



PART A

INTRODUCTION

This part provides background to the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation and the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council. It outlines the terms of reference and other matters to be taken into account in the investigation. It describes the investigation process and timeline and the community views presented to VEAC during the course of the investigation.

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the investigation

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's (VEAC) investigation of metropolitan Melbourne covers 29 of the 31 metropolitan municipalities (see figure 1.1 below). The investigation area is approximately 562,740 hectares (5,627.4 square kilometres) in total, of which approximately 163,000 hectares* (1,630 square kilometres) is public land.

While it is only about 2.5 per cent of the area of Victoria, approximately 68 per cent of Victorians live within the investigation area. Much of this area is modified, largely due to urbanisation and agriculture. It does, however, retain substantial biodiversity values with high diversity of flora and fauna. Twenty-six per cent of land (both public and private) contains native vegetation.

Most public land within metropolitan Melbourne is used for services and utilities to support its residents. VEAC estimates that nearly half is roads. Water supply reservoirs also cover a substantial area. A large proportion of the remaining public land is dedicated to parks and reserves managed for conservation and/or recreation. A smaller, but significant, area of public land is used for schools, libraries, community halls and other community purposes.

Public land in Melbourne and its surrounding areas also supports Victorians who live outside the metropolitan area. Melbourne's public hospitals and cultural, sports and entertainment venues on public land (such as the Melbourne Museum, Melbourne Cricket Ground and the Arts Centre precinct) provide services for all Victorians and visitors from interstate and overseas.

Figure 1.1
The investigation area



* This includes an estimated 73,000 hectares of Crown road reserves.

Metropolitan Melbourne's population is growing and the landscape is becoming increasingly urbanised. In 2002, the Victorian Government introduced *Melbourne 2030*; its 30 year plan to manage the growth and development of metropolitan Melbourne and the surrounding region.¹ *Melbourne 2030* aimed, amongst other things, to protect the liveability of established suburbs by concentrating higher density developments in development sites and limiting Melbourne's outward development with an urban growth boundary (UGB) and the concentration of urban expansion in the designated growth areas.

In 2008, in response to projections that Melbourne's population was growing faster than expected and would reach five million by 2030, the Government updated its *Melbourne 2030* initiatives. One of the outcomes of this update was an extension to the urban growth boundary. Approximately forty-four per cent of the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation area is within the extended boundary (see figure 1.2 below).

