

Timeline of Coastal Policy and Planning in Victoria (1970s–2020s)

1970s

- **1970 – Environment Protection Act 1970:** Establishes the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and a framework for State Environment Protection Policies, including water quality regulations that benefit coastal waters[1].
- **1975 – National Parks Act 1975:** Provides a statutory basis for protecting natural areas, leading to the declaration and management of coastal national parks and reserves (e.g. Wilsons Promontory)[2].
- **1977 – Coastal Planning Policy (SPP No. 10):** The Town and Country Planning Board releases *Statement of Planning Policy No. 10 – Coastal Environments*, one of Victoria’s first statewide coastal policies, emphasizing protection of coastal areas[3][4].
- **1978 – Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:** Establishes a legal framework for reserving and managing Crown land, including coastal foreshore reserves, and provides for appointing local Committees of Management to care for these areas[5].

1980s

- **1987 – Planning and Environment Act 1987:** Overhauls Victoria’s planning system. It introduces State planning policies and requires that land use planning (including on private and Crown coastal land) be integrated into local planning schemes[6]. This sets the stage for coastal issues to be considered in statutory planning.
- **1988 – Victorian Coastal Policy (1988):** The state government releases a coastal policy document (1988) but with no dedicated legal framework or institutions to implement it. It was later described as “policy without implementation” due to the lack of on-ground effect[7].
- **1988 – Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988:** Victoria’s key biodiversity conservation law is enacted, providing tools to protect coastal flora, fauna, and ecological communities (e.g. listing beach-nesting birds as protected)[8].
- **1989 – Water Act 1989:** Introduces an integrated framework for water resource management. It indirectly supports coastal planning by promoting sustainable use of waterways and catchments that flow to the coast[9].

1990s

- **1994 – Coastal Management Review:** Amid growing concern about uncoordinated coastal development, a public review of coastal management (Wescott 1994) calls for integrated management and stronger institutions[10]. This, along with national

initiatives (e.g. the 1993 Coastal Zone Inquiry report), paved the way for legislative reform.

- **1995 – Coastal Management Act 1995:** Landmark legislation establishing an integrated framework for Victoria's coast[11]. It creates the Victorian Coastal Council (VCC) as a peak advisory body and three Regional Coastal Boards, and mandates preparation of a statewide Victorian Coastal Strategy every five years[12]. The Act also requires Coastal Action Plans at regional level and regulates use of coastal Crown land (consent for works).
- **1997 – First Victorian Coastal Strategy:** The VCC releases the *Victorian Coastal Strategy 1997*, the first comprehensive strategy under the new Act[13]. It sets out principles of coastal planning (e.g. protecting environmental and cultural values, directing development to appropriate areas) and establishes a framework for coordinated management of Victoria's 2,000+ km coastline[13].
- **1998 – Parks Victoria Established:** The *Parks Victoria Act 1998* creates Parks Victoria as a government authority[14]. Parks Victoria becomes a key coastal land manager (managing coastal national parks, marine parks, piers, etc.), consolidating responsibilities previously held by several agencies.
- **1999 – Regional Coastal Action Plans Begin:** Under the 1995 Act, Regional Coastal Boards develop targeted Coastal Action Plans (CAPs) to implement the strategy's goals. For example, the Gippsland Coastal Board publishes the **Gippsland Lakes Coastal Action Plan** in 1999[15] – one of the first CAPs, focusing on sustainable use and conservation of the Gippsland Lakes foreshore. These CAPs provide more detailed regional planning guidance consistent with the statewide strategy.

2000s

- **2002 – Second Victorian Coastal Strategy:** The *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2002* updates and refines the 1997 strategy[16]. Notably, it strengthens requirements for integrated coastal zone management and explicitly provides for the ongoing role of Regional Coastal Boards and their Coastal Action Plans[17]. By 2002, Coastal Boards in the west produce CAPs for the Great Ocean Road region (Central West and South West Coastal Action Plans 2002) to guide land-use and landscape protection along that iconic coastline[17][18].
- **2002 – Marine National Parks Established:** In a milestone for marine conservation, Victoria creates a system of **13 Marine National Parks and 11 Marine Sanctuaries** (effective 2002) – the first statewide network of fully protected marine areas in Australia[19]. These no-take parks (declared under the National Parks Act) protect significant marine habitats along the coast (covering ~5% of coastal waters) and reflect a growing recognition of marine environments in coastal planning.
- **2004 – Great Ocean Road Region Strategy:** The government releases the *Great Ocean Road Region – A Land Use and Transport Strategy* (April 2004) to manage growth and conservation in the Great Ocean Road coastal region[20]. This regional plan (covering coastal towns and hinterland from Torquay to Warrnambool)

responds to community concerns about ad-hoc development, aiming to protect scenic coastal landscapes and control urban sprawl in this iconic area[20].

