

SHIRE OF YARRA RANGES
GREEN WEDGE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ISSUES PAPER
SEPTEMBER 2008



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PREFACE

The green and natural environment of Yarra Ranges is highly valued by the community and the Council alike. It features strongly in the vision for Yarra Ranges as expressed in the Community Plan (*Vision 2020*) as follows:

In 2020, Yarra Ranges is one of the special places in Australia... It is a rich mosaic of urban settlements, productive rural holdings, healthy waterways, native bushland and forest... It is one of the most beautiful natural environments in the nation. It is exceptional because it also has a strong human dimension. The spirit of the people is as evident as the beauty of the surroundings...

The value of agriculture is also recognised in this vision:

In 2020, Yarra Ranges is home to some of Australia's most famous rural produce. Each day its fresh flowers, fruit and market garden produce are flown out to markets in the Asia - Pacific Region. Its wines, cheeses and other food products are in demand around the world...

Council has numerous planning controls, programmes, and projects in place to protect the Green Wedge in the face of numerous challenges. The challenges are largely a result of Yarra Ranges' location on the edge of a fast growing metropolis of 3.8 million people and stem from issues such as unsuitable development, weed infestation, and inappropriate land management. The initiatives have helped control the worst excesses of these land pressures and have retained much of the rural and environmental areas in a relatively natural and unspoilt condition.

However, more can be done and what is being done can be more effective. A Green Wedge Management Plan is the recognised means to plan for the Green Wedge and Council has approved this way forward. A Management Plan can bring a strategic focus to the planning and management of Yarra Ranges' rural and environmental areas and brings together in one place all of the various policies, projects and programmes which are currently in place.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper marks the start of a process to prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan for the Shire. The Plan will provide a strategic framework for action to enhance the Green Wedge. It will build on existing green wedge management procedures which include a variety of planning controls, environmental programmes, support for voluntary groups, and joint working with other agencies.

Initial consultation and research suggests that there are five key elements which need to be addressed in the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge, namely:

- A Healthy Biodiversity
- Landscape Protection
- Productive Farming
- Managing Tourism
- Rural Living

These key elements can be combined to describe a draft vision for the Green Wedge using objectives from the community plan for Yarra Ranges - Vision 2020. The draft vision for the Green Wedge is as follows:

The Shire's Green Wedge will be a place of great natural beauty which actively contributes to making Yarra Ranges a world class Shire and will be held up as a model for biodiversity and sustainable living. It will be recognised locally and nationally as a premium tourism destination with rural produce that is in demand throughout the world. Local communities and landowners will take responsibility for protection and enhancement of their natural environment and they will have a high level of awareness of its significance. These aspirations will be supported by strong local planning policies which ensure that development is not at the expense of the environment.

This vision needs to be reviewed through community consultation on this Issues Paper and an agreed version will provide direction for the Green Wedge Management Plan.

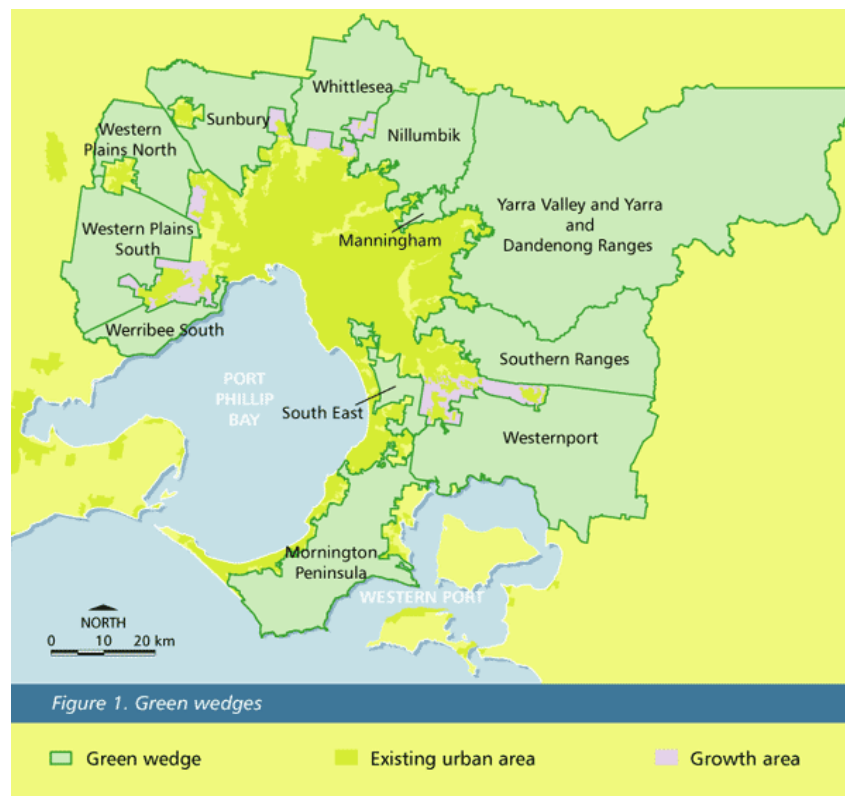
This paper explains the thinking behind this draft vision and identifies fourteen preliminary issues for the Green Wedge. The issues have been informed particularly by the extensive research and consultation that was carried out for the review of the Local Planning Policy Framework in 2006/07. A programme of priorities for the next stage of work for the Green Wedge Management Plan is described and a form to provide feedback on the Issues Paper is available with this paper or on request.

1 BACKGROUND

This Issues Paper identifies key issues facing the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge and seeks community feedback as a first step in developing a Green Wedge Management Plan for the Shire. The Paper draws on previously completed work such as *Vision 2020*, the *Local Planning Policy Framework Review*, the *Environment Strategy*, the *Economic Development Strategy* and the *Community Well Being Plan*. The paper also explores questions raised by the community and stakeholders in relation to the Green Wedge Management Plan.