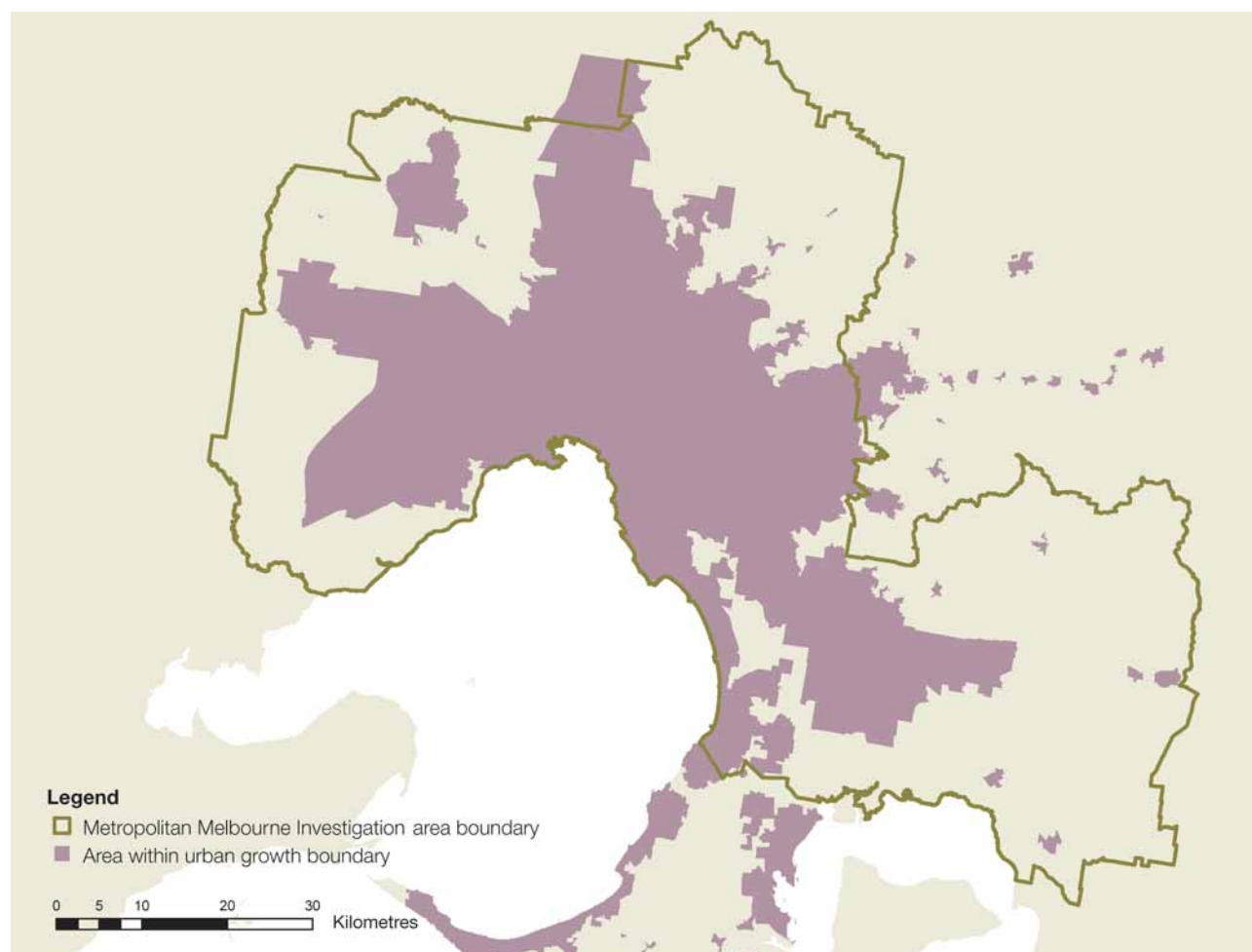
Outside the urban growth boundary, the investigation area includes the "green wedges" of agricultural land, conservation and recreation areas and land that supports urban functions such as airports, sewage treatment and reservoirs.

Many of the outer parts of the investigation area have been affected by recent bushfires. In 2009, bushfires at Kilmore East–Murrindindi, Bunyip State Park, Narre Warren North, Endeavour Hills and Plenty Gorge affected 24,438 hectares of land, including 17,249 hectares of public land in the investigation area.

Among the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission accepted by the Victorian government was a number that impact on public land in the investigation area. These include increased fuel reduction burning to five per cent of public land annually (385,000 hectares), clearing and fuel reduction along roads, bushfire risk reduction around houses adjoining public land and establishing refuges and shelters.²

Figure 1.2

Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation area with the urban growth boundary



1.2 The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council

The *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* (VEAC Act) came into effect on 31 December 2001. This Act repealed the *Environment Conservation Council Act 1997* and established the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) to conduct investigations and make recommendations relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land.

The current five members appointed to VEAC are Mr Duncan Malcolm AM (Chairperson), Mr Barry Clugston, Mr Ian Harris, Mr Ian Munro PSM and Dr Airlie Worrall. A brief biography of each of the Council members is provided on the inside front cover of this discussion paper. The Council is supported by research, policy and administrative staff. The VEAC Act requires the Council to consult with departments and public authorities, and requires departments and public authorities to give practicable assistance to the Council in carrying out investigations. VEAC papers and reports are, however, prepared independently.

The Council conducts its affairs in accordance with the VEAC Act. In particular, section 18 specifies that "Council must have regard to the following considerations in carrying out an investigation and in making recommendations to the Minister-

- a the principles of ecologically sustainable development;
- b the need to conserve and protect biological diversity;
- c the need to conserve and protect any areas which have ecological, natural, landscape or cultural interest or significance, recreational value or geological or geomorphological significance;
- d the need to provide for the creation and preservation of a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of parks and reserves within Victoria;
- e the existence of any international treaty ratified by the Commonwealth of Australia which is relevant to the investigation;
- f any agreement at a national, interstate or local government level into which the Government of Victoria has entered, or under which the Government of Victoria has undertaken any obligation in conjunction with the Commonwealth, a State, Territory or municipal council, which relates to the subject matter of the investigation;
- g the potential environmental, social and economic consequences of implementing the proposed recommendations;
- h any existing or proposed use of the environment or natural resources."

