

9 November 2017

## **Bushwalking Victoria statement on Australian Adventure Activity Standards**

Bushwalking Clubs have a long history of providing safe and enjoyable trips for their members. Clubs provide a sound standard of care to trip participants using experience-based training and resources.

Volunteer trip leaders are appointed and overseen by clubs. They ensure their bushwalks are safe by using and updating a variety of resources on topics including trip planning, trip management, leadership, bushcraft, navigation, first aid and handling emergencies and by drawing on the depth of experience that exists within clubs.

Bushwalking Clubs provide a safe and supportive environment for people to learn and develop bushwalking skills with guidance and assistance from members with more experience. Group sizes on bushwalking club trips group are varied according to the difficulty of the trip and the skill levels of participants.

An existing Victorian Bushwalking Adventure Activity Standard dating from 2004 was not endorsed by volunteer bushwalkers and is not used by them. However, compliance with this standard is a licence condition for commercial tour operators using public land in Victoria.

In 2016 Outdoors Victoria commenced writing new "Australian Adventure Activity Standards" (AAAS) for over twenty adventure activities including bushwalking, camping, cycle touring, mountain biking, rock climbing and recreational angling. New "AAAS Core standards" are being written that are referenced across all activities.

Outdoors Victoria states that the AAAS are *"voluntary"*, *"are not directly binding on any person or organisation and have not direct legal force"* and *"are only advisory in nature and may not be suitable for all contexts"* (ref AAAS Core Standards Disclaimer).

The AAAS are not enacted or authorised by any Act of Parliament or other legislative instrument.

We consider that most of the content of the AAAS Core and Bushwalking Standards is either not relevant to or far exceeds the needs of volunteer bushwalking activities.

The Minister for Sport, John Eren MP, has advised that there is no current intention to mandate the use of the AAAS on behalf of relevant jurisdictions, including the Department of Health and Human Services, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Water, Land and Planning.

The Minister for Energy, Environment & Climate Change, Lily D'Ambrosio MP, has advised that on their own, the standards have no legal status and there is no requirement to comply with them.

Volunteer bushwalkers cannot and should not be required to comply with the Core AAAS, Bushwalking AAAS or Camping AAAS. Any attempts in the future to do so will be vigorously opposed, as will any other similar restrictions or impediments that would enable commercial interests to override the rights of community-based clubs to access and enjoy public land.

Community based volunteer bushwalking trip leaders will continue to responsibly manage trip safety by using and contributing to the body of knowledge that informs and supports safe and enjoyable bushwalking.

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