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MEDIA RELEASE

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State Government must work with Lake Charlegrark Committee

Instead of ignoring the practical knowledge and the many years experience of Lake Charlegrark Recreation Reserve Committee members, David Koch, Member for Western Victoria, says the State Government should work with the committee to resolve long-standing issues in managing the lake.

David Koch raised the on-going concerns of committee members in Parliament again this week after previously highlighting them in June and April.

He said that in May, a long-term member of the Lake Charlegrark Recreation Reserve Committee was prosecuted by the Department of Primary Industries on instruction from Parks Victoria for cultivating the dry lakebed to control the spread of fairy grass.

“The wilful and heavy-handed approach that brought about this unnecessary prosecution led to the resignation of all committee members and raised a warning to other voluntary recreation reserve committees that despite their best intentions, they could face prosecution in undertaking management works.

“Recognising the immense cost savings of utilising this and other voluntary committee members in managing recreation reserves, several months ago DSE and Parks Victoria along with West Wimmera Shire reached an agreement with members of the former committee to be re-appointed.

“Indeed a memorandum of understanding was proposed by DSE to set out a co-operative management and communication arrangement between the committee as the recreation and camping reserve manager and Parks Victoria as the adjoining lake reserve manager.

“But settlement of this long-running dispute stalled after Parks Victoria told committee members they could not sow a crop on the lakebed to once more try and control the spread of fairy grass.

“Parks Victoria would only permit grazing on the lakebed, which is more likely to spread the fairy grass than control it.

“Although committee members assured DSE and Parks Victoria they could control fairy grass in an environmentally friendly manner with no till seeding, fertiliser, chemicals or seed dressing, Parks Victoria insisted grazing sheep would be the best method to control the infestation.

“The vast experience of committee members is yet again ignored. They know that sheep continually tramping across the dry lake bed are more likely to cause damage than sowing a crop.

“Despite writing to the Minister for Agriculture, who swiftly passed the buck, and assurances from the Minister for Environment and Climate Change that a resolution was reached, it is clear that bully tactics will not resolve these differences.

“I call on the Government to adopt a conciliatory approach to find the best resolution instead of ignoring the practical knowledge and long-term experience of this dedicated volunteer committee”, said David Koch.

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