



2021 / 2022

# Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

Annual Report



Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP  
Minister for Environment and Climate Action  
Parliament House  
East Melbourne 3002

Dear Minister

In accordance with the requirements of Section 14(1) of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council is pleased to submit to you its twentieth Annual Report, covering our activities for the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.



Mellissa Wood  
Chairperson  
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council  
30 June 2022

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# CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

This year has brought change, new perspectives and partnerships with a new Council appointed on 7 July 2021, involving three new appointments, including myself as Chairperson. I acknowledge the outgoing members Janine Hadow (Chairperson), Charles Meredith and Geoffrey Wescott for their dedication to VEAC and welcome the incoming and ongoing members.

In November 2021 VEAC received terms of reference from the Minister for Phase 1 of the assessment of Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs) in state forests in eastern Victoria. IPAs were put in place by the Victorian government in November 2019 as part of the Victorian Forestry Plan. The government announced a new process for establishing the future uses of State forests in eastern Victoria in August 2021 involving VEAC. Notably, the process requires VEAC to prepare scientific assessments of the values of the IPAs while community engagement is undertaken by an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE). The VEAC Chair is a member of the Panel which has helped build a new partnership between VEAC and the EPCE.

VEAC published two reports in March 2022, one for each of the Strathbogie Ranges and the Mirboo North IPAs. We were very pleased to partner with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Taungurung Land and Waters Council on the values assessment and on reproducing their bio-cultural assessments for each IPA area in the two VEAC reports. An assessment of the economic implications of proposed land use changes recommended by the EPCE and provided to the Council was completed in June 2022. These assessments provided a basis for the deep community engagement program of the EPCE and for EPCE recommendations to the Minister.

VEAC continued work this year on the request from the Minister for advice on aspects of public land use information. This technically complex project comprises two parts. The work on VEAC's spatial dataset on the public land use decisions of the Victorian government (VEACRECS25) will support the government's work on modernising Victoria's public land legislation, while the advice on data on recreational activities on public land will support evidence-based decision making.

The government tabled its response to VEAC's Assessment of Victoria's Coastal Reserves in August 2021, accepting or accepting in principle all nine recommendations.

This year we were pleased to award five scholarships from a competitive field in the eleventh round of the Bill Borthwick Student Scholarships. These scholarships will support the costs of research for a wide range of projects on Victoria's public land.

Building on initiatives by the previous Council, we spent the first quarter of the year focusing on high-level strategic work including identifying a diverse set of future work priorities to support government decision making and conservation impact.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance and support Council receives from State government departments and agencies, Traditional Owners, local government, a range of organisations and community groups, and members of the public. Thanks go to VEAC's expert staff for their dedication, especially during a second disruptive year of the COVID-19 pandemic, and also to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning who provide the business services and support for VEAC to carry out its work.



**Mellissa Wood**  
Chairperson

# VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COUNCIL

## OUR PURPOSE

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council was established under the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* (the VEAC Act) to provide independent and strategic advice to the Victorian Government on matters relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of Victoria's public land (refer to Sections 4 and 5 of the VEAC Act).

## OUR VALUES

Our organisational values reflect our attitude to the public land estate, the community and the environment.

- We think long term
- We use evidence and expertise as the foundation of our work
- We act conscientiously in the public interest
- We seek out and listen to diverse voices
- We treat everyone with respect
- We work independently and are accountable for our activities

## OUR FUNCTIONS

The Council:

- carries out investigations and assessments and provides advice as requested by the Minister on matters relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land
- carries out any other functions that are conferred on the Council by the VEAC Act or any other Act (refer to Section 6 of the VEAC Act).

In carrying out investigations and making recommendations the Council is required to have regard to:

- the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- the need to conserve and protect biological diversity
- the need to conserve and protect any areas which have ecological, natural, landscape or cultural interest or significance, recreational value or geological or geomorphological significance
- the need to provide for the creation and preservation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of parks and reserves within the State of Victoria
- the existence of any international treaty ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia which is relevant to the investigation
- any agreement at a national, inter-state or local government level into which the Government of Victoria has entered, or under which the Government of Victoria has undertaken any obligation in conjunction with the Commonwealth, a state, territory or municipal council, which relates to the subject matter of the investigation
- the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations
- any existing or proposed use of the environment or natural resources.

