

Meeting notes

Meeting: Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) Meeting 2

Date: Tuesday 19 November 2019

Location: Halls Gap (277 Grampians Road, Halls Gap)

Independent Chair: Mark Dingle (Deloitte)

Parks Victoria staff: Rhonda McNeil (Area Chief Ranger), Stuart Hughes (Director Park Planning), Koel Wrigley (Stakeholder Engagement), Josh Chikuse (Manager Park Management Planning)

Parks Victoria observers: Mathew Jackson (Chief Executive Officer), Annette Vickery (Parks Victoria Board), John Pandazopolous (Parks Victoria Board)

Participating organisations:

- Victorian National Parks Association
- DELWP FFR Regional
- Outdoors Victoria
- Grampians Tourism
- Bushwalking Victoria
- Rock-climbing Founding Council
- Four Wheel Drive Victoria
- Friends of Grampians Gariwerd
- Grampians National Park Advisory Group
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Southern Grampians Shire Council
- Ararat Rural City Council
- Northern Grampians Shire Council

Apologies: Aboriginal Victoria

The below meeting notes have been prepared to reflect the major themes of the discussion during the Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) meeting for the Greater Gariwerd (Grampians) Landscape Management Plan (the plan), and will be made publicly available from <https://engage.vic.gov.au/grampians-management-plan>. Organisations participating in the SRG are encouraged to share meeting notes with their community.

Welcome and introductions

- The group were welcomed by Mark Dingle, the independent chair (the chair), and each member asked to introduce themselves. There were several people who were replacing another representative for this meeting, so they were new to the group.
- The chair began the meeting by reiterating the role of the SRG and the overall project governance framework, and then outlined the agenda for the meeting.
- The chair confirmed that the Terms of Reference for the SRG are approved for public distribution and are now available on from <https://engage.vic.gov.au/grampians-management-plan>.

Overview of planning activities since meeting 1

- An overview of the activities that have occurred since the first SRG meeting was presented. Activities included:
 - Meeting notes from the first meeting have been publicly released
 - SRG Terms of Reference have been approved for public release – available on Engage Vic
 - Undertaken stage one of consultation for the development of the plan:
 - 12 face-to-face events and online participation
 - 270+ people attended workshops and listening posts, 450+ people contributed overall
 - Began engagement with broader Traditional Owner community members
 - Commenced Aboriginal Cultural Values Assessment
 - Commenced Visitor Experience Framework internal workshops
 - Commenced Natural Values and Impacts analysis
- The progress in the overall planning process was shared and it was confirmed that the plan is currently on track for a draft completed by June 2020.
- The different types of legislation that apply to the Grampians Landscape was summarised, particularly the National Parks Act (1975). It was reiterated that the plan must be developed to comply with this legislation. The key legislation that applies to the landscape is:
 - National Parks Act 1975
 - Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978
 - Wildlife (State Game Reserve) Regulations 2014
 - Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006
 - National Heritage Listing – (Commonwealth) Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999
- SRG members asked whether the timing of engagement with Traditional Owner communities for the Aboriginal Cultural Values Assessment will impact the plan's development timelines. The planning team confirmed that the aim is to conduct this engagement in early 2020 before the draft plan is prepared and that the assessment results will be incorporated into the draft plan.
- There was group discussion and interest in the community workshop numbers and the high drop-off rate in Melbourne based workshops, despite each one being fully booked out.

Presentation on the Grampians Peaks Trail

- There was a presentation on the Grampians Peaks Trail (GPT). This covered:
 - a description of the GPT, and when it will be completed
 - how the cultural heritage and environmental assessments were conducted on the trail alignment
 - the environmental management approach for construction, and
 - how the GPT will be included and managed for in the plan.

