

National Parks Advisory Council Annual Report 2024 - 2025



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Steve Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Environment
Level 16, 8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne Vic 3002

Dear Minister

In accordance with the requirements of Section 11 of the *National Parks Act 1975*, the National Parks Advisory Council (NPAC) is pleased to submit to you our Annual Report, covering activities for the period 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025.

Yours sincerely

Anna Foley
Convenor
National Parks Advisory
Council

16 September 2025

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September 2025

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This document is also available in PDF format at www.deeca.vic.gov.au

Photo acknowledgments

Cover photo: George Bass Coastal Walk (Yallock-Bulluk Marine and Coastal Park)

Acknowledgment

We acknowledge Victorian Traditional Owners and their Elders past and present as the Original Custodians of Victoria's land and waters and commit to assisting them and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Foreword

It is with pleasure that I provide the Annual Report of the National Parks Advisory Council ('the Council') to the responsible Minister Steve Dimopoulos MP, Minister for Environment.

The Council met four times in 2024–25 and formally advised the Minister on one matter for which advice was sought under the *National Parks Act 1975* ('the Act').

The matter was:

- A proposed new 21-year lease and associated licence for the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club under section 19G of the Act. The lease will cover a larger footprint than the Club currently occupies to accommodate a new, larger clubhouse building. Additionally, the Club intends to demolish the existing public change rooms and construct new ones outside the lease footprint, which Parks Victoria will maintain ownership and management once completed.

In that instance, after careful consideration of the documentation made available, the importance of Sorrento SLSC's role in community safety, and subject to resolution of the concerns relating to:

- building design
- matters addressed via the planning permit process
- allowable uses under the lease

the Council wrote to the Minister expressing they were supportive of the granting of a lease of 21 years, under section 19G, and associated licence under section 19K of the Act, to Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club in the Mornington Peninsula National Park.

Over the year, the Council also received updates on matters to support its work and understanding of park management issues.

During the year, updates were received from Parks Victoria on:

- future Environmental Effects Statements (or similar) that may lead to applications under section 27
- Wilsons Promontory National Park
- cultural heritage protection at Dyurrite/Mt Arapiles

Updates were received from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) on:

- the renewal of the Victorian Public Land legislation
- GORCAPA and its future relationship with the Council
- the Sea to Summit trail concept research from Errinundra National Park to the beaches of Cape Conran Coastal Park in East Gippsland

The Council continues to be supported in its work by DEECA and Parks Victoria. Special thanks to Cameron McKenzie and Cassie Elder of DEECA who provided Executive Officer and secretariat support over the past year.

This year Council was greatly saddened by the loss of valued member Mary-Jane Taylor, we will remember her as an intelligent woman, who was positive and kind, and insightful with her contributions. We will miss her immensely.

Vale Mary-Jane.

In what was in some respects a challenging year for Council, I express my sincere thanks to all members for their professionalism and compassion, and their diligence in applying their expertise and acumen to the Council's work. Their contributions have significantly benefited both the Council and Victoria's parks estate.



Anna Foley, Convenor

16 September, 2025

The Council

The Council is established under section 10 of *National Parks Act 1975* ('the Act'). In 2024–25 the responsible Minister was Steve Dimopoulos MP, Ministers for Environment.

Statutory responsibilities

Under section 11 of the Act, the functions of the Council are to:

- advise the Minister generally in relation to the administration of the Act and on particular matters in relation to that administration on which its advice is sought by the Minister
- advise the Minister on any proposed excision from a park referred to it by the Minister
- submit to the Minister within three months after each year ending on 30 June a report on the performance of its functions during that year

In addition to these functions, the Minister is required to seek advice from the Council in relation to the granting of:

- certain leases within parks, under sections 19G, 30AAA, 30AAAC, 31AA, 31AABB, 32CA and 32CC of the Act
- consents in relation to various earth resources tenements and operation within parks, under section 40 of the Act

The Act

The Act governs the protection, use and management of Victoria's parks system. It provides a strong framework for ensuring that the uses and management of the parks are compatible with the long-term maintenance of their natural and cultural values.

