

# **XCSAV**

## **CROSS COUNTRY SKIING ASSOCIATION VICTORIA**

### **Update on the Falls Creek XC Stakeholder Forum alternative trail options consultancy**

**Sandra Paul, the President of XCSAV was invited to attend a three-hour consultation meeting on 22 June 2023 facilitated by two consultants from the Cube Group on behalf of Alpine Resorts Victoria. This meeting was an opportunity for various stakeholders from the local cross country skiing community as well as other stakeholder groups to come together to discuss ARV's proposed alternative trails relating to the potential winter clearing of the Bogong High Plains Road.**

In attendance were the following:

1. Five ARV people including the CEO and Deputy Chair.
2. A senior ecologist from Biosis
3. Representatives from
  - XCSAV
  - Disabled Wintersport Australia (DWA)
  - Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club (BNSC)
  - YMCA – Howmans Gap
  - Outdoor School Bogong
  - Falls Creek Primary School
  - Kangaroo Hoppet
  - Snow Australia XC, was an apology due to sickness but emailed feedback prior to meeting to ARV
  - Falls Creek Stakeholder Consultancy Committee invitee was an apology.

As part of the introduction the CEO acknowledged that previous interactions with the XC community and FRCM had not been ideal, and she was hopeful that today's meeting would be productive.

The question was asked by one of the representatives if the decision had already been

made to clear the road and if today's meeting was just to be seen to go through the process. We were assured this was not the case.

We raised the how incredibly importance the Alpine environment is and the need to protect the area including the Alpine Bogs, Snow gums, and alpine heath. We stated the clearing of BHP would impact this environment. We also said the proposed car park, and the alternative trails proposed would adversely affect the environment.

We raised that new laws with relationship to clearing of old growth trees must also be considered.

At the close of the meeting, we did ask is it necessary to clear the road in winter and had ARV not considered alternative transport to the ANARE shed.

The meeting format was a break out discussion on our tables as seated, with a notes being recorded by Cube Group.

I raised concerns that the information sent out via Cube had a number of incorrect points and did not want these to remain on the record as factual.

Especially the Note

"Alternative FIS Homologated courses haven't been shown here as these are actively being pursued by ARV Falls Creek with Snow Australia in addition to this option. ARV are confident this will be achieved."

An email was sent by Snow Australia to CEO which I have a copy of prior to the meeting saying that they would not regard "actively" to be a true and accurate, as no contact had been had since a meeting in September with a member of FRCM staff and Snow Australia. The CEO acknowledged that that the statement was not correct.

Letters of validity of the support for the grant application were also raised, we stated these all but one related to the use in summer and should not be used to endorse winter activation of the ANARE.

I raised why does the grant application funding have 750 car spaces, I acknowledged that they did not receive all the funding, but it was unclear how many spaces they were looking to create. The FCRM staff, "laughed" said no way was it that many more like a bit under 100. We did not get an answer why the 750 was included in the application.

### **Sandra Paul's thoughts on the meeting...**

I felt we were given an excellent opportunity to raise our concerns, I personally was able to talk with the Deputy Chair of the Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) as she was seated next to me. I raised the [Road Safety Audit \(RSA\)](#) that has been completed with her including the 3 accidents and she had not seen it, so she asked me to forward which I did, and this was acknowledged.

I raised I believe the Hoppet would not be able to be run in its current format and its position as a FIS popular race would be in doubt in my mind. I believe it was also evident that the being able to run the Hoppet is important, and the Deputy Chair of ARV asked me a lot of

