



Department of
Sustainability and Environment

FOI 190401
Document 1

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Mr Dean Knudson
First Assistant Secretary
Environmental Assessment and Compliance
Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities
PO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dean

Dear Mr Knudson

WESTERN GRASSLAND RESERVES ACQUISITION PROGRESS

I am writing following our recent discussions regarding the Melbourne Strategic Assessment. As you would be aware the acquisition of the Western Grassland Reserves (WGR) is one of the major Victorian commitments in the *Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities* Program Report.

Firstly, I would like to inform you that the Victorian Government has recently acquired the first significant part the Western Grassland Reserves (WGR). The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) purchased a large property of 1000 hectares, west of Werribee, on the northern edge of the southern reserve. This is the largest land parcel in the WGR Public Acquisition Overlay area and means the Victorian Government has nearly 7 per cent of the WGR under its management.

The property has high biological values, and is almost entirely covered by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act* listed "Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain". It also contains several high quality wetlands, all of which are referable to the newly listed *EPBC Act* community "Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands (Freshwater) of the Temperate Lowland Plains". The property supports many significant native plant and animal species.

When we discussed the WGR acquisition program in early June, I explained to you some of the challenges DSE faced in meeting the overall acquisition timeline of 2020.

The acquisition program is based on cost-recovery, and reliant on developers purchasing native vegetation offset "credits" from DSE. The funds from the sale of these credits are then used by DSE to purchase and manage properties in the WGR.

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However, as mentioned, recent forecasts indicate that development within the Melbourne growth corridors is slower anticipated and is likely to take decades to complete. DSE and the Victorian Department of Treasury and Finance are exploring options to advance the process of acquiring land. These are unlikely to meet the current commitment detailed in the program report and the actual timing of development.

Given these circumstance, I seek confirmation that the acquisition timeline for the WGR as currently set out in the program report may be extended. I also seek your advice as to the best way to effect this variation, assuming it can be made.

A renegotiated timeline should maintain the connection between clearing and offsetting, and ensure that there is always a pool of offset credits secured ahead of development. This is a fundamental principle. However, given the uncertainties in the timing of development, I would suggest that a process and outcome based approach be considered consistent with the above principle, rather than a specified date. I understand that the Australian Government has taken a similar approach, based on this principle, with the Sydney growth areas.

I look forward to your considered advice on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Adam Fennessy

Acting Secretary

Department of Sustainability and Environment

12 / 07/2012



Our reference: 2012/08397

Mr Adam Fennessy
Acting Secretary
Department of Sustainability and Environment
PO Box 500
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 8002

Dear Mr Fennessy

I refer to your letter of 12 July 2012 regarding the acquisition process for the Western Grassland Reserves.

I note your advice that there may be difficulties in meeting the overall acquisition timeline of 2020 stated in the *Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities Program Report* (Victorian Government, December 2010) endorsed on 2 February 2010 under Part 10 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. I understand this is due to the continued lag in housing developments and consequent reduced availability of funding for the acquisition process.

The department agrees in principle to extension of the acquisition timeline, if needed, in the circumstances you describe. We note the Property Acquisition Overlay and Environmental Significance Overlay will continue over properties within the proposed Western Grassland Reserves to ensure properties can be purchased as funds become available. I propose we continue to work together to develop clear and transparent options to extend the acquisition timeframe for the Reserve.

I further note your advice the first property has now been acquired within the Western Grassland Reserves. This is a significant milestone particularly since the property contains nearly 1000 hectares of listed critically endangered *Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain* as well as the more recently listed *Seasonal Herbaceous Wetlands (Freshwater) of the Temperate Lowland Plains*.

Please do not hesitate to contact Carolyn Cameron s22 [REDACTED] if you need to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

Dean Knudson
First Assistant Secretary
Environment Assessment and Compliance Division

19 July 2012

s22

From: s22
Sent: Thursday, 28 August 2014 5:01 PM
To: s22
Subject: FW: Western Grassland Reserve Applications [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]
Attachments: Ltr_signedWM_toClth_21082014_WGR18.pdf; List of proponents - Quandong Applications Summary Table Aug 2014.pdf; Map - Quandong Plan of Dwelling Sites.pdf

From: Gaddes, Shane
Sent: Friday, 22 August 2014 10:46 AM
To: s22
Subject: FW: Western Grassland Reserve Applications [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

For appropriate action

Regards
SG

-----Original Message-----

From: Warrick.P.McGrath@depi.vic.gov.au [Warrick.P.McGrath@depi.vic.gov.au]
Sent: Friday, August 22, 2014 10:38 AM AUS Eastern Standard Time
To: Gaddes, Shane
Cc: s22 @depi.vic.gov.au
Subject: Western Grassland Reserve Applications

Dear Shane

Please find attached a letter signed by myself with regard to 18 applications we have received for development within the proposed Western Grassland Reserves.

I have posted the signed letter to you.

Please contact s22 at s22 @depi.vic.gov.au or on s22 if you have any queries regarding this letter.

Kind Regards
Warrick McGrath

	<p>Warrick McGrath Director - Regulatory Strategy and Design Environment and Landscape Performance Land, Fire and Environment Department of Environment and Primary Industries 8 Nicholson St, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002 T: 03 9637 9056 M: 0400 872 469 E: warrick.p.mcgrath@depi.vic.gov.au</p>	
	<p>     www.depi.vic.gov.au </p>	

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Department of Environment and Primary Industries

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Shane Gaddes
Assistant Secretary
Compliance and Enforcement
Environment Assessment and Compliance
Department of Environment
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Mr Gaddes

APPLICATION FOR DWELLINGS WITHIN THE PROPOSED WESTERN GRASSLAND RESERVES

I am writing to inform you that the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) has received 18 applications from various proponents (see attached list of proponents) for development within the proposed Western Grassland Reserves. Each application is for a single dwelling and associated outbuildings (see attached map).

DEPI is assessing these applications under Victorian planning processes. We are writing to inform you of this proposed development as these applications may have a significant impact on Matters of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

If you would like any further detail on these applications please contact s22 or s22

Yours sincerely

Warrick McGrath
Director, Regulatory Strategy and Design

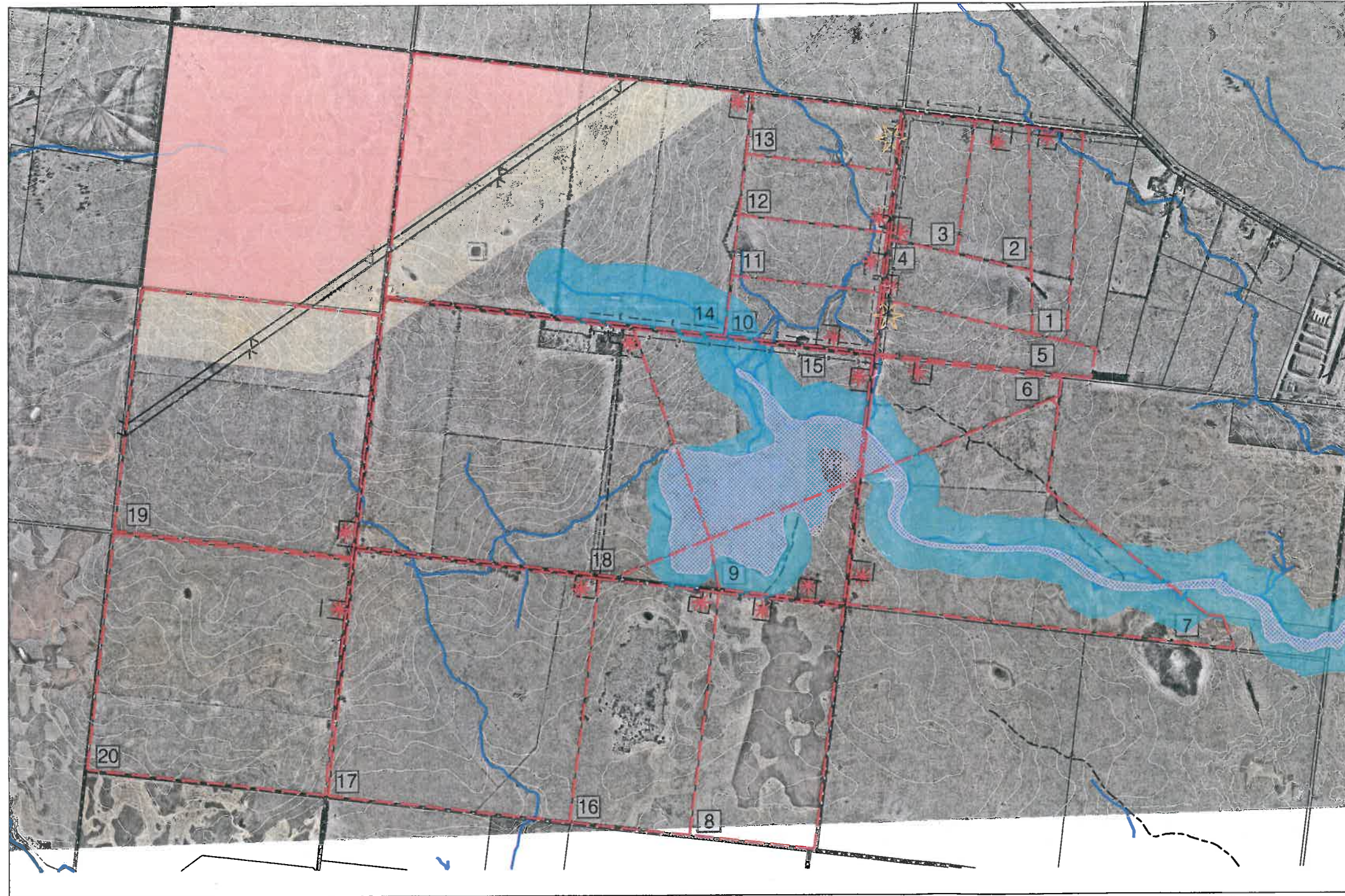
Applications referred to DEPI (received 12 August 2014) under the Wyndham Planning Scheme.

All applications submitted by Tract Consultants on behalf of applicants listed below.

DEPI Ref.	Wyndham City Ref.	Address	Applicant	Proposal
SP450841	WYP7590/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2592 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450842	WYP7591/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2207 m ²), dwelling, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450843	WYP7592/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2880 m ²), dwelling, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450845	WYP7596/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2267 m ²), dwelling, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450846	WYP7598/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (128 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450847	WYP7599/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (31 m ²), dwelling, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450848	WYP7600/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (1200 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court

SP450849	WYP7601/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (782 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450850	WYP7602/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2272 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450851	WYP7606/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	Dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450852	WYP7607/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	Dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450853	WYP7608/14	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] s47F [REDACTED]	NVR removal (750 m ²), dwelling, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450855	WYP7609/14	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450857	WYP7610/14	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	Dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450858	WYP7611/14	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	NVR removal (323 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450859	WYP7612/14	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	NVR removal (2643 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
SP450860	WYP7643/14	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED]	NVR removal (323 m ²), dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court

SP450861	WYP7623/14	s47F [REDACTED]	s47F [REDACTED]	Dwelling, rural shed, residential shed, swimming pool, tennis court
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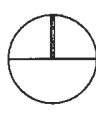


LEGEND

- 16 LOT NO. & LOT BOUNDARY
- EXISTING DWELLING
- PROPOSED DWELLING
- PROPOSED LOCATION OF QUARRY
- QUARRY BUFFER ZONE (500m)
- ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OVERLAY (ESO-1)
- CULTURAL HERITAGE SENSITIVITY
- EXISTING CONTOURS
- EXISTING TRANSMISSION LINES
- APPROX. EXISTING POWER & TELSTRA
- EXISTING ROADS
- EXISTING WATER COURSES

NOTE
THIS PLAN DOES NOT IDENTIFY THAT THE ENTIRE PRECINCT IS SUBJECT TO THE PUBLIC ACQUISITION OVERLAY AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OVERLAY (ESO-4)

A3 - NOT TO SCALE



OVERALL QUANDONG PRECINCT PLAN

QUANDONG

s22

From: s22
Sent: Wednesday, 4 January 2017 9:07 AM
To: s22
Subject: FW: WGR concept plan [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]
Attachments: Letter to Ms Collins DoE_WGR Concept Plan.pdf; Concept Plan final_reduced.pdf

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Completed

From: s22 @delwp.vic.gov.au [mailto:s22 @delwp.vic.gov.au]
Sent: Friday, 16 December 2016 8:40 AM
To: s22 <s22 @environment.gov.au>
Subject: WGR concept plan

Hi s22

Please find attached the WGR concept plan and letter to Monica. We consider this plan, combined with our other tools (management guidelines, bayesnets etc) fulfils the program report requirements for a reserve management plan for the WGR.

Thanks
s22

s22 | Manager MSA Ecological Program | Biodiversity
Energy, Environment and Climate Change | Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Address, Suburb, Victoria Postcode
T: s22 | M: s22 | F: s22 | E: s22 @delwp.vic.gov.au





Department of Environment,
Land, Water and Planning

FOI 190401
Document 4(a)

8 Nicholson Street
East Melbourne, Victoria 3002
www.delwp.vic.gov.au

Ms Monica Collins
Assistant Secretary Compliance and Enforcement Branch
Department of Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787
CANBERRA 2601

Dear Ms Collins

WESTERN GRASSLAND RESERVE CONCEPT PLAN

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has produced a Concept Plan for the Western Grassland Reserve to provide the strategic framework and direction for the establishment, use, zoning and infrastructure management within the reserve.

The Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) Program Report (DSE, 2009) commits the Victorian Government to prepare a Reserve Plan for the Western Grassland Reserve. As land for the Western Grassland Reserve is progressively acquired over several years, reserve management planning will occur at two scales:

1. On-ground management of ecosystems and species to address outcome commitments directed by "Management requirements to meet outcomes: Western Grassland Reserves". This document is updated annually and forms the management agreement between DELWP and the land manager, Parks Victoria.
2. A strategic framework to guide the development and infrastructure management of the entire reserve over the establishment period. This commitment is met through the Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan.

If you have any questions about the enclosed Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan please contact s22 [redacted], Manager MSA Ecological Program on s22 [redacted] or s22 [redacted]@delwp.vic.gov.au

Yours sincerely

James Todd
Director- Knowledge and Decision Systems

15 / 12 / 16

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Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan

Internal working document for Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment,
Land, Water and Planning.

24 NOVEMBER 2016



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Executive summary

The Western Grassland Reserve will protect the largest remaining concentration of volcanic plains grasslands in Australia. It will increase the extent of protected critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain from two per cent to 20 per cent. Located next to the western growth corridor of metropolitan Melbourne, the reserve will also be a significant natural asset for the region's growing population.

The aim of the Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan is to guide the establishment of the whole reserve by providing a strategic framework and direction for the establishment, spatial zoning and opportunities for use and infrastructure management of the park over the acquisition period. The following is the vision for the reserve:

The Western Grassland Reserve will maximise the area of habitat available to resident plant and animal species, in particular threatened species, and will enable management activities critical to the long term survival of plant and animal species. The Reserve will be a regional destination where the public can appreciate and learn about the biodiversity objectives of the reserve.

The primary objective of the reserve is ecological management but it also has secondary objectives such as protection of history and heritage, education and knowledge, and community health and wellbeing.

An analysis of the current ecological values and landscape character zones has been prepared to inform the preparation of the Concept Plan. In addition, visitor experiences have been identified that are compatible with the vision and objectives of the reserve.

The Concept Plan has been developed using the following criteria:

- Allow visitor visitation and experiences without impacting on the existing biodiversity values of the reserve. Locate facilities to in areas compatible with user needs and in modified parts of the reserve;
- Through consultation with stakeholders assess the type and scale of facilities to be included in the reserve;
- Explore options for reuse of existing assets where possible and appropriate; and
- Consider the surrounding land use and recreational opportunities to guide how the reserve fits into the broader regional context and what is needed.

More detailed assessments of ecological, cultural and heritage values will be required as land parcels are progressively acquired and actions are implemented. This includes the preparation of business cases to determine the feasibility of capital works and ongoing maintenance.

This is an internal working document for Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning to guide decisions on the development and infrastructure management within the reserve. It is recommended the Concept Plan is reviewed as appropriate dependent on the rate of progress of the reserve, but at least every 10 years to enable an assessment of the progress in the implementation of the vision for the reserve. It will also provide an opportunity to supplement the Concept Plan with additional information obtained as sites are acquired.

Once site acquisition reaches an appropriate level, a Master Plan should be prepared for the reserve. The preparation of the Master Plan should include public and stakeholder engagement to gain community insights as well as sharing information about the reserve which should assist with growing public appreciation of the reserve.

1 Aims

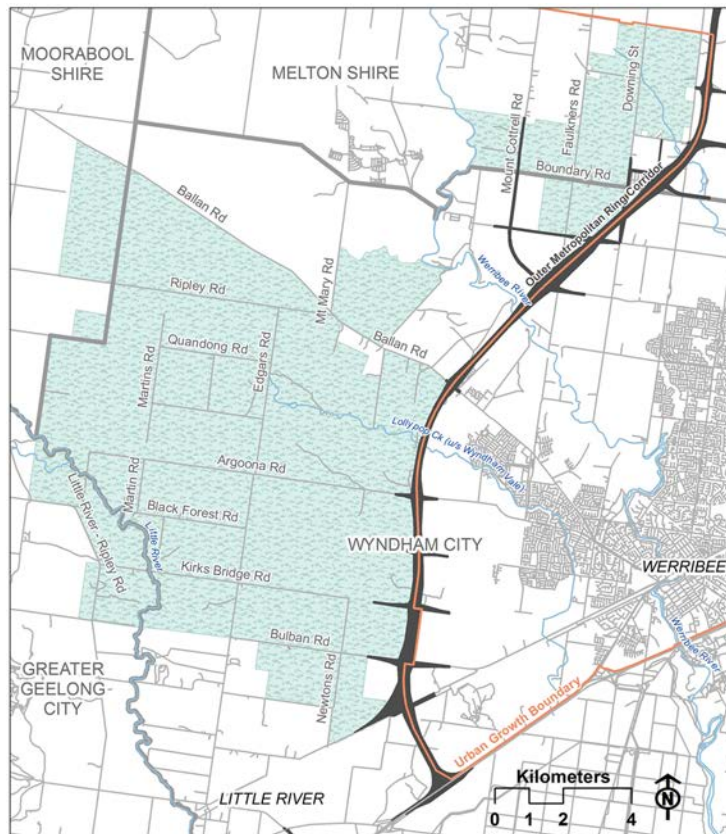
1.1 Western Grassland Reserve

The Victorian Government is committed to the protection and management of native grasslands in Melbourne's west. This commitment was the outcome of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (DSE, 2009) and is linked to the expansion of Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary. It is a mitigation measure required under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC).

The Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) Program Report (DSE, 2009) commits the Victorian Government to the preparation of a Reserve Plan for the Western Grassland Reserve. As land for the reserve will be progressively acquired over many years, reserve management planning will occur at two scales:

- On-ground management of ecosystems and species to address MSA commitments directed by the MSA ecological program including adaptive management response models, targeted research and detailed site inventory information. Reserve management plans are prepared at a parcel level and updated annually. The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will also publish a document concerning management decision systems for vegetation communities and species to be completed by 2017.
- A Strategic Concept Plan to guide the development and infrastructure management of the entire reserve over the establishment period. This strategic concept plan provides a vision of how the reserve will be used and managed as a reserve including public access and broader opportunities.

Figure 1.1:
The proposed locations of the
Western Grassland Reserve (Source:
DELWP)



1.2 Concept Plan

The aim of the Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan is to guide the establishment of the whole reserve by providing a strategic framework and direction for the establishment, spatial zoning and opportunities for use and infrastructure management of the park over the acquisition period.

The Concept Plan forms part of a broader policy framework for the reserve as outlined in Figure 1.2. The Concept Plan is one of multiple documents that will inform management decisions at a land parcel scale. For instance, detailed vegetation and fauna surveys conducted at a land parcel once it is secured, and the best ecological management of these values will ultimately inform what aspects of the concept plan may or may not be applicable at a parcel scale. It is anticipated that the Concept Plan may be updated as additional information is obtained through parcel assessments, or more information is available on future planning of open space and conservation activities in the surrounding region that would lead to considerable changes to the concept plan design. For this reason the Concept Plans aims to provide vision and direction without being over prescriptive given incomplete knowledge on the distribution of ecological values and future planning in surrounding areas. In addition, more detailed land parcel plans will be prepared for key aspects of the reserve identified in the Concept Plan as that land is secured.

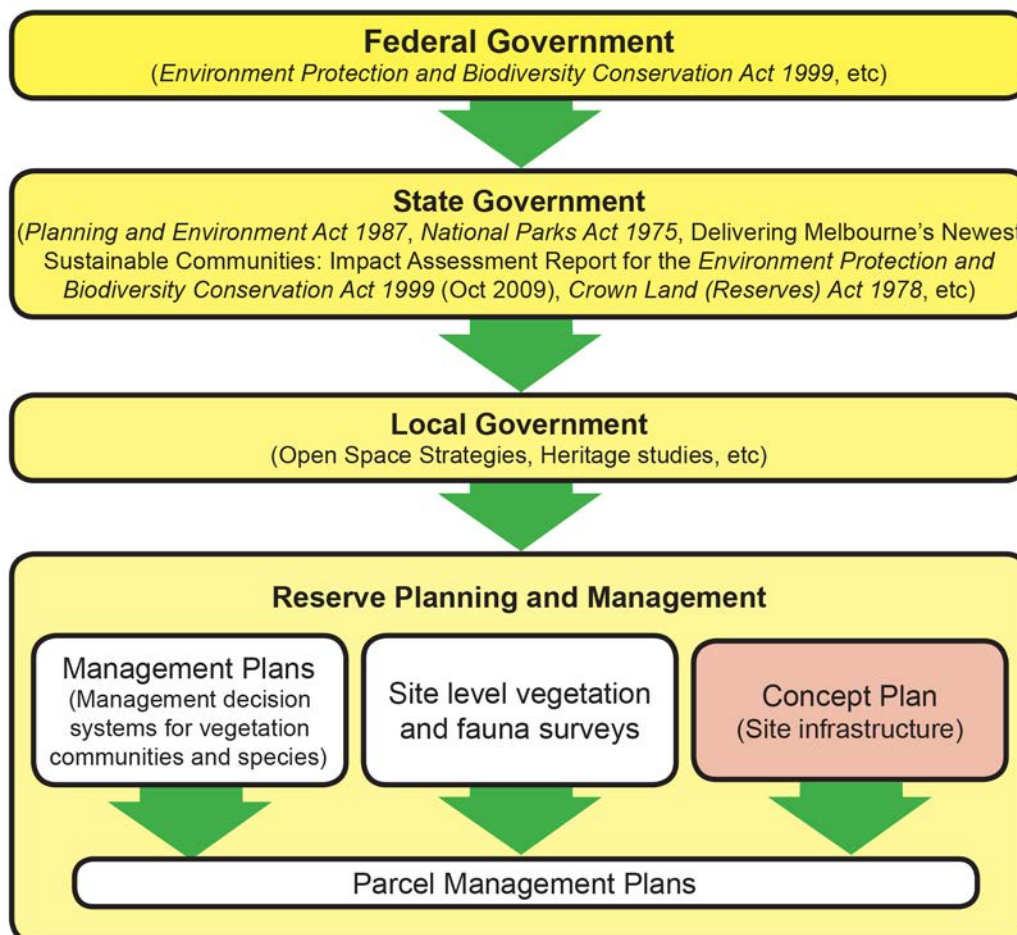


Figure 1.2: Western Grassland Reserve policy framework

2 Study area

The proposed Western Grassland Reserve is located approximately 30 kilometres to the west of Melbourne and 15 kilometres to the north of Geelong. The Reserve consists of two large areas with the northern portion in the area known as Mount Cottrell and the southern portion in the areas known as Quandong and Mambourin. The reserve extends across the municipal areas of Wyndham, Geelong, Melton and Moorabool.



Figure 2.1: *Western Grassland Reserve context plan.*
The proposed Western Grassland Reserve extents are highlighted in yellow.

3 Vision and objectives

The Western Grassland Reserve will protect the largest remaining concentration of volcanic plains grasslands in Australia. It will increase the extent of protected critically endangered Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain from two per cent to 20 per cent. Located next to the western growth corridors of metropolitan Melbourne, the reserve will also be a significant natural asset for the region's growing population.

3.1 Vision

The following vision statement has been prepared which is based on the recommendations of the "Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Impact Assessment Report for the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999" (DSE, Oct 2009)

The Western Grassland Reserve will maximise the area of habitat available to resident plant and animal species, in particular threatened species, and will enable management activities critical to the long term survival of plant and animal species. The Reserve will be a regional destination where the public can appreciate and learn about the biodiversity objectives of the reserve.

The Western Grassland Reserve will be protected as a National Park to ensure the protection and management of this nationally significant area in perpetuity.

3.2 Objectives

The following objectives have been identified following a review of strategic documents and stakeholder consultation.

Primary objective

- Ecological management.
Maximise the protection, enhancement and restoration of native grasslands and their associated habitats. This includes the use of ecological grazing and traditional land management practices such as fire.

Secondary objectives

- History and heritage.
Protect sites of archaeological and cultural significance within the reserve.
- Education and knowledge.
Foster public appreciation of indigenous grasslands through public awareness and on site information. The reserve will also be a place of ongoing research where ecologists and scientists investigate the values and qualities of the reserve, and the species within it.
- Community health and wellbeing.
Provide public access to support broader community physical and mental health outcomes.

These objectives have guided the development of the Concept Plan and inform the establishment of the reserve.

3.3 Land Reserve Status

It is envisioned that the majority of the Western Grassland Reserve will eventually be protected as a National Park under the *National Parks Act 1975*. The reserve will protect a consolidated area of Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains, Seasonal Herbaceous Wetland (freshwater) of the Temperate Lowland Plains and habitat for a range of flora and fauna species protected under *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. However, this includes land of various landuse history, and vegetation and habitat condition. The Strategic Impact Assessment notes that the reserve will protect some degraded areas which may require interim management activities or provide opportunities for alternative land uses that may not be compatible with a National Park.

This means the reserve may consist of land parcels with different reserve statuses based on the values and proposed management actions for the sites. In all cases an interim reserve status will be required until such time as a consolidated area is land is available to begin the establishment of a National Park. The majority of land parcels will be acquired and protected initially as nature conservation reserves under the *Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978*. In some cases an alternate land reservation status may be required on parcels with little native vegetation etc., that may require management actions such as cropping to maintain their values that would not be suitable within a National Park.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning is currently preparing an approach to land reserve status for the reserve and any solution will ensure areas of native vegetation are protected to a sufficient level required to act as an offset. Until this approach is finalised the concept plan assumes the reserve will be protected as a National Park in the long term, meaning most land uses including visitor and recreational use planning will be guided by the *National Parks Act 1975* and associated policy.

4 Site conditions

The following provides a summary of current site conditions along with the identification of issues and opportunities that are relevant to the development of the Concept Plan.

4.1 Topography and views

The topography of the reserve is typical of the Werribee plains, with landscape features such as Mt Cottrell, Green Hill and the You Yangs rising above the relatively flat western plains. Waterways such as the Werribee River and Little River provide distinctive incisions in the otherwise flat landscape.

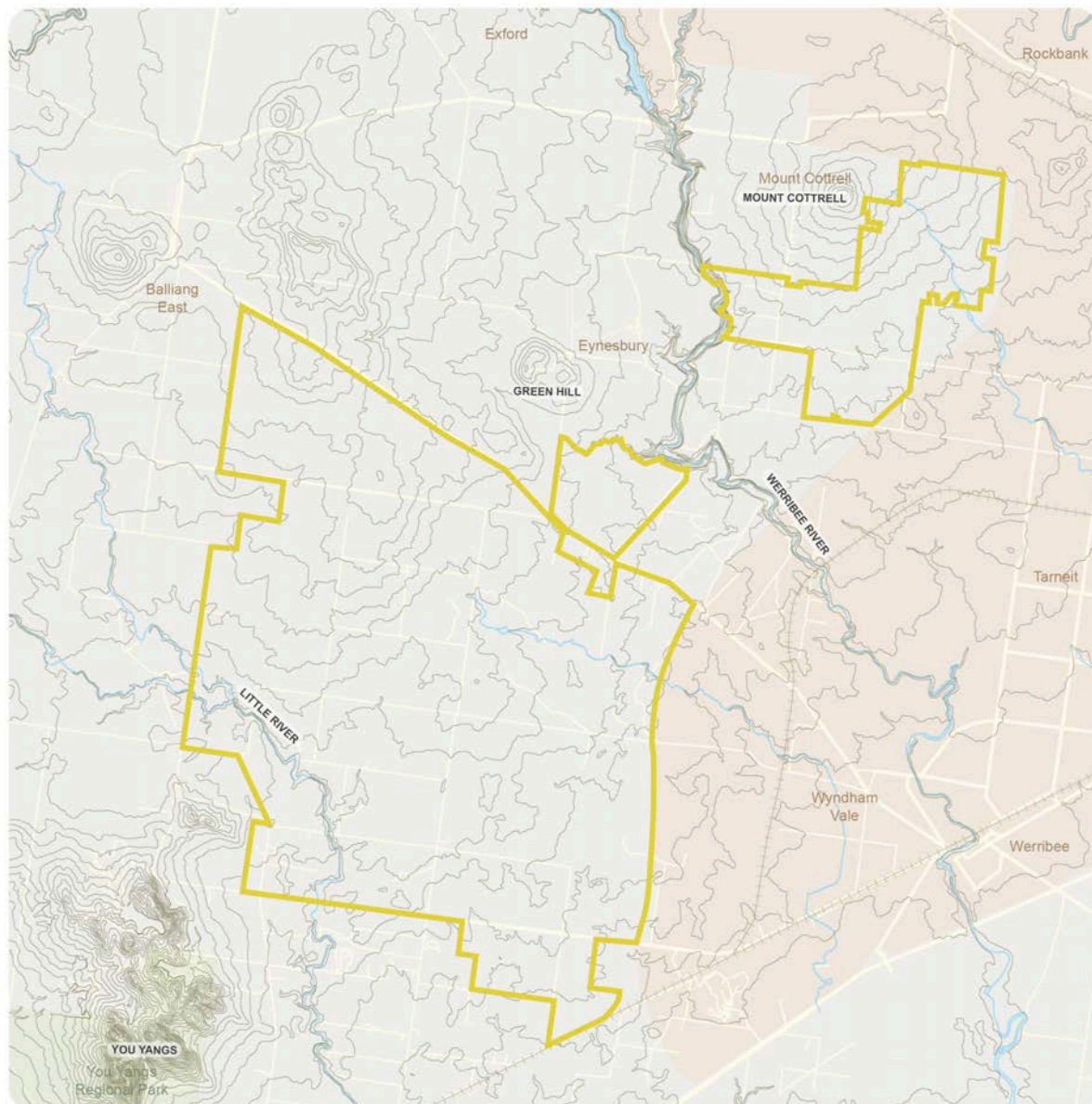


Figure 4.1: Site topography

The relatively flat topography enables views to the surrounding area. The northern sections of the reserve feature views to the Macedon Ranges. The eastern section of the reserve has views to the Brisbane Ranges and You Yangs. At higher points within the reserve there are views back towards Melbourne across the western suburbs and Port Phillip Bay. Two high voltage power lines pass across the reserve acting as distinctive reference points within the landscape. Major waterways

such as the Werribee River and Little River feature attractive rocky outcrops and escarpments along their lengths with areas of permanent water. A number of wetlands are located in the southern portion of the reserve, some of which are surrounded by River Red Gums.

Issues and opportunities:

- **A reserve the scale of the Western Grassland Reserve enables an appreciation of the natural landscape and its relationship to the broader topography.**
- **Whilst visually unattractive, the powerline easements provide distinctive reference points which may assist users of the reserve to orientate themselves.**
- **The waterways and wetlands within the reserve provide areas of interest such as rocky outcrops and ecological diversity which provide opportunities for visitor experiences.**

4.2 Climate

The Avalon weather station (located to the south of the southern portion of the reserve) has a mean annual rainfall of 457.8mmⁱ. Open parts of the reserve are exposed to the strong winds that are synonymous with the Werribee plains with Avalon weather station having a yearly mean daily wind run of 402km (compared to Melbourne Regional Office station having a yearly mean daily wind run of 234km)ⁱⁱ.



Figure 4.2: View to the You Yangs from within the reserve

Issues and opportunities:

- **There is little shelter from weather within the reserve. Exposure to wind and sun should be considered when locating facilities for public use.**

4.3 History and historic sites

The Werribee Plains were inhabited, used and managed by Aboriginal people, and the Western Grassland Reserves includes sites and artefacts of cultural significance. Root crops were actively managed through fire and some re-planting of plant material. Very early accounts of the Werribee Plains confirm that they were frequently burnt (Fleming 1803, Hovell 1824 (in Moloney 2006), Batman 1835, King 1837 (in Moloney 2006)). Unfortunately, we know little of the timing, coverage or frequency of management burns. Most of the herbaceous species with subterranean storage organs are edible, and were available in large numbers. The Murnong (*Microseris* sp.) is the most frequently mentioned, and was once extensive on the Werribee Plains (Gott 1999). Game would no doubt have been available on the plains, and fish including eels in the rivers; but we have little direct evidence of their utilisation. At least one significant cultural site is known within the reserve: the Wurdi Youang stone arrangement.

The Registered Aboriginal Party for much of the grassland reserve area (west of Werribee River) is the Wadawurrong (also known as Wathaurung Aboriginal Corporation) There is currently no Registered Aboriginal Party to the east of the Werribee River but multiple groups wish to be recognised as the Registered Aboriginal Party. DELWP and Parks Victoria will work with all relevant Registered Aboriginal Parties and archeological professionals to determine the best approach to ensure appropriate information on cultural heritage sites is identified and these sites are managed in a suitable way. Initial discussions with the Wadawurrong have identified interest and future opportunities for aboriginal cultural tourism. Dependent on an agreement under the *Traditional Owner Settlement Act 2010* there may also be future opportunities for joint land management.

A range of sites of historic significance are located within the reserve or in close proximity. These include old farm settlements and dry stone walls. The Geodetic Survey of Victoria (H1957) and Mambourin Bombing Range (Victorian War Heritage Inventory) fall within the reserve and are listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. This is not a comprehensive listing of historic sites and the establishment of the reserves provides an opportunity for further surveys and research of historic sites.

