

National Parks

Advisory Council



Annual Report
2005-06

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Melbourne, September 2006

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Front cover: Rainforest Gallery, Yarra Ranges National Park (Photo: Ian Harris)

INTRODUCTION

The National Parks Advisory Council is responsible for advising the Minister on the administration of the *National Parks Act 1975*. Council is well placed to provide this advice given its regionally orientated membership and its broadly based expertise and experience.

This report of the performance of Council's functions in the year ended 30 June 2006 is submitted to the Minister for Environment in accordance with section 11(1)(c) of the National Parks Act.

It highlights the major theme considered by Council during the year, namely community engagement in park management. Council adopted this theme as it considered that successful engagement of the community by park managers is vital for the future of Victoria's outstanding parks and protected areas.

The 132 parks and other areas managed under provisions of the National Parks Act form a magnificent parks system covering nearly 3.3 million hectares. The parks system provides the cornerstone for biodiversity conservation in Victoria, protecting areas that are substantially representative of the natural environments occurring on public land. In addition, it provides a diverse range of outdoor recreation opportunities, focusing on environmental appreciation, enjoyed by millions of visitors annually.

Council supported the State Government's recent expansion of the national parks network, in particular the creation of the Great Otway National Park and Point Nepean National Park. It noted the ongoing benefits arising from success of the State's outstanding marine national parks and marine sanctuaries and the expansion of parks in the box-ironbark region, created in 2002.

Legislation that extended the parks system in 2005-06, supported by Council was:

- the *National Parks (Point Nepean) Act 2005*, which established Point Nepean National Park incorporating former Commonwealth land
- the *National Parks (Otways and Other Amendments) Act 2005*, which created the Great Otway National Park.

The National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill, which will add 400 ha to the parks system and improve the provisions relating to offences in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries, was introduced into Parliament during the year.

The increase in size of and complexity of the parks system requires increased resourcing for management. Council therefore welcomed the Government's decision to increase funding for the protection and improvement of this network as an initial step in this direction.



Ian Harris
Convenor
September 2006

ROLE OF COUNCIL

Under section 11 of the National Parks Act the functions of Council are to:

- advise the Minister generally in relation to the administration of the Act and on particular matters in relation to that administration on which the Minister seeks its advice
- advise the Minister on any proposed excision from a park referred to it by the Minister
- submit to the Minister within three months after each year ending on 30 June a report on the performance of its functions during that year.

In addition to these functions the Minister is required to seek advice from Council on certain leases, licences and consents for particular activities within parks.

The Act governs the protection and management of Victoria's parks system. It provides a strong framework for ensuring that the use and management of the parks are compatible with the long-term maintenance of their natural and cultural values.

The Secretary to the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible under the Act for ensuring the appropriate management of parks in accordance with the Act. Parks Victoria, established under the *Parks Victoria Act 1998*, manages the parks under a management agreement with the Secretary.

MEMBERSHIP

Council consists of ten members of whom—

- one is a nominee of the Secretary to DSE
- one is the Director of National Parks (defined under the Act as the Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria)
- eight are appointed by the Governor in Council of whom—
 - (a) two must be persons with skills or experience relating to the preservation and the protection of parks
 - (b) one must be a person who is a professor or teacher of ecology, biology or earth science at a university in Victoria
 - (c) one must be a person with experience in local government who

resides in a municipality in which there is a park

- (d) four must be persons with experience in matters affecting the interests of the community.

The member categories are described in full in the National Parks Act.

Changes in membership during 2005-06

Council members are appointed for a period of up to three years, and may be re-appointed. The terms of office of two members, Mrs Deirdre Slattery and Ms Jan Palmer, expired on 30 November 2005. Another member, Mr Tom Guthrie resigned in December 2005.

Mr Guthrie was a member of Council for 12 years and the Convenor for 5 years. In particular, he provided insight on the issue of ending grazing in the Alpine National Park. Ms Jan Palmer was a member of Council for 6 years and had experience in local government. Both contributions are acknowledged and greatly appreciated.