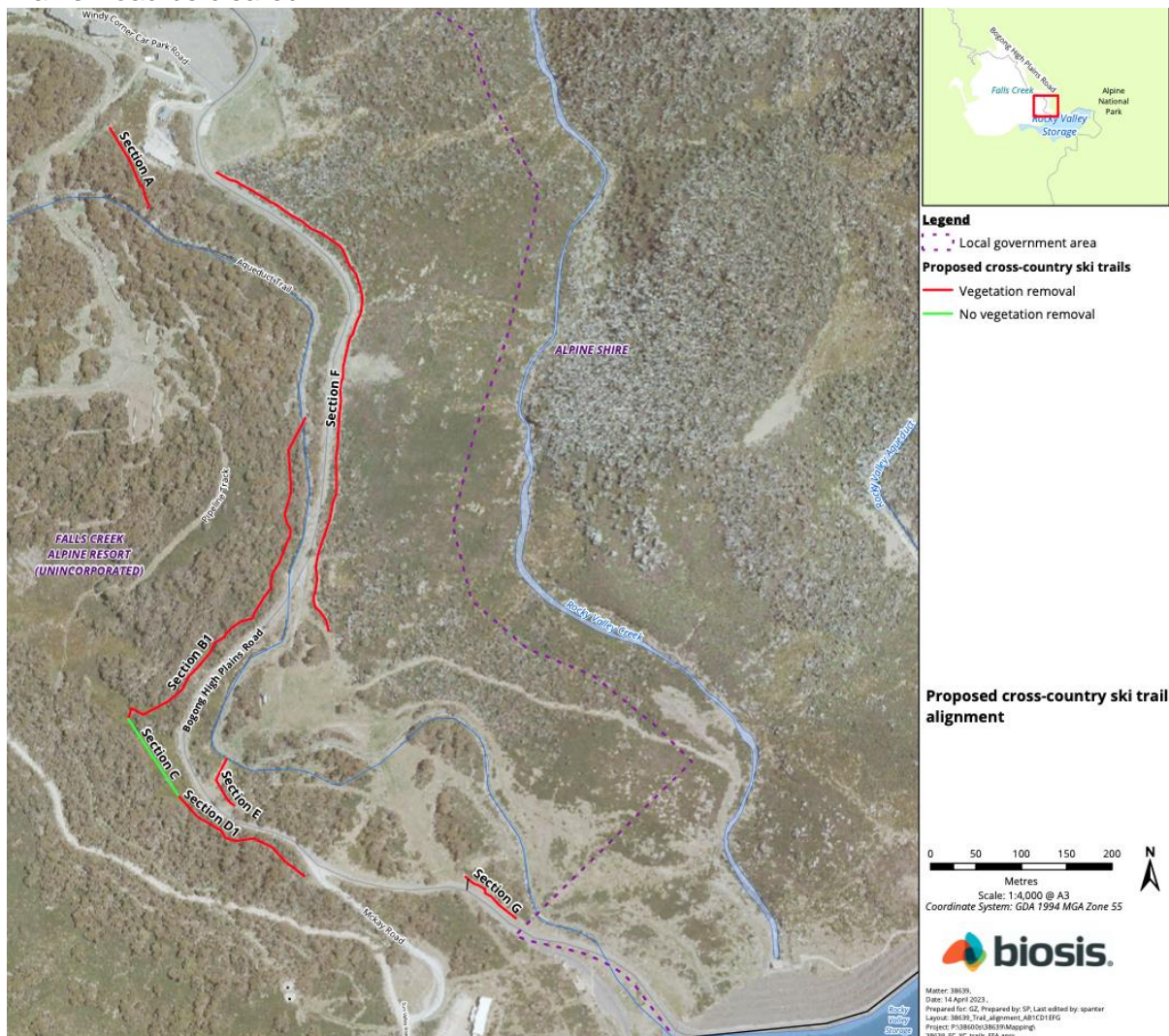
questions about why 2-way traffic tracks would be needed in front of the ARANE shed, she was interested in photos I had of the area showing the profile. She also repeated that it was not an issue to close the road and push snow to ensure FIS races could be run.

I left the meeting feeling that it had gone well, that we had been listened to, that we had all given strong and valid arguments against the road clearing and maybe we had a chance to influence the ARV decision.

Unfortunate I believe that the consultation was only a 'box ticking' exercise that ARV was required to be seen to be undertaking consultation. The announcement on Saturday regarding the DWS accessible toilet at Lakeside left me sickened and feeling that the ARV had been disingenuous, and our consultation meeting was just going through the motions to say they had consulted.

