

Let us manage

Kylie Kitchen

Macedon Ranges Council has appealed to the State Government to continue managing Hanging Rock.

In its submission to the Hanging Rock management review, council gave a snapshot of the Rock's public use, environmental value, and challenges.

The submission, prepared by council staff, also labels council's management practice as successful, despite controversy in recent years over funding and maintenance, and the proposed solution to develop a resort at the site.

"Council has endeavoured to proactively manage Hanging Rock including the often challenging balance of protecting the environment, managing visitors and generating income for its sustainability," the submission states.

"Council strongly believes that the State Government should support the current structure of locally based council management that has served Hanging Rock, the local, shire and

Victorian community well for 130 years."

The submission was sent to the State Government in time for the July 31 deadline, however the final document was only brought to councillors at last week's meeting for retrospective endorsement. (Staff circulated the draft submission to councillors for comment before a reviewed copy was sent).

The process attracted criticism from the Hanging Rock Action Group (HRAG) and the mayor herself.

"This is simply irresponsible governance and misrepresentation spun into a style-over-substance fairytale," HRAG's Luke Spielvogel said.

"Shire administration had ample opportunity to present this to (the council) for endorsement prior to the submission date."

In a letter to the councillors, Mr Spielvogel encouraged them to acknowledge the problem and begin a new chapter of cooperation with the community.

Mayor Jennifer Anderson's speech against the submission was met with applause from a full

gallery of residents at the council meeting.

"I know council should have a role in the management of Hanging Rock Reserve and the East Paddock and I had hoped our submission would outline our opinion about strengths and weaknesses of the various options and our reasons behind how we have made decisions in the past," she said.

"I would like to see more of an outline of the history of committee of management, what was done prior to amalgamation, and why council decided the format it uses now is the best."

Cr Anderson said council should embrace the public criticisms of its management of the Rock in order to improve and have open discussion.

Cr John Letchford was in the majority when he said he was satisfied council input was considered and was happy to endorse the final document.

"The State Government set the rules, we had to meet those rules, and of course we've all had input into this document," he said.

Council voted 5-2 to endorse the submission.

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