

Engagement strategy



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Printed by Finsbury Green, Melbourne
ISBN 978-1-76077-709-8 Print
ISBN 978-1-76077-710-4 PDF/online/MS word

Aboriginal acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

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Foreword

The Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) was established in early 2019 following an Independent Review of Timber Harvesting Regulation in Victoria's public native forests administered by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

In DELWP's response to the independent review of timber harvesting regulation, DELWP committed to reforms that will:

- increase transparency about how we regulate,
- improve our relationships and engagement with stakeholders, the community and those we regulate, and
- enhance DELWP's regulatory capability.

The OCR oversees regulatory responsibility for DELWP in timber harvesting, biodiversity, fire prevention and land-use regulation and will make significant improvements to the way we regulate to deliver our regulatory mission of an effective, trusted, best practice regulator.

These commitments reflect that to achieve our regulatory mission, we must increase information about how we regulate and improve our engagement with stakeholders.

Through the DELWP Community charter we promise to put the community at the centre of everything that we do, be available, speak and listen and act. We know that to be an effective regulator requires more than a focus on enforcing the law, it requires raising awareness, partnering, sharing knowledge and motivating people to comply with the law.

Regulating the natural environment is a shared responsibility between communities, government, industries and stakeholder organisations, and all can play their part in achieving better outcomes for the environment.

This Engagement Strategy is a key document, describing our ambition to increase transparency about how we regulate and the way we will engage with all Victorians in our regulatory approach.

I look forward to working with you as we deliver upon our ambition to be an effective, trusted, best practice regulator



Kate Gavens
Chief Conservation Regulator,
Office of the Conservation Regulator

Office of the Conservation Regulator

The Office of the Conservation Regulator (OCR) was established by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) early in 2019 following an Independent Review of Timber Harvesting Regulation in Victoria’s public native forests.

The Chief Conservation Regulator leads the OCR and is accountable for regulatory decision-making for the direct regulatory responsibilities of DELWP, initially focussed on timber harvesting, biodiversity, fire prevention and land-use regulation.

The OCR will also play a role to support all of DELWP to lift regulatory performance, working with others in the Department to ensure the consistent application of the DELWP Regulatory Framework and support the development of systems and capabilities to be an effective and transparent regulator for the Victorian community.

The DELWP Regulatory Framework outlines how DELWP will deliver its regulatory role for direct regulatory responsibilities and explains the way we want to regulate and the principles which guide our approach to regulation.

Our regulatory mission is to be an effective, trusted, best practice regulator

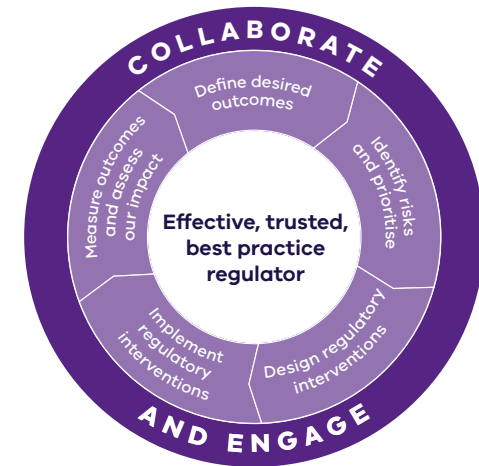
The Chief Conservation Regulator’s role is to contribute to DELWP’s vision of “liveable, inclusive, sustainable communities and thriving natural environments” through the delivery of our regulatory outcomes:

Equitable and safe access to public land and use of natural resources

Protected natural and heritage values

Sustainable communities – social, economic and environmental

This Engagement Strategy is a key document that supports our implementation of the DELWP Regulatory Framework.



Purpose of this strategy

The DELWP Regulatory Framework states that:

‘We recognise that being a successful regulator requires strong relationships, and that collaborating with others leads to better outcomes’.

The OCR Engagement Strategy describes how we will engage with community, stakeholders, Traditional Owners and co-regulators to deliver regulatory outcomes for the environment and the Victorian community.

