



SUMMARY OF MEMBERS CONCERNS

Yellingbo Conservation Area (aka YCA and State Emblems Conservation Area)

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Increased bushfire risk

The Yarra Valley is considered to be the second worst region in the world for bushfires. The Victorian Government recognizes much of the Upper Yarra Valley is considered severe to extreme bushfire risk.

The CFA, DELWP and DEPI also recognize in many documents, strategy plans, assessments and letters that adding higher fuel loads or more vegetation to the region, will increase fire risk.

The Yarra Waterways Group (YWG) believes the revegetation of thousands of hectares of public land (in the populated areas of the Yarra Valley) will threaten the safety of our community and our environment.

The YWG believes creating wide corridors of dense bushland (hundreds of meters wide in areas) will change the current riparian environment from a minor risk to a major threat. These forest corridors will connect many major towns and (heavily vegetated) residential areas with the fire prone Warburton State Forest, Yarra Ranges National Park, Powelltown State Forest, Dandenong Ranges National Park, Kurth Kiln Regional Park, Conservation Reserves and Private Bushland.

These forest corridors will be planted along the Yarra River, Little Yarra River, Woori Yallock Creek, Badger Creek, Don River, Dee River, Britannia Creek, Hoddles Creek, McCrea Creek, Menzies Creek, Emerald Creek and Cockatoo Creek.

These forest corridors also run alongside or very close to many major roads in the area. During a bushfire emergency (e.g. Black Saturday) these escape routes for residents will be at greater risk of being impacted by fire and these roads closed by authorities.

Width of the proposed corridors is of Major Concern to the YWG, over half the area to be re-afforested is much wider than the standard 20/30 meter riparian corridor. Widths between 100m – 300m is common along the Yarra River and some tributaries, please refer to YWG Bushfire Risk Map 2

YWG does not have confidence that DELWP can maintain the Crown Reserves during any transition stage from pasture to forest. This will result in an **immediate fire threat** with the development of long grass and weeds in revegetated areas.

The Victorian Government has also failed to provide the following to the community or our members:

1. Detailed specific fire management plans for the entire YCA indicating the location and dimensions of fire breaks along the river reserves.
2. Location of access for fire-fighting helicopters to safely draw water, rather than using private dams around the area.
3. Details on how CFA units will obtain access to the revegetated corridors to fight *wick, lineal and spot bushfires in the revegetated areas*.
4. Details of annual fire management programs and how they conform to all Royal Commission recommendations.

VEAC Yellingbo Investigation was flawed from the beginning

The 'Terms of Reference' set down by the Victorian Government for the investigation made no mention of the existing custodians of the Crown Reserves (adjoining landowners and licensees that have held tenure for over 100 years). During the public consultation process, the VEAC skillfully avoided alerting adjoining landowners & licensees "as to the implications" the Yellingbo Conservation Area would have on their use of Crown land.

Many adjoining landowners without Water Frontage Licenses were never directly notified about the Yellingbo Investigation.

Conflict of principles

Interconnecting corridors of bushland is the underpinning principle of the Yellingbo Conservation Area. This underpinning principal is in direct conflict with basic fire management guidelines and control of feral animals in our environment.

No assessment of economic effects on Tourism & Agriculture

No detailed assessment or study of the effects the implementation of the Yellingbo Conservation Area would have on agriculture (loss of hundreds of hectares of prime agricultural/horticultural land). Or the effect on tourism in the Yarra Valley, resulting from major changes to the rural character, amenity (views & vistas) and access to waterways for recreation, caused by the re-forestation of the Yarra River & tributaries.

Increased flood risks

No detailed study or assessment has been undertaken by Melbourne Water, CSIRO or the Bureau of Meteorology as to the likely changes re-forestation of the Yarra River flood plain (and the flood plains of its tributaries) will have on flood flows, inundation levels and flood velocities in the Yarra Valley and Greater Melbourne.

Misleading information and lack of notification

The YWG is very concerned that majority of affected adjoining landowners with Crown Reserves incorporated in the YCA, didn't know anything about the Yellingbo Investigation, the YCA or what effects the implementation will have on their properties, until the formation of the YWG in June 2016.

Many adjoining landowners have still not received any information from DELWP or Melbourne Water regarding the YCA. Only Water Frontage Licensees have received information.

Until May 2016, much of the information provided to Water Frontage Licensees about the YCA was vague, non-specific and confusing. Even using the names Yellingbo Investigation & Yellingbo Conservation Area infer the proposed changes are confined to Yellingbo, therefore most Water Frontage Licensees took little notice of this information until DELWP sent a letter headlined Cancellation of Water Frontage Licenses.

