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3.1.0 Wyndham Growth Area

3.1.1 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 native grasslands disappearing under bitumen. Many local groups 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 and species that are irreplaceable.
- The current alignment of the proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring-road will involve the destruction of known high-quality grassland sites. We suggest an alternative alignment to protect key sites (shown in the Figure, below).
- The design of the two Grassland Reserves has missed many key areas on its boundaries. We have made a number of suggestions regarding important sites that should be included (see below) including a link from Eynesbury remnant vegetation along the Werribee River.
- Creeks in the Growth Area provides significant habitat and landscape value. They currently exist within a semi-rural environment. The impacts of urban development need to be minimised. An unambiguous minimum 100m 'reserve' should be provided. Where grassland areas exist along streams (such as Lollypop Creek), a wider conservation reserve is required.
- The ecological and social value of smaller 'urban' grasslands needs recognition. Groups such as 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 education and involvement.

3.1.2 Issues

- It is unclear what mechanisms will protect areas of biodiversity value that are to be excluded from development.
- 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).
- The Wyndham Growth Area contains significant areas of Critically Endangered Western (Basalt) Plains Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain. It also provides habitat for EPBC listed fauna: Striped Legless Lizard, Growling Grass Frog, Golden Sun Moth and Earless Dragon. EPBC listed flora include Spiny rice-flower; Large-fruited Groundsel, Swamp Wallaby-grass, Clover Glycine, Curly Sedge and Golden Moths. It also provides habitat for migratory waterbirds protected under the EPBC Act, 1999.

- 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 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 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. 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 Wyndham 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 provide unique and important habitat, in many cases for threatened species, and are not transferable.
- Should 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.

3.1.3 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 in the Final Report to the Federal Government.

Table 2.0 Areas that must be protected – Wyndham Growth Area

Sites that must be protected	Locations – refer to map for numbers	Comments
	1. South of Bulban Road	A significant block south of Bulban Road, bounded by MacPherson Road to the south, Edgars Rd to the west and Newtons Road to the east, should be included in the Southern Grassland Reserve.
	2. Lignum Swamp wetland	This is a large Lignum Swamp wetland, currently overgrazed but which should come back well and should be added to the Southern Grassland Reserve.
	3. Proposed railway line	The rail reserve contains significant vegetation (EPBC listed Spiny Rice-flower, Large-fruited Groundsel and Small Golden Moths). The siting of the railway should be reconsidered to avoid these sites.
Habitat Links	4. From Eynesbury to the Grassland Reserve including the block west of Cobbledicks Rd	A link should be established between Eynesbury and the Northern Grassland Reserve. This link would be further strengthened by a link along the Werribee River to the Southern Grassland Reserve.
	5. Top of Skeleton Creek and Dry Creek	These waterways require buffers of 200m from the centre of the creeks. This area would be a good asset for the urban environment and allow for recreation. The area is known for its interesting landforms, biodiversity and cultural heritage.
	6. Lollypop Creek	Although a precinct plan is proposed, a creek buffer of 100m should be included as a prescription.

Figure 3- Priority Areas for Protection and Important Habitat Links Wyndham, Growth Area