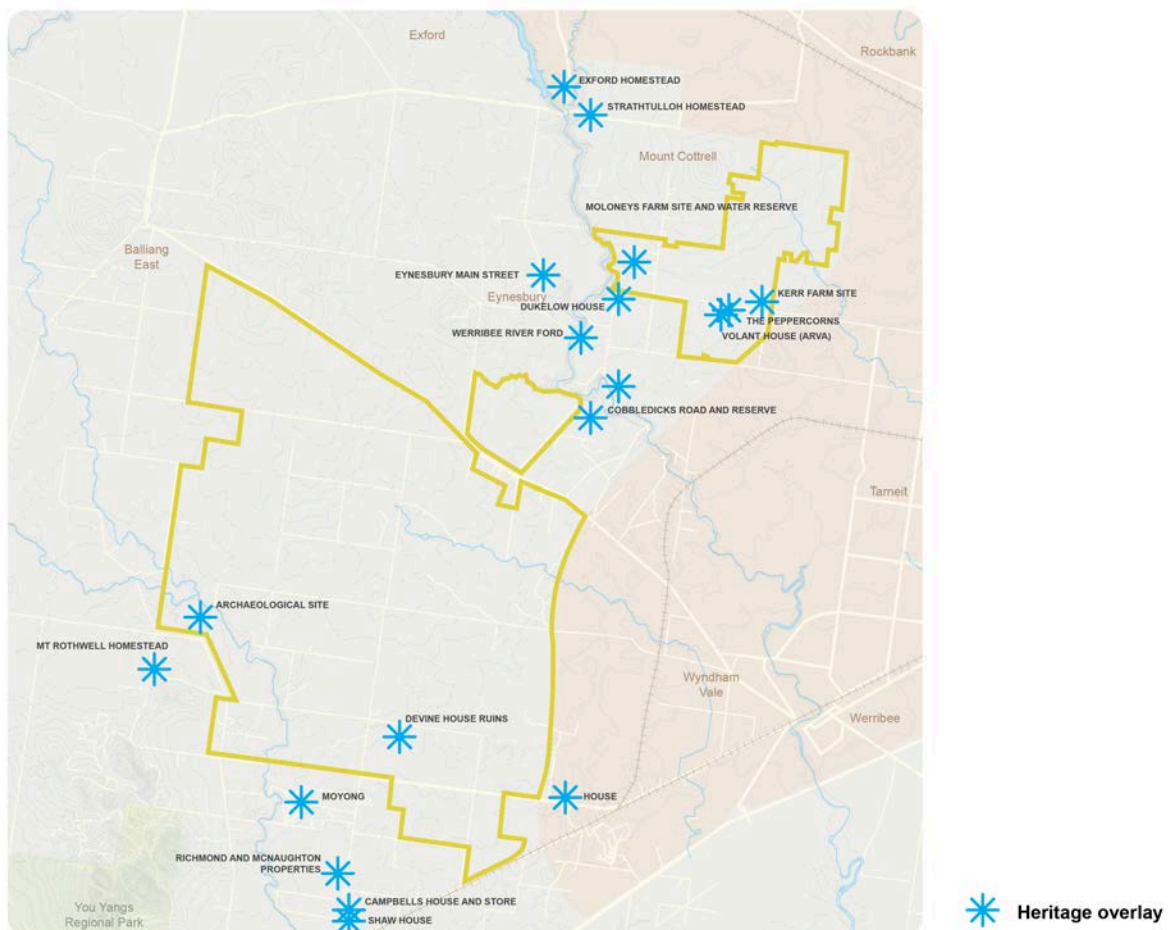


Figure 4.3: Known Historic sites

Issues and opportunities:

- **Opportunity for aboriginal involvement in management of the reserve.**
- **Opportunity for aboriginal tourism to form part of the visitor experience.**
- **Opportunity to include historic sites as part of the visitor experience.**

- **More detailed site assessments can make recommendations regarding heritage status, controls and the suitability of public access to sites (such as drystone walls and old buildings) to ensure they are appropriately protected.**

4.4 Flora and fauna

A broad scale assessment of the grassland distribution and categorisation of the grassland types has been prepared by the DELWP. This information was prepared using a range of techniques including remote mapping and analysis of aerial photos.

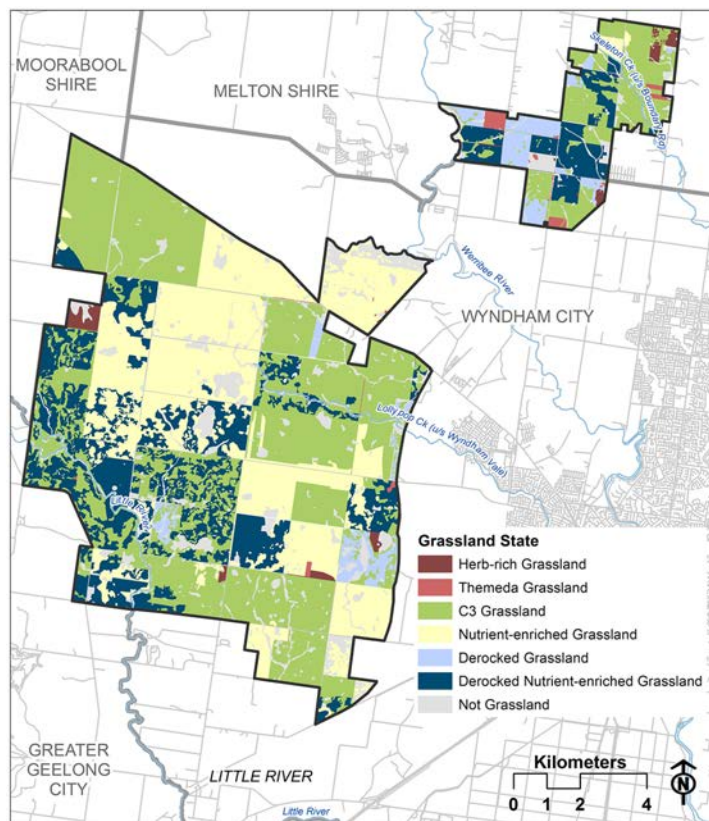


Figure 4.4: Grassland distribution and categorisation (source: DELWP)

Management plans for the reserve outline strategies to manage weeds and progressively enhance the quality of native grasslands. More detailed analysis of the grassland qualities will be prepared as land parcels are acquired or as additional studies are completed.

Vegetation and fauna surveys will be conducted on land parcels once secured in the Western Grassland Reserve. Surveys have only been conducted on a small proportion of the reserve but have already identified;

- Golden sun moth (listed as Critically Endangered under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999)
- Spiny Rice Flower (listed as Critically Endangered under the EPBC Act)
- Striped Legless Lizard (listed as Vulnerable under the EPBC Act)
- Black falcon (listed as Vulnerable in Victoria) and Spotted Harrier (listed as Near Threatened in Victoria)
- The Eastern Bent-wing Bat (listed as Critically Endangered in Victoria)
- The Tussock Skink (listed as Vulnerable in Victoria)
- Eastern Grey Kangaroo and Black Wallaby
- At least 11 species of bat

- Arachnid sampling recorded spiders belonging to at least ten taxonomic families.
- A diversity of birds, reptiles and flora.

Previous recent surveys (less than 6 years) in the Western Grassland Reserves have identified Striped Legless Lizard and Fat-Tailed Dunnart. Introduced species such as Black Rat, Cat, European Rabbit and Red Fox have also been observed.

It is highly likely that additional species will be identified as more land within the reserve is secured and surveyed. Population sizes are also likely to increase as land management practices are altered. Vegetation and Fauna inventory reports for each parcel are made available on the Department's website.

Issues and opportunities:

- **More detailed site assessments enable mapping of environmental values and establishment of management priorities.**
- **Strategies to manage and enhance the quality of native grasslands have already been developed and are being applied as sites are acquired.**

4.5 Existing trees

Trees have been planted along fence lines to create wind breaks or habitat corridors. Native and exotic trees have also been planted around existing dwellings and buildings along with scattered trees being located in paddocks or along roadways. The highest concentration of tree plantings appears to be in the parts of the reserve near the power lines. This may indicate they have been planted to screen views in addition to acting as wind breaks, or it may be a reflection of particular land management practices employed by a few property owners.

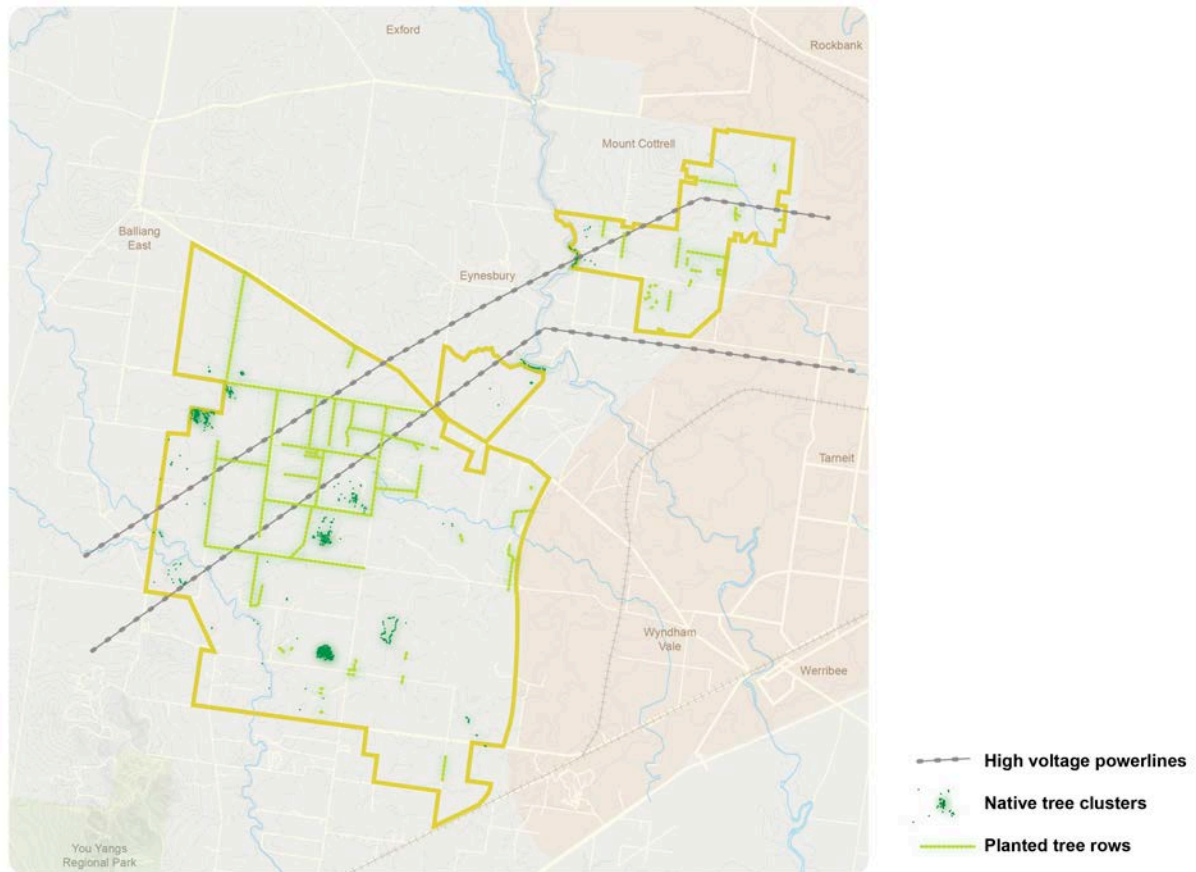


Figure 4.5: Existing tree distribution

Native trees and shrubs are also scattered across the reserve with large clusters of plants located around wetlands and along waterways.

Issues and opportunities:

- **Opportunity to reinstate the landscape character of a continuous grassland plain by removing introduced tree plantings.**
- **Existing trees may provide habitat for species currently using the reserve. Some trees may be retained in certain locations permanently or for a period of time to retain existing habitat. Replacement of native habitat may be required prior to removing exotic trees.**
- **Tree plantings provide shelter and screening and in certain locations they may be linked to the history of the reserve (such as near old homes). Opportunity to retain existing trees to enhance visitor experiences.**

4.6 Roads and rail

The condition of existing roads is highly varied. Two main roads pass through the reserve with Ballan Road (C703) in the north and Kirksbridge / Bulban Roads to the south. All other roads in the reserve are unsealed. The proposed Outer Metropolitan Ring (E6 reservation) runs along the eastern boundary of the reserve. It is proposed to contain a freeway and rail (interstate freight and high speed passenger). There is potential to create direct access to the grasslands from the road, although it is expected that not all of the proposed access points from the Outer Metropolitan Ring will be needed west into the reserve

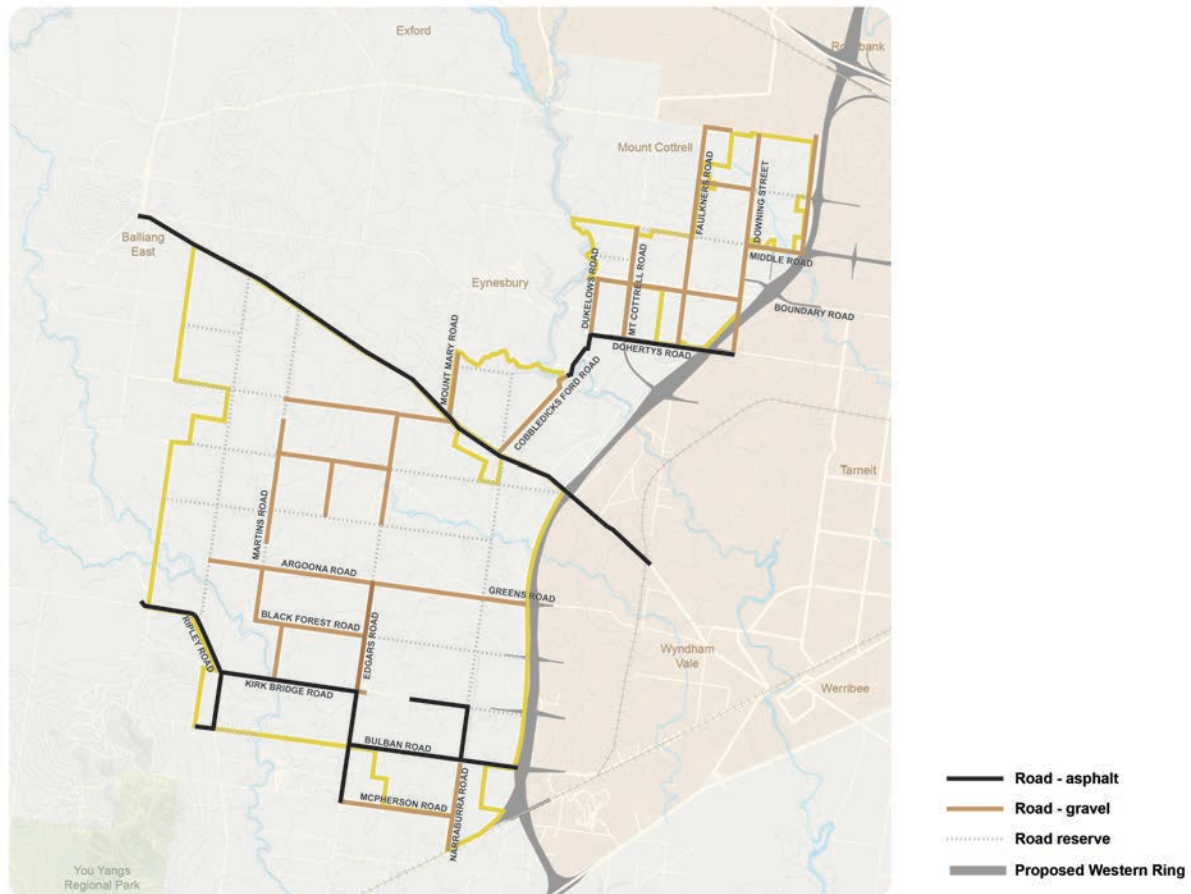


Figure 4.6: Existing road network

The reserve is located between existing or future residential areas and nature reserves such as the You Yangs. Within these areas are a number of current or proposed trails that could be extended in or across the reserve. The You Yangs is also a recognised destination for mountain biking with a trail network already established. Road cyclists currently use the sealed sections of Bulban, Edgars, Kirks Bridge and Little River-Ripley Road.

Issues and opportunities:

- Existing road network enables good access to the grasslands in the short and longer term for both management and public access.
- Existing roads provide a physical barrier between habitat areas. Opportunity to progressively remove redundant roads from public access as sites are acquired.
- Opportunity to adaptively reuse existing roads.
- Opportunity to encourage cycling as a way to provide low-impact visitor access to the reserve.
- Interfaces with current and future roads likely to require treatments to reduce hazards to wildlife, park users and road users. Those responsible for new roads or road upgrades may need to consider enabling habitat and recreational links across major roads.

4.7 Water

Little River and the Werribee River are the only permanent waterways within or adjoining the reserve. A number of ephemeral wetlands and waterways such as Lollipop Creek are also located within the reserve. Dams have been constructed within the reserve and in certain locations infrastructure has been constructed to supply water for grazing stock.