1.3 Terms of reference for the investigation

The Minister for Environment and Climate, Gavin Jennings MLC, requested the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council to undertake the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation in July 2008. The terms of reference for the investigation are copied below.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Pursuant to section 15 of the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001* the Minister for Environment and Climate Change hereby requests the Council to carry out an investigation of Crown land and public authority land in the cities constituting metropolitan Melbourne* and the Shire of Cardinia.

The purposes of the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation are to:

- a systematically identify and assess the uses, resources, condition, values and management of Crown land, and public authority land in metropolitan Melbourne;
- b assess values of Crown land, and public authority land for areas not committed to a specific use, and report on appropriate future uses relevant to Melbourne's liveability and natural values; and
- c report on the contribution of Crown land, and public authority land to Melbourne's liveability and opportunities for enhancement of this contribution.

In addition to the considerations specified in section 18 of the *VEAC Act*, the Council would need to take into account the following matters:

- relevant State Government policies, programs, strategies and Ministerial Statements relating to the use of open space in Melbourne, including *Melbourne 2030* and *Planning for all of Melbourne and Linking People & Spaces*;
- public authority plans and strategies such as the Port Phillip Catchment Management Authority *Regional Catchment Strategy* and *Native Vegetation Plan*; and
- land required by transport and other utilities for their functions and appropriate access for social, recreational and community activities.

The Council is required to consult with the community in accordance with the *VEAC Act*, to release a Discussion Paper, and to submit a Final Report on the results of its investigation. The Final Report must be submitted by May 2010**.

* Municipalities of Banyule, Bayside, Boroondara, Brimbank, Casey, Darebin, Frankston, Glen Eira, Greater Dandenong, Hobsons Bay, Hume, Kingston, Knox, Manningham, Maribyrnong, Maroondah, Melbourne, Melton, Monash, Moonee Valley, Moreland, Nillumbik, Port Phillip, Stonnington, Whitehorse, Whittlesea, Wyndham, Yarra, Melbourne Docklands

** In July 2009, the Minister extended the timeline for the completion of the investigation until May 2011.

1.4 Scope of the investigation

This investigation has much in common with previous investigations carried out by VEAC and its predecessors in that the terms of reference require VEAC to identify and assess the uses, resources, condition, values and management of Crown land and public authority land (public land) in the investigation area.

Unlike previous investigations, the terms of reference also require VEAC to report on the contribution of public land to Melbourne's liveability and opportunities for enhancing this contribution. Although the role of VEAC is to conduct investigations of public land, the Council has taken the view that the contribution of local government land to liveability should be recognised in this discussion paper (see chapter 6).

In addition, the terms of reference require VEAC to discuss the values and appropriate future uses of public land not committed to a specific use, and report on future uses relevant to Melbourne's liveability and natural values. The Council has taken the view that land not committed to a specific use is public land that is surplus to requirements of its current owner or manager. Chapter 9 discusses the scope and values of this land and the opportunities to use it for other public purposes.

The terms of reference specify that VEAC release a discussion paper and submit a final report. As they do not specify that VEAC is to release a draft proposals paper, the Council has decided to include in this discussion paper invitations to comment on particular issues (see Part D) and a small number of draft land use recommendations (see Part E).

1.5 The investigation process

The process for this investigation is specified in the VEAC Act and the terms of reference for the investigation. The process and timeline are shown below in figure 1.3 below.

Figure 1.3
Investigation process and timeline



1.6 Consultation and information gathering

During the preparation of this discussion paper VEAC sought input from the community of metropolitan Melbourne, Victorian government departments and public authorities and local government. The consultation process provided VEAC with valuable insights into the values and uses of public land in metropolitan Melbourne and the associated issues. VEAC wishes to thank everyone who made a submission or otherwise participated in the consultation process.

1.6.1 SUBMISSIONS

Public submissions are one of the key processes used by VEAC to seek community views on issues associated with public land. The first submission period commenced on 3 December 2008. Submissions were accepted after the end of the advertised 75 day period to enable people affected by the 2009 bushfire season to contribute. The last submission was received on 9 March 2009.