The parks system

As at 30 June 2025, there were 138 parks and other areas, with a total area of approximately 3.47 million hectares, managed under various provisions of the Act. These areas comprise 45 national parks, 3 wilderness parks, 26 state parks, 13 marine national parks, 11 marine sanctuaries, 11 marine and/or coastal parks or reserves, 14 other parks and reserves, 1

landscape conservation area (comprising 7 component areas) and 14 non-scheduled areas. In addition, there are 19 wilderness zones and 22 remote and natural areas located within 13 national parks, and 4 designated water supply catchment areas within 3 national parks.



Kookaburra in Wilsons Promontory National Park

Credit: Roberto Sebo



Kangaroo in Wilsons Promontory National Park

Membership

Council consists of eight members with specific skills and experience, appointed by the Governor in Council:

- two people with skills or experience relating to the preservation and protection of parks
- one who is a professor and teacher of ecology at a university in Victoria
- one with experience in local government who resides in a municipality in which there is a park
- four (at least two of whom reside outside of the metropolitan area) with experience with matters affecting the interests of the community

Anna Foley (Convenor)



Anna is an experienced environmental advisor with over 20 years of experience in ecology, heritage, planning and community engagement.

She is the Strategic Development Manager and former statewide Operations Manager at Trust for Nature, working on strategic initiatives to protect a private land conservation network of more than 100,000 hectares.

Anna was previously the Conservation Manager at the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) advocating for natural and cultural heritage protection and still volunteers her expertise to conservation organisations.

She is a Council Member of the Heritage Council of Victoria, a member of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee, chair of an Industry Advisory Committee at RMIT, and a graduate

of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Associate Professor Ursula de Jong (Member)



Ursula is Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Built Environment, at Deakin University, Geelong. She is a Research Associate of HOME, a Deakin University Strategic Research and Innovation Centre, providing evidence-based, community-tailored housing and social inclusion strategies.

She is an Honorary Research Fellow in Deakin's School of Architecture and Built Environment, Architecture Vacancy Lab.

Ursula is an experienced academic, scholar and teacher, with particular expertise in architectural history and as a researcher of place, with numerous publications across both fields. She is the architectural historian Council Member of the Heritage Council of Victoria. She is a founding member of SAHANZ, and made an honorary member in 2024; and a full international member of ICOMOS. She is a member of the National Liturgical Architecture and Art Council (NLAAC).

Ursula is an Honorary Member (2023) of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) being a former long-standing Director and Deputy Chair of the Trust. She is President of the Nepean Conservation Group which has cared for the local environment since 1973 and oversees twenty local Friends' Groups on the tip of the Mornington Peninsula, two in the MPNP and one in PNNP.

She is a heritage advocate and environmental activist and brings to Council much experience working with communities. In 2017 she was appointed Chair of the Reference Areas Advisory Committee.

Dr David Jones (Member)



David is an experienced planner, landscape architect and academic. Over a 40-year period he has worked at and for several councils, universities and Aboriginal Corporations in South Australia and Victoria.

With qualifications and expertise in regional planning, urban design, landscape architecture, cultural heritage management, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, he has taught, researched, published and practiced in these disciplines and has an applied understanding of evolution and application of Victoria's legislative conservation systems, instruments and planning schemes.

Currently Adjunct Professor (Research) at the Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, he recently had oversight of all Strategic Planning and Urban Design operations of the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation that embraces Geelong (Djilang), Ballarat (Ballaarat) and western Melbourne (Naarm) regions.

Dr Marie Keatley (Member)



Marie holds a PhD in eucalypt flowering ecology from the University of Melbourne. She is a lecturer at RMIT University with research interests in ecology including phenology,

vegetation ecology, botany, climate change as well as citizen science.

