

## **Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline in Victoria**

### **Nillumbik Council response to questions on notice - 28 May 2021**

#### **Question 1**

*If you have got any suggestions as to where you could put an overarching objective into the planning scheme for biodiversity towards conservation of habitat and things like that so it would have to be considered at all levels of strategic planning and statutory planning? As noted on page 2 of the transcript.*

#### **Response**

The Victoria Planning Policy (VPP) 12.01-01 supports consideration of biodiversity in all planning schemes and constitutes an overarching objective. It is how and whether this overarching objectives can be made operational which may be a limitation. The first strategy in this VPP:

*Use biodiversity information to identify important areas of biodiversity, including key habitat for rare or threatened species and communities, and strategically valuable biodiversity sites.<sup>1</sup>*

highlights the importance of biodiversity information to support biodiversity protection through the planning scheme.

In Nillumbik, biodiversity information collected in the 1990s has been used to inform the Environmental Significance Overlays. This data is now considered to be old and the cost for an individual local government to replicate this work may be prohibitive or may not be considered warranted where there are competing priorities.

There is a useful conversation for the state government to lead with local government on how to achieve delivery of *Biodiversity 2037* through planning schemes and what kind of support is required by local government. This may parallel the process around delivering *Recycling Victoria* where the state government has taken a strong role in policy development; managing and analysing data; setting targets and facilitating communication across local government and with the community.

Nillumbik Council also has overarching objectives around biodiversity in Nillumbik's current Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) which is being translated into the new Municipal Planning Strategy (MPS).

Council will be consulting on this draft MPS which gives the overarching direction for planning themes in our Shire. Nillumbik's Biodiversity Strategy (due to be reviewed in 2022) informs the overarching objective expressed in the MPS, advances the state policy and adds value from a Nillumbik perspective.

#### **Question 2**

*Updated information regarding the pilot peri-urban deer control program, as noted on page 4 of the transcript.*

#### **Response**

Nillumbik received \$450,000 for Sugarloaf Link project (December 2018 to June 2021) which primarily operates on private land. The project is funded by DELWP to control fox, deer, and

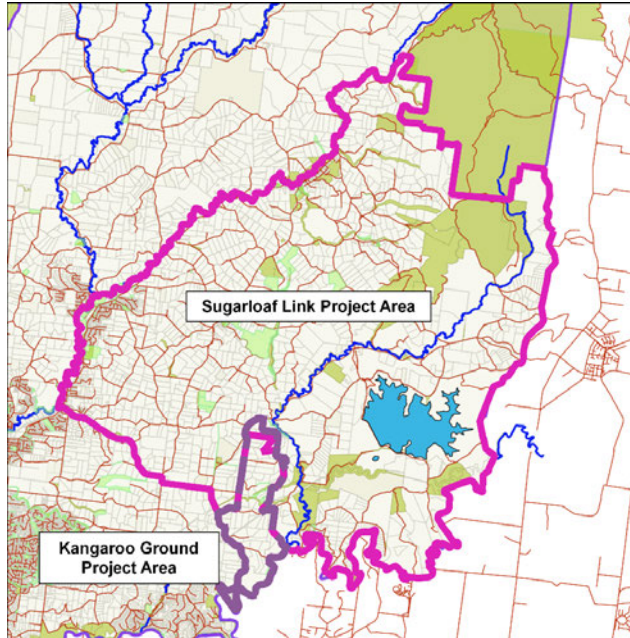
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<sup>1</sup> [https://planning-schemes.api.delwp.vic.gov.au/schemes/vpps/12\\_01-01S.pdf?\\_ga=2.219850909.560115123.1622172442-1496791954.1581996330](https://planning-schemes.api.delwp.vic.gov.au/schemes/vpps/12_01-01S.pdf?_ga=2.219850909.560115123.1622172442-1496791954.1581996330)

weeds to protect biodiversity in the Warrandyte to Kinglake habitat corridor which includes Christmas Hills, Bend of Islands and Watsons Creek.

Additional federal grants totalling \$58,000 have been received to extend the project area into Kangaroo Ground and to support private land owners to work collaboratively to control deer.

A map of the current project areas is provided below.



