



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our web site at <http://friendsvic.org/>

Editorial comment: Community consultation, empowerment and engagement

A key feature of this edition is articles about how government and its agencies consult with, engage and empower environmental volunteering groups.

In the first article environmental groups tell their story of frustration about the Oxfam 2019 Trailwalker event. Despite extensive efforts by Friends groups to engage and consult with the agencies involved, there were some very poor decision-making processes by Parks Victoria and associated agencies. Under the new Parks Victoria Act 2018, Minister for the Environment, Lily D' Ambrosio is required to issue a Statement of Obligations (SOO) to Parks Victoria. Issued on 30th October 2018, the SOO, among other matters states that Parks Victoria 'must undertake timely and inclusive engagement with the broader community, community and Friends groups'. In this case, Friends of Sassafras Creek; Monbulk Landcare Group; Johns Hill Landcare Group; and Meander, a group caring for the Menzies Creek and Emerald Tourist Track Club, have found that important decisions were taken before they even knew about selection of the trail for the 2019 Trailwalker event.

The second article by Bill Incoll looks at the requirements under the new Act and questions whether the Board of Parks Victoria has an appropriate balance of expertise and skills to effectively deliver on its mandate. Bill points to a number of recent developments in our parks that highlight the increased emphasis on commercial developments. This trend is of great concern to all Friends groups, the environment more generally and our collective efforts to improve biodiversity in Victoria.

The third article highlights the new obligations under which Parks Victoria operates to engage with the community and involve volunteers in its management of our parks.

The final article on the independent evaluation of the DELWP's Biodiversity Response Planning program underlines how poor consultation undermine the integrity of processes. The evaluation report found that consultation was not undertaken in a timely manner and

nor was enough time allowed for consultation. These poor processes impacted badly on Traditional Owners who did not get much of a look-in at all. Friends groups were largely excluded too.

A new year and new government brings significant opportunities for Friends groups to be involved in the management of our parks. All Friends groups and the Victorian Environment Friends Network look forward to working closely with Minister D'Ambrosio to implement these important initiatives.

Stephen Derrick
Editor, FriendsNET

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Suggestions for articles for FriendsNET are welcome. Please email to ecosystems@bigpond.com. If you want to include photos, please send as separate files in jpeg format, preferably in landscape.

Feature article: Oxfam 2019 Trailwalker route puts fragile mountain trails at risk

The 2019 Oxfam Trailwalker event is planned for 29th and 30th March 2019 and up to 3,500 walkers and runners are expected to participate. The 2019 trail includes a 16.2km section within the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve (SCNCR)¹ along the Menzies, Woori Yallock and Sassafras Creeks.

Local environment groups Friends of Sassafras Creek, Monbulk Landcare Group, Johns Hill Landcare Group, and Meander... a group caring for the Menzies Creek and Emerald Tourist Track Club (hereafter referred to as The Four Groups) were not consulted about the proposed route and are deeply concerned about the potential adverse environmental impacts of the 2019 walk. The Four Groups do not accept the Oxfam Trailwalker route decision. (cont next page)

The groups will pursue a formal complaint process on the basis that the decision doesn't conform with the government adopted VEAC recommendations.

From 2008 to 2012 Oxfam Trailwalker used a section of this track for their walk and this caused significant environmental degradation including: track widening, loss of vegetation along the edges of the track and an increase in tree root and rock exposure.

Friends of Sassafras Creek consulted with Oxfam to discuss this and the route was changed for 2013. However, development for the 2019 Oxfam walk was initiated without consultation with our groups and Oxfam appeared to have no corporate memory of the impacts of the walk on the track in earlier years, or of their previous decision not to go ahead with such walks in future in this area. The 2012 walk had 2,500 walkers and Oxfam is aiming for 3,500 for the 2019 event. Readers can imagine the increased pressure that up to 7,000 feet pounding over these tracks over 2 days will have. In addition to the pressures resulting from the event, there will be considerable foot traffic over the next 2 or 3 months as participants train for the event.



