

More Balance at the Rock

FRIENDS of Hanging Rock have called for Macedon Ranges Shire Council to better balance environmental and recreational needs at the rock.

Macedon Ranges Shire recently sought community feedback on its draft environmental management plan, which includes the reserve's first thorough botanical survey, and outlines ecological management objectives, principles and recommendations for the reserve.

While the Friends group has praised council for commissioning the reserve's first environmental management plan, and particularly applauded council's extensive consultation on the draft, president of the Friends of Hanging Rock, Nathan Alexander has expressed concerns that the plan is too weighted to business as usual.

"It's a great first step. However it's too timid, too much business as usual. The botanical survey shows how degraded the natural environment has become after years of environmental neglect," Mr Alexander said.

He added that the botanical survey was a recommendation of a 1993 management plan.

"The 1993 plan is still the reserve's broader management plan. It remains important for the restoration and preservation of Hanging Rock, and the realisation of its importance within the Cobaw biolink. The environment plan needs to accord with it," Mr Alexander said.

He said the 1993 plan emphasised a need to balance Hanging Rock's values and directs that, if a conflict in management should arise, conservation values should be considered the second highest priority after visitor access to the rock.

"Council's environmental management plan needs to identify the conflicts between conservation and recreation, and recommend how to manage them. This draft plan seriously compromises conservation values and potential in favour of car parking for a small number of events," he said.

"We look forward to our comments being taken on board by the council. Doing so will make a stronger document and a better management tool. We'll continue to work with council to achieve positive conservation and recreation outcomes for Hanging Rock Reserve."

Hanging Rock Reserve is Crown land managed by council. Directly east of the reserve is an area of freehold property owned and managed by council, known as the 'East Paddock'.

Hanging Rock is seen as an important recreational, environmental, heritage, cultural

and tourism asset for the local community and Victoria.

Features of Hanging Rock Reserve include a racecourse, cricket ground, picnic areas, café, Discovery Centre, tennis courts along with numerous walking paths and trails.

The reserve is also home to a variety of flora and fauna such as powerful owls, koalas, and kookaburras.

The adjacent 'East Paddock' is integrated into council's management of the Hanging Rock Reserve and in recent times has been used as a venue for international music concerts.

Hanging Rock has been attracting record numbers in recent years, with more than 80,000 visitors through the gates in the last 12 months, and it was also recently awarded a certificate of excellence by TripAdvisor.

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