

## 21.06 NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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C61

This clause provides local content to support Clause 14 (Natural resource management) of the State Planning Policy Framework.

### 21.06-1 Protection of agricultural land

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Agriculture is the main rural land use by area across most rural areas of the Shire. The types of agriculture that are practised are largely a function of land type, which falls broadly into three geologies: basalt, granite, sedimentary and alluvial. The dominant agricultural use across most of the Shire is broad acre grazing of cattle and sheep. It occurs wherever agriculture is practiced across the Shire. Grazing is mixed with other agricultural and non-agricultural uses to differing degrees in different parts of the Shire. Extensive cereal cropping occurs on large holdings of alluvial land and gently sloping sedimentary land in the north-west of the Shire.

Irrigated horticulture (mainly apples) supported by the Coliban Irrigation System occurs on granite slopes and outwash land (soil deposited from higher slopes), and valley land at Harcourt. The Harcourt district has a long history as one of Victoria's significant fruit production regions. Harcourt has a reputation as Victoria's 'apple centre' and, even though production has decreased over past decades, the district still produces around 40 percent of Victoria's apples. The region also produces pears and stone fruit and, more recently, wine grapes, olives and quinces. Some large vineyards exist on granite land east of Faraday adjacent to the Faraday – Sutton Grange Road. Vineyards including some small, boutique plantings also occur on granite land in the general area of Welshman's Reef and Cairn Curran Reservoir. Manufacturing activities that add value to horticultural produce are also present in the region.

Council has prepared the *Rural Land Study (2014)* to guide future planning in the Shire's rural areas. The Shire's Agricultural Land Quality is represented in Figure 6. The best quality agricultural land in the Shire is rated 'moderate': the lowest quality land is rated 'very low'. The largest areas of 'moderate' quality land exist in the north west of the Shire and along waterways in the other parts of the Shire.

