

INQUIRY INTO TOURISM IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Organisation: Prospectors & Miners Association of Victoria
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Submission to the Inquiry into Tourism in Local Communities

From the Prospectors and Miners
Association of Victoria Inc.

Reg No: A0000422H

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About the Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria

The PMAV was established in 1980 to protect and enhance the rights and opportunities for prospectors and miners in the state of Victoria.

The PMAV is managed by a voluntary committee of 10 with branches in Melbourne, East Gippsland, West Gippsland, Central Goldfields, North East Victoria and Ballarat.

We have no paid staff and no dedicated office.

We have approximately 1400 memberships which equates to around 3000 members. All prospecting and some camping clubs have joined as single memberships of the PMAV so the total number of people involved is not known.

Our membership has steadily increased over the past few years.

We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission to the Committee and trust it will be given true consideration.

Contact details

Postal address: GPO Box 1706, Melbourne Vic 3001.

E-mail: pmav@pmav.org.au

Web: www.pmav.org.au

Our current committee

President – Rita Bentley

Full-time miner/pro prospector for 12 years from 1981 and a recreational prospector since then. Member of many state government advisory boards and committees over the past 25 years. Editor of the Eureka Echo.

Vice-President – Andrew Bales

Geologist and recreational prospector. Member of the Geological Society of Australia.

Treasurer – Geoff Strang

Owner of 'Prospecting Supplies Australia' a wholesaler to the prospecting industry. Previous manager of Miners' Den. Secretary/Treasurer of the Gold Panning Association. Recreational prospector.

Secretary – Wallace Young

Recreational Prospector and office bearer with the Ivanhoe Fossickers Club.

Committee

Don Brereton	Inventor, retired engineer. Recreational prospector
Bruce Brown	Small-scale miner and member of various government committees.
Mark Craig	Recreational prospector and convenor of PMAV Melbourne branch.
Peter Maffey	Recreational prospector and member of the Victorian Seekers Club
Tony Mills	Full-time prospector following sale and retirement from ownership of Goldsearch Australia - a prospecting retail outlet in Dunolly.
Dean Smith	Recreational prospector. Preparator and taxidermist at the Melbourne Museum

Introduction

Prospecting is an activity undertaken largely by older Australians. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of people participating, we believe this is due to the 'baby-boomers' reaching retirement age and wanting to remain active.

Recreational prospecting is considered in Victoria to be the search for minerals (particularly gold and gemstones) using only hand tools for excavation.

Prospecting is regulated by the Miners Right which is issued under the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act.

What is 21st Century Prospecting?

Prospecting (or searching as it is referred to in the Mineral Resources Sustainable Development Act) is the activity of looking for minerals – in this case we are discussing recreational prospecting under a Miners Right. Under the Miners Right activity is limited to using hand tools to excavate. Typically prospectors use a metal detector, gold pan or small portable sluice. Some use a small pump to move water over a sluice, while others simply put the sluice in flowing water and let nature do the work.

Metal Detecting became popular in the 1980's as new technology allowed individuals to search for gold in mineralised ground. The early detectors were not particularly good; as a result much gold was missed. Despite this there were a large number of significant nugget finds. The largest of which was the Hand of Faith at 876oz found at Kingower in Central Victoria. This nugget received huge media coverage and was eventually sold for \$1 million to a casino in the USA where it is still on display. Its discovery by Kevin Hillier and his wife Bep in 1980 sparked a new gold rush which continues to this day.



The PMAV has produced a short film on modern prospecting. It can be found at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cElqEl39QbM> The level of interest in prospecting can be indicated by the number of views - 903,602 as at 26th June 2013. People are interested in knowing about responsible, modern prospecting.

21st Century prospecting is a healthy, non-invasive, pastime that can cost lots or little to participate in. A gold pan might cost \$10 add a small shovel you can start. That is the cheapest; the most expensive is the \$6,500 state of the art Minelab metal detector GPX 5000. The Minelab GPX 500 is at the forefront of gold detectors. This Australian company makes the best gold detectors in the world. The idea for these detectors was based on conditions and environment of the Victorian Goldfields. They are now exported far and wide.

Prospecting is an activity that anyone can try. It can be exciting, relaxing, mentally soothing, physically demanding (or not), sociable or in solitude – the variations are huge. But no matter what form it takes it is fun and harmless!

