



# Environmental Management of Marine Protected Areas





VICTORIA

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Victorian  
Auditor-General

# Environmental Management of Marine Protected Areas

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The Hon. Bruce Atkinson MLC  
President  
Legislative Council  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

The Hon. Ken Smith MP  
Speaker  
Legislative Assembly  
Parliament House  
Melbourne

Dear Presiding Officers

Under the provisions of section 16AB of the *Audit Act 1994*, I transmit my performance report on the *Environmental Management of Marine Protected Areas*.

Yours faithfully



D D R PEARSON  
*Auditor-General*

2 March 2011



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# Audit summary

Victoria's marine environment covers 1 017 400 hectares, or just over 10 000 square kilometres. It extends three nautical miles from the coastline to depths of about 120 metres. Compared with similar cool-temperate marine environments around the world, it is unusually rich in species, with over 12 000 species of aquatic plants and animals.

Across the state there are 30 marine protected areas (MPA) that have been reserved to protect environmental, historical or cultural features. There are five types of MPAs in Victoria, making up 11.7 per cent of the Victorian marine environment:

- marine national parks
- marine sanctuaries
- marine and coastal reserves
- marine parks
- marine reserves.

This audit examined how effectively MPAs have been managed to protect marine biodiversity. It assessed Parks Victoria, as the agency with primary responsibility, on its planning frameworks, management activities, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities relevant to MPAs.

The audit also assessed the Department of Sustainability and Environment's (DSE) role in marine policy and marine biosecurity, and the fishing compliance activities that the Department of Primary Industries performs in marine protected areas.

## Conclusion

Parks Victoria cannot show that marine biodiversity is being protected or that the related management obligations of applying resources as intended are being discharged. Little environmental management activity is evident across its MPAs.

In common with our 2010 performance audit, *Control of Invasive Plants and Animals in Victoria's Parks*, this audit points to systemic weaknesses with planning, program management and resource allocation that should be addressed.

## Findings

### Managing marine protected areas

Parks Victoria could not demonstrate that it is effectively managing MPAs or that it is being effective or efficient in protecting marine biodiversity within MPAs.

This is largely because dedicated funding for managing MPAs has been used for other activities. This has contributed to a lack of dedicated marine staffing and expertise, and a consequent lack of demonstrable activity to achieve management plan objectives. While dedicated funding for marine-related activities has not been used as intended, management and reporting systems within Parks Victoria are such that it is not possible to determine where these funds were applied.

Gaps in program documentation, including lack of detail about the objectives, outputs and outcomes for the programs and the activities that Parks Victoria undertakes, mean it is not in a position to assess whether its programs have been effective.

As Parks Victoria cannot track activity against labour, its biggest cost, it is also not able to show that the delivery of its programs and activities has been efficient. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of a database for capturing and reporting on activities to management, and the absence of evaluation frameworks and performance indicators.

There are also gaps in marine pest biosecurity across the state, particularly regarding specific roles and responsibilities to support preparedness, detection and responsiveness, as well as resourcing each of these phases. Consequently, DSE's ability to coordinate a rapid and effective response to a marine pest biosecurity incident is significantly impaired.

## Planning for marine protected areas

DSE is responsible for state marine environmental policy. However, it has not developed a policy to direct management of the marine environment—one that encompasses all marine areas, integrates well across catchments and coastal areas, and enables consistent planning across both MPAs and other marine waters to achieve agreed outcomes.

Shortcomings exist with planning at the state level. While Parks Victoria had developed a plan for marine national parks and sanctuaries—*Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*—it had neither fully implemented nor evaluated it before it expired in 2010.

Unclear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities between stakeholders prevent effective planning. Poor information sharing about threats to marine biodiversity exacerbates this.

An absence of regular risk assessment review, detailed action plans and a lack of evaluation—both of management plans and activities—undermine planning at the park level. Parks Victoria has not reviewed its MPA risk assessments since 2005, and it therefore has no reliable basis to judge whether the risks identified then remain current, and whether their respective risk ratings still apply. It has not completed an assessment for the other marine parks in the MPA network.

There are no final management plans for marine and coastal parks. Collectively, these parks are larger than the marine national park and sanctuary network and possess significant environmental value. While Parks Victoria has developed management plans for all 24 marine national parks and sanctuaries, which broadly detail threats and management objectives, the plans lack detailed targets, prioritised actions or responsibilities and time frames.

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
1.	<p>Parks Victoria should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>document its marine environmental management programs, including program logic, implementation plans, reporting frameworks and evaluation plans</li> <li>implement a system to track time spent by staff on specific activities, particularly on activities related to protecting marine protected areas</li> <li>allocate funding dedicated to the management of marine protected areas, to that activity, as intended</li> <li>develop a capable and sufficient workforce to discharge its obligations to environmentally manage marine protected areas.</li> </ul>	15
2.	The Biosecurity Standing Committee should assign expertise to develop a marine pest biosecurity plan.	15
3.	<p>Parks Victoria should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>develop park management plans for all marine protected areas with supporting plans that specify actions, targets, performance indicators, accountabilities and time frames for delivery</li> <li>develop management reporting that enables the assessment of performance against park management plans</li> <li>regularly and routinely review its risk assessments, including prioritisation, for marine protected areas</li> <li>as park manager, develop and lead collaboration with other agencies to better inform its planning</li> <li>review, for effectiveness, <i>Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010</i>, to inform the development of a new strategy.</li> </ul>	23
4.	The Department of Sustainability and Environment should implement a new services agreement with Parks Victoria that clearly specifies the responsibilities of both agencies, performance standards and indicators, funding levels and reporting requirements.	23

## Submissions and comments received

In addition to progressive engagement during the course of the audit, in accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994*, a copy of this report was provided to Parks Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and the Department of Primary Industries with a request for submissions or comments.

Agency views have been considered in reaching our audit conclusions and are represented to the extent relevant and warranted in preparing this report. Their full section 16(3) submissions and comments, however, are included in Appendix A.