Powers held by the Council include the ability to appoint committees and, with the consent of the relevant Minister, make use of the services of any person employed in the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning (refer to Section 7 of the VEAC Act).

A website containing general information about the Council's role, operation and current and past investigations is available at [www.veac.vic.gov.au](http://www.veac.vic.gov.au). The site also contains links to past investigations and studies conducted by the Environment Conservation Council (ECC) and the Land Conservation Council (LCC).

## COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP



(L-R) Ms Anna Kilborn, Mr Nick Wimbush, Ms Mellissa Wood, Ms Joanne Duncan, Ms Nicola Ward.

Members of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council are appointed under the provisions of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*. Members for the period 7 July 2021 to 30 June 2022 were Ms Mellissa Wood (Chairperson), Ms Nicola Ward and Mr Nick Wimbush and Ms Joanne Duncan, Ms Anna Kilborn. Members for the period 1 July to 6 July 2021 were Ms Janine Haddow (Chairperson), Ms Joanne Duncan, Ms Anna Kilborn, Dr Charles Meredith and Dr Geoffrey Wescott.

### **Ms Mellissa Wood (Chairperson)**

Mellissa Wood has over 30 years' experience in leading and providing scientific and strategic advice on sustainable development, conservation and environmental management and sustainable food systems. She has held Executive positions with the Australian Government and internationally, including UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and CGIAR. Her international expertise covers Sub-Saharan Africa, SE Asia and the Pacific.

Mellissa was General Manager, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and member of CGIAR's System Council and System Management Board. Prior she was Director of the Australian International Food Security Centre, worked at the FAO, Rome as a Director, Global Crop Diversity Trust and spent 15 years at the Bureau of Rural Sciences, Federal Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries providing scientific advice to support natural resource management decision-making.

Mellissa is currently a Visiting Scientist CSIRO, Food Systems and Global Change. She holds a Master of Public Policy (Development Policy) from Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, Bachelor of Science (Resource and Environmental Management) from the Australian National University and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors (GAICD).

### **Ms Joanne Duncan**

Joanne Duncan was elected to the Legislative Assembly seat of Gisborne in 1999 (later transferring to Macedon in 2002) which she represented until her retirement from politics in 2014.

During her time in Parliament, Joanne was a member of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee (1999 to November 2010 and May 2011 to November 2014).

Joanne is a member of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Advisory Panel, a past board director of Western Water, and also chaired the stakeholder reference group for the review of the native vegetation permitted clearing regulations.

### **Ms Anna Kilborn**

Anna Kilborn is an environmental planner and analyst, with 30 years' experience across Australia in natural resource management, regional development, environmental policy and stakeholder engagement. She holds a Bachelor of Science and is studying for a Masters of Public Policy at Monash University. She is also a graduate of the AICD's Company Directors Course.

Anna currently serves on Victoria's Fire District Review Panel, and has previously served as a Director of South Gippsland Water Corporation, a Member of Regional Development Australia's Gippsland Committee, and as a sessional member of Planning Panels Victoria.

Anna lives in regional Victoria and is committed to ensuring that regional communities have a voice in public land management decisions. She also strives to incorporate long-term thinking, so that current and future generations benefit from the decisions that are made today.

### **Ms Nicola Ward**

Nicola Ward has held senior positions in the state governments of New South Wales and Victoria and local government, with extensive public policy experience in environment and natural resource management. She has policy and program expertise in environment, sustainability and climate change; strategic planning, land use and development; community infrastructure planning; sport, recreation and open space planning. She is experienced in organisation strategy, business transformation and risk and performance.

She holds a range of paid and volunteer positions including Sessional Member of Planning Panels Victoria, Board Director of the Natural Resources Conservation League (Vic), Independent Chair of the Southern Brown Regional Recovery Group and committee member of various community groups. She was previously Board Director of the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority.

Nicola has a Masters degree in Social Science (Environment and Planning) with Distinction and an Honours degree in Social Science. Nicola holds memberships with the Institute of Public Administration Australia and the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

### **Mr Nick Wimbush**

Nick Wimbush is a Senior Sessional Panel Member at Planning Panels Victoria and a Sessional Member at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

He has strong public sector governance experience in senior roles with a focus on environmental planning and climate change. He is a highly experienced chairperson who has presided over many significant public inquiries with high levels of public interest.

