

Friends of the Gunyah Reserves
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To Lisa Neville Minister for Environment, Climate change and Water
Level 17, 8 Nicholson Street, East Melbourne, VIC 3002

re: Upgrade, consolidation and enlargement of the Gunyah reserves in the Strzelecki Ranges

July 7 2015

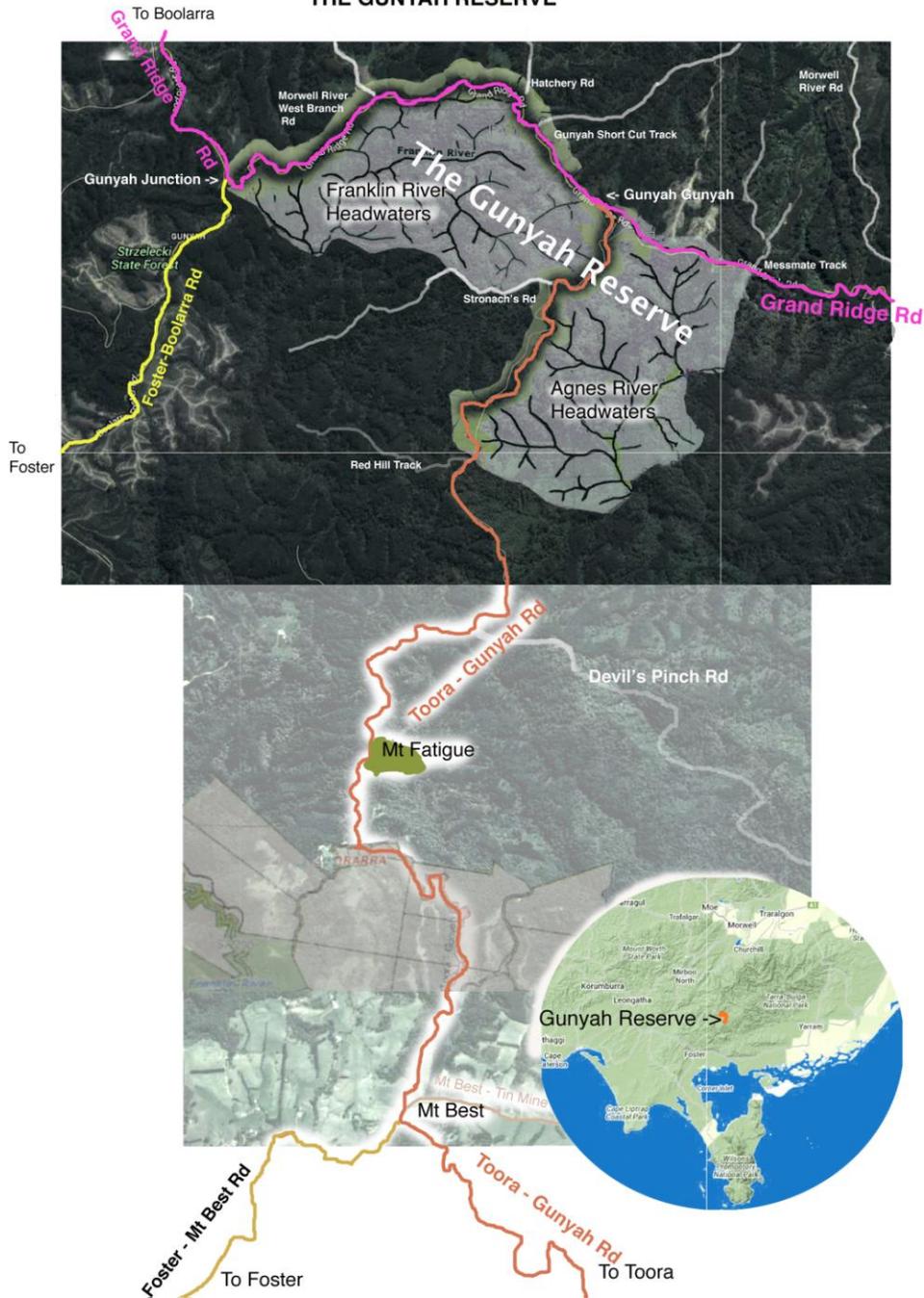
Dear Minister Neville,

The Friends of the Gunyah Reserves are writing to ask for your facilitation to upgrade the Gunyah Scenic Reserve and the Gunyah Rainforest Reserve in the Strzelecki Ranges to national park status.