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# 1 Background

## 1.1 Introduction

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Victoria's marine environment covers 1 017 400 hectares, or just over 10 000 square kilometres. It extends three nautical miles from the state's 2 000 kilometre south-facing coastline to depths of about 120 metres. Compared with similar cool temperate marine waters around the world, it is unusually rich in species, with over 12 000 species of aquatic plants and animals.

For its size, it is also unusually diverse, with reefs, kelp forests, deep sponge gardens, sandy plains, seagrass meadows, and areas of open water. Having evolved in relative isolation, 90 per cent of Victoria's marine species are found nowhere else. The state's marine waters are important for a range of protected species including whales, dolphins, seals, sharks, many seabirds and migratory waders.

Victoria's marine environment also supports a range of commercial, recreational and tourism activities. These activities include commercial ports and shipping, as well as recreational and commercial fishing. Fishing contributes around \$2 billion each year to the state's economy.

Natural attractions, including iconic coastlines such as those along the Great Ocean Road, are one of the state's tourism strengths. Around 37 per cent of domestic visitors and 77 per cent of international visitors do at least one nature-based tourism activity during a trip to Victoria, making this one of the most important markets of the tourism industry.

## 1.2 Marine protected areas

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A marine protected area (MPA) is an area reserved to protect environmental, historical or cultural features. There are five types of MPAs in Victoria, making up 11.7 per cent of the Victorian marine environment:

- marine national parks
- marine sanctuaries
- marine and coastal parks
- marine parks
- marine reserves.

## Marine national parks and marine sanctuaries

Marine national parks are areas that, collectively, represent different types of marine environments. The government established them in 2002 to protect and preserve marine biodiversity. They are highly protected, with legislation limiting the activities that can occur in them. While swimming, diving and boating are allowed, fishing, damaging or extractive activities—such as oil and gas exploration—and discharging ballast and waste are not allowed. Pipelines and seafloor cables in the park may be permitted with approval of the minister.

Marine sanctuaries are smaller than, and complementary to, marine national parks. The government established them—also in 2002—to protect special natural features, such as unique rock formations. Marine sanctuaries have the same restrictions on activities as marine national parks in addition to an outright prohibition on pipelines and seafloor cables. There are 11 marine national parks and 13 marine sanctuaries.

## Marine and coastal parks, marine parks and reserves

Marine and coastal parks, and marine parks and reserves are areas of high environmental and cultural value. The government established them between 1984 and 1986 with the purpose of conserving, or sustainably managing, marine biodiversity rather than preserving it.

While these parks have some protections in place, they are of a lower level than in marine national parks and sanctuaries. Marine and coastal parks, and marine parks and reserves allow a range of sustainable uses, including recreational fishing and some types of commercial fishing. There are three marine and coastal parks, two marine parks and one marine reserve.

Figure 1A shows the locations of the marine national parks, sanctuaries, parks, and reserves in Victoria.

Figure 1A  
Victoria's marine protected areas



**LEGEND**

- Marine National Parks & Sanctuaries
- Marine Parks & Coastal Reserves
- Major Road

Map produced by Parks Victoria, August 2010. Base data used with permission of Land Victoria, Department of Sustainability & Environment. Parks Victoria does not guarantee that this data is without fault and therefore disclaims all liability for any errors or omissions that may arise from your relying on this information.

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KILOMETRES

Cartography By Parks Victoria 2011

- |    |   |    |                                       |    |  |
|----|---|----|---------------------------------------|----|--|
| 1  | Discovery Bay Marine National Park      | 11 | Point Cooke Marine Sanctuary          | 21 | Wilson's Promontory Marine Park          |
| 2  | Merri Marine Sanctuary                  | 12 | Jawbone Marine Sanctuary              | 22 | Wilson's Promontory Marine Reserve       |
| 3  | The Aches Marine Sanctuary              | 13 | Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary       | 23 | Wilson's Promontory Marine National Park |
| 4  | Twelve Apostles Marine National Park    | 14 | Mushroom Reef Marine Sanctuary        | 24 | Corner Inlet Marine & Coastal Park       |
| 5  | Marengo Reefs Marine Sanctuary          | 15 | Yaringa Marine National Park          | 25 | Corner Inlet Marine National Park        |
| 6  | Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary             | 16 | Churchill Island Marine National Park | 26 | Nooramunga Marine & Coastal Park         |
| 7  | Point Addis Marine National Park        | 17 | French Island Marine National Park    | 27 | Ninety Mile Beach Marine National Park   |
| 8  | Point Danger Marine Sanctuary           | 18 | Bunurong Marine Park                  | 28 | Beware Reef Marine Sanctuary             |
| 9  | Barwon Bluff Marine Sanctuary           | 19 | Bunurong Marine National Park         | 29 | Point Hicks Marine National Park         |
| 10 | Port Phillip Heads Marine National Park | 20 | Shallow Inlet Marine & Coastal Park   | 30 | Cape Howe Marine National Park           |

## 1.3 Managing marine protected areas

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### 1.3.1 Responsibility

Under the *National Parks Act 1975*, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is accountable for the effective management of MPAs. DSE has entered into a management services agreement with Parks Victoria for the provision of park management in MPAs.

For marine national parks and marine sanctuaries, the *National Parks Act 1975* specifies the requirements for park management, underpinned by the development of management plans. Requirements include:

- preserving and protecting the natural environment and indigenous flora and fauna
- preventing the introduction of exotic flora and fauna
- eradicating or controlling exotic flora and fauna.

The requirements for the management of marine and coastal parks, marine parks and reserves are less well defined by legislation. Park managers are responsible under specified provisions of the *National Parks Act 1975*, the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* or the *Wildlife Act 1975* for managing, improving, maintaining and controlling these MPAs. The two marine parks and the marine reserve require management plans, while the three marine and coastal parks do not have this requirement.

### 1.3.2 Strategy

The strategy covering the environmental management of MPAs is *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*.

Parks Victoria is responsible for implementing the strategy, which covers marine national parks and sanctuaries.