There are twelve green wedges around Melbourne's urban fringe as shown on Map 1. They are rural areas which have been identified for permanent protection from urban development so that they can accommodate activities which are needed in rural areas close to Melbourne. Those activities include traditional rural uses such as farming, recreation, national parks, forests and nature reserves, but also other activities which prefer a rural location such as golf courses, recreation facilities, and rural dwellings.

Map 1: Metropolitan Green Wedges



The State Government's metropolitan strategy (*Melbourne 2030*) recognises that the green wedges will be under intense pressure from development, recreation, and other activities. To deal with these pressures, the strategy identifies an Urban Growth Boundary which marks the edge of urban development. Development is encouraged to consolidate within this boundary and prevented from intruding into rural areas by a range of planning scheme controls which limit urban growth and development.

The concept of preserving rural areas is not new and in the Shire of Yarra Ranges a level of green wedge protection has been provided by the Regional Strategy Plan. The Regional Strategy Plan was originally prepared for the Upper Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Authority in 1982 to protect the special features and character of the former

shires of Healesville, Lillydale, Sherbrooke and Upper Yarra. Although the Authority does not now exist, the provisions of the Strategy Plan were retained in the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme through a special clause (*Clause 53 Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Region*) and Section 46F of the Planning & Environment Act 1987.

The planning scheme therefore provides a means by which the green wedges can be permanently reserved for rural activities and for recreation and enjoyment by the people of Melbourne.

However, rural areas on the edge of a large city need more than planning scheme controls which define minimum standards. They need to be proactively managed to prevent infestation by weeds and pests, to improve land management, to enhance local biodiversity, to protect agriculture and to provide better facilities for recreation. Green wedge management is therefore required to complement the planning scheme controls.

A Green Wedge Management Plan is recommended to achieve this balanced and holistic approach to the management of the Green Wedge. The Department of Planning & Community Development promotes this approach and has produced guidance for Councils describing how these should be prepared¹.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges has decided to prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan for land within the Shire and this Issues Paper is the first step in that process. Although there are already many programmes and planning controls in place, Council believes that these can be better coordinated, that there are still gaps in what is done, and that green wedge management will benefit from a strategic, overall approach.

The following chapters describe issues affecting the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge under ten main headings. For each heading, there is a short overview of existing conditions, current programmes and planning controls. The final chapter – Concluding Comments – identifies five key elements, a draft vision for the Green Wedge, key issues, and a small number of priority areas. The Issues Paper will inform public consultation and a *Feedback Form* is available with this Paper or on request. The Study Area for the Green Wedge Management Plan is included as Map 2.



2 FARMING

... a model for sustainable business and agriculture. Productivity is high, the quality of the produce is exceptional and business confidence is strong. In 2020, Yarra Ranges is home to some of Australia's most famous rural produce. Each day its fresh flowers, fruit and market garden produce are flown out to markets in the Asia - Pacific Region. Its wines, cheeses and other food products are in demand around the world.

Vision 2020

Farming is an important industry for both the Green Wedge and the Shire. There are 854 businesses in agriculture (2006) and they contribute \$528m² to the Shire's economy - some 6% of total industry output. Agriculture accounts for 5% of the Shire's employment (ie 1782 workers) and the main activities are plant nurseries, wine-growing, berries, flowers and fruit. It also accounts for seasonal and casual employment in the order of 3000 full-time equivalent jobs which generates supplementary income for local workers and increased expenditure in the Shire. In terms of agricultural land area, broad-scale pasture is the dominant farming use (36,000ha or 81%) followed by horticulture (8800ha or 18%) and pigs & poultry (200ha or 0.5%).



Agriculture in the Shire has advantages because of its proximity to the Melbourne market, the "Yarra Valley" brand for fine wines and healthy food products, and its capacity to link wine and food to tourism. However there are also serious challenges because of subdivision, loss of farming land to other uses, water shortages, biosecurity (biological threats to the environment and public health) and food security (availability of food and access to it), shortages of labour and seasonal accommodation, and conflicts with some rural residents who do not share those farming interests.

The table below sets out the main agricultural industries.

INDUSTRY	COMMENTS	AREA (ha)	BUSINESSES
Cut flower nurseries	Silvan-Monbulk	1900	228
Fruit	Mainly apples and cherries	2070	39
Berries	Blueberries (3%), raspberries (18%), & strawberries (74%)	411	96
Wine	Strong growth in last 30 years	3660	121 vineyards ³

However the nature of farming is changing due to technology, new markets, global economics, and consumer demand. Agricultural productivity used to be based on soil quality - for instance the red soils of Silvan-Monbulk - but now it is equally related to the

availability of water and new technology where produce is grown in a controlled environment with imported soils. The popularity of the Yarra Valley for wine growing was unimaginable 50 years ago as was the prospect of Japan as a major importer of cut flowers from Silvan and Monbulk. The future of local agriculture is equally difficult to predict with questions about climate change, transport costs, consumer demand, and technology but the emphasis in Yarra Ranges must continue to be for sustainable agriculture within this changing framework.

Council supports agriculture in the Shire through planning controls which aim to maintain a healthy farming sector in the Shire, as well as other measures including the Farm Rate and employment of an Agribusiness & Tourism Officer. It also provides support to the Centre for Agriculture and Business (Yarra Valley) as a forum for the local industry and advocates on behalf of agriculture.

To avoid fragmentation of farming land and to recognise its importance, Council sets subdivision standards for rural areas through the zone provisions, and in particular through the Green Wedge Zone. This Zone sets a minimum subdivision standard of between 6ha and 40ha via six "Schedules" applied to specific areas. Council also has adopted policies for rural areas and agricultural structures such as igloos and glasshouses, in order to provide planning guidance and to give local agriculture more certainty for the future.

An overall framework which supports farming and agriculture is described in the Municipal Strategic Statement⁴ and also in the Economic Development Strategy 2006-2009.

