

Phillip Island (Millowl) Wildlife Plan

PROJECT UPDATE NO.4

(February 2023)

FINAL PLAN

The Phillip Island (Millowl) Wildlife Plan was released in December 2021 following public feedback and community consultation. The full plan and a summary can be found at wildlife.gov.vic.au.

The aim of the plan over the next five years is to:

- Ensure the community values wildlife and contributes to its management
- Improve animal welfare
- Reduce the negative impacts of wildlife
- Maintain a viable agricultural industry
- Establish partnerships, including with the Bunurong Land Council
- To deliver effective wildlife management

Millowl is the Bunurong name for Phillip Island. It is part of the Country recognised as being the traditional land and waters of the Bunurong and is steeped in cultural history dating back tens of thousands of years. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live, work and learn, the Bunurong. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

To oversee the implementation of the plan, governance arrangements were established in 2022. A working group was convened and held meetings nine times throughout the year.

The working group reports to the steering committee, which continues to guide the development of the Phillip Island (Millowl) Wildlife Plan. The working group includes representatives from:

- Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA, formerly DELWP)
- Phillip Island Nature Parks (Nature Parks)
- Bass Coast Shire Council (BCSC)
- Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC)
- Local farming land holders
- Community groups including Phillip Island Landcare
- The newly established Phillip Island Land Alliance

In 2022 and 2023 the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BLCAC) will continue to build their Environment Team, which has grown to six staff who have assisted with island-wide Cape Barren Geese counts. Using the principles of self-determination the project team will continue to work with Traditional Owners to identify further opportunities for involvement.



Environment,
Land, Water
and Planning

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(STRATEGY 1)

PUBLIC EDUCATION & COMMUNICATION

A range of community engagement strategies are in place in accordance with the plan, providing information to the local community, landholders, and visitors about wildlife values and challenges.

These ongoing programs educate about ways to live with and manage wildlife.

Implementation in 2022 included:

- Collaborative **Sharing our Shores campaign** for summer 2022-23, which raised community awareness around the importance of ensuring beaches are safe places for nesting birds.
- The **Dark Sky So Shearwaters Fly campaign** continued in 2022, encouraging community involvement in helping migration by reducing the light pollution in fledgling areas of Short-tailed shearwaters.

Ongoing projects to target public education and collaboration:

- Downloadable fact sheets: [Nature Notes](#).
- Community representation and advice is formally shared via the Community and Environment Advisory Committee (CEAC) to the Nature Parks Board of Management.
- Regular media outreach, driving awareness of conservation initiatives.
- Regular sharing of conservation news, information and updates made available to the community via [Know Your Nature Parks](#), and the [Conservation Update](#).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In 2022 the community and visitors were given opportunities to participate in research and conservation.

- Bush stone-curlew program, involving feeding and behaviour observations at Koala Conservation Reserve.
- Seal Spotter program seeking the assistance of the public to collect critical data on Australian fur seals.
- Community led initiatives such as the Surf Beach Sunderland Bay Biodiversity Project.
- Ongoing volunteering opportunities allow community to work directly with Nature Parks in a variety of areas including threatened species, revegetation, and research.

(STRATEGY 2)

EVIDENCE-BASED ACTION

Research has been undertaken to better understand key wildlife populations and their impacts on agriculture, public health, conservation and tourism to inform evidence-based decision making and wildlife management practices. Research findings from 2022 included:

- **Task 5.** Regular island-wide counts of Cape Barren Geese have been undertaken since 1993. In 2022 counts were undertaken twice to examine seasonal trends with the population and to obtain a ratio of adult to juvenile birds.
- **Task 6.** Wildlife injury research was conducted by collecting data from local veterinarian clinics and wildlife shelters to analyse species trends and possible causes of wildlife injuries.

