



Victorian Pest Management

A Framework for Action

summary



Department of
Natural Resources
and Environment

SUM

OUR COMMITMENT

The Victorian Government has recognised that the permanent care of our natural environment is one of its most important duties. The Government, through its *Growing Victoria Together* vision statement, has nominated “Promoting sustainable development” and “Protecting the environment for future generations” as two of the priority issues for Victoria over the next ten years. In particular, the Government has recognised the degradation to Victoria’s rivers and catchments caused by introduced weeds and pest animals and is committed to tackling the pest problems faced by urban, rural and regional Victoria.

Pests are a major concern for private land and water managers and government in Victoria. They are one of the most significant threats to biodiversity, the community and the economy. The management of pests is a complex issue because it involves all land and water types and tenures; sometimes finding solutions is difficult. The challenge facing Victoria now, and in the future, is responding to this issue, and identifying the steps that can be taken to minimise the impact of pests on the economy, the environment and the social values of the local and broader Victorian community.

Like many management issues facing Victoria, pest management requires a sound strategic framework, coordinated and consistent action and the capacity to respond effectively to changing circumstances. Pest management is an integral part of good land management and this concept is central to the Victorian Pest Management – A Framework for Action (VPMF).

The VPMF has been developed by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), in consultation with the community and comprises the overall strategic principles and direction setting framework for pest management in Victoria for the next five years, as well as specific strategies relating to weed, fox, rabbit, feral pig and feral goat, wild dog and public land management.

Our Aim

That the VPMF presents a consistent and strategic approach by Government across all pest management programs on public and private land and water through:

1. The application of basic principles across all pest areas to develop priorities and programs;

2. A focus on impacts and outcomes in determining pest programs;
3. Developing and using procedures that are safe, humane, environmentally sound and economically feasible;
4. Appropriate institutional arrangements and effective working partnerships for progressive pest management;
5. Encouraging land and water managers, as well as promoting community vigilance, in reporting new pest problems and ensuring rapid response to new pest infestations;
6. Ensuring that the Victorian community is fully aware of the social, economic and environmental impacts and threats of pests and has the capability to act to minimise their damage;
7. Containing, and where possible reducing, the level and impact of existing pests and maintaining gains already made in pest management;
8. Continuous improvement and application of best management practice through evaluation, review and targeted research; and
9. Promoting and implementing innovative market-based incentives for activities that protect farm production and biodiversity values from the impact of pests.

Results

The VPMF will:

1. Ensure available resources are utilised to achieve maximum economic, social and environmental benefits;
2. Guide future reviews of Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) Regional Catchment Strategies and Regional and Local Action Plans relevant to pest management;
3. Provide directions that can be supported by both private and public land and water managers; and
4. Provide a basis for priority setting and public resources allocation that is efficient, effective and fair, and will achieve the desired results.

Determining Success

The success of the VPMF will be determined by:

1. Achieving a standard of land management which meets State biodiversity objectives for public and private land and waterways, and enhanced productivity and profitability on private land and fisheries (recreational, commercial and aquaculture);
2. Preventing new and emerging pests from having significant impacts on natural and productive resources;
3. Decreasing the impact of established pests on natural and productive resources; and
4. Increasing community capability to successfully respond to new and existing pest problems.

ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

While the VPMF provides for future directions, substantial progress has already been made towards effective long-term pest management during the two years of the Bracks Government. Key achievements **over this two year period** include:

- Allocated \$10 million for the Second Stage of the Rabbit Buster program, which has been one of the most successful initiatives with:
 - An average reduction in rabbit populations across Victoria of 92% with a range of 77% to 99% at 17 monitoring sites.
 - Approximately \$34 million in annual financial benefits state-wide through reduced rabbit impacts on primary production.

