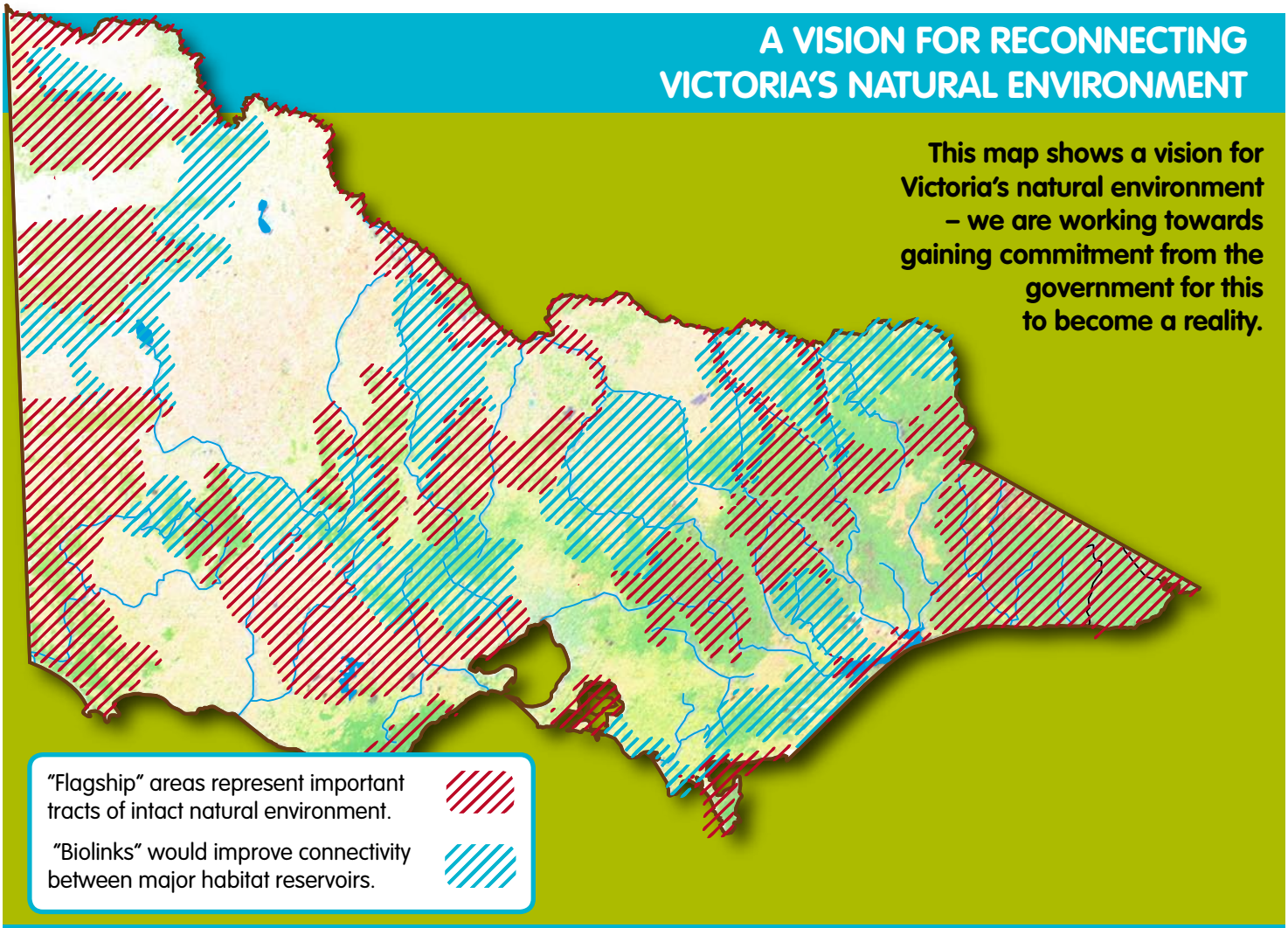
Victorian National Parks Association

People caring for nature

Reconnecting the landscape

To achieve our vision of 'reconnecting the landscape' we need to work at many levels. With scientists, on the ground with local groups, at a policy level by engaging with the highest levels of government, and directly with land managers, both private and public.



Nature is everybody's business

Although governments must take the lead if we are to protect, restore and reconnect Victoria's fragmented landscape, all levels of society are ultimately needed if we are to ensure our unique natural heritage survives and flourishes into the future.

After all, the natural environment is our key to ongoing health and happiness – it helps create diverse, healthy, self-sustaining ecosystems, which ultimately support nature and all of us.

Rescuing the bush

The map above was a vision outlined in a Victorian Government White Paper on biodiversity in 2009. Does the Baillieu Government share this vision? Ask your local member of parliament.

Stepping stones for survival

Building connectivity in the bush


Kookaburra


Brown Treecreeper


Superb Fairywren. Source: Wiki

Many woodland birds rely on small patches of bushland found on private land for survival.

What does 'reconnecting the landscape' mean? In cleared landscapes, vegetation or habitat have been pulled apart by different types of land-use either for farms, houses, roads, railway lines or similar. These fragmented landscapes are bad for wildlife, which often need to be able to move across the countryside if they are to survive and flourish.

