

Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan: Minority Report

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2018

**Revised April
2019**

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GREEN WEDGE RESIDENTS
ON THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PANEL**



Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan: Minority Report 2018 (revised April 2019)

Recommendations from Green Wedge Residents on the Community Engagement Panel

Prepared for the Shire of Nillumbik by:

Narelle Campbell

Janet Holmes

Colin Hall

Peter Griffiths

Sonia Saltas

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people as the traditional owners of the land now known as the Shire of Nillumbik. We respect and value the history and culture of the Wurundjeri people as essential to the shire.



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1. VISION

Our vision is of a safe, peaceful, prosperous countryside, where landowners and land managers are supported to manage an economically, ecologically and socially sustainable and healthy environment for people to live in and visit.

1.1 Rationale

The Local Government Act 1989 defines the roles and responsibilities of local government in areas of public peace, sustainability, economic development, and quality of life.¹

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission report requires all levels of government and society to promote and support the primacy of human life, and this is the first priority in the management of populated areas.²

The Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan needs to support the social, economic and environmental dimensions of the Green Wedge; this is fundamental to sustainability.³

Key values include:

1. **Leadership:** Lead by example.
2. **Collaboration:** Committed teams - one vision.
3. **Fairness:** Equitable and practicable solutions.
4. **Engagement:** Work closely with our community and stakeholders.
5. **Innovation:** Identify opportunity, nurture ideas and act.
6. **Excellence:** Positive attitude, strive for success.
7. **Communication:** Consistent, concise and timely.
8. **Respect:** Respect each other and our stakeholders.⁴

References

1. Local Government Act 1989
2. 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission
3. Planning Practice note 31 Green Wedge Management Plan
4. Local Gov NSW Guiding Principles for Local Government

2. OBJECTIVES

- 1. Bushfire risk to be mitigated from extreme to moderate/medium.**
- 2. Community health and wellbeing outcomes are known and are comparable with other Green Wedges areas.**
- 3. Land owner and manager roles and efforts are acknowledged and valued.**
- 4. Economic Operation and land holding asset performance is comparable with other Green Wedge areas and broader metropolitan Melbourne.**
- 5. Areas of high value biodiversity are identified , protected and conserved.**
- 6. The rural ambience of the Nillumbik Green Wedge be protected.**

2.1 Rationale

Bushfire is the greatest risk to the safety of property, human life and biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.^{1,2} Fire can also affect the quality and quantity of water in catchments and have significant impacts on stream flows. Health, including mental health, outcomes for residents of the Nillumbik Green Wedge compare poorly to the rest of Nillumbik and in some areas compare poorly to the Victorian average.³

Council's lack of appreciation for the role of land owners and land managers in managing the Nillumbik Green Wedge has led to an adversarial relationship between them. This has compromised the safety and wellbeing of the Green Wedge and its residents.⁴

High value biodiversity areas cannot be properly conserved unless they have been reliably identified.

References

1. Inquiry into Fire Season Preparedness.
2. Climate Change and the Victoria Bushfire Threat: Update 2017.
3. Nillumbik Health and Wellbeing Profile 2016.
4. Report of the investigation into the abandonment of Nillumbik Planning Scheme amendment C101.

3. PRINCIPLES

The Green Wedge Management Plan considers these guiding principles in order of priority -

1. Keeping people, property and resources safe is the first priority of government.
2. Wellbeing of landowners and managers is vital for the Nillumbik Green Wedge to be sustainable.
3. Connectedness between landowners and land managers of the Nillumbik Green Wedge, council and the broader community is crucial to effective management of the Green Wedge.¹
4. The social, economic and environmental aspects of the Nillumbik Green Wedge are mutually supporting.
5. Council leadership facilitates implementation of the plan.
6. It is important to continue to learn from local indigenous people about caring for each other and country.
7. Coordination of risk mitigation activities cross agencies and property boundaries is to be encouraged.
8. Conservation of high-value biodiversity is a priority on public and private lands across the Green Wedge.
9. Respect and acknowledgement that the Green Wedge is a home for some, and a visiting place for many others.
10. The co-dependence across Nillumbik urban and rural communities is based on mutually acknowledged benefit.
11. Council systems should be streamlined and cost effective.²
12. Regulation is acknowledged to be an imperfect method of influencing behaviour.
13. Regulation should be kept to a minimum and only introduced when essential for the safety of the Nillumbik Green Wedge residents, assets and high value biodiversity resources.
14. Regulations should be clear and comprehensible.
15. Regulations should be enforceable.
16. The cost of permits should be kept to a minimum.
17. Decisions will be made using an objective evidence-based approach recognising that the community's goals are best served when scientific evidence is used rigorously and comprehensively to inform decisions.³

References

1. Local Govt NSW Guiding Principles Objective 3.
2. Local Govt NSW Guiding Principles Objective 6.
3. Banks, Gary. Evidence-Based Policy Making: What is It? How Do We Get It? (May 29, 2009). ANU Public Lecture Series, Productivity Commission, Canberra, February 4, 2009. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1616460>



RECOMMENDATIONS

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Governance

4.1.1 Rigorous scientific evidence to support plan priorities

Recommendations

1. Where this report provides no direction on an issue council believes should be prioritised in the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan, council should refer to the Objectives and Principles sections of this report. These should be used to guide the assessment of established, credible, current, independent, relevant evidence to inform and address the issue.

