

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Green Paper community workshop - summary

BEACONSFIELD - 13th May 2008

Melaleuca Lodge, Cnr Princess Hwy & Brunt Rd
12.00pm – 5.00pm

Number of participants: 46

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 Beaconsfield 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

- Priority setting for private sector investment needs to focus on biolinks
- Monitoring and maintenance of trees planted by private sector and landholders is critical
- Companies should be encouraged to see this as part of ethics, not just a requirement to put something back into the environment. There needs to be a cultural change
- Need more education to encourage industry to protect the environment.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Engage landowners about the commercial opportunities for large-scale restoration or asset protection using market mechanisms
- Better communicate State priorities to encourage philanthropic and corporate investors to contribute to strategic goals
- Encourage corporate scale farming organisations and food industry supply chains to build environmental outcomes into operations.

Enablers

- The detail of how to implement the approaches needs to be included
- Need to ensure the companies providing money are recognised.

Barriers

- Private involvement in public land raises concerns such as conflict of interest. Companies change hands so there is a lack on continuity and potential for abuse.

Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health

General comments

- Vegetation communities need to be identified and approved
- Factor in cost of land
- Integrate these suggested approaches into planning system
- No value given to existing carbon sinks

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Promote biodiversity outcomes from biosequestration efforts by providing information to underpin decisions and simplifying approval processes
- 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.

Enablers

- A political system that encourages parties to work together on environmental issues
- Knowledge
- Planning practice notes - guidance for urban and non urban land
- There needs to be underlying principle - does this development enhance biodiversity?
- Any guides need to be enshrined in planning legislation.

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Barriers

- Lack of preparation and research (eg identifying suitable sites)
- There needs to be incentives to undertake plantings
- Lack of general community awareness (eg carbon in soil): need for increased information and awareness
- Information is not easily accessible.

Improving catchment management

General comments

- Provide incentives (i.e. rate reduction) for lifestyle properties (i.e. rate reduction) to protect remnant vegetation and streams
- Regional planning could be done to link up transport, education, services, and statutory planning. Consider effects downstream and wider impacts
- Mandate green/sustainable building practices
- Stream frontages should be public land managed by CMAs
- Landowners undertake training on whole property management practices.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Better integrate catchment and statutory planning; improving information flows with local government
- Improve integration and collaboration between catchment, coastal and marine programs
- Develop mechanisms under Green Wedge Management Plans that promote land stewardship and the protection of ecosystem services.

Enablers

- Funding and improve capacity of staff
- Empower community (people think it is beyond them) and improve awareness
- Give Port Phillip & Westernport CMA management of water
- Improve *Planning Act* and Catchment Objectives - there are gaps
- Better co-ordination between departments.

Barriers

- Enforcement issues - lack of coordination creates a lack of accountability
- Land tenure is based on ancient and inconsistent systems (needs to be sorted)
- Soil health - no minimum size for sub-division to protect health of soil. No designated targets and not enough resources
- Small rate base in large council areas therefore lack of capacity
- Coastal boards need to amalgamate with CMAs; all agencies need to be better aligned.
- Weeds and pests are a huge problem and not high enough priority
- Lack of political will to do the unpopular.

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Managing water for multiple outcomes and managing aquatic ecosystems

General comments

- Integration is not happening - we need cohesion across all agencies
- Management arrangements for coastal and marine environment are very complex
- How is current scientific knowledge and research being incorporated into current approaches?
- One approach should be to implement the actions in the Victorian Coastal Strategy
- Suggested approaches do not mention coastal habitat links and the importance of foreshore vegetation.

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
- 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
- Build scientific understanding of the marine environment to guide management and decision making, including modelling the predicted vulnerability of Victoria's marine environment to climate change
- Improve collaboration between all organisations with a role in managing threats to the marine environment
- Review the Crown frontage licensing process for the 2009 licence renewals to better reflect broader environmental outcomes.