This does not mean everywhere needs to be covered in trees, rather we need to keep what remains and build connections using wildlife corridors, 'stepping stones', and retaining important paddock trees. This can often be done as part of good farm planning or urban design, by using roadsides, streamways and fence lines.

Vegetation is not just for wildlife, it can help stop erosion and salinity, provide shelter for stock, help with crop pollination by attracting bees, and aid pest control by nurturing insect-eating birds and bats.

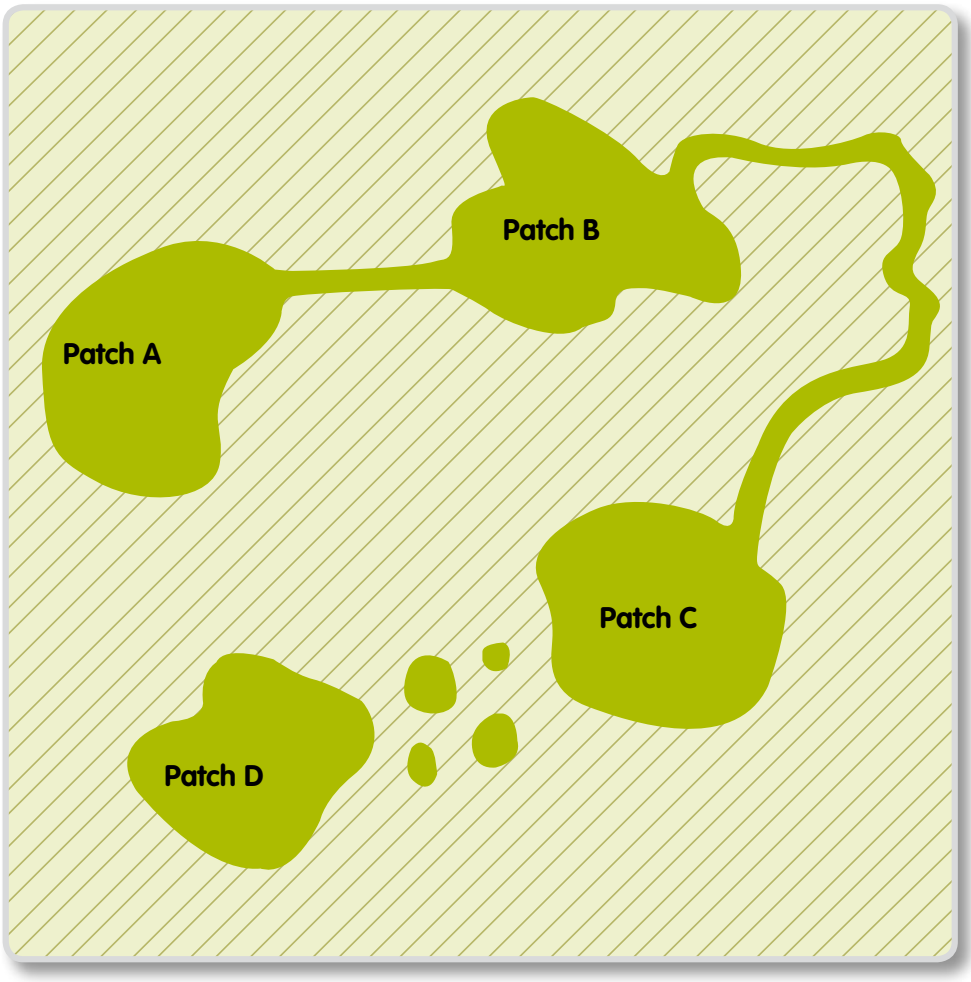
It is well documented that landscapes in which vegetation is connected – often through wildlife corridors and stepping stones, are thought to be more likely to maintain populations of the various species that once occupied the original landscape.

Various studies have suggested that we need at least 20-30% vegetation in cleared landscapes to maintain healthy wildlife populations (though this can be different, depending on the species).

These connections, or 'connectivity', prevent and reverse local extinctions by enabling the re-colonisation of empty patches. Connectivity promotes the exchange of genes between populations of animals and plants, and prevents the extinction of local populations by suppressing inbreeding.

A schematic representation of corridors

Corridors may be direct between two patches of vegetation [A-B], a non-direct route such as along a riparian or water side zone [B-C], or a series of structurally non-connected habitat stepping stone corridors [C-D].



In modified landscapes many species use a matrix as habitat. Scattered trees in the matrix are used by bats, woodland birds and reptiles. Despite the potential value of the matrix for some species, such as birds, the matrix will be inhospitable to many other wildlife. VEAC, 2011

Corridors: Linear or linear-like features that connect core areas of habitat. The effectiveness of vegetation corridors will be dependent on their width and quality, and is species-specific.

Stepping stones: Like corridors, stepping stones can provide additional habitat to those species that are not area sensitive.

Although a small patch may not support the diversity of larger patches, their cumulative conservation value is substantial and studies show that up to three-quarters of native bird species may use patches of less than 1 hectare in some way.