



Parks Victoria

Managing Country Together Framework





The place we know today as Victoria is a land of extraordinary contrast, from deserts to alpine snowfields, ancient rainforests to dormant volcanoes, rugged coastlines, and inland waterways. This remarkable diversity contains a living record of culture, connection, and care that stretches back thousands of generations.

Across the national parks and reserves in Victoria lie cultural landscapes, shaped through millennia by Aboriginal peoples with deep knowledge, stewardship, and relationships to Country. These places tell stories of resilience, ingenuity, and belonging; stories passed down through generations and embedded in the land itself.

Parks Victoria respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of these lands and waters. We honor their enduring connection to Country and their continuing role as custodians. Together, we commit to protecting and celebrating these landscapes so they remain vibrant for generations to come.

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Joint Foreword from the Chair and Chief Executive Officer

Victoria's national parks and reserves form some of the State's most spectacular land and sea scapes. They are places of immense natural, cultural and social value to Traditional Owners, the Victorian community and visitors to the State. We are fortunate to have the opportunity and responsibility to look after these special landscapes.

It is with a shared sense of purpose that we work alongside Traditional Owners as partners in park management. This refreshed Managing Country Together Framework will guide how we work together to manage Victoria's national parks, ports and waterways for the benefit of current and future generations.

We do this in the context of the Victorian Government's commitment to Self-determination, Treaty and Truth - recognising the Yoorrook Justice Commission's inquiry that brought to light First Peoples' stories of injustice, survival and resilience, and embracing the new foundations that Treaty has established for realising Traditional Owner rights.

We are working closely with Traditional Owners to heal and manage Country in many landscapes, with Joint management a key pillar in advancing

self-determination. As an implementation partner, we are working hard to support the establishment of Traditional Owner ranger teams and to deliver on the priorities and objectives of Country Plans. We will continue to deepen relationships with joint management partners and establish new partnerships as recognition progresses.

At the same time, we need to be open and innovative about different ways to work together, learning as we go and supporting Traditional Owners to work in the way that their communities choose.

We know that self-determination will not be achieved overnight and that it will look different across the communities. We also know it will require us to change the way we do business.

We are committed to the journey. To forging strong partnerships based on trust and respect. To building a culturally capable and supportive park management sector. To removing the barriers that are hindering the realisation of Traditional Owner rights.

Putting Traditional Owners at the heart of caring for Country will strengthen the way park values are managed and offer richer experiences for all park users.

We will continue to walk this path together.



About the Framework

This Managing Country Together Framework sets the foundation for a generational change in the way Victoria’s national parks are managed. It sets out Parks Victoria’s commitments to working with Traditional Owners and advancing self-determination in the park management context.

The Framework delivers on key Victorian government policies and laws. It aligns with Parks Victoria’s ‘back to basics’ approach and Land Management Strategy aspirations for resilient, inclusive, and valued parks. It is nested within the park planning hierarchy, providing the strategic basis for what we do on the ground.

It is intended to complement strategies and plans developed by Traditional Owners – both statewide strategies like the Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations’ Cultural Landscapes Strategy as well as individual place-based Traditional Owner Country and Joint Management Plans.

This alignment will ensure that Parks Victoria’s efforts and reforms are directed where they are most needed and help mobilise the resources required to remove barriers to effective joint management. The Framework is not time bound. It is designed to be an enduring signpost that guides us towards embedding Aboriginal self-determination in park management into the future.

The Framework is a Parks Victoria organisation-wide commitment. All staff share responsibility for its implementation and for integrating self-determination into the business of park management.

Specific actions and initiatives to deliver on the Framework will be identified separately through action plans. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability frameworks will be co-designed with Traditional Owners.



Self-determination reform roadmap

Fully embedding Aboriginal self-determination in park management will take time. Progress is more evident in some areas than others. Recent Park management plans better reflect Aboriginal values and priorities, and joint management is being delivered in several parts of the State. But we have further to go.

The first Managing Country Together Framework in 2019 set the foundation for culturally informed Traditional Owner engagement and partnerships.

This refreshed Framework is taking us another step forward. It will guide the next phase of reforms for managing the national parks estate in partnership with Traditional Owners. The aim is to continue to progress along this pathway towards true self-determination.

By moving along this path, we will be working towards the activation of Traditional owner rights and incorporating Aboriginal knowledge and practice into the caring and healing of Country.

Self-determination reform roadmap



Principles



Principle 1

Manage holistically for biocultural landscape values

Victoria's national parks and reserves are special places that sit within broader biocultural landscapes. These landscapes are made up of interconnected natural and cultural values that are understood through Traditional knowledge systems, stories, practices and obligations around cultural fire, water, and species management. All of these values are considered together in the way we manage Country for everyone's benefit.