The strategy guides management planning and activities across five themes, each with key performance areas to assess effectiveness. Two themes are relevant to the environmental management of MPAs—natural values management, and environmental research and monitoring. Figure 1B shows the two themes and the corresponding high-level key performance areas.



**Figure 1B**  
**Management strategy 2003–10: themes and key performance areas**

<b>Theme: Natural values management</b>
<b>Key performance areas</b>
Environmental management framework
Vulnerable habitats and threatened species
Marine pests
Pressures from coastal and catchment activities
Compliance
Marine incident planning
<b>Theme: Environmental research and monitoring</b>
<b>Key performance areas</b>
Environmental monitoring framework
Marine habitat mapping
Collaborative environmental research partnerships
Environmental information management

Source: Parks Victoria.

There is no specific policy, strategy or planning document for the other MPAs, which account for around 55 per cent of the state's protected marine environment.

## 1.4 Audit objective and scope

This audit examined the environmental management of MPAs. The audit scope included all known threats and management responses to marine biodiversity.

It assessed Parks Victoria's planning frameworks, management activities, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting activities relevant to MPAs. The audit also assessed DSE's role in relation to marine policy and marine biosecurity, and the fishing compliance activities that the Department of Primary Industries performs in marine protected areas.

The audit was performed in accordance with Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards. The total cost of this report was \$270 000.



# 2 Managing marine protected areas

## At a glance

### Background

Protecting Victoria's marine biodiversity requires active management to prevent, control or eradicate environmental threats. This includes developing and delivering programs and activities that efficiently and effectively use available resources to achieve desired environmental outcomes.

### Conclusion

Parks Victoria is not effectively managing marine protected areas (MPA). Dedicated funding has not been used for marine protection and focused management activity is not evident. Further, the Department of Sustainability and Environment is not well prepared to coordinate, detect and rapidly respond to marine pest biosecurity incidents.

### Findings

- Parks Victoria cannot show that its efforts to protect marine biodiversity are commensurate with the funding it receives for that purpose. Parks Victoria has not used dedicated funding for MPAs, and its staff are not required to record how much time they spend on their activities.
- Parks Victoria cannot demonstrate that its activities are appropriate, justified or applied consistently across the park network, because there is no program documentation for MPAs.
- There is a lack of dedicated staff and expertise to protect the marine environment and achieve the objectives of management plans.

### Recommendation

Parks Victoria should:

- document its marine environmental management programs, including program logic, implementation plans, reporting frameworks and evaluation plans
- implement a system to track time spent by staff on specific activities, particularly on activities related to protecting MPAs
- allocate funding dedicated to the management of MPAs as intended
- develop a capable and sufficient workforce to discharge its obligations to environmentally manage MPAs.

## 2.1 Introduction

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Protecting Victoria's marine biodiversity requires active management to prevent, control or eradicate environmental threats, including those that exotic flora and fauna pose. Active management includes developing and delivering programs and activities with the available resources, to address identified threats and achieve desired environmental outcomes. Programs require clear logic, implementation and resourcing plans, well structured performance indicators and reporting frameworks, and evaluation against indicators to demonstrate effectiveness.

To discharge its obligations to protect marine biodiversity within marine protected areas (MPA), Parks Victoria should undertake routine environmental management activities. These include research and monitoring activities, prevention and response activities, compliance and enforcement activities, and education.

## 2.2 Conclusion

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Parks Victoria is not effectively managing MPAs. Funding provided for the environmental management of these areas has been used in other ways, and focused management activity is not evident. Accordingly, there is little assurance that Parks Victoria is adequately protecting marine biodiversity. Further, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is not well prepared to coordinate, detect and rapidly respond to marine pest biosecurity incidents.

## 2.3 Program funding and resource allocation

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Parks Victoria receives funding to protect marine biodiversity within MPAs from both the state and Australian governments. Despite receiving state funding of around \$38.1 million for marine-related activities since 2002–03, Parks Victoria could only demonstrate that it had spent around 10 per cent for that purpose.

Parks Victoria cannot reliably account for the remaining \$34.3 million due to poor time recording, and project management approaches and controls.

### 2.3.1 Marine protected area funding

When the government established marine national parks and sanctuaries in 2002, it committed to provide ongoing funding for their management. The funds were intended to be used for:

- park establishment in the first two years
- performance assessment and monitoring
- ongoing park management.

Figures 2A and 2B show Parks Victoria's funding and expenditure for natural values management in MPAs from 2002–03 to 2009–10 as advised by Parks Victoria. Figure 2A shows that, since 2002–03, around \$38.1 million was provided to Parks Victoria, an average of around \$4.8 million each year.

**Figure 2A**  
**Marine environmental management funding and expenditure, 2002–03 to 2009–10**

Year	Funding (\$mil)	Expenditure (\$mil)	Expenditure (%)
2002–03	4.4	0.58	13.2
2003–04	5.1	0.62	12.2
2004–05	4.1	0.72	18.0
2005–06	4.8	0.67	14.0
2006–07	5.3	0.40	7.5
2007–08	4.8	0.17	3.5
2008–09	4.8	0.33	6.9
2009–10	4.8	0.31	6.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>3.80</b>	<b>10.0</b>

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, from data provided by Parks Victoria.

**Figure 2B**  
**Marine environmental management expenditure by program area, 2002–03 to 2009–10**

Management area	Expenditure (\$mil)
Research and monitoring	2.60
Park strategy and planning	0.55
Pest plant management	0.16
Habitat, catchment and water management	0.17
Signage	0.14
Natural resource protection	0.12
Community partnerships	0.06
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.80</b>

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office, from data provided by Parks Victoria.

### 2.3.2 Reliability of expenditure data

Figure 2A shows that Parks Victoria could only demonstrate that 10 per cent of the total MPA funding over the eight-year period had been spent on marine related areas. Demonstrated annual expenditure on MPAs almost halved, from around \$580 000 in 2002–03 to around \$310 000 in 2009–10.