- High level of community acceptance with approximately 80% of participants rating it successful.
- Provided an increase of \$0.65 million under the Enhanced Enforcement Program to significantly improve NRE's weed enforcement capability. A total of \$1.55 million per year is now allocated to the Program compared to just \$0.9 million under the previous Government. This program has now seen the appointment of specialist compliance officers in all 6 NRE regions as well as a Statewide Compliance Leader to head up the program. This has resulted in 100% increase in weed enforcement activity by NRE compared to that achieved by the previous Government.
- Appointed a Statewide Retail Compliance Leader and a Statewide Exotic Species Leader with responsibility for preventing the establishment of new weed and animal pests in Victoria.
- Provided an additional \$0.53 million in each of the last two years to significantly improve the strategic ability of regional staff, which is equivalent to approximately 7 full time positions across Victoria.
- Added \$0.5 million to the budget for weed management across the State for a package of measures which will encourage a more coordinated approach in dealing with priority weeds during 2001/02.
- Allocated \$9 million under the Good Neighbour Program (GNP) which is an essential element in the Government's approach to pest management on public land. The GNP is managed by NRE to address damage caused to the community by pests that originate on public land and disperse onto adjacent private land.
- Allocated \$1 million under the Bracks Government Second Generation Landcare grants to community-based groups working to find solutions to weed problems. Funding has been directed to:
 - The Serrated Tussock Working Party;
 - South West Ragwort Reference Group; and
 - Ballarat Region Gorse Task Force and many Landcare groups and networks across the state.
- Developed Regional Weed and Rabbit Action Plans by all Catchment Management Authorities, in consultation with NRE. Action Plans provide the detailed guidance for Government and community investment in pest management at the regional level.
- Increased funding for wild dog control to more than \$1.3 million, of which \$1.15 million is spent on the ground employing the equivalent of 17 full time dogger positions which operate from 12 locations across Victoria's North East and Gippsland.
- Through a more focused Weed Research and Development Program carried out:
 - Assessment and prioritisation of over 100 declared noxious weeds for CMAs;
 - Assessment of potential, new and emerging weeds such as Texas and Mexican Needle grasses, Horsetails, Branched Broomrape, Willows;
 - Rapid response on following up potential Branched Broomrape occurrences, and new infestations of Japanese Knotweed, Texas and Mexican Needle Grasses, Salvinia and Senegal tea;
 - Development of a Weed Spread Prevention Strategy including industry codes of practice and negotiations with the nursery industry;
 - Worked with the community through Landcare groups and schools to release and monitor the impact of biological control agents on a range of agricultural and environmental weeds including blackberry, Paterson's curse, ragwort, boneseed, bridal creeper, English broom, gorse, thistles;
 - Carried out overseas surveys for new biological control agents on blackberry, serrated tussock, English Broom and gorse and undertaken feasibility studies on potential biological control programs of willows, spartina and polygala;

- Extension and community awareness products and services including development and update of Landcare Notes on weeds and a range of field days, principally on biological control;
- Undertaken an extensive Alligator weed campaign with Sri Lankan community; and
- Investigated new herbicides, grazing management and agroforestry options for Serrated Tussock management.

THE FUTURE

The VPMF highlights the key actions, major approaches and specific strategic directions in key areas of pest management in Victoria over the next 5 years.

Key Actions

A summary of the proposed key actions are:

- Increased whole of Government, One NRE and whole of catchment coordination;
- Amendment of pest management legislation;
- Increased emphasis on prevention and early action;
- Establishing effective partnerships with regard to roadside pest management;
- Enhancing the information flow to land and water managers;
- Improving social capability;
- Increased emphasis on collaboration with other Government Departments as well as local government;
- New community based approach to wild dog program; and
- CMAs responsible for prioritising all GNP projects.

Major Approaches

The following components are a mixture of improved existing as well as new and innovative approaches aimed at enhanced, effective, long-term pest management on public and private lands in a number of priority situations.

A. The Government supporting private land managers

B. The Government as a land manager


A. The Government supporting private land managers

Pest plants and animals have been identified as the most significant issue facing Landcare groups across Victoria. Most land managers voluntarily carry out pest management as it is in their own interest to do so. While existing Government support, through NRE, is targeted at supporting these activities, the VPMF has identified the need to further increase support in the following areas.