VEAC received 189 submissions, 102 of which were from private individuals. The remaining submissions were from environment groups, friends groups, committees of management, residents' groups, recreation and other specific interest groups, local governments, Victorian government departments and public authorities and Victorian and federal members of parliament. Submissions can be viewed at www.veac.vic.gov.au.

A summary of the issues and themes outlined in submissions is provided in section 1.6.5.

1.6.2 COMMUNITY REFERENCE GROUP

VEAC established a Community Reference Group (CRG) for this investigation in accordance with section 13 of the VEAC Act. Members of this group represent a broad range of interests related to the investigation. The CRG met four times in 2009 and 2010. Appendix 1 lists the CRG members. The issues and themes raised by the CRG are also included in section 1.6.5.

1.6.3 STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAKEHOLDERS

VEAC received valuable input from a range of departments and public authorities, particularly those that own and or manage public land, and the local councils within the investigation area. This input included advice on public landholdings from departments and public authorities and participation at three roundtables on public land issues. It also included advice from local councils on the distribution of public open space within their municipalities.

1.6.4 EXPERT CONSULTANCIES

VEAC commissioned six expert consultancies to inform the investigation. The reports from these consultancies are listed in box 1.1 below and are available at www.veac.vic.gov.au.

Box 1.1

Expert reports commissioned by VEAC

- ▶ *The contribution of public land to Melbourne's liveability*³
- ▶ *Demographic characteristics of communities within the Melbourne Investigation Area*⁴
- ▶ *Biodiversity of metropolitan Melbourne*⁵
- ▶ *Sites of geological and geomorphological significance on public land*⁶
- ▶ *Indigenous cultural heritage and history within the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Area*⁷
- ▶ *Non-Indigenous cultural heritage and historic places on public land in VEAC's Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation Area*⁸

1.6.5 COMMUNITY VIEWS

This section discusses the issues and themes outlined in submissions and at meetings of the Community Reference Group. Although they are presented under a number of broad headings, most issues are interrelated.

Terms of reference

Many submissions commented on particular issues raised in the terms of reference including on the appropriate future uses for 'land not committed to a specific use' and the contribution of public land to Melbourne's liveability.

A small number of submissions commented that land owned by the Commonwealth and local governments and private land should be covered under the terms of reference. Several submissions suggested the investigation area should be extended to include the Shires of Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Ranges.

Uses, resources, condition and values of public land

Many submissions responded to the terms of reference for the investigation by documenting the uses, resources, condition, values and management of Crown land and public authority land. Many of these highlighted the community uses of public land including formal

sporting facilities and parks, gardens, conservation areas, kindergartens, libraries, health services and arts venues, schools, police stations and social housing; utilities infrastructure like retarding basins, pipe tracks and transmissions lines and transport infrastructure such as linear trails, rail and tram networks and roads and freeways.

Some noted commercial uses such as the Grand Prix and Caulfield Racecourse, the use of parkland for car parking, and public land sold for development. A significant number of these submissions supported public land being used for public purposes.

Most submissions, and the CRG, valued public land very highly and described it as an essential community resource. It was particularly valued as a major contributor to the liveability of Melbourne through the provision of public open space and the conservation of natural values. Submissions commented on the recreational, social, heritage and environmental values of public land.

The condition of public land was described in varying terms. Some submissions described the public land they enjoyed (such as their local park) and others expressed concern about the condition of particular land.

Open space

Most submissions and CRG discussions stressed the value of public land that provides public open space. It was mentioned more frequently in the submissions than any other issue and was regularly linked to Melbourne's liveability.

Relief from the urban environment and the opportunity to be in contact with natural environments were highlighted by many submitters as contributors to improved mental health. Submissions drew attention to the physical health benefits associated with recreation which are made possible by ready access to public open space. Many submissions also placed a high value on the protection of native vegetation and habitat links that public open space provides. The CRG and a number of submissions also recognised the ecosystem services supplied by public open space which cannot be provided by the built environment. High visitation rates at Melbourne's premier parks and gardens and national parks were noted by a small number of submissions as a substantial contributor to Victoria's tourism revenue.

