

Victorian Landcare Council

Briefing Note 26



The Victorian Labor Government is reviewing a large number of policies and State plans with implications for Landcare. Here we up-date you on the Biodiversity Strategy, and State of the Environment reporting, and invite you to get on the mailing list for news on other reviews.

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The Biodiversity Strategy

The Government's environment policy *Our Environment, Our Future* committed the government to "review the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and institute a state wide biodiversity strategy to protect our habitats for future generations."

The previous Labour Government had invested in developing a White Paper "*Land and Biodiversity in a time of Climate Change*", but the previous Liberal Government put that policy to one side. The new Labour Government is going back to the drawing board on biodiversity, looking as well at the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (FFG). The FFG Act sets a process for deciding the level of threat to indigenous plants and animals, and the level of protection threatened species will be given by government. In tandem with the Planning and Environment Act 1987, the FFG has been the principal avenue through which risks posed by new development have been assessed and reduced.

The Environment Policy Division of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is leading the development of the biodiversity strategy and the FFG Act review. A draft strategy is expected around mid 2016. The VLC has a place on the Stakeholder Reference Group, which will act as a sounding board. Invitations have also gone out to:

- BirdLife Australia
- Bush Heritage Australia
- Environmental Farmers Network
- Environment Justice Australia
- Environment Victoria
- Farm Tree and Landcare Association
- Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations
- Financial / investment sector (e.g. NAB)
- Local Government
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Science
- The Nature Conservancy
- Urban Development Institute of Australia (Victoria)
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Victorian National Parks Association

The Stakeholder Reference Group has met twice, and the next meeting at the end of September will consider coordination of investment in biodiversity management, and knowledge and information sharing, and the FFG Act. The VLC will be highlighting the need to develop clear linkages between State-level plans and their implementation at regional and local scale, and the need to draw on local knowledge in setting priorities and taking action at local scale.

Kaye Rodden is the VLC's representative on that Stakeholder Reference Group. If you want to keep track of this review, email Kaye at "nidgee@reachnet.com.au" and she will up-date you after each meeting of the Reference Group.

The environment: is it getting better or worse?

The VLC has been invited onto the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability's Reference Group for the development of the 2018 Victorian State of the Environment Report.

The previous Commissioner Professor Kate Auty's [2013 State of the Environment Report](#) was handed to the Liberal-National coalition late in their term. The current government [has responded](#) and we now have a new Commissioner, Dr Gillian Sparkes. One of her priorities is:

"Establishing accurate and repeatable indicators to enable monitoring of: condition and extent of our natural assets, socio-economic benefits from, and implications on, our natural capital; and impact of and adaptation to, climate change."

We will be arguing that measures need to be useful to **landholders**, not just to scientists, managers and politicians, and that the best way to do this is to talk to the people who manage the land. The Commissioner is keen to look at citizens as scientists who collect reliable data on landscape health, and she will be attending the [VLC's AGM and the Third Peter Huthwaite Address](#) to hear how the Landcare community will work with Birdlife Australia to give citizen science a stronger role in NRM.

Review of State Government Landcare programs

The Local Landcare Facilitators program and Victorian Landcare Program are at the end for their term of funding and both are being reviewed, to make the case to government for continued funding. We understand a contract for this review has been awarded, so keep a lookout for the opportunity to give feedback on each of these programs.

Independent public Inquiry into the Environment Protection Authority

A Ministerial Advisory Committee is undertaking an independent public Inquiry into the state's Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and is keen to hear the views of environment groups on key trends and emerging risks and issues that will shape what Victoria needs from the EPA in the future. The VLC has been invited to attend a roundtable discussion with other environment representatives. VLC delegate, Geoff McFarlane, geofflynmcfarlane@gmail.com, will be representing the Landcare community, and is keen to have input from the VLC community.

Keep up with policy that affects you

Theme 1 Coasts, bays, marine and waterways: a new Marine and Coastal Act, a new Environmental Management Plan for Port Phillip Bay, State of the Bay five-year report, new management and oversight arrangements for marine parks, coasts and bays, Regional Riparian Action Plan

Theme 2 Biodiversity and native vegetation: FFG Act and biodiversity strategy, native vegetation clearing regulations, an integrated Catchment Management Strategy for Victoria, and of course the Landcare Program is being reviewed.

Theme 3 Land and Parks: Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land; a timber industry taskforce to look at native timber harvesting and conservation of habitat in the Central Highlands.

Theme 4 Climate Change: An independent review of the Climate Change Act; setting an achievable emissions reduction target.

To get updates on a theme, write direct to Paul Smith, Deputy Secretary, Fire and Environment, Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, paul.smith@delwp.vic.gov.au