Update from the Program Director

In this second issue of the Future of our Forests newsletter, I am excited to update you on the significant progress that has been achieved on the Forest Modernisation Program over the past two months.

As you are aware in July 2018, the Victorian Government commenced a major program to modernise how Victoria's forests are managed and ensure future forest management delivers the highest and best value uses of our forests for Victorian communities.

Key highlights since the last newsletter include:

- Commencement of one of Australia's largest ever acquisitions of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data to enable much more accurate mapping of forest values, including old growth forest and rainforest
- Delivery of a Youth Forest Symposium that brought together over 50 youth delegates from across the State to share their views on forests
- Delivery of the second in our series of public lectures showing contemporary forest science
- Completion of the first phase of engagement for the modernisation process, to which we received over 2,800 responses to the online survey and over 1,000 responses from face-to-face workshops and events delivered across rural and regional Victoria towards the first phase of engagement. A report summarising what you told us will be released in May.

We are thrilled to have received such a strong response from community members and stakeholders from across the State, who have been getting involved in the program and sharing their valuable insights.

I encourage all Victorians to take advantage of the many opportunities that will continue to be offered over the coming months to have your say and help us shape the future management of Victoria's forests.

Next month we will:

- Release an independent consultation paper on the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) prepared by Dr William Jackson
- Open a two-month public submission and online survey process for people to share their views on opportunities to improve the Victorian RFAs
- Advertise joint engagement events to be delivered with the Australian Government across each of the five Victorian RFA regions in June

I look forward to providing you with another update next month and hope to see you at an engagement event soon.

Courtney Bertram
Program Director

Latest News

For the latest news on the Future of our Forests check out our website:
https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests

Community engagement

Regional workshop series

Since January, we have delivered over 100 face-to-face engagement events with local communities and stakeholders across metro, rural and regional Victoria.

This includes a broad range of activities such as attending community events and assisting people to complete surveys, as well as delivering place-based community information sessions and workshops with environment groups, timber industry, commercial and recreational user groups, the scientific community and local government to better understand the range of perspectives on forest management.

Community response has been strong. People are telling us that they appreciate the opportunity to be heard. And there are still many more events to come!

Figure 1: A recent workshop in Orbost.

Members from the local DELWP team – Kate Hill, Julianne Sargant, Kerry Spencer, Wally Notman and Carmel Henderson - recently held workshops in Orbost and Heyfield with people employed in the timber industry. Timber industry contractors, seed collectors, haulage contractors, firewood contractors, mill owners, workers and Councillors attended the workshops to provide feedback on what they value about the forests in their regions, and their vision for future forest management.

Calendar of upcoming events

Community engagement is vital to ensure the future management of our forests address the needs of Victorian communities. There are many more events and activities happening in your area where you can get

involved. You can see the calendar of events on the Future of our Forests website.

Month	Activity
Ongoing	Engagement opportunities across metro, rural and regional Victoria
May	Release independent consultation paper
May	Joint Vic-Cth public submission process and online survey open on the Engage Victoria site (closes 30 June 2019)
May	Release report summarising outcomes of the first phase of engagement
May	Science public lecture #3
June	Joint Victoria-Commonwealth RFA Engagement

Youth Forest Symposium

Over 50 young Victorians attended Victoria's first Youth Forest Symposium held in Melbourne on 28 March. The Symposium gave young people the opportunity to have their say on the future of our forests and connect with representatives of the Victorian Government.

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change, the Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP, thanked delegates by video for their participation in what she described as an important event. "I want to assure you that your contribution today will feed directly into decision making by the Victorian and Australian Governments," the Minister said, "your ideas and what you value matters."

The delegates aged between 12-25, represented diverse geographies, backgrounds and perspectives. They also represented various stakeholder groups including youth environmental organisations, the timber industry, Traditional Owner groups, Scouts, Guides, the Field Trip youth movement, schools and recreational user groups.

Over the course of the day, youth delegates learnt about the importance of sharing their views from the 2019 Victorian Youth Governor Olivia Beasley and followed the instructions of Yarn Bark's Will Austin to perform a Wayapa Wuurrk (an earth connection wellness practice).

Staff gave short presentations on diverse forest values designed to spur lively conversation. Topics covered included: Natural Environment; Cultural Identity;

Experience and Recreation; and Resources, Livelihood and Economy.

