



Victorian Government response  
to the State of the Environment  
2018 report

# Contents

Minister Foreword	5
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Introduction	6
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## Victorian Government Response

### Summary table of responses

Recommendation	Level of Government Support	
1	Support in principle	8
2	Support	9
3	Support in principle	10
4	Do not support	12
5	Support in part	13
6	Support in principle	14
7	Support in principle	15
8	Support	16
9	Support	17
10	Support in principle	18
11	Support in principle	19
12	Support	20
13	Support in principle	22
14	Support	23
15	Support	24
16	Support	25
17	Support in principle	26
18	Support in principle	27
19	Support in part	28
20	Support in principle	29









I am pleased to present the Victorian Government response to the *State of the Environment 2018* report.

Victoria is home to some of the world's most important native plants and animals in a range of unique natural habitats.

Our environment is not only beautiful, it is fundamental to the health and well-being of every Victorian.

It provides clean air and water, productive soils, natural pest control, pollination, flood mitigation and carbon sequestration – and supports productive activities that underpin our state's liveability and economic advantage.

In Victoria, we have an ambitious environmental agenda that aims to strike a balance between the care and protection of our natural environment and community experience. It is vital that we have strong and independent advice on the health of our environment to support this.

The *State of the Environment 2018* provides objective evidence, through indicators and trend analysis, to inform us and challenge us to provide the care the environment needs.

In the *State of the Environment 2018* report, we have a baseline from which to continue to monitor the health of our environment. And in this, the Government's Response, you have a commitment to delivering environmental outcomes in partnership with communities all year round.

Understanding trends and identifying priority areas helps governments and communities to know where to focus our collective efforts. The *State of the Environment 2018* report identifies potential improvements in environmental data collection and reporting. It is a collective focus of the Government to take steps to improve data collection and communication. This response outlines the big and small programs that contribute to build the picture of Victoria's environmental health.

## Minister's Foreword



In November 2019, the Victorian Government announced the immediate protection of 90,000 hectares of Victoria's remaining rare and precious old growth forest and the gradual phasing out of all logging in native forests by 2030. The plan will also protect the future of the Greater Glider alongside the Leadbeater's Possum and more than 35 other threatened species.

The Victorian Government has equipped the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) with \$190 million in record funding to protect our environment and public health, and to continue to take strong regulatory action to address the greatest pollution and waste risks across Victoria.

In Recycling Victoria we have outlined a \$300 million overhaul of our recycling system. These historic reforms including the introduction of a four-bin household recycling model, complemented by a container deposit scheme, new investment in industry and the creation of a dedicated waste authority delivering a more reliable and transparent industry. The 2019-20 summer bushfires resulted in far reaching devastation of Victorian ecosystems, communities and industries, with over 1.5 million hectares burnt. Habitats and national parks were significantly impacted, with devastating effects for Victoria's biodiversity. Over 240 of Victoria's rare or threatened plant and animal species had over 50% of their known habitat burnt.

Supporting communities and the environment to recover from the 2019-20 summer bushfires is a priority for the Victorian Government. My Department is coordinating a significant program to support recovery of our flora, fauna and biodiversity; cultural healing in partnership with Traditional Owners; restoration of visitor and community assets, roads, waterways and catchments; land rehabilitation and management; and planning measures to support rebuild of fire-affected communities.

The Government thanks the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Dr Gillian Sparkes, for her efforts to align Victoria's environmental reporting with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals framework.

The Government supports the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals and as the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change I have asked my department to continue to deepen its engagement with the framework to ensure we are doing our bit to contribute to the achievement of the goals by 2030.

In presenting the Government's response to the *State of the Environment 2018* report, I thank the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability for her work to shed light on the most important of matters – the health of the environment. I also thank Victorians for their interest in, and their actions to care for, our environment.

There is a lot to do, but we will achieve so much more with the right information and a collaborative approach.

Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP  
Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change  
Minister for Solar Homes

# Introduction

## THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT 2018 REPORT

As required by the *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability (the Commissioner) submitted the State of the Environment 2018 report (the Report) to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in early 2019. The Report was tabled in Parliament by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change on 19 March 2019.

The Report provides an indication of the state of Victoria's environment through analysis of an extensive set of 170 indicators covering both biophysical and socio-economic factors. The Commissioner makes 20 recommendations within the Report which are largely targeted at improving the acquisition, quality, access and management of environmental data, or enhancing work in specific policy or program areas. The Report also highlights the opportunity for community involvement in the monitoring and caring for our environment.

