



Regulatory priorities

2020 – 2021

JULY 2020

**CONSERVATION
REGULATOR VICTORIA**

Regulatory priorities

2020 – 2021

Aboriginal acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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Accessibility

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Rising to the challenge to deliver better regulation

FOREWORD

As the Conservation Regulator enters its second year of operation, the events of the last year have shown us that it is more important than ever we protect our state's natural environment so we can enjoy it today and protect it for future generations.

The loss of 1.5 million hectares to bushfire during 2019-20 devastated communities and impacted the biodiversity of our state.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has reaffirmed Victorians' love for and appreciation of the natural environment. Victorians returned in high numbers to beaches, waterways, recreation sites, forests and public lands as initial public health restrictions were eased in 2019-20.

The bushfires and pandemic required us to be flexible and adjust how we approached our regulatory priorities during 2019-20. Conservation Regulator staff supported both the bushfire emergency response and the recovery effort. Our staff have also played a key role in the government's response to the pandemic by regulating the access and use of state forests in support of the public health measures and by providing authorised officers to the effort on secondment. We expect we will continue to support the pandemic response effort in 2020-21 and will balance this contribution in a way that ensure we can continue to undertake our core regulatory functions.

These events also required us to be flexible as new and varied risks to our natural environment occurred.

I'm incredibly proud of the hard work everyone at the Conservation Regulator has put in during these challenging times, especially those in the field who have worked tirelessly to support the state response to these significant events.

These current circumstances will impact the nature of our work in the 2020-21 financial year. Travel restrictions mean Victorians are likely to spend more time travelling in regional Victoria visiting our forests, parks and public lands. More people increases the potential for non-compliance with laws relating to the use of forests and we will be focusing on supporting forest users to understand and comply with the law.

Our annual review of our compliance risks has reinforced the issues that continue to impact on our natural environment, such as climate change, declining ecosystem resilience and challenges of a growing population.

The Regulatory Priorities for 2020-21 outlined in this document identifies our state-wide priorities and the unique challenges and compliance risks facing our regions.



Kate Gavens
Chief Conservation Regulator

Targeting our work to our regulatory priorities allows us to focus our efforts to where they will be most effective at protecting and conserving our natural environment.

In its second year of operation the Conservation Regulator continues to focus on internal reform to become a trusted, effective, best practice regulator. Key initiatives include reviewing our internal governance frameworks, implementing a monitoring and reporting framework, and developing our intelligence capabilities.

Enforcing the law is one of many tools at our disposal and our regulatory approach, described later in this document, outlines how we will use all the tools at our disposal in a risk-based and intelligence led way. The regulatory approach also outlines how we collaborate and engage with the community to ensure your feedback and insights are used to help us be an effective, trusted and best practice regulator.

The Conservation Regulator

The Conservation Regulator was established by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to be accountable for timber harvesting, biodiversity, fire prevention and land-use regulation.

Vision

Our vision is to create and maintain liveable, inclusive, sustainable communities and thriving natural environments.

Regulatory mission

Our regulatory mission is to be an effective, trusted, best practice regulator.

Regulatory outcomes

DELWP regulates to achieve three outcomes:

- Equitable and safe access to public land and use of natural resources
- Protected natural and heritage values
- Sustainable communities – social, economic and environmental

How we work

The Conservation Regulator is committed to working collaboratively and transparently with the community and stakeholders to improve conservation regulation in Victoria.

The Conservation Regulator's regulatory functions include:

- Setting priorities for regulatory activities
- Informing and educating about the law
- Providing clear standards and guidance
- Monitoring compliance and enforcing the law



Victoria's natural assets

Victoria's public lands contribute to our health and wellbeing by providing opportunities for recreation, supporting social cohesion and enabling Indigenous cultural connections.

Nearly 40% of Victoria is public land, including national and state parks, state forests, coastal and riparian reserves, marine sanctuaries and community and recreational reserves.

The Conservation Regulator plays a key role in maintaining the standards Victorians expect for a healthy, resilient and biodiverse environment.

Biodiversity

Public spaces provide a home to native flora and fauna species thereby helping to maintain genetic diversity. They also support flood and stormwater protection, atmospheric carbon regulation and storage, coastal protection, water purification and pollination.

The 2018 State of the Environment Report outlined that our forests, land and waterways are under stress and there is considerable uncertainty about its current and future condition.

Adding to the stress, the 2019-20 bushfire season added to the ecological stress by burning through approximately 1.5 million hectares of Victorian land. The bushfires have impacted threatened species and their unique habitats, including approximately 70% of the remaining Warm Temperate Rainforest in Victoria. Over 170 of Victoria's rare or threatened plant and animal species have had over 50% of their known habitat burnt.

DELWP is coordinating and delivering actions to support Victoria's plants and animals following the fires through its Bushfire Biodiversity Response and Recovery program.

The Conservation Regulator's role in educating the community and supporting compliance is crucial to protecting plants and habitats from further damage that could hinder their recovery.



Tourism and the economy

Prior to the pandemic and 2019-20 bushfire season, tourism represented 8.5% of the regional economy and contributed nearly \$25 billion annually to Victoria's economy, generating approximately 215,000 jobs.

The tourism industry has been hit particularly hard due to the double impact of a severe bushfire season and coronavirus movement restrictions.

Tourism is an important source of income for many communities and our natural assets contribute to the overall attractiveness of Victoria and provide the opportunity for recreational activities. Protecting Victoria's natural assets and capital is critical to the tourism industry.

We expect to see nature-based tourism contributing to a high proportion of tourism activities due to the impact of state and international travel restrictions, as well as the affordability of options.



Our natural assets continue to be vulnerable to two major threats

Population growth

At the end for 2019, Victoria had a population of 6.6 million and was the fastest growing of Australia's states and territories, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS).

Historically, ABS figures show that net migration has been a key driver for the state's growth. However, in addition to border closures and reduced international travel, the dual economic shocks of the recent bushfires and the pandemic may cause a temporary slowdown in population growth.

In the medium to longer term the population is still expected to continue to grow and in the short term changes to public health measures during 2019-20 led to higher than usual numbers of people using our public lands, and we expect that trend to continue into 2020-21 due to travel restrictions and broader implications of the pandemic.

More people means greater pressure on our natural resources, greater demand for equitable and safe access to public land for recreation, pressure for development and more competition for land use, and more human and wildlife interactions that need to be managed. Within this changing context, the community continues to highly value and expect protection of our shared natural assets.

We work in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including community members, Traditional Owners and our DELWP colleagues to help us prioritise and tackle regulatory risks, particularly with the higher levels of visitation we expect during 2020-21.

Climate change

The Bureau of Meteorology reported below average rainfalls across Victoria in 2018 continued into 2019. Nationally, Australia experienced its second driest year on record since 1902.