1. **Legislation:** There is community concern that despite significant investment by NRE into enforcement the existing legislation is ineffective and that many landholders are still not meeting their responsibilities under the Catchment and Land Protection (CaLP) Act to control declared pests. A priority under the VPMF is to amend the current legislation in order to speed decision making on weed declarations, including revisions. Improvement of the effectiveness of enforcement is also a priority to ensure that there is an increase in the relative focus on enforcement action against the recalcitrant and more difficult landholders whose inaction threatens their adjoining landholders efforts to manage pests.
2. **Prevention and Early Intervention:** The most cost effective mechanism to deal with pest issues, particularly weeds, is either to

prevent the establishment of, or to intervene early, when new pests are identified. Priority will be given to the establishment of a weed alert mechanism to quickly identify significant new and emerging weeds. Once established this will be extended to include pest animals and form a “pest alert” mechanism. In addition, priority will be given to restricting the sale of environmental weeds through nurseries and informal markets, or their distribution through garden clubs, botanical societies or other avenues.

3. **Research and Development:** Knowledge is required to effect change. Research is one of the keys for building the capacity for land managers to effect change. The knowledge and understanding that comes from research allows land managers to develop appropriate management responses. There are potentially large benefits that can be derived from properly focussed investment in research. Biological control also offers the most likely avenue for successfully managing established pest populations on public land. Research is therefore the most cost effective long-term approach for minimising the impact of established pests and will continue to be a priority under the VPMF.
4. **Local Government:** Local Government has an important role to play in pest management. Support will be provided to further engage local government to be involved in planning and coordinating programs and other innovative approaches to add value and to facilitate a broader ownership of pest management.
5. **Roadside Pest management:** This is a major community concern. Greater clarity will be provided as to roadside responsibilities. In addition, the VPMF recognises the importance of establishing effective working partnerships with VicRoads (or local governments acting as its agent) as well as providing increased support to roadside pest management on roads under VicRoads’ responsibility.
6. **Enhancing the Information Flow:** The VPMF recognises that basic information on pest identification, status and treatment must be readily available to land and water managers to enable them to carry out effective pest management and fulfil their legal responsibilities. Specific strategic actions will target innovative extension programs, developing a new pest management web-based information site and enhancing the Customer Service Centre to provide basic pest management information on key issues.
7. **Incentives:** Future incentives will consider new and innovative means to encourage biodiversity protection. NRE will also examine innovative market based incentives for fox control activities to protect farm production and biodiversity values from the impact of foxes
8. **Improving social capability:** The introduction of new approaches to problems, new policies, or new land-use possibilities will always challenge the existing structure of rural communities. Change cannot be avoided but genuine engagement of the community through the CMAs, in providing for effective regional coordination and whole-of-catchment reporting with NRE, other state government land managers and local government, can significantly improve the process. This also includes the assessment by CMA Regional Assessment Panels of priority projects under the Good Neighbour Program. In addition, regionally based and community formed Wild Dog Management Groups (WDMG) will be established and based in the North East and Gippsland regions respectively. While line management of staff delivering the program will be retained by NRE, these Groups will be required to set the strategic



directions for the operation of the wild dog program in their region, taking into account best practice wild dog management techniques.

B. The Government as a land manager

1. The community has strong expectations that Government meets its responsibilities in effectively managing its public land, particularly with regard to minimising the impact of pests on conservation values, and agricultural values on adjoining private lands.
2. Managing pests on public land is designed to contribute to meeting the strategic priorities and objectives of NRE – ecologically sustainable development, enhanced biodiversity values, improved natural resource management and effective community engagement in decision making.
3. Pest management is a major component of effective stewardship of public land and is an integral part of sustainable and integrated land management in our catchments. Both public and private land managers have responsibilities under the CaLP Act. NRE will fulfil these responsibilities for the land it manages.
4. Where the activities of pest management on public land primarily benefit public land values, such as protection of biodiversity values and the natural resource base, the determination of the priority and extent of activity will be the core responsibility of the relevant public land manager.
5. Where pests on public land cause off-site impacts on adjoining private land, pest management activities will be the responsibility of the relevant public land manager but that responsibility will be met through the Good Neighbour Program (GNP) and budget. CMAs will determine priorities in accord with priorities detailed in their weed and rabbit Action Plans. Catchment and Water Division of NRE will coordinate and evaluate the GNP through a cooperative approach with relevant businesses.

Implementation of the VPMF over the next 5 years will reduce the impact of pests on natural and productive resources and prevent the establishment of new pests through improved understanding, capability and cooperation at a State, regional and local level.

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ISBN 1 74106 053 2

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