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To <land.whitepaper@dse.vic.gov.au>
cc
bcc
Subject Land and Biodiversity at a time of Climate Change

Project Director

Please find attached BOCA's comments for consideration in the White Paper

Regards

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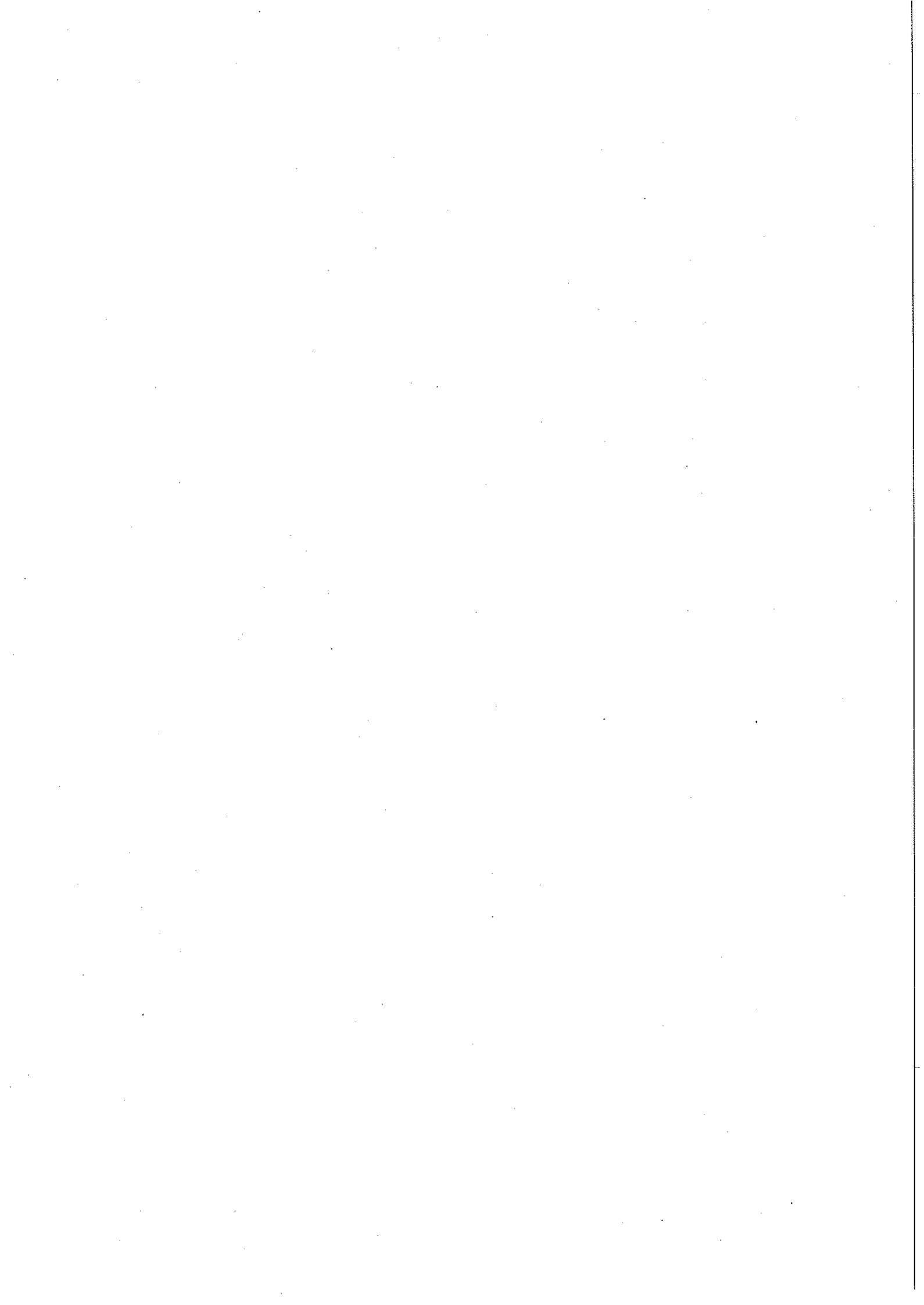
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21 June 2007

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Land and Biodiversity White Paper
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Land and Biodiversity at a time of Climate Change – White Paper

BOCA congratulates the Government for undertaking to develop the above report and submits the following comments for consideration in the White Paper.

