

# The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability's approach to independent science reporting

## The Commissioner

The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability provides independent scientific reporting to inform policymakers, scientists, and the wider Victorian community on the state's natural environment and support ecological sustainable development.

The Commissioner is an independent statutory role and is a Governor in Council appointment.

Dr Gillian Sparkes was appointed as Victoria's third Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability in 2014.

## The Act

The *Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003*, requires the Commissioner to:

- review and report on the condition of Victoria's environment
- encourage decision-making that facilitates ecologically sustainable development
- enhance knowledge and understanding of issues relating to ecologically sustainable development and the environment, and
- encourage Victorian and local governments to adopt sound environmental practices and procedures.

## Commissioner's Reporting Obligations

The Commissioner will prepare the following statutory reports for Victoria to 2024.

### 'State of' environment reports 2021-2024

- State of the Environment 2018 Report: Biodiversity Update – **due 2021**
- 5-yearly State of the Marine and Coastal Environment Report – **due 2021**
- 5-yearly State of the Environment Report – **to be tabled 2023**
  - o Will also include a report on the outcomes of environmental watering (Action 3.6, Water Plan) and a report on Victoria's Biodiversity 2037 targets
- 5-yearly State of the Yarra and its Parklands Report – **to be tabled 2023**

- 5-yearly State of the Forests Report – **due 2023**
- 5-yearly State of the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Report – **due TBC**

## Strategic Audit Reports

- Annual strategic audits of Environmental Management Systems (EMS) in Victorian government agencies –tabled March 2021
- Biennial reports on the implementation of Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) conservation outcomes – to be tabled 2022, 2024.

## Approach to reporting

### Vision: Independent reporting on Victoria's natural environment to enable practical action

The *Victorian State of the Environment (SoE) 2018* reporting process ushered in new ways of working with stakeholders to enhance the value of the Commissioner's independent science reports and the impact of the recommendations.

The Victorian Government responded to the *State of the Environment 2018*, *State of the Forests 2018* and *the State of the Yarra 2018 Reports* – with 30 of 31 recommendations accepted in full, part or principle.

Building upon the Victorian SoE 2018 report, in June 2020 the Commissioner tabled the *Science for Sustainable Development Framework* for the Victorian SoE 2023 Report in the Victorian Parliament.

This approach provides structure to guide all state of environment reports that will be prepared by the Commissioner during the current reporting cycle to 2024 and includes collaborative methods for working with key stakeholders.

The approach continues the Commissioner's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the critical role of science, data, and community in decision-making for sustainable development.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

The Commissioner applies the SDGs to broaden the focus of environmental reporting and better address economic, social, and environmental considerations. Using the SDGs as an operating framework for reporting provides a depth of science storytelling capable of reflecting the diverse views and complexity of both the natural environment and needs of Victorians.

### **Three levels of synthesis**

The Commissioner's approach to reporting embraces three levels of synthesis:

1. environmental condition reporting.
2. assessing interlinkages across the SDG targets.
3. tracking progress on selected SDG targets.

### **Spatial science**

This approach to reporting commits to incorporating spatial data into environmental condition reporting for Victoria. Spatial technology offers new levels of intelligence to quantify, analyse and unlock the transformative potential of the SDGs as a framework for decision making for sustainable development.

### **Localisation of indicators**

Although scalability of data can be a challenge, this approach prioritises working across local, state, and federal government. The SDGs offer a common language for measuring progress against diverse goals and targets, allowing progress to be tracked at local, state, national and global levels.

Engaging with stakeholders across the state, is crucial throughout the reporting process to identify and report on local indicators.

### **Science communication**

A key purpose of the Commissioner's work is to engage Victorians in environmental science.

The Commissioner reports on the State of Victoria's environment to help government, business and the community take practical action.

The Commissioner is committed to transparency and participation in the science reporting program and providing the community with access to multiple reporting products that support understanding of the findings – making the science accessible to all Victorians. For more information visit:

[www.ces.vic.gov.au](http://www.ces.vic.gov.au)

***"We all have a responsibility to understand the impact of our activities on the environment. The decisions we make matter for the future of our environment and our liveability. Respecting and valuing each other and the role of science is fundamental for the future prosperity and environmental health of Victoria."***

– Dr Gillian Sparkes, Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

