



Commissioner *for* Environmental Sustainability Victoria

State of the Bays Report 2016

Q&As as at February 2016

Overview

- The Victorian Government is delivering a range of new initiatives to protect and enhance the health of our marine and coastal environment. These include a Marine and Coastal Act, a new Environmental Management Plan for Port Phillip Bay, a review of the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters) and delivering the first State of the Bays Report.
- Increasing population and recreational use, urban growth, climate change, erosion and pollution all place pressure on our beaches and bays.
- A shared understanding of the threats and their relative impact on the health of our coasts, bays and waterways is critical if we are to continue to improve our management of these important areas.

What is the 2016 State of the Bays Report?

- The Victorian Government has publicly committed to a State of the Bays report every five years to monitor and report on the health of Victoria's coast, bays and waterways.
- The State of the Bays report, to be issued by the independent Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability by December 2016, will be closely aligned with the establishment of a new Marine and Coastal Act and the revised and the updated Environmental Management Plan for Port Phillip Bay due for release late 2016.
- It will be the first of its kind and will provide a scientifically rigorous baseline report on the health of Port Phillip Bay and Western Port against which future reporting can be compared.
- The 2016 State of the Bays Report will consider existing research and data, identify knowledge gaps, propose new data collection and monitoring priorities, and develop indicators for future reporting on the State of the Bays.

What will be covered by the 2016 State of the Bays Report?

- The geographical scope of the 2016 State of the Bays Report will be Port Phillip Bay and Western Port. Other coastal and marine areas may be included in future reports.

Why Port Phillip Bay and Western Port?

- Port Phillip Bay covers nearly 2000 square kilometres and is located in Australia's most densely populated catchment.
- Port Phillip Bay will be one focus of the first State of the Bays report as it is one of Victoria's most precious natural assets.
- It contains many habitats – seagrass meadows, mangroves, reefs – and is home to up to 10,000 species of marine plants and animals including dolphins, penguins and the Weedy Seadragon.
- Western Port, which is experiencing population growth and industrialisation, will also be included.
- Western Port supports a wide variety of aquatic species and habitat types including seagrass beds, intertidal rock platforms, sandy beaches, and intertidal mudflats.
- Both Port Phillip Bay and Western Port include marine national parks and reserves, and internationally significant Ramsar wetlands sites.

What will be reported on?

- The 2016 State of the Bays report will be a stocktake of a broad range of existing biophysical data for Port Phillip Bay and Western Port.
- The scope of State of the Bays reporting will include:
 - Water Quality (e.g. Chlorophyll a, turbidity, pH)
 - Species (e.g. seagrass, fish, birds)
 - Habitat and Communities (e.g. native veg, seagrass, estuaries)
 - Ecosystem Function (e.g. nutrient cycling, connectivity).
- The impact of threats (e.g. coastal development, climate change) will be considered across all themes.

Why use only existing data?

- As the 2016 State of the Bays Report will be the first report, it will help us understand what data is available and what more data is needed to inform a comprehensive view of the health of the bays.
- A data gap analysis will form part of the project. Key knowledge gaps will be identified, which will inform the priority of future monitoring to create new data sets to improve understanding of the health of the bays.

How is data to be sorted and managed?

- DELWP is developing a new data management system which will consolidate data and information for:
 - 2016 State of the Bays Report
 - A new EMP for Port Phillip Bay
 - Beach Report – EPA/Melbourne Water
 - Yarra Watch (estuarine region) – EPA/Melbourne Water
 - Index of Estuarine Condition – DELWP
 - Other relevant estuarine and marine monitoring and reporting programs.

What is the Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan and how does it relate to State of the Bays?

- A revised and updated Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan (EMP) will set targets and actions for effective management of threats to bay health and the bay's important natural assets.
- It is a practical guide to what needs to be done to manage the bay, it will set out a long-term vision and provide new short-term objectives, targets and actions to keep the bay healthy and resilient in the face of pressures, including population growth.
- The Port Phillip Bay Environmental Management Plan is planned for public release in 2016.
- The first State of the Bays report will be a scientifically rigorous baseline report on the health of Port Phillip Bay and Western Port against which future reporting can be compared.
- Through the development and use of meaningful and repeatable indicators, State of the Bays reporting will provide the required transparency and evidence base to support future efforts to protect and enhance Victoria's coastal and marine environment.

How is State of the Bays different to the existing Cleaner Yarra River & Bay Report Card issued by EPA and Melbourne Water?

- The Cleaner Yarra River and Port Phillip Bay Report Card was developed to report on the environmental health of Port Phillip Bay and its six catchments.
- It is issued each year and also shows changes over time by comparing the annual scores and indicators from 2000 for Port Phillip Bay and its catchments
- However, it reports on water quality indicators only.
- State of the Bays reporting will offer a more comprehensive picture of the state of the environment of the bays – water quality, species, habitat and ecosystem function.