

3.4.0 Whittlesea/Hume & Merri Creek Corridor

3.4.1 Introduction

- This region has already been subject to significant urban growth, threatening biodiversity values. Many local groups and local government have worked hard to delineate 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 areas of habitat and links that are irreplaceable.
- There needs to be an unambiguous minimum 200m conservation reserve on both sides of the Merri Creek, along its entire length, irrespective of current biodiversity values adjacent to the Creek. The total corridor would need to be a minimum of 400m wide. Other land uses (recreation and community buildings, sporting facilities, infrastructure such as sewers, water mains and power lines) should not be located in this reserve. It should be managed as a continuous corridor for conservation and restoration of indigenous habitat.
- The proposed location of a new Sewerage Treatment Plant (STP) is adjacent to Merri Creek and a known stronghold of Growling Grass Frogs (GGF). Whilst the STP will also include provision of recycled water to new developments, the impacts on the Merri Creek and its values have not been addressed.
- Areas of high biodiversity value in the Upper Merri, such as the Bald Hills grasslands, are currently threatened by quarrying. The future of current extractive industry areas in the 'constrained land' is not clear.
- The ecological and social value of smaller 'urban' grasslands needs recognition. Groups like the Merri Creek Management Committee have demonstrated that sustainable management and enhancement of small grassland reserves is feasible; these areas provide important biodiversity value and opportunities for community development and involvement.
- With funding from the Natural Heritage Trust, DSE, private landholders and volunteers have contributed a considerable amount of investment, both on-ground and landholder capacity-building, to the Merriang Local Area Biodiversity Plan. Much of this investment stands to be destroyed.

3.4.2 Issues

- It is unclear what mechanisms will protect areas of biodiversity value that are to be excluded from development. Mention is made of *"..a selection of smaller reserves in the north, some within the urban context, providing additional protection for key sites and connectivity between related habitat types, particularly grassy woodlands, stony knolls and floodplain grasslands."* For Grassy Woodlands there is also the promise to *"Investigate establishing a large reserve south-west of Whittlesea."*
- 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. Instead of avoiding clearing grassland areas, it is proposed to retain only those grasslands that are contiguous with other grassland areas *"typically of at least 150 ha."* (Strategic Impact Assessment Report p.128). On this basis, it is estimated that approximately 40-50% of current grassland could be destroyed.
- There is an over-emphasis on using the 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. Smaller grasslands within the new UGB are likely to be cleared, and 'offsets' for this clearance located in the two new western grassland reserves.
- Significantly constrained areas, where they are identified for biodiversity purposes, must remain so. There is no current assurance that this is the case.

- Offsets for destruction of native grassland in the Merri are proposed to be located 60km or more away in the new western parks, rather than in the Merri catchment itself. This is not acceptable, as the grasslands within the Merri Catchment provide important local habitat and genetic diversity, in many cases for threatened species.
For example the Flame Robin, listed under the EPBC Act as a migratory species, travels from the ranges to the grasslands in the lower Merri Catchment to feed over winter. There is no similar link from the ranges north-east of Melbourne to the proposed grassland reserves on the Werribee Plains, therefore effectively breaking the lifecycle requirements for this small but important bird. The Merri Creek catchment's Grasslands and Grassy Woodlands are not transferable.
- Should any offsets be required for development within the expanded UGB, they should occur within the boundary of the same growth area to enhance the important habitat connectivity for which this Zone is vital.