3 TOURISM & LEISURE

... tourism is integral to the prosperity of Yarra Ranges, playing a critical part in the lives of the community. It provides significant economic benefits and is essential to the protection of the Shire's natural environment and cultural heritage. This is its greatest attraction. This is what draws millions of visitors every year. They come because they are welcome. They come because Yarra Ranges is accessible, information is easily found and the range of experiences is so diverse. They come because it is so beautiful.

Vision 2020

Tourism in Yarra Ranges is worth around \$300m to the local economy and accounts for 1837 jobs (5% local employment). About 1.6m visitors come to the Shire each year, attracted by world class tourist attractions such as Healesville Sanctuary, Puffing Billy, and the Yarra Valley food and wine industry. These are supplemented by popular metropolitan outings to the Dandenong Ranges, Yarra Valley and national parks for picnics, bushwalking, cycling and other outdoor activities.

Marketing for the region is through the newly formed Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Marketing which is supported by an annual Council grant of \$298,000. It concentrates on "product strengths" of wine and food, conferencing, and tourism and markets the region as "Victoria's hero [sic] food and wine destination". The importance of the local wine industry is highlighted by the numbers - over 100 wineries and 97 cellar door sales. There are also 250 visitor accommodation establishments which are divided between the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges, and most of which are the small "boutique" enterprises such as B&Bs and small cottages. Potential growth for local

tourism has been identified in areas such as nature-based or “ecotourism”, health and wellbeing facilities such as spas and natural therapies, craft and produce markets, and agri-tourism including farm stays and education.

Although Vision 2020 and the Council’s Economic Development Strategy aim to promote and support local tourism, planning controls for tourism are more equivocal. Current provisions seriously restrict the type, size, and location of tourist facilities and there may be scope to explore some additional types of tourist development in appropriate locations. This situation – where stand alone policies support, for instance agriculture, tourism, local amenity, and landscape protection – creates a problem for decision making because there is little overall guidance for resolving conflict, for instance when what is best for agriculture or tourism, is not what is best for landscape protection or biodiversity.

The Green Wedge Management Plan will need to address how such conflicts can be better dealt with and resolved.

4 RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

... a rich mosaic of urban settlements, productive rural holdings, healthy waterways, native bushland and forest.

Vision 2020

There is very strong demand for residential development on rural lots from people who wish to do small-scale farming, own horses, enjoy living in a bushland setting, or have a business need for a larger property. This is understandable and to be expected in an area with such a wonderful natural environment and which is on the edge of an affluent city of 3.8 million people. However a rural lifestyle close to city services is a luxury which can compromise and ultimately spoil the environmental values which are so attractive and it would be unthinkable to create rural living opportunities to meet demand.

The Planning Scheme recognises this dilemma and its priorities are to protect rural areas for farming and biodiversity and to clearly delineate the urban fringe. The Scheme nevertheless make provision for a limited range of associated services including tourism and recreation opportunities. Residential development is provided for in townships and within the metropolitan area which is defined by the Urban Growth Boundary. Some modest provision for rural living on larger lots is provided for by the Green Wedge A Zone and the Rural Living Zone (which is inside the Urban Growth Boundary). Other opportunities exist in areas with “old and inappropriate” subdivisions where smaller rural lots are a legacy of past mistakes. Some of these areas are now covered by a Restructure Overlay which ensures that further development and subdivision is in accordance with an approved plan. Subdivision provisions for the green wedge zones are shown in the table below.



ZONE & SCHEDULE	AVERAGE	RANGE
GREEN WEDGE ZONE (Farming etc)		
Schedule 1	8	6-14ha
Schedule 2	16	12-28
Schedule 3	20	15-35
Schedule 4	25	18-44
Schedule 5	40	30-70
Schedule 6	50	40-60
GREEN WEDGE A ZONE (Rural Living etc)		
Schedule 1	2	1-3
Schedule 2	4	3-7
RURAL CONSERVATION ZONE (Conservation etc)		
Schedule 1	40	30-50
Schedule 2	50	40-60
Schedule 3	60	50-70

Despite these controls rural land is fragmented and many smaller lots exist. In addition, the controls are regularly and frequently tested by landowners and agents who - for a variety of reasons - wish to build new dwellings. However Yarra Ranges is a sensitive environment under extreme development pressure from continuous incremental development and the Shire has responsibilities to safeguard that environment for future generations.

5 LANDSCAPE PROTECTION

In 2020, heritage value is attributed, not only to buildings, but also gardens, trees and broad landscapes... It is one of the most beautiful natural environments in the nation.

Vision 2020

The beautiful landscapes of the Shire are a treasured asset for the Shire and are a central part of its appeal to residents and visitors. Whether it be the towering Mountain Ash forests of the Black Spur or Sherbrooke Forest, or the red-earth agricultural panoramas around Silvan and Monbulk, or the Yarra Valley vineyards, the Shire's landscapes are central to the identity and charm of Yarra Ranges and need to be protected for future generations to enjoy.



Controls in the Planning Scheme discourage inappropriate development in the countryside and protect against the loss of native vegetation. They also contain specific controls to protect the landscape through a Significant Landscape Overlay which covers one-third of the Shire. The Overlay identifies 21 valued landscape segments across the Shire and specifies some limited criteria to ensure that the qualities of these landscapes are protected. A further twelve of these landscapes are classified by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) including Sherbrooke Forest, the Silvan Agricultural Area, the Upper Yarra River, and the Donna Buang Range.

However there are problems with the performance of these controls, in particular in relation to industrial and agricultural structures in some parts of the Shire, and potentially with new structures such as wind farms. Additionally, other equally significant landscape areas of the Shire have not been protected and the application of the Overlay needs to be reviewed.

6 PUBLIC LAND

Vision 2020 requires the concerted efforts of the entire Yarra Ranges community to make it a reality. No single organisation alone can 'deliver on Vision 2020'. The collaboration of the Environment Protection Authority, Department of Sustainability & Environment, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria, VicRoads and the Country Fire Authority with Council has led to a holistic approach in managing issues of air quality, water quality, wastewater disposal, fire prevention and control and biodiversity conservation.

