



**Media release – Wednesday 27 August 2008**

## **ENVIRONMENT GROUPS UNITE TO SAVE NATIVE WILDLIFE HABITAT**

Local, state and national environment organisations are backing a campaign to save important native wildlife habitat in Darebin Parklands.

Environment groups have united in opposition to a controversial proposal to install a fenced dog exercise zone in a conservation area on the Darebin Creek floodplain and to create a dog swimming hole close to emerging platypus habitat in the creek.

Eleven organisations are objecting to the proposal, contained in the draft Darebin Parklands Master Plan. They are calling on Banyule and Darebin councils to instead implement a compromise recommendation, contained in the master plan, to relocate the dog off-leash area away from sensitive wildlife habitat.

“Relocating the dog off-leash zone to an area of low habitat value is a win for dogs, as it allows them continued access throughout the parklands as well as a large area in which to run free. It is also a win for the safety of wildlife and the public,” the president of the Darebin Parklands Association, Ingrid Svendsen, said.

“There are also dozens of off-leash parks in Banyule and Darebin, including several within a few minutes’ walk of Darebin Parklands.

“The councils do not need to sacrifice this important conservation park when there are so many alternative dog exercise areas.”

Organisations supporting the recommendation to relocate the off-leash area to a location in the parklands of low habitat value include:

- The Darebin Parklands Association
- Darebin Environmental Reference Group
- The Banyule Environment Advisory Committee (includes Warringal Conservation Society, Riverlands Conservation Society and Friends of Wilson Reserve)
- Warringal Conservation Society
- Riverlands Conservation Society
- Friends of Darebin Creek
- The Australian Platypus Conservancy
- Environment Victoria
- Friends of Merri Creek
- Victorian National Parks Association
- Victorian Advocates for Animals

The Australian Platypus Conservancy has told the councils that plans to establish a dog swimming hole in the creek, downstream from where a platypus was sighted last year, will jeopardise prospects of platypus recolonising the Darebin Creek.

Ms Svendsen said public safety was also a major concern, with the draft master plan detailing seven attacks on people and wildlife over the last 12 months. These include the fatal mauling of a kangaroo, the mauling of a small dog and attacks on park users.

“These are only the most serious matters that have been reported to park rangers, police or the councils and do not include all dog attacks and incidents.

“While many dog owners do the right thing it is clear that there are significant numbers who do not control their pets, and this creates a hazard for park users, pets and wildlife.

“Banyule and Darebin councils have a duty of care to protect park users from known hazards. These problems are well documented and the community expects the councils to act.”

The 33-hectare park on the Alphington-Ivanhoe border, classified by Darebin Council as conservation bushland/conservation parkland, is home to wildlife including echidnas, flying foxes, kangaroos, more than 50 species of birds, native frogs and fish. Koalas are also predicted to recolonise the parklands soon.

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