Participants openly reflected on the topics and shared their diverse opinions through the creation of murals, facilitated small group discussions, and role playing.

The Symposium highlighted the strong passion of young Victorians for the future of our forests, with participants describing the event as fun, engaging and eye opening.

Figure 2. Participants at Victoria's first Forest Youth Symposium

Information gathered will help shape the modernisation of Victoria's Regional Forest Agreements and broader forest management reform.

Paul Kooperman from the DELWP Engage team commented that he was inspired by the quality and number of great ideas delegates generated. "The Symposium has shown the important contribution that our youth can make to the modernisation of our forests," Paul said.

Other opportunities are planned to empower young Victorians to advocate and share their views on our forests and future forest management over the coming months.

Face to face joint engagement with the Commonwealth

Due to the extended Victorian bushfires this summer, the planned face-to-face joint engagement with the Australian Governments scheduled for March 2019 was postponed. It is confirmed now that the joint engagement will go ahead in June.

A series of targeted stakeholder workshops and meetings, and community drop-in sessions, will be held across each of the five Victorian RFA regions and provide an opportunity for anyone interested in the Victorian RFAs to share their views.

Event dates and locations will be advertised through social media, local newspapers and on the Future of our Forests website.

New website

We're pleased to share that the Future of our Forests website has undergone a major update. The website is now easier to navigate and includes more information.

Check it out at:
https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/futureforests

Science at the centre of future forest management

Victoria's largest acquisition of forest LiDAR

Victoria's largest ever acquisition of Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) data across Victorian public forests has just commenced. This exciting work will provide important information for supporting decision-making during the RFA and forest modernisation process.

LiDAR (light detection and ranging) is an invaluable tool for mapping and monitoring our forests. Mapping the location and density of high-conservation value forests, such as ecologically mature forests and rainforest, with the assistance of the LiDAR measurements provides the foundation for long-term monitoring programs and management strategies. It also helps us to manage threatened and endangered species.

Identification and precise description of mature forests for the existing RFAs was carried out 20 years ago using aerial photographs and information about forest growth. Mapping quality was variable and since that time there has been no comprehensive mapping of Victoria's mature forests.

We have commissioned a comprehensive airborne LiDAR measurements program of Victoria's forests.

Our team will collaborate with researchers at the University of Melbourne to model and map the State's forests to identify areas that are likely to contain high conservation values.

Tom Hill, Team Lead of the Forest Values Assessments explains "From a plane flying over the landscape, the LiDAR illuminates a target with a pulsed laser and measures the reflected pulses with a sensor. As the laser pulses penetrate the forest canopy to the

understory, it provides a highly-detailed three-dimensional profile of the lower strata structure at a very high resolution (centimetre scale).

Data derived from LiDAR measurements, verified by on-the-ground surveys will allow us to create models that can be used to produce detailed, accurate forest maps."

Focussing on public forests, it will identify areas with: rainforests; cool temperate mixed forests; giant trees; multi-aged stands; areas with old-growth trees which have suffered recent disturbance; and old-growth stands, where the influence of past disturbances is now negligible.

This work is an important step in informing the Forest Modernisation Program with best-practice science.

Public lecture series

Over 200 people attended a public lecture focussed on Conservation of Biological Diversity held at the Royal Society of Victoria (RSV) on 13 March. The lecture was also livestreamed via Facebook to viewers across Victoria.

This was the second in a series of public lectures hosted by DELWP and RSV to share the research we are investing in through the Forest Modernisation Program and promote other contemporary forest management science.

The lecture included presentations from:

- Professor David Lindenmayer (Australian National University) on key findings from long-term research on the ecology and management of ash-type eucalypt forest
- Professor Simon Jones (RMIT University) on remote sensing science used to inform forest policy
- Dr Emma Razeng (Monash University) and Dr Peter Kriesner (The University of Melbourne) on genetic risks faced by Victorian flora and fauna and associated implications for conservation planning
- Vanessa Craigie (DELWP) on background and methods for the Conservation Status Assessment Project.

The next lecture will be held on 21 May 2019 at the Box Hill Institute in Lilydale. It will begin with a presentation by Dr. Bill Jackson on the findings of the Independent Consultation Paper: Modernising the Victorian Regional Forest Agreements.

This will be followed by presentations under the theme of "Maintenance of productive capacity of forest ecosystems"

More information about the public lecture series, including videos of each presentation, is available on the Future of our Forests website.

