



Turning it around

A 2010 STATE ELECTION AGENDA
TO SAFEGUARD VICTORIA'S ENVIRONMENT





Photo credit: Greenpeace

2010 State Election: The Turning Point

Victorians love our environment. As well as supporting people and communities for thousands of years, it is home to some of the most important places and species in the world.

But this natural wealth – from the alpine meadows to the kelp forests – which supports every aspect of our physical, emotional and economic wellbeing, is at risk.

We now face an environmental emergency. Our rivers are running dry as greenhouse emissions rise. Our forests and natural areas shrink while our cities sprawl. And we swelter through heatwaves that Victoria has never experienced before. Perhaps most disturbing of all, scientists warn that without immediate action, drought, firestorms and heatwaves are our new reality.

Is this the future we want for our children?

If we take strong and decisive action now, we can fix our mistakes and create a healthy, prosperous, and sustainable future.

If we choose it, the future can be a place where healthy, biodiverse landscapes contain protected areas of natural beauty as well as support sustainable food production and strong regional economies.

Where the energy that fuels our lives comes from clean sources like wind and sunshine, and transportation for everyone is fast, efficient and close to where we live and work. Where our homes and workplaces are energy efficient and every drop of water is cherished. Where we lead the world in clean and green technologies. And where our favourite spot next to the local creek is still around when our children's children have grown up.

For decades, successive governments have overseen the decline of our environment. The next term of government must be the turning point.

It is clear that the challenges we face are enormous so our response must match the scale of the problem.

Victorians need our political leaders to take urgent and large-scale action to safeguard our climate, make our rivers flow again, and protect our natural heritage. We need urgent action to ensure Victorians have jobs, industries, homes and lives that help restore nature and secure our own future.

In the face of an uncertain future, Victoria needs visionary environmental leadership. In the 21st century this leadership must both deliver urgent and large-scale action and inspire governments and communities around Australia and the world to follow suit. Victorians are looking to the next State Government to show the type of environmental leadership that will secure a safe and prosperous future.

The 2010 state election must be the turning point for Victoria's environment.

Victoria's leading environment groups are calling on all parties contesting the 2010 state election to:

1. Make sustainability central to all government decision-making.
2. Slash Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions and switch to a low-emissions economy.
3. Restore our rivers and wetlands to health.
4. Protect biodiversity by managing and restoring ecosystems and re-linking areas of habitat.
5. Increase and resource the protected areas system.
6. Protect our native forests.
7. Make our cities more sustainable and liveable.



Photo credit: Acciona

... all too often, government decision-making loses sight of the big picture by treating issues in isolation or focusing on short-term political or economic considerations.

1. Make sustainability central to all government decision-making

Most Victorians understand that a healthy environment underpins what we take for granted in life – clean food, air and water to nourish our bodies and a healthy, biodiverse natural environment to nourish our souls. And many Victorians are taking action in their daily lives to reduce their impact on the environment – from saving water, to choosing sustainable transport or insulating their home.

But there is a limit to individual action. Some issues – like providing sustainable transport options or investing in renewable energy – require government action. But all too often, government decision-making loses sight of the big picture by treating issues in isolation or focusing on short-term political or economic considerations.

Only by making sustainability central to all government decision-making will we be able to achieve the rapid turnaround we need.

1.1 Implement all recommendations of the 2008 Victorian State of the Environment Report by the end of 2011.

1.2 Apply a 'climate test' to all new government policies, programs, investments and future infrastructure decisions to ensure they do not increase greenhouse gas pollution and instead contribute to its reduction.

1.3 Review subsidies for fossil fuel and energy use by June 2011 and redirect subsidies from polluting activities to non-polluting activities from the 2011-2012 budget onwards.

1.4 Investigate the impacts of climate change on ecological processes. Undertake modeling and mapping of the likely impacts of climate change on ecological processes, ecosystems and species in Victoria, and implement strategies to assist adaptation.

1.5 Repeal the Major Transport Projects Facilitation Act 2009 which overrides existing planning and environmental approval processes, and reject other legislation aimed at fast-tracking development and over-riding existing approvals processes.

1.6 Develop a comprehensive strategy for engaging all Victorians in sustainability, climate mitigation and adaptation, filling the current policy void. Building on the 2005 draft of the Learning to Live Sustainably

strategy and 2006 Sustainability Action Statement, the strategy should outline direction, investment, support and coordination mechanisms.