Exposed tree roots along a section of the track

Lyrebird nest alongside the track at Sassafras Creek

Representatives of the Four Groups met with Oxfam and Parks Victoria on 7th September and 20th December 2018 with Parks Victoria to express their concerns about the adverse impacts of the walk and their dissatisfaction with the approvals process, which had not involved any consultation with local environment groups. The Four Groups also expressed the view that the proposal for such a large group walk in an area of high conservation value displayed poor environmental commitment by Oxfam. Despite its claim to be working to empower communities, Oxfam has failed to consult with groups and communities that will be impacted in the Dandenongs.

On 1st August Oxfam publicly announced the details for their 2019, 100km Trailwalker event. A new track route was developed by Oxfam for 2019. Since then, it has become clear to The Four Groups that discussions between Oxfam and Parks Victoria had commenced early in 2018 and that initial agreement on the new route was reached as early as May. No local groups were involved in these early consultations.

We are volunteer community custodians with a 28 year history of caring for this precious ribbon of ferny creeks and towering eucalypt forest running through the Dandenong Ranges. We are extremely dissatisfied with the responses of Parks Victoria, DELWP and the Minister's office. We will now head to the Victorian Ombudsman and seek support from the wider community. If you are concerned that Government supported VEAC recommendations are being treated as "suggestions" and have legal or other relevant expertise to help with a broader campaign, contact Kate Forster, Meander on 0477 174 999.

The walk begins at Emerald Lake and travels from Emerald to Sassafras along 16.2Km of the Menzies and Sassafras Creek walking tracks. The walk finishes in Fairfield at the Fairfield Park. The Trailwalker route is shown in Oxfam's map below.



Oxfam Trailwalker 2019 showing the area discussed before checkpoint 2 Image from <https://trailwalker.Oxfam.org.au/melbourne/trail/>

The Significance of the Reserve

The walk travels along the SCNCR. These areas are mainly narrow riparian zones, with significant environmental values. Because the riparian areas are so small within often much larger forested areas they are disproportionately prone to significant damage by heavy foot traffic along the small area of a walking track. These tracks often have flowing water at their centre and this can rapidly spread invader weeds downstream. Weed control through these areas has been a major focus of the environment groups.

The SCNCR has habitat to support seven significant or threatened animal species:-

- Greater Glider (*Petauroides Volans*)
- Grey Goshawk (*Accipiter novaehollandiae*)
- Sooty Owl (*Tyto tenebricosa*)
- Powerful Owl (*Ninox strenua*)
- Kallista Flightless Stonefly (*Leptoperla kallistae*)
- Dandenong Burrowing Crayfish (*Engaeus urostrictus*)
- Sherbrooke Amphipod (*Austrogammarus haasei*)
- Dandenongs Amphipod (*Austrogammarus australis*).
- and two Flora & Fauna Guarantee listed vegetation communities:-
 - Slender treeferns (*Cyathea cunninghamii*) and
 - Cool Temperate Rainforest

The regionally significant superb lyrebird (*Menura novaehollandiae*) nests regularly in several places along the creek edge.

Our Concerns

The Four Groups are concerned about further damage to the tracks and to the delicate riparian areas. Past experience shows that if walkers move off the narrow

tracks and this causes significant damage to delicate vegetation growing along the side of the track including small ferns, tree ferns and native orchids.



Narrow section of track between two Mountain Ash

Slender treeferns alongside the track

The risk of further damage to the root systems of the trees is increased by the proposed route. Damaged roots provide access for fungal disease. Parks Victoria did not perceive any major threats from fungal infections in the area so have recently decided that the proposed hygiene station would not be implemented.

It is likely that the spread of environmental weeds like Panic Veldt Grass (*Ehrharta erecta*) will be accelerated. Panic veldt grass is found in some places along the edge of the track, and the small seed can easily be transported to the higher value areas. There are many other weeds that are also easily spread by walkers.

In this riparian area, the track is usually very close to the creeks. The first toilet stop is 14Km into the walk, the second nearly another 10Km in Olinda. There is concern about walkers going off track for a toilet stop.