Enablers

- Raise community awareness about the environment and that it is everybody's responsibility to help
- Develop a clear path for how the average person can be involved in the environment
- Education

Barriers

- Different objectives (vested interests) of various agencies
- Complexities of the current management arrangements
- No central database to collect and collate relevant information (eg current research).

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Building ecological connectivity

General comments

- Land acquisition gets sidestepped, but should not be avoided
- Public funds need to be spent on extending the reserve system
- Need to build in private sector incentives for covenanting and protection
- Broad scale connectivity is required across the state in the face of climate change
- Ecological connectivity is a realistic response to climate change
- There are a lot of "ready to go" strategic projects which need action - eg Yarra for Life, Living Links, Spirit of the Bunyip, Grow West.
- Better communication and linking of groups at a local scale
- Councils know where we need links but are not resourced to do it
- Corporate sponsorship for land acquisition (tax breaks)
- Rate incentives to have native gardens rather than ornamental - neighbourhood habitat corridors. Incentives rather than punishments
- Utilise road corridors and incorporate roadside strips into whole farm planning.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Working with community-based natural resource management networks, such as Landcare and land managers, in planning and implementing biolinks and maintaining ecosystem services
- Improve riparian vegetation as a priority. This will have the multiple benefits of improving river health and water quality while contributing to ecological connectivity.
- Directing investment to achieve multiple outcomes and minimise negative impacts.

Enablers

- A substantial ongoing secure fund source (eg. Victoria Trust Fund) and on ground staff to engage with landowners and the community
- Training educators and teachers to teach the values; why biodiversity valuable
- Visitor education centres in National parks
- Getting appropriate strategies in place - incorporating biolinks into planning schemes
- Legislation and policing supported by community education, not just education alone
- Need to turn education into action.

Barriers

- Lack of political support for habitat protection over development
- Many view the bush as a hazard (fire) or not productive
- 20-50 yr plans are outside of political cycles - need a process to ensure ongoing
- Private ownership of land versus land use for community benefit. There needs to be compensation or incentives to change
- Lack of enforcement with vegetation removals - not enough personnel to check
- It's difficult for farming community (eg drought) – farmers are just focused on their survival, not on biodiversity.

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Supporting species and ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate

General comments

- Inform revegetation with climate change data and models recognising threatened species and EVCs (Ecological Vegetation Communities) - funding required
- Develop a process that identifies critical places with regard to EVCs/species on public/private land and purchase specially
- Need to take a proactive action in regard to threatened species/communities
- A balance is required between species and ecosystem management.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- 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.
- Focus on increasing the resilience of critical habitats to assist species and communities to deal with climate variability
- Institute a better approach to dealing with wildlife issues through skills and training, education and awareness raising programs, streamlining regulation and improving the knowledge base.

Enablers

- Provide financial incentives to encourage positive sustainable NRM programs (farming, etc) in all regions
- Community facilitated or mentored programs; active private management of NRM assets

Barriers

- Lack of integration of threat management
- Landowner awareness re NRM applied to their land
- Lack of landcare-based incentive programs (i.e. community-focused)
- Lack of controls and resources to carry out compliance and extension role re NRM
- Lack of ecological data or information in regard to species and ecological communities to inform natural resource management decisions re climate change.

Working towards a net gain in native vegetation

General comments

- The Land for Wildlife Program should be explored as a cost-effective option on private land and also Trust for Nature; landcare in urban areas
- Need for awareness raising and education programs
- Implement a single accreditation system including data collection and monitoring
- Introduce legislation requiring all farmers to have a whole farm plan that includes a set percentage of native vegetation
- Assist farmers to understand the business benefit - short and medium term benefits
- Learn from American system and pay people/give incentives only after the work is done
- All councils to have a native vegetation plan policy document which should include number of staff, and strategic location of offset sites.

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Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Ensure compliance with clearing controls while supporting landholders to understand their obligations.
- Create better linkages between native vegetation clearing controls and incentives by increasing the use of Bush Tender and related programs.
- Investigate opportunities to increase agricultural productivity by integrating native vegetation management into farming systems.

