



15 March 2016

Hon. Daniel Andrews
Premier of Victoria
Parliament House
Spring Street
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Cc: Hon. Lisa Neville, Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water
Hon. John Eren, Minister for Sport; Tourism and Major Events

Re: Victoria's parks and recreational assets

Dear Premier,

On behalf of the outdoors community of our state, Outdoors Victoria and the groups listed below would like to express our deep concern that our state's wonderful network of state and national parks, waterways and other outdoor recreational assets is in decline due to inadequate funding.

Since 2011, per-visit funding for Parks Victoria has declined by 35% in real terms, and staffing levels have fallen by 11%. These cuts have come at a time of greater realisation of the centrality of our parks in delivering a range of policy objectives, from health and wellbeing, to ecological resilience, to regional economic development, to the visitor economy and many other areas.

At a time when expectations are increasing, and more and more people are visiting our parks, we believe the lack of adequate resourcing for Parks Victoria risks doing long-term damage to our economy and our wellbeing. Our community is already experiencing the consequences of these cuts in the form of worse maintenance of facilities, a lower standard of visitor information and community engagement, and less effective environmental management.

We acknowledge the leadership shown by your government, and by Minister Lisa Neville in particular, in approving an \$11 million emergency injection of funding for Parks Victoria in last year's budget. This funding was most welcome.

This year, we believe more ambitious action is needed. An additional commitment of \$75 million would be needed to restore Parks Victoria to 2011 funding levels on an inflation-adjusted per-visit basis.

Such funding could provide for more rangers on the ground, more resources for visitor facilities and infrastructure, more resources for conservation, rehabilitation and land management, and better programming and community engagement across the board.

Our community does our very best to help out and pull our own weight. Outdoors clubs and "Friends of" groups contribute many thousands of volunteer hours every year to conservation, maintenance and citizen-science work in partnership with Parks Victoria. We have the utmost respect for Parks staff, and believe they have done the best possible with the deep cuts to their funding.

Outdoors and nature-based recreation, tourism and education are a key pillar of many regional economies in our state. Independent economic analysis commissioned by Outdoors Victoria (to be released later this month) shows a gross value-add of \$6.2 billion annually attributable to outdoor and nature-based activities, generating 71,000 jobs for our state. Much of this is in regional areas.

We believe the example set by the United States may be helpful. Last year, President Barack Obama launched the “Every Kid in a Park” initiative, which included free entry to national parks for every year 4 student and their family, as well as paid youth coordinators in national parks, free transportation from low-income areas to parks, and a range of other investments in parks maintenance, environmental education and other programming.

Meanwhile, in Australia, the Active Healthy Kids Alliance found in 2014 that less than one in five of our children are meeting the minimum required daily physical activity guidelines of 60 minutes of physical activity per day.

We can do our part to reverse this trend, we ask of you only that you give our parks service the tools and resources to do their part well. Our kids’ health depends on it.

We would be pleased to discuss any aspect of this submission with you, at your convenience. Please feel free to contact me at on 0417 447599 to arrange a time, and many thanks for your consideration.

Best regards,

Chuck Berger
CEO, Outdoors Victoria

Endorsed by

