

# DEVELOPMENT APPLICATION ASSESSMENT REPORT:

Use of Existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow Mountain Bike Trails, Thredbo Alpine Resort, Kosciuszko National Park

**DA 8817** 



Environmental Assessment Report Section 79C of the *Environmental Planning and* Assessment Act 1979

November 2017

Use of Existing Mountain Bike Trails, Thredbo Alpine Resort Kosciuszko National Park

# **ABBREVIATIONS**

Alpine SEPP State Environmental Planning Policy (Kosciuszko National Park – Alpine

Resorts) 2007

Applicant Kosciuszko Thredbo Pty Ltd Consent This development consent

Department Department of Planning and Environment DPI Water Department of Primary Industries – Water

EP&A Act Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979
EP&A Regulation Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000

EPI Environmental Planning Instrument

Minister Minister for Planning

MTB Mountain bike

OEH Office of Environment and Heritage

RtS Response to Submissions

Secretary Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment

SEE Statement of Environmental Effects
SEPP State Environmental Planning Policy

Cover Image:

Riders using one of Thredbo's mountain bike trails (Source: Applicant's

website)

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# 1. BACKGROUND

#### 1.1 Introduction

This report provides an assessment of a Development Application (DA 8817) lodged by Kosciuszko Thredbo Pty Ltd on 10 October 2017 under Part 4 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979* (EP&A Act). The application seeks consent for the use of the existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike (MTB) trails and immediate surrounds as recreational infrastructure for the purpose of mountain biking, trail monitoring, management and maintenance to achieve better environmental outcomes and mountain bike associated events within Thredbo Alpine Resort, Kosciuszko National Park.

The proposal is described in detail in **Section 2** of this report.

# 1.2 The Site and Surrounding Development

The site is located across the main ski slope of Thredbo Alpine Resort between Kosciuszko Express chairlift and Valley Terminal (**Figure 1** and **2**) and consists of the existing alignments of the Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails.

The existing mountain bike trails occur predominantly on ski slopes or within native vegetation areas on the edges that enables riders to experience different terrain and obstacles during the decent to Valley Terminal, which then provides access back to the top on the Kosciuszko Express.



Figure 1: Location of proposal (circled) in comparison to Thredbo Alpine Resort (Source: SIX Maps 2017)

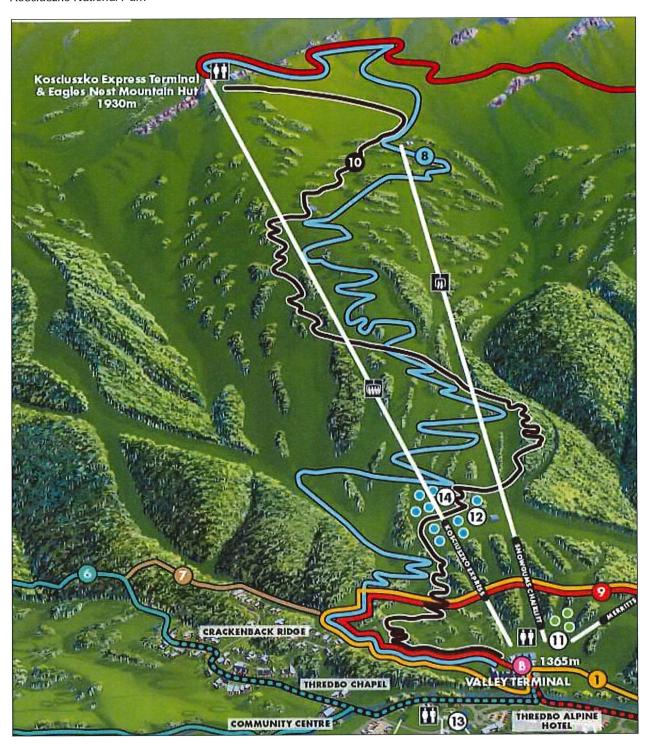


Figure 2: Approximate alignment of existing Cannonball Downhill (black line) and Flow (light blue line) mountain bike trails (Source: Applicant's website)

# 1.3 History of mountain biking in Thredbo

The Applicant states that the beginning of formed mountain bike trails within Thredbo started in the 1980's in response to what was at the time a fledgling recreational activity with no real guidance for trail planning, construction or maintenance. In the 1990's the sport grew rapidly with the introduction of new bike technologies and particularly suspension bikes. Thredbo became known as the premier downhill mountain bike resort in Australia due to the lift assisted access to the Cannonball Downhill trail providing repeat riding opportunities on a highly technical downhill course.

