

30 June 2020

Mr Andrew McNee
Assistant Secretary
Environmental Approvals Division
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment
GPO Box 858
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Andrew

SADDLE LOOKOUT – SHOWCASING EASTERN MAAR PEOPLE AND COUNTRY

Thank you for our discussions to date regarding the Saddle Lookout project. As we move into the next stage of the project, I wish to provide some information about the partnership between Parks Victoria and the Eastern Maar people.

Parks Victoria recognises that Aboriginal people make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of Victoria, and that the people of Australia intend to rectify the consequences of past injustices.

Parks Victoria recognises that the world class network of parks and reserves under our management form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, which have been modified over many thousands of years of occupation. These landscapes are reflections of how Aboriginal people engaged with their world and experienced their surroundings, physically and spiritually – making them products of enduring economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns. These landscapes are tangible and intangible Aboriginal heritage - evidence of an ancient culture, which continues to live and offer deep insights into the defining characteristics of this Country.

Parks Victoria has principles emboldened through our Managing Country Together framework that aspire, or compel us through all our actions, to provide new opportunities for contemporary expression of Aboriginal culture and rights, which are becoming more broadly understood and celebrated throughout the Victorian community.

The process to date of Parks Victoria ensuring the new structure needed at Saddle Lookout meets the standards of the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Protection Act 1999 has highlighted fundamental challenges to ensure the aspirations of managing Country together can be achieved.

From the outset of planning, the process has been a true partnership between Parks Victoria and the Eastern Maar community. Elders and community members have contributed their ideas and wisdom in how best to express the identity of Eastern Maar Country to the millions of people that will visit the lookout. Parks Victoria was privileged to work with an outstanding designer, Aunty Vicki Couzens, to reach a design that celebrates the landscape in a powerful and sophisticated manner.

Parks Victoria has illustrated the need for a new lookout at this internationally significant location; the functional drivers that have influenced the design; and how the risk of impacts to flora, fauna and social values have been mitigated.

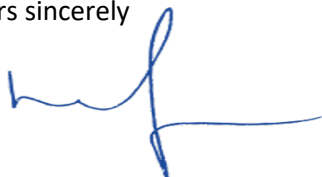
The challenge of this project to date has been the inability for the Eastern Maar tangible and intangible values, woven into the project, to be considered by the Department. The National Heritage List citation process inextricably excluded these values. In discussions this year between the Department, Parks Victoria and Eastern Maar representatives, the injustice of Eastern Maar values not being recognised (and celebrated) in the citation has been expressed by the Eastern Maar community members. In contrast, the partnership with Parks Victoria in planning the future of the Saddle Lookout was considered by Eastern Maar to be collaborative and respectful.

The colour palette for the structure, chosen by Eastern Maar as a representation of the totemic cockatoos, is a crucial part of the design and people's identity. These colours are important, and to date the evaluation process has considered them impactful to the historic heritage values. With this next stage of evaluation, we seek that this important feature is seen as a real benefit.

Comprehensive technical information is provided to the Department, and community through a further exhibition process, that evidences the need, benefits and impact mitigation of the proposed works. This letter is provided to reinforce the value of the partnership with the Eastern Maar people, and the powerful expression of their values through a design that puts people and Country at the forefront.

There is a tremendous opportunity for the Department to support the Saddle Lookout renewal. In doing so, governments can celebrate a contemporary approach to inclusion of social and cultural values; address legacy barriers; and demonstrate new opportunities for contemporary expression of Aboriginal culture and rights.

Yours sincerely



Matthew Jackson
Chief Executive Officer