



NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association Inc.

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“Fights for fairer access to land in NSW and represents the interests of prospectors and fossickers”

To the: Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board

Submission to: The Draft Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks.

Date: June 19, 2018

Introduction.

The NSW & ACT Prospectors and Fossickers Association (NAPFA) fights for fairer access to land and to represent the interests of prospectors and fossickers. As a peak body we advise on matters that may affect the interests of members of the Association.

Many of our members reside in, or visit Victoria on a regular basis. They conduct prospecting activities, mostly metal detecting, in the parks subject to the Draft Joint Management Plan For the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks.

NAPFA also supports the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria (PMAV) and its initiatives.

Summary

NAPFA appreciates this opportunity to table a submission on the Draft Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks. A summary of our points are:

- The draft plan, if implemented, will remove the right to practice a long term activity, and severely restrict citizens enjoyment, and the health and wellbeing benefits of a popular outdoor hobby, that is presently permitted in these long-standing goldfields.
- Modern day prospectors provide a needed stimulus to regional tourism and business. Many interstate visitors conduct their prospecting in conjunction with visits to all local attractions, events and educational opportunities, which can be used to increase knowledge of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and their cultural and traditional values.
- The current draft Plan of Management does not take into account the valuable contribution that can be made by modern day prospectors in recognising heritage, and reporting adverse behaviours of others accessing the parks.
- This submission seeks to allow recreational prospecting to continue with minimal restrictions in the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks.

Objectives

We hope that when the new Joint Management Plan is settled that there will be an opportunity for recreational prospecting to continue in the parks with little restrictions, especially given its known history of gold mining and prospecting, and the minimal impact of recreational prospecting on the environmental and traditional values of such an area.

NAPFA understands the Dja Dja requirement to manage and protect aspects vital to maintaining significant areas and potentially endangered sites. However, such management should also be able to co-exist with reasonable use of the parks by recreational prospectors.

Prospectors support the regional economy while still meeting overall conservation goals. Recreational prospectors respect the environment and know it well, because they spend a lot of time in the bush.

The parks have many old alluvial gold workings within their boundaries and these previously disturbed areas are not pristine, contain little heritage and should remain accessible.

The Draft Joint Management Plan is unfair to the prospecting public, as it simply restricts access based on boundaries, and does not take into account access to these previously disturbed areas.

Prospecting in this day and age, is a recreational activity. Despite what some elements who oppose recreational prospecting contend, recreational prospectors who use hand tools cannot be compared in any fair way with mining or exploration at any level.

There are significant regulations governing the what and how recreational prospectors can go about their hobby. Those regulations place strict limits on prospecting.

Prospectors are well aware that any detrimental activity from their hobby, either environmentally or to cultural and heritage sites will see their activities curtailed, or lost altogether. The level of self-regulation amongst prospectors is very high.

Background

The significant loss of prospecting areas from the parks would be unfair given the relative rarity in land access to alluvial gold areas, and their surrounding reefs.

There is a strong history set by 170 plus years of continuous interest in the area's mineral resources from the old gold rush miners to the modern day prospectors. This attracts the general public to explore the history and to partake in the attraction, that the hope of finding gold offers.

Like many regional areas of Victoria, the parks need to play their own part in multiple community and cultural activities to attract visitors and tourists, in addition to promoting and preserving the cultural values and traditions of the Dja Dja people.

The obvious potential for prospecting-based tourism is arguably the greatest drawcard to the area that exists. Harnessing this in conjunction with the planned education of the traditional owners values has enormous benefits.

The park plan recognises that the parks are in good ecological condition. This supports the fact that visits of thousands of prospectors over many years have had little to no detrimental ecological impact.

Policy analysis

It is Parks Victoria policy to encourage more use of parks and reserves and “Healthy Parks Healthy People” recognises the fundamental connections between human health and environmental health.

Unlocking the power of nature and parks for their preventative and restorative health and wellbeing benefits, while conserving biodiversity, and incorporating generations of traditional knowledge is helping to restore some balance to the way that parks and reserves can be used by all the people, who through the state, own them.

