

Press Release – 7/10/2024

Cross Country Skiers Fight to Save Ski Trails at VCAT

Cross Country Skiing Association Victoria (XCSAV), Victoria's peak community group of cross country skiers, is about to defend public ski trails at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) from a development which is intended to lead to the gutting of Falls Creek's ski trail network and will jeopardise Australia's biggest ski race, the Kangaroo Hoppet.

The proposal arises amid a litany of poor and unethical conduct by Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV), detailed below.

1. The Proposal

Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) is seeking a planning permit to:

- redevelop the ANARE Shed site at the Lakeside Precinct at Falls Creek; and
- build a 74-space sealed carpark, in the middle of a key ski trail.

The shed is intended to contain a café or restaurant, but ARV has not secured an operator. ARV has said it intends to clear Bogong High Plains Road, the main artery of the Falls Creek trail network, to allow people to park cars out at the site, an exposed area subject to severe weather.



A range of photos from Australia's biggest ski race the Kangaroo Hoppet.



Bogong High Plains Road to be cleared (left) and the ANARE shed and carpark location (right)

2. XCSAV opposes the application for two main reasons

First, the proposal is inconsistent with the objectives of the alpine resorts planning scheme, which seek to protect ski facilities in Victoria’s Alpine Resorts. This proposal will likely lead to the cancellation of the Kangaroo Hoppet International Ski Marathon and will mean that Falls Creek, home of the Australian National Team, loses its internationally-certified race courses;

Second, the proposal, particularly the removal of vegetation to build a carpark, will have unacceptable impacts on threatened and endangered species such as the broad-toothed rat, endangered alpine skinks and the iconic mountain pygmy possum, all of which have been recorded at the subject site.

“Alpine Resort Victoria are trying to destroy our winter wonderland of ski trails by clearing the Bogong High Plains Road to allow access to the ANARE shed development. Why pave paradise to put up a parking lot!” Sandra Paul, President XCSAV.

3. Hearing Details

The hearing is scheduled at **Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, 55 King Street Melbourne** from 10am to 4pm **9 to 17 October**, and **30 October to 1 November**. XCSAV will begin presenting its case on 9 October and will likely finish on 11 October. The hearing is open to members of the public.

XCSAV has fundraised in excess of \$40,000 from members of the XC ski community to run this appeal. It is represented by barristers Will Houghton KC and Andrew Walker, and solicitors Marcus Lane Group.

4. Previous Media Coverage:

Mountain Journal – 17 July 2022 - [Plans revealed for Falls Creek Lakeside Development project](#)

ABC – 12 October 2022 - [Falls Creek battle rages between alpine board and skiers over snow-clearing](#)

Guardian – 16 October 2022 - [Cross country skiers given cold shoulder as Falls Creek climate change planning sparks trail row](#)

5. Unethical and other poor conduct by ARV

- Falls Creek Resort Management (predecessor to ARV) applied for a \$3.95 million grant under the Bushfire Recovery Regional Economic Stimulus and Resilience Grants program, following the Black Summer bushfires which severely impacted summer tourism. XCSAV obtained the application under FOI. The grant application referred **only** to summer use, not winter use, and said it would include **750 car spaces**. Falls Creek subsequently obtained a grant for \$2.5 million.
- Of 9 supporting letters provided with the application, **only one mentioned winter use**. The purported author of the letter was unaware of the letter, and it turned out her signature had been placed on the letter **without her knowledge by a member of Falls Creek Resort Management**. Alpine Resorts Victoria denied wrongdoing and the matter is subject to ongoing investigations.
- Falls Creek Resort Management made legal and other threats against XCSAV's President, a former employee, in 2022. These threats and other subsequent action (details that can be provided on request) caused the then-President to resign from XCSAV leadership and to leave North-East Victoria altogether.
- The then-CEO of Falls Creek Resort Management, and current General Manager – Falls Creek, told a concerned elderly member of the community by email that the project was part of a long-term plan to develop downhill skiing in the XC skiing area to mitigate the effect of climate change. When the contents of this email were made known, that person:
 - falsely stated that it was “illegal” to communicate the email exchange (described as a “conversation”) without permission of the parties involved in that exchange; and
 - threatened potential legal action with the sentence: “I am obliged to report this to the Victorian Government Solicitors office [sic] for further action”.
- When limited consultation with the XC ski community occurred in 2022 (in the form of two invitation-only workshops, plus a later survey of community members), the community was told that the Project was going ahead, and it was too late to stop it. A member of Falls Creek Resort Management (since employed by ARV) said that if cross-country skiers continued to object to the Project, the community would be worse-off under the new ARV governance structure (which commenced in late 2022). We are aware of at least one other attempt to silence those who oppose the Project.

6. Next Steps

Learn more by visiting our campaign website www.savefallscreekxc.org.

Please feel free to reach out to the below key contacts:

- Sandra Paul – 0425 769 395 – president@xcsav.org.au
- Treasurer, James Louw – 0402 916 566 – treasurer@xcsav.org.au

