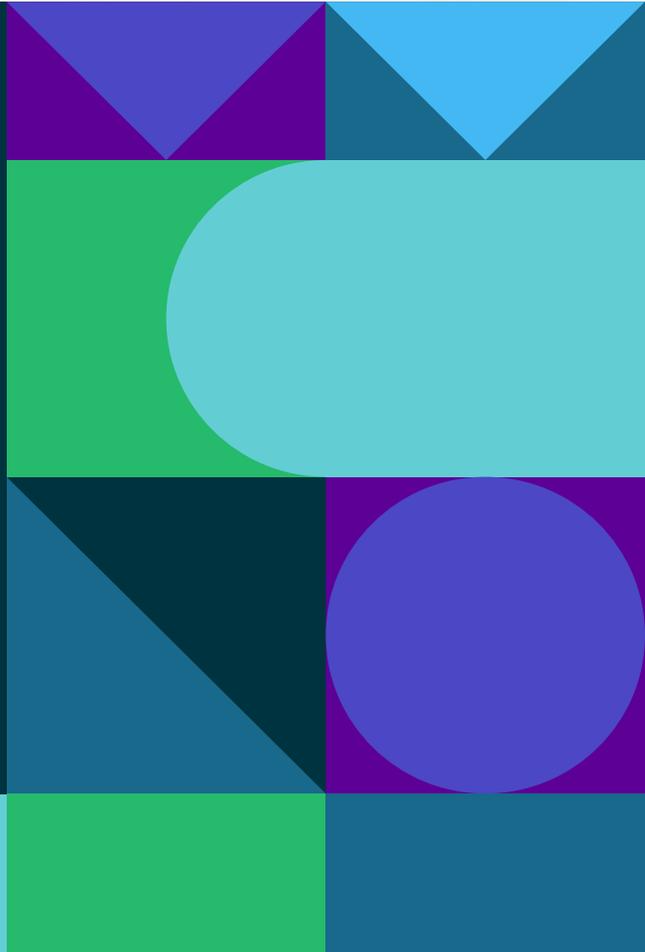




# Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan Updated April 2024



Alpine Resorts  
Victoria



Authorised and published by

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## Aboriginal Acknowledgement

The Gunaikurnai, Taungurung and Wurundjeri are the First Peoples of much of Victoria's alpine resorts country. For generations they have owned and managed the land. The Victorian Government acknowledges all the Traditional Owners of Victoria's alpine resorts and pays its respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

ARV recognises and values the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal people and communities to Victorian life, and how this enriches all Victorians.

ARV recognises that Aboriginal cultures and communities are diverse, and in the importance of celebrating these cultures and communities. ARV acknowledges that the land is of spiritual, cultural and economic importance to Aboriginal people. ARV also recognises the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners to Country and acknowledge their contribution in the management of land, water, natural landscapes and built environments. ARV embraces the spirit of reconciliation, working towards the equality of outcomes and ensuring an equal voice. ARV has distinct legislative obligations to Traditional Owner groups that are paramount in its responsibilities managing Victoria's resources.



**Alpine Resorts  
Victoria**



# Preface

The *Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2020–2025 (ARSP)* is the key strategic tool currently leading Victoria’s alpine sector.

Following the transition to the single entity, Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV), the Minister requested ARV review and update the existing plan to reflect both the significant impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the sector and the establishment of ARV by the Minister to facilitate alpine governance reform.

To meet this directive, ARV has undertaken an internal review of the existing ARSP and updated it. This includes affirming the long-term strategic objectives for the alpine resorts and associated sector and resort priorities set out in the current ARSP.

The updated ARSP provides strategic direction that reflects the establishment of ARV as a single entity, is informed by engagement with relevant stakeholders, considers the global operating context for the resorts post-pandemic, and sits alongside guiding policies and plans.

It will help ARV and the broader alpine sector to achieve government’s objectives to create economic resilience and financial sustainability for Victoria’s alpine sector, recognising its importance to the State’s visitor economy.

At the conclusion of this plan in 2025, ARV will undertake a comprehensive, sector-wide review to better understand the economic and strategic landscape of the alpine resorts. A new plan will then be developed in consultation with stakeholders, reflecting the refreshed direction of the sector and with a focus on collaboration and transparency. This next ARSP will be a plan that recognises the imperative of responding to climate change and encompasses the needs and opportunities for the sector in its entirety, ensuring that all facets of Victoria’s alpine resorts work towards common goals and success.

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# Executive Summary

The Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2020–2025 (Updated April 2024) serves as the foundational roadmap guiding Victoria’s alpine sector through an evolving landscape marked by significant challenges and opportunities. This updated strategic plan, crafted in response to directives from the Minister and informed by stakeholder engagement, aims to ensure the sector’s sustainability, economic resilience, and adaptation to climate change.

## Vision

The vision driving this plan is for Victoria’s alpine resorts to achieve their potential as thriving, sustainable destinations for mountain activities and nature-based tourism. Central to this vision is the integration of climate change adaptation into all activities and a commitment to collaborative planning and decision-making processes that strengthen partnerships across the sector.

## Strategic Objectives

The plan outlines four key strategic objectives:

- 1. Enable Investment that Drives Sustainable Businesses**
  - > Focus on securing support for diverse tourism and recreational activities to bolster the economic viability of the alpine resorts.
  - > Guide investment and development through the Victorian Alpine Resorts Visitor Economy Development (VARVED) plan.
- 2. Protect and Enhance the Alpine Environment**
  - > Emphasise environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation to preserve the natural beauty and ecological integrity of the alpine regions.
- 3. Enhance the Visitor Experience**
  - > Improve facilities, services, and overall visitor satisfaction to maintain and grow the resorts’ appeal as premier tourist destinations.
- 4. Implement Practical Policy and Regulatory Reform**
  - > Streamline policies and regulations to foster innovation, efficiency, and responsiveness within the alpine sector.

## Economic Significance

Victoria’s six declared alpine resorts are pivotal to the state’s economy, in 2024 estimated at contributing \$2.14 billion annually and generating approximately 12,130 direct and indirect jobs. The resorts attract over 1.38 million visitors yearly, significantly impacting the regional economy by contributing 9% to regional visitor economy jobs and visitor spending, and 31% of visitors to the High Country tourism region.

## Challenges and Adaptations

The COVID-19 pandemic profoundly affected the alpine sector, necessitating a pause and subsequent reassessment of the original strategic plan. The formation of Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) as a single entity in October 2022 marked a strategic shift aimed at consolidating governance and enhancing operational efficiency.

## Implementation and Review

The updated plan is divided into two components: the main document, which includes the vision, strategic objectives, and guiding actions, and the Action Plan, a dynamic document outlining specific actions, measures, targets, and outcomes for the remaining 18 months of the plan. This live document will be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure the plan remains responsive to emerging priorities and changing conditions.

In conclusion, the Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2020–2025 (Updated April 2024) sets a clear and adaptive path for Victoria’s alpine resorts, balancing economic goals with environmental stewardship and community engagement to secure a vibrant future for the sector.

# Vision Statement and Strategic Objectives

## Vision Statement

*The Victorian alpine resorts achieve their potential as thriving and sustainable destinations for mountain activities and nature-based tourism.*

To achieve this vision ARV must embed climate change adaptation in all its activities and continue its collaborative approach to planning and decision making to strengthen stakeholder partnerships. ARV must build financial resilience to ensure the ongoing sustainability and growth of Victoria's unique alpine resorts and maximise opportunities for the alpine sector. Achieving the sector's full potential requires actively planning pathways together to a new future. ARV will achieve this by delivering on four strategic objectives.

## Strategic Objectives

*The Victorian alpine resorts achieve their potential as thriving and sustainable destinations for mountain activities and nature-based tourism.*



### INVESTMENT

Enable investment that drives sustainable businesses



### ENVIRONMENT

Protect the alpine environment and drive climate change adaptation



### VISITORS

Enhance the visitor experience



### REFORM

Address industry priorities and deliver practical alpine reform

# 01 Background

Victoria has six declared alpine resorts: Falls Creek, Lake Mountain, Mt Baw Baw, Mt Buller, Mt Stirling, and Mt Hotham. They lie in the east and northeast of Victoria, between 120km and 380km from Melbourne. A detailed profile of each of the alpine resorts can be found on their respective websites.