1.7 Increase investment in community sustainability, climate mitigation and adaptation programs tailored to meet the needs of diverse communities. Funding should be directed towards community organisations and local councils with investment of at least \$60 million over four years, as well as a doubling of investment in the 2006 Sustainability Action Statement, and dedicated recurrent funding for coordination within the sector.

1.8 Develop and fund a climate change adaptation plan by the end of 2011 which increases the ability of communities and nature to cope with climate change and prioritises investment in activities that both reduce emissions and help us adapt, like improving the environmental performance of our building stock.

1.9 Develop a population policy. In the next term of government develop a sustainable population strategy for Victoria that addresses consumption, environmental limits and population growth.

1.10 Introduce a moratorium on the growing of genetically modified crops in Victoria.



Photo credit: Environment Victoria

We urgently need government leadership on climate change and a funded, long-term plan similar in scale to the State Government's \$38 billion transport plan.

2. Slash Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions and switch to a low-emissions economy

Scientists warn that we already have too much greenhouse pollution in the atmosphere and that our climate is already changing. We need to ensure our emissions are falling and we move towards zero emissions economies as fast as possible. This will only be possible with a strong international agreement. As one of the communities that has benefited from industrial development in the last 200 years, Victoria and Australia must lead by example if such an agreement is to be reached in time to avoid a climate catastrophe.

In Victoria we are getting less rain and soaring temperatures. If we don't dramatically cut our carbon pollution and secure a safe climate, these changes will further threaten our precious biodiversity, human health and key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and tourism. The impacts of climate change will hit disadvantaged Victorians the hardest – those heavily dependent on ever more expensive petrol for transport and living in energy and water-inefficient housing that is expensive to run.

The good news is that making the changes we need will also make our homes more comfortable and efficient, our cities more livable and create thousands of jobs in new, green industries.

We urgently need government leadership on climate change and a funded, long-term plan similar in scale to the State Government's \$38 billion transport plan.

2.1 Set a target to halve Victoria's greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by 2020 and develop a ten year plan to achieve this target. The plan should include annual milestones for emissions reductions, measurable actions and sufficient funding similar in scale to the State Government's \$38 billion transport plan. The Plan should be developed by 2011.

2.2 Make our new buildings 'climate safe'. Set a goal of achieving zero net carbon and water-efficient new buildings by 2020, and create a cross-sector taskforce by the end of 2011 to define standards and develop pathways towards achieving this goal.

2.3 Green our existing buildings. Commit to a coordinated green makeover of Victoria's entire building stock by 2020, with a '1 million homes' retrofit program to be delivered by 2014. The one million homes program should target vulnerable and low income households and be accompanied by behaviour change programs to maximise environmental benefits.

2.4 Promote renewable energy. Set a target for 40 per cent of Victoria's electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020 as part of a state renewable energy strategy.

2.5 Support community investment in renewable energy through the introduction of a gross feed-in tariff for small scale renewable energy including solar and micro wind.

2.6 Phase out the biggest polluters. Decommission the Hazelwood Power Station within the next term of government and plan for the phase-out of Yallourn and Anglesea power stations by 2015.

2.7 Encourage cleaner electricity generation. Introduce a ban on new conventional coal-fired power and introduce a standard for new fossil fuel generation of less than 0.4kg CO₂-e/kWh.

2.8 Rule out a new coal allocation or brown coal exports. Rule out a further allocation of coal or the development of a brown coal export industry.

2.9 Support coal-dependent communities to transition to sustainable industries. Working with communities, local industries and stakeholders, develop comprehensive transition plans for coal-dependent regions such as the Latrobe Valley and Anglesea coal mine and power station.

2.10 Establish a sustainable production and consumption taskforce to develop a policy framework for reducing greenhouse emissions and other impacts from the way that we produce and consume things, by the end of 2011.

2.11 Improve vehicle emissions standards. Advocate for the adoption of a national agreement on efficiency standards for new vehicles of at least 5 litres per 100km (130g CO₂/100km) for all cars sold in Australia by 2015. Adopt these standards for government fleets within the next term of government.



Photo credit: Environment Victoria

In times of drought, the State Government has chosen to take more water from rivers that are dying of thirst.

3. Restore our rivers and wetlands to health

Healthy freshwater ecosystems are critical to healthy landscapes, regional communities and economies. However, unsustainable practices over many years such as over-extraction for irrigation and domestic use, land-clearing and destruction of riparian vegetation, has left our rivers, wetlands and estuaries stressed and degraded.

