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Subject

Please find attached a copy of submission to the Land and Biodiversity White paper. Please note that this document has not been submitted to council but was developed by officers in consultation with Council's Conservation Advisory Committee.

Regards,

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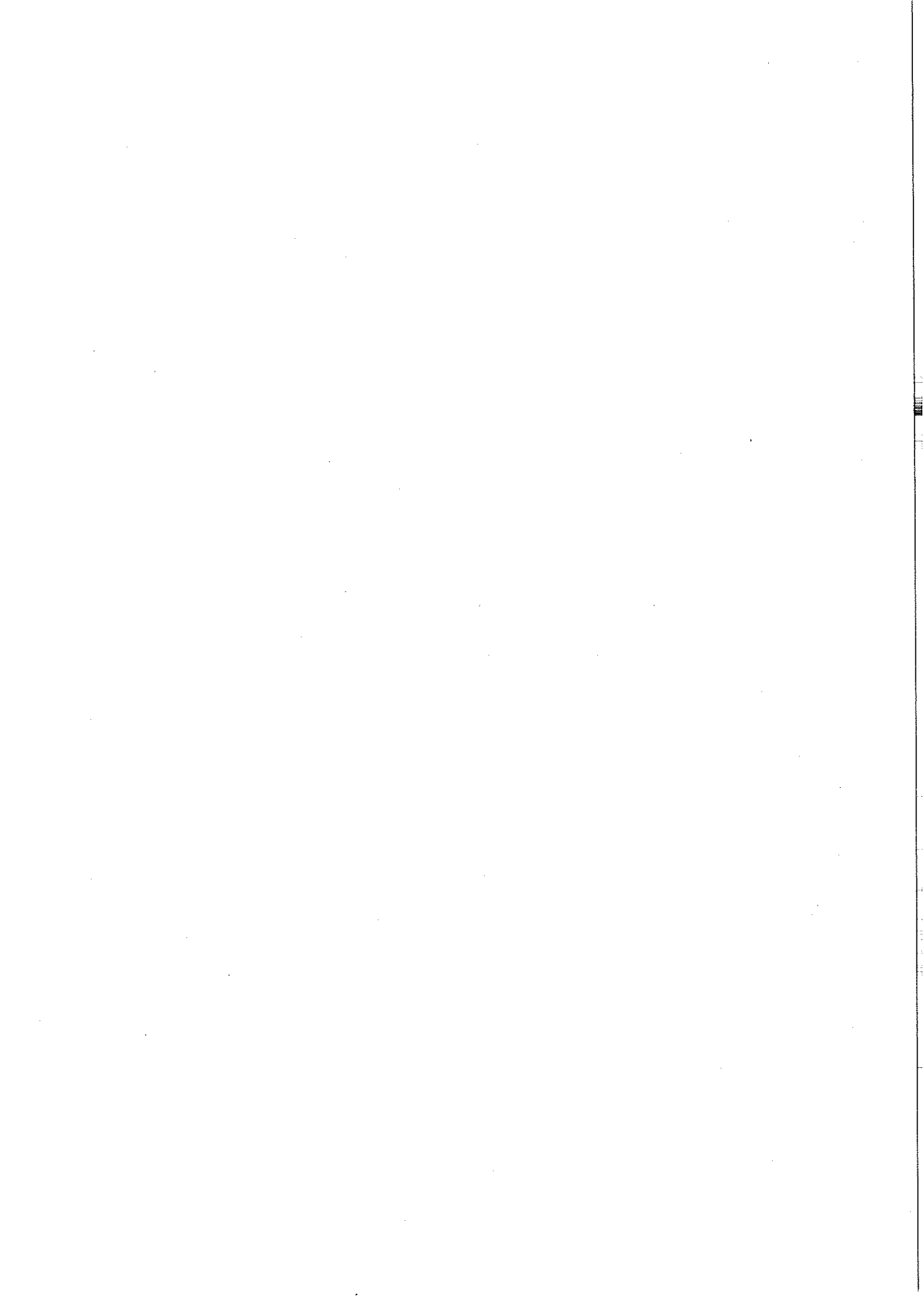
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Response to biodiversity white paper.doc



## Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

The "White Paper - call for submissions" consultation paper contains a number of key policy questions around which the strategic framework for the White Paper will be built. These are repeated below. Submissions addressing these key questions and any or all of the others posed throughout the paper are invited by Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> June.