## Victoria's alpine resorts

Victoria's alpine resorts are iconic state tourism attractions, and key economic contributors to the regional economy, responsible for generating \$2.14b per annum to Victoria's economic output and creating approximately 12,130 direct and indirect jobs.

Attracting 1.38m visitors in 2022, the alpine resorts are a key pillar of Victoria's visitor economy. Visitation to the resorts generates significant economic contribution to the State, generating 9% of regional visitor economy jobs and visitor spend, and 31% of visitors to the High Country tourism region.

The winter snow season is the primary economic base for the resorts, with 70% of annual visitation, and 86% of visitor expenditure occurring between June and September. The non-winter or 'green' season attracts a smaller audience and offers an opportunity for visitation growth to enhance year-round sustainability.

The larger northern resorts (Falls Creek, Mt Buller, Mt Hotham) have extensive lifting and village infrastructure, and operate as small towns throughout the year. Historically (i.e., prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) these resorts were financially self-sustaining, generating income and cash reserves for future investment. They are also sites of significant private investment.

The resorts of Lake Mountain, Mt Baw Baw and Mt Stirling have smaller-scale infrastructure and provide an entry level, lower-cost opportunity to access the Victorian alps and a pathway for people to take up snow sports. These resorts make a significant contribution to meeting the demand for safe and affordable access to the alps for people of varied cultural and economic groups.

The challenge for ARV in partnership with the broader sector, is to find a model of economic resilience and financial sustainability for all resorts, encouraging ongoing investment in the sector, and meeting the needs of a diverse audience base without compromising the unique and important role each resort plays in the tourism landscape.

# 01 Background

## Legislative framework

The statutory functions for the management of the alpine resorts are defined by the *Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997* (the Act), with amendments adopted in March 2022.

The object of the Act is to promote:

- (a) the management, development, promotion and use of alpine resorts that takes into account the following factors—
  - (i) the unique characteristics of each alpine resort;
  - (ii) the environment and ecology of the resorts and the effect of climate change on them;
  - (iii) economic considerations in relation to the resorts;
  - (iv) the cultural heritage and landscape of the resorts, including Indigenous cultural heritage and the provisions of any relevant traditional owner recognition and settlement agreement; and
- (b) provision for the use of alpine resorts in all seasons of the year by persons from different cultural and economic groups, primarily for the purposes of recreation and tourism.

## Roles of Ministers and Departments

The Minister for Environment is responsible for the alpine resorts on behalf of the State. The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) is responsible for advising the Minister on alpine resort matters. This includes policy and strategic planning, legislation and regulatory reform, environmental matters and governance oversight of ARV.

The Minister for Planning is the Responsible Authority and the Planning Authority for the alpine resorts. The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) administers the Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme on behalf of the Minister for Planning.

## Economic significance of Victoria's alpine resorts

**Modelling by Urban Enterprise in November 2023 quantifies the economic contribution of the Victorian alpine resorts and identifies the value of the resorts to both regional economies and the state of Victoria.**

This analysis demonstrates that the alpine resorts help boost economic activity in regions and provide significant employment opportunities that should be preserved and built upon. While these figures demonstrate that the snow season remains the engine of the alpine resort's economy, the contribution from the green season is notable. Not only is the sector a major economic contributor, but analysis shows that the economic power of the sector is still growing significantly."

During the 2022 snow season, Victorian alpine resorts received 1.08 million visitors and 1.90 million visitor days. This level of visitation represents a 58% increase in visitors and a 48% increase in visitor days compared with the 10-year average from 2012 to 2022. Visitation for 2022 was up by 16% per cent and visitor days were up by 12% compared with the 2019 season (the last season of reliable data before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted visitation).

The 2021–22 green season saw 192,667 vehicles\* enter the resort, which was a slight decrease on the previous year's visitation of 229,760 vehicles. However, when compared with pre-pandemic visitation, the 2021–22 green season visitation was 32% above the 2019–20 green season which saw 145,660 vehicles enter the resorts.

The Victorian alpine resorts generate significant economic activity for the State through the attraction of Victorian, interstate and international visitors. The GSP contribution of the 2022 snow season to the Victorian economy is estimated at \$1.3 billion and the 2021–22 green season at \$204 million. This combined level of expenditure results in a contribution to total Victorian employment in annual equivalent terms of approximately 14,300 direct and indirect jobs.

The economic performance of the alpine resorts becomes more significant when considered in a regional context. The alpine resorts draw significant numbers of people to regional Victoria and keep them there through overnight stays, resulting in a transfer of spending from the capital cities into regional Victoria. The fact the resorts can do this in winter, usually the quietest time for regional tourism, is also noteworthy. It is likely that the alpine resorts are the number one tourist attraction in regional Victoria in the period between June and October each year, creating jobs and economic activity for their regional communities.

\* In green season vehicle occupant numbers are not recorded, only vehicles.



## Establishment of Alpine Resorts Victoria

Historically the resorts were managed by four separate Alpine Resort Management Boards (ARMBs); Falls Creek, Mt Buller & Mt Stirling, Mt Hotham and Southern (Mt Baw Baw and Lake Mountain).

In March 2021, the Victorian Government announced that the four ARMBs would merge into one entity, known as ARV. There were several key drivers for this reform:

- > **Financial stability**  
Improving the economic viability of the alpine sector, both now and into the future.
- > **Contemporary governance**  
Implementing a modern and fit-for-purpose legislative and governance framework that increases transparency and accountability, and that can provide sector-wide leadership.
- > **Adapting to climate change**  
Strengthening climate change mitigation and planning across the sector.
- > **Functional efficiency**  
Improving coordination in managing the resorts, removing duplication and enhancing strategic and operational deliverables.
- > **COVID-19 recovery**  
Delivering a roadmap out of COVID-19, recognising the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on the resorts and alpine sector.

Within this context, and consistent with the object of the Act, ARV was established on 1 October 2022 to promote the management, development, promotion, and use of Victoria's six alpine resorts.

The establishment of ARV brings the management of the resorts together into one organisation that replaces the ARMBs.

ARV is a statutory authority that reports to the Minister for Environment and is subject to the general direction and control of the Minister. ARV is a body corporate and is considered a public body for the purposes of the *Financial Management Act 1994*.

The alpine resorts are permanent Crown land reserves. ARV is deemed to be Crown land manager under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978* and has the same powers and functions as a Crown land reserves Committee of Management.



### Principles of Alpine Resorts Victoria

The *Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997* (the Act) outlines the principles by which ARV must operate in performing its functions:

- a) protecting the unique environmental, social, cultural and economic characteristics of each alpine resort;
- b) planning for and managing all alpine resorts in a coordinated manner that adapts to and responds to the impacts and risks of climate change;
- c) the ongoing impact of the use of the alpine resorts on natural and cultural features and the ecology of the alpine resorts;
- d) respecting, protecting and promoting Aboriginal self-determination, cultural values, practices, heritage and knowledge in the alpine resorts;
- e) partnering with traditional owners in policy development, planning, and decision-making in the alpine resorts;
- f) protecting and enhancing the amenity, access and use of each alpine resort, for the benefit and enjoyment of current and future generations of all Victorians; and
- g) promoting investment in a diverse range of tourism and recreation experiences.

### Functions of the Alpine Resorts Victoria

The functions of ARV are described in the Act, under the principles outlined above. Some functions are long-term or strategic in nature, whilst at resort level many are operational. The statutory functions of ARV as set out in Section 21 of the Act are:

- > To manage each alpine resort in accordance with the object of the Act and alpine resorts principles.
- > To develop the Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan and undertake other strategic planning for the development, promotion, management, and improvement of alpine resorts.
- > To provide strategic tourism activities and marketing.
- > To act as a committee of management for Crown land reserves.
- > To arrange for the provision of services for each alpine resort (such as essential services, snowmaking, ski patrol, transport).
- > To charge contributions for the services provided by ARV within the alpine resorts.
- > To determine and collect fees for each alpine resort in accordance with the regulations.
- > To attract investment for the improvement of the alpine resorts.
- > To advise the Minister on matters relating to these functions or powers or on any other matter referred to ARV by the Minister.
- > To liaise with and encourage the co-operation of all State and local government authorities, industries, communities, and other persons involved in the development, promotion, management, and use of alpine resorts.
- > To carry out any other function conferred on ARV by or under the Act or any other Act

## Partnerships and stakeholders

The alpine resort sector is a network of inter-related partners and stakeholders, that together create an ecosystem for collaboration and communication. If the sector is to thrive, then all participants need to be part of the journey. ARV recognises the importance of maintaining and developing relationships with all partners and stakeholders, as well as delivering on statutory obligations through legislation.

