


Cindy McLeish MP

State Member for **Eildon**



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Hon Lily D'Ambrosio
Minister for Environment, Climate Change & Water
Level 17, 8 Nicholson Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002


Dear Minister,

Re: Yellingbo Conservation Area and Cancellation of Crown Land Water Frontage Licences

I write to further concerns from a number of constituents in the Upper Yarra with regard to the proposed cancellation of Crown Land Water Frontage Licences. I am disappointed to have to do so as when this project was first brought to my attention I was informed through the Department that the affected land owners were on board with the decision and process. I do not believe this to be the case at all.

My constituents received a letter from DELWP informing them that the creation of the Yellingbo Conservation Area, which extends to and includes many properties in the Upper Yarra, will see their water frontage licences phased out by June 2018. More recently they received letters informing them that their water frontage licences will cease as of 30 June 2016.

I recently met with a number of landowners affected by this decision at their property so I can understand the exact nature and context around their areas of concern. I have also been contacted by other landowners. All are very upset. I understand that there has also been a community meeting about the matter with a further meeting scheduled later this month.

The landowners have been farming and maintaining their properties adjoining the crown land in question for some considerable time, in some instances for well over 100 years. Being licence holders for the crown land they have well maintained the areas under licence as is their responsibility. This includes noxious weed control, tree planting, fencing off areas, revegetation and ongoing maintenance. They argue that they have maintained crown land water frontages at their own costs and appropriately cared for and maintained a riparian wildlife corridor.

The landowners believe this decision fails to recognise the care and maintenance they have provided for many years in looking after these areas. They are dismayed that they have not been consulted in this process. To add insult to injury a recent letter informs them that whilst they will no longer have access to the water frontage, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water are keen for them to continue to be involved in protecting the river.

A number of specific concerns have been raised with me. These include:

- The lack of consultation with landowners over the proposed Yellingbo Conservation Area and its impact on their livelihoods.
- Increased bushfire risk as the river banks and adjoining land will become havens for weeds and feral pests and will not be maintained as effectively as their responsibility as licence holders enabled.
- The constant lineal vegetation which will lead to wick or lineal fire events as occurred in Gruyere in February 2009 bushfires.
- Failure to recognise the recreational use of the waterway
- Failure to address public rights of access to waterways through landowners properties
- The high cost of fencing
- The security of properties and assets
- The Yellingbo Conservation Committee, appointed by Minister Neville until November 2018, not being representative of the community. Due to the importance of agriculture in the Yarra Ranges Shire from an economic point of view, combined with the inherent bushfire risk within this section of the Yarra Valley, landowners believe the committee should have representation from the agricultural/farming community, the business community and a representative from the Country Fire Authority.

My constituents also seek answers to a number of their questions:

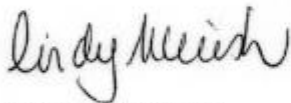
- What efforts were made to consult with people affected by the Yellingbo Conservation Area?
- What is the fire, weed and pest management program and plans for maintaining the river frontage areas?
- What is the estimated financial burden of the State maintaining these areas?
- Why is the area being reclaimed on the northern side of the river considerably greater than the southern side?

I understand some of my constituents have sent letters to you in regards to the cancellation of their water frontage licences and have called for a meeting with you to discuss their concerns.

I am also of the belief and concerned that only residents with crown land water frontage licences have been contacted about the Yellingbo Conservation Area. All other landowners with river/water frontage have not been informed so are unaware of the implementation and impact.

I seek your advice in this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Cindy McLeish MP
State Member for Eildon
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Communities & Volunteers.

17/6/17