Rationale

There has been a significant change in government policy since the previous plan was prepared. A key election platform supporting this change was concern about the gaps, flaws and failures of the previous Green Wedge Management Plan. Some of the most significant of these included safety, social, and economic issues, and the lack of scientific evidence supporting recommendations regarding environmental issues.

The previous plan was handicapped by the inability to report meaningfully against its objectives because they were neither specific nor measurable. They were not supported by the people who would be responsible for implementing them. Some recommendations of the previous plan have been found to be unlawful, were politically unpalatable and/or unfunded.^{1,2,3}

The previous Green Wedge management plan was not developed in accordance with IAP2. It did not consider the needs and priorities of key stakeholders impacted by it, and who would be responsible for implementing it.¹

The environmental conservation sections of the previous Green Wedge management plan were underpinned by environmental information that is now 25 years old.⁴ There is a dearth of credible, current, independent, or relevant evidence of the current state of biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge to support the previous plan.

References

1. IAP2 - International association for public participation Australasia Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement
2. VCAT ruling abandons planning amendment C101 (www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au)
3. State Planning Minister dumps unpopular law (www.medianet.com.au/releases/ 126266/)
4. NEROC Report 1997

4.1.2 Regulation, enforceability and cost

Recommendations

1. Bureaucracy be reduced as far as possible.
2. Eliminate the cost of permitting linked to essential services and safety (eg. water tanks).
3. Eliminate the cost of permitting to replace like for like.
4. No requirement of permit reports when council intends to site validate (eliminate duplication).
5. Permit applications only be required by council when they are necessary to ensure adherence to the building code.
6. The offset scheme removes financial penalties, and limits permit conditions to the no-net loss principle.
7. Discontinue regulation that imposes penalty payments for replacement of vegetation with no market based mathematical formula.²

Rationale

Permits for routine activities associated with landholding management and maintenance in the Green Wedge are complex, time consuming, and expensive.

Expensive permit requirements that create uncertainty and result in months of follow up and duplication by council promotes non-compliance and contempt for the law.¹ Regulation that imposes penalty payments for replacement of vegetation with no market based mathematical formula promotes corruption and contempt for the process.

There is no evidence that bureaucracy improves land management conditions and practices in rural areas. There is no evidence the Nillumbik Green Wedge would benefit from additional bureaucratic oversight and we recommend council advocates government to direct resources to areas where evidence supported benefits can be achieved.^{2,3}

References

1. Reducing the Risk of Policy Failure OEC.
2. Department of Environment Land Water and Planning.
3. Banks, Gary, Evidence-Based Policy Making: What is It? How Do We Get It? (May 29, 2009). ANU Public Lecture Series, Productivity Commission, Canberra, February 4, 2009. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1616460>

4.1.3 Support owners and managers of Nillumbik Green Wedge land

Recommendations

1. Improve communications between council and Nillumbik Green Wedge land owners and managers.
2. Ensure Nillumbik Green Wedge grant opportunities are available and accessible to all Nillumbik Green Wedge land owners.
3. Encourage community input to Nillumbik Green Wedge issues in the form of personal effect statements.

Rationale

Historically the relationship between council and Nillumbik Green Wedge land owners and land managers has not respected the rights and responsibilities of council or landowners and land managers. This is not conducive to the health, wellbeing, safety and sustainability of the Nillumbik Green Wedge, Green Wedge communities or the council.

There has historically been a low uptake of Nillumbik Green Wedge grant opportunities due to:

1. Dysfunctional council and land owner and manager relationships;
2. Barriers to access to grant opportunities; and
3. Ineffective communication strategies supporting grant opportunities.

Nillumbik Green Wedge community consultations have resulted in responses that aim to impose minority ideological and political views on Green Wedge communities. The Community Panel is another example of this. Council may receive more meaningful and useful input and feedback to guide and inform decision making and encourage more respectful community relations if consultation were to seek input in the form of a personal impact statement.

Large Public Nillumbik Green Wedge landholdings are held by Melbourne Water, Council, Vic Parks, Vic Roads and others. The community is best served where all landholding managers work together to manage public and private landholdings.