At the same time, climate change predictions suggest we are facing a drier future, while our population and demand for water continues to increase. An already stressed system lacks the resilience to cope with these extra pressures. Recently, governments have been moving to restore environmental flows to our severely stressed rivers by defining environmental entitlements and buying water back from other entitlement holders. However, to date very little of this environmental water has actually been delivered. In times of drought, the State Government has chosen to take more water from rivers that are dying of thirst.

The truth is Victoria's water allocation and management system was not designed to deal with climate change. Key changes are needed if we are to save our rivers and protect their environmental, cultural, social and economic benefits in a changing climate.

3.1 Overhaul the Water Act 1989 to provide greater security for rivers and wetlands in a time of climate change by the end of 2011. The overhaul should: a) protect environmental entitlements from qualification of rights; b) establish an independent body to hold all environmental entitlements and manage and report on delivery of all components of the Environmental Water Reserve; and c) direct all funds raised through the environmental contribution from water authorities towards mitigating the environmental impacts of water extraction.

3.2 Prioritise the delivery of environmental entitlements and flows. Deliver existing environmental flow commitments to the Goulburn, Murray, Moorabool, Snowy, Yarra, Thomson, Werribee, Barwon, Wimmera and Glenelg rivers by allocating high-security environmental entitlements from 2011. Establish environmental flow requirements and methods of delivery for all other rivers by 2014.

3.3 Begin buy-back of water for rivers and wetlands. Establish a State Government fund to match Federal Government water buy-backs for environmental flows, prioritising rivers and wetlands of greatest need, including the new River Red Gum National Park wetlands and forests. Remove existing market barriers to environmental water purchase, such as the 4 percent cap on trade out of irrigation districts.

3.4 Help irrigation communities adapt to reduced water availability. Integrate relevant state and federal funding (including industry and drought assistance, water buyback and regional development funding) to support northern Victorian communities where irrigation is no longer viable to transition to other, low water-use industries.

3.5 Rule out major new dams and new or increased water storages.

3.6 Reduce household water use to 100 litres per day per person. Implement a 1 million homes retrofit program as outlined in other sections. Adopt building standards that lead to 40 per cent less water use in new homes in existing suburbs and 65 per cent less in new homes in new suburbs by 2011. Increase rebates and regulations to encourage the installation of 100,000 plumbed-in rainwater tanks each year.

3.7 Improve Melbourne's water security and reduce its dependence on other catchments. Boost water conservation targets for commercial and industrial water users, and lower the EPA's Environment and Resource Efficiency Plans threshold to 10 million litres a year by 2012. Immediately ban logging in Melbourne's water supply catchments and increase incentives for storm-water capture and reuse. Treat recycled water from the Eastern Treatment Plant to drinking quality standard for introduction to water storages.

3.8 Limit environmental impacts of new water supplies by minimising use of the desalination plant and prioritising water efficiency measures. Ensure that the first 75 billion litres of savings from the Foodbowl Modernisation Project goes to delivering environmental flows for the Goulburn River ahead of allocations for Melbourne or for other consumptive uses.

3.9 Protect riparian vegetation by reforming Victorian Crown water frontage licences to protect priority reaches, amend management where required and provide fencing and off-stream stock watering.

3.10 Undertake a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation into the condition and management options for freshwater-dependent ecosystems (including groundwater).



Photo credit: Michael Williams, It's A Wildlife

Despite the already extensive damage to our natural landscapes and biodiversity, Victoria is still experiencing net loss of both the extent and quality of its native vegetation.

4. Protect biodiversity by managing and restoring ecosystems and re-linking areas of habitat

Victoria is the most cleared state in Australia with 44 per cent of plants and 30 per cent of animals threatened. Despite the already extensive damage to our natural landscapes and biodiversity, Victoria is still experiencing net loss of both the extent and quality of its native vegetation. We can turn this around by increasing protection for fragmented landscapes, and reducing threatening processes such as pest plants and animals, firewood collection and logging in key areas.

As climate change begins to affect the timing and location of food sources and habitat for native animal species, fragmented, isolated areas of habitat across the landscape hinder their capacity to move and adapt to changing circumstances. Resilience to climate change can only be achieved by connecting and restoring habitat across the landscape, and restoring and maintaining ecological processes.

4.1 Manage fire to protect nature and people. Develop a science-based ecological fire management strategy to ensure fuel reduction burns in national parks and conservation reserves are informed by best available science on fire tolerances of key species. This would include: a) funding long-term, strategic research into fire behaviours and fire tolerances of key species; b) rapidly undertaking a statewide assessment of the proportion of rare and endangered animal habitat required to remain unburnt for populations to survive, and c) dramatically increasing 'fire ecology' expertise in operational areas to inform best available science.

