

Peter M Cooper, [REDACTED] Gilderoy, VIC 3797

1st August 2016

Dear

Re: Yellingbo Conservation Area

I write to advise you of the serious & genuine concerns I have with regards to the above.

By background, I am a second generation farmer who has been living in Gilderoy for some 65 years with approaching 100 years of family history in this area. My property covers approx. 280 acres & has approximately 1km direct frontage to the beautiful Little Yarra River. As a practical conservationist & custodian of this land I have diligently & respectfully cared for the river bank within my property over this period by removing weeds, fallen bark & by clearing the river of blockages & debris at my own cost. I have experienced both the beauty & the danger that living in the World's second high risk fire area brings, including first-hand experience of bush fires & their impact on our Valley.

Whilst I have personal concerns regarding the potential loss of 15 acres of prime pasture to this proposed National Park within my property; my overriding concern is based around the unacceptable fire risk that this "corridor" will create. At approx. 60m wide, with no confirmed upkeep, it will develop into a "wick" of dense fuel along the valley floor, which presently doesn't exist. My experience of fire in the area is that it starts at Millgrove to the North of Gilderoy & then any ember attack leaps the valley where it is unable to find a footing due to the lack of fuel, & continues South over the Beenack Ridge. The thought that a river bank does not pose a fire hazard is frankly nonsense & since the removal of willows over the years I have personally witnessed the water table dropping by some 600mm & can attest to the drying out of the Valley over the years. The Royal Commission into bush fires cited the danger that road verges pose as "wicks" throughout the State & we now see regular upkeep & fuel reduction in these areas of risk. To date we have had no confirmation of how these new areas will be maintained to reduce the build-up of fuel (not to mention noxious weeds, feral animals & the like). Very simply you are placing my family & the community at severe risk with this proposal & it is unacceptable – we live in a Valley with one road in & out & you plan to turn a massive percentage of the Valley floor into a fire hazard!?

After 65 years in this area I consider that I carry significant wisdom of this valley & the surrounds & am insulted that during your planning neither myself nor other such individuals were consulted or invited to give advice – the name of this working project was both confusing & somewhat deceitful meaning I had no ability to input. Whilst I have both regard for academics & conservationists I am afraid that they are only a small part of any equation & the custodians of this land deserve better. I am aware of accounts of the indigenous tribes who used to frequent these valleys talking of large trees with grassed areas yet my understanding is that you will be attempting to revegetate the area

in a manner that bears no resemblance to its native state. As a side has anyone ever considered what happens to all of the plastic protection that is placed around plantings – I'm guessing they get washed into the river at the first flood. I have seen first-hand the "jungle" that is created when you fence off river frontages & unfortunately our community simply cannot rely on you to manage these areas effectively with our safety & well-being in mind.

I would also like to pose the following questions:

1. What actually are the fire, weed & pest management programs & plans to maintain river frontage areas & what is the estimated cost?
2. Will toxic chemical sprays be used to control weeds?
3. Who will pay for fencing?
4. Who & how quickly will fences be restored in the guaranteed annual event of a tree falling & breaking the fence?
5. By potentially removing my license I believe that my property value will be significantly impacted – is there compensation planned?
6. Will water pumping licenses still be maintained?

I implore you to please meet with myself & other Land owners to view first-hand the significant threat this Park will pose to our community. Regrettably at this stage, without any answers, I will be unable to comply with any requests or restrictions associated with my property & bring to your attention that legal advice is being sought to ensure accountability given the danger you are foisting upon us.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Cooper