He holds a Master of Laws (Juris Doctor) from Monash University; a Bachelor of Science (Environmental Science) from Murdoch University; and a Post Graduate Diploma (Public Policy) from Deakin University. Nick is a fellow of the Victorian Planning and Environmental Law Association and a member of the Environment Institute of Australia and New Zealand and the National Environmental Law Association.

## MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Hon Lily D’Ambrosio MP, Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, was the responsible Minister for the period 1 July 2021 to 27 June 2022 and for the period 27 June 2022 to 30 June 2022 it was the Hon Lily D’Ambrosio MP, Minister for Environment and Climate Action.

## COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The Council met formally nine times during the 2021-2022 financial year.

Council members’ attendance at council meetings from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022

NAME	ATTENDANCE (number of meetings)
Melissa Wood	8 of 8
Joanne Duncan	9 of 9
Anna Kilborn	8 of 9
Nicola Ward	7 of 8
Nick Wimbush	6 of 8
Janine Haddow	1 of 1
Charles Meredith	1 of 1
Geoff Wescott	1 of 1

## ADMINISTRATION

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council office is located on level 39, 2 Lonsdale St, Melbourne, 3000.

**Telephone** 1800 134 803  
**Email** [veac@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@delwp.vic.gov.au)  
**Website** [veac.vic.gov.au](http://veac.vic.gov.au)  
**Executive Officer** Joan Phillips

The Executive Officer is responsible for managing the office and staff.

## INVESTIGATIONS

VEAC did not undertake any investigations in 2021-2022.

## ASSESSMENTS AND ADVICE

### **ASSESSMENT OF THE VALUES OF IMMEDIATE PROTECTION AREAS IN THE STRATHBOGIE RANGES AND MIRBOO NORTH**

VEAC was requested on 25 November 2021 by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP to assess the values of state forests in the Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs) in the Strathbogrie Ranges and Mirboo North.

The assessment will inform the work of an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister on the future uses of the Immediate Protection Areas and state forest in eastern Victoria.

The purpose of the assessment is to:

- (a) identify the biodiversity, ecological and geological and geomorphological values of the specified area
- (b) identify the cultural heritage, social and economic values of the specified area
- (c) identify the current and likely future threats to those values, including climate change
- (d) identify the typical land use categories commensurate with the identified values
- (e) assess the potential economic implications of proposed land use changes recommended by the EPCE and provided to the Council

This request is for an assessment and report on the above values and the economic implications of the proposed recommendations of the EPCE. Public consultation and recommendations are not required.

VEAC published its assessment of the matters specified in (a) to (d) on 31 March 2022. The Council will report on the completed assessment including the matter referenced at paragraph (e) by 31 July 2022.

Separate assessments addressing (a) to (d) in the terms of reference were prepared for the two IPAs. Each assessment includes in full a rapid bio-cultural assessment report from the Traditional Owners of the land.

VEAC is not undertaking community consultation or receiving submissions on its assessment.

An Eminent Panel for Community Engagement is undertaking the next stages of community engagement and making recommendations to Government on the future uses of the State forest in eastern Victoria. VEAC's chairperson is a member of this panel.

## Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Assessment of the Values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogrie Ranges and Mirboo North for the 2021-2022 financial year was \$354,826.

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 26B of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change hereby requests the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (the Council) to carry out an assessment of the values of state forests<sup>1</sup> in the Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs) in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North<sup>2</sup> as shown on the accompanying map.

The assessment will inform the work of an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change on the future uses of the Immediate Protection Areas and state forest in eastern Victoria.

The purpose of the assessment is to:

- (a) identify the biodiversity, ecological and geological and geomorphological values of the specified area
- (b) identify the cultural heritage, social and economic values of the specified area
- (c) identify the current and likely future threats to those values, including climate change
- (d) identify the typical land use categories commensurate with the identified values
- (e) assess the potential economic implications of proposed land use changes recommended by the EPCE and provided to the Council

This assessment will build upon the Council's Conservation values of state forests - Assessment report (2017) by providing a more localised assessment of these areas.

