

# Green Wedge Management Plan Community Panel

Recommendations  
17 November 2018

# Preamble

This Panel has come together to consider the question, "What is the best way to manage Nillumbik's Green Wedge now and into the future?"

After considering the evidence and expert opinion presented to us, the recommendations made cover issues that we have identified as being critical, whether they are included in the existing Green Wedge Management Plan or not.

The panel acknowledges the significant amount of work and expertise that has gone into preparing the existing plan. We strongly believe that it should serve as a base from which to prepare an updated plan, and any actions that are yet to be completed should be carried over, unless specifically contradicted by our recommendations.

The panel acknowledges that while this is a majority view, not all of its members agree on all points. Minority reports have been prepared and should be given due consideration.

# Vision

## **Our vision for the Green Wedge in 2030**

Management of the Nillumbik Green Wedge will lead the way in supporting a vibrant, resilient, connected and diverse community, living with the landscape to enhance the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the Shire.

# Principles

The Panel reviewed the current principles guiding the Green Wedge Management Plan. All remain relevant, but the panel wish to emphasise the following:

Principle 1 - collaboration: the commitment to collaboration between Council, community and stakeholders remains paramount. The voice of both rural and urban residents should be recognised.

Principle 2 - sustainability: a continued pursuit of sustainability is a priority for a Green Wedge community.

Principle 3 - leadership: Council has a responsibility to assume leadership; this should be demonstrated through all its actions around Green Wedge Management Plan review and implementation.

Principle 4 - conserve & enhance: the Council together with the community must recognise our stewardship responsibility to protecting our irreplaceable natural landscape.

Principle 5 - connectedness: both urban and rural areas of our Shire have a role to play in supporting the Green Wedge.

Principle 6 - embrace change: the Green Wedge Management Plan must acknowledge ongoing policy changes and the constantly evolving context provided by climate change, a growing Melbourne, and pressure on our precious Green Wedge resources and natural assets.

Principle 7 - social equity: the Green Wedge Management Plan must balance diverse social needs, including our social mix, differing personal needs and variable access to services.

Principle 8 - celebrate local identity: local diversity of communities within the Green Wedge must be embraced.

Principle 9 - precautionary principle: this remains fundamental to Green Wedge management.

Principle 10 - appreciation and enjoyment: The Green Wedge shall always be a special place for Nillumbik residents and the wider community.

The Green Wedge Management Panel identified several other principles that the plan must address:

1. Focus on the future: there is a danger that short-term pragmatics compromise our stewardship responsibilities. Council and stakeholders must assume responsibility for a focus on the long term, because of the precautionary principle and the need to respect future generations.
2. Indigenous voice: we have much to learn from our First Peoples, particularly about caring for country.
3. Whole of Shire approach: the Green Wedge is a whole of shire responsibility; both urban and rural areas are co-dependent and should have a voice about the Green Wedge future.

4. Relationship to Metropolitan Melbourne: Nillumbik's role as the Green Wedge shire has increased significance, as Melbourne expands within the urban growth boundaries. Nillumbik's role in protecting biodiversity and natural landscape must be supported.

# OVERARCHING THEME

**Topic Name: Bushfire Preparedness, Mitigation and Management**

## **Recommendation**

1. Encourage and support the use of, and further research into the impacts of, indigenous cool burning practices for ecological management and fuel reduction.
2. Promote and support community education that provides a clear understanding of risks, action, obligations and opportunities to protect people and property. This includes consideration of fire bunkers where appropriate, community safe areas, etc.
3. Council collaborate with all levels of government and residents to mitigate the risk of bushfire and resultant impacts on residents, assets and resources in the green wedge.
4. Ensure the Municipal Fire Prevention Plan is up to date, appropriate and compliant with Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations.

## **Rationale**

- For community safety in the event of wildfire
- For the purpose of biodiversity conservation
- To ensure the two above points are not in conflict

# GOVERNANCE THEME

**Topic Name: Strengthened Governance for the Green Wedge Management Plan**

## **Recommendation**

Governance of the GWMP should be strengthened through:

1. Commit to establish a GWMP advisory committee. Subsuming these responsibilities within Environment and Sustainability Committee has led to a reduced focus on monitoring GWMP implementation.
2. Publish an annual budget statement relating to the GWMP about resource allocation and actual expenditure in each financial year, and reasons for variation. This should be accompanied by an annual statement of performance against GWMP performance indicators.

