

# Nature Fund 2023 Guidelines



Energy,  
Environment  
and Climate Action

OFFICIAL

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**Photo credit**

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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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## 1. What is the Nature Fund?

The Victorian Government has established the Nature Fund to support high impact projects that deliver on the goals of *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* (Biodiversity 2037), the Government's plan to stop the decline of native plants and animals and improve the state's natural environment.

The purpose of the Nature Fund is to drive non-government investment into projects that benefit biodiversity by:

- improving habitat (preferred) or
- benefiting threatened and/or culturally significant species.

Nature Fund 2023	Details
Project Duration	Nature Fund funded component of the project to be concluded by May 2026.
Selection process	Competitive, 2 stage (EOI acceptance and 6-month project implementation planning and funds-confirmation period).
Total Funding	\$3.5 million
Co-funding requirement	1:1 - At least matched funding from non-government sources – see funding eligibility
Minimum funding request	\$20,000
Multiple applications	Multiple grant applications may be submitted. Each application submitted must be separate (not reliant on another project) and must not be a scaled version of another funded project – or a scaled version of another application.

In 2023, the program design and selection criteria have changed following the first round of funding to further drive a culture of collaboration and co-investment to protect and restore Victoria's rich biodiversity.

## 2. Who can apply?

The following organisations can apply for funding:

- not for profit organisations
- government agencies
- private sector businesses and agencies
- educational institutions
- local government authorities

(Individuals cannot apply)

Incorporated Victorian Traditional Owner organisations or Aboriginal Victorian organisations. These are organisations that are:

- a not-for-profit organisation registered with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission **or**



- an incorporated body or organisation registered with Consumer Affairs Victoria or an incorporated association under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act).

In addition, to be eligible for funding applicants must:

- be delivering a project located in Victoria
- Be an incorporated or statutory entity with financial systems in place for receiving, managing and acquitting government funding
- have appropriate systems, processes and procedures in place to identify and manage risk that complies with all relevant laws and regulations including the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004* and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017*
- have appropriate systems, processes and procedures to ensure good governance, and a high standard of quality assurance for project delivery
- have appropriate insurance coverage for its operational and business risks public liability insurance (\$10 million minimum) and personal accident insurance cover to safeguard any volunteers and participants involved in the funded activities.

### ***Auspice arrangement***

Applicants who do not meet the eligibility above can partner with another organisation that does meet the eligibility, known as an auspice. DEECA will provide appropriate budget for the auspice if required.

## **3. What can be funded?**

Eligible projects need to:

1. Secure (or have the potential to secure by the end of Stage 2) matched co-funding from non-government sources, excluding volunteering and in-kind support (see 'matched funding' below).
2. Deliver benefits for Victorian biodiversity by,
  - Improving habitat (preferred) or
  - Benefiting threatened and/or culturally significant species
3. Engage Traditional Owners:
  - For public land: Recognised Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) are engaged and supportive of project.
  - For private land: Traditional Owners (TOs) are given an opportunity to be involved.

### ***Matched Funding***

Applicants must secure at minimum matched co-funding. The co-funding can include a combination of financial donations (including donations from businesses and individuals) and philanthropic grants but cannot include funds obtained from government sources (e.g. Federal, State, or Local Government grants programs). Funding must be cash, not in-kind.

Applicants will need to describe how they will achieve matched funding. Co-funding does not need to be secured at the time of proposing investment from the Nature Fund – however, when submitting an EOI at Stage 1, projects must demonstrate the potential to secure co-funding by the conclusion of Stage 2 (a six-month period).

Note, the amount of co-funding will also be considered as part of the assessment criteria for selecting projects.

#### 4. Eligible types of expenditure

The Nature Fund will support the following categories of expenditure:

- contribution towards land purchase costs (e.g. as part of a project to purchase land to protect habitat and support the survival of a threatened species – see ‘Private Land’ on page 5)
- undertaking conservation works – on-ground or ex situ
- improvement of existing assets that support the environmental health of the site
- personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves, goggles and masks)
- site preparation
- translocations (with a permit)
- training and certification
- capital items (e.g. access steps)
- project coordination / project management (limited to ten per cent of any project proposal)
- contractors, including presenters and survey work
- capital equipment, such as monitoring equipment (excluding computers).
- materials and equipment hire
  - for revegetation (for example, plants and tree guards)
  - for pest and predator control (for example, exclusion fencing)
  - to support threatened wildlife (for example, captive breeding or translocation of a species to a new habitat, or creation of artificial hollows)

**Capital equipment** - Please note that capital equipment will need to become a registered asset with your organisation or auspice.