The Governor in Council appointed Mrs Heather Gee (from 1 December 2005 until 30 November 2007) and Mr Brian Martin (from 11 April until 30 November 2007) as new members. Mrs Deirdre Slattery was re-appointed as a member (from 1 December 2005 until 30 November 2006). The expiry of appointments has now been aligned in two groups (i.e. the terms of four members expire in 2006 and the terms of another four in 2007).

Current members

The members of Council as at 30 June 2006 were:

- *Mr Ian Harris* (Convenor), community representative – metropolitan
- *Mr Tim Allen*, community representative – metropolitan
- *Mr Damein Bell*, community representative – rural
- *Mrs Debra Bray*, community representative – rural
- *Mr John Burley*, Director, Pest Management, DSE (nominee of the Secretary, DSE)
- *Mrs Heather Gee*, person with experience in local government who resides in a municipality in which there is a park

- *Dr Ruth Lawrence*, university professor or teacher of ecology, biology or earth science
- *Mr Brian Martin*, person with skills or experience relating to the preservation and protection of parks
- *Mrs Deirdre Slattery*, person with skills or experience relating to the preservation and protection of parks
- *Mr Mark Stone*, Director of National Parks (Chief Executive Officer of Parks Victoria).

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

During the year Council held five meetings, conducted two inspections of parks and met with the Board of Parks Victoria (on 30 September 2005).

Meeting numbers and dates were:

	2005		2006
226	29 July	229	10 February
227	9 September	230	2 June
228	9 December		

The parks inspected and dates of inspection were:

- 27 & 28 October 2005
Wilson's Promontory National Park, Corner Inlet and Nooramunga marine and coastal parks and the State Coal Mine, Wonthaggi
- 20 & 21 April 2006
Dandenong and Yarra Ranges national parks, Bunyip State Park and Kurth Kiln Regional Park.

Through its meetings and inspections, Council is able to provide its views on a range of issues. These views form the basis of this report. Council acknowledges that there are many other aspects of park management that the report does not cover. Further information on management of the parks system is available in the *National Parks Act Annual Report 2006* and in Parks Victoria's 2005-06 Annual Report.

Statutory responsibilities and other submissions

During the year Council advised the Minister on matters as required under the National Parks Act and provided other advice gained from its work program to relevant authorities, as follows:

Statutory

Section 11(1)(aa) of the National Parks Act

- proposed minor excisions from several existing parks as part of the National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill in order to rationalise roads, excise land not required for park purposes and correct boundaries – *not opposed*

Sections 19(2)(b) and 19(3)(b) of the National Parks Act

- proposed lease of Thurra and Mueller River Campgrounds, Croajingolong National Park – *supported provided that the park management plan continues to be the mechanism to determine the number of campsites*
- proposed lease of RSL Recreation Hut (Zumsteins), Grampians National Park – *supported with the recommendation that options for phasing out the use of the hut and removing it from the park be considered when the park management plan is revised*
- proposed lease of Traralgon Secondary College Camp (Welcola), Alpine National Park – *supported with recommendations for improving the environmental condition of the grounds*

Section 40(3) of the National Parks Act

- application for consent by Nexus Energy Ltd to directionally drill through, but below the surface of, the Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park to explore for hydrocarbons – *not opposed subject to conditions to protect the park*
- application for consent by Essential Petroleum Resources Limited to undertake seismic surveying in Lower Glenelg National Park – *not opposed subject to comprehensive conditions to protect the park's values and the experience of visitors*

Other submissions

- comments on the Public Land Tour Operator and Activity Provider Licence Reform Project. Council welcomed the overall scrutiny given to the licensing system for public land. Suggestions related to equity for park visitors, the need to protect park values and visitor experience, monitoring, interpretation

and making revenue available for park management.

Program for 2005-06

Council considered that a thematic approach was an effective way of focusing its deliberations, both for meetings and park inspections. In choosing the theme of community engagement, Council recognised that this is a growing and potentially powerful means of gaining community participation in Victoria's natural and culturally important places and increasing support for their management as protected areas. In particular, Council considered the scope of Parks Victoria's community engagement program.

Presentations received at Council meetings

- Parks Victoria's management plans and advisory committees – Graeme Davis, Linda Greenwood and Anne van de Meene, Parks Victoria
- Pt Nepean, a case study of the community engagement process – Di Marshall, DSE
- Developing better relationships with partners and the community – Frankie MacLennan, DSE
- Community engagement in fire management – Nicole Hunter, DSE
- Community participation in parks management – Kerry Murphy, Parks Victoria.