Vision 2020

More than two-thirds of the Shire's green wedge (168,000ha) is in public ownership in the form of water catchments, national parks, nature reserves, and state forests. The main public landowners are the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water, although the Shire of Yarra Ranges owns or manages some 2% of land in the form of bushland reserves, parks and other open spaces. There are clear limits on what Council can accomplish on public land which it does not own and for which a planning permit is not normally required for works and development.

The Regional Strategy Plan requires that works and undertakings by public agencies are in conformity with the Regional Strategy Plan and contains controls over the use and disposal of public land. However these and many other controls in the Regional Strategy Plan are now inconsistent with State provisions. They create confusion for applicants and the wider public and need to be reviewed in line with current environmental standards and to reduce unnecessary red tape.

In addition, there is significant inter-agency working between Council and the other agencies who manage the public estate within the Shire. Joint working and coordinated management to agreed ends is essential to successful management of the Green Wedge. While consultation and cooperation is generally carried out on an informal and as needed basis, there are examples where joint working arrangements have been articulated through a Memorandum Of Understanding, such as that agreed with Parks Victoria in 2002 regarding management of parks and reserves in the Dandenong Ranges.

7 WATER

Water has also become a key focus of the community's efforts to protect and enhance the natural environment. Water is valued as a precious and scarce resource. The quality of water entering and passing through the Shire has been dramatically improved through innovative catchment management approaches, sustainable farming and stormwater and wastewater interventions. The Shire boasts some of the healthiest waterways in the country.

Vision 2020

Management of the Shire's water resources is not just about water supply. It raises issues of flooding, water catchments, water quality, and stream management - as well as supply and reticulation. The Regional Strategy Plan sets out objectives for these areas and a position for Council in relation to planning proposals. In addition the Council's Environment Strategy identifies waterway health and wetland protection as two key issues for the environment.

Nearly all of the Shire falls within the Yarra River catchment and this accounts for half of the entire Yarra River catchment. A small part of the Shire also falls within the Dandenong Creek catchment but this part accounts for only 10% of this catchment. Indicators of river and stream condition show that for the fourteen smaller catchment units which are within the Shire, Yarra Ranges compares favourably with the metropolitan area and the State as a whole as shown in the following table. The table probably flatters Yarra Ranges somewhat as many of these stream units are in remote and pristine natural areas although Council's State of the Environment Report assesses river condition as having "good" status and "improving".

RIVER CONDITION	YARRA RANGES	METRO AREA	STATE
Good/Excellent	28% (4)	25%	na
Moderate	50% (7)	30%	na
Poor/Very Poor	21% (3)	45%	30%

Within the Shire, Brushy Creek (Mooroolbark), Stringybark Creek (Yering and Coldstream), and Middle Dandenong Creek stand out as of poor river quality although these are the subject of concerted improvement programmes with Melbourne Water and other agencies.

However it is of concern that the Dandenong Ranges stands out as a black spot for the whole of Melbourne in terms of its sewerage. There are 17,000 septic tanks in this area - equivalent to a city the size of Warrnambool or Shepparton - and nearly all of these are old tanks which do not treat "grey" water which is discharged into the stormwater system via local streets. There are significant costs in constructing a new system but eliminating this pollution of the environment must be a priority for the Green Wedge. Council is currently coordinating a Domestic Waste Water Management Plan to address the issue but this will require the support of all levels of government.



A further issue for the Green Wedge is management of the floodplain alongside creeks and watercourses⁵. In many cases this land is dedicated Crown Land and managed by agencies such as Parks Victoria or the Department of Sustainability and Environment. In other cases however, land is privately owned to the centreline of the watercourse and can be subject to trampling by stock and degradation of the streamside environment. Melbourne Water negotiates with owners to fence off land within 20m of the watercourse but this approach needs to be reinforced through conditions on planning applications and a Memorandum Of Understanding between the relevant agencies.

While the Green Wedge Management Plan focuses mainly on land management and biodiversity issues there may be opportunities for the Plan to contribute to a more integrated approach to water management in conjunction with initiatives for agriculture, biodiversity, tourism and landscape protection.

8 FAUNA AND FLORA

... Yarra Ranges is held up as a national model of biodiversity and sustainable living. The significant biodiversity of the Shire has been actively conserved and protected through efforts of governments, landholders and the whole community. These efforts have led to improved biodiversity throughout the Shire and have arrested the decline that was evident in the early years of the 21st century.

Vision 2020

The fauna and flora of Yarra Ranges – its biodiversity – is one of its most treasured assets. National parks and state forests cover vast tracts of the Shire and approximately half of the Shire has been identified as being of high botanical or zoological significance and is protected in the Planning Scheme. Some 1432 indigenous plant species have been recorded in the Shire of which 112 are listed as Rare or Threatened and six species are listed as Nationally Significant. These include the Buxton Gum and the Maroon Leek Orchid.

The Shire is also home to 404 indigenous fauna species of which 79 are listed as Rare or Threatened in the State and 16 are listed as Nationally Significant. Included among these are the Helmeted Honeyeater, Leadbeaters Possum and the Mt Donna Buang Wingless Stonefly.

The Council contributes to protecting the Shire's fauna and flora through a combination of management measures, community programmes, and planning controls. Many of these initiatives are outlined in the Yarra Ranges Environment Strategy (2008) which will be strengthened over time with the development of a Fauna and Flora Strategy. Key management measures include the following:

- Council's Roadside Management Programme – which concentrates on roadside reserves with high conservation significance
- Community Roadside Management Programme – for landowners adjoining roadside reserves with high conservation significance
- Biodiversity Rate Rebate - for properties with a Trust For Nature conservation covenants
- Conditions on planning permits which require owners to enhance local biodiversity through planting schemes, land management measures etc

- A network of community-based “Friends” and “Landcare” groups which comprise hundreds of local residents and landowners who give their time voluntarily to improve the local environment.
- Council staff who are responsible for initiating and managing programmes to improve protection and enhancement of the Shire’s fauna and flora

With this jigsaw of initiatives, controls, and groups working to a common cause, it is essential that they are well coordinated and working to an agreed programme of environmental improvements within an agreed overall strategy.