The riparian areas provide an essential corridor for the wildlife living in this area, such as swamp wallabies, wombats, antechinus as well as species such as lyrebirds whose habitat is centered in the riparian area.

Oxfam will ask walkers to progress in single file in only one section of the track to help reduce this kind of damage. However, it is inevitable that enthusiastic walkers and an estimated 80 runners will try to edge past slower people.

While there will be an environmental impact study carried out on 10 sites, 3 days before the event and one day after, this ignores the fact that there is already a significant increase of walkers undertaking early training along the track. While Oxfam claim they don't ask people to use the track to train, they do suggest it is important to do so in their documentation.

The Four Groups believe that a full Environmental Impact Study (EIS) should be undertaken now before training intensifies on the tracks. The groups requested at the September 7th 2018 meeting that funds for an independent EIS be carried out promptly. The environment groups recorded a video of the state of the track in early August. This will be repeated after the event. The track condition can then be compared before and after the walk.

Process of approval for walk by Parks Victoria

Oxfam applied to Parks Victoria earlier this year, with verbal approval given in May with no consultation from Parks Victoria or Oxfam with any groups, or with Yarra Ranges and Cardinia Councils. The Four Groups were informed of the decision and later met with Parks Victoria, Oxfam and other users of the area to air concerns and discuss the what effects the walk may have on the track.

While Parks Victoria has given the walk approval, not all of the land in the walk is managed by them. Yarra Ranges Council, Parks Victoria and DEWLP are currently Land Manager of parts for the SCNCR.

More importantly, all land managers are obliged to follow the government approved Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC) recommendations for management of SCNCR. This states that approval for small numbers of people for use of the Reserve are allowed at the discretion of the land manager. Three thousand five hundred people is not a small number in the context of these tracks.

The Four Groups are significant stakeholders and must have a say in the initiation, planning and carriage of an event like this. The groups bring significant grant funds to Parks Victoria to improve the biodiversity of this area. They are constantly monitoring the reserves, observing

wildlife, reporting damage and carrying out various projects to improve biodiversity of the area and make a substantial investment of their own time and labor. Parks Victoria and Oxfam should have consulted with the Groups early on so that their concerns could be considered prior to that decision being made, and not after.

The Four Groups were provided with the 'Sassafras and Menzies Creek Works Program' on the 19th of December. This details the works that are to be undertaken to maintain and improve the track both for the walk and general use. While the Groups are yet to review and comment in detail on the proposed works, it is doubtful that enough funds and effort will be expended to protect the track from the expected 3,500 people. It remains the case, that the track is mostly in good condition and that the works are required because of the Trailwalker event.

The SCNCR has not been high on the Parks Victoria list for environmental works like track repair, steps and boardwalk repairs over the years but Parks Victoria has allocated significant funding to manage the walk for the event. While significant, the length of the walk along the creeks is about 16.2Km, so large areas may not benefit. Repairs of infrastructure have been happening already. Parks Victoria have installed infrared sensors to monitor numbers of walkers at 4 sites. One site has tallied nearly 1600 walkers in the first month.

Letters have been written to Parks Victoria and Lily D'Ambrosio, Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change expressing concerns. Minister D'Ambrosio has not replied to any of our correspondence, instead referring our letters to Parks Victoria. Replies from Parks Victoria confirm that the walk will take place in 2019 as scheduled. However, there was a notification on December 19th from Matt Hoogland Area Chief Ranger Dandenong Ranges of Parks Victoria, that after consultation with DEWLP and Cardinia Shire Council, the Teleopea steps are now closed for safety reasons, whilst the land status is further investigated.

On December 20, the Four Groups together with the Maroondah Bushwalking Club met with Parks Victoria to show them the proposed Oxfam track and discuss their concerns. Discussion suggested ongoing engagement with local groups in the decision making processes for this event and in the future. Resources and repairs of the track as detailed in the maintenance report were also discussed. The groups will be involved with the parameters of EIS discussions with Parks Victoria. One of the conditions of use for Oxfam is to ensure responsible use of the track.