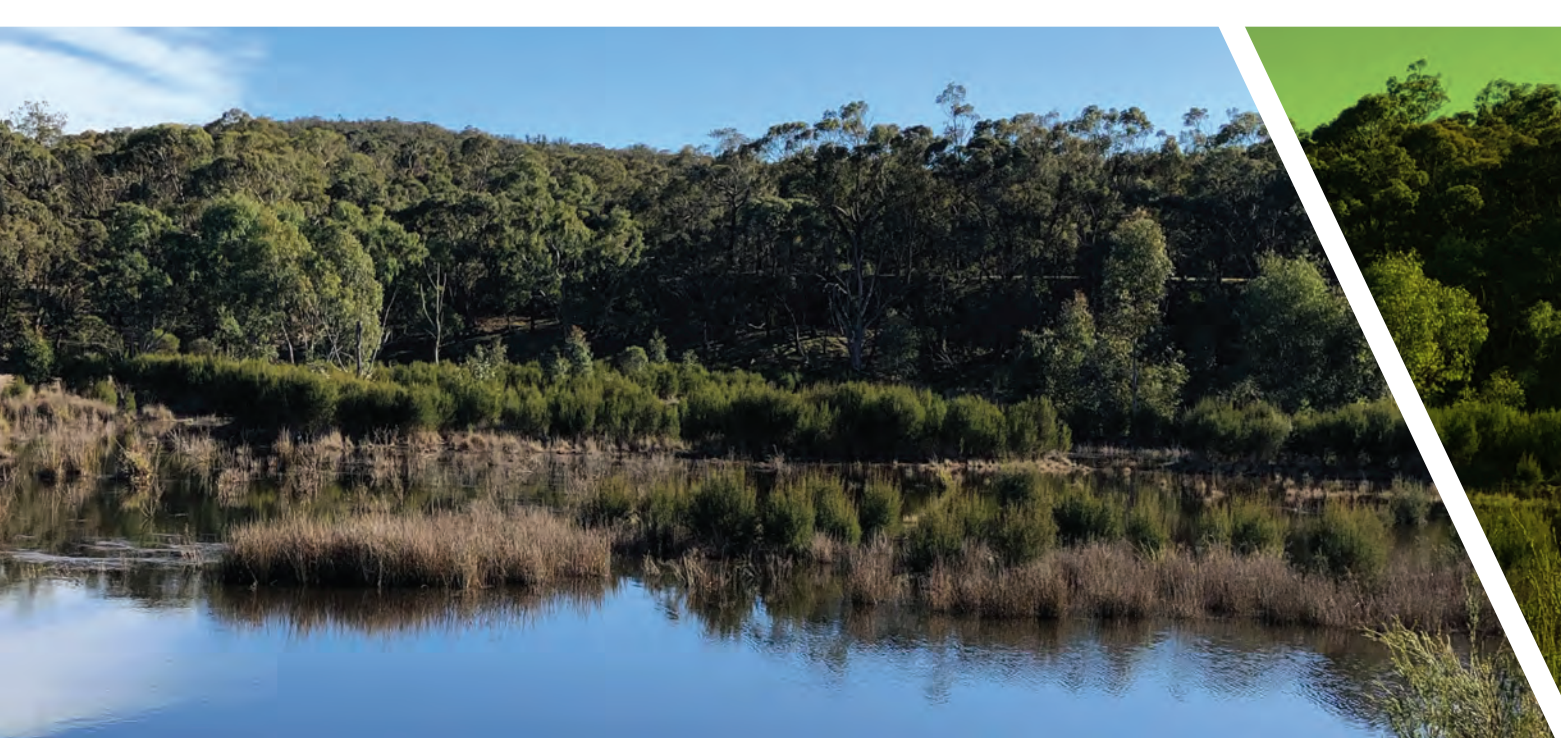
The Victorian Government's formal response to the 20 recommendations is presented within this document. As outlined in the response, the Government's priorities are driven by understanding what matters most to the community and by focusing work on delivering better environmental outcomes for all Victorians.

## USING DATA TO SUPPORT THE DELIVERY OF ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

The Government recognises the important role data plays in supporting good decision-making. Access to Victorian Government open data sources has been increased through the expansion of DataVic, and Victoria's first Chief Data Officer has been appointed to lead the Victorian Centre for Data Insights. However, the value of data is only fully realised when it is outcomes orientated. The Government's commitment to outcomes-based decision making, informed through data and evidence, is outlined in the Outcomes Reform in Victoria framework.

The response to the Report reflects this focus by highlighting the Government's extensive environmental reform agenda, which includes Biodiversity 2037, the Marine and Coastal Strategy and the Circular Economy Policy and Action Statement. Several responses also highlight potential future opportunities to engage with the Commissioner to help identify methods and appropriate sources of information to support the measurement and evaluation of environmental policies or programs.





## ACHIEVING OUTCOMES THROUGH ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES

The Government understands the importance of connecting with the community to understand what issues matter most to them. Several responses highlight strong relationships and partnerships with research organisations, community groups and Traditional Owners that help to develop a shared understanding of important environmental issues and opportunities. The Government is committed to maintaining and enhancing these relationships to empower people to make a real difference to environmental issues that matter to them.

The Government recognises the importance of Traditional Owners' knowledge and expertise, and the importance of strong engagement with Traditional Owners based on the principles of self-determination, as outlined in the Government's Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023. The Government has existing relationships with Traditional Owners for environmental and cultural management purposes and will continue to work with the Aboriginal community to drive reforms and initiatives which promote the rights and cultures of, and improve outcomes for, Aboriginal Victorians. This includes strengthening Aboriginal cultural heritage management and protection, and stronger protections for intangible heritage such as stories, songs and languages.

## WORKING TOGETHER TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT

With a growing population, the health of our environment has never been more important. The Government wants all Victorians to be able to enjoy a healthy and vibrant environment. In combination, the Report and this Government response present Victorians with information to understand the health of the environment and what is being done to support it. The Government will continue to work with the Commissioner to support objective environmental reporting.

# Recommendation 1

That the Victorian Government, in consultation with Traditional Owners and relevant agencies, develop contemporary cultural indicators to inform future environmental reporting. These indicators must reflect the priorities of Traditional Owners, have practical and cost-effective data-collection methods, be meaningful, and demonstrate change within a five-year reporting period.

## GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government is committed to supporting Aboriginal self-determination and Traditional Owner aspirations for culture and Country. The Government will support Traditional Owners to identify cultural indicators for biocultural landscape health within the principles of self-determination, as outlined in the *Victorian Government's Aboriginal Affairs Framework 2018-2023*.

Responding to the Government's new *Self-Determination Reform Framework*, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is developing a strategy for transforming its systems and structures to support self-determination. DELWP is currently working to support Traditional Owners' capacity to actively pursue their natural resource interests. This support includes:

- 23 Aboriginal Water Officer positions across Victoria to support Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to have better involvement in the water sector.
- Gunditji Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation's Killara Kooyang Water Project. Funded through the Aboriginal Water Program's Economic Development Initiative, this project will pilot the access and use of water for an aquaculture facility in the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape.
- Partnership and Engagement Coordinators in 11 Traditional Owner Corporations to support Traditional Owners to meaningfully participate in the Forest Reform process and support cultural values assessments.
- Liaison officers within Traditional Owner Corporations to help coordinate work with the Department in managing the state's natural resources.



## Recommendation 2

That DELWP, in coordination with research partners, conduct further analysis to improve localised climate projections (particularly in agricultural regions). These projections would aim to reduce the uncertainties associated with rainfall projections as a minimum.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports the development of science, including improved projections and guidance to improve the useability of projections, to support decision-making across all regions of Victoria. The Government acknowledges the value of localised climate projections, noting however that localised projections do not reduce the large uncertainty in rainfall projections, because the large uncertainty in rainfall projections is a feature of the source global climate models.