Operating as a single entity, ARV is now well-placed to lead coordination and collaboration, focusing on matters that are of sector-wide importance and facilitating enhanced stakeholder engagement across a range of private and public organisations and agencies within Victoria and interstate, and to foster collaboration between resorts.

### Traditional Owners

ARV recognises that Traditional Owners have never surrendered their connection to their Country; the cultural connection to the land has always been strong and continues to grow.

Although significantly developed and modified in parts, the alpine resorts rest within a culturally rich landscape. This includes the traditional country of three Registered Aboriginal Parties:

- > Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation within lands of the Mt Baw and Mt Hotham resorts.
- > Taungurung Land and Waters Council within lands of the Lake Mountain, Mt Buller, Mt Stirling, and Mt Hotham resorts.
- > Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation within lands of the Lake Mountain resort.

It is recognised that there are other First Nations groups which also have connection to and assert interest and rights in alpine country.

The resorts contain culturally sensitive areas, with many sites registered for protection through the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. ARV has a responsibility to respect and protect Aboriginal cultural heritage through this Act and its regulations.

The resorts and their stakeholders are committed to building on the considerable work already done, nurturing and growing existing and new relationships and partnering with Traditional Owners in matters of policy development, planning, and decision-making in the management of the resorts.



### Stakeholder Consultative Committees

The Act outlines ARV's approach to stakeholder consultation through the creation of Stakeholder Consultative Committees (SCCs). Enabling stakeholders to directly communicate with ARV on the strategic and operational matters that affect them at each resort, the SCCs are the primary tool used by ARV to ensure consultation.

SCCs herald a new era of transparency and collaboration for the alpine sector, providing meaningful, two-way conduits for information and advice.

To ensure the unique characteristics of each resort and local matters are considered by ARV, the function of the SCCs is to give ARV the opinions and response of the community of each resort about:

- > matters relating to the promotion, operation, management, development, and use of the resort;
- > strategic matters affecting alpine resorts and surrounding communities (including First Nations people);
- > the development of the Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan; and
- > matters relating to fees and contributions for the provision of services by ARV.

ARV is committed to ensuring that each resort's SCC has the information, resources and support required to best serve their respective communities, and that all matters of deliberation and discussion are met with a spirit of receptiveness and openness to support local matters being raised, heard, and considered.

### Private business and industry

Many of the day-to-day services that underpin the visitor experience, including food and drink, accommodation, ski lifts, lessons, rental, retail and tourism activities, are provided by private businesses. The exception to this is Mt Baw Baw and Lake Mountain, where ARV currently delivers a number of these services.

Private businesses underpin the operating model of the larger resorts and provide commercially sustainable and viable tourism products that complete the recreation options available to guests. Supporting private business to thrive, and create vibrant resorts and villages, is critical to the economic sustainability of the sector.

ARV recognises the fundamental importance of the private sector partners in making the alpine resorts what they are today. It is crucial that alpine resort businesses are financially sustainable and that barriers to further investment are minimised so that the resorts can continue to thrive into the future.

From an ARV perspective, continual investment in resort infrastructure and essential services is crucial to attracting private sector investment and ensuring the resorts can provide an appropriate and appealing location to invest in comparison to other tourism destinations.



### Local government and land managers

It is important to recognise the role the resorts play in the wider economic, social and natural landscape, surrounded geographically by a number of land managers, including local government, Parks Victoria and DEECA.

The resorts interface with Mansfield, Alpine, Baw Baw and Murrindindi shires, and their 'valley' towns deliver significant support to the resorts, often providing local staff and hosting staff accommodation. These towns supplement resort services such as food and beverage and accommodation and offer services most resorts don't, such as fuel stations, banks and hospitals, thereby increasing the attraction of the resort offering to holiday makers and staff, and further strengthening the regional tourism offer.

In addition, many resort tourism products are not confined to the resort boundaries, crossing into public land. For example, resort trails, including the Mt Buller Mt Stirling EPIC mountain bike trail, and the cross-country trials at Lake Mountain, traverse land managed by Parks Victoria and DEECA. Working collaboratively with these partner agencies will be critical to ensure the ongoing provision of these tourism products.

Through formal channels, such as the SCCs, and through ongoing communication and engagement with stakeholders, ARV will continue to work to build relationships that support sustainable growth and development across the region, to ensure the mutual benefits of a thriving, sustainable alpine sector.

### Regional Tourism Boards

Regional Tourism Boards (RTB) are appointed by the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) and are responsible, at a regional level, for destination marketing, industry and product development and sector advocacy.

Membership of the RTBs sits at resort level, with the northern resorts, Mt Buller, Falls Creek, Mt Hotham, Mt Stirling and Lake Mountain falling within the Victoria's High Country region, whilst Mt Baw Baw is represented by Destination Gippsland.

RTBs are influential in setting regional priorities and are a key point of contact between local industry, resorts and government. As such, ARV will continue to support the advocacy efforts of the RTBs, leverage opportunities presented by engagement at a regional level, and encourage and facilitate industry to maximise resources and support provided by the RTBs.

# 05 Context

The alpine resorts have made a significant contribution to Victoria's economy for decades. However, the resorts are changing, and the sector must adapt to these changes and embrace the opportunities to grow regional economies, nurture environmental assets, and build partnerships.

Every five-year strategic plan helps build the foundation for a long-term sustainable alpine resort sector. Understanding the economic, social and cultural significance of the resorts, and the challenges they face provides context for the strategic actions identified in this plan.

## Climate change

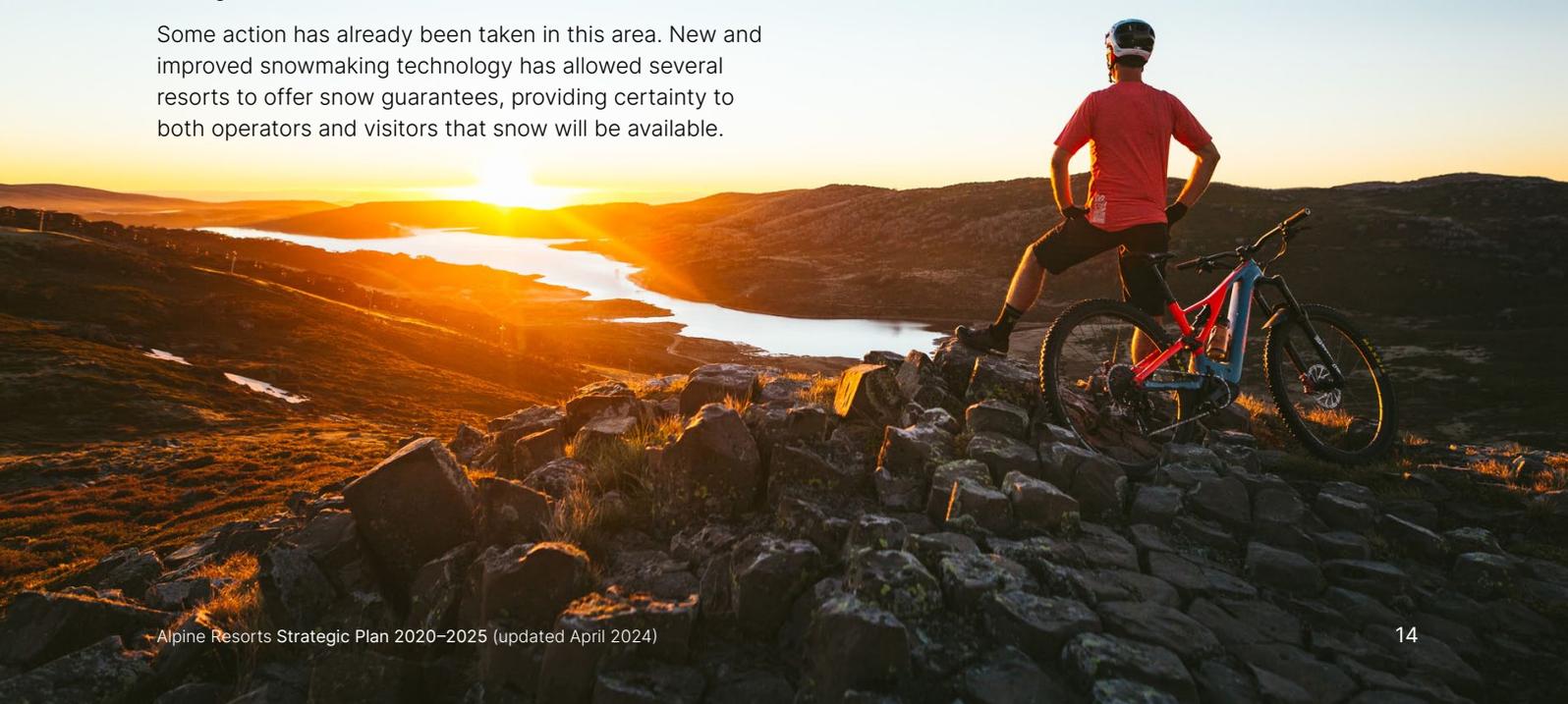
Climate change is the single largest threat to Victoria's alpine sector and the precious alpine environment within which the resorts operate. The world is warming, natural snowfalls are declining, the oceans are changing, and extreme climatic events are becoming more frequent. The increased prevalence of extreme weather events including storm activity, altered fire regimes, changes to rainfall and access to water are all pressures that are already manifesting themselves in the alpine resorts.