In particular, the management and maintenance of Council-owned bushland and roadside reserves needs to be considered strategically. There are some 600 reserves comprising 5000ha and Council does not have the resources to maintain all of these reserves. Priorities need to be set through an agreed strategy (a Bushland Reserves Management Strategy) which considers each site in relation to criteria such as the quality of habitat, weed infestation, fire hazard, and community support.

There are many planning controls which protect and conserve native vegetation. These controls are necessary because over 30% of privately owned land in the Green Wedge is covered by native vegetation which has important habitat and connectivity value. Statewide requirements are set out in the Planning Scheme and are complemented by local provisions which include a local policy for vegetation protection, planning "overlays" for sites of botanical and zoological significance, and permit requirements to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. However, there is significant overlap and duplication between these controls which can lead to confusion and ineffective use of Council’s resources.



A new Statewide approach to the management of native vegetation was set out in a "Framework for Action in 2002"⁶. The Framework requires landowners to take all possible steps to avoid removal of native vegetation. If avoidance is not possible, then every effort must be made to minimise removal. Vegetation "offsets" are required as a last resort where it can be demonstrated that no other course of action is possible⁷.

The Fauna and Flora Strategy will set out how and when offsets for lost vegetation can be provided to achieve a "net gain" and this needs to be complemented by provisions in the Planning Scheme. There is particular interest in ensuring that offsets are undertaken within the Shire, rather than in other local government areas.

9 FORESTS

The historic decline of native vegetation cover on private land has been arrested and turned around. From small bush blocks to large farms, residents and farmers actively protect and link bushland remnants on their land, thus helping to create a network of bush corridors - ribbons of green along road reserves, trails and creeks - which connect bushland remnants on private property to forested public land.

Vision 2020

Some 76% (188,000ha) of the Shire of Yarra Ranges is covered by forest and is of immense ecological, landscape and recreation value. The forested landscape is also of great cultural importance for the people of Melbourne including the indigenous community. Nearly all of this area is managed as state forest, national parks or Crown Land by government agencies such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water. However some 12% (22,000ha) is on private land where Council's role is limited but it can still influence management through planning controls, community education, or grants and other incentives. In addition the Shire has direct control over 2500ha of Council-owned bushland in the form of roadside and local reserves.

Our Forests – A Shared Responsibility sets out Council's Forests Policy and was adopted in November 2004. It describes policies for forest uses under four main headings ie Biodiversity, Arts Culture & Tourism, Recreation, and Timber Uses.

However, timber production has declined in importance since 2004 and it is now proposed to revise the Policy and incorporate it into a Fauna and Flora Strategy which recognises the primacy of forests for biodiversity.

In addition, timber production on private land is constrained through a variety of state and local planning controls as follows:

- State provisions guiding timber production on private land
- Local MSS provisions to support and encourage the timber industry
- Local policy for timber growing, harvesting, and processing
- Local controls which require a permit for timber production and prevent the planting of softwood species

There can be difficulties in reconciling the employment and business arguments for timber production, and the need to protect local biodiversity and the natural landscape. This is further emphasised when state and local planning controls over native vegetation are considered ie:

- State provisions to protect and conserve native vegetation
- Local controls which require a permit to remove, lop or destroy any vegetation, even if it is on public land

It is anticipated that the emerging Fauna and Flora Strategy will provide further direction in this respect and that the Green Wedge Management Plan will include guidance for situations where there are conflicting objectives and values.

10 WEEDS

The problem of weeds, a significant issue in 2000, has been considerably reduced through intensive weed control programs introduced under the Shire's Weed Management Strategy in 2005. These programs now extend beyond high value road reserves to all areas of the Shire including private land. Landowners understand the negative impact of weeds on the environment and have been supported to purchase and plant indigenous and lower impact species.

Vision 2020

Weed infestation is a serious problem for Yarra Ranges and a major threat to the Shire's biodiversity. Over 100 weed species are already included on the Shire's "Environmental Weeds List"⁸ and the Council's Weed Management Strategy (2005) identifies a further 62 weeds that should be included on the list and a further 120 that should be "considered" for inclusion. The list identifies well known weeds such as Bindweed and Blackberry, and also Australian species which are not indigenous to Yarra Ranges but which also pose a very serious threat such as Sweet Pittosporum, Sallow Wattle, and Willow Hakea.

The Strategy explains that "...weed populations have reached an 'explosive' stage and are now rapidly expanding" - especially in the Dandenongs. Infestations increase exponentially and will be very difficult and costly to control unless early action is taken to manage and contain their spread. The Strategy aims to prevent new outbreaks, contain and reduce current infestations, and for all stakeholders to fulfil their roles and responsibilities for weed management on their land. A strategic approach is adopted which sets priorities for the hundreds of sites across the Shire by concentrating resources on sites of highest conservation significance. In summary, the Strategy aims to work with the community and agencies to:

- Prevent new weed problems from occurring, and
- Reduce the impact of existing weed problems

A series of community education and awareness programmes support this approach, for instance through *Ivy Blitz*, *Weedbusters Week*, and other education tools. In addition, Council undertakes improvement and maintenance programmes for bushland and roadside reserves, and works with adjoining landowners to improve and enhance these reserves.

The Strategy requires cooperation and coordination across a number of Council departments and in particular, requires positive action through the planning system to induce improvements when permits are issued. The planning system also raises awareness of weed management by issuing advice notes and information sheets to prospective applicants. The information sheets could be extended to cover a range of Green Wedge and land management issues for private landowners.

