

action 11: sustainable forests

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Forests are a priority area of action for the Victorian Government. Increasing recognition of the many uses of forested public land (including biodiversity conservation, water quality, timber and recreation); and the changing use patterns enabled by the reduction in timber harvesting (resulting from the *Our Forests, Our Future* policy), presents significant challenges but also exciting opportunities.

The Government remains committed to sustainable forest management. It will continue to ensure it has the right knowledge base to do this and will work with the community and industry to implement its new approach to public land stewardship which includes better valuation processes to inform decisions and a program of on-ground action. The Government remains committed to ensuring the forest estate is managed sustainably for the long term.

What we will do

11.1 Further protection of forests

We will protect key biodiversity areas in our State forests – including the Strzeleckis in South Gippsland – in the next stage of the Government's actions to safeguard our forests.

The Government has requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to investigate the appropriate use and management of Victoria's River Red Gums and Goolengook Forest block. It is also consulting with community and industry on the future management of old growth areas in East Gippsland.

In addition, the Government will enter into negotiations with Hancock Victorian Plantations with a view to protecting high biodiversity sites in the Strzelecki Ranges in South Gippsland.

11.2 Sustainable forestry

We will make sure Victoria's sustainably harvested timber is accredited with the highest possible environmental standards to maximise sales in the international market.

Victoria has reduced its native timber industry by 30 per cent to be on a more sustainable level and we need to make sure this timber gets the highest credit through the international certification regime.

Victoria will progress with achieving both the Australian Forestry Standard (AFS) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification standards. Having accreditation under both programs will maximise our international advantage.

Sustainability Charter for Victoria's State forests

The State Forests Sustainability Charter provides seven objectives to guide forest management decisions and actions. The State Forests Criteria and Indicators Framework will help track progress against these objectives. These initiatives together with the supporting policies for sustainable forests provide Government with a best practice governance approach to forest management.

This initiative will be kick-started with a \$500,000 investment in appointing a forestry expert to work with government and industry stakeholders on accelerating the process towards achieving FSC and AFS certification across Victoria's native forests. There will also be more long-term monitoring across the forest estate as part of this project.

11.3 Tourism development framework

We will develop a new tourism strategy to attract more Victorians and other visitors to our magnificent forests.

With the decrease in logging from *Our Forests Our Future* policies, more Victorians are becoming aware of the recreational value of our forests. We want more Victorians to be active and experience our great natural assets. We will continue to support forest tourism and recreation opportunities by developing a Tourism Development Framework for public land. This will be completed by the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development in partnership with the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

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