These changes pose significant challenges for the management of the resorts, which require rapid responses to adapt in the face of climate change. As the key visitation driver for an alpine experience, it is critical to protect and manage natural and manufactured snowfalls.

Some action has already been taken in this area. New and improved snowmaking technology has allowed several resorts to offer snow guarantees, providing certainty to both operators and visitors that snow will be available.

Snowmaking technology continues to improve as climate change impacts alpine resorts around the world. However, the sector will need to be mindful of both the resources (water and power) and financial constraints of snowmaking when making investment decisions, and the sector as a whole needs to further adapt and change in response to climate change impacts.

To achieve appropriate adaptation and mitigation for the sector, ARV will lead the creation of the Victorian Alpine Resorts Climate Change Adaptation Strategy to provide an overview of the expected impacts of climate change on Victoria's alpine resorts and its effects, and practical actions that ARV will undertake to adapt to climate change to protect individuals, communities, infrastructure, and natural systems to increase the overall resilience of the resorts. Importantly the Strategy will be underpinned by science and analysis to inform decision-making, to help prioritise areas for adaptation, and to choose the best responses.



# 05 Context

## New governance

As detailed in Section 3, the management and strategic development of the alpine resorts of Mt Hotham, Falls Creek, Mt Buller, Mt Stirling, Mt Baw Baw and Lake Mountain came under the responsibility of the single entity, Alpine Resorts Victoria (ARV) on 1 October 2022. This follows the direction of the Minister for Environment and Climate Action to amalgamate the governance arrangements of the resorts.

This governance change represents a significant shift for the Victorian alpine sector in terms of its operating environment. Strategic Objective 4 details how ARV will lead the sector through this period of transition, to create a sustainable future for all.

## Economic recovery

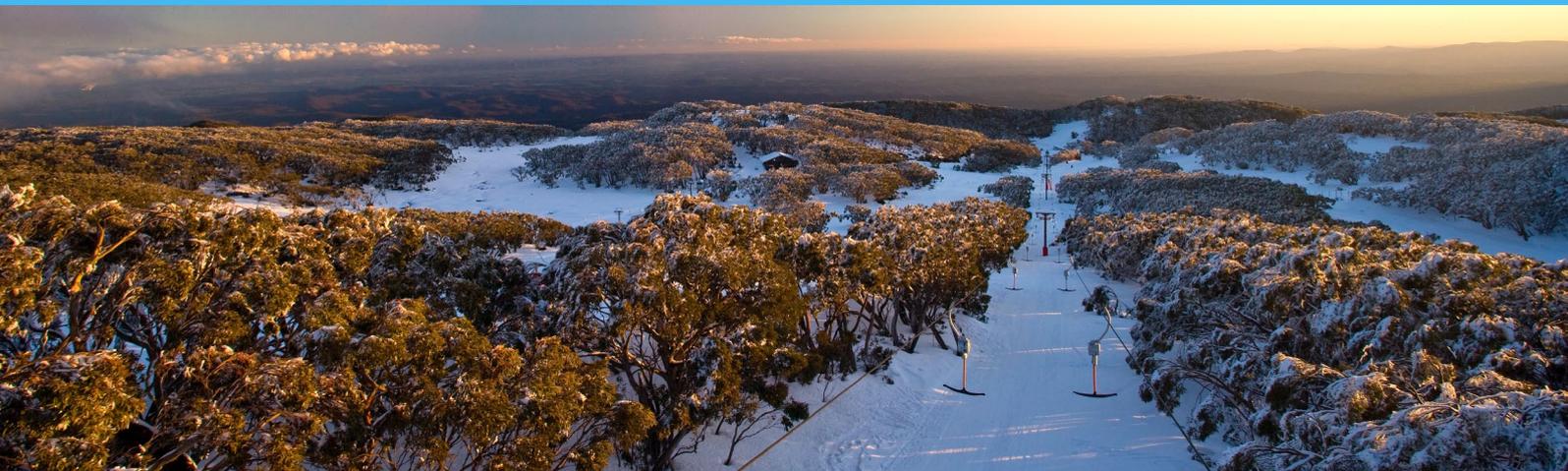
The visitor economy in alpine resorts is still very much in recovery mode following the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw nearly two entire snow seasons decimated due to the impact of travel restrictions at an estimated loss of up to \$2.2 billion in tourism expenditure to the High Country region.

This loss compounded further losses experienced as a result of was compounded by the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires that saw access to the resorts cut off for periods of time (plus the hesitancy of visitors with fires in other parts of the State that were not directly impacting the resorts), as well as the summer closure of Falls Creek in 2022–23 due to a landslide that closed the Bogong High Plains Road. These two disasters resulted in economic losses of up to \$208 million (for the High Country region) and \$64.6 million (for Falls Creek only) respectively.

Whilst the 2022 snow season saw record visitation with over 1.08 million people visiting the alpine resorts, the impact of such massive economic losses will continue to have a long tail of recovery, during a time when ARV's financial position remains uncertain. These disasters, combined with ARV remaining under a letter of comfort with DEECA, as well as being tasked with finding a financially sustainable solution for the Southern resorts' deficit, create significant challenges in the path to financial prosperity.



# 05 Context



## Impacts of COVID-19

The pandemic significantly impacted the resorts, which lost nearly their entire 2020 winter season visitation, followed by a compromised 2021 season. Indeed, while the resorts were able to open on the June Queen's Birthday Long Weekend in 2021, they were challenged by a series of COVID related lockdowns that once again significantly impacted visitation. This included:

- > State-wide COVIDSafe lockdowns that resulted in the resorts being closed to all visitors for a period of 32 days, primarily in the peak winter period of July/August;
- > Extended Melbourne COVIDSafe lockdowns that inhibited travel, which meant that the resorts lost their core visitor market for a further 39 days, limiting trade opportunities;
- > This was exacerbated through border closures and interstate travel restrictions; and
- > Restrictions on people entering the resorts, requiring visitors to have undertaken a COVID test and received a negative result within 72 hours of arrival; and off-mountain staff required to undertake the same process on a weekly basis for a certain period.

Considering that the season traditionally covers 116 days of operation (from the Friday of the June long weekend until the Sunday of the first weekend in October) these disruptions significantly impacted operations and the viability of the resorts.

While record breaking numbers of visitors have returned to the resorts post-COVID, it will still be many years until they can rebuild financial resilience.

