

Executive Summary

Marine and Coastal Policy



March 2020

Minister's message

Victorians love to live near, visit and use the marine and coastal environment. It holds significant environmental values, forms a core part of our shared cultural identity, and is a major contributor to the Victorian economy.

The marine and coastal environment faces many pressures and a long-term, strategic approach is required to ensure this precious and unique environment is protected.

The Victorian Government has an ambitious environmental agenda and is committed to acting on climate change. The passing of the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* heralded a new era of reform and commitment to best practice management of Victoria's marine and coastal environment.

The Marine and Coastal Policy (the Policy), the first prepared under the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*, reflects a drive to deliver lasting benefits to the marine and coastal environment in its own right, as well as to the millions of Victorians who enjoy its rich beauty and

opportunities for recreation, and who prosper from the huge economic value it delivers to the state every year. The Marine and Coastal Policy recognises Traditional Owners' enduring connection to Country and seeks to support a self-determination approach.

Thank you to those people and groups who contributed their time and effort to developing the Policy. I particularly thank the members of the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council for their guidance.



The Hon. Lily D'Ambrosio MP
*Minister for Energy, Environment
and Climate Change*

Victorian Marine and Coastal Council message

It is the role of the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council to provide advice that is both stakeholder-informed and evidence based. The Policy was produced in that context with input from many stakeholders, and the latest science.

From social research, we know that Victorians love our marine and coastal areas and expect fully functioning marine and coastal ecosystems that underpin our liveability, economy, recreation, cultural life, provide for ecosystem services and, most importantly, be biodiverse and healthy.

Enabling climate resilient communities (both ecological and human) is one of our biggest challenges in the coming decades. Through the Policy the core objectives of the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018* to promote climate resilience are made real.

Along with that, we look forward to a step change in partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners in caring for Country, and a clearer framework enabling consistent decision-making and certainty across Victoria. While the Policy can set us up for the challenges and opportunities of the future in Victoria, we know that it is our collective leadership needed to give it full effect.



Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.



Victoria's marine and coastal environment is special and unique. In addition to its intrinsic natural values, it provides enormous environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits, contributing to the health, wellbeing and prosperity of all Victorians.

Victorians value and enjoy the marine and coastal environment in a variety of ways – from walking, fishing, surfing and boating, to simply being on the coast. The extent to which we value it was demonstrated in the Wave 5 survey which looked at community attitudes about our marine and coastal environment.

The survey results are clear – Victorians love and treasure their marine and coastal environment, which makes the responsibility to nurture it and protect it from the advancing impacts of climate change all the more important.

80% of Victorians said the marine and coastal environment was the State's most important natural feature.

98% of Victorians reported a positive experience last time they visited the coast, remarking that picturesque scenery, clean water and the absence of litter were key to their enjoyment.

A large majority – 77% – had visited the coast in the previous 12 months, with half of them staying overnight. More than a third made more than five trips to the coast in the previous year.

There was also widespread acceptance that climate change poses a threat to Victoria's marine and coastal environment and that more needs to be done to reduce its impacts.



The Policy was guided by community feedback and prepared through a collaborative process involving key government and non-government groups, with representation across various sectors, engagement with Traditional Owner groups, and guidance from the Victorian Marine and Coastal Council.

A draft Marine and Coastal Policy was released for two months of public comment in July 2019. More than 200 submissions were received from a wide cross-section of the Victorian community, with many different views represented.

Overall there was strong support for the need to protect the marine and coastal environment for current and future generations.

There were calls for greater recognition within the Policy of internationally significant values and sites, such as Ramsar sites, and for efforts to ensure environmental values more broadly are protected. Communities and user groups raised concerns about ongoing access to the marine and coastal environment and sought recognition for the social and economic value of existing uses.

Local governments requested greater direction and clarity on climate change adaptation. They also wanted to ensure strong strategic planning was at the forefront of managing use and development in the marine and coastal environment, and that suitable development opportunities would not be stifled.

The full breadth of community feedback was considered and taken on board, resulting in many changes to the wording of the draft policies to ensure a balanced outcome. The strategic approach to planning has been strengthened to ensure appropriate use and development is enabled, while also ensuring our unique and precious environmental values are protected.

Stronger and clearer direction on climate change adaptation was also included to give local government, industry and communities greater certainty about how climate change can and will be managed in the marine and coastal environment.



