

Living with Wildlife Action Plan



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Minister's foreword

Our landscape features a diverse range of wildlife, from kangaroos and koalas to dunnarts and potoroos. Our native wildlife is a distinct and important part of our environment, and it gives me great pleasure to demonstrate the Victorian Government's commitment to protecting and conserving the state's native wildlife through the actions under this Living with Wildlife Action Plan.

Unfortunately sometimes interactions with wildlife can be harmful to humans or damaging to livelihoods. Whether it is magpies swooping cyclists, kangaroos grazing on farmers' crops, wombats crossing busy roads or any one of a range of challenging encounters, there is a clear need to manage our interaction with wildlife. This must be done in a way that ensures sustainable wildlife populations while protecting human health, safety, biodiversity, amenity values, property and livelihoods.

The *Wildlife Act 1975* provides the framework for this, and we have developed this Living with Wildlife Action Plan to further ensure that we can look after wildlife species while appropriately managing their impacts.

We've sought advice from experts in wildlife ecology, animal welfare, wildlife behaviour and veterinary science in developing this Action Plan.

Our approach incorporates themes of encouraging positive attitudes towards wildlife, effective management of wildlife and human interactions, improving knowledge and wildlife rehabilitation. The proposed actions are designed to deliver real results.



This Action Plan provides decisive action to achieve positive outcomes – from helping the community know what to do if they find sick, injured or orphaned wildlife, to more complex issues such as managing overabundant wildlife populations to protect animal welfare, biodiversity and livelihoods.

Wildlife management is a shared responsibility between communities, government and industry, and all of us need to play our part. By working together, we can achieve a better outcome for Victoria's wildlife for the future in a way that ensures the sustainability of our unique native species while protecting human health, safety, biodiversity, amenity values, property and livelihoods.

Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Minister for Suburban Development

Aboriginal acknowledgement

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal community and their rich culture and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples and as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and biodiversity which we rely on and value.

We embrace the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice.

We recognise the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life and how this enriches us. We acknowledge that the land and its wildlife are of spiritual, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people.

We also recognise the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and acknowledge their contribution in the management of land, water, the natural landscape and our wildlife.

We have distinct legislative obligations to Traditional Owner groups that are paramount in our responsibilities in managing Victoria's wildlife.

Introduction

Victoria's native wildlife species are a unique and important part of the landscape. The Victorian Government is committed to the conservation of Victoria's wildlife and has developed this Action Plan to address some key areas that require improvement.

Many Victorians value living in areas rich with wildlife, whether it be in suburban backyards or parks, or rural landscapes, wetlands, coastal areas or native forest. Victorians and visitors from both interstate and overseas seek to enjoy our wildlife and view them in their natural habitats, particularly our more iconic species such as kangaroos and koalas.

The health of wildlife populations is often an indication of the health of the environment, on which people depend. Wildlife play a vital role in maintaining healthy ecosystem function, influencing a range of factors including plant productivity, soil condition and water quality – all environmental conditions that also affect humans.

Wildlife is also embedded in the cultural heritage of Victoria's Traditional Owners. Victorian Traditional Owners have cultural, spiritual and economic connection to the land and its natural resources, including native wildlife, through their association and relationship with Country. As custodians of the land, Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians have managed the land and the native animals that inhabit it sustainably for thousands of years.

Balancing the needs of humans and wildlife across our landscape can at times present significant challenges for human safety, property or livelihoods and the welfare of both individual animals and wildlife populations. For example, farmers may be impacted by overabundant kangaroos which can overgraze pastures resulting in a loss of income, magpies can swoop cyclists and pedestrians causing safety concerns, possums can eat our garden plants and live in our roofs, and animals may suffer from lack of food in a habitat that can no longer support thriving populations. In some instances, management interventions are required to protect both people and wildlife and are based on strict protocols and government regulations that are evidence-based, humane and cost effective.

Wildlife conservation and management is a shared responsibility between communities, government, industries, businesses and stakeholder organisations, and all can play their part in achieving a better outcome for Victoria's wildlife in the future.