Figure 2B shows that, of the \$3.8 million Parks Victoria could demonstrate was spent on MPAs, 83 per cent (\$3.15 million) was spent on the research and monitoring program, along with park strategy and planning, and protected area planning. This means only 17 per cent of the recorded spending has been used for interventions and management responses that directly target threats to MPAs.

The evidence that Parks Victoria provided shows that the research and monitoring expenditure has been relatively stable since 2005–06 when the park level management plans were completed—an average of \$264 000 was spent each year. Expenditure on the remaining management activities in MPAs, however, has declined significantly, from an earlier average of over \$253 000 each year to a post-2005 average of almost \$93 000 each year. This trend is particularly acute for the west region—from Torquay to the South Australian border—with expenditure totalling \$6 000 for marine natural values management since 2006.

### Tracking labour costs

Parks Victoria advised that it used the remaining \$34.3 million allocated over the eight years on staff labour costs for marine-related activities. However, as Parks Victoria cannot track labour by activity or program, it is not possible to substantiate this claim. This system constraint is acknowledged by Parks Victoria and is significant given that labour is its single largest expense.

Parks Victoria provided a list of all staff involved in MPA activity—with salaries and percentages of time dedicated to MPA management, respective roles and inclusive of all on-costs—to demonstrate that the \$34.3 million had been used for marine-related activities. However, this material contained significant inaccuracies in relation to time allocated to MPA management, and was therefore unreliable.

We sampled 30 Parks Victoria staff out of 194 (15 per cent) to check how much of their time they spent on activities in MPAs. This indicated Parks Victoria had substantially overestimated the time spent on marine-related activities for 20 staff, or 67 per cent of the sample.

While Parks Victoria has acknowledged it does not have systems to track labour by activity or program, it has further advised VAGO that it undertook a survey of over 200 staff after the completion of our fieldwork. These staff were nominated as having had involvement in MPAs during the 2007–08, 2008–09 and 2009–10 financial years.

Parks Victoria advised that this survey identified that approximately 3 400 work days were dedicated to MPA management in each of these financial years: equating to 17 full-time equivalent staff in those three years at a total cost of approximately \$1.9 million per year.

Since Parks Victoria does not track labour by activity or program, the survey results could not be verified.

Further, and notwithstanding Parks Victoria's assurances that it has used MPA funding for marine-related activities, an internal memorandum written by the Manager, Policy and Planning to the General Manager of Parks in May 2009, states:

*'... it is evident that the existing funding to marine parks has been redirected to other priorities in Parks Victoria. A critical action is to clearly identify the ongoing funding for marine parks from within the budget received from DSE and articulate the labour resources that regions and divisions must maintain.'*

The memorandum also states:

*'...despite the initial intent and established program, resources for the delivery of the marine program have declined as resources have been redirected to other priorities across Parks Victoria. Accordingly the Marine NVM Funding Case developed through this process identified the resource requirements to deliver priority programs established for marine values management, effectively \$4.6 million dollars per annum.'*

This also clearly indicates that Parks Victoria has not allocated the financial and human resources to fulfil its environmental management obligations for MPAs, consistent with the funding provided for this purpose since 2002.

### 2.3.3 Staffing levels

Parks Victoria does not have adequate and appropriately trained staff to manage MPAs. Of the 18 dedicated marine positions established in 2003, only six park rangers with marine specific skills remain—four of whom have other duties, such as assisting in terrestrial park duties. We were able to identify only two Parks Victoria staff whose roles were solely focused on MPA management.

An internal audit completed in 2008 identified a lack of dedicated marine staffing to implement actions and achieve management plan objectives. It recommended that Parks Victoria assess the level of resources and training required for marine national parks and sanctuary management. The subsequent Parks Victoria assessment emphasised the critical need to 'clearly identify the ongoing funding for marine parks and articulate the labour resources that regions and divisions must maintain.'

While Parks Victoria identified its funding and human resource requirements in 2009, it has not acted to meet these requirements. Consequently, the staff shortages remain, further putting at risk its ability to fulfil its obligations to effectively manage biodiversity in MPAs.

## 2.4 Environmental management programs and activities in marine protected areas

A global challenge facing natural resource managers is the accurate assessment of environmental condition in protected areas. To address this, the key activity that Parks Victoria undertakes in MPAs, based on the level of funding, is its research and monitoring program. Parks Victoria jointly delivers this program with external providers. The program’s aim is to increase the knowledge and understanding of marine biodiversity through broad-scale, long-term monitoring programs and specific research.

Parks Victoria and its partners have delivered the research and monitoring program effectively and according to better practice guidelines developed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This program is the exception.

While Parks Victoria identified a range of other programs and activities it undertook within MPAs, it could not be substantiated that all of these had been delivered. Figure 2C outlines the activities that Parks Victoria identified by management area.

**Figure 2C**  
**Marine protected area activity by management area, 2002–03 to 2009–10**

Management area	Activity
Research and monitoring	Broad-scale, long-term monitoring programs and focused research with external partners
Park strategy and planning	Development of the statewide strategy and management plans for marine national parks and sanctuaries
Pest plant management	Management of invasive plant species that pose a threat to MPAs
Habitat, catchment and water management	Integrated initiatives aimed at improving run-off from adjacent catchments
Signage	Raising community awareness of the boundaries of, and restrictions in, MPAs
Natural resource protection	General MPA management tasks
Community partnerships	Catchment scale projects raising community awareness of poor water quality risks to MPAs

Source: Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, from data provided by Parks Victoria.



### 2.4.1 Demonstrating the effort invested in programs and activities

For the activities in the management areas shown in Figure 2C, there is evidence in the form of publications that research and monitoring, and park planning occur. There was also evidence that Parks Victoria has installed signage relating to MPAs. However, for activities in the other management areas, Parks Victoria could only provide expenditure information to demonstrate that they occurred. This information did not demonstrate when, how or who performed the activities, nor whether Parks Victoria had performed them effectively or efficiently.

