

Managing Country Together

Our Framework

With responsibility for managing over four million hectares of Victoria’s most intact landscapes, Parks Victoria recognises the value and importance of working closely with First Peoples to manage parks and reserves in a culturally sensitive and ecologically sympathetic way. Parks Victoria is embarking on a reform program to prepare us for a future of jointly managing Victoria’s cultural landscapes with Traditional Owners. The Managing Country Together framework will provide both practical and symbolic recognition of Traditional Owner rights, underpin enduring partnerships with Traditional Owners and strengthen sector capacity in joint protected area and cultural heritage management. It includes a program of organisational reform which will inform our core operating programs, and be strengthened by special strategic projects that will explore different partnership models.

Managing Country Together management strategy

Organisational reform

Accountability framework
Engaging the right Traditional Owners, at the right time, in the right way.

Aboriginal employment and wellbeing strategic plan
Better supporting Parks Victoria’s Aboriginal workforce, building sector capacity and helping all Parks Victoria staff to become more culturally competent.

Aboriginal cultural heritage compliance
Ensuring Parks Victoria meets its obligations to protect Aboriginal Cultural Heritage.

Aboriginal cultural heritage conservation
Working with Traditional Owners to protect cultural heritage values across Victoria’s parks and reserves.



Special Strategic Projects

Aboriginal burials protection and management
Managing large-scale culturally sensitive landscapes

Rock art conservation
Agreements for holistic cultural heritage management

Gariwerd – foundations for joint management
Building strong relationships

Joint management implementation project
A partnership model for jointly managed lands



Core operating programs

Tools
Tools and templates for use by Parks Victoria teams

Services
Support and advisory services for Parks Victoria staff and partners

Projects
Strengthening partnerships and on-ground outcomes through targeted small-scale projects

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Traditional Owner Recognition Statement

Recognition

Parks Victoria recognises that Aboriginal people have lived throughout Victoria for more than a thousand generations, maintaining complex societies with many languages, kinship systems, laws, polities and spiritualities. Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants, or First Peoples, of this state. Land forms the basis of Aboriginal existence and identity which, along with water and natural resources, were subject to access and use rights and sustainably managed according to traditional laws and customs.

Parks Victoria recognises the devastation caused to these societies with the arrival of Europeans, including the loss of ancestral lands, separation of families and attempted suppression of culture. Aboriginal people were dispossessed and unable to assert their native title rights and interests. With successive governments expropriating and reallocating away their inherent rights to lands and resources, Aboriginal people became the most disadvantaged in contemporary society.

Parks Victoria recognises that Aboriginal people make a unique and irreplaceable contribution to the identity and wellbeing of this state, and that the people of Australia intend to rectify the consequences of past injustices. Traditional ownership of Country is increasingly being recognised by state and federal governments; and the special relationship of Aboriginal peoples with their land is being acknowledged through legal recognition Traditional Owner rights. Aboriginal cultures are becoming more broadly understood and celebrated.

Parks Victoria recognises that the world class network of parks and reserves under its management responsibility form the core of Aboriginal cultural landscapes, which have been modified over many thousands of years of occupation. They are reflections of how Aboriginal people engaged with their world and experienced their surroundings. They are the product of thousands of generations of economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns.

Parks Victoria recognises that these parks and reserves are critical for Traditional Owners' ability to practice culture and to fulfil their responsibilities to care for Country. The Victorian Government's progressive handback of these lands to Traditional Owners, together with new joint management governance, are one means of achieving practical reconciliation and providing an opportunity for contemporary expression of Aboriginal culture and rights. The Parks Estate is integral to the protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage and Aboriginal intangible heritage; and it provides a platform for community development through job creation and a range of potential commercial partnerships.

Commitment

As an agency of the Victorian Public Service, Parks Victoria is responsible for maintaining a world class parks service while delivering on the government's policies, commitments and agreements. In the context of government policies, and in line with the Victorian charter of human rights and responsibilities and the Victorian public service code of conduct, Parks Victoria is committed to protecting the human rights of Victoria's Traditional Owners - including recognition, cultural freedoms and property rights.

Parks Victoria recognises that change needs to start within, with a strong focus on building its own organisational capability and cultural competency. Parks Victoria is committed to acting now to form strong foundations of respect and collaboration with Traditional Owners; to collectively protect and nurture natural and cultural heritage; to help guide the transition into a new park management future; to enhance visitor experiences; and to improve land and sea management outcomes.

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Principles

The following ten principles are grounded in international best practice approaches for respecting the rights of Indigenous peoples and managing conservation lands, and collectively describe how Parks Victoria will practically demonstrate our commitment to undertake best-practice park management in genuine collaboration with Traditional Owners. Parks Victoria will use its best endeavours to fully implement these principles and integrate them into the way we manage Victoria's parks and reserves, recognising that government policies and resourcing will influence the degree to which this is possible.

Principle 1

Managing for cultural and environmental values

Aboriginal cultural and natural values will be considered equally important in the management of the Parks Estate.

Principle 2

Honouring formal recognition processes

Parks Victoria will work within the existing legal framework to recognise the rights, interests and authority of Traditional Owner groups.

Principle 3

Recognition of Traditional Owner priorities and aspirations

Park management planning will align with the priorities and goals of Traditional Owners.

Principle 4

Effective collaboration and partnerships

Partnerships will be designed to be mutually beneficial and empowering for Traditional Owners.

Principle 5

Respect for Aboriginal governance systems and self-determination

When engaging with Traditional Owners, Parks Victoria will support traditional decision-making processes and structures.

Principle 6

Appropriate engagement

Free, prior and informed consent will be adopted when working with Traditional Owners.

Principle 7

Locally tailored approaches

Projects, management activities and engagement processes will be tailored to meet the social protocols, capacity and priorities of Traditional Owners.

Principle 8

Support for cultural expression

Parks Victoria will support opportunities for Traditional Owners to maintain, practice and revitalise their culture and spiritual traditions.

Principle 9

Traditional Owner control of cultural heritage

Tangible and intangible heritage will be managed in the appropriate way, as determined by Traditional Owners.

Principle 10

Recognition of traditional culture, knowledge and history

Traditional Knowledge, culture and history will be integrated appropriately, in collaboration with Traditional Owners, into the way parks and reserves are used and managed