Marine and coastal environments were identified as particularly vulnerable to a range of existing pressures and the impacts of climate change. Together these pressures will impact on biodiversity, ecosystem health, Victoria’s fishing industries and coastal infrastructure. The Victorian Government recognises the importance of our marine and coastal environments. We will create new legislation, management and oversight for these special places, including a new Marine and Coastal Act and a five-yearly State of the Bay report to monitor the health of coasts, bays and waterways.

The State of the Environment Report spans multiple portfolios, including transport and energy, and the Victorian Government Response to the State of the Environment Report 2013 demonstrates that the entire Victorian Government has a collective focus on Victoria’s sustainability.

Creating a more sustainable Victoria can be achieved by fostering innovative industries, boosting jobs and working with local communities to rebuild our natural capital while ensuring that any public health and environmental impacts are not disproportionately felt across communities. Together we will reposition Victoria as a leader on climate change, protect the environment for future generations and secure our long-term prosperity.

I would like to thank Professor Auty and the numerous scientists, community groups and stakeholders who were involved in the development of Victoria: State of the Environment Report 2013. I am excited for what is to come, and look forward to working together with Victorians to build a stronger, fairer and better state supported by a healthy environment.

The Hon Lisa Neville MP
Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water
INTRODUCTION

The Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability and state of the environment reporting is governed by the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act 2003. As required by the Act, the former Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability submitted *Victoria: State of the Environment Report 2013* to the former Minister for Environment and Climate Change in 2013.

The previous government did not table a response to the Commissioner’s report whilst in government.


In addition to this government response, the report’s recommendations will be used to inform the development of the policies of this government in areas such as biodiversity, climate change, waste and resource recovery and fire and emergency management.
The report made several recommendations regarding Victoria’s biodiversity

RECOMMENDATIONS: 1, 2, 3, 4

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring that our environment and biodiversity remain healthy and resilient for generations to come. To support this commitment, the Victorian Government will develop a state-wide biodiversity strategy to protect wildlife habitats for future generations and develop tools to more effectively manage threatened species. This will include restoring habitat via landscape scale projects that recognise the importance of ecosystem processes and services provided by the environment. The government will review the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and native vegetation clearing regulations to ensure legislative and regulatory frameworks meet current and future needs.

The Victorian Government will develop an integrated catchment management strategy. The government will work with catchment management authorities, Landcare groups and environmental interest groups to improve catchments and integrate the work of thousands of volunteers and landholders to achieve the maximum benefit across the landscape. These efforts will be complemented by a new Marine and Coastal Act that will provide an integrated framework for managing rivers, coastal and marine areas.

The report recommended setting targets for managing ecosystem processes and protecting water resources

RECOMMENDATIONS: 5, 6, 13

The Victorian Government will target specific ecological processes, such as restoring river flows, where they are needed to protect environmental values. For some values, an asset-based approach will be more effective, allowing clear indicators, attribution to action and greater applicability at the state level. The asset-based approach to environmental policy and planning will ensure that ecological processes are considered in decision-making processes and prioritise public investment to focus on high value assets.

The survival of many ecosystems and the health of Victorian communities and economies depend on the sound management of water resources. Victoria’s strong water allocation framework leaves Victoria well placed to deal with future challenges such as increasing population and climate change. The Victorian Environmental Water Holder, an independent statutory body established in 2011, holds and manages environmental water to benefit the environmental condition of waterways within a robust and transparent operating framework.
The report made recommendations relating to fire and emergency management

RECOMMENDATIONS: 7, 8, 9

The report contained recommendations for fire and emergency management in Victoria, which included the development of a risk-based fire management strategy. The Victorian Government is committed to making Victoria more resilient to emergencies and reducing the impact of events such as bushfires and floods by working through Emergency Management Victoria and with agencies such as the Country Fire Authority and the Victorian State Emergency Service, as well as local communities.

The government’s approach to emergency management will continue to evolve based on expert advice, current research and recent advances in emergency management planning. Independent advice from the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) will help guide the development of performance measures to support an evidence-based approach to fire management.

The IGEM has recently delivered a report to ministers on the efficacy of hectare-based versus risk-based burning targets. The report will provide input to our future approach to reducing bushfire risk.

The Victorian Government will continue pre-and-post burn monitoring and support bushfire readiness, including helping landowners reduce their bushfire risk. Bushfire suppression on private land will continue to be the responsibility of the CFA and emergency management agencies.

The report made recommendations relating to sustainable food and agriculture

RECOMMENDATIONS: 10, 11, 12

The productivity of Victoria’s food and agriculture industries is closely linked to the sustainability of the environment. Well-managed soils, water and a diversity of pollinating insects support Victoria’s world-class agriculture industries and our internationally renowned high quality products from a clean environment and safe supply chain. The Victorian Government supports sustainable farming practices; it believes government incentives can be important to produce public benefit.

