

## 21.15 NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

27/09/2018  
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### OVERVIEW

#### Rural areas

The Shire's rural areas contain some of the most ecologically important and diverse areas in the State. Natural assets such as the Gippsland Lakes, National Parks and wetlands have high intrinsic natural values and are a significant factor in attracting people to reside and visit the Shire. There are significant environmental issues in the Shire's rural areas, including water quality, inappropriate residential development, protection of vegetation habitat, and impacts on neighbouring wetlands and coastal parks. Infrastructure development such as windfarms and high voltage transmission lines can also have significant detrimental effect on the landscape. The rural amenity of the Shire is also an asset which warrants protection. Residents and tourists derive pleasure from the scenic values of the rural landscapes. This rural amenity is worthy of protection. The rich green pastures of these irrigation areas are also some of the most productive agricultural land in the nation. These areas are currently under intensive agricultural production and need careful management in order to remain sustainable for that purpose.

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#### Water

##### Catchment management and water quality

The Shire is principally located within the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority area and partially within the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority. The Shire can generally be divided between the catchments which drain into Lake Wellington and the South Gippsland Catchment which drains into Nooramunga Inlet and Bass Strait. Townships and farming communities across the Shire are heavily dependent upon the health of the rivers and streams within these catchments for town water supplies and rural irrigation. The continued health of these catchments is therefore extremely important to the long term sustainability of the Shire and the economic well being of the Shire's industry, agriculture, and settlements. Additionally rivers and streams often form an excellent native vegetation linkage through landscapes that are largely devoid of native vegetation. The careful management of timber production is critical to the protection of these catchments, especially with regards to reducing sediment loads into catchments and maintaining remnant native vegetation.

Salinity, acid sulphate soils, sedimentation and high nutrient loads may pose threats to farmland, infrastructure and wetlands, in particular around Sale and Lake Wellington. Salinity may also pose a threat to the built environment in the urban areas of Sale, Rosedale and in coastal towns. Careful management of irrigation and farm planning must continue to address these serious problems. Management of chemical and fertiliser use in agricultural production is also important for the protection of water quality.

Management of settlements is also a major issue in catchment protection. Many coastal and inland towns lack infrastructure and cannot adequately manage effluent loads, yet they continue to develop. There is significant concern that poor management of stormwater and effluent is resulting in pollution of ground and surface water resources in a number of settlements, including Briagolong, Coongulla, Loch Sport, Port Albert, Seaspray and Alberton. Algal blooms in the Gippsland Lakes can, in part, be attributable to poor effluent and stormwater management in urban areas across the Shire.

Substantial areas of rural land in the Wellington Shire are located in Special Water Supply Catchment Areas as defined in the *Catchment & Land Protection Act 1994*. These catchments provide water for urban, domestic and irrigation water supplies.

#### Wetlands

The wetlands in the Shire provide a haven for bird life and many are recognised by their listing on the National Estate Register and declaration under the RAMSAR Convention on

Wetlands of International Importance, especially as water fowl habitat. These wetlands provide a prelude to the Gippsland Lakes, Lake Wellington, Lake Victoria, Heyfield and the coastal regions including the Corner Inlet/Nooramunga Marine National Park in the Shire's south-west region. Importantly, wetland environments are susceptible to damage from inappropriate development and land use.

### **Objective 1**

To achieve integrated catchment management that addresses salinity, erosion, sedimentation, water quality, biodiversity, and native vegetation retention.

#### **Strategies**

- Implement the relevant regional catchment management principles of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority and the Land Protection and Coastal Management Strategies.
- Ensure that wetlands are conserved and managed appropriately.

### **Objective 2**

To protect watercourses, wetlands, remnant native vegetation, and areas of ecological, cultural, historic, archaeological and scientific interest.

#### **Strategies**

- Promote wetlands as vital components of the Shire's natural environment.
- Ensure that development or works within a wetland provide for the ongoing use of that land as a healthy wetland.
- Ensure that unclassified wetlands are identified, conserved and protected from inappropriate development.
- Protect and maintain wetlands listed under the RAMSAR Convention.

### **Objective 3**

To minimise the impacts of development and human activity on the ecological values of the coast and around the Gippsland Lakes.

