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MEDIA RELEASE

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Concerns voiced over tourism plan

Concerns over the agenda for a tourism study into future development of Mt Arapiles were raised in Parliament this week.

David Koch, Member for Western Victoria said the feasibility study and precinct plan is being undertaken by Consultants Connell Wagner for Parks Victoria, Horsham Rural City Council and Tourism Victoria, and it includes the Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park, the township of Natimuk and nearby Mitre.

“While the objectives of the study, to be completed in October, are to identify and look into opportunities that will encourage visitors to stay longer in the region, it will also look at ways to plan for future development”, he said.

“Although the study is being promoted as an ‘information gathering exercise’ there is real concern in the community, and by those who enjoy this spectacular recreational area, that this is the first step towards developing significant tourist facilities in the Mt Arapiles precinct.

“Concern centres about invading this sensitive and unique area with what could become an ecological disaster.

“Mt Arapiles is internationally recognised as the top rock climbing and abseiling destination in Australia and with over 2,000 climbs, it has the largest concentration of high-quality climbing in Australia, and some of the best climbs anywhere on the planet. It is one of the finest climbing areas in the world and for aspiring climbers, is recognised as an essential inclusion in their conquests.

“But you don’t have to be a rock climber to enjoy this beautiful environment. Numerous walking tracks connect the camping ground at the base to the summit and a sealed road provides direct access to the main lookout. This is certainly a distinctive place where visitors can enjoy views across the Wimmera and the Grampians Region.

“One of the main attractions of Mt Arapiles is that current camping and picnicking facilities are very basic and users and the local community are opposed to any development of new tourist facilities that would alter the beauty of these natural surroundings.

“It is critical that interested community members who enjoy this magnificent icon are consulted and have the opportunity to voice their concerns.

“I have sought assurances from the Minister for Environment, John Thwaites that the community will be kept informed and consulted about any proposals affecting development of the Mt Arapiles-Tooan State Park”, said David Koch.

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