



Department of Environment,  
Land, Water and Planning

PO Box 500, East Melbourne,  
Victoria 8002 Australia  
delwp.vic.gov.au

Ms Nicole D'Rozario  
Coroner's Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Ref: SBR013198



Dear Ms D'Rozario

**DELWP RESPONSE TO CORONER MCGREGOR'S FINDINGS INTO DEATH WITHOUT INQUEST  
OF YOA (COR 2022 000026)**

Thank you for providing Minister D'Ambrosio, Coordinating Minister for the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), with a copy of Coroner McGregor's Findings into death without Inquest. As Secretary of DELWP, Minister D'Ambrosio has requested that I respond on her behalf.

DELWP is committed to continuous improvement. As the manager of over 250 camping areas located across 3.1 million hectares of state forests, this commitment to continuous improvement includes a strong emphasis on promoting safety for community members enjoying Victoria's great outdoors.

Please find enclosed DELWP's response to Coroner McGregor's recommendations.

If you would like to discuss DELWP's response, please contact Mr Daniel van Oosterwijck, Executive Director, Forest and Fire Operations Division at [daniel.vanoosterwijck@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:daniel.vanoosterwijck@delwp.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**John Bradley**  
Secretary

23 / 12 / 2022

## Overview

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) acknowledges the recommendations from Coroner McGregor's findings into the death without inquest of YOA (COR 2022 000026).

Woods Point Campground is located on the Snowy River, 30 minutes from Orbost within the Gippsland Region of DELWP. It is one of several campgrounds located within the Lower Snowy Camping Precinct. As a site with moderate 2WD access and direct access to the Snowy River, the campground is popular with community members wanting to undertake water-based activities.

In April 2022, Woods Point Campground was closed for planned upgrades, funded under the Victoria's Great Outdoors Program. Subsequent high rainfall and flooding in October 2022 delayed the reopening of the campground. The Woods Point Campground was reopened to the public on 16 December 2022.

## Response

In his findings, Coroner McGregor made three recommendations.

- DELWP accepts and has implemented Recommendation 1 in full.
- DELWP has carefully considered Recommendation 2 and has implemented it in part. An alternative to this recommendation, which meets the community safety intention of the recommendation, will be implemented.
- DELWP has carefully considered Recommendation 3 and discussed options with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR), as the relevant state government department. DELWP has written to DJPR and the Commonwealth government advising them of your recommendation and requesting that funding be directed towards its implementation at the earliest opportunity.

A detailed response to each recommendation is provided below.

*Recommendation 1: DELWP install appropriate signs at the Wood Point campsite to warn visitors of the dangers of swimming in the river, including the dangers of sudden floods and strong currents*

DELWP accepts this recommendation and has implemented it in full.

DELWP acknowledges the safety risks facing community members enjoying public land across Victoria, including at campgrounds near waterways. Risks are regularly assessed across all DELWP-managed campgrounds, and appropriate mitigations are put in place where possible to minimise risks.

Water safety signage, warning community members of deep water, strong currents, (hidden) drop offs and submerged objects, has been installed at the Woods Point

Campground.

A photo showing the installation of water safety signage at the Woods Point Campground is shown below.



*Water Safety Signage installed at Woods Point Campground.*

Water safety signage is already in place at many of DELWP's campgrounds near waterways. Updated safety signage is being progressively introduced across DELWP sites statewide and will incorporate water safety messaging as appropriate.

*Recommendation 2: DELWP liaise with Snowy Hydro to establish a real-time warning system to notify DELWP employees and relevant personnel about water releases from the Jindabyne Dam*

DELWP has considered this recommendation and, following consideration of the products on water levels already available from Snowy Hydro and the New South Wales Department of Planning, Industry and Employment (DPIE), is implementing an alternative initiative to meet the community safety intention of the recommendation.

Jindabyne Dam is upstream of the Woods Point Campground and water releases from the dam can impact on water conditions at DELWP-managed recreational sites along the Snowy River. Jindabyne Dam undertakes regular planned releases, which are published on the Snowy Hydro website. DPIE also publishes "rising river alerts" for the Snowy River on its website to inform the community when increased releases will occur, which may impact on

river heights.