In addition to the programs and activities listed above, Parks Victoria identified a range of other activities that it expects its park rangers to undertake routinely—including checking compliance with licensing and regulatory requirements during patrols, and providing information and education about the marine environment to the community. While there was evidence in patrol logs of on-ground compliance activities, it was not possible to assess whether these routine activities had been undertaken as expected, or to determine the level of effort given to them. This is because Parks Victoria cannot track their labour against activity or program.

Parks Victoria staff at the Wilsons Promontory marine national park advised that they do not perform any environmental management activities in the park. Yet, according to Parks Victoria's rating system, the park warrants the highest level of protection—and there were no staff dedicated to marine-related areas or staff with marine expertise.

### 2.4.2 Assessing the effectiveness of programs and activities

The lack of information about the objectives, outputs and outcomes for the programs and activities that Parks Victoria undertakes, means it is not possible to assess their effectiveness. The lack of information about actual resources used for these activities means that it is also not possible to determine whether delivery of the programs and activities has been efficient.

### 2.4.3 Recording key information about programs and activities

Apart from the research and monitoring program, none of the identified programs and activities had supporting program documentation. In particular, there was little evidence of:

- **underlying program logic**—detailing the objectives the programs were intended to achieve and the reasons for the planned activity
- **implementation plans**—including methodology, resource allocation, staff competencies and location of planned program actions
- **reporting frameworks**—including targets and output measures
- **evaluation plans**—indicating the outcomes expected for each program and how Parks Victoria would assess effectiveness.

Poor documentation hinders consistent application of programs across the MPA network. It also makes it difficult to establish clear alignment of the programs with the statewide strategy and individual park management plans.

The lack of program documentation means that Parks Victoria cannot demonstrate that it considered whether:

- an evidence base supported and justified the planned activity
- staff with marine expertise were available at a particular location to deliver the program competently
- resources and equipment were adequate for program delivery
- the allocation of resources to a particular location might not be better spent elsewhere, or on another program entirely
- the intervention, or planned activity, was the most appropriate one for that particular objective
- the program was able to deliver the expected benefits.

## 2.5 Gaps in protecting marine biodiversity

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A significant gap in the management of marine biodiversity is the preparedness to respond to marine pest biosecurity incidents.

The introduction of invasive species threatens biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems in marine areas. Increasing trade, transport, travel and tourism activity increase the risk of the introduction and establishment of invasive species in marine environments. Once established, such species are extremely difficult to control or eradicate.

The spread of marine pest species is mostly associated with human activity. Sources of marine pest species include:

- bio-fouling of vessel hulls, mobile infrastructure or underwater equipment—such as drilling rigs or anchors
- ballast water and sediment discharge from ships
- commercial and recreational fishing, through the use of fouled equipment or fishing bait
- aquaculture equipment.

There are gaps in marine pest biosecurity regarding detailed roles and responsibilities to support preparedness, detection and responsiveness, as well as resourcing each of these phases.

Better integration between the management of established marine pest species and marine biosecurity in general is needed. We found poor coordination between the lead role of DSE in marine biosecurity and the Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) ongoing management role of noxious aquatic species under the *Fisheries Act 1995*.

There is also no marine pest monitoring system to detect and respond to marine biosecurity incidents. DSE has not comprehensively monitored the Port of Melbourne or Portland, the two busiest state ports, for over a decade. No systematic or routine monitoring occurs in any Victorian port.

DSE is the control agency for marine pest emergencies. DPI and Parks Victoria are support agencies. While Victoria's Emergency Management Manual broadly outlines the roles and responsibilities, it provides no operational detail in the event of a marine pest emergency. Despite being the lead agency, there was no evidence that DSE had a detailed operational plan to coordinate these agencies.

DSE, as the control agency, has also not allocated sufficient resources—in terms of size and capability—to plan for, or respond to, a marine pest biosecurity incident. These factors reduce DSE's ability to lead, and effectively respond to, environmental emergencies should they occur.

A cross-agency Biosecurity Standing Committee was convened in 2010 to address biosecurity concerns across the state. Representatives from DPI, DSE, the Environment Protection Authority and Parks Victoria, among others, collectively possess expertise and experience in planning for, and responding to, threats to biosecurity. Although the committee's terms of reference cover economic, environmental and social biosecurity matters, including marine biosecurity, it currently has no involvement with marine pest biosecurity.

## Recommendations

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1. Parks Victoria should:
    - document its marine environmental management programs, including program logic, implementation plans, reporting frameworks and evaluation plans
    - implement a system to track time spent by staff on specific activities, particularly on activities related to protecting marine protected areas
    - allocate funding dedicated to the management of marine protected areas, to that activity, as intended
    - develop a capable and sufficient workforce to discharge its obligations to environmentally manage marine protected areas.
  2. The Biosecurity Standing Committee should assign expertise to develop a marine pest biosecurity plan.
-



# 3 Planning for marine protected areas

## At a glance

### Background

Sound planning is a prerequisite for effective management of marine protected areas (MPA), increasing the likelihood that management activities are prioritised to address the most significant threats in areas of highest environmental value.

### Conclusion

Poorly integrated planning, weaknesses in identifying threats and inadequate park management plans, mean that Parks Victoria is not in a position to protect marine biodiversity effectively and manage MPAs.

### Findings

- Planning is not integrated across agencies, resulting in inadequate sharing of information about threats to marine biodiversity.
- There are no final management plans for marine and coast parks, which make up 53 per cent of the state's MPA network.
- Neither park management plans nor any other documents detail targets, prioritise actions or assign responsibility and time frames for management actions.
- An absence of risk assessment reviews mean there is little assurance that risks identified and ranked in 2005 remain current.

### Recommendation

Parks Victoria should:

- develop park management plans for all MPAs with supporting plans that specify actions, targets, performance indicators, accountabilities and time frames for delivery
- develop management reporting that enables the assessment of performance against park management plans
- regularly and routinely review its risk assessments, including prioritisation, for MPAs
- as park manager, develop and lead collaboration with other agencies to better inform its planning.

## 3.1 Introduction

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Sound planning is a prerequisite for effective management of marine protected areas (MPA). It increases the likelihood that park managers prioritise management activities to address the most significant threats in areas of highest environmental value. It should incorporate an assessment of the threats, develop actions to address them and assess the effectiveness of those actions.

