



BEVERLEY McARTHUR MP
Western Victoria Region

26 March, 2020

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your email, regarding the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) *Central West Investigation Report*, tabled in Parliament last year and currently under consideration by the Minister for the Environment Lily D'Ambrosio.

It is hard to overstate how strongly I agree with you, not just on the VEAC Central West report, but on the whole philosophy which seems to inform it and which has infected Government departments and Ministers for many years now. Like you I value Victoria's beautiful natural environment incredibly highly. I count myself extraordinarily fortunate to represent an area which contains so much of it, and would never want to see it damaged or degraded. Yet I passionately believe that there is no need to choose between conservation and sensible public-use and enjoyment. In fact the opposite is true – the more we encourage people to get out and experience our fantastic natural environment, the more they will wish to protect it for themselves and future generations. I was born in country Victoria, in Terang, grew up on a farm at Tylden, went to school in the bush at Mt Macedon, and have brought up my own children on a farm near Camperdown where I live with my husband, Stewart. I have always known, loved and appreciated 'country'.

The belief that man and nature should not in any way interact is deeply damaging. It's a threat to the liberty of Victorians to enjoy hobbies, activities, sports and business engrained in our culture. It's damaging to rural economies which may rely on these activities. It's also hugely counterproductive: the idea that we should lock up huge swathes of the bush and forest in the interest of environmentalism contributed to the neglect which brought us increasing fuel loads and more catastrophic bushfires.

I also find it absurd that Government should even consider expanding our national parks, when those already existing are so poorly maintained and managed. Extending national parks can only make things worse, and excluding the very user-group and community-led organisations which maintain the space would be disastrously counterproductive. Since my election, I have repeatedly raised this point. Just one example is the campaign I ran against the appalling treatment of the rock-climbing community by Parks Victoria, who wrongly accused the climbers of damaging Aboriginal rock art in the Grampians and attempted to ban them from the area: <https://www.bevmcarthur.com/new-page-3>

On the specifics of this report, I have had a number of discussions with Gold Prospecting groups. In addition to explaining the inconsistency, inadequacy and bias of VEAC and their consultants, and reinforcing the benefits of public access to the bush mentioned above, I was greatly struck by the public health argument they made. The mental and physical benefit of exercise and enjoyment in the great outdoors is considerable, and in an age where public policy values these so highly, it is surprising that recent Governments have misguidedly prioritised environmentalism over human health and happiness.

I hope, therefore, you will understand how strongly I oppose the VEAC report and the ideology which underpins it. Even before its publication, I argued strongly against the Government's desire to lock up the bush, and since June last year I have continued to make the case. I was happy to support the Bush Users Group petitions, and to help promote the most recent one at the public rally I held in Terang about bushfires, fuel-load and public land management.

Most recently, earlier this month I called an Adjournment Debate in Parliament on the VEAC report, and the damaging consequences acceptance of its recommendations would bring: *"Beholden to ideologues, this government appears determined to destroy the country pursuits which Victorians have enjoyed for decades... **Public spaces belong to all Victorians, not Parks Victoria, not the government and not the Premier.**"*

"This government's obsession with trying to avoid unearthing a single blade of grass is precisely the attitude that has contributed to the build-up of fuel loads in state forests and the out-of-control vegetation that has become rampant on our roadsides, which has exacerbated fire risk."

"Wherever possible we should be enabling citizens to pursue recreational activities that provide them with enjoyment and time spent outside amongst the natural environment. "

You can find my speech on Facebook – please do comment and share!

<https://www.facebook.com/BevMcArthurMP/videos/1974299312714217/>

I await a response from the Minister to this, and will update you when I receive one. In the meantime I can assure you I remain strongly opposed to the report's recommendations, and will spare no opportunity to contest them. While it is an unfortunate fact that the Labor Government has a parliamentary majority in Parliament, I do draw some encouragement from the increasing recognition – following the bushfires – that non-interventionist environmentalism can prove positively counterproductive, and so it may be that the campaign to reverse this trend will gain momentum. I will certainly continue to push in this direction, and hope that the campaigning effort that you and other BUGU members have made will ultimately make a difference.

Kind regards,



Beverley McArthur MP

Member for Western Victoria Region



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