The Council is required to consider the values referred to above at the relevant state, regional and local levels, including their occurrence in existing protected areas and on other public land.

This request is for an assessment and report on the above values and the economic implications of the proposed recommendations of the EPCE. Public consultation and recommendations are not required.

The Council will engage with the EPCE regarding the content of the Council's assessment.

The Council must publish its assessment of the matters specified in paragraphs (a) to (d) above by 31 March 2022\* and submit a report on the completed assessment by 31 May 2022.\*\*

\*The terms of reference were amended by the Minister in February 2022 to change this reporting date from 28 February to 31 March 2022.

\*\*The date for completion of the assessment was extended by the Minister from 31 May 2022 to 31 July 2022.

<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this assessment, State forest is defined as the areas of public land depicted as General Management Zone, Special Management Zone and Special Protection Zone in the maps accompanying the Regional Forest Agreements as updated from time to time and expressed in the DELWP forest zoning data set (FMZ 100) as at the time of commencement of the assessment.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this assessment, IPAs are defined as the areas announced as part of the Victorian Forestry Plan in November 2019 and update on 21 November 2019.

## ADVICE ON ASPECTS OF PUBLIC LAND USE INFORMATION

In November 2020 VEAC was requested by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, to provide advice on aspects of public land use information. The request is for technical advice on aspects of public land use information and does not extend to recommending changes to public land use.

The advice will focus on:

- (a) data on recreational activities on Victoria's public land and any significant knowledge gaps relating to those activities, and
- (b) improvements to the VEACRECs25 dataset.

VEACRECs25 is a dataset maintained by VEAC that provides a spatial representation at 1:25,000 scale of the public land use decisions of the Victorian Government or Parliament, including the government-accepted recommendations of VEAC and its predecessors (the Environment Conservation Council and the Land Conservation Council). VEACRECs25 is a key tool to help land managers and the community understand the purpose for which public land is to be managed.

The terms of reference for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information are contained in the box on the next page.

Progress updates were published in June 2021 for the two areas specified in the terms of reference: (a) data on recreational activities on Victoria's public land and (b) improvements to the VEACRECs25 dataset on public land use decisions.

The advice is expected to be completed in early 2023.

## Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information for the 2021-2022 financial year was \$476,138.

## ASSESSMENT OF VICTORIA'S COASTAL RESERVES

In June 2018 VEAC was requested by the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP to carry out an assessment of Victoria's coastal reserves.

A final report was submitted to the Minister in March 2020. The Government response to the recommendations in VEAC's final report was tabled in Parliament on 5 August 2021.

# TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 26B of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change hereby requests the Council to provide advice on:

- a) data on recreational activities on Victoria's public land and any significant knowledge gaps relating to those activities
- b) improvements to the VEACRECs25 dataset.

This request is for technical advice on aspects of public land use information and does not extend to recommending changes to public land use.

## **a) data on recreational activities on Victoria's public land and any significant knowledge gaps relating to those activities**

A range of data on different recreational activities on Victoria's public land is required to support government planning and evidence-based decision-making.

The advice sought is to compile an inventory of statewide data on the broad range of recreational activities on Victoria's public land and identify any significant knowledge gaps. VEAC is requested to provide advice on:

- data coverage and availability (both geographically and by recreational activity)
- data quality, including any inconsistencies
- data custodianship
- age of the data
- suitability of the data for Victorian Government planning, reporting and decision-making
- knowledge gaps.

## **b) Improving the VEACRECs25 dataset**

VEACRECs25 is a dataset maintained by VEAC that provides a spatial representation at 1:25,000 scale of the public land use decisions of the Victorian Government or Parliament, including the government-accepted recommendations of VEAC and its predecessors (the Environment Conservation Council and the Land Conservation Council). VEACRECs25 is a key tool to help land managers and the community understand the purpose for which public land is to be managed.

VEAC is requested to provide advice on issues and gaps in the VEACRECs25 dataset and how this important tool could be improved, including:

- any issues that need to be resolved to ensure Victoria has an accurate record of agreed public land use;
- any aspects of the current data that need clarification;
- the broad types and extent of uncategorised public land<sup>1</sup>
- any improvements to the functionality of VEACRECs25 to assist public land managers and support future legislative reforms; and
- establishing an online accessible repository of relevant information sources for the government decisions represented in VEACRECs25.