BOCA is a national non-government organization with more than 3000 members throughout Australia. BOCA's objectives may be summarized as appreciation, education and conservation relating to Australian birds and their habitats. Consequently this submission addresses matters relevant to birdlife and their habitat, rather than the full range of environmental issues.

1. Landscape-scale Conservation.

To protect and enhance biodiversity there is an urgent need for a landscape-scale approach to conservation which covers both freehold and public land. To be effective this requires a coordinated program involving all the key players, including Government Departments, Parks Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities, Trust for Nature, local government and the community.

- i. **Priorities:** There are several landscape-scale projects under way or being considered. However these have often been developed in isolation by different agencies or community groups. Meanwhile a large amount of resources and effort have gone into revegetation projects without any overall plan. Victoria needs a State-wide evaluation of potential biolink projects which are both practical and offer the opportunity for biota to adapt to climate change. One way of developing an approved network of biolinks would be to use the VEAC process of investigation and community consultation to formulate recommendations to Government. While it is recognized that VEAC investigations are currently confined to public land, the VEAC Act could be amended to allow for a biolinks study.
- ii. Maintenance or re-establishment of natural habitat on private land is essential for landscape-scale conservation and requires a much greater commitment by Government. While the Bush Tender and similar programs have had some success, these have been of limited scope. A much larger program is needed which assists or rewards managers of private land to protect native habitat on their land or undertake regeneration programs. The priorities for funding private land conservation would be determined by the approved biolinks plan and/or the FFG threatened species and communities action plans.

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Two other programs which are very important for conservation of habitat on private land are Trust for Nature's covenanting program and DSE's Land for Wildlife program. Both of these should be more adequately funded.

Trust for Nature is a Victorian Government initiative which is now being followed by other States. The Trust's covenanting program has been very successful despite limited resourcing by the State Government and to a large extent depends on NHT funding through the CMAs. The Trust's program which targets threatened EVCs and the Trust's revolving fund are particularly effective, but could benefit greatly from additional funding. The Trust's stewardship program is also essential for long-term protection of covenanted values and needs long-term security of funding.

BOCA and the then Fisheries and Wildlife Department initiated the Land for Wildlife program in 1981.

There are some 6000 properties in Victoria listed under the Land for Wildlife program and the number is still growing, so it is hard to understand why Departmental support for the program has been reduced over recent years. Some argue that because it is a volunteer program it does not necessarily address priority issues. However, it does protect valuable habitat and it has important education and awareness values for the general public. It is ironic that other States have implemented the Land for Wildlife program while Victoria has reduced its support.

- iii. Roadsides are very important as wildlife habitat – and an essential building-block of landscape-scale conservation. In 1975 Victoria established a Roadsides Conservation Committee which had great success working with road authorities and municipalities to raise awareness of the habitat values of roadsides and the development of roadside management plans. BOCA was a member of that Committee. Some years ago the State Government discontinued financial support for its successor, the Roadside Conservation Committee of Victoria and there is now no coordinated approach to roadside conservation in this State. This should be rectified.
2. Pest plants and animals are a serious threat to biodiversity and habitat.

This problem will probably be even greater with some introduced species being advantaged by climate change. It is not clear how research into these issues will be conducted in the future. In the past valuable work was conducted at KTRI and the CRC for weeds (in South Australia) but both of these are being wound down. From a biodiversity perspective it is particularly important that research be continued into biological control of pest plants and animals rather than relying on pesticides which could be to the detriment of native species. The White Paper should ensure that recommendations are provided for effective and efficient research into the best ways of tackling existing and emerging pest plants and animals which threaten or may be a future threat to biodiversity.
 3. Specific Threatening Activities.

There are many activities or issues which are a serious threat to biodiversity in Victoria. Three of these are listed below.

 - i. Fire Prevention Measures.