Conclusion

Oxfam's web site states that "**Together we are on the ground, empowering communities to tackle poverty.**" The Trailwalker event is a large money raising enterprise and Oxfam's target is to raise \$3m. Unfortunately, Oxfam

have chosen an area of high environmental value that already faces many threats and a walk of up to 3,500 participants as well as their pre-walk training will threaten the environmental value of this area. Use of this area for an event of this nature has significant negative impacts on the high conservation values of the area. While Oxfam state they only wish walkers to leave behind their footprints, 7,000 footprints in a small muddy area will leave a significant impression.

Protections are already in place for this area, in the VEAC recommendations for management of our Nature Conservation Reserve and Parks Victoria and other agencies are obliged to follow these.

What plans are there for follow-up works to repair any damage to the tracks? How will this be funded?

Parks Victoria needs its volunteer groups to continue with their work in monitoring wildlife and vegetation, their weed works and maintaining their tracks.

Parks Victoria must recognise their input and make final decisions after consulting with them.

Parks should not alienate these groups and must continue to work with them.

The Four Groups do not accept the Oxfam Trailwalker route decision. Meander, supported by Friends of sassafras Creek and Monbulk Landcare will pursue a formal complaint process on the basis that the decision doesn't conform with the government approved VEAC recommendations.

The Four Groups, together with Maroondah Bushwalkers all regard themselves as stakeholders in the area and will continue to follow-up the process of event approval and management in the SCNCR and will continue their best endeavors to preserve and enhance the conservation values of these fragile and beautiful areas.

1. [Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/documents/YellingboFINAL_REPORT-interactive-web.pdf) refers to the reserve of the same name recommended in the 2013 VEAC Yellingbo Investigation final report and the 2014 Government acceptance of the recommendations. Refer to http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/documents/YellingboFINAL_REPORT-interactive-web.pdf and <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/documents/Victorian-Government-Response-to-VEAC-Yellingbo-Investigation.pdf>. The SCNCR is a component reserve of the Yellingbo Conservation Area which is proposed to be managed under the National Parks Act.

Jane Hollands (Friends of Sassafras Creek), December 2018.

With Bill Incoll (Monbulk Landcare) and Kate Forster (Meander).

Parks Victoria reborn

Did you know that new legislation recently passed the Victorian Parliament giving Parks Victoria stronger controls over our parks? The new Parks Victoria Act 2018 came into effect on 12 September 2018. Jeff Floyd, the new Chair of Parks Victoria says

“With strengthened funding and a new Parks Victoria Act to come into force this year, we are well placed to meet these challenges and continue to protect and manage our parks, waterways and marine environments” (Parks Victoria Annual Report 2017-18, p8).

There are significant changes – instead of being a service organisation to DELWP with powers delegated by the Minister, Parks Victoria has been recreated as an independent statutory authority with a broad range of direct powers of its own (See <https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/about-us/news/new-parks-victoria-act-2018-strengthens-park-management>). It is worth looking at the new Act to understand whether our National Parks will change under the new management regime.

Parks Victoria Act 2018

The objects of Parks Victoria as stated in the new Act are:

- “(a) protect, conserve and enhance Parks Victoria managed land, including its natural and cultural values, for the benefit of the environment and current and future generations; and
- (b) recognise and support traditional owner knowledge of and interests in Parks Victoria managed land; and
- (c) provide for and encourage the community's enjoyment of and involvement in Parks Victoria managed land; and
- (d) improve the community's knowledge and appreciation of Parks Victoria managed land; and
- (e) contribute to the well-being of the community through the effective protection and management of Parks Victoria managed land; and
- (f) contribute to the achievement of State and regional land management outcomes as far as is consistent with the effective protection and management of Parks Victoria managed land.”

You can see the whole Parks Victoria Act 2018 here http://classic.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/num_act/pva201819o2018216/ .

How does this fit with National Parks Act responsibilities?