The government has committed to modernise Victoria's public land legislation in the Victorian Government Response to VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land Final Report. The improved VEACRECs25 dataset will assist in the transition to the new legislative framework.

## **Reporting**

VEAC must provide reports containing its advice within 12 months from the date of the request, with separate reports for topics (a) and (b). VEAC must also provide a progress update on its work within 6 months of the request and make this information publicly available.

<sup>1</sup> Uncategorised public land is a broad category for which no specific public land use has been recommended by VEAC or its predecessors. Victoria is estimated to have less than 65,000 hectares of uncategorised public land.

# BILL BORTHWICK STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS 2022

The Bill Borthwick Student Scholarships assist with some of the costs of research for students undertaking Honours, Masters or PhD research projects relating to public land in Victoria in the fields of natural sciences, humanities and social sciences, economics or politics. The scholarships were established in March 2011 to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the first meeting of the Land Conservation Council (LCC) and to honour the vision of the Hon Bill Borthwick, a central figure in establishing the LCC to advise government on the use of Victoria's public land.

The 2022 scholarships totalling \$7,600 were awarded to five recipients.

The recipients of the 2022 scholarships are:

## **Atalaya Ferrari, RMIT University**

*'Accounting for unseen carbon: measuring soil organic carbon in Victoria's tall wet old growth forests'* The scholarship will assist with the costs of conducting fieldwork to collect more than 400 soil samples for spectroscopic analysis.

## **Jessica Keem, University of Melbourne**

*'Fire, Fauna and the Future: identifying biodiversity refuges and protecting them from extreme disturbance events'* The scholarship will assist in funding acoustic recorders to monitor bird diversity across fire refuges and validate spatial modelling.

## **Rohan Khot, University of Melbourne**

*'Improving trait-based Eucalypt distribution models in the Grampians-Gariwerd'* The scholarship will assist with the costs of travel to sample eucalypt species.

## **Isabel Tickle, La Trobe University**

*'An Aboriginal Stone Quarry at Yanga Nowie National Park in North West Victoria'* The scholarship will assist with the costs of collection and analysis of geological samples from Berribee Quarry in order to get a 'fingerprint' of the stone to use as a reference for stone artefacts from other archaeological sites within Yanga Nowie

## **Anne Yusuf, RMIT University**

*'The link between microbial diversity and carbon chemistry of the Australian Alpine peatlands'* The scholarship will assist with the costs of laboratory experiments.

## COMMITTEES

VEAC is required to establish a community reference group to provide advice in respect of each investigation. Community reference groups are not required in respect of assessments or advice unless directed by the Minister or specified in the terms of reference. The Council may also appoint any committees that it considers necessary to assist with conduct of investigations.

There were no continuing groups and VEAC did not establish any committees or community reference groups in 2021-2022.

## MEMBERSHIP OF EXTERNAL COMMITTEES

During 2021-2022 VEAC chairperson Mellissa Wood was a member of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (from January 2022) and the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Reference Group (from November 2021).

## CONSULTANCIES

A consultant is a particular type of contractor that is engaged primarily to perform a discrete task for an entity that facilitates decision making through:

- provision of expert analysis and advice, and/or
- development of a written report or other intellectual output.

In 2021-2022, there was one consultancy where the total fees payable to the consultant were \$10,000 or greater (Economic Assessment of Immediate Protection Areas - Gillespie Economics). The total expenditure incurred during 2021-2022 in relation to this consultancy was \$56,000 (excl. GST).

In 2021-2022, there were no consultancies where the total fees payable to the consultants were less than \$10,000.

## DECLARATION OF PECUNIARY INTERESTS

The Chairperson and all members completed Declarations of Private Interests.

Executive Officer Joan Phillips and Senior Project Manager Paul Peake have also completed declarations.

All returns are confidential.

## FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Council's operating funds were provided through the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

The financial operations of the Council have not been separately audited. Audited statements are incorporated into the overall Financial Statements of DELWP's Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 2022. The table below shows expenditure incurred. This includes expenditure for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information of \$476,138 (see page 9) and the Assessment of the values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North of \$354,826 (see page 8).

There were no significant changes in financial position during the reporting period.

