

H1990 Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site, Thomson River, WALHALLA

Permit Application P28472

Why is Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site of heritage significance?

The Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is included in the Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) under the provisions of the *Heritage Act 2017* for its historic significance.

Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site is historically significant as one of thirteen diversion tunnels constructed for gold mining purpose in Victoria. The tunnel demonstrates the technology used to divert a portion of the river's flow away from the natural watercourse to enable the mining of the river bed for alluvial gold.

The Diversion Tunnel was listed in the VHR in 2002. In 2016, Heritage Victoria received an application to amend the registration to include Horseshoe Bend. The revised registration extent including Horseshoe Bend — comprising the 1.2 kilometres section of river between the tunnel inlet and outlet and the river banks extending 20 metres of either side of the river bed— was approved by the Heritage Council of Victoria in 2017.

What was the permit application for?

In March 2018 the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority applied for a permit under the *Heritage Act 2017* for the construction of a low water fishway.

Reduced flows resulting from the construction of Thomson Dam and the Thomson River Tunnel have created a barrier to fish passage on the Thomson River. The fishway will provide passage to the upper Thomson River for migratory native fish, including Tupong, Common Galaxias, and Australian Grayling which is listed as Vulnerable under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

A permit was issued for the same works in 2016. It should be noted that at that time only the tunnel was included in the VHR, however, a permit was requested due to the potential impacts of works on the tunnel. At that time the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority decided to put the construction of the fishway on hold until a determination was made in relation to increasing the extent of registration to include Horseshoe Bend.

The proposed works to Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site included in the current permit application are as follows:

- Excavation of a low flow fishway
- Placement of three stockpiles of rock along the edge of the riverbed
- Removal of rock from the southern side of the rock bar near the tunnel inlet
- Installation of a rock arrangement opposite the tunnel outlet.

Additional works will be occurring in the area outside of the extent of registration.

What are the heritage impacts of the proposal?

All works have been designed to have minimal impact on the setting of the place. Water will flow via the original river course to provide passage for the fish, while maintaining sufficient flow in the tunnel to demonstrate its function and preserve its heritage values.

Heritage Victoria has assessed that the construction of the proposed fishway will have minimal impact on the heritage values of Thomson River Diversion Tunnel Site. In addition, the overall project will improve access to and interpretation of the heritage values of the place.

Heritage Victoria acknowledges that some of the proposed works will have a temporary visual impact on the place.

How were public submissions considered in the decision-making process?

The permit application was advertised on 29 March 2018 in the *La Trobe Valley Express* and through the placement of advertising signs at the site. Application documents were also available on the Heritage Victoria website during this period. The advertising period concluded on 10 April 2018.

Twelve written submissions were received during the advertising period. The key issues raised in the submissions included impacts to the place; the integrity of the tunnel and river bed through the proposed works; and impacts to known and unknown historical archaeological sites associated with gold mining.

Heritage Victoria were only able to consider the content of submissions which related to the application under assessment.

Why has the permit application been approved?

The *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director to consider various matters in determining a permit application including the extent that the application, if approved, would affect the cultural heritage significance of the place; the extent that refusal would affect the reasonable economic use of the place; and any submissions received in response to public notice of the permit application.

On 14 June 2018, the Executive Director approved the permit application, following determination that the proposal would not adversely affect the historical values, or use of the site as a diversion tunnel.

What are the conditions of the permit?

The permit requires:

- The nomination of a suitably qualified heritage consultant to monitor the works, to the satisfaction of the Executive Director
- Vibration and archaeological monitoring during works

Can I appeal the decision?

The applicant can make a written submission to the Heritage Council to review the decision of Heritage Victoria or the conditions imposed in the permit.