



## CONSERVATION POLICY

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### Conservation objectives

The bushland of Australia must be actively preserved if it is to survive. In particular, the wilderness areas, parks, and natural reserves in Victoria must be nurtured in order to maintain diversity of

<sup>1</sup> Adopted by the VicWalk Council on 6 June 2006.

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natural ecosystems and resources.

It is the policy of the Federation of Victorian Walking Clubs ("the Federation") to promote the protection of all such areas by example, education, information, and debate. Any public or private use of flora, fauna, land form, water bodies, rivers and streams, or activities which impinge thereon, must not degrade the environment and must be ecologically sustainable.

The Federation expects that the application of this policy will allow walkers and other members of the general public to continue to enjoy the Australian bush without prejudice to its natural, cultural, and aesthetic values.

### **The purpose of policy**

The Federation's Conservation Policy is a document of the Federation Council which directs the actions of all Federation officers, committees and any person who represents the Federation. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that the aforementioned parties may act without needing to refer all decisions to the Council. Should an unforeseen situation arise, including circumstances where it will be desirable for actions to be taken which directly contradict this policy, then the matter should be referred to the Council for resolution, or in urgent cases to the Federation Executive.

### **The Conservation Committee**

The Federation will maintain a Conservation Committee to investigate and report on the matters concerning the conservation of bushland and walking areas, and to act thereon on behalf of the Federation and its member clubs. The Committee will consist of representatives of member clubs under the chairmanship of the Federation Conservation Convener.

The Committee is to represent the Federation at meetings, conferences, workshops and similar functions convened by Government bodies, business interests, and other groups, review Management Plans and similar proposals; and make submissions to Government bodies and agencies. In preparing for these activities the Committee should make use of the most appropriate resources, and employ the best available expertise, whether these be within or outside the Federation.

The Committee is to liaise with Land Managers and co-operate on conservation projects where applicable. It should monitor the observance of agreed practices and promote the adoption of accepted best practice where possible.

In furtherance of this policy the Committee is to establish effective communications with Federation clubs and their members. It should encourage clubs to appoint a representative to serve on the Committee or, failing this, to nominate a contact person through whom to channel two-way communications. It should seek the active support of clubs in conservation projects and in its submissions to outside bodies, and where necessary organise this support. It should conduct educational programs on conservation issues such as minimum impact bushwalking, pest eradication programs, and current conservation policies.

The Committee should continually review the conservation policy of the Federation and make such

recommendations thereon as it considers desirable.

## **The role of member clubs**

The Federation encourages members of Federation clubs to participate in the conservation of bushland and walking areas, and in particular:

- to observe minimum impact bushwalking codes and other practices set out in Federation publications;
- to nominate representatives to serve on the Conservation Committee, or to act as contacts with that committee;
- to participate in conservation undertakings identified by the Committee;
- to write submissions and letters to Ministers, government agencies and other bodies concerning current issues; and
- to provide feed-back to the Committee on conservation issues, and to facilitate liaison between the Committee, Federation clubs, and other like-minded groups.

## **Responsibilities of bushwalking**

The Federation advocates the adoption of minimum impact by all bushwalkers and other users of the bush. We expect members of Federation clubs to conform to local requirements in the interest of preserving the bush itself and the species it harbours.

Such requirements include, among others:

- restricting the size of parties, particularly for overnight walks using bush camps
- avoiding the use of tracks, campsites, or entire areas that are temporarily or permanently closed;
- avoiding sensitive areas or those ecologically at risk, such as sphagnum moss beds and wetlands, the location of rare species, or outbreaks of cinnamon fungus;
- observing fuel stove only areas;
- carrying out all litter;
- taking care to avoid polluting water sources; and
- using tracks and trails where they exist, and avoiding creating ad-hoc tracks.

Bushwalkers should be familiar with various Codes of Practice, such as the Code of Forest Practices, so that they can note any breaches found in the field and report them to the Conservation Committee and the relevant management authority.