Over two thirds of submissions expressed support for the protection of existing open space and the provision of more public open space. Almost half of the submissions expressed concerns that the community was effectively losing public open space through the sale or development of public land, allocation of open space to sporting activities

in a way that restricts public access and the decrease in per capita provision of open space as Melbourne's population grows.

A number of submissions commented that the current legislative mechanisms for setting open space contributions from developers are not effective. It was considered that they do not provide for sufficient public open space given population growth, higher density living and the loss of private open space.

Suggestions to increase the amount of public open space included expanding existing parks and developing a strategy for the purchase of new parks and conservation areas.

Some submissions suggested that a state-wide approach to open space management would ensure consistency across all state and local government land managers. Clarification of responsibilities and improved communication between different land managers (including volunteers) was also suggested to facilitate better coordinated public land management.

Many submissions commented on the need for improved management and funding for public open space. Management of remnant native vegetation and control of weeds and pests were two of the management issues raised.

Biodiversity conservation

Many submissions and the CRG commented on the important role played by public land in the conservation of biodiversity and natural values. Particular types of public land mentioned included national parks, regional parks, linear reserves, wetlands, foreshores and stream frontages.

The failure to recognise biodiversity values before disposing of, or building on, public land was considered to be a threat to biodiversity in the investigation area. Extensions to the urban growth boundary and the loss of green wedge land (both public and private land) were also seen as contributing to the loss of biodiversity. The visual amenity and conservation values of natural areas were also thought by some submitters to be under threat due to development occurring in close proximity to natural areas.

Opportunities identified to protect biodiversity included creating or extending existing national parks, protection of road reserves, creeks and linear trails, and better management of pest species.

It was suggested that public land used for services and utilities, cemeteries and schools often has significant conservation values and that relevant sites be managed to protect these values.

Recreational opportunities

The recreational values of public land were acknowledged, mostly in relation to the opportunities for non-organised and informal recreation provided by public open space.

Linear trails were discussed in a number of submissions, with an emphasis on the need to upgrade and close gaps in the metropolitan trail network and increase linkages to public transport.

There were some comments on the importance of sports fields and other built facilities for organised recreation. A small number of recreational groups and individuals expressed interest in continued or increased access to public land in order to pursue their particular recreational activities.

Other submissions considered that sports fields restricted use of public land to a proportion of the community. They tended to support open space that is available for a wide range of users (such as non-organised recreation and conservation areas). The CRG also expressed strong support for multi-purpose spaces that would meet the recreational needs of a wide range of users.

Cultural and heritage values of public land

The cultural and heritage values of public land were acknowledged in submissions that referred to important Indigenous and European cultural heritage sites on public land. Some commented that public land helps preserve Melbourne's heritage and contributes to tourism revenue through iconic cultural sites such as the National Gallery of Victoria, Federation Square, the Melbourne Museum, Scienceworks and the State Library.

Climate change and sustainability

A number of submissions commented on how public land can aid climate change mitigation and adaptation. Increased revegetation of public land was suggested for carbon sequestration, to reduce the urban heat island effect and to create habitat links. Some submissions also suggested that public land should be used to extend and improve the public transport system and trail network to reduce transport emissions, and to adapt to lower rainfall (e.g. with water tanks in parks and water-sensitive urban design).

Fire-risk management

Fire management was raised in relation to the 2009 bushfires. Issues raised included using public open space as evacuation areas during emergencies, a government 'buy back' of private land in high fire-risk areas, and concerns about fuel reduction burning.

Public land governance

A large number of submissions advocated the protection of public land with community and environmental values. Current legislative protections for public land were viewed as inadequate with several submissions citing the loss of areas of parkland as evidence of the lack of legislative protection afforded to public land.

There were a number of calls for the state government to develop a state-wide approach to public land and open space planning and management. Some submissions suggested that the protection and management of public land currently relies too heavily on the use of volunteers.

Inappropriate use of public land

Many submissions highlighted uses of public land that they considered inappropriate. Examples included the use of public open space for commercial activities or major sporting events that restrict public access to open space. More than a quarter of submissions argued for the use of public land for public purposes only. Activities damaging to the environment, such as car-parking in parkland and some recreational activities in conservation areas, were also thought to be inappropriate uses of public land. Commercial developments along waterways and foreshores were also considered damaging to sensitive coastal and riparian environments and inappropriate where climate change posed increased flood risk and coastal erosion.