DELWP's investigation of the practical implementation of this recommendation has revealed that a real-time warning system to notify relevant personnel about water releases from the Jindabyne Dam would have limited impact on minimising water safety risks to community members using the Woods Point recreational site and others along the Snowy River downstream from Jindabyne Dam. This is principally because such a system would rely on visitors having access to a reliable telecommunications network, including emergency alerts. The lack of mobile phone coverage across many recreational sites along the river system means any electronic warnings will not reliably reach community members using these sites and other recreational sites across the public land estate.

DELWP considers updated safety signage, which clearly communicates the risk of strong currents and drop offs, will be a more effective risk mitigation approach at Woods Point Campground. As per Recommendation 1, new water safety signage has been installed at Woods Point Campground.

In addition, DELWP will ensure advice to visitors about the potential for rapidly changing river levels and links to the DPIE Rising River Alerts will be available on its relevant websites, including the Victoria Great Outdoors and Camping on River Frontages pages, to assist visitors to plan their trips and manage their safety.

DELWP personnel undertake regular patrols of campgrounds to check conditions and undertake safety checks. Rainfall and river conditions, as published by the Bureau of Meteorology, is already considered by DELWP employees in planning work and when communicating to visitors to State forests during site inspections and compliance activities. Unusual water releases, as informed by 'rising river alerts', will be included as another factor considered by DELWP when scheduling these patrols and when communicating to visitors about safety risks.

*Recommendation 3: DELWP liaise with the appropriate authorities to conduct a feasibility study of installing/improving mobile phone reception and coverage in the and around the area of the Wood Point camping ground to allow for prompt emergency notification if required.*

DELWP has considered this recommendation and will implement it as part of any future co-investment funding programs delivered by the Commonwealth or Victorian governments. DELWP has written to DJPR and the Commonwealth government to advise them of this recommendation and request that it be considered within future Victorian and Commonwealth government funded programs.

Under current regulatory arrangements administered by the Commonwealth Government, licensed mobile carriers are primarily responsible for determining where they provide mobile coverage. Commercial and technical considerations inform carriers' decisions around where

to provide coverage, which would include expected levels of usage.

The Commonwealth and State and Territory governments have complemented the above arrangements with funding programs designed to encourage carriers to extend mobile coverage to locations they may otherwise consider non-commercial. These funding programs include the Commonwealth Government's Mobile Blackspot Program and the Victorian Government's Connecting Victoria Program.

Under these programs, governments have consulted with communities to identify unserved areas with mobile coverage needs and provided this information to carriers under specific program guidelines. Governments are unable to mandate locations for new or upgraded mobile coverage, and carriers retain the commercial discretion over the locations they seek funding for under these programs.

Woods Point Campground was not identified as a location requiring mobile coverage improvements through stakeholder and community engagement processes conducted as part of the Connecting Victoria Program or past Mobile Blackspot Program funding rounds. No application for funding for mobile coverage at Woods Point Campground has been made to date under either program.

Carriers do not report any current plans to augment coverage to the Woods Point Campground. One carrier noted complexities in delivering new mobile phone coverage to the campground including difficult terrain, dense forest and availability of power sources in the immediate area. Carriers routinely review potential network upgrades as part of their ongoing network investment planning processes and may carry out feasibility studies for the Woods Point Campground in future, should it be identified as a priority in a future government co-investment funding program.

DELWP has written to DJPR, as the state government department responsible for the Connecting Victoria Program, and the Commonwealth Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, as the Commonwealth government department responsible for the Mobile Blackspots Program, to notify each department of your recommendation and request that Woods Point Campground be considered for prioritisation under future Mobile Blackspot Program funding rounds and similar funding programs, as appropriate.

To better support community members in making informed decisions about their safety, DELWP will also update signage at the Woods Point Campground to proactively notify users of the site that there is no mobile phone reception.