



2022 / 2023

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

ANNUAL REPORT



Ingrid Stitt MP
Minister for Environment
2 Treasury Place
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 twenty-first Annual Report, covering our activities for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023.



Mellissa Wood
Chairperson
Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
30 June 2023

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ISSN: 2207-0613 Online/PDF

Accessibility

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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD

I am very pleased to provide the 2022-2023 annual report of the VEAC Council to the Minister for Environment, Ingrid Stitt MP, in accordance with the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*. A number of notable achievements were delivered during 2022-23. This year has seen the continued evolution of VEAC in advancing new partnerships and knowledge across the conservation and use of Victoria's public lands. In addition to undertaking six assessments - four delivered to the Minister and two in progress (discussed below) - VEAC concluded the delivery of our 50th anniversary program with the launch of the LCC and ECC digital archive on the VEAC website and a successful '50 Places' Instagram campaign to celebrate Victoria's special parks, forests and reserves. The LCC and ECC digital archive contains all the published reports and associated maps from the LCC from 1971 to 1997 and the ECC from 1997 to 2001. This substantial body of work represents 35 separate investigations, reviews and special investigations, and is now available to the public via our website.

Delivery highlights included:

In April VEAC provided advice to the Minister on key aspects of public land use information. This complex assessment comprised separate reports on:

- a) recreational activity data on Victoria's public land. This report was timely, noting that while recreation is now (along with nature conservation) the dominant use of Victoria's public land, there is no basic information available on levels and patterns of use with recreational use being the only major public land use without state-wide spatial data to inform decision making, and;
- b) improving VEAC'S dataset on agreed public land use (VEACRecs25). This work establishes an accurate record of public land use decisions for use in future land use planning and is foundational work for implementing the government's current public land use category-based legislation reforms.

Public land use categories reflect government decisions about how land can be used and have evolved over the last 50 years. VEAC was requested by the Minister to assess the status of government-accepted public land use category recommendations, made by the LCC between 1973 and 1983, which had not been subsequently reviewed. Completed in June, the results have indicated that several broad types of public land use should be reviewed in a targeted work program.

Early in the year, VEAC delivered its final reports on the Assessment of the values of Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs). We were pleased to partner with Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation and Taungurung Land and Waters Council on the values assessment and include their bio-cultural assessment for each IPA area into the VEAC reports as well as the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (EPCE) during this process.

Work underway includes:

In March, VEAC began the Assessment of the Values of the IPAs and adjacent state forests in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland. Aligned with the previous IPA assessments, VEAC's scientific assessment will inform the work of the EPCE in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister for Environment on the future uses of the IPAs. Council is enthusiastic to use the Central Highlands assessment as an opportunity to build genuine, meaningful partnerships with Traditional Owners, and a greater understanding of cultural landscape knowledge and how this can be applied alongside western science to achieve better outcomes in land and water planning and management. Council remains committed to supporting Traditional Owners in advancing self-determination and we greatly appreciated spending a wonderful day on Country, kindly hosted by Dhelkunya Dja Land Management Board and Djarra staff and rangers in October. Together, we shared productive discussions on management of cultural landscapes.

I'd like to acknowledge the assistance and support Council receives from state government departments and agencies, Traditional Owners, local government, organisations and community groups and members of the public. Heartfelt thanks go to VEAC's expert staff for their contributions and dedication, and to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action who provide the business systems 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 Energy, Environment and Climate Action (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. 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 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023 were Ms Mellissa Wood (Chairperson) Ms Joanne Duncan, Ms Anna Kilborn, Ms Nicola Ward and Mr Nick Wimbush.

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 and member of CGIAR's System Council and System Management Board. 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 member of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement and 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 and member of the Royal Society of Victoria.

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 was a member of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Advisory Panel, a past board director of Western Water, and she 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 strategic 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 Master of Public Policy at Monash University. She is also a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

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 integrate 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 volunteer positions including Board Director of the Natural Resources Conservation League (Vic), Independent Chair of the Southern Brown Bandicoot Regional Recovery Group and committee member of various community groups. She was previously a Sessional Member of Planning Panels Victoria and 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 is a member of 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 Environment and Climate Action was the responsible Minister for the period 1 July 2022 to 4 December 2022, and for the period 5 December 2022 to 30 June 2023 the responsible Minister was Ingrid Stitt MP, Minister for Environment.