You will need to demonstrate:

- that all expenditure, especially for contractors, training, project coordination and capital equipment, is essential to the success of the project
- that the amounts requested are commensurate with the overall project; and
- as part of the overall project, what specifically is being requested from the Nature Fund and what is being funded through co-investment from other source/s.

When developing budgets, you should ensure that activity costs (such as equipment, materials and contractor charges) are fully costed, including GST.

#### 5. Ineligible Expenditure

Funding is not available for:

- routine or ongoing maintenance activities including those required by legislation
- recurrent operating costs, for example rent and associated utility costs, insurance and/or activities establishing expectations of ongoing funding
- activities located outside the State of Victoria (unless in the case of translocation of species)
- political campaigning or advocacy activities for political parties
- activities that are already funded through another organisation, programs or fund source  
(Note: Your project can build on the success of past or existing projects. The grant must fund additional activities that would not occur without this funding.)

- native vegetation and threatened species offsets or offset activities (such as to meet a condition of a permit)
- any illegal activity
- purchase of goods for competitions, prizes, giveaways, vouchers or alcohol
- any other action or activity determined through the assessment process to be an inappropriate or unsuitable use of the funds.

## 6. Project Location

The Nature Fund can support projects on land of any tenure in Victoria. Projects must have landowner / land manager approval.

### ***Private Land***

Projects on private land must demonstrate a clear public benefit. The project will need to demonstrate it will make a significant difference and represents good value for money, leveraging co-funding from another source. Preference will be given to private land projects that will ensure permanent protection.

### ***Public land***

DEECA supports the self-determination of Traditional Owners. For projects on public land, partnership with Traditional Owners should be undertaken as early as possible in the project development, in line with *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu* 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025 — for example, discussions at a relevant forum, a site visit on Country and/or demonstrated 'in principle' support from the Traditional Owner group specific to that area.

<https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/aboriginalselfdetermination/self-determination-reform-strategy>

Projects should factor in adequate budget for Traditional Owners to be adequately remunerated and resourced. Sufficient time should be allocated, and timelines must incorporate Traditional Owners' governance structures and ways of making decisions.

Applicants are strongly encouraged to read the relevant Country Plan for the group you will be engaging (if they have one) prior to commencing any engagement and understand the Traditional Owner group's legal status and rights under the relevant legislation.

Applicants who are not Traditional Owner Corporation registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act), will need to include a letter of support for the project and for the organisation from the Traditional Owner Corporation of the Country where the works are proposed.

If the proposed works are on Country where there is a formally recognised Traditional Owner Corporation (Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP)), the letter should be from the RAP. Where the location has no RAP, letter/s of support should be from relevant Traditional Owner groups with interest in the area of the proposed works.

### ***Find out more...***

To find out the Formally Recognised Traditional Owners for an area, search the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Register and Information System (ACHRIS), available at <https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/victorias-current-registered-aboriginal-parties>. To find details of non-formally recognised Traditional Owner groups in Victoria, please visit the (Commonwealth) [Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations \(ORIC\)](#).

## **7. Application Process**

### ***Stage 1 – EOI Assessment***

Applicants will submit an expression of interest (EOI) detailing how the project meets the **eligibility and assessment criteria**. The DEECA Nature Fund Governance Group will select the most promising projects demonstrating alignment (or **potential** for alignment) with the purpose of the Nature Fund. These projects will be recommended to the Minister for approval.

Note, at this stage projects will be assessed on their potential. EOIs will need to demonstrate the potential for the project to fulfil the criteria within the 6 month-long second stage. For example, a project may not have secured full co-funding but can demonstrate high likelihood funding avenues in development.

In addition to responses against the Nature Fund eligibility and assessment criteria, applicants should articulate whether a small payment of up to 5% or up to a maximum of \$10,000 is required for the six-month planning and fund-securing process (ie. for payment for Traditional Owner group engagement or project governance planning and coordination). The selected projects will progress to Stage two.

