



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Maitreya Update**

**22 March 2016**

It is now over a week since the promoter of the Maitreya festival stopped undertaking illegal construction on the public land at Wooroonook Lakes and cancelled the festival. In the intervening time, the promoter has still not vacated the site. This is in contravention of the enforcement orders served on it by VCAT on Friday 4 March.

Council had no objection to allowing the festival to go ahead, provided a compliant permit and associated documents were provided. Council was put in the invidious position of either allowing an illegal event to expose Council and its community to unjustified and unacceptable levels of risk, or refusing the permit, disappointing the Charlton and district community and the festival ticket holders. The cancellation of the festival at least meant that no-one was hurt on-site and no accidents arose; these could have crippled Council and its community. This is a major relief and a validation of Council's approach.

As with other matters related to the illegal occupation of the site, the promoter has not met the requirements of Council or the courts. VCAT required the promoter to cease using the site on 4 March and to remove all materials and structures and remediate the site to Council's satisfaction by 18 March. At last inspection, the promoter was still on site and has not provided Council with a date for completing remediation. Council is currently developing a strategy for prosecution to try and reduce the damage that has been done and to recover costs. This will be very difficult as the damage is extensive, especially in regard to the almost complete removal of undergrowth, the amount of ground disturbance and the loss of a significant number of trees and habitat.

Apart from the impact on the site, the impact on Council of the promoter's illegal activities has been large. Significant costs have occurred related to Council minimising the risks imposed upon it and its community. The actions of the promoter have meant Council has had no choice but to comply with the law and enforce its requirements. Further costs will arise from any repair of the site and Council will seek recovery of costs from the promoter. A public report to Council will detail these costs once the full extent is known over the next few months.

The various state and local government agencies are now reviewing events and looking to see what can be done to prevent a recurrence anywhere in Victoria. Key factors that need to be addressed across the state include setting standards for all music festivals and enhanced laws allowing more effective and earlier enforcement to prevent illegal activities.

**End release**

**For further information contact Travis Fitzgibbon on 1300 520 520**