

LCC SW, District 2 – submission in 1979 on base report

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB.

Submissions to the Land Conservation Council concerning various areas of land in the South-Western Area District 2.

A. EUMERELLA BLOCK

1. Public land at Yambuk and Lake Yambuk

General Comment:

This stretch of coastal vegetation is the only area of public land adjoining the coast as you go west to Portland. The land is well protected from people by the channel entering the sea, and appears to contain relatively undisturbed native vegetation, albeit many Boxthorn bushes near the estuary. It is possible that it may act as a refuge for the orange-bellied parrot.

An old resident said that wombats were once prevalent in the area, before being exterminated by farmers in the period after the first world war. It should be possible to re-introduce wombats to the area.

The area is well protected on three sides by the ocean, Lake Yambuk and the Eumerella River. Areas on the East side of Lake Yambuk are more suited to recreational use.

Lake Yambuk itself has considerable conservation significance for water birds and native fish.

Recommendations:

That the public land to the ocean and western bank of the Yambuk estuary, plus Lake Yambuk itself, be declared a wild like reserve and be managed by the Fisheries and Wildlife Division.

(NB) Though we agree that the coastal branch of the Crown Lands Management Division is doing a good job in our area, we feel that the present and potential fauna aspects of these areas make the Fisheries and Wildlife Division the appropriate body.

2. Public Land at Pleasant Park, near St. Helens.

General Comments:

This area (approximately 50 ha.) is one of the very few areas of native vegetation left in the southern part of the study area. It is principally a swamp gum/manna gum woodland (plus blackwood and cherry ballart) with a heathy understory comprising species such as silver banksia, prickly tea tree, scented paper bark, common heath, grass tree, silky tea - tree and erect guinea flower.

The red-necked wallaby has been seen in this area.

The area has high conservation significance because it is one of very few areas of native vegetation left on that part of the Tyrendarra plains in the study area.

Recommendation:

That the area be declared a fauna and flora reserve. No grazing, timber extraction or soil removal should be allowed. The area should be managed by the Department of Crown Lands Management Division, provided that they are given adequate funds and manpower to do so. In our experience the Department of Crown Lands and Survey does not, in our area (excluding the coast), have sufficient resources to properly manage areas presently under its control.

3. Public Land at Pastoral Research Institute, Hamilton.

Introduction:

The former Buckley Swamp covered 2000 acres, but was drained in the 1890's. However it floods annually, with water lying for 1 - 2 months. Wild fowl are prominent here - particularly ibis, spoon-bills, herons but also a few Brolga - and the long term establishment of breeding and feeding grounds here would fill a gap in this region.

Historically Buckley Swamp had a prolific wildlife population and was a focal point for aboriginal tribes. Some dwellings on the banks were of a permanent nature (Ref. G. Robertsons records of 1840).

The land in question is a peat swamp and is atypical of land in Western Victoria. It is not suitable for experimental purposes for this reason. Further, it contains high Molybdenum concentration in the soil, and this induces severe copper deficiency in cattle and sheep which graze the area when it is not under water.

Present conditions and Management.

The swamp is not farmed intensively - and that is the only justification for continuing drainage. We believe that contributions annually towards maintenance of the drains is about \$2,000 - the remainder must come from public funds. It seems that the public at large is keeping uneconomic drainage schemes operating for the benefit of a few farmers. For example, to run a drag-line machine for 3 months a year would cost perhaps \$10 - 20,000, plus expense fees.

A more satisfactory use would be for nature conservation. This would benefit farmers indirectly by increasing the population of Ibis which can aid in the control of crickets - a very serious problem in this area.

It should be noted that the land in question at PRI could easily be separated from the major portion of the farm. A public road runs along the bank of the swamp separating the two blocks - in part (the southern end) this road has not been formed.

Recommendations:

(a) We recommend that a 500 acre portion (see map) of the former Buckley Swamp, now part of the P.R.I. should be given over to the control of the Fisheries and Wildlife Division, to convert the former Buckley Swamp back to its original status.

(b) The immediate transfer of $\frac{1}{2}$ of the area of the former Buckley Swamp would make further land acquisition by the Fisheries and Wildlife Division possible. (Obviously our proposal is a long term one, but several portions of the adjacent freehold land were on sale recently).

(c) In the short-term the Fisheries and Wildlife Division could construct levee banks to maintain wetland conditions on its part of the swamp without affecting freehold land upstream.

4. Mt. Napier and Mt. Eccles plus associated Lava Flows.

See separate submission.

