Waterfront camping

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Leaks in waterfront camping amendment

* Farmers call for extension to public consultation

IN just four months Bruce McCormack’s property in North East Victoria could be home to hundreds of campers.

That is, at least, if things go unchanged between now and September.

As of September first camping on licensed riverfronts will become a legal right, regardless of who owns the land, after amendments to the Lands Act 1958 were passed in November.

Mr McCormack, who is president of the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria, has the Delatite River running along his boundary on the family farm in Merrijig.

Like others, the draft regulations have left him flabbergasted – allowing the public to camp within 20 metres of a waterway for up to 28 days.

“The amendment has been passed but we have until September to sort out the details,” he said.

“The regulations weren’t released when they were calling for public feedback meaning they wanted us to have an opinion on rules we weren’t aware of – how ridiculous is that.”

Mr McCormack said his concerns were many; from liability insurance to stock management, bio security to personal safety.

Like many farmers he also had to diversify income and has run trail rides from his Delatite River paddocks for thirty years.

But what that means for the new rules he couldn’t say.

“Imagine if campers were down on the river and we had horses come up only to have someone kicked – am I responsible for their safety on my own property?

“What ïf your bull paddock is on the river; no one is able to answer these questions and yet they want us to provide feedback.

“I understand people want places to camp and fish, but why does their leisure come before my livelihood?”

GlenFalloch Station sits on the Macalister River in Gippsland, with some 27 kilometres of river frontage set to be affected by the new regulations.

Last week Nationals Member for Eastern Victoria Melina Bath visited GlenFalloch, taking the opportunity to call on the Government to extend their public consultation period.

“Farmers are agricultural businesses: they are not campground caretakers or park rangers,” Ms Bath said.

“GlenFalloch Station has a large amount of river frontage – managing camping activities along the river is … sheer impossibility.”

Ms Bath wants the Victorian Government to listen to both those affected and the National party.

“Based on feedback the public consultation has been insufficient – this it too critical to get wrong,” she said.

“The consequences are quite dire for both the farmer and the environment if we don’t get it right.”

Another member of the Mountain Cattlemen’s Association of Victoria, with a remote property in the North East, has similar concerns.

“All consultation has been done online – so for those of us who aren’t good on a computer it means there is no consultation; what happened to phone calls,” he said.

Requesting his name be withheld, the farmer has concerns talking publicly about his property will only increase problems.

“I have several kilometres of river frontage and I am now concerned that advertising that fact will mean I end up with campers on my banks,” he said.

“I’m trying to make a living here, not provide a place for family weekends; if they want to go camping there are plenty of public places to visit without coming onto my property, compromising my biosecurity and stock management.

“Campers are going to have a legal right to drive through my property, through my closed gates and my stock, to access spots to camp,” he said.

“Everyone tells me ‘don’t worry, they will shut the gates’, but I’ll be the one sorting stock out when that doesn’t happen.”

It is understood the draft regulations will also see campers able to collect up to half a cubic metre of fallen timber per person per day, despite farmers not being able to do so, with no consideration for environmental consequences or cultural sensitivity.