## **Land management and use by major groups**

### ***Wilderness***

All Wilderness areas should be protected by Acts of Parliament. Such Acts should be flexible, so that areas presently excluded on the grounds of size, and areas with wilderness qualities but bearing the marks of human works may be classified as Wilderness. They should also permit management authorities to implement programs that foster natural rehabilitation.

The Federation supports the establishment of buffer zones around designated Wilderness areas.

## ***Fire Management***

The Federation supports research into all aspects of fire prevention and suppression, and into the use of fire as a management tool. Research by organisations independent of managing bodies is particularly welcome. Where fire is used as a tool, independent programs must be in place to monitor and report on the results.

Management agencies should show sensitivity in the construction of fire breaks, having full regard to their effects on local ecology. Indeed, such agencies should give careful consideration to all relevant factors before using fire for management, and should make their intentions and objectives clear to the public before they do so.

## ***Campsites and Tracks***

The Federation recognises the benefits of banning fires in some areas and requiring that any cooking therein is done on fuel stoves. We support the application or extension of similar bans in regions identified as being endangered by the use of wood fires.

The Federation supports the occasional or periodic closure of overused campsites or walking tracks to permit them to recover. Where possible, suitable alternatives should be made available. We urge further research into the long term effects of heavy use on popular campsites, tracks, and their environment; where this research indicates that such facilities have a finite life span, management should develop plans to provide alternatives and rotate them as required.

## ***Huts***

VicWalk is opposed to further commercial development in State Forests, State Parks and National Parks.

There should be no huts in areas which are classified as wilderness. Any existing hut in these areas should be removed.

There should be no new huts in areas which have significant remoteness or conservation values, such as the “remote” and “conservation” zones of national parks. Where an existing hut in such areas is destroyed its replacement may be acceptable if it has high emergency refuge value.

Huts may be acceptable in areas which are zoned as “recreation development”. Any huts in these areas should be non-intrusive and their purpose should be to support low impact activities such as bushwalking or cross-country skiing.

If in special circumstances it is deemed necessary for a non-commercial hut or shelter to be erected, then VicWalk would consider this on a case by case basis.

## ***Flora and Fauna***

The conservation and protection of all native flora and fauna, and in particular of threatened and endangered species, is of paramount importance to the Federation. We support the eradication of all introduced plants in the bush, and of all feral animals. Eradication should be by means that do not endanger local native species.

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### **Forestry**

The Federation strenuously opposes any proposals to fell timber in existing National and State Parks and in reserves. Rainforest and natural native forest, including old growth forests not contained in National Parks or Wilderness areas should be declared as protected reserves to be preserved for the future.

The Federation endorses the “Code of Forest Practices for Timber Production” (DSE 1996), and supports its enforcement, with consistent application of prescribed penalties for breaches of the code.

We will campaign against the replacement of native forest with timber plantations. We support the planting of timber in areas where other existing forms of agriculture are no longer economic.

The Federation supports the establishment of native bush corridors to retain habitat and maintain diversity of species through migration.

### **Rivers and Streams**

The Federation supports “Integrated Catchment Management” for all rivers and streams to preserve the associated bushland and walking areas.

We condemn interference with natural water courses, and in particular we oppose dams on heritage rivers and the diversion of large volumes of water for industrial or agricultural purposes. In short, we urge the adoption of minimum impact practices.

### **Grazing**

The Federation opposes the grazing of farm animals on public land. Under no circumstances should grazing be permitted in National or State parks or in flora and fauna reserves.

We support the establishment of bush corridors linking areas of bushland to permit the migration of wild life, and again no grazing whatever should be permitted therein.

### **Mining**

Mining and mineral exploration in Wilderness areas, National and State parks and flora/fauna reserves is totally inconsistent with their conservation.

