

This submission is on behalf of myself as a resident affected by the proposed SERA overlay. I have significant concerns about the entire proposal, in particular the information, or lack thereof, available to the general population. There has been very obvious sense of poor timing and insufficient management of this whole process in terms of ensuring public awareness and UNDERSTANDING.

My main issues include:

### **Inadequate consultation**

There is a very real sense of the department using COVID-19 as an opportunity to slip into policy a new set of overlay rules. It feels that DEWLP is taking advantage of an extremely stressful, unstable, and confusing time to introduce policy that will severely impact residents' livelihoods and the sustainability of our surrounding land. For instance:

- DEWLP states that it has provided consultation. However, according to the English dictionary, the meaning of 'consultation' is:

**a meeting to discuss something or to get advice:**

Noting the key underline words that the dictionary highlights, there has been no meetings with residents nor face-to-face opportunity to get advice from DEWLP to discuss. You can't just put information on a website and say you have consulted. This is not consistent with what a consultation is and involves and therefore makes this whole process inadmissible.

If DEWLP's answer is that they couldn't due to COVID, then this proves my belief that they are taking advantage of these unprecedented times to pass a legislation in a time where there is a high chance civilians will not see it or have the capacity to follow it up. It is imperative that DEWLP consults in a proper manner and at the very least delay this proposal until this proper consultation can occur.

### **Inadequate information and delivery of information**

The first time I heard of this proposal was when a neighbour reached out to me. Proceeding this was a flurry of attempts by me to gather further information. It is the 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020 and in 4 hours this letter has to be submitted and I still have absolutely no clarity of where, when, how etc. this will work. I don't understand your talk and the consultation has been denied to us where I could potentially get it explained in the layman terms I need.

Where is my letter explaining this SERA overlay proposal? I am in, what I believe to be an affected area and all I have is a photograph of my neighbour's letter. You have a responsibility to ensure all residents are aware of this. You failed – how many other people are still oblivious to this proposal?

Please delay this proposal until such time you have adhered to your responsibilities to the public by ensuring all affected resident are 100% informed and all relevant information has been provided with full transparency including HOW it affects me and my family and HOW you are going to ensure I am not adversely affected financially, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Furthermore, Little River is a community, a community that supports each other through thick and thin and this is evident in how we conducted ourselves through the fires and how we come together to support local initiatives such as fundraising for the school. Therefore, how do you respond to the fact that there are generational residents and farmers in the proposed area that you are impacting –

how can you ethically place this overlay on their productive land? As DEWLP has not actually conducted consultation, these farmers have not been provided with adequate information and what impact this has on their future. Many affected residents are farmers and have been poorly handled and treated.

### **Poor planning of SERA area**

Building from the above issue(s), the area is very close to the township. This will have long lasting effects on the community through noise, dust and trucks driving through the town. This was a large issue when the Youth Detention Centre foundations were constructed. Trucks were driving through the town at high speeds and at all times of the day creating a nuisance and danger to the community. Our roads are not designed for this type of traffic.

The area nominated for the SERA overlay is an irregular shape that looks like it has forcefully been planned to fit within the river and the Western Grasslands Reserve. This seems more like a tactic to lock down land rather than ensuring availability of extractive resources. There are appropriate extractive areas away from communities. The basalt plains is huge and these sites should be strategically placed in areas away from communities that don't have impacts on tens of thousands of residents.

### **Contradiction to current rules**

The council enforces rules and regulations so land owners maintain and encourage the native grasses in the area. This includes mitigating weeds through constant spot spraying. Some residents have literally had to move because of the strict regulation – the very regulations that you are now going to change with a click of a button. This is absolutely abhorrent. Little River residents even have rules around rock removal and now you want to come in and remove all the rock? – how is this not a gross contradiction and misuse of power? To me it is a matter of dictatorship and people sitting in an office thinking of their own agenda without a sense of how it is for those affected.

There is so often talk of being a hero...be the hero of the story, whether it be in its literal sense, or maybe it's a child at school standing up to a bully or maybe it's a person who through whatever avenues has found themselves in this seat of power at DEWLP where you can make a choice to think of your pockets or do the right thing by a community of hardworking, law abiding, upstanding citizens who have for decades, centuries even protected the very land you wish to rip away.

Little River has for a long time been seen as a location that should not be developed with the Wyndham council regularly making the following statement:

Develop plans for the Little River township precincts and manage their development to avoid over development, protect the adjoining rural precincts from any detrimental impacts that might arise from the townships' development, and prevent further expansion of the townships into the surrounding rural precincts.

But now you want to come in, rip it up, ruin the land and leave the people with the leftovers.

DEWLP has an entire section of the website dedicated to your commitment to the traditional owners of this land – the following statement comes direct from the VIC DEWLP:

“We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.”

Can you please provide me with the evidence and consultation notes that you have had with the traditional owners of the land and the impact it will have on the land in and surrounding Little River?

In closing, while there is so much more I could write (especially if I had all the proper information), I want to highlight that Little River doesn't just serve a purpose to its residents, it provides an escape for city dwellers (and residents) who come here to ride their bikes on our roads as they pass through to the You Yangs. It is a place where people come to breathe fresh air, get exercise and find a mental health balance that is so severely lacking in the fast paced world of cities. It is a tourist destination, a location for many movies and just a beautiful reflection of our country that has respected its heritage and culture. Please come and see who and how you are going to affect us and the wider community.

There is a great deal more that could be said, at the end of the day my request to you is:

- Find an alternative location that protects our beautiful land and serves your purpose. Please look for an appropriate balance.
- Delay the proposal until all consultations can be done fairly.

Regards,

(redacted)