

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Green Paper community workshop - summary

WODONGA- 22nd May 2008

Wodonga Civic Centre, 106 Hovell St
12.00pm – 5.00pm

Number of participants: **33**

The Green Paper on *Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change* was released for a twelve week consultation period from 6th April – 30th June 2008. The Green Paper aims to promote discussion on the best ways to respond to the decline of Victoria's land and aquatic ecosystems and the biodiversity that supports them.

In addition to receiving written submissions, community feedback on the Green Paper has been sought through a series of workshops across Victoria.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment, in partnership with Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), ran workshops in 13 locations across the State, involving a total of 643 participants. Workshops ran for 4 to 5 hours and included information sessions as well as group discussions on a range of the topics raised in the Green Paper. The workshops have been attended by participants with diverse interests, including representatives from farming groups, conservation groups, Landcare, local council, government agencies and interested individuals. Several organisations have also run their own Green Paper workshops.

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This report provides a summary of the discussions held at the Wodonga Workshop. It does not represent the final analysis of the workshop, rather provides an indication of some of the things participants said on the day. A more detailed analysis is being considered in the development of the *Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change - White Paper*.

The report highlights the approaches suggested in the Green Paper that were most supported as well as additional suggestions raised by workshop participants. It briefly outlines key barriers and enablers that were raised in the workshop discussions.

For more information on the *Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change* White Paper process, or to read about what was said at other Green Paper workshops across Victoria, please visit the DSE website: www.dse.vic.gov.au/landwhitepaper

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Working with the private sector to encourage investment in our natural assets

General comments

- Governments need to encourage and enable public and private partnerships e.g. use bigger incentives to get this off the ground. Taper off the incentives over time.
- State and federal governments need to align priorities, to enable regional investment. For example, the border region between VIC and NSW currently loses out because of conflicting priorities between state and federal governments.
- Needs to be a link between 'biodiversity' markets and carbon markets. It's currently easier to understand a 'carbon market' therefore biodiversity and ecosystem services based markets are less likely to attract investment.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Remove regulatory barriers that hinder private investment in the environment
- Continue to develop market-based mechanisms to purchase activities that enhance ecosystem services
- Investigate the potential for public-private partnerships to manage some areas of public land.

Enablers

- Corporate social responsibility e.g. Hancock's Plantations are starting to address biodiversity issues to maintain accreditation (FSC - Forest Stewardship Council)
- The 'good will' and 'good feelings' that businesses, corporations and people within them get from being involved in environmental works
- Research and development into carbon sequestration particularly in soils will enable investment and bring about changes in agriculture. There may need to be payments for those that provide carbon capture or storage.

Barriers

- Governments need to understand the investment risk. Is the Government willing to 'bankroll' the difference between an expected return on investment and the actual return? There is shared risk between Government and private industry
- Needs to be communicated in language that the private and business community uses everyday. - Current chapter uses 'government-speak' which is not understood by the business community. Difficult for business community to assess risk
- Agency people are not necessarily the best people to communicate with business people.

Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health

General comments

- Give farmers the opportunity to participate. The system needs to be equitable
- Figure out the best species to plant. Information and knowledge must be made available
- Work with landholders adjacent to public land to get best biodiversity results.

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Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Promote biodiversity outcomes from biosequestration efforts by providing information to underpin decisions and simplifying approval processes
- Support farmers to adopt risk management approaches that enable them to better respond to climate change impacts
- Develop mechanisms that recognise the soil carbon sequestration benefits of improved land management practices.

Enablers

- Establish a clear link between market-based instruments and carbon markets. Needs to consider biodiversity values
- Develop infrastructure to develop accreditation measurement, and audit like NSW system Greenhouse Gas Scheme. Use an understandable and streamlined system
- Market ecosystem services all in a bundle for farmers. It is more flexible and marketable as a whole, so you don't have to deal with multiple contacts.

Barriers

- Lack of understanding of soil carbon
- Lack of consistent methodology/measuring
- Recognising dynamics of the carbon system and building in accountability

Improving catchment management

General comments

- People need to be aware that there are problems and they need be given an opportunity to participate in solving them
- Environmental Management Systems and Whole Farm Planning need to be considered as variations of a similar theme and not in separate points. Evaluate link to Regional Catchment Strategy and natural resource management goals.
- Current legislation is way behind current needs.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Better integrate catchment and statutory planning, improving information flows with local government
- Clarify the relationships between Regional Catchment Strategies, sub-strategies, and other planning frameworks
- Accelerate efforts to link whole farm planning methods to priority natural resource management goals.

Enablers

- Funding should be driven from the ground up based on clearly identified community needs. Know the capacity of landholders to inform strategies
- Education programs in place so that the landholder understands and has ownership of the RCS goals
- Needs to be incorporated into local government planning schemes and the Act.

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Barriers

- Lack of overall vision for sustainable landscapes – there needs to be shared visions, driven by a framework
- Overall these approaches really lead to improving catchment management, however most actions are limited to farm scale. Fundamental institutional change is required
- Need to recognise that sustainable agriculture will equal a sustainable catchment.

Managing water for multiple outcomes

General comments

- Looking at systems as they are now, is not enough. We need to look at a vision for the future accounting for changing land use demographics and agriculture
- Some of the solutions in Our Water, Our Future are not meeting sustainability principles e.g. desalinisation. We should firstly change our water use (i.e. develop water recycling) and place more emphasis on these methods in parallel with "new" water solutions.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Assess the impact of climate change, forestry, agro forestry, fire and catchment dams on water availability
- Promote policies for peri-urban development that balance the needs of changing populations' lifestyle choices with sustainable environmental and water management.

Enablers

- Some ground water management issues: When spare water is scarce there is an increased demand on Ground Water which leads to a huge drop in water table. We need to treat ground water as an important water source and develop ground surface water plans.