Presentations received on field trips

- Community partnerships – Kate Millar, Parks Victoria
- The Friends of the State Coal Mine – Mike Wellings, President
- Community engagement, South Gippsland marine national parks and coastal parks – Kate Millar, Ross Williamson and Jonathan Stevenson, Parks Victoria
- Bush Forums – Ross Williamson, Parks Victoria
- Enhancing visitor experience and creating advocates – Graeme Baxter and Ryan Duffy, Parks Victoria
- Tidal River Open Space Project – Dana Hughes, originator
- Wilsons Promontory Advisory Group – John Davis, President
- Lessons learnt from the fire – Andrew Marshall, Parks Victoria

- Track reconstruction and community consultation – Roger Fenwick, Parks Victoria
- Volunteers monitoring fire recovery – Mary Ellis, Wilsons Promontory Advisory Group
- The local community and the fire – Claire Buckland, South Gippsland Shire Council
- Dandenong Ranges National Park and the community – Siobhan Rogan and Matt Hoogland, Parks Victoria
- Fire safety messages/play – Anthony Hester and Craig Parsons, Parks Victoria
- Engaging communities about fire through community arts – Bev McAlister, Dandenong Ranges Music Council
- Partnerships with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire Ready Victoria – Rebecca Mouy, CFA
- Creating partnerships with the community about fire management on public land – Anthony Hester, Parks Victoria
- Friends groups activities – Alfred and Ursula Klink (Friends of Kurth Kiln), Graeme Kidd (Vic Walk), Jasper and Carmel Hails (Friends of Gembrook Flora and Fauna), Bruce King (Friends of Bunyip State Park)
- Bunyip Recreation Framework – Greg Young, Parks Victoria
- Caring for protected species – Lindsay McNaught, Friends of Bunyip Helmeted Honeyeaters
- Catchment management agreement with Melbourne Water – David Nugent, Parks Victoria and Mario Malovic and Jack Snodgrass (Melbourne Water)
- Management of a picnic area within the water catchment – Glenn Mawson, Parks Victoria
- Fire and pest plant/animal management in the park and catchment – Jon Gwilt and Glenn Mawson, Parks Victoria and Jack Snodgrass, Melbourne Water
- Community partnership in development of recreational opportunities – David Nugent, Parks Victoria.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PARKS

In line with Council's theme of community engagement in parks, Council's observations are highlighted in this section with the key recommendations being shown in italics.

Community engagement includes processes adopted for working with groups of people affiliated by geographical location, shared interests, values, experiences or traditions.

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) has developed the Public Participation Spectrum to demonstrate the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities. It identifies five stages of engagement that move towards an increased level of public participation (inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower). The stages are used as a framework for Council's observations.

Ideally, park managers can increase the community capacity to engage at higher levels (i.e. move from inform to empower). In practice, a particular level of participation may work well to achieve the desired outcome. Members of the public may not wish to be engaged beyond a threshold level on some issues and there may be statutory constraints or other limitations to public participation for others.

Inform

The first stage of community engagement is to provide people with balanced and objective information to assist them to observe and appreciate park values. This will provide them with a sound basis to understand management decisions.

For park visitors, this is done through the traditional tools of interpretation. Parks Victoria provides a range of interpretive information: Park Notes, guided activities in parks, interpretative displays, the Parks Victoria website and news articles. These materials enhance visitor experience and may create advocates for the protection of parks.

The several examples of interpretative information considered by Council were of varying quality and maintenance standard. For example, the displays for the Rainforest Gallery Walk in Yarra Ranges National Park were in need of replacement. Council noted that both expensive park assets and

simple basic materials without adequate maintenance funding can create a poor image.

Information should also be seen as a two-way flow. It was important for parks staff to recognise community knowledge and ideas about protected areas. This includes people's attachment to place, oral and written history and prior experience of recently protected areas.

Council recognised that the role of Parks Victoria also includes long term engagement with local communities on many issues. This requires different information methods than those appropriate for occasional park visitors. For example, Parks Victoria has employed a community engagement officer for the metropolitan region to deliver programs on fire management and preparedness.

