A reset for nature

Invasive species actions for the next Victorian government

October 2026



invasive species council



Fernshaw, Victoria. Photo: Andrew Bunnell.

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About the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council was formed in 2002 to advocate for stronger laws, policies and programs to keep Australian biodiversity safe from weeds, feral animals, exotic pathogens and other invaders. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation, funded mainly by donations from supporters and philanthropic organisations.

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Victoria needs a reset on invasive species

Victoria's nature is in crisis, and invasive species are a major cause.

Invasive species drive extinctions and wildlife declines. They damage forests, waterways and other habitats. They reduce farm output and threaten human lives and livelihoods. They harm the economy and spoil recreation.

The 2021 Inquiry into ecosystem decline in Victoria noted that:

> *'Invasive species are now present in all terrestrial and aquatic environments across Victoria and are damaging the environment, impacting agricultural businesses, creating public health and safety risks and reducing liveability of communities.'*

In the years since this inquiry, the situation has not improved.

Victoria has the nation's largest population of feral deer. They damage forests, pollute waterways, devastate farmers and cause road incidents. Carp in the Murray-Darling are degrading the river system and pushing native species towards extinction. Invasive weeds have taken over large areas of forest. They crowd out native plants, destroy habitat and add fuel that increases bushfire risk.

Victoria's response has become piecemeal and fragmented. Too often, the unfunded burden falls on individual landholders and local communities. Recent cuts to key departments have made this worse. Many stakeholders now see the message that 'biosecurity is everyone's responsibility' as hollow. Gaps in resources expose native species to threats and disease and leave communities, land managers and industry to fill gaps. H5 bird flu adds to these risks and is likely to have catastrophic impacts on wildlife at a time when investment in nature has not met need.

The result is a system in decline. Invasive species are gaining ground, and Victoria's unique wildlife is at growing risk.

Cuts will not solve this problem, and it will not go away if it is ignored.

The next government must reset this approach with leadership and investment in invasive species management.

This document sets out the Invasive Species Council's priorities for the next Victorian government. Key priorities include:

- **Priority invasive species:** urgent action on feral deer, foxes, cats, feral horses and other high-risk invasive animals and weeds before they become unmanageable.
- **Conservation and protection:** a final push to make French Island a safe haven for native wildlife and turn Wilsons Promontory into Australia's largest mainland predator-free wildlife haven.
- **Stronger biosecurity:** stronger response to H5 bird flu to foster resilience in susceptible wildlife populations and independent leadership of the biosecurity system.
- **Community and nature:** long-term funding for pest and weed control, national parks, the environmental workforce, Landcare and First Nations leadership.
- **National leadership:** support for a strong federal plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds, and full funding to eradicate fire ants.

Invasive species actions for Victoria

Priority invasive species

1. Commit to controlling feral deer quickly and at scale.
2. Streamline invasive animal control to empower communities.
3. Support cat containment and expand feral cat control.
4. Remove feral horses from the Alpine National Park and state forests.
5. Stop buffel grass spreading in Victoria.
6. Prepare the Murray-Darling catchment for carp biocontrol.

Conservation and protection

7. Protect the internationally significant UNESCO Western Port Biosphere.
8. Fund the plan to declare Wilsons Promontory invasive-free.

Stronger biosecurity

9. Prepare Victoria's wildlife for H5 bird flu.
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National leadership

15. Champion a strong federal plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds.
16. Fund the next phase of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program.



Black cockatoo in Mornington Peninsula National Park, Flinders, Victoria. Photo: Geoff Brooks.

Priority invasive species



Red deer. Photo: Pixabay.

1. Commit to controlling feral deer quickly at scale

Current situation

Feral deer are one of the most destructive invasive species in Victoria. A few animals were released for hunting in the 1860s. Since then, deer have spread across the state. According to the Victorian Deer Control Strategy, there are now up to 1 million feral deer across about 40% of the state.

Deer cause enormous damage to the environment. They have a high impact on more than 30 threatened species and 13 threatened ecological communities. These include the critically endangered Leadbeater's possum and Grampians globe-pea. They also include the Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain and the Littoral Rainforest and Coastal Vine Thickets of Eastern Australia.

Deer could cost the Victorian economy more than $2 billion by 2050. This will happen unless there is a serious commitment to reduce their numbers quickly and at scale. That requires coordinated control across the landscape and across different types of land ownership (cross-tenure control). Government agencies should work with landholders and communities to protect the environment and cultural heritage. Together, they should also stop deer spreading west.

Victoria is the only mainland state that protects all feral deer as game species under the *Wildlife Act 1975*. Other pest animals in Victoria are listed under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act). This gives land managers access to tools and funding for control.

Because deer are protected, many land managers – farmers, catchment management authorities (CMAs), Landcare groups and councils – cannot use tools that are standard in other states and territories. It also makes coordinated cross-tenure control at a landscape scale much harder.

