

Media Release

The Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP

Minister for Energy, the Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Solar Homes



Wednesday, 19 January 2022

NEXT STEPS TO GUIDE THE FUTURE OF OUR PROTECTED FORESTS

The Andrews Labor Government is taking the next steps to engage Victorians in determining new conservation, recreation and tourism opportunities in Immediate Protection Areas.

The Immediate Protection Areas – made up of more than 146,000 hectares of state forest located in Mirboo North, Strathbogie Ranges, Central Highlands and East Gippsland – were protected from timber harvesting in 2019 due to their precious biodiversity.

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change Lily D'Ambrosio today announced the membership of the Eminent Panel for Community Engagement, established to lead conversations with Victorian communities on the future care and management of the land.

A representative from the relevant Traditional Owner group and two other experts have been appointed to join Chairperson Karen Cain on the panel. The panel will work with the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) that is currently undertaking scientific assessments in these areas.

Formally recognised Traditional Owner groups relevant to each region will be appointed to the panel during the engagement process for each Immediate Protection Area on their Country. This new governance model was developed in partnership with the Traditional Owners and supports self-determination.

Melissa Wood, Chairperson of VEAC, and Nicola Pero, Chief Executive Officer at Food and Fibre Gippsland, have been selected to join the panel.

VEAC is already assessing the environmental, recreation and other values in Immediate Protection Areas in Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges. Work in the Central Highlands and East Gippsland will start in mid-2022.

The panel will present a report and recommendations to the government on Mirboo North and Strathbogie Ranges in mid-2022. Community engagement on Central Highlands and East Gippsland will begin later in 2022.

Since 2019 the Victorian Government has added more than 250,000 hectares of protected forests in Victoria – including 96,000 hectares of Immediate Protection Areas, 65,106 hectares for the new Central West National Parks and 90,000 hectares of old growth.

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

"The Immediate Protection Areas are one of the largest environmental initiatives in our state's history – it's crucial we get our engagement right to give as many Victorians as possible a say in how we care for these forests."

"The partnership we're developing with Traditional Owners signifies an important step forward for self-determination. This is truly exciting to be a part of and I encourage Victorians to contribute to the conversation."

Media Contact: Siobhan McKenna 0480 147 921 | siobhan.mckenna@minstaff.vic.gov.au