



Protecting Victoria's
state forests and
native wildlife

Regulatory Priorities

2024–2025

CONSERVATION
REGULATOR VICTORIA

Regulatory Priorities

2024 – 2025

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

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. We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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Accessibility

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FOREWORD

Chief Conservation Regulator

From red gum forests to pristine beaches, Victoria is known for its diverse landscapes which are home to unique flora and fauna. These environments also provide Victorians with fantastic opportunities to get out and enjoy the environment safely and sustainably. The Conservation Regulator works to protect these environments and Victoria’s native wildlife through education, compliance monitoring and enforcement of laws relating to biodiversity, public land use, wildlife and bushfire prevention.



Kate Gavens
CHIEF CONSERVATION REGULATOR

To help us focus our efforts, we identify a set of regulatory priorities – the things that through dedicated focus of the regulator will make the most difference. To determine our regulatory priorities, we undertake a state-wide risk assessment to understand what the greatest risks are to Victoria’s public land, biodiversity and wildlife.

This involves us collecting information from a range of sources including public reports such as the **Victorian State of the Environment Report 2023**, proactive intelligence and trend analysis and engaging subject matter experts and stakeholders.

CHIEF CONSERVATION REGULATOR FOREWORD CONTINUED

Illegal campfires, illegal take of firewood, cruelty to wildlife, protection of threatened species and illegal vehicle use are our regulatory priorities for 2024 – 2025. These activities present ongoing risks to Victoria’s native flora and fauna, especially as we continue to see declines in biodiversity.

Commercial native timber harvesting ceased in Victoria on 1 January 2024. This change means a significant reduction in the risk of illegal commercial timber harvesting, and therefore removal as a regulatory priority.

However, the future of Victoria’s forest management is still critical context for our role and we will continue to play our part in regulating the removal of forest produce from Victoria’s state forests. In addition, the illegal take of firewood continues to be a focal point of our work in the year ahead and it remains a regulatory priority.

Wildlife protection continues to be a cornerstone for the work of the Conservation Regulator. Our priority of tackling cruelty to wildlife recognises the unacceptable and preventable harm it causes to Victoria’s wildlife.

Threatened species continue to face major threats such as habitat loss and degradation. We recognise the vital importance of ensuring threatened species are protected from extinction. Both cruelty to wildlife and the protection of threatened species remain as regulatory priorities for 2024 – 2025.

We are pleased to again see thousands of Victorians take advantage of Victoria’s great outdoors. By using public land for recreation, the community benefits from a thriving environment.

We’re working to ensure Victoria’s native species benefit too. We’ll continue to collaborate with our regulatory partners, volunteer organisations and colleagues across the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action. This work ensures your visitation is sustainable and supports our shared environment.

Thank you for taking an interest in our work. We appreciate your attention and trust in us to deliver on our responsibilities.

Kate Gavens

CHIEF CONSERVATION REGULATOR



How we set our regulatory priorities

The Conservation Regulator is committed to tackling our regulatory responsibilities.

We identify priorities by analysing environmental and behavioural trends and hearing from key stakeholders on what matters to them. These conversations are central to our work and help test our understanding of risk.

Our regulatory priorities ensure we are focusing on what matters most. This enables us to design more proactive and preventative approaches.

Whatever our focus, we value transparency.

We publish our regulatory priorities so the public is aware of our work and understand what they can expect from us.

Trends we are seeing



Wildlife welfare report increase

The number of reports of illegal and deliberate harm to wildlife continue to increase. We remain concerned with the number of breaches of wildlife licences and authorities, in particular instances constituting cruelty, neglect or mistreatment. These trends require proactive efforts to protect our unique wildlife.



Changed public land use

Victorians are interacting with public land in changing ways, including due to increased demand for firewood. We are also seeing increased unauthorised occupation of public land. We appreciate these pressures are challenging and we undertake compliance activities in proportion to the harm caused.



Visitation rate increase

As Victoria's population continues to grow, we are seeing visitation rates to public land increase across the state. Research shows that people who connect with and benefit from nature are more likely to protect the natural environment. We will continue to support Victorians enjoying nature while also protecting native flora and fauna.