## 3.2 Conclusion

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Parks Victoria is not effectively planning the environmental management of MPAs. A lack of integration in the planning process, weaknesses in identifying threats and inadequate park management plans, mean that Parks Victoria is not in a position to effectively protect marine biodiversity.

## 3.3 Statewide planning for marine protected areas

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The marine environment is interconnected, with no tangible boundaries between marine protected areas and the other marine areas. Given this, the most effective way to manage environmental threats is through integrated policy and planning that considers the whole marine environment and involves the key stakeholders involved in its management.

### 3.3.1 Marine policy and strategy

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is responsible for state marine environmental policy. However, it has not developed an overarching policy to guide the management of the marine environment—one that encompasses all marine areas, integrates well across catchments and coastal areas and enables consistent planning across marine waters.

In consultation with DSE, the Victorian Catchment Council developed the *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008*, which contains guiding principles for the protection of biodiversity in marine and coastal areas. Although it emphasises the importance of marine ecology, the strategy does not adequately detail the protection of marine values or threats to marine areas, such as invasive species. Because the strategy's focus is the coastal environment, it cannot, on its own, direct management of MPAs.

Policies exist for specific aspects of the marine environment, such as the discharge of domestic ballast water and water quality in bays. However, combined with the *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008* and *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*, they only partially inform management of the marine environment. Around 80 per cent of the state's marine waters have no detailed planning policy or management strategy in place, limiting the effectiveness of planning for protecting marine biodiversity.

In December 2009, DSE led the proposal to develop a Victorian marine plan by 2014, which is intended to integrate management of the state marine environment with coasts and adjacent catchments.

### 3.3.2 Management strategy and framework

Parks Victoria's key strategy for MPAs is *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*. The strategy provides clear and detailed guidance for the management of marine national parks and sanctuaries, including management of marine pests, regulatory compliance and environmental information management.

The strategy, however, does not cover marine and coastal parks. Collectively, these are larger than the marine national park and sanctuary network and possess significant environmental value, such as internationally recognised wetlands. No other statewide policy or strategy addresses these marine areas.

The strategy expired in 2010, after seven years of operation, without ever having been fully implemented.

Parks Victoria reported that 70 per cent of the strategy's actions were completed. However, there was not a reliable evidence base to show this was the case. Specifically, it was not evident:

- how the environmental management framework, which incorporates adaptive management, supports statewide management programs
- whether incident protocols for marine pests in each park and sanctuary were updated
- whether training programs and schedules for staff identification of target marine pest and incident arrangements had occurred
- whether a signed, statewide management agreement detailing roles and responsibilities in fisheries enforcement and compliance existed
- whether completed regional compliance plans and regional service agreements existed for two of the three regions across the state
- whether activities detailing 'response arrangements' across agencies existed
- that the storing and retrieval of marine information for effective data analysis and reporting was occurring.

There has not been an effective evaluation of the completed actions, nor an assessment of the impact of the strategy on marine protected areas. Parks Victoria has not planned an evaluation. Consequently, developing a new strategy will be challenging if the effectiveness of the current strategy is unknown.

An internal audit of the strategy, completed in 2008, found that Parks Victoria needed to improve accountability for the strategy's implementation, through an annual report for the Parks Victoria board and executive. Parks Victoria prepared an annual report for 2009. The final implementation report, due in June 2010, was provided to VAGO on 23 December 2010 in draft form after audit fieldwork was completed. It is yet to be considered by the board.

### 3.4 Integrated statewide planning

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Integrated planning provides for a more comprehensive approach than planning by specific agencies alone. An integrated approach involves the key stakeholders in the planning process, recognises the impact that the activities of stakeholders can have on other stakeholders, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and enables information exchange.

In addition to the roles that DSE and Parks Victoria perform in planning and managing marine protected areas, several other agencies have roles in regulating, funding or encouraging activities that could adversely affect the biodiversity of MPAs. These agencies include:

- the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), responsible for fisheries management, including marine compliance activities in MPAs
- catchment management authorities (CMA), responsible for catchments whose activities may impact MPAs, for example, through water run-off
- Regional Coastal Boards, responsible for coordinating strategic planning and management of the coast
- the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), responsible for water quality in bays and waterways, and regulating ballast discharge from intra-state shipping.

Arrangements between the various stakeholders are inadequate to enable effective planning. DSE's *Securing Our Natural Future: A white paper for land and biodiversity at a time of climate change* and *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008*, and Parks Victoria's plan, *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*, all emphasise an integrated approach to the management of MPAs. Yet, in practice, there is little interaction between the agencies.



**Figure 3A**  
**Arrangements between stakeholder**

**Arrangements between DSE and Parks Victoria**

A service agreement is in place to document the delegation of responsibility for MPAs from DSE to Parks Victoria. However, the agreement is significantly lacking.

VAGO identified weaknesses with this agreement in the 2009 audit *Control of Invasive Plants and Animals in Victoria's Parks*, which showed that the agreement did not assign roles and responsibilities, detail expected outcomes, or provide a mechanism to assess Parks Victoria's performance.

These same issues are evident for MPAs, with both DSE and Parks Victoria disagreeing during this audit about their responsibilities and accountabilities. The inadequacies with this agreement also contributed to DSE's failure to detect Parks Victoria's diversion of funding that DSE provided for MPA management.

**Arrangements between DPI and Parks Victoria**

Illegal fishing in MPAs, particularly in national parks and sanctuaries, is a significant threat to marine biodiversity. However, Parks Victoria and the DPI do not share all relevant information about its occurrence. For example, only notices for infringements, rather than all incidents involving fishing in MPAs, are recorded in a shared database.

Although the three-year strategy and annual operational arrangements on which DPI bases its statewide fishing compliance activities cover MPAs, they were developed in isolation from Parks Victoria.

