



# National Parks Act Annual Report

2022–23



## Traditional Owner Acknowledgement

Victoria's network of parks and reserves 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 and are the product of thousands of generations of economic activity, material culture and settlement patterns. The landscapes we see today are influenced by the skills, knowledge and activities of Aboriginal land managers. Parks Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of these cultural landscapes, recognising their continuing connection to Victoria's parks and reserves and their ongoing role in caring for Country.

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## Notes

- The Ministers responsible for administering the Act during the year:
  - 1 July to 5 December 2022, the Minister for Environment and Climate Action, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP,
  - 6 December 2022 to 30 June 2023, the Minister for Environment, Ingrid Stitt MP.
- In this report:
  - 'the Act' means the *National Parks Act 1975*
  - 'DEECA' means the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
  - 'the Minister' means the Minister responsible for administering the Act
  - 'the Regulations' means the National Parks Regulations 2013
  - 'the Secretary' means the Secretary to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

# FOREWORD

This report on the workings of the *National Parks Act 1975* (the Act) for the 2022–23 financial year is presented to the Minister for Environment, Ingrid Stitt MP, under section 35 of the Act.

The Act establishes a network of national parks and other protected areas that are representative of Victoria’s diverse natural environments and sets out the legal framework for their protection, enjoyment and management. The objects of the Act set out the key objectives for park managers to deliver for the Victorian public.

Parks Victoria manages a system of more than 130 parks and other areas under the Act, totalling approximately 3.47 million hectares, on behalf of the Victorian Government. This work is done in close partnership with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA).

This was the third successive year under La Niña conditions where natural disasters have impacted Victoria’s parks. In October 2022, a significant weather event caused widespread flooding predominantly in the central and north central regions of Victoria. This resulted in access to some assets and parks being restricted until recovery efforts could reinstate safe access. This is in addition to ongoing recovery efforts related to the 2019–20 bushfires and flood events in late 2021 and early 2022.

This year saw the release of Parks Victoria’s inaugural *Land Management Strategy*. The implementation of this long-term strategy will guide the protection and management of parks and other areas under the Act, including the increasing challenges from climate change. The strategy will be reviewed every 10 years.

In 2022–23 a Conservation Action Plan was published for East Gippsland. The plan encompasses some of Victoria’s most pristine parks and reserves, intact watersheds and remnant forests, as well as long stretches of protected coastline and rocky reefs supporting a diversity of marine species, including 101 nationally threatened species of flora and fauna and many species of state significance.

Other highlights this year include:

- the 20th anniversary of the significant expansion of parks in the box-ironbark forests and woodlands of norther central Victoria on 30 October 2002; and the creation of Victoria’s system of marine national parks and marine sanctuaries on 16 November 2002
- the Golden Kelp Restoration Project, which included the completion of comprehensive surveys of Jawbone and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries which mapped reef areas and identified sites for restoration
- the Twelve Apostles (Port Campbell National Park) returned as one of the busiest sites in Victoria, with an estimated 1,464,184 visits in 2022–23, up 100 per cent on the previous year
- volunteers across Victoria contributed \$2 million of in-kind support, particularly through habitat restoration and track maintenance activities
- in October 2022, the Victorian Government and the Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement (RSA)
- in October 2022, the Victorian Government and the Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation entered into on an updated RSA.

Parks Victoria continues to work closely and collaboratively with Traditional Owners and partner agencies to achieve the objects of the Act.

We look forward to building on our achievements in 2023–24 by continuing to encourage more visitors from all backgrounds to get into nature and discover and protect Victoria’s diverse natural and cultural landscapes.

**John Pandazopoulos**  
Chair



**Matthew Jackson**  
Chief Executive Officer



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# A REPRESENTATIVE PARKS SYSTEM

## Areas managed under the Act

As at 30 June 2023 there were 139 areas with a total area of approximately 3.47 million hectares managed under various provisions of the Act. Appendix 1 lists the areas and Appendix 2 shows their location. There were no changes to the areas managed under the Act during the year.

The 139 areas comprised:

- 124 areas listed on various schedules to the Act
  - 45 national parks (Schedule Two)
  - 3 wilderness parks (Schedule Two A)
  - 26 state parks (Schedule Two B)
  - 5 coastal parks, 3 historic parks, 1 marine and coastal park, 1 nature conservation reserve (flora and fauna reserve) and 8 regional parks (Schedule Three)
  - 3 marine and coastal parks, 1 marine park, 1 marine reserve, 1 national heritage park and 1 nature conservation reserve (Schedule Four)
  - 13 marine national parks (Schedule Seven)
  - 11 marine sanctuaries (Schedule Eight)
  - 1 landscape conservation area (Schedule Nine).
- 15 non-scheduled areas to which particular provisions of the Act apply.

The Act also defines the following areas within particular national parks:

- 19 wilderness zones (Schedule Five) in 7 national parks (see Appendix 1)
- 22 remote and natural areas (Schedule Six) in 12 national parks (see Appendix 1)
- 4 designated water supply catchment areas in the Great Otway, Kinglake and Yarra Ranges national parks.

There were no changes to the areas managed under the Act during the year.

## 20th anniversary of Victorian marine national parks and marine sanctuaries

On 16 November 2022, Victoria celebrated 20 years since the establishment of one of the world's first representative systems of fully protected marine reserves comprising of 13 large marine national parks and 11 smaller marine sanctuaries. Parks Victoria together with agency and community partners took the opportunity to showcase Victoria's marine protected area system and successes in marine protected area management through a wide-reaching communication and engagement program.

Key events that contributed to this program included a major uplift of marine content on Parks Victoria's website with over 100,000 views of marine pages, a monthly webinar series on marine themes with more than 2,500 individual registrations, and a comprehensive social media marine protected area campaign and series of videos released on YouTube profiling individual parks and the work of marine rangers.

Local events hosted by community groups including Friends of the Bluff (Barwon Heads), Marine Care Ricketts Point, Marine Care Jawbone (Williamstown) and Friends of Point Addis (Anglesea) also celebrated the many major contributions to management made by marine volunteers.

Research findings and lessons learned from 20 years of Parks Victoria's marine research and monitoring were shared with international audiences through participation in the Fifth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) held in Vancouver Canada in February 2023.

## 20th anniversary of Victorian box-ironbark parks

On 30 October 2002, the Victorian Government established a network of new and expanded box-ironbark parks and reserves. In 2022–23, there was a range of partnership activities with Dja Dja Wurrung in joint managed parks, including the Indigenous ranger program, development and implementation of cultural burning in Greater Bendigo National Park, and planning for cultural thinning in Paddys Ranges State Park. Under the long-term Box-Ironbark Ecological Thinning Trial, which commenced in 2003 to measure the improvements to forest health from various thinning regimes, there was repeated monitoring of selected biodiversity and habitat elements, as well as knowledge-sharing and extension of thinning practice and other learnings to external workshops/conferences and community groups.

## Management planning

Following partner and community engagement in past years, Parks Victoria's inaugural *Land Management Strategy* was approved by the Minister for Environment and Climate Action in September 2022 and released in March 2023 for Parks Victoria's implementation. This long-term strategy is aimed at guiding the adaptation of parks, including parks under the Act, in a time of challenges from climate change, shaping the cultural landscape with Traditional Owners, protecting values, and supporting local communities. The strategy frames park management planning, program development and assists in reporting.

In 2022–23, Parks Victoria initiated the process to develop a Wilsons Promontory landscape management plan. This planning will combine the strategic directions for the terrestrial area, coastal areas and marine areas within the Wilsons Promontory landscape. The first phase has been to review the existing management plans, commence a coastal hazard risk assessment, and importantly commence the engagement with the Traditional Owners about how the planning process will be undertaken in collaboration. The initial stage of community engagement is to commence in July 2023, with a draft management plan aimed for further community engagement in 2024.

Significant effort has gone into assessing the values in areas of rock climbing within the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, known to the Traditional Owners as Dyurrite. In 2022–23, Parks Victoria and Barengi Gadjin Land Council have been assessing the cultural values where climbing is occurring, which have resulted in further rediscoveries of cultural values. The outcomes from these assessments are to form the basis of an amendment to the Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park (Mount Arapiles Management Unit) Management Plan 1991. The engagement process is scheduled to commence later in 2023.

In accordance with the *Yarra Protection (Willip-gin Birraung murrn) Act 2017*, the Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan was developed, led by Melbourne Water and released in 2022. The plan sets the community vision and strategic direction for areas that include parks under the Act, such as the Yarra Ranges National Park and Warrandyte State Park. Together with the Land Management Strategy, the future management planning for these parks will be in accordance with the Burndap Birrarung burndap umarkoo Yarra Strategic Plan.



Image: Squeaky Beach, Wilsons Promontory National Park

# NATURAL VALUES

## Managing natural values

National parks and other areas under the Act protect the critical backbone of Victoria’s natural values, including a diverse array of animal and plant species, habitats, ecosystems, landscapes and seascapes. Conservation programs focus on direct action to protect threatened species, communities and habitat; transitioning for and addressing the effects of climate change, addressing threats from invasive species, changed bushfire and water regimes, overabundant native species; and the delivery of research, monitoring and planning for natural values. The programs are led by Parks Victoria in collaboration with key partners including Traditional Owners, DEECA, catchment management authorities, the Commonwealth and the community. Many programs are ongoing and achievements for 2022–23 are provided in the following sections.

### Nature conservation strategy

Parks Victoria’s *Nature Conservation Strategy 2021-2031* recognises the natural riches and a dazzling array of animal and plant species, habitats, ecosystems, landscapes and seascapes occurring in Victoria’s parks. The Nature Conservation Strategy has the goal of conserving nature in Victoria’s parks in the face of unprecedented threats – through intensified action with partners, new techniques and increased community collaboration.

Implementation planning and delivery of actions is in progress and a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan is in development.

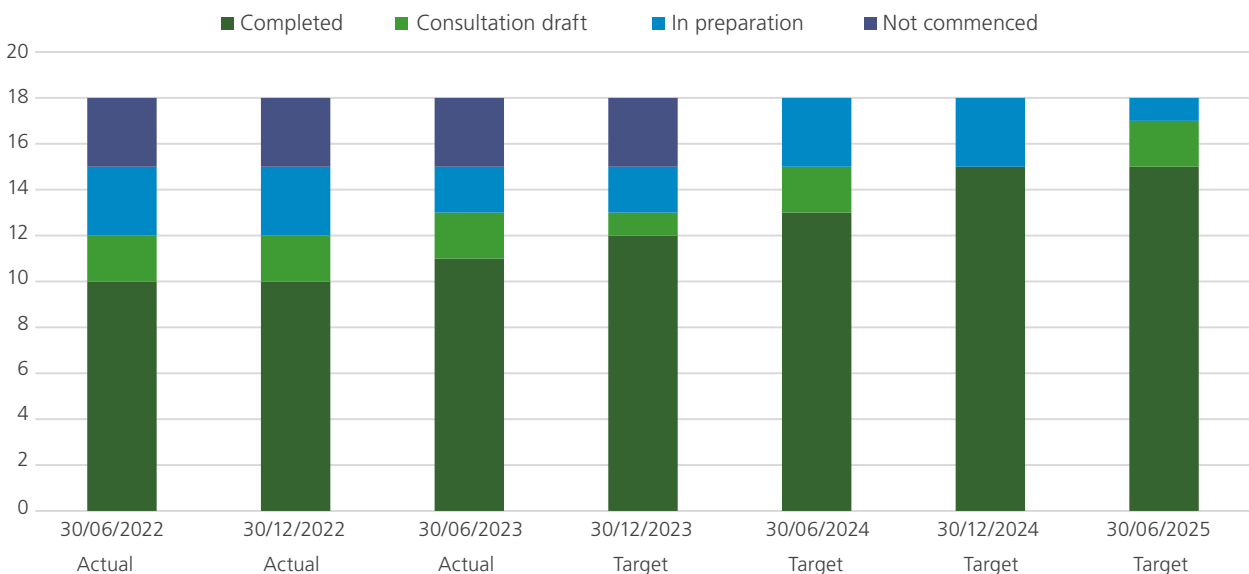
## Conservation action plans

Conservation Actions Plans (CAPs) deliver a best-practice approach to conservation planning for managing the extensive parks across Victoria. The methodology identifies the strategies that will achieve the greatest improvement in the health of ecosystems and enables a framework for monitoring and evaluation. The CAPs will cover 18 park landscapes when completed and will include all parks under the Act.

A CAP was recently completed for East Gippsland, incorporating the remote forests of Snowy River and Mitchell River national parks, coastal parks such as Croajingolong National Park and Lake Tyers State Park, and significant marine values across Point Hicks and Cape Howe marine national parks and Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary. Following the unprecedented bushfires of 2019–20 there has been significant fire impacts and subsequent recovery work in this landscape. A series of workshops was undertaken over the past year with Parks Victoria, partners and other stakeholders, including Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, DEECA and the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority, to develop conservation strategies for the next 15 years, including terrestrial and marine pest plant and animal management, fire and water management, human impacts and climate change.