Other examples observed by Council included the support by Parks Victoria for the Dandenong Ranges Music Council production of the concert 'The Fire Cycle'. A puppet show 'Fire Fire' produced by Parks Victoria as part of the interpretation holiday program for the Dandenong Ranges National Park also conveyed messages on fire safety, the role of fire in the environment and the purpose of fuel reduction burning.

Government agencies often generated information that provided a basis to understanding ecological and management issues. Council believed the onus is on management authorities to make this information available to the public in a relevant and 'user friendly' form.

Council:

- *emphasises the need for Parks Victoria to recognise the value of a knowledgeable community and its own role in assisting that process through making scientific and management information available, relevant and 'user friendly'*
- *emphasises the need to clarify the differences between programs required for interpretive information for park visitors and those required for community engagement aimed at increasing understanding of ecological principles and current park issues*
- *emphasises that rangers play a crucial role in community engagement and*

that staff training and staff continuity are important aspects of the process

- *emphasises that park interpretation infrastructure and other community engagement tools need review, evaluation and ongoing investment to ensure that they achieve effective outcomes*
- *supports the strategic use of the arts as a valuable tool in engaging the community on protected areas*
- *urges that the work achieved by the Parks Victoria school education centres (at Wilsons Promontory, Grampians and Dandenong Ranges national parks) be enhanced by a statewide program of support for school education that can be used in all parks*
- *encourages Parks Victoria to assist teachers, tour operators and other key stakeholders in understanding park management actions and using this understanding to reinforce messages and become advocates for parks.*

Consult

The second stage of community engagement is consultation. To consult is to obtain feedback on project alternatives and/or decisions. It is a valuable component of park management because it:

- enables stakeholders and the community to be better informed and to understand decisions and/or policy
- enables park managers to understand local needs, values, interests and skills
- helps to identify issues of mutual concern which may not otherwise have been considered
- ensures commitment and greater ownership of outcomes by stakeholders and the community and greater acceptance of the land managers
- assists different groups in the community to better understand and consider the views of others.

The National Parks Act requires the preparation of a management plan for each park and this has traditionally been considered a mechanism for the community to provide input through 'Have your say' opportunities, issues/options papers and comments on draft plans.

Council was briefed on Parks Victoria's review of the public consultation processes for park management plans. Some changes that Parks Victoria has made as a result are:

- earlier notification of key stakeholders regarding the commencement of plans in the Parkweb and local media
- earlier consultation (e.g. through 'Have your say' and issues papers) before the publication of the draft plan
- more face to face consultation through local workshops/information sessions
- responding to input to the draft plan by providing an explanation of changes from the draft to final plan.

Council commended this responsiveness to community feedback. However, Council noted there is still a general loss of momentum for engaging the community after a management plan is approved. Council considers the management plans for marine national parks and marine sanctuaries released recently present an opportunity for continued community involvement and partnerships. It encourages Parks Victoria to commit staff and resources towards this outcome.

The success or failure of a management decision may depend on the effectiveness of consultation. For example, during its inspection of Yarra Ranges National Park, Council was informed of the adverse public reaction that followed inadequate consultation over closure of Fernshaw picnic ground. Groundwater pollution from the toilets was a potential threat to the closed catchment but this link was not well communicated to the public at the time. Due to the public response the facility has been reopened but on a smaller scale and with portable toilets.

The redundant O'Shannassy Aqueduct, Yarra Ranges National Park, has recently been added to the park and planning is in progress to open up the area for public use. In this case, community input is being sought to determine the stages and priorities for opening up sections of the track to users and in developing facilities.

Council was informed of several methods used by Parks Victoria to engage the community on weed and pest issues across land tenures. For example, roving weed teams operating in Gippsland and South West Victoria provide a visible work force

addressing threats to high values particularly on the private/public land interface. Bush forums where Parks Victoria appears as a participant in community life are also being trialed as an approach to the exchange of information on neighbour issues. For example, the Parks Victoria stand at the local Foster Christmas market enabled park staff to discuss management issues across land tenures with a wide cross section of the community.

