

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Green Paper community workshop - summary

HAMILTON – 8TH May 2008

Grange Burn Motor Inn, 142 Ballarat Rd
9.00am – 2.00pm

Number of participants: **50**

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 Hamilton 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

- Recommendation for a system where the community is 'taxed' and the money used to buy unsustainable farming enterprises (to be sold or added to the public land estate)
- Investigate opportunities for 'environment trust funds' for the philanthropic sector to invest in
- Rewards need to be present for private landowners to invest in 'public good'.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Investigate the potential for public-private partnerships to manage some areas of public land
- Continue to develop market-based mechanisms to purchase activities that enhance ecosystem services
- Engage landowners about the commercial opportunities for large-scale restoration or asset protection using market mechanisms.

Enablers

- Learn from and encourage "champions of sustainability" within the private sector
- Assist private sector to recognise the "competitive edge, or market share gains" that they can achieve by investing in the environment – eg. through corporate image, financial returns
- Tax incentives

Barriers

- Inadequate regulation
- Poor return on investment, lack of profitability.

Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health

General comments

- Ensure that soil health is considered in the overall strategy - soil health is the backbone of growing plants/trees and storing carbon
- Should work with the Australian Government to develop incentives for biosequestration to include biodiversity value – where an accredited offset must include a biodiversity score
- Connectivity is being missed in the developing carbon market
- Any legislation needs to be based on scientific information.

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
- Support farmers to adopt risk management approaches that enable them to better respond to climate change impacts
- Promote biodiversity outcomes from biosequestration efforts by providing information to underpin decisions and simplifying approval processes.

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Enablers

- More research needed
- Need significant incentives to attract biodiverse rather than monoculture plantings
- Process needs to be simple

Barriers

- Cost of biodiversity over monoculture
- We don't know how much biodiverse plantings actually sequester

Improving catchment management

General comments

- Green Paper needs to address the lack of community involvement in planning activities, need for more extension and awareness raising
- We need a continuous approach from strategy level down to individual farm level.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Better integrate catchment and statutory planning, improving information flows with local government
- Accelerate efforts to link whole farm planning methods to priority natural resource management goals
- Improve integration and collaboration between catchment, coastal and marine programs.

Enablers

- Adaptive management approach
- More education and awareness raising
- Recognition and encouragement for partnerships & practice change
- Increased importance of regional model and Regional Catchment Strategies.

Barriers

- Lack of mechanism for establishing and maintaining relationships between stakeholders
- Lack of education of community groups regarding what funding is available; too much bureaucracy/ red tape in funding applications
- Institutional arrangements - competing interests and objectives produce barriers.

Managing water for multiple outcomes

General comments

- Should require environmental effects statements, planning permits and water licences for extensive plantations
- Greater emphasis on promoting and using alternative water sources (eg recycled water)
- Assess land use change from a social, environmental and water perspective.

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Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- 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
- 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.

Enablers

- Increasing partnerships between government and research institutions, agencies and non-government organisations
- Better acknowledge the impact of all land uses on water
- Good planning and regulation

Barriers

- General public don't understand the true value of water (eg groundwater)
- Inequality in water allocations
- Irrigation and plantations favoured in water policies.

Managing aquatic ecosystems

General comments

- Greater public ownership of wetlands required – buy back wetlands
- Microbiology is useful to help determine value of wetlands
- Need more coastal parks near Melbourne and more marine national parks
- Need to consider natural variability of aquatic systems.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Review the Crown frontage licensing process for the 2009 licence renewals to better reflect broader environmental outcomes
- 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
- Improve the management of riparian areas and encourage the development of stewardship arrangements with adjacent landholders and other potential managers.

Enablers

- Proactive restoration of wetlands to address drainage problems and recharge of aquifers
- Financial incentives for stewardship arrangements
- 5 yearly stocktake of marine environment, better monitoring of wetlands.

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Barriers

- Lack of knowledge of current assets
- Environmental water allocation inadequate
- Unsympathetic farming practices.

Building ecological connectivity

General comments

- Integrate connectivity approach with sustainable agriculture and whole-farm planning
- Need to consider temporary connectivity (eg some wetlands) and their role in any connectivity strategy
- Roadsides are a good opportunity to increase connectivity – need to be clear about responsibilities
- Connectivity of marine parks is important.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Work with local government on transport corridor management issues, including identifying opportunities for using roadsides and disused licensed roads to improve connectivity
- 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.