Opportunities

Victoria has signed up to the *National Feral Deer Action Plan 2023–2028*. It has also prepared the *Victorian Deer Control Strategy*. If fully funded, the strategy would enable government, councils, CMAs, farmers and other landholders to work together on coordinated, cross-tenure control at a landscape scale – the only way to reduce deer numbers. This must include more aerial culling and better support for landholders.

Victoria can greatly strengthen its response to feral deer. It should follow expert advice and learn from successful programs interstate and overseas. An expanded strategy must be serious about reducing the impact and spread of deer.

Actions needed

Commit to controlling feral deer quickly and at scale:

- Hold a deer summit in early 2027: Bring together everyone involved in deer control to share ideas and agree on practical outcomes for communities and businesses.
- Fund community deer facilitators: Provide $10 million over 4 years for 10 to 12 deer facilitator roles across Victoria's 10 CMA regions. Facilitators would support landholders to navigate the system, work with agencies and coordinate local control.
- List feral deer as pest animals: Remove their protected status under the *Wildlife Act 1975* and list them as pests under the CaLP Act. This would remove regulatory barriers to control and give land managers access to tools, methodologies and funding that are currently unavailable due to their status as a protected game species.
- Eradicate deer from western Victoria: Provide up to $2 million a year for 5 years to remove deer where numbers are still low. This is outlined in the *Western Victorian Deer Control Plan*. Prioritise western Victoria's high-value areas and isolated deer populations, including the Grampians-Gariwerd region, Big Desert and Mount Cole, using professional shooters and aerial contractors. Align the program with South Australia's deer eradication program.
- Fully fund the *Victorian Deer Control Strategy*: Ensure deer control grants are ongoing and increased to at least $6.5 million a year.
  - Review the strategy, its 3 regional plans and the grants program to see what has worked best and what more is required to deliver on its objectives.
  - Involve communities and land managers in designing the next grants round, and include flexible funding to respond quickly to new deer populations.

Case study: Grampians-Gariwerd Deer Coordinator Trial

The Project Platypus Landcare Network hosts this trial in western Victoria. It aims to control feral deer before populations become entrenched.

The 14-month trial funds a dedicated deer control coordinator to align deer control across public and private land in the Grampians-Gariwerd region. They bring together farmers, landholders, Landcare groups, covenant holders and government agencies. Together, these groups plan and sustain coordinated control across the landscape. The coordinator also helps communities start and run their own local control programs.

The Australian Government funds the project through the *National Feral Deer Action Plan 2023–2028*. Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) administers the funding. Project Platypus delivers the project with a steering committee. Members include Parks Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). Other members are Trust for Nature, the Victorian Deer Control Community Network, Landmapper/Patchweave and Barengi Gadjin Land Council.

The trial is a model for the community facilitators that are missing from Victoria's deer control strategy.

2. Streamline invasive animal control to empower communities

Current situation

Victoria's approach to foxes, pigs, goats and rabbits is fragmented and ineffective. Funding is often tied to outdated grant processes. Some programs, such as the fox bounty, are ineffective and divert resources from proven measures.

The fox bounty shows how confused the state's approach has become. It pays landholders $14 per fox and will cost $2.2 million in 2026–27. That is the same as all new funding for pest species management in the 2026–27 Victorian budget. The scheme is promoted to farmers as a way to recover costs. However, it is ineffective at reducing fox populations and the resources could be better used to fund control measures that are proven to work while supporting land managers.

Similarly, support for land managers to control invasive species like rabbits, goats and pigs is piecemeal and fragmented. Rabbits are a significant problem for many councils and community land managers but the grants available are inadequate to support best-practice rabbit management at the scale required and often restrictive in the types of control they allow.

Opportunities

Controlling these pests needs sustained, strategic investment instead of one-off responses. It needs coordination across the landscape and stronger community capacity. This will protect native species and cultural heritage.

Investing in these actions through a dedicated pest and weeds fund (outlined in action 11) would ensure land managers have the tools and resources they need.

Actions needed

Streamline pest animal control to empower communities and achieve effective control:

- Foxes: Redirect funding from the fox bounty to planned, evidence-based control and better support for land managers and farmers. This includes landscape-scale baiting timed to help wildlife recover after fire. Align control strategies with the new draft national fox threat abatement plan.
- Pigs and goats: Replace piecemeal efforts with landscape-scale control led by the government. Build on successful programs like those in the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape and Hattah-Kulkyne National Park which worked closely with Traditional Owners to deliver effective control.
- Rabbits: Maintain co-funding for the next stage of the *Rabbit Biocontrol Pipeline Strategy 2024*, as current biocontrol agents are losing effectiveness.
- Support community rabbit control: Fund groups such as Landcare and the Victorian Rabbit Action Network to use proven methods for the best-practice management of rabbits.

