

# Bushwalking Victoria



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Project Director  
 Land & Biodiversity White Paper Project Team  
 Department of Sustainability and Environment  
 PO Box 500  
 East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Sir/Madam,

**BUSHWALKING VICTORIA (formerly VicWalk) - SUBMISSION ON THE  
 APRIL 2007 DSE CONSULTATION PAPER ENTITLED "LAND AND  
 BIODIVERSITY AT A TIME OF CLIMATE CHANGE"**

Bushwalking Victoria (BWV) is responding to the call for submissions contained in the subject consultation paper and thanks you for permitting individuals, and organizations such as ours, the opportunity to do so. We also appreciate your allowing sufficient lead time before the deadline of 22 June 2007 to permit stakeholders sufficient leeway to prepare meaningful answers to the questions your paper raises. It is my responsibility, as Convener of BWV's Bushwalking Environment Committee, to consult within the organization as necessary and provide submissions on such matters. I am accordingly writing on behalf of our organization in the representation which follows, and am conveying Bushwalking Victoria's views on the items discussed.

Bushwalking Victoria represents the common interests of over 80 Victorian bushwalking clubs, with in excess of 10,000 members. It also aims to represent the interests of all other walkers in Victoria as well as visiting walkers from interstate and overseas. One of the common interests of our clubs and their members is the conservation of the ecosystems and natural (particularly pristine) landscapes through which they walk, so that they can enjoy the maximum variety of native flora and fauna and unspoilt scenery the walking areas have to offer and ensure their preservation for future generations. Founded in 1934, as the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs we have a long history of active interest in conservation, including being one of a group of like-minded organizations pressing for legislation to create a comprehensive system of national parks in Victoria as early as the 1940s.

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*Bushwalking Victoria: Promotes bushwalking, engages in activities that add value to the community  
 and proactively represents the interests of all recreational bushwalkers*

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 Formerly Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs (VicWalk) Inc.

At the outset, let me congratulate DSE on the excellent quality and wide scope of the consultation paper, which covers a broad range of relevant issues in an articulate and interesting manner. That having been said, there are matters which we do not feel the report addresses, but *should*, given the nature of the problem it is setting out to solve. These points, and specific replies to questions you pose in the paper, form the basis for the rest of this representation.

You conclude, on the basis of “general scientific consensus”, and rightly in our view, that climate change is occurring, and that the potential results of this will include “Rising sea level and temperatures, water scarcity and increased severity of wildfire, storm events and associated flooding” (page 8). What you do not underscore is the weighty body of scientific evidence leading to the conclusion that superimposed on the natural warming associated with the interglacial period through which we are now passing are the heating effects associated with the release since the industrial revolution of greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere. Accordingly, your attack on the problems you are experiencing on the Victorian landscape should start with attempting to radically reduce those emissions in this State. We would contend that this consideration is *not* outside the terms of reference of your paper, indeed being integral to a comprehensive consideration of the subject matter, and could come in, for example, under your objective (page 4) to “Make sure Government policy and investment is responsive to new threats and opportunities” and your key policy question (also page 4), “What are the other threats and opportunities?” or under your objective to “Set the direction for Victorian Government policy and investment priorities in natural resources management ...”, with a particular emphasis on how you manage your brown coal and petroleum energy resources and apply yourself to examining and employing the use of less polluting alternatives like sun and wind.

What you are doing in this paper, in actuality, is accepting global warming, without taking on any responsibility or making any commitment to attempting to reduce the man-made elements which are accelerating it. You are embarking on treatment of the symptoms but not the cause. This aspect of the topic should be given due attention, ie crucial attention, in the ensuing Green and White Papers. Victoria is not Australia, and Australia is not the world, but every little bit helps in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and Victoria is not administratively or morally exempt from adding its own contribution in this global context. Also, Victorian State Labor representatives, and where possible, MPs from other parties and States/Territories, should fiercely lobby Federal parliamentarians and the Prime Minister with a view to getting the Kyoto Convention ratified by Australia, and, if possible, the US, whose dubious policies in this wise our present Liberal national government is slavishly and mindlessly aping.