Enablers

- Use the connectivity vision to inspire people
- Long-term financial incentives for landholders (as well as for local government); volunteer base is finite and can't do it all
- Make sure remnants in public land are well managed and worth connecting
- Better acquire and use knowledge, including Indigenous knowledge – connectivity needs to be based on social and ecological science.

Barriers

- Inadequate financial incentives
- Lack of strategic planning for where and how to increase connectivity
- Planning schemes and planning framework could be a hindrance if they don't properly incorporate connectivity – need to be built in.

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Enhancing public land values

General comments

- Increase funding to purchase land for the National Reserve System
- Consider conservation values of disused railways – not just recreational values
- Consider removing grazing except where it is to achieve specific objectives
- Support for Indigenous involvement in public land management - consider purchase of significant Aboriginal sites and retain them in public ownership.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Work with property owners adjacent to public land to help protect biodiversity values on intact landscapes.

Enablers

- Support for management plans (including funding)
- Legislation change
- 'BushTender' approach extended to public land adjacent to private land.

Barriers

- Confusion in the community – eg with regards to paying for entry to some areas of public land and not others.

Supporting species and ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate

General comments

- Important to recognise that people are a part of ecosystems
- Maintain a focus on protecting *processes* which will in turn support biodiversity
- We cannot afford to lose any species, so need to develop ways to protect species
- When species are at or near the edge of their ranges no amount of money will allow them to persist e.g. mountain pygmy possum.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Develop information to better allow local governments to incorporate information on threatened species into planning schemes
- 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

- Increase taxonomic training and research, including research into ecosystems processes and ecology of species, EVCs (Ecological Vegetation Communities) and habitat in Melbourne and regional areas
- More connectivity to allow movement
- Strengthen *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act*
- Awareness raising through a range of mechanisms, including multimedia.

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Barriers

- Presumption that we have to let some species go
- Reactive rather than 'forward thinking' planning
- Short term funding and staffing
- Urban encroachment on habitat

Working towards a net gain in native vegetation

General comments

- DSE should be a responsible authority, rather than a referral authority
- Important to put effort into enhancing degraded remnants
- Crown land, roadsides as net gain locations – use for provision of offsets.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- As a priority, focus on protecting and managing endangered grasslands
- 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.

Enablers

- Sufficient resourcing for compliance – money, people, skills, knowledge and follow-up
- Better planning and policing of offsets, as well as better site preparation and maintenance
- Make net gain a positive (incentives) rather than just a negative
- Provide better information (eg fact sheets on how to recreate habitat so it is functional; permit requirements included with rate notices; taking information to landowners directly).

Barriers

- Cannot recreate pristine habitat – once it's lost it is lost for good
- Development valued over the environment
- Awareness of value of native vegetation as well as process for permits.

Using and managing fire

General comments

- Science is critical in determining ecological burning
- Need to balance community protection with ecological values
- Consider alternative approaches to asset protection, not just fire breaks.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Conduct research to better understand the likely effects of climate change on managed and natural fire regimes
- Consider tighter assessment processes for new and existing settlement growth in areas of high fire risk or biodiversity value
- Integrate fire management into planning processes for landscape rehabilitation.

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Enablers

- Modify approach for different ecosystems, local environmental conditions
- More research, eg how to minimise impacts on fauna.

Barriers

- Large scale planning – not local enough
- Political pressure to reach targets

Improving management of pests and weeds

General comments

- Consider risk analysis for weeds occurring north (ie in the climate envelope that may become Victoria's)
- Need to maintain focus on implementing pest and weed control.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- 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'
- Improve the management of invasive species in marine environments by establishing systems for surveillance of agreed locations to support national risk-based prevention programs, and raising stakeholder awareness and cooperation across relevant government agencies
- Address the impact of high-risk established pests to enhance and restore high value assets.

Enablers

- Create a list of 'permitted plants' for import, not just exclusions
- Better resourcing for biosecurity and control of existing pests and weeds
- Increasing public understanding of the threat posed by pests and weeds
- Follow up weed control after burns.

Barriers

- Insufficient funding, high cost of weed control
- Misaligned state and federal legislation.

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Community engagement

General comments

- Importance of regional approach, particularly through Catchment Management Authorities, to increase community understanding and engagement
- Community engagement needs to be embedded and supported in all programs
- Need to recognise that it's hard to measure community engagement outcomes, doesn't mean it's not valuable.

Enablers

- Provide better information on what grants are available and make it easier for community groups to apply
- Continuity of staff and funding
- More action learning

Barriers

- Lack of recognition and funding for community engagement

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