



13 May 2016

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
8 Nicholson St
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Ask for: Kathleen McClusky
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To whom it may concern

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036

Hobsons Bay City Council welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036. Council has a strong commitment to biodiversity, which is demonstrated through our ongoing management of 22 conservation sites and the current development of a Biodiversity Strategy.

The overall direction of the draft plan is supported in principle. In particular the draft plan's identification of the values of Victorians biodiversity and the challenges that we face in conserving biodiversity into the future are supported. It is noted that the impacts that climate change will have on Victoria's biodiversity need to be specifically communicated and brought into the climate change debate. While greater collaboration on biodiversity is supported it is important that any such collaboration be entered into recognising that councils must continue to manage local issues in accordance with local needs and within local resources. Local government would welcome any additional assistance that could be provided to allow better manage important conservation assets.

It is noted that the plan identifies that a whole of government approach is required to embed early consideration of biodiversity in planning and decision making. This objective is supported and should be extended to ensure a whole of government approach and the cross-integration of all environmental policy and strategy such as the proposed Water for Victoria plan. Integrated government action, policy and strategy is imperative to protect Victoria's environment and the health and wellbeing of its community.

A detailed response to the discussion paper is attached and we welcome any additional opportunities to provide feedback. Should you wish to discuss the submission please contact Kathleen McClusky, Manager Strategy and Advocacy on 9932 1004 or email kmclclusky@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Bill Millard
Director Strategic Development



Hobsons Bay City Council's response to Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036

Section 1 and 2 Introduction and Victoria's Challenge

The draft Plan's identification of the values of Victorians biodiversity and the challenges that we face in conserving biodiversity into the future are supported.

It is noted that the impacts that climate change will have on Victoria's biodiversity need to be specifically communicated and brought into the climate change debate.

Section 3 - A Fresh Vision for Victoria's Natural Environment

Question 1 – What do you think of the proposed goals and objectives of this plan?

The draft Plan's vision and goal of encouraging more Victorians to value nature and ensuring that Victoria's natural environment is healthy, valued and actively cared for are supported. It is important to have the support of the public and the political structure, as this ensures that the steps needed to protect and improve biodiversity are able to be funded and maintained.

It is considered that there are opportunities to promote spending time in nature in low impact activities which generate biodiversity knowledge and care in our parks, gardens, streets and reserves.

Question 2 – What might they mean for you personally and professionally?

From a professional perspective the natural environment should be seen as an asset worth protecting. By valuing our natural assets and making them 'mainstream', it will become easier for the Local Government sector to gain additional conservation outcomes in a way that co-ordinates with approaches from other tiers of government to protect and enhance our natural environment from inappropriate development and outcomes.

Question 3 – What might they mean for the organisation that you represent?

It is considered that the proposed goals and objectives could assist in making each government department, private business and individual accountable for the natural environment and ensure that impact assessments for all projects includes the consideration of natural environment. Other outcomes might include: community pride in our natural heritage which will create an atmosphere of engagement and enjoyment with the natural environment; and increased benefits of human health and wellbeing. It can be noted that specifically for Hobsons Bay, local conservation reserves aligned with waterways are areas most visited by a broad section of the local community.

Question 4 – Do you support the approach to target setting that focuses investment efforts on places in the landscape where the most cost-effective actions are possible?

Hobsons Bay enjoys dedicated community involvement that we enjoy and rely on. As a result we contend that any target setting should occur at all spatial scales and the approach proposed above is not supported. A species with habitat within a small urban area supported by an active passionate community should not be disadvantaged by a landscape scale approach.



Section 4 - Principles of Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2036

Question 5 - What do you think of the principles of this plan? Which ones make sense, which ones do not?

The principles supporting the draft Plan are generally supported with the exception of point four under Living Systems.

There are numerous examples of species persisting, perhaps thriving, in highly 'unnatural' or modified areas. Due largely to habitat degradation and pest animals, some species now rely more often on modified environments that would not meet the definition of native vegetation under the Permitted Clearing Regulations. There are species that rely on non-indigenous tree species or survive on farm land or in modified dams. There are also many species that are being supported in areas that are unlikely to be classified as 'in the wild'. This digression from 'healthy habitats' should be acknowledged within the principles.

Question 6 – Is it the right mix of principles to guide the plan's implementation?

It is considered that, for some species, biodiversity protection can now only happen in 'non-natural' environments and that there are opportunities to bring species back into non-natural environments (e.g. street trees, parkland, gardens). We recommend the Plan recognise this and include opportunities to manage species in this way.

Question 7 – What principles might be missing from this plan?

It is recommended that a principle that recognises the potential value of modified environments to assist the retention and support of some species be included.

Section 5 – Healthy Environment for Healthy Victorians

Question 9 – What does a healthy environment look like to you?