## Financial sustainability

ARV has inherited the challenge of depleted cash reserves, operating revenues returning to pre-pandemic levels, increasing costs of delivering services, a 20-year legacy of Government funding being received by the Southern Resorts and a Treasury Letter of Comfort arrangement being instituted to support resorts meeting their financial obligations conditional on limiting expenditure to essential operating items.

As required under the Letter of Expectations from the Minister for Environment, ARV will work with the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) to develop a sustainable funding model for ARV. In considering pathways to financial sustainability, ARV will:

- > review and benchmark alpine resort service provision;
- > quantify realised and potential operational efficiencies;
- > identify new or enhanced visitor experiences that will attract investment and grow revenue; and
- > determine the appropriate delivery of core and non-core services.

# 05 Context

## Changing demographics

Victoria's changing demographics and increase in its Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) population is a factor influencing the profile and patterns of visitation to tourism destinations including the alpine resorts.

Victoria is home to one of the most culturally diverse societies in the world and is also among the fastest growing and most diverse states in Australia. While most people in Victoria were born in Australia, the proportion of people who were born overseas has increased over time. At the 2021 Census, 30% of Victoria's population were born overseas, which was an increase from 28.3% in 2016 and greater than the national percentage, with 27.6% of Australia's population born overseas. Further, 49.1% of Victorians were either born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas, and 41.3% of Victorians reported having both parents born overseas, India and China in particular ranking second and fourth in the top five countries of birth in Victoria.

The alpine resorts have responded to this change in demographics to a degree, however there is space for ARV to work with the resorts on understanding these markets better to cater to their needs whilst balancing the expectations and needs of different visitor groups.

## Green season

Traditionally, the primary climate adaptation and financial sustainability intervention of the resorts has been to increase non-snow dependent visitation via a focus on green season development. Increasing green season visitation has long been an aspiration for Victoria's alpine resorts and has been a mainstay of successive strategic plans.

While visitation numbers during the green season continue to increase, these visitors tend to stay for short periods generating far less yield than winter markets. In summer, whilst the resorts retain their natural beauty and uniqueness, they must compete with established destinations on the coast, and in cities and towns, and National Parks.

A more complete picture of the future potential of the green season has been investigated through the Victorian Alpine Resorts Visitor Economy Development Plan (VARVDEP) that serves as a guide for further investment into infrastructure or services for the green season.



The Act specifies the content of the ARSP, which includes strategic objectives, actions to implement the plan, and a management plan for each resort.

This ARSP is prepared under section 48.1(b) of the Act. The Act requires that the plan must set out:

- > the strategic objectives that are to be achieved in relation to alpine resorts and principles that are to be followed to achieve the objectives; and
- > the strategic actions that may be taken to implement the ARSP.

## Strategic Framework

The development of the ARSP has been guided by the following:

- (i) Climate Change Legislation and Policy
- (ii) Traditional Owner Legislation and Policy
- (iii) Biodiversity Legislation and Policy
- (iv) Regional Tourism Review

### (i) Climate Change Legislation and Policy

The *Climate Change Act 2017* lays the foundations for Victoria to achieve net zero emissions and enable a climate resilient community and economy. It places obligations on Victorian Government decision makers and provides guidance to all stakeholders on responding to the impacts of climate change.

*Victoria's Climate Change Strategy 2021* describes how the State, including alpine resorts, will achieve net zero emissions by 2050 and build resilience to the impacts of climate change. It establishes a five-point plan to achieve this goal through actions supporting:

1. A clean energy economy;
2. Innovation for the future;
3. Resilient farms and forests;
4. Climate smart businesses and communities; and
5. A climate resilient Victoria.

*Building Victoria's Climate Resilience 2022* sets out what Victoria is doing to adapt and build resilience to the changing climate. This report drives vital adaptation and guides actions for alpine resorts across seven essential systems – built environment, natural environment, education and training, primary production, health and human services, transport and the water cycle – which are vulnerable to climate impacts or critical to building Victoria's climate resilience.

## About the Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan

### (ii) Traditional Owner Legislation and Policy

The nature of the State of Victoria's relationship with Traditional Owners is binding and based on a meaningful partnership founded on mutual respect. The Gunaikurnai (Mt Baw Baw and part of Mt Hotham), the Taungurung (Mt Buller, Mt Stirling, part of Lake Mountain and part of Mt Hotham) and the Wurundjeri people (part of Lake Mountain) are the recognised Traditional Owners of a majority of Victoria's alpine resorts land.

Gunaikurnai achieved legal recognition of connection to Country and rights as Traditional Owners in 2010 when it was granted Native Title by the Federal Court of Australia. As part of the native title settlement package, Gunaikurnai also entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the State of Victoria.

In addition to the Settlement Agreement with Gunaikurnai, the State of Victoria has also entered into a Recognition and Settlement Agreement with the Taungurung people. The Recognition and Settlement Agreements, executed under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010*, afford Traditional Owners certain rights relating to the use of public land within their Agreement area, including alpine resorts land. Gunaikurnai, Taungurung and Wurundjeri have Registered Aboriginal Party status under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006* over the majority of Victoria's alpine resorts land.

There are several groups that identify as Traditional Owners in the greater north-eastern alpine area (including Falls Creek resort and the northern section of Mt Hotham resort); this area is not currently within Native Title, Recognition and Settlement Agreements nor Registered Aboriginal Party boundaries.

### (iii) Biodiversity Legislation and Policy

*Biodiversity 2037* is Victoria's plan to stop the decline of native plants and animals, and improve the natural environment so it is healthy, valued and actively cared for. *Biodiversity 2037* is underpinned by the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and the *Native Vegetation Removal Regulations 2017* and together these instruments ensure that Victoria has a modern and effective approach to and managing biodiversity.

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is the Australian Government's key piece of environmental legislation. The EPBC Act enables the Australian Government to join with the states and territories in providing a national scheme of environment and heritage protection and biodiversity conservation.

### (iv) Regional Tourism Review

A Regional Tourism Review was undertaken by State Government in 2021. The review took a broad look at regional tourism in Victoria to find new ways to support tourism growth in regional Victoria, enhance private investment and create more regional jobs. The review resulted in the Visitor Economy Recovery and Reform Plan (VERRP), which identifies a range of strategic tourism initiatives, including the creation of Visitor Economy Partnerships to replace Regional Tourism Boards.

The VERRP was the founding document for *Experience Victoria 2033*, the strategic plan that aims to shape the future of Victoria's visitor economy over the next decade. The plan aims to leverage the State's competitive product advantages: wellness, arts and culture, First Peoples-led experiences, food and drink, and nature.

In developing initiatives to support the execution of the ARSP, the revised tourism plans will be considered.



## How this plan was prepared

### The ARSP review

The current version of the plan was developed by the former Alpine Resorts Coordinating Council (ARCC) with significant stakeholder consultation. The engagement process determined that the ARCC needed a plan that outlined a vision and strategic priorities for alpine resorts while also responding to the effects of climate change.

The resulting document, the Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2020–2025, provided a five-year road map for the industry as a foundation for economic resilience and sustainability. The plan, and accompanying Action Plan, was to lead and support the alpine sector through a period of transition and adaptation around the most compelling issue facing the resorts – climate change. A range of initiatives to support the implementation of the plan were planned and delivered at both resort and sector level.

However, 2020 saw the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on the sector was extreme. Across two winter seasons the resorts saw a series of shutdowns, preventing visitors entering the resorts, that resulted in significant and widespread economic losses to both the resorts and the private sector alike. With the resorts and stakeholders facing viability issues, and the long-term impact unclear, the Victorian Government determined it was not feasible to continue the implementation of the plan and paused the rollout.

In March 2022 the Victorian Government advised its intention to merge the existing resort management boards into a single entity, ARV in October 2022. To support the merger, the Minister outlined detailed performance priorities for ARV in a Letter of Expectations (LoE).

In respect to the plan, the LoE states that ARV must continue to act in accordance with the plan and directs ARV to:

- a) lead a review of the existing ARSP; and
- b) develop a new strategic plan for 2026–2030, for consideration by the Minister.

In accordance with the LoE, the revised plan must include long-term strategic objectives for the alpine resorts; set out the challenges to be faced by, and opportunities presented to, the alpine resorts; identify the priorities for the protection, management and use of each alpine resort and set out the actions that may be taken to achieve the object of the Act.