The Applicant comments that:

• The Cannonball Downhill Trail was Thredbo's first mountain bike trail originally following the mountain access trail from Eagles Nest to the valley floor. In its infancy mountain biking in the late 1980's was initially a novelty activity for some staff and a small group of downhill mountain bike pioneers. It very quickly gained momentum with increasing numbers of riders seeking out the downhill adrenalin that Thredbo offered with its advantage of a lift assisted ascent. It became apparent very early on that the descent down the mountain access trails was unsafe and that instead riding down the cleared ski runs was much more fun, safer, more technically challenging and easier on the rider and bike. Various spur trails off the mountain access roads onto the cleared ski runs (and in some cases uncleared areas as well) developed through rider preference. In other words, someone rode a line off the mountain access road, someone followed and very soon thereafter a preferred trail had developed.

In the early 1990's, the Applicant closed many of these spur lines, formalised a single Cannonball route and required riders to stay on the formed downhill trail and not take short cuts or create new trails. The current Cannonball alignment has been largely as it is now since summer 1995/6 with the exception of some corner re-alignments. The trail was never properly designed and pre-existed IMBA or any other design, construction and maintenance guidelines. As a result, sections of the trail suffered from erosion due to its steep slope. By their very nature "downhill" trail cannot meet IMBA guidelines and still be a "downhill" trail as fall line riding goes against the key IMBA principle of avoiding steep slopes, staying below 10% grade and using regular grade reversals (uphill sections). Most of the erosion on the Cannonball occurred in the first few years and is best (or more correctly worst) identified by the deeply incised Snakes and Ladder section. Remedial maintenance work has included trail drainage, rock armouring, use of decomposed granite gravel and elevated platforms. The Cannonball in its current alignment now operates as a sustainable downhill trail with appropriate sediment control structures, maintenance regimes and continuous improvement through the bi-annual environmental assessment reporting undertaken by NPWS. The trail has not shown evidence of major erosion events or "blow outs" since the late 1990's save for expected frost heave, rider wear and deluge rain events.

 The Flow trail is a more recent addition to the resorts trail network first established in 2005 to appeal to the "not so hard core" gravity riders aimed at families and less skilled riders still wanting a gravity experience. The trail is a flow style trail experience, with predominantly banked corners, smoother trail surface and less technical features.

# 2. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The development application seeks consent for the use of the existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails and immediate surrounds as recreational infrastructure for mountain biking, trail monitoring, management and maintenance to achieve better environmental outcomes and mountain bike associated events within the Thredbo Alpine Resort.

## 2.1 Use of existing trails and immediate surrounds

The application seeks formal approval for the use of the existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails that provide different alignments / gradients depending on the level of rider experience and or family use. The Cannonball Downhill trail is for more experience riders than the Flow, which provides opportunities to traverse the mountain instead of being more direct.

The Applicant seeks a 20-metre corridor along the trail alignments for ancillary works without further consent, which comprising matters such as:

 the erection of small temporary structures at event start areas and at / near other developed areas of the trail network such as lift stations and mountain restaurants

- minor trail changes for environmental or user driven reasons;
- minor structures relating to mountain biking.

The Department notes that a formal Ancillary Works Guideline would need to be endorsed prior to the installation of any works occurring covered by the guidelines.

Along the trail (predominantly the Downhill), the Applicant constructs, prior to the season opening, earth mounds for jumps each year (**Figure 3**). These mounds are subsequently dismantled prior to the winter season with the earth spread across the existing ski slopes adjoining the jumps area.



Figure 3: Example of a jumps park area near Valley Terminal (Source: Applicant's website)

## 2.2 Trail monitoring, management and maintenance

The Applicant proposes ongoing monitoring, management and maintenance of the trails throughout the season. In addition, where the trails or their use have an impact on any sensitive ecological areas, the Applicant proposes to seek advice from the OEH prior to undertaking any rehabilitation / remediation works.

A Trail Management Plan accompanies the application and includes commentary on management requirements and guidance on maintenance works to provide a sustainable trail network. The Plan also describes monitoring and reporting requirements.

