

To: Minister for Energy,
Environment, and Climate
Change



IMPACTS OF ROCK CLIMBING IN THE GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

Core message

Over the past decade, the evolution of rock climbing practises, including in the Grampians National Park, has resulted in significant damage to the environment and protected cultural sites. In response to this, Parks Victoria has commenced a phased compliance strategy across the Special Protected Areas that are identified in the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003), as well as 29 additional locations, to protect sensitive areas of the park. Compliance activities commenced in March 2019. This has included the installation of signs at eight key locations most at risk of environmental and cultural damage advising that climbing is prohibited. Parks Victoria officers have been patrolling these locations, engaging with climbers and issuing infringements where necessary.

Timing

Recommendations

1. Note the commencement of compliance operations for the cessation of rock climbing activities across eight initial key sites within the Grampians National Park.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review
2. Agree that the attached photographs are evidence of damage to protected sites within the park and should not be released without express permission from Parks Victoria's Managing Country Together Directorate.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review
3. Approve the standard response letter for use by your office when responding to rock climbing related correspondence.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review

Comments

Signed

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Date

Approved by

Matthew Jackson, Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria

Date

19/03/2019

MBR038945

To: Minister for Energy,
Environment and Climate
Change



From	MATTHEW JACKSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, Ref	MBR038945
Title	PARKS VICTORIA IMPACTS OF ROCK CLIMBING IN THE GRAMPIANS File NATIONAL PARK	

Key Information

Background

1. The Grampians National Park is a significant rock climbing destination. The number of climbing sites (and climbers) within the Grampians National Park has risen in recent years.
2. Recently, Parks Victoria became aware of potential impacts from climbing activity on the park's environmental and cultural values.
3. Parks Victoria is working to address these impacts, as well as concerns for visitor safety in the park. In early 2019, Parks Victoria implemented the Special Protection Areas (SPAs) outlined in the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003), as well as 29 additional locations that may contain significant environmental and cultural values.
4. Existing SPAs represent 32 per cent of the total area of the national park. The additional 29 locations represent a further 1.2 per cent of the total area of the park. Enforcement activities are only occurring at eight locations in the protected areas.
5. Parks Victoria acknowledges the legitimacy of rock climbing as both a recreational and sporting pursuit for many people, and the value it brings to the local and regional economy. This is evidenced by Parks Victoria's support of rock climbing activities in many locations across its estate.
6. An estimate of the number of climbs can be taken from the online geowiki 'theCrag' <https://www.thecrag.com/>. 'theCrag' identifies that there are 674 climbing sites within the Grampians National Park. Parks Victoria are currently working to understand the number of these sites that are impacted by the introduction of the protected areas. Data has been requested from the Victorian Climbing Club to assist in this analysis.

Recent Activity

7. At the start of March 2019, Parks Victoria installed signs prohibiting climbing at eight initial key sites that are most at risk due to increased climbing activity.
8. Enforcement Officers have undertaken patrols from Saturday 9 March 2019 onwards, educating climbers and issuing infringements where necessary. To date, no infringements have been issued for rock climbing offenses. However, through the patrols 16 infringements have been issued for offences including: illegal campfires, dogs, off-track driving, damage to vegetation and illegal camping.

Stakeholder engagement

9. In early October and early December 2018 respectively, Parks Victoria met with the Victorian Climbers Club, the peak body for rock climbing in Victoria.
10. On 12 February 2019, Parks Victoria also met with the Chief Executive Officers from two of the relevant Traditional Owner corporations to inform them of the introduction of no climb zones to protect the park's cultural heritage and environmental values. Parks Victoria received support for the decisions taken.
11. Also on 12 February 2019, Parks Victoria met again with the Victorian Climbing Club, as well as other representatives of the climbing community, to inform them of the need and subsequent decision to introduce no climbing areas across the park.
12. A map outlining the eight enforcement locations and broader protected areas was emailed to rock climbing representatives on 15 February 2019. This was also made available from Parks Victoria's website, along with a media statement.
13. The map and an email advising of the introduction of the protected areas and enforcement activities was distributed to approximately 30 potentially impacted Licensed Tour Operators on 15 February 2019.

Endorsed by: Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

Page 2

MBR038945

To: **Minister for Energy,
Environment and Climate
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14. Further detailed maps showing the protection areas and an information sheet was distributed to rock climbing representatives and uploaded to Parks Victoria's website on 27 February 2019.
15. Parks Victoria has continued to engage with the Victorian Climbers Club and other key rock climbing representatives through regular phone and email contact, discussing the changes and answering questions.
16. Parks Victoria is continuing to respond to stakeholder enquiries. Primarily these enquiries are seeking clarification around where climbing is and is not permitted. To date, approximately 60 stakeholder enquiries have been received, as well as over 15 direct social media queries in the last fortnight.

Traditional Owner Engagement

17. Parks Victoria has consulted heavily with the three Traditional Owner Groups in the Gariwerd landscape: the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.
18. All Traditional Owner Groups have expressed significant concerns about the potential destruction of irreplaceable cultural heritage assets to Parks Victoria.
19. Parks Victoria's current actions and proposed mitigations for the potential impacts of rock climbing are in alignment with Traditional Owner expectations of cultural heritage protections and Parks Victoria's obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. Failure to act would result in a failure to meet legislative obligations.

Impacts of Rock Climbing on the Park

20. Between 2003 and 2018 the number of climbing routes (individual climbs) recorded by third party websites has risen from approximately 2,000 routes to an estimated 8,000 routes in 2018, with visitation increasing from approximately 8,000 people in 2003 to 80,000 people in 2018.
21. The nature of rock climbing activities has evolved to include the increased use of fixed protection (for example, permanent climbing bolts and anchors affixed to the rock face).
22. A newer climbing activity, Bouldering, has also emerged. It requires protective mats to be placed below the climber, which leads to significant damage and loss of vegetation (**Attachment 1**).
23. In combination, these factors have caused significant impacts to irreplaceable cultural values and environmental assets, as well as increasing risks to visitor safety.

Impacts to Licensed Tour Operators (LTOs)

24. There are currently 27 LTOs for rock climbing (and/or abseiling) in the Grampians National Park. The majority of these operators are licensed to operate across multiple parks, not just the Grampians National Park.
25. Parks Victoria is continuing to work with affected LTOs in the coming months to ensure that they are promptly kept informed of developments in the park.

Media Coverage To Date

26. Parks Victoria has shared information through with several media channels including: issuing a media release, publishing a website update, conducting interviews on ABC Radio and 3AW, and contributing to news articles.

Immediate Next Steps

27. Enforcement activities will continue in the eight key locations where signage has been installed.
28. Parks Victoria is establishing an ongoing round table group (stakeholder reference group) with key rock climbing representatives to support discussions moving forward.
29. Stakeholder engagement activities, including responding to stakeholder enquiries, will continue.

Endorsed by: Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

MBR038945

Page 3

To: Minister for Energy,
Environment and Climate
Change



Long Term Management Steps

30. Over the next twelve months, Parks Victoria will begin a process to review key aspects of the Grampians National Park Management Plan, including the SPA's. This will be delivered in partnership with Traditional Owner groups and will be supported by a suitable stakeholder engagement process.
31. Parks Victoria will undertake cultural heritage assessments through the protected areas to identify any further sites at risk of damage.

Context

32. Details regarding the significance of the potential impacts caused by the increase and evolution of rock climbing practises are expressed in **Attachment 2**.

