

Nature for Life Action Plan

Bold action is needed by the Andrews Government to protect the places and wildlife we love – our National Parks, forests, rivers, beaches, oceans, grasslands, native plants and animals.

A healthy natural world is critical for the survival of our beautiful and unique wildlife, but also for people and our way of life. Nature provides clean water, clean air, healthy soil and is a critical tool to both reduce carbon emissions but also buffer us against the impacts of a climate changing world.

The number of animal and plant species our environment supports have seriously decreased over the past two centuries. According the official Victorian State of the Environment Report released in 2018, most biodiversity indicators are poor and trending downwards, of 35 indicators. More than 20 are poor, 7 are fair and none are good. 18 indicators show deterioration, 7 are stable, and only one is trending up. See: ces.vic.gov.au/reports/state-environment-2018/biodiversity-plants-animals

As Victoria's biodiversity continues to rapidly decline, habitats become more stressed, species become more threatened and the climate crisis escalates, we need a comprehensive policy response.

The Victorian National Parks Association, The Wilderness Society, Environment Victoria, Australian Conservation Foundation, Friends of the Earth, along with over 40 local community conservation groups across the state are calling on the Andrews Government to implement, as a starting point, the following asks for the *Nature for Life Action Plan*:

Create new National Parks and reserves in central west Victoria:

- Commit to create 60,000 hectares of new National Parks and protected areas and 20,000 ha of regional parks in the central west of Victoria in this term of government, as recommended by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) in June 2019.
- This would protect the Wombat forest (near Daylesford), Wellsford Forest (near Bendigo), Mount Cole Forest (near Beaufort) and the Pyrenees Ranges (near Avoca), where forests are home to 380 threatened species, have high biodiversity values and are the headwaters of seven important rivers providing water supply to large areas of western and northern Victoria. More information: vnpa.org.au/a-dozen-good-reasons-for-new-national-parks-in-the-central-west-of-victoria

Protect native forests:

- Create large new National Parks and reserves including the Great Forest National Park greatforestnationalpark.com.au and Emerald Link emeraldlink.com.au in East Gippsland to protect habitats, threatened species, water catchments, store carbon and mitigate climate impacts as well as create recreation spaces free from logging.
- By the end of 2020, formally protect in new National Parks and reserves at least 96,000 hectares of the recently announced 'immediate protection areas'.
- Immediately protect 90,000 hectares of old growth forests as promised by ensuring there are no logging coupes scheduled inside at least 90,000 hectares of mapped modelled old growth forest (MOG 2009 updated 2019), and, by the end of 2020, formally protecting this area in new National Parks and reserves. More information: geco.org.au/what_does_this_mean_for_victoria_s_forests

- Ensure there is an immediate ban on all logging of old growth by deploying an improved field verification tool outside that protected 90,000 hectares—and *only* outside that area—to ensure any old growth not protected in the 90,000 hectare area is not logged. Don't leave it to VicForests to decide what is and isn't old growth. More information: vnpa.org.au/announcement-to-end-logging-victorias-native-forest
- Fast track Australian Paper's exit from native forests by supplanting supply from native forests with FSC-certified plantation and recycled fibre well ahead of 2024 and importantly of 2030.
- Don't wait until to 2024 to make financial, training and other support available to those workers and businesses who wish to leave the industry ahead of 2024: support those who wish to leave the industry, and to transition into fire management, recreation, pest plant and animal management, and other sectors, when they wish to make this switch.
- Allow all five of Victoria's Regional Forest Agreements to expire.
- Provide incentives for small-scale woodlots and agroforestry plantings and support sawmills that are willing to grow their own wood resource (rather than rely on native sawlogs provided by the state, or state-owned and run plantation sawlogs).

Fund and manage National Parks to high standard:

- Increase funding for the management of 4 million hectares of National Parks and reserves from less than 0.5 % of state expenditure to 1%, which will increase the number of Parks Rangers and ramp up ecological management and control of pest plants and animals and better support Friends Groups and Traditional Owner management. More information: vnpa.org.au/caring-for-parks-by-the-numbers
- Increase support and recognition for Traditional Owners to jointly manage parks and reserves and other public land.
- Increase support for volunteer programs on public land to encourage Friends Groups to grow so they can undertake tree planting, weeding, citizen science, and a range of other activities to help protect, restore and enhance our unique natural areas. More information: friendsvic.org and vnpa.org.au/call-for-more-support-to-nature-conservation-volunteers

Protect and enhance rivers:

- Scale up the implementation of the already successful Regional Riparian Action Plan by providing \$60 million of new funding to be delivered between 2020 and 2024, which would provide \$15 million per year for riverside restoration. More information: vnpa.org.au/riverside-rescue
- Save the Murray - Work to deliver the remaining 450 GL of environmental water required by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and abandon unproven wetland engineering projects. More information: environmentvictoria.org.au/campaign/save-the-murray

- Reform the Victorian Water Act so that it guarantees good quality environmental water and prevents re-direction of environmental water to other uses.
- Support communities in northern Victoria to broaden their economic base to adjust to the impacts of climate change on water availability and build socio-economic resilience.

Protect our bays, marine waters & coasts:

- Stop AGL's gas import project for Westernport's beautiful Bay. More information: environmentvictoria.org.au/campaign/stop-agls-dirty-gas-plan-for-our-bay
- Adequately protect our marine and coastal species by identifying areas for, and creating new or expanded marine national parks and sanctuaries.
- Ban commercial horse race training on public beaches, starting with the Belfast Coastal Reserve near Warrnambool.
- Deliver on the new marine and coastal reforms including the marine and coastal policy, strategy and state of the marine and coastal report.

Action for birds:

- Ramp up action to protect native birds, including increased funding for dedicated action and recovery plans.
- Increase efforts to restore and manage wetlands to reverse waterbird declines.

Conserve our private bushlands:

- Invest between \$30 and \$40 million in a self-sustaining Conservation Revolving Fund that purchases private properties rich in biodiversity, applies permanent protections with covenants and then re-sells the properties, to fund future purchases.
- Increase support partnerships for landscape scale biodiversity conservation, which supports private landholders, Landcare and Friends Groups and Traditional Owners to restore nature.

Stop invasive species:

- List deer as a pest species and dramatically ramp spending to control deer and other feral pest species such as pigs, goats, cats and feral horses. More information: vnpa.org.au/call-for-andrews-government-to-act-decisively-on-feral-deer

ACT for nature:

- Further, strengthen threatened species laws such as the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act to put in place real enforcement powers, tougher penalties for non-compliance and clear targets to help threatened species recover. More information: environmentvictoria.org.au/campaign/act-on-extinction
- Save our critically endangered grasslands and grassy woodlands from urban sprawl by delivering promised grassland protection by 2020. More information: vnpa.org.au/victorias-western-grassland-reserves-failure