Members of the community can play an important role in conserving and caring for our wildlife, particularly when encountering wildlife in need of assistance. Victoria has a dedicated network of volunteer wildlife shelter operators and foster carers who take in sick, injured and orphaned wildlife and rehabilitate them so they can be returned to their natural habitat. These individuals are supported by a number of wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisations that operate throughout the state and assist in assuring that wildlife in need are responded to as quickly as possible.

The importance of wildlife and its habitat to current and future generations of Victorians has led to the development of this Action Plan. It focuses on actions needed in key areas in order to protect, conserve and sustainably manage Victoria's native wildlife.



Vision

Victorian communities value wildlife and work together to achieve the sustainable management and conservation of wildlife.

Outcomes

The outcomes we strive for by taking these actions are:

1. Victoria's native wildlife populations are healthy and secure.
2. The management of wildlife is sustainable and underpinned by available scientific evidence and best practice.
3. The Victorian community understands their roles and responsibilities relating to wildlife and are actively engaged in wildlife protection and conservation.
4. The Victorian community is confident in the government's actions to protect, conserve and manage wildlife.



Guiding principles

The Victorian Government encourages a 'living with wildlife' approach in how Victorians think about and interact with wildlife. This approach promotes positive attitudes towards wildlife and encourages people to understand the importance of conserving wildlife.

The following principles guide the development of policies and procedures which are used to inform decision making for individual situations.

Human safety is paramount

While looking after the welfare of animals and conserving species are important, the impact on human health and safety must always be the first consideration.

Wildlife belongs in the wild

If healthy and there is habitat to sustain them, wild animals should remain in the wild. It is illegal in Victoria to take wildlife from the wild into captivity. Victoria has an established legal framework for the trade of captive-bred wildlife that meets the needs of members of the community wishing to possess, or trade in, wildlife.

However, in some circumstances, captive intervention is required to support the breeding and release of some of our most critically endangered species. Captive insurance populations enable the genetic diversity of the species to be maintained, allow husbandry and breeding procedures to be tested and provide individuals for reintroduction programs. These interventions are initiated and facilitated by accredited institutions including zoos and wildlife facilities.

Wildlife and their habitat should be sustainably managed

The management of wildlife should not compromise the health of the population and its habitat or other species that depend on it.

A precautionary approach should also be applied, so that irreversible losses from action or inaction are avoided.

The welfare of all wildlife must be protected and all actions taken to manage the impacts of wildlife should be justified, humane and effective

Anybody working with wildlife, whether it be rehabilitating sick, injured or orphaned wildlife or carrying out research involving wildlife, needs to ensure that their actions take into account the welfare of the animals and that the most humane approach is used.

Some wildlife problems don't require intervention or active management. A better understanding and a shift in people's attitude towards the perceived problem is all that is necessary. When some form of management intervention is warranted, the most appropriate, humane and practicably feasible method of management to achieve the objective should be adopted.

Non-lethal control methods should be used where practical and feasible, and where they do not result in reduced animal welfare outcomes

Where wildlife is causing damage to property or biodiversity, non-lethal management methods, such as exclusion, deterrence or scaring, should be considered first. However there are times when non-lethal management methods may not be practical or feasible. They may sometimes offer a less humane solution (e.g. may result in death due to the stress of capture and handling) or may be prohibitively costly. In these cases, humane lethal control methods may be necessary and the most humane control method should be prioritised.

Context

Scope of this Action Plan

Native wildlife is protected in Victoria under the *Wildlife Act 1975*, which defines wildlife as all vertebrates indigenous to Australia, some non-indigenous vertebrates (including deer and gamebirds) and any terrestrial invertebrates listed as threatened under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*.

This Action Plan focuses on actions to protect the welfare of individual animals and native wildlife populations by managing and mitigating risk to populations while balancing human interests. These actions will be led by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

It does not cover reviews or reform relating to threatened species, animal welfare, the keeping or sustainable access and use of wildlife in commercial industries, tourism or game management.

Links to other government policy

This Action Plan is part of the government's broader long-term agenda to ensure stronger protection of important biodiversity.

The government is committed to improving the care and protection of Victoria's biodiversity, including wildlife and its habitat, through the following interconnected initiatives:

- Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 (Biodiversity Plan).
- A review of the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1987*.
- A review of the native vegetation clearing regulations, which form part of Victoria's planning system.
- The development of this Action Plan.