4.2 Protect and connect natural environments. Complete a representative protected area system while dramatically increasing funding to address threats and improve management of protected areas. Support landscape-scale projects such as Habitat 141 in the South West and Connecting Country in Central Victoria.

4.3 Develop statewide targets for biodiversity and land health that drive investment in resilience in the face of climate change. Put in place a systematic and long-term ecological monitoring program to monitor progress against the biodiversity targets and ensure high quality data to assist with adaptive management.

4.4 Increase investment in on-ground protection and restoration of ecosystems, including payments to private landholders, traditional owner groups and community organisations for biodiversity protection and restoration beyond the duty of care.

4.5 Strengthen our public institutions such as the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC), Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act and Catchment Management Authorities to deliver real measurable improvements in ecological health.

4.6 Establish a Biodiversity and Climate Change Fund to support action that builds the resilience of ecosystems to climate change and invests in biosequestration opportunities in rural landscapes.

4.7 Ban the recreational shooting of water birds in Victoria.



Photo credit: Bill Boyle, courtesy DSE

In Victoria, a mere 5 per cent of the marine environment is protected compared with 18 percent of the terrestrial environment.

5. Increase and resource the protected area system

It is hard to imagine a healthy future for our planet without the existence of protected areas. National parks and protected areas provide refuge for plants and animals whose habitats are threatened elsewhere. By protecting and managing key habitats, threatened species can be brought back from the brink of extinction.

The Victorian marine and coastal environment is affected by many threats, the most significant of which is climate change. In Victoria, a mere 5 per cent of the marine environment is protected compared with 18 per cent of the terrestrial environment. International commitments call for the protection of 20 to 30 per cent of marine and coastal habitats in marine national parks.

5.1 Increase marine and coastal protection. Commit to protect an additional 20% of Victoria's marine and coastal areas by 2012 and undertake a Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) investigation into threats to habitats in marine national parks.

5.2 Develop marine planning: Prepare a Victorian marine planning and management strategy as a precursor to the development of an institutional and legislative framework for ecosystem-based planning of Victoria's marine waters. Ensure that this is integrated with the planning and management frameworks for coastal and catchment areas.

5.3 Increase funding for parks management to levels that are demonstrably adequate to deliver clearly defined nature conservation outcomes including improved pest plant and animal management.

5.4 Accelerate the creation of jointly managed parks around the state by implementing the Victorian Native Title Settlement framework.

5.5 Protecting our special places. Areas of public land have a greater role to play in ensuring the future health of Victoria's biodiversity. With increased management they can act as the initial foundations in the landscape

to support networks of habitat and help protect our plants and animals from the impacts of climate change. Key areas include:

- **South west Victoria:** Protect in a comprehensive landscape reserve system of National Parks, State Parks, Nature Conservation Reserves and Flora and Fauna Reserves the remaining public land in the far south west of Victoria.

- **Central Victoria & Goldfields:** Increase protection and management of high conservation values areas in Central Victoria and the Goldfields area as a building block for a larger landscape renewal project.

- **Remnant native vegetation:** Implement the findings of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) Remnant Native Vegetation Investigation.

5.6 Protect endangered grasslands: Protect high conservation value grasslands and grassy woodlands threatened by Melbourne urban growth, and establish permanent new grassland and grassy woodland reserves within five years.



As the climate changes, these forests will also play increasingly important roles as carbon sinks and provide resilience against climate change as habitat sanctuaries for many threatened plants and animals.

6. Protect our native forests

The forests of eastern Victoria are of world significance. English botanist David Bellamy described East Gippsland as “the most diverse range of temperate forest ecosystems on earth”. They contain old growth forests, rainforests, pristine rivers and the last stronghold for threatened wildlife such as the Spotted-tailed Quoll and the Long-footed Potoroo.

As the climate changes, these forests will also play increasingly important roles as carbon sinks and provide resilience against climate change as habitat sanctuaries for many threatened plants and animals. Logging native forests releases carbon into the atmosphere, while protected forests withdraw carbon from the atmosphere.

However, in removing logging from these precious places, the Victorian Government has a responsibility to support structural adjustment for timber communities, assisting the sector to transition to alternative livelihoods based on plantation timber, tourism and other industries.

Future management of our forests should prioritise maximising water yields and carbon sequestration and storage, and minimising the risk of firestorms.

6.1 Protect the high conservation value forests of eastern Victoria by immediately and permanently removing logging from all high conservation value, old growth forests and domestic water catchments. Manage these areas to maximise their value for carbon sequestration, water production and biodiversity conservation.