5. Community Parkland Hamilton.

This area of approximately 200 ha. just outside the northern boundary of the City of Hamilton (note error in L.C.C. Report's Public Land Map) contains significant remnants of the original swamp gum woodland around Hamilton (about 100 native species have been recorded by club members). We support efforts being made by the Hamilton Water Trust and by the Community Parkland development committee to preserve and restore vegetation remnants of the area, and to develop the area for conservation, recreation and education purposes. The Water Trust have recently decided to terminate grazing on the most significant conservation areas, this decision is highly commendable.

Besides its high significance for flora conservation, the area contains an old reservoir and associated swamp, and would be a good habitat for water birds now that grazing around the area has ceased. Potentially it may also be a good area for the barred bandicoot once habitat is restored.

6. Lake Dolling Dolling.

This area is significant because it is the only public land swamp in the immediate Hamilton area in the study area. Old fence lines right across indicate that the area has been grazed in the past.

Recommendation:

That the area become a fauna reserve and that it be managed by the Fisheries and Wildlife Division.

B. BLACK RANGE - DUNDAS BLOCK.

1. Grampians - Black Range - Rocklands (north).

See separate submission.

2. Dundas Ranges, Southern Rocklands, Wannon River.

See separate submission.

3. Areas Near Coleraine.

Members of the Wannon Conservation Society are recommending that two areas near Coleraine (Denhills near Konong Wootong and Giant Rock near Wootong Vale) be fenced and protected from grazing to allow regeneration of native species. This is particularly important as this area around Coleraine is virtually devoid of both public land and of samples of the original vegetation. We strongly support their proposals.

4. Wannon River from the Wannon Falls upstream to Cavendish.

We have previously submitted a detailed submission on this area. The area contains considerably more public land that is indicated on the public land map - eg. substantial Crown Reserves at Four Posts (and midway between Nigretta and Four Posts), "The Rapids", Ballintubber - Sawpit Creek area and Diprose Bridge. Between these areas are many small river frontage stretches of public land. Some further comments on the Wannon area are made in our separate submission on the Dundas Ranges and nearby areas.

5. Kanagulk Crown Land fronting Glenelg River.

Introduction:

This is a woodland area of approximately 1,000 ha. 8km north of Balmoral. It has a c. 5km frontage to the Glenelg River on the south bank. Apart from this area, and areas east of Balmoral, there is little other access to the Glenelg. At Kanagulk there are at least 2 permanent water holes which are popular fishing spots for locals, and are most attractive billabongs.

The vegetation is basically open woodland of Redgum, Yellow Gum, Yellow Box and Stringybark. There is a fairly extensive heath area associated with the Stringybark. *Banksia marginata* grow on the sand sheets near the river on the western end, and the sandy heath vegetation here is in good condition. Grey box, unusual in this area, has been recorded.

A large area of Mallee Honey Myrtle (*Melaleuca neglecta*) grows in a swampy flat near the river in the central section.

Slender cypress pine (*Callitris preissii*) grows in one small area of cliff top at the Eastern end of the reserve. Several individuals must be of great age since they have a base thickness of around 24". This is an outlying Mallee species which is rare in this study area and surely constitutes the most southerly occurrence in Victoria. The nearest occurrences appear to be Mt. Arapiles and the outwash slopes of Mt. Zero.

In the same general area light wood (*Acacia implexa*) is to be found on a rocky bank. Another notable species is Porcupine grass (*Triodia irritans*).

The flora appears to be in a near natural condition and capable of responding to management.

Geologically the area is significant too, because it contains a large area of metamorphic rock (schist or gneiss) from the Ordovician period (c. 460 million years BC). Apart from one other area of public land (east of Balmoral, also fronting the Glenelg) there is no other public land in the study area containing significant quantities of metamorphic rock and soils derived therefrom.

Present Conditions and Management.

The whole area is, or has, been grazed by sheep. This has contributed to the sparse nature of much of the ground vegetation and the absence of young vegetation of most shrub and tree species. There is a very noticeable paucity of seedlings or young specimens of Hakea muellerana, Acacia verniciflua and ulicifolia, Casuarina stricta, Acacia implexa, Callitris preissii and all Eucalyptus spp. This trend must be reversed to prevent a climax vegetation phase developing with permanent loss of species.

Weed invasion does not seem to be significant. It is evident that the area has not been burned for many years. In most places a fire would not even carry. Judicious firing in some areas, at least, could well be desirable provided that grazing was terminated prior to this event. The banksia area in particular needs rejuvenation.

Timber has been harvested from the area at some stage - wood is still being removed (probably firewood and occasional sleepers or poles). There is a proliferation of tracks through the Western end of the area, some could well be closed since they all end in roughly the same area.