Funding was provided to DPI in 2002 for fishing compliance activities, including within MPAs. A difference of opinion between DPI and Parks Victoria about its use—whether it is MPA-specific or statewide—has affected the level of engagement between the agencies on the threat of illegal fishing. However, DPI was compliant in the application of these funds.

Source: Victorian Auditor-General's Office.

### 3.4.1 Risk management

Risk management is a key part of planning for MPAs. It involves identifying, assessing and prioritising threats to marine biodiversity, and then applying resources to minimise, monitor, and control the probability and/or impact of the threats.

Risk assessments were completed for marine national parks and sanctuaries by 2005; however, Parks Victoria has not completed assessments for the state's other marine and coastal parks.

For the risk assessments completed, Parks Victoria did not prioritise the identified risks at the park level in its park management plans—plans required to be prepared to facilitate the management of marine national parks and sanctuaries. The management plans do not assign specific actions, time frames or accountabilities against the risks identified. Collectively, this makes it difficult for park managers to focus activity on the greatest threat and to determine whether they are appropriately targeting resources.

Parks Victoria has not reviewed its MPA risk assessments since 2005 and it is unknown whether the risks identified in 2005 are still current or that their respective weightings still apply.

DSE, the EPA and CMAs have extensive quantitative and qualitative data on new and cross-tenure threats, such as climate change and water quality. However, Parks Victoria does not routinely collect this information, further highlighting the lack of, and need for, integrated planning.

### 3.5 Park-level planning for marine protected areas

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To facilitate the management of marine national parks and sanctuaries, the *National Parks Act 1975* requires Parks Victoria, as delegated by DSE, to prepare park management plans.

Parks Victoria has developed management plans for each marine national park and sanctuary, broadly detailing threats, response and management objectives. However, there are significant limitations with them. Specifically:

- they do not include action plans or supporting documentation that detail how Parks Victoria will achieve the plan's objectives
- neither management plans or any other documentation specify:
  - measurable targets and performance indicators
  - the priority of risks or actions
  - accountabilities or time frames for implementing actions
- they do not clearly link plan objectives, on-ground activities and outcomes
- they do not provide a framework for reporting on management actions
- they do not detail how and when evaluation of the actions or the plan will occur.

These limitations are similar to those reported for terrestrial park management plans in our 2010 audit of the *Control of Invasive Plants and Animals in Victoria's Parks*.

There are no management plans for the marine and coastal parks. Collectively, these parks make up 53 per cent of the state's MPA network. Draft plans exist for the marine and coastal parks, but these have not been assessed because:

- they have not been endorsed by the Parks Victoria Board, DSE or the minister
- they have not been made available to the public
- they are not the guiding documents used by all operational Parks Victoria staff
- they have been in draft form for well over a decade—therefore their currency is questionable.

It is unclear how Parks Victoria manages these MPAs without detailed or approved plans.

Parks Victoria advised that it uses annual regional action plans, which collectively detail the actions committed to within that region, to guide priorities, based on the available resources. However, the regional action plans do not provide park-level detail, or clearly align to the particular risks and key performance areas of *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*.

No assessment of management plan actions has occurred, despite Parks Victoria committing in 2008 to do so by July 2009.

## Recommendations

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3. Parks Victoria should:
    - develop park management plans for all marine protected areas with supporting plans that specify actions, targets, performance indicators, accountabilities and time frames for delivery
    - develop management reporting that enables the assessment of performance against park management plans
    - regularly and routinely review its risk assessments, including prioritisation, for marine protected areas
    - as park manager, develop and lead collaboration with other agencies to better inform its planning
    - review, for effectiveness, *Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003–2010*, to inform the development of a new strategy.
  4. The Department of Sustainability and Environment should implement a new services agreement with Parks Victoria that clearly specifies the responsibilities of both agencies, performance standards and indicators, funding levels and reporting requirements.
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## Appendix A.

# *Audit Act 1994* section 16— submissions and comments

### Introduction

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In accordance with section 16(3) of the *Audit Act 1994* a copy of this report was provided to Parks Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Department of Primary Industries with a request for submissions or comments.

The submissions and comments provided are not subject to audit nor the evidentiary standards required to reach an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of those comments rests solely with the agency head.

## Submissions and comments received

**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Sustainability and Environment on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria**



### Department of Sustainability and Environment

Ref: SEC007453



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Auditor General Victoria  
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Dear Mr Pearson

#### **PROPOSED AUDIT REPORT - ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT OF MARINE PROTECTED AREAS**

Thank you for your letter dated 18 January 2011 enclosing a copy of the proposed audit report on the *Environmental Management of Marine Protected Areas*.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and Parks Victoria (PV) welcome the Audit Report and accept the recommendations made. The audit report will be a valuable resource implementing the government's marine protected area management framework.

Alignment of the priorities and activities of DSE and PV will be addressed through a joint commitment to cross-agency collaboration. DSE and PV will work to improve the transparency and accountability for marine park management outcomes, as part of robust business planning.

Specific responses to the recommendations are provided below.

#### Recommendation 1: Parks Victoria should:

- *document its environmental management programs, including program logic, implementation plans, reporting frameworks and evaluation plans;*
- *implement a system to track time spent by staff on specific activities, particularly on activities related to protecting marine protected areas;*
- *allocate funding dedicated to the management of marine protected areas, to that activity, as intended; and*
- *develop a capable and sufficient workforce to discharge its obligations to environmentally manage marine protected areas.*

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**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Sustainability and Environment on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria – continued**

By June 2011 PV will document its programs, project logic, reporting frameworks and evaluation plans. PV is in the process of developing implementation plans as part of its current planning framework.

During the audit, PV commenced implementation of new finance, budgeting and human resource systems, consistent with systems used by other agencies. A labour allocation and tracking process including a labour tracking tool is currently being revised and will be implemented by 2011/12 financial year. In addition, PV is revising its funding allocation process to increase transparency and accountability. This will be implemented in the 2011/12 financial year. DSE will oversee the implementation of this initiative to ensure that PV can track marine parks expenditure.