The extended months of below average rainfall, particularly over eastern Victoria, and above average temperatures contributed to a bushfire season of exceptional size and impact.

The outlook for the first quarter of 2020-21 indicates we may experience above average rainfall over most of Victoria. However, in the medium and longer-term we can expect the trend towards lower rainfall, higher temperatures and more frequent extreme weather events.

Lower overall rainfall over the longer-term levels increases the underlying dryness of our forests. Areas of forest previously considered a lower risk of burning

are now being affected by bushfire increasing the area at heightened risk of fire. The increased drying means that forests are burning more completely, meaning recovery of burnt areas can take much longer to regenerate.

Despite the overall hotter and drier climate, the rainfall we do receive will occur more frequently in heavier downpours and storm events. This means we will see more severe flooding events and erosion.

This is particularly damaging to areas already burnt by bushfire which are vulnerable to the loss of topsoil that is important to regenerating plants and the wildlife that depend upon them.

Our regulatory role in the prevention of human-caused bushfire, and more broadly, is an important way we protect our natural assets which are facing increasing pressures from climate change and more direct human activity.



Our regulatory approach

DELWP's Regulatory Framework describes how we deliver our regulatory functions in collaboration with the community and co-regulators.

The regulatory framework

Collaborate and engage

We develop and maintain productive and effective relationships with communities, Traditional Owners, co-regulators, regulated parties and peak bodies.

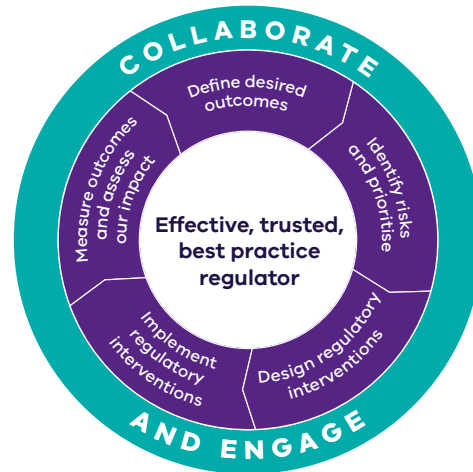
Conduct risk-based and intelligence-led regulation

Good intelligence requires strong relationships and networks to identify emerging risks.

Address priority risks

By being clear about what we are trying to achieve, applying a consistent risk approach, and designing, implementing and reviewing the effectiveness of our regulatory interventions.

The Conservation Regulator's Regulatory Priorities 2020-21 draws on the principles in the Regulatory Framework to define the risks and regulatory priorities for this year.



Compliance and enforcement policy

The Compliance and Enforcement Policy sets out:

- how we encourage voluntary compliance with the law
- the range of compliance and enforcement tools available, depending on the culpability and harm to the environment
- how we will apply the law and exercise judgement in carrying out our compliance and enforcement activities

Our Regulatory Priorities reflects a balance between encouraging voluntary compliance (setting standards, informing and educating, supporting compliance) with effective regulatory risk management (issuing permits, licenses and authorisations, monitoring compliance, enforcing the law).

Statements of regulatory intent

Statements of regulatory intent provide a detailed explanation of how the Conservation Regulator uses its powers to prevent and respond to breaches of the law in specific areas.

Regulating timber harvesting in state forests under the Allocation Order

This Statement outlines the role of the Conservation Regulator in regulating timber harvesting in state forests under the Allocation Order and describes what the community and industry can expect from us as a regulator. Specifically, it describes how the Conservation Regulator intends to use the regulatory tools that are available to it under the law.

Future statements of regulatory intent

The Conservation Regulator is developing and publishing further statements of regulatory intent for future key regulatory responsibilities, including for:

- Biodiversity – wildlife
- Preventing illegal recreational use of public land

State-wide priority regulatory risks

This plan outlines our approach for managing priority regulatory risks during 2020-21.

This plan provides the regulatory priorities across Victoria, with each region having its own priorities to allow for a nuanced response based on regional issues and needs.

We will enforce compliance across all our regulatory responsibilities but will prioritise our effort for these state-wide regulatory priorities.



Regulatory risks

Regulatory risks are events or activities that could harm our:

- natural and heritage values
- equitable and safe access to public land and use of natural resources
- sustainable communities – social, economic and environmental

Assessing risk

State-wide and regional regulatory risks are identified as events or activities that could prevent DELWP from achieving its outcomes:

- Reduce the impact of major bushfires and other emergencies on people, property and the environment
- Promote a healthy, resilient and biodiverse environment
- Enable productive and effective land management

Risk prioritisation is based on the likelihood of the risk event occurring and the consequences or impacts on the state and region if the risk does occur.

Risks are assessed using intelligence from the Conservation Regulator, DELWP and co-regulators. This is considered in the context of the frequency, timing and potential harm associated with these events.

How risks are changing

Regulatory risks usually evolve over time but can change quickly when there is a change in the environment or new information comes to light that allows us to see a risk in a new way.

Top risks for 2020-21

Our review of our regulatory risks has reinforced the regulatory priorities we identified for 2019-20, with the elevation of a new priority focus on regulating human interactions with wildlife.

The review found that while the types of underlying risk had not changed, they had intensified due to the events of 2019-20 and were expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Environmental change continues to be a significant threat, with more frequent heat waves, droughts and bushfires continuing to put pressure on our flora and fauna, putting many species at a greater risk of extinction.

The size and impact of the 2019-20 bushfire season has increased the stress our natural environment is under and the pandemic has also meant that more Victorians are spending time locally and enjoying the recreation benefits of our public lands.

The Department of Treasury and Finance's Coronavirus Economic Outlook indicates the pandemic will increase unemployment and reduce economic growth. This can cause an increase in the illegal take of firewood due to costs of living.

In response, the Conservation Regulator will continue its focus on:

- Illegal campfires
- Illegal take of firewood
- Illegal vehicle use on public land
- Regulating native timber harvesting

In addition, we have elevated our focus on:

- Regulating the use, keeping, trade, treatment and control of wildlife



ILLEGAL CAMPFIRES

Last year low rainfall over several years and high temperatures led to the 2019-20 bushfire season that was exceptional in size and scale. The trend towards warmer, dryer weather and with parts of Victoria still experiencing drought-like conditions, fire prevention remains a priority risk for the Conservation Regulator.

Dryer and warmer conditions lead to an increase in underlying dryness that allows fires to spread more quickly and more completely.

The growing population means that more people are using public land, and this increases the frequency of

campfires and the likelihood that there will be incidences of non-compliance. In addition, due to the economic impact of the pandemic we expect to see even more Victorians holidaying locally and spending time on public land.