## **Rationale**

- The current GWMP acknowledges the importance of "...strong, active and committed governance, in particular a commitment to proactive leadership in partnership with the community...".
- A stronger demonstration of commitment to implement the plan is required, compared to what has occurred under the current plan so far . This lack of commitment was demonstrated by the need to retrospectively prepare a report on implementation actions, only after a specific request for information by the Community Panel.
- Progress on implementation would be supported by annual assessments against key performance indicators for GWMP implementation

**Topic Name: Lobby state government for Green Wedge funding**

**Recommendation**

Lobby the State Government to be recognised as a semi-rural Shire and for increased funding to support the management of the Green Wedge.

**Rationale**

- GW's are the 'lungs' of Melbourne
- GW's provide a number of services to the whole of Melbourne
- GW's differ from urban environments and need different funding arrangements



# ENVIRONMENT THEME

**Topic Name: Biodiversity**

## **Recommendation**

- A. Develop a broad-scale land management plan to undertake regular review of biodiversity values to protect and enhance remnant vegetation, water resources, fauna and flora, and habitat corridors, and to guide landholders on biodiversity management practices.
- B. Review the placement of the Environmental Significance Overlays on private land, and appropriately fill schedules to ensure all areas of significant biodiversity are protected. These reviews should be conducted by appropriately qualified independent contractors.
- C. Review Nillumbik Biodiversity Strategy to bring into line with recently revised state environment policy.

## **Rationale**

- Arrest the loss of native vegetation (habitat and biodiversity) on public and private land
- Identify actual and potential wildlife corridors and valuable habitat and ensure that these areas are protected
- Ensure that biodiversity data and information is current and credible.

**Topic Name: Feral Animals and Pest Species****Recommendation**

Increase and prioritise the focus on feral animal and pest species reduction programs, and measure their effectiveness, in conjunction with other councils and State Government.

**Rationale**

- Increased community concerns about the impact of rabbits, foxes and deer, in terms of public safety, soil erosion, water contamination, vegetation loss and agriculture.
- Ensure management of feral animals and pest species remains a priority in the Green Wedge.
- Minimize impact of feral animals and pest species, including both fauna and flora, on areas of biodiversity.
- Minimize the impact of non-indigenous plant species.

**Topic Name: Conserving the Landscape**

**Recommendation**

- Conserve and enhance bush and rural landscapes to maintain the natural beauty of the green wedge
- Complete an assessment of the Green Wedge Landscape Character and implement planning controls and other recommendations arising from this study

**Rationale**

- Green wedge landscape is a highly valued natural resource for all people to enjoy
- Maintain natural beauty of the area in perpetuity.

**Topic Name: Responding to the challenge of climate change**

**Recommendation**

That Council develop action plans, within the next 3 years, for the mitigation and adaptation to climate change in its many dimensions.

**Rationale**

- That Council incorporate its Climate Change Action Plan in the Green Wedge Management Plan, this could include encouraging the use of water tanks, solar power, recycling initiatives, etc,
- To respond to the challenge of climate change, focus on revegetation practices as one of many dimensions (water, fire, pests, diseases, etc.)
- As part the adaptation response, encouraging and creating a culture of a community awareness of the impacts, such as checking on vulnerable people in the community during high temperature days.

**Topic Name: Water Planning**

**Recommendation**

Increase priority from medium to high of existing GWMP actions (EN5.1, EN 5.2, EN 5.3, EN 5.4) to improve water conservation (supply, use, recycling).

Better protect stream flows in the Green Wedge by ensuring the construction of new dams on private property takes into account water conservation and sustainability.

**Rationale**

- Climate change and worsening droughts.
- GWMP Background Report, Page 74-76
- Stream flows are steadily declining.

Evidence for this recommendation - GWMP Background Report p 74-76

**Topic Name: Light pollution**

**Recommendation**

Manage light pollution in the green wedge so that visibility of the night sky is enhanced and to minimise adverse effects on nocturnal native animals.

**Rationale**

- Sports grounds, private tennis courts and security lights can produce excess light

**Topic Name: Regulation regarding grazing****Recommendation**

Hoofed grazing domestic animals to be restricted to grazing/agricultural private land-holdings appropriate for livestock or properties with low biodiversity values. Grazing to be under guidance and education of a vegetation management plan, which will be *enforceable*.

**Rationale**

- Diminishing biodiversity is occurring due to grazing stock being introduced to bushland on private properties.
- Current planning controls are ambiguous regarding ability to restrict or police the introduction of grazing domestic animals to bushland and biodiverse areas. State government to be lobbied to remove ambiguities in the planning scheme that will make enforcement viable.
- If the grazing is for issues such as fuel reduction, this could be achieved through guidance of a Vegetation Management Plan, approved by DELWP

**Topic Name: Renewable energy**

**Recommendation**

Investigate opportunities to support community-based, distributed, clean energy solutions (from Glossop report). Council to consider developing an Energy Plan.