The Act outlines how a review of the ARSP must be undertaken including the notification period and method, stakeholders to be consulted, and publication of the plan following Ministerial endorsement.

ARV undertook a review of the plan in November 2023, seeking input from the resorts' Stakeholder Consultative Committees and executive ARV staff. In accordance with Ministerial direction, following extensive stakeholder engagement and consultation the new strategic plan will be developed, to lead and guide the sector for a further five years.



### Implementation of the revised Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan

The ARSP informs several strategic and business planning processes, which in effect 'operationalise' the plan and provide the framework for delivery and reporting. These include the ARV Corporate Plan, and resort-specific Strategic Management Plans.

This plan focuses on the final 18 months of delivery to maintain flexibility and responsiveness to changes in the policy and operating environment. Several of the preparatory activities described in the plan have been completed and used to inform decision making for the remaining term of the plan.

To continue the flexibility built into the original plan, this plan has been divided into two components:

- > The first component (this document) contains the Vision, Strategic Objectives and Strategic Actions that will guide decision making and behaviours for the life of the plan.
- > The second component is the Action Plan, which contains the actions, measures, targets and outcomes to be achieved for the remaining 18 months of the plan.

The Action Plan continues to be a 'live' document that will be reviewed regularly to ensure ARV is delivering the most effective and efficient activities. New actions may be added as priorities are identified and existing actions may be rescheduled or removed if they are no longer a priority.



## Strategic objectives

## Objective 01

# Enable investment that drives sustainable businesses

**Economic sustainability underpins the viability of Victoria's alpine resorts. It is vital to secure support to develop a broad range of tourism and recreation activities and events in the alpine region to support a thriving mountain experience.**

In 2019 Tourism North East, in conjunction with DELWP, the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership and the resorts, commissioned the Victorian Alpine Resorts Visitor Economy Development (VARVED) plan to guide investment and development for the resorts.

The plan outlines four themes to steer future development and identifies a range of projects to support these themes. The themes are:

- > Vibrant, accessible and diverse alpine villages;
- > Infrastructure to enable sustainable growth;
- > Compelling and quality winter experience for all visitors; and
- > Motivating green season products and experiences.

To create successful year-round destinations, the plan states that alpine resorts must broaden their appeal to include Lower Involvement (those that participate in a range of recreational activities, outside skiing and boarding) visitor markets, and details how investment in iconic tourism attractions and experiences, delivery of world class visitor infrastructure and promotion of the resorts, will drive demand for year-round from new and existing markets.

There are opportunities to diversify offerings in the snow season to include activities less dependent on traditional snow cover, cater for more diverse audiences, whilst continuing to invest in efficient snow making and snow management. Investment in new products and experiences to boost sustainability of green season activities, without impacting continued investment in the snow season, remains a challenge.

### Strategic Action 1.1

#### Identify new, and enhance current, year-round experiences that attract investment.

This strategic action is twofold: optimisation of the snow season to maximise visitation and revenue throughout the snow season and optimising green season activities to promote a vibrant product that can also be activated in low-snow seasons.

As tourist activity outside the winter season is relatively undeveloped, there are opportunities to better use 'lazy assets' (e.g. physical assets, human capital, regional investment) to encourage year-round recreational activities and events in the alpine resorts. Although many facilities that cater for green season visitors and activity are already in place, significant effort and investment is required to create a market and put facilities to better use, to assist offset any impacts of a shorter snow season.

The strategic growth vision will be informed by the VARVED plan, which quantifies the market potential for both winter and summer seasons, should appropriate public and private investment be sourced. The plan identifies that for the resorts to be successful year-round destinations there is investment required in enabling infrastructure and demand driving hero tourism experiences, and growth inhibitors that must be addressed.

To create successful year-round destinations, the resorts will be supported to broaden their appeal to lower involvement visitor markets. Investment in iconic tourism attractions and experiences, delivery of world class visitor infrastructure and promotion of the resorts, will drive demand for year-round from new and existing markets.

# Objective 01

## Enable investment that drives sustainable businesses

### **Strategic Action 1.2** **Seek opportunities for diverse sources of development funding.**

Increased private sector investment as well as targeted government support are required to enable the alpine resorts to be financially sustainable. These would likely be augmented with a focus on increasing visitor spending, engagement with destination partners and engagement with new and expanded market segments.

To have the best chance of gaining targeted government investment, the sector will need to clearly demonstrate the net benefits of that investment to the community. The sector should also identify new opportunities to seek grant funding for cases where net benefit is clearly demonstrated.

### **Strategic Action 1.3** **Work with infrastructure and service providers to maintain, upgrade, replace, and provide the optimum suite of assets for a sustainable, climate ready alpine region.**

Resort assets – both public and private – need to be resilient to the impacts of climate change and able to meet the needs and growth in population. Continued investment in snowmaking and snow management will assist resorts meet demand for a winter snow experience, however must be done sustainably, acknowledging that high water and energy use and high emissions may contribute further to climate change.

ARV will undertake consistent planning for assets and infrastructure across the resort portfolio, matched by research into key demand capacity drivers. This will ensure that resort assets and the services they support are able to scale with investment, development and visitation growth.

It will be important to demonstrate financial sustainability and net community benefit of infrastructure and asset development, particularly in the green season, to secure support for a broad range of tourism and recreation activities that will create a thriving community and sector. This support includes targeted investment in new assets – notably resort infrastructure and assets that support resorts – to boost sustainability of the green season, without impacting continued investment in the snow season.

## Objective 02

# Protect and enhance the alpine environment and adapt to climate change

At the heart of strategic and operational decision-making in the resorts, lies an understanding and appreciation of the incredible unique environment in which they operate. Victoria's alpine resorts, comprising only 0.02% of the Australian landscape, contain some of Victoria's most rare, spectacular, and fragile, natural assets, as well as many unique and precious plant, bird and animal species.

Coupled with a deep appreciation for the natural values of the resorts is the understanding of the impacts of climate change; many long-serving staff and visitors have witnessed first-hand the decline in natural snowfalls, and the increase in extreme weather events, that have severe negative impacts on the natural environment.

It is recognised that climate change is not the only influence on the alpine environment, and other factors including inappropriate development, human impacts and resource usage can also have detrimental impacts. The resorts each have unique and varied landscapes, with differing environmental values, requiring tailored strategies and plans for successful management and protection.

ARV will lead initiatives to ensure effective environmental management of the resorts, separately and collectively, and that the protection of precious alpine landscapes is prioritised through future strategic planning and budget cycles.

### Strategic Action 2.1

#### Lead climate change adaptation planning for the alpine resort sector informed by the Alpine Resorts Futures Vulnerability Assessment delivered by DELWP in 2017.

The findings of the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre (ACE CRC) potential climate impacts study were used to prepare the *Alpine Resorts Futures Vulnerability Assessment Report 2017*.

This project assessed the climate change vulnerability of Victoria's alpine resorts and how this could affect the economic, social, and cultural value of the resorts as climate change occurs. The project identified and recognised the substantial economic, social, and cultural value the alpine resorts currently contribute to Victoria.

The vulnerability assessment found that the snow season in the alpine resorts will continue to be impacted by climate change through changes to natural snow fall conditions and patterns, including reductions in natural snow fall over time. The project also found that the green season will be impacted by climate change through increased bushfire risk.

The vulnerability assessment concluded that if adequate adaptive responses are deployed, most of Victoria's resorts should be able to offer adequate snow to support snow activities for quite some time.

These insights provide the impetus for ARV's response to the climate change emergency facing the resorts, with climate related risk disclosure, scenario analysis, model reporting and long-term sector-wide adaptation planning as the next steps in successful resort adaptation.

Whilst the resorts have individually made efforts to drive climate change adaptation, the formation of ARV presents an opportunity to make changes at sector level. In 2024, ARV will develop a climate related risk disclosure statement, undertake scenario analyses, implement model reporting, and develop a dedicated and holistic strategy that will lead the sector in climate change adaptation.

## Objective 02

# Protect and enhance the alpine environment and adapt to climate change

### Carry out climate change risk disclosure and scenario analysis

Climate change is widely accepted and recognised as a financial problem, not purely an ethical or environmental issue. Given that climate change presents material risks (and opportunities) it is best considered and managed in the context of business strategy, scenario analysis and risk management.