EXPENSES	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19	2017-18
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Salaries and oncosts	929,130	866,437	896,835	1,406,817	1,123,174
Operating	511,298	348,865	377,050	955,873	431,045
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,440,428</b>	<b>1,215,302</b>	<b>1,273,885</b>	<b>2,362,689</b>	<b>1,554,219</b>

## WORKFORCE DATA

EMPLOYMENT	2022 (A)			2021 (B)		
	Male	Female	Total staff	Male	Female	Total staff
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8 (FTE 7.7)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6 (FTE 5.6)</b>

Notes:

(A) relates to payroll and contract staff as at 30 June 2022

(B) relates to payroll and contract staff as at 30 June 2021

Note: Employees have been correctly classified in workforce data collections. VEAC staff are also included in employment statistics for DELWP for 2021-2022.

## MERIT AND EQUITY

Victorian Public Service merit and equity principles are applied in the appointment and management of staff. VEAC follows the merit and equity principles used by DELWP, in accordance with Government directives and the *Public Administration Act 2004*.

Three primary goals have been assumed by VEAC with regard to people management practices:

- develop and sustain organisational culture in which policies, practices and services are adapted to the needs of the community
- ensure a workplace free from policies and practices that discriminate against staff or potential staff
- ensure that staff have access to a fair, efficient grievance review process to resolve perceived breaches of merit and equity.

## COMPLIANCE

In accordance with the reporting directions, the annual report must include a statement about compliance with the building and maintenance provisions of the *Building Act 1993*. The Council makes use of buildings and facilities controlled by DELWP to perform its functions and does not own or control any buildings.

The Council utilises DELWP's Occupational Health and Safety policies and procedures.

The Council is committed to the requirements of the Premier's Circular 2006/1, in relation to community inclusiveness, and applies these requirements in its operations where possible.

Government policy requires disclosure of all Government Advertising Expenditure with a total media buy of \$100,000 or greater (exclusive of GST). No Government Advertising Expenditure was incurred by the Council during the reporting period.

## SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

The Government's aim of improved environmental management is supported by a requirement that Departments disclose their ongoing performance in managing and reducing the environmental impacts of their office-based activities. The Council makes use of DELWP offices and facilities to perform its functions and the reporting requirement of the office is met by DELWP. The VEAC office participates fully in a range of environmental programs undertaken by DELWP, including:

- separation of reusable, recyclable, compostable and landfill waste
- use of Green Power
- use of flow restricted taps and waterless urinals
- use of recycled paper and use of duplex printing
- environmentally sustainable fitouts, and
- regular use by staff of public transport, cycling or walking to and from work.

# INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) EXPENDITURE

VEAC falls under the umbrella of DELWP with regard to ICT and providing business-enabling ICT services. Please refer to DELWP Annual Report 2021-2022.

## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

*The Freedom of Information Act 1982* gives everyone the right to seek access to documents held by the Council. It is worth contacting the Council in the first instance to find out if you can access the information without making an FOI application.

FOI requests can be lodged online at <https://ovic.vic.gov.au>. Access to documents can also be obtained through a written request to the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning's Freedom of Information team, as detailed in s17 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Requests for documents in the possession of VEAC should be addressed to:

Freedom of Information Officer  
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning  
GPO Box 527  
Melbourne Vic 3001

The cost of an FOI application is \$30.60; however, access charges may also be payable if the document pool is large, and the search for material, time consuming. Further information is available from the website FOI Online ([www.foi.vic.gov.au](http://www.foi.vic.gov.au)).

### Operations

For the 12 months ending 30 June 2022 there was one request.

There were no requests outstanding as at 30 June 2022.

## LOCAL JOBS FIRST

For the 2021-2022 reporting period, VEAC did not undertake any projects subject to *Local Jobs First Act 2003*.

# PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES ACT

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* (PD Act) enables people to make disclosures about improper conduct by public officers and public bodies. The Act aims to ensure openness and accountability by encouraging people to make disclosures and protecting them when they do.

## COMPLIANCE WITH THE PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES ACT 2012

The PD Act was part of a package of integrity reforms introduced by the Victorian Government, which also established the Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC).

The PD Act enables people to make disclosures about improper conduct within the public sector without fear of reprisal. It aims to ensure openness and accountability by encouraging people to make disclosures and protecting them when they do.

