

5 September 2016

Ms Merryn Kelly
DELWP -
Chair Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee
DELWP
PO Box 500
East Melbourne 8002

Dear Ms Kelly,

Re: Waterways Crown Land Upper Yarra Region

We write to you with our extreme concerns over our Crown Land Water Frontage Licence along the Little Yarra River and the Britannia Creek.

We have attended two public meetings and are horrified to think of the resulting mess that will follow the closing and fencing off of the Yarra and Little Yarra River frontages as well as the Britannia and other creeks in the Upper Yarra area. Of all the landowners at the meeting – and there was in excess of 100 people – there has been no consultation in respect to the cancelling of the Crown Land Water Frontage Licences. Also, landowners without a licence have received no information or notification that their access to the river/creek will be prohibited and that they will be liable for the fencing that will keep themselves out! Even more concerning these ‘non licenced’ landowners will be encouraged to maintain weed control, fence repairs when trees fall and general clean-up of the frontage.

Could you please advise which Government department is responsible for the clean-up of the waterways at present? It would be good to have that knowledge as there are so many areas in desperate need of weed control and fire risk management clearing along the reserves.

We purchased our property in Tarrango Road Yarra Junction back in 1987. Our parcel of land was recommended to us by our friend – Fred Lay – as a wonderful grazing property with the river flats and the connecting water frontages. The decision to purchase our land was based on the fact that we had those water frontages and an Agricultural Licence was available for us to accept. The size of the Crown land as stated on the Licence is 2.2Ha. Given our land is only 18 acres the 2.2ha is a really important addition. There is large area of land at the corner of our property where the Little Yarra River, the Britannia Creek and the Melbourne Water Pipeline cross over. (See the map attached) The original buildings – pre 1947 could even be on the area affected. Our land, together with the water frontages has been wonderful for our cattle producing business. Part of our fodder for the cattle is to grow hay on our land and the licenced land is perfect for that. It is much dryer than the rest of our property at growing time.

Even more importantly, the river and creek frontages have been a constant source of enjoyment for our children, grandchildren and extended family. We have spent many wonderful days sitting on the river banks, watching our family share a picnic, play games, laugh and appreciate the wonderful place we call home.

Our major concern- a very real concern – is fire risk.

Can you show us the report from the local fire brigades – I can't believe it would say they support even more bushland in an area that is considered a huge bush fire threat already. I believe it is rated in the top two around the world!

We believe the crown land either side of the river/creek will become a huge risk to our property, our cattle and our family. The branches, (and in fact gums trees) leaves, weeds, blackberry bushes, thistles all add up to a high fire risk. We undertake the cleaning up and disposing of the noxious weeds and rubbish each year. Will your department guarantee us the same standard of clearing? Can we expect our bushfire risk will not increase if our Crown Land Licence is cancelled? Can you guarantee the funding for maintaining a fire safe area along our waterways every year? If you cannot guarantee this then we will hold you responsible if our family, our cattle and our home are threatened by bushfire as a result of your negligence.

Another real concern is the feral animals that will inhabit the corridors. We have many foxes in our area – last week lambs were killed in the next property and their carcass strewn over the adjoining properties. They are a real threat to our cows when calving. These foxes are a big concern and if they are protected and allowed to breed in the undergrowth and blackberries along the river then all the native birds and animals you are trying to protect will be wiped out anyway. Not to mention the spread of noxious plants and disease foxes generate. Also of great concern are the increasing numbers of rabbits and deer in our area.

I am still to make sense of the decision of Government to cancel these licences.

Could you please tell us—?

Why were we – as licence holders – not notified individually of this proposal? How could VEAC think a notice in the local paper – a paper that is very limited in quantity and only obtained in a few places around the Yarra Junction Township – is enough to constitute notifying all landowners? We did not see that notice and was not aware of the VEAC extension to the Upper Yarra areas.

What fire risk management will be in place for the area along the affected Crown Land areas? Who do we hold responsible if a bushfire travels along this land when it could have been prevented by regular, targeted maintenance – such we, as landowners do now?

What weed and feral animal maintenance program will be in place?

What Department will fund these programs and at what cost? Where will this funding be sourced?

What will happen if fallen trees etc. situated in the Crown land reserve destroy the fences? How quickly will the fences be repaired? Who will fund those repairs?

What maintenance program is in place to keep the river/streams clear so the adjoining properties do not suffer flooding? Who do we hold responsible for damage to our property/assets if a waterway bursts its banks and inundates our land due to lack of works done to keep the water flowing?

By removing our Licence, denying us access to the waterway and overrunning the Crown Land with 'native vegetation' we believe our land value will decrease. If this is the case is there a compensation plan in place?

We acknowledge we purchased our land with the knowledge that the Crown areas were not part of our title but we could use it and look after it. We did not hesitate to purchase because of the access to such a wonderful area. Now we are informed that access will be denied. We believe that will result in a loss in the value of our land. For us it will also mean a loss of income from our cattle and an increase in fodder costs as we will need to purchase more feed for our cattle.

We hope you can understand our concerns – not only for the loss of the use of the land. The real threat to our family - and the families in our region - of an increased bush fire risk in the Upper Yarra Region along with the spread of uncontrolled weeds, the mess of fallen trees, the risk of waterways flooding out into the properties as a result of debris in the waterways, the lack of maintenance along those waterways, and the increase of feral animals in those waterways. Unfortunately we think this paragraph sums up a real threat to our beautiful region.

Thank you for taking the time to read our sincere concerns and we wait with hope, for your reply.

Sincerely,

Peter and Susan Hotton