#### **Strategies**

- Locate and design activities such as abattoirs and intensive animal husbandry to minimise environmental damage and loss of amenity to surrounding areas taking into account matters such as effluent control, odour, noise, soil compaction, erosion and protection of water quality.
- Locate activities such as abattoirs and intensive animal husbandry at least 100 metres from waterways and wetlands to protect water quality.

### **Objective 4**

To ensure that land use and development in water catchments do not adversely affect the quality and quantity of water that is available for domestic and agricultural consumption.

#### **Strategy**

- Encourage co-operation with water catchment authorities regarding the management of identified domestic water supply catchments to enhance water quality within the Shire.

### **Objective 5**

To protect groundwater quality and aquifer recharge areas, particularly from the impacts of urban run-off.

#### **Strategies**

- Require all dwellings in rural areas to retain all effluent and stormwater on site as well as have a potable water supply and energy source.

- Require that developments with associated effluent disposal systems are located at least 100 metres from waterways and wetlands, particularly in areas with high water tables and in domestic water supply catchments.

### Objective 6

To support and implement environmentally sensitive waste management and recycling practices.

### Strategies

- Encourage innovative forms of infrastructure provision including reed-beds and composting toilets in keeping with the theme of environmentally sustainable development (such innovative techniques will need to be appropriately documented and trialled prior to endorsement by Council).
- Encourage stormwater systems that prevent high nutrient and sediment concentrations entering waterways and wetlands.

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### Sustainable Land Management

#### Objective 1

To achieve ecologically sustainable management of rural land, particularly in relation to the agricultural, timber and other industries that rely on the Shire's natural resources.

#### Strategies

- Limit non-agricultural uses and subdivision on high quality agricultural land.
- Consider the impacts of timber production activities (on public and private land) on native flora and fauna habitat, and the surrounding visual environment.
- Encourage the exploitation of mineral and stone resources only where it can be demonstrated that the environmental impact of such activity is minimised and is conditional on a plan for the appropriate rehabilitation of the site.
- Encourage agroforestry, particularly in areas of low agricultural value and environmental degradation.

#### Objective 2

To protect, improve and sustainably manage the Shire's natural environment and diverse landscapes.

#### Strategy

- Discourage residential development and associated uses in areas which have high agricultural value, environmental and/or scenic significance, are near main landfill sites or are in areas that are subject to high fire or flood risk.

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### Coal Resources

#### Gippsland coal fields

#### Overview

The Gippsland region contains significant coal resources that are an important energy resource suitable as a fuel source for the generation of electricity, and having potential for alternative fuels and other products. The coal resource contained within the Wellington Shire is shown on the Wellington Shire Coalfields map following this clause.

The coal industry has been one of the most influential land use activities in terms of physical, social, economic, and environmental impacts. These impacts have been both profound and unique in Victoria due to their nature and extent. The brown coal resources of the Gippsland coalfields have long been recognised by Victorian governments commencing with a Royal Commission in 1891. The delineation and protection of the coal resources within the area commenced in the 1940's with the *Latrobe Valley Development Interim*

*Regional Survey and Report*. This resulted in the *Latrobe Valley Sub-Regional Planning Scheme*, approved in 1951, to protect the coal areas and provide for land use control in areas adjoining the coal resource.

During the 1970's rural residential land uses were encroaching onto the coal resource areas and additional planning measures were introduced. A *Brown Coal Resource Interdepartmental Committee (BCRIC)* was established in 1976 to define the limits of economically winnable brown coal. In April 1978, the Government introduced 6 separate Interim Development Orders (IDO's) to control land use development in areas identified as containing 'economically winnable brown coal'. Those IDO's were revoked in 1980 and the planning controls were transferred into the relevant municipal planning schemes.

