# Meeting notes (approved)

Meeting: Grampians/Gariwerd National Park: Rock Climbing Roundtable #2

**Date:** Tuesday 8 October 2019

**Time:** 3.00pm – 6.00pm

**Location:** Deloitte 550 Bourke Street Melbourne

Roundtable Chair: Mark Dingle, Deloitte

### Attendees:

Group

Alpenverein Melbourne

Australian Climbing Association (Vic) Inc (ACAV)

Climbing QTs

LTO representative, Halls Gap

Melbourne University Mountaineering Club

**Outdoors Victoria** 

**RMIT Outdoors Club** 

Sport & Recreation Victoria

Sports Climbing Australia

**Sport Climbing Victoria** 

Victorian Climbing Club

### **Parks Victoria representation**

- Jeff Floyd, Board Chair
- Matthew Jackson, CEO
- Supporting Parks Victoria staff

### **Attachments**

- Attachment 1: Meeting Protocol
- Attachment 2: Formal statement, Parks Victoria's Board Chair 8 October 2019
- Attachment 3: Presentation on cultural heritage and environmental survey process, Parks Victoria

### Summary of meeting notes

The below summary has been prepared to support roundtable participants share the key discussion points and outcomes from meeting 2.

- Parks Victoria has convened the rock climbing roundtable to promote and strengthen the
  relationship between the Victorian rock climbing community and Parks Victoria and to progress
  action on access to climbing in the Grampians.
- Currently, environmental and cultural heritage assessments in the Grampians National Park are
  underway and will continue over several months. Outcomes of the assessments will help identify low
  and high-risk areas which may allow for recreational activities including rock climbing, to
  recommence.
- The next roundtable will be scheduled for early December 2019 and will be an opportunity to share and discuss key findings of the assessments to date.

### Welcome and introductions

- The Chair gave an Acknowledgement of Country, welcomed new participants and noted apologies.
- The Chair proposed that the Roundtable confirm meeting notes from 20 August 2019. ACAV noted it did not approve the meeting notes and had provided comments on the version circulated to other Roundtable participants. No other participants raised issues with the meeting notes.
- The Chair noted that the meeting notes were not comprehensive 'meeting minutes', but a summary that noted the primary topics discussed and points raised to inform development of the next meeting's agenda.
- The Chair voiced disappointment about the online commentary and correspondence following previous Roundtable, noting this was outside the principle of Chatham House Rules which was tabled in the previous meeting. It was agreed that a shared communique on the meeting be developed at the end of the meeting to support all groups to communicate openly and transparently with members.
- It was agreed by the group that if a member disagreed with any future reporting or correspondence, they would approach the Chair first. The Chair also noted that he is available to review any further formal member statements prior to distribution.

### Roundtable meeting protocols and membership

- One member noted the need for a Terms of Reference to be developed for the group that would detail how the group will move forward. The Chair advised a draft document to formalise Meeting Protocols and Membership has been developed and would be reviewed in the meeting (see Attachment 1).
- The Chair reiterated the purpose of the Roundtable was to create an invitational forum where rock climbing representatives and Parks Victoria could work through some issues and arrive at actions.
- The Chair shared Roundtable protocols, including purpose and objectives. A member noted it was important to ensure language reflected the focus on outcomes the group had, and the interests in the climbing community. It was agreed to update the Protocols to 'progress action on access to climbing in the Grampians'.
- One member requested that a report on the Roundtable be produced and voiced concerns about the lack of decision-making ability of the roundtable. Another member shared that while there is no defined

- decision-making power, 'we as a group can agree to do things' to progress the future of climbing.
- A further member voiced their appreciation for the opportunity for being involved in the Roundtable and felt it was a good opportunity to raise awareness of the issues and to work together to deliver tangible outcomes.
- The Chair reiterated that group had a commitment to outcomes and reporting through meeting notes and communique, and highlighted the importance of the focus on relationships and conversation.
- The Chair reiterated the importance of respecting Chatham House rules as a minimum requirement to engender trust and allow participants to contribute openly and freely.
- Parks Victoria's Chair and CEO advised that they (ie Chair and CEO) could be named along with statements as agreed, however no other Parks Victoria staff should be named.
- The Chair discussed the membership criteria and noted the need to keep the group to a manageable size. The Chair shared that a number of phone calls had taken place with climbers expressing a desire to be part of the roundtable.
- A member noted that there are a number of other climbers with in-depth knowledge of the Grampians that have requested to be part of the Roundtable. The Chair and Parks Victoria agreed that where suitable, specific individuals with in-depth knowledge could be invited to share in relevant discussions.

#### Opening Remarks from the Chair

- The Chair shared some reflections and observations on the situation in Gariwerd. Key points are noted below:
  - Parks Victoria has convened the Roundtable to promote and strengthen the relationship between the Victorian rock climbing community and Parks Victoria.
  - Gariwerd is the largest known site of Aboriginal art in south eastern Australia.
  - Gariwerd is also now recognised as an internationally significant rock climbing site with thousands of climbs established by individuals.
  - In the last 15 years Gariwerd has been the stage for a series of events that when pieced together highlight how natural disaster, population growth and visitor demand, combine to create a fragile state of affairs. Since 2006 every corner of Gariwerd has been affected by bushfire and/ or landslides.
  - Parks Victoria has a complex operating environment. There are at least 16 Acts, plus additional Regulations, Standards, Policies and Guidelines that Parks Victoria has accountability for in whole or in part.
  - Parks Victoria needs to manage the landscape in partnership with Traditional Owners three organisations who bring deep sources of knowledge and understanding.
  - One of the features of the decision by Parks Victoria to enforce restrictions in Special Protection Areas was the potential and observed impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage. The Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 defines cultural heritage as "Aboriginal places, Aboriginal objects and Aboriginal human remains" and extends to intangible heritage.
  - On 12 February 2019 Parks Victoria met with representatives of the climbing community in Halls Gap to inform them of the decision to enforce restrictions on recreational activities in Special Protection Areas in eight locations. The enforcement of these Special Protection Areas followed dialogue between Parks Victoria and Traditional Owner organisations and other relevant organisations.
  - The *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* requires that where a site of Aboriginal cultural heritage is identified, the site must be kept confidential. The Aboriginal Heritage Regulations (2018)

- state that land within 50 metres of a registered cultural heritage place is an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.
- Rock climbers can be an ally and advocate in protecting and managing the Parks estate.

### Opening Remarks from Parks Victoria's Board Chair

- Parks Victoria's Chair shared a written statement about rock climbing in the Grampians as the
- organisation's formal position (see Attachment 2).
- The Board Chair encouraged group participants to share relevant resources and materials via the engage@parks email, noting that resources received unless otherwise specified would be shared amongst the wider group.
- The Board Chair also provided an update on engagement with Traditional Owners, sharing that Traditional Owners had advised that while they enjoy regular contact with Parks Victoria, they do not wish to meet in a formal round table setting with Parks Victoria or the climbing community at this time. He noted that when Traditional Owners advise they are ready to meet, this will be communicated with the Roundtable and the opportunity for the group to meet with Traditional Owners explored.