References

1. Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan Background Report 2018.
2. [Investigation into the abandonment of C81 and C101.](#)

4.1.4 Strengthening governance of the Green Wedge Management Plan

Recommendations

1. Council report progress on implementing the Green Wedge management plan to the community every two years.
2. Engage the Nillumbik Green Wedge community in the implementation of the plan by establishing a Nillumbik Green Wedge Advisory Committee comprised of landowners and managers of the Green Wedge to assist council in prioritising and implementing recommendations.¹

Rationale

The previous Green Wedge management plan suffered a void of governance. Those responsible for implementing the plan were disengaged, and those responsible for tracking and monitoring the implementation of the plan did not.²

The Environment and Sustainability Advisory Committee is not an appropriate body to oversee the GWMP as the scope of the plan is beyond the scope of the committee.

Actively engaging the Nillumbik Green Wedge communities in owning and implementing the plan is likely to lead to improved and supported implementation.¹

References

1. Bryson JM, Quick KS, Slotterback CS, Crosby BC. Designing Public Participation Processes. *Public Administration Review*. 2013;73(1):23-34. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02678.x.
2. Governance of the previous Green Wedge Management Plan, personal communication.

4.2 Land Use and Regulation

4.2.1 Addressing Risk in Zones and Schedules

Recommendations

1. Restructure zones and schedules so that zones imposed over areas are consistent with the settlement patterns of landholdings within them to rectify the housing security and right of tenure risks in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
2. Investigate and review the current planning zones and schedules to ascertain whether the purposes of the Nillumbik Green Wedge are adequately supported by the current regimen of zoning and schedules, and whether areas and residents of the Nillumbik Green Wedge would be better served by Rural Activity Zone, Rural Living Zone, Rural Conservation Zone, Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge Zone A, Farming Zone, or other zones with accompanying schedules that recognise and accommodate the diversity of activities and land sizes across the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
3. Recognising that low density hobby farming is one of the primary uses and purposes of the Green Wedge, advocate for the as-of-right grazing of livestock on both Green Wedge and Rural Conservation zones and consider the removal of animal exclusions and limitations in current zones and schedules.

Rationale

The purposes of the Victorian government in creating the Nillumbik Green Wedge were mixed and include:

1. Infrastructure supporting metropolitan Melbourne
2. Agriculture
3. Public parkland
4. Rural living
5. Rural hobby farming and rural lifestyle
6. Equestrian, motor sport, cycling, yachting and recreation
7. Conservation of high value biodiversity resources

The ability of the existing zoning and scheduling regimen to support these purposes is not evident. Over 79% of properties in the Green Wedge are smaller than the zone imposed on them. An increase in bushfire risk, climate change, a change in VCAT processes, and an increase in the number of objections to permit applications in the Green Wedge, places housing security and right of tenure at risk for most residents; the risk is now high to extreme. This risk can be reduced to low to medium by amending the schedules in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme so that the zones and schedules align with the reality of settlement patterns and land holdings on the ground.^{1,2,3}

Council may find that these purposes and the amenity of residents would be better served by the application of different zones and schedules, taking care to ensure the zoning imposed is consistent with settlement patterns.^{1,2,3,4,5}

Existing restrictions on animal numbers and types in the zoning scheme fail to support the diversity of contemporary low-density animal production systems and ignore the contribution that low-density animal production makes both to the local economy and to the rural character of the shire. It also fails to acknowledge the improved health and wellbeing outcomes of companion animal and pet ownership.^{6,7}

References

1. Nillumbik Planning Scheme .
2. Weingartner v Nillumbik SC [2016] VCAT 1359.
3. Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan Review.
4. Proposed Reforms to Planning Controls for Animal Industries in Victoria Nillumbik Council Submission.
5. [2018 Planning reforms for animal industries in Victoria.](#)
6. O’Haire, M. 2010. Companion animals and human health: Benefits, challenges and the road ahead. *Journal of Veterinary Behavior*; 5(5) pp. 226-234.
7. Wood L, Martin K, Christian H, Nathan A, et al. 2015. The Pet Factor - Companion Animals as a Conduit for Getting to Know People, Friendship Formation and Social Support. *PLOS ONE*; 10(4): e0122085.

4.2.2 Council Planning Overlays

Recommendations

1. Review existing vegetation overlays with the view of ensuring that areas where evidence shows high value biodiversity are appropriately protected and conserved, within the footprint of the overlay, and areas where evidence shows they do not contain high value biodiversity are not burdened by irrelevant regulation.
2. Ensure that Green Wedge landowners and managers, regardless of the value of biodiversity on their land, are aware of how to enter into a Trust for Nature Agreement if they should choose to.
3. Council and landowners and managers consider alternatives to the imposition of regulation as an effective land management tool to provide for the sustainability of the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

Rationale

No evidence has been shown that the existing overlays are appropriately applied or have achieved their purpose. The evidence that supported their imposition is now 25 years old and did not consider social and economic implications. This would not be thought adequate in 2018.¹

Regulation is only one way of attempting to preserve areas with high value biodiversity. There are other methods including Trust for Nature Agreements, Land Management Plans and education. Council will better serve Green Wedge stake-holders by considering a range of options.

