

Metropolitan Melbourne



Andrew Booth

16/02/2009 05:50 PM

To veac@dse.vic.gov.au Sub: ① 2

cc

bcc

No: 150

Subject Initial submission to Metropolitan Melbourne investigation

Dear Jillian

please find attached my initial submission to the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation

I look forward to reading, and providing a more detailed response to the discussion paper.

regards

Andrew Booth



VEACMelbinvestigationABoothsubFeb09.doc

Andrew Booth

VEAC METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE INVESTIGATION

INDIVIDUAL SUBMISSION TO INVESTIGATION SCOPE

ANDREW BOOTH, February 2009

My initial submission to this investigation follows on from my work with a number of environment groups, advocating for the application of native vegetation policy and planning controls to protect Melbourne's native vegetation. Environment Victoria, the Victorian National Parks Association and the Green Wedges Coalition presented a report listing examples of threatened remnants to the previous Minister for Environment, John Thwaites.

As an overall comment, I believe the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation provides a focus to help develop a vision and strategy for biodiversity conservation across greater Melbourne, including the urban area and nearby green wedge land.

Values of Melbourne's native vegetation

We have around the edge of Melbourne a concentration of some of the most endangered ecosystems in Australia, including Western Basalt Plains Grassland and Grassy Woodland, and a diverse range of other rare vegetation types and threatened species. Remnant vegetation closer to Melbourne is relatively rich in threatened species compared with large tracts of forested public land further afield¹. As reflected by this investigation, Melbourne's native vegetation is of immense value, not only for biodiversity conservation but also for the character and liveability of our city.

We need an overall vision and strategy for Melbourne's native vegetation and biodiversity, not least due to the immense development pressures which impact on it.

¹ Port Phillip and Westernport Draft Native Vegetation Plan (maps of threatened species distribution), Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority

Threat to native vegetation on private land – need for expanded reserve and protected area network

Much of Melbourne's native vegetation is located on private land, where it is threatened with various forms of development and inappropriate land management practices – despite the great work of some conservation minded landholders and community groups. For instance we have lost about half of the native grasslands from the western edge of Melbourne over the last 20 years², due to industrial and residential development and new roads. Even in the last couple of years grassland sites of state and national significance have been approved for development, whilst it is estimated that over 100 ha / year of grasslands is destroyed annually in the green wedge³.

Protecting remnant vegetation on private land, requires the acquisition of new public reserves, and the funding of secure conservation agreements with landholders. A reserve and protected area network should protect the diversity of ecosystems and habitats across greater Melbourne and be ecologically viable to sustain species. State Government has signalled its intent to establish two new grassland reserves on the Melton-Werribee Plains - which I hope will become part of a program of securing new conservation reserves.

Scope of VEAC Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation

Whilst the management of private land is outside the scope of VEAC and this investigation, existing public land can provide a framework of secure sites upon which a reserve and protected area network can build. I urge VEAC to assess public land in the light of its potential role in conserving biodiversity across the metropolitan landscape, and make recommendations accordingly. Management of existing public land to protect ecological values is of course crucial.

We already have some important metropolitan nature conservation reserves, e.g. Plenty Gorge Parklands, Langwarrin Flora and Fauna Reserve, and Yarra Bend Park. A key issue for this investigation will be the on-ground management priorities, and the resourcing and administrative arrangements, to protect the ecological values of these reserves, now and into the future.

Many ecologically significant remnants and important habitat links, occur on public authority land whose primary purpose is not nature conservation. Melbourne Water land is crucial in this regard, considering urban flood ways and retarding basins and their role as habitat links, and vegetated reservoir land and the Eastern and Western Treatments Plants. Other public authority land supports important remnants of endangered ecosystems, e.g. rail and freeway reserves, yet existing management practices or potential future landuses may be in conflict with nature conservation. It will be important for this investigation to examine how infrastructure and other services can be provided whilst protecting local biodiversity.

² N Williams et al, Landscape and Urban Planning 71 (2005), pp 35 - 49

³ Frances Overmars, landcare coordinator, Mt Cotterell. pers. com