- **2006 – Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006:** Introduced to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage, this Act requires assessment and management of heritage sites (such as coastal shell middens or sacred sites) when development is proposed[21]. It establishes the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council and extends important considerations for coastal planners regarding Traditional Owner heritage on the coast.
- **2008 – Third Victorian Coastal Strategy:** The *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008* is released and becomes a turning point by highlighting climate change as a critical issue[22]. For the first time, the strategy includes policy to plan for sea-level rise and increased coastal hazards. It adopts a planning benchmark of **not less than 0.8 metre sea-level rise by 2100**, echoing emerging science and national guidance[23][24]. This strategy's release in December 2008 is accompanied by major changes to the Victorian Planning Provisions to address climate risks.
- **Dec 2008 – Planning Scheme Amendments (VC52):** In concert with the 2008 Coastal Strategy, the State updates the planning policy framework. Amendment VC52 (gazetted in Dec 2008) inserts new policy (Clause 15.08 in the State Planning Policy Framework) requiring planners to **apply the precautionary principle** to coastal development in light of climate change, plan for at least 0.8 m sea-level rise by 2100, and avoid new development in high-risk coastal areas[25][26]. This enshrines climate adaptation into all local planning schemes.
- **Oct 2008 – Ministerial Direction No. 13:** The Planning Minister issues **Ministerial Direction No. 13: Managing Coastal Hazards and the Coastal Impacts of Climate Change**, effective late 2008[27]. This binding direction requires that any planning scheme amendments affecting coastal land (e.g. rezonings for development) must consider and address coastal climate change risks in accordance with the new policy. Complementing this, a **General Practice Note (2008)** on *Managing Coastal Hazards and Climate Change* is published by the Department[28]. It introduces the concept of a **Coastal Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (CHVA)** – a detailed risk assessment for proposed developments in coastal hazard areas – which quickly becomes standard practice[29][30].
- **July 2008 – Landmark VCAT Decision (Climate Change):** In *Gippsland Coastal Board v South Gippsland Shire Council (No 2) (2008)*, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) breaks new ground by overturning an approval for a small housing subdivision at Venus Bay due to projected sea-level rise[31]. VCAT applied the precautionary principle, finding a “reasonably foreseeable risk” that future coastal inundation (from climate change) would impact the site, and ruled that permitting the development would be poor planning[31]. This is one of the first cases in Australia where climate change risk led to refusal of a coastal development, and it affirmed the importance of the emerging policies.

2009–2010 (VCAT and Climate Adaptation)

- **2009 – *Myers v South Gippsland SC*:** In 2009, VCAT heard the *Myers* case concerning a two-lot coastal subdivision. In **Myers (No.1)**, the Tribunal found insufficient information on climate risk and, citing the new 2008 policies, ordered that a **Coastal Hazard Vulnerability Assessment (CHVA)** be prepared before any approval[32][33]. Later in **Myers (No.2)** (Nov 2009), after a CHVA was submitted, evidence showed that by 2100 the site (and access road) could be lost to dune erosion and storm surges[34][35]. VCAT refused the subdivision, concluding it would unjustifiably burden future generations and that in absence of a specific local policy framework, allowing the development would be a “poor planning outcome” in an era of rising seas[36][37]. This case set a precedent that developments must proactively assess and mitigate long-term coastal hazards.
- **2009 – *Ronchi v Wellington SC*:** Another pivotal 2009 case where VCAT considered two proposed dwellings on low-lying coastal land (between a creek and dunes at Seaspray). By this time, Amendment VC52 had elevated climate change in the planning scheme. VCAT held that the new policies placed a **greater onus on developers** to design for climate risks[38][39]. The Tribunal, following the approach in *Myers*, required the proponent to prepare a CHVA and ultimately refused the development pending that analysis[39]. *Ronchi* reinforced that councils and VCAT must ensure coastal inundation and erosion are addressed before permits are granted.
- **2010 – *Taip v East Gippsland SC*:** VCAT continues its climate-adaptive jurisprudence. In *Taip* (VCAT 2010), which involved a review of a permit for coastal residential development, the Tribunal found that simply **raising floor levels** of a building was an inadequate response to the “totality of climate change impacts”[40]. The proponent had elevated a planned house to mitigate flood risk, but VCAT held that other factors (like loss of access, coastal erosion, ecosystem impacts) also must be considered. This decision underscored that coastal adaptation in planning must be holistic, not just a matter of structural elevation.
- **2008–2013 – Future Coasts Program:** Alongside policy and legal changes, the state government invests in scientific assessment of coastal vulnerabilities. The *Future Coasts* program (2008–2013) conducts detailed mapping of elevation and landform (using LiDAR) and develops the **Victorian Coastal Inundation Dataset (2013)**, providing “second-pass” statewide hazard maps for sea-level rise and storm surge inundation[41][42]. These tools give planners and communities better information on which areas are at risk under future climate scenarios, informing both local planning schemes and regional adaptation plans.