Regulation is most effective where it is based on evidence, fit for purpose, supported by those who live with the effects of it, and regularly reports outcomes. The Australian government supports regulation as a last resort. It should never be the first response.²

References

1. Nillumbik Planning Scheme
2. Best Practice Regulation: A guide for Ministerial Councils and National Standards Setting Bodies (2014)

4.2.3 Amenity and safety

Recommendations

1. Ensure that Nillumbik Green Wedge community amenity and safety is supported when considering permit applications.
2. Educate residents about the benefits of darkness for some local wildlife and encourage them to turn off unnecessary lighting and use smart lights as far as possible.¹

Rationale

The previous Green Wedge management plan focused on limiting lighting in Nillumbik Green Wedge properties so that the area was dark at night. This failed to consider night time activities across the Green Wedge including organised sport, tennis, football, cricket, horse riding, and ignored home security lighting.²

The Green Wedge is home to people, most of whom work outside the Green Wedge. They are generally home in the evening and so many activities occur in the evening and at night. It is appropriate that organised sports, and resident amenity and safety are accommodated in homes and clubs across the Green Wedge.

There are no street lights in the Green Wedge and the area is, for the most part, dark at night compared to urban areas. Education about the benefits of darkness for local wildlife and the use of smart lighting will benefit Green Wedge wildlife and residents.¹

References

1. Kevin J. Gaston, Marcel E. Visser, Franz Hölker. 2015. The biological impacts of artificial light at night: the research challenge. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B*; 370(1667). DOI:10.1098/rstb.2014.0133.
2. Previous Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan.

4.3 Planning Scheme

4.3.1 Township Plans

Recommendation

Articulate a vision and develop a plan for each Nillumbik Green Wedge Township (Panton Hill, Wattle Glen, Hurstbridge, St Andrews and others) in partnership with local communities, that will help it to:

1. Be a gateway to the Nillumbik Green Wedge for visitors;
2. Embed Environmentally Sensitive Design Principles;
3. Ensure future development is in keeping with the vision and plan for each township; and
4. Increase housing diversity.

Rationale

It is noted that many services and supports are better provided for in non- Green Wedge townships. Most Green Wedge townships and settlements do not have sufficient population density to support sustainable service provision and most townships are within Bushfire Management Overlay areas.^{1,2}

This means that supporting service and support provision is most appropriately provided in Eltham and Diamond Creek, which are not Green Wedge townships.

References

1. Nillumbik Planning Scheme.
2. Department of Environment Land Water and Planning, Planning Advisory Note 46; Bushfire Management Overlay Mapping Methodology and Criteria.

4.3.2 Housing Development

Recommendations

1. Council and the community advocate for maintaining the current Urban Growth Boundary.
2. Council continue to advocate for limiting the use of the Nillumbik Green Wedge for future further major Melbourne Infrastructure.
3. Better provision in the Nillumbik Green Wedge for ageing in place and multi-generational site occupancy in areas covered by Bushfire Management Overlay.
4. Consideration of rural and un-serviced conditions in all permit applications, which provide for water collection so as to protect residents from risk and harm (tanks and dams as of right).
5. Lobby the Victorian government to provide that vacant Green Wedge landholdings are able to be developed for rural residential use or purchased by government for a capital sum negotiated by the land owner and to be maintained by the owner (government) in a pest and weed free bushfire safe state in perpetuity.

Rationale

The Urban Growth Boundary is a Victorian construct and so advocacy is the council role to create change.¹

Infrastructure Victoria's 30 year plan identifies Nillumbik for the Outer Ring Road - council and community should advocate for this to not occur.²

References

1. Plan Melbourne.
2. Infrastructure Victoria 30 Year Plan.

4.4 Social and Cultural Development

4.4.1 Ageing Population and Community Health

Recommendations

Support the ageing population of the Nillumbik Green Wedge by investigating how best to assist elderly Nillumbik Green Wedge residents to:

1. Maintain their properties in bushfire prepared state;
2. Gain access to services and supports to support their health and wellbeing;
3. Implement the Positive Ageing Strategy; and
4. Encourage multi-generational land occupancy so that people can remain on their properties safely for as long as possible.

