

## CREATION OF GRASSLANDS RESERVES AND BIODIVERSITY ASSESSMENT

Melbourne's rapid population growth requires a decisive, clear response from the Government that will:

- Create enough homes to meet the demands of our rapidly growing population;
- Ensure that infrastructure and services are ready to support communities as they grow;
- Support the transport needs of communities and businesses;
- Strengthen Melbourne's affordability and liveability;
- Protect our city's highly-valued open space and biodiversity; and
- Give people a wide choice of housing options.

*Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities* is part of the Government's response to this growth. It integrates land-use and transport planning in Melbourne's growth areas to ensure that the land and infrastructure needed by new communities is available as they grow.

The Department of Sustainability and Environment has conducted a Strategic Impact Assessment on Biodiversity in accordance with the *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*. The assessment has reviewed the impact that projects under the *Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities* program, including revising the Urban Growth Boundary, and developing the Regional Rail Link and Outer Metropolitan Ring / E6 Transport Corridor would have on Melbourne's biodiversity.

By conducting this assessment as part of an integrated planning process that also considers land use and transport needs, biodiversity can be better protected, and private developers and public authorities can be given clarity about opportunities for future urban growth.

The assessment identified two areas of grassland of significance to Melbourne which need to be preserved for future generations. The Volcanic Plains Grasslands in Melbourne's west are only found in Victoria, and are of international significance. At least 95 percent of these grasslands have been cleared or severely degraded since European settlement, and they are now listed as a critically endangered.

The Victorian Government is acting now to establish a 15,000 hectare grassland reservation to protect

some of the world's largest remaining concentration of Volcanic Plains Grasslands, as well as a range of other habitat types including wetlands, riparian habitats and scattered open grassy woodlands. The grasslands are also home to a number of threatened animal and plant species, including;

- Striped Legless Lizard
- Golden Sun Month
- Spiny Rice Flower
- Large-headed Fireweed
- Growling Grass Frog

The areas to be preserved are based around Mt Cottrell, south east of Melton, and around Little River, west of Werribee. Reserving them will offset the clearing of native grassland necessary for urban development under the proposed changes to the Urban Growth Boundary.

### WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO MY PROPERTY IF IT IS LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY THE PROPOSED GRASSLANDS RESERVATION PROJECT?

Owners and occupiers of land affected by the grasslands reservation project are being notified by letter and are encouraged to make a submission about the proposed changes. All submissions will be considered before a decision is made about the proposed grasslands reserve. If the Government proceeds with the creation of the reserves a

recommendation about amending the planning scheme is made to Victoria's Planning Minister. Once the amendment is made by the Minister for Planning, affected properties will be included within a Public Acquisition Overlay under the planning scheme. This will give the Victorian Government first right of purchase if you decide to sell your property. This also gives the Victorian Government the right to compulsorily acquire your property in return for fair compensation (payment of market value),

## CAN THE GOVERNMENT COMPULSORILY ACQUIRE PROPERTY?

The Public Acquisition Overlay gives the Victorian Government first right of purchase when a landowner decides to sell their property. This also gives the Victorian Government the right to compulsorily acquire the property in return for fair compensation (payment of market value). Compensation is calculated in accordance with the provisions of the *Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986*. The Act provides compensation for those directly affected or those whose properties would lose access. For neighbouring properties, the Department of Sustainability and Environment may provide assistance to restore access or negotiate consolidation of adjacent properties, where needed.

## HOW WAS THE STRATEGIC IMPACT ASSESSMENT UNDERTAKEN?

The Strategic Impact Assessment involved:

- Identification of all species and ecological communities, and other Matters of National Environmental Significance (NES) such as Ramsar wetlands listed under the *EPBC Act* that could potentially be found in the study area;
- Specialist advice from State and Commonwealth government staff and flora and fauna consultants and reference to recovery plans and guidelines about the likelihood and nature of impacts on Matters of NES in the study area;
- The creation of modeled maps by the Department of Sustainability and Environment to predict the current extent and condition of native vegetation and habitat characteristics of threatened species;
- Detailed, property scale assessment to validate the modeled maps within the study area; and

- Detailed field surveys and mapping by flora and fauna consultants within the study area, including targeted surveys for specific threatened species.

## FEATURES OF THE ASSESSMENT

- Detailed analysis, using a precautionary approach, of the possible impact of urban development on 25 fauna species, 32 flora species and five ecological communities across the Melbourne area.
- In-depth proposals to reduce the impact of urban development on threatened and migratory species and habitats, including the creation of two major grasslands reserves in Melbourne's west.
- Mechanisms to deal with uncertainty, including identification of further information requirements to be collected as part of Precinct Structure Planning and other development planning processes. This would include further targeted surveys for key species.
- Clear process and timeframe for reporting the outcomes of mitigation activities and the actual impacts of development on biodiversity proposed by the State for acceptance by the Commonwealth.

## WILL THESE GRASSLAND RESERVATIONS OFFSET ANY GRASSLAND LOST THROUGH FUTURE URBAN GROWTH?

Under Victoria's Native Vegetation Management Framework, native vegetation removed in one place must be offset by the active improvement of a larger area of similar native vegetation elsewhere. The new grassland reservations will provide an offset for native grassland lost in the urban areas.

Environmental offsets are used to compensate for grassland cleared to accommodate important infrastructure or appropriate urban development. Offsets must be permanently protected, and be much larger than the area cleared. They help to balance the Government's need for biodiversity, affordable housing and quality of life for residents in the impacted areas.

Further information about *Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities*, including maps, reports, and details of public information open days and the submissions process is available at [www.vic.gov.au/planningmelbourne](http://www.vic.gov.au/planningmelbourne) or by calling 1800 090 789.