Parks Victoria is the manager of all National and State Parks, Wilderness Areas and other areas vested in the authority. The National Parks Act 1975 has been amended to reflect this and now reads:

“Parks Victoria has the control and management of each (category of land) and must—

- (a) ensure that each (category of land) is controlled and managed, in accordance with the objects of this Act, in a manner that will—
- (i) preserve and protect the park in its natural condition for the use, enjoyment and education of the public;
 - (ii) preserve and protect indigenous flora and fauna in the park;
 - (iii) exterminate or control exotic fauna in the park;
 - (iv) eradicate or control exotic flora in the park; and
 - (v) preserve and protect wilderness areas in the park and features in the park of scenic, archaeological, ecological, geological, historic or other scientific interest;”

These conditions are repeated for every category of land specified in the National Parks Act. The conditions heavily emphasise environmental protection and the control of threats to indigenous flora and fauna for the long term (“preserve and protect”). These attributes of the natural condition of our environment are “for the use, enjoyment and education of the public”, however, this use is clearly subservient by implication to preservation and protection, as it should be. The objects of Parks Victoria given above, are similar to those given in the National Parks Act, but the subservience of use for enjoyment, education and well-being are not so clear because these objects are given in separate clauses without an indication of priority. Given the potential for a clash of responsibilities, it is worth looking at how Parks Victoria currently carries out its responsibilities.

Who runs Parks Victoria?

Parks Victoria is a Statutory Authority, administered by the Parks Victoria Board, who are appointed by the Governor in Council (ie State Government). Parks Victoria reports to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change. The Board consists of a minimum of five and up to nine members. Board members are required, collectively, to have “skills, knowledge or experience of” the functions of Parks Victoria, and there must be one member with skills in financial management and one member with skills and experience in conservation.

Given the heavy emphasis on both conservation and protection of the environment, it is most inappropriate that only one member is required to have qualifications in conservation. This effectively means that a disagreement in the Board on a matter of conservation will result in the environment losing the argument. However, this is only the minimum requirement – Government could remedy this simply by making sure that there is a majority of members with conservation qualifications.

So how does the current membership of the Board stack up?

The Parks Victoria website includes a page on the Board (<https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/about-us/who-we-are/our-board>). Reading this page and summarising the qualifications of the members has resulted in the following table (some members have more than one qualification):

Qualification	Members with this qualification
Park management	1
Tourism	2
Directorships	5
Major events	1
Heritage management	1
Environment	2
Indigenous affairs	2
Stakeholder management	1

An emphasis on directorships is sensible, given the Board’s task is to manage a large organisation. But to have only two members who claim qualifications in the environment is a recipe for environmental mis-management. There are an equal number who claim experience in tourism (one a former minister of tourism) and with the emphasis in the group on management of business, there is a significant risk that tourism and commercial proposals put to the Board will win out over proposals that protect the environment.

The Board has established six Committees, including the Commercial Business Committee and the Conservation and Science Committee. The Commercial Business Committee is chaired by a former Minister for Tourism. The Conservation and Science Committee is chaired by a Board member whose previous experience includes being co-chair of the industry superannuation fund for the timber, pulp and paper, furniture and joinery industries and who was the CEO of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries. These memberships show a clear emphasis on tourism and commercial exploitation of natural resources, which is inappropriate for what should be a primarily conservation oriented organisation.

There is evidence of commercial bias in recent decision making, a few examples being bird feeding at Grants Picnic Ground Kallista, the Oxfam Trailwalker getting approval to use the Sassafras Creek Nature Conservation Reserve in 2019 and commercial boat tours at Wilson’s Prom.

What about consultation?

On 30 October 2018, the Victorian Government Gazette published a Statement of Obligations relating to the new Parks Victoria Act 2018 (See https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/729419/Special-gazette-SOO.pdf). This Statement included the following, relating to Engagement with the Community:

“Parks Victoria must undertake timely and inclusive engagement with the broader community, community and Friends groups, and key stakeholders to effectively support the preparation of its park management strategies and plans **and the delivery of its programs and projects**. In its engagement, Parks Victoria must have regard to the principles set out in the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office publication *Public Participation in Government Decision-making (May 2017)*.” (My emphasis in bold.)

