

Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board  
PO Box 1363,  
Shepparton, Vic, 3632

## **SUBMISSION TO DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR BARMAH NATIONAL PARK**

I am writing on behalf of VRFish, the peak body representing Victoria's 838,000 recreational fishers. Fishing and camping in Victoria's national parks is a unique experience cherished by all generations of anglers. We believe Victorian fishers have the right to enjoy dispersed camping opportunities and have a campfire.

One of the purposes of VRFish is reconciliation with Traditional Owners through recreational fishing. We show leadership in our sector by advocating for the respect of, and awareness of cultural heritage values. VRFish recognises the positive outcomes that can arise from joint-management.

Firstly, there is still little knowledge around what Joint Management Plans are, how they come together and implemented. To achieve widespread community support as stated as one of the objectives of joint management under the TOLMA, more work needs to be done with users,

VRFish reiterates to many Government agencies and other managers that lengthy and complex management plans are significant barriers for the community to engage in and participate in. This draft plan is no different. VRFish is only able to perform this representational and expertise function through funding provided by Victorian Recreational Fishing License funds.

In addition, our current level of funding limits VRFish's ability in establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with Traditional Owners. This includes with the Yorta Yorta nation, at the levels we desire and think are required to build effective and long-lasting relationships and partnerships. We acknowledge there are some synergies with the needs and aspirations of recreational fishers and how Traditional Owners want to

***Let's make fishing  
better, for everyone.***

manage Country. We believe working together on native fish recovery, habitat restoration and responsible fishing and camping campaigns should be explored.

In general, many of the strategies can be considered aspirational and we question whether some are included for 'management for the sake of management'. We would encourage strategies to be reviewed to ensure they are realistic and achievable in the lifespan of the plan.

In conclusion, the majority of issues we have with the draft plan are almost identical to comments VRFish provided Parks Victoria to the Draft River Red Gums Plan Management Plan. These relate protecting dispersed camping and the use of campfires, and our opposition to camping booking systems. If these are not sufficiently addressed and taken into account, our advice is they will continue to cause significant and ongoing conflict with recreational fishers and campers.

Below is some specific feedback for each selected strategy.

### **Response to specific strategies or action:**

**E16** - *Implement programs with the Victorian Fisheries Authority to re-introduce or re-stock native fish species, including Trout Cod, Southern Pygmy Perch, Murray Cod and Long-tailed Catfish.*

Supported. In addition, should also refer to NSW DPI who manage the Murray River. Recovery stocking must be complemented by restoring instream habitat, riparian zones and removing fish passage barriers.

**E17** - *Reduce the impacts of exotic fish on native species where control methods are available, including promotion of Barmah as a key site for implementing the National Carp Control Plan.*

Supported. The impact of carp is significant.

**E18** - *Support research into the management of other invasive fish species such as Eastern Gambusia and Redfin.*

Referring to the such reports as *Barmah-Millewa Fish Condition Monitoring: 2006 to 2016* by the Arthur Rylah Institute, other species including oriental weatherloach and goldfish are found in significantly higher numbers than redfin perch. In fact, reported redfin perch numbers are negligible. Redfin perch are highly regarded and targeted as a

recreational fishing species and does not appear from the data to be requiring additional research or management.

**VE7** - *Provide access and opportunities for designated and dispersed camping in accordance with zone provisions and Table 3.*

Dispersed camping allows fishers to choose sites based on the camping with friends, family, number of people, duration of stay, time of year, whether they are fishing from boats and the desired type of fishing experience they are seeking. Fishers understand the level of demand for these locations and often have a suite of preferred campsites in mind. Our strong position is to retain the park's underdeveloped characteristics and dispersed camping experience across **all** visitor experience areas.