We acknowledge that building relationships and developing trust takes time. This strategy sets our ambition as we commit time and resources to work more closely with our stakeholders and with Victorian communities.



Why we engage

Engagement is core to delivering our regulatory mission to be an effective, trusted, best-practice regulator. We all have a role to play in making sure the laws that protect our environment are observed.

OCR engagement is based on the DELWP Community Charter, which describes how we will be available, speak and listen and act to build trust in the way we do our jobs and work with you delwp.vic.gov.au/community-charter

The OCR Engagement Strategy has been informed by the Engage@DELWP Engagement Framework.

By working with stakeholders and communities we are better able to:

- Identify local risks and priorities;
- Build joint awareness of threats and impacts and work with you on local solutions;
- Support Victorians to understand their regulatory obligations and how to comply with them;
- Collaborate to deliver better regulatory outcomes;
- Understand if there are any perverse outcomes through our regulatory approach;
- Make sure that accessing the regulator is easy both directly and through our systems;
- Continually improve the way we engage and regulate.

DELWP Community charter Delivering on our promise



OUR ENGAGEMENT AMBITION

You trust us to communicate openly and work effectively with you to deliver regulatory outcomes for the environment and community

Who we engage with

As a regulator we work with many different types of community. A community may be based around geography or location, interest or identity.

Victorian communities

Any individual is part of several communities, for example a member of an environment group may work for local government, a member of a mountain bike group may be a Traditional Owner, or a forester may be a beekeeper and a member of a bird watching group.

This means we will interact with you in different ways at different times, sometimes we may seek your views or advice while at other times we may provide you with information that supports you to comply with the law or, when required, enforce the law.

Traditional Owners

People with traditional and customary rights in a particular part of the land (i.e. the 'right people for Country'). We work with Aboriginal Traditional Owner groups whether or not they have had these rights recognised by the Australian legal system. We aim to work in partnership with all Traditional Owners.

Our stakeholders include:

Regulated parties

Any person or business who is required to comply with the law. We work with regulated parties to support compliance with the law and to enforce the law if it has been broken.

Co-regulators

Other areas of government that have environmental regulatory responsibility. We work with co-regulators to improve the consistency of our regulatory approach and to support planning and delivering compliance activities. Examples include Parks Victoria, Game Management Authority, Local Government and Victoria Police.

Non-government organisations (NGOs)

Non-profit organisations that are set up and operated independently from government. They usually represent a collective group such as a specific industry or a social issue such as the environment. We work with NGOs to understand collective perspectives and expertise across a range of topics.



Principles of engagement

We use the DELWP Community charter as the basis for our engagement. We engage about our decision-making, to build and maintain relationships and to support community capacity to plan, learn and act. We do this through planned consultations, workshops and events, but also through our unplanned interactions with you as we go about our work.

Our engagement principles to support this are

- **We engage at place** where our partners, stakeholders and communities live, work and play
- **We seek out those affected by a decision** and share information that is easy to find and understand
- **We are clear on why and how we engage**, ensuring genuine opportunities to take part
- **We actively listen** and strive to understand diverse views and needs
- **We value your contributions** and provide feedback – we seek your views and respond with what we heard, what we have done and why
- **We engage early** with our partners, stakeholders and communities to ensure genuine engagement



Engaging throughout our Regulatory Framework



Throughout the phases of our work there are opportunities for us to be available, speak and listen and act as we work more closely with our stakeholders and Victorian communities. By working this way we are able to better achieve our regulatory outcomes and our mission to be an effective, trusted, best practice regulator.



Equitable and safe access to public land and use of natural resources



An effective, trusted, best practice regulator

Protected natural and heritage values

Sustainable communities – social, economic and environmental

Who, why and how

Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians

We recognise Traditional Owners as Aboriginal people with traditional and customary rights to particular parts of the land, whether or not these rights are formally recognised through the Commonwealth or Victorian legal system. Munganin Gadhaba sets out DELWP's approach to inclusion such as building collaborative partnerships, delivering economic opportunities, caring for country and advancement towards self-determination.