The Government's arbitrary annual target of 150 000 hectares of fuel reduction burning, if continued, has the potential to seriously impact on biodiversity. Some national parks, such as Grampians are currently being extensively fuel-reduced even though about 40% of it was burnt in the 2006 wildfire. Is there an ecological fire plan for the Park? Another threat arising from a recent Government decision is the construction of very wide firebreaks to protect water catchments. These destroy connectivity of habitat, open the adjoining native vegetation to the effects of wind, drying and weeds and provide access for predators of native fauna.
 - ii. Centre-pivot irrigation is having a disastrous effect in some parts of the State, particularly the Wimmera. Large standing trees, which are important nesting habitat for the endangered Red-tailed Black-Cockatoos and Buloke, one of their primary food sources, are being cleared.
 - iii. The rock-strewn volcanic plains of western Victoria are being modified at an alarming rate through the use of a large on-site rock crusher. This is removing important wildlife habitat and paving the way for these lands to be cultivated, therefore losing their value for native flora as well as the fauna.

4. The Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act.

The Listing process for the FFG Act has been successful in identifying threatened taxon, threatened communities and potentially threatening processes. However there are some issues which need improvement.

- i. Resourcing of the Management Actions in the FFG Action Statements.
More than 200 Action Statements have been prepared in accordance with the FFG Act, each having a range of Management Actions requiring implementation by various agencies. The Government should allocate substantial additional funding to implement the vast number of projects identified in the Actions for Biodiversity Conservation database which have been derived from the Action Statements. Additional resourcing is also needed to enable preparation of Action Statements for the 450 listed items which have not been addressed.
- ii. The process for listing under the FFG Act is lengthy and requires many steps before an item is finally added to a schedule of the Act. Nominations for listing come from "a person" and there is no procedure in place to ensure that species which should be listed are nominated. This creates the situation where some taxa which are included on departmental advisory lists are not FFG listed.

5. Classification of Threatened Species.

- i. There is some inconsistency with listing procedures and categories between the State and the Commonwealth. While some differences are inevitable there should be greater alignment and logical explanation of differences. This is recommended in the Report of the Commonwealth Auditor General: The Conservation and Protection of National Threatened Species and Ecological Communities (2007).
- ii. There is inconsistency between the Wildlife Act 1975, the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and the DSE Advisory List of Threatened Vertebrate Fauna in Victoria 2003 with the classification of threatened species. For example, the Schedule to the Wildlife Act has 8 taxa of birds declared as Endangered, the Advisory List has 10 Critically Endangered and 25 Endangered, while the FFG taxa are "listed" without any further classification. Penalties for interference with wildlife can only be applied under the Wildlife Act. There is a need to update the Wildlife Act and to coordinate the Victorian classification systems to avoid confusing the public, the legal system and planning authorities.

6. Offsets for Clearing Native Vegetation.

While the concept of offsets has merit, in practice it must be used with caution. The habitat value of a large old tree with hollows cannot be replaced by planting many seedlings, until many decades have passed, by which time the dependent wildlife may have disappeared.

7. Education.

Education will be an important factor in gaining community support for the future implementation of the White Paper recommendations.

In 2005 the Victorian Government produced a draft document titled *Learning to live Sustainably* (DSE). The main thrust of this document can be summarised as initiating whole-community learning and behaviour change for environmental sustainability. Resources to back this outcome would assist in gaining community support for land and biodiversity management at a time of climate change.

Existing education programs need to be expanded and new programs developed to provide support and knowledge about how to take action to prevent further loss of land and biodiversity.

Education needs to be provided for many sectors of the community:

- o Business - especially urban and semi-rural land developers who have the opportunity to conserve remnant vegetation and provide for wildlife corridors and habitat
- o Urban landholders – gardens as habitat, pet management and impacts of recreational activities
- o Public land managers – both urban and rural
- o Farmers

Resources are needed so that education can be provided through existing bodies:

- Landcare and Land for Wildlife which would help to link knowledge with action on privately owned land
- Environmental organisations
- Schools
- Municipal councils
- Friends groups

I hope that the above comments are useful. If you wish to have clarification or further information please contact BOCA's Conservation Co-ordinator, Don Saunders on 9877 5342 or email conservation@birdobservers.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Richard Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

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