Consultation

N/A

Attachments

No.	Attachment name
1	Photographs – Impacts of Climbing Activity within the Grampians National Park
2	MBR038732
3	Standard Letter of Response
4	Key Complaints Summary

Endorsed by: Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer

MBR038945

Page 4

Attachment 1 – Environmental Impacts, Photographs



Image 1: Vegetation
Trampling, Venus
Baths
Grampians National
Park



Image 2: Vegetation
Trampling, Venus
Baths
Grampians National
Park



Image 3:
Vegetation
Trampling, Venus
Baths

Grampians
National Park



Image 4: Vegetation
Removal, Venus
Baths
Grampians National
Park



Image 5:
Fireplace,
Millenuim Cave

Grampians
National Park



Image 6:
Chainsaw
Cutting,
Millenium Cave

Grampians
National Park



Image 7: Cave
Stone Stacks,
Millenium Cave
Grampians
National Park

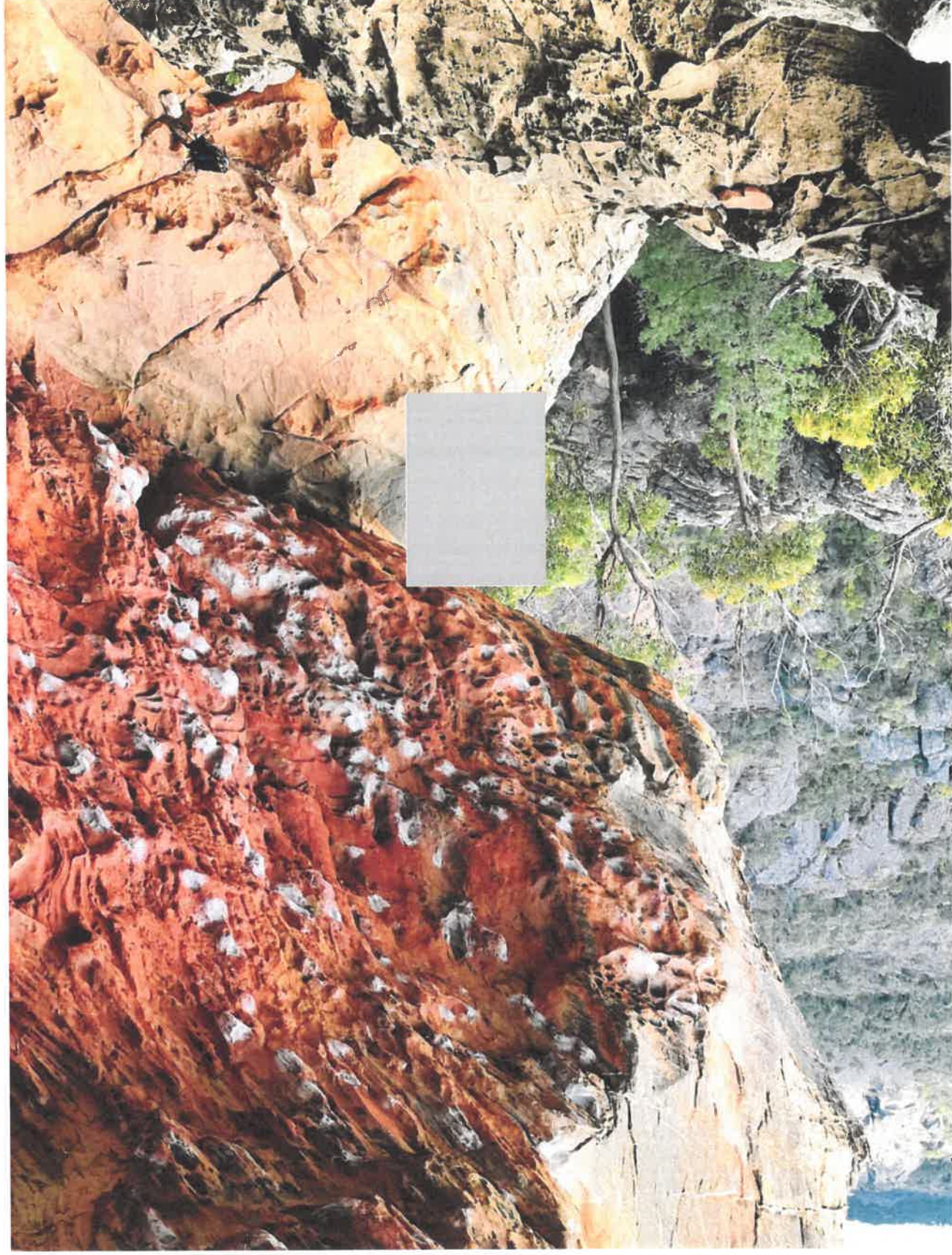


Image 8: Chalking

Grampians National
Park

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Change



CHANGES TO ROCK CLIMBING CONDITIONS IN THE GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

Core message

Once a small scale, recreational activity, rock climbing has become increasingly popular among national and international visitors. Resultantly, the number of climbing sites within the Grampians National Park has risen exponentially in recent years. This has significant implications for the park's environmental and cultural values. Parks Victoria is working to address these impacts as well as concerns for visitor safety in the park by implementing mitigation measures outlined in the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003). Working collaboratively with key stakeholders and Traditional Owner groups, a compliance strategy is being implemented. Enforcement will initially focus on eight key sites where impacts on park values are significant.

Recommendations

1. Note the interim policy position taken by Parks Victoria to cease development of new climbing areas.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review
2. Note the approach adopted by Parks Victoria to implementing the current Grampians National Park Management Plan.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review
3. Note the approach adopted by Parks Victoria to commencing a review of the current Grampians National Park Management Plan.
☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☐ Noted ☐ Returned for review

Comments

Signed Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Date _____

Approved by 
Matthew Jackson, Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria 

Date

11/3/2019

MBR038732

To: Minister for Energy,
Environment and Climate
Change



From	MATTHEW JACKSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PARKS VICTORIA	Ref	MBR038732
Title	CHANGES TO ROCK CLIMBING CONDITIONS IN THE GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK	File	

Key Information

1. Once a small-scale recreational activity that relied on a self-managed industry code of practice, rock climbing has evolved to an internationally recognised Olympic sport.
2. Resultantly, the number of climbing sites within the Grampians National Park have risen exponentially in recent years – from approximately 2,000 sites in 2003 to an estimated 8,000 sites in 2018. This has been accompanied by an increase in annual rock-climbing visitation from an estimated 8,000 people in 2003 to 80,000 people in 2018.
3. In addition to the increase in visitation, the nature of rock climbing activities has evolved to include the increased use of fixed protection (such as permanent climbing bolts and climbing/abseil anchors) as well as the introduction of a newer climbing activity known as bouldering.
4. Bouldering typically involves climbing without ropes or fixed protection and requires protective mats to be placed below the climber, which leads to significant damage to and loss of vegetation.
5. The increased popularity of rock climbing has also led to the establishment of informal bush-camps and networks of walking tracks as climbers seek to access more remote parts of the Grampians National Park.
6. This has significant implications for the park's environmental and cultural values. To ensure that the environmental and cultural values of the park are maintained, Parks Victoria needs to implement Special Protection Areas (SPAs) across the Grampians, that will exclude some areas from climbing activities.
7. Parks Victoria is proactively working to manage current issues associated with rock climbing in the Gariwerd landscape, which includes: the Grampians National Park and other protected areas such as Black Range, Mount Arapiles-Tooan, Red Rock and Mount Talbot.
8. The Gariwerd landscape is a significant Aboriginal cultural landscape and Aboriginal occupation in this landscape dates back over 22,000 years. The area contains the majority of surviving Aboriginal rock art sites in south-east Australia, with over 121 known rock art shelters in the area and an additional 18, newly rediscovered rock art sites.
9. Traditional Owners consider rock art places to be sacred sites and they are highly valued in cultural lore. Pictorial records of Aboriginal culture are one component of a greater information bank embedded in the Gariwerd landscape.
10. The Gariwerd landscape is also highly valued as a nature based tourism destination and contributes significantly to Victoria's visitor economy. It is internationally renowned as a rock climbing destination due to the quality of the rock, the number of sites, and the spectacular national park setting. Many international visitors, as well as local Australian visitors, travel to the area primarily for rock climbing.
11. Over a number of years, the scale of climbing activity has significantly increased and the nature of the activities has changed. In combination, these factors have caused significant impacts to irreplaceable cultural and environmental assets, as well as increasing risks around visitor safety.
12. Parks Victoria will implement the Special Protection Areas (SPAs) identified in the existing Grampians National Park Management Plan (the management plan) along with 29 additional smaller protected areas where the management plan allows climbs to be closed if they conflict with Aboriginal cultural sites, significant flora and fauna and other parks values.
13. From March 2019, Parks Victoria will begin installing signs in the Grampians National Park to enforce the prohibition of climbing in eight initial locations. These are places where there is evidence of existing impacts on values and where there is a continued high risk of harm due to increased climbing activity.
14. Maps have been prepared showing all the SPAs within the Grampians National Park including the eight locations which are at most risk (**Attachments 1,2 and 3**).