2010s

- **2012 – Coastal Climate Change Advisory Committee:** The government-appointed Coastal Climate Change Advisory Committee delivers its report in 2012, reviewing the new climate-related planning provisions. In June 2012, Planning Minister

Matthew Guy releases the Committee's findings and his response[43]. While the Minister did not accept all recommendations (e.g. he rejected creating a new "Coastal Hazard Overlay" in planning schemes[44]), the process led to clearer guidance.

- Amendment **VC94 (July 2012)** effectively lowered Victoria's near-term risk benchmark by adopting an interim **+0.2 m by 2040** (via a 0.2 m freeboard on current flood levels) for existing settlements, while retaining 0.8 m by 2100 mainly for greenfield areas. This "two-speed" standard is **illogical from a risk-based perspective**: councils routinely approve assets with 30–80+ year lifespans, so dialing down the 2040 allowance locks in exposure and shifts future costs onto communities through retrofits, hard protection, and disaster recovery. Far from adding useful nuance, VC94 **privileged short-term development flexibility** over precaution and made later adaptation **harder and more expensive**. The government also committed to issue detailed guidelines to Catchment Management Authorities and release improved coastal inundation datasets[47] (which occurred through Future Coasts).
- **2014 – Fourth Victorian Coastal Strategy**: The *Victorian Coastal Strategy 2014* is published by the VCC as the last in the series of five-year strategies[48]. It sets a vision for the period up to 2019/2020, focusing on balancing development and protection, climate adaptation, and improving public access. The 2014 VCS highlights emerging issues such as increased erosion hotspots, the need to plan for **climate change beyond 0.8 m SLR** (e.g. planning allowances for even higher seas if warranted), and integrates new policies like the *Marine National Parks* and *planning practice notes* into a comprehensive coastal policy framework.
- **2014 – Community and Environmental Advocacy**: Around this time, civil society continues to influence coastal policy. The Victorian National Parks Association releases "*The Coast is Unclear*" (2014, Chris Smyth) – a major report reviewing the state's coastal planning and calling for reforms[49]. It points to fragmented responsibilities and gaps in marine planning. Similarly, community campaigns during the decade – such as opposition to an inappropriate boat ramp at Bastion Point (Mallacoota) and debates over Port Campbell and Western Port developments – underscore public demand for sustainable coastal management. These pressures contributed to the political commitment for new approaches.
- **2015 – Marine and Coastal Act Reforms Initiated**: The newly elected Labor government (Andrews Government) commits to modernize coastal and marine management. In mid-2015, an **Expert Panel** chaired by Professor Geoff Wescott is appointed to review Victoria's coastal laws[50]. The Panel (with broad stakeholder input) works through 2015–2016 to formulate what becomes the Marine and Coastal Act. This process acknowledged that while the 1995 Coastal Management Act had provided "extraordinary continuity" for 20 years[51], challenges such as climate change, marine environmental management, and overlapping governance warranted a new framework.