The Government has made a significant investment in improved climate projections, and in improved understanding of Victoria's climate variability through the following work streams:

- The Victorian Climate Initiative (VicCI), was a collaboration between the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) that produced a set of climate and streamflow projections based on 42 global climate models, which have been used by all water corporations across Victoria when assessing the impacts of climate change on water availability.
- The Victorian Water and Climate Initiative (VicWaCI) is a collaboration between DELWP, BoM, CSIRO and the University of Melbourne, which builds on the VicCI by looking at the changes in catchment runoff response across Victoria, and better understanding how changes in Victorian rainfall over recent decades fits with projections of future rainfall declines. Like VicCI, the findings will support many actions including the development of guidelines, issued by DELWP to water corporations, for the application of VicWaCI findings to long-term climate change adaptation planning within the water sector.

- The Victorian Climate Projections project (VCP19) is a collaboration between DELWP and CSIRO that has produced new local-scale climate projections for the entire state of Victoria for medium and high emissions pathways, including rainfall. VCP19 has made a significant contribution to improved understanding of rainfall in Victoria through localised scaled models that improve the simulation of rainfall, in part due to better representation of topography such as mountain ranges and coastlines. Key to this program is support by CSIRO climate scientists to assist users in understanding and applying the new data to different situations, which aids with the integration of data into decision-making.

These are user-driven, collaborative research programs that focus on improving scientific understanding of changes in climate and increasing the capacity of users to apply the research outputs, which supports environmental decision-making informed by data and evidence. The existing research activities and products provide improved localised projections, along with supporting science that assists stakeholders to understand the range of uncertainties in projections so that they are able to make robust decisions.

The work that DELWP has already undertaken fulfils this recommendation. Continued efforts will be required to further improve the understanding of the physical impacts of climate change on Victoria, including better understanding of the uncertainties associated with projections of future climate. Any investment in additional research and product development will be subject to stakeholder needs, including through the application of the next round of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change global climate models.

## Recommendation 3

That EPA Victoria prioritise the implementation of the EPA Inquiry Recommendations 6.3 and 7.2 to develop a publicly accessible, real-time assessment of air quality across Victoria that incorporates air-quality monitoring data, citizen science observations, air-quality modelling and an up-to-date air-pollution inventory. Future monitoring and assessments would also be expanded to include ultrafine particles and data on indoor air quality.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government submitted a formal response to the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Inquiry in 2017 which outlined the Government's support for Recommendations 6.3 and 7.2. Actions to progress the implementation of Recommendations 6.3 and 7.2 are being undertaken across Government.

Recommendation 6.3 required the EPA to assess the adequacy of its air and water monitoring networks, particularly in relation to air quality and consider options to improve data sharing and accessibility, and community communications. The EPA fulfilled this recommendation through the delivery of *An evaluation of EPA's environmental monitoring and assessment programs (2018)* report, which assessed EPA's air, inland water, marine, groundwater, land, odour and noise monitoring and assessment programs. The evaluation identified the need for a strategic framework to support monitoring and assessment program design, coordination, and Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement practices. In response, EPA has developed and implemented a strategic framework to provide a more coordinated approach to monitoring and assessment activities, including program leads for each environmental segment. EPA will develop implementation plans and monitoring and assessment frameworks relating to changes to its monitoring networks in line with the intent of the recommendation 6.3 assessment over time.

Recommendation 7.2 required the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to implement measures to coordinate environmental management in Victoria, in partnership with the EPA and other agencies responsible for environmental, public health and other liveability outcomes, including statewide environmental monitoring, a statewide spatial data system and state reporting of health, environmental and liveability outcomes. DELWP is identifying practical opportunities to better coordinate environmental management, improve monitoring and reporting to support decision-making, public health outcomes and share information with communities and stakeholders on environmental and public health outcomes.

#### Air quality

In relation to air quality, EPA are undertaking a number of projects to increase the coverage of its air network with new air monitoring sites in Campbellfield and Bendigo, along with citizen science and source apportionment projects to enhance knowledge of inner-city air pollution issues and sources.


#### Ultrafine particles

EPA will work to enhance scientific understanding of the characteristics of Australian urban ambient ultrafine particles, their main sources, their potential health effects and provide recommendations for legislative approaches to this emerging airborne pollutant. This will be delivered via an approved Australian Research Council Linkage project with Queensland University of Technology, which commenced in 2019 and is due for completion in 2020.

#### Indoor Air Quality

The Government acknowledges a knowledge gap on exposure data for indoor air quality in Australia homes. However, the priority for indoor air quality and public health in Victoria is addressing known risks to human health and life. Priority activities include:

- Managing carbon monoxide risks through the safe installation, operation and maintenance of gas heating.
- A study run by the EPA with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), to better understand the impacts of regional smoke events on indoor air quality and the role filtration systems can play in reducing exposure to fine particles.
- Information and advice from DHHS to the community on how to protect health, safety and wellbeing from factors in the home, including indoor air quality and comfort (i.e. temperature). Examples of advice include managing mould in the home and guidance on thermal comfort during hot and cold weather conditions.



The Commonwealth Environment and Energy portfolio has a significant role to play in facilitating air quality research and information. The Government will work constructively with the Commonwealth Government to make contemporary data available to researchers, policy makers and the community by advocating for an update to the 2001 State of Knowledge Report: Air Toxics and Indoor Air Quality in Australia.



## Recommendation 4

That Victoria's Chief Environmental Scientist, supported by relevant government agencies and research partners, lead the establishment of a contemporary pollen-monitoring network to enable community access to information on pollen levels in the air in a timely manner, through actions including increasing the number of locations monitored, the frequency of the monitoring, and automating the monitoring process.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: DO NOT SUPPORT

The Victorian Government acknowledges the role of pollen monitoring in assisting people with hay fever to take preventive action during the grass pollen season, and the intent of the recommendation to improve hay fever management. The intent of this recommendation is considered to have been met through the pollen monitoring and community awareness program established after the epidemic thunderstorm asthma event in November 2016. The Government's decisive action following this event resulted in the expansion in the number of pollen traps across Victoria, and the provision of comprehensive public information around protective actions people can take during the grass pollen season.

In 2017 as part of the response to the November 2016 epidemic thunderstorm asthma event, the Department of Health and Human Services, through the Bureau of Meteorology, established a pilot epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system. This system combines pollen forecasts and weather inputs to estimate the risk of an epidemic thunderstorm asthma event during the grass pollen season. As part of the establishment of the system, the Government provided funding to expand the number of pollen traps across Victoria from three to eight, and provided funding to the University of Melbourne and Deakin University to count and report grass pollen levels during the season. These five new regional pollen sites have been used to develop, verify and refine a state-wide pollen forecasting model.