Figure 3. **Professor David Lindenmayer (Australian National University) presenting on ash-type eucalypt forest ecology and management.**

Fact sheets

It is important that the modernisation of the Victorian RFAs and forest management system is guided by robust science. This will ensure our forests are managed to deliver the highest and best value uses for Victorian communities and are resilient to a changing climate.

Comprehensive assessments of a broad range of forest values are underway to inform the modernisation of forest management in Victoria, including: updating the Victorian RFAs; legislative and regulatory reform of timber harvesting operations; and forest management planning including review of the Forest Management Zoning Scheme.

A series of factsheets have been produced which describe the research we're investing in through the Forest Modernisation Program, including the approaches being used, and are available on the Future of our Forests website.

Should you require accessible versions, please contact the DELWP Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or email us at future.rfa@delwp.vic.gov.au

Showcase: Endangered Species Assessment

Learn about the forest values assessments that are informing our future forest management strategies!

Each month, we'll provide a snapshot of the latest science informing the modernisation process.

Improved data modelling to increase understanding of forest-dependent threatened species

The 2017 VEAC Conservation Values of State Forests Assessment report identified 84 forest-dependent threatened species. Improved data and updated scientific modelling will increase our understanding of the distribution of habitat for high priority, forest-dependent threatened species, to support a more strategic approach to their management.

The Forest Modernisation Program, drawing on expertise from the Arthur Rylah Institute and The University of Melbourne, is investing in the following modelling and assessment:

Landscape-scale surveys

Landscape-scale surveys will update current knowledge of the distribution of high-priority forest-dependent threatened species impacted by timber harvesting, climate change, road construction and fire management. Researchers will target 10 terrestrial fauna species for surveys in eastern Victoria, including Leadbeater's Possum, Long-footed Potoroo, gliders and owls, Glossy Black Cockatoo, Large Brown Tree Frog and Giant Burrowing Frog.

In addition, surveys will target up to 15 threatened aquatic species (galaxias and crayfish) and 27 threatened plants to improve our understanding of their distribution and enhance their protection.

Habitat distribution models

Habitat distribution models (HDMs) will be updated for 77 species. HDMs use information on where a species has been recorded and relate these data to environmental variables, such as soil, prevailing climate, topography and remotely sensed spectral information.

Researchers can then estimate habitat suitability for a species across the landscape. Updates to Habitat Distribution Models will improve understanding of the habitat suitability of the landscape for threatened forest-dependent species and predict the likelihood of suitable habitat in areas that have not been surveyed.

Figure 4. Electrofishing for galaxiids.

Population viability analysis

Population viability analysis will be used to predict the combined effects of timber harvesting, bushfire, planned burning, climate change and other forest disturbances on animal populations now and in future.
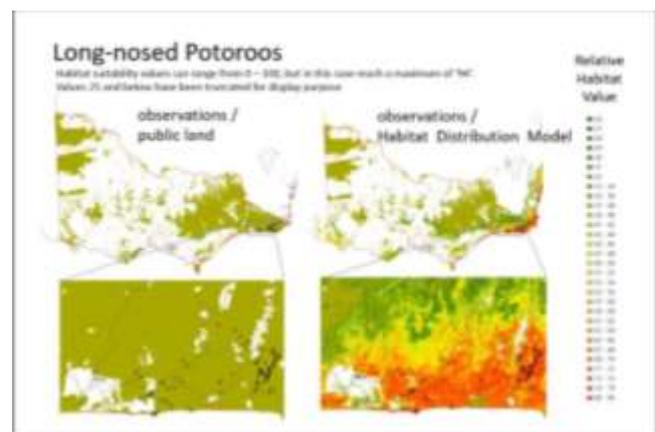

Figure 5. Survey observations and Habitat Distribution Model information for Long-nosed Potoroos, displaying modelling of gaps between records to predict the distribution of likely habitat across the landscape

The research will improve our understanding of the prospects for the number, distribution and long-term viability of important, forest-dependent species and support a more nuanced appreciation of the consequences of various management strategies and decisions for species.

The modelling and assessment process will improve our understanding of the distributions of threatened species' habitats to support a more strategic approach to managing multiple forest values.

Key engagement contacts

If you would like further information on the RFA Modernisation Program, or to find out about engagement activities happening in your area, please contact your local RFA Engagement Coordinator:

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