Conservation action planning is underway for Northern Plains and Box-Ironbark, Basalt and Bellarine and Western Plains and Wetlands landscapes. Frameworks for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and costing of CAP implementation are also in development.

### Conservation action plan progress targets



### Threatened species and communities

Parks Victoria and DEECA continue to work with the community and key partner agencies to manage threatened species and communities. This work included programs delivered as part of protecting and enhancing habitats and management of invasive species.

#### **Eastern barred bandicoot protection at Woodlands Historic Park**

Parks Victoria and Conservation Volunteers Australia have finalised plans for re-alignment of the replacement predator-proof fence at Woodlands Historic Park that will include more optimal eastern barred bandicoot habitat, and less areas subject to predator invasion through creek lines. A cultural heritage management plan is being assessed by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and construction of the fence is due to commence in 2023–24.

#### **Translocation of eastern bristlebirds to Wilsons Promontory National Park**

During March 2023, a delicate operation was launched to capture 11 endangered eastern bristlebirds from Croajingolong National Park and translocate them to Wilsons Promontory National Park. The new arrivals joined 16 birds which were translocated to Wilsons Promontory from Jervis Bay in 2021–22. Parks Victoria are building a new, genetically robust insurance

population which will improve the global conservation status of the species. This is the first species to be introduced as part of the Wilsons Prom Sanctuary program. The partners in the project include DEECA, Parks Victoria, NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, Zoos Victoria and Birdlife Australia.

#### **Protecting rainforests from deer impacts in Snowy River National Park**

A monitoring program is assessing the effectiveness of the landscape-scale deer control program in supporting native vegetation recovery post-fire in Snowy River National Park. This involves collection of data on deer density and vegetation condition in warm temperate rainforest within rainforest sites of significance where deer have been controlled at different intensities. High intensity aerial and ground shooting has reduced deer density to an average of 44 per cent of comparable control sites. Differences in vegetation were less clear, possibly due to underlying site differences. Camera data is now being analysed, and future vegetation surveys will be conducted to identify how deer numbers and deer control affect vegetation cover, recruitment and survival.

#### **White-footed dunnart monitoring on the Mornington Peninsula**

Parks Victoria has established a monitoring program for the white-footed dunnart in the Mornington Peninsula and Point Nepean national parks, in



Image: Eastern bristlebird translocation, Wilsons Promontory National Park



collaboration with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The program will test the effectiveness of remote cameras compared with the less labour-intensive artificial shelters for detecting and monitoring populations of this species. Early results have shown the cameras to be highly effective for the monitoring of this species with much higher detection rates than artificial shelters.

### **Swamp skink surveys on the Yanakie Isthmus, Wilsons Promontory National Park**

With the recent listing of the cryptic and elusive swamp skink as a nationally endangered species, Parks Victoria deployed artificial shelters to survey for the swamp skink at Shallow Inlet and Corner Inlet on the Yanakie Isthmus at Wilsons Promontory National Park. A breeding population of the swamp skink was detected at Shallow Inlet; this is the first record of this species on the Yanakie Isthmus and is the first recorded observation of this species at Wilsons Promontory in 20 years. The establishment of the artificial shelters will enable future monitoring and will help inform the ongoing management of this species and its habitat as part of the Wilsons Prom Sanctuary program.

### **Invasive species**

Parks Victoria has continued to deliver threat management programs to address invasive species impacts in high priority parks and reserves.

Control programs are targeted to maximise investment and effectiveness by focusing on the protection of specific environmental assets at site or landscape scale. Landscape-scale conservation programs, often cross tenure and involving several partner agencies, are the cornerstones of invasive species management in parks.

The major programs for 2022–23 included:

### **Bushfire biodiversity response and recovery**

The bushfire recovery program, primarily in the Alpine, Budj Bim and Wilsons Promontory national parks, were largely completed by the end of 2021–22. Some minor variations extended some projects into 2022–23.

Parks Victoria received further funding in 2022–23 from DEECA to continue pest plant and animal control to sustain fire recovery in eastern Victoria under the *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* program as outlined below.

### **Protecting biodiversity tranche 1**

Parks Victoria received funding for seven projects across the eastern region to deliver pest herbivore control, pest predator control and weed control, including deer, pig and fox control, feral horse management, the Far East Eden project, weed control in the north-east, and the collaborative ox-eye daisy project. These projects ranged across most national parks in the eastern region, including the Alfred, Alpine, Burrowa-Pine Mountain, Croajingolong, Lind, Mount Buffalo, Snowy River and Wilsons Promontory national parks, the Avon and Wabba wilderness parks, Cape Conran Coastal Park, and Lake Tyers, Mount Granya, and Mount Lawson state parks.

### **Keystone projects from protecting Victoria's environment program**

Further funding has been provided to June 2025, under the Protecting Biodiversity Keystone program, for six projects identified as high-impact projects and that are strongly aligned to delivering on the targets of *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*.

### **Weeds and pests on public land**

The Eden projects continue to target high priority and emerging weeds in the Glenelg (Cobboboonee, Lower Glenelg and Mount Richmond national parks, Cape Nelson State Park and Discovery Bay Coastal Park) and Otway (Great Otway and Port Campbell national parks) regions.

The Ark programs involve fox control for small mammal protection and include the Barry Mountains fox control project (Alpine National Park) as well as Glenelg Ark (Cobboboonee, Lower Glenelg and Mount Richmond national parks and Discovery Bay Coastal Park), Grampians Ark (Grampians National Park), Otway Ark (Great Otway National Park) and Southern Ark (Alfred, Alpine, Cooracambra, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Lind and Snowy River national parks, Lake Tyers State Park and Cape Conran Coastal Park).

The Weeds and Pests on Public Land program also supports rabbit control to reduce grazing pressure as part of the grazing management plan to restore semi-arid woodland. This initiative is supported by a long-standing investment in herbivore control by Parks Victoria.

## BushBank program

Parks Victoria was successful in obtaining funding for multiple restoration projects across Parks Victoria's regions, including the Grampians, Mount Buffalo and Wilsons Promontory national parks, and Lerderderg State Park.

## Other pest plant and animal programs

The Alps Intensive Management Program continued to support the management of invasive pest animal and plants in key vulnerable areas of the Alps and preventing their expansion. Strategic management of horses, pigs and deer continued as well as management of pest plants including willows, hawkweed and English broom.

Parks Victoria continues to implement feral horse management programs consistent with the *Alpine National Park: Feral Horse Action Plan (2021) and the Strategic Action Plan: Protection of floodplain marshes in Barmah National Park and Barmah Forest Ramsar site (2019–2023)*. Feral horses were removed in 2022–23 through rehoming and targeted ground-shooting by professionals. Close supervision and management of the control program remains in place to ensure the best possible outcomes for animal welfare, safety and effectiveness, including input from external technical experts.

The Peri-urban Weed Management Partnership with multiple councils targeted areas for weed management on Churchill, Dandenong Ranges, and French Island national parks, as well as other parks and reserves.

The Good Neighbour Program continued to invest in controlling invasive species on the public-private land interface across Melbourne and Regional Victoria.

## Wilsons Prom Sanctuary program

Significant progress was made in 2022–23 to deliver on the vision for a 50,000 hectare climate change safe haven through the implementation of the Wilsons Prom Sanctuary program. A major output is the delivery of the sanctuary strategic planning framework including five year implementation plans to guide:

- invasive species' removal and threat management
- native wildlife risk management
- wildlife and threatened species restoration

- monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement
- fire management, including ecological fire objectives
- high priority habitat restoration, including three habitat restoration plans for coastal grassy woodland, heathlands and wet forest.

Delivery of this suite of planning outputs including a 20-year overarching vision for the sanctuary was a major achievement and step forward to ensure outcome focused conservation program delivery at Wilsons Promontory National Park (the Prom).

Landscape scale invasive species control was delivered in advance of anticipated construction of the sanctuary's 10 kilometre introduced grazer and predator exclusion fence. This included aerial and ground shooting programs over 25,000 hectares at the Prom to knock down an estimated 50 per cent of the known population of hog deer that are damaging native flora toward a goal of complete removal in the long term. This is the first large scale removal of hog deer ever undertaken in Victorian national parks, with recovery of habitats already being recorded in the field.

The Prom is one of the very few places in Victoria where sambar deer are not yet present in large numbers, and where eradication of the species is feasible to prevent long-term ecosystem damage.

Progress toward eradication of sambar deer from the park was a priority, with works focused on detection and removal of small and challenging to remove isolated populations in the southern section of the Prom including from the offshore Wattle Island where sambar deer were detected and controlled successfully. The project has been successful in reducing already small populations of sambar deer to very low levels with the target of complete removal to prevent establishment of large deer populations.

The Wilsons Prom Sanctuary program has enabled upscaled on-ground invasive species control, habitat restoration and dedicated strategic planning at a scale not previously attempted and is supporting a major shift in the way Parks Victoria design, deliver, and monitor conservation outcomes at the Prom.

## Native animals

Long-term programs to manage the impact of overabundant kangaroo and koala populations continued in several parks. Excessive numbers threaten habitats and can result in animal welfare issues. The programs are underpinned by established species management plans developed with the support of key stakeholders.

The Victorian Government released the new *Victorian Koala Management Strategy* in May 2023, the first major update since the current strategy was released in 2004. Parks Victoria is delivering a two-year investment program to continue population control of koalas in Budj Bim and French Island national parks.

## Total grazing management

Red and western grey kangaroos were subject to population management in Hattah-Kulkyne, Murray-Sunset and Wyperfeld national parks as part of managing total grazing pressure to support restoration of the endangered semi-arid (non-eucalypt) woodland and floodplain woodland habitats. The spring 2022 survey of kangaroos reported the population density to be above the targets that would be expected to protect regenerating woodlands, which prompted a kangaroo culling program in autumn 2023. The total grazing management program also controls rabbit populations, with spotlight counts in autumn 2023 of over 757 kilometres reporting that over 90 per cent of

transects have an average of one or less rabbits per spotlight kilometre. In addition, an aerial operation targeting feral goats further reduced grazing pressure. Ongoing annual vegetation condition assessments inform progress of habitat restoration. A review of the condition assessments is currently investigating how grazer densities (and control) inform condition and management targets.

Reducing kangaroo densities and maintaining rabbit abundance at these low levels in accordance with the Mallee grazing management plan has helped protect revegetation and initiated natural regeneration of understorey and overstorey woodland vegetation communities and an increase in the cover of the juvenile age-class of overstorey species. The actions and results of the previous five-year strategy are currently being evaluated as part of the preparation of a renewed strategy.

## Budj Bim and French Island koala programs

Koala health check and fertility control programs were delivered in autumn 2023 at Budj Bim National Park, and across French Island's national park, roadside reserves and private land. At French Island 292 koalas were captured and health-checked, and of these, 250 eligible females were implanted, and 18 individuals euthanised. At Budj Bim, 232 koalas were observed, and of these 60 females captured and treated with implants. All individuals were released back to point of capture.



Image: Native pine regeneration at Wyperfeld National Park

### **Pink cockatoo: restoring semi-arid woodlands**

Funding was received in 2022–23 from DEECA's Nature Fund for restoration of ecosystem function in semi-arid woodlands and to address the shortage of nest hollows for pink cockatoos and other threatened fauna within Wyperfeld National Park. Works included the creation of approximately 20 nesting cavities in existing trees, reducing hollow competition by culling galahs in June 2023 just prior to nesting time, protecting hollow-bearing trees from fire threats, and supporting the establishment and development of the next generation of nest trees through revegetation and grazer control.

### **Environmental water**

In 2022–23, Parks Victoria continued to work in partnership with catchment management authorities and the Victorian Environmental Water Holder to support the environmental watering program by contributing to the planning and approval of proposed activities in the Barmah, Gunbower, Hattah-Kulkyne, Lower Goulburn and Murray-Sunset national parks. Large scale natural flooding in late 2022 resulted in significant inundation of the Murray River floodplain and its tributaries, filling most of the wetlands in these parks naturally.

### **Barmah National Park**

Environmental water was used between July and August 2022 to divert some water through Barmah Forest, until large scale natural flooding occurred in spring, resulting in 100 per cent of the floodplain becoming inundated.

The ecological outcomes of this flood event were mixed. Flooding initiated colonial waterbird breeding, predominantly of Australian white ibis, straw-necked ibis, royal spoonbills and cormorant species which bred and successfully fledged young. The flooding also extended out to support river red gum and black box growth that cannot be reached with the delivery of environmental water alone. Moira grass also responded well, with new growth and flowering and this was best demonstrated in the enclosure plots where it was protected from grazing pressure. Unfortunately, large scale deaths of native fish and Murray crayfish occurred due to the hypoxic blackwater which also occurred across the forest and in the adjoining Murray River.

### **Gunbower National Park**

Gunbower National Park experienced inundation from June 2022 to January 2023 with some wetlands retaining water beyond this time. From June 2022 environmental water was delivered, dispersing water through flood runners and wetlands and up onto the floodplain. However, by August 2022 the Murray River rose, and the environmental water delivery was superseded by the natural flooding which took over through to December 2022.