Rationale

Elderly people, like other people, enjoy a better quality of life at home in familiar environments.^{1,2}

Volunteers have been shown to live longer, happier, more fulfilled lives and are a valuable resource for their communities.^{1,2,3}

Land management practices handed down in person over generations are a valuable part of the cultural landscape of the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

References

1. Nillumbik [Positive Ageing Strategy](#).
2. Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021 Stakeholder Engagement Key Findings Report 2017.
3. Nillumbik Council Background Report.

4.4.2 Mental Health and Wellbeing of Nillumbik Green Wedge Communities

Recommendation

1. In recognition of higher levels of distress and mental illness in Nillumbik Green Wedge communities, council work with local mental health, drug and alcohol service providers to improve pathways to service access.

Rationale

Evidence of Nillumbik Green Wedge communities experiencing high levels of distress and mental illness is well documented. Council is not a direct service provider but does carry responsibility for planning local health and wellbeing and can advocate service providers where outcomes differ from local, and state-wide norms.¹

Improving resilience and wellbeing in communities experiencing disadvantage and poor outcomes is a core role of government.

Healthy resilient communities are better able to provide for the sustainability of the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

References

1. Beyond Bushfires; Community Resilience and Recovery Final Report. University of Melbourne. 2016.

4.4.3 Community facilities in the Nillumbik Green Wedge

Recommendations

1. Work in collaboration with agency and service providers to maximise the utilisation of valuable community assets in the Nillumbik Green Wedge and ensure they are maintained in good condition for public use.
2. Support the creation of a high-quality regional gallery to showcase Nillumbik Green Wedge artists and promote the importance of local cultural heritage, support our sense of place and wellbeing, and create economic prosperity in the local arts communities.

Rationale

Nillumbik Green Wedge public facilities across council, health, not-for-profit, emergency services and education portfolios are many and varied. Most are not fully utilised. Most will, over time, require maintenance and renewal that any single agency will be limited in its ability to provide for.

Council can play an important role in better utilising these facilities for a range of community-based purposes through the strategic use of joint tenancy agreements and other vehicles which can provide for their maintenance and renewal over time.

Outreach services can connect in to appropriately located equipped public service spaces. The benefits of community facilities in rural communities are well supported by evidence. The Marysville community hub is an example of this.

The development of a high-quality regional gallery represents a significant business opportunity for Nillumbik, which has a proud arts history. Display and sales places for local art are limited and not accessible all year round. A regional gallery will help promote the area as a destination, support local tourism and support the local economy. It will also support the Artisan Hills strategy.

References

1. Infrastructure Victoria 30 Year Plan.
2. Nillumbik green wedge management plan Background report.

4.4.4 Volunteers

Recommendations

1. Continue to encourage, support, promote and celebrate volunteering in the Nillumbik Green Wedge, and investigate opportunities for volunteers to assist to manage the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
2. Investigate innovative Green Wedge management volunteering programs, adopt a road for road side reserve fuel management, community road side management, and others that assist to manage the Green Wedge, protect high value biodiversity and provide for the safety of residents, land owners, assets, resources and high value biodiversity assets.

Rationale

Volunteers live longer, are happier and report higher self-reported health and wellbeing outcomes than people who do not volunteer.¹

Partnerships between volunteer communities and landowner, land manager and resident communities, who may also be volunteer communities, promote social cohesion. Volunteers support local leadership and participate in managing the Nillumbik Green Wedge.^{2,3}

Volunteers promote social cohesion and resilience through improving community connectedness.

References

1. World Health Organisation.
2. Volunteering (2016).
3. Nillumbik volunteering program.

4.5 Economic Development

4.5.1 Commerce

Recommendations

1. Seek a clear understanding of the economy of the Nillumbik Green Wedge and its relationship to the rest of the Shire in order to be able to ensure decisions and actions promote the health of the local economy, including protecting the asset value of Green Wedge land.
2. Investigate opportunities to expand agriculture sector commercial opportunities such as farm stays, bed and breakfast facilities, restaurants, wineries, agistment, small scale intensive primary production, fresh produce and other cottage industries.
3. Evaluate the performance of the Artisan Hills Strategy with a view to its improvement and expansion.
4. Identify small scale business types consistent with agricultural, environmental and tourism pursuits, currently excluded by the "in conjunction" test. Council partners with local Chambers of Commerce and green wedge communities to investigate the viability of these business types. Where economic, social and environmental analysis supports the benefits of these business types, council should consider advocating the Victorian government for the "in conjunction" clause to be accordingly modified.
5. Acknowledge the benefit to the economy that hobby farms and horse agistment properties provide and encourage horse riding amenities, promoting the expansion of this existing Green Wedge role.
6. Business types should be consistent with the rural nature of the Green Wedge. Businesses not in keeping with the peaceful bucolic character of the Green Wedge should not be supported.

