



Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

PO Box 500, East Melbourne,
Victoria 8002 Australia
delwp.vic.gov.au

Ref: MIN036474



Dear Ms [REDACTED]

26 OCT 2017

HAINING FARM REDEVELOPMENT

Thank you for your emails of 27 September, 2 October and 9 October to the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change about Haining Farm. As this matter is in my area of responsibility, the Minister has asked that I respond on her behalf.

I appreciate you taking the time to write, and for your passion for the Don Valley Area.

Haining Farm is a 69 hectare site within the Yellingbo Conservation Area which is currently managed by Parks Victoria and leased as a dairy farm. The lease for the dairy farm is coming to an end. The future use of the site will be changed to provide for community use with a greater emphasis on sustainability, including providing habitat for the Helmeted Honeyeater and lowland Leadbeaters possum, two of Victoria's threatened species.

The Haining Farm Working Group was established during February 2017 to develop concepts for the site that considered the views of the community and would not result in an increase in bushfire risk. Membership of the group included six residents of Don Valley and representatives from local stakeholder groups and agencies. The working group was provided access to a range of information and experts to support their decision-making process, beginning with a review of the bushfire risk in the area.

The specific bushfire risk review for Haining Farm was led by Dr Kevin Tolhurst and Justin Leonard, two of Australia's leading bushfire risk experts. The independent bushfire experts advised that revegetation of the site could be achieved without increasing the bushfire risk to the community. The experts' advice was that the addition of an open woodland on the boundary of the site acts as a bushfire mitigation measure by reducing the impact of embers and the effect of wind on the surrounding area. This open woodland allows revegetation of the site without increasing the bushfire risk to the local and broader communities and is a buffer zone of less fire prone vegetation that you mention was recommended by the Black Saturday Royal Commission.

The working group developed three concepts for Haining Farm that did not increase the bushfire risk and presented these to the community. The community engagement process involved both local meetings and online surveys, and over 2300 responses were received. The process identified that the local community supported maintaining a commercial farming operation on the site and the broader Victorian community supported providing habitat for the threatened species. Of the total responses, approximately 80 per cent were supportive of the site providing habitat for the two threatened species. For greater detail on the engagement process, please view the Haining Farm Engagement Report available on <https://engage.vic.gov.au/yellingboconservationarea>.

The final recommendation of the working group was that the site be divided to provide approximately 30 hectares each for farming and conservation. This recommendation is in accordance with concept 01, which received the least amount of community support.

The final plan for the site builds on the recommendations of the working group by adding the open woodland on the northern and eastern boundaries of the site. We understand the concerns of the local community about increasing vegetation on the site leading to an increase in bushfire risk, and respect the views of the local community that the valley floor can act as bushfire mitigation due to it historically being irrigated and heavily grazed. In response to the concerns of the local community, we will incorporate additional water sources in these areas, which may include either an internal sprinkler system or irrigation along the northern and eastern boundaries. We are also currently working with the CFA in the detailed design to ensure that adequate bushfire mitigation measures like fuel breaks, water points and access tracks meet the needs of the local CFA brigades.

Your idea of planting broad leafed European trees and fruit trees like wild apple is a good one and could be considered in the open woodland buffer along the boundaries of the site. We are continuing to work with the Haining Farm Working Group in deciding on which species of trees to plant in the open woodland and these trees do not need to be native to the area. I will ensure your ideas are considered as part of this decision.


DELWP and Parks Victoria acknowledge the importance the local community placed on seeing farm animals on the site, especially in the northern and southern boundaries which are most visible from Don and Dalry roads. For this reason, DELWP and Parks Victoria will investigate future uses of these areas that are consistent with the views of the local community. The working group's recommendation also included increased community access and recreation opportunities on the site which have been included in the final plan.

The habitat requirements of the two threatened species are quite specific and include a wet environment with dense mid-story vegetation. The addition of an artificial wetland in the north-west corner and ensuring good connectivity between blocks of vegetation is essential to the site providing viable habitat for both species.

If you would like more information about this matter, please call Victoria Purdue, Project Manager, Yellingbo Conservation Area, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, on 0419 115 636 or email Victoria.purdue@delwp.vic.gov.au

Thank you again for writing and letting me know about your ideas for the future of Haining Farm.

Yours sincerely



Kelly Crosthwaite
Regional Director Port Phillip