Endorsed by: Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer

Page 2

MBR038732

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Environment and Climate
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15. Parks Victoria has commenced meeting with affected partners, stakeholder groups and local businesses to work through what these decisions mean for them. Supporting communications (including the attached, detailed maps) have been prepared and distributed broadly to raise awareness of this change.
16. A stakeholder reference group will be established to involve the community and rock climbers in next steps.
17. Alongside this, Parks Victoria will begin a process to review the management plan. Members of the public will be able to make submissions as part of the review.
18. There are still hundreds of known climbing locations across the Grampians National Park alone that remain unaffected by the decisions made by Parks Victoria.

Context

Rock Climbing

19. Recreational rock climbing has developed as a sport in Australia over the past 50 years. Parks Victoria recognises rock climbing and abseiling as legitimate recreational activities.
20. All popular venues for rock climbing in Victoria are on Parks Victoria managed land. Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, Grampians National Park and Mount Buffalo National Park are internationally significant climbing venues attracting interstate and international visitors.
21. The Black Range State Park, You Yangs Regional Park, Werribee Gorge State Park, Cathedral Ranges State Park, Brisbane Ranges State Park and Mount Macedon Regional Park are of state significance mainly drawing climbers from Victoria.
22. The number of climbing areas in the Grampians National Park alone has been estimated at 674 comprising over 8,600 individual climbs. Over 3,000 climbs have also been estimated at Mount Arapiles, and a total of 70,000 ascents have been logged on one website alone.
23. Although the management plan for the Grampians National Park always allowed for SPAs where climbing was prohibited, this mechanism was not implemented. Additionally, on some occasions, Parks Victoria facilitated access to, or provided advice about, climbing in contradiction to the provisions of the management plan.

Implementation of a Compliance Strategy for the Grampians National Park

24. As a consequence of these trends, the impacts to Aboriginal cultural heritage, rock faces, and vegetation have increased dramatically.
25. There is also potential liability exposure for Parks Victoria through an inconsistent management approach to rock climbing fixed protection. For instance, Parks Victoria takes on responsibility for testing climbing bolts in some locations, such as at the You Yangs Regional Park, but not others.
26. This approach includes a risk of creating an expectation in the broader community that this testing is undertaken in all parks and that Parks Victoria is ensuring climbing bolts are safe for their use.
27. Now that Parks Victoria has confirmed with key stakeholder groups the implementation of SPAs within the Grampians National Park, an associated compliance strategy will also be implemented. The implementation of this strategy includes:
 - developing education and communication materials,
 - installing signage and conducting enforcement activities such as fining climbers.
28. Parks Victoria will implement the compliance strategy over the coming months using a phased approach while working with partners and key stakeholders.
29. A core element of implementing compliance within the park is to focus initial efforts on eight places in the Northern Victorian Range.

Enclosed by: S mor Talbot Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

MBR038732

Page 3

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30. Over the past 18 months, Parks Victoria has identified places where cultural and environmental values have been significantly impacted through actions such as the use of climbing bolts, the use of protective mats associated with bouldering and unauthorised cutting of access tracks by climbers.
31. Parks Victoria has decided to initially focus enforcement activities on these places as a measure to address these impacts, mitigate risks to the organisation in relation to visitor safety and mitigate potential prosecution under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 for harming Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Reviewing the Grampians National Park Management Plan

32. Alongside the implementation of the compliance strategy, Parks Victoria will begin a review of the management plan which was adopted in March 2003. Parks management plans are prepared with a ten to fifteen-year outlook and can be reviewed in response to a change in the park's environment such as changes to visitor demand, introduction of new activities or impacts of major emergencies such as flood and fire. All of these changes and events have occurred in the Grampians National Park since the management plan was prepared.
33. Reviewing a management plan is a public process which includes consultation with key partners and stakeholders to obtain advice on possible management options and to discuss proposed amendments. Once an amended management plan is drafted, it is released for public comment and submissions are invited from all interested parties.

Stakeholder Engagement

34. On 12 February 2019, Parks Victoria met with the Chief Executive Officers from two of the relevant Traditional Owner corporations to inform them of the decisions made in the Grampians National Park. Parks Victoria received support for the decisions taken.
35. Also on 12 February 2019, Parks Victoria met with office bearers from the Victorian Climbing Club, the peak user body for rock climbers in Victoria, as well as other representatives of the climbing community, to inform them of the decisions and of changes to conditions for climbing within the park.
36. While the climbing community representatives did not welcome the decisions that have been made, the meeting was productive and they agreed to meet again and to work collaboratively with Parks Victoria.

Consultation

N/A

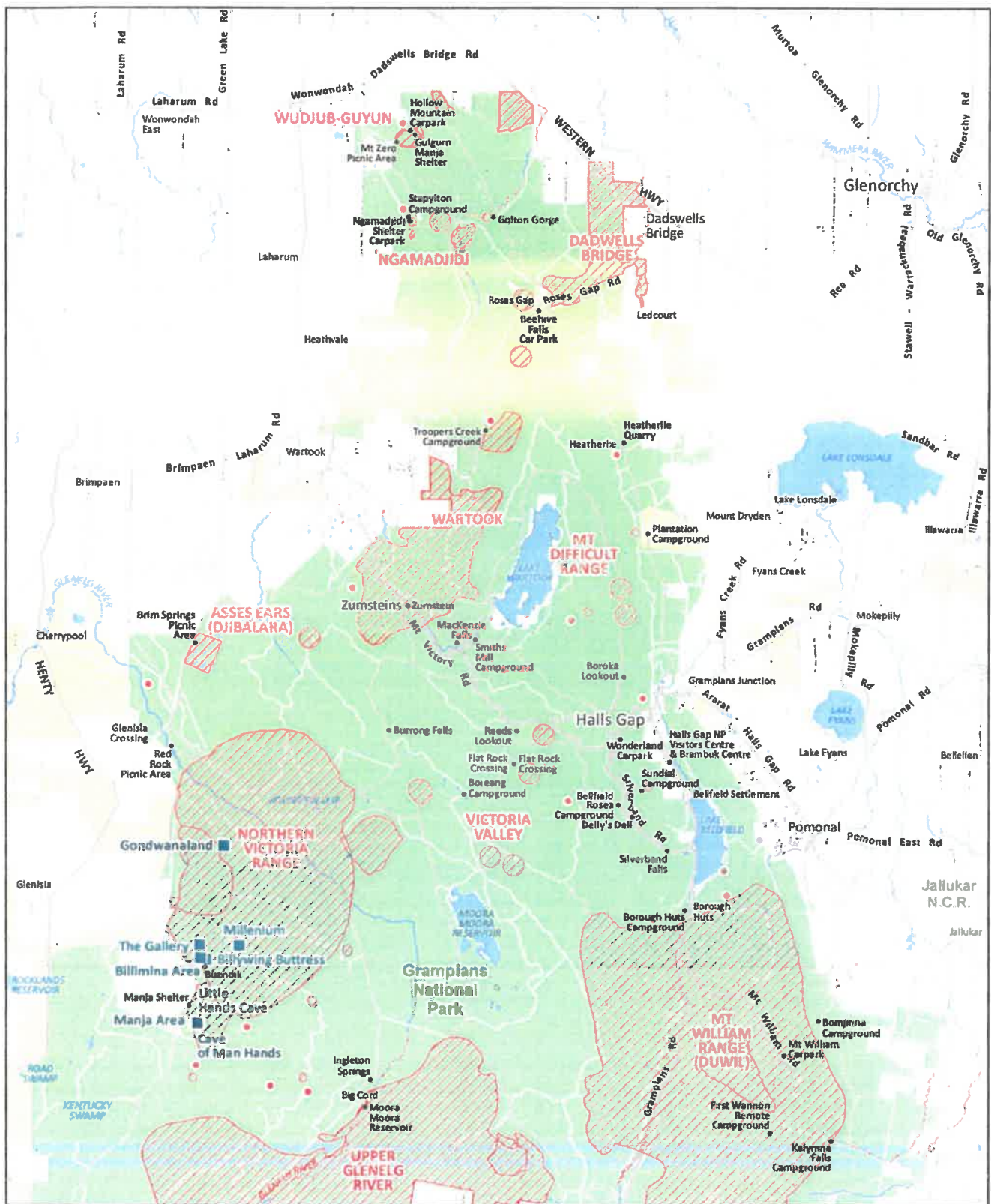
Attachments

No.	Attachment name
1	Map of Special Protection Areas in the Grampians National Park (North)
2	Map of Special Protection Areas in the Grampians National Park (South)
3	Map of Special Protection Areas in the Grampians National Park (Northern Victoria Range focus area)