#### 2.3 Events

The Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails are expected to be utilised throughout the mountain bike season and particularly during scheduled events, such as:

- Cannonball MTB Festival held in early December,
- Snowies MTB Festival held in early February;
- Thredbo Super Enduro held in late February; and

Interschools held in middle of March.

During events, the trail alignment is defined with border tape to ensure riders do not cut corners and consequently damage areas of vegetation not part of the trail.

Apart from the formal events that attract the majority of additional MTB visitors to Thredbo, the trails are also used for training and lessons from various mountain bike organisations.

# 2.4 Justification for the proposal

The Applicant states that mountain biking has been a summer recreational activity in Thredbo since the late 1980's following the establishment of the Cannonball downhill run leading to the network available today. Mountain biking in Thredbo and the broader Snowy Mountains region is now recognised as a leading and growing recreational attraction and a strong contributor to the local summer tourist economy.

The Applicant has been at the forefront of mountain bike development in the region having embraced the IMBA guidelines and increased its summer mountain bike resourcing to ensure ongoing and appropriate maintenance of the network.

The Applicant states that the Cannonball and Flow trails, while not built to the IMBA guidelines, have been subject to on-going continuous improvement works as a result of the Kosciuszko National Park Plan of Management monitoring program. In addition, potential environmental, aboriginal heritage and operational impacts of these trails are known and are proposed to be managed.

The proposal to legitimise the on-going use of these trails through issuing of a Development Approval is of positive social and economic impact for Thredbo and the broader Snowy Mountains Regions. The environmental impacts will continue to be managed in line with the Environmental Management measures outlined above and in the Thredbo Mountain Bike Management Plan along with the entire network to ameliorate on-going impacts to an acceptable level.

## 3. STATUTORY CONTEXT

## 3.1. Consent Authority

Under clause 7 of State Environmental Planning Policy (Kosciuszko National Park – Alpine Resorts) 2007 (the Alpine SEPP), the Minister for Planning is the consent authority for the application as the development takes place within a ski resort area as referred to in Clause 32C (2)(a) of Schedule 6 to the EP&A Act.

# 3.2. Determination under Delegation

In accordance with the Minister's delegation of 11 October 2017, the Team Leader, Alpine Resorts Team may determine the application as:

- the application is in relation to land which the Alpine SEPP applies; and
- there are less than 25 public submissions in the nature of objections.

## 3.3. Permissibility

The proposal includes the use of existing mountain bike trails within the definition of 'recreation infrastructure' as defined in the Alpine SEPP. Pursuant to clause 11 of the Alpine SEPP, 'recreation infrastructure' is permissible with consent within the Thredbo Alpine Resort.

#### 3.4. Notification

After accepting the application, the Department placed the application on its website available to the public. Due to the nature of the proposal, the application was not notified or exhibited. No public submissions were received during the assessment of the application.

The proposal was referred to the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) pursuant to clause 17 of the Alpine SEPP.

The OEH provided comments on the submitted Draft Mountain Bike Trail Management Plan and Aboriginal Cultural Heritage and recommended several conditions that could be included in the consent (i.e. trail widths and flexible construction corridors, rehabilitation, soil removal and management, materials and stabilising agents, and other construction requirements).

The Department has included discussion on relevant matters in the OEH comments in **Section 4** and recommended conditions in the instrument of consent at **Appendix D**.

#### 3.5. Considerations under section 79C of the EP&A Act

Under section 79C of the EP&A Act, in determining a development application, a consent authority is required to take a number of matters into consideration in relation to the proposed development. The Department has given due consideration to the matters prescribed by section 79C.

The Department's consideration of the development against the provisions of section 79C of the EP&A Act is contained in **Section 4** and within **Appendix B** of this report.

# 3.6. Environmental Planning Instruments

Under section 79C of the EP&A Act, the consent authority, when determining a development application, must take into consideration the provisions of any environmental planning instrument (EPI) and draft EPI (that has been subject to public consultation and notified under the EP&A Act) and development control plan/s (DCP) that apply to the proposal.

The Alpine SEPP is the only EPI which applies to the site for this type of development. An assessment against the requirements of the Alpine SEPP is provided in **Appendix C**. The Department is satisfied that the application is consistent with the requirements of the Alpine SEPP.

#### 3.7. Objects of the EP&A Act

In determining an application, the consent authority should consider whether the proposal is consistent with the relevant objects of the EP&A Act.