COUNCIL ACTIVITIES

The Council met formally 11 times during the 2022-2023 financial year.

Council members' attendance at council meetings from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023

NAME	ATTENDANCE (number of meetings)
Melissa Wood	11 of 11
Joanne Duncan	9 of 11
Anna Kilborn	10 of 11
Nicola Ward	11 of 11
Nick Wimbush	10 of 11

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
Website 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 2022-2023.

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 Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North.

The assessment informed the work of the 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 was 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 was for an assessment and report on the above values and the economic implications of the proposed recommendations of the EPCE.

VEAC published its assessment of the matters specified in (a) to (d) on 31 March 2022. Separate assessments were prepared for the two IPAs. Each assessment included a report from the Traditional Owners of the land.

The Council provided its completed assessment including the matter referenced at paragraph (e) to the Minister on 31 July 2022.

VEAC was not required to undertake community consultation or receive submissions on this assessment.

The government response to the assessment was tabled in both houses of Parliament on 30 May 2023 and gazetted on 6 June 2023.

Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Assessment of the Values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North for the 2022-2023 financial year was \$105,306.

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 forests¹ in the Immediate Protection Areas (IPAs) in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North² 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.

¹ 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.

² 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

On 30 November 2020 VEAC was requested by the then 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 was for technical advice on aspects of public land use information and does not extend to recommending changes to public land use.

The advice focused 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.

The Minister extended the date for completion of the provision of advice by six months in September 2022.

The Council provided its completed advice to the Minister for the Environment Ingrid Stitt MP on 28 April 2023 in two separate reports.

An inventory of data on recreational activities on Victoria's public land was also published.

Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information for the 2022-2023 financial year was \$437,202.

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 land¹
- 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.

¹ 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.

ASSESSMENT OF EARLY GOVERNMENT-ACCEPTED LAND CONSERVATION COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

VEAC was requested on 5 September 2022 by the former Minister for Environment and Climate Action, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, to assess the status of government-accepted public land use category recommendations, in relation to particular areas of land, made by the Land Conservation Council (LCC) between 1973 and 1983, and which have not been subsequently reviewed.

The assessment supports the current reforms to public land legislation by identifying land use recommendations that require review to ensure the proposed transition to public land management categories, as recommended in VEAC's Statewide Assessment of Public Land Final Report (2017), is based on current and appropriate government-accepted recommendations for public land use categories.

The assessment did not include government-accepted public land use recommendations for national parks, state parks, wilderness parks, regional parks and state forests (including recommendations for areas for hardwood production and uncommitted land).

The purpose of the assessment was to:

- (a) identify government-accepted public land use recommendations that require review, and
- (b) identify government-accepted public land use recommendations that have been superseded by subsequent government policy decisions.

This assessment did not extend to recommending changes to public land use, and public consultation was not required.

The Council provided its completed advice to the Minister for Environment Ingrid Stitt MP on 5 June 2023.

Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Assessment of Early Government-accepted Land Conservation Council Recommendations for the 2022-2023 financial year was \$210,700.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 26B of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Environment and Climate Action hereby requests the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (the Council) to carry out an assessment of government-accepted public land use recommendations, in relation to particular areas of land, made by the former Land Conservation Council between 1973 and 1983 and which have not been subsequently reviewed. The assessment does not include government-accepted public land use recommendations for national parks, state parks, wilderness parks, regional parks and state forests (including recommendations for areas for hardwood production and uncommitted land).

The purpose of the assessment is to:

- (a) identify government-accepted public land use recommendations that require review
- (b) identify government-accepted public land use recommendations that have been superseded by subsequent government land use decisions.

The assessment supports the current reforms to public land legislation by identifying land use recommendations that require review to ensure the proposed transition to public land management categories, as recommended in the Council's *Statewide Assessment of Public Land Final Report* (2017), is based on current and appropriate government-accepted recommendations for public land use categories.