The purpose of climate risk disclosure is to inform stakeholders how the organisation is managing climate change risks. Scenario analysis is a method for understanding risks and opportunities around climate change and for informing strategic decision making. A scenario refers to a plausible and often simplified description of how the future may develop, based on a consistent set of assumptions about driving forces and key relationships.

The complexity of the alpine resorts system creates a challenge for climate change adaptation planning; to develop an effective climate change adaptation strategy, ARV will clearly identify climate risks and complete scenario analysis to inform and establish the climate change adaptation strategy, future planning and reporting.

### Prepare climate risk disclosure statement and model report

Following the review of climate change risks and scenario analysis ARV will prepare a climate risk disclosure statement and model report for inclusion in its annual report. The disclosure statement will be consistent with the climate change risk disclosure and scenario analysis for the sector and the Victorian Government's Climate-related Risk Disclosure Statement 2022.

Climate related financial disclosure will be mandatory for many Australian companies from July 2024 with nature-related financial disclosure expected to follow. Improved climate and nature governance, in both the public and private sectors, aims to better meet Victoria's climate change targets by 2050.

### Prepare a sector-wide climate change adaptation strategy

ARV will lead the development of a climate change adaptation strategy that clearly articulates the actions required by the sector to achieve a sustainable and vibrant future for the resorts.

The climate change adaptation strategy will provide an overview of the expected impacts of climate change on Victoria's alpine resorts and its effects. It will detail practical actions that ARV will undertake to adapt to climate change to protect individuals, communities, infrastructure, and natural systems and increase overall resilience of the resorts. The strategy will be all-resort focused, community-led and values driven so that adaptation actions are tailored to the resorts' unique context and the communities that will be impacted. The strategy will be underpinned by science and analysis to inform decision-making, help prioritise areas for adaptation, and choose the best responses.

### Strategic Action 2.2 Sustain and protect the biodiversity of the alpine ecosystems.

About one third of Victoria's native plant species, more than half of the terrestrial bird species, and 40% of the state's mammal species are found in the Alpine National Park which surrounds most of the northern alpine resorts. Approximately one third of the state's total rare and threatened species are also found here, including species such as the Mountain Pygmy-possum, Leadbeater's Possum, and the Baw Baw Frog.

*Biodiversity 2037* provides the policy framework to guide the delivery of on-ground actions to ensure Victoria's biodiversity is healthy, valued and actively cared for. As public land managers, the ARV, working with their stakeholders, are responsible for managing their resources to contribute to delivering the state-wide targets under *Biodiversity 2037*.

Alpine resorts have an opportunity to actively manage 'business-as-usual' activities to contribute to a state-wide target of 100 per cent change in suitable habitat (CSH). 100% CSH is defined as '100% positive change in the outlook for threatened species in 50 years, with co-benefits for non-threatened species, measured across Victoria'.

## Objective 02

# Protect and enhance the alpine environment and adapt to climate change

*Biodiversity 2037* establishes a state-wide target of 100 percent CSH to achieve the following outcomes:

- (a) no vulnerable or near threatened species will become endangered;
- (b) critically endangered and endangered species will have at least one option for being conserved in the wild; and
- (c) net gain in the overall extent and condition of habitats.

As custodians of the alpine environment, all alpine resorts stakeholders have a responsibility to contribute to these goals, led by the ARV.

*Biodiversity 2037* also seeks to build people's understanding that their personal wellbeing and Victoria's economic wellbeing are dependent on the health of the natural environment. The alpine resorts provide safe, well-managed access to the alpine environment that generates a deep connection through repeat visitation and a broad connection (over 1.89 million visitor days in 2022). The alpine resorts will maximise the opportunities that this connection with the natural environment provides by engaging with resort users on matters of environmental importance.

Biodiversity Response Planning (BRP) is the government's area-based planning approach to biodiversity conservation in Victoria. BRP is designed to strengthen alignment, collaboration and participation among government agencies, Traditional Owners, nongovernment organisations and the community.

ARV and its stakeholders can participate in BRP to align and coordinate actions and resources to achieve the greatest gain in habitat.

Management interventions to achieve a net gain in habitat are informed and prioritised by Strategic Management Prospects (SMP), a decision-making tool developed by DELWP (new DEECA). SMP ensure the most efficient and effective management actions are delivered through BRP. Pest herbivore, predator and weed control, and revegetation, in priority areas are examples of effective and efficient management actions. Continuous improvement and ARV's ability to demonstrate achievement against the Victorian Government's biodiversity goals and targets will be informed by best-practice monitoring and reporting standards.

### Strategic Action 2.3

#### Connect people with the alpine environment and enable low impact visitation.

Connecting people with nature is a strength of the alpine resorts. More than 1.56 million people currently visit the alpine resorts each year, many of them passing this tradition on through the generations. The alpine resorts are one of the few tourism sectors that thrive through the winter months and therefore play a key role in delivering against the 'Victorians Value Nature' goal under *Biodiversity 2037* on behalf of the Victorian Government.

As more people visit the alpine resorts, and the visitation patterns change to include a greater proportion of day visitors, there is a growing need to reduce potentially increasing environmental impacts. ARV and partners will investigate ways to deliver high quality educational information, facilities, and services for all resort visitors so that impacts on the alpine environment can be minimised.

### Strategic Action 2.4

#### Reduce the environmental footprint of the alpine resorts.

With the alpine environment being on the frontline of the battle against the impacts of climate change, it is important that the sector shows leadership in reducing its environmental footprint.

Victoria's alpine resorts continue to reduce their environmental footprint through a range of waste and recycling initiatives, water efficiency programs, and increasing renewable energy use. There are opportunities to do more, including an increased focus on sustainable transport to and within the resorts, waste minimisation, and meeting the Victorian Government's Circular Economy goals via transitioning to 4-bin source separation systems, continued investment in energy efficient buildings, plant and equipment, increased generation of renewable energy, and decreasing per capita water consumption.

## Objective 03

# Enhance the visitor experience

### Findings from the Victorian Alpine Resorts Visitor Economy Development Plan (VARVEDP) show that latent demand for alpine experiences in Victoria is strong.

Market research indicates that 'Low Intensity' market segments are the largest potential visitor market to the alpine resorts year-round, accounting for 44% of the total Victorian alpine resort snow season market and 37% of the green season market.

It has however been identified that this group is currently not well serviced by the resorts and that there is the opportunity to develop new products and experiences that meet their interests, including iconic lookouts, scenic gondolas, alpine coasters, snow play activities, short walks and cycle loops, and food, wine, and spa and wellness activities to attract year-round visitation.

Research also indicates that the main barrier for visitation to the alpine resorts in green season was a lack of awareness. To be successful summer destinations, the alpine resorts need to invest in icon tourism experiences to address awareness and subsequently boost demand, creating a compelling proposition to motivate travel.

It is important to balance the increasing quantity of visitors with the quality of visitor experience. The potential for large numbers of visitors to travel to a small number of areas in the snow season is an ongoing challenge for resort operators as well those managing surrounding infrastructure and services. The current and forecast growth in Melbourne's population presents both opportunities and challenges for Victoria's alpine resorts. Meeting the needs and expectations of new visitor cohorts, while continuing to cater for traditional resort visitors, must be a priority for resort operators.

This increased visitation also creates challenges, with roads and carparks congested and many first-time visitors to the resorts being unfamiliar with travelling in alpine conditions. During weekends and school holidays the resorts are frequently full, and overcrowding can become a problem. Maximising the use of public transport and providing real-time resort information are two ways to help address these issues, as well as using product initiatives, marketing and communications to encourage midweek visitation and even out peaks and troughs in visitation.

# Objective 03

## Enhance the visitor experience

### **Strategic Action 3.1** **Deliver the optimum visitor experience by matching infrastructure and services with visitor needs via marketing and communications.**

Critical to optimising the visitor experience is balancing the supply of tourism product with demand from visitors, which will be managed by ensuring resort attractions, events, activities, and services are matched to visitor needs and create a compelling reason to travel, coupled with targeted, demand-driving marketing programs.