Virtually all the questions you have raised in the Policy Questions section of the paper (pages 12-14) and indeed other areas of the document, have at least peripheral implications for bushwalking in that any improvements you achieve will help preserve the landscapes and ecosystems we love, but we have singled out those we consider of most immediate pertinence to the hiking fraternity in the comments which follow.

#### *How do communities value landscapes and seascapes as a whole?*

The bushwalking fraternity’s *raison d’être* is rooted in the pleasure it obtains from walking through and viewing natural landscapes and seascapes. It is an emotional and spiritual experience for our members, akin, we believe, to the sense of being at one with the land that our Aboriginal brothers and sisters talk about. For us it is like a liberating breath of fresh air after the confinement and pollution of the city. It is the visual equivalent of a symphony that resonates with the rhythms of our very being. We have no monopoly on this feeling, which has analogies in every piece of landscape or seascape art that adorns an urban wall, and initially inspired the artist

to attempt to capture the mood on canvas. Landscapes and seascapes provide us with an opportunity to revisit our aesthetic sensibilities, recharge our emotional batteries, and to draw strength from them, better enabling us to endure the prosaic and the pedestrian humdrum of other aspects of our lives: they provide us with both escape and inspiration. To us they are food for the spirit, as essential in their way as nutrients to the body. 'Man cannot live by bread alone' and we would face atrophy of our souls, marasmus of our very beings, without the vital stimulation which these panoramas provide. We are not yet emotional flatliners when we can appreciate the beauty and feel uplifted by the very essence of natural landscapes and seascapes.

*What are the different ways biodiversity is valued?*

In a similar manner as we gain pleasure from landscapes and seascapes, walkers derive joy from encounters with a variety of native birds and animals, wildflowers, shrubs and trees as we hike tracks and trails through the bush – the greater the variety the better. These chance meetings bring feelings of excitement or pleasant surprise, as well as appreciation and admiration of the aesthetic beauty which such flora and fauna bring to the landscape. Without such encounters to punctuate our walks, our pastime can become impoverished and dull.

*How can we define an ecologically sustainable landscape or seascape?*

In the purest sense, we would define an ecologically sustainable landscape or seascape as one which has been left alone to let nature take its course. Apart from in a limited number of protected wilderness areas, such ecologies no longer exist. Inherent in the picture of an ecologically sustainable landscape or seascape is the absence of introduced weeds and animals, so that to return such a feature to as near to the pristine conditions it originally enjoyed, human intervention may be required. If this activity succeeds in eradicating introduced flora and fauna, and native plants and animals regain the numbers they had initially (with or without measures like reforestation and captive breeding programs), then this too might be considered an ecologically sustainable landscape or seascape even although it is not strictly pristine. As walkers, we like to see landscapes and seascapes that have not been changed by human intervention, but, failing that, landscapes that have been very little altered. We see activities like grazing, logging and mining as inimical to the concept of an *ecologically* sustainable landscape or seascape although they may very well be *economically* sustainable.

*How should we manage rare and threatened species and respond to threatening processes?*

Restoration of original habitat is crucial to the survival of a number of threatened species, eg the Regent and Helmeted Honeyeaters and Leadbeaters possum, and some of this is occurring through the efforts of friends' groups, school groups, local councils and community organizations, other volunteers and bodies like Parks Victoria. But more effort is needed in this area, particularly from Government sources; the ball is squarely in your court.

Large-scale pest extermination programs like the Southern Ark fox-baiting exercise have the potential to bring back native fauna in their original numbers, and are strongly supported by VicWalk. We note that this kind of plan is being extended to other areas, eg through Glenelg Ark, and we would like to see it used all over the State. We would also like to see other eradication programs attacked on a similar broad front, eg in relation to feral cats, dogs (possibly excluding dingoes) and pigs as well as various varieties of introduced weeds including blackberries and pussy willow. It is our observation, however, that such schemes are piecemeal at present; we think you are on the right track, but more of the same is needed – you need to put more of your money where your mouth is.