11 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The major improvements have largely been achieved by local communities or 'Friends Groups' which, with the support of Council, have each taken on the responsibility for the protection and enhancement of their local environment, creating safe and high quality flora and fauna 'havens' for future generations. Volunteering continues to provide the foundation to the strength of the Yarra Ranges community, bringing people together and providing immeasurable services that benefit the entire community.

Vision 2020

The Yarra Ranges community is actively involved in managing the Green Wedge. There is an extensive network of landowners, Landcare and Friends Groups, and other individuals who contribute to the upkeep of the Green Wedge through planting programmes, weed removal, sustainable farming, and other management measures. Council helps to coordinate and support many of these initiatives through dedicated staff

appointed to work with these groups, and through the preparation of programmes and strategies – such as the Weed Management Strategy - which ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction and contributing to an overall vision. Support staff include coordinators for both Landcare and Friends Groups, environmental education officers, and the Birdsland Environmental Education Centre at Belgrave South. There may be ways in which this community involvement can be improved, for instance through increased participation, by increased financial and material support, and by ensuring that contributions are closely aligned with agreed objectives. Networking between groups and agencies will be essential to this end, as will be a clear strategic framework to provide direction and to set priorities.



In this respect it needs to be recognised that privately owned land in the Green Wedge is quite fragmented. There are more than 19,000 rural landowners but most of these are smallholdings (0-4ha) and the great majority of rural land is owned by only 2,000 of these properties. This suggests that efforts to improve land management could be even more effective if they are directed at the larger landowners.

There are also opportunities for people to engage with management of the Green Wedge through the planning system. This can be via consultation on planning applications and planning scheme amendments, or through contributing to the development of planning strategies such as the Green Wedge Management Plan and the Environment Strategy.

Finally, joint working between agencies needs to be fostered. Parks Victoria, Port Phillip & Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Department of Primary Industry, Department of Sustainability and Environment, and Melbourne Water all have important roles to play in managing the Green Wedge. Consultation and cooperation between these agencies takes place but it is on an ad hoc basis rather than strategically driven. Clearer and better defined arrangements for working together with jointly prepared strategies and operational plans may be needed to deliver better outcomes for the Green Wedge.



12 DRAFT VISION AND KEY ISSUES

This paper marks the start of a process to prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan for the Shire. The Plan will provide a strategic framework for action to enhance the Green Wedge. It will build on existing Green Wedge management procedures which include a variety of planning controls, environmental programmes, voluntary groups, and joint working with other agencies.

12.1 Five Key Elements

Initial consultation and research suggests that there are five key elements which comprise the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge, namely:

1 *Healthy Biodiversity*

Protecting the Shire's biodiversity and its rare and endangered species, and enhancing native vegetation through appropriate management

2 *Landscape Protection*

Protecting Yarra Range's beautiful landscapes - the blue mountain ranges, rural pastures, mountain ash forests, rolling vineyards etc

3 *Productive Farming*

Promoting a sustainable, productive and contemporary agricultural sector which supplies Melbourne and markets further afield with high quality produce

4 *Managing Tourism*

Promoting a sustainable rural tourism industry with opportunities for nature based tourism and farm-related activities

5 *Rural Living*

Providing limited opportunities for people to live in a bushland or rural setting - close to urban amenities but without constraining traditional rural activities

These five key elements provide a framework for the priority areas which are identified in Section 12.4 below.

12.2 Draft Vision for the Green Wedge

These key elements can be combined to present a draft vision which derives from *Vision 2020 - A Vision of the Yarra Ranges Community*. Vision 2020 is the community plan for Yarra Ranges and is the outcome of extensive public consultation which produced a shared and holistic plan for the Shire. A vision for the Green Wedge can be articulated from Vision 2020 which reads as follows:

The Shire's Green Wedge will be a place of great natural beauty which actively contributes to making Yarra Ranges a world class Shire. It will be recognised locally and nationally as a premium tourism destination with rural produce that is in demand throughout the world and will be held up as a model for biodiversity and sustainable living. Local communities and landowners will take responsibility for protection and enhancement of their natural environment and they will have a high level of awareness of its significance. These aspirations will be supported by strong local planning policies which ensure that development is not at the expense of the environment.

This vision needs to be endorsed through community consultation and the agreed version will provide direction for the Green Wedge Management Plan.

However, the challenge for the Plan is not only to accommodate competing interests in appropriate locations, but rather to reduce the potential for conflict between them. There are occasions when these elements are in competition - for instance when best practice agriculture is at odds with landscape protection (eg protective netting) or rural living (eg

scare guns). The Green Wedge Management Plan aims to address such conflicts and to propose guidelines and measures which help reconcile those differences.

12.3 Issues

As a first step, a number of specific issues have been identified. These issues are based on a review of Council's policies and programmes and discussions with Council staff and other agencies. In particular, outstanding issues from the Directions Paper⁹ (June 2007) have been included. The Directions Paper involved a comprehensive review of green wedge planning issues and included substantial public consultation. The green wedge issues arising from that process therefore need to be addressed as a priority.

Overarching Issues

Issue 1: Review of Green Wedge Zones

The current suite of green wedge zones¹⁰ was introduced in 2004 and was intended to make rural zones more relevant and aligned with Melbourne's metropolitan strategy (*Melbourne 2030*). While Council supports the nature of those zones and their controls, there may be a need to realign some boundaries as they are largely historic and have not been reviewed for many years. For instance, there may be arguments to extend Rural Conservation Zone boundaries to include areas of native vegetation. This would not involve a review of the Urban Growth Boundary which is not proposed to change.