### A detailed summary of the consultation session

We were presented with this map showing alternative trail options should the Bogong High Plains Road be cleared.



Alternative trail options proposed.

There was concern that Biosis was not given the information on what would be required for the sections to form replacement access and ski trails compared to what is provided by the BHP road.

This was evident in comments from Matt (Biosis Senior Ecologist) at the start, that **Section F** is already an existing MTB trail and that trimming of snow gums, minimal clearing would be required with some widening.

We all commented that the replacement would need to be approximately 6-8 metres wide, not off camber, cleared of heath to enable grooming. We also commented that snow could not be cleared from the road onto ski trails.

The use of the term 'trails' is also somewhat misleading. It conjures up an image of the equivalent of a bike track, as a route to somewhere, rather than being an integral part of the cross-country ski terrain.

It was discussed that areas such as the BHP Road surface and the Nordic Bowl's predominately grass surface provide excellent skiing during low snow volumes. It was raised by a member of ARV that wouldn't Heath 'hold' snow, so we were given the opportunity to explain that this was not the case.

It was commented by ARV more than once, that to ensure FIS races it is possible to close roads and push snow.

FCRM staff commented that xc skiing was declining at Falls Creek Resort. When questioned on this statistic we were told that Snow Australia has provided the survey information. Subsequently Snow Australia has informed us that the survey only has only captured Snow Australia Interschool numbers at Mount Buller.

The meeting was then divided into 3 separate 'breakout' groups as per the tables we were sitting at, and notes were taken by a member of Cube group. At this stage the notes are not available.

We were asked to discuss the map produced by Biosis, with sections as labelled, these proposed sections are what is seen to be required to be built if the BHP road was cleared.

**Prior to and during the breakout we continued to list some basic requirements for cross country ski trails to replace the current amenity and value of the Bogong High Plains Road. Minimum requirements needed to replace like with like:**

1. **Width:** 8 metres width minimum.
2. **Slope and Camber:** No camber/cross slope with adequate drainage.
3. **Safety:** Safe for two-way traffic.
4. **Accessibility:** Suitable for large numbers of people including large groups of beginners.
5. **Gradient:** Gradient appropriate for users with lower skill levels.
6. **Snow Retention:** Smooth surface with no heath, for example only grasses and low herbs. We commented that BHP Road can be groomed as soon as there is 15 – 30 cm of snow, as was evident at the start of the 2023 season, in contrast to grooming over areas with heath which require much more snow volume as a base to compress



plants and allow grooming.

In addition to these basic requirements, we commented that we need to consider.

7. Safety for skiers especially children, the Nordic bowl has always been a fantastic safe environment.
8. Access for school groups to snow if they must shuttle from Windy Corner to ski.
9. Access to toilet facilities if you cannot ski down to Windy Corner.
10. The need to maintain the connectivity between the ski trails above and below the BHP Road and the Nordic Bowl.
11. Ensure skiers staying in the Village did not need to drive or take the shuttle to ski.
12. The peace and quiet of the cross-country skiing environment.
13. Use of the broad and sheltered section of BHP road above the Nordic Bowl as a teaching and training area.
14. Sheltered skiing in inclement weather.
15. FIS homologated courses for national championship events.
16. Maintaining a safe and fair course for the Kangaroo Hoppet.
17. Disabled Wintersports Australia (DWA) athletes using sit skis cannot manage road crossing.
18. DWA athletes struggle with 'off 'camber.
19. Road crossing are potentially dangerous for children and the vision impaired.
20. If you want to ski when a shuttle service is not available.

The sections were discussed, in no way does this capture all the concerns.

**Section A** is proposed to include a staircase, the terrain is quite steep and it would need to have a grassed surface, therefore the existing heath would need to be cleared, to enable use under low snow conditions.

It would need to be at least 6-8 metre wide with no camber. It would also require a significant flat area at both ends of staircase to allow for skiers putting on and off skis and have space for descending skiers to slow down and stop.