The government plans to grow the food and fibre sector by focusing on Victoria’s specialties and investing in infrastructure and skills. The government’s goal is to create the agricultural jobs of the future and attract the next generation of farmers and growers. While most food and fibre grown in Victoria is produced in rural and regional areas, food production is also increasing in the urban environment, where it is often innovative, enhances the urban setting and contributes to community well-being.

The government will establish a $200 million Future Industries Fund, awarding grants to businesses specialising in the sustainable production of food and fibre, and in other high-growth industries. A further $20 million will be invested in Food Source Victoria, a new program to build alliances of producers from the same region and with the same specialty.
The report highlighted climate change as Victoria’s greatest challenge

RECOMMENDATIONS: 17, 18, 27, 34

The Victorian Government will reposition Victoria as a national climate change leader. Internationally, there is agreement to limit climate change to no more than a 2°C increase above pre-industrial times. Work is currently underway to identify an achievable emissions reduction target for Victoria, which will guide our actions as we aim to lower greenhouse gas emissions across the state. The public inquiry into the EPA will also consider the EPA’s role in regulating greenhouse gas emissions.

The report recommends modernising Victoria’s energy system. The Victorian Government believes renewables can play a bigger role in delivering Victoria’s energy supplies and is preparing a new Victorian Renewable Energy Action Plan. This will outline comprehensive measures to attract Victoria’s share of investment in renewable energy in Australia.

In an effort to attract investment in renewable energy, the dwelling buffer zone for unbuilt wind projects and new wind farms was reduced from 2km to 1km in April 2015, and a $20 million New Energy Jobs Fund offering grants to companies and communities to support renewable energy projects will also be established.

Improving energy efficiency and productivity is also part of the government’s plan to reduce emissions from the energy sector. During 2015, the government will work with consumers, industry and experts to develop measures to be included in an Energy Efficiency and Productivity Strategy. This plan is set out in an Energy Efficiency and Productivity Statement, expected to be released in June 2015.

The Victorian Energy Efficiency Target scheme will be retained and reviewed in the first half of 2015 with a view to strengthening it further as part of broader strategy to drive improvements in Victoria’s energy efficiency in homes and businesses. The government’s actions on renewable energy and energy efficiency will generate growth in investment and jobs in Victoria.

To emphasise that all Victorians have a role to play in building sustainability and climate resilience, the government will review the Climate Change Act 2010, develop a second Victorian Climate Change Adaptation Plan, and refocus Sustainability Victoria to help communities address climate change. The government recognises the importance of acting at a local as well as a national level to combat climate change. For example, the government recognises the climate change adaptation benefits of urban forest strategies and local risk strategies. These locally tailored strategies are best developed and delivered by local government.

The government supports in principle the benchmarking of vulnerability and adaptive capacity at a community level. Understanding how climate change will impact Victorians, and how well we are able to respond, is key to effective adaptation. This will be a focus of the second Victorian Climate Change Adaptation Plan.
The report made recommendations relating to waste, resource recovery and pollution

**RECOMMENDATIONS: 14, 15, 16, 28, 29**

The report highlighted that, as Victoria continues to grow, waste generated from increased consumption could impose social, environmental and economic costs on Victorians. The Victorian Government believes that effective management can minimise these impacts and identify opportunities. The government supports in principle the development of life-cycle assessment tools at the state level. In 2015, a Statewide Waste and Resource Recovery Infrastructure Plan will be developed in consultation with communities to provide strategic direction for managing waste and resource recovery infrastructure in Victoria for the next 30 years. The government will also reduce the significant impacts associated with discarded electronic goods by banning e-waste from landfill.

The report recommends Victoria develop strategies for product stewardship and standards for particle emissions and pollution such as ozone. The Victorian Government believes managing these important issues is most effective at a national level with the continued support of other Australian state and territory governments.

The Victorian Government is reopening the Hazelwood Mine fire inquiry with $24.5 million to implement the recommendations from last year’s board of inquiry. This will include funding for new air quality equipment to be used by the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and a long-term health study in the Latrobe Valley.

The Victorian Government is commissioning a public inquiry into the EPA, with community and industry engagement, to ensure a strengthened EPA that is agile, efficient and effective in protecting Victoria’s environment into the future and to give effect to the principle of environmental justice.

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The report made recommendations about Victoria’s built environment and sustainable transport

**RECOMMENDATIONS: 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26**

The report includes several recommendations that address the links between the built and natural environments. The Victorian Government will maintain cultural heritage and sustainable, liveable urban environments. Our public transport, cycling paths and open space help make Victoria an energetic and thriving state. The Victorian Government is developing a Metropolitan Open Space Strategy to ensure that Melbourne continues to enjoy the benefits of a world class open space network.

