

06/08/2010
VC68**SCHEDULE 3 TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OVERLAY**

Shown on the planning scheme map as **ESO3**.

WESTERN GRASSLAND RESERVES**1.0 Statement of environmental significance**06/08/2010
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These areas have been identified for protection through the creation of grassland reserves. The establishment of the reserves will create large consolidated areas of permanently protected native grassland outside the Urban Growth Boundary in Melbourne's west. These areas are to be managed to improve their quality and offset losses from clearing associated with urban development and transport infrastructure associated with changes to the Urban Growth Boundary and the implementation of the Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities Program.

The Western Grassland Reserves will contain the largest consolidated area of Natural Temperate Grassland remaining on the Victorian Volcanic Plain, and support several nationally threatened plant and animal species and provide potential habitat for a range of other nationally threatened species. They also include a range of other habitat types including wetlands, riparian habitats and scattered open grassy woodlands. Parts of these reserves will be made available as offsets for clearing of grasslands within the Urban Growth Boundary.

Conservation reserves account for only 2 per cent of the current extent of natural temperate grassland and the addition of this proposed 15,000 hectares reserve will increase the level of reservation of natural temperate grassland to 20 per cent. Approximately 19 per cent of the native grasslands within the proposed reserves are High quality (habitat score greater than 0.6) and a further 80 per cent are Medium quality (habitat score between 0.31–0.6). The grassland reserves will secure at least 5290 habitat hectares of existing grasslands.

The proposed grassland reserves support several nationally threatened species: Golden Sun Moth (critically endangered), Striped Legless lizard (vulnerable), Spiny Rice-flower (critically endangered), Large-headed Fireweed (vulnerable), Clover Glycine (vulnerable). They also contain Werribee Blue Box which is likely to be listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* in the near future. They include the most likely suitable habitat on the Volcanic Plains for Plains Wanderer (vulnerable) and potential habitat for a range of other specialist grassland species such as Button Wrinklewort (endangered) and the Grassland Earless-dragon (endangered).

The reserves take in a range of other habitats, including Buloke Grassy Woodlands, and a variety of wetland types including Plains Grassy Wetland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain. These wetlands provide habitat for existing populations of Growling Grass frog (vulnerable) and several migratory bird species.

The proposed grassland reserves have been designed to maximise the area of habitat available to resident plant and animal species, in particular threatened species, and to enable management activities critical to the long term survival of species and vegetation to be undertaken. As a result, not all areas within the reserves support high quality native vegetation and some areas are degraded. Management works will be targeted to these areas.

2.0 Environmental objective to be achieved06/08/2010
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- To facilitate the establishment of a reservation for at least 15,000 hectares of grassland (nature conservation reserve or National Park) outside the Urban Growth Boundary in Melbourne's west.

- To provide interim management of the western grassland reserves before they are acquired, achieved by assisting landholders to manage threats and strengthening regulation to prevent degradation.
- To introduce a management regime to ensure that the grassland areas are not degraded in the period prior to acquisition of the land for the grassland reserves.
- To manage the areas as a conservation reserve or National Park for a range of particular vegetation and species requirements.
- To protect and enhance significant landscape and habitat areas of threatened species.
- To ensure that any development does not impact on the environmental significance of the land or the ability of the land to be managed as a contiguous conservation reserve or National Park in the future.
- To ensure that any use, development or management of land within and adjacent to areas of environmental significance are compatible with their long-term maintenance, conservation and management (e.g. ecological burning) and will not have detrimental impacts on biodiversity values.
- To prevent degradation of sites of environmental significance.
- To protect and improve the viability of habitats, ecological communities, flora and fauna and genetic diversity in areas of environmental significance in the long term.
- To maintain and enhance the integrity of sites of environmental significance.
- To maintain and enhance habitat connectivity for National and State listed threatened species.
- To encourage ecological restoration, regeneration and revegetation of areas of degraded habitat and areas which currently have no habitat value due to historical or current land management practices.
- To manage buffer areas to reduce the impact of land uses adjoining the Western Grassland Reserves and to ensure appropriate management of the reserve does not adversely impact on surrounding land uses.
- To provide for the long term preservation of the flora and fauna of environmentally significant areas.