**VE10** - *Define and designate campsites where necessary to control encroachment on cultural sites (based on expanded cultural mapping) and impacts on vegetation. Periodically rest parts of camping areas to allow revegetation.*

While some areas may require some work to better define dispersed campsites areas it is our expectation that the local community is engaged and consulted with before changes are made. We question the value of periodically resting parts. It is unclear how long this will be required to realise enough benefits to outweigh negative consequences of closing areas and shifting effort elsewhere. To reiterate, some recreational fishers are seeking dispersed camping away from designated camping areas which provides greater solitude and is close to their favourite fishing spots, for example.

**VE13** - *Introduce a booking system and fees for camping in designated camping areas with facilities, comparable to fees in other Victorian national parks. Investigate arrangements to provide community fee concessions and re-invest fees in the maintenance of visitor facilities and services.*

Strongly opposed. The Andrews Labor Government has made a commitment to make camping more affordable, yet this plan is advocating for more fees? We question if this strategy is indicating that Victoria's current funding model for our National Parks is not sustainable. We continue to detect a strong demand for dispersed camping with only basic facilities and infrastructure. We are bemused that on one hand additional management is aspired to in the plan that is clearly unfunded and our observation is the push for more facilities appears to be coming from managers, not users.

The adverse impact of this management approach is fishers will no longer have the flexibility to enjoy a community resource without planning months in advance at peak times. Fishers monitor a range of environmental cues such as water temperature and flows to plan fishing activities. Fishers respond to recent fishing reports to increase their catchability and target fish when they are on the 'bite'.

**VE14** - *Ensure constructed fireplaces are provided in all designated camping areas and restrict the use of campfires to the fireplaces provided.*

VRFish seeks clarification whether this strategy, in effect, bans campfires at dispersed camping sites. If so, it is strongly opposed.

We do support that Victorians should be able to enjoy campfires in accordance with Victorian fire regulations. If constructed fireplaces are being rolled out across designated camping areas, then each site must have a fireplace for VRFish to support this strategy.

**VE15** - *Provide constructed fireplaces at dispersed visitor sites in the Dhungalla Zone and Walla Walla Zone where environmental and cultural values are identified as at risk.*

Where significant cultural or environmental are at risk it appears to be a reasonable mitigation treatment to consider the provision designated fireplaces.

**VE16** - *Educate visitors on the need to use constructed fireplaces, and enforce use through set asides under park regulations.*

A broader fire safety campaign is probably more effective, along with responsible camping attitudes and behaviours.

**VE19** - *Work with the New South Wales agencies to ensure coordinated enforcement of fire regulations, and seek authorisation of Parks Victoria staff to allow enforcement of NSW fire regulations.*

Starting to enforce NSW fire regulations on the southern banks of the Murray River is not practical and we question the value of policy. It's difficult for recreational users to determine if they are on NSW land while on the southern side of the Murray River. This a very technical point and effort surely should be spent on more meaningful activities to provide value to the park management than implement another state's conflicting fire regulations.

**VE20** - Increase resourcing and focus on education and enforcement to prevent visitors creating informal boat launching points on the banks of Dhungalla, and the lakes and creeks in the National Park.

We suggest a better approach is to develop a boating infrastructure plan with Better Boating Victoria that captures user expectations. Victorian boating infrastructure has been poorly planned for with little strategic oversight. VRFish has called for a review of the governance and funding models and establishment of an independent authority. Therefore, Better Boating Victoria should be involved before informal boat launching sites are closed or further areas are expanded as clearly, these launching sites are important and needed for fishers and boaters.

**VE23 Construct additional boat ramps between The Gulf and Sand Ridge Track, and at Ulupna Island, and upgrade boat access at Crawford's Road (see VE48 and VE58).**

Again, we encourage these ramps should be planned for as part of a boating infrastructure plan with Better Boating Victoria. These specific projects must capture user needs and expectations to ensure location and design specifications meet the mark for efficient and safe launching facilities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Loats', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rob Loats  
Chair  
Victorian Recreational Fishing Peak Body

6 October 2019