

VICTORIA

Victorian
Auditor-General

Audit summary
of
Control of Invasive
Plants and Animals in
Victoria's Parks

Tabled in Parliament
26 May 2010

Audit summary

Victoria reserves about four million hectares of public land, or 20 per cent of the state, for nature conservation. The majority of this is within 68 national and state parks, which significantly contribute to Australia's biodiversity—the multitude of life forms, such as plants, animals, insects and microbes, and the land and water they inhabit.

Several reports, including the State of the Environment report from the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, have made it clear that Victoria's biodiversity is in poor condition and declining in most areas. Invasive plants and animals are a major contributor to that decline, and can have substantial economic, environmental and social impacts on parks.

This report examines the effectiveness of invasive species programs in national and state parks. In particular, the audit examined the governance arrangements, information systems, planning frameworks and on-ground activities targeting invasive species across the park network.

Conclusion

Governance arrangements for the control of invasive species across the state are complicated and not well coordinated. There is no single point of focus for oversight or for the responsibility of success or failure.

How well Parks Victoria manages the invasive plant and animal threat in national and state parks is generally unclear. Its planning is not robust, its data is inadequate and increasingly out of date, and its park management plans are also outdated and lack sufficient detail. In addition, monitoring and evaluation of invasive species management activities is inconsistent.

Good progress has been made in managing some invasive species in some parks, but an increasing reliance on short-term initiative funding to address a long-term problem is detrimental to the effectiveness of the effort across the park network.

Given the scale of the problem, if these organisational issues and resource constraints are not addressed, invasive species will continue to pose a major and likely growing threat to Victorian parks.

Main findings

Coordinating invasive species management

The governance arrangements for managing invasive species are very complicated and do not clearly assign roles and ultimate responsibility for success or failure. Recent policy emphasises a landscape scale approach—one that disregards boundaries based on land ownership and use—to manage pervasive threats, such as invasive species. While progress has been made, Parks Victoria (PV) is yet to apply this approach consistently, and no agency is clearly responsible for balancing local and regional issues with statewide management priorities. There are no detailed outcomes that the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) expects PV to achieve nor is there a performance framework to assess how effective PV has been in managing invasive species.

Around 75 per cent of all plant data and 57 per cent of animal data is over 10 years old, while around 30 per cent of plant and animal data is over 20 years old. Data gathering on new and emerging invasive species is not given sufficient emphasis. The lack of universal access to good quality information is hampering coordination between responsible agencies.

Planning by Parks Victoria to control the threat

PV is not systematically applying its own planning frameworks or risk assessment processes to manage invasive species. The reliance on local knowledge, which is generally not recorded or stored, and anecdotal information limits PV's ability to consistently and reliably prioritise threats at the state level.

In recent years, there has been an increasing reliance on short-term initiative funding, with PV reducing the proportion of recurrent funding it spends on invasive species. This represents a mismatch between funding certainty and the necessarily long-term nature of control programs. The way that PV allocates resources is also complicated, lacks transparency and is not well understood by staff in parks.

Planning and control at the park level

There are no park management plans or documents that provide park level detail on threat priorities, the actions to manage these threats or sets out who is responsible for implementing and action. Nearly half of the plans are over a decade old and do not address new and emerging threats—a key element of the current biosecurity approach.

PV's human resources system does not capture the total time spent on invasive species management activities. Monitoring, evaluation and reporting vary depending on location, staff capability and invasive species. Collectively, these differences diminish the ability to perceive wider trends in invasive species, and to assess the effectiveness of management activities across the park network. In recognition of this, PV is implementing the *Signs of a Healthy Park* initiative, which aims to detect change in park health and quantify effectiveness of management.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation	Page
1.	The Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> review and update their agreement to clearly assign responsibilities and respective roles for park management develop a performance framework to assess the effectiveness of Parks Victoria's invasive species management. 	13
2.	The Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and the Catchment Management Authorities should jointly agree on and implement a landscape scale framework to identify statewide invasive species objectives and priorities.	13
3.	The Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries and Parks Victoria should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> update their invasive species databases as a first priority enable timely input and access to these databases by responsible agencies. 	13
4.	Parks Victoria should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implement planning frameworks that incorporate risk assessment consistently across state and national parks structure invasive species resource allocation so that it is transparent, and funding matches the extent and ongoing nature of the problem. 	21
5.	Parks Victoria should improve its park-level planning so that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> all national and state parks have current park management plans all plans align with current state policy and reflect the landscape scale approach to invasive species management specific actions to manage the threats, including targets, performance indicators, monitoring standards and responsibilities for implementing these activities are clearly documented. 	27
6.	Parks Victoria should improve its human resources system to accurately capture all invasive species management activity.	27
7.	The Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Primary Industries and Parks Victoria should implement a framework to monitor, evaluate and report on invasive species management across public and private land.	27