

# Terms of Reference

## Warby-Ovens National Park Advisory Group 2023-2025

### Introduction

Parks Victoria is a statutory authority of the Victorian Government acting in accordance with the *Parks Victoria Act 2018* and reports to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Action. Parks Victoria recognises the value and importance of working in partnership with Traditional Owners to manage parks and reserves in a culturally sensitive and ecologically appropriate way.

Parks Victoria is responsible for managing a diverse estate of more than 4 million hectares including 3,000 land and marine parks and reserves making up 18 per cent of Victoria's landmass, 75 per cent of Victoria's wetlands and 70 per cent of Victoria's coastline. Victoria's parks are home to more than 4,300 native plants and around 1,000 native animal species.

Parks Victoria's estate attracts more than 100 million visits every year and we are committed to providing accessible, enjoyable, diverse programs and destinations while protecting and enhancing environmental and cultural values. It is our primary responsibility to ensure parks are healthy and resilient for current and future generations.

Warby-Ovens National Park is managed by Parks Victoria pursuant to the *Parks Victoria Act 2018* and the *National Parks Act 1975* and comprises 14,750 hectares of parkland that protects a diverse range of natural, cultural and archaeological values. The Park is recognised as one of the most diverse areas in Victoria for the protection of the threatened Sedgy Riverine Forest, Floodplain Riparian Woodland, Riverine Swampy Woodland and Billabong Wetland Aggregate, Granitic Hills Woodland, Box Ironbark Forest and Heathy Dry Forest plant communities. It is home to a range of threatened flora and fauna species including Carpet Python, Powerful Owl, Grey Grass Tree, Muller Daisy, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Growling Grass Frog, Murray & Trout Cod, Murray Crayfish and Southern Myotis. The Ovens River which flows through the Warby-Ovens National Park is protected under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992* and remains the only substantial, essentially unregulated Victoria tributary of the Murray River.

In August 2021, the Warby-Ovens National Park was awarded The International Union Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List Accreditation. The IUCN Green List of Protected and Conserved Areas is the global standard for nature conservation recognising the best-managed sites on the planet. Warby-Ovens National Park is only the fourth site in Australia to be admitted to the IUCN Green List.

As an IUCN Green List Park the Warby-Ovens National Park will be managed as an outstanding protected area for conservation and appropriate recreation consistent with its status. Protecting and restoring the park's highly significant plant and animal communities will be an important management goal, as will maintaining the local community's sense of connection to the forest, mountains and rivers that attract visitors to the park.

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## Background

Parks Victoria considers community collaboration an important mechanism to support the delivery of park management objectives, including implementation of the River Red Gum Management Plan where relevant to Warby-Ovens National Park. Released in 2018, the plan sets the broad management objectives for the park, providing key strategies for addressing many day-to-day management issues.

## 1. Purpose

Warby-Ovens National Park Advisory Group will:

1. Collaborate on the implementation of management planning for the Warby-Ovens National Park
2. Provide advice to Parks Victoria on the development of management responses to new opportunities and communicate issues within Warby-Ovens National Park.

The Advisory Group will be a mechanism for community input into the development of options to address strategic management issues. In this context “community” includes the broad spectrum of those interested in the successful management of Warby-Ovens National Park including:

- Park visitors
- Residents and neighbours
- Stakeholders with interests including but not limited to agriculture, tourism, conservation, and recreation
- Traditional Owners
- Local Government

The group provides a forum for Parks Victoria to share information about key management programs currently being implemented within Warby-Ovens National Park. New management challenges and opportunities can also be raised by the Advisory Group.

The Warby-Ovens National Park Advisory Group will act in an advisory capacity and will not initiate projects in its own right. The responsibility for managing Warby-Ovens National Park will remain with Parks Victoria as the appointed land manager. However, the group should bring forward for discussion, issues and opportunities of strategic importance for the consideration of Parks Victoria, including:

- Management challenges and issues as they arise.
- Ways of continuously improving communications and understanding between Parks Victoria and the community to ensure openness relating to issues confronting Warby-Ovens National Park, now and in the future.
- Proposed responses to the expectations of general park visitors, other user groups, neighbours, other stakeholders, and the State Government in relation to Warby-Ovens National Park.

## 2. Structure and membership

The Advisory Group will be established at the invitation of the District Manager, Northern Rivers District through a public 'Expression of Interest' process. The selection of members will be considered by a Parks Victoria panel led by the District Manager, and selection will be based on ensuring there is a mix of diversity and ability to represent their local community on all levels, as well as skills and experience as detailed below. The Advisory Group shall consist of up to 15 members from the community with skills, interest and/or expertise in some (or all) of the following disciplines:

- Environmental management
- Recreation and leisure management
- Community liaison/engagement
- Aboriginal Cultural Heritage
- Heritage management
- Water management
- Tourism Industry
- All abilities and accessibility interest
- Risk management and emergency response
- Education
- Skills and experience in governance from a variety of sectors.

