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# Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity

**Tabled 13 October 2021**



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## **Objective**

In this audit, we examined if the management of Victoria's biodiversity loss is halting the decline of threatened species.

## **What we examined**

We examined how well the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is acquitting its responsibilities to better protect threatened species under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (or the FFG Act) as well as the Protecting Victoria's Environment—Biodiversity 2037 policy (which we refer to as Biodiversity 2037).

## **What we concluded**

DELWP cannot demonstrate if it is halting further declines in Victoria's threatened species populations because it lacks an effective monitoring and performance framework to measure and report the impacts of its actions.

DELWP has better-practice tools to help it choose which protection actions to prioritise. However, data gaps hinder the reliability and accuracy of these tools.

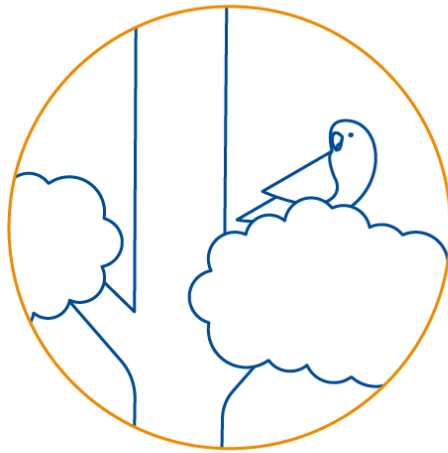
Funding available to DELWP falls significantly short of what it predicts is needed. However, DELWP has not provided detailed advice to the government about the cost and benefits of protecting threatened species.

## **Why this audit is important**

Healthy flora and fauna populations are critical to Victoria's biodiversity. Healthy biodiversity supports clean air and water, productive soils, pollination of crops and is fundamental to our wellbeing.

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## Why this audit is important



Healthy biodiversity is fundamental to our wellbeing. It supports:

- clean air and water
- productive soils
- pollination of crops.

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## Background

Victoria's native plant and animal species have been lost over the last two 200 years because of threats, including land clearing and climate change. As of June 2021, Victoria has 1 991 listed species at risk of extinction. DELWP is the responsible agency for overseeing the protection of threatened species. In 2017 it released its Biodiversity 2037 strategy to halt threatened species declines.

## Issues

The objective of the FFG Act is to guarantee the protection of all threatened species. However, Biodiversity 2037's approach is to protect the greatest number of species possible. This is pragmatic and recognises that DELWP cannot guarantee there will be no further species decline or extinctions. However, DELWP is yet to transparently communicate the gap between Biodiversity 2037 and the objectives of the FFG Act to the government and the public.

The flaws in DELWP's monitoring, reporting and performance indicators hinder its ability to demonstrate that public funds are being spent effectively and efficiently. DELWP's lack of targeted monitoring means it cannot determine if its management interventions are adequately addressing key threats and halting further species declines.

DELWP uses better-practice tools to help prioritise cost-effective management actions that are predicted to provide the greatest benefit to the greatest number of species. However, data and knowledge gaps underpinning these tools limit confidence in their outputs in the absence of adequate knowledge of what is happening on the ground.

DELWP's continued limited use of legislative tools to protect threatened species means that including a species on the FFG Act Threatened List does not guarantee its protection.

DELWP lacks a transparent process to prioritise the management of critically endangered species that are not protected by Biodiversity 2037's approach.

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## Issue 4: Unused legislative tools



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### Recommendations

We made 9 recommendations to DELWP about:

- improving its monitoring, and reporting of the impacts of its prioritised management actions
- improving the currency and comprehensiveness of the data and knowledge underpinning its decision-support tools
- improving its use of the available legislative tools
- improving its advice to government about funding needs and species prioritisation.

### More information

To learn more, you can view the audit snapshot and full report on our website [www.audit.vic.gov.au](http://www.audit.vic.gov.au).