Council:

- *recommends that Parks Victoria develops a strategic framework that outlines consultation processes and their appropriate use and includes the provision for appropriate staff preparation and training*
- *suggests each park should have a communication plan/strategy to facilitate a pro-active approach to resolving issues which includes a database of key stakeholders for the park*
- *advocates engaging the community after the management plan stage and incorporating recommendations for such engagement in the management plan*
- *commends Parks Victoria in developing various means of improving communication on good neighbour issues and suggests extending programs more widely across Victoria.*

Involve

The third stage of community engagement is to involve and work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public issues, concerns and ideas are consistently understood and considered.

Community advisory committees (section 14 of the National Parks Act) have been used for specific parks in the past to provide ongoing community input in the planning and management of parks. With the establishment of Parks Victoria, the committees under this provision are less relevant as they are required to report to the Secretary, DSE. Consequently, Parks Victoria has tended to establish advisory groups under informal administrative arrangements.

For example, an advisory group comprising 20 key stakeholders (e.g. walkers, horse riders, trail bike riders, four-wheel drivers,

residents and environmentalists) provided input to the Draft Recreation Framework for Bunyip State Park. It addressed the difficult issue surrounding the use of trail bikes in the park.

The Wilsons Promontory National Park Advisory Group was initially established in 2000. However, in speaking with some members, Council noted that the group would benefit from greater clarity regarding its role and the purpose of its advice.

Several advisory groups have been formed recently to advise on planning for the marine national parks and marine sanctuaries, box-ironbark parks and Point Nepean National Park. In the conduct of these groups, Council has observed the need to:

- *clarify the role of the groups and their terms of reference and manage expectations*
- *balance input from group members (address any stakeholder bias) and determine whether a group member will speak for themselves or represent a broader group*
- *ensure that all group members are heard through the use of effective facilitation*
- *ensure that Parks Victoria acts as a facilitator (not a stakeholder or group member)*
- *recognise the value of continuity of personnel and approach for this kind of engagement both during the process of developing the plan and in its implementation*
- *supply adequate resources in terms of staff time and skills.*

During its field inspections, Council observed that Friends groups are another mechanism for fostering community involvement in parks. For example, there are several Friends groups affiliated with Dandenong Ranges National Park. They are involved in several projects including Lyrebird counts, vegetation surveys and weed removal.

Issues faced by many Friends groups are static numbers, ageing members and meeting health and safety requirements. Council noted the absence of mechanisms for involving family and middle aged groups and suggested that events involving

rangers and encounters with wildlife are likely to be effective in attracting new groups in engagement processes.

Council:

- *strongly supports advisory groups having an ongoing role in park planning/management and recommends Parks Victoria clarify their role and provide a framework for their useful operation*
- *supports the work of Friends groups and recognises their value in park management*
- *suggests Parks Victoria develop a policy framework to provide better support and direction for Friends groups that includes advice on suitable projects, financial support and health and safety issues*
- *suggests park staff consider specific programs for inclusion of family groups in parks appreciation and protection.*

Collaborate

The fourth stage of community engagement is to collaborate or form a partnership with the community (or other agencies) in each aspect of the decision/project including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution(s).

Council was informed of some of the close working relationships that Parks Victoria has with other authorities. For example, it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2002 with the Shire of Yarra Ranges to facilitate collaboration on matters such as weeds/pests management, cultural opportunities and tourism. Potentially this is an important instrument and could form a model for use in other areas of the State. In practice, it appeared that this partnership is not being fully realised.

Parks Victoria has a close working relationship with Melbourne Water in managing the closed catchments within Yarra Ranges National Park. Melbourne Water is responsible for the road system and security arrangements (locked gates etc.) while Parks Victoria manages recreation and environmental matters (e.g. pest animal management). There is an exchange of information on works programs.

Council noted that these examples concentrated on collaboration for shared

management purposes and did not cover community education.

Council was informed of the program 'Fire Ready Victoria'. It is coordinated by the CFA and involves DSE and Parks Victoria (it is an outcome of the *Report of the Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires*). It aims to increase awareness of bushfires and the effective response by communities. Officers from the three organisations meet regularly, particularly during the fire season, and discuss operations (including fuel reduction burning). The aim is for a more seamless approach to fire management. It also uses existing networks (CFA) to inform the community.