Tree health increased considerably, with canopies significantly greener and denser. The largest amount of viable wetland and fringing floodplain habitat for waterbird breeding and feeding was available since 1993–94. Victorian listed threatened species including the Australasian shoveler, eastern great egret, hardhead, magpie geese, musk duck and white-bellied sea-eagle were observed.

### **Hattah-Kulkyne National Park**

During winter and spring 2022, environmental water was delivered to all 18 lakes of the Hattah Lakes system, except Lake Kramen which had a planned drying phase. Top-up of these wetlands, following on from the 2021–22 water delivery, was conducted to re-establish connection between all lakes to stimulate productivity and reproductive cues for water dependent fauna. A planned drawdown following this inundation was superseded by the natural large-scale flood event in the Murray River. All regulators were opened across the forest allowing free flow of floodwaters. By November 2022 water flowed into Lake Kramen and passed further through to northern Hattah.

This flood event was the largest since 1956 and is estimated to have inundated 16,842 hectares, compared to the 6,000 hectares that can be inundated with environmental water alone. This is of great significance, as floodplain vegetation which cannot be actively managed received a much-needed flooding event. Larger and long-lived vegetation (i.e. black box and river red gum) is starting to show positive responses, through an increase in canopy condition by way of new growth. Also evident is an increasing prevalence of flowering/bud development. The Hattah Lakes also maintained areas of high water quality, providing refuge for aquatic fauna during the flood period.

## Lower Goulburn National Park

Reedy Swamp filled naturally in April to May 2020 and though it has had periods of water recession since this time, it has not completely dried out. Accordingly, a drying cycle was planned for 2022–23 and no environmental water was allocated. However, in October 2022, a large flood event naturally re-filled the wetland.

## Murray-Sunset National Park

In the Murray-Sunset National Park no environmental water was delivered; however, all creek lines and wetlands (billabongs) were inundated through the natural large-scale flood event in the Murray River commencing in late November 2022 and continuing through to February 2023.

The natural flooding has created important ecological connections between wetlands and the channel allowing exchange of aquatic fauna, propagules, carbon and nutrients. The flood extent was far greater than can be achieved through pumped delivery of environmental water, inundating floodplain trees (i.e. black box and river red gum) that otherwise cannot be reached.

## Marine values

Victoria's system of marine national parks and marine sanctuaries protect unique and diverse marine values. Management of these values involves Parks Victoria led programs and effective partnerships with other government agencies and the community to address threats that emanate from both inside and outside park boundaries, including marine invasive plants and animals, illegal fishing, poor water quality, visitor pressures, and climate change.

Key management focuses and outcomes for 2022–23 included:

### Addressing climate change challenges on Victoria's coast

Parks Victoria is developing a coastal and marine hazards project for Wilsons Promontory which encompasses Wilsons Promontory National Park, Wilsons Promontory Marine National Park, Wilson Promontory Marine Park and the southern section of Corner Inlet Marine National Park. This project is using the Victoria's Resilient Coast guidelines approach to

identify risks to the natural and cultural values of the coastal and marine environment of Wilsons Promontory and will provide management direction for coastal and marine impacts as a result of climate change.

### Overabundant native species and kelp restoration

In 2022–23, actions to reduce the numbers of overabundant native urchins and promote the restoration and recovery of native kelp forests have been a major focus in Beware Reef, Jawbone and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries. Targeted urchin numbers were reduced to two urchins per square metre, which is a target density known to promote the recovery of kelp forest, using targeted methods across a 1.5 hectare area in Jawbone Marine Sanctuary, 1 hectare in each of Beware Reef and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries. To date approximately 100,000 long spined urchin have been removed from Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary, which has seen rapid recovery of kelp forest.

In partnership with the University of Melbourne, Deakin University and The Nature Conservancy, Parks Victoria commenced the Golden Kelp Restoration Project. This project aims to restore an additional four hectares of critical macroalgal (seaweed, kelp) habitat in Jawbone and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries that have been lost to overgrazing by the native purple urchin. Project activities included:

- comprehensive surveys using remotely operated vehicles (ROV) to identify priority restoration sites
- monitoring of marine flora and fauna in restoration project sites to begin measurement of the effectiveness of restoration efforts
- the reduction of urchin densities through targeted culling to support recovery of macroalgal habitat
- the cultivation and out planting of juvenile golden kelp to actively enhance restoration efforts.

In 2022–23 the Golden Kelp Restoration Project has completed comprehensive surveys of Jawbone and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries using ROV and underwater visual surveys to map reef areas and identify sites for restoration. Activities to reduce urchin numbers and outplant juvenile golden kelp commenced in late June 2022–23.

## Marine pests

Management and monitoring of marine pests has been a major focus of Parks Victoria programs in 2022–23. Monitoring and weeding of the invasive Japanese kelp (*undaria pinnatifida*) continued to be a key focus in the Port Phillip Head Marine National Park. Five management events involving a total of thirteen dives were undertaken to weed and monitor *undaria*. Monitoring indicates very low numbers inside the park. Monitoring for the early detection of marine pests through the Marine Rapid Health Assessment (RHA) program was a major focus in Port Phillip Heads and Wilsons Promontory marine national parks. Twenty RHA dives were completed across these parks and did not detect significant increases in established pest species and no new pest species.

## Monitoring natural values

Monitoring is vital for understanding the status of natural values and threats, and how these change over time. Monitoring by Parks Victoria, contractors, researchers, students, community groups and volunteers is important for understanding the effectiveness of park management and helps inform decisions about how to better manage threats and protect biodiversity in the future.

## Terrestrial environments

Monitoring natural values in terrestrial environments during 2022–23 included:

- ongoing support for the Australian National University's long-term monitoring of forest structure and fauna communities in the tall forests of the Yarra Ranges National Park. This collaborative monitoring project is approaching 20 years in duration
- ongoing monitoring of ground dwelling mammals and introduced predators as part of the Ark predator control programs Coopracambra, Croajingolong and Snowy River national parks (Southern Ark), Cobboboonee and Lower Glenelg national parks (Glenelg Ark), Grampians National Park (Grampians Ark) and Great Otway National Park (Otway Ark)
- measurement of avian fauna, floristics and ground habitat characteristics in long-term monitoring plots for the Box-Ironbark Ecological Thinning Trial including Paddys Ranges State Park

- citizen science monitoring of grassland fauna and habitat structure in Terrick Terrick National Park
- the continuation of one of Australia's longest-running citizen scientist-led programs to monitor malleefowl breeding activity in areas including Hattah-Kulkyne, Little Desert, Murray-Sunset and Wyperfeld national parks and Mount Arapiles-Toosan State Park
- developing application of helicopter-mounted thermal and visual band imaging systems used for aerial intelligence gathering in emergency management systemically monitor a variety of vertebrate animals (including feral species), with the ability to survey large areas efficiently in the Alpine, Barmah and Great Otway national parks
- culmination of five years of introduced predator and herbivore prey monitoring for the Protecting Our Malleefowl project in the Wimmera Region, including Little Desert National Park
- establishment of a five year post-fire fauna monitoring program in Holey Plains State Park focusing on threatened amphibians and small mammals. This project is supported by partners at Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation, Deakin University work placement students and community volunteers
- development of monitoring and ground-truthing methods using remote imaging model for phytophthora and dieback extent assessment in Warby-Ovens National Park.

## Marine environments

The monitoring of marine natural values in 2022–23 included the completion and establishment of several key monitoring projects for Parks Victoria's Signs of Healthy Parks marine monitoring program. This included the publication of a Parks Victoria Technical Report detailing long term monitoring at [Cape Howe Marine National Park](#) and [Wilson's Promontory Marine National Park](#). Long-term monitoring of Discovery Bay Marine National Park was completed in the summer of 2022–23 with evaluation and reporting currently underway for completion later this calendar year.

These projects have been run in partnership with Deakin University and the integrated marine observing system and have used a combination of diver surveys, baited remote under water video, habitat mapping and surveys of southern rock lobster populations to understand the long-term trends in the ecological health of these key marine national parks.

Long-term monitoring of Cape Howe and Wilsons Promontory marine national parks has been finding that fish populations and most large mobile macro-invertebrates are in good condition and tend to have higher richness inside the marine national parks, indicative of the benefits of the 'no-take' protection provided by these parks. Signs of long-term decline were detected in some key species, particularly large macroalgae (kelps and red algae) and some macroinvertebrates. Preliminary results from Discovery Bay Marine National Park are showing significantly more and larger southern rock lobster inside the park than outside, indicating positive benefits of the no-take protection the park provides and consistent with a general pattern that has been found for several other major parks that have been the focus of long-term monitoring (e.g., Cape Howe, Point Addis and Port Phillip Heads marine national parks and Merri Marine Sanctuary).

Parks Victoria's long term monitoring data was used extensively in a research paper published in November 2022 called *Mapping the impacts of multiple stressors on the decline in kelps along the coast of Victoria, Australia*. This paper identified significant current declines in two species of major canopy forming macroalgae, namely golden kelp (*ecklonia radiata*) and crayweed (*phyllospora comosa*) across Victoria and within Victoria's marine national parks and predicted declines in these species across 62 to 94 per cent under future climate scenarios.

Parks Victoria completed 14 reef life survey activities (training and assessments) involving 64 scuba dives to monitor the abundance and condition of fishes, macroinvertebrates and macroalgae in Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park. This monitoring data contributes to both Parks Victoria's long-term monitoring as well as the national and international

Reef Life Survey program co-ordinated through the University of Tasmania.

A total of 16 assessments involving 20 dives were undertaken to monitor the abundance of urchin species and recovery of macroalgae to support urchin management and kelp restoration projects in Jawbone and Ricketts Point marine sanctuaries.

The marine Rapid Health Assessment program has also continued to deliver significant and more widespread monitoring of environmental condition across Victoria's marine protected areas. A total of 18 assessments involving 30 scuba dives were completed in South Gippsland and South Port Phillip. Overall, the assessments have been finding that marine protected areas are generally in good condition.

Parks Victoria has led and partnered on citizen science monitoring days for the Victorian National Parks Association Great Victorian Fish Count.

## Researching natural values

### Research activity access agreements

Parks Victoria provides access agreements for research activities to be undertaken on public land, including parks and areas under the Act.

In 2022–23, there were 269 research activity access agreements issued, with a total of 569 active access agreements in place.

A wide range of research was facilitated and undertaken in areas managed under the Act. Parks Victoria continued to support collaborative research on a broad range of issues with a variety of new projects commencing through the year, including the following

- fire intensity impact on flora species recruitment and diversity in the Great Otway and Wilsons Promontory national parks
- drone technology for native wildlife population assessment (kangaroo) in Hattah- Kulkynne and Murray Sunset national parks.

## Research programs

With a commitment to evidence-based management, scientific research continues to be a critical part of Parks Victoria's conservation program. Imperfect knowledge is one of the big challenges in conservation, but research helps bridge the knowledge gap, make better decisions, and improve park management.

The backbone of Parks Victoria's research program is the successful and long-running Research Partners Panel. Built on a culture of collaboration, the Research Partners Panel continues to strengthen relationships between Parks Victoria and the research community. During 2022–23 over 20 new projects were established under this program to address a diversity of topics in marine and terrestrial parks and reserves across Victoria. These include assessment of ecosystem condition, fire ecology, species biology and ecology, understanding ecosystem dynamics, function and processes, environmental restoration, habitat management, novel techniques for species conservation, species responses and adaptation to changing environments and application of technology to environmental management. On top of this, a range of projects that commenced in previous years continued to help improve understanding and inform management decisions. New projects included:

- population genetics and regenerative strategies of a threatened endemic alpine ford shining snow-daisy in the Alpine National Park
- investigating the effect of habitat and shrub removal on the distribution of the threatened endemic snow-patch daisy shining cudweed, in the Alpine National Park
- an investigation of the seed ecology of the nationally significant environmental weed, cape broom, in the Alpine National Park.
- researching peatland ecosystem function, condition and carbon sequestration in the Alpine National Park
- understanding snow gum (*eucalyptus pauciflora*) dieback for effective and integrated management in the Alpine National Park

- investigating if the use of artificial shelters can improve survival and recolonisation of reptiles after prescribed burns in the Little Desert National Park
- impacts of fire regimes and coast tea-tree on siliceous sand heathlands in the Wilsons Promontory National Park
- exploration of the contribution of fungus-feeding mammals to ecosystem function in the Wilsons Promontory National Park
- investigation of broad-toothed rat population genetics in areas including the Alpine and Baw Baw national parks
- a new collaboration with Deakin University was established to investigate the use of more efficient image tagging programs and methods to analyse images from remote cameras in Victorian national parks
- developing remote sensing techniques to better predict coastal erosion and coastal cliff collapse
- assessing the environmental drivers of urchin-kelp dynamics in Port Phillip Bay
- understanding changes to the defensive chemistry of seaweeds in response to climate change
- understanding little penguin responses to environmental change in Port Phillip Bay
- exploring ecologically engineered mangroves as a nature based coastal defence
- identifying climate refugia and understanding future risk from climate change for canopy forming kelp species inside Victoria's marine protected areas.