### **Alpine Resorts**

The Federation is opposed to the extension of existing Alpine Resorts , and to the creation of new Alpine Resorts. All Alpine Resorts should be managed for year-round use. We strongly condemn any proposal to extend the powers of the Alpine Resorts outside their resort areas or to exempt them from scrutiny. Alpine Resorts should not be permitted to operate within National or State parks.

We oppose activities within existing resorts that cause or accelerate environmental degradation, or which damage the environment outside those areas through water contamination, soil erosion, and the like. The creation of new ski trails or the extension of existing trails should not involve tree

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felling that would break the continuity of the tree canopy.

The Federation opposes any extension of the activities of ski resorts into adjacent areas. Mechanised activities such as over-snow transport should be minimised within the resorts and should not extend beyond resort boundaries except in emergencies. Under no circumstances should snow grooming extend beyond resort boundaries.

### ***Roads***

The Federation is opposed to the opening of additional roads for recreation purposes in parks, etc. Where excessive use of existing roads causes undue environmental damage or disruption to local fauna and flora they should be closed temporarily, seasonally, or permanently. Access roads for management, both existing and proposed, must be clearly justified.

### ***Aircraft***

The Federation is opposed to the construction of landing zones for fixed wing aircraft in reserves and parks. The operation of rotary wing aircraft into such areas should be restricted to search and rescue, fire-fighting, or essential management purposes.

Low level aircraft destroy values, such as quiet and a sense of remoteness, which are sought by the users of natural areas. The Federation opposes their use over national and state parks and reserves except in emergencies.

## **Other land use**

### ***Trail bikes and 4WD vehicles***

The use of trail bikes and 4WD vehicles is incompatible with quiet enjoyment of the bush. They should not be permitted to go off-road or to use walking tracks, and they should comply with requirements for registration. In their legitimate use of bush roads they should be driven in a manner sensitive to the environment: they should not cause erosion or pollution, and they should not exceed permitted noise levels.

### ***All Terrain Bicycles (Mountain Bikes, etc)***

The Federation will encourage all ATB riders to adopt minimum impact principles. However, ATB's should not be permitted off track, on walker-only tracks or in erosion-prone areas. In areas used heavily by both walkers and ATB riders management should consider the establishment of separate tracks.

### ***Hunting***

The Federation opposes shooting on public land other than as part of pest control or eradication programs organised or licensed by management authorities. In these circumstances limited participation by recognised shooting clubs under strict control may be accepted.

## ***Riding and Pack Animals (Horses, etc)***

The use of the word “horses” in this section means horses and other riding and pack animals.

Introduced animals are inherently incompatible with the conservation objectives of National Parks. The use of horses in National and State Parks, except on public roads, should cease as soon as possible. Feral animals should be eradicated.

The Federation considers that under no circumstances should horses be permitted:

- in highly erosion-prone areas;
- in wilderness zones;
- in areas of high conservation value;
- where restoration or establishment of indigenous vegetation is required; or
- on walker-only tracks. Where an area is heavily used by both walkers and horses management should consider the establishment of separate tracks.

The admission of horses to parks is a potential danger to the environment. A careful evaluation of their impact on the area should be carried out before they are admitted, and their effect monitored continually by independent observers. Where there is an unacceptable degree of environmental damage they should be excluded or restricted.

Their continued use in such areas must always accord with management plans and be subject to the following conditions:

- Commercial operations should be licensed, with restrictions on numbers, frequency of operation, and routes to be used, so as to ensure acceptable environmental impact. Camping by commercial operators should only be permitted at sites approved by the land managers.
- Camping areas and yards for horse parties should be physically separated by at least 100 metres from other camping areas.
- Competitive horse events should not be allowed in national or state parks.
- Food for horses must be sterilised, free of seed, and brought in from outside the park. Surplus and uneaten food must be recovered and removed from the park.
- Sources of water in areas shared by walkers and horses should be separate and clearly marked. Horses should be watered from a bucket or trough and not permitted within 50 metres of the water supply.