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The Policy will guide planning and management of the marine and coastal environment so that ecosystems, communities, industries and built assets are resilient in the face of future change, including from natural hazards, climate change, population growth, or a combination of these factors.

Ensuring the survival of healthy and functioning ecosystems is essential to preserving the intrinsic values of the marine and coastal environment. It will also promote resilience for industries and communities that rely on marine and coastal resources for liveability and economic prosperity.



Our vision is for a healthy, dynamic and biodiverse marine and coastal environment that is valued in its own right, and that benefits the Victorian community now and in the future.

This vision complements the *United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals* that focus on sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, protection of cultural heritage, increased resilience of communities and the natural environment, climate change response, and sustainable use and development.

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The Policy guides decision makers to achieve the objectives and guiding principles outlined in the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*. The Planning and Decision Pathway provides a process for clear and consistent decision making using these objectives and guiding principles.

GUIDED BY THE PRINCIPLES OF

Integrated coastal zone management

Ecologically sustainable development

Proportionate and risk-based principle

Evidence-based decision making

Ecosystem-based management

Adaptive management

Precautionary principle

DECISION MAKERS WILL

1

Acknowledge Traditional Owners' rights, aspirations and knowledge

Understand, acknowledge and act upon the rights and aspirations of Traditional Owner groups for Country

2

Protect and enhance the marine and coastal environment

Protect and enhance intrinsic values and goods and benefits of the marine and coastal environment

3

Respect natural processes

Understand the dynamic natural processes in planning for and managing risks to people and assets

4

Strengthen resilience to climate change

Understand the current and future stressors from climate change and assess how well the marine and coastal environment can cope with and adapt to change and how that can be strengthened

5

Use and develop sustainably

Consider the impacts and benefits of existing and new use and development on the environment, other users and the prosperity of future generations

THROUGH

Taking a stewardship approach

to how we care for and manage the marine and coastal environment

Building understanding and knowledge

of the condition and values of the marine and coastal environment

Engaging

with a wide variety of communities and user groups that value the marine and coastal environment

Collaborating

across the breadth of people and organisations involved in marine and coastal management to deliver an integrated and co-ordinated approach

Highlights of the Policy

- ✓ Recognises Traditional Owners' enduring connection to Country. It supports a self-determination model that facilitates current and future generations to have their voices heard in planning and management decisions, and to care for Country.
- ✓ Supports the consistent application of ecosystem-based management to enable marine and coastal ecosystems to be functioning, resilient and valued by all Victorians, and to provide goods and services now and in the future.
- ✓ Enshrines the ongoing public ownership of marine and coastal Crown land for the benefit of all Victorians.
- ✓ Embeds climate change adaptation as a core component of all planning in the marine and coastal environment, and for the first time explicitly states possible adaptation actions that must be considered.
- ✓ Clarifies that the state will prioritise actions strategically and use a risk-based approach to protect public values.
- ✓ Enables climate resilient development, and prepares our environment, community and economy for change.
- ✓ Acknowledges the importance of use and development of the marine and coastal environment to people, groups, communities, industries and the Victorian economy.
- ✓ Provides direction for strong strategic planning for sustainable use, development and access to the marine and coastal environment aimed at ensuring its continued health and maintenance as a desirable place to visit, live and work.
- ✓ Supports the coordination of marine and coastal land management to ensure that the capacity and capability of managers can effectively meet current and future challenges.
- ✓ Articulates that funding is a shared responsibility of all levels of government, beneficiaries and users, and encourages co-investment for asset renewal using a strategic, risk-based approach that prioritises available funding.
- ✓ Delivers Victoria's first marine spatial planning framework for achieving integrated and coordinated planning and management of the marine environment.

Marine and Coastal Policy



Marine and Coastal Strategy

A Marine and Coastal Strategy will be developed in 2020. The Strategy will detail priority actions to achieve the Policy's directions on the ground and will be accompanied by an implementation and evaluation plan.

Working together

The diverse nature of the marine and coastal environment means there are many different interests and overlapping responsibilities. To reflect this, the Policy represents a whole-of-government approach to managing the marine and coastal environment, and has been approved by the following relevant Ministers:

- Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change
- Minister for Water
- Minister for Planning
- Minister for Ports and Freight
- Minister for Fishing and Boating
- Minister for Agriculture
- Minister for Resources.