- **2017 – Climate Change Act 2017:** Victoria passes a new Climate Change Act, updating the 2010 version. This Act embeds climate change considerations across government decisions and creates a system of sectoral Adaptation Action Plans[52]. It reinforces that coastal management must incorporate climate risk. (Subsequently, a **Marine and Coastal Climate Change Adaptation Plan** is to be prepared under this framework as part of sectoral planning.)
- **2017 – Statewide Hazard Assessments:** Building on the Future Coasts work, the government completes a **Statewide Coastal Hazard Assessment (Second Pass)** in 2017[53]. This technical study refines understanding of coastal erosion and inundation threat levels for every coastal region of Victoria under various climate scenarios. At the same time, the **Victorian Coastal Monitoring Program (est. 2017)** is launched[54] – a long-term program engaging universities and community groups to monitor shoreline change (using drones, lidar and citizen science) in key areas like Port Phillip Bay, Western Port, and open coasts. These initiatives enhance the scientific basis for planning and emergency management along the coast.
- **2018 – Marine and Coastal Act 2018:** A major reform, the Marine and Coastal Act 2018 comes into effect on 1 August 2018, **repealing and replacing the Coastal Management Act 1995**[55]. This new Act expands the scope to include marine waters (not just the shoreline) and aims for truly integrated coastal and marine planning[56]. It establishes guiding principles (such as ecosystem-based management and equitable use) and updates institutional arrangements: the Act **abolishes the Victorian Coastal Council and Regional Coastal Boards**, replacing them with a new **Marine and Coastal Council** to advise the Minister[57][58]. Regional planning is to be achieved through flexible **Regional and Strategic Partnerships (RASPs)** rather than standing Boards. In practice, this weakened the coast's independent voice at the regional scale: the old Boards could act as clear **champions for coastal outcomes**, put uncomfortable issues on the public record, and, where necessary, supported more direct escalation (including participating in statutory processes and challenging planning decisions). The newer partnership model is more collaborative, but it is typically less equipped (and less mandated) to act as an assertive regional watchdog or to help drive (or support) robust challenges when coastal values are being eroded. The Act also mandates key policy instruments – a statewide **Marine and Coastal Policy**, a **Marine and Coastal Strategy** every 5 years, and **State of the Marine and Coastal Environment** reporting – to ensure strategic direction and accountability[58]. Transitional provisions allowed the existing 2014 Coastal Strategy to remain in effect until the new Policy was prepared.
- **2018 – Other Reforms:** The same year sees related changes: an updated **Parks Victoria Act 2018** (making Parks Victoria a standalone statutory authority)[59], and an **Environment Protection Amendment Act 2018** strengthening pollution controls[60] (which would support healthier coasts). Meanwhile, the long-standing **Victorian Coastal Council** is farewelled as the Marine & Coastal Council is formed (inaugurated with new members in late 2018).

2020s

- **2020 – Marine and Coastal Policy 2020:** Under the new Act, the government releases the first Marine and Coastal Policy in March 2020. This comprehensive policy replaces the Victorian Coastal Strategy series[61]. It sets a 15-year vision for “a healthy, dynamic and biodiverse marine and coastal environment” and provides detailed policy directions for decision-makers across themes like climate change, sustainable development, ecosystem protection, and public access[62][63]. Notably, the 2020 Policy introduces a Marine Spatial Planning Framework to guide the future allocation of marine space for various uses[64] – a first for Victoria. It also reaffirms the planning benchmarks for sea-level rise (0.8 m by 2100, with allowance to plan for higher in vulnerable areas) and calls for developing local adaptation plans.
- **2020 – VEAC Coastal Reserves Assessment:** The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) completes its *Assessment of Victoria’s Coastal Reserves* in 2020[65]. This report inventories some 1,200 coastal public land reserves (outside of parks) and evaluates their environmental, social and cultural values and the risks they face (e.g. from climate change and development)[65]. The assessment provides the government with recommendations on rationalising and improving management of these reserves. It is a significant milestone in understanding and planning for coastal Crown land outside the major parks – many of these reserves (foreshore strips, cliffs, wetlands) are essential for conservation and community use.
- **2020 – Great Ocean Road Authority:** In September 2020, the **Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020** is passed, reflecting a targeted regional reform. This Act declares the Great Ocean Road coastal region a single, integrated and living entity, and it **establishes the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GORCAPA)**[66]. The new Authority (operational from December 2020) centralizes management of public land along the Great Ocean Road, taking over from various local committees and state agencies. Importantly, the Act embeds Traditional Owner involvement in governance and enshrines principles of ecological and cultural heritage protection for the famed Great Ocean Road coastal parks[66]. The reform was driven by years of community concern over fragmented management and was informed by a 2018 Great Ocean Road Taskforce and Action Plan.
- **2021 – Planning Practice and Tools:** The early 2020s see continued improvements in coastal planning tools. For example, updated **Planning Practice Note 53: Managing Coastal Hazards and Coastal Impacts of Climate Change** is released (with a 2021 and later 2023 revision), giving planners and developers practical guidance on assessing coastal risk in proposals[67]. The practice note works in tandem with **Ministerial Direction 13** (still in force) and reinforces the need for Coastal Hazard Vulnerability Assessments for developments in coastal inundation or erosion-prone areas[68][69]. **Amendment VC171** gazetted 6 September 2021 amends the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPP) and all **planning schemes** “to implement the Marine and Coastal Policy”, specifically to support coastal hazard