3. Support cat containment and expand feral cat control

Current situation

Cats are a major threat to Australian wildlife. Feral cats kill over 1.5 billion native mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs, and 1.1 billion invertebrates each year. And roaming pet cats kill around 546 million animals across Australia each year. In Victoria, cats threaten 123 native species. These include the plains-wanderer, the mountain pygmy-possum and the state's 2 faunal emblems – Leadbeater's possum and the helmeted honeyeater.

Feral cats are relentless hunters and a major cause of native species decline and are declared established pest animals on Crown land under the CaLP Act. Feral cats are not declared pests on private land, though landholders can control nuisance cats under specific circumstances. Control methodologies vary by land tenure type, with tools like Felixer grooming traps tightly regulated for use by government agencies in targeted eradication programs.

In towns and suburbs, each roaming pet cat will kill on average more than 3 animals every single week, totalling over 186 birds, reptiles and mammals per year. Victorian law allows each council to set its own cat containment rules. But councils have taken up and enforced these rules unevenly. All pet cats must be registered, but many owners do not comply. The 2023 *Victorian Pet Census* found that only 227,000 of Victoria's estimated 914,000 pet cats were registered.

Opportunities

The *Victorian Cat Management Strategy 2025–2035* sets out a plan to reduce the impact of cats on Victoria's environment and wildlife. To enable this plan to succeed, Victoria needs consistent statewide rules. All pet cats should be registered, and owners should understand their responsibilities. Many local governments are already partners in this effort and more will come on board if they are better resourced and supported.

Actions needed

Introduce statewide cat containment and expand feral cat control:

- Keep pet cats contained: Fund councils to enforce cat containment rules and to run containment, desexing and responsible pet ownership programs from a new Victorian established pests and weeds fund.
- Enforce cat registration: Expand enforcement and education so all pet cats are registered and owners manage their cats' behaviour.
- Expand feral cat control: Fund innovative control programs, including alternative tools such as Felixer grooming traps. Permit broad operational use of Felixer traps for feral cat control statewide, removing regulatory barriers that restrict their deployment solely to specialised eradication programs. Allocate dedicated funding to deploy Felixer trap networks across high-value conservation reserves, national parks, and island sanctuaries.

4. Remove feral horses from the Alpine National Park and state forests, as part of broader feral animal management

Current situation

Feral horses are causing serious damage in the Alpine National Park and nearby state forests. This includes highly sensitive sphagnum bogs and ephemeral lakes.

The *Protection of the Alpine National Park: Feral Horse Action Plan 2021* allows control of feral horses, including lethal control. The plan says control will extend to 'adjacent state forests'.

But outdated laws are holding back control in state forests. DEECA and Parks Victoria treat feral horses there as livestock, not pest animals. Under section 3 of both the *Forests Act 1958* and the *Land Act 1958*, horses in state forests fall within the definition of 'cattle'. They are also considered Crown property. The *Impounding of Livestock Act 1994* classes horses as livestock, with strict rules on how they must be handled.

As a result, agencies say they cannot use standard pest control methods in state forests, such as aerial shooting and professional ground shooting. Instead, control needs a Governor in Council order, which means the minister must obtain Cabinet approval.

Opportunities

Removing feral horses brings major benefits for fragile alpine environments. Horse numbers are still relatively low. Removing horses now, and keeping numbers down, should be the goal of feral horse control.

Actions needed

Invest at least $3 million over 2 years to remove feral horses from the Alpine National Park and state forests:

- Speed up removal: Over the next 2 years, prioritise:
  - areas around sphagnum bogs
  - ephemeral lakes, including Lake Hill and Mundys Plain
  - areas near the New South Wales border and access corridors such as Limestone Creek, working with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- Update the law: Remove the livestock classification of feral horses in state forests so agencies can control them effectively.

Case study: Recovery in Barmah National Park after feral horse control

Barmah National Park lies on the Murray River floodplain, on Yorta Yorta Country in northern Victoria. It is part of the world's largest river red gum forest and has Ramsar-listed wetlands of international importance.

Unmanaged feral horses caused severe damage. They reduced native Moira grass (*Pseudoraphis spinescens*) plains to less than 5% of their original cover. They also eroded floodplain soils, polluted waterways and damaged Yorta Yorta cultural heritage sites.

Under the Joint Management Plan for the Barmah National Park, Parks Victoria and the Yorta Yorta Traditional Owner Land Management Board began evidence-based control. The program combined trapping, rehoming, targeted humane lethal control and conservation fencing. Running from January 2020 until 2024, it successfully removed all feral horses from Barmah National Park.

The ecosystem has responded quickly. Moira grass has regenerated strongly, and native wetland plants have re-emerged from the seed bank. Stable soils have made the water clearer and restored natural floodplain processes. This has improved nesting and foraging habitat for waterbirds such as the Australasian bittern.