#### Presentation on the cultural heritage surveys

- Presentations from Parks Victoria staff on the process for cultural heritage and environmental surveys were shared to the group. Refer to Attachment 3.
- Key presentation points are below:
  - The legislative context provides for protection of cultural heritage and empowering Traditional Owners as the protectors of this heritage.
  - Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP) are appointed by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council.
     In Victoria, there are 11 groups with RAP status. Other groups are still consulted by Parks Victoria and Aboriginal Victoria. Where there is not RAP status, Aboriginal Victoria is responsible for making decisions on the registration of cultural heritage in consultation with relevant parties.
  - Cultural heritage is being constantly rediscovered. Whether it's on private or public land, once
    identified there is an obligation to document and report this for assessment and registration
    with Aboriginal Victoria. If values are found there are a range of decision points, including a
    decision to not permit activities in the area, or to apply for a permit to harm which may allow
    activity to occur at the site under specific conditions.
  - For the Gariwerd landscape, Aboriginal Victoria is the decision-maker as there is not a RAP and may or may not permit an application to harm.
  - The organisation/person who has applied for the permit is responsible for complying with the conditions and there are serious penalties for not doing so.
  - Summerday Valley is an example of Aboriginal Victoria and Traditional Owners agreeing to a permit to harm. A detailed set of conditions support the permit to guide how the activity can continue without further harm.
  - Today, there is new technology that shows rock art that may not be visible to the naked eye.
- Participants asked about the type of harm in Summerday Valley. As such, while the below notes provide some specific examples they are not a complete list.
- Parks Victoria advised that the currently identified harm was physical and included bolts and chalk on some of the walls, as brushes can result in scratching and chalk has properties that over time break

- down. Permit conditions for allowing climbing in Summerday Valley restrict the use of brushes and bolts to prevent any further harm.
- Participants were interested in how harm to intangible cultural heritage values is determined. Parks
   Victoria shared that the recording of intangible heritage is new, with amendments made to the
   legislation in 2016 to enable recognition of intangible cultural heritage. As a guide, Traditional Owners
   provide advice as to whether harm to intangible heritage values has occurred. One member reflected
   that because of this, access and relationships to Traditional Owners are critical to enable information
   sharing and to demonstrate how climbing can be an activity with minimal impact.
- A participant queried who initially raises harm to intangible values. Parks Victoria advised that this would be likely to come from Traditional Owners but notification may be made by other parties.
- One participant noted the LTOs operating within Summerday Valley needed further information about conditions, a clear point of communication within Parks Victoria and an update on the induction process previously agreed. Parks Victoria advised that conversations were underway with Traditional Owners about the induction and an update would be provided as soon as possible.
- One participant shared that they believed Parks Victoria cannot use the National Parks Act 1975 and regulations to protect intangible cultural heritage. The group was reminded that Aboriginal Cultural Heritage is regulated under separate legislation to the National Parks Act – the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 and supporting Regulations.
- Parks Victoria's CEO reiterated that over 60% of the park remained open to all recreational activities, with the organisation's role being to protect and conserve Victoria's special places for future generations.
- Participants shared that a sense of fear exists within the climbing community, noting 'we don't know
  where this will lead to'. Parks Victoria's CEO acknowledged the stress and sense of fear amongst the
  climbing community and assured participants that the organisation was committed to identifying where
  climbing can continue as soon as possible.
- One participant shared that access to Summerday Valley had little benefit to the wider recreational climbing community, as it only allowed access for Licenced Tour Operators (LTOs).
- One participant observed that local LTOs have seen closures in the past for fires, and that these had been worked through. They also raised concerns around the increased pressure the Special Protection Areas (SPAs) may create for other areas that experience greater visitation as a result of the restrictions.

### Presentation on the process for environmental surveys

- Key presentation points are below:
  - Field assessments are scheduled to begin later this month (October) and will be a parallel process to cultural heritage assessments, focusing on high/low risk.
  - Assessments will consider vegetation disturbance/ loss and dieback; track formation and impacts; waste and refuse; threatened species and significant vegetation types.
  - For rare species within the parks, sites are so small and patchy that currently Parks Victoria does not have the base line data.
  - Currently, the assessments are in the knowledge gathering stage.
- Participants asked whether a climbing representative could attend these assessments and surveys. Parks Victoria advised that they would be open to this in the future, and this had been done in other areas of the state for other projects. However, it would be important to allow for the assessors to be on-site before this could occur.

- One participant suggested that where low risk areas not proximate to cultural heritage values were
  identified, these could potentially be reopened for climbing. Parks Victoria advised they would be
  supportive of this approach where appropriate.
- Parks Victoria spoke of the impacts of illegal tracks on the spread of introduced and pest species.
   Participants expressed a willingness within the climbing community to be involved in future track rehabilitation works, noting that illegal tracks were from all user groups, not just climbers.
- Another participant further noted the importance of involving local LTOs in the assessments as they have knowledge about how tracks are used by the general public.

### Discussion on priority sites for survey

- The group discussed the need for Parks Victoria to make decisions around the schedule of assessments for the cultural and environmental surveys, with surveys currently underway or scheduled to start later this month.
- Participants expressed hesitation around sharing priority and favourite climbing areas, in case climbing
  restrictions were placed on further areas. The Chair observed that from what Parks Victoria had shared,
  there was an opportunity for conditional access in future to suitable sites depending on the outcomes of
  assessments and the views of Traditional Owners. The Chair and Parks Victoria reiterated the
  opportunity to contribute to the schedule and prioritisation of assessments. Parks Victoria also
  reiterated that they had heard clearly that SPAs are the priority for the assessments.
- Participants agreed to have a further conversation off-line to discuss inputting into the process, with a
  focus on low risk sites. The Chair noted that Parks Victoria required this information within the next
  week or two.

### Climbing Management Plan (Australian Climbing Association Victoria and Victorian Climbing Club)

- Version 1 of the draft contents page of the climbing management plan was shared with the group.
- ACAV and VCC confirmed that the document relates to recreational climbing only (not climbing using commercial providers).
- ACAV/VCC discussed plans for the draft contents to be shared more broadly with the community for comment.
- Participants felt that it would be a good opportunity to go through the contents at the next roundtable meeting.
- Parks Victoria CEO clarified that there was no precedent where a third-party plan or standards could be included in a Parks Victoria park management plan.
- Parks Victoria CEO clarified that other organisations and industry bodies work well with Parks Victoria including Four Wheel Drive Victoria and Sporting Shooters where MOU's are in place.

#### Communication

- The group was asked to continue to correspond through engage@parks.vic.gov.au.
- The Chair committed to draft meeting notes being made available for comment, prior to a final set issued, and that these would be available as soon as possible.

### Next roundtable meeting

• It was agreed the next roundtable meeting will be scheduled to coincide with the completion of the cultural heritage and environmental assessments, expected at the earliest in late November.

### Meeting actions and items for next Roundtable meeting agenda

- Roundtable Chair to distribute group communique (within 24 hours), and draft meeting notes for comment, before issuing a final (draft to be issued within the week).
- Finalise Protocols and distribute with meeting notes (Attachment 1).
- At the next meeting, Parks Victoria to present on partnership and working relationship examples with other groups, including Four Wheel Drive Victoria and Sporting Shooters.
- Parks Victoria to clarify conditions, next steps for induction process and point of contact at Parks Victoria for LTOs operating in Summerday Valley.
- Schedule next roundtable for late November 2019.