Rationale

Employment generation and economic development is a key role of government. The Nillumbik Green Wedge economy is not well understood. There are limited opportunities for Green Wedge landholdings to be used to generate income and employment opportunities unless linked specifically to agriculture on site.

Green Wedge areas are intended to provide services for Melbourne including agriculture, visiting by people from urban areas, conservation and other purposes. There are opportunities in the Nillumbik Green Wedge to provide better amenity for visitors, and for the economy to grow modestly.¹ Currently, economic activity includes agriculture, restaurants linked to agriculture, and agistment of livestock.^{2,3}

The Nillumbik Land Capability Study on farming and agriculture in the shire found, as did the Productivity Commission review into Agriculture (2016), that landholdings locally were generally not appropriately sized for sustainable farming enterprises, and that most farms would require off site income sources to be viable.³

The broader economy of the Nillumbik Green Wedge lies with home business, trades, and the underlying asset value of Nillumbik Green Wedge land holdings. Council needs to understand the value and change in value over time to inform decision making and protect the assets of land owners.

The Artisan Hills strategy has been effective, and we look forward to council continuing to promote the area, arts, markets, wineries, restaurants, trails and other places across Nillumbik and the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Ensuring economic evaluation of this strategy occurs is desirable so the benefit can be understood.¹

References

1. Nillumbik Artisan Hills strategy.
2. Nillumbik Council Plan Economic Development Strategy.
3. Nillumbik Land Capability Study by Woodward and Clyde 1998.

4.5.2 Agriculture

Recommendations

1. Further fragmentation of land holdings across the Nillumbik Green Wedge not be encouraged, except to provide for reduction of bushfire risk and the protection of people, assets, resources and high value biodiversity.
2. Encourage hobby farms and rural residential living in the Nillumbik Green Wedge, recognising that they enhance community safety and improve biodiversity outcomes.
3. Support the equine enthusiast community.

Rationale

The majority of privately-owned Nillumbik Green Wedge land consists of lifestyle blocks and hobby farms. These have improved biodiversity in the Green Wedge. This is largely a result of the increased amount of native vegetation found on these properties and the lack of large-scale monoculture farming undertaken on them.¹

Many families move to the Nillumbik Green Wedge to hobby farm, graze, and ride horses, and horse agistment is one of few economic and social activities in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

More than 50% of Nillumbik Green Wedge properties are hobby farms, and these properties underpin the economic value of the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Hobby farms help protect the Nillumbik Green Wedge from inappropriate development for as long as they retain their economic value.

Whilst acknowledging some in the local environmental advocacy community are not supportive of horses, cattle and other hooved animals, there is little evidence of negative biodiversity outcomes in well managed grazing properties or small hobby farms, which lends no support to efforts to severely limit their numbers.^{1,2,3}

References

1. [Biodiversity and ecosystem services in agricultural landscapes—are we asking the right questions?](#)
2. Bott R, Greene E, Koch K, Martinson K, et al. 2013. Production and Environmental Implications of Equine Grazing. *Journal of Equine Veterinary Science*; 33(12) pp. 1031-1043.
3. Smith F, Prober S, House A, McIntyre S. 2013. Maximising retention of native biodiversity in Australian agricultural landscapes - The 10:20:40:30 guidelines. *Agriculture, Ecosystems & Environment*; 166(15) pp. 35-45.

4.5.3 Nillumbik's economic sustainability

Recommendations

1. Lobby the Victorian government for recognition that the rural part of the shire should receive an increased grant funding allowance to support the management of Nillumbik's Green Wedge.
2. Consider amalgamation with one or more adjoining shires in order to enjoy the benefits of a large rate base that Nillumbik, as a shire with a relatively small, mostly urban population and mostly rural land mass, cannot currently claim.

Rationale

The Nillumbik Green Wedge supports metropolitan Melbourne, but Nillumbik Shire gets considerably less funding from the Victorian government than the average Local Government Area in Victoria. Just over 7% of Nillumbik funding comes from grants while the average is about 15%. This is largely because Nillumbik is not recognised by the Victorian government as a rural shire even though the shire supports a substantial rural road network. This represents a funding disparity and council can lobby government to address it.^{1,2}

Nillumbik rate payers are already burdened by the highest rates in Victoria and even so, at a projected income of only \$86.8 million Nillumbik has the lowest income of any shire in its cohort of Interface Councils. By comparison Wyndham City's forecast income of \$491 million is nearly six times greater.³ Without a modicum of economic growth to provide the funding necessary

to support Nillumbik Shire the Nillumbik Green Wedge is at existential risk. Local Government Councils need an income in order to fund the services they are obliged to provide. The limitations on the expansion of Nillumbik's rate base due to the Urban Growth Boundary and the Nillumbik Green Wedge Planning restrictions mean that the shire cannot expect the increases in rates that other shires rely on. The Nillumbik Green Wedge needs a healthy economy to safeguard its future, and this is limited by a small rate base and Nillumbik being considered an urban council. The Green Wedge amenity and rural character is at risk because of the council area the Nillumbik Green Wedge sits within.^{5,6}

References

1. Nillumbik Shire Council Budget 2017-2018.
2. Report on 2018-2018 Council Budgets Analysis by Local Government Victoria.
3. Population and Household Model, Essential Economics, 2008.