### ***Stage 2 - six-month period for meeting eligibility criteria***

Successful proponents will be given six months to secure the proposed co-investment and finalise project plans, as well as gain Traditional Owner support. DEECA will provide support and advice during this stage and may provide seed funding if required (as per above). At the end of Stage 2, when projects are confirmed to have met all eligibility criteria, projects will enter into funding agreements for the full funding requested.



## 8. What are the assessment criteria?

First, applications will be checked for eligibility to make sure that the applicant and their activity are eligible for funding. After that, eligible applications will be assessed using the selection criteria below.

Criterion	Description	Evidence required
<b>Biodiversity benefit 40%</b>	<p>Extent to which project delivers habitat improvement to benefit Victorian biodiversity</p> <p><b>Strongly preferred</b> - Habitat improvement actions are likely to include pest and weed control and revegetation and may include some species-specific habitat improvement actions (eg. provision of nesting boxes).</p> <p>OR</p> <p><b>Lower preference</b> - Extent to which project demonstrates benefit for threatened and/or culturally significant species.</p> <p>AND</p> <p>Extent to which biodiversity impacts will be sustained into the future (ie. legacy beyond the funding period).</p>	<p>Demonstrate how biodiversity and threatened species will benefit, using relevant tools and evidence, including but not limited to Strategic Management Prospects and threatened species action statements.</p> <p>Sustained benefits could be demonstrated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Establishment of permanent protection</li> <li>– Sustained funding from other sources</li> <li>– Creation of long-term collaborative relationships with the community, Traditional Owner groups, funders and neighbouring landowners</li> <li>– Ongoing volunteer/in-kind support</li> <li>– Building capacity of community groups involved in the project</li> <li>– Project activities that contribute to long-term restoration ie. Restoration of wetland hydrology</li> </ul>
<b>Co-funding 40%</b>	Degree to which project will leverage non-government investment – considering both ratio of funding and likelihood of securing co-funding.	Description of plans/intent for securing co-funding, including degree confirmed/secured. Letters of support required as evidence for confirmed funding
<b>Delivery risk 20%</b>	<p>Extent to which applicant demonstrates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their organisation's capability and capacity to deliver the project</li> <li>• Previous expertise and experience in delivering similar biodiversity projects for biodiversity</li> <li>• Previous expertise and experience in securing private funding for projects</li> <li>• Likelihood of obtaining permits or approvals, if required</li> <li>• Best practice methods and approaches and/or risk mitigation for innovative/untested methods</li> </ul>	Demonstrated through examples of previous work, evidence for methodologies etc

## 9. What supporting documents will need to be provided?

Please submit the following documents with your application:

- a) evidence of confirmation of other funding sources
- b) evidence of support from Traditional Owner Groups
- c) written consent from the relevant public land manager or private landowner to undertake the activity
- d) approval for appropriate works permit/s from councils or other authorities
- e) certificate of insurances
- f) project location shapefiles if available
- g) written support from an Auspice organisation is applicable
- h) further information to support your methodology

## 10. What are the funding conditions?

### ***Funding agreements***

Successful applicants must enter into a funding agreement with Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). The Victorian Common Funding Agreement is used for funding agreements with not for profit organisations and Local Government Authorities.

The DEECA Transfer Payment Funding Agreement is used for Victorian public entities, as defined under section 5 of the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

It is recommended that applicants review the terms and conditions before applying. Information about the Victorian Common Funding Agreement is available on <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-common-funding-agreement>

The activity does not include using the Funding for political campaigning or advocacy activities for political parties.

### ***Legislative and regulatory requirements***

In delivering the activity grant recipients are required to comply with all relevant Commonwealth and state/territory legislations and regulations, including but not limited to:

- *The Privacy Act 1988 (Commonwealth)*
- *The Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*

### ***Tax implications***

Applicants should consult the Australian Taxation Office or seek professional advice on any taxation implications that may arise from this grant funding.

Successful applicants without an ABN will need to provide a completed Australian Taxation Office form 'Statement by a Supplier' so that no withholding tax is required from the grant payment.

### ***Acknowledging the Victorian Government's support***

Successful applicants are expected to acknowledge the Victorian Government's support and promotional guidelines (<https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/grants>) will form part of the funding agreement. Successful applicants must liaise with the departmental program area to coordinate any public events or announcements related to the project.