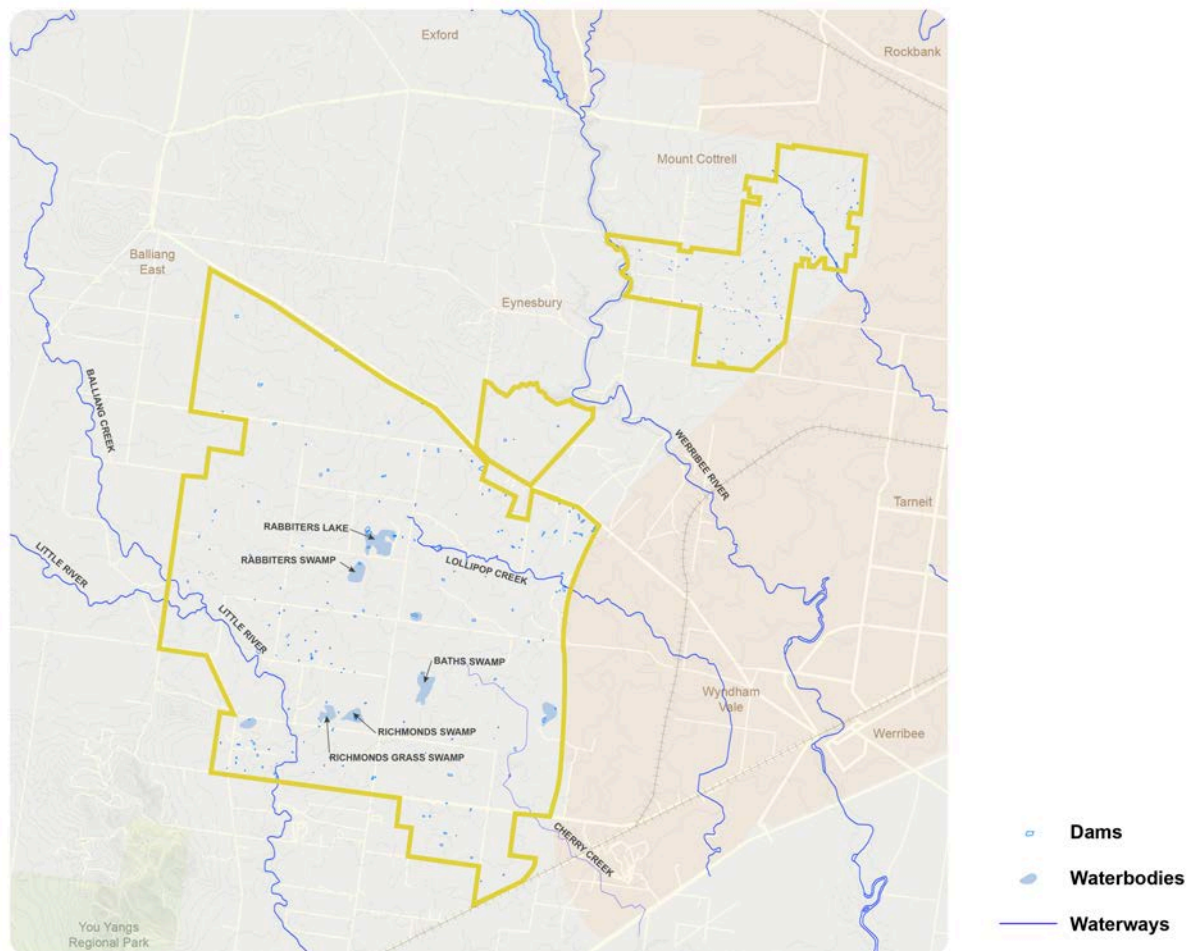


Figure 4.7: Waterways and water bodies

Issues and opportunities:

- **Opportunity to reinstate existing catchments through the removal of farm dams and associated infrastructure.**
- **Opportunity to adaptively reuse existing infrastructure to provide for future management and user requirements.**
- **Interim management may require the retention of water sources for grazing animals.**
- **Provision of water bodies is likely to have an impact on the ability for the reserve to sustain populations of native fauna. It may be necessary to retain 'artificial' water bodies to sustain specific species.**

4.8 Existing buildings utilities, infrastructure and industry

Existing homes and farm-related buildings and structures are located within the reserve. More detailed assessments will reveal the quality of these buildings however they appear to be quite varied. Opportunities are likely to exist for adaptive reuse of buildings especially as they may include features such as service connections, structures, etc. that could be adapted for use in visitor or maintenance facilities. Boundary fences and stock management fences are widespread across the reserve.

Two high voltage powerlines run between the northern and southern portions of the reserve. Very good mobile coverage is available across the reserve with some existing telecommunications infrastructure located in the reserve. Sewer, water and gas infrastructure is also located in part of the reserve. Where they are required to ensure supply of services outside the reserve or may be used within the reserve for visitation or management purposes they will remain. On-going access will be required to maintain some utilities infrastructure including a gas main running along the eastern boundary of the southern reserve. There are also existing licences in place for mining within the reserve.

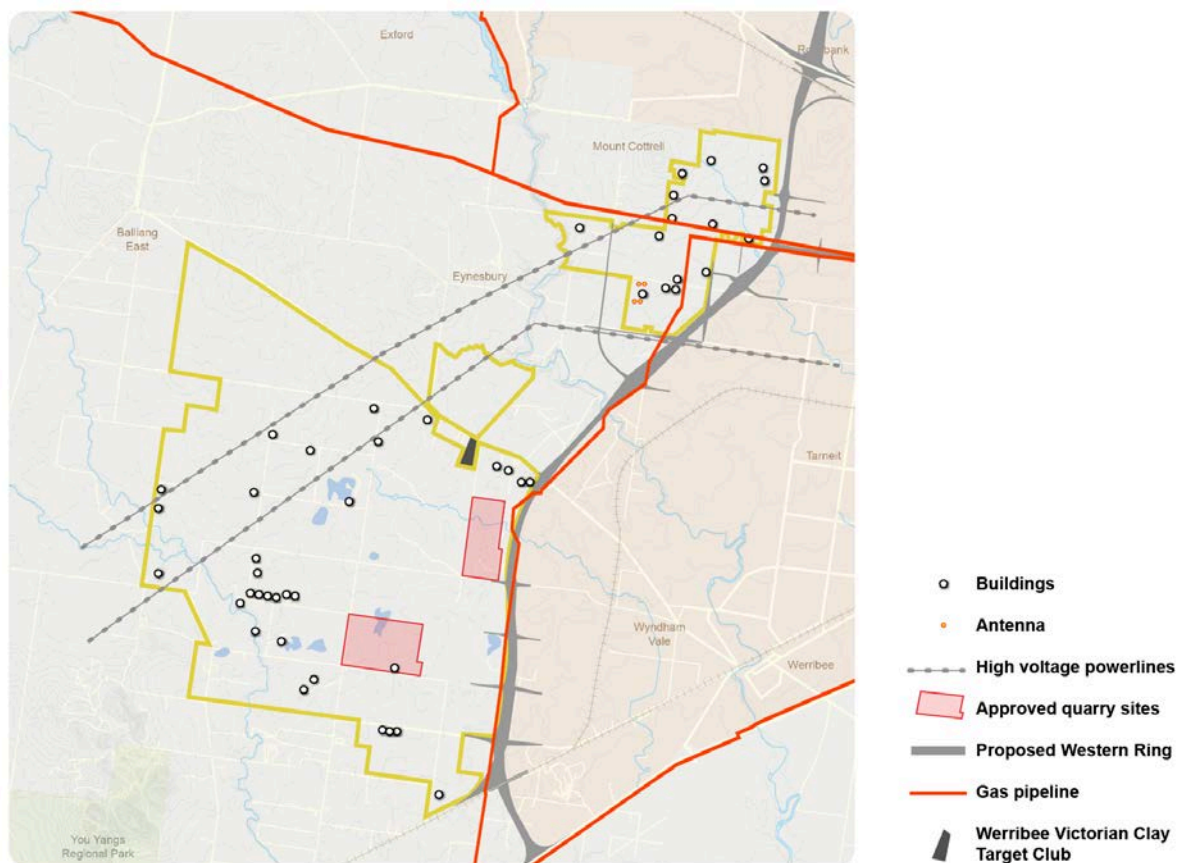


Figure 4.8: Existing buildings, utilities, infrastructure and industry

Issues and opportunities:

- **Opportunity to adaptively reuse existing buildings, structures and service infrastructure to provide visitor or management facilities**
- **Existing infrastructure is likely to require regular maintenance inspections. Where possible existing infrastructure could be integrated into the ongoing functions of the reserve or removed where it will have no ongoing use.**
- **Opportunity to combine infrastructure such as fire management and infrastructure maintenance tracks with other park uses.**

- **Opportunity for farm related infrastructure such as dams, windmills, fences to be maintained where ecological grazing will be used as a management method**
- **Opportunity to remove fences and other farming infrastructure where not required, to reinstate the landscape character of a continuous grassland plain**
- **The location of proposed visitor facilities should have consideration of existing or adjacent land uses such as amenity impacts of quarries and shooting ranges.**

4.9 Ecological burning and bushfire management

Grassland communities are well adapted to fire events, which reduce biomass levels and help maintain a diversity of grassland species. Ecological burning regimes will be used within the Western Grassland Reserve as a management tool to maintain species and habitat diversity, to create niches required for restoration, remove elevated soil nutrients, and to assist with reducing perennial weed cover.

Two types of fire events are likely to occur in the WGR; ecological burns and unplanned bushfires. DELWP and Parks Victoria (Land Manager for the grassland reserves) must be able to control both planned ecological burns and unplanned bushfires within the reserve to ensure risks to community and assets are reduced. Permanent strategic fuelbreaks will be required across the reserve and consist of gravel tracks about 3-4 metres wide. As far as possible existing roads will be used as fuelbreaks, however some additional tracks will be built. These tracks will be used for fuel breaks, park access and management and in most cases can also be available as walking and cycling tracks.

Preliminary fire management plans have been prepared for the reserve and Figure 4.9 gives an indication of the location of these fuel breaks. The final location of the fuel breaks will be dependent on detailed site assessments following land acquisition.

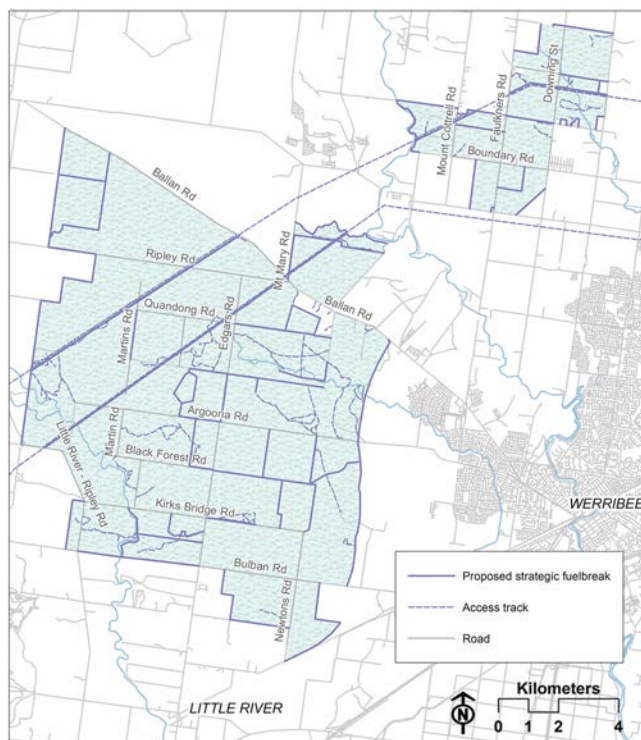


Figure 4.9: Existing fire management plan (source: DELWP)

Issues and opportunities: Fire is a natural part of native grasslands. Fire management planning and infrastructure are an essential aspect of managing site risks and ecological values.

- **Opportunity to combine infrastructure such as fire management tracks with other uses such as walking and cycling trails.**

5 Analysis

There are a range of potential visitor experiences that could be included within the reserve in addition to essential management infrastructure. This section provides an analysis of the site conditions and qualities that will inform the location of key elements of the Concept Plan.

5.1 Ecological qualities

Preliminary studies and initial site investigations have started the identification of current and anticipated ecological qualities. The plan in figure 5.1 maps known ecological qualities such as existing grasslands distribution, waterways and wetlands. An offset of approximately 200 metres beyond each of these areas has been identified as a zone likely to contain additional values or have a high potential for ecological enhancement.

Environmental qualities are not static. They will change over time in response to management practices. More detailed mapping will provide further information on current ecological qualities and the impacts of altered land management.

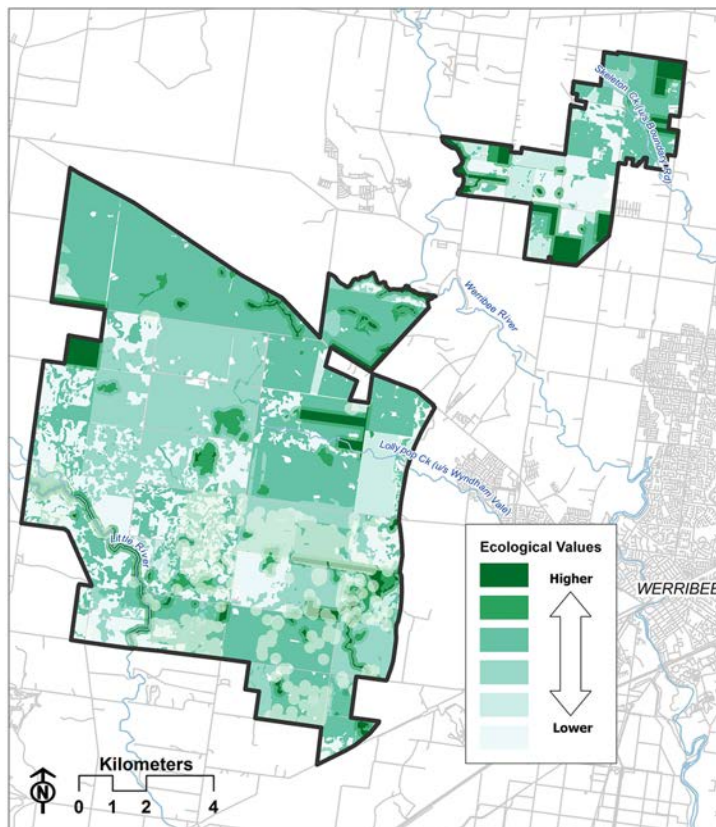


Figure 5.1: Western Grassland Reserve ecological qualities (source: DELWP)

As identified in the Concept Plan objectives the primary objective for the Western Grassland Reserve is the protection, management and enhancement of the biodiversity values of the reserve. Thus the ecological values of the reserve are the primary directive of the Concept Plan design, and may also be the reason for changes to the design as more information on the distribution of biodiversity values is known following the acquisition of land parcels.

5.2 Landscape Character Zones

The broader landscape character of the Western Grassland Reserve, including visual landscapes, historic land uses and existing infrastructure, will impact the type of experiences visitors will have within the reserve and the way that they interpret and interact with it. For instance, landscapes modified by large powerlines may limit a visitor's ability to appreciate the site as a natural landscape, while an old farm house and stone walls provide opportunities to identify with the region's farming heritage. In this way the varying landscape character across the reserve has informed the development of the Concept Plan.

The following landscape character zones have been identified within the reserve and were mapped to help describe and locate some of the visitor opportunities:

- **Scenic Landscapes.**
A chance to experience a landscape which is likely to have existed prior to European settlement. The reserve provides an opportunity to immerse oneself in a broad scale native grassland. In sections of the reserve it will be possible to experience a grassland with wildflowers and wildlife such as birds and kangaroos and without fences, buildings and treelines. The indigenous heritage adds to the story and offers a unique, authentic experience.
- **Farming heritage.**
The reserve contains a number of relics which explain the farming history of the region and which are worthy of retention. Over time the landscape context of these relics will change as the surrounding landscape becomes a native grassland. Visitors will increasingly gain an insight to the experiences of the first farmers of the region.
- **Modified landscape.**
The presence of infrastructure such as powerlines and telecommunication towers visually overwhelms the landscape, especially a grassland reserve with few vertical elements to screen these views. In the same way the noise generated by a major road detracts from the natural qualities of a landscape. High ecological values can exist in these locations but the visitor experience is altered.

The character zones have been applied to the plan in Figure 5.2 based on the following parameters:

- **Modified landscape**
 - 2km offset from powerlines
 - 500m offset from Outer Metropolitan Ring corridor
 - 200m offset from Ballan Road and Mt Cottrell Road
 - 200m offset from shooting facilities in Ballan Road
 - 100m offset from the approximate extent of quarries
- **Farming heritage**
 - 500m offset from known historic sites within the reserve.
- **Scenic landscapes**
 - Significant waterbodies and watercourses
 - The balance of the reserve.

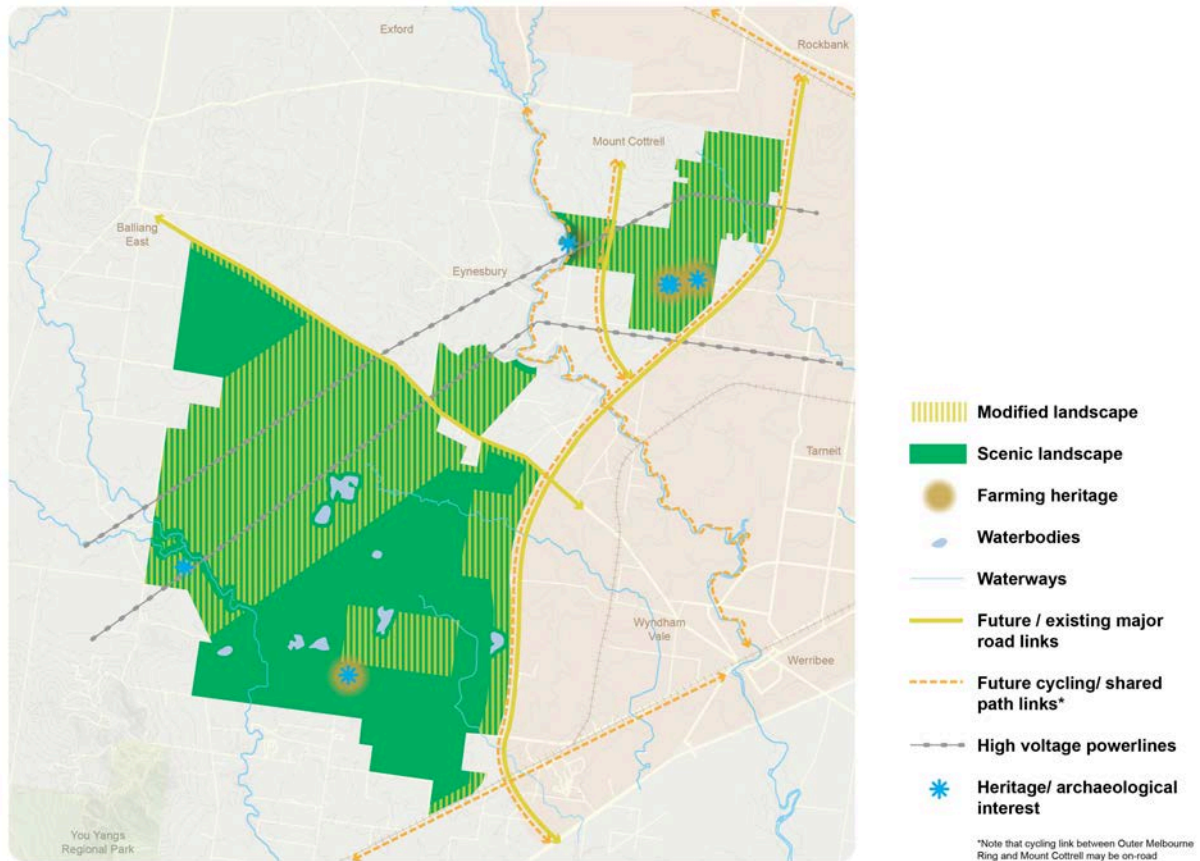


Figure 5.2: Landscape character zones

5.3 Visitor experiences

The general public typically finds it difficult to distinguish native grasslands from exotic pastures and weeds. The reserve provides an opportunity to educate and inform the community of the values of the grasslands. Providing high quality, publicly-accessible experiences within the reserve will foster broad appreciation of the importance of the reserve.