### Parks Victoria welcomes Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network to the Roundtable

**28 October 2019:** Parks Victoria welcomes the addition of the <u>Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network</u> to the Grampians/Gariwerd National Park Rock Climbing Roundtable.

Formed by local members of the climbing community, and supported by Traditional Owners, the Network aims to "find a way to listen, learn, and acknowledge what has happened, to uncover a positive path forward together."

The network will join 15 other rock climbing and bouldering representatives on the Roundtable that was established earlier this year to discuss matters related to climbing in the national park and build a better relationship between the climbing community and Parks Victoria.

While climbing is very well represented by the current members of the Roundtable, Parks Victoria considers the Network to represent a positive step forward, noting that all groups on the Roundtable have expressed a clear wish to work closely with Traditional Owners.

Parks Victoria is committed to partnering with Traditional Owners to manage parks and reserves in a culturally sensitive and ecologically sympathetic way. In the Grampians/Gariwerd region this is currently being realised through day-to-day communication and consultation, and through the partnership approach to developing a new landscape management plan.

Through this process, and on-ground assessments within the Grampians National Park, Parks Victoria is seeking to better identify, understand and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage. In turn, this work will inform how recreation activities, including rock climbing, can be sustainably enjoyed.





# **Attachment 1: Rock Climbing Roundtable Meeting Protocols and Membership Criteria**

### Roundtable Purpose

• To promote and strengthen the relationship between the Victorian rock climbing community and Parks Victoria.

### Objectives of Roundtable meetings

- To listen to the rock climbing community's concerns relating to rock climbing in the
- Grampians/Gariwerd.
- To discuss Parks Victoria's position on rock climbing in the Grampians/Gariwerd.
- To progress action on access to climbing in the Grampians/Gariwerd including through the proposed environmental and cultural values assessment process.

### Decision making and reporting

- The Roundtable has no decision making powers beyond its own deliberations. It is a forum convened for information sharing and dialogue to promote understanding and inform the views of all participants.
- The Roundtable operates under the Chatham House Rule (...participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.)
- The Roundtable will agree on a consensus basis messages about the outcomes of meetings.
- The notes from each meeting will be prepared by the secretariat and reviewed by the Independent Chair before being circulated to participants. Any changes to the notes can be discussed as subsequent meetings.
- Meeting agendas will be set by the Independent Chair based on the outcomes of previous meeting and include any emerging issues the Independent Chair considers relevant.
- There is no formal report proposed for the Roundtable process.

### Membership Criteria

- Groups or organisations that are representative of unique cohorts from the Victorian climbing community.
- Groups or organisations established to represent rock climbers.
- Each group or organisation can send one representative only to Roundtable meetings.
- Representatives would ideally be consistent throughout the process.
- Representatives are responsible for sharing agreed messages from Roundtable meetings with their members.
- Representatives must respect the confidentiality of discussions at the Roundtable.
- Groups or organisations do not require formal incorporation status.

Attachment 2: Formal statement, Parks Victoria's Board Chair 8 October 2019



### ROCK CLIMBING IN THE GRAMPIANS (GARIWERD) ROUNDTABLE

The Grampians National Park is one of Australia's finest national parks. It is a place of great cultural significance containing irreplaceable Aboriginal artefacts and Aboriginal sites.

Parks Victoria is committed to the protection of this Aboriginal heritage and the environmental values of the Grampians. It works in partnership with Traditional Owners and a wide range of park user groups to achieve this.

Rock climbers are an important visitor group. Climbers enjoy the great challenges of climbing in the Grampians, and have done so for many years.

Parks Victoria is committed to building an ongoing strong working relationship, based on trust and understanding with the rock climbing community. The establishment of this roundtable process is a key part of this commitment.

We welcome participant suggestions for additional representatives at this roundtable and look forward to discussing this today, noting that it is important to keep the group to a workable size.

We will not be dealing with individual groups or representatives on matters that should be before the roundtable, so that everyone can have confidence that all key matters will be worked through together.

Proposals and ideas received from individual clubs and groups will be shared with all for discussion, and we will distribute to all participants these ideas and proposals; and proposals from Parks Victoria. Your proposals and ideas should be submitted via <a href="mailto:engage@parks.vic.gov.au">engage@parks.vic.gov.au</a> so that they can be considered by the Independent Chair, and distributed to you all for review and discussion at a roundtable meeting.

Grampians Gariwerd Traditional Owners are our partners in caring for this landscape, and are deeply involved in the development of the management plan. Our conversations with them are continuing, including on matters relating to rock climbing.

Traditional Owners have indicated a desire to meet with representatives of the climbing community in the future, for an important discussion they want to have. At their request, we will be more than willing to facilitate that discussion at the time of their choosing.

Parks Victoria will continue to consult widely and listen to all views to ensure that the right balance is struck for the future of the Grampians Gariwerd and I thank you for your ongoing commitment.