The document referred to here is an audit of three Victorian Government agency programs’ recent performance in engaging with stakeholders. The results reported were mixed – one performed well, two not so well. The Victorian Government does not have a whole-of-government framework for this process – some other State Governments do, and the mixed results found in the audit are a reflection of this. Parks Victoria was not a subject of the audit, however, a recent example reported elsewhere in this issue of FriendsNET (Oxfam Trailwalker 2019 proposal) shows that Parks Victoria has not only performed at the lowest level possible in the consultation spectrum given in the audit report (“inform”), but there is some doubt as to how well Parks Victoria has consulted with other managers of the land concerned as well as disregarding the Government supported VEAC recommendations for the area, intended to protect the Sassafras Ck Nature Conservation Reserve.

It is disappointing that Parks Victoria has failed to carry out the obligation given it by the Minister so soon after the new Act was proclaimed.

What should be done?

These changes are a result of political decisions, so the only way to change them is to influence Government to re-value the environment over commercial activity in or near National Parks. The immediate priority should be to increase the Board’s conservation qualifications and reduce the commercial and tourism qualifications. In parallel with this, it is necessary to re-emphasise with the Board and Parks Victoria’s executive, the priority of conservation over commercial and private use embodied in the National Parks Act 1975 and the need to engage effectively with its stakeholders. The long term priority should be to amend the legislation so that conservation is the clear primary object that must be met before consideration of public and commercial use. These priorities can only be met through concerted action by the environment movement.

Bill Incoll, Friends of Sherbrooke Forest

Parks Victoria on the hook to consult with Friends groups

The article by Bill Incoll describes some of the key elements of the new Parks Victoria Act 2018. As a part of the requirements under the new Act, Minister D’Ambrosio issued a Statement of Obligations which was published in

the Victorian Government Gazette on 30 October 2018. Section 6, reproduced below is of particular interest to friends groups (highlight added).

6	ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMUNITY
6.1	Parks Victoria must undertake timely and inclusive engagement with the broader community, community and Friends groups, and key stakeholders to effectively support the preparation of its park management strategies and plans and the delivery of its programs and projects. In its engagement, Parks Victoria must have regard to the principles set out in the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office publication <i>Public Participation in Government Decision-making (May 2017)</i> .
6.2	Parks Victoria must implement programs to involve volunteers in parks and other areas which it manages.

As highlighted in the article about the Oxfam 2019 Trailwalker, Parks Victoria has, to date, failed the “timely and inclusive engagement” test. It remains to be seen whether Minister D’Ambrosio, DELWP or Parks Victoria will take prompt action to address this.

Friends groups should take particular note of these new obligations imposed on Parks Victoria and ensure that this requirement is exercised properly in dealings with them.

The full Parks Victoria [Statement of Obligations](#) can be found here.

Stephen Derrick
Editor, FriendsNET

DELWP Biodiversity report card: Could have done much better

On 20th December 2018 DELWP ‘took out the trash’ as they say in government circles. The release of a summary version of the Evaluation report of Phase 1 of DELWP’s Biodiversity Response Plan (BRP) reveals just how poor the program consultation was, particularly in relation to Traditional Owners. Along with the Summary Evaluation report, DELWP also released a response report.

DELWP admits major failings in relation to Traditional Owners.

‘DELWP acknowledges that Traditional Owners were not engaged effectively in this first investment phase of BRP overall. Despite an effort by DELWP to engage with Traditional Owners before the start of the BRP co-design process, and to ask them how they wanted to be engaged, there was insufficient time during this first phase of the BRP process to implement this properly. This

was compounded by capacity and other issues within many organisations across the biodiversity sector to properly engage with Traditional Owners ‘ (p2).