Enclosed by: Simon Tetbot, Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

MBR038732

Page 4



Grampians National Park - Rock Climbing Exclusion Zones (North)

- Protected Areas - restrictions apply
- Eight focus sites where signage will be installed and compliance activities occurring
- National Parks
- Parks and Reserves
- State Forest
- Protected Areas - restrictions apply
- Parks Victoria Visitor Sites
- LOCALITY REGIONS

Parks Victoria
Healthy Parks Healthy People

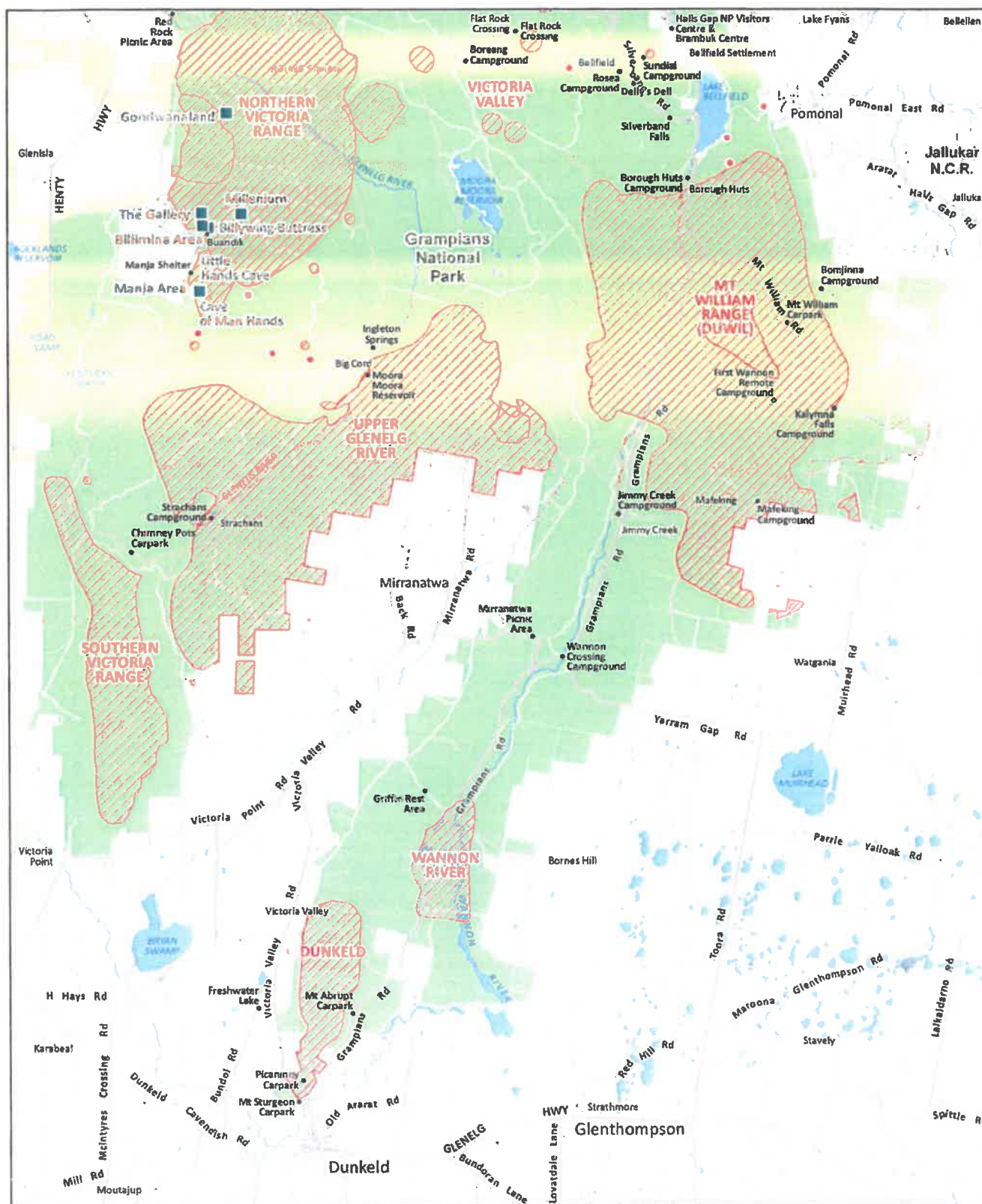


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Disclaimer: Parks Victoria does not guarantee that this data is without flaw of any kind and therefore disclaims all liability which may arise from you relying on this information.
Data source acknowledgements: State Digital Mapbase, The State of Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

26/02/2019



Grampians National Park - Rock Climbing Exclusion Zones (South)

- Protected Areas - restrictions apply
- Protected Areas - restrictions apply
- Eight focus sites where signage will be installed and compliance activities occurring
- Parks Victoria Visitor Sites
- National Parks
- Parks and Reserves
- State Forest
- LOCALITY REGIONS

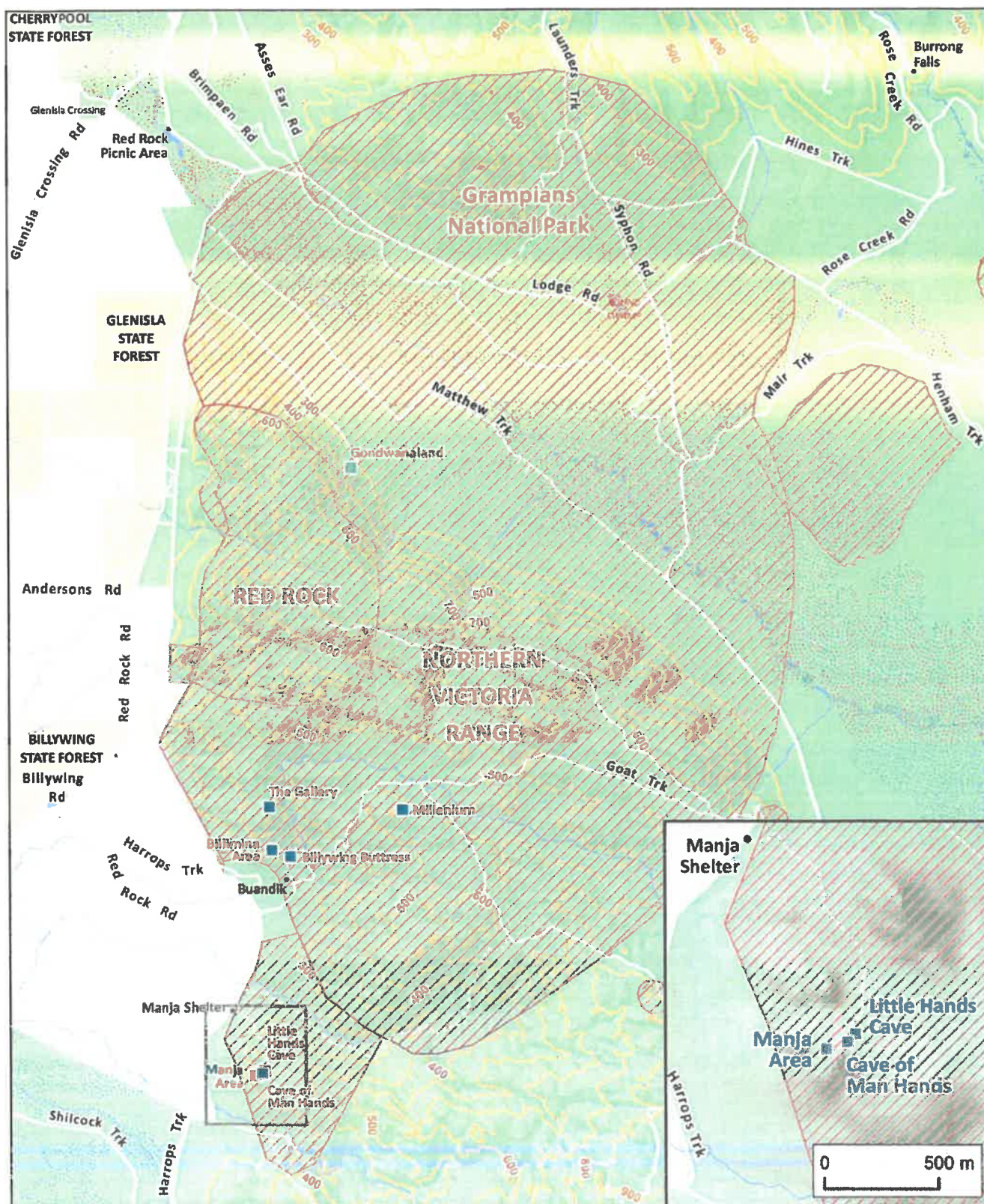


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26/02/2019



Eight Focus Areas

- Eight focus sites where signage will be installed and compliance activities occurring
- ▨ Protected areas - restrictions apply
- Parks Victoria Visitor Sites
- Grampians National Park
- State Forest