She also brings to the council many years of experience in park management, having worked for Parks Victoria. Through this work she has extensive knowledge of Victorian flora, plant conservation and landscape ecology.

At the international level, she has contributed to studies on the impacts of climate on plant flowering ecology, particularly of the southern hemisphere.

Marie is a member of the Executive Board of the International Society of Biometeorology and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board for the International Journal of Biometeorology. She was also one of the founders of ClimateWatch, Australia's citizen science phenological observation network. Marie lives in regional Victoria.

Dr Michael Looker (Member)



Dr Michael Looker is a scientist by background with over 35 years' experience in conservation program development and public open space management. He has previously held roles with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) as Director of TNC's Australia program, where he partnered with local NGOs and Government on large-scale conservation initiatives and established a Corporate Conservation Council to forge a closer alliance between business and conservation. He also developed close working relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations supporting their aspirations in looking after country. As Director of Regional Strategies, Infrastructure his main focus was on developments across the Asia Pacific, especially in the extractive industries, and implementation of TNC's

“Development by Design” which helps to guide sustainable development decision-making. He was Director of the Aotearoa New Zealand Program, a two-year assignment to establish one of the Conservancy’s newest country program and Senior Advisor to the “Conservation in Partnership with Indigenous Peoples & Local Communities” global program with a primary focus on sustainable financing for community led conservation programs.

Prior to joining TNC, Michael served as the Director of Trust for Nature, Victoria. Under Michael’s leadership, the Trust acquired Ned’s Corner Station - the largest private conservation purchase in Victoria.

He was previously a Senior Lecturer in Environmental Horticulture at The University of Melbourne, Burnley Campus, as well as Superintendent of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne.

Andy Meddick (Member) #



Andy Meddick is a former Member for Western Victoria in the Parliament of Victoria. During Andy’s time in Parliament, he was a member of three Committees, including the Planning and Environment Committee, that conducted the largest review in history of the state of biodiversity in Victoria.

Andy also Chaired two Government Taskforces, as well as served on the Board of VicHealth for four years. He currently is a Board Member of the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority.

He is also a Board Member of Transcend Australia, helping promote policy and rights for Trans and Gender diverse families and youth, as well as rescuing wildlife for Wildlife Victoria.

Andy has made an informal study of Australian, American and British politics and policy for almost thirty years, and the same on Asia-Pacific geo-politics for almost fifteen years. He pays particular interest as to how policy at a domestic and international level affects people, the environment and animals across the globe.

He is passionate about the environment, particularly wildlife and the role that water plays in healthy, thriving eco-systems.

Andy Meddick joined the Council in May 2025.

Mark Reeves (Member)



Mark has a BA (Recreation), Grad. Dip Ed. (Outdoor & Phys. Ed.), Post Grad Dip (Org. Change) and is a member of the Australian Council of Educators, a fellow of the Australian Council for Educational Leaders and is a graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

He is the founding Principal of The School for Student Leadership, also known as The Alpine School. Since 1999 the school has expanded from one to four campuses and has also operated programs in Guangdong Province, China.

He has worked with Catholic, Independent and Government sectors, local government and private industry in his career spanning 35 years.

As well as academic studies at Melbourne University and Phillip Institute of Technology, he has technical training and qualifications including in outdoor pursuits from the National Mountaineering and Water sports School, North Wales, UK.

Mark received a Churchill Fellowship in 2010 and researched the adolescent rite of passage and received a Citation from the Gippsland Chapter of ACE for developing and running programs that enhance physical development, wellbeing and self-esteem.

He has published and contributed to titles including *Surviving, Thriving and Reviving in Adolescence* (Springer pub. 2016) and became a Fellow of the Australian College of Educational Leadership in 2015.

Mark is a local government councillor in East Gippsland Shire having been Mayor from 2013 to 2014 and again from 2021– to 2023. He was elected Chair of One-Gippsland in February 2023.

