Jordan Crook: The Fight to Save our National Parks summary – October 2026

The battle to protect the natural environment from all the threats it faces has been long and bitter, and the challenges for national parks continue.

Jordan Crook from Victorian National Parks Association didn't try to gloss over the difficulties facing national parks in his recent climate café presentation, but he did finish on some positive actions we can all take to protect our natural heritage from further degradation and fragmentation.

Jordan began with a history of the movement to create national parks, and traced their growth from beginnings in the late 19th century to the present day. Before 1952, only a handful of national parks existed in Victoria, but as more of an ecological consciousness began to emerge from the late 1960s, the pressure to create more national parks ramped up.

From the late 1960s into the 1970s, a flush of new national parks was set up, including the Little Desert NP and Croajingalong NP. In 1971 the **Land Conservation Council** was established, followed by the **National Parks Act of 1975** which saw the cessation of grazing and logging in national parks. This Act ensured that each NP has its own management plan that is developed in consultation with Traditional Owners and community.

Another wave of national park legislation in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s saw the emergence of the **Great Alpine NP**, **Grampians NP**, **Otways NP** and **Big Desert**, among others.

Into the 2000s, marine national parks appeared on the scene, but for the past 15 years there has been a ban on marine national parks by the Labor government.

The most recent national parks, gazetted in October this year, and the first in several decades, are the **Central West parks** – **Wombat/Lerderderg**, **Mt Buangor** and the **Pyrenees**. A fourth park – **Wellsford** – was proposed but knocked back. These three parks took a total of 47 months to come to fruition, and the process is still not complete.

Victoria has the distinction of being the **most cleared state in Australia**. Only 18% of the state is protected, and only 5% of marine areas. Less than 5% of native grasslands remain in the west of the state.

Although called 'national parks', these reserves are managed by the state. However, they do help the federal government to meet their **biodiversity commitments**, one of which is to protect 30% of land and 30% of marine areas nationally by 2030. They play a crucial role in the protection of threatened and endangered species and ecosystems, and keep these areas ecologically functional.

Many problems continue to beset the creation of new parks and the management of existing parks. Among these is a chronic **lack of funding**. In spite of national parks delivering a direct economic benefit of around $1.5 billion - in additional to indirect ecosystem services such as water filtration, health benefits, coastal protection, carbon sequestration etc. - funding cuts continue to strangle the effective operation of parks. Funding currently stands at less than 0.5% of state budget.

The political climate has also changed. In previous decades the state Labor government had a good track record on protecting national parks, but that is no longer the case. A culture of **anti-nature sentiment** currently permeates government. While it is not clear where current premier **Ben Carroll** stands on conservation, under former premier **Jacinta Allen** the unions, mining industry and gun lobby teamed up to prevent duck shooting from being banned, and the environment minister **Steve Dimopoulos** illegally opened up new tracks in Chiltern Mount Pilot NP. Other anti-nature moves include abandoning plans to create a **Great Forest National Park**, stopping the **Great Outdoors Taskforce** from assessing post logging Gippsland public lands, abolishing **Victorian Environment Assessment Council (VEAC)** and **Marine Coastal Council**, and stripping out Wombat forest of timber before it was protected. Logging by another name continues with Victoria's State Forest By-products Framework legislation, under the guise of bushfire risk reduction, and deer are still classified as game rather than feral animals, making it more difficult to control exploding populations.

Surveys show that the public still want national parks. 84% of Victorians said national parks were important to them, **80% support new national parks**, 70% visit national parks, only 5% of the population are shooters. There is clearly a demand for national parks, and **support is largely bipartisan and evenly distributed across the state.**

The Stop the F*ckery campaign was started to try to reverse this anti-nature trend. This campaign keeps track of all the attacks on nature that have occurred recently and are still occurring for the 'f's – forest, feral, fish, fauna, funding. It urges Victorians to send a letter to their MP to, in this election, put **'nature on the priority list, so communities, habitats and wildlife can recover and thrive'**.

Click here to sign the letter.