Council:

- *supports the partnership approach (e.g. MoUs) to develop better work relationships with local government and other agencies to manage parks and adjacent public land*
- *sees merit in Parks Victoria developing greater commitment to partnerships that includes organisations committed to community education about shared issues (e.g. the Zoos and Trust for Nature)*
- *notes the potential gains of partnerships between management agencies (e.g. Catchment Management Authorities and DSE) are not being realised except in the fire area*
- *notes that some Parks Victoria staff are working with other agencies at a local level and that there could be more direction and support from Head Office.*

Empower

The fifth stage cited in community engagement is empowerment. To empower is to place part or all of the decision-making of a project in the hands of the public. It depends on high levels of knowledge and understanding by participants.

Although Council observed two case studies where a group was empowered to make management decisions for a project, it considered that this level of community engagement was more the exception than the rule.

One of these projects was the Tidal River Open Space Project for which the aim was to upgrade the existing playground facility

to reflect the natural character of Tidal River and provide an attractive gathering place.

The project group developed its own MoU with Parks Victoria, generated local interest in the project, employed landscape architects to submit designs, obtained funds and ultimately worked to deliver the project.

Council was informed about the Friends of the State Coal Mine, Wonthaggi (not an area under the Act), which undertake a significant component of the management of this cultural site and tourist venture.

StateMine2009 is a partnership between Parks Victoria, the community and the Friends group which is endeavouring to plan, fund, and implement a sustainable future direction for the State Coal Mine, with the aim to include underground tours.

Council noted there was potential, in some situations, to empower Indigenous people having a special relationship with land. The Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk consent determination and settlement over an area that includes part of Little Desert National Park is the first Native Title recognised in southern Australia. The Cooperative Management Agreement between the State and Yorta Yorta Nations includes Barmah State Park and this is now in operation. Parks Victoria's Draft Indigenous Partnership Strategy identifies opportunities for developing stronger partnerships in parks but, as yet, this is still in its early stages.

Council:

- *considers the proactive approach of the Tidal River Open Space Project Group achieved a highly beneficial result*
- *recognises that empowerment should not involve volunteers actually performing agency work in management and interpretation and recommends maintenance of adequate core skills by the management agency*
- *supports the rights of Indigenous people to be genuinely involved in management of land relating to their cultural heritage and hopes to see Indigenous partnerships develop further in park management in Victoria.*

THE PARKS SYSTEM

As at 30 June 2006 there were 132 areas managed under various provisions of the National Parks Act. These comprised 40 national parks, 3 wilderness parks, 27 State parks, 13 marine national parks, 11 marine sanctuaries, 11 marine and/or coastal parks or reserves, 11 other parks and reserves, and 16 non-scheduled areas. Their total area is nearly 3.3 million hectares. In addition, there are 19 wilderness zones and 22 remote and natural areas designated under the Act within 13 national parks, and 4 designated water supply catchment areas.

Key recommendations in relation to the parks system are highlighted in italics.

Point Nepean National Park

As a result of the *National Parks (Point Nepean) Act 2005*, a new Point Nepean National Park incorporating part of the existing Mornington Peninsula National Park was created on 17 August 2005. An Agreement between the State and the Commonwealth was also executed, which led to the transfer of the 205 ha former weapons range into the Park in March 2006. However, the 90 hectares encompassing the former Quarantine Station still lies outside the park.

Council strongly supports the protection of all of the public land at Point Nepean in an integrated Point Nepean National Park. It recommends that the State Government urge the Australian Government to transfer the quarantine station land to the State for incorporation in the Point Nepean National Park as soon as possible.

Great Otway National Park

As a result of the *National Parks (Otways and Other Amendments) Act 2005*, the Great Otway National Park was officially opened on 11 December 2005. It provides protection of old growth forest, threatened flora and fauna and many special tourist destinations. The 2005-06 State budget included an additional \$13.1 million over four years (and \$3.4 million per year ongoing) specifically for establishing and managing the national park and the adjacent Otway Forest Park, including employing 17 new staff.

Council commends the Government for establishing the Great Otway National Park and strongly supports ongoing funding initiatives for this park.