Disposal of public land

Disposal of public land was raised in more than one quarter of submissions and frequently in CRG discussions. It was generally considered that all surplus public land should be assessed for its community and environmental values before being sold and that the disposal process should be more transparent and consultative. There were some suggestions that, given Melbourne's increasing population, current or potential public open space should not be sold.

The requirement for public authorities to sell public land at market value was considered to be a barrier to achieving more public open space. Some submissions wanted particular public land sites to be transferred to local councils at no cost.

Population growth

The pressure on Melbourne's liveability caused by rapid population growth was a commonly expressed concern. CRG discussions and many submissions raised concerns about the resulting increased demand for open space, public transport, water resources and other services that contribute to liveability in Melbourne.

1.7 Policy context

1.7.1 INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

The investigation is carried out in the context of a number of international and national agreements and strategies.

The World Heritage Convention was adopted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) General Conference in 1972 and came into force in 1975. The Convention aims to promote cooperation among nations to protect heritage around the world that is of such outstanding universal value that its conservation is important for current and future generations. Australia became one of the first countries to ratify the Convention in 1974.

In 2004, the Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens became the first property in Victoria to be inscribed on the World Heritage List.

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance⁹, known as the Ramsar Convention, is an inter-governmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Australia is a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention.

The Ramsar Convention encourages the designation of sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or wetlands that are important for conserving biological diversity. Once designated, a management framework aimed at conserving the wetland and ensuring its wise use is established. Victoria currently has 11 Ramsar sites, three of which overlap with the investigation area.

Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-30¹⁰ is a long-term strategy for the protection of Australia's biodiversity. The strategy aims to enhance the National Reserve System (the national network of protected areas set aside to protect natural values) over the next twenty years. It focuses on improved design and selection, accelerated establishment and effective planning and management of protected areas, and strengthened partnerships and increased community support.

1.7.2 VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The terms of reference specify that VEAC should take into account:

- ▶ relevant State Government policies, programs, strategies and Ministerial Statements relating to the use of open space in Melbourne, including *Melbourne 2030*, *Planning for all of Melbourne* and *Linking People and Spaces*.
- ▶ public authority plans and strategies such as the Port Phillip Catchment Management Authority *Regional Catchment Strategy* and *Native Vegetation Plan*.

Some of the key policies and strategies are outlined below.

Melbourne 2030¹ was developed in 2002 as a strategic plan to manage Melbourne's growth and development planning over 30 years. It provides a long-term framework to reduce urban expansion, consolidate an increased share of urban development around transport nodes to more efficiently use existing infrastructure and improve access to services and facilities.

The core of *Melbourne 2030* is a series of directions which include a more compact, prosperous, green and well-connected city, and better management of metropolitan growth.

Planning for all of Melbourne 2008¹¹ is the Victorian Government's response to the *Melbourne 2030* audit undertaken by an independent Audit Expert Group between 2007 and 2008. The audit provided recommendations on strategic and implementation priorities for *Melbourne 2030*.

Key actions of the strategy include increasing coordination across government for the implementation of *Melbourne 2030*, planning and managing Melbourne's current and future transport needs, increasing Melbourne's environmental sustainability in the face of climate change and managing urban growth and change.

Melbourne @ 5 million¹² is a planning update for *Melbourne 2030*, providing a long-term framework for managing Melbourne's growth. It outlines the implications of the *Victoria in Future 2008* growth projections for Melbourne, which indicate that the city's population is likely to reach five million before 2030.

Melbourne @ 5 million provides complementary policy initiatives to the directions in *Melbourne 2030*. Key policy initiatives include the creation of Central Activity Districts and employment corridors, and the expansion of Melbourne's urban growth boundary.

*Linking People and Spaces 2002*¹³ was developed in 2002 as a strategic plan for the growth and improvement of Melbourne's regional open space network. This includes regional parks, shared use trails, coasts and bays and area with important environmental and cultural values.

It focuses on ensuring equitable access in the development of major parks and trails, and on protecting and enhancing conservation values and sites of significance.