As the Registered Aboriginal Party for the area, Yorta Yorta will automatically have two of the 15 members appointed to the group. Yorta Yorta representatives will be selected and nominated to the group by Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation.

Members of the Advisory Group will be appointed for either a two or three-year term. Members shall not extend beyond the original term of appointment. At the expiry of the first term, members may subsequently apply to be appointed for a second term. Members shall not be appointed for more than two consecutive terms. Offering both two and three-year terms enables continuity and retention of knowledge when members transition in and out of the group.

Members of the Advisory Group are expected to attend at least 75% of the scheduled meetings per year. The proposed meeting schedule is bimonthly - equalling 6 meetings per year.

Failure to attend the required number of meetings could result in the membership on the Advisory Group to be deemed vacant. Parks Victoria will then have the right to seek a replacement for the position.

Parks Victoria may at its discretion suspend or terminate an Advisory Group member, if in its opinion the Advisory Group member has failed to meet the expectations set out in the Terms of Reference.

Should a member of the Advisory Group resign or be terminated, a replacement member will be sourced from the pool of applicants that expressed interest through the public 'Expression of Interest' process. The replacement member will be appointed based on the skills, interest and/or expertise aligned to some or all of the disciplines listed above to ensure all disciplines/ interest areas are represented on the group.

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A quorum for the Advisory Group to effectively deliver its functions is to be no less than six members of the group. If an attendance quorum cannot be reached, the meeting will proceed, but formal resolutions will be deferred to subsequent meetings.

The Advisory Group may request that a member of any relevant authority, organisation, topic specialists or any individual be invited by Parks Victoria to attend a meeting to assist the group with its discussions. The Advisory Group is charged with providing advice solely to Parks Victoria. Parks Victoria will review and utilise this advice to guide its decision-making processes. However, this does not mean that all advice will be adopted and/or implemented. The members of the Advisory Group are not empowered to speak on behalf of Parks Victoria.

## 3. Responsibilities of Members

### **Chair**

- Chair meetings of the Advisory Group.
- Collaborate with Parks Victoria staff in the coordination of agendas, meeting papers and invitations.
- Ensure that the range of views from members is sought via discussions during each meeting.
- Coordinate responses on behalf of Advisory Group to Parks Victoria on matters of interest.

### **Deputy Chair**

- Undertake responsibilities of the Chair if they are unable to attend.

### **All Members**

- Submit agenda items to the Chair for discussion at each meeting.
- Provide advice through the Chair to Parks Victoria regarding strategic issues that face Warby-Ovens National Park in accordance with the approved management plan.
- Act in the interests of Warby-Ovens National Park consistent with requirements of the *National Parks Act 1975* and other relevant legislation and policies.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding agenda items discussed or government policy / procedure shared with members.

## 4. Media

All media associated with the Warby-Ovens National Park Advisory Group will be coordinated and approved by the Area Chief Ranger, Northern Hume, Parks Victoria.

## 5. Parks Victoria staff involvement

Parks Victoria staff will not be appointed as members of the group but will attend all meetings to provide technical advice and to ensure Parks Victoria understands the intent of, and background to, the advice provided to Parks Victoria. It is envisaged the following staff will be involved at various times with the group:

- District Manager, Northern Rivers
- Area Chief Ranger, Northern Hume

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- Ranger in Charge Fire, Northern Rivers
- Ranger Team Leader, Park Operations Wangaratta
- Ranger Team Leader, Fire Wangaratta
- Other Parks Victoria staff as required

Administrative and secretarial support for the Group will be provided by Parks Victoria including:

- Setting of meeting dates with the chair
- Circulation and collation of correspondence including agendas
- Taking of minutes

## 6. Location of meetings

Meetings will generally be held at the Centre, Chisholm St Wangaratta, or virtually via Microsoft Teams. In person meetings may include site visits within Warby-Ovens National Park.

## 7. Frequency of meetings

The Advisory Group shall meet bi-monthly or more frequently if the group decides that there is a matter that requires more attention. Following the establishment meeting, notice of meetings shall be given in writing with a minimum notice of two weeks.

## 8. Minutes and Reporting

Minutes of all meetings will be taken by Parks Victoria and will be distributed to each member for ratification following each meeting. Members of the group must inform the Chairperson and Ranger Team Leader of any changes to contact details. Records will be kept on group discussion outcomes, recommendations, and actions in addition to meeting minutes.

At the end of each membership term, the Advisory Group will develop a report outlining achievements and/or issues dealt with over the previous term.

## 9. Meeting costs

There is no provision to pay sitting fees.

Meeting costs, such as refreshments, will be paid by Parks Victoria in accordance with Parks Victoria's policies and procedures.