The level and type of public access to the reserve needs to balance the quality of visitor experiences with environmental sensitivities. Priority should be given to locating visitor facilities in previously disturbed areas such as existing farms that may include infrastructure such as buildings, fencing, access roads, paths and services that can be adaptively reused. However, some of the more sensitive parts of the reserve are also likely to be the most interesting and picturesque. Existing wetlands and waterways, for example, are landscapes that combine ecological, cultural and scenic qualities such as open water, birds, wildlife, established trees and rocky outcrops. Selective access to these areas will be necessary to provide high quality visitor experiences, but access may need to be highly structured to protect ecological values.

The following are a range of visitor experiences that have been identified as being compatible with the vision and objectives of the reserve. These are scalable options that will require further assessment to determine their viability and timeframe for implementation.

5.3.1 Grassland Learning Centre

Information centres in large open spaces range from the inspiring and uplifting through to underwhelming and unnecessary. Many factors contribute to the creation of a successful facility. For the Western Grassland Reserve a range of options were considered including small scale information signage and larger scale permanently-staffed facilities.

Prioritising education as a key component of the information facility was seen as strongly aligning with the objectives of the reserve and making such a centre viable. The size and unique ecological values of the grasslands, in addition to its close proximity to metropolitan Melbourne and Geelong, make the reserve a logical place for visits by school groups. The extremes of weather would require a facility which has indoor learning spaces for groups of 50 – 100 people. The creation of such a facility with associated visitor amenities, access roads, paths and car park would become the main centre of activity within the reserve. It could be the location of facilities for reserve management staff as well as potentially having a café and facilities for community use. A regional playground could be included to provide facilities for visiting primary school students in addition to younger children visiting the centre. Demonstration gardens could incorporate species present in the grassland to encourage the public to include them in their gardens at home.

Centres such as Ecolinc, Iramoo and Werribee Zoo already provide education on ecology of the western plains and grasslands. Further investigations will be necessary to ascertain the level of demand for a new facility, potential partners and the programs offered.



Figure 5.3: Ecolinc Bacchus March is an example of education facility linked to school learning programs

5.3.2 Trails and viewing areas

Walking is the most popular physical recreation activity in Australiaⁱⁱⁱ. Cycling and mountain biking are also increasing in popularity as forms of recreation, in addition to being sustainable methods of transport. The relatively flat topography of the reserve will enable the creation of a trail network within the reserve and to surrounding areas (such as residential areas and the You Yangs) that would cater for a broad range of users with varying levels of mobility.

Walking Trails

Opportunities exist to create short and longer walks within the reserve. The following is a proposed hierarchy of trails and associated infrastructure.

- Short walks (less than 1 hour, less than 5km).
These trails link car parking and picnic areas to destinations such as wetlands or historic sites. Trails should be designed to provide access to visitors of all abilities which may require paths constructed of concrete, boardwalks, additional seating and shelters at rest areas.
- Longer walks (1 – 4 hours, 5 – 20km).
Longer walks provide visitors with a more adventurous, nature-based experience. These walks may require visitors to have a higher level of mobility as they traverse rockier terrain.

Grasslands are a somewhat unique plant community in that they don't require formal trails for them to be explored. In the same way that trails can be routed along a beach without requiring trail construction, an informal trail can be created by slashing grass to guide visitors through the reserve. This method also allows different routes to be created from one year to the next to reduce the human impacts in any one location. This is likely to be the most cost effective means of creating longer trails. More formal trails may be created over time in response to demand or to improve access.

Directional and information signage should be included along all trails. All access points to the reserve should be designed to prevent easy access by motorised trail bikes except for on designated riding tracks/ roads. Trails should be separated from maintenance and access tracks where possible to create a more authentic nature based experience, but will primarily be designed in a way to limit the impact foot print on the grassland values.

Cycling and mountain biking

Cycling and mountain biking are increasingly popular activities. The You Yangs Regional Park is already a recognised destination for mountain biking with an established trail network. The following items should be considered regarding cycle facilities within the reserve:

- To encourage bicycle riding and an alternative way of accessing the reserve, bicycle racks should be provided at all picnic areas. The number of racks installed should increase in response to demand.
- Concrete off-road paths should be constructed to link high activity areas (such as the Grassland Information Centre) with adjoining residential areas and trail networks such as the Outer Metropolitan Ring and along waterways.
- Construction of on-road cycling lanes and off-road bicycle trails as part of road upgrades (both within and adjoining the reserve) should be encouraged.
- The You Yangs Regional Park will continue to be the primary destination for mountain biking. However, the proposed trail network in the Western Grassland Reserve should be constructed to enable use by mountain bikes, especially in areas where it provides a connection between residential areas and the You Yangs.

- The creation of links between the northern and southern portions of the reserve will enable cycle touring through the reserve and to surrounding areas. Creating clearly defined external links to train stations and the You Yangs would further encourage these activities.



Figure 5.4: Mountain biking in the You Yangs Regional Park

5.3.3 Picnic areas and play

The close proximity of the reserve to metropolitan Melbourne and Geelong as well as major transport corridors is likely to create a high number of incidental and day visitors. These visitors are likely to be seeking areas for a short break or slightly longer visits (such as place to meet friends and family for a gathering or lunch). Five sites within the reserve will be created to cater for these visitors with picnic facilities located in close proximity to all car parks. Picnic facilities should include shelters, paths, barbecues, picnic sets, seats and signage. Picnic areas would be created near, but separated from, camping and accommodation sites.

Playgrounds are often a feature of regional open spaces as they complement other recreation activities. The Grassland Learning Centre has been identified as the location for a regional playground within the reserve. This location would provide the facilities necessary to support a regional playground. On weekdays it would be used by visiting primary school students and on weekends it would be a destination for children and families. It is anticipated that all other play space needs would be catered for within surrounding urban areas outside the reserve.

5.3.4 Camping and accommodation

Camping and other forms of accommodation could be included in the reserve. The inclusion of camping and accommodation has as implications for the types of experiences that can be provided within the reserve and surrounding area. Tourism strategies such as the *Wyndham City Tourism and Event Strategy 2012/13 – 2015/16* (EC3, 2011) has identifying nature-based tourism as a potential growth area for the region, especially activities that include evening and morning activities which encourage overnight stays. Overnight stays increase visitor expenditure in the region which supports local employment and economic development.

An overview of affordable or nature based accommodation (caravan parks and camping) currently available in the region is provided in Figure 5.5. Also included on the plan is the location of train stations as these can be important connections for cycle touring. It highlights the lack of accommodation facilities in close proximity to the reserve.

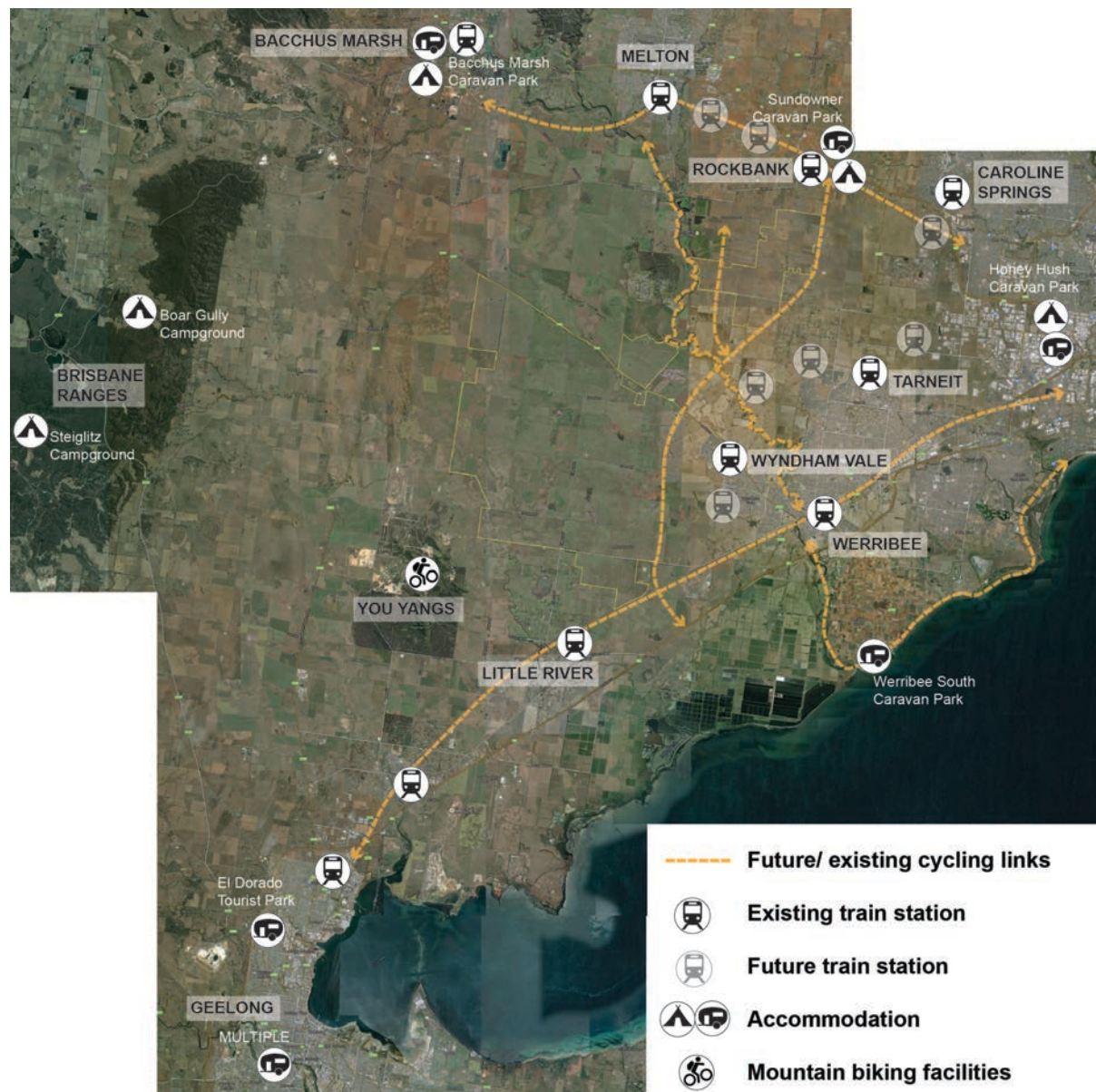


Figure 5.5: Overview of currently available affordable or nature based accommodation (caravan parks and camping) and train stations in close proximity to the reserve.

The following types of accommodation are proposed to be included within the reserve.

- Serviced camping.
This includes flushing toilets, showers and a camp kitchen for campers.
- Eco cabins.
The high number of farms within the reserve provide a range of potential locations for this type of accommodation. Existing farms are typically highly disturbed areas and are likely to have pre-existing service connections for power, water and other utilities. The cabins should be positioned to share access roads and trails with other uses whilst being separated from day visitor trails and facilities.
- Boutique accommodation.
Boutique accommodation is proposed to be created as part of adaptive reuse of existing homes and buildings in the reserve. Such facilities provide the opportunity to retain a connection to the farming history of the area. It may also be possible for this type of accommodation to provide access to the reserve for people with special needs such as people with limited mobility.



Figure 5.6: Examples of Eco cabins at Tidal River Wilsons Promontory Victoria (source: Parks Victoria) and boutique accommodation at Hilltop Cottage, Royal National Park NSW (source: NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service)

It is assumed that larger-scale hotel developments would be located outside of the reserve. Such developments could be encouraged at existing homesteads in close proximity to the reserve such as Moyong in a style similar to Eynesbury and Werribee Mansion.

All camping and accommodation would be managed in accordance with Parks Victoria standards and use existing booking systems.

5.3.5 Western Grassland Reserve and the broader landscape context

The Western Grassland Reserve is located in close proximity to growth corridors in the west of metropolitan Melbourne. The reserve provides the following opportunities for the planning and construction of this areas:

- The reserve aims to facilitate passive recreation by providing walking and cycling. Access to these facilities will be enhanced by the creation of links to nearby urban areas, public transport, along waterways and other reserves such as the You Yangs.
- Residents of these new communities will have ready access to nature based experiences within the reserve. These provide a range of physical and mental health benefits that will contribute to the broader health and well being of these communities.

Formal recreation facilities such as sports grounds are not appropriate land uses within the reserve. These uses are expected to be located either within growth corridors or in other locations outside the urban growth boundary.

6 Concept Plan

The Concept Plan shown in Figure 6.1 has been developed to guide the development of the Western Grassland Reserve. The Concept Plan has been developed using the following criteria:

- Allow visitor visitation and experiences without impacting on the existing biodiversity values of the reserve. Locate facilities to in areas compatible with user needs and in modified parts of the reserve;
- Through consultation with stakeholders assess the type and scale of facilities to be included in the reserve;
- Explore options for reuse of existing assets where possible and appropriate; and
- Consider the surrounding land use and recreational opportunities to guide how the reserves fit into the broader regional context and what is needed.

The following sections provide additional information on key components of the Concept Plan.

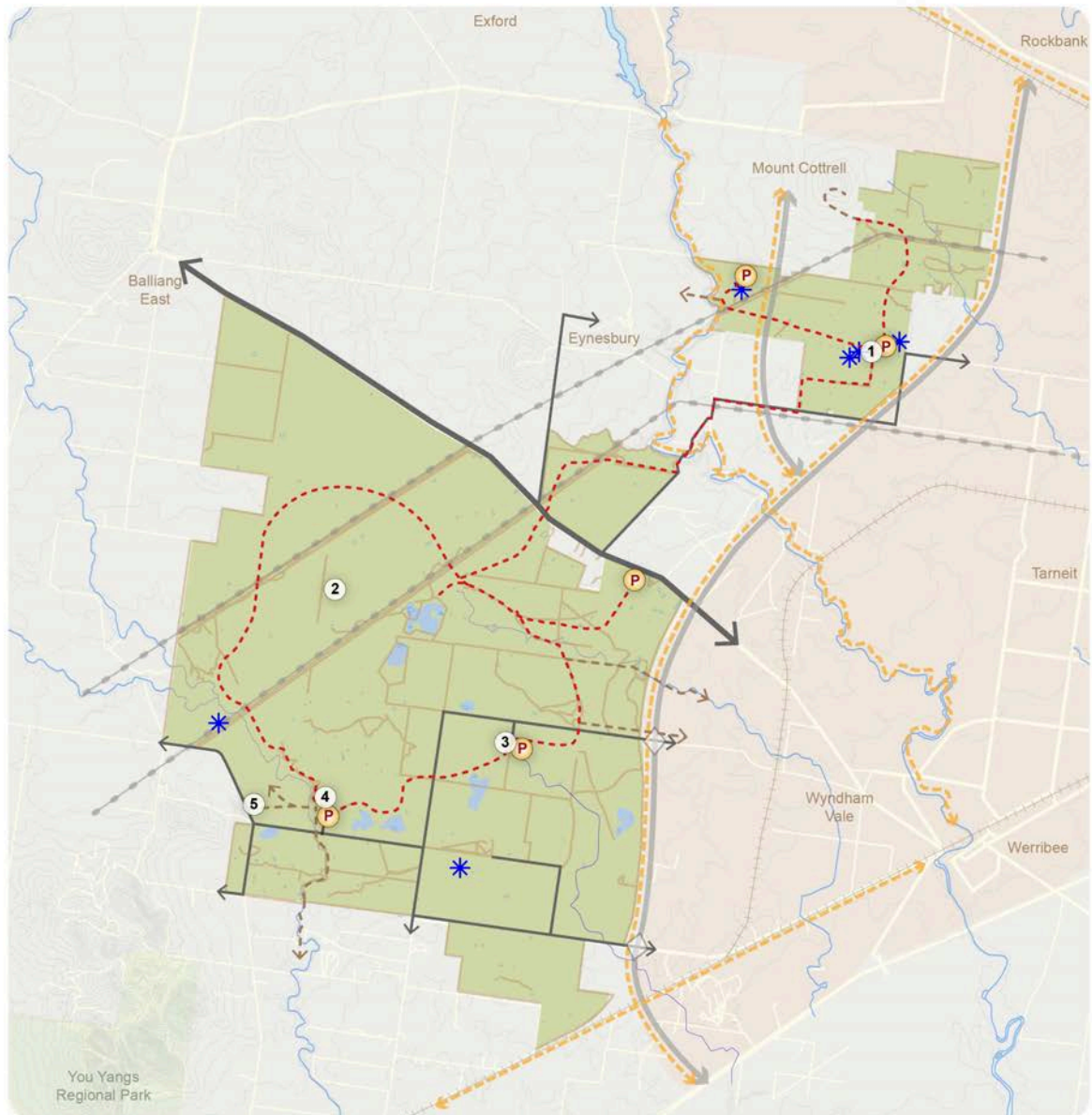


Figure 6.1: Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan

6.1 Grassland protection and enhancement

A range of management strategies have been developed to guide the protection, enhancement and re-establishment of grasslands within the reserve. More detailed site assessments as land parcels are acquired will enable more accurate mapping of grassland distribution and quality.

