

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Green Paper community workshop - summary

HORSHAM – 7th May 2008

DSE Office, 110 Natimuk Rd
12.00pm - 5.00pm

Number of participants: **47**

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.

* * *

This report provides a summary of the discussions held at the Horsham 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

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



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

General comments

- This area is important to increase the pool of funding and ensure the wider community pays for environmental services, not just farmers. Should add to, not replace, State funding
- Offsets and sponsorship are not the same – they will need to be treated differently
- Need to think about the return to companies and landholders
- Consider casting the net wider – to achieve health, social and environmental outcomes.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Remove regulatory barriers that hinder private investment in the environment
- Engage landowners about the commercial opportunities for large-scale restoration or asset protection using market mechanisms
- Encourage corporate scale farming organisations and food industry supply chains to build environmental outcomes into operations.

Enablers

- A broker service – environment exchange
- Clear pathways for investment, sponsorship and offsets
- Building relationships.

Barriers

- No easy way at accounting level to invest in an asset that isn't commercial or productive
- Complex nature of private investment process, lack of awareness about opportunities
- Lack of capacity in local government and local communities to implement.

Using carbon markets for biodiversity and land health

General comments

- Will endemic species survive in a changing climate? Need certainty to be in market. May need to plant for future climate conditions – consider non-indigenous plants
- Soil carbon is only small part of a much larger issue, eg. soil type, mapping, health, conservation and biota. A major effort on soils is needed.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Develop mechanisms that recognise the soil carbon sequestration benefits of improved land management practices
- Support farmers to adopt risk management approaches that enable them to better respond to climate change impacts
- Encourage plantings in priority areas (such as riparian zones) for biodiversity improvements and permanent carbon sequestration.

Enablers

- Government should subsidise biodiverse plantings, or double/triple the carbon credit
- Need to clearly define biodiverse plantings – need for more science.

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Barriers

- Availability of water
- Lack of data on biodiverse plantings, lack of information on trading schemes
- Committing to 100 years of ongoing management will not be attractive to landowners.

Improving catchment management

General comments

- Impact of climate change on biodiversity and production systems means we need to fundamentally rethink our approach. Tinkering at the edges won't be enough
- Don't forget the importance of local action and local needs – community voices need to be heard in catchment planning
- There is a divide between urban & rural understanding of catchments. There needs to be more Melbourne-based education on catchments.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Accelerate efforts to link whole farm planning methods to priority natural resource management goals
- Better integrate catchment and statutory planning, improving information flows with local government.

Enablers

- Compensation and incentives are essential if farmers are to provide public good
- Better integration of statutory planning between councils and CMAs, including changing legislation
- A central information service across many councils and agencies to provide information – a 'one stop shop'
- Privately owned land in National Parks could be bought back to preserve catchment integrity.

Barriers

- Lack of understanding about the impacts of climate change
- Duplication and inconsistency across agencies and councils
- Lack of continuity with support for volunteer efforts.

Managing water for multiple outcomes

General comments

- Need to critically review multiple use of water in urban environments – are there uses that are unnecessary?
- Consider multiple use strategies such as reusing water
- Need to consider the broad benefits of water (including environmental) rather than just economic value
- Need to consider the impact of carbon sinks on water availability.

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Continue to implement and evolve Victoria's water allocation and strategic planning frameworks, guided by Our Water, Our Future
- Implement the actions and policies of Our Water, Our Future and regional Sustainable Water Strategies to better manage our water resources for the needs of all water users including farms, towns and the environment.

Enablers

- Removing barriers for reuse systems
- Better communication of impacts, options and water allocation.

Barriers

- Lack of understanding about groundwater
- Future costs of water.

Building ecological connectivity

General comments

- Important to include South Australia and New South Wales in plans for connectivity – ecosystems don't stop at the border
- Fire is important to connectivity both as a threat and an enhancement
- Connectivity should be planned on a wide range of scales – statewide, regional, local
- Need to focus on connectivity in transition from one ecosystem to another.

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
- A north-south biolink zone in the west of the state joining the Mallee to the Cobbobonee.

Enablers

- Good record keeping, monitoring and evaluation
- Long term funding in Landcare and volunteer programs as well as market-based instruments
- Paid project facilitators
- Planning schemes to support increasing connectivity.

Barriers

- Need large areas of land for some ecosystems/ in some areas.

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Supporting species and ecosystems to adapt to a changing climate

General comments

- General support for focusing on systems rather than species, but be opportunistic in using key species for marketing and public support
- Need to consider how the composition of ecological communities will change with climate
- Larger farms leading to economic imperative without the personal connection to the land.

Most supported approaches in the Green Paper

- Institute a better approach to dealing with wildlife issues through skills and training, education and awareness raising, streamlining regulation and improving knowledge
- Review the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and the *Wildlife Act 1975* for inconsistencies and efficiencies and for adequacy given climate change scenarios. Review the process for listing species.

Enablers

- Enforcing clearing controls to protect what habitat is left
- Incentives for private landholders
- More investment in science to understand climate change, increasing resilience, plants and animals at risk
- Buffers around national parks.

Barriers

- Local government representatives may not be impartial – many are too close to landowners to make objective decisions about native vegetation
- Too many agencies with overlapping responsibilities
- Loopholes in legislation.

Working towards a net gain in native vegetation

General comments

- Importance of protecting what we already have – need to recognise the cumulative effect of many small exemptions over a large area
- Legislation is strong but not enforced
- Need more monitoring and better communication of results towards Net Gain.

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

Enablers

- Incentives and rewards for landowners, volunteers to protect native vegetation
- Greater recognition and financial support to local government
- Paid facilitators to support landowners and volunteers – increase the value of public investment through a more personal approach.

The above is a collation of views from the Green Paper community workshop and does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Sustainability and Environment or the Victorian Government.

Land and biodiversity at a time of climate change



Barriers

- Local government not resourced to implement (and enforce) native vegetation laws
- Lack of continuity of extension staff working with Landcare groups and landholders.

Using and managing fire

General comments

- Contradiction between protection of community and assets versus ecological trade off - more fuel management may work against ecological values
- Concern for impact of burning on wildlife - could reduce fire hazards physically rather than burning.

Enablers

- Need more small burns, not large burns
- Increase resources and target them to local brigades, first attack and detection
- Re-prioritise after wildfire – not necessary to do planned burning in the same area.

Barriers

- Burning threatens certain species, for example by removing habitat and litter for Mallee-fowl.

Improving management of pests and weeds

General comments

- Prevention is good, but it is imperative to control weeds and pests that are already established
- Funding should be for local weeds, based on local priorities – state and national lists do not address the needs of locals – listing should utilise local knowledge
- Evaluate the impact of current funding to illustrate what might happen if funding is reduced.

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.

Enablers

- Direct funding to those with the responsibility to manage weeds and pest – i.e. landholders and local councils
- Support landholders with more equipment and extension services to control weeds
- Invest more in compliance and hasten prosecution process.

Barriers

- Scale and cost of weed and pest control
- Diminishing community capacity reducing volunteers on the ground.

The above is a collation of views from the Green Paper community workshop and does not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Sustainability and Environment or the Victorian Government.