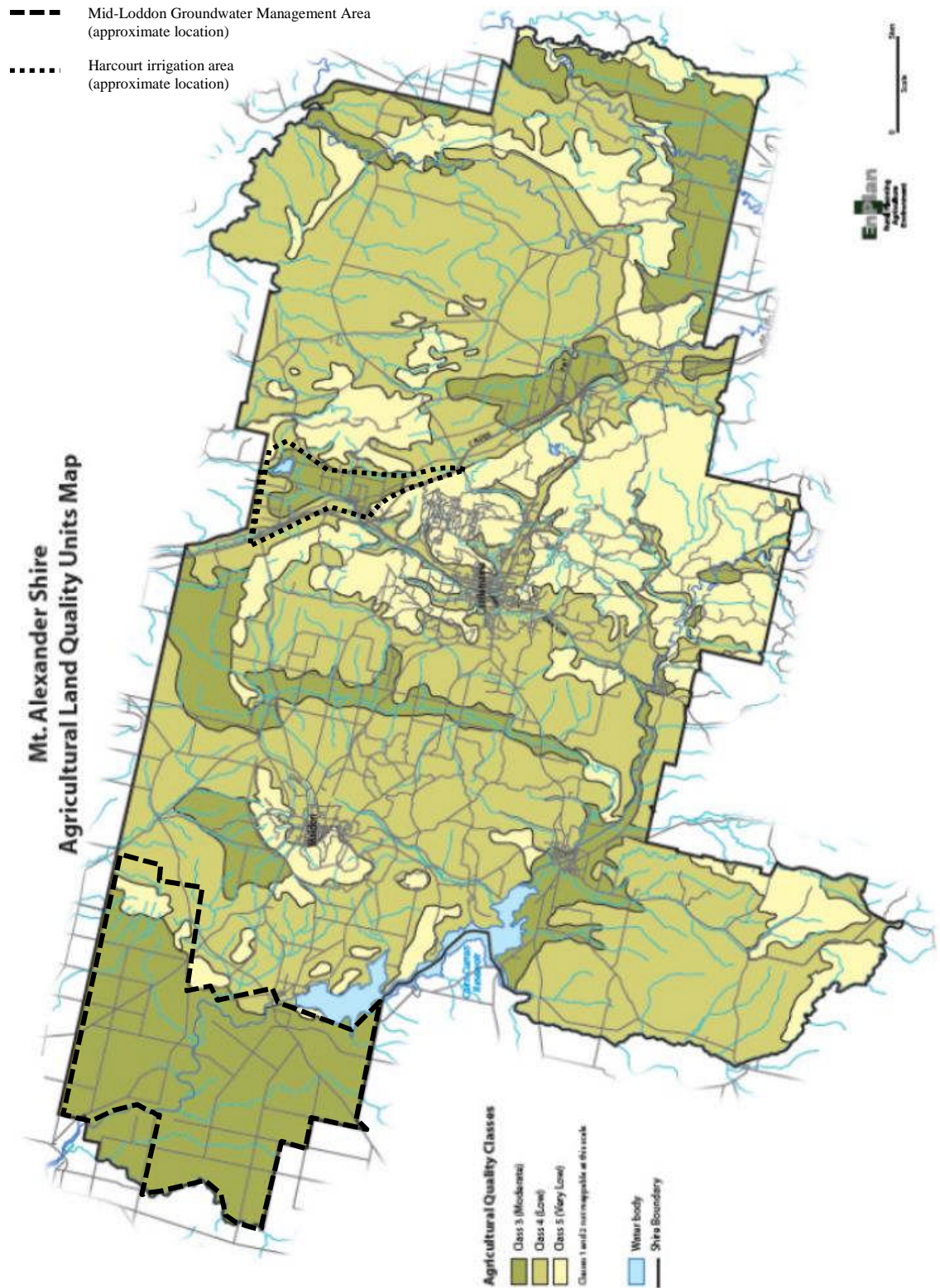
Water availability is a key driver of intensive agriculture. Where water of sufficient volume and quality is available and the land is suitable for irrigation then access to water transforms the versatility and production potential of the land. The Coliban supply system has been integral to sustaining the horticultural industries in the Harcourt area and is undergoing major improvements. Groundwater in the Mid Loddon Groundwater Management Area in the north west of the Shire supports spray-irrigated lucerne on alluvial land. This groundwater is a valuable agricultural resource of regional significance.

Council has prepared restructure plans for old and inappropriate subdivisions in the Shire that need to be restructured to reduce the environmental impacts of dwellings and other development.

#### Key issues

- Protecting the future of agricultural land of local and regional strategic significance.
- Controlling the unplanned loss of agricultural land to rural living and residential uses.
- Managing the future use and development of small lots in fragmented ownership.
- Protecting the irrigation and groundwater resources that support intensive agriculture and horticulture.
- Restructuring old and inappropriate subdivisions.

**Figure 6: Agricultural land quality units and water resources in Mount Alexander Shire**



Source: *Mount Alexander Rural Land Study*, 2014, water resource information from other sources.

*Note: Figure 6 provides a strategic level indicator of agricultural land quality and is not accurate at the individual property level. Quality classes are expressed on a state wide basis, not on a comparative basis within the Shire.*

## **Objective 1**

To protect the land and water resources relied upon by agriculture.

### **Strategies**

- Strategy 1.1 Promote agriculture and horticulture as the primary land uses in the Shire unless other land uses are strategically justified.
- Strategy 1.2 Discourage the subdivision or fragmentation of agricultural land or multi-lot landholdings if they are likely to lead to a non-agricultural use.
- Strategy 1.3 Encourage the consolidation of existing titles to maintain the viability of farming uses.
- Strategy 1.4 Discourage the development of dwellings in areas of moderate agricultural land quality unless they are directly linked to and will benefit an agricultural use.
- Strategy 1.5 Strongly discourage the fragmentation of, or non-agricultural uses within, the Farming Zone in:
- the Mid-Loddon Groundwater Management Area; and
  - the Harcourt irrigation area.

## **Objective 2**

To reduce the number of small and inappropriately located lots in rural areas.

