

3.0 Conservation priorities in growth areas

Some very high conservation significance areas are proposed to be cleared, and more work needs to be done to retain as much habitat as possible. A series of meetings was held with local groups and a workshop undertaken with local field naturalists, conservationists and experts to determine high priority sites in the growth areas. These are described in some detail in following sections, but should also be read in conjunction with submissions from regional and local groups.

Almost 8,000 ha of Nationally Significant ecological communities are proposed to be cleared:

- 6918 ha of native grassland in Melbourne's western and northern suburbs.
- 924 ha of grassy woodland, mostly in the northern suburbs.

Some small areas are proposed to be set aside within the new growth areas:

- 530 ha of native grassland in Wyndham–Melton non-urban area.
- 700 ha of native grassland in Melbourne's north.
- 600 ha of grassy woodland in the north.

There is not enough detail provided for any of the Significantly Constrained areas, and not enough information provided for any organisation or individual to provide meaningful comment on the proposed uses of such areas.

On this basis, we have compiled our own list of locations that must be protected upfront through the Growth Area Structure Planning process. We also provide a list of important habitat links.

There are five growth areas, each of which has some high-value grassland and biodiversity sites which require better protection and recognition in the plan. Forty-two sites and key habitat links which need protection have been identified within the proposed urban growth areas..

Summary of key growth areas

- **Whittlesea (Upper Merri) Growth Area.** – At least nine key areas have been identified as needing greater protection. There are no commitments for new reserves proposed in the north, which has a higher dominance of Grassy Woodland than the west. Underlying ecological information is poor and needs to be redone with targeted surveys over the coming spring. Up to 40-50% of high value remnant areas could be destroyed, based on criteria in the Impact Assessment Report. (see Whittlesea (Upper Merri) brief for more detail)
- **Melton-Caroline Springs Growth Areas** – Seven areas of conservation significance (including the Boral Quarry site) have been identified as needing additional protection through inclusion in a Kororoit Creek Regional Park and realignment of the E6 transport corridor (see Melton-Caroline Spring brief for more detail)
- **Wyndham Growth Area** – Seven key areas identified, including three high priority sites and three habitat links, as well as a realignment of E6 Transport corridor (Outer Metro ring road) to allow high conservation significance sites to be avoided (see Wyndham brief for more detail).
- **Sunbury Growth Area** – Twelve significant areas have been identified, including five high value sites. A significant expansion of the existing Holden Flora and Fauna Reserve, and seven habitat links, are required to allow species to move when pressured with urban development (see Sunbury brief for more detail).

- **South East Growth Area** – Seven areas, including two key high conservation areas and five habitat corridors, have been identified as requiring recognition and protection to safeguard the endangered Southern Brown Bandicoot and vulnerable Growling Grass Frog. (see South East Brief for more detail)

General Recommendation: *Forty-two high conservation values sites and key habitat links across the five growth areas have been identified which need additional survey in spring and summer to allow retention and protection as part of urban conservation network (see Section 3.0 below for detail)*