
Country Fire Authority, Eastern Metropolitan Area	Ms Sharon Merritt; Ms Tammy Garrett	✓	✓
Country Fire Authority, Eastern Metropolitan Regional Strategic Fire Management Committee (RSFMPC)	Ms Kim Halse; Mr Graeme Armstrong; Mr Craig Bray	✓	✓
Country Fire Authority, Yarra Valley Group	Mr Roly Rak	✓	✓
Dandenong Ranges Fire Brigades Group	Mr Shane Peacock		✓
Emerald Scout Group	Mr Mevan Rantatunga		✓
Emerald Village Committee	Mr Frank McGuire	✓	✓
Friends of Hazel Vale Valley Tecoma	Ms Anne Elizabeth	✓	
Friends of Hoddles Creek Inc.	Mr Laurence Gaffney	✓	✓
Friends of Leadbeater's Possum	Ms Sera Blair; Ms Pamela Miskin	✓	✓
Friends of Sherbrooke Forest	Mr Bill Incoll	✓	
Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater Inc.	Mr David Howell; Mr Alan Clayton	✓	✓
Friends of Wright Forest	Mr Dudley & Mrs Noel Gross	✓	✓
Gembrook Township Committee	Mr David Nickell	✓	
Gruyere Rural Fire Brigade	Mr Don Bigham		✓
Healesville Environment Watch Inc	Ms Maureen Bond		✓
Helmeted Honeyeater Recovery Team	Mr Peter Menkhorst	✓	✓
Hillcrest Fire Brigade	Ms Fiona Burns		✓
Hogan Park Committee of Management Inc.	Mr Andrew Thompson		✓
Johns Hill Landcare Group Inc	Ms Karen Alexander	✓	✓
Kallista -The Patch Rural Fire Brigade	Ms Laraine Dunning		✓
Little Yarra Rural Fire Brigade	Mr Les Hart	✓	✓
Macclesfield Adult Riding Club Inc.	Ms Ros Weadman	✓	✓
Macclesfield Landcare Group	Ms Irene Pearey	✓	✓
Macclesfield Rural Fire Brigade	Mr Andrew Nash		✓
Maroondah Bushwalking Club Inc.	Mr Kim Rea	✓	

Organisation	Contact	Submission period no.	
		1	2
Meander. A group caring for the Menzies Creek & Emerald Tourist Track	Ms Kate Forster		✓
Melbourne Water	Mr David Ryan		✓
Monbulk Fire Brigade	Mr Ingo Riedel		✓
Monbulk Landcare Group	Mr Bill Incoll	✓	✓
Olinda Action Group	Mr Mark Fergus		✓
Parks Victoria	Mr Ian Walker		✓
Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority	Mr David Buntine		✓
Scout Association of Australia, Sherbrooke Forest District	Ms Deirdre Lancaster		✓
Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group	Ms Jan Incoll	✓	
Southern Dandenongs Landcare Group	Ms Vicki Boyle	✓	
Southern Ranges Environment Alliance	Mr Glenn Brooks-MacMillan	✓	
Surveyor-General Victoria, Melbourne	Mr David Boyle		✓
Trust For Nature (Vic) (Head Office)	Ms Victoria Marles		✓
Victorian Catchment Management Council	Mr Mick Murphy		✓
Victorian National Parks Association	Mr Phil Ingamells		✓
Woori Yallock Creek Park Alliance	Mr Jeff Latter	✓	✓
Yarra Ranges Council	Cr Jim Child; Mr David Harper	✓	✓
Yarra Ranges Mountainbikers	Mr John Baldwin		✓
Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Landcare Network	Ms Irene Pearey; Ms Anne Fitzpatrick	✓	✓
Yarra Valley Equestrian Landcare Group	Ms Kerry Rollins	✓	
Yellingbo Fire Brigade	Mr Paul Spinks; Mr Neil Shankly	✓	✓
Zoos Victoria	Mr Chris Banks; Ms Rachel Lowry	✓	✓

Individual	Submission period no.	
	1	2
Ms Karen Alexander	✓	✓
Mr Thomas & Mrs Judith Ballantyne		✓
Ms Sue Bendel		✓
Mr Walter Berger	✓	
Mr Darren Birthisel	✓	
Ms Christina Bowen	✓	
Mr Jayson Brownfield		✓
Mr Bruce & Mrs Sue Tardif		✓
Ms Carolyn Buckland	✓	
Mr Paul Buckland	✓	
Ms Carol Campbell	✓	
Mr Arthur Carew	✓	
Ms Christine Coulson	✓	
Mr Phillip Coulson	✓	✓
Ms Judy Dinsdale		✓
Ms Sue Ditchfield		✓
Ms Samantha Dunn	✓	
Ms Tracey Elliott		✓
Mr Andrew Fischer		✓
Ms Kerrie Fitzgibbon	✓	
Ms Jan Fleming		✓
Ms Kate Forster	✓	
Ms Elizabeth Fraser	✓	
Mr Gary & Mrs Janet Johnson		✓
Mr Geoffrey & Mrs Jennifer Foote		✓
Mrs Inge Hammer		✓
Ms Julie Harrison	✓	
Ms Fiona Heylan		✓
Mr David Howell		✓
Mr Andrew Inglis	✓	✓
Mrs Elizabeth Jacka	✓	
Ms Helmi Jesse		✓
Mr Keith Jesse & Ms Jacqui Vanderzee		✓
D. & D. Kennedy	✓	

Individual	Submission period no.	
	1	2
Mr Michael Kerr	✓	
Mr Peter Kerr	✓	✓
Ms Vivienne Kerr	✓	
Ms Michelle Knoll	✓	
Mr David Latter		✓
Mr Jeff Latter	✓	✓
Dr Jane Lennon		✓
Mr John Lloyd		✓
Ms Dianne Luc	✓	
Mr Colin Mackay		✓
Mr Peter Mauger		✓
Mr Ian McKay	✓	
Ms Deb McLeod	✓	
Ms Sharon Merritt		✓
Ms Deborah Mitchell	✓	
Mr Steve Mitchell	✓	
Mr Gary Moran	✓	
Mr Lyle Murray	✓	
Mr George Nejtek		✓
Mr Philip Norman	✓	✓
Mrs Diane Packer		✓
Mr Matthew Parker	✓	✓
Ms Irene Pearey		✓
Shanon Phipps	✓	
Mr Anthony Purton	✓	
Ms Wendy Roy	✓	
Mr Ron Sawyer	✓	✓
Ms Janet Seccull	✓	
Mr Neil Shankly		✓
Ms Helen Sharp		✓
Mr William Smith	✓	
Mr Terry Swanson	✓	
Ms Bessie Tyers		✓
Ms Y. Virgona	✓	
Mr Jeff Walker	✓	✓