Enablers

- Understanding and valuing ecosystem services
- Make it more attractive to protect bushland - more MBIs, and guaranteed long term funding – more covenants
- Maintain Green Wedges - government needs to be strong on it
- Open space in new subdivisions should be mandated native/indigenous vegetation
- Research into what revegetation/net gain mechanisms are most
- Professional and coordinated approach to revegetation, i.e. not just volunteers
- Increase volunteer base - especially young people. "Make it cool"
- Target contractors for compliance
- Link funding opportunities through landcare groups into requirements under planning schemes - to go over and above their obligations
- Training for planners in basic ecology, native vegetation framework training.

Barriers

- The problem with net gain is not the policy - but a need for consistent approach
- Lack of consistency and support in VCAT system.
- Lack of follow up and compliance with illegal vegetation removal
- Legislation that supports logging
- Lack of connection between different agencies around native vegetation and offsets
- Insurance costs and administrative support for community groups and volunteers
- Fines are too low for illegal vegetation clearance
- Grasslands are hard to monitor - people tend to focus on trees. There is little awareness of grassland values.
- Unsustainable population growth
- DSE needs to follow the 3 step approach and avoid, minimise then offset.

Using and managing fire

General comments

- Assess the need to not burn in internal forest areas
- There was a feeling that the current approach seems bent towards prescribed burning based upon misinformation to some degree
- The need to conduct research needs to be more prominent
- Neighbours believe they will be safer if nearby areas are burnt.

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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.
- Consider tighter assessment processes for new and existing settlement growth in areas of high fire risk or biodiversity value.

Enablers

- Funding to Arthur Rylah Institute for research into vegetation monitoring: structure and composition after prescribed burns
- Monitoring of previous and future burns
- High level change in mindset based upon sound science
- Need for strict approval processes and better auditing.

Barriers

- Some people have the perception of "the more burning the better". There's a misconception about what the burning is about and what burning is doing to EVCs
- A lot of community knowledge is based on anecdotal evidence. Need to re-educate community based upon harder scientific data
- Vested interests impact on wise decisions being made in fire management
- People who decide what to burn are the people who conduct the burns
- Lack of rigorous scientific processes before actions.

Improving management of pests and weeds

General comments

- Need technical information on herbicide use including specific applications to avoid targeted species
- Recognise sources of pests and weeds infestations
- Need to work with nurseries and garden staff to combat selling and promotion of weeds
- Identify priority weeds by sub catchment or ecosystem vegetation type
- Involve private adjoining landholders in weed management on public land
- Need feral animal proof fencing around conservation reserves

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'.
- Extend risk assessments to address gaps such as freshwater species, additional pest animals, diseases and pathogens that impact native biodiversity and other values.

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Enablers

- Research (particularly into the marine environment)
- Better resourcing including for coastal weeds
- Education, eg. on buying pets and also on marine pests and weeds
- Rapid response capability for new and emerging pests
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- Enhance enforcement ability
- Mandatory information at point of purchase

Barriers

- Need to bring all land managers along
- Uncertain leadership /awareness of problem in DPI, CMAs, local government and DSE
- Lack of control measures for urban areas
- What can be defined as pests is not clear
- Conflict between settlement heritage and natural environments.

Landcare and volunteer organisations (including Trust for Nature - TfN)

General comments

- TfN is an important program that protects ecological values. It's important for developing biolinks but gets ignored - more funding and staff are needed
- Need more grants for works to address weeds and pests on covenanted land
- Need to build more knowledge of ecological values and of the Trust for Nature model including the benefits of covenants
- Council enforcement is not working at present - native vegetation offsets are too easy and the 'avoid' concept is overlooked
- Developers can just protect vegetation but not achieve a net gain
- Need to get financial incentives right to encourage more covenants
- Zoning and Environmental Significance Overlays should be enforced regarding important land around TfN properties.
- Need to ensure covenants are maintained appropriately when properties are sold
- Expand TfN's revolving fund to enable purchase of more properties
- Need to encourage better links with volunteers.

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