### **Strategies**

- Strategy 2.1 Support the consolidation of lots in old and inappropriate subdivisions into existing tenements or land holdings wherever practicable.

### **Implementation**

The strategies in relation to agriculture will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

### **Policy guidelines**

- Applying Council's local policy Clause 22.04 (Use and development of land in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone) when considering applications for use and development of rural land.

### **Application of zones and overlays**

- Applying the Farming Zone to the Shire's agricultural areas.
- Applying the Restructure Overlay to old and inappropriate subdivisions.

### **Reference documents**

- Review of Restructure Overlays in the Mount Alexander Planning Scheme, 2007
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Rural Land Study, 2014

**21.06-2 Sustainable agricultural land use**28/04/2016  
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Agriculture is an important industry within the Mount Alexander Shire, although many traditional farming practices are now associated with continuing loss of environmental quality and unsustainable land management practices. Significant initiatives at the local level (e.g. Landcare) and regional level catchment management strategies are attempting to address these matters. Ultimately the potential of the agricultural industry is dependent on the health of the environment and Loddon - Campaspe catchment.

The terms of trade and increasing costs associated with traditional agricultural pursuits have led to pressures on the traditional farming sector. As a result, there is a concern that productive agricultural land is being lost to non-agricultural uses, especially to rural living and low density residential development, due mainly to land values. Dwellings in rural areas can also lead to amenity conflicts with existing agricultural activities.

**Key issues**

- Uncertainties about the viability of traditional farming practices on low quality agricultural land.
- Acknowledging that the dominant agricultural uses in the Shire have changed little over past decades, although farming activities are diversifying.
- Assisting the agricultural sector in adapting to changing macro-economic conditions, climate change and other pressures.
- Managing land use conflicts in rural areas between rural living/lifestyle uses versus the 'right to farm'.
- Managing the potential for the introduction and expansion of intensive animal production, whilst acknowledging community resistance to these uses.
- Supporting emerging agricultural and horticultural activities, which have yet to achieve industry scale in the Shire.

**Objective 1**

To minimise potential amenity impacts between agricultural uses and rural lifestyle or other sensitive uses.

**Strategies**

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|--------------|---|
| Strategy 1.1 | Discourage the use and development of land that could create conflict with existing agricultural activities through consideration of noise, dust, odour, spray drift or hours of operation. |
| Strategy 1.2 | Consider the likelihood of amenity related conflicts for any proposals for more intensive development at the interface between urban and rural land.  |
| Strategy 1.3 | Restrict urban development to areas within the township/urban boundaries identified in the framework plans in Clause 21.12.   |
| Strategy 1.4 | Establish appropriate buffer areas and performance requirements for intensive activities such as feed lots, piggeries, dairies, dog breeding, and poultry farms.                            |
| Strategy 1.5 | Ensure the appropriate siting and operation of intensive activities so as to negate off-site negative impacts and give accessibility to required infrastructure.                            |

## Objective 2

Diversify the agricultural base of the Shire to increase resilience to change.

### Strategies

- Strategy 2.1 Encourage agricultural diversity.
- Strategy 2.2 Promote opportunities for new farming enterprises to incorporate innovative technologies and use of land.
- Strategy 2.3 Encourage farm management practices that are sustainable and reflect the optimal use of the land.

### Implementation

The strategies in relation to sustainable agriculture will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

### Policy guidelines

- Applying Council's local policy Clause 22.04 (Use and development of land in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone) when considering applications for use, development and subdivision in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone, as appropriate.
- Applying Council's local policy Clause 22.05 (Spray Drift) when considering applications for accommodation or other sensitive uses in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone, as appropriate.
- Applying Council's local policy Clause 22.06 (Animal keeping and greyhound training) when considering applications for animal keeping or greyhound training in the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone, as appropriate.

## 21.06-3

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### Water

The Shire is located in the catchments of both the Loddon and Campaspe Rivers. The condition of the Loddon catchment is poor due to significant land degradation and poor water quality. It is the fourth most degraded catchment within Australia. The degradation of the environment affects land, agriculture and community amenity, with resulting flow on effects to the economy and people who reside in the Shire.