Data from the sites has also been made available to the public for personal use through the Melbourne Pollen mobile app and website, and the Deakin AIRwatch website. The pilot epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system and associated pollen monitoring is under review. The program is currently funded until 2021.

The Government acknowledges that many Victorians experience hay fever during the season, however, this is only one of a range of health conditions and environmental threats that it must address to protect Victorians. Development of the pollen monitoring network beyond the expansions already implemented through the pilot epidemic thunderstorm asthma forecasting system is not considered necessary to improve the comprehensive information already available about protective actions people can take during the grass pollen season. This includes a primary focus on promoting good control of hay fever through the development and implementation of hay fever treatment plans by General Practitioners, pharmacists and practice nurses for patients, including appropriate treatment. This is considered the most effective primary prevention approach for hay fever management.

## Recommendation 5

That DELWP streamline the governance and coordination of investment in the science and data capability of all government biodiversity programs and improve the coherence and impact of the publicly-funded, scientific endeavour. Further, that DELWP establish the position of the chief biodiversity scientist to oversee this coordinated effort and provide esteemed counsel to the DELWP Secretary and the Minister for Environment to improve the impact of investment in biodiversity research across the Victorian environment portfolio.

That DELWP improve biodiversity outcomes on public land by streamlining and coordinating governance arrangements.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

#### Science and data capability

As an evidence driven organisation, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) invests strategically across its portfolio to ensure that decisions are made based on the best available science. DELWP recognises the need for continual improvement in the way data and knowledge are used across its portfolio areas. The Department has recently commenced several initiatives to progress the coordination and impact of biodiversity science, research, data collection/use and analysis. Key initiatives include the review of all DELWP Science Programs by the DELWP Science Leadership Group, initiation of a new project to develop a unifying small set of biodiversity indicators to be used across DELWP and the establishment of the DELWP Scientific Reference Panel. In combination this work is seen as an essential enabler to resolving the broader issues covered by this recommendation, including more efficient, transparent and more fit-for-purpose evidence-based decision making and reporting, to maximise desired biodiversity outcomes. It is considered that this will deal with the fundamental problem that is the lack of alignment across DELWP and its portfolio agencies in dealing with biodiversity data and science.

#### Chief Biodiversity Scientist

DELWP has implemented a range of activities since the State of the Environment 2018 report was prepared, that respond to the requirement to establish a Chief Biodiversity Scientist.

The opportunity for the Victorian Government of achieving the intent of the Chief Biodiversity Scientist recommendation is through the recent establishment of a new mix of key entities, including the newly formed DELWP Science Reference Panel, the recently formed DELWP Science Leadership Group, the VicEnvironments Forum (VEF) and supporting VEF Science Committee, as well as more targeted use of the existing Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act Scientific Advisory Committee and DELWP's biodiversity research centre of excellence, the Arthur Rylah Institute.

Improved oversight of this coordinated effort can be realised by using these entities in a more cohesive, interdependent and collaborative manner than was previously possible. These arrangements are now in place and this will provide esteemed counsel to the DELWP Secretary and the Minister for Environment to improve the impact of investment in biodiversity research across the Victorian environment portfolio.

Implementation of this approach and its effectiveness in meeting the intent of the recommendation will be reviewed and evaluated within 12 months of establishment of the Science Reference Panel to inform future implementation.

## Recommendation 6

That DELWP improve biodiversity outcomes on private land by accelerating private land conservation. This will require resourcing permanent protection measures that focus on high-priority ecosystems and landscapes, and investing in local government capability to enforce the existing Guidelines for the Removal, Destruction or Lopping of Native Vegetation and the Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports improving biodiversity outcomes on private land. Biodiversity 2037 acknowledges the need to address the ongoing decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation on private land and includes a target to permanently protect 200,000 hectares of private land by 2037. The primary mechanism for this is through the establishment of conservation covenants registered on the title of private landholdings by Trust for Nature via the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

The Government recognises the shift in conservation management towards considering whole ecosystems and landscapes, rather than focussing on a single threatened species. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) supports this approach by taking a collaborative, landscape level approach to biodiversity response planning that provides a mechanism for all stakeholders within a landscape to work together to identify priority outcomes for biodiversity – including actions on private land. Additionally, DELWP's Strategic Prospects Management Tool identifies priority biodiversity values on private land for management and protection.

In Victoria, the Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework (IPAPF), under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (CaLP Act)*, sets out the Government's approach to the management of existing and potentially invasive species. The IPAPF prioritises actions based on a biosecurity approach that aims to prevent the entry of new high-risk invasive species, eradicate those that are at an early stage of establishment, contain, where possible, species that are beyond eradication and take an asset-based approach to managing widespread invasive species.

The effective management of invasive plants and animals on private land in Victoria relies on a partnership approach that involves all three levels of government, community and the private sector. DELWP currently invests in a number of strategic programs to build capability of local government to respond to the threats of invasive species. Programs include:

- The Roadside Weeds and Pests Program: assistance to regional councils to respond to weeds and pests' threats on roadsides and prevent spread to private land.
- The Peri-urban Weed Management Partnership Program: to help manage weed threats in peri-urban Melbourne.
- The Good Neighbour Program: helping public land managers reduce the spread of weeds and pests to private land.
- The Land for Wildlife and Landcare programs which encourage voluntary conservation efforts on both private and public land.

The Government, primarily through the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, invests in the enforcement and compliance of the noxious weeds and pest animals' provisions of the *CaLP Act*. Local Government Areas also have local laws to penalise landholders who do not comply with the Act.

Illegal clearing contributes to the decline of biodiversity on private land. Compliance with the Guidelines for the Removal, Destruction or Lopping of Native Vegetation is a requirement of all planning schemes in Victoria. The government acknowledges that enforcement by local governments varies for a range of reasons and DELWP has established a cross-departmental working group to develop an action plan to deliver more effective administration of Victoria's native vegetation regulations, in order to reduce the impacts of unauthorised vegetation removal.



## Recommendation 7

That Agriculture Victoria lead the design and delivery of a state soil and land condition monitoring program, that includes analysis of the threats and impacts of land use and land-use change, to improve decision-making across a variety of sectors including agriculture, planning and water management.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government agrees that soil and land condition underpins agricultural productivity and maintenance of healthy ecosystems. The Government also recognises that improved soil conditioning and monitoring systems could allow private land managers to understand the impacts of a more variable climate including extremes of temperature, rainfall and wind and improve the decision-making processes used by farmers, other land managers and policy makers.

