

Bushfire recovery community information session

Questions and answers



Below is a summary of questions that were asked during our bushfire recovery information session on 23 November 2023, and also received via email both before and after the event.

You can send through any further questions to engage@parks.vic.gov.au

Information about bushfire recovery projects on Parks Victoria-managed land is maintained on our website: www.parks.vic.gov.au/projects/eastern-victoria

Q. You presented a lot on visitor access and commercial development. We know you are monitoring flora and fauna. It would be great to hear about what you are finding and how the fauna is recovering. Also, we love Croajingolong and are eager to help you as PV staff to recruit resources for recovery. What can we do to help on the political side?

The rate of fauna recovery after the Black Summer fires has been affected by factors including the size, health, and proximity of animal populations before the fires, the overall fire intensity in different areas, and the feral predator and grazer response work done after the event.

Parks Victoria was working on rapid response plans and longer-term partnerships that have had enduring benefits. For example, insurance populations and translocations of rare freshwater crayfish and fish (including galaxiid species) have occurred. Eastern Bristlebirds have a new burgeoning population at Wilsons Prom National Park after their only Victorian population was almost lost in the fires.

Unburnt sections of bush continue to act as important refuges for fauna and flora recovery and recolonisation of the landscape. Notable examples include Howe Range in Croajingolong National Park, parts of the Errinundra Plateau and the Cabbage Tree Creek Flora and Fauna Reserve.

We appreciate and value community support for fauna and flora recovery throughout East Gippsland via friends groups and other community volunteers.

Q. Can Parks Victoria make public the arboricultural risk assessments that lead to the removal of many trees across parks and reserves in East Gippsland. The VNPA has received reports of overzealous tree removal operations across East Gippsland.

The danger of trees damaged by fire and storm events is a significant risk that Parks Victoria manages for public safety. Parks Victoria uses qualified arborists for assessments and advice on all tree safety issues. It's not our approach to distribute internal working documents. These expert arborists are best-placed to provide guidance on tree hazards in relation to visitor and staff safety.

//

Q. How does Parks Victoria balance tree risk management and obligations under State and Commonwealth legislation to protect wildlife habitat such as hollow bearing trees; Loss of hollow-bearing trees from Victorian native forests is listed as a Potentially Threatening Process under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act as well many hollow dependent species recovering after the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires.

During and immediately after fires, tree hazard is managed by response agencies (Forest Fire Management Victoria and CFA) according to the Emergency Management Victoria Joint Standard Operating Procedure 8.03 *Tree Hazard - Fire*.

The procedure provides for the consideration of environmental values in decision-making, however during emergencies safety of emergency management personnel and the community is prioritised.

//

Q. How does Parks Victoria balance tree risk management and obligations under State and Commonwealth legislation to protect wildlife habitat such as hollow bearing trees? Loss of hollow-bearing trees from Victorian native forests is listed as a Potentially Threatening Process under the FFG Act as well many hollow dependent species recovering after the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires.

Parks Victoria has undertaken post-fire hazardous tree management in East Gippsland and North-East Victoria under the guidance of arborists, removing hazardous trees when necessary for safety of our team and the public, and otherwise trimming or modifying trees where practical to keep people safe while retaining habitat values. Where appropriate, fallen material is left to continue providing habitat.

During and immediately after fires, tree hazard is managed by response agencies (Forest Fire Management Victoria and CFA) according to the Emergency Management Victoria Joint Standard Operating Procedure (JSOP) 8.03 *Tree Hazard - Fire*.

The Joint Standard Operating Procedure provides for the consideration of environmental values in decision making, however during emergencies safety of emergency management personnel and the community is prioritised.

//

Q. Will the plan to extend boardwalks at Cape Conran Coastal Park go to public consultation?

We know there's a lot of interest in works to extend and rebuild boardwalks in the park.

While assessments, technical studies and appropriate design will be the key considerations, we'll provide opportunities for the community to have their say on what's important to them with these projects via the Parks Victoria website.

//

Q. Are there plans to build roofed accommodation as part of the Wilderness Coast Walk in Croajingolong National Park?

The current funding for Croajingolong Wilderness Coast Walk project (stage 1) doesn't include roofed accommodation as part of the scope of works.

Upgrades as part of the project are likely to be between Cape Conran and Point Hicks, while areas east of Point Hicks will continue to offer a wilderness experience with limited infrastructure.

//

Q. Has the tender for Thurra River Bridge been awarded? What is the updated timeline to be completed?

The Thurra River Bridge rebuild is being led by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

All planning and engineering activities are now complete. Bridge construction tenders have been assessed and a contract award is expected to be issued in late December.