Dr Mary-Jane Taylor (Rogers) (Member) *



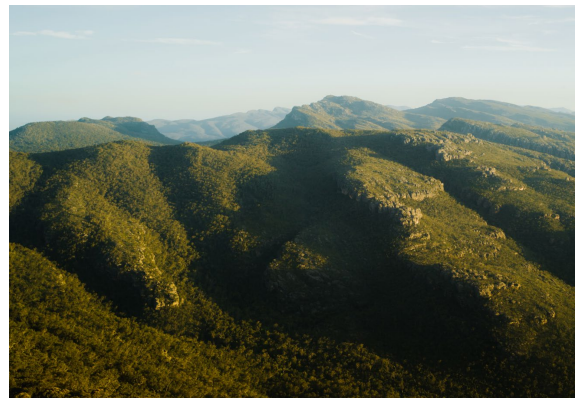
**** Dr Mary-Jane Taylor (Rogers) sadly passed in December 2024. Her contribution to Council's work was exemplary over several years. Council expresses its heartfelt condolences to Mary-Jane's family and many friends. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her.***

Observers – DEECA and Parks Victoria

Recognising the critical role which Parks Victoria and DEECA play in decisions regarding Victoria's parks, representatives of these two organisations attend and participate in meetings as observers but do not have any decision-making responsibilities.



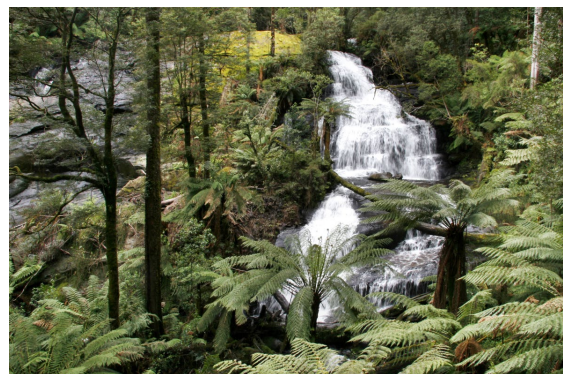
Little Desert National Park



Grampians [Gariwerd] National Park



Mornington Peninsula National Park



Great Otway National Park

Council program

Program

The Council structures its work program according to its statutory responsibilities, provides advice required on key government investigations, policies and strategies, and fulfils its corporate governance responsibilities.

The Council continued to take a close interest in on-ground park management issues through regular updates by Parks Victoria and DEECA staff.

Council meetings

Meeting No. 306	7 August 2024
Meeting No. 307	13 November 2024
Meeting No. 308	12 February 2025
Meeting No. 309	14 May 2025

Meeting attendance

Member	Number of meetings attended
Anna Foley (Convenor)	4 out of 4
Associate Professor Ursula De Jong	4 out of 4
Dr David Jones	3 out of 4
Dr Marie Keatley	4 out of 4
Dr Michael Looker	4 out of 4
Andy Meddick #	2 out of 2
Mark Reeves	3 out of 4
Dr Mary-Jane Taylor (Rogers) *	2 out of 2

Advice to Minister

The Council met four times in 2024-25 and formally advised the Minister on one matter for which advice was sought under sections 19G, 31AA, 31AABB and 40(3) of the Act.

That matter was:

A proposed new 21-year lease and associated licence for the Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club under section 19G of the Act. The proposed new lease will cover a larger footprint than the Club currently occupies to accommodate a new, larger clubhouse building. Additionally, the Club intends to demolish the existing public change rooms and construct new ones outside the lease footprint, which Parks Victoria will maintain ownership and management once completed.

After careful consideration of the documentation made available, the importance of Sorrento SLSC's role in community safety, and subject to resolution of the concerns relating to:

- building design
- matters addressed via the planning permit process
- allowable uses under the lease

the Council wrote to the Minister, expressing they were supportive of the granting of a lease of 21 years, under section 19G, and an associated licence under section 19K of the Act, to Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club in the Mornington Peninsula National Park.

Field visits

Nil.