Agriculture Victoria has a long-term strategy to enhance Victorian agriculture's global competitiveness, innovation and resilience. Key initiatives underpinning this strategy and delivering on long-term objectives for soil health and land condition include:

- **The National Soil Research, Development and Extension Strategy:** This strategy coordinates soils research, development and extension that meets the needs of stakeholders. Agriculture Victoria is a member of the Australian Soil Network who coordinates this strategy. A key initiative under the strategy is to resolve soil data systems issues and data sharing arrangements via a national Soil Information Facility. Agriculture Victoria Research is also part of the Australian Collaborative Land Use and Management Program. This partnership ensures national approaches to land use and land management practices data for Australia. Complementing national initiatives, Agriculture Victoria Research has created a Soil Application Programming Interface that increases access and utility of Victoria's land and soil data and is the custodian of Victoria's soil data.
- **Grains 21:** This is Agriculture Victoria Research's strategy for the grains sector. As part of this strategy, Agriculture Victoria Research partners with industry investors including the Grains Research and Development Corporation and agribusinesses to undertake research and innovation to improve adaptation and resilience of grain production systems. This includes research that considers multiple soil constraints. This research is developing new sensors and diagnostic technologies that accurately map soils, identifying where, when and in what combinations soil constraints reduce crop yields.

- **The Land Health Program:** This program supports private land managers to adopt practices which improve the management of soil, water and vegetation on their land; minimise on and off-site impacts to priority natural assets; manage risks relating to climate change and land use; and reduce the impacts of natural disasters through preparation and accelerated recovery.

The design of a national or state-wide monitoring system is a complex task that would require research partners from across governments, industry, universities, CSIRO and the Cooperative Research Centre for High Performing Soils to allocate and prioritise significant resources over a long period of time. Agriculture Victoria will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure positive and tangible outcomes for soil health.

While Agriculture Victoria recognises the potential future benefit of a new soil and land condition monitoring system, delivery of such a monitoring program would need to be cost-effective, adequately resourced and not duplicate existing activity.

## Recommendation 8

That DELWP maintain their commitment to resourcing and maintaining the VFMP and enhance it to (i) improve statewide understanding of the impacts of forest fragmentation on forest-dependent species (including the development of an authoritative list of Victorian forest-dependent species), and (ii) improve assessment of protected areas by conducting detailed research to identify the benefits of various types of IUCN-protected areas for target species. Any amendments to the VFMP must not disrupt future trend analyses.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Victorian Forest Monitoring Program (VFMP) has been collecting information on the biophysical attributes and botanical diversity of Victoria's forests since 2011. The Government understands the benefits of the program accrue over time and is committed to the continuation of the program.

Botanical information from the program is delivered in the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas, which also now includes the authoritative list of Victoria's forest-dependent species. Data from the VFMP more broadly underpins a range of derived datasets and modelling processes and provides valuable ground truthing data used to verify satellite image analysis, including the assessment of forest fragmentation. Recent time series forest extent data has been used to assess the status of fragmentation across time.

The program is specifically designed to differentiate forest health characteristics between state forests and conservation reserves, including national parks. The information generated through the program and its contribution to complementary scientific studies assists the Government in understanding the utility of the state's reserve system, and in doing so, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected areas. In addition, the forest values assessment program currently being implemented through the forest management reform program, is undertaking a review of the Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system, which is underpinned by the IUCN criteria.

Any amendments to the VFMP program will ensure the time series data is complemented and enriched and will not undermine the legacy of information collected to date. At the same time, a process on continual improvement is applied through annual review. In the 2019/20 field season, additional metrics were included to strengthen assessment of vegetation condition; and for the first time, Traditional Owner groups were engaged for the dual benefit of enabling working on country opportunities and to advise on the development of cultural health indicators across public forests. Future enhancements may include integration of new remotely sensed imagery to assist long-term assessment of impacts associated with climate change and other disturbances.

Current and future data derived from the VFMP will contribute to Government initiatives aimed at understanding the effectiveness of the protected area estate in the conservation of target species and key forest values.



## Recommendation 9

That the Victorian Government establish a structured framework based on the findings of the dual-scale ecosystem-resilience monitoring program, piloted by DELWP in 2017-18, and undertake a detailed analysis of the persistence of key fire-response species to increased fire frequency in Victoria, particularly in areas where below-minimum Tolerable Fire Interval (TFI) exists.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The state-wide ecosystem resilience monitoring program has commenced and surveys of the first two Ecological Fire Groups began in Spring 2019. These surveys will improve our knowledge of the effects of varying fire-intervals on the persistence of key fire response species. This will allow a robust analysis of the changes to vegetation composition as a result of areas being burnt below the minimum Tolerable Fire Interval. This analysis and the results of the broader program will improve the conservation of threatened ecological communities and have implications for the way fire prevention activities, including controlled burns and mechanical fire prevention, are planned and implemented.



## Recommendation 10

That DELWP expand the Marine Knowledge Framework to include all state marine and coastal environments.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation, noting that the current focus is the development of the Marine Knowledge Framework (MKF) within Port Philip Bay and Western Port Bay, as recommended within the State of the Bays 2016 Report. The future direction of the MKF beyond 2020 will reflect the priorities identified in the Marine and Coastal Strategy which is expected to be released in December 2020.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), in partnership with CSIRO, initiated the MKF project in 2017 in response to the Commissioner's State of the Bays 2016 report and the supplementary State of the Bays Update 2017 report. The first stage of the MKF has focussed on the progressive consolidation of Port Philip Bay ecosystem data and information into a central knowledge management system. The MKF is currently being applied to inform the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) strategy for the Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan 2017-2027. The MERI will be published by December 2021 and will focus on addressing gaps in knowledge and monitoring priorities identified from the MKF.

DELWP has begun work to apply the MKF to other marine and coastal areas of Victoria throughout 2019-20 through the following actions:

- Consolidation of marine science data, imagery and research studies and surveys.
- Development of a new marine ecosystem classification system.
- Development of ecosystem models for priority marine habitats and species of interest that identify which indicators are the most important to monitor, and which actions are the most important for management.
- Development of a Feature Activity Sensitivity Tool which calculates the sensitivities of marine habitats and species to pressures and allows users to undertake cumulative impacts assessment.
- Integration of Good Environmental Status principles and criteria used internationally for describing the status the health of ecosystems across 11 themes.
- Integration of DELWP's standards for environmental accounting.