6.2 Support timber dependent communities transition into sustainable industries. Working closely with communities, industry and local stakeholders, develop transitional arrangements to assist the native forest sector to either exit the industry or use plantation logs for all suitable applications.

6.3 Abolish VicForests and reconfigure its role to manage public native forests for ecosystem services that maximise water production and carbon carrying capacity and minimize the frequency and intensity of firestorms.

6.4 Maximise wood supply and value from plantations. Commit to immediately move native forest commodity production into plantations, particularly in western Victoria, and assist Victoria’s plantation sector to supply current purchasers of native forest pulpwood and sawn timber. Encourage the development of value-added processing of Victoria’s plantation estate.

6.5 Improve management of plantations. Undertake rigorous water quality testing for toxicants in all domestic water catchments containing broadacre plantations, making results publicly available. Ensure new plantations are rigorously assessed for their likely surface and groundwater usage, with caps on plantations put in place in overutilised catchments.



Photo credit: Fletcher Insulation

Greening our cities and towns will also create the jobs of the future – in manufacturing of energy-efficiency products such as insulation and double-glazed windows, in the rainwater harvesting industry, and in the growing home audit and retrofit sector.

7. Make our cities more sustainable and liveable

Australians use more water and energy and own more cars per person than people in almost any other industrialised country. Our car-dependent cities, which fuel asthma and obesity, could be transformed into clean, efficient places with great public transport and healthier people.

If we invested in the cost-effective technologies that are available now, we could save 30 to 50 per cent of energy used in our homes and make them more comfortable to live in, while protecting families – particularly low-income households – from future fuel, energy and water price increases.

Greening our cities and towns would also create the jobs of the future – in manufacturing of energy-efficiency products such as insulation and double-glazed windows, in the rainwater harvesting industry, and in the growing home audit and retrofit sector.

7.1 Create green jobs. In the next term of government develop regional green economy plans beginning with 'Just Transition' plans for those areas likely to be most affected by climate change and climate change responses such as the Latrobe Valley and northern Victorian farming communities. Legislate for social and environmental employment targets to ensure that disadvantaged people can participate in the emerging green jobs markets. Provide up-to-date and accurate supply and demand data for green skills and undertake a skills audit for Victoria with a focus on regions and disadvantaged groups. Create a 'Green Jobs Council' and reinvigorate manufacturing in sustainable industries such as train manufacture.

7.2 Build better new buildings. Set a goal of achieving 'climate safe' (zero net emission, water-efficient) new homes by 2020. Take substantial steps towards this goal by requiring all new homes and renovations to install greenhouse-efficient hot water by mid-2011, and meet 7-8 star energy and 40 per cent water efficiency standards by the end of 2011. Introduce 5-star standards for new commercial buildings by the end of 2011.

7.3 Green our existing buildings. Commit to upgrading the energy and water efficiency of Victoria's entire building stock by 2020, with a coordinated '1 million homes' retrofit program to be delivered by 2014. The one million homes program should target vulnerable and low income households and be accompanied by behaviour change programs to maximise environmental benefits. Minimum performance standards for energy and water efficiency should be introduced in residential, commercial and community properties at the point of sale or lease by 2012.

7.4 Build livable suburbs. Rule out any expansion of Melbourne's urban growth boundary. Commit to a consolidation of existing urban areas with an emphasis on public open space, sustainable transport options and local services, employment and food production to reduce travel demand. Require that new housing developments are adequately served by public transport and local services, make effective use of sustainable water sources, contain a minimum of 30-35 dwellings per hectare, and ensure housing orientation allows for best possible use of passive energy design features.

7.5 Invest in sustainable transport. Introduce an immediate moratorium on new major road projects. Re-focus annual transport expenditure in the state budget to allocate at least two-thirds to public and active transport and one third to roads.

7.6 Reduce waste. Set a target to recover 80 per cent of total solid waste by 2014. Raise the landfill levy to increase recycling rates and reduce landfill. Ban the disposal of organic material to landfill and build dedicated organic waste treatment facilities.

7.7 Encourage producer responsibility. Expand the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for televisions and computers to include other priority materials and products such as all other electronic waste, batteries, mobile phones, and compact fluorescent lightbulbs. Ban the disposal of any product covered by an EPR scheme to landfill. Support the introduction of a national container deposit scheme.

Environment Victoria
www.environmentvictoria.org.au

Victorian National Parks Association
www.vnpa.org.au

The Wilderness Society
www.wilderness.org.au

Friends of the Earth
www.melbourne.foe.org.au

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