planning and sea level rise adaptation, and update policy references. Additionally, the government develops **Victoria's Resilient Coast – Adapting for 2100+** strategy and guidelines (a statewide climate adaptation framework for the coast, completed around 2022), to assist regional and local decision-makers in long-term planning for sea-level rise and extreme events.

- **2022 – Marine and Coastal Strategy 2022:** Fulfilling the requirements of the 2018 Act, the government launches the first **Marine and Coastal Strategy** in May 2022[70][71]. This five-year strategy serves as an action plan to implement the 2020 Policy. It outlines **six priority areas** and **45 specific actions** to be pursued by 2027[71]. Key actions include: supporting Traditional Owners' leadership in sea-country management, accelerating climate change adaptation (through local vulnerability assessments and adaptation plans), enhancing coastal habitat restoration (e.g. saltmarsh and mangroves), improving coordination among agencies, progressing marine spatial planning (with pilots in Port Phillip Bay), and assisting private landowners to manage erosion and inundation risks[71][72]. The Strategy's implementation is backed by new funding in 2022–23 for coastal asset protection and community projects[73]. It represents a move toward more proactive and collaborative management, continuing Victoria's integrated coastal management journey.
- **2025 – Changes to Coastal Institutions:** In late 2025, the Victorian Government announces the **abolition of the Marine and Coastal Council** (which had succeeded the VCC in 2018) as part of public sector cost-saving measures[74]. This decision, raising concern among coastal stakeholders, effectively removes the independent expert advisory body that was providing strategic advice and overseeing policy implementation. Observers note that this ends a 30-year tradition (since 1995) of an independent coastal council guiding statewide coastal strategy[75][76]. The government indicated that coastal governance will be streamlined within departments, but the move has prompted public debate about maintaining accountability and long-term vision for Victoria's coasts in the face of rising climate challenges. (As of 2026, the **Marine and Coastal Act 2018** itself remains in force, and statutory requirements like the 5-yearly strategy and reporting still apply, albeit with new administrative arrangements.)

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- Marine and Coastal Act 2018 (Vic) – No. 26/2018; establishes new governance, policy and strategy requirements[57][58].
- Victorian Coastal Strategy 1997, 2002, 2008, 2014 – prepared by the VCC under CMA 1995[77][22].
- Marine and Coastal Policy 2020 – Victorian Government (DELWP), pursuant to Marine and Coastal Act[61].

- Marine and Coastal Strategy 2022 – Victorian Government (DEECA), 5-year action plan under 2018 Act[71].
- Great Ocean Road and Environs Protection Act 2020 (Vic) – establishes GOR Coast and Parks Authority[66].
- Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Vic) – establishes planning framework[6]; **Amendment VC52 (2008)** and **VC94 (2012)** – key coastal/climate policy updates[25][45].
- Ministerial Direction No. 13 (2008) – *Managing Coastal Hazards and Coastal Impacts of Climate Change*, Vic. Govt Gazette 2008 (applicable to planning scheme amendments)[27].
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- VCAT Red Dot Decisions: *Gippsland Coastal Board v South Gippsland SC (No 2)* [2008] VCAT 1545[31]; *Myers v South Gippsland SC* [2009] VCAT 1022; *Ronchi v Wellington SC* [2009] VCAT 1206; *Taip v East Gippsland SC* [2010] VCAT 1222 – influential cases on coastal climate adaptation in planning.

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