Jeff Floyd			

Chair



# Attachment 3: Presentation on cultural heritage and environmental survey process, Parks Victoria



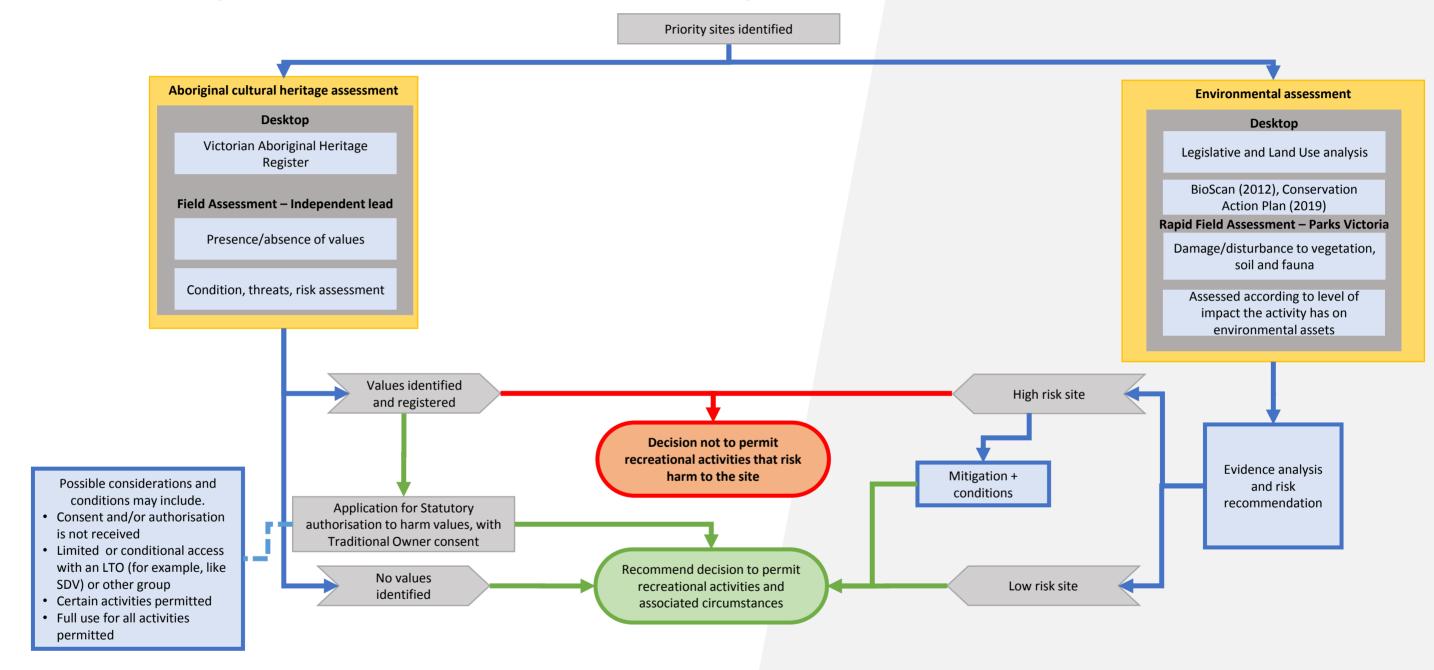


# ASSESSMENT OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

# Roundtable Discussion 8 October 2019

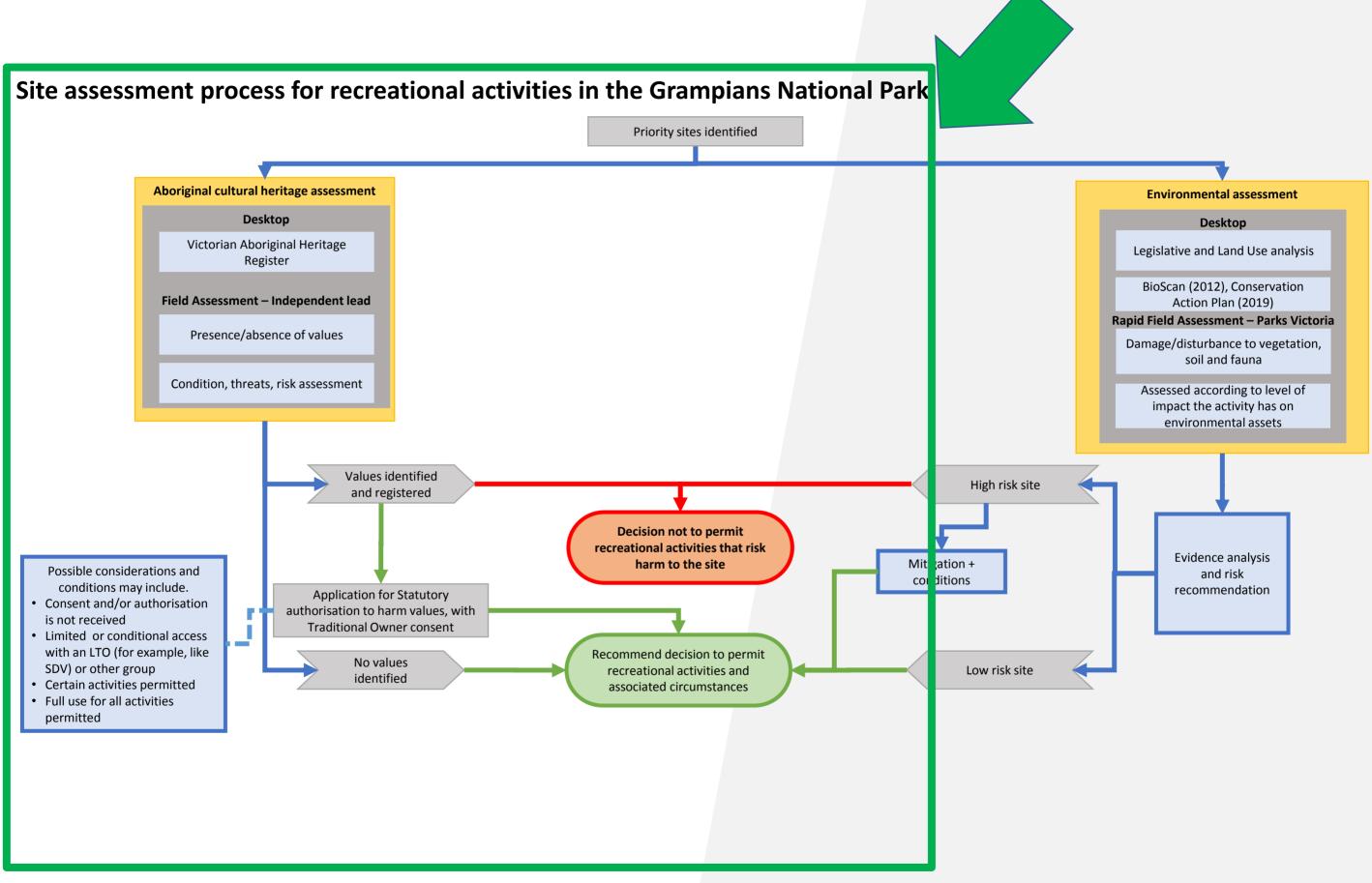
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### Site assessment process for recreational activities in the Grampians National Park