Issue 2: Reconciling Different Interests and Values

Vision 2020 and the Economic Development Strategy describe a supportive Council policy position for tourism but the Planning Scheme and the Regional Strategy Plan has to limit this support to "appropriate" and "sensitive" development in appropriate locations under the right circumstances. In many situations, investors and owners are unclear about Council's position and guidance in the Planning Scheme does not provide sufficient clarity for many proposals. Clearer and more definitive guidance is needed but this is more difficult than it sounds because there will often be special circumstances which justify an exemption. In addition, the size and diversity of the Shire mean that its Planning Scheme must cater for many contingencies and diverse values and it is difficult to be prescriptive. Nevertheless, the Green Wedge Management Plan is an ideal opportunity to try to reconcile some of these differences through for instance, a more transparent assessment framework for development proposals, or a defined set of Council priorities for values such as economic development, conservation, agriculture and so on.

Issue 3: Inter-Agency Working

There may be benefits for the Green Wedge and public land owners if joint working between agencies can be formalised. For instance an inter-agency forum could be established consisting of Melbourne Water, DSE, Parks Victoria, the Catchment Management Authority, adjoining Councils, and the Shire of Yarra Ranges. A forum could address the following issues:

- Recreation trails and links between public land reserves
- Nature based tourism opportunities including eco-tourism
- Biodiversity research and mapping
- Water catchment policies

- Community education and information
- Coordination of management and land use plans

There may be opportunities for the Department of Planning & Community Development to take a lead role on this issue by coordinating joint working within and across green wedges.

Issue 4: Regional Strategy Plan

Since the introduction of the Regional Strategy Plan in 1982, the State Government has made significant changes to strengthen planning controls in the green wedges. However, because of the Regional Strategy Plan the planning controls in Yarra Ranges are not the same as those in other metropolitan green wedges. While on the surface this may seem appropriate, the reality is that policies are conflicting and confusing, and in some instances the Yarra Ranges Green Wedge is now more vulnerable than in other municipalities. For example there is overlap and conflict between the state provisions for native vegetation in Clause 52.17 and local requirements in Clause 53 of the Planning Scheme. Another example relates to restaurants in the Green Wedge, where under Clause 53 a restaurant can be in association with tourist accommodation, but this is contrary to the Green Wedge Zone.

These differences need to be resolved through an amendment to the Scheme so that the Council's position has credibility and clarity for applicants and the wider community.

Healthy Biodiversity

Issue 5: Biodiversity Mapping

It is essential for Council to have robust data on the quality and significance of the Shire's fauna and flora. If this data is not available and up to date, then development which compromises threatened species habitat could inadvertently take place and inappropriate development will impact on the overall biodiversity of the Shire. The mapping and research which informs the Environmental Significance Overlays in the Planning Scheme was carried out in 1989. While the outcomes of the reports and mapping are not challenged, the research needs to be reviewed and updated to provide consistency with the State mapping framework, and to assess areas of native vegetation which have not been included in previous research nor on the Overlays in the Planning Scheme.

Landscape Protection

Issue 6: Is a Review of Significant Landscape Overlay Needed?

The Significant Landscape Overlay generally requires a permit for development. However, the boundaries of the Overlay are based on National Trust designations from over 25 years ago and provisions are general in nature. A recent report¹¹ advised that the provisions provide insufficient guidance for decision-making on planning applications especially in regard to buildings and works in these areas. Additionally, many equally significant landscape areas of the Shire are not included in the Significant Landscape Overlay. A thorough review is required to overhaul and upgrade the Significant Landscape Overlay and a project brief for this work is proposed for the next stage of preparing the Green Wedge Management Plan.

Productive Farming

Issue 7: On-Site Food Processing and Farm Gate/Cellar Door Sales

From an economic development perspective, Council wishes to “add value” to agricultural produce as a means of supporting the economic viability of local agriculture. However, some regulations are seen to disadvantage the smaller growers who do not process their produce on site. For example, a vineyard cannot sell at its “cellar door” wine made from grapes grown on site, if the wine from those grapes was made by a winery at another location. Should these State planning provisions be reviewed?

The line becomes blurred when farm gate and cellar doors sales sell greater and greater proportions of farm products which are largely produced elsewhere and traffic and amenity impacts become significant. This issue was also raised in the Directions Paper.

Issue 8: Farm Structures

Agricultural techniques are constantly evolving to improve the quality and quantity of crops and to provide for more sustainable use of water and land. As a result, controlled growing environments through horticultural structures, protective netting, frost fans and other structures - and in some cases "out of soil" production such as hydroponics - are becoming increasingly common.

These practices can have a significant impact on the landscape of the rural areas. There is also confusion in the agricultural community as to what requires a permit and how the process works, and Council needs some flexibility to respond to innovations in agricultural practice. As a first step, guidance is needed to set out how Council should address planning applications for protective netting and a review is also needed of current policy on horticultural structures.

Issue 9: Use of Recycled Water for Farming

With continuing low rainfall across the State, water has become an increasingly valued resource. However Yarra Ranges is well-placed to be a model for sustainable water use because there are four sewerage treatment plants in the Shire which produce 6300 megalitres of recycled water to Class B standard (ie for general farming but not market gardening or domestic uses). This water is currently discharged to local streams but it could be used to irrigate large areas in the vicinity of these plants for certain types of agriculture, or for other uses such as golf courses. There are significant costs involved in the process but the opportunities need to be investigated further.

Managing Tourism

Issue 10: Visitor Accommodation

The Planning Scheme sets out the planning and land use constraints within which tourist facilities and visitor accommodation proposals should operate. For instance, visitor accommodation is directed to locate in townships or in conjunction with an agricultural activity. Policies also restrict the scale of tourist accommodation and the size of land on which facilities may be located. However the tourist industry would be expected to prefer a natural bushland environment surrounded by forests or sweeping views for ecotourism as well as for health and wellbeing resorts. In addition there are problems with definitions and terminology in the Planning Scheme¹² which create confusion and uncertainty for the industry and need to be resolved. This issue was examined in the

Directions Paper for the Local Planning Policy Review and an amendment to rectify this now needs to be prepared.

Issue 11: Special Use Zones

With very restricted opportunities for new development in natural areas, twelve Special Use Zones of up to 20ha have been identified over the years to accommodate one-off tourist developments in rural areas. While some of these sites have now been developed, many of the proposals were not pursued and the Green Wedge Management Plan provides an opportunity to review these sites with a view to reconciling their provisions with objectives for the Green Wedge.

