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In accordance with directions found on the Engage Victoria website (<https://engage.vic.gov.au/seppwaters>) below is the general submission from Parks Victoria for the Draft State Environment Protection Policy (Waters) review.

Submission to the DELWP SEPP (Waters) Review Team

Parks Victoria (PV) supports the revised state-wide focus for the SEPP (Waters) and bringing together the protection of surface water and groundwater. Through its obligations under the SEPP, PV will continue to contribute to the objectives for environmental quality and beneficial uses of waters and the management of pollution into receiving waters. The SEPPs support maintenance of water quality for water dependent natural and cultural values, and opportunities for the use and enjoyment of Victoria's parks and reserves.

PV has obligations to ensure SEPP objectives are met in regards protecting beneficial uses and to work with partners to achieve these. The SEPP enables PV to seek investment and develop programs to achieve these goals. These include working with water authorities, CMAs, industry groups including agriculture, and the community.

PV acknowledges the practicability approach of the SEPP to balancing trade-offs with economic or social development while recognising risks and consequences. PV practice for activities such as dredging, stormwater and sediment runoff, chemical and fuel storage aim to implement best practice and pursue continuous improvement.

Specific comments are made to improve the SEPP policy document:

It would be useful to include a list of "protection agencies" and what are they responsible for to be clearly explained in the introduction to the document. Relevant agencies and their roles could be listed up front or in appendix (which can be updated if they change).

It would be useful to provide some guidance as to the accountability of undertaking monitoring. The policy lacks clarity regarding the monitoring accountability for 'protection agencies' i.e. who is responsible for undertaking and/or ensuring for different types of monitoring water quality particularly for major rivers and water bodies e.g. Port Phillip Bay, Westernport, Gippsland Lakes. While overall it is the EPA, but in what circumstances can/or has this been delegated? This may fit within Schedule 3: Environmental quality Indicators and Objectives.

An omission within the scope of the SEPP is the management of fire (both wildfire and controlled burns) and recovery after fire. Given the widespread use of chemicals as retardants, and the significant impacts of runoff from fire on waterways and nearshore environments the impact of fire management should not be excluded from the SEPP.

Comments on specific clauses:

Clause 12 Assessing Practicability.

Parks Victoria acknowledges the practicability approach of the SEPP to balancing trade-offs with economic or social development while recognising risks and consequences. This should also consider economic considerations as outlines in Environment Protection Act principle 1Bc that states that measures adopted should be cost-effective and in proportion to the significance of the environmental problems being addressed.

Clause 38. Management of recreation activities.

This is an important focus for PV such as in lakes, rivers, wetlands, estuaries, bays, estuaries and the open coast. The SEPP explanatory notes state that this does not add further obligations to agencies but it can be used to justify resources for programs to address threats. This raises the question whether PV will need to undertake more monitoring for microbial water quality in relation to primary and secondary contact to meet water quality objectives and requirements. Refer to point above - It would be useful to provide some guidance as to the accountability of undertaking monitoring.

Clause 39. Minimising runoff from pollutants from agricultural activities.

This section refers only to the land occupier (referring to farmers), and uses the term “as far as practicable”. The clause would be strengthened by including the role of Protection Agencies e.g. CMAs, DELWP, DETEJR in providing extension type activities to improve negative impacts of nutrients on waterways, estuaries, bays and inlets derived from agriculture. The Implementation Plan (Appendix A) does recognise the need for effective agricultural management practices.

Clause 52 Aquatic Pests.

PV has concerns that the policy no longer refers to introduction and spread of aquatic pests generally i.e. previous wording was “including ballast” but current wording doesn’t seem to allow for issues (the actual aquatic pest itself or the mechanism of transfer) other than “from biofouling on vessels” to be acted upon. Freshwater pests also need to be referenced explicitly.

The policy should either recognise all vectors and pathways for invasion by pests, or otherwise make a general reference to preventing the introduction and spread of aquatic pests. Limiting it to vessel owners seems too narrow, particularly when some of the most damaging aquatic pests are more likely to come from small items of personal equipment. Fishing gear, barges, sci equipment, etc are all are potential vectors and continue to out the onus on users. It is noted that the clause is only advisory in operation.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on your review of the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters)

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