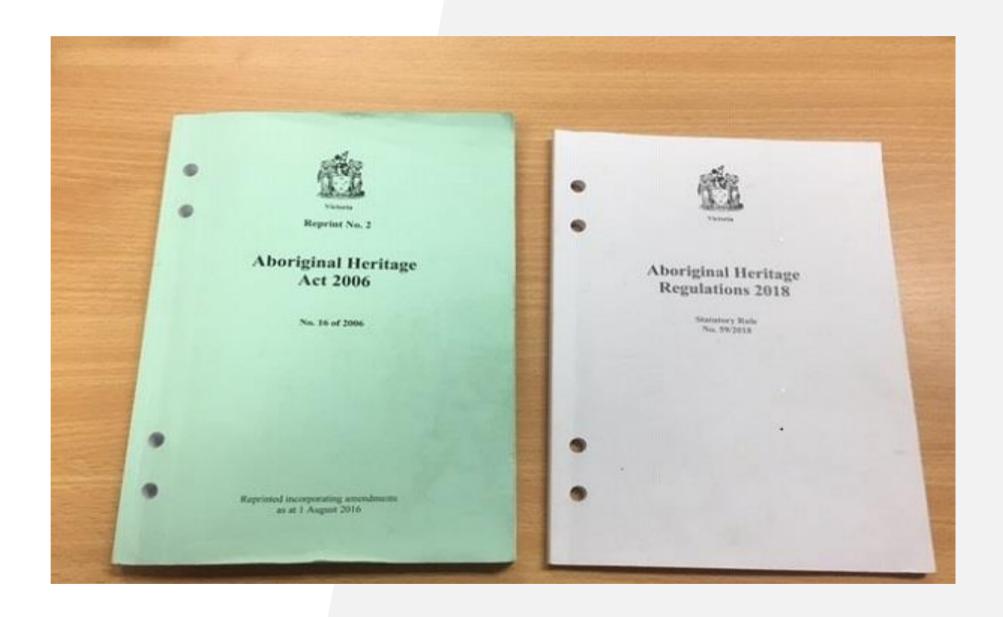






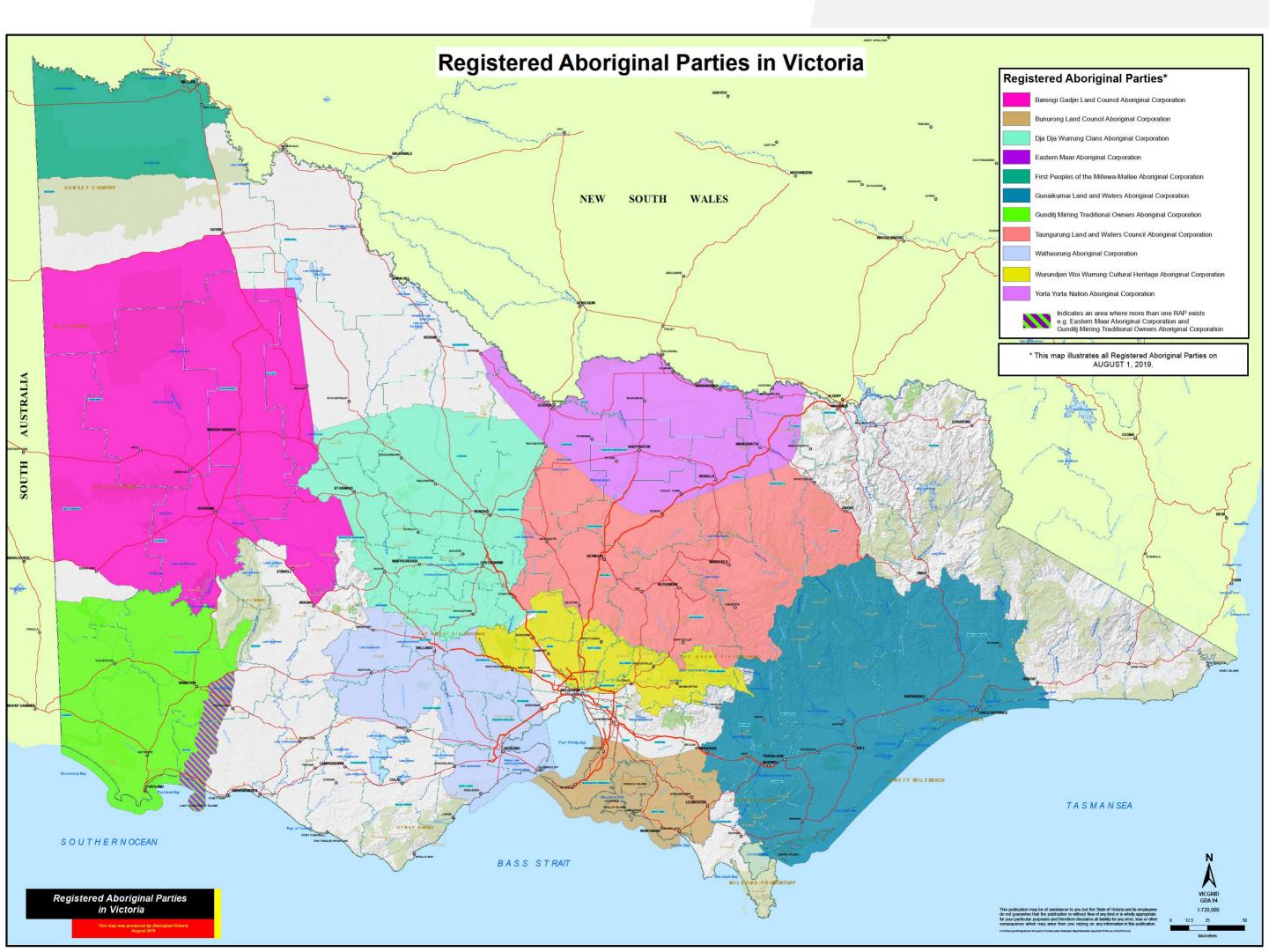
# **Legislative context**













# Aboriginal cultural heritage -

- Aboriginal places
- Aboriginal objects
- Aboriginal Ancestral Remains
- Intangible heritage





# How the legislation operates

- (Re) discoveries of Ancestral Remains, objects and places must be reported
- Aboriginal cultural heritage is protected from harm
- Harm can be permitted through cultural heritage permits and cultural heritage management plans
- Where permission to harm is sought, there must be a demonstration that attempts have been made to
  - Avoid harm
  - Minimise harm
  - Manage harm



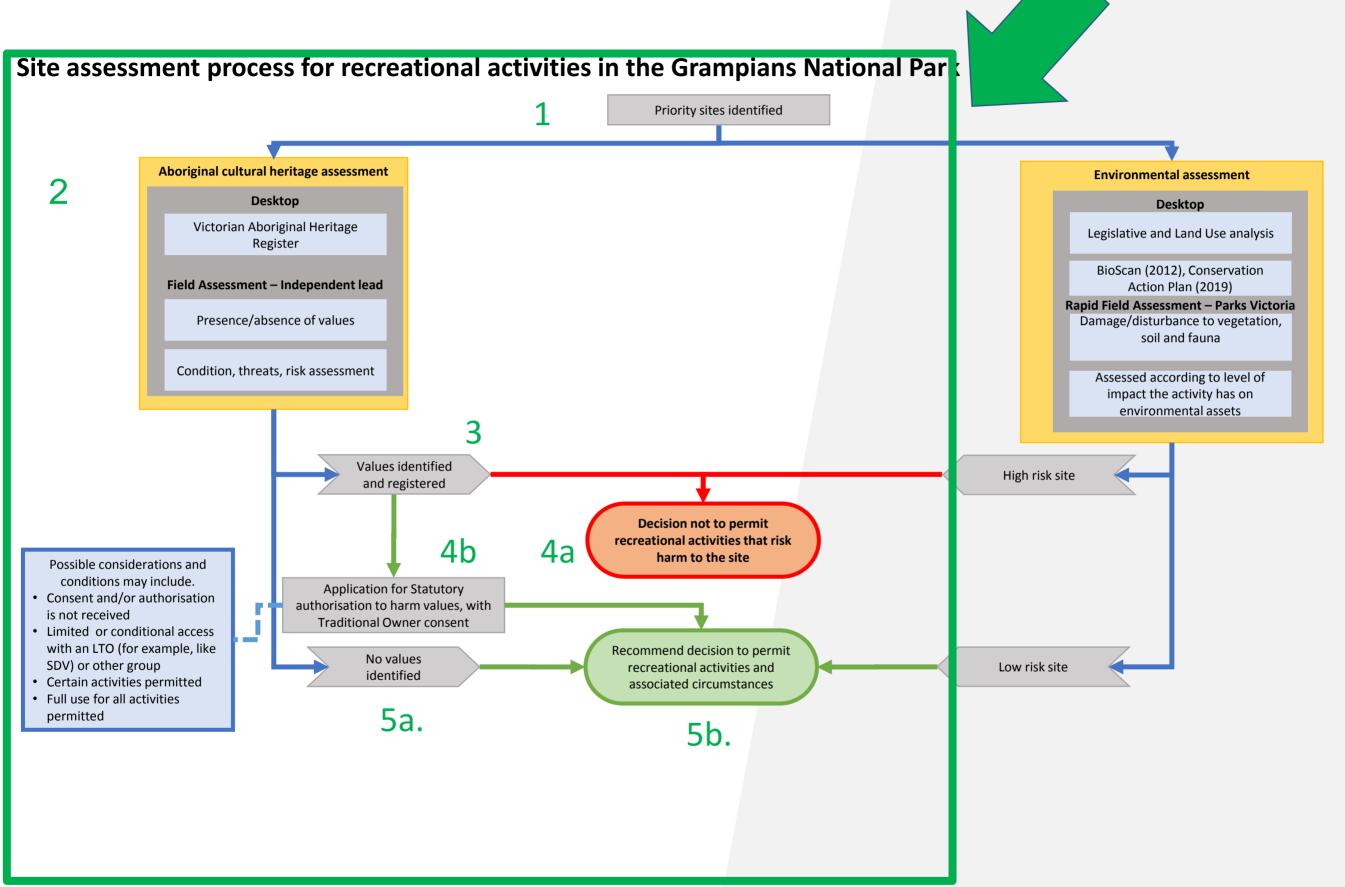
# Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register