Issue 12: Festivals and Events in Rural Areas

Music festivals, concerts and other events have become commonplace as entrepreneurial wine growers and farm-owners seek to expand their businesses. While many of these events have proved to be highly popular and are meeting an evident commercial demand, they can contravene planning controls which aim to protect local amenity, regulate traffic impacts, and retain a viable farming industry in rural areas. An appropriate means to regulate the operation and conduct of these events will be explored.

Issue 13: Accommodating New Golf Courses

The Shire accommodates several golf courses already but there are currently proposals to develop further golf courses. One is the proposal for relocation of the Chirnside Park golf course to a more rural location, and the other is a proposal for a new course for the Eastern Golf Club. This issue needs to be researched further because it may be the start of a new phase as metropolitan golf courses relocate to accessible rural areas. The capacity of the Shire to absorb golf courses would need to be investigated in terms of the benefits for investment, employment, and potential improvements versus the consumption of agricultural land.

Rural Living

Issue 14: Residential Development in the Countryside

The overall direction for residential development and further subdivision in the Green Wedge must be that opportunities should be excluded as far as that is possible in accordance with legislation and natural justice. This is essentially the Council's policy position at present and is implemented through the Planning Scheme. However those controls are continually being tested and further changes to tighten those controls may be justified. For instance, there may be many hundreds or even thousands of properties in single ownership but comprised of many separate allotments ("tenements") which have the potential to be sold off separately and developed.

There are two distinct issues regarding tenements. The first is an equity issue in that the current planning provisions for tenements are not consistent across the Shire and nor are potential purchasers made aware of provisions at the time of sale. The second issue is that wholesale development of tenement lots could have an enormous impact on the landscape, on farming, and on local biodiversity. An assessment is needed to establish the scale of the threat and then to introduce more transparent, prescriptive controls if that is justified by the evidence. This research is proposed to be carried out in the next stage of preparing the Green Wedge Plan.

12.4 Priority Areas and Next Steps

Following public consultation on this Paper, the issues above can be combined as an agenda for the next stage in the process of preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan. That process will involve targeted research and implementation of a limited number of key projects which can be resourced and which will contribute to the final Green Wedge Plan. The proposed projects have been listed under the Five Key Elements identified earlier and are articulated as "Priority Areas" as follows:

Priority Area 1 Overarching Issues

- Review need to *update the Green Wedge Zones* - but not the Urban Growth Boundary (Issue 1)
- Investigate a corporate model for an Assessment Framework to advise on major and controversial proposals in the Green Wedge and to *Reconcile Different Interests and Values* (Issue 2)
- Consult with DPCD to initiate improved joint working with Parks Victoria, DSE and Melbourne Water on issues such as master planning, long-distance trails, community education and information etc (Issue 3)
- Reconcile differences between the Regional Strategy Plan, Clause 53, and State Planning Provisions for the Green Wedge (Issue 4)

Priority Area 2 Healthy Biodiversity

- Research adequacy of *Biodiversity Mapping* and recommend way forward (Issue 5)

Priority Area 3 Landscape Protection

- Research - and prepare an amendment as necessary - for Significant Landscape Overlay (Issue 6)

Priority Area 4 Productive Farming

- Prepare a Planning Scheme amendment for on-site food processing, farm gate sales, and clearance of operational landscaping (Issue 7)
- Prepare Code of Practice for farm structures (Issue 8)
- Investigate and report on potential *Use of Recycled Water for Farming* and other uses and recommend way forward (Issue 9)

Priority Area 5 Managing Tourism

- Prepare a Planning Scheme amendment for visitor accommodation (Issue 10)
- Research and prepare amendment as necessary for *Special Use Zones* (Issue 11)
- Prepare *Local Law for Festivals and Events* in rural areas (Issue 12)
- Research - and prepare an amendment as necessary - for *Accommodating New Golf Courses* (Issue 13)

Priority Area 6 Rural Living

- Research impact and equity of *Residential Development in the Countryside* including subdivision and dwelling controls - and prepare amendment as necessary (Issue 14)

While it is intended that these projects will be completed as Stage 2 of the Green Wedge work programme, Council has limited resources and projects may have to be reassessed if further priorities are identified as part of the consultation process.

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20. *Vision 2020 By Design*; Planisphere for Shire of Yarra Ranges, Oct 2007
21. *Visitor Accommodation Strategy*; Meinhardt for Shire of Yarra Ranges, May 2005
22. *Weed Management Strategy*; Shire of Yarra Ranges, November 2005



ENDNOTES

¹ General Practice Note: Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan; DSE, August 2005

² This includes \$215m of wine growing (2007)

³ 97 of these 121 vineyards are also wineries

⁴ The Municipal Strategic Statement – Clause 21 in the Planning Scheme which describes the local planning strategy.

⁵ Refer page 2 Review Report 12 for the Local Planning Policy Framework Review 2007.

⁶ Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action; Dept of Natural Resources and Environment, 2002

⁷ Refer page 13 Review Report 10 for the Local Planning Policy Framework Review 2007.

⁸ Schedule 5 of the Regional Strategy Plan

⁹ Directions Paper for the Local Planning Policy Framework Review of Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme; June 2007

¹⁰ Mainly Green Wedge, Green Wedge A, and Rural Conservation Zone.

¹¹ Vision 2020 By Design: A Built Environment Framework for Yarra Ranges; October 2007

¹² For instance “Bed & Breakfast accommodation” does not correspond with its commonly accepted meaning and self-contained accommodation associated with a dwelling is not well covered by existing definitions although it is the most common type of accommodation for the Shire. Seasonal accommodation for farm workers should also be addressed as part of any review, although this is a farming, rather than a tourism issue (refer page 24 Review Report 6A for the Local Planning Policy Framework Review 2007)