

Mr Mark Wakeham
CEO
Environment Victoria
Level 2, 60 Leicester Street
CARLTON VIC 3053

5 November 2018

Dear Mr Wakeham

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and your organisation for your advocacy work on behalf of your 40 member groups and 150,000 Victorian members. Our Government respects the contribution Environment Victoria makes to protecting our precious natural environment and we appreciate the opportunity to respond to Environment Victoria's policy survey.

Victoria's renewable future

Our Government has written into law ambitious, but achievable, renewable energy targets of 25 per cent by 2020 and 40 per cent by 2025. To support this, we recently announced the successful results of our Renewable Energy Auction, which will bring 928 MW of new clean renewable energy to Victoria. This will join the 732 MW from 12 solar and wind plants built since 2015 that are already feeding into the grid, and the 2,236 MW under construction across 14 solar and wind plants currently.

There is a renewable boom happening right now in Victoria. In one term of Government we have built, are building, or have contracted to build almost two and a half times the capacity of the former Hazelwood Power Station in energy generation.

Solar Homes and transport for Victoria

Victoria's Solar Homes program will revolutionise the Victorian energy grid, and we will ensure that we continue to reduce our emissions and household bills. We are locating large batteries at strategic locations on our grid to manage the transition to renewables and are rolling out household storage through our Solar Homes program. TAFE courses linked to renewable energy have been made free and we are working with the sector to improve consumer protections.

Climate change isn't going away and our Government is committed to addressing it as we move towards zero emissions by 2050.

Our Government has delivered 100 per cent solar powered trams and a strategic network of electric vehicle charging stations across the state. We will continue to build a low carbon future for our transport sector.

A fair transition to a sustainable Victoria

Our Government has announced a 10 year, \$1.2 billion program to install solar panels on 650,000 homes. This will cut Victoria's carbon emissions by almost four million tonnes, and help Victorian families save around \$900 a year on their electricity bills.

We have committed to ensuring that within a decade we will have one million solar homes in Victoria.

Thanks to Victorian Labor, since 2009, 1.8 million Victorian homes and 90,000 businesses have received upgrades through the Victorian Energy Upgrades program. This program is the largest of its kind in Australia. This year the 55,000 homes and 20,000 businesses that undertook upgrades in 2017 will on average save \$200 and \$4,500 respectively.

In 2014, the Liberal Party went to the election promising to cut this program and the 2,500 jobs it supports. We have saved and strengthened the program so that Victorians can use electricity smarter and more efficiently, bringing down household bills and carbon emissions.

The Labor Government founded the Latrobe Valley Authority, announced a \$266 million investment in the community and remains committed to the long term economic and social wellbeing of the Latrobe Valley Community.

Cleaner waste systems

Our Government has invested over \$100 million into waste and resource recovery over the last four years, more than any in the state's history.

Our \$37 million Recycling Industry Strategic Plan committed to developing a whole-of-government circular economy policy by 2020, providing certainty and a long-term direction for our waste and resource recovery industry.

This plan will also reform our recycling systems by improving contracting and procurement processes used by local government, by partnering with the Municipal Association of Victoria, to develop more flexible, transparent and consistent contracts across all councils.

Our Government is also empowering Victorians to tackle food waste at home and in their local communities. Victoria is already leading the way in food waste initiatives by investing nearly \$9 million to help families and businesses reduce waste and support more council collections.

The Resource Recovery Infrastructure Fund has also supported a number of composting projects in regional Victoria in Shepparton, Morwell and Wangaratta to increase Victoria's recovery of organics.

Minister D'Ambrosio recently announced that 76 councils have received funding to upgrade and build over 130 e-waste collection and storage sites ahead of the ban coming into place in July 2019. Our Government is also providing councils with \$790,000 to deliver local education campaigns so that all Victorians are ready when the ban on e-waste commences.

Environmental protection for Victoria's future

The Labor Government recognises that Victoria's natural environment supports jobs, communities, tourism, wildlife and our liveability. In particular, our parks contribute significant environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits to Victoria, including ecosystem services and recreational opportunities.

The Government provided \$70.6 million in the 2018/19 Budget to revive the operations of Parks Victoria. This funding has provided extensive upgrades in park infrastructure and improved visitor services including 53 new rangers across regional Victoria. Under the former Liberal Government one in ten staff at Parks Victoria lost their jobs.

In terms of biodiversity, our Government has committed to a 20-year biodiversity strategy, Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037. It is a comprehensive plan to stop the decline of our native plants and animals and achieve overall biodiversity improvement over the next 20 years. In addition, our Government made a record investment of \$86.3 million to implement the plan.

There are many stakeholders with diverse interests in forest management and each perspective is valued. The Forest Industry Taskforce worked over many months bringing together these views on some challenging issues. The Taskforce has undertaken significant work but has not been able to agree a way forward.

A re-elected Labor Government will continue to consult with industry, unions, the conservation movement, and recreational user groups as we work towards long-term solutions which balance job protection with the protection of our unique native flora and fauna and threatened species.

Our Government has already taken meaningful steps to protect high environmental-value forest including protections for all large, old trees greater than two and a half metres in diameter across Victoria, and protecting 2,500 hectares in and around the Kuark Forest. Around half of this area is old growth forest and provides essential habitat for threatened species, including the Greater Glider.

In Victoria, VCAT currently operates in a similar role to a 'Lands and Environment Court', but with significantly less expense and formality. In addition, measures are being taken to reduce delays in the Planning Division of VCAT and introduce mediation procedures to resolve planning disputes at an earlier stage.

Our Government has restored the proper use of the referral mechanism in the Environmental Effects Act 1978 and closely adheres to the Act.

The Act has been reviewed on a number of occasions and most major proposals referred have been determined to require an Environment Effects Statement, including the Edithvale-Bonbeach level crossing removal, the Mordialloc Bypass and Crib Point gas terminal.

This year we made lasting reforms to the Environment Protection Amendment Act 2018 that will commence in July 2020. These reforms, and the unprecedented \$180 million investment our Government has made will transform the Environment Protection Authority (EPA), making Victoria a world leader in environment protection once again.

At the centre of the new Act is the General Environmental Duty focussed on preventing harm to human health and the environment. The Act also establishes a duty to manage contaminated land and a new duty to notify of contaminated land.

Substantial stakeholder engagement will occur between now and July 2020 by EPA and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on the new Act and subordinate legislation to ensure the Victorian community, business and industry are all ready for the new environment protection regime in our State.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to say that we look forward to continuing to have a constructive and respectful relationship with Environment Victoria into the future.

Yours sincerely



HON DANIEL ANDREWS MP
Premier of Victoria
Leader of the State Parliamentary Labor Party