

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Green Paper community workshop - summary

BENDIGO – 19th May 2008

The Foundry, High Street

Time: 12.00pm – 5.00pm

Number of participants: **86**

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 Bendigo 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

- A consistent, big picture approach is needed
- Need clear signals of how actions of the private sector impact on the environment
- Ensure greater alignment of state and business priorities
- Need for more research into valuing ecosystem services and into defining the meaning
- Corporate farming will see big investment in farming in future and should be built into environmental costs and credits to encourage investment

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Continue to develop market-based mechanisms to purchase activities that enhance ecosystem services
- Encourage corporate scale farming organisations and food industry supply chains to build environmental outcomes into operations
- Remove regulatory barriers that hinder private investment in the environment

Enablers

- Legislation
- Accountability for reporting on triple bottom line
- Appropriate access to funding
- Development of appropriate Environmental Management Systems
- Much more clarification of the opportunities is required and then communicated

Barriers

- Local Government imposing planning fees on NRM based groups working on public land i.e. bureaucracy/red tape
- Corporate reporting on triple bottom line is variable and can mislead investors
- Communication with business limited because we can't tell them what they'd be buying

Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health

General comments

- Government needs to become carbon neutral
- Existing forests are worth more in the ground as carbon sinks than as harvested logs
- Need for legislation to ensure there are multiple outcomes for carbon plantations
- Acknowledge role of farm forestry in carbon trading – plantings should include biodiversity
- Use existing biodiversity controls to value carbon
- Need transparent education/information for investors due to complexity of issues

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Work with the Australian Government to remove barriers that limit the inclusion of public land in the carbon offsets market
- Encourage plantings in priority areas (such as riparian zones) for biodiversity improvements and permanent carbon sequestration
- Develop mechanisms that recognise the soil carbon sequestration benefits of improved land management practices

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Enablers

- Establish a farming futures Cooperative Research Centre
- All food producing methods should be organic and used to store carbon
- Genuine monitoring and measurement
- Empowering communities to reduce carbon use in the home eg subsidies, education
- Learn from experience in other countries

Barriers

- Lack of information, education and design rules for the system
- Risk of leaving the market to sort things out - won't necessarily get the outcomes we want.
- Biodiversity plantations sequester less carbon than forestry plantations - need incentives
- Need for clear accounting for carbon emissions from any industry.
- Monitoring and accreditation needs to be standardised and regulated

Improving catchment management

General comments

- Need better integration and coordination of a range of natural resource management issues as well as clarifying roles and avoiding duplication
- Need long term and adequate funding, rather than a reliance on market mechanisms
- More research into sustainable agriculture and a greater emphasis on whole farm planning
- Concerns about environmental water issues, including excessive use of groundwater and the need for stronger legislation on farm dams.
- Duty of care requirements should be communicated to new land owners

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
- Increase the focus of Regional Catchment Strategies on climate change mitigation and adaptation as well on public land

Enablers

- Clear state policy framework, strengthened with respect to biodiversity guiding local actions
- Greater coordination and integration between CMA's and other agencies
- Introduction of a catchment levy
- Greater authority for CMAs
- More research linked to land management and education

Barriers

- Duplication and number of organisations involved with differing objectives, confused roles
- Funding cycles and grants based of funding which is too short term
- Focus on markets and private investment means loss of accountability
- Because many of these NRM issues have been "flogged to death", hard decisions need to be made to implement the impalatable

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Managing water for multiple outcomes

General comments

- The aims of this section need to be clearer - what are we trying to achieve?
- The suggested approaches will not help if there is less water available, many issues are not dealt with and how information is to be used to solve environmental problems is not clear.
- Need to look at the big picture rather than focus on the small scale.
- Government needs to develop strong, measurable, innovative strategies that they follow through with, backed by legislation

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Promote policies for peri-urban development that balance the needs of changing populations' lifestyle choices with sustainable environmental and water management
- Plan for the impacts of climate change and changing land use on water entitlements for consumptive users and the environment by continuing to develop regional Sustainable Water Strategies

Enablers

- Build natural resource management costs into farming production costs
- Strengthen legislation to increase water conservation with more regulation and compliance
- Continue with "small" water grants for individuals to make changes on farms
- Capitalise on opportunities for using the water through the water cycle (eg re-use, effluent)
- Monitoring groundwater use
- Standing firm on allocation for the environment - should go where its allocated

Barriers

- There is community "fracture" on issues of change
- Institutional roles need to be clarified
- Need for more community engagement on decisions
- Inconsistent approach to water restrictions is not equitable
- We should not encourage increased population when there won't be water

Managing aquatic ecosystems

General comments

- Focus should be on implementation rather than identification of options since these have already been identified
- Environmental floods need to be a higher priority and utilised to used to facilitate biodiversity health
- There should be holistic management of environmental water resources

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Improve the management of riparian areas and encourage the development of stewardship arrangements with adjacent landholders and other potential managers
- Consider the application of incentive schemes and market-based instruments for coastal and marine management
- Review the Crown frontage licensing process for the 2009 licence renewals to better reflect broader environmental outcomes