The proposal complies with the objects as it seeks approval for the use and ongoing monitoring, maintenance and management of the Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails aimed at promoting the orderly and economic use of the site to support continued summer use of Thredbo, which is a tourist destination resort, while having an appropriate regard to the environmental significance of the site.

The proposal also promotes the orderly and economic use of the site and will not have an impact on the environment thus being ecologically sustainable development (**Section 3.8**).

## 3.8. Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD)

The EP&A Act adopts the definition of ESD found in the Protection of the Environment Administration Act 1991. Section 6(2) of that Act states that ESD requires the effective integration of economic and environmental considerations in decision-making processes. The Department has considered the project in relation to the ESD principles. The precautionary and Inter-

generational Equity principles have been applied in the decision-making process via an assessment of the impacts of the proposal.

# 3.9. Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000

Subject to any other references to compliance with the EP&A Regulation cited in this report, the requirements for Notification (Part 6, Division 7) and Fees (Part 15, Division 1) have been complied with.

## 3.10. Strategic context

The Department considers the proposal is consistent with the South East and Tableland Region Plan which was released by the Department of Planning in July 2017. The plan aims to, among other things, increase visitation to the NSW ski resorts.

The proposed development assists with this by formalising the use of two mountain bike trails within Thredbo Alpine Resort to continue to meet demands by members of the mountain bike community. Formalisation of trails and improved management practices will allow the continuation of visitation to the NSW ski resorts during the mountain bike season during summer.

#### 4. ASSESSMENT

The Department has considered the relevant matters for consideration under section 79C of the EP&A Act, the SEE and additional information and issues raised in submissions in its assessment of the proposal. The key issues in the Department's assessment of this proposal is in relation to:

- the proposals use of the existing trails; and
- ongoing monitoring, maintenance and management.

Each of these key issues is discussed in the following sections of the report.

# 4.1. Use of existing trails and immediate surrounds

The existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails are historic trails that have developed over time. Each year the Applicant has provided trails and the jumps park areas which involve works to open the trails and then dismantling them at the end of the mountain bike season. These works and other trail realignments have taken place without any clear regulatory regime in place.

With the increase in popularity of the mountain biking within Thredbo, the use of the Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails has increased. In recognition of the increase in demand the Applicant has prepared, and partly implemented, a MTB Masterplan which identifies an extensive trail network in connection with the Downhill and Flow trails. The network includes the All Mountain Trail and trails around Friday Flat that link back to the Valley Terminal.

During the assessment of an application for upgrade works to the Flow Trail (DA 8405), the Department sought to resolve the historic use of the Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails and following discussions with the Applicant and the OEH, a use application was sought for the continued use of the trails.

The subject application therefore seeks consent for the use of the existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails and immediate surrounds for recreational purposes permitted under the Alpine SEPP. In addition to the use of the trails, the Applicant has also included three sites where they form earth mounds for jumps and then dismantle the mounds prior to the winter season. The application will also allow for further monitoring, maintenance and management to ensure sustainable trails into the future.

The subject application provides an opportunity for the Department to implement ongoing monitoring, maintenance and management programs through conditions of consent to ensure that environmental impacts do not spread from the existing trail alignment. In addition, a framework can be provided for the use of the trails for designated events and the installation of temporary structures through an Ancillary Works Guideline.

Recommended conditions are proposed to ensure the continued use minimises impacts upon the existing environment. These conditions include parameters on:

- trail corridors enabling a corridor of 5 metres either side of the existing alignments to allow for minor trail changes because of environmental improvements or restricting rider variations;
- maximum trail widths specific requirements set for the trail to encourage management of the trails into the future;
- structures inclusion of temporary structures for mountain bike events;
- reshaping and drainage ability for the trail maintenance team to reshape the existing trail to cater for drainage requirements;
- events use of the trail for particular events;
- rehabilitation rehabilitation of the site following works to the trails or the realignment of the trails when required; and
- hardening use of hardening materials on the trail, such as rock armouring, and the use of stabilising agents only with the endorsement from the OEH.

The Department has assessed the existing use of the trails and supports the submission of the application as it provides certainty for the future use of the trail and enables the Department to be able to have clear criteria for the maintenance, erosion and sediment control requirements and the ongoing use of the trails.

The Department has recommended appropriate conditions to ensure the trails are well maintained and suitably monitored to assist in the continued use of the site for mountain biking. The Applicant is aware of their responsibilities for the use of the trail and raised no concerns with the conditions.