- Established under the Aboriginal Heritage Act for the purposes set out in the Act
- Administered by Aboriginal Victoria
- Accessed under s 146 (1) and s 146 (2)
- Persons and purposes listed under s 146 (1)
- All persons not listed or who are listed but want access for another purpose can access with permission of a Registered Aboriginal Party or, where there is no Registered Aboriginal Party, the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council



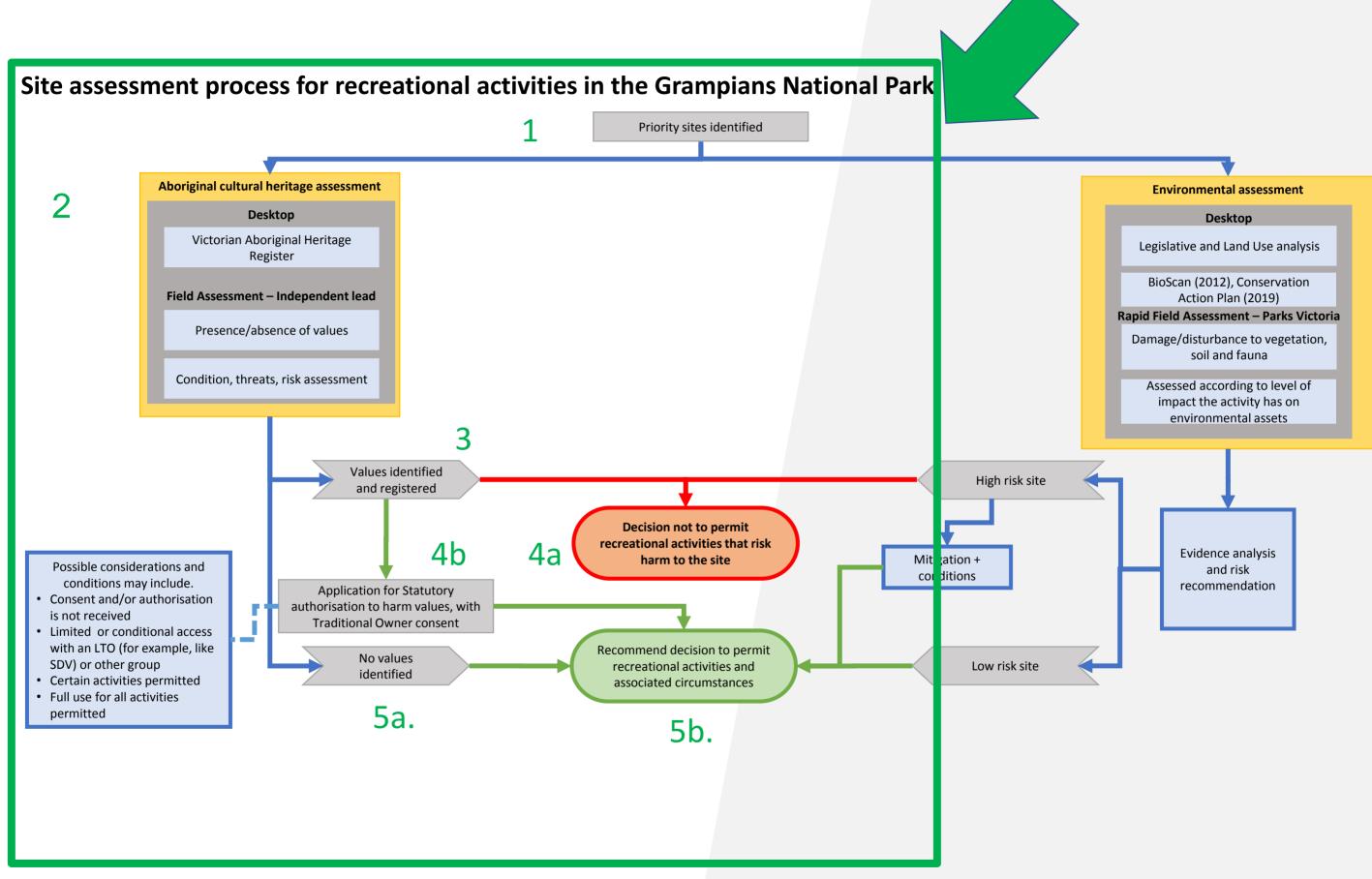












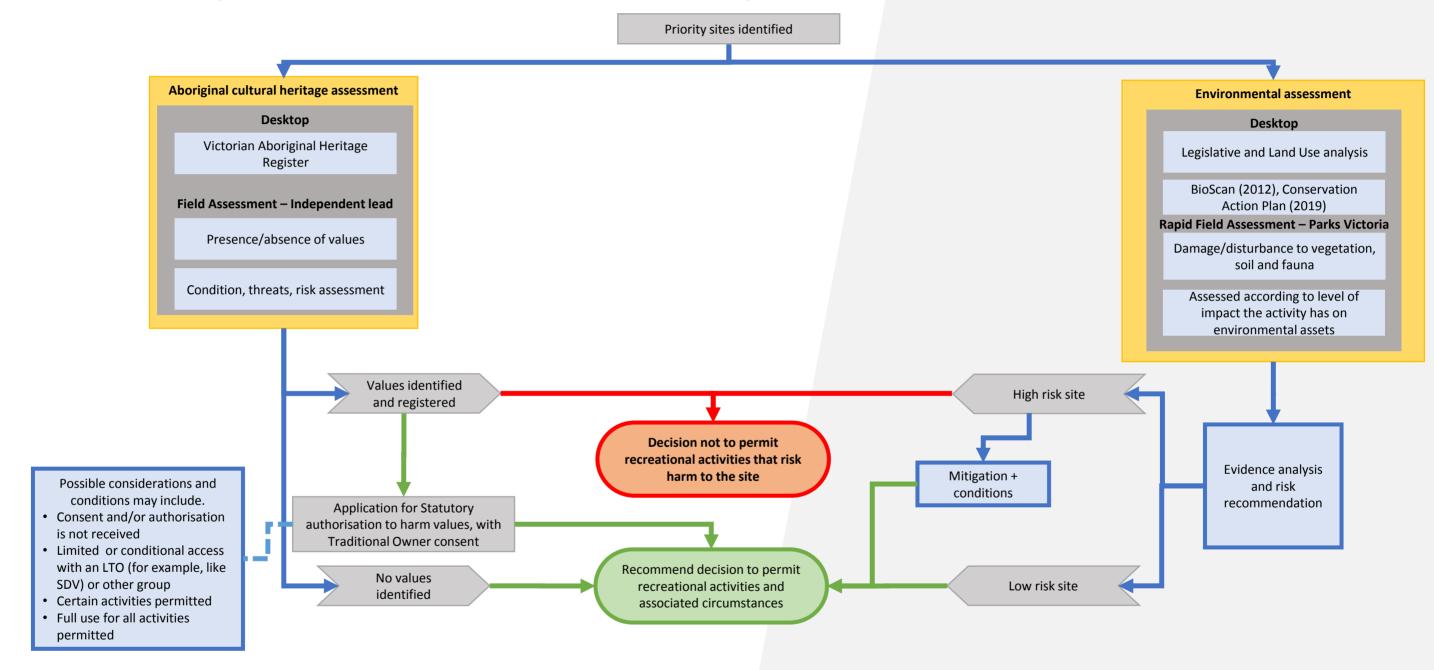




# ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS ASSESSMENT

# Roundtable Discussion 8 October 2019

### Site assessment process for recreational activities in the Grampians National Park





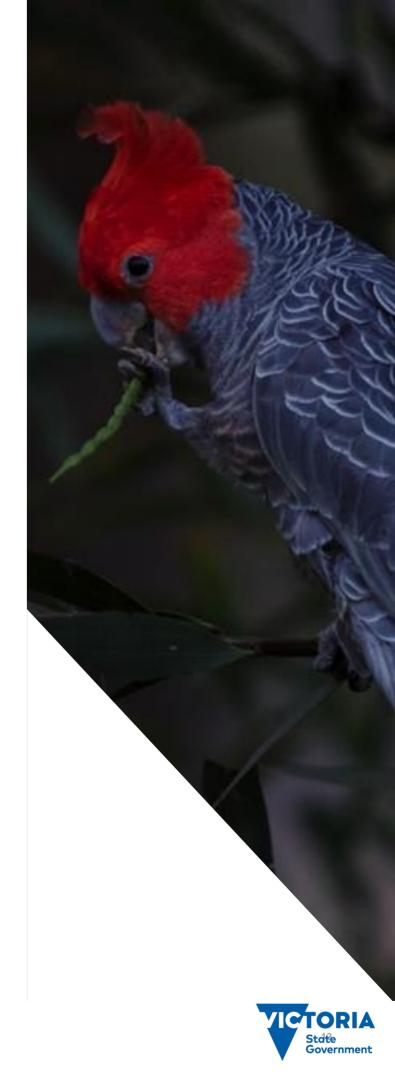


# **Process steps**



- Site selection
- Baseline knowledge build
- Assessment processes:
  - 1. Vegetation disturbance/loss
  - 2. Track formation and impacts
  - 3. Waste and refuse
  - 4. Threatened species and significant vegetation types