Fishermen, and possibly shooters, camp along the river. Recently a semi-permanent camp was seen there. One problem is that riverside vegetation is being destroyed - particularly the old Banksias - for firewood. Hopefully the same fate will not occur to the slender cypress pines at the "Pine Huts" area.

There are no picnic facilities - barbecue fire places, tables, toilets - a limited development of this type could well be provided at the western end of the reserve. Provision of firewood would overcome - to a large extent - vandalism to trees.

Fencing on the eastern (upstream) end of the reserve has fallen down in places and needs repair.

There is no evidence of management of any type in the area, although rubbish dumping and littering is not a significant problem yet.

Recommendations.

This area is important for preservation of woodland of the Yellow Gum - Yellow Box type; for public access to the Glenelg River for recreation - and for preservation of distinctive elements of flora (eg. Callitris preissii, Acacia implexa, Triodia irritans, Melaleuca neglecta) uncommon in this area.

Grazing should be terminated immediately, regardless of whom is the future manager.

A flora reserve may be an appropriate designation. Intermittent inspection and management by a ranger would probably suffice.

C. SOUTH-WEST WIMMERA PLAINS.

1. Mt. Arapiles.

See separate submission.

2. Other Areas.

Comments.

The lakes and the woodland areas have high conservation significance, especially for bird species, and should be managed accordingly. The Tooan block, because of its wide plant diversity and the most southerly record of the mallee fowl and some other birds, is extremely significant. The Meereek, Kadnook-Connewirrecoo, Tallageira and Kalingur sub-blocks are very significant because of the large areas of gum and box woodland remaining. The Jillpanger sub-block has a wide diversity of plant species, and is quite considerable in area.

Recommendations.

We recommend that no further alienation of land for agriculture occur, and that large section of the various blocks, especially the woodland areas, be protected from grazing. Most of the crown land and associated lakes in the SW Wimmera Plains area should be managed as flora and fauna reserves. Timber, sand and gravel extraction and grazing, should be confined to limited areas of low conservation significance.

D. GRAMPIANS BLOCK.

1. Grampians - Black Range - Rocklands Area.

See separate submission.

2. Water Reserve at Victoria Point.

General Comments.

This small area to the south of the road at Victoria Point is a very important flora area. It has many species of orchids, a beautiful spring surrounded by King Fern and Fishbone water fern, and two species of boobialla (Myoporum insulare and Myoporum viscosum), both of which are very rare in the Grampians and surrounding area. Yellow box also occurs here, a very southerly occurrence of this species. Orchids found include the waxlip orchid, tall greenhood, dwarf greenhood, nodding greenhood, maroon-hood, trim greenhood, leopard orchid, snake orchid, green comb spider orchid and Caladenia patersonii var hastata (very rare in the Victoria Range). It is well-known as a good spot for orchids.

Recommendation:

The area needs to be permanently protected by including it in the proposed Grampians National Park.

3. Bryan Swamp - Wannon River.

Due to the importance of this area for conservation of water birds, we recommend that -

(a) Bryan Swamp, plus the section of reserved forest adjacent on the Wannon River at McIntyres Crossing be managed as a Fauna Reserve by the Fisheries and Wildlife Division.

(b) Not all the frontage of Bryan Swamp is public land; the remainder should be acquired wherever possible. Also, land should be acquired between Bryan Swamp to the Wannon River to link these two areas.

E. GENERAL ISSUES.

1. River Improvement Works.

Introduction.

Our experience with such works is confined to the Glenelg and Wannon Rivers, although we have seen examples elsewhere in the State.

Our opinion is that the available funds should be spent on rehabilitations of catchment areas for erosion prevention and revegetation, rather than on de-snagging schemes.

There is ample historical evidence to suggest that the Wannon has always flooded its banks to the extent of its flood plain during wet winters. The presence of sand and salt is obviously now largely associated with clearing of the catchment areas. This would seem to be a separate issue and the problem that needs tackling. Short term efforts to shift the loads of sand downstream by speeding up the water flow rate have had bad environmental effects and are no solution to the problem.

The composition of the standing consultative committee on river improvement is inadequate. There is no member representing the Department of Agriculture, who are in the best position to judge effects of flooding on pasture production. Moreover the Committee has not consulted persons who do not favour de-snagging and drainage schemes.

There has been no economic assessment made on the schemes - not even the most rudimentary cost / benefit analysis has been published. Department of Agriculture economists could have done this.

Recommendation.

We recommend that no "improvement" work be permitted on sections of the rivers which have Crown frontage or Crown reserves especially upstream from the Wannon Falls to Dunkeld.