Barmah Lakes, Barmah National Park. Photo: AcaciaFlowstone / Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

5. Stop buffel grass spreading in Victoria

Current situation

Buffel grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) is turning desert plant communities into dangerous grass monocultures (single-species stands). It burns hotter, faster and more often than native grasses. It spreads through songlines and sacred sites, chokes waterways and leaves dust where there was once diverse native life.

In Central Australia, buffel grass now covers hundreds of kilometres of Country. It continues to spread, threatening native ecosystems in South Australia and towards the New South Wales and Victorian borders. Road and rail corridors act as 'super spreaders'. When buffel grass burns, it can close roads and warp rail lines.

Buffel grass is currently listed as a very high-risk environmental weed on the Victorian government's advisory list, but it is not yet a declared weed under the CaLP Act.

Victoria treats buffel grass as an emerging high-risk threat. It is restricted under biosecurity regulations, and the goal is to keep it out and eradicate any outbreaks. The main focus is the Victorian Mallee. Biosecurity officers and land managers watch transport corridors and highways so that plants carried on interstate vehicles do not take hold.

Opportunities

Victoria still has the chance to stop buffel grass before it becomes further established. Preventing a weed from spreading costs far less than controlling it once it takes hold. Regulations need to be updated for clarity to all stakeholders. This can be done by listing buffel grass as a restricted weed under the CaLP Act. Victoria can also provide inter-jurisdictional leadership to support the management of this contested invasive species.

Actions needed

Ensure Victoria has the right regulatory framework to stop buffel grass spreading:

- Support strong, nationally consistent management of invasive grasses that increase fire risk.
- Declare buffel grass a restricted weed under the CaLP Act.
- Scale up early detection and rapid response along highways and rail corridors that cross the Victorian Mallee, using remote-sensing data.
- Introduce mandatory vehicle hygiene audits for commercial and freight vehicles arriving from heavily infested areas in South Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.
- Run education campaigns for Mallee land managers and community groups so they can spot and report new infestations.

6. Prepare the Murray catchment for carp biocontrol

Current situation

The potential release of the Cyprinid herpesvirus 3 (carp virus) offers a historic biocontrol opportunity to reduce European carp populations across the Murray catchment. However, biological control alone will not restore river health. Without targeted preparation, severe ecological risks emerge: decaying biomass degrades water quality, pest species like redfin perch and tilapia rapidly fill ecological niches, and feral hard-hoofed pests – including pigs and deer – continue to destroy critical riparian zones, accelerating bank erosion and smothering aquatic habitat.

Opportunities

Comprehensive pre-release investment will build resilient river systems capable of supporting long-term ecological recovery. Restoring riverbanks, controlling invasive species, and creating dedicated safe zones will ensure native fish populations, such as the vulnerable Murray cod, thrive following carp suppression.

Actions needed

Prepare the Murray catchment for carp virus release:

- Establish native species safe zones: Designate and restore at least 6 protected aquatic refuges with optimised flow regimes and riparian habitat repair. This would allow the reintroduction of robust populations of native species, including Murray cod, to boost the strong post-carp recovery of the river system.
- Restore riparian habitats and control pest ungulates: Expand targeted control of feral pigs and deer to eliminate bank erosion, alongside revegetation programs to improve water quality and habitat structure.
- Prevent secondary invasive fish surges: Implement active surveillance and suppression programs targeting redfin perch and tilapia to prevent them from capitalising on post-carp ecological voids.



Lower Moira, Victoria. Photo: Barmah John.

Conservation and protection



Eastern quoll. Photo: Marco.

7. Protect the internationally significant UNESCO Western Port Biosphere

Current situation

Western Port Bay and its surrounding hinterlands support unique ecosystems housing hundreds of iconic native species, including diverse migratory birds, Australian fur seals, and the delicate weedy seadragon (Phyllopteryx taeniolatus), Victoria's official marine faunal emblem. However, repeated industrial threats, habitat fragmentation, and invasive predators jeopardise the long-term ecological integrity of this internationally recognised UNESCO Biosphere.

Opportunities

Establishing strategic whole-of-bay planning, stronger environmental protections and dedicated biosecurity funding will safeguard vital marine life, Ramsar wetlands, and coastal habitats while empowering community-led conservation.

Across the Western Port Biosphere, local council-backed wildlife corridors are restoring native vegetation and reconnecting isolated natural habitats to enable local native flora and fauna to thrive. The expansion of these corridors will boost the resilience of locally threatened native wildlife and plant species.

Actions needed

Protect and restore the Western Port Biosphere:

- Implement the Western Port Bay Framework: Secure coordinated whole-of-bay planning and lasting protection to strengthen the long-term health of unique marine life, birds, and plant species across the region.
- Eradicate invasive species on French Island: Provide multi-million, multi-year funding to remove feral cats, deer, goats, and other invasives to support our native species in this critical haven.
- Expand and connect wildlife biocorridors: Increase funding and support for regional biocorridors by leveraging joint state, federal, and local government investment.