The devastating impacts on communities and natural assets from bushfires, and the increasing likelihood of high-risk factors, means the Conservation Regulator continues to prioritise reducing risks from unauthorised and poorly managed campfires.



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD

Preventing the destruction of wildlife habitat caused by illegal firewood collection in Victoria's forests, parks and reserves is even more critical in 2020-21 due to the additional stress placed on biodiversity from the 2019-20 bushfire season.

This damage adds to an environment already under pressure from population growth and an increasing number of individuals who seek to reduce their energy costs by accessing forests for firewood for heating.

Intelligence suggests that the illegal take of firewood is occurring on a significant scale across Victoria and during 2019-20 there was an increase in the amount of wood being taken in commercial quantities.

Illegal commercial operators are being targeted due to the extensive environmental harm they are doing due to the volume of wood take and their practices, which also pose a threat to public safety due to the illegal and unsafe felling of trees.

The Conservation Regulator is reviewing its strategy to address the illegal take of firewood to ensure our regulatory interventions are designed to address the changing nature of the risk.

The development of the strategy provides an opportunity to review how firewood regulation currently occurs and it identified new ways of improving our regulatory impact, including a different mix of regulatory activities, improvements to our communications and focussing our effort on those doing the most harm to the environment.



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND

Population growth and cheaper recreational vehicles are driving an increase in off-road activities on public land. Industry figures indicate that off-road motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles accounted for nearly 60% of motorcycle sales in Australia during 2019.

We are likely to see an increase in this activity in the short-term due to people spending more time locally and on public land due to the pandemic.

Illegal vehicle use can damage the natural habitat of our animal and plant life and can lead to issues with erosion.

It is also a significant risk to public safety and amenity of other users of parks and forests. Particularly when it occurs on existing walking paths and roads, leading to personal safety risks and the degradation of those paths through erosion.

The noise pollution also reduces the enjoyment people get from visiting our forests.

The damage to access roads can mean that emergency service and maintenance vehicles are prevented from using them and can require remediation work that would not otherwise be required.

For these reasons, it is illegal to ride motorbikes and drive 4WD vehicles off-road in all Victorian state forests, parks and reserves. Motorcyclists and drivers can be fined for driving off-road including driving or riding on walking, cycling or informal tracks as well as roads not open to the public.

The same restrictions apply to mountain bike use in all Victorian state forests, parks and reserves except on designated mountain bike trails.



REGULATING NATIVE TIMBER HARVESTING

VicForests is the State-owned business responsible for the harvest, commercial sale and re-growing of timber from Victoria's state forests on behalf of the Government. Timber harvesting in state forests is permitted by law, but this must be done in a way that is compliant with the law.

The 2019-20 bushfires had a significant impact on the environment, with a significant loss of habitat, flora and fauna which is discussed in detail in the DELWP report Victorian Bushfire Emergency: Biodiversity Response and Recovery and demonstrates that there is significant scientific uncertainty about the exact nature of the bushfires impacts and the ability of impacted species to recover.

Timber harvesting has the potential to exacerbate the impacts of bushfires on habitat, flora and fauna.

It is critical that timber harvesting occurs in a way that recognises the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfire season and is adjusted in line with legal requirements.

The Conservation Regulator will focus on geographic areas, habitats and species that have been most impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires. This includes providing regulatory guidance to VicForests to ensure it meets its obligations, assessing compliance and investigating non-compliance as appropriate.

In addition, we will work to ensure VicForests' timber harvesting operations occur within the boundaries permitted by law in the Allocation Orders.

This work builds on the Conservation Regulator's Timber Harvesting Statement of Regulatory Intent and is part of our commitment to strengthen the regulation of timber harvesting and prevent non-compliant harvesting practices.



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE

The conservation and sustainability of wildlife is under increasing pressure from threats such as loss and fragmentation of habitat, introduced pests such as foxes and cats, illegal take from the wild, wildlife trafficking, climate change and growing human populations coinciding with shrinking native habitats.

Wildlife is an important part of our environment and essential to the functioning and health of our ecosystems. The services they provide include clean air and water. It also supports a range of economic activities, including eco-tourism. Traditional Owners also have a cultural, spiritual and economic connection to country, with wildlife and its habitat often at the core of that attachment.

The Conservation Regulator is responsible for administering the permissions schemes surrounding the use, keeping, treatment and control of wildlife in Victoria, including:

- Private wildlife licences to enable Victorians to keep wildlife at home in certain circumstances
- Commercial wildlife licences to allow people to conduct certain commercial activities involving wildlife
- Authorities to Control Wildlife, to ensure where wildlife and human activity conflict, good management balances wildlife welfare and protection with that of human safety, property and livelihoods
- Import and export permits, to protect against illegal wildlife trafficking and preserve our biosecurity

In 2020-21 the Conservation Regulator will continue reforming wildlife permissions, finalising improvements to Authorities to Control Wildlife. The reforms aim to improve the experience of our customers and include the publication of a new application form, a guide on how to apply, and more information online to support the use of non-lethal control methods.

The Conservation Regulator is streamlining our internal processes and investigating innovative solutions such as clarifying the use of Aboriginal Cultural permits, or the relationship between Authorities to Control Wildlife with the Kangaroo Harvesting Program. This will help us manage conflicts between wildlife and human activity consistently.






The Conservation Regulator responds to a range of wildlife crime ranging from breaches of licences to illegal destruction and illegal trafficking. Major cases in 2019-20 included allegations of poisonings of birds of prey by farmers and the deaths of koalas at Cape Bridgewater.






In 2020-21 the Conservation Regulator will release its Statement of Regulatory Intent on the protection of wildlife to raise awareness of the regulations and outline our approach to improving the protection, conservation and interaction with Victoria's wildlife.

The Conservation Regulator will respond swiftly and intently to serious and significant incidents of wildlife crime.