The need for a further review of existing resource boundaries became evident following receipt of new information. This included the *Victorian Brown Coal Resource Development Study*, December 1982, and further exploration in the region carried out by the former State Electricity Commission of Victoria, the (then) Department of Minerals and Energy and a number of mineral exploration companies. The Interdepartmental Committee on Coal Resource Boundaries contributed the following:

- Fourteen townships and several significant locations (eg. the township of Gormandale and the transport corridor between Traralgon and Rosedale) totally and permanently excluded from coal related activities.
- The substitution of the term 'protected coal' for 'economically winnable coal' as the basis for planning policy.
- The imposition of different development controls on land overlying coalfields which are expected to be the first to be developed (Category A coalfields) compared with land overlying coalfields whose development is expected later (Categories B and C coalfields).
- The identification and protection of areas required to facilitate development on Category A coalfields.
- Provision for strengthened environmental and social planning in the region.
- The definition of coal boundaries and the establishment of buffers to urban areas.

The following objectives were established:

- Minimise the social and environmental impact of development.
- Assure the availability of coal for electricity generation.
- Provide a higher degree of certainty for regional planning purposes.

Ensuring the security of the resource also led to the development of the *Sequential Coalfields Development Strategy*. The Strategy was a process established to achieve the above objectives. It set out the functions of government agencies, incorporated the Government Energy Policy Statement *Victoria Brown Coal* dated 11 July 1984, to align with the Regional Strategy Plan, *Steps Ahead*, and introduced new planning controls. These controls included more detailed definitions of coal and urban buffer boundaries. The boundaries formed *Policy Areas* which were used as an overlay control rather than a replacement to the underlying zoning. The boundaries identified:

- Category A Coalfields - the first stage for coal development .
- Category B Coalfields - the second stage for coal development .
- Category C Coalfields - the third stage of coal development .
- Uncategorised coalfields.

The span of time for development is in decades.

The provision of buffer areas is intended to protect urban communities from possible adverse effects associated with open-cut mining as well as protect use of the land for coal winning and electricity generation industry.

The urban buffer distance is established on the basis of known impacts of earth subsidence, noise, dust, fire hazard, and visual intrusion. Adequate buffer areas have been established.

Buffer areas extend for a distance of 750 ( $\pm 75$ ) metres away from any urban settlement boundary, and they include an additional 250 metre distance from the coal operational area. Therefore, the total separation area between an urban settlement boundary and the crest of any future open cut development should not be less than 1 kilometre in width.

### Key Issues

Important factors for the planning and development of the Gippsland coalfields area are:

- The significance of the coalfields in providing, directly or indirectly, a major proportion of energy supplies to the State of Victoria. More specifically:
  - 80-90% of present electrical energy in Victoria is generated using coal from deposits in the coalfields area. This use of the coal resource could increase.
  - Approximately one million tonnes of solid fuel, as coal briquettes, is supplied annually to domestic, industrial, power station, and export markets.
  - Coal deposits offer opportunities for the production of chars, carbons, chemical feedstock, soil conditioners, synthetic fuels, and a range of dried coal fuel in addition to briquettes.
  - The coal deposits are particularly suitable for open cut operations because they occur in thick seams close to the surface.
- The variations in coal characteristics and coal quality within and between the coalfields.
- The requirement for water in the region for domestic, industrial, commercial, agricultural, and natural systems purposes. Specifically, in connection with the exploitation of coal and timber resources, water is required for industrial processing, cooling, processing, dust control, and fire prevention and suppression.
- The direct and indirect existing and potential conflicts between the use or development of land for coal extraction and power generation, agriculture (particularly dairy farming), timber production, recreational, residential, major industrial, and main transport purposes.

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### Wellington Coal Fields

#### Objective 1

To recognise and appropriately protect that part of the Gippsland Coalfields located in the Wellington Shire.

#### Strategies

- Encourage existing uses, on land identified as required for coal exploitation, to continue until such time as the land is required for brown coal winning or processing. Other uses may be considered on a temporary basis if it can be demonstrated that they would not adversely affect future development of the coal resource.
- Discourage the following in all designated coal recovery areas: the use or development of land for urban or non coal related industrial purposes; major overburden dumps; and other uses which could prejudice the winning or processing of the underlying coal resource.
- Protect the brown coal resource from the encroachment of incompatible use, development or subdivision.
- Monitor data on the use of groundwater in terms of:
  - Depletion of aquifers.
  - Protection of groundwater recharge zones (for both quality and volume of recharge water).

- Waterlogging and subsidence of soils through groundwater use.

### **Objective 2**

To facilitate orderly coal development so that the resource is utilised in a way which is integrated with State and local strategic planning.