LOCALITY
REGIONS



26/02/2019

Key issues and response – rock climbing in the Grampians

ISSUE	RESPONSE
Inadequate consultation prior to climbing bans being put in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Special Protection Areas have been implemented to protect sensitive environmental and cultural heritage values. Over the coming months, Parks Victoria will continue to review the Grampians National Park Management Plan, working closely with rock climbing representatives through this process. A Stakeholder Reference Group will be established, and will include representatives from the climbing community.
Lack of clarity around enforcement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> On-site signage has been installed at eight locations where Parks Victoria will focus enforcement efforts to ensure places of significance are protected.
Inadequate information about where climbing is / is not permitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Under the existing Grampians National Park Management Plan 2003, rock climbing in Special Protection Areas is a prohibited activity. Detailed maps and information sheets are now on Parks Victoria's website to assist rock climbers in identifying where climbing is prohibited. From March 2019, on-site signage will be installed at eight locations where rock climbing is not permitted. Hundreds of other climbing areas located throughout the Grampians National Park, including the Bundaleer, Mount Stapylton Amphitheatre, The Watch Tower, Wonderland Area and Halls Gap Valley, where climbers are able to explore without damaging the environment.
Sceptical about damage / need for change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The primary focus is to ensure that important environmental and cultural assets throughout the Grampians National Park are protected and conserved. Once a small scale recreational activity, rock climbing has become increasingly popular among national and international visitors, with the Grampians National Park being one of the most significant rock climbing destinations. This has resulted in the number of climbing sites (and climbers) within the Grampians National Park rising in recent years.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The number of climbing sites have risen from approximately 2,000 sites in 2003 to an estimated 8,000 sites in 2018.• Visitation has increased from approximately 8,000 people in 2003 to 80,000 people in 2018.• The nature of rock climbing activities has evolved to include the increased use of fixed protection (i.e. climbing bolts, climbing anchors, protection mats).• In combination, these factors have caused significant impacts to irreplaceable cultural values and environmental assets, as well as increasing risks around visitor safety.
Parks Victoria's authority to act / enforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• As the responsible statutory authority, Parks Victoria has legislative requirements to protect and manage this estate in partnership with Traditional Owners, Government and the broader community.
Sceptical about cultural significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Grampians National Park is listed on Australia's National Heritage List for its Aboriginal cultural heritage, landscapes, diversity of flora and fauna and protection of threatened species.• As the responsible statutory authority, Parks Victoria has legislative requirements to protect and manage environmental impacts, in partnership with Traditional Owners, Government and the broader community

Parks Victoria Board Meeting

Meeting Date: 30 April 2019

Meeting Number: 10/2018-19

Item: 15

Matter for: Noting

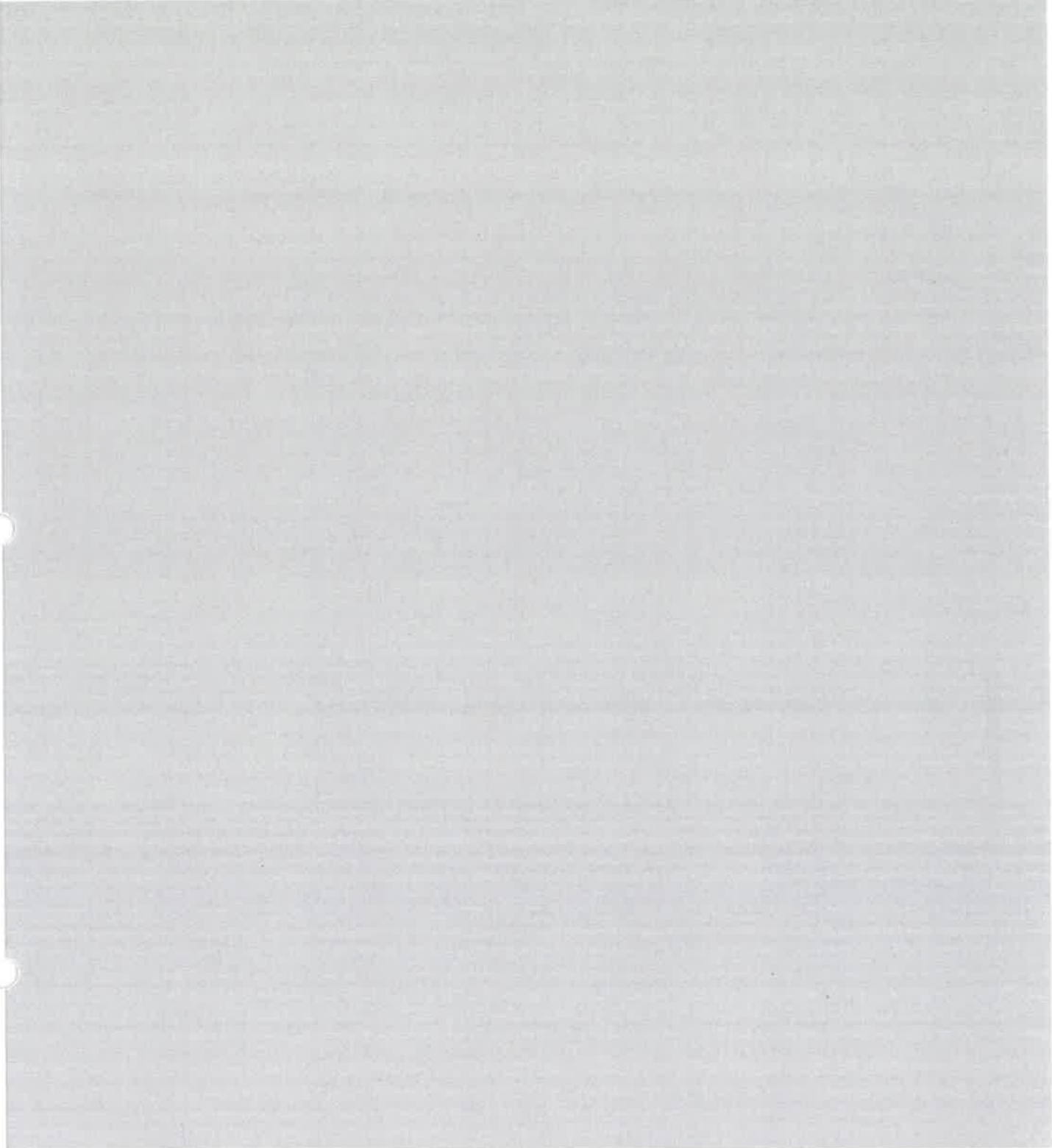
Subject: Chief Executive Officer Report

Recommendation:

That the Board notes the Chief Executive Officer report

Purpose and Background:

The CEO report is submitted monthly to Board, and is an update on key achievements, high-level matters of interest and any significant issues and risks to the organisation. It is prepared by Corporate and Business Strategy with input provided by the Executive Team. Where required, further detail will be provided verbally by the CEO at the Board meeting.

- 
- 11. Rock Climbing Compliance program** - Rock climbing compliance operations began over the March long weekend with a team of Authorised Officers dispatched to protect Grampians Flora, Fauna, and cultural heritage sites. This was the first of such operations with Authorised Officers engaging with 175 people and detecting 16 offences. New evidence of the impact of rock climbing and associated activities such as bouldering on natural and cultural values is being identified beyond the Grampians National Park, confirming the need for a landscape and state-wide response. Parks Victoria staff and Traditional Owners recently discovered up to nine incidents of potential harm to five Rock Art sites in the Red Rock Bushland Reserve and eight in the Black Range State Park. –Parks Victoria is obtaining advice regarding the treatment of existing and new LTO licences in the Special Protection Areas. Q&As have been prepared and uploaded to our website by the Marketing and Communications Department to correct misinformation in the community.