Recreational use of the River Yarra

The Victorian Government has failed to provide adequate assurances that recreational use of the Yarra River will be maintained in accord with *the Upper Yarra Valley Regional Strategy Plan - Part 3A Victorian Planning & Environment Act 1987*, and the Victorian Youth, Sport and Recreation guideline *Canoeing in the Upper Yarra*.

Maintenance of weeds and feral Pests

The YWG members believe weeds & feral pest problems will increase based on poor management of previous revegetation projects by the Victorian Government. The plague numbers of feral deer (now coming out of the surrounding State Forests and National Parks) will be provided a highway by these re-afforested corridors allowing them to damage farms and enter residential areas. Other feral animals such as foxes and cats will become a much greater problem as these re-afforested corridors run through or very close to residential areas. Feral foxes, cats, dogs and pigs do untold damage to our native wildlife including the Helmeted Honeyeater & Leadbeaters Possum, they also do considerable damage to agricultural livestock. The YWG believes creating these corridors near residential areas is self-defeating in attempts to create habitat for native fauna.

The YWG is also very concerned about the future control of weeds in the Crown Reserves and how that will impact adjoining landowners. Authorities plan to replace current environmentally friendly weed control practices (used by adjoining landowners for over 100 years) being slashing, selected grazing and some hand maintenance. Under the proposed management arrangements for the new park there will be a reliance on chemical herbicides. This poses many questions as to what effect these herbicides will have on the health of our waterways, the flora & fauna in the reserves and the effect of overspray on adjoining private land.

Riparian Management Agreements and Melbourne Waters Stream Frontage Management Scheme

For many adjoining landowners (farmers), particularly those with wide Crown Reserves, the concept of losing their most productive agricultural land (used to grow crops for Melbournians for over a 100 years) is unacceptable. Adjoining landowners are being pressured to sign management agreements with the Victorian Government that removes their use of the Crown land and makes them responsible for fencing, revegetation and maintenance of the Crown Reserves for 5 years, this is unacceptable.

These agreements offer no flexibility or incorporate the needs of adjoining landowners.

Land Surveys

The Victorian Government has not agreed to pay for new land surveys where a dispute arises between an adjoining landowner and the government about the location of the boundary.

Fencing

YWG is very concerned that many adjoining landowners have received letters recently stating they have weeks to erect a fence between their land and the Crown Reserve. These letters threatened legal action if they don't comply.

The government has **NOT** notified **ALL** adjoining landowners effected by the YCA, about the implementation of the YCA and likely fencing requirements. Only Water Frontage License holders have been notified.

Some adjoining landowners have been told by Melbourne Water and DELWP representatives that they require a fence to be erected or re-aligned between their land and the Crown Reserve. These authorities have given unrealistic deadlines for such works and told the adjoining landowners they have to pay the full costs unless they sign a management agreement with the government.

In circumstances where fences have been erected by mutual agreement between adjoining landowners and Melbourne Water (or any other management authority), no conformation has been provided to the adjoining landowner that the existing fence may stay. DELWP and Melbourne Water have notified some landowners (with agreements) they now require the existing fences to be demolished and new fences be erected on the boundary between the Crown Reserve and their property. This is contrary to their original agreement and the Government's Response to the Yellingbo Investigation Final Report.

No information of planned revegetation program

No timetable has been provided to landowners with adjoining Crown Reserves about the roll out of the revegetation process and when it will affect the Crown Reserve adjoining their property, even though demands/deadlines for fencing have been made.

Increase in insurance premiums

Much of our region already has significant insurance premiums on assets due to bushfire management overlays (BMO & WMO) due to severe bushfire risk. The re-forestation of these river corridors will put considerable upward pressure on insurance premiums for the entire Upper Yarra Valley.

Significant drop in Property Values

Properties with river frontage have always attracted a premium price. Many current owners paid that premium price because of direct access to the waterway. Although the Crown reserve is not part of a private land title, it's often noted on a private title with a requirement that the property owner has a Crown License for use. The long standing (renewable) Crown land Water Frontage Licenses have always been viewed as secure tenure which created a much higher price for these properties. Due to the cancellation of these Crown licenses, property values have dropped considerably, up to six figure sums in some cases.

Bio-diversity Values will be degraded

The current high diversity values existing with current landowner management will be severely degraded when the inevitable wildfire, feral animal and pest invasion occurs.