### *What are the environmental, social and economic values provided by healthy land and biodiversity?*

Nobody could question the need to protect ecosystem processes like pollination, composting, stormwater filtration and the psychological benefit to humans of being immersed in nature. Values to consider include:

Humans are part of an ecosystem not separate and apart from it.

Plants have an importance in ecosystems that exceeds their aesthetic, nutritional and economic value to humans.

All things interconnect.

Feedback loops are the basis of ecosystems and economic systems.

Urban ecosystems are analogous to a living organism that requires inputs of energy and water, and expels the products of metabolism like CO<sub>2</sub> and sewage.

Biodiversity relates to species variety, species abundance and genetic diversity within a species.

Ecosystems are dynamic, not static and so change is inevitable and not all change is bad.

## Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

*What impacts will climate change have on these values?*

Western Port Green House Alliance and CSIRO have done some excellent work in this regard. WPGA have made a separate submission. The City of Casey is a founding member and host Council to WPGA.

# Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

## *What are the other threats and opportunities?*

### **Flora and fauna**

- With 60% of threatened Victorian vegetation types being on private land, we need to improve assistance and surity to these land owners. For example, individual assessments and advice for the preservation of existing flora and fauna and restoration work. This already exists through CMA's and local government but only for land owners who seek the information, we need to be more proactive with those who don't willingly seek help, or don't necessarily know its available.
- Urban design to include contingencies for wildlife eg. new roads under road or even over road corridors.
- Updated data on individual BioSites including detailed management recommendations including the protection and enhancement of environmental values within DSE BioSites.
- Support for councils to provide comprehensive flora & fauna surveys
- Consideration of the concept of climate change refuge for environmental values.

### **Land management and farming practices**

- Field days and tours for land holders to promote existing demonstration sites of low impact building, gardening, horticultural and agricultural practices. This could relate specifically to crop selection, irrigation practices, avoiding tillage, groundwater management, composting of weeds to introduce carbon into the soil.
- Horticultural and agricultural courses need to emphasise natural resource management and the links between practices and impacts.
- Consideration of green trade options to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas.
- There needs to be greater support for public acquisition and management of key sites of environmental significance, especially along the coastline.
- There could be more control of recreational uses of waterways in the future in response to changes to water levels and increased bank erosion. It seems that there are minimal levels of controls for boats being sailworthy, resulting in many boats leaking oil and petrol.
- Updated State sponsored research is needed to revisit the key environmental references for Westernport There is a significant knowledge gap regarding the complexities of the Westernport catchment, particularly the interaction between the natural systems and the expanding urban fringe.
- Create certainty around green wedges by developing mechanisms to recognise the value of public benefits on private land.
- There are opportunities for carbon trading or participation in bush broker. Hover there is also the threat that offsets can be gained in other regions.
- The concept of climate change refuges should be considered for environmental values i.e. coastal land identified as being subject to extensive flooding.
- State land management tender projects should be targeted to the Westernport green wedge.

### **Population growth**

- Planned population growth in this region is the single biggest pressure on the ecosystems in the Casey Cardinia Growth Corridor. For example demand on Domestic and Commercial Water consumption (including small business)
- Population Growth pressures for Casey include edge effects at the interface with the foothills, coastal villages and RAMSAR areas. Cranbourne Botanic Gardens has become an island soon to be surrounded by residential development. Habitat corridors should be retained/created through future developments to afford links to other significant areas.
- Recreational pressure on coastal infrastructure including boating facilities and pressure on public lands from deleterious activities including motorbike riding & 4WD driving.

# Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

- Recent studies have shown high water tables and salinity risk areas in the South Eastern Growth Corridor. This is significant as relying on treated effluent for landscape irrigation in new areas, can be problematic if not managed correctly. Despite being "Class A" there is potential to contribute to urban salinity, particularly in parts of Cranbourne.

## Periurban issues

- Unemployment is often relatively high in these transition areas between urban and rural. More effort is needed to create employment. For example, allotments are no longer viable/productive for agribusiness, could there be a scheme of creating productive agricultural corridors similar to wildlife corridors, where communities could develop market gardens.
- Support for property owners to strive for sustainable farming practices.

## Pest species

- Review the list of prescribed weeds to include more environmental weeds,
- There is a lack of resources made available for weed and pest control. At present DPI is the only authorised body to pursue environmental weeds and more officers are required.
- Lack of control of weeds along road & railway (particularly disused lines) offer corridor for spread.
- Consideration of innovative approaches by farmers who actually use the weeds to advantage like Peter Andrews (see Back from the Brink, ABC publishing). This is primarily important for agriculture and horticulture as oversprays and runoff continue to be a problem.
- Consideration of fertility and other biological control of wildlife and feral animals is the long term solution to unsustainable numbers of animals.
- Casey supports statewide mandatory desexing of domestic cats.

## Planning scheme

- Getting better ecological outcomes in the built environment is heavily dependent on improvements to state wide building and plumbing regulations and the Victorian Planning Provisions.
- In particular we need much stronger unified enforcement for breaches of planning permit requirements, particularly vegetation removal. There is currently very little incentive for a developer to worry about trees when the only penalty for removing them is a fine for a few hundred dollars.
- The planning system could draw on the wealth of strategic documents within councils as these are recognised as protection areas that will be upheld by VCAT.

## Coastal Villages Strategy

Casey Council is currently preparing its Coastal Villages Strategy, the study area including the Westernport Coast and some land within the Westernport Green Wedge. The RAMSAR wetland is of international significance for migratory bird species. Part of the RAMSAR wetland is on private property.

Some of the relevant draft key directions of the Draft Coastal Villages strategy include:

- Identification of key sites along the coastline for public acquisition and management
- Protection and enhancement of environmental values within DSE BioSites- Tooradin and Warneet and surrounds.
- Concept of climate change refuge – coastal land is identified as being subject to extensive flooding

## Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

*What are the roles and responsibilities of individuals, community and government and how can we maximise the effectiveness of our joint effort?*

- The roles and responsibilities of a range of organisations involved in resource management need to be clarified. We need to provide a consistent management process across Victoria, even if the details vary regionally.
- Consistency and connectivity between state & catchment management authorities and with local government in line with regional catchment management strategies, RCIP funding and specific areas of responsibility.
- Of particular importance is how the RCS is translated into on ground actions. On ground work is often left to disparate voluntary groups and local government competing for resources and support.
- Management of coastal land is often unclear. Land ownership and responsibility of private/public boundaries remains difficult to determine which can make land management cumbersome and confusing for communities. For example "who is responsible for bank erosion in coastal areas, and weed maintenance in roads and railway reserves and in forests and parks?" Similarly the RAMSAR wetland in Wester Port is of international significance for migratory bird species but RAMSAR wetlands appear to cross onto private property.
- We need better coordination and processing of data. Large and accessible repositories of information could be rich sources of new insights about environmental processes.
- The need to engage at the outset with the indigenous community is often overlooked and consultation appears to be an afterthought.

# Land and Biodiversity at a time of climate change

*How well are the current institutional arrangements working and how could they be improved to deliver sustainable land, water and biodiversity outcomes?*

- See comments above
- There should be more long term coordinated programs involving multiple stakeholders rather than just project support for unconnected programs. Some potentially good examples of upcoming multi stakeholder programs are Living Links and Bring Back the Bunyip.
- Support for public acquisition and management of key sites of environmental significance Rutherford Inlet is a good example of where land acquisition could improve the management of a natural system.

## Submission author details

**Please note that this submission has been made at officer level and was informed by our Conservation Advisory Committee, but has not been submitted or approved by Council.**

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