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IMPACTS OF ROCK CLIMBING IN THE GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

Core message

Over the past decade, the evolution of rock climbing practises, including in the Grampians National Park, has resulted in significant damage to the environment and protected cultural sites. In response to this, Parks Victoria has commenced a phased compliance strategy across the Special Protected Areas that are identified in the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003), as well as 29 additional locations, to protect sensitive areas of the park. Compliance activities commenced in March 2019. This has included the installation of signs at eight key locations most at risk of environmental and cultural damage advising that climbing is prohibited. Parks Victoria officers have been patrolling these locations, engaging with climbers and issuing infringements where necessary.

Timing

Recommendations

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☐ Approved ☐ Not approved ☒ Noted ☐ Returned for review
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Comments

Signed

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Date

11/4/19

Approved by

Matthew Jackson, Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria

Date



MBR038945

To: Minister for Energy,
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From	MATTHEW JACKSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, PARKS VICTORIA	Ref	MBR038945
Title	IMPACTS OF ROCK CLIMBING IN THE GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK		

Key Information

Background

1. The Grampians National Park is a significant rock climbing destination. The number of climbing sites (and climbers) within the Grampians National Park has risen in recent years.
2. Recently, Parks Victoria became aware of potential impacts from climbing activity on the park's environmental and cultural values.
3. Parks Victoria is working to address these impacts, as well as concerns for visitor safety in the park. In early 2019, Parks Victoria implemented the Special Protection Areas (SPAs) outlined in the Grampians National Park Management Plan (2003), as well as 29 additional locations that may contain significant environmental and cultural values.
4. Existing SPAs represent 32 per cent of the total area of the national park. The additional 29 locations represent a further 1.2 per cent of the total area of the park. Enforcement activities are only occurring at eight locations in the protected areas.
5. Parks Victoria acknowledges the legitimacy of rock climbing as both a recreational and sporting pursuit for many people, and the value it brings to the local and regional economy. This is evidenced by Parks Victoria's support of rock climbing activities in many locations across its estate.
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8. Enforcement Officers have undertaken patrols from Saturday 9 March 2019 onwards, educating climbers and issuing infringements where necessary. To date, no infringements have been issued for rock climbing offenses. However, through the patrols 16 infringements have been issued for offences including: illegal campfires, dogs, off-track driving, damage to vegetation and illegal camping.

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10. On 12 February 2019, Parks Victoria also met with the Chief Executive Officers from two of the relevant Traditional Owner corporations to inform them of the introduction of no climb zones to protect the park's cultural heritage and environmental values. Parks Victoria received support for the decisions taken.
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Endorsed by Simon Taibot, Chief Operating Officer,

Page 2

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16. Parks Victoria is continuing to respond to stakeholder enquiries. Primarily these enquiries are seeking clarification around where climbing is and is not permitted. To date, approximately 60 stakeholder enquiries have been received, as well as over 15 direct social media queries in the last fortnight.

Traditional Owner Engagement

17. Parks Victoria has consulted heavily with the three Traditional Owner Groups in the Gariwerd landscape: the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation.
18. All Traditional Owner Groups have expressed significant concerns about the potential destruction of irreplaceable cultural heritage assets to Parks Victoria.
19. Parks Victoria's current actions and proposed mitigations for the potential impacts of rock climbing are in alignment with Traditional Owner expectations of cultural heritage protections and Parks Victoria's obligations under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. Failure to act would result in a failure to meet legislative obligations.

Impacts of Rock Climbing on the Park

20. Between 2003 and 2018 the number of climbing routes (individual climbs) recorded by third party websites has risen from approximately 2,000 routes to an estimated 8,000 routes in 2018, with visitation increasing from approximately 8,000 people in 2003 to 80,000 people in 2018.
21. The nature of rock climbing activities has evolved to include the increased use of fixed protection (for example, permanent climbing bolts and anchors affixed to the rock face).
22. A newer climbing activity, Bouldering, has also emerged. It requires protective mats to be placed below the climber, which leads to significant damage and loss of vegetation (**Attachment 1**).
23. In combination, these factors have caused significant impacts to irreplaceable cultural values and environmental assets, as well as increasing risks to visitor safety.

Impacts to Licensed Tour Operators (LTOs)

24. There are currently 27 LTOs for rock climbing (and/or abseiling) in the Grampians National Park. The majority of these operators are licensed to operate across multiple parks, not just the Grampians National Park.
25. Parks Victoria is continuing to work with affected LTOs in the coming months to ensure that they are promptly kept informed of developments in the park.

Media Coverage To Date

26. Parks Victoria has shared information through with several media channels including: issuing a media release, publishing a website update, conducting interviews on ABC Radio and 3AW, and contributing to news articles.

Immediate Next Steps

27. Enforcement activities will continue in the eight key locations where signage has been installed.
28. Parks Victoria is establishing an ongoing round table group (stakeholder reference group) with key rock climbing representatives to support discussions moving forward.
29. Stakeholder engagement activities, including responding to stakeholder enquiries, will continue.

Endorsed by: Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

MBR038945

Page 3

To: Minister for Energy,
Environment and Climate
Change



Long Term Management Steps

30. Over the next twelve months, Parks Victoria will begin a process to review key aspects of the Grampians National Park Management Plan, including the SPA's. This will be delivered in partnership with Traditional Owner groups and will be supported by a suitable stakeholder engagement process.
31. Parks Victoria will undertake cultural heritage assessments through the protected areas to identify any further sites at risk of damage.

Context

32. Details regarding the significance of the potential impacts caused by the increase and evolution of rock climbing practises are expressed in **Attachment 2**.

Consultation

N/A

Attachments

No.	Attachment name
1	Photographs – Impacts of Climbing Activity within the Grampians National Park
2	MBR038732
3	Standard Letter of Response
4	Key Complaints Summary

Endorsed by Simon Talbot, Chief Operating Officer, [REDACTED]

MBR038945

Page 4



Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes

8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
Telephone: 03 9637 9504
DX210098

<Title> <First Name> <Surname>
<Organisation>
<Address>
<SUBURB> <STATE> <POSTCODE>

Ref:
“

Dear <Title> <Surname>

ROCK CLIMBING IN GRAMPIANS NATIONAL PARK

Thank you for your correspondence of <Date received> about rock climbing in the Grampians National Park.

Firstly, I acknowledge the importance of rock climbing as a recreational and sporting pursuit for many people. I also value the contribution it brings to the local and regional economy.

Spanning more than 165,000 hectares, the Grampians National Park's natural beauty has captivated visitors for decades. Its extraordinarily diverse landscape is steeped in a rich history and is a place of environmental and cultural significance.

It is important that local, national and international visitors can continue to sustainably experience this globally unique landscape into the future. This means protecting the environment and culture that make it so popular.

As the responsible authority, Parks Victoria has legislative requirements to protect and manage this estate in partnership with Traditional Owners, government and the broader community. This includes protecting from damage the rock art of significant cultural importance. Importantly, more than 60% of the park remains available for rock climbers, constituting hundreds of sites already popular with the climbing community.

Over the coming months, Parks Victoria will continue to review the Grampians National Park Management Plan and work closely with rock climbing representatives through this process. To support strong engagement, a stakeholder reference group will be established which will include representatives from the climbing community.

For more information and responses to the frequently asked questions on rock climbing in the Grampians, please visit Parks Victoria's website at:
<https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/grampians-national-park/plans-and-projects/rock-climbing-faq>

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Yours sincerely

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes



Parks Victoria Aboriginal Engagement Committee Meeting

Item 12

Meeting Date: 17 May 2019

Meeting No: 4/2018-19

Matter for: Noting

Subject: Update regarding implementation of special protection areas in the Grampians National Park

Recommendation:

That the Committee note the actions taken to implement special protection areas in the Grampians National Park

Purpose & Background:

In November 2018, Parks Victoria (PV) decided to implement special protection areas (SPAs) in the Grampians National Park (GNP). The management plan for the GNP, adopted in 2003, made provision for SPAs where rock climbing would not be permitted. Despite this, the SPAs were not put in place and some of the decisions made by PV directly contradicted the provisions of the management plan. One example of this inconsistent action was that PV developed infrastructure to support climbing in the Hollow Mountain/Summerday Valley area of the GNP despite this area being within an SPA.