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Enablers

- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, including better incorporating estuarine management into coastal CMAs or integration with coastal boards
- Agreed standards, targets and more monitoring and accountability for riparian management
- Implementation of plans that are already in place
- Development of a market based instrument for riparian management
- Increased skills and knowledge in the CMAs of estuarine and coastal management

Barriers

- Duplication of roles of organisations involved in managing aquatic ecosystems and capacity of agencies for coastal and marine management
- Insufficient funding
- Community acceptance of approaches
- Competitive approach between icon sites

Building ecological connectivity

General comments

- Overall the sense of urgency is lacking, there needs to be priority at local and regional level so that actions are delivered
- Need for better cooperation between agencies
- Need a strong knowledge base, including more research on the viability of corridors
- Need to articulate how connectivity will be achieved, particularly on private land
- There is overemphasis on Landcare and other volunteers to do the work
- Stewardship payments should be paid over time to build resilience into systems being managed, with long term monitoring to ensure outcomes

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Identify and map areas where the natural resilience of ecosystems remains viable and concentrate regeneration efforts in these areas.
- Improve riparian vegetation as a priority. This will have the multiple benefits of improving river health and water quality while contributing to ecological connectivity.
- Identify strategic planning responses to better integrate opportunities for species migration as part of the four yearly review of local government Council Plans and Municipal Strategic Statements (MSSs).

Enablers

- More funding, including for public land
- Increased emphasis on education and building community awareness and responsibility
- Broadening out market based approaches including rate rebates - paid by the State
- Increased rewards for good land stewardship

Barriers

- Vague vision and no underlying philosophy
- Over reliance on community groups
- Market based approaches are not the answer as they are random in impacts
- Ad hoc implementation, including direction of offsets and destruction of roadside corridors

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Enhancing public land values

General comments

- Need for more integrated planning and improved community involvement that addresses multiple and conflicting uses and protects biodiversity.
- Historical uses of public land shouldn't be a reason to continue existing uses
- Need for more investment in public land, there is too much reliance on volunteer groups
- Concern about using market based approaches on public land - unclear how it would work
- Increasing the involvement of Traditional owners will require more effective strategies
- Need to work with urban communities to protect open space with native vegetation values

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Simplify and integrate public land legislative and administrative arrangements.
- Work with property owners adjacent to public land to help protect biodiversity values on intact landscapes.
- Maintain and enhance the CAR reserve system.

Enablers

- Need an education campaign to build knowledge of biodiversity in the general community
- Greater cooperation agencies involved and greater prioritisation around NRM outcomes
- Community / friends groups should be listened to by DSE
- Need to encourage individual action and responsibility in those living adjacent to public land

Barriers

- There is no education/information on responsibilities in entering public land
- Historical mindset about management of public land
- Biodiversity protection not prioritised in LG planning

Supporting species and ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate

General comments

- Concerns about contradictory information and vague statements in the Green paper
- There needs to be acknowledgement of the needs of individual species.
- Adaptation of individual species is irrelevant when whole ecosystems are at risk and we cannot protect them
- Long term committed government funding is required rather than reliance on grants
- Need more specific actions as to how this can be achieved
- How we define resilience is critical

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Focus on increasing the resilience of critical habitats to assist species and communities to deal with climate variability.
- Continue building knowledge on threatened species, causes of their decline and how best to mitigate the threats. This will require sustained and targeted research and the establishment of long-term monitoring sites
- Develop information to better allow local governments to incorporate information on threatened species into planning schemes

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Enablers

- More research about "winners and losers" and learning about how things are adapting
- More community education to change core values - people need to understand how it directly affects them
- Greater enforcement of regulations eg clearing native vegetation, control of pest animals
- Funding to buy property for the reserve system and adequately support community projects
- Expand the ark project to other parts of the state
- Encourage more sustainable farming as this supports sustainable ecosystems

Barriers

- The community does not understand the issue - it is not being given enough importance
- Research funding is too under resourced
- Nothing can be achieved until resilience is defined and it is open to subjectivity
- Lack of enforcement of current legislation to protect native vegetation
- Monitoring of restoration programs has been poorly managed - we don't know if species are adapting or not

Working towards a net gain in native vegetation

General comments

- Current system is not working – we are achieving net loss as revegetation, offsets are inadequate
- More resources are needed for land purchase, Bushbroker and for councils
- The land use planning system does not connect adequately with the Native Vegetation Framework aims – there are too many exemptions and it is too development focussed
- Need to understand climate change and its effects on species composition for revegetation
- Economic and population growth and consumption threaten all native vegetation

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Ensure compliance with clearing controls while supporting landholders to understand their obligations.
- Investigate opportunities to increase agricultural productivity by integrating native vegetation management into farming systems.
- As a priority, focus on protecting and managing endangered grasslands.