4.5.4 Internet Connectivity

Recommendation

1. Continue to lobby government to prioritise Nillumbik internet connectivity to support land owners, emergency services, services and business.

Rationale

Internet connectivity is an economic imperative for business and the education and social networks of families and children. This is particularly important for teenagers, as teens in rural areas can experience social isolation leading to poor health and wellbeing outcomes. In the 21st Century the internet is recognised as an essential service and a basic human right.¹

For Nillumbik Green Wedge communities, bushfire risk, and climate change risk make internet connectivity and the ability to communicate a critical essential service.

References

1. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue, Human Rights Council, Seventeenth session Agenda item 3, United Nations General Assembly, 16 May 2011.

4.6 Tourism

4.6.1 Mixed Use Trails

Recommendations

1. Renew the Recreation Trails Strategy to integrate with the Yarra Ranges Trails Strategy and ensure walking, cycling and horse riding is incorporated in all public destination and circuit trails across the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
2. Continue to advocate with Melbourne Water and Parks Victoria for mixed use access to trails to link to broader trail networks.
3. Consult with Yarra Ranges regarding linking the trails in Nillumbik with those in Yarra Ranges to create a combined network of trails.

Rationale

Many people move to the Nillumbik Green Wedge to walk, cycle and ride horses. The area's trail networks need to meet the needs of local residents. The current Recreation Trails Strategy does not include horses in all of the trails network and is now almost 20 years old.

Recreational mixed-use trails provide opportunities to bring economic benefit to the Nillumbik Green Wedge. The area has a healthy horse agistment property sector and this strategy, and opportunities for equestrian tourism should be explored.

Yarra Ranges' recently reviewed their trail strategy, and this provides opportunities for cross council border trail networks which should be exploited for the benefit of residents of and visitors to both shires.

References

1. Infrastructure Victoria 30 Year Plan.
2. Yarra Ranges Recreation and Open Space strategy (2013-2023).
3. Nillumbik Recreational Trails strategy (2001).

4.7 Environmental Management

4.7.1 Bushfire Preparedness, Mitigation and Management

Recommendations

1. Encourage and support the use of, further research into, and trials of indigenous fire stick burning for ecological management and fuel reduction.
2. Promote and support community information providing an understanding of risk, actions, obligations and opportunities to protect people and property, including fire bunkers where appropriate, community safe areas, fuel reduction on a landscape level, and other options.
3. Council work in partnership with all levels of government and emergency services and residents and land owners to mitigate the risk of bushfire and resultant impacts on residents, assets, resources and biodiversity in the Green Wedge.
4. Council improve the management of the roadside fuel load, advocating for the Shire with VicRoads as necessary.

Rationale

Bushfire presents an extreme risk to lives, assets and resources and biodiversity across the Nillumbik Green Wedge, and that risk is increasing.^{1,2,3}

The 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations for the most part have not been implemented. The area that includes the Nillumbik Green Wedge carries the highest residual fire risk in Victoria, and the risk is increasing annually.^{1,2,3,4,5}

Roadside fuel management remains largely unaddressed.

References

1. Forest Fire Management Victoria - Reducing Victoria's bushfire risk Fuel Management Report (2016-17)
2. Refer Bushfire and Climate Change Recommendations
3. Climate Change and the Victoria Bushfire threat: Update 2017
4. Municipal Fire Prevention Plan
5. 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission Report(s)

4.7.2 Biodiversity

Recommendations

1. Council advocate for Victorian and/or Commonwealth government funding of university research study of biodiversity at Green Wedge sites 25 years post NEROC. Research to be published in peer reviewed journals and repeated using the same research methodology every 10 years.
2. Published research of high value biodiversity sites be used in conjunction with a social, economic and environmental impact assessments in the Nillumbik Green Wedge to inform land management planning, and the Nillumbik Planning Scheme.
3. Council to work with landowners and land managers to consider appropriate actions necessary to protect and conserve sites identified as having high value biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
4. With land owners and land managers, council revises and executes the full funding and implementation of weed and pest management plans across public and private lands in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

Rationale

The current state of biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge is not clear. There is limited current, credible, evidence that high value biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge is at risk, or that native vegetation habitat and biodiversity is in decline.

