

**MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL**

**Council Meeting Attachment**

**ENGINEERING AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

**16 MAY 2016**

**9.4**

**PROTECTING VICTORIA'S ENVIRONMENT -  
BIODIVERSITY 2036 DRAFT SUBMISSION**

**Attachment No: 1**

**Draft Biodiversity Plan Submission**

# DRAFT VICTORIAN BIODIVERSITY PLAN *“Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2036”*

## DRAFT Mitchell Shire Council submission

Mitchell Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the Draft Victorian Biodiversity Plan *“Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2036”*. (the Draft Plan)

Council recognises the need to show leadership in environmental sustainability by embracing its responsibility to the next generation of Mitchell Shire residents. The strong association between the local environment, economy and community calls for a considered approach to the management of the natural environment. This is particularly important in the current context of environmental pressures such as climate change, land use changes and population growth.

The following submission has been formatted into subheadings covering aspects of the Draft Plan and omissions that have been identified by Mitchell Shire Council.

### Vision and Goals

Mitchell Shire Council supports the proposed vision and goals of the plan as it focuses on both the social and natural environment and the interaction between the two.

The vision of the Mitchell Shire Environment Strategy 2014-2024 is *“Our community supports a healthy and resilient natural environment”* which aligns well with the vision of the Draft Plan *“Victoria’s biodiversity is healthy, valued and actively cared for”*

In addition the Mitchell Shire Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 acknowledges the link between physical health and a healthy natural environment; *“Environmental surroundings influence health through a variety of channels - exposure to physical, chemical and biological risk factors or by triggering changes to behaviour. Such effects may be direct (such as injury or death) or indirect (through changes in lifestyle and health behaviours). The environment has the potential to affect physical health (for example, respiratory problems due to air pollution) and mental wellbeing (for example, poor mental health associated with drought conditions). Conversely, there are natural and modified features of the environment (such as green space and water quality) which benefit health.”*

### The Role of Local Government in Biodiversity Management.

Local Government has an important role to play in biodiversity management, through its controls over strategic land use planning, environmental health, infrastructure development, health and wellbeing programs, facilitating community involvement and education, local laws, and through the management of reserves and rural roadsides. Local government is also the closest level of government to the community.

Mitchell Shire Council believes that the role Local Government plays in biodiversity management has been downplayed in the document, especially considering that there are indications in the draft plan that Local Government will be responsible for implementing some of the proposed changes ; *“A key aspect of the regional biodiversity conservation planning process is the inclusion of regional regulators, such as local government.”* (p. 86)

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## Collaboration

Mitchell Shire Council supports greater inter-governmental coordination and the provision of accurate and shared information to enable informed decision making by Local Government in relation to the protection of biodiversity assets.

The regular sharing of electronic databases and map layers for rare and threatened species, culturally significant sites, land capability, certified organic farms and accurate mapping of native vegetation offsets sites and revegetation undertaken through public funding would all assist Local Government in ensuring decision making focused on achieving the best environmental outcomes.

## Regulatory and Legislative Framework for Biodiversity

Mitchell Shire Council supports improvements to the regulatory and legislative framework for biodiversity and seeks clarification on the roles and responsibilities of Local Government in regard to biodiversity management.

## Rural Roadsides

In many areas native vegetation has been extensively cleared and rural roadsides represent the only remaining native vegetation across the landscape. These remnants provide essential habitat, including biolinks for endangered, vulnerable, rare and locally significant flora and fauna.

The protection of these environmental values is supported by National, State and Local legislation, and are under threat from road works, development, fire prevention and unsolicited works, however they do not receive a mention in the Draft Biodiversity Plan.

The management of rural roadsides, both those reserves listed on municipal road registers and unused road reserves is integral to achieving the goals of the draft biodiversity plan.

## Genetic Modification

The effect of genetically modified foods should be referenced in the Draft Plan. The potential impacts on biodiversity are not well known by all and should continue to be heavily scrutinised by the Australian Government.

## Biosecurity

The importance of biosecurity in protecting Australia's unique biodiversity should be highlighted in the Draft Plan, including recommendations to adequately resource of this service into the future.

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## Rural Landholders, Landcare and Environment Groups

*“People are the Shire’s greatest asset in protecting and enhancing the natural environment”* (Mitchell Shire Environment Strategy 2014-2024). The Draft Biodiversity Plan rightly highlights that the interaction of people and natural environment is key in achieving biodiversity outcomes, however it fails to adequately acknowledge the immense amount of action undertaken by individual landholders and volunteers, especially in rural and farming areas, to preserve and enhance biodiversity.

Mitchell Shire Council recommends that the environmental works, both on-ground and educational, undertaken by rural landholders, landcare and environment groups is suitably acknowledged in the final Biodiversity Plan.

## Pest Plants and Animals

Mitchell Shire Council recommends that the issues surrounding the control of pest plants and animals is properly addressed in the Draft Plan.

It is noted on page 14 of the draft document that pest plants and animals are a *“primary cause of biodiversity decline”*, however DELWP has failed to adequately resource proper enforcement and compliance activities for weed control, in addition the responsibility for roadside weed and pest animals has been shifted to local government without adequate and long term resourcing.

## Nature and Culture Based Attractions

Mitchell Shire Council supports Priority 8 of the Draft Plan *“Showcase Victoria’s environmental assets as world-class nature based and culture based attractions”* however recommends that the encouragement of only environmentally sensitive activities are cited in the plan. This is supported by the Mitchell Shire Environment Strategy 2014-2024, which includes the following actions;

- *“Promote existing natural areas through the provision of new infrastructure to increase community access to the natural environment and increase awareness and appreciation of our natural environment” and;*
- *“Provide opportunities for young people to become better connected and more active in their local environment”*

The Mitchell Shire Draft Economic Development Strategy 2016-2021 also identifies eco-resorts, agri-tourism and nature based tourism as potential investment opportunities.

## Funding

The provision of adequate funding and resources is critical in achieving the vision and goals of the Draft Plan. Mitchell Shire Council supports the continuation of funding programs such as the Victorian Climate Change Grants and Landcare grants and the investigation of innovative funding models for biodiversity outcomes.

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## Regional Biodiversity Investment Plans

It is important that existing information, such as Catchment Biodiversity Action Plans are utilised in the development of the Regional Biodiversity Plans.

Likewise it is important that Local Governments are part of the consultation for the development of these regional plans and consideration be given to those Shires which cross water catchments. For example Mitchell Shire is in three (3) water catchments.

The draft plan mentions *“Each prospectus will be used by the regional co-ordinating government agency”*, Mitchell Shire Council seeks clarification on who the regional coordinating government agencies are.

## Expectations on Local Government and Further Consultation

The resource implications of the plan on Local Government are not clear and may become evident upon the development of the implementation plans, measurable outcomes and regional Biodiversity investment plans.

It is vital that Local Government is consulted with closely in the development of the Implementation Plan, the development of the measurable outcomes and the Regional Biodiversity Investment Plans, as the capacity of local government and the issues faced varies greatly across the state.

The reference of Local Government publishing annual environmental accounting reports and the development Environmental-Economic Accounting tools / adoption of the United Nations System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (Chapter 6 strategies and p. 43) is of particular concern to Mitchell Shire Council, especially if it is envisioned that Local Government will be responsible for this reporting. This concern is further compounded in the current rate-capping environment.

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