

3.2.0 Melton-Caroline Springs Growth Area

3.2.1 Introduction

- This region has already been subject to significant urban growth that threatens biodiversity values. Local groups and local government have watched some of Melbourne's last grasslands disappearing under bitumen. Many locals have been working hard to delineate the habitat links and areas containing important natural values to be preserved. More intensive development without areas for habitat and linking is not acceptable. If intensive development is allowed without preserving and managing for natural values, we will lose important landscape networks that are irreplaceable.
- Kororoit Creek has significant habitat value within the northern section of this Growth Zone. It provides habitat for Growling Grass Frog, Striped Legless Lizard and other important species. We note that various existing plans apply to Kororoit Creek, in particular the Kororoit Creek Regional Strategy 2005-2030. In addition to any requirements specified in this Strategy, there needs to be an unambiguous minimum 200m 'buffer', on both sides of the Creek, along its entire length, irrespective of biodiversity values within this buffer. The total corridor would need to be a minimum of 400m wide.
- Kororoit and Skeleton Creeks both flow through the Growth Area. On the basis that any previous planning for the wellbeing of the waterways did not account for an ever-encroaching urban environment, the impacts upon the integrity of the waterways and their habitat values must be addressed. They require significant protection not only for their value as habitat corridors but also to reduce flows of sediment, nutrients and pollution. A minimum buffer of 100m from the centre of the creek on each side is required.
- The ecological and social value of smaller potentially 'urban' grasslands needs recognition. Local groups have demonstrated that sustainable management and enhancement of small grassland reserves is feasible; these areas provide important biodiversity value and opportunities for community involvement. Furthermore, the value of securing and maintaining a network of grassland areas has been identified by Williams et. al. as assisting in maintaining the resilience of species populations in any one location.

3.2.2 Issues

- It is unclear what mechanisms will protect areas of biodiversity value that are to be excluded from development. Mention is made of the *Clarke's Road Grassland*, an area of State Significance, which is identified for protection, albeit with no details as to the protection mechanisms. An area to the west of Caroline Springs is identified whereby *'Park's Victoria's Linking People and Spaces proposes investigating the possibility for a new Regional Park along part of the Kororoit Creek'*. This sounds as though there is no guarantee of the Regional Park coming into existence. Furthermore, there is little detail for this in the reports.
- Areas within the proposed UGB and not identified as 'significantly constrained' may be developed, unless they are deemed as habitat required for certain EPBC listed species. This is unacceptable, and we have identified sites that are too important to lose (listed below).
- Areas of grassland within the existing UGB will only be retained if they are contiguous with other grassland areas *"typically of at least 150 ha."* (Strategic Impact Assessment Report p.126). This is too high a threshold. Many areas significantly smaller than 150 ha have been found to be viable and to maintain biodiversity. There should be no set minimum size; instead, areas for retention should be assessed on the basis of species richness, intactness, connectivity, and extent of occurrence of key species.
- There is an over-emphasis on using Precinct Structure Planning Process to work out biodiversity details. This appears to override the 'avoid' part of Victoria's Native Vegetation

Management Framework in favour of offsets, particularly for grasslands. This is explicitly stated in the strategic impact assessment report.

- Offsets for destruction of native grassland in this Zone are proposed to be provided by the western grasslands reserves, rather than locally. EVC mapping shows that many of the locations in the Melton-Caroline Springs Growth Area are Heavier-soils Plains Grassland, a different floristic community from that which will be largely represented by the reserves. This is not acceptable as the floristic differences mean that these areas contain unique and important habitat, in many cases for threatened species and are not transferable.
- If any offsets be required for development within the expanded UGB, they should also occur within the boundary of the expansion area to enhance the important habitat connectivity for which this Area is vital.

3.3.3 Areas that must be protected

Important biodiversity areas, and habitat corridor connections between some of these areas, are slated for development. The State Government must ensure the protection of the following areas of high biodiversity value and importance for connectivity. These areas should be clearly indicated within the Final Report to the Federal Government.

Table 3.0 Areas that must be protected – Melton Caroline Springs Growth Area

Locations	Comments
1. Rockbank Radio Station Woodland	Must be included within Kororoit Creek Regional Park or an exclusion zone. Contains wetland areas, including a Red Gum Wetland.
2. Dean's Marsh and other wetlands	Realign E6 to the east of these wetlands. This area must be included within Kororoit Creek Regional Park or an exclusion zone.
3. Deanside	Containing good grassland vegetation. To be included within Kororoit Creek Regional Park or an exclusion zone.
4. Cluster of locations near Clarke's Road	Clarke's Road Grassland has been identified as an area that will be protected for biodiversity values. However, this should be supported by protection of four other blocks that adjoin or are in the vicinity of Clarke's Road Grassland.
5. Greigs Road Cluster	Blocks that have been identified as comprising grassland with vegetation condition values of 41-50 south of Greigs Road and between Faulkeners Road and Troups Road should be protected by being added to the northern section of the proposed Grassland Reserves.
6. Boral Quarry	This quarry is known to contain high quality grasslands. It is currently identified as an area 'significantly constrained' for development. However, it has been granted a works permit for quarrying. This site contains EPBC listed Western (Basalt) Plains Temperate Grassland of the VVP in excellent condition, Spiny Rice Flower and Striped Legless Lizard. We propose that in the context of the proposed development in this area, this site is too important to lose. More detail is given in the case study below.
7. Realign E6 corridor	There has been no detailed on-ground assessment of the favoured corridor. The E6 corridor is currently aligned to intersect more than one block of high-quality grassland and wetland.

Figure 4.0 Priority areas for protection Melton – Caroline Springs Growth Areas