This request is for an assessment and report on the status of government-accepted public land use category recommendations, including a rationale for why a review is required. It does not extend to recommending changes to public land use, and public consultation is not required.

The Council must report on its assessment of the matters specified in paragraphs (a) and (b) above within nine months from the date of the request.

ASSESSMENT OF THE VALUES OF IMMEDIATE PROTECTION AREAS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND EAST GIPPSLAND

VEAC was requested on 20 March 2023 by the Minister for Environment, Ingrid Stitt MP, to assess the values of the Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, and in adjacent state forests.

The assessment will inform the work of an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister on the future uses of the Immediate Protection Areas and adjacent 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 Panel 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 Panel. Public consultation and recommendations are not required.

The Minister amended the terms of reference on 18 June 2023 to extend the reporting dates. VEAC must publish its assessment of the matters specified in (a) to (d) by 30 September 2023 and a report on the completed assessment including the matter referenced at paragraph (e) by 30 April 2024.

Expenditure

Expenditure, including salaries and on-costs, for the Assessment of the Values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland for the 2022-2023 financial year was \$162,977.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 26B of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*, the Minister for Environment hereby requests the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (the Council) to carry out an assessment of the values of the Immediate Protection Areas¹ in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland, and in adjacent state forests in eastern Victoria² as determined by the Council. The Immediate Protection Areas and state forest in eastern Victoria are shown on the accompanying map.

The assessment will inform the work of an Eminent Panel for Community Engagement (the Panel) in its provision of advice and recommendations to the Minister for Environment on the future uses of the Immediate Protection Areas and adjacent 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 Panel 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 the values 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. Public consultation and recommendations are not required.

The Council will engage with the Panel 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 30 September 2023 and submit a report on the completed assessment by 30 April 2024.

¹ For the purposes of this assessment, Immediate Protection Areas are defined as the areas announced as part of the Victorian Forestry Plan in November 2019 and updated on 21 November 2019.

² For the purposes of this assessment, state forest in eastern Victoria is defined as state forest areas east of the Hume Highway. 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 DEECA forest zoning data set (FMZ 100) as at the time of commencement of the assessment. State forest also includes state forest that is a natural catchment area under the *Heritage Rivers Act 1992*, an 'Other area with remote and natural attributes' recommended by the former Land Conservation Council in its Wilderness Special Investigation Final Recommendations (1991) and a reference area under the *Reference Areas Act 1978*.

BILL BORTHWICK STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS 2023

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 2023 scholarships totalling \$9,250 were awarded to ten recipients.

The recipients of the 2023 scholarships were:

Aaron Heap, University of Melbourne

'Values of forests in an alternative state – A case study of Wilson Promontory'.

The scholarship will assist with the costs of vehicle hire.

Aindreeya Alcova, University of Melbourne

*'Biodiversity of *Collectotrichum* spp. associated with Australian native plants in Victoria'.*

The scholarship will assist with the costs of fuel, camping permits and laboratory work.

Allison Menzies, La Trobe University

'Using novel eDNA approaches to assess invertebrate pollinator communities in an endangered grassland'. The scholarship will assist with vehicle hire, DNA extraction kits, Mini Reagent kit and consumables.

Brady Hamilton, Deakin University

'Pesticide monitoring of Australian streams using citizen science'. The scholarship will assist with the costs of equipment, chemicals and postage.

Chloe Stringer, University of Melbourne

'Towards a holistic understanding of past human-mollusc-environment relationships in northwest Victoria'. The scholarship will assist with vehicle hire, accommodation and payment of participants.

Claudia Geraldo Escobar, University of Melbourne

'Phenology and distribution of two stringybarks, vital for an endangered cockatoo'.

The scholarship will assist with the costs of food, accommodation, vehicle costs, consumables and laboratory costs.

Felix Powrie, University of Melbourne

'Facilitating 16s rDNA metabarcoding of southern Australian Algal Turf'.

The scholarship will assist with the costs of fuel, accommodation and disposables.

Joelle Hervic, Monash University

'Colonialism of People and Country: Opportunities for Self-Determination in Australia'.