## Recommendation 11

That DELWP use the current Long-Term Water Resource Assessment (LTWRA) to identify metrics for monitoring the condition of, and risks to, Victoria's water resources and waterway health for reasons related to flow, and commit to long-term monitoring. Complementary thresholds would also be established for these metrics, and actions determined for circumstances when thresholds are crossed. Further, in a changing climate, it is recommended that DELWP review the 15-year period between LTWRAs, as more frequent assessments may be required to maintain ecosystem health and function.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government is committed to reviewing and improving waterway and catchment monitoring through Water for Victoria and using it to inform decision making and action in waterway and catchment health. There are more appropriate mechanisms to achieving this recommendation than using the Long-Term Water Resource Assessment (LTWRA) and existing processes are in place to address these concerns as outlined below.

*Under the Water Act 1989*, the LTWRA is a retrospective technical assessment whereas Sustainable Water Strategies consider future risks to water resources and waterway health and are reviewed every five years. Expanding the scope of current LTWRA to include work on metric identification, data gaps and recommendations would stretch resources and compromise the quality of both the current LTWRA and potential recommendations for long-term monitoring. The *Water and Catchment Legislation Amendment Act 2019* now provides for the findings of a LTWRA to be addressed through the preparation of a new, or review of an existing, Sustainable Water Strategy.

The Government is undertaking a range of actions to respond to the challenge that climate change poses for water resources. These include investing in climate and hydrology research through the Victorian Water and Climate Initiative and building this knowledge into water resource planning decisions including through Sustainable Water Strategies and Urban Water Strategies. A range of other actions are documented in the Pilot Water Sector Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan. DELWP is also currently gaining better information through monitoring programs like the Victorian Environmental Flows Monitoring and Assessment Program and Wetlands Monitoring and Assessment Program that can be used in the medium term (~5 years onwards) to set targets (measurable biological responses) for environmental water.

## Recommendation 12

That DELWP, working with its portfolio agencies, implement an agile water-quality monitoring framework that (i) clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all agencies and the community, (ii) improves monitoring of pollution hotspots, and (iii) builds on EPA Victoria's implementation of EPA Inquiry recommendations 6.3 and 7.2.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has established a water quality steering committee. Its role is to:

- Provide strategic oversight of water quality policy issues, water quality monitoring and research.
- Improve communication between DELWP teams with responsibility for water quality.
- Provide strategic direction for water quality incident management responsibilities.

DELWP will work with its portfolio partners to extend the existing water quality monitoring framework to be more agile so that it can incorporate and report on water quality hotspots. Roles and responsibilities of the partners will be more clearly articulated.

DELWP manages and co-ordinates the Regional Water Monitoring Partnership (RWMP) which is responsible for an extensive state-wide network of water quality monitoring sites. The RWMP is made up of 45 different agencies (water corporations, catchment management authorities, Bureau of Meteorology, Murray Darling Basin Authority, DELWP and local government). As well as the fixed network of site monitoring stations, RWMP partners can deploy what is known as portable automated loggers at short notice to monitor water quality events. An increasing number of water quality sites now have telemetered real time data.

The RWMP has formed a water quality working group that will take the lead on addressing Partnership water quality issues, investigate and make recommendations on new water quality technology.

DELWP strongly supports the catchment management authorities carrying out citizen science programs such as Waterwatch and Estuary Watch which supplement the state-wide monitoring network by providing information on local water quality issues.

DELWP will continue to work with stakeholders to identify practical opportunities to better coordinate environmental management activities with monitoring and reporting to:

- Improve natural resource management decision making.
- Provide information to communities and stakeholders.
- Achieve environmental and public health outcomes.

DELWP has identified that improved data sharing, and more accessible public environmental information are required.

Recommendation 6.3 from the Independent Inquiry into the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) required the EPA to assess the adequacy of its air and water monitoring networks, particularly in relation to air quality, and consider options to improve data sharing and accessibility, and community communications. The EPA has fulfilled recommendation 6.3 through the delivery of the report An evaluation of EPA's environmental monitoring and assessment programs. EPA will develop implementation plans and monitoring and assessment frameworks relating to its monitoring networks in line with the intent of the recommendation 6.3 assessment over time and as funding becomes available.

Recommendation 7.2 from the EPA Inquiry required DELWP to implement measures to coordinate environmental management in Victoria, in partnership with the EPA and other agencies responsible for environmental, public health and other liveability outcomes, including state-wide environmental monitoring, a state-wide spatial data system and state reporting of health, environmental and liveability outcomes. DELWP is identifying practical opportunities to better coordinate environmental management, improve monitoring and reporting to support decision-making and public health outcomes, and share information with communities and stakeholders on environmental and public health outcomes.

## Recommendation 13

That Sustainability Victoria, in 2019, develop indicators and implement a comprehensive monitoring and reporting framework to measure delivery of the current Victorian Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan (SWRRIP) and the regional plans (WRRIPs) against their circular-economy design principles. From July 2020, that Sustainability Victoria expand that monitoring and reporting framework to track the progress of the implementation of the strategy and publicly report, at least annually, on Victoria's transition to a circular economy.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation.

The Government recognises the need to measure, monitor and report on Victoria's transition to a circular economy and that circular economy planning and policy decisions need to be informed by reliable data. Monitoring the transition will require a range of indicators, including some for which data is already being captured and others that will require more work to undertake baseline analyses and establish data collection and reporting processes. In line with policy priorities and its new *Recycling Victoria* policy the Government will explore options for how to achieve this outcome.

The focus of the *Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan* and regional infrastructure plans is ensuring there is appropriate infrastructure in place to manage the changing volumes and types of materials entering Victoria's waste and resource recovery system in the coming years. The Government will ensure circular economy principles are reflected in future amendments to these plans, which will continue to be monitored and evaluated.