- A question was asked about what vegetation offsets are planned for vegetation clearing on the trail and campsites. The planning team confirmed that they are working with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to ensure all native vegetation management is in accordance with the relevant regulations. The planning team noted that there were changes to the procedures in how native vegetation regulations are administered for DELWP and Parks Victoria managed estate, and one aspect of this is that offsetting or counterbalancing activities may be across the Parks Victoria estate, not necessarily in the same park or Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) as where the native vegetation is cleared.
- A question was asked whether cultural heritage assessments were undertaken with Traditional Owners and experts. It was confirmed that a consultant was used who worked with each of the three Gariwerd Traditional Owner groups through the assessment.
- There was a discussion about whether the plan will influence the future management of the GPT. It was confirmed that the plan will include the GPT in its Visitor Experience Framework. This Framework will look at how the trail will interact with other visitor experiences in the landscape and how management directions will impact the operation of the trail.
- A question was asked about whether there is a plan to build more elaborate campsites on the trail. It was confirmed that Parks Victoria is looking into options for more accommodation types to support experiences on the trail. However, they must comply with the National Parks Act and other relevant legislation and management overlays (such as bushfire).
- SRG members stated that they would like the plan to have a role in setting future directions for the scale of visitor infrastructure in the future. They expressed that this will help the community and other areas of government know what is possible, and avoid unsolicited proposals and business cases being developed, an example of an unsuccessful community proposal was expressed.
- A question was asked regarding an estimate of how many people will be access the GPT. The estimate is 30,000 a year however Grampians Tourism will continue to track visitor numbers and trends. It was also pointed out that given the increase in population and visitors to the landscape, doing nothing to increase visitor experiences in the park could create more impacts. The GPT will support dispersing visitors around the park because it offers more walks in the north and south, which in turn will share the economic benefits with more communities around the landscape.
- The chair asked that the planning team describe the normal structure of a landscape management plan, for example summarising the table of contents. The following was how this was captured during the session:
 - Management Context
 - Vision
 - Management Zoning
 - Goals
 - Management strategies to achieve the goals

Presentation of the community engagement workshops and results

- A presentation was given providing overall numbers from stage one of consultation including how many people participated, their relationship to the landscape, where they came from and what they enjoy doing in the landscape. The evaluation results from the workshop were also shared.
- Several SRG members attended a workshop and the reflections they had was that there was a high representation from the rock-climbing community. Some members felt that the rock-climbing interest dominated the conversations, however it was acknowledged that it was positive to have that dialogue and for other groups to share their perspective with rock-climbing users.
- The suggestion was made by SRG members to do more consultation with researchers, as that is a key activity that occurs in the landscape. Parks Victoria said they would look into this, and that it will be straightforward to reach out to researchers through their existing research permits with Parks Victoria.
- An SRG member highlighted that participants self-selected to participate in the consultation and therefore they were not a statistical representation of the community. Parks Victoria confirmed that this will be acknowledged in the consultation summary report.

Group activity: Reviewing the engagement results and how Parks Victoria will consider community feedback.

Early engagement results were shared with the SRG members and a summary of how Parks Victoria is planning to consider the community's ideas in the development of the plan. There was an hour for SRG members to review the results, with Parks Victoria staff available to provide input and answer questions. The members were asked to respond to the following three questions:

1. Do you think we are adequately considering the community's feedback and ideas in the development of the plan?
2. How do you believe your stakeholders will respond to the key ideas suggested in the consultation?
3. Do you have any other feedback you want to provide on this management theme?

The key points from the discussions are summarized below under each management theme. Only three members submitted their answers to the above questions. Some members expressed they would have liked more time to review the results.

Environmental conservation

- The plan needs to describe S.M.A.R.T outcomes and have a focus on resourcing and implementation. There should be measurable programs and baseline data.
- Ensure that the planning process profiles the need for conservation strategies and links to research (activities and outcomes).
- Consider off-park outcomes for example, services located off-park and possible adjacent buffer areas to limit development on the edge of the park. This could be done by partnering with councils through the planning process. Also consider impacts on adjacent towns for example the carry

rubbish in and out policy means people leave their rubbish in the first towns they encounter after they leave the park.

Protecting and recognising cultural heritage

- There was discussion about the process for collecting knowledge about intangible heritage, and then how the information will be used. The planning team will be collecting information about intangible values through conversations with elders.
- SRG members believe there is a need for more information in-park about the cultural significance of the landscape. There was discussion about how this is best done for example, should Brambuk continue to be the focus or should there be new technology in the park?
- There was discussion about how cultural knowledge may be shared between Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria, and how this is or is not then shared with the community. For example, in some cases Traditional Owners may wish to not share specific details about intangible heritage values, but how do we still provide sufficient information for park users so they understand, and respect management directions influenced by the presence of intangible values.

