

The ORC, the AAS and You

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Abstract

The Outdoor Recreation Centre (ORC): The ORC is the central hub for all providers of outdoor recreation-based activities within Victoria. Its mission is to advance the cause of outdoor activities in Victoria through communication, networking and representation

Recognition and support of existing peak and community organisations enables the ORC to support the many outcomes and experiences available from the outdoors.

Where necessary, the ORC provides a single point of contact to and from the outdoor industry when liaising with state government departments in the areas such as community participation, land management (access) and regulatory influences.

The ORC provides Victorians with the opportunity to contribute towards initiatives in the outdoors that may affect them, as they arise. The ORC Committee of Management is made up of nominees from member organisations.

The Adventure Activity Standards (AAS)

AAS are voluntary guidelines for undertaking potentially risky activities in a manner designed to promote:

- Safety for both participants and providers.
- Protection for providers against legal liability claims and criminal penalties.
- Assistance in obtaining insurance cover.

The AAS have been established as minimum standards for organizations conducting outdoor recreation activities for dependant groups, where participants have a level of dependence upon the leader(s).

The necessity for minimum standards has arisen as the outdoor recreation sector continues to develop 'best practice'.

The AAS originated in Victoria and have been in place here for 5 years. All of the states around Australia are now introducing their own AAS.

This session will:

- Give an overview of the work the ORC is currently involved in, as well as where we can assist our members.
- Introduce you to the concept of what the AAS are and update you on future plans.
- Give ideas and tips on how to constructively contribute to the AAS.

Introduction

The Outdoor Recreation Centre (ORC) was established in 1988 by industry peak bodies and associations. The ORC is a central hub for all providers of outdoor recreation-based activities within Victoria. Recognition and support of existing peak and community organisations enables the ORC to support the many outcomes and

experiences available from the outdoors.

Where necessary, the ORC provides a single point of contact and a single voice for the outdoor industry when liaising with state government departments in the areas of community participation, nature based and adventure tourism, land management (access) and regulatory influences. Likewise, these state government departments are enabled to communicate to the outdoor industry via the ORC.

The ORC's membership of the Outdoor Council of Australia (OCA) ensures that Victorian organisations are informed of national developments such as conferences, leaders' registration, standards and events as well as being networked to interstate counterparts. The ORC provides Victorians with the opportunity to contribute towards initiatives in the outdoors that may affect them, as they arise.

The ORC Committee of Management is made up of nominees from member organisations. It currently comprises representatives from Adventure Guides Australia, Australian Camps Association, Bushwalking Victoria, Scouts Australia (Victoria Branch), Swinburne University, Tourism Alliance Victoria and the Victorian Outdoor Education Association.

Our Mission Statement

To advance the cause of outdoor activities in Victoria through communication, networking and representation.

What the ORC can do for you!

Information

The ORC is in a unique position of being a part of all the major components of the outdoors in Victoria. We are in regular contact with public and personal recreation, education, tourism, camps, government and peak bodies across Victoria and Australia. This means that if you have a question, we can answer it.

Advocacy

If you have an issue that you want help with, perhaps even some representation, we can help you. It could be to government or other organisations (such as peak bodies) and on any issue relevant to our mission. For example, land access and safety are current topics.

Recreation House

Recreation House provides a physical centre for members including offices, meeting rooms, storage and a conference area. Currently four tenants and the ORC's own staff reside at the Westerfolds Park location. There is one available office and an extension is proposed to accommodate the Australian Camps Association. The conference room is currently available to all members free of charge and ample parking is available. We are even located inside a park, right on the Main Yarra Trail and the Yarra River.

Outdoors Victoria Update

The Outdoors Victoria Update is a monthly email that updates you on current industry-wide news and information that concerns the outdoors in Victoria. This resource also enables members to communicate events and initiatives with other members.

Forums

We run a range of forums and workshops throughout the year. Recent examples are a risk management seminar, an industry round table, and guest speaker sessions. A focus for the coming year will be upon empowering and developing community/not-for-profit groups. All of these events also provide members a great opportunity for networking with your peers.

Vehicle purchase and leasing

The ORC is currently engaged in talks with some car manufacturers on making fleet and leasing deals available to ORC members.

Conferences, workshops, industry days

Throughout the year there are a number of conferences, workshops and the like on a range of topics. We know that members struggle to attend them all. If there is a relevant event, seminar, forum or conference that members would like more information on, we can attend and provide a report for you. We attend local, interstate and national events so that our industry is informed of the latest ideas and trends.

Adventure Activity Standards (AAS)

The ORC is the Guardian of Victoria's Adventure Activity Standards. These are a suite of industry approved state-wide guidelines for safety and the environmental impact across the most popular adventurous activities. They provide clarity on common risk management and environmental practices expected by organisations providing adventure activities for dependant groups.

An important and ongoing part of this initiative is the AAS Technical Committee, made up of nominees of members from across the industry and government. Its role is to collate and assess any feedback and suggestions on the AAS, which is done as a continual process.

Additional AAS can and are being developed as needs arise, as suggested by events, government and/or members. AAS are being developed across the country. South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and New South Wales have all introduced AAS.

Industry Mapping

Last year we completed an industry mapping report that is available to members upon request. The report outlines what outdoor experiences, activities, organisations, training and regulation are currently available within Victoria. Essentially this report provides context and benchmarks for coordinated development of the industry. The report is available from the ORC via email as a 70 page document that includes a summary.

Governance

The governing board of the ORC is the Committee of Management. A part of ORC membership is not just the ability to vote at the AGM and on special resolutions, but also to stand for a position on the Committee.

The operational side of the ORC is managed by an Executive Officer, on behalf of and reporting to the Committee of Management. Available staff resources currently include the Executive Officer, Membership Manager (both full time) as well as a Project Officer (consultant), bookkeeper and IT support.