Mount Buffalo National Park

Presentations and briefings at meetings

Title	Presenter	Date
<i>Presentation on Future Environmental Effects Statements (EES) or similar that may lead to s27 consents (such as energy transmission lines).</i>	Parks Victoria	7 August 2024
<i>Presentation on Wilsons Promontory Landscape.</i>	Parks Victoria	7 August 2024
<i>Presentation on GORCAPA's interaction with the Council.</i>	DEECA Land Governance	13 November 2024
<i>Update on Rock climbing at Dyurrite.</i>	Parks Victoria	13 November 2024
<i>Presentation on the renewal of the Victorian Public Land legislation.</i>	DEECA Public Land Reform	13 November 2024
<i>Presentation on Sea to Summit.</i>	DEECA Recreation and Assets	12 February 2025
<i>Briefing on potential new 21-year lease to Sorrento Surf Lifesaving Club.</i>	Parks Victoria	14 May 2025



Point Nepean National Park

Council operations

The Council is an advisory body that does not have the capacity to employ staff or operate outside of DEECA's Policies and Procedures.

Secretariat staff are DEECA employees and abide by DEECA policies and procedures in relation to Employment, Health, Safety, and all other matters.

Council uses DEECA systems to operate, including finance and procurement, IT, data and records management, HR and other systems, therefore the following Disclosures are reported on in the DEECA Annual Report 2024-25:

- Compliance with the *Building Act 1993*;
- Summary of Environmental Performance
- Public administration and employment conduct principals
- Details of changes in process, fees, charges and levies charge
- Occupational Health and Safety policies
- Risk Management policies
- Compliance with DataVic Access Policies
- Local Jobs First
- Workforce Inclusion Policy
- Environmental reporting
- Industrial Relations reporting
- Procurement, including social, complaints and emergency procurement
- Competitive neutrality
- Compliance under the *Disability Act 2006*
- Asset Maturity Assessment.

The table below sets out the expenditure incurred in the operation of the Council

	2023–24	2024–25
Meeting fees	\$7,854	\$8,255
Other operating expenses	\$11,143*	\$3,778*
Total	\$18,997	\$12,033

**This figure includes ICT expenditure*

Consultancies below and above \$10,000

Nil

Major reviews carried out by Council

Nil

Government advertising

Nil

Overseas travel

Nil

Workforce data

As at 30 June 2025, the Council was supported by two ongoing staff on Secondment from DEECA totaling 0.2 Equivalent Full Time (EFT).

Council Policies

The Council has adopted the following model DEECA policies and procedures:

- Code of conduct
- Conflict of interest
- Meetings and decision-making
- Dispute resolution
- Gifts, benefits and hospitality
- Performance assessment
- Induction and continuing education

Statement of pecuniary Interests

All members of the Council have completed declarations of pecuniary interest for the current reporting period.

Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality attestation

I, Anna Foley, Convenor of the Council, certify that:

- my public entity has policies and procedures in place that are consistent with the minimum requirements and accountabilities outlined in the Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Framework issued by the Public Sector Standards Commissioner
- staff are informed about these gifts, benefits and hospitality policies and procedures

Performance assessment

The Council conducted an annual performance review in line with their adopted Performance Assessment Policy.

Membership of external committees

Anna Foley and Ursula de Jong are members of the Heritage Council of Victoria.

Anna is also a member of RMIT's Industry Advisory Committee for the Bachelor of Environment & Society and Bachelor of Environmental Science/ Environment & Society double degree, and a member of the National Trust's Expert Committee for the Register of Significant Trees.

Ursula is also the President of the Nepean Conservation group Inc.

David Jones is the Chair of the Yaluk Barring Park Consultative Committee and a member of Birrarung Council.

Michael Looker is a member of the *La Trobe University Centre for the Study of the Inland Board*.

Conferences and seminars attended

Nil.

Women, Youth and Indigenous Affairs

The Council is committed to involving Victoria's community, including women, youth and Aboriginal Victorians.