Biodiversity decline

Victorian State of the Environment Report 2023 shows that biodiversity is declining and more frequent bushfires means more land is below the tolerable fire interval. Habitat loss and degradation, human population, land clearing, environmental weeds and invasive herbivores and predators are major drivers. Our work is part of government-wide effort to reverse this trend as outlined in Biodiversity 2037.



Regulatory priorities

The Conservation Regulator's state-wide regulatory priorities for 2024 – 2025 are:



Illegal campfires



Illegal take of firewood



Cruelty to wildlife



Protection of threatened species



Illegal vehicle use



PRIORITY

Illegal campfires

Bushfires caused by illegal campfires can devastate communities and the environment.

Bushfires are a known and potentially devastating feature of Victoria's landscape. Reducing the bushfire risks posed by illegal and unsafe campfires has been a priority since the Conservation Regulator was established.

Illegal campfires remain one of our priorities into 2024 – 2025. We're committed to sustaining our efforts to engage and educate Victorians about campfire safety. We engage with the Victorian community through targeted campaigns, patrols and messaging aimed at raising the awareness of campfire safety and regulations.

The risks from illegal campfires are higher in December, January and February due to the warmer weather conditions.

Illegal campfires during these months risk the destruction of native plants and animals, and of heritage values, loss of access to public land, loss of personal property and impact to community infrastructure, and in the worst cases – loss of life.

Visitation rates to Victoria's forests, parks and reserves are expected to continue to increase. It is great to see so many Victorians out enjoying nature and we seek to support all Victorians in making the most of public land in a safe and sustainable manner.



The Conservation Regulator encourages the public to report unattended campfires to **136 186**, or **000** in an emergency



Campfire rules
[vic.gov.au/campfires-stoves-and-bbqs](https://www.vic.gov.au/campfires-stoves-and-bbqs)



Illegal campfires risk the destruction of native forests and animals, and loss of life



PRIORITY

Illegal take of firewood

Firewood taken illegally from the forest continues to destroy vital habitat across Victoria’s public land.

The illegal take of firewood threatens critical wildlife habitat and the unacceptable loss of Aboriginal scarred trees.

Wood debris and tree hollows are critical habitat for protected and threatened bird, mammal and reptile species, providing space for species to nest, forage and shelter. The removal of trees and hollows can have catastrophic impacts on the health and welfare of numerous native species such as the red-tailed black cockatoo and the brush-tailed phascogale, and flora, like our river red gums.

Our monitoring and compliance activities respond to patterns in the illegal take of firewood. We account for various drivers of illegal activity, including costs of living, home heating and energy costs.

We are also closely monitoring the potential impact of reduced commercial timber harvesting on the demand for illegally sourced firewood.

Our work includes educating Victorians about how to source firewood lawfully, informing communities on the impacts of illegal take of firewood including habitat destruction, and using surveillance

techniques to assist with intelligence gathering and enforcement action targeting firewood theft.

Victoria has two domestic firewood collection seasons each year from 1 March to 30 June (autumn season) and 1 September to 30 November (spring season). Victorians can collect firewood for private use from designated areas during these periods. Firewood collection maps are available on the Forest Fire Management Victoria website.

Illegal firewood for sale can be hard to spot. When buying firewood, we recommend asking where it came from, recording an ABN and getting a receipt.



Firewood collection maps
ffm.vic.gov.au/firewood/firewood-collection-in-your-region



Sourcing firewood
vic.gov.au/sourcing-firewood



The Conservation Regulator encourages anyone with information about illegal take of firewood or the suspicious sale of firewood to report it to **136 186**



Domestic firewood collection seasons

IN DESIGNATED AREAS

AUTUMN 1 March – 30 June

SPRING 1 September – 30 November



PRIORITY

Cruelty to wildlife

Cruelty to wildlife is unacceptable and requires a proactive and preventative approach.

Cruelty to wildlife remains a focus for the Conservation Regulator in 2024 – 2025. The priority recognises the importance of protecting wildlife from harm. Our approach is proactive, and our goal is prevention. We provide guidance to Victorians on how they can ensure the welfare of native animals.

We focus our efforts on instances of significant and intentional cruelty to wild and captive wildlife. We partner with Crime Stoppers to bring awareness to this issue and address breaches of law. Breaches include unauthorised destruction, injury or disturbance of wildlife, breaches of conditions outlined in permits issued under the *Wildlife Act 1975*, deliberate acts of cruelty towards captive wildlife, and the illegal acquisition and transportation of wildlife.

