

19 June 2018

**Submission to Draft Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks:
Strategy**

Introduction

We congratulate the partners on the Draft Joint Management Plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks: Strategy ('the Strategy') and welcome this opportunity to provide feedback.

The Wilderness Society Victoria is a community based, not-for-profit environmental organisation that recognises the right of Traditional Owners to claim title. The Wilderness Society Victoria is supportive of joint management arrangements and traditional use within sustainable limits.

General comments on the Strategy

There are many encouraging aspects to the Strategy, including intentions to:

- Strengthen equity, empowerment and capacity for joint management and self determination
- Establish and support Dja Dja Wurrung businesses related to the Parks
- Engage and raise cultural awareness among visitors and local communities
- Recognise the knowledge and culture of the Dja Dja Wurrung people in management of Country
- Jointly protect and manage cultural and environmental values and promote Dja Dja Wurrung law, culture rights and responsibilities
- Support Dja Dja Wurrung people to undertake systematic surveys of priority areas of Parks and prioritise management requirements
- Encourage employment of Dja Dja Wurrung rangers, management staff, and contractors
- Expand cultural heritage interpretation and communications.

Overall, the partners are to be congratulated on a Strategy that, we believe, promotes constructive steps towards land justice, reconciliation and better protection of cultural and natural values.

Traditional use

The Wilderness Society Victoria is supportive of the right for Traditional Owners to hunt, gather and use resources within protected areas in accordance with ecologically and culturally sustainable management, with Traditional Owners involved in the development of management plans and other prescriptions that may apply.

We believe Government and Traditional Owners should instigate special measures for the protection of rare and threatened species. Strong action is required for the future of rare and threatened species, as well as measures to prevent further threats to them.

We are supportive in principle of traditional use as described in the Strategy, noting there is insufficient detail within the Strategy to understand the processes in place to identify and manage for issues in areas or populations being harvested.

We strongly believe Dja Dja Wurrung and the partners need to be involved in development of management strategies, particularly for rare and threatened species.

Thinning trials within Parks

The Strategy identifies thinning trials as an action:

Implement the outcomes of eco-thinning trials (experimental removal of small trees that are crowding the understorey of the forest and woodlands undergoing recovery) to increase the speed of recovery of the woodlands and forests in the Parks, to meet Dja Dja Wurrung People's cultural values

and support cultural knowledge sharing (page 63 Strategy)

The Wilderness Society Victoria has concerns over proposed thinnings operations in forests and woodlands in other parts of Victoria, whether claimed to be for fire management, ecological and other objectives.

We believe the actual intent of many of thinning proposals elsewhere – while initially perhaps small in scale – is to in future establish commercial scale logging operations.

We are therefore wary of ‘thinnings trials’ in general and especially within protected areas, including ‘eco-thinnings trials’ where insufficient detail is provided.

We are strongly opposed to ‘thinnings trials’ for commercial purposes within the park or within protected areas.

We do however recognise, there may be a genuine ecological need for species specific or EVC specific thinnings at some specific sites, including within the parks, but we are unclear on the actual need for thinning on Dja Dja Wurrung country as there are insufficient details within the Strategy. We would welcome any further advice or information about this.

Logging in areas nearby to adjacent to Parks

We are concerned logging operations in areas adjacent to Parks. The currently approved Timber Utilisation Plan (April 2017) includes logging proposed near the Greater Bendigo National Park, Kooyoora State Park, Kara Kara National Park, Paddy Ranges State Park and Heburn Regional Park.

We strongly encourage consideration of the impacts of these logging operations on wildlife populations, movement and ecological processes, particularly that operate across Park boundaries – and support strong dialogue between all managers and agencies across the boundary of Parks within the Strategy about logging and its impacts on Dja Dja Wurrung country.

Intellectual Property

It is crucial that Dja Dja Wurrung intellectual property rights are recognised throughout the joint management process, and the need to develop protection mechanisms is highly supported.

Concluding remarks

Overall, we congratulate the partners on the positive aspects of the Strategy and look forward to its further development and implementation.

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