3.0 Permit requirement

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A permit is not required to:

- Construct a building or construct or carry out works or to remove, destroy or lop vegetation (including dead vegetation) in accordance with an agreement under Section 69 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*.
- Construct or carry out works or to remove, destroy or lop vegetation (including dead vegetation) by or on behalf of a public authority or public land manager involving revegetation, or preparatory works associated with revegetation.

4.0 Application requirements

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An application must be accompanied by, as appropriate:

- A flora and fauna assessment of the land prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced person to the satisfaction of the responsible authority. The assessment must include:

- A flora and fauna survey.
- A habitat hectare assessment.
- Identification of the vegetation and habitat significance of the property.
- The total extent of vegetation on the property and the extent of native vegetation proposed to be removed, lopped or destroyed.
- A description of any proposed disturbance or surface soil or rocks, associated with the proposed development.
- A description of the steps that have been taken to avoid and minimise the removal of native vegetation including the practicality of alternative options which do not require removal of the native vegetation.
- The effect of the proposed removal of native vegetation on the habitat value and long term viability of remnant grasslands in the vicinity.
- A land and environmental management plan prepared by a suitably qualified person identifying:
 - Any proposals for revegetation, including proposed species, and ground stabilisation.
 - How any vegetation removal will be offset (an offset plan), in accordance with Victoria's Native Vegetation Management: A Framework For Action (Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2002).
 - Weed management, including species to be targeted and proposed management techniques.
 - Pest animal management, including species to be targeted and proposed management techniques.

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Referral of applications

In accordance with Section 55 of the Act, an application must be referred to the relevant referral authority specified in the schedule to Clause 66.04.

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Decision guidelines

Before deciding on an application, the responsible authority must consider, as appropriate:

- The conservation significance of any vegetation to be removed and its habitat value for native fauna.
- The effect of any proposed building or works on the environmental values of the land and the integrity of the future reserve.
- The reason for removing any vegetation and the practicality of any alternative options.
- The importance of the natural environment including any important landscape or conservation characteristics of the area and the suitability of the proposed development.
- The control of noxious and environmental weeds and pest animals, including the need to minimise the spread of weeds and soil pathogens.
- The impact on the integrity of the site from the proposed development, disturbance and removal of rock, indiscriminate weed control, habitat fragmentation and isolation and disturbance and destruction of habitat of threatened species.
- The proposed management practices for the land including:

- The linking and enlarging of areas of significant flora and fauna habitats.
 - Effective and targeted weed control.
 - Programs to control or eliminate introduced predatory and pest animal species, in particular foxes, rabbits and hares.
 - Rehabilitation of degraded areas through fencing, revegetation with appropriate native species and ongoing management.
 - Collection of seed and other plant propagules for rehabilitation projects on and off site.
- The results of any flora and fauna survey and assessment of the land.
 - Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Strategic Impact Assessment Report for *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.
 - Any Growth Area Framework Plans, Biodiversity Conservation Strategies, Sub-Regional Species Strategies, Native Vegetation Precinct Plan, Conservation Management Plan, Precinct Structure Plan or other management plan approved for the area by the Minister for Planning or Minister for Environment and Climate Change.
 - Any relevant park management plan or interim management plan.
 - Any action statement prepared under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* and any significant impact guidelines or prescriptions prepared under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth) for species or habitat listed under either of these Acts that occur or are likely to occur on the land.

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Reference

- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Report for Public Consultation, Urban Growth Boundary Review (Department of Planning and Community Development June 2009)
- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Strategic Impact Assessment Report for the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Department of Sustainability and Environment June 2009)
- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Background Technical Report 2a: Biodiversity Assessment of Melbourne's Western Investigation Area (Biosis Research June 2009)