Together, these initiatives develop a new direction for the protection and management of Victoria's biodiversity, including wildlife and its habitat.

1. Encouraging positive attitudes towards wildlife

The conservation and management of wildlife is a shared responsibility by all members of the Victorian community. Most of us encounter wildlife every day, from magpies and possums in our urban parks and backyards, to kangaroos and koalas in the urban fringe and rural areas.

Wild animals are an important part of our environment and essential to the functioning and health of our ecosystems. They are an integral part of the beauty of the outdoors and the excitement and fun of activities such as hiking, camping and photography.

At times wildlife can impact our way of life, such as native birds and bats eating our backyard fruit trees. This has meant that in some cases wildlife can be viewed as pests.

However, by building greater public awareness and understanding of animal behaviour and their requirements across the landscape, it is possible to foster attitudinal and behavioural change that both values and understands improved ways of living with wildlife across Victoria.

We can also be more responsible to ensure our actions don't result in negative impacts on wildlife. Simple things, such as using wildlife friendly fruit-tree netting to avoid bird and bat entanglement, and keeping pet cats indoors overnight so they don't prey on birds, can go a long way to protecting our native wildlife.

Short-term Action (1 year)

- 1.1. A range of communication methods will be used to encourage positive attitudes towards 'living with wildlife', and raise awareness of wildlife–human interaction issues that are common in Victoria.



2. Effective wildlife management

As Victoria's human population grows and urban development expands, wildlife-human interactions are becoming more frequent. While many of these interactions are positive, in some circumstances wildlife can negatively impact on people and the environment and require some form of management.

Wildlife can at times cause damage to property, crops and pasture, impacting on people's livelihoods. Wildlife in urban areas can become aggressive and potentially dangerous to people or cause serious road collisions. Overabundant wildlife can also have negative impacts on biodiversity, recreation and amenity values.

The management of wildlife-human interactions is complex and seeks to balance competing needs – ensuring the conservation and protection of wildlife, while also allowing for the active management of wildlife when necessary for the protection of human health and safety, livelihood and biodiversity.

Under the *Wildlife Act 1975*, it is illegal for anyone to control (take or destroy) wildlife without an authorisation. The authorisations to take or destroy wildlife are known as an Authority to Control Wildlife. The ATCW system allows wildlife to be controlled in certain circumstances, where the wildlife is posing a risk to human health or safety, damaging property, crops or pasture or impacting on biodiversity.

The species most commonly subject to management and control in Victoria is the Eastern Grey Kangaroo, which is considered secure and abundant on both private and public land in certain areas of the state. DELWP also manages overabundant koala populations with the aim to ensure healthy habitat, healthy koala populations and to protect koala welfare. DELWP encourages the use of non-lethal management methods such as exclusion, deterrence, fertility control or scaring, where practical and feasible. Where these methods are not feasible or not cost effective, lethal control may be considered.

Victoria's community is diverse and there are many different views on the impacts of wildlife-human interactions and also how they should be managed. The community have raised concerns about the effectiveness of the ATCW system to manage the impacts of wildlife. There are often calls for more monitoring and enforcement of compliance with ATCWs. Some sectors of the community feel that non-lethal control methods are not fully considered, that lethal control is used too often, and have concerns around whether the control is humane.

There are also often conflicts or different opinions around whether control should be allowed. This is particularly evident between wildlife shelters and neighbouring landholders who have ATCWs to control wildlife that is causing damage to their property or with respect to large scale kangaroo control programs on public land. Difficulties also exist with the planned control or management of wildlife in urban and peri urban areas, and the management of displaced kangaroos as a result of urban development.

Existing management options for overabundant wildlife populations, such as fertility control, are not always effective at addressing immediate or short-term issues.

Short-term Action (1 year)

- 2.1. A review of the ATCW system will be conducted to gather evidence and stakeholder input into the limitations and strengths of the system. The review will examine the rigour and transparency of the ATCW processes, procedures, conditions, monitoring and compliance and will inform improvements to the system.
- 2.2. Comprehensive ATCW assessment and decision-making guidelines will be updated for DELWP staff. These will incorporate wildlife and agricultural expertise and advances in scientific knowledge about sustainable wildlife management.
- 2.3. Review and monitor the effectiveness of the kangaroo management planning process to reduce impacts on kangaroos in Melbourne's growth areas.