The scholarship will assist with the costs of travel, accommodation and informant fees.

Katherine Horsfall, University of Melbourne

'Seed pre-treatment to enhance the functional diversity of direct-seeded grassy ecosystems'.

The scholarship will assist with the costs of seed, specialist herbarium services, accommodation and vehicle costs.

Stacey Phillips, La Trobe University

*'The effects of urbanisation on the genetic diversity of White's Skink (*Liopholis whitii*)'.*

The scholarship will assist with the costs of DNA testing, extraction, fieldwork and travel costs.

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 community reference groups in 2022-2023.

A Recreation Reference Group was established under section 12 of the VEAC Act to provide advice to Council on part (a) of the terms of reference for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information. The group met three times during 2022-23 and comprised nominees from the following organisations:

ORGANISATION
Australian Motorcycle Trail Riders Association
Australian Trail Horse Riders Association
Field and Game Australia
Four Wheel Drive Victoria
Prospectors and Miners Association of Victoria
Victorian Environment Friends Network
Victorian National Parks Association
VRFish
Victorian Tourism Industry Council

MEMBERSHIP OF EXTERNAL COMMITTEES

During 2022-2023 VEAC chairperson Mellissa Wood was a member of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement and the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Reference Group.

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 2022-2023, there were no consultancies where the total fees payable to the consultant were \$10,000 or greater.

In 2022-2023, there was one consultant engaged during the year, where the total fees payable to the consultant were less than \$10,000. The total expenditure incurred during 2022-2023 in relation to this consultancy was \$5775 (excl. GST).

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 Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

The financial operations of the Council have not been separately audited. Audited statements are incorporated into the overall Financial Statements of DEECA's Annual Report for the year ended 30 June 2023. The table below shows expenditure incurred. This includes expenditure for the Advice on Aspects of Public Land Use Information of \$437,202 (see page 10), the Assessment of the values of Immediate Protection Areas in the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North of \$105,306 (see page 8), the Assessment of the values of the Immediate Protection Areas in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland of \$162,977 (see page 14), and the Assessment of early government-accepted Land Conservation Council recommendations of \$210,700 (see page 12).

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

EXPENSES	2022-23	2021-22	2020-21	2019-20	2018-19
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Salaries and oncosts	1,193,021	929,130	866,437	896,835	1,406,817
Operating	298,376	511,298	348,865	377,050	955,873
Total	1,491,397	1,440,428	1,215,302	1,273,885	2,362,689

WORKFORCE DATA

EMPLOYMENT	2023 (A)			2022 (B)		
Type	Male	Female	Total staff	Male	Female	Total staff
Total	3	6	9 (FTE 9)	3	5	8 (FTE 7.7)

Notes:

(A) relates to payroll and contract staff as at 30 June 2023

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

Note: Employees have been correctly classified in workforce data collections. VEAC staff are also included in employment statistics for DEECA for 2022-2023.

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 DEECA, 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 DEECA to perform its functions and does not own or control any buildings.

The Council utilises DEECA'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 DEECA offices and facilities to perform its functions and the reporting requirement of the office is met by DEECA. For further information please see the DEECA 2022-23 annual report.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) EXPENDITURE

VEAC falls under the umbrella of DEECA with regard to ICT and providing business-enabling ICT services. Please refer to DEECA Annual Report 2022-2023.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI)

The Freedom of Information Act 1982 gives everyone the right to seek access to documents held by the Council. This comprises documents both created by VEAC or supplied to VEAC by an external organisation or individual, and may also include maps, films, microfiche, photographs, computer printouts, computer discs, tape recordings and videotapes. 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 ovic.vic.gov.au. Access to documents can also be obtained through a written request to the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action's Freedom of Information team, as detailed in s17 of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. When making an FOI request, applicants should ensure requests are in writing, and clearly identify what types of material/documents are being sought.

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

Freedom of Information Officer
Department of Energy, Environment, and Climate Action
GPO Box 527
Melbourne Vic 3001
foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au

The cost of an FOI application is \$31.80; 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).

Operations

For the 12 months ending 30 June 2023 there were no requests.

There were no requests outstanding as at 30 June 2023.