Case study: French Island, a haven for native wildlife

French Island in Western Port is a unique wildlife haven with Ramsar-listed wetlands. It is at the heart of the Western Port Biosphere Reserve, recognised by UNESCO. Feral cats, goats and deer are a major threat to its vulnerable native species.

The French Island Priority Place project is a partnership led by Melbourne Water. It has greatly reduced feral cat numbers on the island. A final push is now needed to secure these gains and remove every feral cat. Feral goats and feral sambar deer are damaging fragile wetlands and ecosystems and must also be removed urgently.

French Island is a priority island for feral predator eradication under the Australian Government's *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032*. It could become one of the nation's few predator-free wildlife sanctuaries.

Removing feral cats would create a haven for threatened wildlife. This includes the long-nosed potoroo, eastern barred bandicoot, orange-bellied parrot, king quail and migratory shorebirds. The island is also the only home of the critically endangered French Island spider-orchid (*Caladenia insularis*).

Removing goats and deer would build on the benefits of cat eradication. Together, these actions would create a genuine haven for the island's native species.



French Island, Victoria. Photo: Owen Pawsey.

8. Fund the plan to declare Wilsons Promontory invasive-free

Current situation

Victoria has an opportunity to transform Wilsons Promontory National Park into Australia's largest mainland sanctuary for native species. The Promontory is one of Victoria's most recognised and beloved national parks and among the most visited natural locations in Victoria. It is home to more than 150 threatened plant and animal species and 10 major Australian ecosystem types.

When completed the 10-kilometre exclusion fence at Yanakie will enable Parks Victoria to conduct large-scale eradication of foxes, cats and deer. Eradicating predators and invasive herbivores will allow the reintroduction of species that once called The Prom home – the eastern bristlebird, eastern bettong and spot-tailed quoll – and safeguard populations of the endangered southern brown bandicoot.

Opportunities

Wilsons Promontory National Park represents Victoria's single best opportunity to establish a world-class mainland haven completely free of destructive invasive species. Its unique peninsular geography provides a natural barrier that, combined with targeted infrastructure and sustained investment, can permanently safeguard native wildlife from invasive predators, herbivores and environmental weeds such as mirror bush, sea spurge and ox-eye daisy.

Actions needed

Unlock funding from state and federal governments and enlist philanthropic support to make Parks Victoria's Prom Sanctuary plan a reality:

- Complete the sanctuary fence:
  - Finalise construction of the 10-kilometre conservation-grade exclusion fence across the Yanakie Isthmus to halt pest ingress.
- Landscape-scale eradication program:
  - Invasive herbivores: Eradicate feral deer (sambar and hog deer) and feral goats using professional thermal-assisted aerial and ground control.
  - Feral predators: Eradicate feral cats and foxes using advanced trapping, tracking dogs, and smart detection technologies.
  - Environmental weeds: Target high-risk weeds threatening coastal heathlands, woodlands, and cool temperate rainforests.
- Traditional Owner partnership and joint management:
  - Embed joint management with Traditional Owner groups – the Gunaikurnai, Bunurong and Boonwurrung people, integrating Caring for Country principles and dedicated First Nations ranger roles.
- Biosecurity and ongoing protection:
  - Establish mandatory visitor biosecurity protocols and continuous AI surveillance networks to prevent and respond to new incursions.

Stronger biosecurity



Phillip Island. Photo: Xuan Lia.

9. Prepare Victoria's wildlife for H5 bird flu

Current situation

H5 bird flu is an ongoing biosecurity and wildlife welfare crisis for Australia. Victoria is particularly vulnerable because of years of cuts to its biosecurity workforce. Its reduced ability to respond to diseases like bird flu will be tested until funding and staff are restored.

Protecting native wildlife needs a sustained increase in programs that reduce other pressures on native species. These include feral predator control and habitat restoration.

Opportunities

Victoria cannot stop this disease spreading through wild populations. But it can make sure vulnerable species are as strong and healthy as possible before an outbreak and given the best chance to recover afterwards.



Little penguins on Phillip Island, Victoria. Photo: Thomas Gabernig.

Actions needed

Adapt lessons from bird flu to build a biosecurity system that invests in wildlife resilience:

- Hold a parliamentary inquiry into Victoria's bird flu preparedness and response. The terms of reference should include how to make wildlife more resilient to future disease outbreaks.
- Provide a government response to the inquiry's recommendations within 6 months of reporting.
- Invest now to reduce pressure on Victorian native wildlife by reducing feral species like cats, foxes, pigs and deer, safeguarding and restoring critical habitat, and strengthening vulnerable populations so they are more resilient when disease strikes.
- Protect native bird habitat and halt avoidable threats to bird and other wildlife populations.
- Ensure funding for frontline agencies and organisations dealing with impacts of bird flu and restore staff capacity to key departments.