Tourism

With the onset of the 1980's Gold Rush, the economies of several sleepy Central Victorian towns such as Dunolly, Tarnagulla, Inglewood and Talbot received a wake up as prospectors spent their money on supplies and accommodation. Prospecting continues to underpin the economy of many towns through to the present day. Ask Robyn Vella, Loddon Shire's Tourism Officer how Wedderburn would cope without the prospecting fraternity.

Some larger towns also benefit from prospectors, as an example, Maryborough welcomes prospectors – to confirm this, simply ask the Maryborough Caravan Park about how their business would be without prospectors.

The discovery of the 177oz Ballarat nugget in January, 2013 has sparked an increase in interest in Victoria's goldfields from around the world. A YouTube clip showing the nugget took a little over a week to reach 1 million views.

The discovery of this nugget has meant tour operators are booked out into the foreseeable future with many customers coming from overseas.

While Victoria holds the record for large nuggets, New South Wales has had its share and is missing out on much of the gold tourism industry.

There is no fanfare linked to prospecting tourism. Like the activity's participants, it happens quietly without fuss or government funding, but many areas would be lost without it.

Benefits of Outdoor Activity to Mental Health

Much has been said about the physical benefits of participating in active pursuits. There is emerging evidence regarding the mental benefits of such. We refer to a report in 'The Nursing Times' 25th June, 2012 which states:

A new study has shown taking part in regular outdoor activity can reduce the risk of suffering mental health problems by half.

Researchers at the University of Glasgow found activities in natural environments such as forests and parks have an especially positive effect on stress, fatigue and mood.

<http://www.nursingtimes.net/nursing-practice/clinical-zones/mental-health/mental-health-boosted-by-outdoor-sport/5046305.article>

Older Australians and the disabled are not likely to climb mountains, go trail-bike or mountain bike riding or orienteering, but many do go prospecting.

Environmental Bonus

Prospectors routinely remove rubbish, pull weeds, report feral animals and can be a real environmental benefit. We would all benefit if prospecting with adherence to a few sensible principles was encouraged, many of which are already undertaken.

We have suggested to the Victorian Government that, in addition to the requirements under a Miners Right, prospectors be encouraged to:

- Remove any additional rubbish found wherever practical.
- Remove all lead and mercury recovered while prospecting and dispose of in an environmentally sound manner.
- Contribute to weed removal wherever possible.
- Report any significant sightings of feral animals.
- Report any inappropriate/illegal behaviour of others.

Many prospectors do this already. Others just need a bit of encouragement. The PMAV has a code of conduct, as do prospecting and camping clubs.

Prospectors in Action



Photo courtesy Gold Prospecting Australia



Photo courtesy François Gilbert

Prospectors in the Community.

Prospectors are very proud of what we do. We enjoy our links with this 160 year heritage of Victoria and many of us work to promote the activity, particularly to younger Victorians.

The PMAV participates in the Australia Day festivities in the King's Domain Gardens in Melbourne. We demonstrate gold panning and metal detecting and encourage a hands-on experience for the public. This year we had around 500 people try panning alone. We were overwhelmed by the interest.



Our branches regularly participate in community events to promote the activity and to extend the heritage.

Our North East branch was approached by their regional TAFE recently as a group of young disabled people at the TAFE were keen to try prospecting. The branch co-operated and the kids had a great time.



TAFE kids enjoying prospecting

Our Heritage

In the clean-up following the 2003 Alpine bushfires, a PMAV member at Bendoc contacted the Association very concerned that an historic steam boiler was being bulldozed into a pit by DSE contractors. A few phone calls later and the boiler was saved from destruction. This is an example of the excellent work done by the PMAV with the support of our membership to protect our heritage items. Again, we are not interested in destroying anything; we treasure our heritage more than most members of the Victorian public. We believe we are part of a living heritage.

The PMAV's East Gippsland branch recently restored the Bullumwaal Cemetery. The Cemetery had been uncared for over an extensive period. Given that many miners were buried there, the branch decided to make a project out of its restoration.

Summary

The above is an abbreviated form of a submission put to a recent Victorian Government Inquiry into extending prospecting access into additional national and state parks.

We hope that the Committee from the New South Wales Inquiry into Tourism in Local Communities finds the contents interesting and useful.

Submission prepared by Rita Bentley. PMAV President.