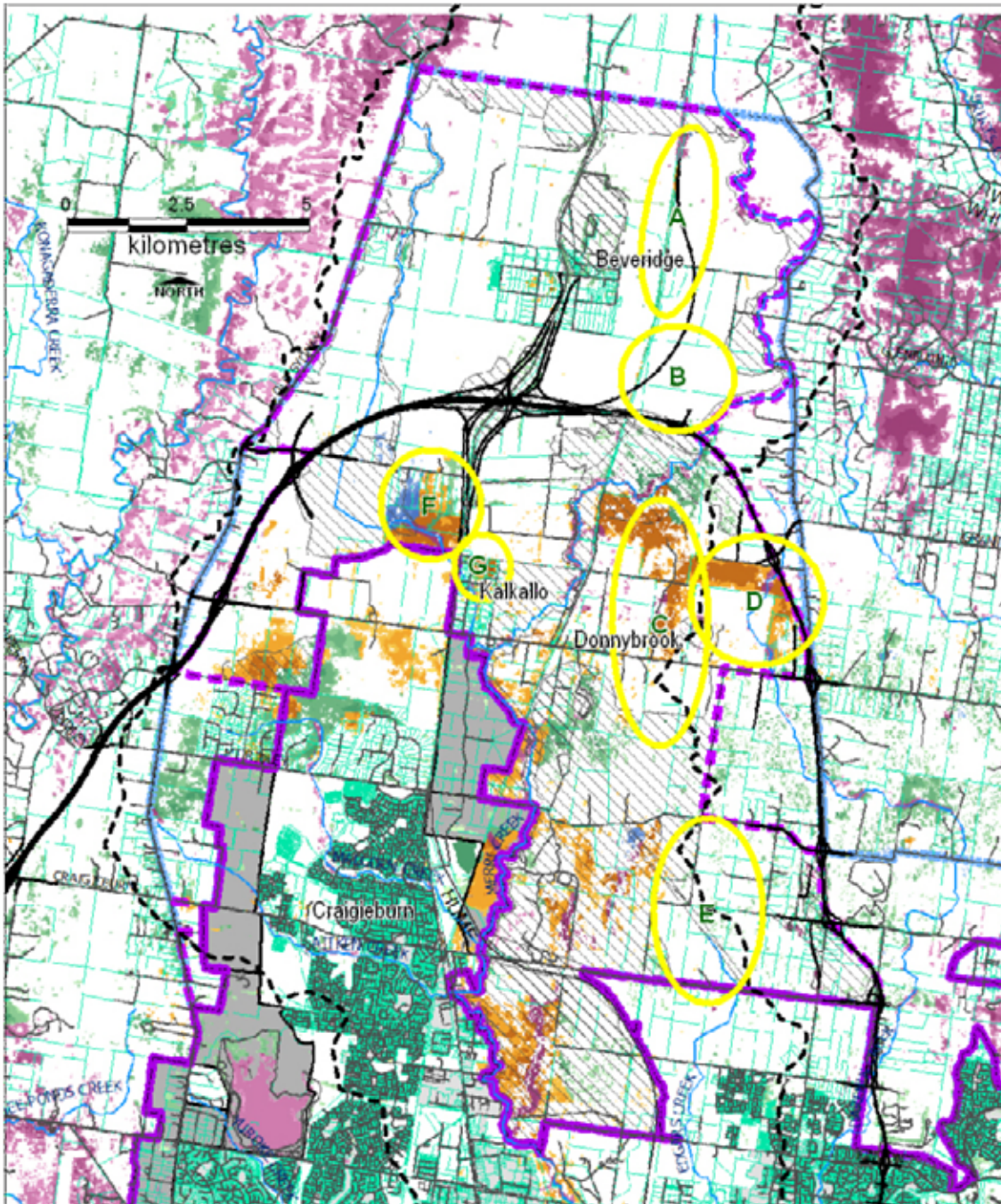
3.4.3 Areas that must be protected

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.

- A. Camoola Swamp Biosite (State significance) – Grassy Wetland - sits within the area designated as Intermodal and Logistics Terminal, including Interstate Freight terminal
- B. Northern half of Bald Hill Grassland Biosite (National significance) - Intermodal and Logistics Terminal
- C. Southernmost parts of Bald Hill Grassland Biosite
- D. Grasslands in Woodstock area
- E. Edgars Creek Headwaters (part) and Summerhill Road Biosites (State significance) – Grassland, Grassy Woodland, stony rises - area between Craigieburn Road East and Summerhill Rd
- F. A large area of Grassland between the Hume Freeway and the Kalkallo Retarding Basin
- G. Remnant grassland immediately to the north and contiguous with the Kalkallo Common.

Other important areas for protection identified by the Merri Creek Management Committee (MCMC) are shown in the two Figures below, along with important habitat links. Each of these areas requires protection in order to support the integrity of the catchments' natural systems and the important species that live there.