*How will we deal with the impacts of climate change on catchments and coastal ecosystems?*

The approaches here will need to be vastly different for catchments, which are drying up, and coastal ecosystems which will be flooded by rising sea levels. Water is a necessity of life, and it may be that in terms of water for human drinking and personal hygiene the concept of catchments will have to largely give way to other water-producing measures like conversion of salt water to fresh water and massive recycling of used water (including sewage) through purification processes, currently only occurring in specific areas, eg London in relation to the latter, but needing to become progressively more widespread as global warming dictates. (Note that the population of Greater London is about 12 million, about the same as the total figure for Australians living in our nation's capital cities, so what has proved feasible for London in terms of water recycling may well be equally feasible for our capital cities' populations.) These processes use energy, and need to be coupled with the employment of alternative sources of power which will not add to greenhouse gas emissions – otherwise the situation could deteriorate into a vicious circle. Were such programs to be utilized at full swing, there may be the potential for a number of catchments to be decommissioned and left to native flora and fauna (such as has happened at Lake Mokoan), releasing them from competition with man for scarce water resources and giving them a commensurably better chance of survival in the face of accelerating desiccation.

As for coastal ecosystems, there seems little that can be done other than to decelerate the growth of the greenhouse gas emissions which are contributing to polar ice-melt and related sea level rises.

*How will we deal with increasing fire risks, and the effects this will have on biodiversity?*

Increasing **fire risks** will have **no** effect on biodiversity, but **more fires** certainly may. Victoria has excellent fire management regulation and documentation, but despite this the State has experienced two huge conflagrations in the last four years. There is not much point attempting to improve the management literature, which is near perfect though possibly in need of simplification, but the conversion of the rhetoric into action is surely an area where there is room for improvement. Perhaps the answer lies in improved recruitment and better training of official and voluntary personnel, more staffed fire observation posts, increased purchase and greater employment of mechanical aids for fire-fighting, more use of technology in its co-ordination, more streamlined access to other units from intrastate, interstate and overseas, together with more serious legal outcomes for arsonists, negligent campers and irresponsible smokers who have caused fires, both as a punishment for them and a deterrent to others. Excellence in this sphere will not be attained without more money being thrown at the problem.

Where fire has had very serious effects on biodiversity, ie where natural regeneration like epicormic growth has not occurred, programs must be put in place to attempt to regenerate the species which have been decimated, through such measures as vigorous replanting in relation to the affected native flora, and captive breeding programs for the relevant native fauna.

*How can we manage the impact of increased drought, floods and temperature rises on native species and introduced plants and other pests?*

It is inevitable that some plants and animals will flourish under global warming conditions and others will decline. In order to attempt to retain current ecosystems, programs of pest eradication (both floral and faunal) should be maintained and enhanced.

*How do we meet the demands of an increasing population within the ecological boundaries of our land and water resources?*

Again there is an assumption in your paper, in this case that population will increase, and that will no doubt be true unless we adopt Draconian measures like China's one child policy. However, we note that in the years ending December 2003, 2004 and 2005 (ABS 3101.0 – Australian Demographic Statistics December 2004 and December 2005), net overseas migration was the largest contributor to Victoria's population growth, so that if we didn't have overseas migration to this State we could reduce population growth by about half. Thus the rate of population growth in Victoria is to a large extent in our hands, without having to adopt a solution à la Chinese.

That aside, we shouldn't try to meet the population's needs within the *ecological* boundaries of our water resources (see *How will we deal with the impacts of climate change on catchments and coastal ecosystems?* above) but by judicious recycling and seawater conversion. As to land, if we can hold population growth down by reduced migration, we will not have so strong a pressure to clear more land on which to construct housing for them or for farming in order to sustain them. We have nothing against migrants, but in harrowing climatic times we may first have to look after those who are already here and only take in bona fide refugees. (Other countries may well gain some pleasure from such a move as we will not be creaming off some of their best tradespeople and professionals.) If, however, this causes the Victorian economy to slow down, so be it – we are talking about the survival of the people in our State, and that is more important.

*How do we best manage our landscapes in a competitive global market?*

Leave them alone. Undamaged landscapes in the long run will earn perpetual tourist dollars while extractive industries will bring in only transitory income and jeopardize our landscapes' ongoing tourist potential. Short-term income will pale in the face of long-term revenue.