Encouragement of concurrent activities meets these aims and those of the Dja Dja Wurrung vision.

Environmental Principals.

Given the extremely low and transitory impact of recreational prospecting, compared to that of a full-scale exploration and mining operation, the amateur fossicker cannot be said to pose any significant damage or risk to the area.

What impact there is, is temporary, and pales in significance to the changes in the landscape that are wrought by the forces of nature, such as floods, fires, landslides, feral animals, and even including native animals.

There is ample evidence in Victoria and from other states proving that prospecting undertaken under “*Prospecting Guidelines*” does no lasting harm to the environment in those areas where prospecting is permitted.

Visitors

The visitor economy is vital to the well-being of the parks and prospectors are a large part of that visitor economy.

Many prospectors from all over Australia visit Victoria on a regular basis and can spend many days or weeks in the area, as opposed to the ‘drive-through’ 4WD tourists. The parks also draw significant numbers of visiting prospectors from overseas.

Prospectors are not making money by visiting the area. Occasionally a few would be lucky enough to cover their fuel costs of the prospecting trip, and once every few years a decent nugget is found. However, they enjoy the challenge of the healthy, outdoor activity and the natural beauty of the area.

Increased visitors to the parks will also boost the understanding of the Dja Dja people and their culture and stories.

Environmental Impacts

Prospectors routinely improve the environment by removing harmful objects like lead bullets, sharp pieces of metal and other rubbish left behind by previous generations. As they leave the parks, many prospectors today responsibly remove rubbish left by other land users in our current generation.

NAPFA recognises and respects the need to protect sensitive ecosystems. It is also essential that decision makers acknowledge the history that has preceded the present situation. All those ecosystems, have already withstood a far greater impact of human activity (a gold rush and over 100 years of timber removal) than anything that is likely to occur in the future.

Compared to what the flora and fauna populations have already accommodated, the likely impact of modern day prospectors on the parks is negligible. Prospecting is not the great threat it is painted to be.

The impact of naturally occurring events, such as fires, floods and even animal burrowing's, far and away exceeds the foreseeable impact of prospectors.

Recreation

The Victorian government has promulgated several initiatives to encourage outdoor recreation and fitness activities to combat obesity and other diseases. The healthy, outdoor physical activity encouraged by prospecting serves to reduce the demand for public health services and enhance the quality of life experiences for families and individuals.

Prospectors enhance their own health and also furnish a community benefit by removing poisonous lead from bullets and lead shot, preventing leaching into water courses and eventually into drinking water supplies.

Conclusions

- After reviewing the Draft Joint Management Plan documents, map and vision statement, NAPFA considers that the wide scale restrictions for prospectors is in conflict with elements of the vision statement "incorporating the culture of the Dja Dja Wurrung People".
- Recognising and incorporating the culture of the Dja Dja Wurrung People in the vision can be done without these restrictions to prospectors.
- Prospectors are key stakeholders and access the parks at more varied times and locations than any other group. They play a key role in providing valuable feedback on activities in the parks, and more importantly in reporting heritage sites.
- Prospectors are avid students of history and are keen to attend lectures, etc to learn more about the history of the land. They are a key asset to involve with educating the ways of the Dja Dja Wurrung People and recognising the cultural heritage.
- At this time NAPFA could not support the plan in principle, however, removal of the restrictions to access for prospectors would see our support to the other initiatives.

Recommendations

To reconsider the access restrictions placed on prospecting in the Draft Joint Management Plan and to allow recreational prospecting to continue with minimal restrictions in the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks.

To consider the many benefits that prospectors bring to the parks, in particular those which can be used to increase knowledge of the Dja Dja Wurrung people and their cultural and traditional values to others.

To consider the valuable contribution that can be made by prospectors in recognising and respecting heritage, providing feedback regarding damaging practices by other park users, and removing rubbish and unwanted metals.

NAPFA would welcome the opportunity to discuss any aspects of our submission and initiatives going forward.

Sean Ashcroft



President

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