Approximately 90 percent of the Shire's land area is located in declared potable water supply catchment areas, which are managed and protected under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*. The Guidelines for *Planning permit applications in open, potable water supply catchment areas* apply to these areas. The Shire also contains significant groundwater resources. Part of the Shire is located within the Central Victorian Mineral Springs Groundwater Management Area (refer to Figure 6). Some of the springs are recognised attractions while others retain their natural setting.

Management of the natural environment is essential to sustain healthy catchments, habitats and retain remnant vegetation. The Shire supports the *Regional Catchment Management Strategy 2013-2019*. The Shire has prepared the *Mount Alexander Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2012-2015*, which identifies priority areas for immediate action and consideration for upgrades or transition to sewer in Castlemaine, Elphinstone and Taradale. Further work is required to manage domestic wastewater at the municipal level using a risk-based approach.

## **Key issues**

- Managing flooding and the preservation of levee banks along the Loddon River.
- Deteriorating water quality due to public access to waterways, overgrazing, fertilisers, intensive animal industries, salinity, weeds and dams.
- Managing the effects on water quality from land clearing, industrial discharges and sedimentation associated with urban development.
- Developing appropriate strategies and policies to manage on-site wastewater disposal/septic tanks in accordance with government guidelines.
- Controlling the impacts of dams on waterway flow and health.

## **Objective 1**

To improve water quality and waterway health in the Shire.

### **Strategies**

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|--------------|---|
| Strategy 1.1 | Protect native vegetation and encourage appropriate revegetation to prevent land degradation, maintain water quality and protect biodiversity of flora and fauna species. |
| Strategy 1.2 | Ensure that the maintenance of acceptable water quality standards and the natural condition of watercourses are considered in the assessment of land use proposals.       |
| Strategy 1.3 | Support improvement options for wastewater management in Guildford, Elphinstone and Taradale.   |
| Strategy 1.4 | Ensure that residential densities in unsewered small settlements and townships take into account effluent disposal limitations.   |
| Strategy 1.5 | Protect and assist community environmental projects involved in protecting, rehabilitating or enhancing watercourses or areas of remnant vegetation.                      |

## **Objective 2**

To increase environmental flows in all streams and watercourses.

### **Strategies**

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|--------------|--|
| Strategy 2.1 | Ensure that land use planning and development supports the regional catchment management strategy and sustainable natural resource management practices. |
| Strategy 2.2 | Discourage the development of dams to maintain environmental flows to waterways.   |

## **Implementation**

The strategies in relation to water will be implemented through the planning scheme by:

### **Policy guidelines**

- Applying Council's local policy Clause 22.07 (Dams) when considering applications for development of dams in the Rural Living Zone and Low Density Residential Zone.

### **Application of zones and overlays**

- Applying the Environmental Significance Overlay to declared potable water supply catchments in consultation with Goulburn-Murray Water and Coliban Water.

### **Further strategic work**

- Engaging with Goulburn-Murray Water and Coliban Water to investigate the extension of the Environmental Significance Overlay to include all declared open potable water supply catchments in the Shire.
- Updating the Shire's Domestic Wastewater Management Plan in consultation with Goulburn-Murray Water and Coliban Water.
- Investigating policies and provisions to identify and protect the Central Victorian Mineral Springs Groundwater Management Area in consultation with Goulburn-Murray Water.

### **Reference documents**

- Draft North Central Regional Waterway Strategy 2014-2022.
- North Central Floodplain Management Plan.
- Lake Eppalock Catchment and Land Capability Assessment and Planning Project Report 2000, Volume 2.
- Mount Alexander Shire Council State of the Environment Report, 2010
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Environment Strategy and Action Plan, 2011-2014
- North Central Regional Catchment Management Strategy 2013-2019
- Mount Alexander Shire Council Rural Land Study, 2014
- Mount Alexander Shire Domestic Wastewater Management Plan, 2012-2015