

Submission on Hepburn Shire Biodiversity Strategy

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Abstract

The draft document (October 2017) does not address the employment of an Environmental Officer. This is a basic requirement. A qualified Environmental Officer should be employed and tasked with the oversight of all planning applications and public works with respect to their environmental impact. This should be a normal and expected part of the workflow of all approval processes.

The draft document does not address the rehabilitation (in terms of biodiversity) of already degraded areas at all. This is an important area of activity. It need not be difficult, nor expensive, and has great potential for community involvement.

It may be argued that biodiversity is not a Shire issue, however, the Shire has substantial control over public land, roadsides, planning and input into the planned burning regime. All these have a biodiversity impact, therefore biodiversity *is* a Shire issue.

Employment and role of the Environmental Officer

The Council shall employ an Environment Officer (EO), tasked as follows:

- The EO shall provide input on planning applications in terms of their impact on the environment and biodiversity, and make recommendations to Council to accept, reject or require changes;
- Scrutinise any planned public works that may have an environmental impact with a view to maintaining and improving biodiversity;
- Evaluate and specify works upon existing public space with a view to improving biodiversity.
- Liaise with VicRoads regarding VicRoads roadsides
- Scrutinise maintenance of local roads and specify procedures with regard to biodiversity
- Liaise with DELWP in regards to the effect of planned burns on biodiversity
- Specify works to increase biodiversity on existing biodiversity-degraded public land
- Promote community involvement in support of biodiversity, leveraging existing community groups such as Landcare, FOBIF, Wombat Forestcare and local planning groups.

It is most important that the EO shall be a normal and expected part of the workflow for approval of

public works, roadside maintenance, planning permits and animal policy. All projects and applications that may have an environmental impact should require the EO's expert input.

Rehabilitation of already degraded areas

Many areas of public land in the Shire are already degraded and may benefit from thoughtful application of rehabilitation measures. This area of activity has not been addressed by the draft strategy.

Rehabilitation measures on public land such as parks and roadsides can be simple and relatively inexpensive to implement. For example:

- Careful choice of species for street trees and shrubs
- Planting in thickets (rather than neatly spaced) to encourage birds.
- Installation of nestboxes specific particularly for species that are endangered such as the Phascogale and Powerful Owl.

This area has great potential for community involvement leveraging existing groups such as Wombat Forestcare, Landcare, FOBIF and men's sheds.

Nestboxes

With regards to nestboxes, it really is a case of "build it and they will come". Much of our forested area was destroyed during the goldrush and since, so we have many immature (I mean less than 100 years) trees that simply do not have the natural hollows to support arboreal mammals and many birds. Such hollows just take too long to develop. We can make up for this at least to some extent by providing artificial nestboxes on public land, at fairly low cost, and with community involvement. We should also promote nestboxes to individual residents. On my own place in Yandoit, I have installed a number of nestboxes: all were tenanted within a month of installation, with Phascogales, Sugar Gliders and Possums. I stress again: "build it and they will come".

I will make particular mention of the Powerful Owl. A nestbox for Powerful Owls needs to measure about 800x500x500mm with a 200mm entrance hole and a perch, and needs to be 7-15m above ground. This is beyond the capability of most landholders to install. This is one case in which Council resources could really help: identify appropriate locations, supply and install.

A final note

I hesitated to include this, because it (to me) is only hearsay, but in case it is true, I include it.

I have heard it said the the current CEO does not regard biodiversity as a Shire issue. If this is true, he needs to be disabused of this notion. The Shire has substantial control over public land, roadsides, the planning process, and has input into the planned burning regime. All of these areas have a biodiversity impact, therefore biodiversity *is* a Shire issue.