Further to my emails and our discussions, I would like to make a brief submission on the position of Geoparks in the broad spectrum of National Parks and protected areas.

Geoparks

In considering the place of Geoparks in the national reserve system, it is relevant to note that the world's first National Park (Yellowstone) and other early National Parks in North America eg Banff in Canada, were established on the basis of their scenic or geological values. However, it would appear that this criterion has been overlooked in a subsequent overwhelming emphasis on wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

In Australia, the significance of geology and geological features in the national reserve system also appears to have been overlooked or regarded as being of lesser significance. As the number of National Parks and similar conservation reserves increased during the 1960s and 1970s with an increased public awareness and demand for protection of these areas on nature conservation criteria, there was little done to preserve and protect areas and sites of geological significance, particularly in these systems. One exception to this was the work done by the Commonwealth Government through the Australian Heritage Commission which actively encouraged the nomination of geological and geomorphological sites for inclusion in the Register of the National Estate. This encouraged the State Governments and the Geological Society of Australia to create their own inventories of sites. It is worth noting that Australia was one of the leading countries in the world in this methodology and listing process. This site based approach was also being adopted by other countries with the result that a Global Indicative List of Geological Sites was complied by international bodies including UNESCO in the early 1990s which included hundred of sites representing outstanding examples of the Earth's history and significant ongoing geological processes. This list has been modified and reworked since the initial compilation. One of the issues relating to this list has been its relationship to the World Heritage List as many people believe that the World Heritage List does not adequately recognise areas and sites of geological significance, the exception being a relatively few fossil sites throughout the world. This is probably also true for Australia where all natural area World Heritage sites have significant geological values although these are not all well recognised.

In the mid 1990s, this increased awareness of geological values resulted in a broadening of thinking about how best to consider and protect these geological values. While the site based approach has continued and strengthened throughout the world, there have been two other significant developments that are relevant to the Inquiry.

The first relates to the work done by the Tasmanian Government agencies in promoting and applying the concepts of 'geoconservation' and 'geodiversity' as an essential part of

nature conservation and land management. These concepts are the corollary or geological equivalents of (bio) conservation and biodiversity and were initially developed as part of the Regional Forests Agreements for Tasmania. This pioneering work has now spread throughout the world. The recognition of the 'abiotic' elements of natural systems followed by their conservation and being valued is increasing so that nature conservation agencies, particularly at Government levels, are slowly beginning to give equal weight these elements rather than focus solely on the conservation of biodiversity. Without the geological foundation, biodiversity could not survive and evolve.

The second, and probably more important, development has been an initiative by UNESCO to establish a Global Network of National Geoparks. UNESCO considers a Geopark as an area with internationally significant geological heritage sites on any scale in which local economic and cultural development (mainly geotourism) can coexist. As such, geoparks can cover very large tracts of land particularly where the geological heritage sites are large scale landscape features. UNESCO notes that Geoparks also include sites of ecological, archaeological, historical or cultural value and these are often linked to the geological sites including the landscapes. UNESCO believes that Geoparks are best 'initiated' from the grass roots level through the involvement and support from local authorities and organisations. Geoparks have now been officially endorsed by UNESCO as an integral part of their network/system of protected areas together with World Heritage sites and the Man and the Biosphere Network of Biosphere Reserves. UNESCO have recently revised the guidelines and criteria for National Geoparks seeking to join the Global Network.

At present, the Chinese and the Europeans are the main driving forces behind the Geoparks concept and most of the world's geoparks are in these two areas. In Australia, work is well underway to nominating a large area of Western Victoria (with a smaller portion of South Australia) as Australia's first Geopark. The area, known as the Volcanoes Discovery Geopark, covers the wide range of volcanic features in this vast area from Colac (Vic) in the east to Millicent (SA) in the west. There is strong support at the local level although the views of State and Commonwealth Governments are not known at this stage. In many respects, Geoparks (as currently defined) provide an interesting contrast in approach to National Park areas which are proposed for their biotic values. Such areas tend to be initiated by State or National Governments, relatively small, tightly defined and with management focussed on protecting biodiversity. Geoparks are the opposite in many respects.

Given the rapidly evolving concepts with all aspects of the 'abiotic' elements of natural systems, it will be very interesting to see how 'geoconservation', 'geodiversity' and 'geoparks' manage to integrate with their biological counterparts in the future.

I would be pleased to elaborate on any of these points and provide further information.

Phil Creaser