

H1449 CHINAMANS BRIDGE

OVER GOULBURN RIVER, NAGAMBIE-HEATHCOTE ROAD NAGAMBIE, STRATHBOGIE SHIRE

Permit Application P39122

Why is Chinamans Bridge of cultural heritage significance?

Chinamans Bridge is included in the Victorian Heritage Register under the *Heritage Act 2017* for its historical and architectural significance to the State of Victoria. It was constructed in 1891 and originally included a lift span (now removed) to enable sawmill and recreation steamers to use the Goulburn River. It is one of the earliest timber road bridges in Victoria and is constructed of hand hewn timber. The use of Chinamans Bridge was discontinued in 1986 when a new bridge was constructed further to the west.

What was the permit application for?

On 10 October 2024 Heritage Victoria received a permit application for works to record and demolish the bridge. The land-based elements of the bridge including abutments and approach spans were proposed to be retained.

The permit application was advertised between 15 January 2025 and 28 January 2025 and 32 submissions were received, all supporting demolition of the Bridge.

On 21 February 2025, a permit application was issued by Heritage Victoria for:

- Demolition of the bridge in full, removing all existing timber and associated infrastructure;
- Retain and restore land-based elements of the bridge;
- Make good all other parts of the bank and river;
- Implementation of an interpretation strategy.

Why has the permit been issued?

It is uncommon for the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria to approve demolition of a place included in the Victorian Heritage Register. In this case it is considered necessary for the following reasons:

- Chinamans Bridge is now beyond repair and cannot be used by pedestrians or vehicles without substantial reconstruction, intervention and introduction of new materials. The condition of the bridge was worsened by damage caused in the October 2022 flood event.
- Chinamans Bridge has no current use and there is no prospect of adaptive reuse. Due to safety issues which would result in permanent closure of the Goulburn River it cannot be managed as a ruin.
- The costs associated with repairing Chinamans Bridge are prohibitive and would divert funds away from the repair of Kirwans Bridge (VHR H1886) which is still in use (although currently closed due to flood damage).
- The safety risks associated with repairing or reconstruction are considerable. A tender process indicated that it would be near impossible to get contractors to work on the bridge due to risk of loss of life or limb as a result of the poor condition.
- Closure of the river impacts the local economy including Chateau Tahbilk (VHR H0296).
- There is strong community support for demolition, as indicated in the 32 submissions which all supported demolition.

The *Heritage Act 2017* requires the Executive Director, Heritage Victoria 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 or economic use of the place; any other relevant matters and any submissions received in response to public notice of the permit application.

Due to the safety issues associated with this place, the assessment of the permit application was prioritised by Heritage Victoria and the permit issued well before the statutory timeframe.

Can the applicant appeal the decision?

The applicant or the owner may make a request to the Heritage Council to review the Executive Director's determination. A request for a review must be made to the Heritage Council of Victoria within 60 days of the determination. The Heritage Council is an independent statutory authority established under the *Heritage Act 2017*.