Emergency management (fires, floods, droughts, landslides)

- SRG members would like Parks Victoria to be able to know more about what visitors are in the park at any given time and be able to communicate with them about emergency behaviour in the park. For example, the management plan could map out the key reception black spots to improve.
- Members would like to see a process which determines when and what sites need to be closed in preparation, response and recovery from emergencies.
- There was discussion about whether campfires should be allowed in the park at all during the fire danger period for example, November to March.
- Members believe there is a conflict between the State Forest and National Park Acts when it comes to fire. They would also like to see the role private landholders in emergency management acknowledged.
- Members of the SRG would like to see the plan consider what fire infrastructure will be required in the future to manage the increasing bushfire risks.

Visitor activities, facilities and access

- There was discussion about whether there were options for private investment or management of visitor infrastructure in the Parks, and how the National Parks Act reduces this ability. Some SRG members would like to see more opportunities for private investment, whereas some are opposed to this.
- Some SRG members would like to see a Parks pass or ballot system be investigated further to manage visitor numbers at peak times, especially if the money goes back into park management.
- Members expressed they would like to see access to key visitor sites from more locations around the park. For example, connecting the northern part of the Grampians Peaks Trail to Wartook Valley.

This could also be supported by more data and information about which sites are heavily booked and therefore could be supported by nearby offsite accommodation options.

- SRG members generally supported seeing more walking options to disperse people around the park.

Supporting recreational opportunities

- SRG members emphasised they wanted to see the plan acknowledge all recreational opportunities, including mountain biking and orienteering.
- Some SRG members would like to see the current Special Protection Area's re-evaluated, and a fine grained and nuanced approach taken that allows recreation in areas where the activity does not adversely impact cultural heritage or environmental values.
- They want the plan to consider how people's interest change overtime and consider what emerging activities will change how local people interact with the park. For example, will powered bikes need different management strategies to non-powered bikes.
- There is the opportunity in the plan to identify areas with fewer natural values and support more recreation in these areas.
- SRG members acknowledged that there is a need for infrastructure to support increasing visitor numbers.

Providing benefits beyond the park boundaries

- There was discussion about ensuring that locals can have daily access to the park when planning for visitor management.
- Some SRG members would like to see the plan provide greater consideration of the parks influence for the local communities, particularly the local businesses, emergency management and quality of water for downstream activities. They believe this is not described well in the plan.
- SRG members are keen to see the plan consider providing opportunities for people with all abilities and ensuring that all language used in information and interpretation is inclusive.

Presentation on the Grampians Conservation Action Plan

- The Conservation Action Plan (CAP) was presented to the SRG. The presentation focused on how the CAP came about, the approach to identifying key threats, key actions for the next five years and how the CAP will be incorporated into the plan. The CAP can be viewed here – (<https://www.parks.vic.gov.au/-/media/project/pv/main/parks/documents/get-into-nature/conservation-and-science/caps/grampians-conservation-action-plan-cap.pdf?la=en&hash=46AF5BEDFA4869048D78960E727C9DB778069706>).
- The current CAP outlines the priorities for the next five years, and therefore focusses on removing threats but not yet on restoring ecosystems. Through discussion it was agreed by the SRG members that they would like to see the plan include longer term ambitious goals such as restoration of ecosystems, building climate change resilience and establishing new ecosystem corridors.

- A question was asked about whether the conservation direction in the current management plan was effective. The response was that it was not easy to measure or prioritise actions under this direction, which is why the CAP was developed. As a result of the CAP Parks Victoria has been able to attract more funding for conservation activities, including recent Biodiversity Response Planning funding from the Victoria Government.
- An SRG member commented that there has been more activity in the last 18 months on pest management than they have seen in the last 15 years.
- An SRG member commented that it was great to see such a robust, best practice plan for environmental management. They would like to see a similar approach for cultural heritage management, and they asked what international best practice approach is for this (commenting that in other parts of the world there are management strategies that are satisfactory for all parties). Parks Victoria responded that they are certainly aiming to have a robust and best practice plan for cultural heritage management. It was noted that the best practice approach to cultural heritage management requires that we listen to elders and respond to what they think is best for managing country and cultural values.
- An SRG member shared that Greening Australia and other groups have been researching strategies for managing climate change impacts. They said Greening Australia will be releasing guidelines soon, which would be valuable for the environment and planning team to consider.

Wrap up and actions for next meeting

- The next meeting is planned for March 2020. The focus of the next meeting will be to explore options for the plan. It was agreed that the meeting may be a full day meeting to allow sufficient time for consideration and discussion.
- SRG members requested more information about trends and predictions for the future, particularly on visitor numbers, climate change impacts and booking system information. This would help them consider the different options that will be presented.