## Recommendation 14

That the Victorian Government, commencing within the metropolitan region as a minimum, align the institutional planning and procurement processes (including leveraging Victorian Government procurement) to support the delivery of the circular economy strategy from July 2020. Ultimately, this alignment would be adopted statewide and enable an orderly transition to a circular economy in Victoria by 2030. In developing the action plan to deliver the circular-economy strategy, the roles and responsibilities of all agencies should be clarified to nominate those agencies responsible for delivering policy, procurement, program, reporting and regulatory roles. Further, that the Victorian Government commit to long-term, systemic, statewide community education to support this transition and assist the change in behaviours that will be required to improve long-term system outcomes. Reducing consumption and contamination levels in kerbside recycling would be the initial focus.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports this recommendation.

The Government recognises the importance of transitioning to a circular economy. The Government published a circular economy policy on 26 February 2020 that fulfils this recommendation and provides a plan to transition to a more circular economy, with ambitious 2030 targets. The policy is *Recycling Victoria: A new economy*, and is online at [www.vic.gov.au/recycling](http://www.vic.gov.au/recycling).

*Recycling Victoria* details a package over \$300 million to deliver the largest recycling reforms and investment in Victoria's history. The policy provides a pathway for Victoria to reduce the environmental impacts of production and consumption, while maintaining or increasing the value people obtain from goods and services.

Under this plan, we'll overhaul our household recycling services, introducing a four-bin system and a container deposit scheme to improve the value captured from the materials we recycle. We'll also introduce new legislation and establish a waste authority to ensure greater accountability and transparency, and improve services.

Implementing behaviour change programs across Victoria is included in the policy. A state-wide education and behaviour change program will be critical to ensure Victorians understand how to use the new system effectively. Better sorting habits mean we will be able to use more of the materials collected from households to make new products.

*Recycling Victoria* will be delivered by agencies across the Victorian government, in line with the Government's waste and resource recovery portfolio agencies roles and responsibilities document (available online here: <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/sustainability/victorias-waste-and-resource-recovery-portfolio-agencies>).

The Government also recognises that local government is a critical delivery partner in Victoria's waste and resource recovery system and is committed to continuing to work closely with local governments and peak associations to understand opportunities and concerns of these communities.



## Recommendation 15

That DELWP establish indicators, and implement measures to collect appropriate data, to track the impact of energy emissions reduction to meet interim targets set under the *Climate Change Act 2017*. The reporting should also track the transition of Victoria's grid, transport and industry infrastructure to support a low-carbon future.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government supports monitoring the impact of energy emissions reduction and notes the importance of tracking Victoria's transition to a low carbon future.

The *Climate Change Act 2017* requires the Government to publish an annual greenhouse gas emissions inventory report for Victoria. This provides a transparent account of sources and trends of Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions across all sectors of the economy, including electricity generation, transport, and industrial processes sectors. The *Climate Change Act 2017* also requires the Government to publish a report at the end of each interim target period which states whether the interim emissions reduction targets have been achieved and assesses the implementation and effectiveness of the emissions reduction pledges.

The *Climate Change Act 2017* sets a target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and requires the establishment of five-yearly interim greenhouse gas emission reduction targets to support the transition to net zero emissions. The Government is in the process of determining state-wide interim emissions reduction targets for 2021-2025 and 2026-2030, along with policies and programs to achieve the emissions reduction targets.

## Recommendation 16

That DELWP implement measures to collect data and track the impact of the transition to a low-emission electricity system on (i) consumer sentiment and behaviour, (ii) investment in distributed, low and zero-emissions electricity generation, and (iii) the associated markets, governance and business models.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT

The Victorian Government is designing and implementing a range of policy and regulatory reforms to modernise our electricity system and support the transition to a more affordable, reliable and clean energy system. The Government notes the importance of tracking this transition.

There is a range of existing publicly available data on consumer sentiment and behaviour, including household and small business energy consumers' sentiment and behaviour published biannually by the Energy Consumers Australia (ECA) and the uptake of electric vehicles published by the Electric Vehicle Council. As part of the government's flagship \$1.3 billion Solar Homes initiative, data on domestic rooftop solar installation and new battery storage will be published by Solar Victoria.

In 2019, the Victorian Government legislated an increase to Victoria's Renewable Energy Target (VRET) to generate 50% of Victoria's electricity from renewable energy by 2030 which will drive investment in distributed, low and zero emissions electricity generation. The Government has a range of complementary initiatives to drive this investment, including the Solar Homes program, the 2017 VRET auction and the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. Data on the uptake and impact of these programs, and progress on the overarching VRET target, is published by DELWP. In addition, the annual report by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change under the *Renewable Energy (Jobs and Investment) Act 2017* includes information on the progress made towards meeting the VRET targets and investment in renewable electricity generation in Victoria.

The Victorian Government continues to work actively with national energy market bodies and through the Council of Australian Governments to drive reforms to the national energy market to ensure it can effectively accommodate higher proportions of variable renewables and distributed energy resources. The Essential Services Commission regularly reports on the performance of Victoria's energy market. The Australian Energy Market Operator tracks and publishes the transition of the electricity generation sector through the annual Integrated System Plan. The Australian Energy Regulator publishes annual State of the Energy Market reports covering Australia's wholesale electricity and gas markets, the transmission and distribution networks and retail sector.

## Recommendation 17

That EPA Victoria, in coordination with other Victorian Government agencies, improve transport-related air and noise monitoring, including:

- developing a real-time noise-monitoring network across Melbourne (with a view to expansion across larger cities in regional Victoria), focusing on monitoring near major transport hotspots that include busy roads, flight paths and along public transport routes
- increasing the number of roadside air-monitoring stations, and publishing the noise and air data on the internet in real-time.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation. In line with Recommendation 6.3 of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) Inquiry, the EPA's air and noise monitoring and assessment programs have been assessed, with the findings outlined in the An evaluation of EPA's environmental monitoring and assessment programs (2018) report. The evaluation findings initiated the development and implementation of a strategic framework that provides a more coordinated approach to the EPA's monitoring and assessment activities.

As part of the transformation in the EPA's assessment and monitoring activities, there are a number of important activities completed or underway.

Projects related to air include:

- Enhancing the AirWatch website to make air quality information more accessible to the community. The enhanced AirWatch website was released in November 2019. EPA is also exploring opportunities to extend this service beyond the air environment, with a pilot recreational water quality website (Beach Report and Yarra Watch) currently under development and due for release by the end of 2020.