These two contiguous reserves are not perceived as two reserves and are known locally as the Gunyah reserve or the Gunyah Rainforest reserve. The 550 hectare Gunyah Rain Forest Reserve is an extremely significant part of the Strzeleckis, gazetted in 1987 under section 50 of the Forests Act by Mrs Joan Kirner, then Minister for Conservation, Forests and Lands. The scenic reserve is a 200 metre wide reserve which runs through the larger reserve along both sides of the Toora Gunyah Road and the Grand Ridge Road. This is an old roadside reserve a strip left protected when the protection of a larger and older reserve was rescinded in 1964. The roadside reserve (approximately 150 ha.) is managed as a reserve by Parks, while the rest is managed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning. Locals and visitors do not distinguish between the two reserves and are surprised to find that the entire 700 hectare reserve at Gunyah is not a park managed by Parks Victoria.

The Friends believe that the Gunyah reserves deserve the highest protection that Victoria can offer, that is, national park status and that management of the consolidated park under Parks Victoria would simplify management and reflect community expectations.

THE GUNYAH RESERVE



Flora & Fauna

The Gonyah Reserves form the headwaters of the Agnes and Franklin river catchments. The reserves contain nationally significant Cool Temperate Rainforest (Sites of Botanical Significance for Rainforest in South Gippsland 1990 Natural Resources & Environment Flora and Fauna Survey and Management Group). This depleted and rare forest community is

deserving of the highest protection and is listed as a threatened community on the Flora and Fauna Guarantee schedule. The community at Gunyah contains the rare rainforest epiphyte, Slender Fork-fern (*Tmesipteris elongata*), the Slender Tree-fern and Skirted Tree-fern. The rainforest crosses the ridge line between two river catchments (Agnes and Franklin), a rare occurrence in Victoria.

The reserves also contain Wet Forest, a depleted EVC in the Strzeleckis. The Mountain Ash in the reserve are of mixed age, including many senescent trees with habitat hollows. The reserve is home to many mammals, reptiles and birds, including the Superb Lyrebird, Powerful Owl and the Greater Glider. The threatened fish species, Australian grayling is present in the Agnes and Franklin rivers.

Management

Having two adjoining reserves under different management bodies has proven problematic and confusing to both the public and Parks and the department. Over the years there has been much confusion as to which body is managing what part. This separation of management makes it difficult for community groups to work effectively to promote and enhance the reserves.

National Park status would clarify the protection offered to this significant area and avoid embarrassing situations such as have occurred in the past. During the Gippsland Regional Forest Agreement, the Gunyah Rainforest reserve was shown on the map as 'available for timber harvesting', causing extreme anxiety and anger during the public consultation period. More recently during the Gippsland State Forests Naming Review, the Gunyah Rainforest Reserve was erroneously assigned two different names. On the map supplied to the public for comment, south of the Toora Gunyah Rd had been labelled , the Gunyah State Forest, and the northern section Grand Ridge State Forest. The reserve status had been omitted. This was clearly an error, but shows the problems associated with Section 50 reserves and the continual need for the public to maintain the integrity of its reserve status.

Consolidating the reserve under Parks management will allow Parks to better implement recommendations and strategies under the action statement for Cool Temperate Rainforest under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee.

As a park the Friends group will be able to co-operate with Parks Management to enhance the park for both biodiversity and visitor experience.