A healthy environment is one in which the landscape and waterways support a balanced diversity and abundance of naturally-occurring indigenous flora and fauna species, where natural functions can occur unhindered to provide vital ecosystem services that are critical for life, such as oxygen production, flowering, pollination, fruiting and seed set, carbon storage, nutrient cycling and water purification. A healthy environment is not overrun by pest plant and animals that impact on ecosystem function, or is impacted upon by polluted stormwater and litter.

Healthy environments include a diversity of vegetation types in a landscape-scale mosaic that provides links, corridors and stepping stones. These enable movement of animal species (and the seeds and pollen they carry) to ensure successful plant and animal breeding with diverse population genetics, and provide opportunities for fauna to escape wildfire or floods that occur at natural intervals and intensities. The functional health of such bio-links and islands is critical to species resilience and adaptability.



Question 10 – What do you think the barriers are that prevent some people experiencing nature and utilising parks and open spaces? What could you, your community or the government do to encourage and provide more opportunities for all Victorians to spend more time in nature including disadvantaged parts of the community?

The draft Plan’s objective to 'increase the number of Victorians spending time enjoying nature' is supported. There are well-established health and wellbeing benefits from contact with nature and community activities such as organised tree planting and citizen science programs which also contribute to conservation efforts, build knowledge and increase community connections and custodianship.

In the longer-term, community connections and custodianship facilitate the efficiency and ability of government environmental management, resulting in vastly improved environmental outcomes.

There are various barriers that prevent people from spending time in nature and enjoying their experiences. Further research into the socio-environmental drivers is required for programs to achieve real outcomes, however there are several known barriers, including: lack of time, perceived risk e.g. fear of insects, long grass, cultural and language barriers, maintenance (or lack of) of natural areas and natural areas perceived as being out of place in urban areas e.g. 'gumtrees belong in the bush'.

Question 11 – How can we raise awareness of biodiversity across the community?

There are various ways the Victorian Government can support its own agencies and other stakeholders to raise the level of community awareness of biodiversity.

As per previous comments to Question 10 community awareness can be raised through:

- communication – positive consistent messaging, social media, sharing resources between State and Local government, engaging stories
- supporting community action (and resourcing) community groups and networks that are actively protecting biodiversity or engaging the community e.g. 'Friends of' Groups that build skills and leadership in the community
- embedding an appreciation of nature from a young age via bush kinders and nature play, and resourcing Junior Ranger programs

Section 6 – Linking our Society and Economy to the Environment

Question 12 – What are you currently doing – personally and professionally to support and create a healthy and biodiverse natural environment?

Hobsons Bay undertakes a broad range of services and programs outlined in the table below

On-ground management activities	Engagement, awareness and support
Weed management on Council managed bushland reserves	Assisting Friends Groups and private landholders
Fencing of reserves	Assisting school/scout planting programs



Fuel reduction burns	Supporting National Tree Day plantings
Regeneration burns	Community planting opportunities
Fire risk assessments	Co-ordinating and promoting citizen science projects
Revegetation/renewal of vegetation sites	Hobsons Bay Friends Group Conservation Activities Calendar
Seed collection and propagation	Developing signage - interpretive and management signs
Removing dumped rubbish and green waste	Providing talks and guided walks in nature
Maintaining existing and building new Water Sensitive Urban Design assets	Running stalls at festivals
Sustainable Environment Advisory Group	Opportunity to engage with business, local industry and community
Liaising and forming partnerships with stakeholders (e.g. Melbourne Water, Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority)	Greening the West 1 Million trees
Controlling pest animals	Working with other landholders and managers
Managing Crown Land as Committee of Management	Supporting private land habitat improvement and tree planting programs
Monitoring/research activities	Planning and liaison
Vegetation condition monitoring	Applying for project grants
Engagement in regional projects such as Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority	Strengthening local planning schemes to ensure planning schemes reflect community values of natural areas
Undertaking research or contributing to research programs	Assessing planning applications
Nest box, bird monitoring	Contributing to strategic activities within Council and beyond: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ embedding biodiversity in strategies, policies and plans ○ current Draft Biodiversity Strategy ○ participating in external working groups and networks



Question 13 – What else do you think you could do to support and create a healthy and biodiverse natural environment? What might help you to do this? What currently hinders you from doing this?

Hobsons Bay is currently developing a Biodiversity Strategy that aligns closely Protecting Victoria's Environment –Biodiversity 2036.

Constraints to achieving a healthy and naturally biodiverse environment include: financial (for all of the various maintenance, events, activities and monitoring required), resources (staff) and buy-in from private landowners.

Question 14 – What could businesses do to improve their environmental performance in relation to biodiversity? What might empower them to do this? What currently hinders them from doing this?

There are many opportunities for businesses to engage in practices that contribute to biodiversity protection and enhancement.