At its February meeting, the Aboriginal Engagement Committee received a verbal report relating to the implementation of PV's decision and the purpose of this paper is to provide a written update.

Key Issues:

Traditional Owner partners welcomed the decision taken at GNP and have provided continuing support for PV's actions in implementing SPAs. Aboriginal Victoria (AV) made a public statement supporting PV's efforts to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage.

PV met with the Victorian Climbing Club (VCC) and other rock climbing groups on 12 February 2019 to explain the reasons for the decisions and to confirm PV wished to work with them in the implementation phase. PV advised that compliance would generally begin with education including issuing warnings to park visitors who were found climbing in SPAs with the exception that climbers would be fined if they were found in eight specified places. PV explained this was because the impact on these places had been assessed as severe and climbers were also advised that PV reserved the right to impose fines if other offences were detected, or if severe impacts were found in other areas.

PV has announced that a review of the GNP management plan will commence in July 2019 and that the review is expected to take 12 months to complete. The review will focus on the current uses of the park, future needs for conservation and commitments to contemporary park management standards. PV has informed Traditional Owner partners and all relevant stakeholders they will be able to participate in the review process

and that pending the outcome of the review process, the 2003 management plan will continue to guide management of the GNP.

While the review is conducted, PV intends to continue to implement SPAs as provided for under the terms of the 2003 management plan. An action plan has been developed and a working group established to support PV to work in a coordinated and consistent manner. In addition, a stakeholder engagement plan, a communications plan and a document outlining roles and responsibilities have been prepared. These documents are providing guidance to the working group which is also reviewing and addressing issues as they arise.

Key matters currently being considered through the working group include:

- Ensuring that the work about to commence on the review of the management plan is kept separate from day to day issues management.
- Reviewing the outcomes achieved by the enforcement activities conducted to date and presenting proposals for future compliance and enforcement programs.
- Planning for the negotiation of new licences for tour operators within the GNP in light of existing licences expiring in June 2019. This is particularly important for licensed tour operators whose activities are focussed on rock climbing.
- Clarifying the environmental and Aboriginal cultural heritage values within the SPA that includes Summerday Valley and Hollow Mountain.
- Planning rehabilitation works in relation to Aboriginal cultural heritage that has been damaged within the GNP.



Aboriginal Engagement Committee Minutes

Date Friday, 17 May 2019
Location Seminar Room, Museum Victoria, Carlton
Time 10:00am to 12:00pm

Present

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Attendees

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Apologies

[Redacted]
[Redacted]

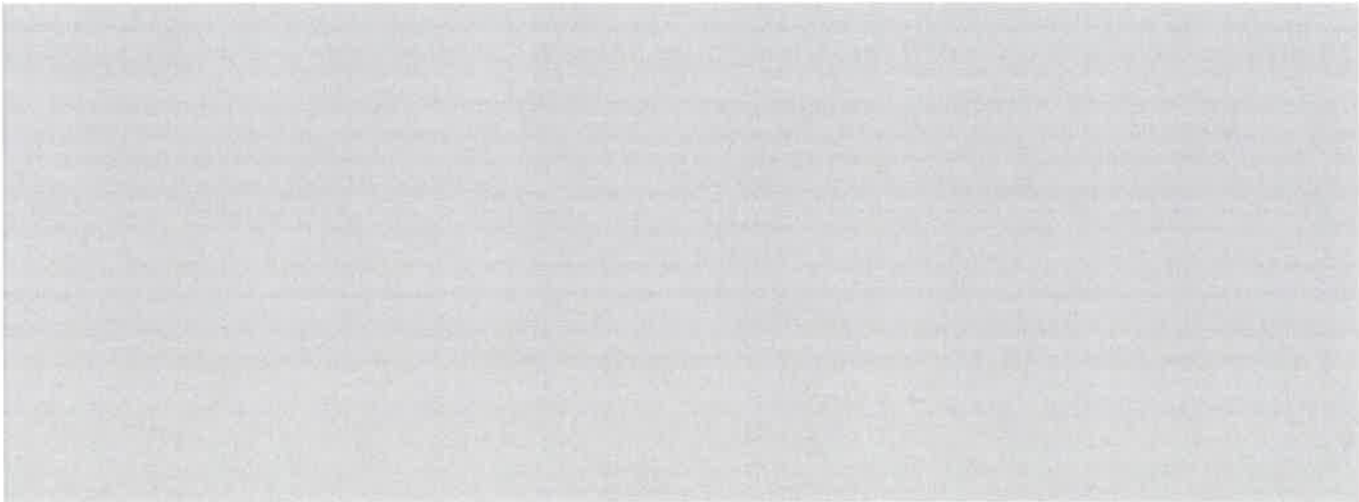
MEETING AND STATUTORY MATTERS

1. Opening

The Chair opened the meeting at 10:06am.

2. Acknowledgement

The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land and paid respect to elders, past and present, of the lands managed by Parks Victoria across the State.



MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

12. Update on implementation of Special Protection Areas in the Grampians National Park

The Director, Managing Country Together and the Chief Operating Officer provided an update on actions taken to implement special protection areas in the Grampians National Park and advised:

- Management continues to manage some challenging stakeholders.
- There will be a peak rock climbing body formed to work collaboratively and deal with a number of these issues.
- Management working with a number of licensed tour operators.
- Parks Victoria is in the process of formalising a strategic management committee to oversee and manage these issues. Management will keep the Committee updated on progress with this.

DECISION: The Committee noted the actions taken to implement special protection areas in the Grampians National Park.

Extract of Minutes

Meeting: Aboriginal Engagement Committee
Date: 17 May 2019
Venue: Seminar Room, Museum Victoria, Carlton
Provided to: Aboriginal Engagement Committee (for distribution)



Agenda Item: 12. Update on implementation of Special Protection Areas in the Grampians National Park

DECISION: The Committee noted the actions taken to implement special protection areas in the Grampians National Park.

Provided by: [Redacted]
Title: Acting Board Secretary
Date: 19 June 2019

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 28 June 2019 9:43 PM
To: [REDACTED] (VICMIN)
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: MP update: LTO access to Summerday Valley
Attachments: MP update.docx; Information sheet.docx

Hi [REDACTED]

In case you wanted to notify ministers and other MPs, please see attached a brief update and a fact sheet on the new arrangements for some LTOs operating in the Grampians National Park.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Parks Victoria

Level 10, 535 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
www.parks.vic.gov.au

Released under Freedom of Information Act 1982 by Parks Victoria

LTO licences – Grampians National Park – Summerday Valley

Background

Heritage-listed for its biodiversity and home to about 90 per cent of the Aboriginal rock art in Victoria, the Grampians National Park was established to protect environmental and cultural areas of national importance.

There are more than 100 Licensed Tour Operators that include the Grampians National Park in their tour schedules.

To protect the park's precious environment and Aboriginal heritage, many activities are restricted within some highly sensitive areas of the national park called Special Protection Areas.

Access for Tour Operators in the Grampians National Park

Licensed Tour Operators continue to have access to the Grampians National Park.

Tour operators that offer rock climbing and abseiling at Summerday Valley in the Grampians National Park have been issued a three month variation to their existing licences by Parks Victoria.

This decision allows Licensed Tour Operators who currently offer climbing in Summerday Valley to work with Traditional Owners to understand and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage unique to the Grampians.

No-impact rock climbing and abseiling can happen throughout 70 per cent of the Grampian National Park, but in 30 per cent of the park which is designated as Special Protection Areas only bushwalking and picnicking are allowed.

Special Protection Areas are places within the Grampians National Park that are particularly special or are at significant risk. This could be because it is a protected Aboriginal site, or have a threatened species of plant or animal that is vulnerable to human activity and a special management focus is required.

The Grampians National Park is the fourth-largest national park in Victoria. In 2018 more than 2.35 million people visited the Grampians National Park, including more than 1.15 million who spent at least one night in the area, with many choosing to experience the park with a qualified and licensed tour operator.

