

# Submission form: Victoria’s draft 30-year infrastructure strategy

## Your details

<b>Name:</b>	Mel Barker
<b>Organisation (if applicable):</b>	UNESCO Western Port Biosphere Foundation
<b>Position (if applicable):</b>	CEO
<b>Email:</b>	████████████████████
<b>Phone:</b>	██████████

## About you

Please tell us which best describes you:

Victorian resident

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Victorian business owner/operator

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Industry professional

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Community organisation representative

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Local government representative

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State government representative

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Researcher

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Other (please specify): Not-for-profit organisation that works with local governments and community to conserve the biodiversity and cultural values of the UNESCO-designated Western Port Biosphere Reserve.

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## Your focus areas

Select the topics or regions you are providing feedback on (select all that apply):

Topics	Regions
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Across sectors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Regional Victoria
<input type="checkbox"/> Circular economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Urban growth areas
<input type="checkbox"/> Cities	<input type="checkbox"/> Melbourne
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Climate change	
<input type="checkbox"/> Community infrastructure	
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Energy	
<input type="checkbox"/> Freight	
<input type="checkbox"/> Health	
<input type="checkbox"/> Housing	
<input type="checkbox"/> Infrastructure for Victoria's First Peoples	
<input type="checkbox"/> Transport	
<input type="checkbox"/> Water	

## Your feedback

Add as many sections as you need to provide all your feedback in this submission.

<b>Topic/area:</b>	Climate resilience / nature-based solutions
<b>Recommendation name:</b>	Better prepare infrastructure for climate change
<b>Recommendation number:</b>	27
1. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In part
2. Tell us why	<p>This recommendation briefly discusses the use of nature-based approaches to climate adaptation i.e. actions that protect, manage or restore ecosystems while also building resilience to climate change.</p> <p>Our efforts to protect and enhance the coastal ecosystems of the Western Port Biosphere Reserve region are an excellent example of a nature-based solution to build climate resilience.</p>
3. Share any supporting evidence or examples	<p>The Western Port Biosphere Reserve region includes 24% of Victoria's coastal wetlands, including mangroves, saltmarsh and seagrass. These ecosystems capture carbon at between 30 and 50 times that of equivalent areas of forest, while protecting coastal communities from climate hazards and providing habitat for the internationally significant biodiversity of the Western Port Ramsar Wetland.</p> <p>Protection and enhancement of coastal ecosystems has been central to Victoria's climate action strategy and zero carbon commitment to date. In 2023, the Victorian Government invested \$1.2 million in grants to the Western Port Biosphere Foundation and Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to improve coastal ecosystems and their potential for blue carbon capture.</p> <p>The grants enabled detailed site analysis and collaborative planning to identify options for protecting and enhancing habitats, and on-ground works including planting, fencing, and pest and weed control. The funded work has now been delivered, and we continue to seek funding to build upon it.</p>
4. Include proposed changes and improvements	We suggest including the Western Port Biosphere Reserve blue carbon project as a nature-based adaptation case study.

<b>Topic/area:</b>	Climate resilience / energy project site selection
<b>Recommendation name:</b>	Improve environmental assessments and site selection for energy projects
<b>Recommendation number:</b>	30
5. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> In part
6. Tell us why	<p>We support the recommendation that the Victorian Government should give industry clearer information on environmental conditions and good sites for energy projects to protect biodiversity and avoid project delays.</p> <p>Together with other organisations, we are advocating for a Strategic Framework for Western Port, including a Marine Spatial Plan, to provide clearer information on ecosystem values and inform appropriate site and design decisions for infrastructure projects.</p>
7. Share any supporting evidence or examples	<p>The draft infrastructure strategy discusses Victoria’s key role in offshore wind development and the challenges posed by sensitive environments around ports, including Port of Hastings, which is the proposed site of the Victorian Renewable Energy Terminal (VRET). The draft strategy notes that in 2023, the Australian Government denied environmental approvals to develop the VRET at Port of Hastings due to the impact on Western Port’s Ramsar wetlands.</p> <p>We are advocating for the immediate commencement of a Strategic Framework for Western Port, including a Marine Spatial Plan. This framework would provide clear understanding of Western Port’s values to support transparent, sustainable management of economic activities, long-term ecological health, and climate resilience. It would improve understanding of the cumulative impacts of development proposals in combination with other existing and planned activities, enabling decisions that embody Working with Nature and Nature Positive principles. This would foster social licence. The proposed framework has three pillars:</p> <p>i       <b>A new strategic plan</b> for Western Port bringing together objectives, actions and programs into a coordinated planning and management tool recognising natural and economic values.</p> <p>ii       <b>A new collaborative management partnership</b> bringing together Traditional Custodians, community representatives, government agencies, council, local business and industries, fishing and recreation groups to develop the plan and oversee implementation.</p> <p>iii       <b>A dedicated and ongoing Western Port fund</b> to deliver the plan, at least equivalent to the Port Phillip Bay fund.</p>

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8. Include proposed changes and improvements

We recommend the proposed Western Port Strategic Framework, including a Marine Spatial Plan, as a tool for that would assist the Victorian Government to provide clearer information on environmental conditions and appropriate infrastructure siting and design to protect biodiversity and avoid project delays. This model could be applied across Victoria.

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<b>Topic/area:</b>	Thriving natural environments
<b>Recommendation name:</b>	Better use government land for open space and greenery
<b>Recommendation number:</b>	26
9. Do you support this topic or recommendation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> In part
10. Tell us why	We consider the integration of an extensive biolink network into infrastructure planning with the UNESCO designated Western Port Biosphere Reserve and adjacent regions is essential to the maintenance of natural assets and community wellbeing.
11. Share any supporting evidence or examples	We partner with the four Councils fringing Western Port (Bass Coast, Cardinia, Casey and Mornington Peninsula), the three Landcare Networks and other key organisations such as Melbourne Water. In our experience, regional partnerships are required to ensure strategic planning of biolinks, as well as on-ground expertise to deliver them on both public and private land.
12. Include proposed changes and improvements	<p>We are seeing increasing fragmentation of habitats so consider that both public and private land needs to be considered in planning.</p> <p>At the moment, the focus in the draft Infrastructure Strategy is on urban areas, but we consider that similar issues arise in regional areas.</p>

## More feedback (optional)

Tell us about infrastructure challenges, gaps or opportunities not covered by the draft strategy. This can include things you think we should add to an existing recommendation, or suggestions for a new recommendation.

Please provide evidence for your suggestions. This can include data, specific examples, cost benefit analyses, surveys, or program evaluations. Also, explain how your suggestions align with the objectives of our draft strategy (see page 11 of the draft strategy).

Suggestions for new recommendations should point towards infrastructure opportunities that can deliver long-term benefits for Victorians. They should also be areas where the Victorian Government has a leading role.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on Victoria's draft infrastructure strategy. We would be pleased to brief you further regarding the matters outlined above.