As well as the research undertaken by Parks Victoria, a large body of research is undertaken independently in Victoria's parks and reserves by the research community every year. This includes the work of universities and other research institutions, naturalists, citizen scientists and other government and non-government organisations. This research is facilitated through research activity access agreements issued by Parks Victoria (see page 13) and makes an important contribution to increasing scientific knowledge and understanding.



# CULTURAL VALUES

## Aboriginal cultural heritage

Victoria's national and other parks can be seen as cultural landscapes, revealing the connections between individual cultural places and natural values. Biodiversity values and ecological systems are intrinsically linked with the cultural practices of Traditional Owners and their continuing connections with their ancestors, reaching back countless generations.

## Rock art

In partnership with Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLCAC), Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC), Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC), and the Nulungu Research Institute from the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA), Parks Victoria supported the convening of the second national Indigenous rock art conference in March 2023.

The event – *The Gariwerd Rock Art Management Forum*, was held in the Grampians National Park, known to the Traditional Owners as Gariwerd, on the lands of the Djab Wurrung, Jadawadjali (Wotjobaluk Nations) and Gunditjmara peoples. More than 150 Indigenous rangers and Elders from across Australia came together to share knowledge, experiences and challenges while discussing opportunities focused on caring for rock art and cultural heritage places.

The five day event discussed key themes such as:

- conservation and management of rock art
- Indigenous ownership of conservation and management programs
- cultural mapping, traditional knowledge and intangible heritage
- public use of cultural places
- world heritage and the promotion of cultural tourism
- strategies for sustainability, research partnerships and protocols.

Other key initiatives linked to the implementation of Parks Victoria's Rock Art Action Plan this year included working with the DJAARA ranger team to undertake values assessments at 16 potential rock art places across their traditional landscape and preparing for restoration works at a significant rock art shelter in the Grampians (Gariwerd) park landscape.

## Ancestral remains

*Ponnun Pulgi – Healing Country Together* is a collaboration between Parks Victoria, First People of the Millewa-Mallee Aboriginal Corporation and People and Parks Foundation to protect the ancient and fragile cultural landscapes of north-west Victoria. The majority of works have been undertaken in the Murray Sunset National Park.

Flood events this year inundated some of the project areas and restricted access to many of the dune systems. As flood waters have receded however, it is evident that the rehabilitation works have remained largely intact. This has increased confidence in the innovative methodologies being applied, which includes the creation of sand bridges to re-cover exposed burial sites and the use of jute matting, logs, revegetation and fencing to protect sites.

Key outcomes of the 2022–23 statewide program include:

- completion of the first dune protection works on Lindsay Island, where 20,000 tonnes of sand has been moved back on site
- completion of stage 2 works at deflated dune, where a similar volume of sand has been returned to the site
- collaboration with Traditional Owners on the emergency response to the Murray River floods, including the re-discovery of four sites
- collaboration with Traditional Owners in Wilsons Promontory National Park with the re-discovery of two sites that were exposed by the flooding of Darby River.

## Non-Aboriginal historic heritage

In 2022–23 the management of non-Aboriginal historic heritage in parks included:

- commencement (planning and scoping) for major conservation repairs to sites funded under the under the Heritage Icons initiative, including Wilsons Promontory light station, as well as Point Nepean fortifications
- continued detailed scoping and tenders for works as part of a \$3 million conservation project to repair the external fabric of the Mount Buffalo Chalet façade (funded by the Australian Government)
- implementation of interpretation and signage in the Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park (funded by the Australian Government)
- heritage assessments for major projects including the Alpine and Wilsons Promontory national parks.



Image: Wilsons Promontory light station, Wilsons Promontory National Park

# FIRE AND OTHER EMERGENCIES

## Bushfires

The 2022–23 fire season was the third successive year under La Niña conditions where above average rain and below average temperatures resulted in benign conditions compared to previous bushfire seasons.

The number of bushfires attended in areas under the Act was 182, and the area of land under the Act burnt by bushfires was 595 hectares. There were 17 fires started by lightning that burnt an area of 346 hectares.

Although reduced in number and impact the year saw a continued trend in the number of fires resulting from visitors leaving their campsites without extinguishing a campfire effectively (132) which burnt an area of 5.3 hectares. Throughout the year public information campaigns focused on campfire safety and how to correctly extinguish a campfire.

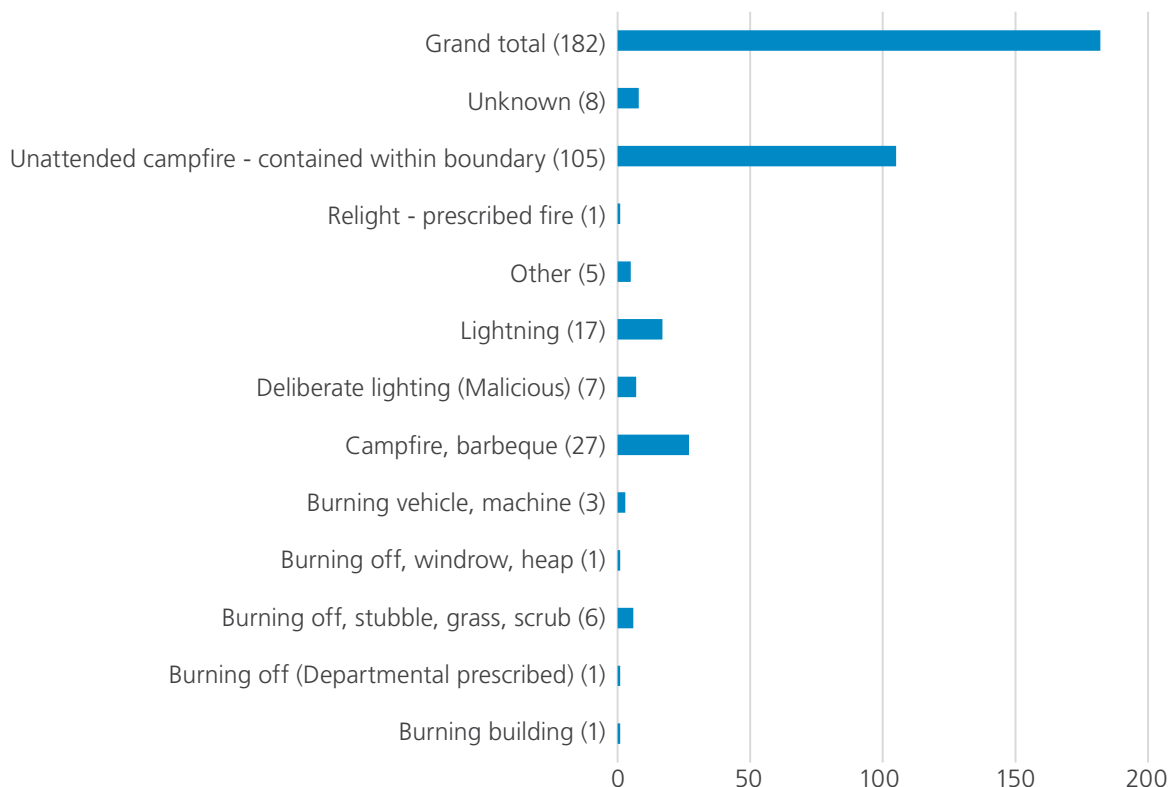
## Storms and floods

In October 2022, persistent low-pressure systems associated with an abnormally intense La Niña cycle led to Victoria recording its wettest October in recent memory. Heavy rainfall in the period 13 – 14 October 2022 resulted in flash flooding and consequential riverine flooding. This resulted in rainfall totals of 50 – 200 millimetres across half of the state and major flooding, predominantly in the central and north central regions, with minor flooding elsewhere in Victoria.

By the end of 2022, Parks Victoria had more than 80 partial and full park closures state-wide primarily as a result of the October 2022 floods, as well as other recent natural disaster events including:

- the Black Summer bushfires in eastern Victoria in 2019–20
- storm and flood events across Victoria during June and October 2021
- storm and flood events in East Gippsland in April 2022
- a state-wide flood event in October 2022.

## Number of fires in areas under the Act by cause



Parks impacted by the October 2022 flood event include: Alpine, Barmah, Dandenong Ranges, Grampians, Great Otway, Gunbower, Hattah-Kulkyne, Kinglake and Murray-Sunset national parks, Arthurs Seat, Kooyoora, Langi Ghiran, Mount Buangor, Warrandyte, and Werribee Gorge state parks, Beechworth Historic Park, Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park, Woodlands Historic Park (including adjacent Commonwealth land), Gadsen Bend, Murray-Kulkyne, and Nyah-Vinifera parks, and Yellingbo Landscape Conservation Area.

### Planned burning

In 2022–23, the La Niña weather pattern led to extensive increases to rainfalls across Victoria and generally cooler than average daily maximum temperatures transitioning to drier conditions by late autumn. Planned burning site preparation, and burn opportunities were limited by significant flooding and the persistence of wet conditions throughout spring and summer. Autumn weather was characterised by dynamic and difficult to forecast weather systems, with 7-day forecasts often changing, which made planning and scheduling burns more difficult than usual for this time of year.

Autumn planned burning activity was marked by four distinct ‘windows’ that saw peaks in burn activity across Victoria. Outside these windows, activity was

mainly opportunistic, delivering small burns that could be quickly secured. Wet conditions associated with three years of La Niña and dynamic weather systems in autumn influenced delivery of the overall fuel management program. Efforts continued to use all available opportunities to reduce bushfire risk through to the end of June, including delivery of burns for other objectives such as ecological burns and supporting Traditional Owner led cultural burns.

The residual risk metric measures the risk to life and property that remains after the effects of planned burning and bushfire have been incorporated. The statewide fuel management target is to keep the residual risk metric at or below 70 per cent of Victoria’s potential maximum bushfire risk by prioritising areas where life and property could be best protected, rather than measuring success by the number of hectares treated.

Over the past year the treatment of 92,630 hectares of fuels on public land (including areas under the Act), comprising 75,868 hectares of planned burns, 16,762 hectares of mechanical treatments (including 631 hectares of storm debris works on public land), helped to keep residual risk to an expected outcome of below the Victorian target. The official end of financial year residual risk figures and areas treated will be published in Victoria’s Bushfire Risk Management Report which is expected to be released later in 2023.



### Ecological burning in heathland, Great Otway National Park

The Great Otway Conservation Action Plan includes a strategy to improve floristic and growth stage diversity in the Carlisle Heath by using ecological burning. The objective is to maintain floristic diversity and provide a range of habitat growth stages contributing to healthy ecosystems and fauna habitat requirements.

Gellibrand - Boggy Creek Track is a multiyear heathland ecological burn within the Great Otway National Park that supports the delivery of this strategy. Burning in cooler months allows application of low severity fire and creates a patchwork mosaic of burnt areas, allowing fire to self-extinguish in wetter, or less flammable vegetation. Planned burning has been applied each winter for the past three years, with approximately 104 hectares burnt in 2022–23. Parks Victoria is working with research partners to study the effectiveness of the heathland ecological fire regime.

There were 75 burns completed in areas under the Act, treating a total area of 49,952 hectares. These included burns in the Alpine (19,711 hectares), Grampians (19,017 hectares), Lake Eildon (2,355 hectares), Great Otway (2,009 hectares), Wyperfeld (1,574 hectares), Yarra Ranges (1,145 hectares) and Wilsons Promontory (1,071 hectares) national parks.

### Melbourne fire and emergency program

The Melbourne Fire and Emergency Program aims to improve bushfire preparedness in Melbourne's urban areas.

In 2022–23, major burn preparation works were undertaken in Dandenong Ranges National Park. Fuel breaks improvements were made in Kinglake National Park and Bunyip State Park, as well as strategic access road improvements in Lysterfield Park.

Activities completed in areas under the Act included the slashing and maintenance of fuel breaks, significant road upgrades to improve access for fire vehicles, preparation of planned burn edges, mechanical modification of bushfire fuel, pest plant control works post-burn, and mechanical works as part of an ongoing program to improve vegetation condition to offset native vegetation losses from previous fuel break works.

In addition to bushfire preparedness programs the Melbourne Fire and Emergency team completed cultural and biodiversity values assessments, conducted face to face programs during community events and contributed to monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of planned burning on flora and fauna species.

## Planning, monitoring and research

### Planning

There continued to be considerable input from Parks Victoria regional fire ecology planners into DEECA-led strategic and operational bushfire management planning, which covers parks under the Act across Victoria.

Fire ecology strategies developed by Parks Victoria's regional fire ecology team informed the planning and implementation of numerous ecological burns, including Wilsons Promontory National Park.

Funding through the Wilsons Prom Sanctuary and Safer Together programs enabled completion of the vegetation condition assessment and fire regime modelling at Wilsons Promontory National Park and a draft Fire Management Strategy has been delivered. The strategy will guide operational delivery on the use of fire in key vegetation types for ecological objectives over the next five years, with a view to achieving a 20-year vision. It will also link actions to the objectives of the Wilsons Promontory Conservation Action Plan.

