



**The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP**

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

Thursday, 20 May 2021

## **BOOSTING OUR NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND BUSHFIRE READINESS**

The Andrews Labor Government is protecting our environment and creating more opportunities for Victorians to enjoy nature, while also ensuring local communities stay safe during bushfire season.

The \$877.1 million investment in the *Victorian Budget 2021/22* will protect Victoria's precious natural gifts, while also protecting the jobs and livelihoods that rely on our environment.

In the largest funding package ever from the Government for Forest, Fire and Regions, more than \$517 million will go towards reducing the risk of bushfires, including \$15.6 million to increase work to remove long grasses and other highly flammable undergrowth.

More than \$133 million will upgrade the digital radio service for Forest Fire Management Victoria staff and other emergency response personnel, so forest fires are contained more quickly while also keeping firefighters safe.

This will mean personnel can avoid radio black spots and communicate better with other first responders – including Country Fire Authority volunteers – when fighting fires and responding to remote emergencies.

A further \$22.5 million will use the expertise of Aboriginal cultural burning in Victoria's land management, contributing to bushfire preparation in local communities.

Acknowledging the crucial role for grassroots volunteers who care for our environment, the Labor Government is investing \$75.3 million to care for our iconic wildlife, to plant trees and tackle weeds and pests. Landcare, Trust for Nature and the Port Phillip Bay Fund will share in this funding, support the work of their local volunteers.

To ensure that the penalties for wildlife crime – including smuggling, animal cruelty and reckless habitat destruction – are as strong as they need to be, the Budget invests \$3 million to undertake a thorough review of Victoria's *Wildlife Act*.

This year's Budget also invests in some of Victoria's most-loved attractions and experiences, including a \$20 million investment to ensure kids can continue to visit our world-class zoos for free.

The Budget will see \$4.5 million invested to improve management of the Great Ocean Road and begin planning upgrades to visitor facilities. To prepare for upcoming snow seasons, \$4 million will be provided for Mt Baw Baw Alpine Resort to improve amenities for visitors.

Scientists, educators and volunteers will be brought together under one roof with a \$2.8 million investment to design and build a new Port Phillip EcoCentre in St Kilda – so more school students and locals can benefit from short courses, community gardening and give new life to old objects with a new repair café.

Last year's Budget delivered \$80 million to build better visitor facilities at iconic locations across Victoria, and \$52 million for Parks Victoria to deliver new walking trails, new picnic tables and new barbecues in parks across the state.

As we continue our upgrades to Victoria's parks, the Budget invests \$31.7 million to ensure they're being properly patrolled and maintained, including regular track maintenance by Parks Victoria rangers. This will support the health of our open spaces while investing in local communities, encouraging more visitors and more local jobs.

To deliver its Climate Change Strategy, the Labor Government is investing \$10 million to drive emissions reductions, keeping us on track to achieve our target of net zero emissions by 2050 and our strong interim targets for 2030 – and supporting the growth of new industries, technologies and jobs.

A \$37.9 million investment will keep protecting our forests through Regional Forest Agreements.

A further \$64.4 million will ensure the reliability and fairness of our energy system, focusing on network and community safety, the boom in renewable energy, and making sure that retailers respect the rights of vulnerable customers through our Energy Fairness Plan.

The Environment Protection Authority will receive \$76.4 million to continue to protect our environment from pollution and waste and respond to local reports of noise, odour, dust, waste dumping and storage, litter and water pollution.

An additional \$14 million will continue the clean-up of high-risk waste sites at Kaniva and Campbellfield. A further \$2.9 million has also been allocated to make public land safe from contamination.

#### **Quotes attributable to Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio**

*"By investing in our iconic locations, from our parks to the Great Ocean Road, we're encouraging more Victorians to experience our incredible environment – and supporting local jobs and communities."*

*"Bushfires are a real and ongoing risk. With this Budget, we'll undertake crucial work to protect our environment and communities."*

*"From planting to clean-up to composting, grassroots volunteers across our state invest their time and energy, so we are investing in them."*