



REPORT - HISTORY OF EVENTS

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Yellingbo Investigation and the Yellingbo Conservation Area

Introduction

The following report was prepared after investigations into the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) – Yellingbo Investigation by the Yarra Waterways Group.

It provides a summarized history of events surrounding the Yellingbo Investigation and the implementation of the VEAC Final Report by the Victorian Government. It also includes actions by the Victorian Government, DELWP, Yarra Ranges Council and private land owners with water frontage Crown land licenses or leases.



Date	Description of Events
24 November 2010	The Upper Yarra Mail announced on a front page article ' <i>the Labor Government plans for a new State Park "State Emblems Park" between the Dandenong Ranges National Park, Bunyip State Park and the Yarra River at Woori Yallock</i> '. This article appeared 3 days prior to the 2010 Victorian election.
20 February 2011	Yarra Ranges Council provided a written submission to VEAC supporting a thorough investigation of public land in the Yellingbo area, at the same time requesting that the terms of reference include a tenure blind assessment is conducted to include the interactions between private and public land. Council was encouraging the development and implementation of appropriate incentives for neighboring private landowners to provide for additional habitat for flora and fauna species in the area. Council also outlined the potential threat to biodiversity in the region, as a result of the increase in intensification of agriculture and horticulture due to the close proximity of the major population center of Melbourne. Council was also concerned that the proposed park could be negatively impacted by an increase in visitor numbers to the area. The report also covered the importance of introducing riparian corridors in the Upper Yarra areas east of Woori Yallock and Hoddles Creek.
August 2011	The new Liberal Coalition Government requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) carry out an investigation of public land in the Yellingbo area, focusing on its biodiversity and ecological values and arrangements to conserve and enhance these values.
6 December 2011	VEAC placed an advertisement in the Upper Yarra Mail announcing the investigation and seeking public submissions and registration of interest from individuals and groups by 20 February 2012. A brochure was also produced which was available from Council link offices. A limited postal distribution was also carried out.

Date	Description of Events
25 July 2012	The Minister granted an extension for the completion of the investigation from 25 February 2013 to 31 July 2013.
6 December 2012	A “Draft Proposals Paper” was produced on the investigation for public comment, with a closing date of 4 March 2013. Community briefing meetings were held at Yarra Junction on Saturday the 9th February 2013, at Emerald on Wednesday the 13th February and at Healesville on 23 rd of February.
6 February 2013	Yarra Ranges Council endorsed all recommendations in the report. Emphasizing the importance of Bio Diversity Conservation in the Shire. Council also stated that additional funding should be put into the strategic landscape assessment of fire risk and combined assessment of biodiversity conservation through the lens of fire ecology. They also raised the potential conflict between the recommendations (which prohibited horses and dogs entering the reserves) and the Shire's Equestrian Strategy 2001, but supported the removal of licensed grazing on stream frontages.
31 July 2013	The final report of VEAC was produced in July 2013 and submitted to Minister Ryan Smith (Liberal Coalition Government).
5 September 2013	The VEAC Yellingbo Report was tabled in Parliament.
March 2014	The Minister Ryan Smith published the Victorian Governments Response to the VEAC Yellingbo Investigation recommendations. This document provided a response to each recommendation, together with some qualifications.

Date	Description of Events
21 May 2015	Under the new Labor Government a generic letter from DELWP was sent out to some land owners with Water Frontage (Grazing) licenses addressed “dear licensee” informing them that their licenses were to be withdrawn on 30 June 2016.
30 November 2015	A 13 member coordinating committee was endorsed by the Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Water Lisa Neville MP. Yarra Ranges Council endorsed Cr Jim Child as a member of the Committee. All appointments were to 30 November 2018. The Labor Government announced Wes Fleming as the chairman from Flemings Nursery, but he resigned shortly after the first meeting. The Council selected 3 community representatives, all are conservationists and environmentalists, none were farmers or effected licensees. There is also no representation from the Business Community, the Tourism Sector, or the CFA.
24 March 2016	A second generic letter from DELWP was received by some landowners along the Yarra River confirming the cancellation of their leases on 30 June 2016.
9 June 2016	<p>A public meeting was called to discuss the Yellingbo Investigation implementation process. From a limited letter box distribution, 70 land owners attended at the SES depot in Wesburn. Most people knew nothing of the entire investigation. A committee was elected to represent the people present, and the main issues of concern were agreed to by the meeting being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increased Bushfire Risk. * Weed and feral pest issues. * Surveying of Crown reserve boundaries. * Fencing, who pays? * Recreational use of the Yarra.

Date	Description of Events
23 June 2016	Second public meeting is conducted at the Yarra Junction Primary School. 110 people attended, 80 became financial members of the newly formed Yarra Waterways Group (YWG). The meeting was again asked for a show of hands as to how many people knew about the VEAC investigation, not one hand was raised, the question was asked a second time, same result. The primary aim of the meeting was to inform people of the background, the issues the YWG Committee had selected to pursue and to give people the opportunity to speak and to ask questions. A letter of support for our group from Cindy Mc Leish MP to the Minister Lily D' Ambrosio was circulated to all present.
6 July 2016	DELWP advised Water Frontage (Grazing) License holders that a grace period of 3 months was being offered to allow licensees to erect fences prior to the new date of 30 September 2016 for cancellation.
25 July 2016	Landowners on all waterways with Crown frontages were advised by DELWP that all assets, such as sheds, pumps or stockpiles were to be removed within 3 months of the date of the letter. Once again a generic letter which some people received and others did not.
3 August 2016	A large number of letters were sent by land owners and license holders to Minister D' Ambrosio and Brad Battin MP. The majority of writers only received replies from DELWP managers, most letters did not address the content of the letters sent by effected land owners.

Summary

The intention to expand the Yellingbo Conservation Area into wide corridors of revegetated forest along the Yarra River (and most tributaries) was concealed from the community and effected land owners during the investigation and public consultation process.

The YWG believes the push to expand the Yellingbo Conservation Area into the heart of the Upper Yarra Valley came from the previous Yarra Ranges Council, due to the submission they made to the VEAC dated on the 20th of February 2011.

The YWG believes the Yellingbo Investigation conducted by the VEAC was flawed for the following reasons.

- The investigation didn't include current custodians of the Crown water frontage reserves (farmers, licensees & adjoining land owners) who have been custodians for over 100 years.
- No in depth or independent bushfire assessment was done that covered the increased risks of revegetating large corridors of forest connecting over 15 towns with current state parks and the Yarra Ranges National Park.
- No major study or assessment was undertaken to identify the impact such a large scale change to the geography of the Yarra Valley would have on the region as a whole. Any such study would have included agriculture, tourism, employment, business and community safety.