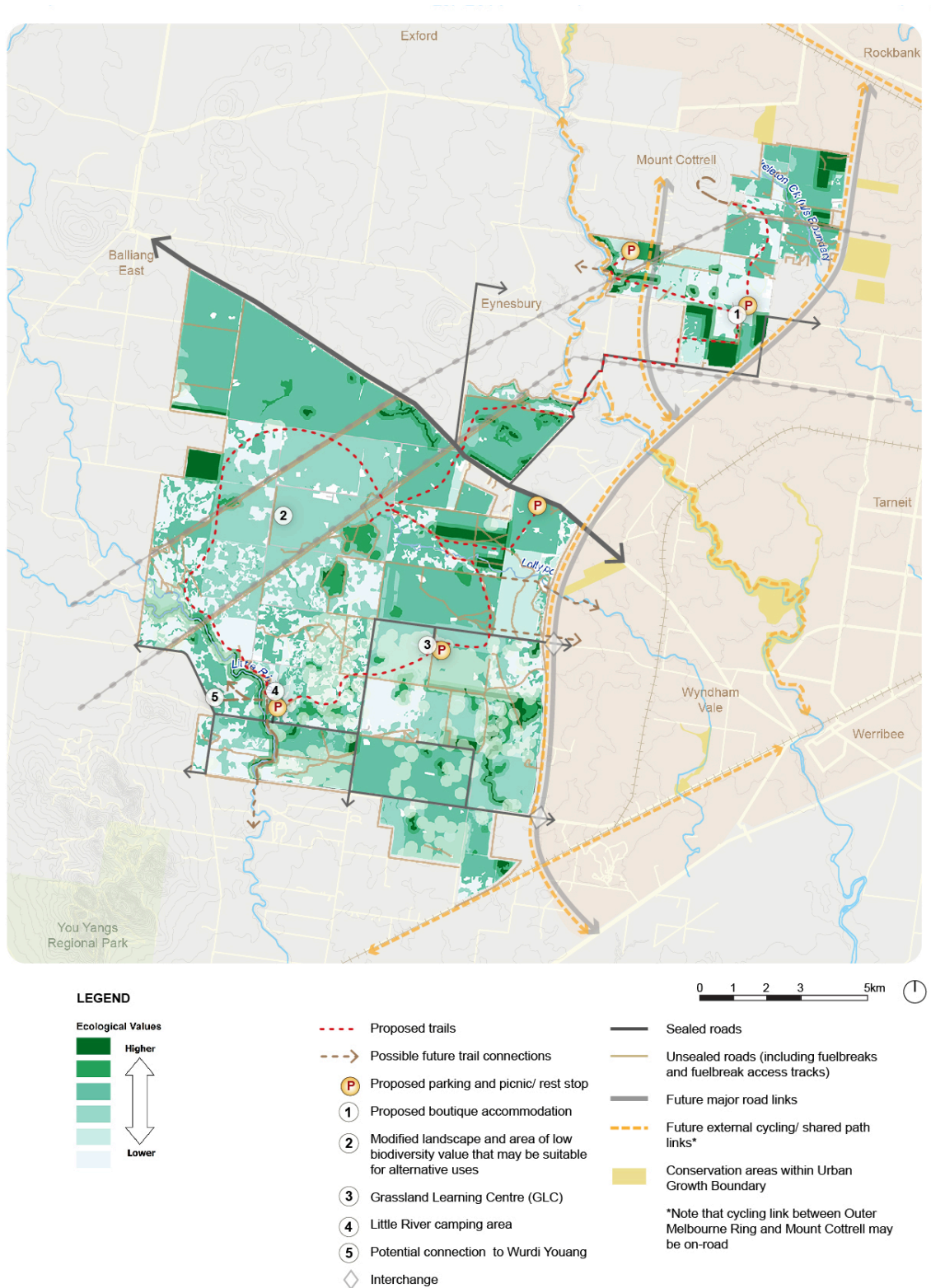


Figure 6.2: Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan overlaid on map of ecological qualities.

6.2 Facilities and infrastructure

The following visitor experiences and proposed facilities and infrastructure are considered compatible and have potential to be located within the reserve. Included with each item is commentary on the factors for consideration during the early stages of the reserve development and where possible direction is provided to assist implementation.

6.2.1 Identity and branding

An important aspect of a new reserve of this scale and type is public perception - first impressions count. The long-term success of the reserve will be enhanced by undertaking activities that foster public appreciation of the reserve. Increased focus on the identity and branding of the reserve will begin once at least a third of the reserve is acquired or some significant sites identified as visitor nodes are acquired. These activities should include:

- Logo, signage and branding.
Consistent use of materials and signage will be necessary to identify a reserve of this scale. Proposed logos and signage should be complementary to Parks Victoria standard and style guides. The development of a branding strategy at the early stages of the reserve will allow for it to be progressively implemented over time.
- Website.
A website that allows the public to interact with the reserve (in the short term it may be one of the few ways to interact) is considered important. The website should have a contemporary look and feel to inform the community of the positive qualities within the reserve, but fit within existing Parks Victoria web guidelines and styling.
- Community newsletter and social media.
Community newsletters and social media provide the public with the opportunity to build a connection with the reserve as well as providing news and information. These will also be managed through Parks Victoria.
- Community events.
During the early stages of the reserve being created, prior to the construction of formal facilities, a range of activities could be held to educate and inform the community. Such activities might include guided tours, kite flying and photographic displays. As facilities are constructed within the reserve a program of community events should be developed. Where possible these should provide experiences unique to the reserve but they might also be part of broader community programs run by Parks Victoria or local Councils. These might include astronomy and star gazing, ranger walks, fun runs, bird or wildlife watching and temporary art installations.

6.2.2 Grassland Learning Centre

The Grassland Learning Centre is proposed to be located along Greens Road for the following reasons:

- Access.
A key consideration when identifying potential locations for a centre such as this is accessibility. Greens Road is an existing public road which is proposed to have an interchange connection with Outer Metropolitan Link corridor. In addition, it is close to the eastern edge of the reserve which enables the creation of walking and cycling connections to future residential areas and public transport connections.
- Views.
In this area it is possible to experience expansive views across the western suburbs of

Melbourne, Port Phillip Bay, Geelong and the You Yangs. It is possible to see the area of the quarry to the south however the broader views dominate the vista. Visibility of the powerlines is significantly reduced by the surrounding topography.

- **Context.**
The proposed location is an area which has undergone a relatively high level of disturbance whilst still being located close to areas expected to be of higher ecological value. Being located in the southern portion of the reserve, it is in close proximity to the You Yangs Regional Park, Geelong Freeway (which is already a major tourist route linking Melbourne to the Great Ocean Road) and the future camping and accommodation area proposed within the reserve along Little River.
- **Staging.**
Greens Roads is currently publicly accessible which means access restrictions would not impact the timing of the centre.

Areas along Ballan Road and near Mt Cottrell were considered as an alternative location for the centre. However, the visual impact of the powerlines was seen as significantly reducing the ability to experience the natural qualities of the native grasslands.

6.2.3 Roads and vehicle access

The reserve is currently well-serviced by existing roads and road reserves. As existing farms are progressively acquired and added to the grassland reserve, many existing roads will no longer be available as public roads. Detailed site assessments should be completed before any existing roads within or adjoining the reserve are modified as many road reserves are known to have high grassland values.

The following are issues to consider regarding the existing road network, with all outcomes subject to further discussions with VicRoads and/or Council:

- Ripley Road, Kirks Bridge Road, Edgars Road, Bulban Road and Ballan Road (Bacchus March – Werribee Road) are the main roads that cross the reserve. As surrounding residential areas grow it is likely that the traffic volumes on these roads will increase. Fencing will need to be constructed along these roads to restrict vehicle access to the reserve. The type of fencing constructed should have consideration of current and future risk posed by wildlife (such as kangaroos). Where possible future modifications to the road reserves should include improved facilities for on-road cycling (increasing the road verge pavement as a minimum) and an off-road shared trail along at least one side of the road. However, some road reserves within the Western Grassland Reserve protect areas of high quality vegetation and EPBC Act species such as Spiny Rice-flower. These road reserves will be removed in order to protect these values. Edgars Road and Greens Road are proposed to be upgraded to paved roads to reduce dust and recurring maintenance. The road should be designed to be a low speed environment and constructed without kerbs to convey an informal character. Where possible swales, long grass and rocks should be used to discourage vehicles from leaving the road instead of fencing and bollards. These roads would be to provide access to the reserve rather than through traffic and options could be explored to restrict access to during park operating hours.
- It is expected that Mt Cottrell Road will be progressively upgraded to an 'arterial road' as it an identified connection to the Outer Metropolitan Ring. The type of fencing constructed should have consideration of current and future risk posed by wildlife (such as kangaroos). Future modifications to the road reserves should include on-road cycling lanes or an off-road bicycle trail and a concrete pedestrian footpath on at least one side of the road.

- Roads in the northern portion of the reserve such as Faulkners Road, Downing Street and Boundary Road should be progressively phased out from public access to reduce rubbish and car dumping as well as to enable the creation of linked grasslands. It will not be possible to remove these roads from public access entirely with sections of the roads retained to provide access to adjoining properties where necessary.
- Cobbledicks Road and Dohertys Road provide an important link between the northern and southern portions of the reserve. However, Cobbledicks ford is unlikely to be a suitable crossing destination particularly following rain, and this should be explored before any attempt is made to upgrade these roads. It may be necessary for part of the trail to extend into the grassland reserve to achieve appropriate access grades to the trail.

In addition to publicly accessible roads, the reserve will also include a number of management, maintenance and emergency access tracks. Such tracks are a necessary part of the reserve however the presence of tracks can detract from the natural qualities of the landscape. The following factors should be considered when determining the location of tracks:

- The distribution of tracks should be limited to that which is necessary to safely and efficiently manage the reserve. They should be designed and constructed to minimise site impacts including reducing soil erosion and the creation of dust.
- It is highly likely that existing farm driveways, roads and tracks can be adapted to provide suitable access for maintenance, management and emergency vehicles within the reserve.
- Further discussions with utility providers should be undertaken to determine the distribution and standard of maintenance access points and trails required for existing utilities such as powerlines and pipelines. Where possible and appropriate tracks should be located to cater for multiple uses to minimise site impacts and recurring maintenance costs.

The Outer Metropolitan Ring provides the opportunity to improve access to the reserve especially for visitors travelling from further afield. The following opportunities exist with the creation of this transport corridor:

- A direct access from the corridor to the reserve enables the creation of gateways and an entry experience. Greens Road (Argoona Road) is the proposed location for the main entry to the reserve. It is currently a publicly accessible road which could be progressively upgraded as facilities such as the Grassland Learning Centre are constructed.
- Mt Cottrell Road is proposed to link directly to the Outer Metropolitan Ring which will enable a direct connection to the northern portion of the reserve. The connection will also generate additional traffic in this location which will negatively impact upon the 'natural' qualities of the reserve. Fencing is anticipated to be necessary to reduce risks associated with wildlife and traffic. Where possible habitat links should be constructed to retain habitat connections across the road.
- A shared trail network is proposed to be constructed along the corridor. Trails within the reserve should be linked at key locations to the proposed trail.
- The existing public transport network is proposed to be extended as part of the transport corridor. The establishment of trail networks within the reserve connecting to train stations is a high priority as it provides visitors and staff with alternatives to driving.

Concept plans for the Outer Metropolitan Ring note an interchange will be constructed at either Bulban Road or Kirksbridge Road. A final decision on the interchange is likely to be influenced by a range of factors. The following issues should be considered when determining the final location:

- Existing road reserves often contain significant remnant vegetation. Detailed studies of existing flora and fauna (along with archaeological and cultural values) should inform the location of the interchange and associated road widening which is likely to be required.

- In the event Kirksbridge Road is the preferred alignment Bulban Road should be discontinued as a through road. This would reduce risks posed by wildlife such as kangaroos and strengthen the habitat links in this area of the reserve.

The Outer Metropolitan Ring corridor is located at the interface between the natural qualities of the Western Grassland Reserve and suburban areas. Interface treatments with the corridor will need to address the following issues:

- Fencing along the corridor will need to prevent wildlife such as kangaroos creating traffic hazards. Suitable fencing along the corridor will also assist with preventing domestic animals (such as cats and dogs) entering the reserve.
- Appropriate buffers will need to be created to manage fire risks.
- It is likely that proposed plantings along the corridor will be sympathetic to the plant communities along the transport corridor.
- Collaborative management practices will be necessary to effectively and efficiently control pests (such as rabbits and foxes) and weeds.

6.2.4 Trails and picnic areas

A number of trails and picnic areas are proposed within the reserve. These have been located in close proximity to areas of interest and ecological value whilst minimising trails that might pass through areas of high value. The following is a description of the proposed trails and picnic areas shown in Figure 6.3. Picnic areas have been positioned to provide parking and setoff points for trails.

Picnic areas

- Little River. This picnic area would be located in close proximity to camping and accommodation facilities proposed along Little River to enable shared use of infrastructure such as access roads and trails.
- Grassland Learning Centre. Picnic facilities in this area would be in close proximity to the proposed playground and be capable of catering for larger groups.
- Ballan Road. Providing a designated area for drivers along this busy road encourages visitors to experience and learn about the qualities of the grassland. The proposed location is separated from shooting ranges, high voltage powerlines and the proposed Outer Melbourne Ring. To enhance the visitor experience there would be an access road to the picnic area to provide a buffer to Ballan Road.
- Peppercorns. Picnic facilities are proposed to be located in this area to capture views back towards Melbourne (either from picnic areas or as part of trails) as well as an opportunity to experience historic features of the reserve such as old buildings and drystone walls.
- Moloneys Farm. As with Ballan Road, providing a designated area for drivers along this road will encourage visitors to experience and learn about the qualities of the grassland.

Short walks (less than 1 hour, less than 5km).

- Richmond Swamp. Opportunity to experience the wetlands and associated wildlife.
- Bath Swamp. Walk to an ephemeral wetland as part of the broader loop track.
- Werribee River. The trail could include viewing points along the river corridor along with information about aboriginal heritage.

Longer walks

- Rabbiter Lake. Medium distance walk which could be aligned to also follow sections of Lollipop Creek.
- Mount Cottrell. Trail connection linking across to the top of Mount Cottrell or to a viewing area below the hill top.

- Loop Track. Longer walk within the reserve with multiple set off point locations.
- North-South Link. Trail connecting the two portions of the reserve. In the short term the trail would follow existing road reserves and be realigned as alternative links (such as along Werribee River) become available.

Final trail alignments would be determined following detailed site assessments. Factors to consider include user experience, views, potential site disturbance and suitability of terrain. Careful design will also be required to limit any impact to the environmental values, particularly wetlands, such as viewing platforms and boardwalks that help manage visitor access.

Names used to describe these walks and picnic areas are based on current descriptions. It is recommended that further consultation with key stakeholders including the Registered Aboriginal Parties be undertaken to assign agreed names to key destinations prior to facilities being promoted or made publicly accessible. This process might include an opportunity for broader community participation such as the public voting on a shortlisted selection of names.

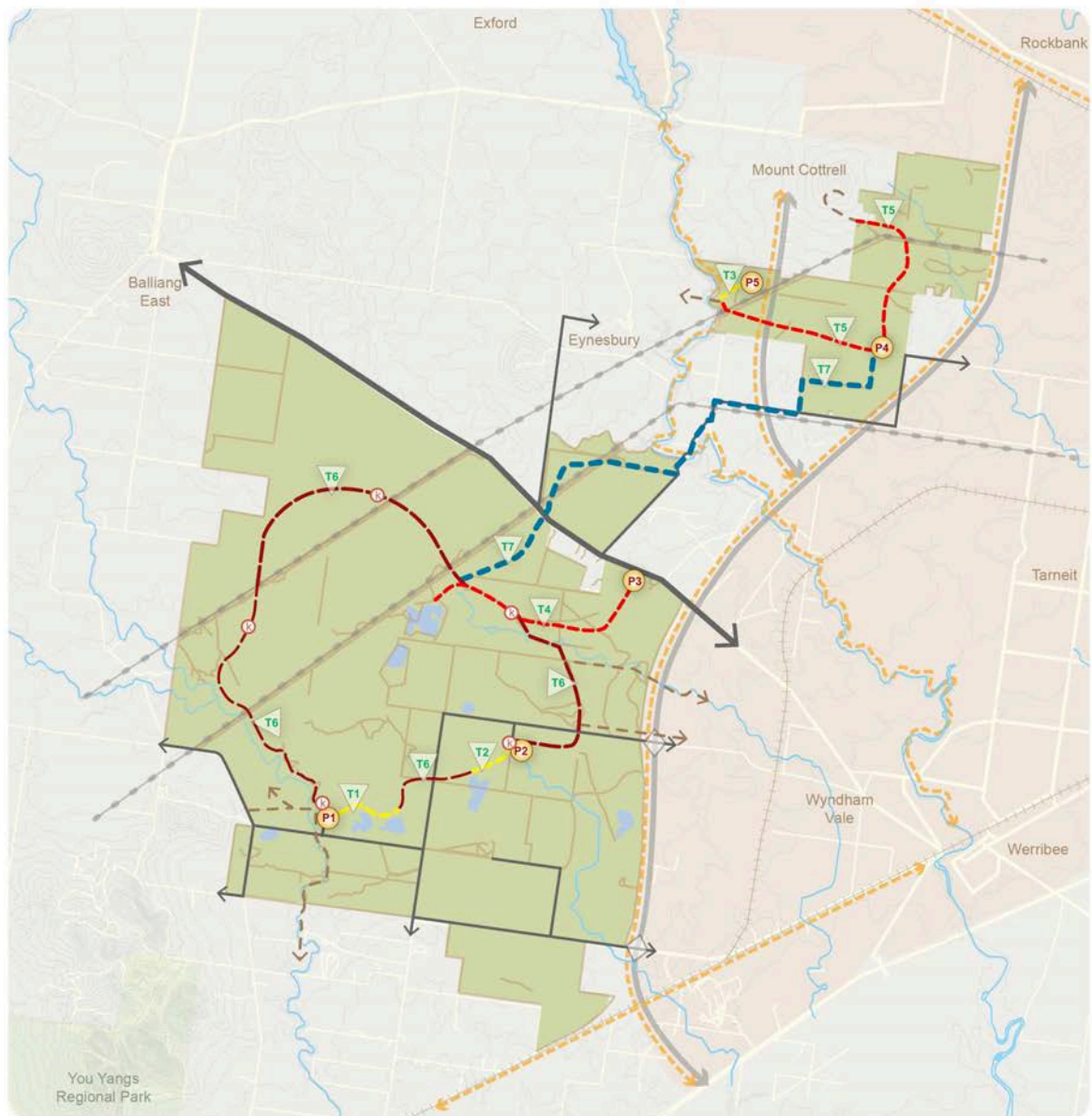


Figure 6.3: Proposed trails and picnic areas

The potential to create a multi-day walk within the reserve was considered. A multi-day walk would typically include camping sites approximately 15 km apart and be capable of accommodating larger groups such as school groups. The current size and shape of the reserve makes it difficult to create such a walk, however it may be possible to create one in the future as open space links beyond the reserve are created.