Wildlife licences and permits are subject to strict conditions. We undertake desktop analysis, audits and inspections to ensure licence holders are adhering to these conditions. We prioritise instances of significant and intentional cruelty, including where there is commercial gain or large holdings of wildlife.

Victorians can report wildlife cruelty to Crime Stoppers, including where captive wildlife has not been provided with adequate food, water or shelter or where wildlife are being harassed, disturbed or killed. In Victoria, it is illegal to disturb or destroy wildlife without an authorisation.

When out and about, you should always keep a safe distance to let wild animals display their natural behaviours.



The Conservation Regulator encourages anyone with information about wildlife crime to report it to Crime Stoppers Victoria on **1800 333 000**. Callers can remain anonymous.



It is illegal to disturb or destroy wildlife without authorisation



PRIORITY

Protection of threatened species

Victoria's native plants and animals are fundamental to a healthy natural environment and are protected by law.

All Victorians can play a positive role in protecting our threatened species and communities. Diversity and abundance of native animals and plants is vital for the health of Victoria's environment. A biodiverse environment also mitigates the impacts of climate change and is important for the cultural practices of Aboriginal Victorians and the state's tourism industry.

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* provides a list of threatened species and communities. Population trends across this list of monitored species are continuing to decline. Our work is part of government-wide strategy to reverse this trend.

Victoria's threatened species and communities are subject to numerous threatening processes, including habitat loss and fragmentation, the changing frequency and intensity of bushfires, invasive species, and illegal removal or destruction of the plants and animals.

Our compliance activities are designed to help address these threats and processes. We proactively educate the public, undertake enforcement activities in key habitat areas for threatened species, and investigate and prosecute those responsible for illegal take of threatened wildlife from the wild.

Our work is incorporated into Action Statements for threatened species and communities. Action statements set out past efforts and potential future actions intended to conserve and manage a species, community or threatening process.



The Conservation Regulator encourages anyone with information about wildlife crime to report it to Crime Stoppers Victoria on **1800 333 000**



For illegal take or damage of threatened flora, please report to **136 186**.



Every organism plays an important and particular role in the ecosystem



PRIORITY

Illegal vehicle use

Illegal off-road vehicle use can result in habitat loss, erosion and the destruction of native plants and animals.

Victoria's state forests, parks and reserves are made accessible by a well-established network of formed roads and tracks.

Through 2023 – 2024, the Conservation Regulator continued to report elevated instances of illegal vehicle use across the state. Vehicle use across walking trails, natural terrain, cycling trails, restricted access areas, closed roads, in streams and on informal single tracks is illegal and can cause significant environmental damage.

Driving off roads and formed vehicle tracks can result in the destruction of wildlife habitat, fragmentation of native forests, degradation of water quality, introduction of weeds and soil erosion. Illegal vehicle use creates unacceptable safety risks for the public and may damage culturally significant sites. We conduct frequent patrols to identify illegal off-road vehicle use.

The Conservation Regulator supports lawful recreational vehicle use by educating the public on the importance of staying on formed roads. Partnerships with community groups and the Transport and Accident Commission help us ensure information is readily available. Victoria's state forests, parks and reserves contain over 30,000 km of roads and formed vehicle tracks. Before you head off, understand which roads are available for use and stay on formed tracks – for the safety of yourself, other users and the environment.



The Conservation Regulator encourages the public to report illegal off-road activity to **136 186**



Vehicle use on public land vic.gov.au/vehicle-use



Keeping to roads and formed tracks protects drivers, riders and the environment



Talk to the Conservation Regulator

If you see something, let us know.
Report environmental crimes on public land
to the Conservation Regulator.



DEECA Customer Contact Centre 136 186



Email us at conservationregulator@deeca.vic.gov.au



Report wildlife crime to us via Crime Stoppers Victoria 1800 333 000
or [crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime](https://www.crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime)



Visit us online at [conservationregulator.vic.gov.au](https://www.conservationregulator.vic.gov.au)



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If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment,
contact us through the National Relay Service on 133 677
or visit [accesshub.gov.au](https://www.accesshub.gov.au)



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