State-wide regulatory priorities

| |  ILLEGAL CAMPFIRES |  ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD |  ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND |  UNAUTHORISED COMMERCIAL TIMBER HARVESTING |  REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|---|--|---|
| WHY NON-COMPLIANCE CAN HAPPEN | <p>Increasing visitor numbers</p> <p>Lack of awareness of regulations</p> <p>Lack of awareness of how to suppress fires and prevent spread</p> <p>Lack of awareness of how to safely manage campfires, and how quickly and easily they can become out of control</p> | <p>Lack of awareness of regulations</p> <p>Economic gain by commercial operators selling to unaware consumers</p> <p>Energy prices and cost of wood from legal suppliers</p> <p>Diminishing resource due to climate change and overuse</p> <p>Limited perceived risk of detection and consequences</p> | <p>Increasing visitor numbers, especially during post-pandemic recovery</p> <p>Decreasing costs of off-road vehicles and trail bikes</p> <p>Lack of awareness of regulations</p> <p>Proximity to peri-urban and large regional centres</p> <p>Easier access to public land due to clearings made by fires</p> | <p>Timber harvesting in state forests is a permitted activity under the law</p> <p>Inconsistent application and interpretation of the law, including the application of the precautionary principle within the Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014</p> | <p>Lack of awareness of regulations</p> <p>Economic gain</p> <p>Conflicts between wildlife and human activities such as agriculture and amenity</p> <p>Lack of awareness of the harm non-compliance can do to the environment</p> |
| WE AIM TO | <p>Raise awareness of the regulations, reduce the prevalence and risk of unauthorised campfires</p> | <p>Raise awareness of the regulations, increase the likelihood of detection, and the consequences of unauthorised collection</p> | <p>Raise awareness of the regulations, reduce the prevalence and risks associated with illegal vehicle use on public land</p> | <p>Ensure that timber allocated to VicForests for harvesting in state forests is managed in line with the law and code of practice, to protect forests for current and future generations</p> | <p>Raise awareness of the regulations and improve the protection, conservation and interaction with Victoria's wildlife</p> |

| |  ILLEGAL CAMPFIRES |  ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD |  ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND |  UNAUTHORISED COMMERCIAL TIMBER HARVESTING |  REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| HOW THIS WILL BE DONE | <p>Providing clear information about campfire regulations and campfire safety on DELWP's website, customer centres, during patrols and through media campaigns</p> <p>Supporting the annual Don't let your campfire become a bushfire campaign reminding campers across the state to be alert when it comes to campfire safety</p> <p>Intelligence analysis of reports of unsafe behaviours and high-risk times and locations</p> <p>Conducting surveillance and patrols in high-use, high-risk locations, during fire hazard days, and targeting high-risk behaviours</p> <p>Investigating reports of unsafe campfire activities</p> <p>Where appropriate, initiate enforcement actions</p> <p>Publicise enforcement actions</p> | <p>Development of the regulatory strategy on the illegal take of firewood</p> <p>Designating firewood collection seasons (Autumn and Spring)</p> <p>Signage and pamphlets at designated collection areas</p> <p>Restricting zones for access to firewood collection</p> <p>Targeting the illegal removal of commercial quantities of firewood</p> <p>Providing clear information on the DELWP website about designated areas and regulations</p> <p>Intelligence analysis of reports of high-risk areas, behaviours, and times/seasons to inform targeting of surveillance and patrols</p> <p>Increasing surveillance of high-risk areas</p> <p>Prioritising investigations on alleged commercial offenders due to increased environmental harm</p> <p>Investigating reports of illegal activities</p> <p>Where appropriate, initiate enforcement actions</p> <p>Publicise enforcement actions</p> | <p>Clear signage and information brochures at point of entry/use</p> <p>Providing clear information on the DELWP website and through media about designated areas and regulations</p> <p>Restricted zones and seasonal road closures</p> <p>Community engagement</p> <p>Management and maintenance of vehicle tracks including fencing and barriers to reduce access</p> <p>Intelligence analysis and increasing surveillance</p> <p>Patrols including in high risk areas and targeting high-risk behaviours</p> <p>Investigating reports of illegal and unsafe activities</p> <p>Where appropriate, initiate enforcement actions</p> <p>Publicise enforcement actions</p> | <p>Providing information to VicForests to comply with its obligations under the law through clear statements of regulatory expectation and guidance</p> <p>Ensuring that the standards and guidance for complying with the law are clear and well communicated to VicForests</p> <p>Delivering education campaigns and engagement events to achieve common understanding of the regulatory framework</p> <p>Conducting surveys and assessments under the Forest Protection Survey Program</p> <p>Conducting forest and compliance audits and inspections</p> <p>Investigating reports of non-compliance and threatened species</p> <p>Initiating appropriate enforcement action for non-compliance</p> <p>Publicise enforcement actions</p> | <p>Publish information on how to apply for a licence, permit or authorisation on our website</p> <p>Deliver information and guidance to support a common understanding of how to comply with the law</p> <p>Support licence and permit holders in understanding their obligations to prevent non-compliance</p> <p>Administering permissions under the <i>Wildlife Act 1975</i></p> <p>Reforming wildlife permissions, initially focusing on Authorities to Control Wildlife</p> <p>Monitor compliance with licence and permit conditions</p> <p>Investigate and respond to wildlife crime, prioritising serious and significant incidents</p> <p>Publish information about our major operations and enforcement actions through a variety of channels, such as our websites and Twitter</p> |
| WE WORK CLOSELY WITH | <p>Parks Victoria</p> <p>Forest, Fire Management Victoria</p> <p>Country Fire Authority</p> | <p>Parks Victoria on park estate</p> <p>DELWP Forest, Fire Operations Division</p> | <p>Parks Victoria</p> <p>Victoria Police</p> <p>DELWP's Forest, Fire Operations Division</p> | <p>Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions</p> <p>DELWP's Forest, Fire and Regions – Policy and Planning Division</p> | <p>Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions</p> <p>Game Management Authority</p> <p>Parks Victoria</p> <p>Victoria Police</p> <p>Agriculture Victoria</p> |
| PRIORITY | <p>We will enforce compliance at any time but this is a priority between September and April</p> | <p>We will enforce compliance at any time but this is a particular priority between April and October</p> | <p>We will enforce compliance at any time but this is a priority between April and October</p> | <p>This is an ongoing priority through 2020-21.</p> | <p>Publish a Statement of Regulatory Intent on Wildlife during 2020-21.</p> |

Regional regulatory priorities

Regional regulatory priorities allow for a nuanced response based on regional issues and needs