PV maintains a generalist workforce to deliver a broad range of park services across the state, including emergency response. Specialist staff are employed in key areas including marine park management. PV will review its existing training and capabilities relating to marine park management to ensure that PV is capable of discharging its obligation to environmentally manage marine protected areas.

Recommendation 2: *The Biosecurity Standing Committee should assign expertise to develop a marine pest biosecurity plan.*

DSE accepts the need for strengthened policies and procedures to protect Victorian waters from marine pests and will work with the Biosecurity Standing Committee to develop a comprehensive marine pest biosecurity plan. The plan will clarify DSE's lead role in marine pest biosecurity and its relationship with the Department of Primary Industries, PV and the Environment Protection Authority.

DSE is committed to working towards effective implementation of Victoria's obligations under the National Environmental Biosecurity Response Agreement, including shared roles in preparing for and responding to marine pest incidents.

Recommendation 3: *Parks Victoria should:*

- *develop park management plans for all marine protected areas with supporting plans that specify actions, targets, performance indicators, accountabilities and time frames for delivery;*
- *develop management reporting that enables assessment of performance against park management plans;*
- *regularly and routinely review its risk assessments, including prioritization, for marine protected areas;*
- *as park manager, develop and lead collaboration with other agencies to better inform its planning; and*
- *review, for effectiveness, Victoria's System of Marine National Parks and Marine Sanctuaries: Management Strategy 2003-2010, to inform the development of a new strategy.*

**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Sustainability and Environment on behalf of the Chief Executive Officer, Parks Victoria – continued**

PV will improve the transparency of the current funding provision and prioritisation process regarding the management of Victoria's parks, including marine parks. This will be addressed through a number of processes including a new service agreement with DSE, revised internal output statements, and the development of a new management planning framework.

DSE is leading the development of a forest and parks planning framework. This project will be completed by 2012 and specify the requirement for management plans to include priorities, actions, targets, performance indicators, accountabilities, monitoring, evaluation and reporting, the use of risk assessment in the development of action plan, and timeframes for delivery. DSE recognises the need for it to be able to assess PV's performance against park management plans. Management reporting that enables this will be specified in the new planning framework.

PV undertakes an annual program of risk assessment across the organisation to inform management activities. While detailed risk assessments for each park and reserve are usually undertaken every 10 – 15 years as part of the management planning cycle, they are updated as required if monitoring detects substantial change or in the event of major disturbances such as floods or fire. PV will continue to review its risk assessment process.

PV acknowledges the concerns raised by the auditor regarding fishing compliance in marine waters. DPI is responsible for fishing compliance in all marine waters and PV will continue to work with DPI to enhance compliance activities.

The government has made a commitment to initiate a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council investigation to examine the outcomes from the establishment of existing marine parks and any ongoing biodiversity threats or challenges to inform future strategies.

Recommendation 4: *The Department of the Sustainability and Environment should implement a new services agreement with Parks Victoria that clearly specifies the responsibilities of both agencies, performance standards and indicators, funding levels and reporting requirements.*

DSE acknowledges the Auditor-General's concerns regarding current governance arrangements.

DSE is committed to reviewing the governance arrangements for PV. It will explore the potential for an external independent review and develop appropriate management tools. As part of this, responsibilities, performance indicators, funding levels, and reporting requirements will be addressed.

Thank you for raising this matter with me.

Yours sincerely



**Greg Wilson**  
Secretary



**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Primary Industries**



**Department of Primary Industries**

Our Ref: SI006716

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Dear Mr Pearson, <sup>31</sup>/<sub>01</sub>

**AUDIT ACT 1994, S16(3) - PROPOSED AUDIT REPORT**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments in response to your letter of 18 January 2011 and the proposed audit report on the Environmental Management of Marine Protected Areas. I also refer to my letter to you of 6 January 2011 in response to your earlier preliminary draft report.

I again note that your proposed audit report presents a number of findings and recommendations that are primarily relevant to the responsibilities of Parks Victoria (PV) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

I wish to provide further comment in response to your broader commentary relevant to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) responsibilities for fisheries compliance and biosecurity.

I welcome your acknowledgement that DPI has been compliant in the application of the funds allocated to it for the purpose of boosting fisheries compliance along the whole Victorian coast, as reported in Section 3.4 Integrated Statewide Planning: Arrangements between DPI and Parks Victoria.

I note that you have not amended Section 3.4 Integrated Statewide Planning of your report to recognise the joint compliance operations undertaken by DPI and Parks Victoria to target assessed risks, such as the recent increase in pipi harvesting at Venus Bay and illegal fishing in the intertidal zone.

Additionally, I wish to reaffirm my previous advice to you that DPI is willing to develop a strategic compliance arrangement with Parks Victoria, *subject to* the development of robust governance arrangements to enable us to continue to discharge our legislative responsibilities and protect the integrity of our existing arrangements with other compliance agencies. For example, this includes reporting to the Ombudsman's Office on the use of defensive devices and applying comparable safeguards for the use of surveillance devices, the seizure of equipment associated with illegal fishing and controls to prevent conflicts of interest. A range of options could be examined, including complex arrangements involving intelligence sharing and targeted investigations or more straight-forward arrangements wherein DPI could be contracted to undertake more intensive compliance activities in marine protected areas (as is the case for Commonwealth marine protected areas). I have requested the Executive Director Fisheries Victoria to initiate action to follow up this matter with his Parks Victoria counterpart.

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For more information about DPI visit the website at [www.dpi.vic.gov.au](http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au) or call the Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

**RESPONSE provided by the Secretary, Department of Primary Industries –  
continued**

Finally, I again note your findings and recommendations with regard to marine biosecurity. I am pleased to reaffirm DPI's commitment to support the Department of Sustainability and Environment in its lead role to manage aquatic pests, as demonstrated by our actions last year to implement new rules under the *Fisheries Act 1995* and distribute associated advisory materials regarding the harvest of European Green Shore Crabs.

I thank you again for the opportunity to provide a response to your proposed performance report.

Yours sincerely,



**Richard Bolt**  
Secretary

27/1/2011



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