**Section A** would not be able to be used by skiers wanting to tow a pulk or by DWA athletes using a sit ski.

It was raised that this area is often used by people learning to ski and snowboard, with families sharing equipment, any improvement to this terrain would encourage more people to congregate.

We were told the aqueduct leading from the resort to the BHP road will be covered.

**Section B1 C and D1** This area has significant off slope and camber which would need to be addressed.

The comment from Biosis was that while some parts of this section do have powerline access which would make it easier to get approval, the vegetation in the **Section C** in green

is not able to be cleared, so this section will only be useable after very significant snowfalls, rendering the trails B1 and C1 unusable at the beginning and end of the season.

**Section E** seems to be a link from the Horseyards Loop back to the bowl. However, unless the aqueduct has been covered this trail would be impossible. We commented that even with this Link Trail the FIS course required the use of a large section of the BHP road.

**Section F** is parallel to and below the BHP road that will be cleared of snow.

Several issues were raised regarding **Section F**:

- a) Will the earthworks required to create a trail that meets the standard specified have an impact on the stability of the already unstable BHP road above.
- b) How will FCRM ensure contaminated snow cleared from the road not end up on the trail below.

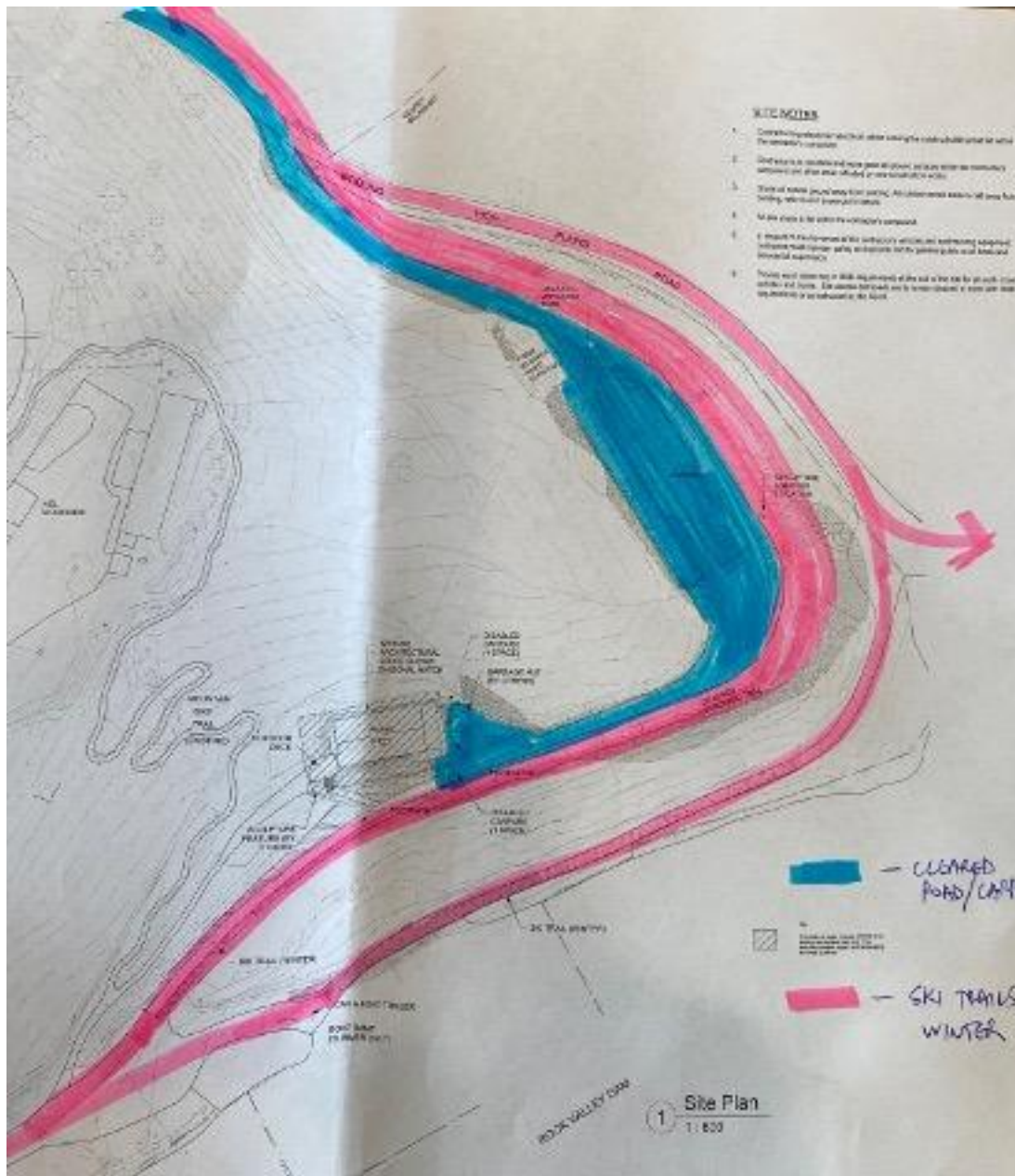
Some of the specific concerns that relate to areas of trail adjunct to the cleared road are;