Projects relating to noise include:

- A comprehensive review of methods used to assess the ambient acoustic environment. The review will document and compare the methods used within Australia and overseas for ambient noise assessment. Analysis of the review will provide options for translating the review findings to the Victorian context, in relation to intersection with other programs, stakeholder engagement and mapping of opportunities, risks and issues.
- A research project to develop and assess a Land Use Regression model for Melbourne using short-term and continuous noise measurements over several days and considering various transportation sources (road, rail and air) to estimate the long-term spatial variation of environmental noise levels in Melbourne.

The EPA will continue to explore further development in the air and noise monitoring and assessment space, including additional roadside locations and noise monitoring, according to priorities highlighted in the report - An evaluation of EPA's environmental monitoring and assessment programs (2018).

## Recommendation 18

That DELWP develop its spatial information capability and database, and ensure it is regularly and routinely updated, to inform decision-making across the environment portfolio.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the intent of this recommendation and acknowledges the important role of spatial data to inform decision-making across the environment portfolio.

Spatial data and services are fundamental to the delivery of many of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) core service obligations. The Department is uniquely placed to take a leadership role in spatial data service design and delivery, given DELWP's expertise, custodianship of essential data sets and the role these services provide for so many public and private sector activities.

DELWP maintains a wide range of spatial information – including topographic, public land, forestry, biodiversity and marine data – and has several systems already in place to store, update and share it. The Department's spatial data is stored in the Victorian Spatial Data Library, which contains over 2,000 datasets that are made available externally through both the Spatial Datamart Victoria and the DataVic websites.

Released in 2018, the DELWP Core Spatial Data Services Strategy sets the direction for the core spatial data services that underpin the State's spatial offerings. The strategy emphasises the need for efficient foundation data infrastructure and the development of spatial products and services that are informed by customer insights and envisages a three-year implementation plan which is well progressed.

In delivering the strategy DELWP has been investing significantly in modernising its spatial infrastructure, establishing cloud-based storage for its spatial data, exploring the potential for foundational spatial datasets to take on a 3D form and trialling new technologies, including digital twins, machine learning and artificial intelligence. To ensure clearer governance and coordination the Department is also establishing the DELWP Spatial Steering Committee that will set the vision and strategy for future spatial service modernisation.

DELWP will explore the following options to improve its spatial information capability and database:

- Ensuring that the Victorian Spatial Data Library contains a comprehensive list of spatial data collected by DELWP.
- Promoting awareness and supporting greater access to DELWP spatial data.
- Developing a roadmap to deliver improved spatial infrastructure and building the case for 'One-VPS Shared Services'.

While the Government acknowledges the risk associated with not actively curating datasets, there are significant costs associated with the collection and management of spatial data to achieve this outcome. In line with existing Government commitments and portfolio priorities, DELWP will consider a review of its information asset register to identify core spatial datasets as a platform to support effective decision-making.

## Recommendation 19

That DELWP establishes environmental-economic accounting as a core capability and delivers a set of environmental-economic accounts for Victoria by 2022, consistent with the SEEA guidelines, the DELWP Valuing Accounting for Victoria's Environment strategy and aligned with the agreed common national approach. Further, that the Minister for Environment include in the Statement of Expectations to the Commissioner for Environment Sustainability a requirement to incorporate reporting against Victoria's environmental-economic accounts in State of the Environment reporting for Victoria from 2023.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PART

The Victorian Government supports the overall intent of this recommendation. The recommendation to deliver a set of environmental-economic accounts for Victoria by 2022 is not supported at this time. The production of comprehensive state-wide environmental-economic accounts by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is not currently feasible.

DELWP will continue to build on its capabilities in environmental-economic accounting and produce accounts to improve the evidence base available for future policy development, planning and decision making in Victoria. This work will be consistent with the current experimental United Nations System of Environmental Economic Accounting (UN SEEA) guidance and the revision process due to be completed by December 2020, DELWP's Valuing and Accounting for Victoria's Environment Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and the common national approach. The scope and depth of DELWP's program on environmental-economic accounting will be driven by policy needs, focusing on areas where there is greatest need for building the evidence base on connections between the environment and economy to tackle future challenges facing Victoria.

The recommendation for a requirement for environmental-economic accounts in the Ministerial Statement of Expectations to the Commissioner for Environment Sustainability is also not supported at this time. DELWP will continue to provide the Commissioner with products from its environmental-economic accounting program to support future reporting and contribute to the development of a comprehensive state-wide environmental-economic accounting framework in the future.



## Recommendation 20

That the Minister for Environment include in the Statement of Expectations to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability a requirement to adopt the SDGs as an operating framework for SoE reporting in Victoria from 2023. This will require that DELWP support the Commissioner by leading a portfolio review of the data requirements to assess Victoria's progress against the selected SDG targets, which will include a complementary analysis of current legislation, policy and programs against the SDG targets, and the development of a plan to improve data-acquisition processes for socio-economic indicators by 2021.

### GOVERNMENT RESPONSE: SUPPORT IN PRINCIPLE

The Victorian Government supports the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and supports the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability utilising the SDG framework to enhance Victoria's environmental reporting. This will be reflected by the Minister for Environment in the Statement of Expectations to the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability.

The SDGs and their objectives feature in important government initiatives including Plan Melbourne 2017-2050, Water for Victoria, and Biodiversity 2037. As the Government's leader of sustainability policy and programs, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) embarked on a whole-of-department approach to the SDGs in 2019. Key activities included releasing a statement of support for the SDGs in the Department's Corporate Plan and aligning the Department's Outcomes Framework to the SDG framework. As part of DELWP's ongoing support of the SDG framework, DELWP will take a portfolio-wide approach to engaging with the SDGs in the future. This will involve engaging with portfolio agencies to understand where they are on their SDG journey and providing tailored advice.

To ensure government policies and programs are outcome-focused each department adheres to an outcomes framework, which includes outcomes, indicators and measures. Work occurs at the whole-of-department level, and at the business unit level, to refine outcomes, indicators and measures as required. There is awareness across Government and DELWP that both socio-economic and biophysical indicators are important to provide an easy to understand and meaningful narrative for the Victorian community. DELWP's ongoing process of refining indicators will include both socio-economic and biophysical indicators as appropriate.

DELWP is willing to work with the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability to ensure alignment of indicators to enhance environmental reporting. Consistent with the Government's focus on outcomes, DELWP's focus is on identifying and settling indicators that will demonstrate outcomes and impact. The refined set of indicators supported by data will inform DELWP's ongoing engagement with the SDG Framework.



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## Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it.

We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

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