10. Strengthen the Victorian biosecurity system

Current situation

In Victoria, the CaLP Act is the main law for managing invasive species and other threats to nature. Agriculture Victoria administers the Act. It is part of DEECA and works with the 10 regional CMAs. Parks Victoria manages parks and reserves on public land.

Opportunities

Victoria can respond to the ever-growing number of new and emerging invasive threats – like fire ants, polyphagous shot-hole borer – by appointing an independent Environmental Biosecurity Commissioner, set up in law. The role would build on the strengths of each agency.

An expert advisory committee would support the commissioner. Together, they would make biosecurity a higher priority for both the government and the community. They would also hold agencies to account for their biosecurity duties.

Actions needed

Strengthen the Victorian biosecurity system:

- Create an Environmental Biosecurity Commissioner: Establish an independent commissioner in law, with a State Biosecurity Advisory Committee to give expert advice on risks to nature, free of party politics.
- Empower and resource the new state Environmental Biosecurity Commissioner with a mandate to prepare emergency response plans for likely future outbreaks and incursions including of H5 bird flu.
- Strengthen agreements between agencies: Improve biosecurity agreements between Agriculture Victoria, DEECA, Parks Victoria and the 10 CMAs to commit agencies to work together on shared goals for nature.



The polyphagous shot-hole borer could affect Melbourne's mature fig trees (pictured). Photo: Mateusz Glogowski.

Community and nature



11. Establish a dedicated fund to manage established pests and weeds

Current situation

Established pests and weeds do immense damage to our natural environment and cost Victorian agriculture $869 million a year.2 Yet the latest Victorian budget gave only $2.2 million in new funding for pest species management in 2026–27.

Existing programs add some support in 2026–27, including:

- $2.86 million for the Roadside Weeds and Pests Program
- $3.85 million for the Weeds and Pests on Public Land Program
- $1.7 million for the Peri-urban Weed Management Partnerships Program
- $3.5 million for the Victorian Landcare Grants.

In 2018, Victoria launched ambitious programs under *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*. These included the Faunal Emblems Program and Icon Species Program. They also included the Protecting Biodiversity Program. It invested $32 million up to June 2025 to reduce the impact of invasive herbivores, predators and weeds in priority locations.

Funding for these programs has ended or is uncertain. For example, the Faunal Emblems Program, which protects critically endangered animals such as Leadbeater's possum, has no funding beyond 2026–27.

Victoria's approach too often leaves communities, councils and landholders to carry most of the cost of pest and weed control. This leads to fragmented, short-term solutions and large funding gaps.

Eligibility rules and red tape also limit access to the grants that do exist. For example, Landcare groups cannot get funding for feral deer control, because deer are not listed as a pest species. Landholders and volunteers often pay for basic equipment and essential land management work themselves.

Opportunities

Victoria urgently needs a dedicated, long-term fund for pests and weeds. Reliable, multi-year funding will support community-led control and coordination across land tenures. It will also help protect biodiversity.

Actions needed

Establish a dedicated fund for pest and weed control:

- Establish a $200 million Pest and Weed Fund: Help communities, industries and agencies tackle weeds and feral animals. Build on work begun under *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*.
- Secure the Faunal Emblems Program: Provide ongoing and adequate funding so Victoria does not lose these iconic and vulnerable species.

2 Agriculture Victoria, 'About the Partnerships Against Pests program', agriculture.vic.gov.au/biosecurity/protecting-victoria/partnerships-against-pests-program-and-grants/about-the-partnerships-against-pests-program.

Case study: Polygala on the Mornington Peninsula

Polygala (*Polygala myrtifolia*), also called myrtle-leaf milkwort, is invading the Mornington Peninsula's fragile coastal heathlands and dunes. It forms dense stands that crowd out native plants, degrade habitat for native animals and stop ecosystems recovering.

Local Landcare groups and volunteers work hard to control it. But short-term, one-off funding causes constant setbacks, and cleared areas are quickly reinvaded.

Polygala infests around 560 hectares across the Mornington Peninsula and its control falls mainly on local community groups including Blairgowrie Friends of Mornington Peninsula National Park and Mornington Peninsula Landcare Network.

These groups have helped establish the Polygone Project, an innovative community-led initiative to develop a biocontrol to target polygala and stop its spread along Australian coastlines.



Case study: Leadbeater's possum recovery at risk

The rediscovery of Leadbeater's possum is one of Victoria's most powerful stories of nature conservation. Long thought to be extinct, the discovery of Leadbeater's possum near Cambarville and Marysville in 1961 was celebrated and led to this iconic marsupial being declared Victoria's Faunal Emblem in 1971. Since then populations have been identified in several locations in the mountain ash forests of the Victorian Central Highlands. The only known population of the lowland Leadbeater's possum was found at the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. The genetically distinct lowland population once likely inhabited an extensive area of low-lying forest extending toward Western Port Bay.