- will the trail be useable when the road is being cleared?
- when the road is wet, will traffic spray containing road grime and hydrocarbon residues drift down to skiers on the trail below?
- will there be a safety barrier along the road?
- snow cleared from the road will contain hydrocarbon residues and road grit.

**Section G** relates to the section of the Hoppet course immediately after the start. The start line is 20 metres wide (30 skiers) wide and the first five hundred metres needs to be wide and straight as possible to provide both fair and safe skiing conditions.

The viability of the Hoppet has been discussed with three international FIS Technical Delegates who have experience at the Hoppet and remain unconvinced that the proposed alignment will meet the requirements of a FIS popular race.

Unfortunately, the map provided in the pre meeting information did not give any indication of how the area from the Observation Deck through to the end of the proposed Lakeside development will be managed to provide the essential two separate Hoppet tracks, one out into Sun Valley and a return trail closer to the lake.



*Mud map provided at the meeting*

### Concerns raised by discussion of the above mud map.

1. Lack of knowledge about the Bog in front of the ANARE shed which should not be benched over.
2. We were told that coach buses could drop off at the car park, but there does not seem to be a turning circle to accommodate this on the mud map.
3. The exposed and windy nature of lakeside

### Topics not discussed during the consultation include:

1. The cost of establishing alternative trails that meet the six basic requirements.

2. How the proposed shuttle bus system will operate. Frequency. Time of day. Ability to cope with large groups and peak load times.
3. Traffic safety on the BHP Road in the light of the Road Safety Audit that has been provided to ARV Falls Creek.
4. Maintaining an open road during heavy snowfalls. Potential for vehicles to be 'marooned' at Lakeside after heavy daytime snowfalls with extreme winds.
5. Damage caused by foot traffic and snowplay to cross country ski trails as a result of non-skiers having easy access by shuttle bus or car to the Nordic Bowl, Observation Deck car park and the ANARE building / Lakeside area.
6. Safety risk created by inexperienced day trippers wandering onto a partially frozen Rocky Valley Lake or wandering across the dam wall into the Alpine National Park during variable alpine weather.
7. The exposed geography of the proposed development area is subjected to some of the worst weather experienced at Falls Creek with both compressed northerly and/or westerly winds, this combined with the potential of white-out periods of low visibility creates a greater risk when you consider the lack of reference features.
8. The cost of snow clearing and the shuttle bus service.
9. The lack of basic toilet and public amenities in the Nordic Bowl, the heart of the Falls Creek cross country trail system.
10. The loss of snow cover adjacent to the cleared road and car parks resulting from black body radiation, and from water runoff.
11. Further groups impacted by the proposed winter road clearing include ski-tour groups, snowshoers and SES snowmobile rescue teams.