Figure 13 - Priority areas for protection in Merri Creek Corridor

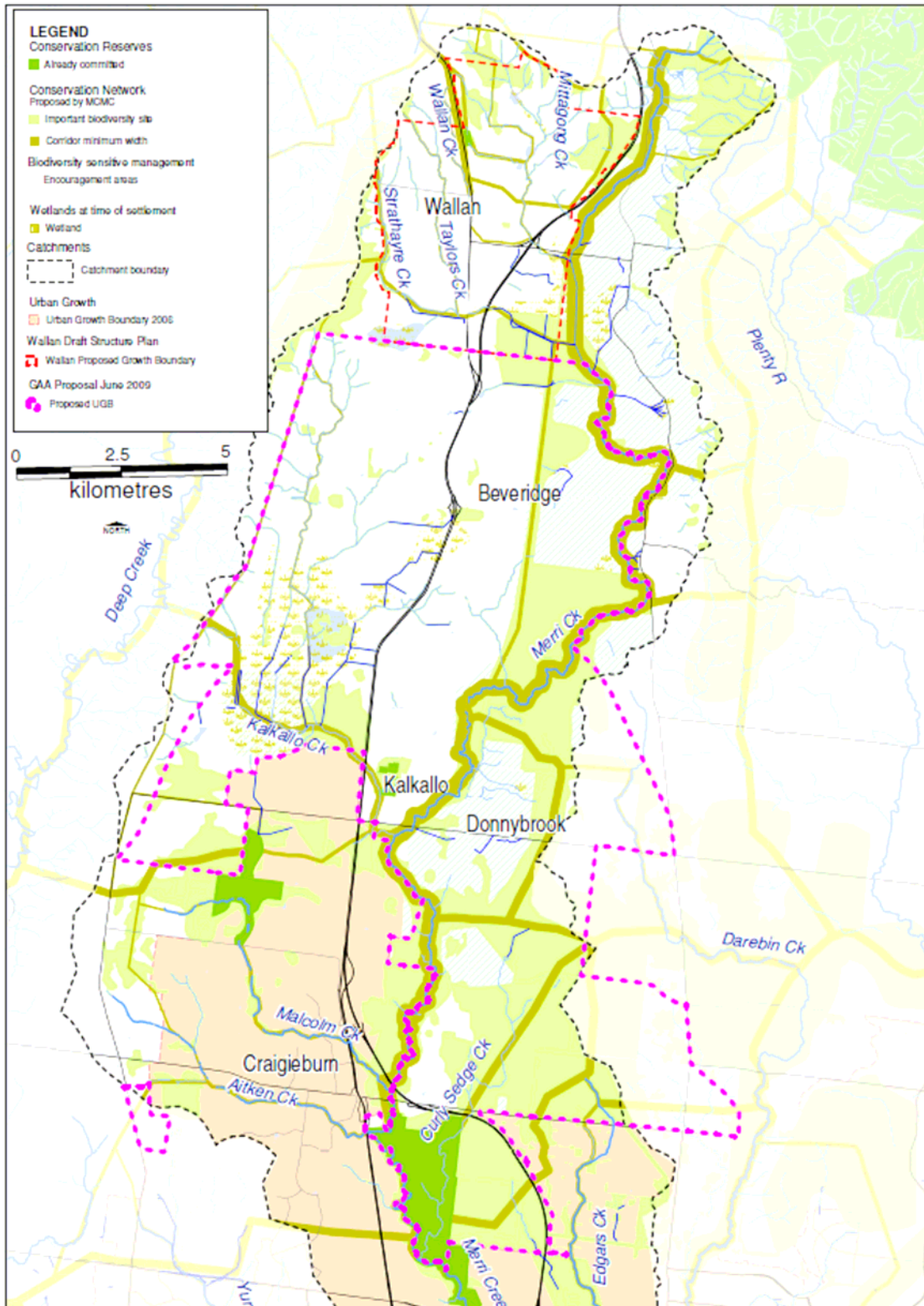


Important habitat corridor connections identified in MCMC's Upper Merri Biodiversity Network Plan, Feb 2009, that are slated for urban development, are shown in the Figure below. They include:

- H. North-south link between Craigieburn East Grassland/Grassy Woodland and the Grassland/Woodland areas north of Donnybrook (n.b. this link is not along Merri Creek but further to the east)
- I. An east-west link from the Kalkallo Retarding basin: west to remnant vegetation on the Old Sydney Rd ridge line, and east along Kalkallo Creek to Merri Creek.

Figure 14 Upper Merri Biodiversity Network Plan and proposed UGB.

Upper Merri Biodiversity Network Plan plus Proposed UGB



Note: MCMC reserves the right to update this proposal as further information comes to hand.
 Werribee XGIS/Geobull conservation network WOR Date 15/1/08 Merri Creek Management Committee Inc.