The remaining Safer Together funds for the Wilsons Promontory fire ecology project have been utilised on specialist Geographic Information System (GIS) work and a literature review.

### Monitoring

Flora surveys were undertaken in Dandenong Ranges National Park and Bunyip State Park comparing flora composition and abundance responses to different fire regimes in grassy dry, lowland forest and shrubby foothill forest ecological vegetation classes. Pre and post-burn monitoring of large arboreal mammals was undertaken within Yarra Ranges National Park. Both of these projects were part of the former DELWP Port Phillip Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting program.

In Wilsons Promontory National Park monitoring has continued in partnership with Latrobe University, on the effectiveness of using different ecological fire treatments in limiting the invasion of coastal tea tree into heathlands. Monitoring of pookila (new holland mouse) response to different fire regimes was also undertaken at Wilsons Promontory National Park in collaboration with DEECA and Zoos Victoria.

### Research

In the Wilsons Promontory National Park research has continued to focus on comparing flammability and provision of selected ecosystem services of forests in different post-fire regeneration states. This research is being undertaken in conjunction with the University of Melbourne.

Fire ecology research is continuing in the Budj Bim, Grampians and Great Otway national parks, including Deakin University's research on refuges for small mammals in the Grampians National Park.

## Recovery programs

### Storm and flood recovery

During the last three years numerous natural disasters have impacted parks under the Act.

Severe weather events in 2021–22 affected a number of areas under the Act. Recovery works continued in 2022–23 in the following parks: Alpine, Burrowa - Pine Mountain, Croajingolong, Errinundra, Mitchell River and Snowy River national parks, Lake Tyers State Park and Cape Conran Coastal Park.

Since October 2022, flood recovery works have enabled the full reopening of 24 parks and reserves under the Act that were impacted by the recent natural disasters. As of June 2023 a total of 30 partial park closures remain in place.

The scale of the impacts to parks under the Act, especially in the north of Victoria, is immense. To date, more than 9,000 assessments have been made and logged for the October 2022 flood event covering damages mainly relating to: potholing and scouring, landslips, erosion, tree fall and root-ball holes, culvert and track damage, management of debris and silt and impacts on assets such as fencing, bollards, picnic tables, BBQs and rotundas. This reflects the vast volume of work that has been undertaken over the past nine months, with work ongoing especially in northern Victoria.

### Bushfire recovery

The recovery works program of \$11.67 million funded in the 2021–22 Victorian state budget continued to be delivered in 2022–23. This included hazardous tree management, roadside vegetation management, road repairs, visitor site repairs and track and trail reopening. A challenge of this program has been that many visitor sites in East Gippsland that were reopened as a result of bushfire recovery projects were impacted by subsequent flood or storm events requiring further recovery works.

The 2019–20 Black Summer Bushfires impacted approximately 120 parks and reserves in East Gippsland and the north-east. Close to half a million hectares of park area burnt including areas within Alfred, Alpine, Burrowa-Pine Mountain, Coopracambra, Croajingolong, Lind Mitchell River, Mount Buffalo and Snowy River national parks.

A hazardous tree management program was delivered during 2022–23 across 49 locations including 15 campgrounds, 18 day visitor sites, 13 walking tracks and along Point Hicks Road within the Croajingolong National Park. Removal of hazardous trees has allowed safer egress and access for visitors and contractors accessing work sites across the estate.

Fire regrowth has been vigorous given the increased rainfall across the fire impacted area. Over 300 kilometres of tracks and trails have been treated for vegetation management and mulching.

Fire impacted campgrounds and visitor sites within Croajingolong National Park were impacted by the April 2022 flood event. Recovery teams supported the repair works at Mueller Inlet and Shipwreck Creek campgrounds which have subsequently been reopened.

Operational recovery teams have facilitated the upgrade of 29 visitor sites across the fire impacted area. This included upgrades to walking tracks and day visitor facilities within fire affected parks. The popular Wingan Inlet campground within Croajingolong National Park has had fencing replaced, and bollards and new BBQs installed.

# VISITORS, TOURISM AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

## Enhancing visitor enjoyment and tourism

Parks Victoria continued to be a lead driver of visitor and tourist access into and enjoyment of regional areas while maintaining park values and reducing risks. Works to enhance visitor enjoyment and increase nature-based tourism opportunities included the following:

### Grampians National Park

Design and approvals continued in the Grampians National Park to progress the Grampians Peaks Trail (GPT) trail heads project with the tender to be released in late 2023. The trail heads will be critical in managing the visitor experiences of hikers, walkers and campers.

Design and approvals for the MacKenzie Falls precinct upgrade project continued to progress. The project will provide quality open spaces for visitors to enjoy, recreate and connect with Country, showcasing the outstanding natural and cultural values of the Greater Gariwerd Landscape.

### Port Campbell National Park

Works continued on the construction of the Saddle Lookout at the Twelve Apostles within the Port Campbell National Park. These works are planned for completion in late 2023.

### Mount Buffalo National Park

Site investigations and designs for the \$3 million upgrade of the Mount Buffalo Chalet façade were completed and works are planned to commence in early 2024 following all required approvals.

Access and facilities at visitor sites are being upgraded. The project for two roofed accommodation units is currently on hold pending approvals before works can commence.

### Wilson's Promontory National Park

Designs and approvals for the \$23 million Wilson's Promontory Revitalisation project continued across the multiple sub projects within Wilson's Promontory National Park. The project will invest in the park to create an internationally significant biodiversity sanctuary, build a new visitor centre and expand the accommodation offering within the park and on adjacent freehold land. Design teams are progressing well, with the contract for roofed accommodation contract being awarded.

### Alpine National Park

Design progressed on the Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing project allowing assessment of the required approval pathways. The project will expand and develop the existing 37 kilometre trail and connect the 57 kilometre crossing to some of Victoria's most outstanding landscapes.

The Falls to Hotham Alpine Crossing will be a mid-distance hiking experience through the unique and captivating alpine environment, from Falls Creek to Mount Hotham. Falls to Hotham will create Australia's pre-eminent year-round alpine crossing.

### Victoria's Great Outdoors

In early 2020, the Victorian Government announced the Victoria's Great Outdoors program, investing \$105.6 million to deliver better visitor experiences in parks and state forests through new or improved campgrounds, tracks and outdoor facilities across Victoria. Designs and approvals progressed on all sites in the program with on ground works commencing in late 2023.

### East Gippsland campgrounds

To support projects and jobs across Victoria as part of the Victorian Government COVID-19 economic recovery included the East Gippsland campgrounds. In 2022–23, designs and approvals for improvements to camping opportunities continued to progress for the Alpine, Croajingolong, Mitchell River and Snowy River national parks with works to commence throughout 2023–24.

### Cape Conran Coastal Park

Cultural heritage assessments required to recommence works are in progress for the provision of upgraded accommodation in Cape Conran Coastal Park to complement the rebuilding of the campground after the 2020 bushfires devastated the site.

Potable water and reticulated sewerage connections between Cape Conran and Marlo continued to progress with the East Gippsland Water Authority. This critical upgrade will allow the site to grow into the future and comply with the *Environment Protection Act 2017*.

The delivery of a shared path between Cape Conran, Marlo and Orbost, which will be a valuable addition to the already existing trail network across Victoria, is continuing with design and approvals.

## Croajingolong National Park

Designs for the Thurra River Bridge, destroyed during the Black Summer fires were completed and progressed to tender with construction to commence in 2024. This will enable access to the Thurra River campground in Croajingolong National Park to be restored.

Works in the park also include replacing up to six jetties to contemporary standards and upgrading day visitor facilities around Mallacoota Inlet.

## Licensed tour operators

Tour operators are licensed to run organised tours and recreational activities for profit on Victorian public land managed by Parks Victoria and DEECA.

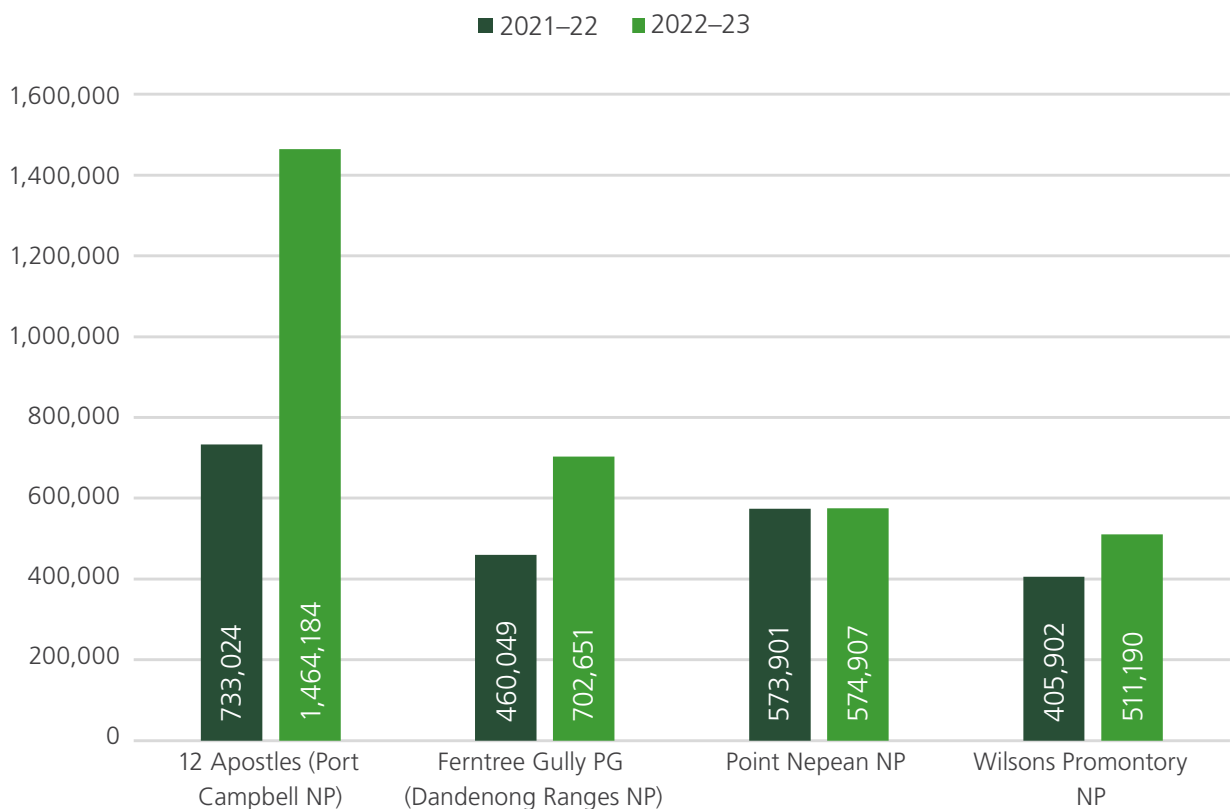
The tourism industry’s recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic was a challenge in 2022–23. Parks Victoria focused on greater engagement with licensed tour operators to assist with addressing the key pain points.

## Visits to parks

The Visitor Number Monitor (VNM) was conducted in 2022–23. The VNM is a broad-based survey that aims to estimate annual visitation to Victorian national and state parks, Melbourne metropolitan parks, and bays, piers and jetties. Visitation to Victorian national and state parks increased in 2022–23, to 54,700,000 visits compared to 49,980,000 in 2020–21. This increase was due to an increase in both Victorian and interstate visitors.

Park based visitor monitoring was conducted in a number of Victorian national parks with an increase in visitor numbers in 2022–23. The Twelve Apostles (Port Campbell National Park) returned to being one of the busiest sites in Victoria, with an estimated 1,464,184 visits, up 100 per cent compared to 2021–22 (733,024 visits). Ferntree Gully Picnic Ground (Dandenong Ranges National Park) saw a similar trend, with an increase of 53 per cent in visits to the site in 2022–23 (702,651 visits).

## Estimated annual visits





## Supporting visitors with disabilities

In 2022–23, Parks Victoria continued to improve accessibility and inclusion for people with a disability in areas under the Act, through:

- releasing a new *Disability Action Plan 2022–2026* with key actions that include embedding universal design principles into park planning and infrastructure upgrades, providing more accessible park information and communication, growing inclusive nature-based health programs and creating pathways for employment and volunteering
- implementing universal design principles for new visitor infrastructure such as the accessible discovery tents at Point Nepean National Park and designs for the future Changing Places facility at Wilsons Promontory National Park
- completing accessibility audits at parks including Wilsons Promontory (Tidal River campground) and Point Nepean national parks that will be used to update park visitor information for the community and inform future infrastructure improvements
- the volunteer guided Park Walks program continued with 78 events delivered at Churchill, Dandenong Ranges and Kinglake national parks as well as Lysterfield Park. Volunteers contributed 226 hours to the program at these locations.

