



# 1. Management of the parks network

## 1.1 About State of the Parks 3<sup>rd</sup> edition

### About Parks Victoria

Parks Victoria was established in 1996. Its responsibilities under the Parks Victoria Act 1998 are to manage the State's parks, reserves, waterways and other public land including a representative system of terrestrial and marine national parks and marine sanctuaries. It is also the Local Port Manager for Port Phillip Bay, Western Port and Port Campbell and the Waterway Manager for the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers.

### Why are parks important?

On behalf of the Victorian Government, Parks Victoria manages one of the most diverse park and waterway networks in the world. These parks contain a highly diverse range of natural and cultural values. In addition to being the backbone of the State's efforts to conserve nature and heritage values, our parks play a significant role in providing jobs, recreation opportunities, health benefits, education and research, opportunities, cultural and spiritual connection, economic activity. They are an important part of a global network of parks and protected areas.

Our parks are central to conserving Victoria's important natural assets for both our current and future generations. Parks protect and conserve representative ecosystems and the biodiversity they contain. Parks enable people to connect with nature, make cultural, spiritual and social connection and provide many opportunities for outdoor recreation and learning about our environment.

The Victorian parks network plays an important role maintaining and improving Victoria's liveability and supporting the State's economy. Parks provide tangible benefits for communities such as clean water, climate and heat regulation, nurseries for fish breeding, pollination and pest control services for agriculture, storm protection for coastal communities and physical and mental health benefits for park visitors. They also provide benefits such as neighbourhood amenity and promote social cohesion and scientific and educational opportunities. Across the world these 'ecosystem services' are increasingly being recognised as both a critical and highly cost effective way to support human life and improve community wellbeing. Both our protected areas such as national parks as well as our urban parks contribute to the provision of these services.

The fundamental connection between people and nature has been highlighted by Parks Victoria's motto of *Healthy Parks Healthy People* (HPHP), which is based on a strong body of scientific evidence that contact with nature is beneficial for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing.

## Park management obligations

Victoria's parks are managed in accordance with a range of State and Commonwealth legislative obligations including the Victorian *National Parks Act 1975* (National, State, Wilderness and some other parks); the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* (Conservation Reserves and Metropolitan Parks), the *Port Management Act 1985*, *Marine Safety Act 2010* and the *Port of Melbourne Authority Act 1958*. Additionally there are obligations under the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the State's *Flora and fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

## Goals for park management

A distinguishing feature of the Victorian parks network is that it encompasses a diverse range of park types with different primary purposes and goals, covering nature conservation, culture and heritage conservation and recreational objectives.

Through its *Shaping Our future* Strategy, Parks Victoria has described four primary goals for management of the parks network. There are

### Conserve Victoria's special places

- Manage the natural and cultural values of parks to increase resilience in the face of climate change and other stressors
- Adapt park management based on evidence from science and traditional knowledge
- Work collaboratively with Traditional Owners and other land managers to conserve natural and cultural park values.

### Connect people and parks:

- Encourage more people, to be more active, more often in parks through offering activities and experiences that improve people's physical, emotional and social wellbeing
- Provide contemporary facilities and information to encourage park experiences and tourism
- Unlock the energy of partnerships and park volunteers
- Promote parks as inspirational settings for learning and education

### Provide benefits beyond park boundaries:

- Play a major role in making communities safer
- Work with Aboriginal communities to achieve shared objectives
- Manage parks to contribute to productive, healthy and prosperous Victorian agricultural and rural communities.

### Enhance organisational excellence:

- Continue to value the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff, volunteers and contractors as our highest priority
- Build a strong service culture that fosters all-round high performance, learning, innovation, team work, excellence, accountability and adaptability
- Create a more resilient Parks Victoria that anticipates and adapts to economic, social and environmental trends.

## Adaptive park management

With the ‘four big drivers’ of demographic change, climate change, technological change and social change, management of the Victorian parks network needs to be flexible and adaptable. Excellence in park management requires a thorough understanding of the diverse natural, cultural and recreational values that occur in parks, their significance and the factors that may positively or negatively impact on them. As a learning organisation, Parks Victoria’s has adopted an adaptive management framework to guide its park planning, on-ground activities and evaluation of park management outcomes (Figure 1 below). This helps to guide decision making and priorities within finite resources.



Figure 1: Parks Victoria’s adaptive management framework

## The State of the Parks evaluation program

The number and total area of parks and protected areas have increased significantly around the world over the second half of the last century. Internationally, the Convention on Biological Diversity Aichi Target 11 was recently amended to reflect the view that simply designating areas to be protected as parks does not always result in adequate protection of park values; parks also need to be effectively governed and managed.

In response, Parks Victoria has committed to undertaking evaluation of the effectiveness of its management programs and condition of its park values at regular intervals as an important component of adaptive management. This is the third edition of State of the Parks. The first State of the parks report which focused on natural values was published in 2000 and was the first of its kind in Australia. A second edition was published in 2007 which included evaluation of all aspects of park management including culture and heritage conservation and visitor services. With consistent indicators and measures it will be increasingly

important to track long term changes in the condition and threats to park values and the effectiveness in meeting park management goals.

The State of the Parks program has adopted the internationally recognised Management Effectiveness Framework from the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA). These types of evaluation assessments are now being undertaken by park agencies in many countries around the world. The program assesses the status, condition and management effectiveness of the parks network including key threats, cultural and heritage values, visitor opportunities and fire management. State of the Parks evaluates the extent to which our park management goals are being met, and the current and emerging threats to our important park values in order to plan and respond into the future.

## Sources of information

The State of the Parks program uses multiple sources of evidence based on best available information. These include data from Parks Victoria's and DELWP databases, on-ground or remote sensing monitoring programs, specialist opinion and, where empirical evidence is not available, observations and experience from park managers. This method of evaluation is accepted internationally by the WCPA as appropriate to evaluate park networks. While it would be desirable to have more quantitative data on which to base assessments, the evaluation model relies on targeted monitoring and gathering of broader knowledge which will improve over time. This State of the Parks evaluation is based on park manager assessments conducted in 2013, trend based assessments of effectiveness between 2010 and 2013 and other available information up to the end of 2013.

## Links to other reports

The State of the Parks program is linked to a number of other reports including State of the Environment Reporting, State of the Forests reporting and catchment condition reporting. Wherever possible indicators of condition and effectiveness are consistent with these reports.

## How are State of the Parks results used?

The information collected through the State of the Parks program is used by Parks Victoria to help improve the way we are managing the Victorian parks system. This includes:

- Identifying and sharing knowledge about the contributing factors that are influencing the condition of parks and the effectiveness of management programs
- Highlighting gaps and emerging issues for improved planning and response
- Providing evidence to better inform allocation of resources

## Further information

Parks Victoria undertakes a very wide variety of programs and activities and more detailed annual outcomes of environmental, cultural heritage, visitor experience and fire programs can be found in Parks Victoria's Annual Reports, published each year.