Public Support

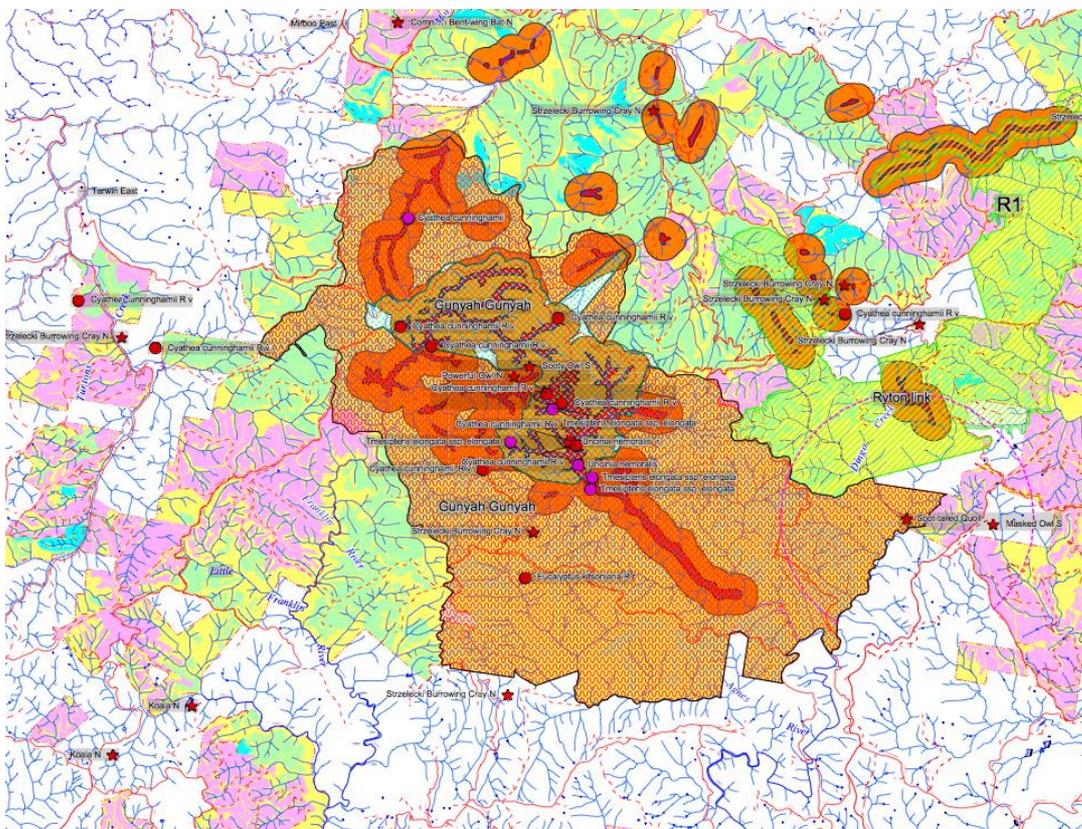
There is plenty of public support for the existing reserves to be upgraded to national park status, as well as strong support for a much enlarged reserve system.

The Gippsland Local Government Network has acknowledged the need for a greater reserve system in the Strzelecki forests. Included in their major objectives is the creation of a major tourism asset in the form of an enlarged park system in the Strzelecki Ranges (from GLGN 'Memorandum of Understanding, Action Plan 1999-2000).

A great many groups supported the proposal for a 30,000 hectare National Park in the Strzelecki State Forest, including Society for Growing Australian Plants, the South Gippsland Conservation Society, the Mt. Best Concerned Residents Association, the Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists, Environment Victoria, the Strzelecki Hills Branch ALP, Wonthaggi/Bass Branch ALP, Friends of the Gippsland Bush; Greens Party, Friends of Tarra Bulga National Park; Friends of Morwell National Park, Friends of the Gunyah Reserve(s) and the Victorian National Parks Association.

The only gains toward this end has been the State government's commitment to eventually reserve about 8000 ha known as the Cores and Links, which is currently part of the Strzelecki State Forest leased to HVP. The State Government paid HVP \$5 million in 2008 presumably toward this end, but regrettably agreed to delay protection for up to 20 years, in which time it's mountain ash would be available for clearfelling. We are now seven years into this appalling plan and swathes have already been cleared. We ask that the State intervenes, and at the very least bring forward the reservation of the section of the Cores and Links known as the Gunyah Core area to add to this upgraded Gunyah National Park.

The herringbone patterned area in this map is the Gunyah Core Area identified by Biosis. It takes in the existing Gunyah reserve but mostly consists of State forest leased to HVP. This area has repeatedly been identified as a site of botanical significance. The 'Big Tree', the widest girthed Mountain Ash in Victoria is here. For effective management and the consolidation of the reserves, the Gunyah Core should be added as soon as possible to the park.



The Friends look forward to your help in creating this significant national park at Gunyah. This upgrade will demonstrate the Government's commitment to the environment and biodiversity protection in the Strzeleckis, and promote the region's tourism industry.

Yours sincerely

Susan Purdy, Secretary, Friends of the Gunyah Reserve(s).