Next steps

Parks Victoria will host a follow-up information session for Licensed Tour Operators on 16 July, and will implement an Aboriginal cultural heritage induction program.

In partnership with Traditional Owner groups, Parks Victoria is also preparing a new long-term management plan for the Grampians landscape.

More information

A media release outlining this matter is published on the Parks Victoria website:

<https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/about-us/news>

Information about the Grampians Landscape Management Plan is available at:

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/grampians-management-plan>



FACT SHEET

Licensed Tour Operators in the Grampians National Park

Background:

Heritage-listed for its biodiversity and home to about 90 per cent of the Aboriginal rock art in Victoria, the Grampians National Park was established to protect environmental and cultural areas of national importance.

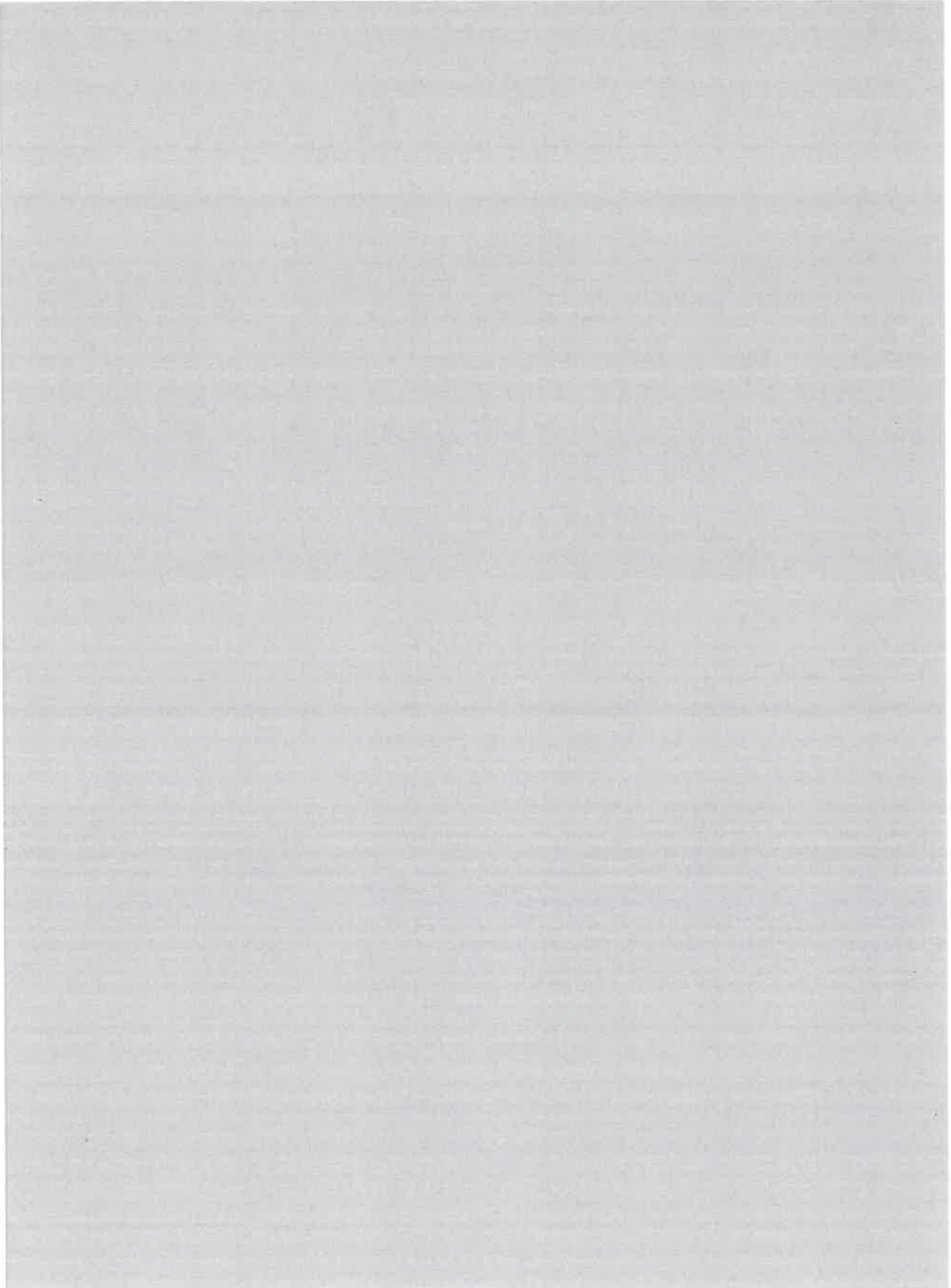
There are more than 100 Licenced Tour Operators that include the Grampians National Park in their tour schedules.

To protect the park's precious environment and Aboriginal heritage, many activities are restricted within some highly sensitive areas of the national park called Special Protection Areas.

Information

- Tour operators that offer rock climbing and abseiling at Summerday Valley in the Grampians National Park have been issued a variation to their existing licences for three months by Parks Victoria.
- The variation provides strictly conditional authorisation for licensed tour operators to continue undertaking their activities (rock climbing and abseiling) in three designated areas – Barc Cliff, Back Wall, and a section of Wall of Fools – within Summerday Valley until 30 September 2019.
- Conditions include:
 - no chalking, bolting or any other fixed protections to be used under any circumstances anywhere in the park.
 - a limit on operating locations. These will be restricted to three locations – Barc Cliff, Back Wall and a section of Wall of Fools.
 - compulsory completion of an Aboriginal cultural heritage induction program. Details and timing of this will be communicated at a later date.
 - ongoing education on Aboriginal cultural values to operators and their tour groups. This may include the presence of a representative from Traditional Owner groups.
 - tour operators and their group members must be clearly identifiable.
 - use of a booking system to manage and monitor access. This will be managed by Parks Victoria and booking requests will be available through the Parks Victoria Information Centre 13 1963.
 - tour operators are required to report accurate visitor data monthly to help with planning and review.

- There is the potential that additional extensions of the variation could be provided after a review of the three-month period. This will only be applicable:
 - if all conditions are met to Parks Victoria and Traditional Owner groups' satisfaction,
 - in three-month periods and
 - concluding 30 June 2020.
- After three months this variation will be reviewed and if an extension for an additional three months is to be offered that will be communicated at the time.
- These conditions have been put in place to ensure that harm to the natural and cultural areas in Summerday Valley, which is in a designated Special Protection Area, is minimised.
- Tour operators found in breach of the conditions will have their licences suspended or cancelled.
- Parks Victoria can revoke Licensed Tour Operator rock climbing and abseiling access to Summerday Valley at any time.
- Any breaches by tour operators will put access to Summerday Valley at risk for all operators.
- Anyone causing harm to natural and cultural values will also face financial penalties and referral to other authorities for possible further action.
- This decision is no indication of future, ongoing access to Summerday Valley or other protected areas in the national park.
- Anyone wishing to climb at Summerday Valley will need to do so through a Licensed Tour Operator – these are the only groups for whom the variation applies.
- Park Rangers will be onsite to monitor activity and ensure compliance.
- Only existing Licensed Tour Operators that offer rock climbing and abseiling are eligible – new licences will not be granted for Summerday Valley. This is a variation to an existing tour operator licence, not a new licence.
- There is otherwise no change to existing restrictions on Special Protection Areas in the national park.
- As part of the development of a Grampians Landscape Management Plan, there will be more assessments throughout Summerday Valley and the Grampians National Park.



On Mon, Feb 18, 2019 at 11:07 AM [REDACTED] @parks.vic.gov.au wrote:

Dear Board Members

Please find below the issues register for the past week for your perusal.

Issues Register		
Item	Comments	Status
Rock Climbing, Grampians National Park	27 LTOs found to be licenced within the Grampians NP. PV met with Traditional Owner groups and rock climbing stakeholders to inform which 8 initial key sites where rock climbing is to cease. Parks Victoria to install signage and commence enforcement operations from March.	Heavy media interest Friday (15/2). PV provided media statements and interviews w Simon Talbot LTOs, stakeholders and media to be kept up to date with any changing messaging

Thank you.

Kind regards.

[Redacted]

Board Secretary

[Redacted]

Parks Victoria

Level 10, 535 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC 3000

www.parks.vic.gov.au

'I respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the country throughout Victoria

and acknowledge the ongoing living culture of Aboriginal people'

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