

# Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



## Green Paper community workshop - summary

### COLAC – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2008

Colac Otway Performing Arts Centre, Cnr Gellibrand & Rae St  
10.00am – 3.00pm

Number of participants: 62

The Green Paper on *Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change* was released for a twelve week consultation period from 6<sup>th</sup> April – 30<sup>th</sup> 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 councils, 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 Colac 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](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/landwhitepaper)

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

### *General comments*

- One new approach suggested was to encourage investment voluntarily through a phase-in period prior to regulation.

### *Most supported approaches in the Green Paper*

- Better communicate State priorities to encourage philanthropic and corporate investors to contribute to strategic goals
- Engage landowners about the commercial opportunities for large-scale restoration or asset protection using market mechanisms
- Continue to develop market-based mechanisms to purchase activities that enhance ecosystem services.

### *Enablers*

- Incorporation of sustainability into regulatory mechanisms to require change
- Appropriate monitoring, communication & support for stakeholders to comply with regulations
- Education of benefits of practice change (eg dairy effluent).

### *Barriers*

- Poor cooperation between public and private sectors
- Presence of government in marketplace: should limit role to establishing opportunities.

## **Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was to have a good recording and reporting system for offsets to achieve biodiversity gains.

### *Most supported approaches in the Green Paper*

- Encourage plantings in priority areas (such as riparian zones) for biodiversity improvements and permanent carbon sequestration
- Promote biodiversity outcomes from biosequestration efforts by providing information to underpin decisions and simplifying approval processes
- Develop mechanisms that recognise the soil carbon sequestration benefits of improved land management practices.

### *Enablers*

- Provide incentives such as higher return for biodiverse offset plantings; tax and/or rate rebates to be offered for holistic carbon and biodiversity outcomes achieved
- Land capability studies or information to inform land management
- Community education: information to be widely available.

### *Barriers*

- Profits realised in long term (30 years+)
- Lack of knowledge re establishing offset and calculating carbon sequestration value
- Need to manage concerns of increased fire risk of new plantings.

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## Improving catchment management

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was to communicate the 'win-win' rather than the current 'win-lose' perception of conservation versus production.

### *Most supported approaches in the Green Paper*

- Improve integration and collaboration between catchment, coastal and marine programs
- 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.

### *Enablers*

- Centralised decision-making body
- Take government out of picture, focus on philanthropic market.

### *Barriers*

- Financial capacity of landholders
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities (government - community)
- Financial capacity of local government.

## Managing water for multiple outcomes

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was to assess the impacts of different land uses on water availability including impacts of revegetation, density of plantings.
- Water authority/State Government should allow people to pay off rainwater tanks through water bill

### *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
- Continue to implement and evolve Victoria's water allocation and strategic planning frameworks, guided by *Our Water, Our Future*.

### *Enablers*

- Turn water off now and then as a community education exercise like Earth Hour
- Get science about groundwater right.

### *Barriers*

- Landholders find rainwater tanks too expensive. Need to implement policies, not just promote them.

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## Managing aquatic ecosystems

### General comments

- A new approach suggested was to expand programs such as Estuary Watch (Corangamite CMA)

### Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Encourage stewardship of the marine environment amongst user groups, resource industries and the broader community
- 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.

### Enablers

- Better integration of planning between CMAs, Coastal Boards and local government, and promote productivity values of environmental protection
- Need a good public education program on what a healthy waterway is (include impacts if it is not healthy) - demonstrate productivity value and value of ecosystems.

### Barriers

- Lack of funding, staffing and capacity
- Lack of enforcement of overlays in planning system
- Concept that economics rules over environment - need to also emphasise social aspects of environment as well.

## Building ecological connectivity

### General comments

- A new approach suggested was to build capacity across agencies to share mapping to inform some of the strategic connectivity.

### Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Enhancing management of existing habitat in strategic locations
- 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
- Identify and map areas where the natural resilience of ecosystems remains viable and concentrate regeneration efforts in these areas.

### Enablers

- Assist volunteer groups with some strategic focus to link the small patch works to a Landscape scale
- Connectivity vision needs to be readily available for contractors and developers to implement immediately
- Willingness to fund small scale projects to link into the broader landscape corridor enhancement - don't just focus on large projects over a short period of time.

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## *Barriers*

- Planning framework: consideration given to a wide spectrum of other issues. Need to consider cross council boundaries for more consistency. State needs to provide overarching consistency.
- Scale of connectivity and getting large buy-in by private landholders
- Lack of capacity to deliver ongoing maintenance and clarifying who is responsible for corridor management.

## **Enhancing public land values**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was to covenant unused parcels before transferring ownership.

### *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.

### *Enablers*

- Good information sharing
- Compulsory acquisition in cases where adjacent private landowners' management is contrary to public land management objectives (in extreme cases)
- Monitoring and enforcement on public/private boundary.

### *Barriers*

- Attributing appropriate values to ecosystem services
- Cross boundary management issues: no coordinated approach and too many players.

## **Supporting species and ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was to consider alternative floral systems (outside of existing EVCs\*) being investigated as habitat for threatened faunal species.

### *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.

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\* Ecological Vegetation Communities

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## *Enablers*

- Make information from all sources (Government, non-government, individuals) more accessible to the public. Develop "knowledge bases" which can be used to inform adaptive management.
- Incorporate climate risk assessment into more than just the listing process (Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act). Incorporate across the board into all relevant policy and planning processes.

## *Barriers*

- Poor understanding of interconnectedness of natural systems and our other social and economic needs and values
- Not having a point of contact who has authority to facilitate an integrated approach.

## **Working towards a net gain in native vegetation**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was that Landcare and other organisations need better access to aerial photos, satellite imagery.

### *Most supported approaches in the Green Paper*

- Create better linkages between native vegetation clearing controls and incentives by increasing the use of Bush Tender and related programs
- Ensure compliance with clearing controls while supporting landholders to understand their obligations
- Improve linkages between Vegetation Protection Overlays and biodiversity conservation priorities as outlined in Regional Vegetation Plans.

## *Enablers*

- Need to ensure compliance - link into tracking system and have more staff for monitoring
- Better monitoring to show if quality is improving
- Like to see DSE use satellite imagery as a compliance tool.

## *Barriers*

- Incremental approach to development still adds to vegetation loss
- Perception of farms losing income if they leave trees; need stewardship programs
- Net gain process is too difficult for average person.

## **Using and managing fire**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was that we need more community education about fire and effects on biodiversity.

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## *Most supported approaches in the Green Paper*

- Consider tighter assessment processes for new and existing settlement growth in areas of high fire risk or biodiversity value
- Facilitate community understanding and acceptance of the role of fire in the landscape by improving community preparedness for dealing with wildfire
- 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.

## *Enablers*

- Community education on reality of fires
- More community consultation locally and from scientific people about what is going on
- Needs to be clear definition of roles and responsibilities and no duplication and resource wasting.

## *Barriers*

- Potential for litigation puts people off getting involved
- Community perceptions that burning 'neatens' the bush

## **Improving management of pests and weeds**

### *General comments*

- A new approach suggested was that modelling needs to be refined to include social and agricultural values.

## *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*

- Long term funding
- Regulation of horticultural industry
- Simplify enforcement procedures

## *Barriers*

- Resources
- Low profile in terms of environmental issues
- Lack of legislative clarity (internally) and consistency and gaps with other Acts (eg. Roads Act).

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