- Development of best approaches, tools and resources to deliver further site assessments and reporting
- Survey timing

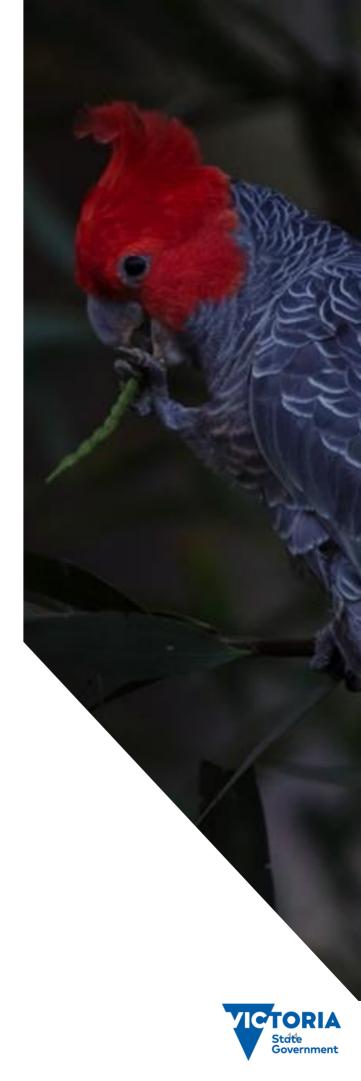




# Site selection



- To be identified by both onground operational staff and recreational users
- Define standardised definition of extent of sites, access tracks and potentially impacted areas



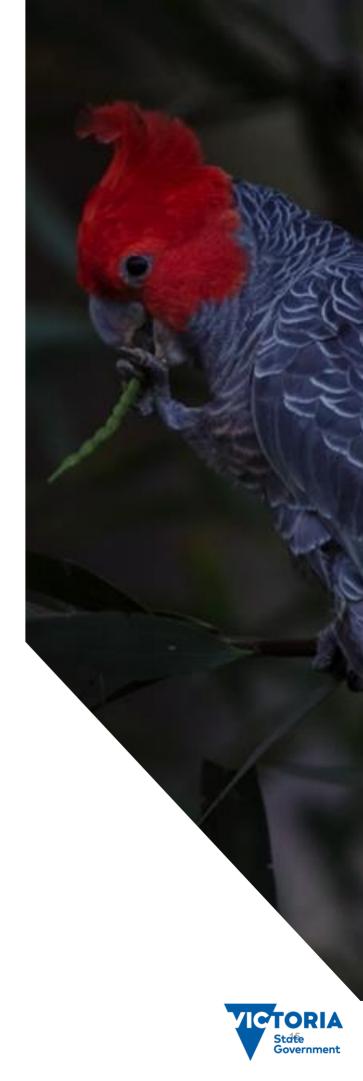


# **Baseline knowledge**

Build knowledge on conservation assets, threats and mitigations from:

- Legislative and zoning assessments
- Understanding of Remote and Natural Areas (RNA) and Special Protected Areas (SPA) zoning and obligations
- Identification of significant species and Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC's)
- Draw on PV Conservation Action Plan (2019)
- Draw on past data sources including Land Conservation Council/VEAC/MV Grampians Bioscan (2012)
- Interrogate Victorian Biodiversity Atlas





# **Vegetation disturbance/loss**



### Two areas:

- 1. Access tracks
- 2. Onsite impacts

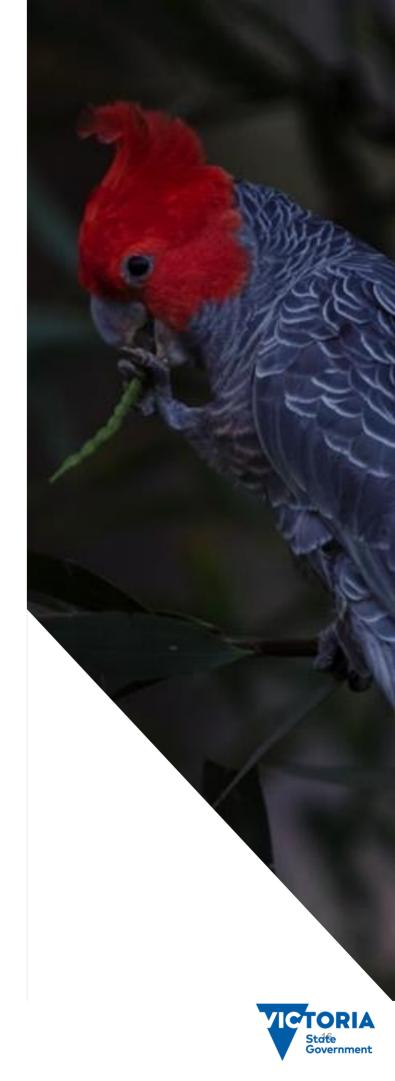
# Document/record:

- Direct damage/removal/impacts
- Cleared areas

## Measure:

Impacted areas at key sites





# Other track formation issues



## Two areas:

- 1. Impacted hydrology/soil erosion
- 2. Secondary halo impacts

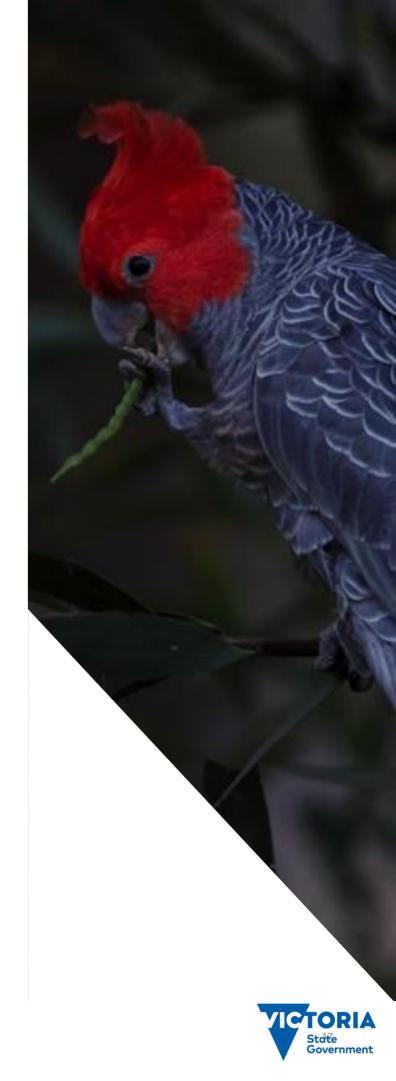
# Document/record:

- Changed hydrology
- Soil erosion
- Evidence of vegetation dieback (cinnamon fungus)

### Measure:

- Track lengths
- Areas of dieback





# Waste and refuse issues



### Two areas:

- 1. Human faeces/toilet practices
- 2. Refuse/littering

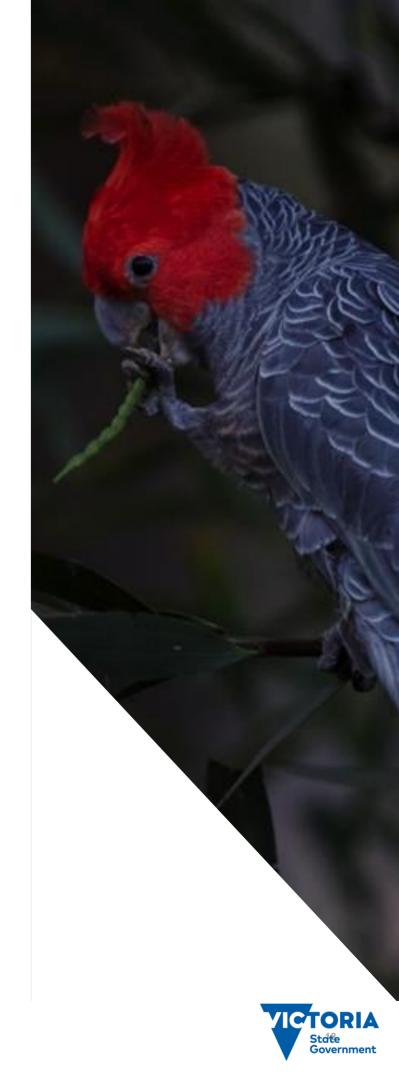
# Document/record:

- Presence/absence
- Extent

## Measure:

Densities/areas affected





# Threatened species/significant EVCs

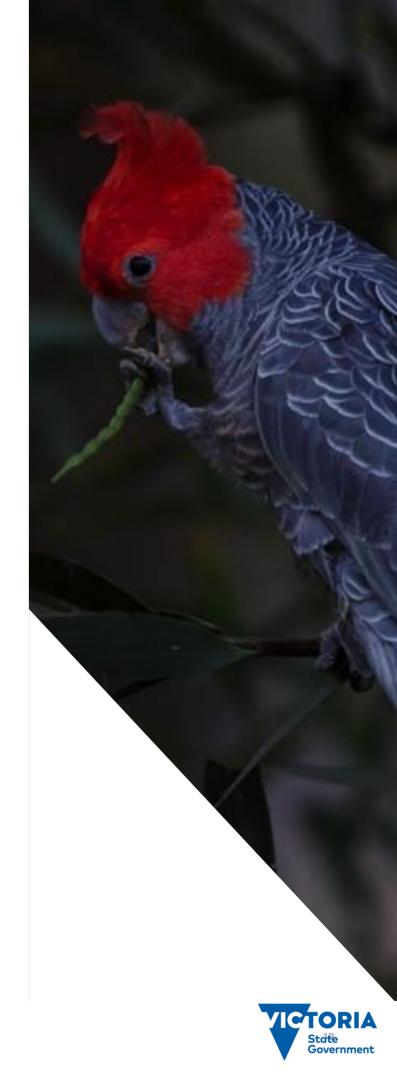
# Document/record:

- Presence/absence
- Breeding/nesting or other significant life cycle sites
- Any impact evidence

### Measure:

- Numbers for fauna
- Area extent of plant species/vegetation types





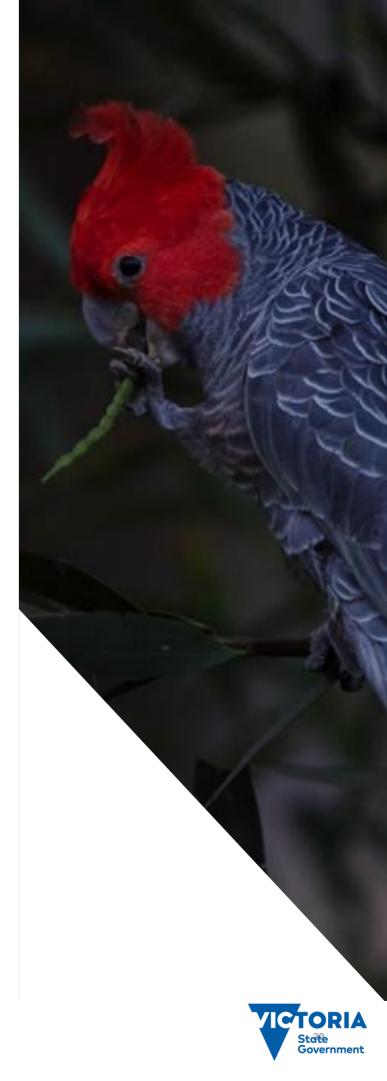
# Next steps



Initial surveys late October – early November

Development of best approach, appropriate tools and protocols, and resourcing to inform subsequent site assessments and reporting.

Site risk assessment, characterisation and recommendations.





### Site assessment process for recreational activities in the Grampians National Park