Opportunities exist to encourage businesses to make greater contributions, such as:

- incentives/tax breaks for supporting biodiversity projects or purchasing and managing land for conservation
- the ability to make tax-deductible donations to local biodiversity projects
- having businesses understand whole-of-life-cycle processes that impact on global and local biodiversity
- providing educational opportunities to address a lack of knowledge and recognition of biodiversity values and ways in which businesses can function efficiently in a more sustainable way

Volunteer programs such as those available through Conservation Volunteers Australia and National Tree Day enable businesses to give back to the community and contribute to nature conservation. Support for these activities needs to be fostered and expanded.

A requirement for triple bottom line annual reporting could also provide the motivation for businesses to identify how they make a contribution and where they can improve. Rewards for businesses who conduct such reporting would provide incentive to participate.

Question 15 – In addition to existing government, private and volunteer programs are there any other ways to help Victorian communities and local government agencies promote can create a healthy and biodiverse natural environment at local and regional levels?

Government leadership at the state and national level is key to protecting our natural resources and limiting the impacts of climate change. It is also important that the community is continually supported in their efforts to work towards healthy and biodiverse natural environments.

Other options include:

- support with data and GIS management systems for local government
- support and encourage biodiversity outcomes in planning, development and business proposals and projects
- support urban biodiversity tourism



Question 17 – Should we support any other approaches to this issue?

New approaches could include:

- the promotion of 'General Corporate Social Responsibility' to Victorian businesses, to encourage investment by local businesses in local environments, preferably in collaborative partnerships
- 'General Corporate Social Responsibility' could also encompass support for corporate volunteering in the community, and encourage businesses to volunteer time to environmental projects. Tax deductions for donated time might be considered

Section 8 – Better Smart Management of our Biodiversity

Question 19 - How do you think we should address the impacts of feral cat predation on wildlife in areas of high biodiversity value?

Feral cats cause significant impact on our wildlife, however all feral animals that predate wildlife and/or impact wildlife habitat in high biodiversity areas should be considered as part of the plan.

Some actions that could assist with addressing the feral cat population and impact of feral cat predation include:

- educating the community about the wildlife impacts of uncontrolled breeding and overpopulation of domestic cats
- offering free or subsidised desexing of animals around areas of high biodiversity value
- engaging the broader community about native wildlife and the impacts caused by cats

Question 20a - What does environmental land stewardship mean to you?

Environmental land stewardship means that individuals and the community advocate for investing time, energy, dollars and resources into the protection, enhancement and management of natural areas and environmental assets.

Question 20b - Do you think there could be some negative consequences of voluntary environmental land stewardship standards?

Some potential negative consequences of voluntary environmental land stewardship standards may include:

- some landowners may voluntarily commit to meeting standards and others may not, leading to inconsistency in environmental outcomes across the landscape
- the need for long term stable and consistent funding of the program including implementation, compliance, commitment, code of practice, standards
- ensuring there is a positive role of philanthropy and corporations

Question 22 – What type of regional land-use planning approach would you prefer to reconcile the trade-offs required at landscape scale as part of our adaptation to climate change?

Trade-offs for biodiversity should not be considered as part of the response to adaptation to climate change. Retaining diverse habitats across a full range of climatic gradients, ecotypes and systems,



connected across the landscape, is the preferred approach to enable adaptation and/or migration to occur.

Question 24 – What is the best way to build participatory community processes to generate ownership of biodiversity outcomes in local areas?

It is recommended that building participatory community processes include:

- better communication and agreed community outcomes with other land management authorities including DELWP and Parks Victoria
- providing Local Government, Catchment Management Authorities, Committees of Management, Parks Victoria and DELWP with the resources they need to assist and engage with communities to generate long-term ownership of biodiversity outcomes in local areas
- ensuring that the future Metropolitan Open Space Strategy considers biodiversity as a key value of open spaces
- providing funding for citizen science projects and programs as these are key mechanisms for engaging the community in participatory processes that increase connections with nature and contribute valuable information to research questions

Question 25 – What would you like to see in a Regional Biodiversity Investment Prospectus?

The Regional Biodiversity Investment Prospectus could include consideration of social benefits and opportunities when selecting sites for funding.

The Prospectus should provide opportunities to save all species not just 'threatened' or 'at risk' species. Maintaining the integrity of common species is important for long term ecological stability.

The prospectus should also include short, medium and long-term goals.

Question 26 – What do you think is the best way to manage and respond to shocks or unforeseen events through the conservation planning process?

Local Governments regularly witness, manage and respond to shocks to local biodiversity. These include fire, drought and pollution events. Local Government often is best placed to respond efficiently to environmental shocks and unforeseen events owing to strong community links, a high degree of local knowledge, and personnel and resources that are located close to any site.

Managing and responding to shocks or unforeseen events requires the conservation planning process to be better integrated across the various state and local governments, agencies and stakeholders to achieve improved, efficient, cost-effective emergency management and responses that consider biodiversity as a core value.

There could be a specific budget for emergency events and any consequent monitoring and management actions required to rehabilitate affected areas.