# 4.2. Operational monitoring, maintenance and management

The monitoring, maintenance and management of the Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails is a key component identified by the Department and the OEH for continued use of the trails and to minimise future disruptions to its operation.

This is supported by the Applicant through the preparation of a Draft Mountain Bike Trail Management Plan (MBTM Plan), which is aimed at setting out management requirements and to guide maintenance works required to sustainably manage the trail network. The Applicant intends that the MBTM Plan is to be utilised on all mountain bike trails within Thredbo and be amending where new trails are proposed.

Comments received from the OEH support the document in draft form, subject to the MBTM Plan being finalised within 6 months. The OEH also requested that the MBTM Plan be annually reviewed and endorsed by the OEH if any changes are required.

The MBTM Plan, has the potential to be referred to within subsequent development applications for future mountain bike trails. With the successfully implementation of the MBTM Plan, the ongoing use of the trails would be appropriately monitored, maintenance programs implemented and the trails sustainably managed. The MBTM Plan also provides guidance for the Applicant on expectations for the future use of the trail and compliance parameters that should be met.

The Department supports the proposed monitoring, maintenance and management arrangements proposed by the Applicant and with the implementation of the requirements, the use of the trail and immediate surrounds for mountain biking is considered acceptable.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The Department has assessed the merits of the proposal taking into consideration the issues raised in all submissions and is satisfied that the impacts have been satisfactorily addressed within the proposal and the recommended conditions.

The OEH raised ongoing monitoring, maintenance and management requirements to ensure the future use of the trails does not have a potential impact upon native vegetation or cause erosion or sediment concerns. The recommendation raised by the OEH are acknowledged and the Department has carefully assessed the potential natural environmental impacts associated with the proposal and recommended several measures to minimise these impacts, including the preparation of an amended trail management plan.

The formalisation of the use of the existing Cannonball Downhill and Flow mountain bike trails maintains mountain biking as a key recreational pursuit during the summer months which in turn provides continued tourism opportunities to Thredbo and the broader Kosciuszko National Park.

The Department recommends that the application be approved, subject to recommended conditions of consent. With the inclusion of the recommended conditions, ongoing use of the trails can continue as the trails would be maintained and monitored appropriately.

## 6. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Team Leader, Alpine Resorts Team, as delegate of the Minister for Planning:

- consider all relevant matters prescribed in Section 79(C) of the EP& A Act, including the findings and recommendations of this report;
- b) **approve** the Development Application (DA 8817), subject to conditions, under Section 80 of the EP&A Act, having considered all relevant matters in accordance with (a) above; and
- c) sign the Development Consent at Appendix D.

Prepared by:

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Mark Brown

**DECISION** 

Approved by:

**Daniel James** 

Team Leader, Alpine Resorts Team

15/11/2017

# APPENDIX A. RELEVANT SUPPORTING INFORMATION / SUBMISSIONS

The following supporting documents and information to this assessment report can be found on the Department's website at:

http://majorprojects.planning.nsw.gov.au/index.pl?action=view\_job&job\_id=8817

# APPENDIX B. CONSIDERATIONS UNDER THE EP&A ACT

# Section 79C(1) – Matters for consideration

Section 79C of the EP&A Act requires that the consent authority, when determining a development application, must take into consideration the following matters:

Consideration of the provisions of all EPIs that apply to the proposed development is provided in <b>Appendix C</b> of this report.
Not applicable.
Not applicable.
Not applicable.
The Department has undertaken its assessment in accordance with all relevant matters as prescribed by the regulations, the findings of which are contained within this report.
n Not applicable.
The Department has considered the likely impacts of the development and is satisfied that approval of the application would provide for better environmental and operational management of the trails. With the consent supported by specific conditions reinforcing parameters for improvement and appropriate ongoing use of the trails through the implementation of the Trail Management Plan, the social and economic impacts are likely to be positive for Thredbo and the wider region.
The suitability of the site has been considered in <b>Section 5</b> of this report.
The Department has considered the issues raised in agency submissions in <b>Sections 4</b> and <b>5</b> of this report.
The proposal is consistent with the aim and objectives of the Alpine SEPP and formalises the use of two mountain bike trails within Thredbo. Environmental impacts are adequately addressed through appropriate monitoring, maintenance and management programs consistent with the principles of ESD.  As such, the proposal is in the public interest.