As our population continues to grow, water sensitive urban design will help manage stormwater and improve the health of our rivers and bays. A new Yarra and Maribyrnong River Protection Act will promote sensitive development along these important waterways.

The new Victorian Planning Authority will deliver integrated land use planning and support the creation of new jobs. In addition, establishing Infrastructure Victoria and Projects Victoria will address recommendations about priority infrastructure needs and will help provide authoritative, transparent advice on infrastructure projects, including funding and financing opportunities for major transport infrastructure projects. The government strongly supports walking and cycling and, by creating Active Transport Victoria, modes of active transport will be given greater priority, promoting a healthier and more environmentally sound transport system. By removing level crossings and enhancing the metropolitan train system, the government will increase capacity during peak periods. In addition, the government will refresh Plan Melbourne by 2016. A renewed Plan Melbourne will give a long-term vision for housing Victoria’s growing population, increasing jobs and liveability, integrating public transport and infrastructure, and dealing with climate change.
The report made recommendations regarding environmental monitoring

RECOMMENDATIONS: 30, 31, 32, 33

The report recommends a systematic approach to environmental data collection that results in innovative decision-making tools and publicly accessible information. The report shows that monitoring environmental change is essential to inform robust, evidence-based decision-making. This monitoring information can be used to help develop, evaluate and improve environmental policy, regulation and investment decisions and assist with understanding and communicating the impact of government and community efforts.

The Victorian Government will work to streamline, coordinate, synthesise and make best use of the state’s comprehensive datasets. This will involve continuing to support important programs that monitor environmental change and developing innovative tools that maximise Victoria’s environmental decision-making capabilities. The government will also continue to lead the way with work to progressively develop experimental ecosystem accounts based on an international framework. This will provide information on ecosystems, their changing condition, their linkages with the Victorian economy and the services they provide to the Victorian community.

The report highlighted the importance of working together and keeping Victorians informed

The report notes the importance of improved dialogue with communities and the need to make data accessible and user-friendly. The Victorian Government is strongly committed to environmental justice, including ensuring that the environment is protected for the benefit of the community, that the community is meaningfully involved in decision making, that there is fair treatment through environmental regulation and that impacts and opportunities are fairly and proportionately shared. We will keep Victorians informed about the environment and work with communities to protect and restore environmental health.

The report highlights the need for government agencies to work together and integrate policies and actions across portfolios to achieve environmental outcomes. These principles and the recommendations presented by the report will form part of the Victorian Government’s approach to creating a healthy, liveable environment for current and future generations.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government undertake statewide accounting and reporting of the outcomes of planned burning to demonstrate risk reduction to human and ecological communities.</td>
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<td>09</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government assess options for private land managers for appropriate fire suppression in high risk areas based on information generated by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) Vegetation Management Program.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government develop a comprehensive sustainable food strategy.</td>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government extend the use of incentives to agriculturalists to adopt environmentally sustainable farming practices and deliver improved ecosystem services.</td>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government develop a strategy to support and promote food production in urban contexts.</td>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government adopt a strategy that delivers water-sensitive urban design (WSUD) and integrated water cycle management (IWCM) as standard practice.</td>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government strengthen incentives and assume a leadership role to improve the efficiency of material reclamation from the waste stream.</td>
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<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government develop a Product Stewardship Strategy.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government assume a leadership role and develop expertise in Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) tools in a Victorian context to reduce carbon and environmental footprints.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government plan an integrated Modern Energy System (MES) for Victoria.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government use the CSIRO’s Futures Forum model to develop a plan for a Modern Energy System.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish an independent statutory planning authority.</td>
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It is recommended that the Victorian Government assume leadership by supporting industry and community in implementing sustainable urban development by developing guides and public awareness tools.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government review taxes and incentives applying to the development industry, and based on this review, introduce a framework to support and promote sustainable housing design and development.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government include efficiency requirements in its design, development and refurbishment of all its social housing and other community buildings.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish an independent transport working group to investigate and recommend best practice transport improvements. The working group will represent broad-sectoral interests.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government expand implementation of the SmartBus system throughout Victoria to improve public transport access.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government investigate road transport pricing and payment measures.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish an independent, statutory authority to analyse Victoria’s priority infrastructure needs and make recommendations.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish a Statewide Urban Forestry Strategy.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government fund multi-sectoral research into the potential impacts of emissions from emerging sources and review the current status and projected change of the emissions.

It is recommended that the Victoria Government address emissions standards to reduce exposure to particles and ozone.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government audit the scope, quality and accessibility of environmental monitoring in Victoria.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish a systematic, environmental data collection plan.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government develop and maintain a public-access Environmental Data Portal.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government establish an interactive, scenario-based state environmental data tool.

It is recommended that the Victorian Government benchmark vulnerability and adaptive capacity at a community level.

PHOTO CREDITS

3,7,8,9 © Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning

4,5,6 Photos by Stephen Colquitt