

# Prospectors & Miners Association of Victoria Inc. Bendigo Branch

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## **PMAV Bendigo Branch submission regarding The Draft Joint management plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks 18<sup>th</sup> June 2018**

The Bendigo Branch of the PMAV unfortunately can't support the Draft Management plan as it is currently presented. Our members, and the broader bush user community, have some significant issues and questions that need to be addressed.

The Bendigo Branch of the PMAV is generally supportive of the Dja Dja Wurrung managing the parks in question.

We support the Dja Dja Wurrung people having the right to protect their culturally significant and historic sites, the chance to reconnect with the land and generate opportunities to develop prosperity for the Dja Dja Wurrung people in general.

There is broad scope to build meaningful relationships and support each other moving forward. We could take land management board members on outings so they can get a feel for what we do, and how we go about it. We would also be interested in hosting guest speakers from the Dja Dja Wurrung community at our monthly meetings to help develop a better understanding of indigenous culture, sites and objects of significance.

The issues with in the Draft Management Plan that the PMAV and its members see that need attending to are as follows

### **Structural issues with the draft management plan**

The draft management Plan has no diagram or chart showing what place different departments and organizations will hold in the management hierarchy of the parks.

This structure should also outline who is accountable and responsible for the various aspects of management plan and how other user groups are placed within that chain of responsibility. This is a critical part to any successful management plan.

Within the draft management plan there are continued mentions of consultation with other user groups or interested parties. However, the Draft management plan has no systems or processes in place to ensure this consultation takes place or to ensure that any relevant information will be acknowledged and taken into account in decision making processes. These processes need to be open and transparent to help build mutual trust and respect between the land management board the various user groups, interested parties and the broader community. (this doesn't mean any one party will always get what they want but have had the opportunity to put a case forward and their case has been taken into account through the decision making process).

There is no transparent process or procedure within the management plan for complaints or grievances to be put forward by user groups or the broader community in general to the land management board.

### **Restrictions to access for Prospecting**

The PMAV and its members are constantly fighting to prevent reduced access for prospecting. Every time there is a change in land management we face further closures to prospecting areas. This management plan leads to access being denied to approx 12,000 hectares of crown land we can currently access.

We acknowledge that indigenous heritage and culturally significant sites should certainly be protected but the large scale closing off of areas as currently shown in the Draft management plan is not the answer. An approach targeting more sensitive specific areas would be more inclusive and appropriate.

The PMAV would support the land management board to help secure funding to possibly fence off significant features and areas and make them into points of interest that people will want to visit for tourism (i.e. information plaques or interactive tour apps).

The PMAV would also like to work with the Land Management board to try to offset any lost access areas with the opening of new areas that have gold prospectively so there is as a minimum no net loss to access for prospectors to gold producing land.

### **Restrictions to forms of Prospecting**

The draft management plan seems to hold a biased unduly negative view of 'wet' prospecting (panning and sluicing) and the environmental risk it poses. The fact is not a lot of people actually pan or sluice for gold and when spread across a large area this has minimal impact on the environment. If minors rites conditions are followed, the impact to the environment is even less. Rain events will produce more sediment disturbance and erosion than a large concentration of wet prospecting in one area.

The PMAV would like to spend time with the management team within the Joint Management Plan that will be responsible for decisions regarding this issue so we can demonstrate how little impact it really does to the environment.

The PMAV notes that there will always be individuals that do the wrong things. These people should of course be punished individually in line with current laws, not emplace blanket bans that punish everybody.

### **Healing and Remediation of old mining sites**

This is, and always will be, a significant issue for the PMAV, it's members and the broader community. .

The Draft management plan indicates that the land management board wants to decontaminate and revegetate or 'heal' the old mine workings (overall extent of these intentions needs to be included in the management plan).

Mercury contamination: Mercury contamination will largely be confined to water courses and areas where wash dirt was processed. Many times in recent history there have been plans to clean mercury from water courses and it was found that the clean-up process would be extremely costly, difficult and more detrimental to the environment than the small volumes of contaminant remaining in place.

Arsenic contamination: Arsenic is a naturally occurring material that occurs in the rock in our goldfields. Arsenic is released into the environment naturally but also through the process of crushing the gold bearing ore. Most of the mining activities that took place in these parks were alluvial which didn't require rock containing the arsenic to be crushed. Where hard rock mining was undertaken most of the processing of ore was either done by hand (very small quantities) or generally the ore was taken to state or private batteries for processing which for the most part are outside of the parks in question. To clean up Arsenic would be a very complicated process that would do a lot of damage to the environment and wouldn't remove all arsenic as it naturally occurs in the ground any way.

The 'Healing' or Revegetation of old mining sites such as surfacing, puddlers, costines, mullock heaps, mine shafts, early open cast reef mining, would lead to massive losses of historic, culturally significant sites and artefacts. These areas are of great importance both historically and culturally; people lived, fought and died in these areas and they should be preserved.

These gold fields not only hold personal, local and state significance but also global significance as there are no other goldfields such as these in the world, they are truly unique.

Destruction or loss of these places will also have a significant impact to tourism. People from interstate and around the world come to the 'Golden triangle', Bendigo, Ballarat and other areas to see these sites. They are world renowned and also something the Land Management board, Dja Dja Wurrung and the broader community can benefit from.

The PMAV's thoughts are that it isn't in the interests of the land management board, the Dja Dja Wurrung people, user groups or the broader community to lose any historic, cultural or heritage assets no matter what time or place in our history they come from.

The PMAV will work tirelessly to prevent damage to any cultural heritage.

## **Conclusions**

The PMAV Bendigo branch cannot accept or endorse the Draft management plan until the structural issues outlined above (structure, process and transparency )are dealt with and questions put to the Land Management board by Rita Bentley and Bill Shultz during the past two weeks have been answered in a definitive way.

If these issues can be worked through and included in a revised draft management plan prior to sign off by the minister, we would be supportive and would look forward to constructively working with the Land management board and the greater Dja Dja Wurrung community to build good relations between user groups. The PMAV would like to see the joint Management of the parks in question be successful for not only the the Dja Dja Wurrung people but the greater community.

Regards

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