Barwon South West

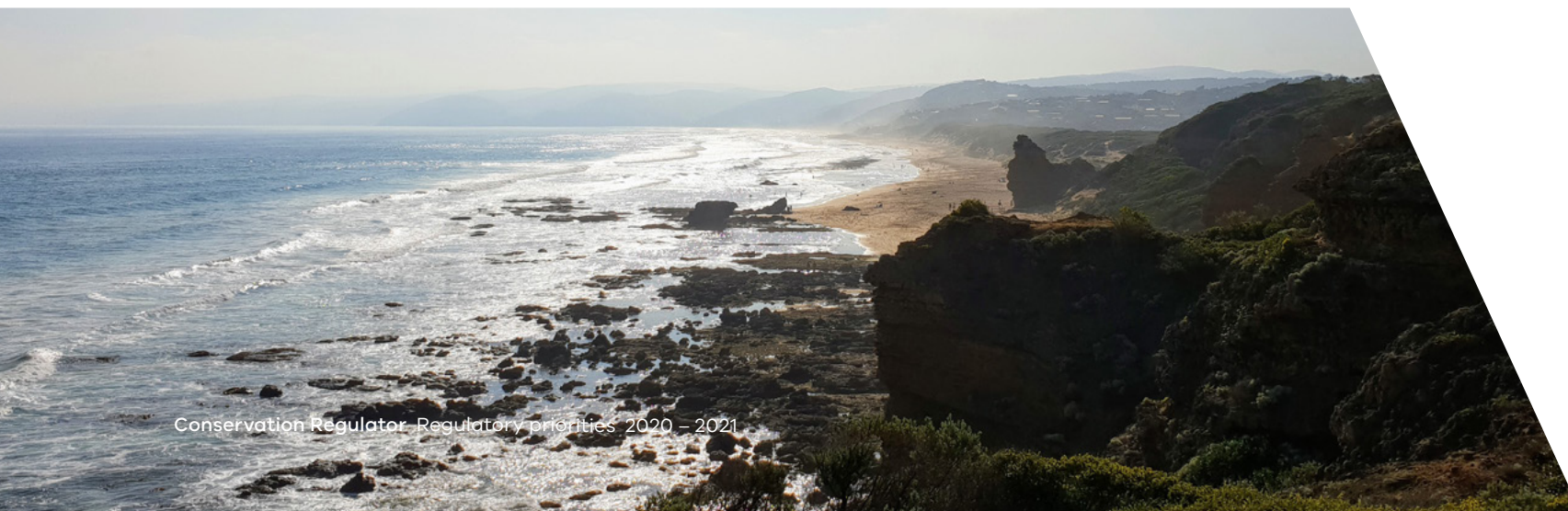
Barwon South West is known for its stunning coastline and the national parks bringing additional visitors to the region for tourism and recreation. Popular and important natural sites include the Great Otway National Park, Otway Forest Park, Lower Glenelg National Park, Cobboboonee Forest Park and the Great Ocean Road.

The region has a population under 400,000 and covers 2.9 million hectares from the tip of the Bellarine Peninsula to the border of South Australia. Both the Gunditjmara and Eastern Maar peoples have had their native title rights recognised on areas of Crown land.

The region is also home to the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, the only world heritage listed landscape in Victoria. It received World Heritage listing on 6 July 2019 and National Heritage listing on 20 July 2019.

It is also home to the important regional centres of Geelong, Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton. Agriculture, manufacturing and healthcare make a significant contribution to the region's economy.

Prior to 2020, the average growth of the area has been 1.5% across the region with the highest growth along the Surf Coast (3%) and in Geelong (2%). While it is expected that growth will slow down temporarily due to the pandemic, population growth and climate change continue to put pressure on the region's natural resources.



Barwon South West priority risks and regulatory activities

The top regulatory risks identified in the region



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRES

The conditions created by climate change, such as lower rainfall and higher temperatures, have increased the consequences of the risk with bushfires burning with greater intensity, frequency and duration.

The urban interface in parts of the Great Otway National Park and surrounding state forest pose an increased risk due to the potential for loss of homes and lives. State-wide fire reporting indicates that at least 40 escaped campfires became bushfires in 2019-20, suggesting that further risk mitigation is required to decreased likelihood.



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD

Population and economic factors are increasing the impacts on the environment and the safety of the public from regulatory risk of illegal take of firewood.

In the Otways and forest close to the South Australian border, more people are accessing the forest for recreation use and resources. The number of information reports for illegal take of firewood has increased with potential commercial quantities being taken. This may be driven by both high energy costs and limited deterrence. The illegal removal of redgum for firewood in the western part of the region is also impacting the nesting habitat available for the threatened red-tailed black cockatoo.



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF NATIVE WILDLIFE



VEGETATION REMOVAL ON PUBLIC LAND



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND

With higher numbers of people spending their time recreationally in our forests, particularly in the Otway National and Forest Parks, and across Barwon South West near population centres, there is a higher number of people using off-road vehicles illegally on public land.



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE

Unauthorised destruction of wildlife, including marine animals, is putting vulnerable wildlife species under pressure along the coast. In particular, intelligence from land managers and the public indicates that hooded plover populations on our beaches are facing increasing levels of interference from people and dogs.



VEGETATION REMOVAL ON PUBLIC LAND

Illegal removal of vegetation, specifically offences relating to the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG), is an emerging regulatory risk. Moving livestock continues to be a driver for vegetation loss on public land and the Conservation Regulator continues to work with local councils and undertake targeted patrols.

Gippsland

The Gippsland Region covers over four million hectares in the South Eastern most part of Victoria, and lies to the east of the eastern suburbs of Greater Melbourne, to the north of Bass Strait, to the west of the Tasman Sea, to the south of the Victorian/New South Wales border, and to the east and southeast of the Great Dividing Range.

Approximately 272,000 people live in the region, of which 40% live in towns and settlements of fewer than 500 people. Before the 2019-20 bushfire season and pandemic, the Bass Coast and Baw Baw Shires were the fastest growing municipalities in Regional Victoria and were on track to reach 386,000 people by 2041.

The average growth over the last decade has been 1.3% across the region with the highest growth in Baw Baw (2.8%). However, as with Victoria more broadly, while we expect a slowdown this will not provide relief to the pressures this growth is putting on our natural environment.

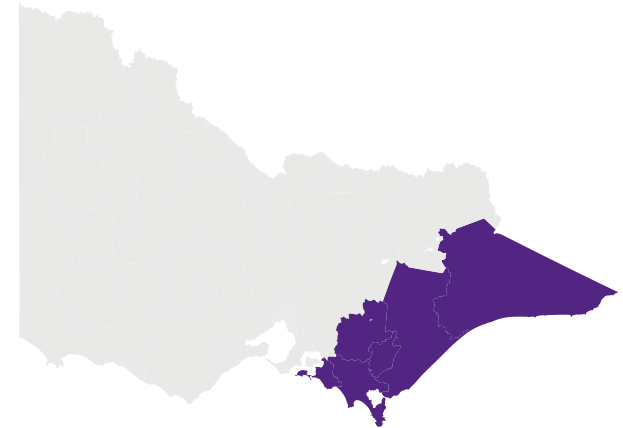
The native title rights of the Gunaikurnai people are recognised through the 2010 Recognition and Settlement Agreement. Gippsland includes the traditional lands of the Gunaikurnai nation and part of West Gippsland of the Bunurong nation.

Gippsland's economy is driven by natural resources and commodities, with key industry sectors including agriculture, forestry, dairy and pastoral industries, fishing, and coal mining, oil and gas extraction and processing.

Sixty-two per cent of the region is Crown Land, and 24,600 hectares is managed by over 200 committees of management. The region includes extensive areas of native forest, remote wilderness areas, major heritage river systems, wetlands and the Gippsland Lakes all of which are internationally significant for their biodiversity values.