The Sugarloaf Link project has been strongly focussed on generating awareness of deer and their impacts on agricultural and biodiversity values, and the social impacts; providing practical advice on deer management and control; and managing grant funded deer control on private land around Sugarloaf and Kangaroo Ground. Achievements include:

- Removal of 260 deer from private properties to date.
- Securing Melbourne Water permission to conduct deer control on their non-catchment properties in Christmas Hills, and likely budget for Melbourne Water deer control on Sugarloaf catchment land in 2021/22
- Facilitating the delivery of Parks Victoria's first deer control in a peri urban region. It will commence in April/May 2021 at the Warrandyte - Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve
- Delivering a program of public webinars and field days to build the capacity of the Nillumbik community to knowledgably and collaboratively respond to deer impacts. 300 people have attended the three events held to date.
- Developing a Local Community Deer Directory which enables deer controllers to promote their hunting, fencing and monitoring services to the Nillumbik community.
- Developing a strong relationship with Victoria Police's District Firearms Officer who provides advice and oversees the requirements for Public Place Permits and hunting in peri urban areas.

Nillumbik Council is now recognised state wide and nationally as a leader in peri urban deer control. The approach that has been developed to coordinate deer control in peri urban Nillumbik will form the basis of a DELWP Standard Operating Procedure for Peri Urban Deer Control.

For an overview of the Sugarloaf Link project please see **attachment 1**.

Please go to the Nillumbik website to view webinars and other material associated with Nillumbik's peri urban deer programs.

<https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Environment/Environment-projects/Collaborative-Community-Deer-Action-across-Nillumbik>

### Question 3

*What opportunities do you see for employment in land restoration and how would you like to see the state government support these opportunities? As noted on page 8 of the transcript.*

### Response

There is a range of employment opportunities across biodiversity data collection and analysis; on ground works; supporting volunteers; and monitoring compliance. Employment opportunities require resourcing and the following suggestions require broader investment than just the Nillumbik community. As discussed in our submission, grant programs are welcome and local government is well placed to host and deliver programs (data collection and analysis, on ground works, landowner and community education, engagement and support) with broader community benefit in terms of biodiversity conservation. Longer term funding arrangements recognise that ongoing work is required to protect and restore biodiversity; provide greater employment stability and opportunity to demonstrate outcomes.

As well as Council, the regional Catchment Management Authorities can be well placed in delivering on ground projects in collaboration with local government. Overall, we need a clear model for delivery of biodiversity conservation investment across DELWP, Parks Victoria, CMAs, water authorities and local government.

- Employ people to undertake biodiversity monitoring to better guide subsequent land conservation and restoration investment allocation. Aligned with this is the need to analyse data to understand biodiversity climate resilience, adaptation and management needs. For example, we have secured private foundation funding (four of a seven year project) for the Forest Health Assessment and Monitoring project where Council is working with Landcare, Parks Victoria and local landholders to assess forest health at 30 locations across Nillumbik. This has included the development of remote wildlife sensing techniques and the identification of 30 key wildlife indicator species, chosen with a community panel of experts, and selected to represent the quality of Nillumbik's wet and dry forest habitats. Monitoring these species will be used to assess habitat health over time across the Shire, and help to inform biodiversity action decision making.
- Employ people to support on ground work in threatened species conservation.
- In recognition that supporting peri-urban landowners to manage their land sustainably is labour intensive due to the number of smaller properties where land management is not the primary purpose - employ people to do on-ground work for landscape scale invasive species control to help restore and protect land at a broader scale.
- Employ people to support Friends Groups / employ urban and peri-urban bushland 'rangers' – with a community engagement / local nature connection / environmental volunteering focus.
- Continue to support the Landcare Facilitator program and broaden the model to enhance the outreach land management support that can be provided to the community.
- In addition employ staff to ensure community compliance with the Catchment and Land Protection Act in terms of management of declared noxious weeds and

established pest animals – education, issuing of directions notices and subsequent follow up – to support the work of community based outreach staff.

- There is an opportunity for the state government to invest in monitoring policy implementation designed to achieve biodiversity conservation outcomes. For example, DELWP monitors third party native vegetation offsets but not on site offsets. Local government may not have the capacity to monitor whether offsets are being maintained.

# Sugarloaf Link Project



**Nillumbik Shire Council has received a 3 year Biodiversity Response Plan grant from the State Government to protect natural biodiversity values. This is being referred to as the Sugarloaf Link Project.**

The project will enable community and government agencies to reduce the impact of weeds, fox and deer on private and public land in the south-eastern region of our Shire.