# APPENDIX C. CONSIDERATIONS UNDER THE EP&A ACT

# State Environmental Planning Policy (Kosciuszko National Park – Alpine Resorts) 2007

Cl 14(1) – Matters to be considered by consent authority		
(a) the aim and objectives of this policy, as set out in clause 2	See discussion above.	
(b) the conservation of the natural environment and any measures to mitigate environmental hazards (including geotechnical hazards, bush fires and flooding),	No specific measures that would adversely impact upon the natural environment are required to mitigate any environmental hazards.	
(c) the cumulative impacts of development on existing transport, effluent management systems, waste disposal facilities or transfer facilities, and existing water supply	The formal consent of the existing trails is unlikely to attract additional riders to Thredbo. The cumulative impacts are also not likely to place any added burden on the transport, effluent management systems, waste disposal facilities, transfer facilities or the existing water supply.	
(d) any statement of environmental effects,	The SEE and additional information supplied are considered adequate to enable a proper assessment of the proposal.	
(e) the character of the alpine resort,	The proposal would not adversely alter the character of the resort, being existing mountain bike trails.	
(f) the Geotechnical Policy – Kosciuszko Alpine Resorts,	The Applicant states that the proposal is exempt from the Department's Geotechnical Policy on the basis that the proposal does not involve the erection of any buildings or carrying out of any works.	
	The Department has considered the scope of the proposal and notes that the use of the existing trail includes the construction of jump park areas and works to the trail alignment prior to the mountain bike season opening each year.	
	Overall, the Department is of the view that geotech parameters for the jumps park areas, trail maintenance and ancillary works should be included within the consent and has recommended geotech parameters consistent with other MTB trail applications.	
(g) any sedimentation and erosion control measures,	The ongoing use and maintenance of the trails would involve earthworks that would be done by small excavators or by hand as required.	

	Appropriate erosion prevention and sediment control measures are proposed to be put in place during these works.  Where trails are found to create erosion opportunities, the Applicant proposes to resolve these identified areas in accordance with the submitted Trail Management Plan, including weekly drainage maintenance works or following rainfall.
(h) any stormwater drainage works proposed,	The trails would not be subject to stormwater drainage works such as pit and pipe systems as the Applicant maintains the trails through the implementation of effective water diversion measures.
(i) any visual impact of the proposed development, particularly when viewed from the Main Range,	The proposed ongoing use of the trails would not result in an unacceptable visual impact as the trails are part the recreation infrastructure provided by Thredbo noting that the trails have been in place for 30+ years for the Downhill and 5+ years for the Flow trail. The trails are also not visible from the main range.
(j) any significant increase in activities, outside of the ski season,	The purpose of the proposal is to seek formal consent for the use of the mountain bike trails that have been used for a number of years.  Therefore, the provision of these trails is not likely to increase the amount of summer visitors to the mountain as the users of the trails are already exist. No adverse impacts are therefore expected.  The local economy is more likely to benefit from the proposal.
(k) if the development involves the installation of ski lifting facilities	The proposal does not involve the installation of any new ski lifting facilities.
(I) if the development is proposed to be carried out in Perisher Range Alpine Resort: the document entitled Perisher Range Resorts Master Plan and the document entitled Perisher Blue Ski Slope Master Plan	Not applicable to the proposal.
<ul> <li>(m) if the development is proposed to be carried out on land in a riparian corridor:</li> <li>(i) the long term management goals for riparian land, and</li> <li>(ii) whether measures should be adopted in the carrying out of the development to assist in meeting those goals.</li> </ul>	Not applicable to the proposal.

Cl 17 – applications referred to the	Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH)	
	DEH pursuant to clause 17 of the Alpine SEPP. Refer to and discussion on proposal at <b>Section 4</b> .	
Cl 26 – Heritage conservation		
European heritage	The proposal would not impact on any European heritage items.	
Aboriginal heritage	The OEH states that:	
	"A search of the AHIMS database, performed by the Proponent, shows that no Aboriginal sites have been recorded within the proposed works area. In addition, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage reports that cover the area that is subject to this 'Use' DA that were submitted with previous DA's, confirm that the landscape features make it unlikely that Aboriginal objects will be found.	
	However, should any Aboriginal objects be uncovered during construction, any works impacting the objects must cease immediately and the NPWS contacted for assessment of the site."	
	Conditions are recommended to address the OEH comments.	

# APPENDIX D. RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS OF CONSENT