We understand there is a big difference between law and lore and as a government regulator, this presents some challenging thinking.

We will work with our co-regulators and partners to understand the potential impacts and benefits of environmental regulations across Country in a culturally safe way.

To achieve this our first steps will be to ask Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities how we can work together to better understand the impact of the regulations we are responsible for on custom and practice on Country.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AMBITION

We develop a partnership with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities to better understand the benefits and impacts of regulation and work together to achieve better outcomes



Stakeholders and community

We all have a role to play in making sure the laws that protect our environment are observed. Working together means we can better listen to and learn from each other, motivating positive action to look after the environment by preventing harm.

One effective way of preventing harm to our environment is to stop the law being broken in the first place. Working together we can identify the information required to support compliance and how this information is best delivered. Whoever the OCR works with we will always act for the public good - we do not act for an individual person, organisation or group that may have specific interest.

At some point, most Victorians are a regulated party that must comply with the law. The OCR takes our responsibility to enforce the law seriously and will act when the law is broken. This means that we will engage with you differently depending on whether we are proactively working to prevent harm to the environment or we are taking action to address or remedy non-compliance.

Over time our ambition is to build strong relationships with our stakeholders and Victorian communities so that:

- We have more frequent interactions with each other focusing on building respect, trust and mutual understanding;
- There is a willingness to engage, and engage early in our processes;
- You tell us about potential issues earlier; and
- We can collectively take a more proactive approach to preventing harm.

We are collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders through the OCR Stakeholder Reference Group which provides advice to the Chief Conservation Regulator on the policies, strategies and processes that frame the OCR's regulatory work.

The OCR operates at both a statewide level and through our regional centres. We will work together to provide more opportunities for our stakeholders and community members to engage and have two-way conversations with us about the things that matter most to you.

We will ask if and how you want to be engaged and provide a clear purpose for that engagement.

We'll engage locally, based on the DELWP Community Charter and informed by the Engage@DELWP Engagement Framework.

We'll try not to create too many more community meetings with government, but instead try to use existing meetings, events, forums and networks that exist within your area. Where appropriate we will collaborate within DELWP and more broadly to provide coordinated opportunities where you can speak with us about a number of topics.

In addition, as we review regulatory standards and guidelines we will provide genuine opportunities to involve you to help us maximise their clarity and effectively support compliance with the law.

When we ask you to share your views as we make decisions, we will always provide feedback to let you know how you have influenced change, and where change can't be made, we will let you know why.

In the DELWP response to the independent review of timber harvesting regulation we committed to listen to your ideas about how we can best implement this strategy.

Over time, we hope that some stakeholders and communities may want to share their ideas and work with us more closely as they look after the local places they care about. Depending on local interests and needs this might include:

- Sharing knowledge and information of local threats and priorities across networks;
- Providing training for gathering and sharing data and information;
- Community networks caring for local places;
- Citizen science;
- Gathering local knowledge, or;
- Planning priorities for and participating in assessments.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AMBITION

We have strong relationships with communities and stakeholders that mean our conversations are respectful and productive and we work together to reduce the impact of harm to the environment

Partners, co-regulators and government

We are more effective as a regulator when we work with our partners and co-regulators. We will seek to build and maintain these relationships to deliver better outcomes for all Victorians.

Collaborating with other regulators and government partners supports us to act against incidents of non-compliance more effectively and efficiently.

It provides benefit for communities by providing greater consistency in approach and avoiding inconsistent actions by multiple regulators.

It benefits us as we learn and share our experiences enabling us to improve regulatory practice and craft.

We will seek to build our networks with other relevant regulators to share our challenges, experiences and solutions as we build a consistent approach to shared issues and practices. Over time this may include, amongst others

- Parks Victoria
- Game Management Authority
- Fisheries Authority Victoria
- Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions
- Country Fire Authority and Emergency Management Victoria
- Victoria Police
- Aboriginal Victoria
- Environment Protection Authority Victoria
- Water Authorities
- Local government
- Energy Safe Victoria

Our partnership network will enable us to better consider overlaps in our areas of authority to improve efficiency by reducing duplication and red tape and by considering joint systems to increase effectiveness and a more consistent community experience.

