



The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change  
Minister for Suburban Development

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Mr Rick Houlihan  
Chairman  
Yarra Waterways Group  
c/- PO Box 292  
YARRA JUNCTION VIC 3797

Ref: MIN021230



Dear Mr Houlihan

### **YELLINGBO CONSERVATION AREA**

Thank you for your letter of 24 October 2016 providing a copy of a Community Investigation Report into the bushfire risks of the proposed Yellingbo Conservation Area prepared by the Yarra Waterways Group.

The report provides a very comprehensive history of fire and potential bushfire risk in the Upper Yarra Valley area will be considered in the development of the Bushfire Management Plan.

As you are aware the report provides six recommendations to the Andrew's Labor Government for the Yellingbo Conservation Area. In response to those recommendations, the government made the following commitments:

- The government will not be undertaking any re-vegetation projects within the subject area identified on the attached map as part of the implementation of the Yellingbo Conservation Area until a detailed bushfire management planning process is undertaken.
- No fencing will be required on properties adjoining Crown land water frontage in areas where there is no domestic stock or horses to be contained. In addition, as you know, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is working with individual landowners on a site-by-site basis to work through their individual arrangements about boundaries, fences, riparian management licences and other issues.

The government has also set aside \$3.2 million to implement the Yellingbo Conservation Area. Funding for on ground works, including the Priority Weeds and Pests program, is now available for immediate implementation. Further information about the program is available at [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au)

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has engaged a consultant to run a community-led process to develop bushfire management recommendations for the Yellingbo Conservation Area with the assistance of two independent fire experts. Importantly, this will ensure bushfire management planning will only be undertaken with proper expert assistance. This process began with a review of the proposed rehabilitation of Haining Farm at a Don Valley community meeting on 10 December 2016. I appreciate your assistance in setting up this meeting. The bushfire management recommendations will then be used to develop a bushfire management plan for the

entire Yellingbo Investigation Area. This plan will be prepared with the assistance of experts in bushfire management planning.

In your letter, you have indicated your support for the Yarra Ranges Council proposal to reduce the size of the Yellingbo Investigation Area to that identified in the proposed Terms of Reference for the Yellingbo Investigation, released for public comment on 22 June 2011. Council's justification for the proposal include concerns about:

- inadequate resourcing
- impact on adjoining landowners, including fencing requirements, and pest plants and animals
- fire management planning and increased fuel loads
- low levels of understanding and engagement of the affected landowners.

I have considered this request and wish to advise that I do not support Council's proposal. The size of the Yellingbo Investigation Area will remain consistent with that in the *Victorian Government Response to the Victorian Environment Assessment Council's (VEAC) Yellingbo Investigation Final Report March 2014*.

I am committed to much better community engagement in the implementation of the Yellingbo Conservation Area, in particular listening and responding to the concerns of local residents. Following my meeting with the Yarra Waterways Group and other members of the communities of Woori Yallock, Yarra Junction, Launching Place, Don Valley, Millgrove and Wesburn, and given the concerns raised about increasing bushfire risk, I have decided to limit the amount of re-vegetation that can occur on Crown land in the area identified on the attached map as the 'subject area'. In the subject area, re-vegetation of Crown land will be restricted to a maximum of 10 meters from either side of the Yarra River and tributaries in the streamside areas. A lesser area will be re-vegetated if determined through bushfire management planning, to ensure that there is no material increase in bushfire risk and that priority is given to the protection of human life and private property.

This new scaled-back approach supports the considerable work already underway to better engage and take on board the input of local communities in the management of the Yellingbo Conservation Area, including Haining Farm. This includes the community bushfire management planning process and the broader concept planning, which will address matters such as pest and weed control, protection of priority habitat and permitted recreational use. Furthermore, it will complement the consultations underway with individual landholders to enable them to continue involvement in the management of the land through the taking up of a riparian management licence. The riparian management licence will be issued for a period of up to 10 years. Under these licences, grazing may be considered as a management tool to improve the quality of the riparian area.

I am pleased to advise that I have also strengthened membership of the Yellingbo Conservation Area Coordinating Committee by including a new member from the Country Fire Authority and an additional community representative nominated by Yarra Ranges Council.

Thank you once again for providing me with a copy of the Community Investigation Report and for your continued dedication to representing the views of the community. If you would like more information about this matter, please call Victoria Purdue, Project Manager, Yellingbo Conservation Area on 0419 115 636 or email [victoria.purdue@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:victoria.purdue@delwp.vic.gov.au)

Yours sincerely



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