A regional playground is proposed to be located at the Grassland Learning Centre. This would be designed to cater for children of all ages and incorporate themes and 'nature play' elements.



Figure 6.4: Nature themed playground at Canberra Arboretum (source: TCL)

6.2.5 Camping and accommodation

The following camping and accommodation options are proposed to provide a range of ways for the public to experience the grasslands.

- Serviced camping is proposed in the Little River Camping Area.
- Eco cabins are proposed to be included in the Little River Camping Area. This area lends itself to this option due to the high number of farms in this area and the proximity to areas of interest such as Little River, wetlands, You Yangs and Wurdi Youang.
- Boutique accommodation is proposed to be created at the historic property 'Peppercorns'. It is possible additional sites for this type of accommodation will be identified as sites are acquired.

More detailed studies will be necessary to assess the feasibility of each option including a detailed economic, environmental and safety analysis.

6.2.6 Aboriginal tourism

Wurdi Youang has the potential to provide a unique, authentic experience of indigenous culture within a nature based setting. Working with traditional owners' successful design of this precinct may enable the creation of a unique overnight visitor experience.

More broadly the reserve provides various opportunities for indigenous cultural education and tourism. DELWP will work collaboratively with traditional owners during the establishment of the reserve to determine suitable opportunities.

6.2.7 Education and Research

Providing facilities to support education and research is a key objective and may include the following:

- Interpretive signage should be installed at key locations to provide the public with information about the reserve. Key themes for signage include flora and fauna, geology, archaeology, farming history and management practices such as the use of fire.
- It is anticipated the reserve will become a destination for ongoing academic research in to native grasslands and species establishment. Infrastructure to support such activities should be incorporated in the Grassland Learning Centre or maintenance facilities.
- Options for "artist in residence" or "scientist in residence" programs should be explored as part of adaptive reuse of existing buildings within the reserve. Such programs have the potential to provide new insights to the reserve as well as encouraging visitor engagement.

6.2.8 Art

Temporary and permanent art installations should be included within the reserve to provide the following benefits:

- Create unique destinations and experiences with the potential to alter public perceptions of native grasslands
- Contribute to the overall image and identity of the reserve
- Enable expressions of aboriginal culture

The location of art installations should be determined in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

6.3 Other site uses

The concept plan is based on the assumption large parts of the reserve will ultimately be reserved as a National Park. For this reason land use, and in particular recreational activities, are guided by the *National Parks Act 1975* and associated policy. The following guidance on the suitability of land uses within the Western Grassland Reserve has been informed by discussions with primary stakeholders, and the *National Parks Act 1975* and associated policy including work conducted by the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (River Red Gum Forests Investigation 2008 and Statewide Assessment of Public Land 2015). These are not exhaustive lists, but provide some guidance for current planning within the reserve.

Activities considered to be permitted within the Western Grassland Reserves:

- Bushwalking, nature conservation, heritage appreciation, picnicking
- Camping in designated areas
- Overnight stays in designated accommodation

Activities for further investigation:

- Research, subject to a permit
- Push bike riding on designated paths
- Ecological management techniques including ecological burning and grazing regimes
- Orienteering and rogaining

Activities that may require further investigation and broader stakeholder and community consultation:

- Native grass seed farming
- Apiculture, subject to the outcome of research into the ecological impacts and park management requirements
- Horse riding on designated tracks
- Model planes and drones (excluding formal facilities)
- Solar power generation (in degraded areas with the aim of making the reserve carbon neutral)

It is noted that many of these uses will be site dependent and would be most likely to occur in degraded areas of the reserve. If considered compatible with the objectives of the Western Grassland Reserve the activities would need to occur on sites with a compatible reserve protection status.

Uses not seen as compatible with the aims and objectives of the reserve include:

- Formal recreation facilities such as sports grounds
- Motorised sports and activities such as car racing
- Motorbikes and trail bikes (other than on public roads where normal regulations apply)
- Converting quarries to landfill sites
- Other activities which detract from the environmental values and the appreciation of the natural qualities of the reserve
- Dumping spoil from surround land development
- New utility infrastructure (aside from further investigations into renewable energy options as described above)
- Hunting and use of firearms
- Dog walking and camping with Dogs
- Cats
- Overnight camping with horses

- Firewood collection
- Prospecting and metal detecting
- Mineral exploration and mining including stone extraction

6.4 Community involvement

Providing opportunities for active involvement within the reserve by community groups and through events provides physical and mental health benefits. In addition, community participation contributes to the broader public value placed on the reserve and can assist with reducing maintenance and management costs.

Opportunities for the community to “get involved” with the park could include the following:

- Participation with community fitness groups such as walking, running or cycling groups
- Participation in community environmental groups which might be involved in nature-based activities such as bird watching, photography or star gazing
- Involvement in programs to report sightings of wildlife
- Involvement in community events and festivals held within the reserve which might be linked to other community groups within the region

Opportunities for community involvement should progressively be introduced as the reserve is created.

6.5 Management and maintenance

A range of management and maintenance issues have been considered in the preparation of the Concept Plan. The proposed management structure for the reserve has already been agreed upon with DEWLP responsible for the acquisition of land and Park Victoria undertaking the site management.

6.5.1 Service infrastructure

Existing utility such as power, gas and water infrastructure will remain within the reserve except where removed as part of a dwelling and associated infrastructure. The concept plan aims to locate visitor areas away from ‘above-ground’ existing utilities. Construction of new utilities within the reserve will be discouraged.

Liaison is required with service authorities to establish agreed standards and protocols for access and site impacts for existing service infrastructure. Existing roads will be maintained as internal management tracks reducing the need for additional access tracks.

Some utilities such as above ground power lines will require a strategic fuel break if situated near grasslands allocated to an ecological burning regime. The draft fuel break plan for the reserve considers the location of powerlines and plans accordingly to minimise the area of fuel breaks. However, biomass management regimes will be confirmed at a site level once land parcels are secured and existing utility infrastructure will be a key consideration in this decision.

6.5.2 Quarrying

Currently approved quarries are expected to be progressively phased out as their approvals lapse. Liaison with quarry operators should occur to minimise impacts (such as visual impacts, pests, weeds

and dust) and develop site management plans to address risks such as fire. Existing sites should be remediated and made safe in accordance with legislative requirements.

6.5.3 Existing farm infrastructure and site contamination and heritage

Site contamination assessments should be undertaken where potential risks (such as asbestos and storage of hazardous materials) are identified as properties are acquired. Risk management protocols should include potential risks associated with areas formerly used to test explosives such as the Mambourin Bombing Range. Steps should be taken to progressively eliminate contamination within the reserve.

6.5.3.1 Existing buildings

- All buildings within the reserve will be removed, unless identified as required for a specific purpose or cultural heritage protections apply. All buildings and structures will be assessed for heritage values prior to any demolition.
- Parks Victoria may choose to retain houses or sheds as work stations. This decision will be based on the location and suitability of existing infrastructure, and the timing of infrastructure availability and needs. A business case is required to inform retention of facilities for this purpose.
- There is potential that existing buildings may present a suitable opportunity for visitor uses such as accommodation or art gallery. A business plan should be prepared to inform the retention of identified buildings which includes consideration of the suitability of the location for the proposed activity, ecological sensitivities and ease of access.
- Where cost effective buildings to be removed from the reserve may be made available for alternative uses.

6.5.3.2 Dams and stock management infrastructure

- The decision to maintain or remove dams and stock management infrastructure will depend on the likely biomass management regime for the site. However, dams and other infrastructure associated with the management of stock will generally be maintained due to the difficult and expense of reinstating this infrastructure if required at a later date.
- The decision to remove a dam may also be driven by the benefits of reinstating natural hydrology at the site.
- Where dams or stock infrastructure are situated on a site of high grassland values allocated to a burning regime that is unlikely to change, this infrastructure may be removed.
- The timing of dam removal should consider the availability of grass seed and ability to rehabilitate the area.
- Dams may also be prioritised for removal where they are not needed to support grazing and are providing harbour for pest animals.

6.5.3.3 Trees and Plantations

- Due to the cost of removal of larger tree plantations and orchards compared with the restoration and maintenance of these areas, large plantations will generally remain within the reserve. Depending on the final reserve status of the WGR and the location of the plantation, they may remain as functioning plantations and either privately leased or managed as part of a visitor 'farm' experience. The decision to maintain a plantation or orchard will require a more detailed business plan and environmental assessment to ensure continuation of the use would not impact the surrounding grassland values.
- With the exception of large plantations as noted above, all non-local and non-indigenous species to be removed unless:

- The trees are located near other elements of European/ farming cultural importance such as historic houses and other buildings to be maintained, or dry stone walls;
- The trees are located on land parcels that will be grazed and are considered to be required as shelter for stock; or
- They are potentially providing benefit to surrounding flora species.
- The removal of non-native trees should consider providing alternative native habitat for fauna species prior to the removal of non-native trees.

6.5.3.4 Fences

- Given the cost associated with building new fences, existing fences will not be removed from a site unless it is considered highly unlikely that a fence will be required in future. This means that (in the establishment phase in particular) fences will not be removed unless they present a safety risk or there is confidence that the fence is not required to manage stock or disturbance.
- However, fences associated with historic sites and buildings should be assessed for their heritage value prior to any proposed removal. For instance, the fence around a homestead garden may contribute to the heritage values of the site. This will again be dependent on any safety risks associated with the fence.
- Similarly, new fences will only be built where required to:
 - Contain stock as part of a grazing regime.
 - Protect high value areas from disturbance. For instance, to discourage visitors accessing the area.
- The need for fences is likely to be higher in the establishment phase to manage boundaries between private and Crown land and while public access to roads etc. is less restricted.
- Fencing will be required along some of the boundaries of the Western Grassland Reserve depending on the interface.
- Alternative options to fences will be favoured for managing disturbance from cars such as swales, long grass, rocks, bollards etc. where possible.
- New fencing and gates should be constructed in accordance with Parks Victoria standards and be compatible with fire management practices.
- Where a fence borders an area to be burnt as part of an ecological burning regime, the fence will be 'burnt-through' and replaced by a fire proof fence if required.

6.5.3.5 Cropping and Agriculture

- The Western Grassland Reserve includes areas of active or abandoned croplands. The appropriate management regime for these areas will be determined at a site level through the management decision processes described elsewhere.
- However, it is likely that cropping may be maintained in some cropped areas as a method of controlling biomass, weeds and elevated soil nutrient levels. These areas may continue using zero tillage (or no-till farming), cropped and harvested without the addition of fertilizer to help reduce the level of available nitrogen in the upper layers of the soil profile or biomass ploughed into the soil to help manage weeds.
- Cropped areas also provide an opportunity to sow (typically after scrapping of the nutrient enriched topsoil) native species for native seed production.
- The use of cropping as a management tool should be considered when assigning a reserve status to land parcels in the Western Grassland Reserve. Further work is also required to determine the best management model for cropping areas for instance cropping areas through lease agreements, or the use of contractors.

6.5.4 Historic features

All features of historic importance such as those listed in the Heritage Victoria Inventory, or under local heritage overlays will be protected. However, existing heritage listings are unlikely to be comprehensive, and assessments will be conducted at probable historic sites before any works such as demolition of buildings or structures. Over time the reserve will provide an opportunity for further historic surveys and studies.

All dry stone walls within the reserve are to be retained.

Most historic sites will be retained in their current condition without providing additional access or infrastructure. However, some sites of historic importance (such as historic farms) may be suitable for visitor facilities. Further exploration will be required to determine the suitability of facilities to ensure effective interaction without impacting on the historic values and the preparation of a business case to assess the costs to repair and maintain facilities.

6.5.5 Traditional Owner heritage

Traditional owner cultural heritage mapping and appropriate management planning will occur in collaboration with the relevant Registered Aboriginal Parties to ensure sites of traditional owner cultural heritage will be protected.

Some sites of indigenous heritage importance may be suitable for visitors. Consultation with the indigenous community will be necessary to identify potential sites and determine their suitability for visitor interaction without impacting on cultural values. Once sites are identified, a business case should be prepared to determine capital and operational costs as well as potential funding sources and management arrangements.

6.5.6 Ecological burning and fuel breaks

Fire is a natural part of the Australian landscape and ecology of native grasslands. Fire management strategies and plans are currently being prepared for the reserve and individual land parcel as they are acquired. Public education regarding the use of fire as a traditional land management practice should be included as part of site information.

DELWP has developed a strategic fuel break plan for the Western Grassland Reserve. However, the location of these breaks is likely to require adjustments as land is acquired and more information on the biodiversity values of each land parcel is known. Burning regimes for the reserve may be altered as better knowledge on and understanding is gained in the management of native grassland systems.

Changes to fuel break design are likely to be required and from a planning perspective should consider:

- The biodiversity values of the reserve.
- The location of existing roads and tracks that can act as fuel breaks minimising the need to establish new fuel breaks.
- The location of existing infrastructure, or potentially new visitor infrastructure that is not compatible with ecological burning.
- Maximising opportunities to provide access for fire vehicles to assist burning and suppression activities.

7 Staging and Implementation

The reserve will be created over stages as existing properties are acquired. Funding is currently in place for land acquisition and ecological management. Additional funding will need to be sourced for capital works projects and recurring initiatives such as education programs. Short to long term partnerships are likely to be an effective way to achieve the vision for the reserve.

The next 10 – 20 years will be a dynamic phase in the evolution of the reserve. A regular process of planning and review will provide multiple benefits including improved decision making, increased public awareness and clarity regarding funding requirements.

It is recommended the Concept Plan is reviewed as appropriate dependent on the rate of progress of the reserves, but at least every 10 years. This will enable an assessment of the progress in the implementation of the vision for the reserve. It will also provide an opportunity to supplement the Concept Plan with additional information obtained as sites are acquired.

Once site acquisition reaches an appropriate level, a Master Plan should be prepared for the reserve. The preparation of the Master Plan should include public and stakeholder engagement to gain community insights as well as sharing with the public with information about the reserve which should assist with growing public appreciation of the reserve.

Detailed plans for key elements of the reserve (such as activity nodes) should be prepared in accordance with the appropriate processes and approvals.

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Aerial images sourced from Google Maps

Photographs by Fitzgerald Frisby Landscape Architecture except where otherwise credited.

Endnotes

ⁱ http://www.bom.gov.au/climate/averages/tables/cw_087113.shtml

ⁱⁱ <http://www.bom.gov.au/jsp/ncc/cdio/cvg/av>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4177.0>



Our reference: SA03

Mr James Todd
Director, Knowledge & Decision Systems
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
Level 2, 8 Nicholson St
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear Mr Todd

**Re: Melbourne Strategic Assessment (SA03) – Western Grassland Reserve
Concept Plan**

I refer to your letter dated 15 December 2016 in which you submitted the Western Grassland Reserve Concept Plan (Concept Plan) to the Department of the Environment and Energy (the Department).

Officers of the Department have reviewed the Concept Plan and consider that it provides an adequate strategic framework and direction for the establishment, use, zoning and infrastructure management within the Western Grassland Reserve.

The Department will continue to work with the Victorian Government to ensure that the conservation outcomes for the Western Grassland Reserve are achieved in delivering the Melbourne Strategic Assessment.

Should you have any queries about any matters raised in this letter please contact s22 [redacted] on s22 [redacted] or email s22 [redacted]@environment.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name.

s22 [redacted] r
A/g Director
Monitoring and Assurance Section
Compliance and Enforcement Branch

13 January 2017



Our reference: SA03

s22

Manager, Melbourne Strategic Assessment Ecological Program
Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
Level 2, 8 Nicholson St
East Melbourne VIC 3002

Dear s22

Re: Melbourne Strategic Assessment (SA03) - Approval of 2014-15 Progress Report

I refer to your email dated 20 May 2016 in which you submitted the Melbourne Strategic Assessment Progress Report 2014-15.

Officers of the Department of the Environment (the Department) have reviewed the Progress Report and consider that it provides sufficient information on the progress of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment to date.

In accepting the 2014-15 Progress Report the Department notes that the report was received 11 months after the end of the 2014-15 financial year, and in the future it is expected that the report be sent through in a timely manner.

In addition to this the Department note that the Melbourne Strategic Assessment has not made sufficient progress on a number of conservation targets relating to Matters of National Environmental Significance, including the targets for:

- land secured for the Western Grassland Reserves
- land secured the Truganina South Conservation Reserve
- habitat secured for the Golden Sun Moth
- habitat secured for the Spiny Rice-flower, and
- habitat secured for the Matted Flax-lily

The Department also notes the Reasonable Assurance Qualifications that were identified in the Audit of Stage 2 of the program and the Victorian Government's response to these identified issues.

The Department will continue to work with the Victorian Government to ensure that the conservation outcomes for Matters of National Environmental Significance are achieved in delivering the Melbourne Strategic Assessment.

Should you have any queries about any matters raised in this letter please contact s22 or email s22@environment.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

s22
Acting Director
Monitoring and Assurance Section
Compliance and Enforcement Branch

22 July 2016



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

MINUTE

File No: 2011/00183

First Assistant Secretary (Dean Knudson)

EACD

Cc: Shanes Gaddes; James Tregurtha

APPROVAL TO PUBLISH 'POLICY STATEMENT FOR MELBOURNE URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS NEEDING CONSIDERATION UNDER PARTS 7, 8 AND 9 OF THE EPBC ACT' (VICTORIA)

Background

Establishment of the Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) is the key commitment to protect listed critically endangered native grasslands, and associated listed species, in the endorsed program for Melbourne's new urban growth areas. The program has been assessed and endorsed under Part 10 of the EPBC Act and provides for over 50% of Melbourne's population growth for the next 20 years. Further information on the Melbourne strategic assessment and WGR is in the draft policy statement at [Attachment A](#).