However habitat degradation, fire impact and predation by feral species have once again pushed Leadbeater's possum to the brink. The lowland population at Yellingbo has been steadily reduced to around a dozen animals and predation risks at that location recently forced Zoos Victoria to relocate the remaining animals to Healesville Sanctuary.

This means the lowland Leadbeater's possum is now extinct in the wild.

A national recovery plan for Leadbeater's possum was unveiled by the federal environment minister in 2024 but remains unfunded by either the Victorian or Commonwealth governments. Victoria's Faunal Emblems Program, which directs $1.52 million to protect 2 species in the wild – Leadbeater's possum and the helmeted honeyeater – is unfunded beyond the current financial year, while recent job cuts at Zoos Victoria put further pressure on people working to save the species from extinction.



Leadbeater's possum. Photo: Dan Harley.

12. Increase funding for national parks and conservation reserves

Current situation

Cuts to park agencies and programs have harmed the health of Victoria's world-class national parks. They have also cost hundreds of jobs. Management to retain and restore the values of national parks and conservation reserves should be fully funded. Skilled professionals, including Traditional Owners, need the resources to care for them.

Significant cuts to roles in Parks Victoria, DEECA and Zoos Victoria undermine efforts to control invasive animals, plants and pathogens and protect threatened species including the state's faunal emblems the Leadbeater's possum and the helmeted honeyeater. More than 1,000 public sector roles from environment and climate portfolios have been cut over successive state budgets.

Funding for important programs to protect threatened species has either ended or remains uncertain beyond the current funding round. For instance, the Faunal Emblems Program, which protects critically endangered animals like the Leadbeater's possum, is unfunded beyond the 2026–27 financial year.

Opportunities

As called for by the Victorians for Nature alliance, which includes groups such as Environment Victoria and the Victorian National Parks Association, a major boost to investment in national parks and other protected areas would begin to restore the health of the state's protected areas. This would strengthen the resilience of native species, and help protect our environmental and cultural assets for future generations. This should include reversing cuts to Parks Victoria staff and ensuring resources are adequate for the management of protected areas into the future.

Actions needed

Increase funding for national parks and conservation reserves:

- Boost the Victorian Government's commitment over forward estimates to $1.15 billion a year for practical nature work, invasive species management, national parks and other protected areas.
- Redirect any money left in the $1.5 billion forest transition fund to managing national parks and other protected areas.
- Reverse the cuts to Parks Victoria and restore funding and staff in public land management agencies so they can control invasive species effectively.
- Provide rangers with best-practice training and resources to manage invasive species.
- Couple expansions of the protected area estate with enough staff and funding to manage them.

13. Appoint a Victorian Indigenous Commissioner for Country

Current situation

Invasive species threaten First Nations cultural heritage and connection to Country. Weeds and feral animals destroy sacred sites. They harm native wildlife and species of cultural value. They reduce native food sources, stop damaged land recovering and change local ecosystems.

Invasive species also make it harder for Elders to share knowledge with younger generations, and the harm lasts. Letting damage to Country and further extinctions destroy culture is a serious policy failure.

Opportunities

First Nations people hold deep knowledge of Country and want to be more involved in conservation. Putting their knowledge and culture at the centre is vital to protect nature. Leadership, jobs and knowledge sharing are all needed to tackle invasive species.

A Victorian Indigenous Commissioner for Country would give First Nations people a stronger lead in managing invasive species. The NSW Natural Resources Commission has set a precedent by appointing an Aboriginal Assistant Commissioner (Healthy Country). At the federal level, the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation supports a similar role. A Victorian role needs the resources and power to give independent advice to government and parliament. This advice should cover land, water and wildlife, including invasive species.

Actions needed

Appoint a Victorian Indigenous Commissioner for Country:

- Create the role: Establish an independent commissioner with an annual budget of $750,000. The commissioner would advise on invasive species and their impact on Indigenous culture and Country.
- Set First Nations employment targets: Create dedicated jobs or set a minimum share of First Nations workers when hiring staff and contractors for invasive species work.

14. Fund Landcare facilitators and on-ground grants

Current situation

Landcare faces severe Victorian Government funding cliffs in the coming 2 years. Without new investment, the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program will end in March 2028, and Regional Landcare Coordinator funding ceases in June 2027, putting the entire delivery network at risk. Landcare Victoria advocates consistent, reliable, adequate investment over 4 years to secure the future of community-led landcare in Victoria.

Landcare groups are often on the front line of invasive species management and nature protection in Victoria. These groups of skilled and motivated volunteers are often left to carry the cost of land management and conservation work. They should not have to fundraise for basic equipment and pest control.