Medium-term Actions (2–3 years)

- 2.4. A Victorian Kangaroo Management Strategy will be developed to inform the sustainable management of Victoria's kangaroo populations and to guide future actions and decisions.
- 2.5. The Victorian Koala Management Strategy will be reviewed and updated to ensure Victoria's koala populations are secure and healthy, and to guide their management. The updated strategy will incorporate advancements in knowledge and consideration of long-term koala management across the landscape.

3. Improving knowledge

The community expects that government decisions about wildlife management will be evidence based, using the most up-to-date and reliable information and data. Advice is often sought from scientific and animal welfare experts when making decisions on complex wildlife management issues. The government is committed to improving our ecological, species, social and economic knowledge to inform decision making.

Evidence-based knowledge is generated by many different parts of the community, including universities and research organisations, other government agencies and Traditional Owner groups. We will tap into this wide variety of knowledge and skill to ensure that wildlife is managed using the best information and techniques available.

The community has called for more research to be conducted into wildlife management in Victoria to support transparent and robust decision making and in particular for species in which current management methods may be inefficient or ineffective to address the problem.

Areas in which more research is needed include:

- wildlife population surveys to ensure the sustainable management of populations
- methods for assessing impacts caused by wildlife species to natural ecosystems and property
- demonstrating the humaneness and effectiveness of both lethal and non-lethal management methods, and investigating new methods, for commonly controlled wildlife species such as kangaroos.

Short-term Action (1 year)

- 3.1. A state-wide kangaroo survey has been carried out based on expert advice to better understand the current distribution of kangaroos in Victoria. The survey will be repeated in 2018. The knowledge gained from the surveys will be used to ensure that authorised kangaroo control will not impact on the sustainability of Victoria's kangaroo populations.
- 3.2. DELWP will work with research institutions and wildlife experts to examine new methods of assessing damage caused by overabundant wildlife and options for humane control methods, including non-lethal methods.



4. Streamlining assistance for sick, injured and orphaned wildlife

Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation in Victoria is undertaken by authorised volunteers who provide an essential and valuable service to assist wildlife found in pain or distress. These are generally incidents involving individual animals, such as a kangaroo or koala being hit by a car, or a lizard or bird being attacked by a domestic dog or cat.

There are approximately 320 wildlife shelter operators and 250 foster carers in Victoria. Wildlife rehabilitators rescue sick, injured and orphaned native wildlife and ensure they are provided with the necessary care and rehabilitation in order to recover and be released back to the wild successfully at an appropriate release site. If it is unable to be released or survive on its own in the wild they must humanely euthanise the animal.

In Victoria, some events that impact large numbers of wildlife or specific species are handled differently. These wildlife emergencies are defined under Victoria's *Emergency Management Act 2013* as:

- cetacean (whale and dolphin) stranding, entanglement and vessel strike
- wildlife affected by marine pollution (including oiled wildlife)
- wildlife welfare issues arising from other declared emergencies such as fire and flood.

DELWP is responsible for leading the response arrangements to these emergency situations, with the help of support agencies and in some cases, trained volunteers. Volunteers may play an important role in the assessment, rehabilitation and release of wildlife during and after emergencies.

Wildlife emergencies can pose significant risks to both responders and members of the community, therefore responding to these types of emergencies requires specialised training and techniques. Managing the welfare of impacted wildlife by a declared emergency in a safe and humane way is critical. If the community observes wildlife being impacted during declared emergencies, it is important that DELWP is notified as soon as possible.

Unfortunately, the community is not always sure of what to do when they find sick, injured or orphaned wildlife and who to contact for assistance. This can result in delays in the wildlife getting the care it needs and frustration for the person seeking assistance. Injured wildlife can also be a danger to people, so it is important appropriate advice is easily available to them to ensure their safety.

Short-term Action (1 year)

- 4.1. DELWP will create a new online injured wildlife tool to ensure that the community can access the information they need and know who to contact for help regarding sick, injured or orphaned wildlife.