## Learning for nature

Interpretation and education services relating to areas under the Act were provided to encourage learning in, about and for nature, by increasing knowledge and understanding of parks and biodiversity, developing a stronger connection with nature and fostering pro-conservation behaviours.

There were 545 ranger-facilitated sessions delivered to 14,298 adults and children at 89 areas under the Act and 58,251 teachers and students undertook self-guided excursions and fieldtrips in 60 areas under the Act. This represents a significant increase in participation from previous years when in-person education and interpretation activities were impacted by COVIDSafe Settings and remote learning.

## Education programs

Engagement with the education community resumed in 2022–23, although not quite to pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels. Despite teacher hesitation in organising excursions, 187 ranger-led education sessions were delivered to 7,328 teachers and students across 13 parks under the Act, the main delivery locations include:

- Barmah National Park
- Brisbane Ranges National Park
- Dandenong Ranges National Park
- Grampians National Park
- Wilsons Promontory National Park.

### Junior Ranger program

Engagement with Victorian families during school holiday periods included the delivery of 310 face-to-face activities to 5,094 participants (children and adults) at 37 areas under the Act, the main delivery locations including:

- Dandenong Ranges National Park
- Grampians National Park
- Kinglake National Park
- Mornington Peninsula National Park
- Mount Buffalo National Park
- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- Yarra Ranges National Park.

### Tertiary professional placement program

In 2022–23, the Tertiary Work Placement program provided ranger-supervised conservation projects in four parks under the Act. There were 22 undergraduate students who participated in project-based learning experiences and skill development in conservation and land management and provided 1,760 volunteer hours, including:

- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- Holey Plains State Park
- Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Lysterfield Park.

## Volunteering in parks

Parks Victoria engaged with 103 volunteer groups across a wide range of activities, with volunteers contributing to 43,701 volunteer hours across 71 areas under the Act. This contribution is valued at \$2 million in-kind support. Consistent with the whole volunteering sector, volunteering in parks was again affected significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic and natural disasters, including storms and floods and has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels.

A variety of activities were undertaken across parks under the Act, with habitat restoration and track maintenance the most common.

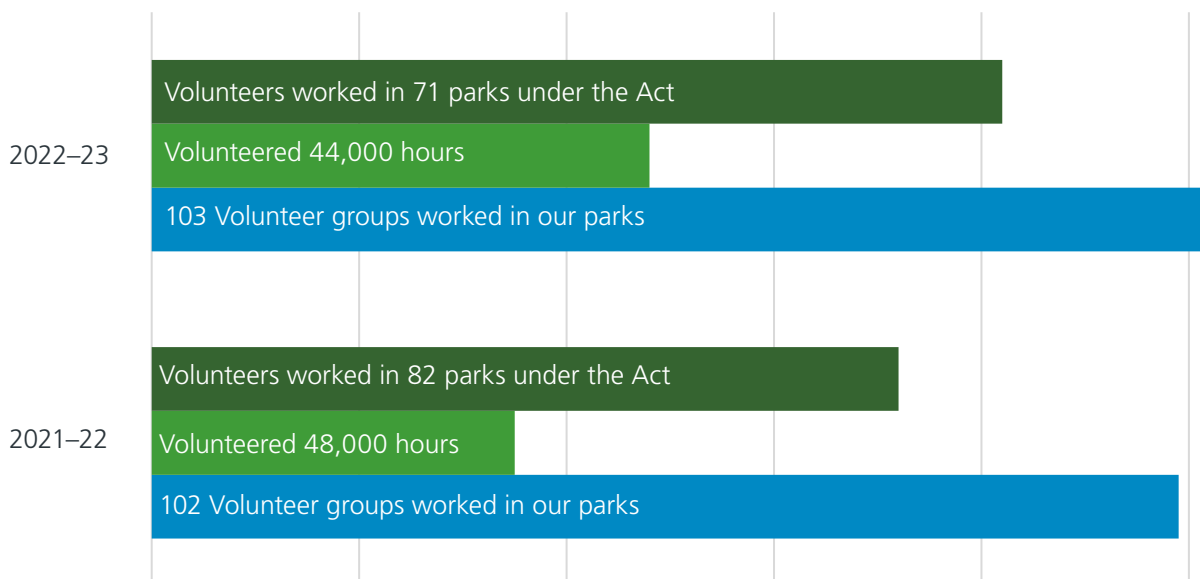
Under the Victorian Government’s Victoria’s Great Outdoors initiative, funding was provided to volunteer groups through the Volunteering Innovation Fund to adopt innovative solutions to grow and diversify volunteering whilst undertaking conservation, health and park improvement. Parks that benefitted from

these projects included Dandenong Ranges, French Island, Grampians, Great Otway, Hattah Kulkyne, Kara Kara, Kinglake and Mornington Peninsula national parks, Port Philip Heads Marine National Park and Bunyip, Kooyoora, Mount Worth and Warrandyte state parks.

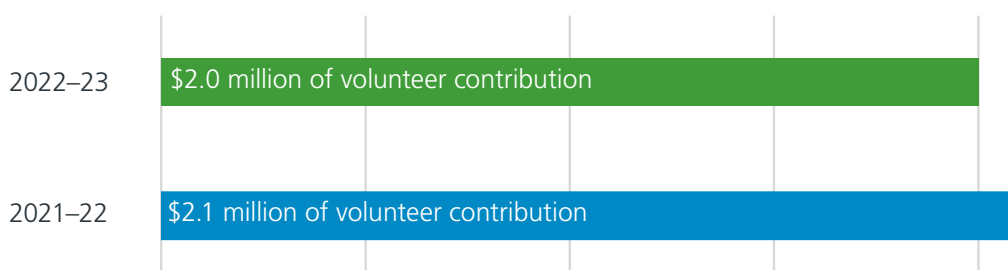
The Great Gariwerd Bird Survey, the Grampians National Park’s largest Citizen Science led program, continued supporting the data collection of native fauna within 36 remote sites across the landscape. The program undertook successful spring and autumn surveys with 36 citizen scientists, collecting invaluable data and contributing 499 volunteer hours.

Campground Host and Volunteer Track Rangers continue to be popular programs, with volunteers contributing 5,335 and 2,326 hours respectively to assist with visitor information, general park management and track maintenance over the holiday periods.

## Volunteers



## \$million in in-kind support



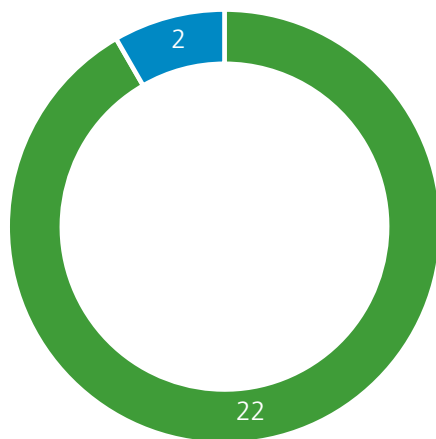
# PARTNERING WITH TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Government reform processes are increasingly placing Traditional Owners at the centre of public land management. Traditional Owner ambitions and objectives have evolved significantly in recent years alongside the Victorian Government’s commitment to Treaty and the action included in the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework to support Traditional Owner-led management and control of land, water and other resources. Parks Victoria has continued to work on strengthening relationships with Traditional Owners in alignment with this policy environment including considering how the roles and functions are delivered in the service of enabling self-determination.

Joint management almost always relies on the finalisation of Recognition and Settlement Agreements (RSAs) under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* and co-management follows positive native title determinations under the *Native Title Act 1993*. With new RSAs executed this year, the number and proportion of parks under joint management arrangements will be expanded.

Across a range of tenures, the total number of parks and reserves under joint management in Victoria will be 43, with a total of eight under cooperative management. Of this total, the number of jointly managed parks under the Act will increase to 22. Correspondingly, the number of cooperatively managed parks under the Act has reduced to two (Budj Bim and Lower Goulburn national parks) with the upgrading of previous areas to joint management arrangements as part of RSA outcomes.

## Current management arrangements in parks under the Act



- Joint management
- Co-operative management

## Joint management

### Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk

The Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples entered into an RSA with Victoria in 2022 that includes 12 areas, six of which are in parks under the Act, to be transferred into Aboriginal title and jointly managed:

- Little Desert National Park
- Wyperfeld National Park
- Black Range State Park
- Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park
- Big Desert Wilderness Area
- Lake Albacutya Park.

Note: The following areas are not under the Act but are part of the RSA:

- Barrabool Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Horsham Police Paddock Reserve
- Lake Hindmarsh Lake Reserve
- Red Rock Bushland Reserve
- Ararat Regional Park (portion east of the Western Highway)
- Wail State Forest (portion only).

A number of these parks, including Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, have been managed under a Cooperative Management Agreement (CMA) as an outcome of a native title determination in 2005. The CMA has now ceased operating, and these parks will transition to the new goWvernance model. Parks Victoria is engaging with the Barengi Gadjin Land Council (BGLC) as the representative body for the Wotjobaluk peoples to begin implementation planning.

In partnership with BGLC, surveys were conducted across 152 places within Mount Arapiles-Tooan State Park, known to the Traditional Owners as Dyurrite. The Gariwerd Wimmera Reconciliation Network Climber group also supported the surveys with information about access to enable assessment of values in areas which had not previously been accessed.

Re-discoveries have included substantial quarries where stone was harvested by Traditional Owners in pre-colonisation times and associated production areas, a rock art place, scarred trees, shelters and rock wells. The information obtained through the survey work is currently informing decision making about how and where existing use can continue without causing harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage. The outcomes of this process will be incorporated into the current park management plan through an amendment.

## Gunaikurnai

The Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation entered into an updated RSA with the Victorian Government in 2022 which added four areas to the ten already handed back (or committed to be handed back) as Aboriginal title lands; then of these are in parks under the Act. The RSA also includes funding to increase the number of joint management rangers.

The 14 areas under this RSA are listed below with the additional four shown in italics:

- Mitchell River National Park
- Tarra-Bulga National Park
- The Lakes National Parks
- Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park
- Lake Tyers State Park
- New Guinea Cave (located within Snowy River National Park)
- *Alpine National Park (part)*
- *Baw Baw National Park*
- *Avon Wilderness Park*
- *Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park.*

Note: The following reserves are not under the Act but are part of the RSA:

- Buchan Caves Reserve
- Corringale Foreshore Reserve
- Gippsland Lakes Reserve (Raymond Island)
- The Knob Reserve.

The handback of Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park will be the first Sea Country protected area to be jointly managed between the Victorian Government and a Traditional Owner group.

A new joint management plan incorporating the new parks will need to be prepared by the Gunaikurnai Traditional Owner Land Management Board, starting in 2023–24.

## Dja Dja Wurrung

A total of six areas, four of which are in parks under the Act, in north central Victoria have been handed back as Aboriginal title and are being jointly managed by Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation (known as DJAARA) and Parks Victoria, with oversight from the Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board (DDLMB):

- Greater Bendigo National Park
- Kara Kara National Park (most of the park is included in joint management)
- Kooyoora State Park (Guyura)
- Paddy's Ranges State Park.

Note: the following areas are not under the Act but are part of the RSA:

- Wehla Nature Conservation Reserve
- Hepburn Regional Park

Implementation of joint management is guided by a Partnership Agreement and the RSA Annual Partnership Action Plan, currently in review for the new financial year. The partnership is supported by a well-established governance model. Monitoring and reporting occur through the Joint Management Plan Implementation Team to the Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board on a quarterly and bi-monthly basis to the Project Control Group.

The Djaara ranger team continued to be hosted by Parks Victoria, under a funding agreement with DJAARA. The team implement a collaboratively developed plan of works that includes a range of caring for Country, park management, visitor education, cultural heritage identification and cultural initiatives, which are guided by the Dhelkunya Dja Joint Management strategic plan.

A program hosted by the team to mentor Aboriginal youth is now in its fifth year, supporting students to stay in school and growing both employment skills and cultural leadership.

A vision to 'Djaarify' the landscape has been supported by the delivery of a range of projects over the past year, including the finalisation of a DJAARA Signage Style Guide and installation of unique DJAARA branded signage, shelters, and landscaping to welcome visitors to the jointly managed parks. These works have complemented DJANDAK (DJAARA business arm) procured weed control, paving and roading. Where possible, DJAARA have committed resources to match Parks Victoria's investment, significantly improving outcomes through the joint management partnership.

## Taungurung

There is a commitment in the RSA between the Victorian Government and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council for Aboriginal title to be granted over a total of nine parks and reserves, seven of which are parks under the Act, in central Victoria to be jointly managed by Taungurung Land and Waters Corporation and Parks Victoria:

- Alpine National Park (part)
- Heathcote-Graytown National Park
- Kinglake National Park (part)
- Lake Eildon National Park
- Mount Buffalo National Park
- Cathedral Range State Park
- Mount Samaria State Park.

Note: the following areas are not under the Act but are part of the RSA:

- Mount Wombat-Garden Range Flora and Fauna Reserve
- Wandong Regional Park.

