



FriendsNET

Newsletter of the Victorian Environment Friends Network

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See our [web site](#)

Mineral exploration expands in Wombat State Forest

Residents in the Blackwood, Victoria area recently noticed mineral exploration activity near the town and are questioning why the Victorian Government has not acted to declare the area a National Park as recommended by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) more than a year ago - in June 2019.

Blackwood is a small town approximately 90km WNW of Melbourne, which was founded in 1855 during the gold rush era. The town is situated on the Lerderderg River and is surrounded by the Wombat State Forest and Lerderderg State Park. These forested areas provide high value habitat, including areas of large, old trees which provide hollows for birds, possum and gliders and high volumes of nectar for nectar-feeding native fauna and honey bees.

In June 2019, VEAC recommended (among other new parks) – after extensive study – the formation of:

a large national park consisting of the existing Lerderderg State Park and the majority of the existing Wombat State Forest (VEAC Final Report on the Central West, June 2019, p74).

The Victorian Government is required to respond to VEAC's recommendations with 6 months, but to date has failed to do so.

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Biodiversity Bushfire recovery grants close 20 July

The Victorian Government has made \$900,000 available to support bushfire recovery activities for communities affected by fire in three catchment management areas: the North East, East Gippsland and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Areas.

A total of \$900,000 is available. Successful applicants' projects can receive up to:

- \$10,000 for private landholders (Stream 1)
- \$30,000 for environmental volunteer groups (Stream 2)
- \$50,000 for environmental volunteer networks (Stream 3)

Applications close Monday 20 July at 5pm and projects must be completed by 31 December 2021. To review the program guidelines and apply see <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/grants/BBRG>.

In this edition

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- 2020 Victorian Junior Landcare & Biodiversity Grants close 31 July.
- Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria.

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.

Disclaimer: Content in this newsletter does not necessarily represent the views of the VEFN committee. Articles are the responsibility of authors as named. All other content is the responsibility of the editor, Stephen Derrick.

Mineral exploration expands in Wombat State Forest - continued

The Blackwood area has a long history of mining and exploration, particularly for gold and there are many companies actively exploring the area currently. Importantly, the VEAC recommendations for the formation of a large new National Park contained a significant caveat:

Recommended new national park areas would not be available for new extractive, exploration or mining licences. Existing mining and exploration licences in new national park areas would continue, according to the provisions in the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and the National Parks Act 1975 (VEAC, p75)

The VEAC recommendation for the new National Park was originally formulated and published in their draft report, which was released in August 2018.

The prospect of the creation of a new National Park, may have spurred on efforts to peg new mineral exploration licences in the area. A search of mining licences in the area around Blackwood revealed the following:

Selected mineral Exploration Licences in Wombat State Forest & surrounding areas					
Exploration Licence No.	Owner	Commodities	Application Accepted Date	First Grant Date	Expiry Date
EL007044	Currawong Resources P/L	Antimony, gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver	11/11/2019	N/A	N/A
EL007045	Currawong Resources P/L	Antimony, gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver	11/11/2019	N/A	N/A
EL007048	Currawong Resources P/L	Antimony, gold, copper, lead, zinc, bentonite, bismuth, silver, tungsten	06/09/2019	N/A	N/A
EL006656	Currawong Resources P/L	Antimony, gold, copper, lead, zinc	08/01/2018	10/07/2019	09/07/2024
EL5479	Blackwood Gold Mines P/L	Gold, platinum, silver	14/05/2013	24/03/2014	23/03/2024
EL007039	The Vic Gold Company P/L	Gold, copper, lead, zinc, silver	11/11/2019	N/A	N/A
EL007112	Kalamazoo Resources Ltd	Gold, antimony, copper, lead, zinc, silver	02/12/2019	N/A	N/A
Source Victorian Department of Jobs, Precincts & Regions. <i>Mining Licences Near Me</i> at https://earthresources.vic.gov.au/licensing-approvals/location-of-mining-petroleum-licences .					

The five Exploration Licences highlighted in the table above are of particular interest as the date of acceptance of the applications by the Victorian Government is well after the date of the VEAC Final recommendations of 21 June 2019.

Gayle Osbourne, Convenor of Wombat Forestcare group commented on the commencement of exploration activities near Blackwood and questioned the Government's delay in acting on the VEAC recommendations: *Is the real reason for the delay that the State Government wants to mine and log the Wombat Forest? (As reported in The Moorabool News, 23 June 2020).*

The increased mineral exploration activity in the area, makes it even more important that the Government acts on the VEAC recommendations and forms the new National Park. VEAC set out its full reasoning as follows:

The recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park covers 49,553 hectares comprised of a large part (29,079 hectares) of the existing Wombat State Forest, the Lerderderg State Park (20,469 hectares) and small areas of in other public land use categories. It contains much of the only largely-intact landscape between the Grampians and the eastern highlands, and the only extensive area of very high Strategic Biodiversity Values (SBVs) in the whole investigation area. The recommended park contains large areas of under-represented EVCs (most notably, Herb-rich Foothill Forest and Herb-rich and Shrubby Foothill Forest Complex). It provides high value habitat for many threatened species such as the small sickle greenhood orchid, wombat bossiaea, square tailed kite, powerful owl, brush-tailed phascogale and greater glider, and is the largest block of habitat in western Victoria for species such as the red-browed treecreeper, common wombat and mountain brushtail possum. The headwaters of five of the six major rivers in the existing state forest are included in the recommended Wombat–Lerderderg National Park (VEAC 2019, p75).