Barriers

- Vested interests - those with water rights, in times of low water are very unwilling to see environmental water be released
- The big divide between urban and regional areas and value of water
- National water management is limited by three tiers of government.

Managing aquatic ecosystems

General comments

- Need to base objectives on overall aquatic system. Identify where and what to improve
- Slow growth in coastal environments; look at population levels and geographic area limits.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Review the Crown frontage licensing process for the 2009 licence renewals to better reflect broader environmental outcomes
- Increase the number of wetlands on private land managed for environmental values, improve the condition of riparian areas and protect habitat refuges by improving integration of wetland and estuary management with a revised Victorian River Health Program
- Improve statutory and administrative instruments for managers to improve riparian zone management.

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Enablers

- Establish a statutory mechanism to define environmental flows and remove from allocation
- Environmental flows should be based on relevance to current season and overall objectives
- River Health Strategy - Develop objectives on further vision - Tailor approaches to meet this (rather than pre-1750) for a functioning ecosystem.

Barriers

- Difficulty managing aquatic ecosystems across multiple land-holders' properties
- Balancing social and environmental views i.e. recreational versus biodiversity values

Building ecological connectivity

General comments

- Need recognition of land-holders' works and appropriate concessions from Government e.g. rates
- Approaches need to better address capacity of private land managers to change management practices.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Improve riparian vegetation as a priority. This will have the multiple benefits of improving river health and water quality while contributing to ecological connectivity.
- Working with community-based natural resource management networks, such as Landcare and land managers, in planning and implementing biolinks and maintaining ecosystem services
- Enhancing management of existing habitat in strategic location.

Enablers

- Understand what we are trying to achieve, develop incentives and communicate successes
- Regulation: licensing conditions and enforcement increased and well resourced.

Barriers

- Catchment management not making good connection between productivity and conservation outcomes
- Perception of corridors as having fire risk
- Tender programs do not prioritise scattered trees and linear reserves.

Enhancing public land values

General comments

- Need to develop collaborative approach between land managers
- Consider broad values that public land may provide such as intrinsic, tourism and recreational and ecosystem services. Follow up with adequate investment and make values better known.

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Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Consider the application of market-based approaches on public land and develop better valuation techniques to ensure investment in public land management reflects the return to the community
- Simplify and integrate public land legislative and administrative arrangements
- Assess options for protecting public good values of open space in the urban environment and Green Wedges, including investigating funding sources.

Enablers

- Clear obligations for all public land managers - social, economic, environmental. Develop a report card for each
- Security of resources for public land management and clear long term objectives to address threats

Barriers

- Lack of resources
- Lack of public knowledge and of information on land management needs
- Impacts of urban expansion.

Using and managing fire

General comments

- Massive fires have significant impacts on weeds. This provides a good opportunity for weed control as part of landscape rehabilitation.
- Use media to display maps of areas to be burnt.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Conduct research to better understand the likely effects of climate change on managed and natural fire regimes
- Implement strategic fire management to better achieve community protection and ecological outcomes as part of planned burning. This may mean a significant increase in fire in the landscape and, in some circumstances, allowing fires to run their course instead of actively suppressing them
- Facilitate community understanding and acceptance of the role of fire in the landscape by improving community preparedness for dealing with wildfire.

Enablers

- Continue and strengthen community consultation
- Partnership between State and Local Governments
- Building codes need to reflect fire protection as part of an upgrade of building standards.

Barriers

- Funding - enough resources to burn more
- Lack of education for fire protection from local governments
- Clarify who is responsible to educate private landholders in fire protection.

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Improving management of pests and weeds

General comments

- Make a market for weeds for managing weeds around property sales - contract of sale for transfer
- The management of new pests is good - but that may impact on existing pests.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Increase the focus on prevention and early intervention to restrict the spread of pests and weeds by training communities to recognise and deal with weeds and pests early, and reviewing current legislation for its effectiveness in preventing and containing incursions
- Further develop and adopt effective surveillance and monitoring tools and methods, including building on community volunteer efforts in pest management and detection programs such as 'Weed Spotters'
- Use climate change projections to inform risk assessments for new pest and weed incursions, as well as rates of spread of established invasive species.

Enablers

- Clarification of responsibilities and who enforces them i.e LGAs. Like fire prevention powers they may need legislation to back up
- Appropriate mix of carrot and stick. Currently there is limited carrot and almost no stick
- Ensure priorities identified at state, regional and local levels.

Barriers

- Clarification of who is responsible for coordination and management
- The weeds classification system is confusing. It mixes up environmental weeds and economic weeds
- Resourcing is based on short term initiatives. Pests are a long term problem.

Landcare and volunteer organisations

General comments

- Climate change is changing farm management. Landcare activities will become part of farm management
- Local issues, local perceptions must be recognised and responded to at state or regional level.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Work with regional communities to improve links between local priorities and regional and state strategies and facilitate cooperative landscape planning
- Seek new ways to engage groups not traditionally involved in environmental work
- Develop state-wide policy for community groups and volunteers involved in natural resource management in the context of the whole of government approach to engage with wider community networks.

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Enablers

- Utilise volunteer development strategies from other sectors. Volunteering issues apply across all sectors
- Local communities get to know land care facilitator on short term funding. There needs to be longer term funding and career prospects
- Make better use of self interest. Volunteers do not need to be members of groups to achieve outcomes.

Barriers

- Lack of population and ageing decline in certain areas. Transition from rural to lifestyle/urban character impacts on volunteer availability and this applies generally to all approaches.
- There are unrealistic expectations on capacity of volunteers especially conservation volunteers
- "Hobby" farmers are sometimes not prepared to invest time into issues.