The Evaluation report reveals that:

- 67% of evaluation respondents felt that opportunities for Traditional Owners to collaborate in the BRP process were either detrimental or less than good.
- 50% thought that the extent of Traditional Owner engagement was either detrimental or less than good.
- 50% thought that the ways in which Traditional Owner cultural values and knowledge was used was less than good.
- 67% thought that the extent to which Traditional Owner cultural rights and values were used in the process was either detrimental or less than good.
- 84% thought that the ways in which cultural differences were treated were either detrimental or less than good.

DELWP also admits major failings in relation to Engagement.

‘DELWP acknowledges that the timelines for this first phase of BRP were inadequate to undertake the level of engagement intended, and that this was sometimes compounded by a lack of clear communication from DELWP about what was intended or expected ‘ (p2).

The evaluation report lists 9 key ‘Ideas for the way forward ‘ (section 8). However, despite the major failings listed above, the first idea is to ‘Retain overall BRP process ‘. This seems quite at odds with both the outcomes of the evaluation and the funding reality. As FriendsNET has previously reported, on 31st August 2018, Minister D’Ambrosio announced \$35 million in funding for 89 projects developed through the BRP process. As DELWP’s web site now makes clear, this funding is to be provided over 3 years and ‘no additional funding will be invested from DELWP as part of BRP in 2019 ‘ (See <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-response-planning> .)

Despite the major failings of the BRP process, funding for selected projects is locked in. Projects were selected without proper consultation and engagement, particularly with Traditional Owners. VEFN, along with many Friends

groups and other environmental volunteer groups made their concerns with these poor processes known to DELWP at many levels during the period March to June. The resulting funding reflects a process that largely excluded Friends and other environmental volunteer groups as well as Traditional Owners. The horse (funding) has well and truly bolted, but DELWP plans to keep on keeping on and retain the same tired old process.

The Summary [Evaluation Report](#) and [DELWP’s response](#) can be found by clicking on these links.

Stephen Derrick
Editor, FriendsNET

Victorian Labour election policy commitments

The government made a number of important announcements in relation to the environment in the lead up to the State election.

One commitment that is of particular interest to Friends groups is the creation of 6,500 hectares of new parks and walking and cycling trails across greater Melbourne. Labour will provide \$150 million to:

Provide \$5m for the Seaford Wetlands for landscaping and environmental works and upgrades to walking paths and facilities.

- \$8m to extend The *Greening the Pipeline* project in Melbourne’s west to create new open space between Lawrie Emmins Reserve and Skeleton Creek.
- establish Cardinia Creek South Parkland, a 508 hectare parkland near Officer
- create the Sandbelt Parklands, a 355 hectare chain of parks running from Moorabbin to Dingley Village with walking and bike trails, conservation and adventure play areas
- complete Clyde Regional Park, creating a 120 hectare parkland
- plan for the Frankston Greenbelt that will link together 1,881 hectares of parks and reserves for locals to enjoy between the Seaford wetlands and Mornington
- create a new 2,778 hectare Upper Merri Park, near Craigieburn
- expand the Quarry Hills Parkland to cover 1,088 hectares, near South Morang

- complete the Plenty River Trail, building another 17 kilometres of walking and cycling trail stretching from Mernda to the Western Ring Road at Greensborough
- invest in new bike and walking trails across Nillumbik, Moreland, Banyule, Darebin, Hume and Whittlesea council areas
- undertake a feasibility study for a new Wallan Regional Park
- create a new 1,008 hectare Jackson Creek Park, near Sunbury
- complete Kororoit Creek Park, creating a 260 hectare parkland
- complete Werribee Township Regional Park, creating a 340 hectare parkland
- complete planning for a new 130 hectare Toolern Regional Park at Melton
- complete planning for a new 223 hectare Werribee River Park at Wyndham

In addition, there will be \$35 million to purchase or repurpose land to create 25 new pocket parks in built up areas, where there is a lack of public open space. A further \$10 million will be provided to upgrade selected existing suburban parks. Councils will get funding to revamp these parks and reserves with new playgrounds, landscaping,

toilets and picnic facilities, transforming them into better places for locals to enjoy.

As welcome as the announcement is, it is light on detail as to processes and timing.