## **Aim of the project**

The Sugarloaf Link project will protect natural habitats, native plant populations, agricultural enterprises and waterways from the degradation caused by deer and weeds.

Small native animals should also flourish by reducing fox numbers. Species such as Brush-tailed Phascogales, Slender-tailed Dunnarts and various threatened orchid species will benefit from these works.

## **Who is involved?**

Nillumbik Shire Council is working in partnership with DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning), Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, Wurundjeri Council, Bend of Islands Conservation Association (BICA), Christmas Hills Landcare Group and local landholders.

## **Where is it happening?**

The project will centre around Bend of Islands, Watsons Creek and Christmas Hills. This area forms a vital link in the major habitat corridor connecting Kinglake National Park to the Yarra River.

## **Information about deer**

This project is Nillumbik's first collaborative program to control and reduce the impact of deer in the local area.

With numbers on the rise, deer are becoming a serious pest in Nillumbik. Impacts of deer include:

- Destroying native vegetation and reducing biodiversity through browsing and wallowing
- Reducing productivity of farms through crop damage, causing financial hardship for local agricultural producers
- Posing a serious hazard on roads, risking the lives of road users.

The project partners will use learnings to help inform potential future deer control programs across the Shire.

Professionally accredited deer hunters, experienced in working in peri-urban areas, will undertake humane shooting of feral deer, using thermal imaging cameras and other specialised equipment on private properties to the south and west of the Sugarloaf Reservoir to stem deer movement from Kinglake National Park southward into more residential areas.

These works complement works being undertaken by both Melbourne Water (within the fenced area of the Sugarloaf Reservoir) and over the river in Manningham Council, where deer control works are coordinated by the Jumping Creek Catchment Landcare group.

Following recent changes to legislation, there is now the ability to 'harvest' the meat for consumption and other uses. Initially this will most likely be for pet food and rendering for fertiliser. This provides a rebate back to Council (or the landowner, if undertaking their own works with an accredited harvester) which will fund Council's ability to extend the project further.

There may also be some opportunity for landowners to take some of the meat for their personal use.

### Information about the red fox

Foxes predate on vulnerable animals such as the Slender-tailed Dunnart and Brush-tailed Phascogale. Timing of control works will be aligned with the dispersal of young Phascogales from their nests, to reduce fox numbers during this critical period.

Professional contractors will use soft-jaw trapping to control foxes on private property within the project area, at sites where there are a number of adjacent properties signed up to be involved.

Parks Victoria and Melbourne Water will also undertake works, particularly in reserves adjacent to the participating properties.

Trapping of foxes will be carried out in accordance with the requirements of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* and associated regulations, with traps checked every morning. This method reduces possible impacts to other animals.

### Information about weeds

The Wurundjeri's Narrap team will be undertaking non-grassy weed control. Initially this will be in the Bend of Islands area. A combination of non-invasive techniques will be used including drill and fill/cut and paint and hand removal.

The approach will be to prioritise the protection of areas with the greatest biodiversity or agricultural values that are at the highest risk of damage, through prevention, eradication, asset protection and containment.

This also involves managing nearby high threat weeds if they are likely to spread into high priority areas.

### Assistance with monitoring

As part of this project we need to monitor weed infestations, deer and fox sightings. We would like to hear from landowners, even those who may not need to have any works undertaken, who may be able to provide 'control sites' for vegetation health assessments, photo-points, scat counts or deer surveys.

### Ongoing participation

It is expected that interested landowners will agree to continue management works to prevent weeds from re-invading once the project is complete. This may be supported through Council incentives in some instances. Your local Landcare group may also be able to provide assistance.

### Do you want to take part or find out more?

For information about the Sugarloaf Link Project visit [nillumbik.vic.gov.au/sugarloaflink](http://nillumbik.vic.gov.au/sugarloaflink)

If you want to take part in any aspect of the Sugarloaf Link Project, contact Council's Environment Team on 9433 3111 or email [environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au](mailto:environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au)

You will need to provide your property address, email and phone number.

Council's project team is keen for all deer sightings to be recorded through the new Deer Scan app.

Visit [feralscan.org.au/deerscan](http://feralscan.org.au/deerscan) and download the app for iPhone or Android devices.

*This project is funded with support of the Victorian Government*



Environment,  
Land, Water  
and Planning