### ***Payments***

Payments will be made as long as:

- the funding agreement has been signed by both parties;
- grant recipients meet the eligibility and selection criteria by the end of Stage 1 of the application process
- grant recipients provide reports as required, or otherwise demonstrate that the activity is progressing as expected;
- other terms and conditions of funding continue to be met.

### ***Monitoring***

Grant recipients are required to comply with project monitoring and reporting requirements as outlined in the funding agreement. This may include progress reports, site inspections, completion reports and acquittal documentation.

### ***Privacy***

Any personal information about you or a third party in your application will be collected by the department for the purposes of administering your grant application and informing Members of Parliament of successful applications. Personal information may also be disclosed to external experts, such as members of assessment panels, or other Government Departments for assessment, reporting, advice, comment or for discussions regarding alternative or collaborative grant funding opportunities. If you intend to include personal information about third parties in your application, please ensure that they are aware of the contents of this privacy statement.

Any personal information about you or a third party in your correspondence will be collected, held, managed, used, disclosed or transferred in accordance with the provisions of the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014* and other applicable laws.

DEECA is committed to protecting the privacy of personal information. You can find the DEECA Privacy Policy online at [www.delwp.vic.gov.au/privacy](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au/privacy).

Requests for access to information about you held by DEECA should be sent to the Manager Privacy, P.O. Box 500 East Melbourne 8002 or contact by emailing [Foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au).

## **11. How do I submit my Expression of Interest?**

Expressions are submitted online using the Grants Online portal. To apply, go to the grant program web page [www.environment.vic.gov.au/nature-fund](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au/nature-fund) and click on the 'Start New Application' button. To return to a saved draft application, click on the 'Access Saved Application' button.

### **Attaching required documents:**

Supporting documents must be in an acceptable file type, such as Word, Excel, PDF, or JPEG. The maximum file size for each file is 10MB.

You will receive an application number when you submit an application online. Please quote this number in all communications with the department relating to your application.

If you have documents to submit that cannot be attached to your online application you can email them to [naturefund@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:naturefund@delwp.vic.gov.au) quoting your application number. Attach all documents to one email, zipping the files if required.

Make sure your application is submitted by **5.00 pm on 6 November 2023**

**Note:** No hard copy applications will be accepted. Late and incomplete applications will not be considered.

## 12. Additional information

If you require assistance submitting your application online, email [grantsinfo@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:grantsinfo@delwp.vic.gov.au).

## 13. What is the notification process?

Successful and unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing after the assessment process is completed. All decisions are final and are not subject to further review. Unsuccessful applicants can ask for feedback on their application.

## 14. Key dates

Expression of interest open	14 September 2023
Expression of interest close	6 November 2023
Grant applicants notified of stage 1 outcome	December 2023

## 15. Checklist

Read these guidelines and the information about this grant program at [Nature Fund \(environment.vic.gov.au\)](https://environment.vic.gov.au) before applying and complete the following checklist.

Have you:

- \* read these guidelines carefully?
- \* checked if you are, or your organisation is, eligible for this grant funding?
- \* checked if your activity is eligible for this grant funding?
- \* checked that you would be able to comply with all relevant laws and regulations in delivery of your activity?
- \* prepared the appropriate supporting documents?

## 16. Policy and strategic documents

There are a range of policies and strategies relevant to the Nature Fund, including:

- [Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037](#)
- Alignment with Biodiversity 2037 - NaturePrint's Strategic Management Prospects (SMP) dataset should be used to guide the location of applicant activities. SMP helps biodiversity managers consider and compare which actions to do and the best locations for actions. For more information

including guidance on how to use the SMP tool visit [Choosing actions for nature \(environment.vic.gov.au\)](https://environment.vic.gov.au/choosing-actions-for-nature)

- Threatened Species Action Statements: [Action statements \(environment.vic.gov.au\)](https://environment.vic.gov.au/threatened-species-action-statements)
- *Pupangarli Marnmarnepu* 'Owning Our Future' Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy 2020-2025
- Local Jobs First: <http://localjobsfirst.vic.gov.au/> - applicable for projects that are delivered by non-government agencies for a value of greater than \$1 million in metropolitan areas and \$3 million in regional areas.