Other park areas

More than 2,800 ha were added to the following parks during the year: Dandenong Ranges, Kinglake, Mornington Peninsula, Port Campbell and Yarra Ranges national parks, Warrandyte State Park and Cape Liptrap Coastal Park. Most of this land comprised areas of Melbourne Water surplus land.

The National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill was introduced into Parliament in May 2006. Of note, it provides for additions of approximately 400 ha to six existing parks and improvements to the provisions relating to offences in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries.

The Bill excises sections of roads from Steiglitz Historic Park and Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and a small area from the national heritage park that was not required for park purposes. It also corrects the plans of Grampians and Great Otway National Parks and Beechworth Historic Park to exclude areas of freehold and associated roads. The excisions are minor and have minimal impact on the relevant parks. In accordance with section 11 of the National Parks Act, Council provided advice for tabling in Parliament.

Council strongly supports the enhancement of Victoria's parks and reserves system. Council did not oppose the excisions proposed in the National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill.

Land acquisitions

Properties that were purchased or donated in 2005-06 for addition to parks were:

- 0.09 ha near Cape Schanck, for addition to Mornington Peninsula National Park
- 0.18 ha near Pound Bend, for addition to Warrandyte State Park
- 0.9 ha on Coast Road, for addition to French Island National Park
- 0.6 ha on Gordons Road, for addition to Broken-Boosey State Park
- 12.2 ha near Ledcourt, for addition to Grampians National Park
- 8.9 ha on Bald Spur Road, for addition to Kinglake National Park

- 1.9 ha at Kalimna Park, for addition to Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park
- 113.5 ha near Eildon, for addition to Lake Eildon National Park.

These areas are being progressively added to the parks system, some being included in the National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Bill.

Council notes the ongoing work to acquire areas that complement the ecosystems protected in the parks system and recommends increased funding of this program.

Marine national parks and marine sanctuaries

Parks Victoria has management responsibility for the marine protected areas system covering around 5.3 per cent of Victoria's coastal waters in 13 marine national parks and 11 marine sanctuaries. Management planning for these parks has progressed, with 6 approved plans and 14 draft plans having been released to date.

Council welcomed statements in recent management plans for routine liaison with the community and relevant government agencies on progress of implementing plans and opportunities for input on priority setting and feedback on performance.

Council has previously recommended greater visible presence of rangers in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries. As wildfire emergency response has priority over marine area management and the busiest times unfortunately coincide, this continues to be a management issue.

Council:

- *supports the commitment by Parks Victoria to continue partnerships with other agencies and involve the community in management of marine national parks and marine sanctuaries (as outlined in recent plans)*
- *urges an increased ranger presence in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries especially during the summer period*
- *suggests that Parks Victoria re-establish the Statewide Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries Stakeholder Reference Group to provide input*

toward the ongoing management of the marine protected areas system.

EXPENDITURE

DSE staff provided administrative support to Council. Council complied with DSE policies in performing its functions throughout the reporting period. Financial and other information relating to the *Financial Management Act 1994* is included in DSE's Annual Report for 2005-06.

Expenditure incurred by Council in undertaking its responsibilities during the year was:

	2004-05	2005-06
Meeting fees	\$7,657	\$7,950
Other operating expenses	\$15,838	\$22,119
Total	\$23,495	\$30,069

WHISTLEBLOWERS PROTECTION ACT

The *Whistleblowers Protection Act 2001* is designed to protect people who disclose information about serious wrongdoing within the Victorian Public Sector and to provide a framework for the investigation of these matters.

The Protected Disclosure Coordinator for the Department of Sustainability and Environment acts as an agent for Council to receive disclosures under the Whistleblowers Protection Act, and applies departmental procedures in managing disclosures. Disclosures may also be made directly to the Ombudsman. The contact details for the Protected Disclosure Coordinator and Ombudsman are:

Deidre Egan, Protected Disclosure Coordinator
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The Ombudsman Victoria
Level 3, South Tower, 459 Collins Street,
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Council also thanks Parks Victoria's staff for providing information at Council meetings and field inspections. Their commitment to the parks they manage is vital in the protection of the parks system.

Further copies of this report and information on Council can be obtained from:

Annette Hatten, Executive Officer
National Parks Advisory Council
Level 2, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002.