Enablers

- Increased resources for compliance and for a much expanded Bush Tender
- Stop all land clearing
- Education for community, landholders and schools
- Focus on win-wins such as farm forestry and building net gain into farm enterprises
- Improved science and make it more accessible including more accessible management information for landholders

Barriers

- Lack of education and resources (particularly in local government)
- The system is too complex and there is a lack of information and ecological expertise
- State government is perceived to be pro development not the environment
- DSE is not considered to be open to innovative ideas

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Using and managing fire

General comments

- Concern that increased frequency of burning is causing ecological damage - the myth/current thinking that our forests need fire should be challenged
- Should be using lower impact methods rather than large scale burning
- More ecological assessment is needed at local level and review of practices with better planning for difficult EVC's
- A greater emphasis should be placed on education
- The culture and practices associated with fire management should be changed

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Conduct research to better understand the likely effects of climate change on managed and natural fire regimes.
- Facilitate community understanding and acceptance of the role of fire in the landscape by improving community preparedness for dealing with wildfire.
- Increase fire access and fuel breaks adjacent to high value areas at risk from inappropriate fire.

Enablers

- Better education
- More holistic approach to fire management not just based on targets
- Public consultation taken seriously
- Proper funding of research on flora and fauna and fire ecology
- Better integrated fire management program

Barriers

- Entrenched views in DSE, PV, promoting use of fire
- Overarching policies applied across Victoria
- Lack of studies particularly on micro-organisms/invertebrates to inform fire management strategies

Improving management of pests and weeds

General comments

- The emphasis should be on a precautionary approach vs. reactive approach, with stronger compliance along with funding to encourage the necessary work
- Need more support for local government and landholders in pest and weed management
- Need more education as to what are and what are not pests and weeds
- Freshwater weeds are an increasingly significant issue
- There should be a focus on sustainable gardening in nurseries rather than "traditional" garden plants
- Integrated community approach and support to target specific "problem" properties

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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'.
- Address the impact of high-risk established pests to enhance and restore high value assets.

Enablers

- Increased education, especially urban and schools, and on television
- Stricter laws
- Research and development on new weeds and eradication methods
- Empower communities and volunteers to "adopt a patch of bush"
- Clear guidelines for agencies responsible and accountability
- Ensure long term funding & monitoring is available for control/eradication
- Clear advice from government agencies on how to manage weeds and pests, what products to use etc

Barriers

- Not enough training for volunteer groups and department and agency staff
- Lack of risk management on public land
- Lack of funding and accountability for weed and pest problems
- Entrenched view of using exotic plants
- Difficulty getting weeds onto prohibited list

Landcare and volunteer organisations

General comments

- Community groups are already feeling overburdened by red tape and this could be counter productive
- Maintaining motivation of existing groups is a key issue, they need more support as they have proven success in attracting new people and support
- It's important for volunteers to have ownership of small, local projects - people lose identity if swallowed up in bigger networks
- Need to integrate these small projects into larger landscape picture
- Establishing priority areas can be divisive and risk alienating some motivated, keen groups. If they can't attract money the groups are at risk of falling over
- Resources should be spent on on-ground works

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Strengthen community, scientific and financial collaboration in natural resource management through supporting large scale landscape focussed projects.
- Seek new ways to engage groups not traditionally involved in environmental work.
- Investigate ways to link urban and rural volunteer and partnership programs, particularly where landscape restoration projects are marketed to capture the attention of urban dwellers.

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Enablers

- Accessibility of scientific research across volunteer groups
- Exchange programs between volunteer groups to share information and learn new things
- Feedback and acknowledgement of groups
- Certainty and longevity of funding
- Recognition of the social capacity provided by volunteer groups - groups provide significant outcomes that aren't seen on the ground - social capacity should be seen as an asset
- Having a scientist linked to the group helps groups contribute more and are more motivated as they can feel they're contributing to a scientific outcome

Barriers

- Uncertainty about funding
- Landcare and other voluntary groups are seen as just a delivery mechanism but should be seen as a resource for community building community capacity

Other Comments

A number of comments were made on a range of additional issues:

- Uncontrolled access and utilisation of underground water by bores is a significant issue – there are problems with licencing – need more regulation
- In order to increase carbon sequestration we should be encouraging crops that increase carbon sequestration, reduce chemical use and encourage indigenous plants
- The Green Paper does not mention biodiverse farm forestry which has many advantages and should be encouraged. It can improve biodiversity, provide farmers with carbon credits, extra income, assist net gain and connectivity
- Apiary should be mentioned in the Green Paper as it is dependent on biodiversity and is important for pollination of farm crops.
- It is important to improve management of urban sprawl in order to protect farmland and biodiversity - planning schemes are not working well with this issue
- The language used in the Green paper is bureaucratic, overly economic in focus and does not relate to real issues - biodiversity cannot be represented in economic language.
- The Green Paper messages need to be more forceful, convey crisis of land and biodiversity
- The multiplicity of groups in natural resource management is unworkable with duplication of functions, unclear responsibilities, lack of integration and accountability

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