

Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

CF315

The "White Paper - call for submissions" consultation paper contains a number of key policy questions around which the strategic framework for the White Paper will be built. These are repeated below. Submissions addressing these key questions and any or all of the others posed throughout the paper are invited by Friday 22nd June.

What are the environmental, social and economic values provided by healthy land and biodiversity?

This very broad question reflects the challenging scope of the White Paper. Managing expectations and delivering outcomes for different communities will be important so the paper should address different landscapes and communities. At a broad level, the City of Bayside acknowledges the importance of maintaining ecosystem services and the economic & social benefits that accrue from them. This is not always readily apparent to urban communities so education and information programs should be an important outcome from the paper. Many councils in Victoria are developing urban/rural alliances and this should be encouraged.

Although urban landscapes are highly modified, it is important to protect key features such as native vegetation and landforms. This should be a high priority for sensitive coastal areas and wetlands. These landscapes have significant economic, social and educational value, their preservation is a significant challenge.

What impacts will climate change have on these values?

Recent global regional and studies suggest that climate change will significantly impact on coastal urban areas. Rising sea levels and drier conditions will affect coastal landforms and pockets of remnant vegetation. Climate change will also affect infrastructure and community health. Understanding the threat of climate change and developing localised responses is a major issue. It is noted that some councils such as Port Phillip City Council are examining and preparing risk management responses for climate change however information is a gap. This requires leadership and an integrated response from all levels of government. Many agencies and communities have a role in the management and planning of key assets such as the foreshore, waterways and drainage networks. In this context a shared approach is required to manage the impacts of climate change.

What are the other threats and opportunities?

Lack of funds for public and private land management is a major threat. It is acknowledged that funding is a constraint for all levels of government however it impacts more on the local government sector. Recent studies show that local government's share of taxation is very small in comparison with other levels of government. More innovative funding models and the involvement of big business provide opportunities to secure more funding. Programs such as the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority's Living Links program and mechanisms such as Bush Tender should be further developed.

Long-term solutions are required so education will be an important for developing community understanding and acceptance of measures to invest in the preservation of landscapes. There is an opportunity for a higher priority for these matters in school curriculums. Community education should be part of the effort to help parents etc. to appreciate what we have, what people are doing to it, and how they can help.

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What are the roles and responsibilities of individuals, community and government and how can we maximize the effectiveness of our joint effort?

Government's key role is to develop policy settings and implementation frameworks that facilitate effective delivery of programs and initiatives. Councils are still concerned that the administrative burden and costs that are not always considered in policy decisions. The Clause 56 Residential Subdivision Provisions and Native Vegetation Framework are examples while recent Victorian Government announcements relating to water infrastructure investments were made with little consultation. Local government is an important partner for delivering community programs. These efforts would be maximised if local government has a greater role in program design.

How well are the current institutional arrangements working and how could they be improved to deliver sustainable land, water and biodiversity outcomes?

Understanding of the current framework needs improving. The institutional framework for public land management is complex so it should be simplified as much as possible. A place-based approach that brings all relevant agencies and stakeholders together would improve integration and coordination, particularly where many state agencies are involved. Local government can have a key role in facilitating this. The current framework for catchment management could be improved by furthering measures such as strengthening partnerships between catchment management authorities and councils.

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