On 15 December 2011, the then A/FAS EACD endorsed a new policy approach for project-by-project assessments, that continue to be undertaken under Part 9 of the EPBC Act, to better align with the outcomes of the strategic assessment ([Attachment B](#)). The new approach allows for urban projects outside the strategic assessment area to take advantage of the offset method endorsed as part of the program. The approach is supported by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment and is expected to reduce the administrative burden for developers and regulators, streamline the sourcing of offsets for smaller urban projects and assist in establishing the WGR.

Eligible projects will still need to be individually referred, assessed and approved under the EPBC Act. However, the department may consider, when making assessment and approval recommendations, clearing and offset approaches consistent with the endorsed program. The Victorian Government (rather than the department) would be responsible for maintenance, monitoring and enforcement of all offsets under this arrangement.

This policy, particularly the eligibility criteria, has been refined through internal consultation between SAB and EAB 3. The policy sets out the criteria for eligible projects.

Issues

The policy is now recommended for publication to ensure transparency and accountability in EPBC Act decision-making processes. It will be made available on the department's internet site and DSE's website.

The policy will be implemented primarily by EAB3 in the course of standard referral, assessment and approval work, in consultation with SAB. The branches will continue to work together to further refine guidance to stakeholders and resolve any uncertainties in applying the policy, with CEB where appropriate. Final decisions regarding application of the policy will remain at the discretion of the relevant delegate.

The successful implementation of this policy is likely to provide a basis for similar opportunities relating to other strategic assessments. This would require consideration on a case-by case basis and further policy development to ensure broad stakeholder endorsement, including from the Minister.

As outlined in the letter of 16 December 2011 to DSE (Attachment B), this policy will be reviewed within 6 months of implementation (suggested at the end of this calendar year), and pending its proven effectiveness, broader application could be considered at that time.

This policy is the first of its kind in that it effectively expands the opportunities which were endorsed for a specific strategic assessment area to proposals outside of that area. As such there are some legal and administrative uncertainties regarding its application with regards to Part 9 approval decisions.

While the policy is expected to offer increased certainty and efficiency to eligible developers regarding offsets, it will not remove the need for referral under Part 9 nor necessarily see a reduction in impact assessment workloads. As such, in the longer term, Strategic Approvals East will look at potentially recommending the expansion of the existing Melbourne SIA to cover additional local government areas.

Recommendation:

Approve the 'Policy for Melbourne Urban Development' (Attachment A) for publication

Approved/Not approved

Signature

Date

14-6-12

Carolyn Cameron
Assistant Secretary
Strategic Approaches Branch

May 2012

Charmayne Murray
A/g Assistant Secretary
Environment Assessment Branch 3

May 2012

Attachment A – WGR Policy statement

Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

POLICY STATEMENT FOR MELBOURNE URBAN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS NEEDING CONSIDERATION UNDER PARTS 7, 8 AND 9 OF THE EPBC ACT

Purpose of this policy

This policy statement describes the approach of the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department) in administering the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) for certain projects that are outside of Melbourne's Growth Areas and for which the framework described in the Melbourne Strategic Assessment can be applied.

The policy describes criteria to determine whether a proposed action may be considered under the strategic assessment framework. Eligible projects may use this framework for offset into the Western Grasslands Reserves where impacts cannot be avoided or otherwise mitigated.

This approach is expected to simplify the assessment of eligible projects and deliver administrative efficiency for developers and regulators.

Background

The EPBC Act is the Australian Government's central environmental legislation and provides a legal framework to protect listed flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places — defined in the EPBC Act as matters of national environmental significance. [More information about the EPBC Act](#) is available at www.environment.gov.au.

The Victorian Government's program for Melbourne's Growth Areas has been assessed under the EPBC Act and is described in the report *Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Program Report* (Victorian Government, December 2009). The program was endorsed under the EPBC Act on 2 February 2010. This means that developments in the new Growth Areas can be considered for approval provided they are undertaken in accordance with the report's commitments and undertakings for protection of matters of national environmental significance. [Further information on the program and strategic assessment](#) is at www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Prescriptions have been approved under the EPBC Act to describe specific requirements to avoid, mitigate and offset impacts on ecological communities and species listed under the EPBC Act for projects covered by the endorsed program. The prescriptions describe the method for calculating offsets for permissible clearing. Offsets under the program are being used to establish the 15,000 hectare Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) located west of Melbourne near Werribee and Little River. A [map showing the location of the reserve](#) is at www.dse.vic.gov.au.

Projects undertaken outside the Growth Areas described in the program report require approval under the EPBC Act if they are likely to have significant impacts on matters of national environmental significance. The department's [significant impact guidelines](#) should be used to determine if a project is likely to have significant impacts.

Projects within Melbourne's Growth Areas, and that have been approved as part of the Melbourne Strategic Assessment, do not require separate referral or consideration under the EPBC Act. Projects not captured by the strategic assessment must continue to be individually referred under the [EPBC Act](#) if they are likely to have a significant impact on any matter of

national environmental significance. For guidance on whether an action is likely to have a significant impact on a matter of national environmental significance refer to the significant impact guidelines and other relevant EPBC Act information and policy statements such as for the Golden Sun Moth and threatened ecological communities of the Victorian Volcanic Plains.

Policy statement

This policy statement applies to urban developments not captured under the Melbourne Strategic Assessment, but for which the department believes that the offset approach under the program (into the WGR) may be appropriate and is likely to provide acceptable outcomes for relevant matters of national environmental significance. The categories of projects eligible for this approach are described below and summarised at Figure 1.

Geographic location

- Projects on the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion and that are within the North Western Metropolitan area including the Local Government Areas of Wyndham, Melton, Hume, Whittlesea, Brimbank, Darebin and Moreland. Developments within adjacent Local Government Areas (Moorabool, Greater Geelong and Golden Plains) may be considered if the specific project meets the other criteria in this policy.

Type of projects

- Actions considered under this policy include urban, commercial and light industrial developments and infrastructure directly servicing such development (roads, pipelines and other utilities). Generally, developments will be smaller scale (less than 50ha in land area) and involve less than 1000 dwellings.
- Excluded are major new freeways, transport, electricity or sewerage infrastructure not directly related to servicing eligible developments. Also excluded are extraction industries and heavy industry (including power stations), and actions on Commonwealth land.
- This policy does not apply to projects which have an existing EPBC Act approval in place; that is, it does not apply retrospectively.

Matters of national environmental significance

- Projects that are likely to have a significant impact on listed Natural Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (NTGVVP) or Golden Sun Moth (GSM) are addressed by this policy.
- The extent of project impacts must be within the following limits:
 - No more than 10 hectares of listed NTGVVP; and/or
 - No more than 10 hectares of GSM habitat.
- Projects with significant impacts on additional matters of national environmental significance, but that otherwise meet the criteria described above, will still be considered under this policy approach for offset of clearing of NTGVVP and GSM habitat. This policy does not apply to impacts on other matters of national environment significance which will continue to be considered on an individual project basis, and consistent with the department's draft EPBC Act offsets policy.

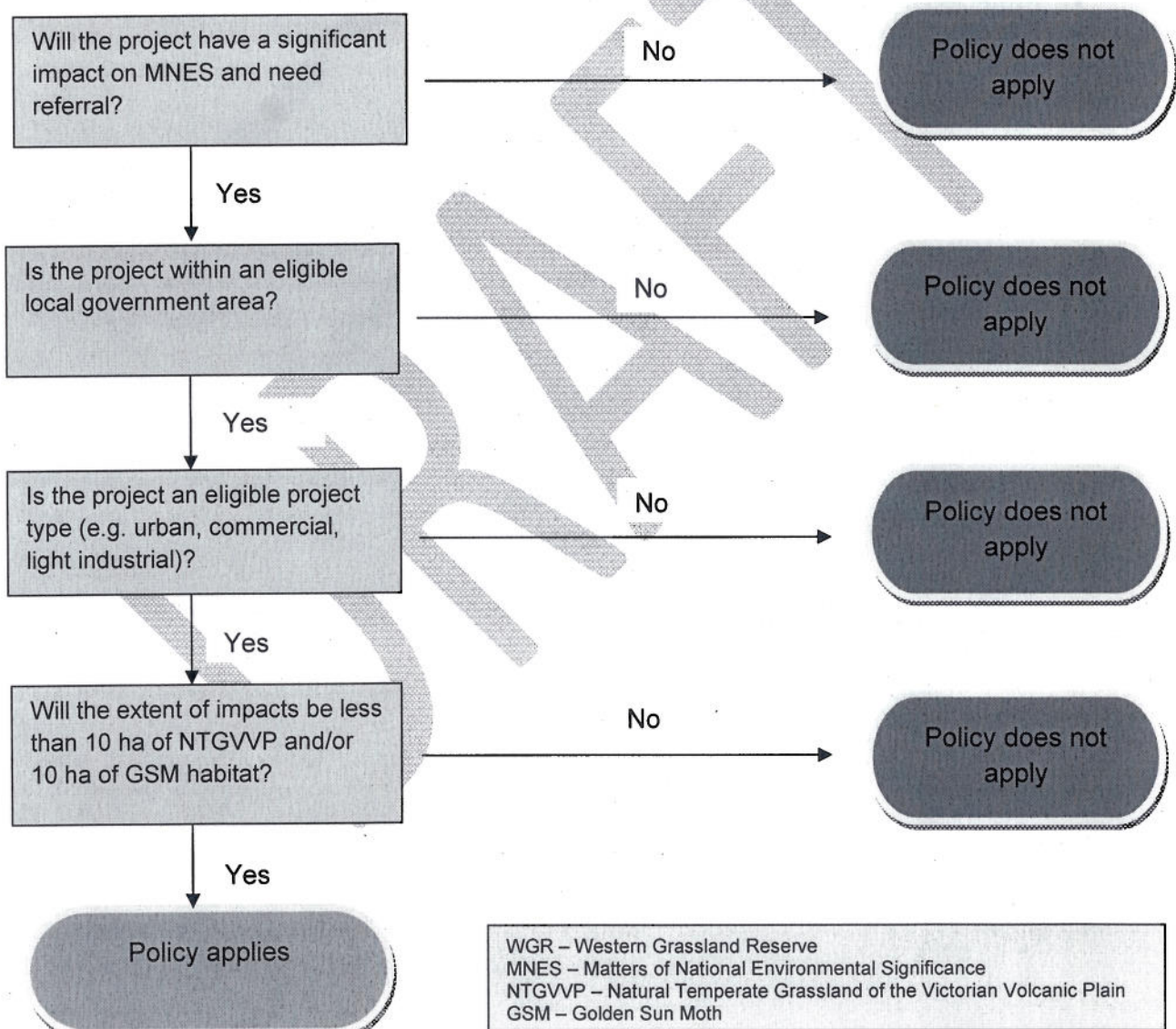
How the policy works

Projects that meet the above criteria will still need to be individually referred under the EPBC Act. However, the department may consider, in forming assessment and approval recommendations, approaches consistent with the following prescriptions under the program:

- Final Prescription for Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain
- Final Prescription for Golden Sun Moth

Offset requirements for projects with significant impacts on NTGVVP or GSM can be calculated in accordance with these prescriptions and the associated processes determined by the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Figure 1: Eligible projects under this policy



Further information

If you have any questions about whether referral is required, or if this policy applies to a particular proposal, please contact the department's Community Information Unit (CIU) on 1800 803 772. The CIU will direct you to the right contact in the department.

Quick links

Further information that may be useful can be found at the following links

- [About the EPBC Act](#)
- [EPBC Act - Fact sheet](#)
- [Refer a proposed action form](#)
- [Glossary](#)

An [online tool](#) is available to help you identify what matters of national environmental significance occur in a given area.

- [Protected matters search tool](#)
- [Species and ecological communities](#)

DRAFT

Attachment B – Minute and letter signed 15 Dec 2012 endorsing WGR offset policy



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

Dr Kim Lowe
Director Ecosystem Services
Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Division
Department of Sustainability and Environment
PO Box 500
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 8002

Dear Dr Lowe

I am writing in regard to offsets into the Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) from actions referred under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act), but that do not fall under the endorsed Melbourne Strategic Assessment Program (the Program).

As you know, this department's policy approach for such actions has been that offsets should not occur within the WGR. This is in recognition of the obligation of the Victorian Government to deliver the WGR as a commitment under the Program, and to ensure that sufficient offsets are available over the 20 year life of the Program.

I note that the new Victorian Government has reaffirmed its commitment to the Program and that key program deliverables, including strategies for conservation of listed Native Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (NTGVVP), Golden Sun Moth (GSM) and Spiny Rice Flower (SRF), are close to finalisation. These strategies detail how the Program's commitment for protection of these entities across the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion will be achieved.

The department has reconsidered its earlier approach and now agrees that there is merit in supporting these outcomes through other mechanisms, including Part 9 decisions under the EPBC Act.

To this end, the department is willing to consider offsets into the WGR from referred actions outside the Program area in limited circumstances and where specifically requested by proponents. These circumstances are:

- the action is in proximity to the Program area (for example, actions associated with urban development within 3 kilometres of the Program area);
- the offset is relatively modest (<10 habitat hectares);
- the offset required is for NTGVVP and/or GSM and/or SRF; and
- DSE confirms that there is spare capacity in the WGR.

In addition to the above, offsets into the WGR will be considered where the proponent owns land or credits within the WGR. For administrative efficiency, the quantum of any offset required will be calculated in accordance with the applicable rules under the Program.

I am advised that the WGR includes a buffer so that spare capacity currently exists. In the event that the WGR looks like being over-allocated, alternative offsets will need to be found by the Victorian Government. I understand that the Program includes mechanisms to achieve this, if necessary. Future reporting to this department, as required under the Program, should include an assessment of the likely remaining capacity of the WGR at regular intervals (for example, every two years).

I think we will need additional discussions on the first few specific projects for which offsets will be allowable, but am otherwise comfortable for the arrangements to commence immediately. I propose that we review the arrangements, based on operational experience, 6 months from the date of this letter.

I would appreciate your confirmation, or advice, on the above issues. Carolyn Cameron S22 is the department's initial contact for further discussions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M Colreavy', written in a cursive style.

Mary Colreavy
A/First Assistant Secretary
Environment Assessment and Compliance Division

16 December 2011



Australian Government

Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

Environment Assessment and Compliance Division

MINUTE

Mary Colreavy
A/FAS EACD

Offsets to Western Grassland Reserve – Melbourne Strategic Assessment

This minute seeks your approval to allow offsets to the Western Grassland Reserve (WGR) from referred projects not covered by the Melbourne Strategic Assessment Program (the Program) in limited defined circumstances. If you agree, a suggested letter to the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) advising of this approach is at Attachment A.

DSE previously wrote to the department, on 5 January 2011, to request that allowance be made for such offsets in view of extra capacity in the 15,000ha WGR, and to facilitate early acquisition of private lots within the WGR. The Victorian Government is committed to acquisition of the private lands making up the reserve over the next 10 years. The Program built in an excess capacity of 500 habitat hectares to act as a buffer for unexpected contingencies that could occur over the 20 year life of the Program. Based on initial implementation experience a buffer of this size will not be needed. There is an opportunity for other offsets to contribute to the WGR and protection outcomes for listed Native Temperate Grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains (NTGVVP) and several associated listed species (discussed below).

At the time, the department did not accept the approach. A summary of some of the key issues is at Attachment B. We advised DSE that the department's policy approach was that projects outside the Program would not be allowed to offset into the WGR.

DSE has informally asked the department to reconsider its approach and circumstances have changed. The attached letter proposes that projects outside the Program area will have the option of offset to the WGR under two scenarios:

- 1) if the quantum of the offset is relatively modest (below 10 habitat hectares of NTGVVP) and if no other listed matters (apart from the Golden Sun Moth and Spiny Rice Flower) need to be addressed as part of the NTGVVP offset; and
- 2) if the developer in question already owns land or offsets in the WGR.

The mechanisms in the Program will be utilised in calculating all offset requirements. This approach will realise efficiencies as it may no longer be necessary for the department to negotiate, monitor and have administrative responsibility for relatively small offsets.

The Program also commits to protection of 80% of key habitat supporting the Golden Sun Moth and Spiny Rice Flower within the Victorian Volcanic Plains Bioregion. The 80% target is for the whole of the bioregion and will be funded through the Program. DSE is surveying the entire bioregion and several hundred additional occurrences of the Golden Sun Moth have been found to date. The habitat requirements to achieve 80% protection for both species have now been identified and are around 8,000ha for each. Most will be



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protected within the WGR or in new reserves to be established in the growth areas. There is still a shortfall of around 2,000ha and these habitats will be conserved outside of the WGR and Program areas in the broader bioregion.

The Program outcomes for NTGVVP, Golden Sun Moth and Spiny Rice Flower will see conservation of 80% of the best quality habitat remaining in the bioregion. The 80% commitment will be achieved through the Program offset arrangements. This outcome goes well beyond the geographic scope of the Program to include the entire bioregion (comprising 2.3 million hectares) as the management unit for achieving 80% protection. The 80% requirements under the Program do not include offsets achieved through Part 9 decisions and these would be additional. We believe that there is scope for Part 9 decisions to help facilitate quicker achievement of the outcomes and to benefit the protected matters at the landscape scale.

VIC/TAS Assessments and EPBC Act Strategic Approvals East have previously agreed an approach for the management of referrals inside and outside of the endorsed (but not yet approved) Program area (Attachment C). This may need to be revisited if the revised approach is agreed.



For Carolyn Cameron
Assistant Secretary
Strategic Approaches Branch

8 December 2011

I agree with the proposed direction to be followed - pls make sure that we clearly advise Vic that they will need to identify a new suitable strategic offset if they run out. Also pls make sure there is nothing in the Ministers approval that would make this inconsistent



15/12/11