*How do we deal with broader landscape threats including salinity, pests and weeds and soil acidity in a time of climate change?*

In much the same way as we are now (we know what is required), except that our efforts are currently piecemeal, and need to be more comprehensive, with more money needing to be poured in to redress these present and projected difficulties. Volunteer resources also need to be tapped to the maximum and effectively co-ordinated if we are to succeed now and into the future.

*What approaches are required to protect biodiversity and ecosystems in the face of increasing urban and peri-urban development pressure?*

See *How do we meet the demands of an increasing population within the ecologically sustainable boundaries of our land and water resources?* above. Yet again you make an assumption, this time that urban and peri-urban development pressure will continue, yet it could be slowed or perhaps even halted by the creation of more dual occupancy properties, building vertically rather than horizontally, and encouraging an apartment-dwelling ethos, such as exists overseas in cities like Athens, in order to discourage urban sprawl.

*How can we ensure that management of Victoria's national parks and reserves maintains their biodiversity and ecological integrity?*

From observation of its functioning we have arrived at the view that Parks Victoria is seriously underfunded, and cannot within its present resources guarantee the maintenance of the

biodiversity and ecological integrity of native plant and animal life within its boundaries. It cannot get on top of requirements like pest control, fire prevention, volunteer co-ordination, road and track maintenance, community education, reforestation, captive breeding of endangered species and policing of visitor behaviour because it plainly does not have the money or the staff to do it all. We hope that the Government does not expect that volunteer organizations will take up *all* the slack, because we would view that as an abdication of responsibility on their behalf if that were the case. We have joined with PV in some very useful and felicitous exercises, and are happy to help, but not just so that the Government can save money and declare a surplus on the strength of our labours, particularly when our joint efforts have still failed to overcome the problems. More than rhetoric is required – more money and greater action are needed.

*How can Government best prioritise investment in its management of public land?*

Fire control is a general overlay, since if you don't have that, you might as well pretty much forget about the rest. Given that as an accepted backdrop, the Government should first invest in programs to bring back animals and plants from the verge of extinction, which may entail all or some of pest eradication, habitat restoration, improvements to bio-corridors and captive breeding projects. Endangered, threatened and rare species should then receive priorities appropriate to their local scarcity. Also, if the Government wants to obtain revenue from national parks, it should prioritize spending on roads within their boundaries, which are typically characterized by gravel or dirt surfaces, potholes, corrugations, rocks, washouts, streambeds, ridges and (when damp) bogs, a nightmare for two-wheel drives and nurturing elitism by virtually only catering for those rich enough to own 4WDs. Road improvements should encourage visitors who in turn will contribute to the Government's coffers, hopefully leading to increased funding for programs which PV is vested with carrying out.

*What should be the Government's research investment priorities for land and biodiversity?*

- The effects of fires of different intensities and frequencies on different species of plants and animals
- The efficacy of different approaches to weed and feral animal eradication
- Original ecosystems, as a basis for returning altered systems to their original state
- Sustainable ecotourism and the associated revenue-raising potential of Victoria's national and State parks, reserves and forests
- Whether facilities (including decent roads) should be provided on the basis of the number of visitors, or whether the provision of quality facilities (including decent roads) will in fact attract larger numbers of visitors.

*What land management standards does the community expect of private landholders and government?*

Very high. With much of our biodiversity on private land, we expect landholders to look after the species on their properties by not grazing and/or clearing bio-corridors and other habitat critical to their survival and, in co-operation with government, which will provide financial and expert assistance, involving themselves in pest eradication and the recreating of original habitat where its absence is leading to a decline in particular species. For their part, we expect nothing less from Parks Victoria and other government organizations vested with looking after the State's public land.

These, in our view, are the questions, and answers, of most immediate relevance to bushwalking. No doubt organizations like VNPA and ACF, for which we have profound respect, will be addressing other aspects of your consultation paper.

We trust that you will genuinely take our views into account in formulating the upcoming Green Paper. When the Green Paper is issued, we will decide what further input we need to make to inform the eventual White Paper.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Robertson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Steve Robertson  
Convener, Bushwalking Environment Committee  
Bushwalking Victoria (VicWalk)