#### **Strategies**

- Ensure that Gippsland coal resources are developed in accordance with a broad strategy which provides for the conservation and use of the coal and also for other important uses and planning considerations.
- Ensure that protection against fire is a major consideration in planning and managing land on which fire could affect open cuts and in all aspects of the protection, utilisation and storage of coal and its products.
- Consider the provision of local structure plans as a guide to:
  - Avoid compromising future economic access to brown coal reserves.
  - Protect opportunities for existing and new plantation forestry.
  - Avoid development pressures on productive agricultural land.
  - Protect key environmental assets from encroachment by development.

### **Objective 3**

To ensure that the use or development of land overlying the coal resources has regard to the need to conserve and utilise the coal resource in the context of overall resources, having regard to social, environmental, physical and economic considerations in order to ensure a high quality of life for residents.

#### **Strategies**

- Prior to the exclusive use of brown coal development on land acquired for that purpose, the land should be managed so as to maximise its productive land use capability, maintain and enhance the quality of the landscape and prevent or minimise the occurrence of fire hazard or soil erosion.
- Ensure that urban growth is encouraged to take place at suitable locations away from coal designated as readily recoverable so that it does not compromise development of the coal resource.

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### **Urban Coal Buffer**

#### **Objective 1**

To provide a clear understanding within the regional community of the implications of designating land for future coal resource development or for buffer areas on the future use of land.

#### **Strategy**

- Protect and improve visual amenity for urban communities by initiating landscaping works and tree planting. However, particular care must be taken to ensure that fire hazard is minimised.

#### **Objective 2**

To ensure that any use or development in a buffer area is undertaken to minimise potential impacts associated with open cut mining, such as earth subsidence, noise, dust, fire hazard, and visual intrusion. In most cases, maximising the distance between a proposed development site and open cut mining will be considered appropriate.

#### **Strategies**

- Ensure that any use or development in a buffer area is undertaken in a manner which minimises potential impacts from sources including earth subsidence, noise, dust, fire hazard, and visual intrusion associated with open cut mining. In

most cases, maximising the distance between a proposed development site and open cut mining should be considered as appropriate.

- Ensure that the management, use or development of land in buffer areas minimises the potential fire risk to open cut mining.
- Encourage the following general uses within buffer areas:
- Extensive animal husbandry.
- Leisure and recreation (public or private).
- Encourage uses which are compatible with the buffer concept including:
  - Service industry which does not pose a fire hazard.
  - Transport facilities.
  - Water and aqueous effluent pipe-lines.
  - Power transmission lines.

**Objective 3**

To minimise the number of residents living permanently in buffer areas.

**Strategies**

- Discourage the expansion of urban development into urban buffer areas.



### **Using zones, overlays, policy and the exercise of discretion**

- Applying appropriate zones and overlays
- Applying the *Special Water Supply Catchment Areas* policy at Clause 22.01
- Applying the *Rural* policy at Clause 22.02
- Applying the *Car Parking* policy at Clause 22.04
- Applying the *Airfields and Environs* policy at Clause 22.05
- Applying the *Coal Resources* policy at Clause 22.06
- Applying the *Coal Buffers* policy at Clause 22.07
- Implement any relevant coastal action plan
- Apply the State Resource Overlay (SRO1) to the Gippsland brown coalfields in the Wellington Shire.
- Apply the Environmental Significant Overlay (ESO1) to land within the coastal and Gippsland Lakes environs.
- Apply the Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO3) to land within urban and construction buffer areas.
- Use the Coal resources local policy to determine the appropriateness of applications on land over coalfields.
- Use the Coal buffers local policy to determine the appropriateness of applications on land within urban and construction buffer areas.

### **Undertaking further strategic work**

- Develop a Local Conservation Strategy to provide a strategic approach to conserving the Shire's environmental assets.
- Develop a policy to promote water sensitive urban design in the Shire in relation to urban run-off.

### **Other actions**

- Implement the Municipal Domestic Wastewater Management Plan.
- Council/EPA to identify further candidate sites for the Environmental Audit Overlay.
- Use Integrated Catchment Management Plans, Salinity Action Plans, and Whole Farm Plans to promote responsible resource management in rural areas.