2. Preservation of Native Vegetation on Roadsides and Railway Lines.

General Comments.

In the areas immediately around Hamilton and Coleraine, very little of the original woodland / grassland areas remain. Most of this area was developed for agriculture, and the very few areas of public land left are either too poor for agriculture (eg. sandy heaths, stony rises), or too wet (swamps). The vegetation in these areas is not the same as that which once existed on the majority of the land, the only remnants of which now occur principally along roadsides, railway lines and stream reserves, and in cemeteries.

We are concerned that local Shire Councils do not appear interested in conserving roadside vegetation. In most cases a bulldozer is sent through regardless of the significance of the flora. In our area ploughing of wide fire breaks between the fence and road tarmac is becoming more prevalent particularly in Wannon Shire. We feel that Victoria should follow the lead of other States (eg. Western Australia) and make it illegal to cultivate road reserves. In most cases a mown break of adequate width on the freehold side of the fence or a ploughed break is sufficient. Some Shires in Western Australia enforce the by-laws whereby fire breaks on boundaries are mandatory.

We have not been successful in our attempts to reserve from grazing certain sections of closed railway reserves. In many cases leases have already been granted to adjoining land-owners. We were informed that such requests would always be given priority over applications to reserve sections for flora conservation.

This is an alarming situation - to date these railway lines (eg. Hamilton - Noradjuia, Hamilton - Peshurst, Hamilton - Coleraine) have ensured that some native vegetation remained across otherwise cleared land.

We have recently made applications to preserve three small areas. One is near the Wannon River (between the bridge and the Wannon - Nigretta Tourist Road), the second south of Kanawalla Siding (approx. 1 km to the next crossing) and at Muddy Creek (200 metres between the level crossing on Mt. Napier Road and the level crossing to the east). The sandy Wannon area contains Triodia irritans and Calytrix tetragona, apart from other heath species. These are rare in the immediate area. The Kanawalla grassland area contains basalt flora - including Blue pincushions, Common Everlasting, Blue Sun-orchids, Onion-orchids and at least 50 other native species.

The Railways Department will not lease sections of the line to bodies such as ours. Rather, the Shire must make an application on our behalf and thereafter bear the responsibility.

We see no good reason why the Railways will not investigate applications such as ours and establish flora reservations on certain areas, without payment of rental being required.

In the event of these lines being re-opened in future years we envisage that the impact of grazing - in particular - will have totally destroyed the native vegetation that exists today. We notice that already virtually all of the Hamilton - Coleraine railway line between Hamilton and the Wannon Falls (about 9 miles) is heavily grazed following closure of the line in 1978. Much of this maybe illegal, but whatever the case the end result will be the same.

Recommendations.

(a) That Vic Rail be specifically asked to conform with the L.C.C. conditions, that land-use is not decided until after resolution by the L.C.C. Further that Vic Rail be asked to take an active part in the conservation of native flora on these used and unused railway lines. To that end we recommend that Vic Rail inspect all closed lines, in consultation with appropriate local bodies (FCV, NPS, Field Naturalist Clubs etc), with the aim of protecting significant areas as Flora Reserves.

(b) That Shire Councils be specifically asked by the L.C.C. to take active steps to protect roadside vegetation. Steps in this process should include:

- (1) Consultation with appropriate groups such as local Naturalists, Forests Commission, National Parks Service, Crown Lands Management etc.
- (2) Classification of the conservation significance of various roadsides.
- (3) Development of a management plan for roadside conservation.

3. School Flora reserves.

Comments .

Hamilton High School manages (on behalf of the City Council) a flora reserve of approx. 4 ha. on the corner of Mt. Baimbridge Road and North Boundary Road, Hamilton. Part of the area used to contain pines (harvested in 1973), a small plantation of ironbarks and grey box (planted in 1932) still remain, as does reasonable remnants of the original basalt plains flora. The area was protected from grazing in 1973, with the intention of developing an arboretum of Western Victorian plants in one section, and allowing the remainder to regenerate. It is used by High School students for field-work (science, geography). Over 40 indigenous species have been recorded, and it is notable how the original vegetation is recovering. In particular, slender sun-orchids (Thelymitra pauciflora) have increased markedly in numbers.

The Cavendish Primary School manages a flora reserve to the south of the school. This area contains valuable remnants of the original vegetation around Cavendish. A very small greenhood orchid occurs here (Pterostylis mutica?) uncommon in our district.

The two schools concerned have been taking active steps to protect and restore these areas.

Recommendations.

These areas should continue to be managed by the two schools on behalf of the Department of Crown Lands so that restoration of the original vegetation can continue and school students can use them for field work and nature study.