*Victoria's Land and Biodiversity White Paper 2009*¹⁴ is a long-term, strategic framework to secure the health of Victoria's land, water and biodiversity in the face of ongoing pressures and a changing climate over the next fifty years. The White Paper describes a new focus on ecosystem resilience, ecological connectivity and high value asset areas. The White Paper has five inter-related goals:

- ▶ To safeguard Victoria's land, water and biodiversity by building ecosystem resilience, maintaining ecosystem services and improving connectivity
- ▶ To reform and realign Victorian Government processes and institutions which lead and facilitate the sustainable management of Victoria's land, water and biodiversity
- ▶ To increase market demand for land, water and biodiversity outcomes
- ▶ To encourage all Victorians to work together as responsive and effective stewards of our land, water and biodiversity
- ▶ Building healthy and resilient ecosystems across the landscape.

*Victoria's Biodiversity Strategy 2010 – 2015*¹⁵ (consultation draft) aims to implement the White Paper's policy agenda for biodiversity over the next five years in partnership with the biodiversity sector.

To take better account of both pattern and process in framing policy and program objectives, the strategy recognises the twin drivers for biodiversity conservation are minimising loss of biodiversity and maximising the functionality of ecosystems.

*Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action*¹⁶ was incorporated into the Victoria Planning Provisions in 2003. Under the Framework, the key goal for native vegetation in Victoria is for "a reversal across the entire landscape, of the long-term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation, leading to a Net Gain".

This framework promotes a three-step approach to apply the principles of net gain, namely *avoid* the removal of native vegetation, *minimise* the removal of native vegetation through appropriate planning and design and appropriately offset the loss of native vegetation.

*Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority Regional Catchment Strategy 2004-2009*¹⁷ provides a framework for managing the natural assets of Port Phillip and Western Port catchment in a sustainable and integrated way. The main focus of the strategy is the management of land, water and biodiversity, including coastal and marine areas. The strategy also covers air and atmosphere, cultural heritage, planning and urban form, particularly where these relate to catchment management.

The strategy provides guidance to the government and community on important catchment management issues throughout the region, including the sustainable use and management natural assets and investment in catchment management. It lists a series of priority actions to achieve these goals.

*Port Phillip and Western Port Native Vegetation Plan 2006*¹⁸ provides a coordinated and strategic approach to managing, protecting and restoring native vegetation in the Port Phillip and Western Port region, with the aim of achieving a net gain in the quality and extent of native vegetation. It is consistent with the statewide approach to native vegetation management outlined in *Victoria's Native Vegetation Management: A Framework for Action*.¹⁶

The plan provides detailed information about the region's native vegetation, while also identifying knowledge gaps for management of native vegetation. It establishes regional priorities and targets for retaining, protecting, enhancing and restoring this vegetation.

*Taking Action for Victoria's Future – The Victorian Climate Change White Paper Action Plan 2010*¹⁹ sets climate change policy and action benchmarks for the Victorian government. Key actions include reducing Victoria's greenhouse emissions, promoting clean energy, improving household energy efficiency, supporting reduced emissions transport solutions and helping Victorians adapt to climate change impacts.

*Victorian Government's response to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission*² supports in full or in part 66 of the 67 recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. The one recommendation not accepted relates to the voluntary buyback of land in areas of extreme fire danger.

A significant, staged increase in the level of planned fuel reduction burning to five per cent of public land each year is the main focus of the government's bushfire mitigation response. There is an annual target of around 385,000 hectares of prescribed burning, with the focus on protecting lives in high risk areas. Enhanced research and monitoring of the impact on natural assets of increased burning will inform adaptive management. Other key actions include:

- ▶ organisational reforms for emergency and incident management, including the establishment of a new Fire Services Commissioner
- ▶ increased support for volunteer fire fighters
- ▶ better maintenance for powerlines and changes to distribution systems
- ▶ improved community warning systems and a major boost to community education and information about preparing for bushfires
- ▶ new planning controls for building in bushfire-prone areas, and continued roll-out of Neighbourhood Safer Places.

The *Policy and Instructions for the purchase, compulsory acquisition and sale of land*²⁰ were developed to ensure accountability and integrity in land transactions. They set out the role of the Government Land Monitor as overseeing all sales, purchases and compulsory acquisitions of land by the Victorian Government and it outlines a best practice approach that must be implemented by all public authorities undertaking land transactions.