The Act allows VEAC to refuse access, either fully or partially, to certain documents or information. Examples of documents that may not be accessed include: cabinet documents; some internal working documents; law enforcement documents; documents covered by legal professional privilege, such as legal advice; personal information about other people; and information provided to VEAC in-confidence.

If an applicant is not satisfied by a decision made about their request, under section 49A of the Act, they may seek a review by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner within 28 days of receiving a decision letter.

LOCAL JOBS FIRST

For the 2022-2023 reporting period, VEAC did not undertake any projects subject to *Local Jobs First Act 2003*.

PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES ACT 2012

The *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012* (PID 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 PID ACT

The PID 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 PID 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 PID Act.

WHAT IS 'IMPROPER OR CORRUPT CONDUCT'?

- Improper or corrupt conduct involves substantial:
- mismanagement of public resources;
- 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 DEECA or IBAC on the contact details provided below.

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

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

DEECA 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 DEECA's procedures on its website at: www.deeca.vic.gov.au.

CONTACTS

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)

Address: PO Box 500, East Melbourne Vic 3002

Ph: 1800 903 877

Website: www.deeca.vic.gov.au

Independent Broad-based Anti-Corruption Commission 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

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 2014

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 DEECA is:

Senior Privacy Advisor
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
PO Box 500, East Melbourne VIC 3002
foi.unit@delwp.vic.gov.au

RISK MANAGEMENT

VEAC relies on the DEECA risk management framework and internal audit of financial and other administrative systems which are used by the VEAC office. Please refer to the DEECA Annual Report for further information.

In addition, in relation to its purpose and strategic objectives, VEAC reviews and approves its risk management framework and policy annually. VEAC maintains a risk register of current and emerging risks and reviews them on a quarterly basis.

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.

DISCLOSURE INDEX

The 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council is prepared in accordance with all relevant Victorian legislation. This index has been prepared to facilitate identification of the Council's compliance with statutory disclosure requirements.

LEGISLATION	REQUIREMENT	PAGE NO
Accountable Officer's declaration		
SD 4.2	Sign off requirements	Inside front cover
Charter and purpose		
FRD 22	Objectives, functions, powers and duties	4
FRD 22	Manner of establishment and responsible Minister	4, 7
FRD 22	Nature and range of services provided	8-15
Financial information		
FRD 22	Operational and budgetary objectives	18
FRD 22	Summary of the financial results	18
Governance and organisational structure		
FRD 22	Occupational health and safety policy	19
FRD 22	Employment and conduct principles	19
FRD 29	Workforce data disclosures	18
FRD 15	Executive officer disclosures	18
Other information		
FRD 10	Disclosure index	19
FRD 25	Local Jobs First Act disclosures	20
FRD 22	Details of consultancies in excess of \$10 000	17
FRD 22	Details of consultancies under \$10 000	17
FRD 22	Disclosure of government advertising expenditure	19
FRD 22	Application and operation of <i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	20
FRD 22	<i>Compliance with Building Act 1993</i>	19
FRD 22	Application and operation of <i>Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012</i>	21
FRD 24	Reporting of environmental data by government entities	19
FRD 22	Statement of availability of other information	19
SD 4.5.5	Risk management compliance attestation	22
	Gifts, benefits and hospitality attestation	22
SD 4.2	General information requirements	Entire document
MRO	Compliance with DataVic Access Policy	22

Legislation		
	<i>Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001</i>	4
	<i>Building Act 1993</i>	19
	<i>Freedom of Information Act 1982</i>	20
	<i>Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012</i>	21
	<i>Local Jobs Act 2003</i>	20
	<i>Victorian Industry Participation Policy Act 2003</i>	20
Print and Design		
FRD 30	Standard requirements for the design and print of annual reports	Entire document

ACRONYMS

FRD – Financial Reporting Directions

SD – Standing Directions

MRO – Model Report of Operations

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 item listed below have been retained by the Council and are available on request, subject to the provisions of the FOI Act.

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

- Publications produced by the entity about itself.

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 industrial relations 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 DEECA Annual Report 2022-2023.

veac.vic.gov.au