Principle 2

Honour formally recognised rights

The Victorian government is progressively recognising the legal rights of Traditional Owners to access, use and care for Country through various legal instruments. These include the Native Title Act 1993 (C'th), Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 (Vic), Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010 (Vic) and the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. We operate in line with formally recognised rights, meet our obligations under relevant agreements and laws, and will continue to do so in line with Statewide Treaty and localised Treaties.



Principle 3

Embed Aboriginal governance and self-determination

Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities have their own governance structures and ways of making decisions. We respect cultural authority and endeavour to provide the time, support and resources to enable Traditional Owners to make informed decisions about management of their Country. A place-based approach will empower Parks Victoria Regions to play a central role in Traditional Owner engagement and partnerships.



Principle 4

Strengthen shared decision-making

We are committed to embedding Traditional Owners' role as landowners and custodians into how Country is managed. This requires new ways of working together and a genuine approach to partnership. We will do this by negotiating and co-designing formal Partnership Agreements that reflect Traditional Owner rights and recognition and Parks Victoria's obligations under various instruments, including institutional arrangements for joint management. We will also work with Traditional Owners on the preparation of action and investment plans that will implement the commitments in this framework.



Principle 5

Support truth-telling and healing

The past actions and inactions of governments have caused significant harm to Aboriginal peoples as they have been disconnected and excluded from their traditional lands, including what are now known as national parks and reserves, and denied self-determination. Acknowledging the truth of the past and how it affects the present is the first step to healing. We support Traditional Owners to tell and rebuild their stories, histories, culture and connections to the national park estate.



Vision

Traditional Owners and Parks Victoria work together in partnerships to care for Country and strengthen cultural connections, creating lasting benefits for all.

Commitments

The Managing Country Together Framework places the Victorian Government's four self-determination reform domains in the context of park management.

We make the following commitments across the four domains. These will help us progress on the path towards self-determination, Treaty and Truth.



OUTCOMES for biocultural landscapes

GOAL

Healthy cultural landscapes for the benefit of all

COMMITMENTS

Protect and heal Country by managing parks as living biocultural landscapes

Ensure access, use and development of parks is culturally appropriate and supports Traditional Owner economic aspirations for Country

Support truth-telling and the sharing of Aboriginal cultural values, experiences and perspectives

PEOPLE in park management

GOAL

Effective, collaborative and culturally-competent park managers

COMMITMENTS

Support and strengthen the Aboriginal park management workforce

Strengthen joint management partnerships with Traditional Owners

Bring together park management partners to care for biocultural landscapes

SYSTEMS to advance self-determination

GOAL

Organisational systems that enable Traditional Owner participation in decision-making

COMMITMENTS

Embed self-determination in park management systems and tools

Improve data integrity and support Traditional Owner control of cultural information

Adopt evidence-based solutions to remove barriers to joint management

ACCOUNTABILITY and responsive management

GOAL

Transparent, agile and effective decision-making

COMMITMENTS

Become a reliable and trusted partner

Provide transparent and accessible information about park management actions and outcomes

Drive implementation through effective change management

Monitoring, evaluation and reporting

Being a trusted partner means being accountable and transparent about the extent to which we are delivering on our promises and achieving agreed goals.

We also need to understand where our actions are effective and where we need to improve.

If we are to establish a robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting framework for Managing Country Together, we also need to focus on building the foundations. This means strengthening the integrity and comprehensiveness of the data that we are collecting and building the systems that support appropriate sharing and protection of information. This includes support for policy makers in the area of

data sovereignty and Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights (ICIP).

While we work to build this longer-term capability, we need to ensure Parks Victoria remains accountable in the short term. To begin with, we will report regularly to Traditional Owners on the programs and activities we are delivering and our compliance with commitments and obligations.

At the same time, we will work on co-designing an outcomes-focused monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework with Traditional Owner partners that will provide a fuller picture of the effectiveness of our partnerships and our progress along the self-determination reform pathway.



Governance and accountability

Preparation of the Framework was informed by engagement with individual Traditional Owner Corporations, the Traditional Owner Corporation Caucus (TOCC), and the Statewide Caring for Country Partnership Forum (SCfCPF).

The Caucus and the Forum will form part of the authorising environment for the ongoing implementation, review, and update of the Framework, in line with its accountability function for Pupangarli Marnmarnepu 'Owning Our Future' - Aboriginal Self-Determination Reform Strategy.



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