Design and construction are due to commence in the first half of 2024 and scheduled for completion in late 2025. Updates on the Thurra River Bridge Project will be on the [Croajingolong NP bushfire recovery webpage](#)

//

Q. You mentioned a 100-year design life for Thurra Bridge. What is this based on – historic info or updated climate scenarios?

The design for the bridge is based on the current and latest Australian Bridge Code for Bridge Design, which is the industry standard. This code ensures the bridge meets the standards for bridge design now and for the future.

//

Q. What is planned for the number of campsites at Thurra? Will it remain the same as previously?

The campground is currently closed and inaccessible due to bushfire and flood damage to the Thurra River Bridge. We're intending to reinstate all original campsites. We're also working on ways to improve the positioning of some camp sites to rectify the issue of periodic inundation by Thurra River during high rainfall.

//

Q. What is the expected time for accommodation at Point Hicks Lighthouse to open again?

The delivery of this project is contingent on the completion of the Thurra River Bridge rebuild. The bridge is currently expected to be completed in late 2025.

Next year we'll be better able to provide a timeline for the lighthouse to reopen.

//

Q. What are the current plans proposed for the Wilderness Coast Walk upgrades budgeted in a previous State Budget and again current?

The proposed Croajingolong Coastal Wilderness Experience aims to improve access to this special area for a wider range of people.

The project will explore iconic day experiences from key visitor sites and the ability to connect them up to experience overnight wilderness journeys. We are currently in the planning stages of the project.

The planning phase is expected to be complete in 2025.

//

Q. What is the timeline for various tracks in the park to open, including Clinton Rocks and Gale Hill. I believe this is needed for the safety of groups undertaking the Wilderness Coast Walk to ensure emergency access if required?

We have completed works to make these two tracks accessible and they will be open imminently.

//



Q. Has any work been done in Errinundra National Park?

We have upgraded a number of roads and tracks in Errinundra National Park following storm damage. We have also completed work on some of the damaged visitor facilities and undertaken hazardous tree works within the park.

//

Q. What is the timeline for opening of the section of Conran nature walk from Joiners channel to Cowrie Beach carpark?

All walking tracks at Cape Conran Coastal Park are now open including the section of the Nature Trail that was closed.

//

What is the update on the shared pathway Marlo to Conran?

\$13.15 million has been invested to improve the quality, sustainability and compliance of water services at Cape Conran by constructing an underground water pipeline, upgrading the localised wastewater system and with the potential to build a shared bike-walking path from Marlo to Cape Conran.

Parks Victoria and East Gippsland Water are progressing the designs and investigations relevant to the water pipeline and localised wastewater upgrades, as a priority.

Options for the shared path are being considered. These options will consider the technical and financial requirements to design and construct a path to the specifications requested by the East Gippsland Shire Council.

//

Q. If funding has been prioritised for water, will there need to be additional funding for a shared pathway for Marlo/Cape Conran. If so, has this process commenced?

Once we have finalised options for the shared path, we will undertake quantity surveying to get a clearer picture of the investment required to build the path in the current construction environment, where costs are significantly higher than they were pre-pandemic when the project was originally scoped.

It's highly likely that the investment required to construct the path will be higher than originally budgeted for and, in that case, Parks Victoria will seek further direction.

//

Q. The four jetties at Mallacoota were constructed via insurance monies. The last in Feb 2022 but there has been nothing since and recently one of the 'old' ones has been closed due to it being dangerous. Over the past 20 months, communication from Parks has been very spasmodic. \$2.8m was allocated to update the jetties close to 3 yrs ago. What the community and visitors want to know is when will work begin to complete the jetties before more are closed?

We are currently working through the regulatory approvals process for construction to commence on the jetties at Mallacoota.

We envisage construction will begin in mid-2024.

//

Q. Can you give timeline for restoration of Cabbage tree Palms walk and Palms Tk which is only 4X4 accessible at present?

We engaged an engineer to assess Palm Track. The recommendation is to use reinforced concrete and gravel to restore the track, particularly in the section where the track runs alongside the creek. We are aiming to have restoration works on the track complete by the end of 2023 depending on contractor availability.

//

Q. When is timeline for Yeerung bridge to be completed?

We are currently working through engineering assessments and funding requirements for works to the bridge. Subsequently, a decision will be made about whether it should be reinstated or rebuilt.

We are carefully considering all requirements for the bridge including the weight-bearing requirements for firefighting vehicles and equipment. We're aiming to have a decision made in the next couple of months. Then we can release a scope of works and timeline for the works on the bridge, which we'll post on the Parks Victoria website.

//