The NEROC Report is now 25 years old. A core recommendation of this report was that it should be

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updated every 5 years but this has not been done, so it appears not to be a priority of government. DELWP mapping lacks rigour. Council biodiversity reporting likewise lacks rigour.²

Legislation and regulation through the planning provisions are some of many options available to protect and conserve high value biodiversity where it is identified.

There is no appetite for further regulation in rural communities as the purpose, effect and need for the regulation cannot be demonstrated.

More than 25 years of questionable conduct with limited evidence in the name of the biodiversity across Nillumbik leaves a legacy of community distrust that is extremely difficult to repair, but it is necessary to do so for the sustainability of the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Sound published University research into economic, social and environmental conditions in the Nillumbik Green Wedge will in time create and support a scientific peer reviewed evidence base that can be used to inform decisions by landowners, land managers, council and the Victorian government.

References

1. The Nillumbik Planning Scheme
2. NEROC Report

4.7.3 *Invasive animals, weeds and pests*

Recommendation

1. Increase and prioritise the focus on pest animal and weed reduction programs in conjunction with other councils, Nillumbik Green Wedge residents, land owners, interested communities and the Victorian Government.

Rationale

Rabbits, foxes and deer erode biodiversity value, cause soil erosion, contaminate water supplies, cause loss of vegetation, threaten safety and negatively impact agriculture.^{1,2,3}

Weed, pest and feral animal management must remain a priority for council, other councils, Nillumbik Green Wedge landowners, land managers, interested communities and the Victorian government.

References

1. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
2. Nillumbik council weed and pest management plan
3. Nillumbik Green Wedge management plan Background report

4.7.4 *Road Management*

Recommendations

1. Improve the condition and safety of public roads in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
2. Prioritise roadside fuel reduction rural roads to reduce bushfire risk.
3. Monitor and report on the implementation of the Road Management Plan.
4. Review the current road sealing program and ensure the sealing of roads is prioritised to reduce run-off from dirt roads to minimise silt, debris and pollution in water courses.
5. Advocate for a roundabout to be constructed by Vic Roads on the intersection of the Kangaroo Ground-St Andrews Road and the Kangaroo Ground-Wattle Glen Road.
6. Council consult with the residents on their attitudes and preferences regarding unsealed roads.

Rationale

The previous plan, and some council written material, suggests rural residents prefer unsealed roads, but there is no evidence to support this assertion.¹

VicRoads efforts to improve road safety are often misguided. Council needs to vigorously advocate

for local road safety issues on behalf of residents (and local wild life).

Community attitudes and preferences are often not appropriately represented. Much council literature is confused as to community support for and opposition to unsealed roads. Council should ensure evidence informs written material. Residents of unsealed roads should be consulted, and findings published.

References

1. Nillumbik road management plan
2. Nillumbik Green Wedge management plan Background Report

4.7.5 *Climate change*

Recommendation

1. Council investigate the impact of climate change on the Nillumbik Green Wedge communities, assets, resources and biodiversity.
2. Council investigate the best ways to provide water security for residents in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
3. Council work with agencies, land owners and land managers to prioritize mitigating the risk of bushfire from severe to moderate.

Rationale

Bushfire risk is an extreme risk in the Nillumbik Green Wedge and this risk is exacerbated by climate change. The risk to lives, assets, resources and biodiversity is extreme. Council should ensure all agencies, land owners and residents act to mitigate this risk as a priority.^{1,2,3,4}

The previous Green Wedge management plan, and most council planning, considered the role of the Nillumbik Green Wedge to be to protect metropolitan Melbourne from the effects of climate change and to protect local biodiversity. Thus, it advocated increasing planting, filling in dams, and returning water flow to streams, all of which significantly increase the risk and severity of the threat of bushfire.

There is no evidence the Nillumbik Green Wedge is able to protect metropolitan Melbourne, or Nillumbik, from the effects of climate change, and this planning methodology is critically flawed. The evidence supports recommendations from the previous plan can be expected to exacerbate the risk of likely harm.

Evidence

1. Adaptation in the North and Integrated Regional Vulnerability Assessment Volume 1, Northern Alliance for Greenhouse Action 2015
2. Nillumbik Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013 - 2017
3. Nillumbik Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2014 - 2017
4. Nillumbik Climate Change Action Plan 2010 - 2015

4.7.6 *Renewable energy*

Recommendation

1. Investigate opportunities to support community based, distributed, clean energy solutions.
2. Council investigate the development of an Energy Strategy and Plan.

Rationale

It is understood council is exploring solar opportunities on decommissioned tip sites. It is likely that this is not the most economically feasible solar production way of funding council power. Locally made and locally used power, community production, and re-using sites that have limited use opportunities for appropriate purposes, are all worthwhile considerations.

References

1. Clean Energy Nillumbik
2. Nillumbik environment and sustainability Advisory Committee