Without long-term investment in the Victorian Landcare Facilitator Program and Regional Landcare Coordinator roles, the benefits of landcare, and up to 90 regional jobs, are at risk.

Landcare facilitators need proper funding so they can support volunteers. Landcare's on-ground action grants deliver excellent value and strong environmental results. But without reliable long-term funding, strong proposals are turned away.

Opportunities

Modest, reliable investment in Landcare gives a strong return. Facilitators connect volunteers to funding, keep groups active and help drive invasive species management. They are the backbone of many regional communities, fulfil a critical role in invasive species management, and funding certainty would enable them to focus on their important work rather than spending time, energy and effort on fundraising for basic equipment. Likewise, on-ground grants turn volunteer effort into lasting results for nature and should be increased to reflect the efforts of groups and networks.

Actions needed

Fund Landcare facilitators and on-ground grants:

- Fund Landcare facilitators: Provide $29.2 million over 4 years for 80 local facilitator roles at 0.5 full-time equivalent.[2] Facilitators connect volunteers to funding, coordinate projects, support governance and keep groups active.
- Increase Landcare action grants: Provide $30.4 million over 4 years to uplift Landcare grants from $20,000 to $25,000 and fund an extra 115 grants per year. This will keep essential on-ground work going and support volunteers, and includes an allocation for the Junior Landcare and Biodiversity grants to support the next generation of Landcarers.

2 Landcare Victoria. May 2027 Budget Priorities, provided

Iramoo planting. Photo: Landcare Victoria.



National leadership



Fire ant close-up.

15. Champion a strong federal plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds

Current situation

The number of naturalised plants and new weeds in Victoria is growing. This increases the risk of major new invasions, like blackberry and gorse before them. It also further harms native habitat.

Only a small share of potentially invasive garden plants are regulated under the CaLP Act. There is also little coordination between jurisdictions to stop these plants crossing borders.

Weeds are already Australia's most expensive land management problem. They have cost the economy almost $200 billion over the last 60 years. If current trends continue, the threat to Victoria's biodiversity and farmland will grow much worse.

Opportunities

A federal threat abatement plan (TAP) could create a nationally harmonised, prevention-focused approach to regulating the sale of garden plants. Victoria is a major hub for Australia's retail nursery industry. It also has highly vulnerable ecosystems, from alpine areas to temperate rainforests. This puts Victoria in a strong position to champion meaningful national reform.

Stronger joint state and federal leadership is needed to stop the next generation of escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds becoming environmental disasters.

Actions needed

Lead a push to implement a strong federal plan for garden and aquatic weeds:

- Champion a strong TAP: Commit to a strong federal threat abatement plan for escaped garden plants and aquatic weeds.
- Push for national reform: Use Victoria's influence in national biosecurity forums. Make sure the TAP includes legally binding rules on selling and moving high-risk garden plants across state borders.

16. Fund the next phase of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program

Current situation

Red imported fire ants (*Solenopsis invicta*) are one of the most destructive invasive species threats to Australia. If they are not eradicated, they will spread across the country. Research from the Australia Institute found Victorian households alone would face costs of about $266 million a year from stings, backyard pesticide treatments and vet bills. Agriculture, infrastructure and tourism would also suffer.

Fire ants are now contained to a relatively small area, mainly in south-east Queensland. The national eradication program is shrinking this area. The Australian Government and all states and territories fund the program, but funding is only confirmed until June 2027.

The last time the program had a funding gap, the infested area grew by 40%. Fire ants spread into New South Wales and the Murray-Darling catchment and almost reached Victoria. The program has since recovered from this setback. But Australia cannot afford another funding gap.

Containment is not a long-term solution. Containment failures have already led to near-infestations in Victoria. Eradication is still achievable and will cost far less than perpetual control across the country.

Victoria's funding has been crucial in keeping fire ants out of the state. The next Victorian government should keep supporting this vital work.

Opportunities

The immediate priority is a long-term funding package for the period after June 2027. The current plan only covers activities until mid-2027, but the national goal is eradication by 2032.

The August 2026 Agriculture Ministers' Meeting confirmed that fire ant eradication is in the national interest, technically feasible and cost-beneficial. Ministers also acknowledged the risk of a funding gap. As a major funding partner, Victoria's support is critical to protect its agriculture, lifestyle and environment.

Actions needed

Fund the next phase of the National Fire Ant Eradication Program:

- Commit Victoria's share: Provide Victoria's estimated cost-shared contribution of $149 million to complete national eradication between 2027 and 2032.
- Confirm funding early: Confirm this funding by early 2027 so eradication continues without interruption.



Echidna on Jan Juc Beach, Victoria. Fire ants pose a threat to echidnas, particularly vulnerable young in burrows. Photo: Enguerrand Photography.



Eastern yellow robin, Victorian High Country. Photo: Pen Ash.

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