Matt Ruchel of VNPA discusses Labour’s commitments in more detail in a recent article in Park Watch here <https://vnpa.org.au/nature-in-the-next-term/>. The full Labour announcement about the creation of new parks can be found here <https://www.danandrews.com.au/policies/creating-a-ring-of-new-parkland-in-our-growing-suburbs> .

Labour also released an election Platform 2018 document. Under the heading ‘Caring for our Environment’ Labour committed to boost support for environmental volunteers by continuing to support environmental volunteers and to “deliver and environmental volunteering strategy to ensure that environmental volunteers, networks and groups are supported to deliver environment projects’ (p121). Again, the announcement is very light on detail. **The full [Platform 2018](#) document can be downloaded here.**

Stephen Derrick
Editor, FriendsNET

Snuffleupagus cleans up

The Yarra Riverkeeper Association recently used a large vacuum cleaner with an elephant like trunk to help with its Yarra River Blitz to clean up rubbish along the river. Nicknamed Snuffleupagus after the Sesame Street character, the vacuum cleaner sucks up small particles of plastic that are very difficult to remove by hand. Yarra Riverkeeper Andrew Kelly said that Snuffleupagus will lift small particles of very light materials such as beads of polystyrene. The large vacuum cleaner also sucks up things such as nerf gun bullets and sauce sachets. The Association aims to purge the river of as much polystyrene as possible and plans to run more Yarra River Blitzes in 2019. To get involved see <http://yarrariver.org.au/yarra-river-blitz-coming-up-25-november/> .



Collecting rubbish by hand



The Snuffleupagus way

Eulogy Les Smith OAM

FriendsNET was saddened to hear of the recent death of Les Smith, Best Friend Awardee in 2015.

The following Eulogy has been posted on the web site of the Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society <https://bdtps.wordpress.com/>.

Eulogy for Les Smith OAM

Les Smith, eminent Whitehorse environmentalist and patriarch of the Blackburn and District Tree Preservation Society died on 16 December 2018.

Les was involved in the conservation movement for over 60 years, initially in England in the late 1940's and continuing when he moved to Australia in the 1950's.

He joined the Tree Society in the early 1960s and served with distinction on the executive committee in many roles over the years including committee member, president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, membership secretary and newsletter editor.

Les was actively involved in the campaign to save the Little Desert from being subdivided for farming in the late 1960s. This campaign was instrumental in launching a wave of environmental campaigns throughout Victoria and also led to the formation of what is now Environment Victoria, an organization to which Les has contributed greatly since its inception.

He was Nunawading Citizen of the Year in the 1975.

Until recent times Les remained active as a volunteer, member or executive committee member of a number of organizations allied to the preservation and enhancement of our natural environment.

Apart from the tree society Les was actively involved with:

- Environment Victoria
- Bungalook Nursery (Whitehorse Indigenous Plant Project)
- Antonio Park, Yarran Dheran and Wandinong bushland park advisory committees in Whitehorse

- Urimbirra Co-operative that owns 1,000 ha of close to virgin bush adjacent to what is now the little Desert National Park. The property is covered by a Conservation Covenant administered by the Trust for Nature and only removable by Act of Parliament

- Friends of the Little Desert

- The Mullum-Mullum Festival (Les was the 2011 festival Patron).

Les, affectionately dubbed the 'Godfather' of environmental advocacy in the City of Whitehorse and beyond, was honoured with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his community service in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June 2017. He was officially presented with his award by the Governor of Victoria, The Honourable Linda Dessau in October 2017 at a ceremony at Government House.

His legacy will live on in the natural world he fought so hard, and with such good grace, to preserve and enhance. Moreover Les inspired many people to embrace his environmental philosophy and deeds.

Our condolences and prayers go out to Helen and the Smith family on this sad occasion. Vale Les Smith OAM.



Les Smith (centre) with fellow Tree Society committee members Anne Payne, Mary Crouch, Ann Clayton and David Berry, June 2017

Vale Les Smith from all Friends groups