



The National Trust and Victorian Landscapes

Classifying and protecting Victoria's landscapes

Victoria contains some of the most beautiful natural and cultural landscapes in the world, but they are increasingly at risk from inappropriate development. Specific threats include poorly designed infrastructure, intrusive buildings, subdivisions, loss of visually or ecologically significant vegetation and plantings unsympathetic to heritage and landscape values. The National Trust, although better known for its work with built heritage, is actively working to increase public awareness of landscapes as a precious, finite resource, and to ensure they are cared for and properly managed as an important part of our heritage.

The National Trust Landscape Committee

The Landscape Committee is a group of volunteers with expertise ranging from earth science and agriculture, to heritage and planning. Its work falls into three categories:

- Raising public awareness of landscape values;
- Advocacy on specific issues like coastal planning and visual management;
- Classification of culturally significant landscapes.



What does landscape classification involve?

The Landscape Committee of the National Trust has been working for more than 30 years to identify and record the important cultural landscapes of the state. Landscapes under consideration are documented using the format prescribed for sites to be listed by Heritage Victoria under the Heritage Act 1995. This identifies what is important about each, and assigns a level of significance, either local, regional, state, national or international, using prescribed criteria. The classification document summarises information about the landscape, including a description of its geology and

geomorphology, important flora and fauna, history and architectural heritage, and threats to landscape quality.

Draft documents are reviewed by the committee, and then recommended to Trust Board for ratification. Once a landscape is formally classified, the Trust will defend the site against inappropriate development, or other threats, that detract from its landscape values.

National Trust classification has no statutory power to protect a landscape. However, most planning authorities will take into consideration the Trust Classification when making decisions.

In many cases the local planning authorities have adopted National Trust classifications as the basis for Significant Landscape Overlays in the local planning schemes. Depending on the individual schedule for each overlay, these may help to give legal protection against unsuitable development or other threats.



Landscapes which are classified by the National Trust as being of State Significance or higher, are also nominated to Heritage Victoria for inclusion in the Victorian Heritage Register. If successfully listed, the landscape has legal protection under the *Heritage Act 1995*. Examples of landscapes which have been included on the Victorian Heritage Register are: The Pines at Shoreham, and Bell's Beach, south west of Torquay.

What makes a landscape suitable for classification?

Landscapes may be valued for cultural significance, which includes aesthetic, historic, social, spiritual and scientific values. Several values may be present in a given landscape. For example:

Historical significance

This may arise from visible features in the landscape that recall important aspects of our history, or from association with important historic events. Examples are the stone walls of the Western District, the scattered relics of mining in the goldfields, early settlement gardens and important indigenous sites.

Aesthetic significance

Defining the aesthetic significance of a cultural landscape is a challenging task. While the debate about the role of personal preference in landscape continues, there are many areas where agreement on merit is almost unanimous. Much of Victoria's coastline, for example, is regarded as of outstanding landscape value. The natural grandeur of the sandstone ramparts of the Grampians, or the wide sweep of the Buffalo Plateau would similarly receive almost universal approval, but smaller and less well-known areas such as Lake Bullenmerri or the You Yangs can be equally important.

Aesthetic significance is not just confined to 'natural' landscape. Many intensively modified areas have outstanding visual qualities such as the following rural landscapes: Parwan Valley, the steep hill country of South Gippsland, the intricate agricultural patterns of the Kiewa valley, and the rich vineyards of the Upper Yarra Valley. All of these share distinctive scenic qualities that not only reflect important cultural themes of Victoria's history, but are collectively valued by the community as being integral to their cultural heritage.

Scientific Significance

The Victorian landscape is much valued by geologists and geomorphologists who recognise the pattern of rocks beneath the soil that gives much of our landscape variety. Obvious examples are the layered rocks of the Port Campbell coast, the volcanic cones and craters of the Western District, and the dramatic granite uplands of Wilsons Promontory and Mount Buffalo.

Many vegetation types are also of great landscape value, including the temperate rainforests of Gippsland and the Otways, the floristically rich heathlands in coastal areas, and the few remaining remnant native grasslands.

How can you help?

Documenting significant landscapes is an enormous task: many important areas are not yet included, while some of the existing classifications are in urgent need of revision. The National Trust would like to encourage everyone, particularly those from the non-metropolitan regions, to contribute their skills and local knowledge to assist with this work.

Summaries of existing landscape classifications can be viewed on the National Trust's web site at www.nattrust.com.au. Classification forms and guidelines are also on the web page. These can also be provided in hard copy on request. In addition, classification workshops can be run for small groups interested in participating. For further information, contact 9656 9800 or conservation@nattrust.com.au.

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