In winter, whilst demand is strong from some markets for some products, there are peaks and troughs in visitation and with supply of available products and experiences. To even out visitation peaks and encourage uptake of a wider portfolio of products, a strong marketing program is required, as well as investment in tourism experiences that meet customer needs.

In the green season, whilst supply of a range of tourism products is plentiful, demand is low, with research showing that the main barrier for visitation due to lack of awareness. To be attractive summer destinations, the alpine resorts must invest in iconic tourism experiences and flagship events to raise awareness and increase demand, creating a compelling proposition to motivate travel. Coupling this investment in iconic experiences with strategic marketing programs will contribute to addressing awareness issues within target markets and exploiting latent demand.

At sector level, ARV will continue to support marketing activity that raises awareness of the alpine resort offering in summer and winter amongst key audiences. In addition, ARV will continue to support the resorts to deliver strategic, resort-specific marketing programs that identify and target key audiences, effectively position the resorts, drive awareness and conversion, and communicate a compelling value proposition.

Resort infrastructure must also align with visitor experience and needs and address climate change adaptation, sustainability, and public safety requirements. Specifically, work is required to improve roads and parking, and management and connectivity of transport.

With increasingly extreme weather events due to climate change, there is a greater need to prioritise public safety and improve communication mechanisms. Co-ordination across resorts could improve public awareness, with widespread and clear information and education to help visitors understand safety measures and the alpine environment. There is also an opportunity to look at ways to provide real time information to alpine resort visitors, in particular when roads and resorts need to be closed due to weather, congestion or other incidents.

### **Strategic Action 3.2** **Deliver a resort experience that meets the needs of current and emerging markets.**

As the demographic of the Victorian public and alpine resorts visitors evolves it will be important to improve awareness of diverse cultures and broaden the appeal of mountain activities, so they respond to and meet the needs of changing visitor expectations.

This will involve catering for different visitors' cultural behaviours, attitudes and backgrounds and planning infrastructure and facilities that are multi-purpose. It will also involve enhancing inclusiveness and multi-culturalism for domestic and overseas visitors by improving awareness of the changing ethnicity of the population. Consideration should also be given to social equity and providing opportunities for people of all abilities and income levels.

## Objective 04

# Implement practical policy and regulatory reform

Governance reform impacts all levels of the alpine sector. The merger of the alpine resorts into a single entity provides a significant opportunity for the sector to deliver meaningful governance and policy reform. For the remaining period of this plan, ARV will lead the sector through a transition phase, as the key regulatory and governance reforms are identified and implemented. Once complete, these reforms will place the alpine resorts in a strong position for future growth and long-term sustainability.

### Strategic Action 4.1

#### Implement alpine governance reform.

The legislative and regulatory environment in which ARV operates is complex. ARV has developed a strategic planning framework that will support the organisation to meet its compliance obligations, guide and standardise efficient and effective planning across the resorts, and determine the development of associated priority plans. An integrated approach to planning, monitoring and performance reporting will assist ARV to ensure resources are aligned to achieving the vision of ARV and the expectations of community and stakeholders.

To support the wider alpine sector, ARV will develop a suite of policies that guide the operations of resort management, stakeholders, private businesses and government. The framework will ensure commonality of approach across resorts, and a 'level playing field' offering certainty to businesses and guests when doing business with the resorts. Ensuring consistency in the development and application of policies will further enhance the transparency of resort governance, and streamline administrative process, thereby improving the user experience and enabling cost efficiencies to be realised.

To enable a consolidated, consistent approach to management, reduce duplication and facilitate the resorts working together more collaboratively ARV will implement common systems, processes, and business practices across the resorts. The development of the broader ARV process framework will be a key lever in support of the new ARV centralised structure, longer-term enabler for operational efficiency and improvement to service levels to both stakeholder groups and the broader customer experience.

The strength of alpine resort governance reform will be demonstrated by its capacity to build the economic resilience of the sector, streamline operations across the resorts where possible and coordinate their response to challenges.

# Objective 04

## Implement practical policy and regulatory reform

### Strategic Action 4.2 Lead planning and leasing reform.

Development and use of land in the alpine resorts is controlled by the Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme. The Minister for Planning is the planning authority and the responsible authority for the scheme, which is administered on their behalf by the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP).

The leasing of land at the resorts is controlled by the *Alpine Resorts Leasing Policy and Implementation Details 2002* (Leasing Policy). The Leasing Policy has a significant influence over alpine resort development outcomes. Both instruments have not been updated in more than 15 years and present a barrier to investment and effective environmental protection and climate change adaptation.

ARV is leading the review and update of these, to provide the best land use and development decision-making framework for the future. The new instruments will:

- > Reflect current strategic objectives, including climate change, sustainable development principles, environmental considerations and the maximising of public benefit;
- > Incentivise appropriate development and remove the current provisions that discourage smaller or more modest developments; and
- > Provide guidance to assist decision making regarding appropriate lease terms, return on investment, land release; and minimising public risks associated with climate change, including the potential for stranded assets.

### Strategic Action 4.3 Identify practical solutions to industry priorities.

The formation of ARV, along with its remit under the Act, provides the opportunity to identify practical solutions to sector-wide issues and priorities, such as: the widespread shortage of key worker housing in and around the alpine resorts; lessees' ability to obtain appropriate property insurance; and the provision of medical services at the resorts.

To address these issues, ARV has been active in engaging appropriately qualified consultants and working with stakeholders to inform recommendations for solutions that can be implemented by ARV or in conjunction with government.

Of critical importance to the ongoing sustainability of the alpine resort sector will be ensuring that the issues and challenges that face the businesses and organisations that are the economic lifeblood of the resorts, are at the forefront of decision making. Through the guidance of Stakeholder Consultative Committees, and the support of technical experts, ARV will ensure it responds quickly to sector-wide priorities, by identifying and delivering practical solutions.



### Monitoring

For the remaining life of the plan, ie until December 2025, ARV will monitor the delivery through the Board, providing six monthly progress reports in June and December 2024, June and December 2025 on the delivery of ARV actions. ARV will also provide an update on the progress of actions assigned to other entities (such as DEECA). This information will be published on the ARV website.

### Reporting

ARV will report on its achievements against the strategic objectives and desired outcomes of the plan, in its 2024 and 2025 Annual Reports.

### Review

This document fulfills the requirements, in line with the Minister's Letter of Expectation, for a review of the existing ARSP, and provides continued strategic guidance for the sector, aligned with the new governance framework, until December 2025.

### Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan 2026–2030

Engagement for the development of a new strategic plan will commence in late 2024. A detailed Stakeholder Engagement plan will be prepared that outlines the manner in which stakeholders will have an opportunity to participate in a collective approach to strategic direction-setting. The next ARSP (2026–2030) will demonstrate ARV is committed to ensuring widespread and meaningful consultation that is truly collaborative and confirms ownership of the strategic direction of the resorts amongst all stakeholders.

# 08 Actions Summary

<b>1.0</b>	<b>ENABLE INVESTMENT THAT DRIVES SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS</b>
1.1	Identify new, and enhance current, year-round experiences that attract investment
1.2	Seek opportunities for diverse sources of development funding
1.3	Work with infrastructure and service providers to maintain, upgrade, replace, and provide the optimum suite of assets for a sustainable, climate ready alpine region.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>PROTECT AND ENHANCE THE ALPINE ENVIRONMENT AND APAPT TO CLIMATE CHANGE</b>
2.1.	Lead climate change adaptation planning for the alpine resort sector informed by the Alpine Resorts Futures Vulnerability Assessment delivered by DELWP in 2017
2.2.	Sustain and protect the biodiversity of the alpine ecosystems.
2.3.	Connect people with the alpine environment and enable low impact visitation.
2.4.	Reduce the environmental footprint of the alpine resorts.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>ENHANCE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE</b>
3.1.	Deliver the optimum visitor experience by matching infrastructure and services with visitor needs via marketing and communications
3.2.	Deliver a resort experience that meets the needs of current and emerging markets
<b>4.0</b>	<b>IMPLEMENT PRACTICAL POLICY AND REGULATORY REFORM</b>
4.1.	Implement alpine governance reform
4.2.	Lead planning and leasing reform
4.3.	Identify practical solutions to sector priorities



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