Statement of Availability of Other Information

Any information retained by the Council relating to its activities is available on request, subject to the provisions of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

Freedom of Information Act 1982

The *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (the FOI Act) allows the public a right of access to documents held by DEECA. The purpose of the FOI Act is to extend as far as possible the right of the community to access information held by government departments, local councils, Ministers and other bodies subject to the FOI Act. An applicant has a right to apply for access to documents held by a department. This comprises documents both created by DEECA or supplied to DEECA by an external organisation or individual, and may also include maps, films, microfiche, photographs, computer printouts, computer discs, tape recordings and videotapes. Information about the type of material produced by DEECA is available on the DEECA website under its Part II Information Statement.

The FOI Act allows a department to refuse access, either fully or partially, to certain documents or information. Examples of documents that may not be accessed include cabinet documents; some internal working documents; law enforcement documents; documents covered by legal professional privilege, such as legal advice; personal information about other people; and information provided to a department in confidence and information that is confidential under another Act.

Under the FOI Act, the FOI processing time for requests received is 30 days. However, when external consultation is required under ss29, 29A, 31, 31A, 33, 34 or 35, the processing time is 45 days. Processing time may also be extended by periods of 30 days, in consultation with the applicant. With the applicant's agreement this may occur any number of times. However, obtaining an applicant's agreement for an extension cannot occur after the expiry of the timeframe for deciding a request.

If an applicant is not satisfied by a decision made by the Department, under section 49A of

the Act, they have the right to seek a review by the Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner (OVIC) within 28 days of receiving a decision letter.

Requests for documents in the possession of the Council should be addressed to:

Freedom of Information Officer
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
GPO Box 500
MELBOURNE VIC 3001
foi.unit@decca.vic.gov.au

The cost of an FOI application is \$33.60; however, access charges may also be payable if the document pool is large, and the search for material, time consuming.

Further information regarding the operation and scope of FOI can be obtained from the Act; regulations made under the Act; and Freedom of Information – Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner
<https://ovic.vic.gov.au>

Public Interest Disclosures Act 2012

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 2012 (PID Act) enables people to make a disclosure about corrupt or improper conduct by a public officer or a public body.

The Council is a public body for the purposes of the PID Act.

What is a public interest disclosure?

A public interest disclosure is a complaint of corrupt or improper conduct or detrimental action by a public officer or a public body.

‘Improper or corrupt conduct’ involves substantial mismanagement of public resources, risk to public health or safety or the environment, or corruption.

“Detrimental action” is action taken against a person in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure.

How do I make a public interest disclosure?

You can make a public interest disclosure about the Council or its members, officers or

employees by contacting IBAC (details following).

DEECA has established procedures for the protection of persons from detrimental action in reprisal for making a public interest disclosure about the Council, its board members, officers or employees.

A secure email disclosure process is available on IBAC’s website.

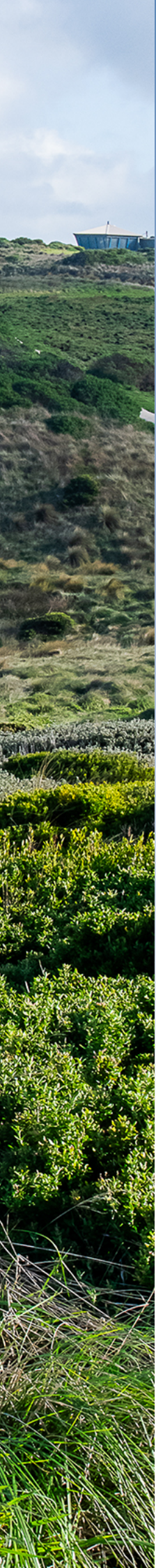
Independent Broad-Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC) Victoria

Address: Level 1, North Tower, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne Victoria 3000.

Mail: IBAC, GPO Box 24234, Melbourne Victoria 3001

Internet: www.ibac.vic.gov.au

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