The popularity of Gippsland with tourists means it also has one of the highest rates of man-made fire in the State. It was the worst hit region in the 2019-20 bushfire season, with fires burning from November 2019 through to April 2020.

This has significantly impacted the regulatory environment through increased illegal removal of forest produce and impacts to wildlife.



Gippsland priority risks and compliance actions

The high priority regulatory risks for the Gippsland region include:



**ILLEGAL FIRES
AND CAMPFIRE**



**ILLEGAL TAKE
OF FIREWOOD**



**BURNING OFF ON PRIVATE LAND
WITHOUT OR PERMIT, OR IN
CONTRAVENTION OF A PERMIT**



**ILLEGAL FIRES
AND CAMPFIRE**

Illegal campfires and burning off on private land without a permit or in contravention of a permit

This is particularly important while drought conditions continue in the region and bushfires occurring as early as July combined with high levels of human activity, such as four-wheel drive enthusiasts, hunters and more broadly people lighting fires on total fire-ban days.

Gippsland's history of fires from human sources of ignition means fire prevention from human sources will remain a number one risk for the region.



**ILLEGAL TAKE
OF FIREWOOD**

We have seen an increase in people illegally removing and selling firewood. These operators are taking risks with their own safety and that of the public by felling trees over busy roads, operating at night and lighting fires.

These people are doing significant environmental and cultural damage in highly sensitive areas of forest and we will continue to work with Victoria Police, conduct patrols and investigate reports.



Grampians

The Grampians region covers 4,861,944 hectares from Edenhope near the South Australian border east to Bacchus Marsh. More than 220,000 live across the region, with Ballarat being the biggest population centre.

Grampians priority risks and compliance actions

Prior to 2020 growth over the last decade had been 1.4% across the region with the highest growth in Golden Plains (2.8%) and Moorabool (2.5%). However, while we expect a slowdown this will not provide relief to the pressures this growth is putting on our natural environment.

The region includes the traditional lands of the Wotjobaluk, Dja Dja Wurrung, Eastern Maar, Gunditjmara, Djabwurrung, Wadawurrung and Wurundjeri people. We partner with the Traditional Owners of the region to manage the Aboriginal values of public land and waters.

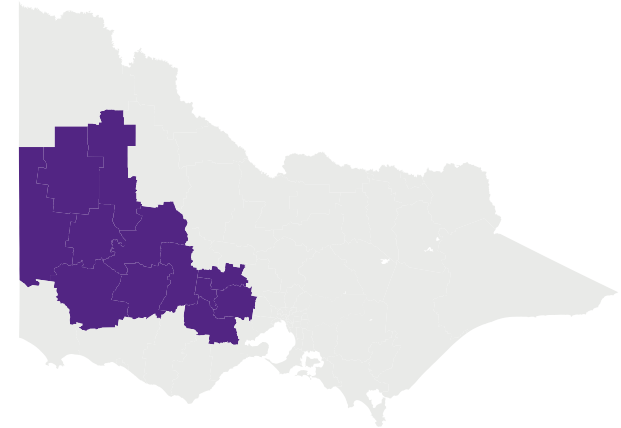
Economic activity includes mineral sand resources and dryland farming in the Wimmera Southern Mallee sub-region, and the increasingly service driven economy of Ballarat in the Central Highlands sub-region.

The Grampians region continues to be a key focus for renewable energy investment in Victoria, hosting the largest windfarms in Australia.

Tourism was a key source of income for the region prior to the pandemic, which was supported by renowned viticulture, restaurants, mineral springs and spectacular parks, forests and lakes. The region is home to a diverse geography of mountains, rocky outcrops and desert supports native forests, grasslands and unique desert ecology.

The Grampians region has 1.03 million hectares of public land and is home to the world-renowned Grampians National Park, an ancient landscape attracting large numbers of tourists every year. The Grampians Peak Trail is an iconic tourism destination attracting many national and international visitors.

Over 250 volunteer committees of management manage significant areas of public land on behalf of the Grampians community. People enjoy a range of recreational activities on public land, including walking, cycling, camping, rock climbing, bird watching and boating.



Grampians priority risks and regulatory activities

The top regulatory risks identified in the region



ILLEGAL CAMPFIRES, INCLUDING TOTAL FIRE BAN DAY, UNATTENDED, POORLY CONSTRUCTED



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD



ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF PUBLIC LAND



WILDLIFE HABITAT DESTRUCTION



WILDLIFE HABITAT DESTRUCTION

The increase in habitat destruction and illegal clearing of native vegetation has been increasing, particularly in the Wimmera District. Critical habitat required for threatened species such as the Mallee Fowl and the Red-Tailed Black Cockatoo are being cleared at a level not seen before. This coupled with climate change influences places these threatened species at greater risk. This illegal behaviour has been identified as an emerging trend.



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRES

The influence of climate change, lower than average rainfall and drying conditions have had a significant influence on the Grampians landscape and has increased the risk of bushfire accordingly. For this reason, bushfire risk due to illegal campfires is rated as high and significant respectively.



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND

Population growth and the lower cost of recreational vehicles is driving an increase in off-road activities which may impact the natural and heritage values, loss of equitable access to public land and the safety of both illegal vehicle users and the public. For these reasons, illegal vehicle use on public land is rated as a high risk.



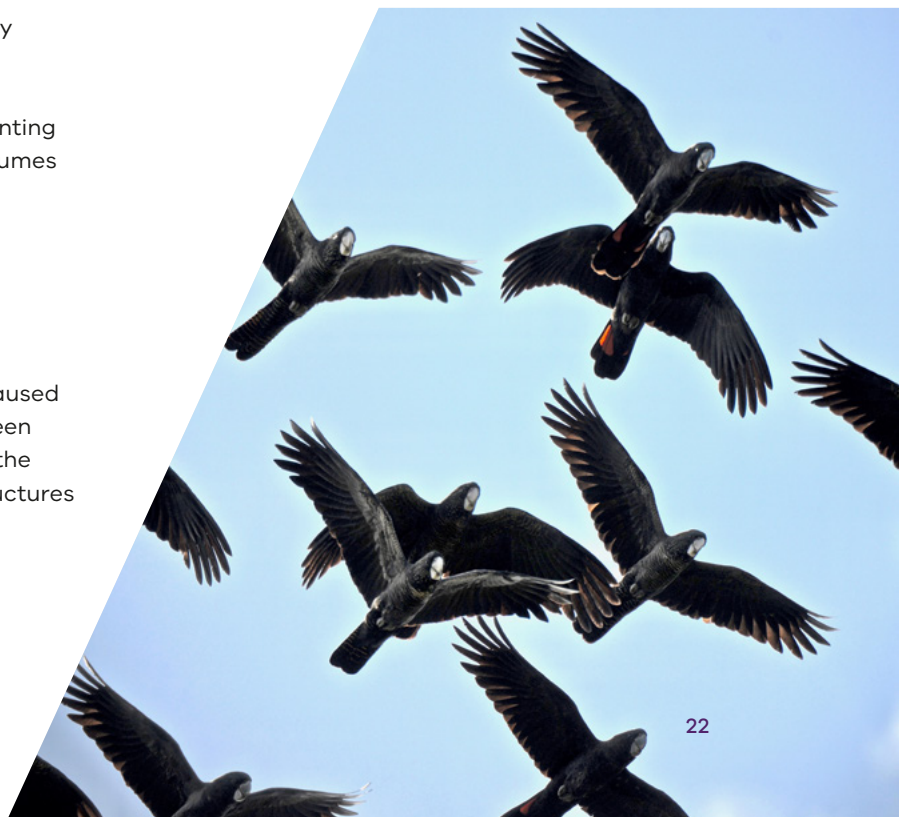
ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD

Individual users seek to reduce their energy costs by accessing forests for firewood for heating, particularly in the Midlands District where many communities have no access to natural gas connection. Investigations show that in many instances well-organised groups are supplementing income through illegal trade of commercial volumes of firewood.



ILLEGAL OCCUPATION OF PUBLIC LAND

The risk of habitat destruction, disruption of ecosystem function and loss of public safety caused by illegal occupation on public land has also been observed to be on the increase. Particularly in the construction, erection and maintenance of structures and encroachments within riparian areas.



Hume

More than 40% of the Hume region (1.66 million hectares) is public land, including state forests, national, state and other parks managed by Parks Victoria and Crown Land. This public land includes a diverse range of habitats from the Victorian Alps to the riverine plains and is home to many threatened species. Public land is used for timber production, firewood, grazing, bee keeping, tourism and recreation.

Hume priority risks and compliance actions

Hume covers over four million hectares featuring spectacular mountain country, fertile river valleys and extensive irrigated farmlands on the plains of the Goulburn and Murray valleys.

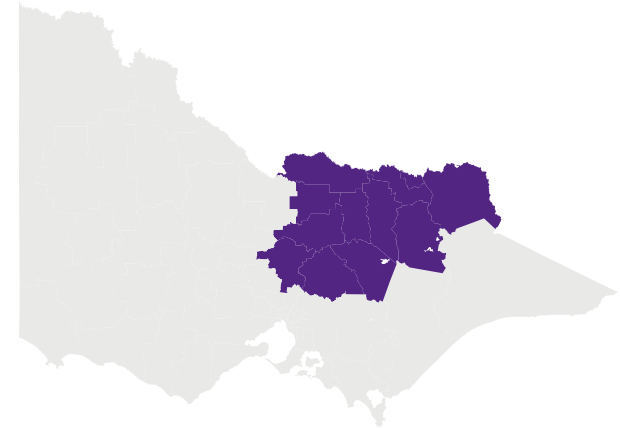
The Region's more than 320,000 population was one of the fastest growing in Victoria before the pandemic, particularly in the Hume corridor closer to Melbourne. The west and alpine areas of Hume support a significant agricultural industry and the eastern region is home to a strong tourism industry with people visiting for the wineries and gourmet food. The Hume and Goulburn Valley transport corridors link supply chains to national and international markets.

Natural rainfall and irrigation support a multi-million-dollar primary production industry in the region, at the forefront of global food production. The North East and Goulburn Broken catchments provide much of the water needed to sustain grazing, dairy, grains, horticulture, timber and viticulture, which supply domestic and international markets.

The state and the Yorta Yorta people have a joint management agreement for the Barmah National Park and a co-operative management agreement for other areas of Crown land within the region.

The State and Taungurung Land and Waters Council have entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement, acknowledging the Taungurung as Traditional Owners of the Crown land across a large area in the southern portion of the region. This agreement provides for joint management of some parks and reserves, natural resource take and use, natural resource management partnerships and influence/control over existing Crown land management activities.

Maintaining the integrity of the natural environment is critical to the future prosperity and sustainability of the Region.



Hume priority risks and regulatory activities

The top regulatory risks identified in the region



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRE



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD



ILLEGAL OCCUPATION ON PUBLIC LAND



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF NATIVE WILDLIFE



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRE

Illegal campfires

Climate change and a growing population spending more time on public land, and living closer to it, continues to make illegal campfires and the catastrophic consequences of bushfire a priority for Hume. Not only does it also put lives at risk, the economic and environmental impacts are significant.

The Conservation Regulator and Forest, Fire Management Victoria in conjunction with Parks Victoria authorised officers will conduct targeted patrols in high risk areas on days of elevated fire danger to minimise the likelihood of illegal campfires escaping.



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD

Population growth, the slowing economy, increased working from home requirements due to public health measures and the increase in energy prices is driving an increase in illegal take of firewood.

There is evidence that illegal take is occurring on a large scale in ecological and culturally valuable River Red Gum woodlands and lineal reserves along waterways and other forest types.



ILLEGAL OCCUPATION ON PUBLIC LAND

This is wide-spread within Hume where consequences include limiting access to public land and impacts on land function and ecological processes. We may expect an increase in this activity due to financial pressures associated with current circumstances.

The Conservation Regulator in Hume will work with key partners to identify environmentally significant areas that are being impacted by illegal occupation and undertake an appropriate, graduated response to achieve compliance.



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND

The increase in recreational vehicle use state-wide impacts the environment, fair and equitable access to public land and means more time and effort is required to repair the damage done to roads. In addition, it can restrict access to areas by maintenance and emergency services vehicles.

The Conservation Regulator in Hume works closely with Forest, Fire Management Victoria and Parks Victoria to monitor seasonally closed roads and environmentally sensitive parcels of public land and develop targeted compliance operations to reduce this impact.



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE

Last year a significant investigation was undertaken into the poisoning of birds of prey within the Hume region that highlighted the importance of our work in protecting native species. More broadly, there has been an increase in reports of negative wildlife and human interaction.

The Conservation Regulator in Hume will undertake investigations, conduct monitoring and inspections as well as targeted community engagement to ensure native wildlife is valued and afforded a high level of protection across the Hume Region.