Exploration Licences are generally issued for an initial term of 5 years. If the companies undertaking the exploration find prospective ore bodies they would have to apply for a Mining Licence before any extraction could occur. Negotiating a licence to mine in a National Park is likely to be far more difficult.

You can search for mining licences here <https://earthresources.vic.gov.au/licensing-approvals/location-of-mining-petroleum-licences/mining-licences-near-me> . Enter an address and then you can see licence areas either by map or satellite view. Clicking on a licence area will provide some basic information about the owner of the licence and other details.

All of VEAC's reports and maps from the central West investigation can be found here <http://www.veac.vic.gov.au/investigation/central-west-investigation/reports> .

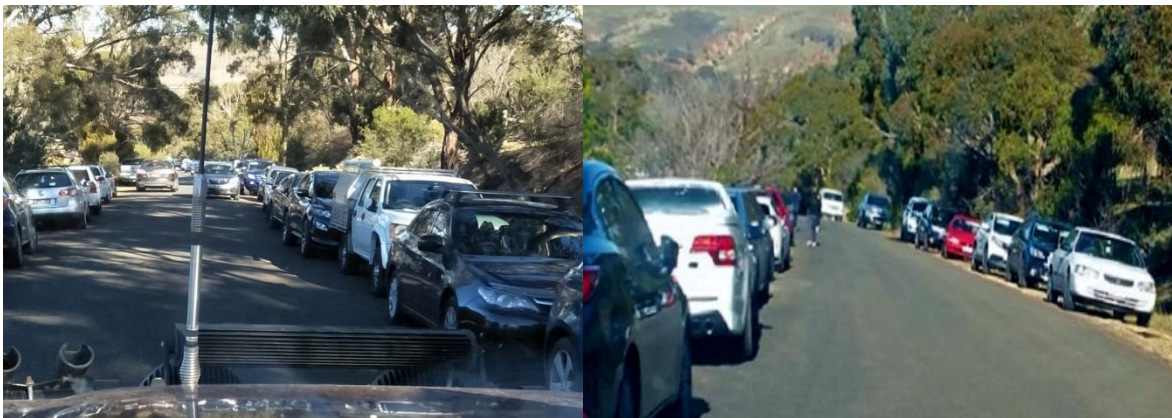
Lerderderg & Werribee Gorge State Parks are very popular destinations

Moorabool Online reported on just how popular these parks are with thousands of people taking the opportunity to get out and enjoy late Autumn sunshine as travel restrictions were eased in late May. Following is short version of the original article from Moorabool Online. The original article is here <https://mooraboolonline.com.au/2020/05/17/thousands-flock-to-lerderderg-werribee-gorge/> .



The Werribee Gorge and Lerderderg state parks have experienced some of their biggest visitor numbers in living memory.

Cars were parked nose-to-tail on both sides of Myers Rd (pictured below) at least half a kilometre beyond the Werribee Gorge park boundary on Saturday – and again on Sunday – as COVID19 restrictions were eased slightly and the temperature soared into the high teens.



It was a similar story on Lerderderg Gorge Road (top), with at least 150 cars parked beyond the state park boundary at lunchtime on Sunday.

In some cases social distancing was not adhered to.

In both areas dozens of cars were also seen turning around and exiting as soon as they arrived.

Victoria's report card on Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands: FAIL!

The Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO) recently released its report *Protecting Critically Endangered Grasslands*, June 2020 <https://www.audit.vic.gov.au/report/protecting-critically-endangered-grasslands>.



Western grasslands with You Yangs in the background

In 2010 the Victorian Government made commitments to improve conservation outcomes, including to establish a 15 000-hectare Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) and a 1 200-hectare Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Reserve (GEWR) by 2020.

The VAGO report concludes that:

DELWP has not met its commitments to deliver the WGR and GEWR by 2020. DELWP intended these reserves to offset native vegetation loss from urban development within the extended UGB. However, delays in acquiring land, and continuing threats of degradation, pose significant risks to the ecological values of native vegetation within the reserves. The delays in acquiring these reserves also mean they will likely require a significantly greater investment to restore and retain these ecological values than if they had been purchased within the intended 10-year timeframe. (p8).

In June 2008 and June 2009, the Australian Government listed Natural Temperate Grasslands and Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands respectively as critically endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

FriendsNET #107, May 2019 included a report on the grasslands and the efforts made over many years to ensure the Victorian Government met its commitments.