## WHAT IS A 'PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE'?

A public interest disclosure is a complaint of corrupt or improper conduct or detrimental action by a public officer or a public body.

VEAC is a "public body" for the purposes of the Act.

## WHAT IS 'IMPROPER OR CORRUPT CONDUCT'?

Improper or corrupt conduct involves substantial:

- mismanagement of public resources; or
- risk to public health or safety or the environment; or
- corruption.

"Detrimental action" is action taken against a person in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure.

## HOW DO I MAKE A 'PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE'?

You can make a public interest disclosure about VEAC or its board members, officers or employees by contacting DELWP or IBAC on the contact details provided below.

Please note that VEAC is not able to receive public interest disclosures.

## HOW CAN I ACCESS DELWP'S PROCEDURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF PERSONS FROM DETRIMENTAL ACTION?

DELWP has established procedures for the protection of persons from detrimental action in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure about VEAC or its employees. You can access DELWP's procedures on its website at: [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au).

## CONTACTS

### Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

Address: PO Box 500, East Melbourne Vic 3002

Ph: 1800 903 877

Website: [www.delwp.vic.gov.au](http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au)

### Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) Victoria

Address: Level 1, North Tower, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne Victoria 3001.

Mail: IBAC, GPO Box 24234, Melbourne Victoria 3000

Internet: [www.ibac.vic.gov.au](http://www.ibac.vic.gov.au)

Phone: 1300 735 135

Email: see the website above for the secure email disclosure process, which also provides for anonymous disclosures.

## **PRIVACY AND DATA PROTECTION ACT**

VEAC complies with the ten information privacy principles in place that help to form the *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014*. This includes handling the collection of personal information in a responsible manner. The coordinator of privacy issues for DELWP is:

Manager, Privacy  
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning  
PO Box 500, East Melbourne VIC 3002  
Telephone: (03) 9637 8697

## **RISK MANAGEMENT**

While VEAC examines the risk of delivery of its particular work functions and objectives on an ongoing basis, it relies on the DELWP risk management framework and internal audit of financial and other administrative systems which are used by the VEAC office. Please refer to the DELWP annual report for further information.

## **GIFTS, BENEFITS AND HOSPITALITY ATTESTATION**

I, Joan Phillips, Executive Officer of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council, certify that:

- my public entity has policies and procedures in place that are consistent with the minimum requirements and accountabilities outlined in the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Framework issued by the Public Sector Standards Commissioner; and
- staff are informed about these gifts, benefits and hospitality policies and procedures.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH DATAVIC ACCESS POLICY**

Consistent with the Victorian Government's DataVic Access Policy (2012), the Council intends that data tables that it may produce in the future will be available at <http://data.vic.gov.au/> in machine readable format.

# STATEMENT OF AVAILABILITY OF OTHER INFORMATION

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

In compliance with the requirements of the Standing Direction of the Minister for Finance, details in respect to the items listed below have been retained by the Council and are available on request, subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

This information is available on request from:

Joan Phillips, Executive Officer, Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

Phone: 1800 134 803

Email: [veac@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:veac@delwp.vic.gov.au)

- Publications produced by the entity about itself, and how these can be obtained

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION INCLUDED IN ANNUAL REPORT

Details in respect of the following items have been included in this report:

- Major research and development activities undertaken – see Investigations and Assessments
- Major promotional, public relations and marketing activities undertaken to develop community awareness of the Council and its services – see Investigations and Assessments
- A list of major committees sponsored by the entity, the purposes of each committee and the extent to which the purposes have been achieved – see Committees

## INFORMATION THAT IS NOT APPLICABLE TO THE COUNCIL

The following information is not relevant to the Council for the reasons set out below:

- Overseas travel undertaken including a summary of the objectives and outcomes of each visit -Nil
- Details of changes in prices, fees, charges and levies charged - Nil
- Assessments and measures undertaken to improve the Occupational Health and Safety of employees #
- A general statement on IR within the entity and details of time lost through industrial accidents and disputes #
- Major external reviews that were carried out on the Council -Nil

# See DELWP Annual Report 2021-2022.

[veac.vic.gov.au](http://veac.vic.gov.au)