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- In 2021/22 Phillip Island Nature Parks Wildlife Clinic responded to 487 calls for various species including Cape Barren Geese (34), Swamp Wallabies (71) and Common Brushtail Possums (41).
- The major causes of admissions for Cape Barren Geese and Swamp Wallabies were vehicle collision.
- **Task 8.** An investigation into the impacts of Cape Barren Geese grazing on agricultural production was conducted collaboratively between Federation University and local farmers. Preliminary results indicate:
 - That geese comprised 97% of wildlife visiting sites.
 - Forage crops such as turnips were impacted more compared with oats or renovated pasture.
 - Grazing by wildlife decreased forage crops by 40-60% in winter and by 50-100% in summer.
- **Task 9.** A Federation University study investigated the faeces of Cape Barren Geese for pathogenic microorganisms that risk disease transmission in both farmland and bushland habitats. Results concluded that the risk of Cape Barren Geese transmitting bacterial or parasitic diseases to humans and animals is low.

RESEARCH INTO NON-LETHAL METHODS OF MANAGING WILDLIFE

In response to the strong support for non-lethal management methods during the community consultation process, in 2022 the plan's implementation explored new and innovative management options.

Virtual Fencing (Action 3. Task 16.)

A three-year study led by Bass Coast Shire Council in collaboration with Victoria University, a local citizen scientist and the Nature Parks is examining the effectiveness of virtual fencing along a road on Phillip Island. In 2022 fieldwork was completed, with data from the study being analysed to determine the effectiveness of this technology in reducing the amount of wildlife injured on roads.

Native Predators (Action 4. Task 19.)

To better understand the role of native predators on Phillip Island, Deakin University has commenced surveys for Powerful Owls, which are significant predators of possums.

Surveys using playback calls and ground searches at key sites were conducted in 2022 and will continue in 2023 with the aim of locating birds so that tracking devices can be fitted to examine how Powerful Owls use the landscape. With this information it may be possible to bolster Powerful Owl populations.

(STRATEGY 3)

ACTIVE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Strategy 3 of the Plan is focused on the active management of wildlife to balance conservation, natural and built environments, public safety, social and economic values on Phillip Island.

In Victoria, all wildlife is protected under the Wildlife Act 1975. It is illegal to disturb or destroy wildlife without an appropriate authorisation, licence or exemption.

In some areas, wildlife can damage property, farmland, and/or the environment. In such cases, land holders or land managers may apply to the Conservation Regulator for an Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW).

A number of improvements were made to the ATCW system in 2022 to improve efficiency and consistency in application and assessment processes:

- An online application process was rolled out in April 2022. This has reduced the time required to submit and process applications by ensuring that all required information has been included before submission (previously, application forms with missing information may have been returned to the applicant for resubmission, resulting in longer processing times). Paper-copy applications are still accepted.
- Improved guidance and supporting documents for land holders and land managers experiencing negative impacts caused by wildlife.
- A range of guidance documents (including wildlife management fact sheets specific to Wallabies and Common Brushtail Possums), and a link to the online application form can be found at [vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au).

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DELIVERY OF IMMEDIATE TASKS

COMPLETE:

Task 1. Governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities for overseeing the implementation of the plan are developed.

- As outlined on page one.

Task 28. Register of landholders/managers wanting to participate in trials of alternate control methods.

- The register of landholders has been completed.

IN PROGRESS:

Action 10. Bunurong access wildlife from Phillip Island (Millowl) for cultural use.

Task 40. Applications to access wildlife on Phillip Island (Millowl) for Aboriginal cultural use are referred to BLCAC for endorsement.

Task 30. Management options for Cape Barren Geese.

OUTSTANDING:

Unfortunately due to resource restraints Task 5 was incomplete in the first year.

Task 5. Identify and establish benchmark data and monitoring requirements to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of wildlife management undertaken as part of this plan (e.g. reduction in crop loss, habitat regeneration, population numbers).

2023 PREVIEW & PRIORITIES

- The working group will focus on **Action 6, Task 26:** ATCW applications from landholders.
- **Task 5.** will be actioned in year two.
- **Task 30.** (Strategy 3.) Provide input into the development of permit conditions and implementation of egg-management as an additional control option for land holders and land managers adversely affected by locally over-abundant Cape Barren Goose populations (via the ATCW system).

HELPFUL LINKS:

- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Read the Full Plan](#)