The VAGO report makes 7 recommendations that DELWP:

1. *finalises a strategy to progress the Grassy Eucalypt Woodlands Reserve that sets how land for the reserve will be acquired and the funding strategy for delivering this commitment (see Section 2.2)*

2. *undertakes an up-to-date condition assessment of the conservation and ecological values contained in the private land designated for the Western Grassland Reserve to inform priority land acquisitions, future interim management and ongoing management planning (see Section 2.5)*
3. *reviews and updates its Western Grassland Reserve interim management strategy in line with the extended acquisition timeline and in collaboration with relevant stakeholders and delivery partners (see Section 3.2)*
4. *evaluates the effectiveness of its interim land management agreement and shares learnings with relevant councils and/or land groups (see Section 3.2)*
5. *improves its landowner communications approach by finalising a communications strategy that identifies all relevant stakeholders, communication methods, timing and responsibilities for actions (see Section 3.4)*
6. *strengthens its governance arrangements by including delivery partners in the governance structure for the Melbourne Strategic Assessment program (see Section 4.2)*
7. *reviews key performance indicators for Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities program outputs and outcomes to:*
 - *improve program reporting and transparency through more meaningful performance information*
 - *include output targets that align to outcome measures and Melbourne Strategic Assessment program objectives*
 - *guide management actions in both reserves (see Section 4.4). (p16)*

There has not been any comment from the Minister. A spokesperson for DELWP was reported in the media as saying that the Government supported all 7 recommendations.

People who have been following this matter for more than a decade are left wondering whether DELWP will put in place proper oversight and community engagement practices to ensure that objectives are delivered.

Inquiry into ecosystems decline in Victoria – submissions due 31 July

The Environment & Planning Committee of the Victorian Parliament is undertaking and [Inquiry into Ecosystems Decline in Victoria](#). The [Terms of Reference](#) for the Inquiry are quite broad and submissions are due by 31 July.

This is an important Inquiry, even more so after the very bad bushfires during 2019-20.

[FriendsNET#107 May 2019](#) included an article - "IPBES warning on global biodiversity" - about the decline in global biodiversity that included links to a number of resources you may like to draw on for your submission. [FriendsNET #106 March 2019](#) included a report on [Victorian State of the Environment: 2018](#) which demonstrated a very poor track record in Victoria with significant declines in 21 out of 35 biodiversity indicators.

2020 Victorian Junior Landcare & Biodiversity Grants close 31 July

Project funding: grants of up to \$5,000 each (ex-GST) are available for environmental projects that connect young Victorians with the environment.

Source of grants funding: the grants are funded by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning through the Victorian Landcare Program. Landcare Australia is running the grants process as part of its Junior Landcare program.

Who can apply: Victorian schools (primary or secondary), kindergartens, childcare centres, scouts, guides and youth groups can apply for the grants.

Focus of grants: projects should have a focus on:

- Improving biodiversity through the development, improvement or restoration of habitat for Victoria's native plants (flora) and animals (fauna), and/or

- Educating, involving and engaging young people in valuing and actively caring for Victoria's natural environment.

Projects can be either direct-action projects (with an on-ground component) or in-direct action projects (with an education component), or a mixture of both.

Applications close: 3pm Friday 31 July 2020

Projects must be completed by: 14 May 2021

Applications & Guidelines: go to [2020 Victorian Junior Landcare & Biodiversity Grants](#) .

More information: contact Landcare Australia via phone: (03) 8631 7800 or email: grants@landcareaustralia.com.au .

Coronavirus pandemic points to need for sustainable farming & clean energy

The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) recently published *COVID 19: Urgent Call to Protect People and Nature*

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/publications/covid19-urgent-call-to-protect-people-and-nature> .

Marco Lambertini, director general of WWF International; Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, executive secretary of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity; and Maria Neira, director of the World Health Organization department of environment, climate change and health, recently wrote in The Guardian that *Coronavirus is warning us the mend our broken relationship with nature.*

We must recognise that the way we currently produce and consume food, and our blatant disregard for the environment more broadly, has pushed the natural world to its limits. Nature is currently declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history, and this is actually increasing our vulnerability to new diseases, particularly as a result of land-use change through activities such as deforestation, and agricultural and livestock intensification. These outbreaks of disease are manifestations of our dangerously unbalanced relationship with nature.

The full article in The Guardian is here

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/17/coronavirus-warning-broken-relationship-nature> .

Changes to the Landcare Facilitator Program

Changes are afoot for the Victorian Landcare Facilitators Program with eligibility to be broadened to include all environmental volunteering groups and networks being eligible to receive funding through and EoI process during the second half of this year.

The Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program funds 78 part-time Landcare facilitators who are employed directly by a range of organisations including Landcare and environmental groups and networks.

Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Extension

The Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program has been extended for six months to 31 December 2020.

The Victorian Government is currently reviewing the Victorian Landcare Program in light of the recommendations from the 2019 independent [Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review - Final Report](#) and the DELWP response [Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program Review - Key Findings, Recommendation & Actions](#).

The six-month extension allows the Victorian Government time to implement recommendations to improve the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program when the Victorian State Budget 2020-21 is delivered.

An Expression of Interest will open later in the year for Landcare and environmental volunteer groups and networks who would like to seek funding to employ a Landcare Facilitator from 1 January 2021 under the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program.

For more information please read the [Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program - Frequently Asked Questions](#).