Establishment of the Taungurung Traditional Owner Land Management Board (TOLMB) has been delayed due to legal complexities affecting the RSA.

Until the establishment of the TOLMB and preparation of a Joint Management Plan over the appointed lands, Parks Victoria and Taungurung Land and Waters Council are prioritising the development of:

- a Partnership Agreement – to outline partnership principles and pathways for strategic alignment and operational delivery across the Taungurung footprint
- the Taungurung Parks Ranger Program – to develop appropriate program strategic objectives and annual work plans and support for the Taungurung Rangers.

## Yorta Yorta

Barmah National Park is jointly managed by Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) and Parks Victoria. The Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board (TOLMB), which oversees the implementation of the joint management plan, is comprised exclusively of Traditional Owners.

The park was severely impacted by the October 2022 flood event, with reopening only becoming possible after assessments and mitigation works have been completed. At the time of writing, most of the park is still closed due to flooding. With varying levels of implementation, management priorities over the course of the year have included:

- ongoing removal all feral horses from the park through staged reduction in the population density of horses by effective and integrated control programs, with the aim of improving the extent of the moira grass community and reducing wetland impacts
- ongoing fox control program delivered by Woka Walla (YYNAC land management team) and led internally by Yorta Yorta Rangers with Good Neighbour grant and recurrent funding
- concept development for further research into nesting locations and populations of broad-shelled turtle and other turtle species. This work will be completed by Yorta Yorta Rangers working with the Arthur Rylah Institute. The focus will be to undertake further research led by Yorta Yorta on their totemic species, to expand capacity through working with Arthur Rylah Institute as well as sharing culture
- implementation of watering strategies, review of protection of floodplain marshes and Ramsar sites and control of introduced predators to protect wetland-dependent birds, especially threatened species including the Australasian bittern
- road and track maintenance, and tree hazard assessment work as part of flood recovery with all tree hazard mitigation works that could be delivered by the local team now completed.

The animal welfare program delivered during and after the flood event impacted culturally sensitive sites and put significant strain of the relationship between Parks Victoria and YYNAC. A cultural heritage permit was subsequently approved by YYNAC to enable flood recovery works to occur, including rehabilitation of culturally sensitive sites along Sand Ridge Track, Garradha Molwa and Bunyip. A significant amount of work will be required to rehabilitate these sensitive places.

## Co-operative management

### Gunditjmarra

Budj Bim National Park is co-operatively managed by Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Parks Victoria through the Budj Bim Council. As part of the broader Budj Bim Cultural Landscape UNESCO listed World Heritage site, the park has been recognised as having outstanding cultural significance.

Significant efforts have been devoted to the implementation of priorities included in the Budj Bim Master Plan through construction of a visitor and interpretation centre, interpretive signage and infrastructure funded through the Victorian Government's Victoria's Great Outdoors program. The program also included improvements to water and waste systems, refurbishment of a toilet block and provision of new campground amenities and trails.

Due to a range of factors, appointments to the Budj Bim Council lapsed on 31 December 2022 and reappointments were finalised by DEECA to commence on 1 July 2023 for a 12 month term expiring on 30 June 2024. While the Council was in abeyance, Parks Victoria continued to work with Budj Bim rangers and the GMTOAC on feral animal control, koala management and high threat weeds. An informal workshop was held in February 2023 to develop strategic and operational plans and this work has been used to guide priorities pending the reinstatement of the Budj Bim Council.

### Yorta Yorta

A total of six parks, one of which is under the Act (Lower Goulburn National Park), are co-operatively managed by Yorta Yorta Nation Aboriginal Corporation (YYNAC) and Parks Victoria.

Note: The following areas are not under the Act, but are cooperatively managed by YYNAC and Parks Victoria:

- Gemmill Swamp Wildlife Reserve
- Loch Gary Wildlife Reserve
- Proposed Murray River Park (part)
- Goulburn River K49 Streamside Reserve
- Murray River Reserve.

Activities in all of these parks were significantly affected by the severe flood event that occurred in October 2022. In relation to Lower Goulburn National Park, management priorities included:

- flood recovery assessment and repair and rehabilitation works
- ongoing partnership with Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative to deliver volunteer activities such as tree planting and educational activities
- implementation of the Australasian bittern project, which included education and monitoring at Reedy Swamp with YYNAC
- nominations and planning for cultural burns
- collection of intelligence information on illegal litter dumping and removal for the park.

### Other Traditional Owner partnerships

Parks Victoria continues to work closely with the Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation, Barengi Gadjin Land Council and Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation on the management of Brambuk: The National Park and Cultural Centre (Brambuk) associated with the Grampians National Park, known to the Traditional Owners as Gariwerd. Work is underway on the development of business and master plans, as well as a new Traditional Owner corporate entity that could operate Brambuk. As members of the Gariwerd Strategic Partnership Committee, the parties are also working together to implement the Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan.

Parks Victoria has established a Leadership Steering Committee with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and the Boon Wurrung Land and Sea Council to focus on a range of strategic initiatives underway at Wilsons Promontory National Park. Initiatives include the development of a new landscape management plan, sanctuary blueprint and revitalisation projects.

Across most parks and reserves under the Act, activities funded through the Victorian Government's Victoria's Great Outdoors and Public Land and Economic Stimulus programs are including engagement and, where possible, partnerships with Traditional Owners.

# SUPPORTING PARK MANAGEMENT

## Management arrangements

Parks Victoria is responsible under the Act for ensuring that the parks and other areas to which the Act applies are controlled and managed in accordance with the Act. DEECA and other organisations also contribute to the parks program, and DEECA provides strategic policy advice to the Minister and the Secretary.

Parks Victoria's 2022–23 Business Plan sets out the management services and strategic priorities to be delivered for the year. Its annual report contains information on the organisation and its operations for the year.

## Legislation

### Amendments to the Act

#### ***Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Amendment Act 2021***

On 1 September 2022, this amending Act amended many provisions of the National Parks Act by inserting references to the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority. This is in anticipation of the Authority assuming statutory responsibility from Parks Victoria by 1 November 2025 for the following areas under the Act within the Great Ocean Road coast and parks: Great Otway (part) and Port Campbell national parks, Bay of Islands Coastal Park, Point Addis and Twelve Apostles marine national parks and Eagle Rock, Marengo Reefs, Merri, Point Danger and The Arches marine sanctuaries.

The Authority will continue to manage those parks under the Act in accordance with the statutory obligations currently applying to Parks Victoria. It is intended that Parks Victoria will continue to manage the parks on the ground on behalf of the Authority.

Responsibility for Glenample Homestead will also transfer from Parks Victoria.

### Amendments to regulations

On 6 June 2023, the National Parks (Tour Operator Licence Fee) Amendment Regulations 2023 amended the National Parks (Tour Operator Licence Fee) Regulations 2021 to extend their operation until 30 June 2025.

## Authorities under the Act

### Leases, licences and other authorities

Parks Victoria manages 288 public land authorisations (consents, leases, licences and permits) under the Act, as shown in the following table. These exclude tour operator licences.

Authority type	No. of authorities	No. of parks
Consent	230	49
Lease	27	15
Licence	18	14
Permit	13	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>86</b>

The number of agreements issued under the Act during 2022–23 is shown in the following table:

Authority type	No. of authorities
Consent	3
Lease	1
Licence	0
Permit	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>

One lease was granted under section 19G of the Act for a three-year term issued in Alpine National Park for Gardners Hut for the purpose of preserving and protecting this historic hut and to provide short-term accommodation.

Three short-term permits were issued under section 21(1AA) to carry on a trade or business at the Quarantine Station in Point Nepean National Park for the provision of services to visitors, including croquet, bicycle hire and a mobile coffee van.

There were three authorisations granted under section 45A(4) to three individuals to permit particular commercial fishing vessels to transit Cape Howe Marine National Park.

## Consents to public authorities

Section 27 of the Act enables consents to be granted to public authorities (as defined in the Act) to carry out works in parks, subject to conditions.

There were three consents issued during 2022–23:

- one consent to Powercor Australia Ltd for installation of electrical equipment at Mount William, Grampians National Park
- one consent to Hindmarsh Shire Council for replacement and upgrade of building infrastructure in Grampians National Park
- one consent to the Commonwealth of Australia (Bureau of Meteorology) for installation and maintenance of weather observation equipment in Wilsons Promontory National Park.

## Consents to earth resource activities

In 2022–23 there were no consents given or tabled under section 40 in relation to earth resource activities in parks under the Act.

## Enforcement

There were 14 individuals successfully prosecuted during the year for committing offences against the Act (28) or the Regulations (4)<sup>1</sup>. The most numerous offences were cutting or taking away fallen or felled trees (12) and assaulting, threatening or obstructing an authorised officer (6).

There were 383 infringement notices issued for prescribed offences against the Act (114) or the Regulations (269)<sup>2</sup>. The most numerous offences related to dogs (140), fishing in a marine national park or marine sanctuary (83), camping other than in a designated area (62), cutting or taking away fallen or felled trees (25), lighting or maintaining a fire (21) or driving or parking a vehicle in contravention of a sign (14).

There were also 81 official warnings and 1 warning issued in relation to offences against the Act (37) or the Regulations (44)<sup>3</sup>. The most numerous offences related to fishing in a marine national park or marine sanctuary (31), camping outside a designated area (18) and dogs (17).

1. The numbers of prosecutions refer to those for which successful results were obtained during the year regardless of when the offences occurred.
2. The numbers of infringement notices refer to those issued during the year, regardless of when the offences occurred, and include any that may subsequently be withdrawn following an internal review during this or the next financial year.
3. The numbers of official warnings refer to those issued during the year, regardless of when the offences occurred, and include any issued following an internal review of any infringement notices issued during this or the previous financial year.

## Advisory bodies

### National Parks Advisory Council

The National Parks Advisory Council is appointed under section 10 of the Act. Its main functions are to advise the Minister generally in relation to the administration of the Act and on particular matters in relation to which its advice is required under the Act or is sought by the Minister.

As at 30 June 2023, the members were:

Convenor:	Ms Anna Foley
Members:	Associate Professor Ursula De Jong
	Professor (Research) David Jones
	Dr Marie Keatley
	Dr Michael Looker
	Mr Mark Reeves
	Dr Mary-Jane Rogers
	Dr Mariyam Zulfa.

The Council's annual report for 2022–23 provides information on the council and its activities during the year.

### Other advisory groups

Several advisory groups provided advice to Parks Victoria on the management of various parks under the Act.



Image: Enforcement Officers



## APPENDIX 1: AREAS MANAGED UNDER THE NATIONAL PARKS ACT

There were no changes to the areas managed under the Act during the year.

### A National parks (schedule two)

National park		Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1	Alfred	3 050
2	Alpine	661 777
3	Barmah	28 505
4	Baw Baw	13 530
5	Brisbane Ranges	8 885
6	Budj Bim	8 565
7	Burrowa-Pine Mountain	18 400
8	Chiltern-Mt Pilot	21 650
9	Churchill	271
10	Cobboboonee	18 510
11	Coopracambra	38 800
12	Croajingolong	*88 525
13	Dandenong Ranges	3 535
14	Errinundra	^43 090
15	French Island	*11 155
16	Grampians	168 235
17	Greater Bendigo	17 586
18	Great Otway	*110 332
19	Gunbower	9 330
20	Hattah-Kulkyne	49 890
21	Heathcote-Graytown	12 700
22	Kara Kara	13 990
23	Kinglake	23 210
24	Lake Eildon	27 750
25	Lind	1 370
26	Little Desert	132 647
27	Lower Glenelg	26 430
28	Lower Goulburn	9 320
29	Mitchell River	14 395
30	Mornington Peninsula	*2 680
31	Morwell	565
32	Mount Buffalo	31 020
33	Mount Richmond	1 733
34	Murray-Sunset	665 400

<b>National park</b>		<b>Area (ha) 30 June 2023</b>
35	Organ Pipes	153
36	Point Nepean	*578
37	Port Campbell	*1 830
38	Snowy River	114 600
39	Tarra-Bulga	2 015
40	Terrick Terrick	6 390
41	The Lakes	2 390
42	Warby-Ovens	14 750
43	Wilson's Promontory	*49 049
44	Wyperfeld	359 445
45	Yarra Ranges	77 185
<b>Total – National parks</b>		<b>2 915 216</b>

\* Area includes the area of the national park located beneath a marine national park.