Adevnture Activity Standards (AAS)

Why Develop AAS?

In Victoria the AAS was developed to help answer the questions raised by government departments, commercial activity providers, community groups, leaders and other stakeholders. Land managers (Crown and private) need to understand what is happening on the land they manage or own. The problem was not a lack of standards, but rather an excess of different standards.

In addition to the initial reasons to clearly document these expectations, the extent that external stakeholders required increased confidence in, or knowledge about, this industry changed in 2001 due to insurance concerns.

Specifically this included:

- Public liability insurance increased significantly (Feb - Jun 2001). SLE withdrew from recreation, tourism and amusement insurance creating increased demand for industry standards (Dec 2001).

- A National Government (SCOR's) 'Review of Australian Insurance' suggested "...among other outcomes..." a need for independent industry operating standards (Mar 2002).

These and other issues posed a significant threat to the ability of organisations to deliver activities.

What is the status of the AAS?

Are they Law and could they become Law?

In Victoria, AAS are **voluntary** guidelines for undertaking potentially risky activities in a manner designed to promote:

- Safety for both participants and providers.
- Protection for providers against legal liability claims.
- Protection for providers against criminal penalties.
- Assistance in obtaining insurance cover.

AAS are NOT statutory standards by law. Legal liability for injuries or property damage is primarily governed by the Law of Contract and Negligence. These are described within the AAS. The AAS describe what activity experts across commercial, non-commercial and education fields deem to be a reasonable minimum in planning, competency/experience, equipment and environmental care for conducting group activities.

In the absence of AAS, the courts must attempt to draw what is the duty of care by finding relevant experts and other documentation.

The simplest way to think of the AAS is that they are a tool that any organisation or individual may use.

Who was involved in Victoria?

The Steering Committee initially governed the entire project. This was made up of representatives from the following agencies:

- Government agency funding consortium (Sport and

Recreation Victoria, Parks Victoria, Dept. of Sustainability and Environment, Tourism Victoria)

- Department of Education and Training
- Verve Knowledge and Skills (Victoria's ITAB)
- Tourism Alliance Victoria
- Australian Camps Association
- Tourism Accreditation Board of Victoria
- Victorian Work Cover Authority (as observers)

Who else contributed? Significant additional direction has also been provided by:

- Insurance Underwriters & Reinsurers
- Insurance Industry Council of Australia
- Risk management consultants
- National and international outdoor recreation organisations
- Victorian Police (Search and Rescue & SOLO Squad)

The Process

Each AAS was developed through workshops with specialists in each activity. These involved representatives appropriate for the activity from:

- Commercial (private operators)
- Non-commercial (Scouts, Scripture Union, Police Search and Rescue, YMCA, VSA)
- Peak bodies (Surfing Australia, Australian Canoeing)
- Training providers (TAFE, University, RTOs)
- Individuals

How were the AAS finalised?

Firstly, the AAS benchmark existing operating standards (where they exist) and agree on relevant standards. Before being finalised, the AAS have been:

- Agreed as reasonable by the working group for each activity.
- Reviewed by a wide cross-section of activity participants online at www.orc.org.au.
- Reviewed by the ORC Committee.
- Reviewed by the AAS Steering Committee.
- Reviewed by the AAS solicitor.

How are AAS implemented?

As they are completed they are posted on the ORC website and are free to download. No hard-copy documents are issued; the current copy is the copy on the website. AAS have been adopted as license criteria by land managers such as Parks Victoria, Philip Island and Great Ocean Road management committees. AAS have been included as activity conditions for accreditation schemes (nationally). Insurers and courts now have an industry-endorsed benchmark to begin to measure accountability.

What this means!

- Community groups and individuals have easy access to industry standards.
- Training (independent or in-house) should become more consistent across activities and the state, and potentially the country.
- Organisations, parents and leaders can be more confident that activities are run appropriately.

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- AAS compliment the following national initiatives i.e. The National Training Package (VET Qualifications) and the National Outdoor Leaders Registration Scheme (NOLRS).

Organisational Accreditation

By ensuring that the AAS complement the work being done at a national level and by other states, the outdoor recreation and adventure tourism industry can better demonstrate a united and professional approach. This is because:

- All group activities have the same benchmark, rather than the safety being defined by profitability, ill-informed leaders or the land manager.
- All group activities are better protected against small claims.
- There can be statewide (and hopefully national) consistency for insurers and land managers.
- Participants can have confidence that they are being appropriately accounted for, by being able to check for themselves.

What is happening now?

AAS will continue to be developed and need ongoing feedback to maintain relevance. Discussion among government and industry of possible national implementation has led to AAS in NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia developing AAS. Continuing to raise awareness of the AAS will strengthen confidence in the industry in both commercial and non-commercial activity providers. The ongoing process requires continued industry support and input.

Finally

The answers to the 'frequently asked questions' in Victoria can be accessed via the AAS section of www.orc.org.au. As these are industry standards we encourage everyone to discuss issues which may affect them and to provide us with your opinions.

Remember that these are broadening awareness of existing standards and expectations rather than imposing anything new. That is not to say that some aspects are not new to some!

The website to access all Victorian AAS information is www.orc.org.au.

How to get involved and have a say?

In Victoria, all contact for the AAS is done by submission on the AAS section of www.orc.org.au.

For those states developing their own AAS, contact your state's industry organisation.

The best thing to do is get your organisation involved in their development on ongoing maintenance. The AAS will happen regardless, so it is best to be heard now rather than later.

Note: In 2013 ORC was replaced by Outdoors Victoria. The AAS exist on the Outdoors Victoria website outdoorstvictoria.org.au/