Beyond our more immediate partners and co-regulators we will collaborate to increase our knowledge and build our capability as a best practice regulator.

To achieve this we will be an active participant in the Regulators Community of Practice convened by the Commissioner for Better Regulation and the Australasian Environment Law Enforcement and Regulators Network (AELERT).

OUR ENGAGEMENT AMBITION

To collaborate across government and with our partners and co-regulators to provide a coherent and consistent approach to environmental regulation for all Victorians

How and why we communicate

We'll provide clear and accessible information to support an understanding of the law and to keep you informed about our work using various communications channels:

- Education campaigns;
- Printed public information;
- Social media;
- The OCR website www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/regulator;
- Regional offices; and
- Community networks.

We will also provide you with education material and practical advice to support you to comply with the laws we regulate as we conduct patrols and monitoring activities.

It's not all about providing information though. Our ambition is to establish an approach that supports two-way conversations to share our ideas and knowledge. We'll do this by being more visible in your area and more accessible at local events and through open days in your communities.

Increasing transparency

We have committed to becoming a more outward-looking, transparent regulator. This is a first step in building confidence and trust in our work.

We are taking some immediate steps to increase our transparency and accountability by publishing a range of policies, principles, procedures, standards and guidelines (listed on the right). We will continue to publish more accessible information including reports on our performance.

As a regulator there are times when we can't release information or comment on some of our activities. We have published information to support community understanding of these restrictions in our Compliance and Enforcement Policy.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AMBITION

To provide clear information that you know where to find and to be available to have conversations to share ideas and knowledge

Regulatory Framework

How DELWP will deliver its regulatory functions and explains the way we want to regulate

Compliance and Enforcement Policy

How we will apply the law and exercise our judgement and discretion in our compliance and enforcement activity

Statements of Regulatory Intent

Describe what we regulate and what you can expect from us as a regulator, including the enforcement powers and tools that we may use

Public information

To raise awareness and support prevention of harm to environmental values

State and regional annual compliance plans

Set out our compliance priorities for the year

Regulatory policy guidance

To increase clarity about how to comply with the law and how the law is applied

Information about regulatory decisions

Including the reasons for those decisions

Report on progress and achievements

What success looks like

Understanding our success about how we engage and how effective our engagement is will be driven by what you tell us. We will monitor and report on the effectiveness of our engagement.

We will be successful if:

- You trust us to communicate openly and work effectively with you to deliver regulatory outcomes for the environment and community.
- You feel like you know where to find information about the law and know how you can comply with it.
- You feel that you have been listened to.
- When we're making a decision and ask for your views, you feel that you have been heard and know why decisions have been made.
- You understand how your reports of suspected non-compliance with the law have been used by the OCR.
- You feel empowered when we support you to take a more active role in preventing harm to the local places you care about.

We will know we are working well with our partners, stakeholders and with Victorian communities when:

- We develop a partnership with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Communities to better understand the benefits and impacts of regulation and work together to achieve better outcomes.
- We have strong relationships with communities and stakeholders that mean our conversations are respectful and productive and we work together to reduce the impact of harm to the environment.
- We effectively collaborate across government and with our partners and co-regulators to provide a coherent and consistent approach to environmental regulation for all Victorians.
- We provide clear information that you know where to find and are available to have conversations to share ideas and knowledge.



Contact us

There are several ways you can communicate with us, whether you've seen something that could be a breach in compliance or to seek advice, find information or to share your idea.

Through our contact centre

136 186

Report suspected wildlife trafficking

Crime Stoppers Victoria

1800 333 000

www.crimestoppersvic.com.au/report-a-crime/

Report potential timber harvest compliance issues

www.forestsandreserves.vic.gov.au/forest-management/forest-reports

Find out more

www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/regulator

Feedback

ocr@delwp.vic.gov.au

If you are deaf, or have a hearing impairment or speech impairment, contact us through the National Relay Service on 133 677 or visit www.relayservice.gov.au