Loddon Mallee

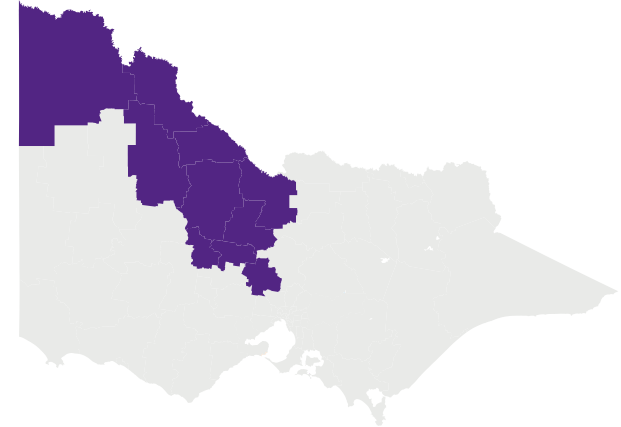
The Loddon Mallee Region covers 26% (5,898,824 hectares) of Victoria with its northern boundary running 400km along the Murray River from the South Australian border to Echuca. The region's southern boundary is only 50kms from Melbourne in the Macedon Ranges. Loddon Mallee is home to ten local government areas.

Loddon Mallee includes the traditional lands of approximately 12 traditional owner groups and is home to the landmark Dja Dja Wurrung Traditional Owner Settlement Agreement and recent announcement of the First Peoples of the Millewa-Mallee as a Registered Aboriginal Party (RSA). Over 300 thousand people live in the region, mainly in the larger centres of Bendigo, Mildura, Swan Hill and Echuca.

Around 28% (1,652,182 hectares) of the Loddon Mallee is public land ranging from many sporting fields and community halls to the vast Mallee Parks, Northern Grasslands and Box Ironbark Forest. The parks and reserves managed by DELWP and Parks Victoria provide important tourism and recreation experiences and are vital for populations of threatened flora and fauna.

Agriculture accounts for over 70% of land use in the region and it is a major producer and exporter of foods including grapes, grains, citrus, almonds, chickens and pigs.

Prior to 2020 the average growth over the last decade has been 1.1% across the region with the highest growth in Macedon Ranges (2%) and Greater Bendigo (1.8%). While it is expected to slow down temporarily due to the current situation, population growth and climate change will continue to put pressure on the region's natural resources.



Loddon Mallee priority risks and regulatory activities

The Loddon Mallee's priorities are aligned with the State's five regulatory priorities.



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRES



ILLEGAL FIRES AND CAMPFIRES

The priority includes campfires that are lit on total fire ban days, are unattended or poorly constructed. Low rainfall and high temperatures are driving increasing dryness which is increasing the risk factor for bushfires, at the same time, the increasing population is resulting in increased use of public land and the likelihood of campfires. For this reason, bushfire risk due to illegal campfires or lighting fires with the intent for it to spread is rated as high.



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF NATIVE WILDLIFE



ILLEGAL TAKE OF FIREWOOD

The illegal take of firewood has been the most frequently reported issues for the Loddon Mallee for the past two years.

As with the rest of Victoria, investigations are showing that in many instances, well-organised groups are supplementing income through illegal trade of commercial volumes of firewood.

There is evidence that illegal take in dry forest and woodland is occurring on a significant scale in Loddon Mallee.



ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE ON PUBLIC LAND

As with other areas in the state, population growth and urban encroachment are causing an increase in damage done to our forests, parks and reserves.

For these reasons, illegal vehicle use on public land is rated as a significant risk.



REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE, TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE

Intelligence shows that the illegal possession and trade of wildlife is occurring within the Loddon Mallee region. The Conservation Regulator has elevated the protection of wildlife to state-wide priority for 2020-21 and in the Loddon Mallee this will include a focus on strategic wildlife licence inspections and audits.



Port Phillip

The Port Phillip region is Victoria's fastest growing, most populous and urbanised region which poses unique challenges in protecting out natural assets. It includes the Melbourne metropolitan region and growth corridors, Port Phillip and Western Port Bays, Mornington Peninsula, the Yarra Ranges, the Dandenong Ranges and the Western Grasslands.

Port Phillip priority risks and compliance actions

The region has 236,600 hectares of Crown land and hosts a diverse range of outdoor spaces, including stunning beaches, wetlands, native grasslands, state forests, national parks, rivers and creeks. Port Phillip is also home to some remarkable wildlife; from the largest urban Little Penguin colony at St Kilda Beach, pods of dolphins and the occasional curious whale in the Bay, to the last wild population of Helmeted Honeyeaters at Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. Recreation and tourism are major industries in the region, with iconic sporting and recreational facilities like the MCG, Albert Park, Flemington and Caulfield Racecourses, Melbourne, Healesville and Werribee Zoos and the Royal Botanic Gardens, supported by a large and diverse public land estate.

Prior to the economic contraction and the anticipated slowdown in population growth caused by coronavirus and the 2019-20 bushfire season, the region was home to a growing population of over four million people. While we expect a short to medium term slowdown in population growth and increasing urban encroachment on the natural environment, this will not have a significant impact in the longer term when economic and population growth return to pre-pandemic levels.



Port Phillip priority risks and regulatory activities

The top regulatory risks identified in the region



ILLEGAL CAMPFIRES



**ILLEGAL TAKE
OF FIREWOOD**



**REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE,
TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF NATIVE WILDLIFE**



**ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE
ON PUBLIC LAND**



**ILLEGAL FIRES
AND CAMPFIRES**

Illegal campfires

Compared with the rest of Victoria the frequency of illegal campfires in Port Phillip is lower, however the consequences remain catastrophic due to the region's population density and Melbourne's water catchments. The risk is shared with the Hume Region and Port Phillip will continue to work with the Hume region on communication and operational working arrangements. We will also assist the Murrindindi district with the implementation of Operation Campfire.



**ILLEGAL TAKE
OF FIREWOOD**

The region has localised, small-scale operators who collect firewood illegally and sell it through social media or noticeboards. High population density and poor access and supply of quality firewood exacerbate the issue.



**REGULATING THE USE, KEEPING, TRADE,
TREATMENT AND CONTROL OF WILDLIFE**

The illegal or unlicensed possession of wildlife is a widespread issue in Port Phillip. The large population, high number of licence holders and mix of people who are unaware of the law or who deliberately break the law provide significant enforcement challenges.



**ILLEGAL VEHICLE USE
ON PUBLIC LAND**

Illegal vehicle use in forests impacts on the enjoyment that others can take from the use of the forest due to personal safety, noise and the damage it does to the environment. The population density and vicinity of public land to population centres makes this a key focus for Port Phillip to protect the amenity of our public land, the safety of its users and avoid rehabilitation costs.



Contact us

There are several ways you can communicate with us, whether you've seen something that could be a breach in compliance or to seek advice, find information or to share your idea.

Visit us online

conservationregulator.vic.gov.au

Or search Conservation Regulator Victoria

Through the contact centre

131 186

Report suspected wildlife trafficking

Crime Stoppers Victoria

1800 333 000

crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime/

Report potential timber harvest compliance issues

forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/forest-management/forest-reports

Email us directly

ocr@delwp.vic.gov.au

National relay service

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service on 133 677 or visit relayservice.gov.au





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