

Commissioner targets key environmental challenges for Victoria over the coming decade

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The five-yearly [Victorian State of the Environment \(SoE\) 2018](#) report was publicly released on 19 March 2019. As well as providing an analysis of a diverse range of 170 environmental indicators, the 2018 SoE report includes a Future Focus section with a view to help focus government on key areas to support environmental improvements over the next decade.

The Future Focus section is a response to pressures, challenges and opportunities for Victoria and takes into consideration the 13 comprehensive scientific assessment chapters and key megatrends to 2030 considered as part of the development of the SoE 2018 recommendations; including the physical impacts of climate change, the decarbonisation of the State, and natural resource constraints. "In order to respond to these environmental challenges, we need to build capability," says Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Dr Gillian Sparkes. "The next ten years are a critical time for Victoria."

The SoE report identifies five key megatrends as having a significant impact on the future of Victoria's environment to 2030. They are:

1. The physical impacts of climate change
2. Reducing Victoria's carbon footprint
3. Clued up citizens shaping business and government practices
4. Disruptive technologies
5. Natural resource constraints

The Future Focus chapter of the SoE report presents 20 recommendations to support environmental improvements to 2030. "The year 2030 is not an arbitrary time horizon," says Dr Sparkes. "It aligns the recommendations of this report with the UN's '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' and the reporting arrangements of important international frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)."

The recommendations aim to sharpen the focus of government on critical areas requiring action and are also informed by other significant state and national reports and include Victoria adopting the UN SDGs as the framework for future state of the environment reports.

The SoE report also considers the influence of significant reports and research undertaken by other agencies including the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, Victorian Auditor-General's Office, Victorian Catchment Management Council, Ministerial Advisory Committee into the Independent Inquiry into EPA Victoria, the Finkel Review and the Independent Panel for Climate Change. "It is about working with our partners across the community, government and industry to continue to develop and deliver the strong scientific evidence base and policy

coherence required for effective environmental protection and management in Victoria in the longer term” says Dr Sparkes.

The Future Focus chapter prioritises recommendations that improve multiple environmental outcomes. For example, recommended actions to build the capacity of Victoria’s spatial information systems for environmental monitoring and management are designed to support collective improvements in the environmental outcomes for Victoria’s biodiversity, land, forests, air, marine & coasts and water, and enhance our ability to respond to fire and climate change impacts.

“These recommendations aim to improve our understanding of the environment and aid better delivery of key policy and legislative actions” says Dr Sparkes, “they are broad-reaching yet highly-targeted to deal with critical issues facing Victoria over the next decade.” The recommendations address issues as diverse as air quality and pollen monitoring to developing climate projections across regional Victoria, producing environmental economic accounts for future SoE reporting and better protecting biodiversity on private land. “We look forward to the government’s response to the recommendations and continued close cooperation with a range of government environmental agencies and community stakeholders as they are implemented” says Dr Sparkes, who is advocating for better investment and use in digital platforms, data analytics, citizen science, environmental economic accounting and for a shift in how we monitor and protect Victoria’s natural assets. “Investment by governments in these capabilities and workforce skills is critical. It is about knowing what we need to know, when we need to know it.”

This SoE report is designed to support business, government and the wider community to protect our natural capital. The 20 recommendations central to this report, aim to focus the effort and investment by government, and target those interventions that will improve multiple environmental outcomes for Victoria. “Everyone can play a role in protecting the environment,” says Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Dr Gillian Sparkes.

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For interviews with Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, Dr Gillian Sparkes, please contact:

Rebecca Koss 9948 2846 Rebecca.Koss@ces.vic.gov.au

Emily Ross 0414 448 055 emilyrossbespoke@gmail.com

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About the Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

The Commissioner’s role is to provide independent and objective scientific reporting to inform policy-makers, scientists and the wider Victorian community on the state’s natural environment.