\*\* Parts of Greater Bendigo NP extend only to 100 metres below the land surface

## **B Wilderness parks (schedule two A)**

<b>Wilderness park</b>		<b>Area (ha) 30 June 2023</b>
1	Avon	39 650
2	Big Desert	142 300
3	Wabba	20 100
<b>Total – Wilderness parks</b>		<b>202 050</b>

## **C State parks (schedule two B)**

<b>State park</b>		<b>Area (ha) 30 June 2023</b>
1	Arthurs Seat	565
2	Black Range	11 700
3	Broken-Boosey	1 010
4	Bunyip	16 655
5	Cape Nelson	210
6	Cathedral Range	3 616
7	Dergholm	10 400
8	Enfield	4 400
9	Holey Plains	10 740
10	Kooyoora	11 350

11	Lake Tyers	8 680
12	Langi Ghiran	3 040
13	Leaghur	2 050
14	Lerderderg	20 185
15	Moondarra	6 330
16	Mount Arapiles-Tooan	7 470
17	Mount Buangor	2 400
18	Mount Granya	6 140
19	Mount Lawson	13 150
20	Mount Napier	2 800
21	Mount Samaria	7 600
22	Mount Worth	1 040
23	Paddys Ranges	2 010
24	Reef Hills	2 020
25	Warrandyte	689
26	Werribee Gorge	575
<b>Total – State parks</b>		<b>156 825</b>

## D Other parks (schedule three)

Other park		Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1	Bay of Islands CP	950
2	Beechworth HP	1 090
3	Cape Conran CP	11 700
4	Cape Liptrap CP	4 320
5	Discovery Bay CP	*10 460
6	Gadsen Bend Park	1 620
7	Gippsland Lakes CP	17 688
8	Haining Farm	–
9	Kings Billabong Park	2 195
10	Lake Albacutya Park	8 300
11	Langwarrin FFR	214
12	Lysterfield Park	1 397
13	Murray-Kulkyne Park	4 555
14	Nyah-Vinifera Park	1 370
15	Steiglitz HP	430
16	Tara Range Park	7 620
17	Tyers Park	1 810
18	Woodlands HP	820
19	Yallock-Bulluk MCP	3 535
<b>Total – Other parks</b>		<b>80 074</b>

CP Coastal Park

FFR Flora and Fauna Reserve

HP Historic Park

MCP Marine and Coastal Park

\* Area includes the area of the park located beneath a marine national park.

## E Other parks and reserves (schedule four)

Other park or reserve		Area (ha) 30 June 2023
-	Bunurong MP	-
1	Castlemaine Diggings NHP**	7 590
2	Corner Inlet MCP	*18 000
3	Deep Lead NCR (No. 1)**	1 120
4	Nooramunga MCP	15 000
5	Shallow Inlet MCP	2 000
6	Wilsons Promontory MP	*10 000
7	Wilsons Promontory MR	*
<b>Total – Other parks and reserves</b>		<b>53 710</b>

MCP Marine and Coastal Park

NCR Nature Conservation Reserve

MP Marine Park

NHP National Heritage Park

MR Marine Reserve

\* Area includes the area of the park or reserve located beneath a marine national park.

\*\* Castlemaine Diggings NHP and Deep Lead NCR (No. 1) extend only to 100 metres below the land surface.

## F Wilderness zones (schedule five)

Wilderness Zones are located within several national parks, as set out below. The areas of the Wilderness Zones are included in the areas of the relevant parks in Part A of this appendix.

	National park	Wilderness zone	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1	Alpine	Mount Darling-Snowy Bluff	40 400
2	Alpine	Razor-Viking	15 700
3	Alpine	Indi	13 800
4	Alpine	Cobberas	10 000
5	Alpine	Buchan Headwaters	30 000
6	Alpine	Tingaringy	7 900
7	Coopracambra	Genoa	19 400
8	Croajingolong	Sandpatch	15 600
9	Croajingolong	Cape Howe	7 100
10	Murray-Sunset	Sunset	126 900
11	Murray-Sunset	Minook	38 700
12	Murray-Sunset	Galpunga	35 700
13	Murray-Sunset	Mount Cowra	23 500
14	Snowy River	Snowy River	27 000
15	Snowy River	Bowen	17 500
16	Wilson's Promontory	Wilson's Promontory	21 800
17	Wyperfeld	North Wyperfeld	97 900
18	Wyperfeld	South Wyperfeld	61 300
19	Wyperfeld	Chinaman Flat	29 800
<b>Total – Wilderness zones</b>			<b>640 000</b>

## G Remote and natural areas (schedule six)

Remote and natural areas are located within several national parks, as set out below. The areas of the remote and natural areas are included in the areas of the relevant parks in Part A of this appendix.

	<b>National park</b>	<b>Remote and natural area</b>	<b>Area (ha) 30 June 2023</b>
1	Alpine	The Governors	8 100
2	Alpine	Macalister	33 300
3	Alpine	Dandongadale	3 700
4	Alpine	Bundara-Cobungra	13 700
5	Alpine	Bogong	16 300
6	Alpine	Davies Plain	10 500
7	Alpine	Suggan Buggan	17 800
8	Alpine	Upper Snowy	11 800
9	Baw Baw	Baw Baw Plateau	6 500
10	Burrowa-Pine Mountain	Mount Burrowa	6 200
11	Coopracambra	Mount Kaye	8 100
12	Croajingolong	Rame Head	9 800
13	Errinundra	Brodribb	7 700
14	Grampians	Victoria Range	14 000
15	Grampians	Serra Range	11 200
16	Grampians	Major Mitchell Plateau	6 900
17	Little Desert	Little Desert	16 400
18	Mount Buffalo	North Buffalo	6 500
19	Murray-Sunset	South Sunset	24 000
20	Wilson's Promontory	Wilson's Promontory Islands (12)	469
21	Wilson's Promontory	Southern Wilson's Promontory	14 400
22	Wyperfeld	Hopping Mouse Hill	32 100
<b>Total – Remote and natural areas</b>			<b>279 469</b>

## H Marine national parks (schedule seven)

Marine national park*	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1 Bunurong	2 100
2 Cape Howe	4 050
3 Churchill Island	670
4 Corner Inlet	1 550
5 Discovery Bay	2 770
6 French Island	2 800
7 Ninety Mile Beach	2 750
8 Point Addis	4 600
9 Point Hicks	4 000
10 Port Phillip Heads	3 580
11 Twelve Apostles	7 500
12 Wilsons Promontory	15 550
13 Yaringa	980
<b>Total – marine national parks</b>	<b>52 900</b>

## I Marine sanctuaries (schedule eight)

Marine sanctuary	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1 Barwon Bluff	17
2 Beware Reef	220
3 Eagle Rock	17
4 Jawbone	30
5 Marengo Reefs	12
6 Merri	25
7 Mushroom Reef	80
8 Point Cooke	290
9 Point Danger	25
10 Ricketts Point	115
11 The Arches	45
<b>Total – Marine sanctuaries</b>	<b>876</b>

\* Marine national parks extend only to 200 metres below the land surface. Some partly overlay parts of other parks under the Act.

## J Landscape conservation areas (schedule nine)

Landscape conservation areas	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1 Yellingbo	1 790
– Beenak NCA	(125)
– Hoddles Creek NCA	(283)
– Sheep Station Creek NCA	(87)
– Warramate Hills NCA	(499)
– Yellingbo NCA	(605)
– Wright Forest BA	(129)
– Haining Farm	(59)
<b>Total – Landscape conservation areas</b>	<b>1 790</b>

BA Bushland Area

NCA Nature Conservation Area



## K Other areas (non-scheduled)\*

Area	Section of Act	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
1 Bald Hills BR	19B	1
2 Collins Settlement Historic Site	19B	1
3 Flinders NCR	19B	1
4 Flinders Natural Interest Reserve	19B	4
5 Long Forest NCR	19B	283
6 Lower Glenelg PPR and SLR	19B	24
7 Main Ridge NCR	19B	64
8 Moreep BR	19B	10
9 Nyerimilang Park	19B	200
10 Wychitella NCR	19B	3 780
11 Mt St Gwinear access road	19C	35
12 Commonwealth land adjacent to Woodlands Historic Park	19D	31
13 Picnic area at McKenzie's Flat (Lerderderg State Park)	19E	0.1
14 Blackwood Ranges Track (Lerderderg State Park)	19E	0.1
15 Glenample Homestead	32AA	8
<b>Total – Other areas</b>		<b>4 442</b>

BR Bushland Reserve

NCR Nature Conservation Reserve

\* Only specific sections of the Act apply to these areas

PPR Public Purposes Reserve

SLR Scenic Lookout Reserve

## L Summary – areas managed under the Act

Category	No. of Areas 30 June 2023	Area (ha) 30 June 2023
A National Parks (Schedule Two)	45	2 915 216
B Wilderness Parks (Schedule Two A)	3	202 050
C State Parks (Schedule Two B)	26	156 825
D Other Parks (Schedule Three)	18	80 074
E Other Parks and Reserves (Schedule Four)	7	53 710
H Marine National Parks (Schedule Seven)	13	52 900
I Marine Sanctuaries (Schedule Eight)	11	876
J Landscape Conservation Areas (Schedule Nine)	1	1 790
K Other areas (non-scheduled)	15	4 442
<b>Total</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>3 467 883</b>

## M Unproclaimed additions

As at 30 June 2023 legislation provides for future additions to several parks as follows.

Park	Act	Provision of Act	Area (ha)
1 Dandenong Ranges National Park	<i>National Parks Act 1975</i>	Schedule One clause 10	*<1
2 Greater Bendigo National Park	<i>National Parks Act 1975</i>	Schedule One clause 12	*31
3 Great Otway National Park (2 areas)	<i>National Parks Act 1975</i>	section 79	*219
4 Moondarra State Park	National Parks (Amendment) Act 1989	section 29(3)	178
5 Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park	<i>National Parks Act 1975</i>	Schedule One clause 3	*<1
<b>Total – Unproclaimed areas</b>			<b>428</b>

\* Area will become part of the park when the rights over the land are surrendered to the Crown.

Image: Croajingolong National Park



## APPENDIX 2: LOCATION OF PARKS AND OTHER AREAS

<b>National and other parks and areas</b>		<b>Map ref</b>				
			Hattah-Kulkyne NP	2	Snowy River NP	98
			Heathcote-Graytown NP	29	Steiglitz HP	37
			Holey Plains SP	93	Tara Range Park	41
			Kara Kara NP	23	Tarra-Bulga NP	91
			Kinglake NP	60	Terrick Terrick NP	27
			Kings Billabong Park	105	The Lakes NP	95
			Kooyoora SP	24	Tyers Park	81
			Lake Albacutya Park	6	Wabba WP	75
			Lake Eildon NP	64	Warby-Ovens NP	69
			Lake Tyers SP	110	Warrandyte SP	57
			Langi Ghiran SP	20	Werribee Gorge SP	33
			Langwarrin FFR	52	Wilson's Promontory MP	87
			Leaghur SP	26	Wilson's Promontory MR	88
			Lerderderg SP		Wilson's Promontory NP	86
			and associated leased areas	31	Woodlands HP and adjacent	
			Lind NP	101	Commonwealth land	59
			Little Desert NP	7	Wychitella NCR	25
			Long Forest NCR	32	Wyperfeld NP	5
			Lower Glenelg NP		Yallock-Bulluk MCP	83
			and Cobboboonee NP	13	Yarra Ranges NP	62
			Lower Glenelg PPR and SLR	15	Yellingbo LCA	61
			Lower Goulburn NP	109		
			Lysterfield Park	54	<b>Marine national parks and marine sanctuaries</b>	<b>Map ref</b>
			Main Ridge NCR	47	Barwon Bluff MS	I
			Mitchell River NP	96	Beware Reef MS	V
			Moondarra SP	80	Bunurong MNP	R
			Moreep BR	35	Cape Howe MNP	X
			Mornington Peninsula NP	45	Churchill Island MNP	Q
			Morwell NP	92	Corner Inlet MNP	T
			Mount Arapiles-Tooan SP	8	Discovery Bay MNP	A
			Mount Buangor SP	21	Eagle Rock MS	F
			Mount Buffalo NP	76	French Island MNP	P
			Mount Granya SP	72	Jawbone MS	L
			Mount Lawson SP	73	Marengo Reefs MS	E
			Mount Napier SP	19	Merri MS	B
			Mount Richmond NP	16	Mushroom Reef MS	N
			Mount Samaria SP	65	Ninety Mile Beach MNP	U
			Mount Worth SP	82	Point Addis MNP	G
			Murray-Kulkyne Park	3	Point Cooke MS	K
			Murray-Sunset NP	1	Point Danger MS	H
			Nooramunga MCP	90	Point Hicks MNP	W
			Nyah-Vinifera Park	107	Port Phillip Heads MNP	J
			Nyerimilang Park	97	Ricketts Point MS	M
			Organ Pipes NP	58	The Arches MS	C
			Paddys Ranges SP	22	Twelve Apostles MNP	D
			Point Nepean NP	43	Wilson's Promontory MNP	S
			Port Campbell NP	39	Yaringa MNP	O
			Reef Hills SP	66		
			Shallow Inlet MCP	85		

BR	Bushland Reserve	MNP	Marine National Park	NIR	Natural Interest Reserve
CP	Coastal Park	MP	Marine Park	NP	National Park
FFR	Flora and Fauna Reserve	MR	Marine Reserve	PPR	Public Purposes Reserve
HP	Historic Park	MS	Marine Sanctuary	SLR	Scenic Lookout Reserve
HS	Historic Site	NCR	Nature Conservation Reserve	SP	State Park
MCP	Marine and Coastal Park	NHP	National Heritage Park	WP	Wilderness Park