**Rationale**

- Provision of clean and green local energy
- Disaster-resilient
- Lowering pollution and doing our bit for climate change
- Economic benefit



**Topic Name: Improved road management**

**Recommendation**

Undertake seasonal review of road conditions to improve management, and review current Road Sealing Program to ensure high use roads are prioritised.

**Rationale**

- It is recognised that many roads in the Green Wedge should remain unsealed, and these should be maintained in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- Reduce runoff from dirt roads; minimise silt, debris & pollution in water courses
- Improved road safety

# PLANNING THEME

**Topic Name: Township Plans**

## **Recommendation**

Articulate a vision and develop a plan for each Green Wedge township, which will:

1. Be a vibrant and attractive gateway to the Green Wedge for visitors.
2. Provide support and essential services for Green Wedge residents.
3. Ensure that future development is in line with environmentally sensitive design principles.
4. Ensure that future development emphasises each town's unique characteristics and remains within existing township boundaries.
5. Increase the range of housing diversity to service the needs of visitors and specific community requirements, e.g. "aging in place".

## **Rationale**

- Townships are the location for many services to visitors (eg. cafes, restaurants)
- Community must feel connected to the townships they choose to live in, to encourage a thriving and resilient community.
- Design guidelines are important to provide clarity and certainty for developers AND residents while protecting the unique character of each township.

**Topic: Right To Rebuild****Recommendation**

Residents should have a right to rebuild on existing structure footprints subject to overlays and building permit approvals. This recommendation refers to rebuilding on lots that are below the zone minimum subdivision size.

**Rationale**

- Enabling existing homeowners to rebuild on small lots under building permits and overlay regulations

**Topic Name: Planning Scheme, Environmental Overlays and Rural considerations for GW Zones**

**Recommendation**

Give priority to evaluating current overlays (ESO & SLO) and schedules for applicability to actual on ground conditions i.e. flora and fauna, land usage & purposes, historical uses, environmental characteristics, for conformity to Green Wedge Management Plan objectives.

Ensure that all assessment and investigative works are undertaken by independent experts

Where overlays currently apply, actions of landowners that lead to degradation of environmental values should be addressed by Council officers.

**Rationale**

- To facilitate cooperation between landowners and council / government.
- To ensure that overlays are able to fulfil their purposes.

**Topic name: Housing development - setting the limits**

**Recommendation**

- Advocate to maintain current Urban Growth Boundary (i.e. hard boundary)
- Monitor and regularly review existing overlays and zones.
- Require environmental sustainable design and construction techniques in new developments to work in harmony with nature and fit the character of the town in Green Wedge townships (Panton Hill, Hurstbridge and St. Andrews)
- Maintain consistent transparency about policy intent and approach to development outcomes within the Green Wedge

**Rationale**

- Urban Growth Boundary is set by the State for the mutual benefit of citizens of the municipality and the outlying country areas
- Changes to policy and Council strategy needs to be made in collaboration with the community and stakeholders.
- We recognise that Climate Change is a reality to which building and community design must be adaptive
- Population growth in the Shire needs to be encouraged to remain within the designated urban growth areas and less into the townships within the Green Wedge.

**Topic Name: Right Of Tenure**

**Recommendation**

Provide clear guidelines on use rights for ALL lots.

The Shire Council to be responsible for education and updating new and existing landowners.

**Rationale**

- Resolve confusion on use rights on lots sizes

**Topic Name: Small lots**

**Recommendation**

- Maintain current Local Planning Policy which governs building on small lots (e.g. RCZ3 <8ha) with a view to its increased enforcement
- Investigate the feasibility of a buy-back/consolidation scheme in which vacant small lots are purchased by State or Council and resold where they can be amalgamated into adjoining land. Where not possible, encourage neighbouring property owners to do so

**Rationale**

- We endorse the intention of Action PC1.1 of the current Green Wedge Management Plan.
- Discourage further development of small lots in the Green Wedge for reasons of fire security and avoidance of suburbanisation

**Topic Name: Regulation, enforceability and cost**

**Recommendation**

To support a better relationship between landowners and council staff, education and mediation should be preferred to regulation.

Council should be more aware of the cost of these regulations, and should strongly endeavour to lower the cost and therefore the barriers to the planning system.

Council regulations should be as far as possible

1. Practicable
2. Enforceable
3. Fair and reasonable in cost
4. Necessary

**Rationale**

- Poor regulations are ineffective and encourage non-compliance, and alienate landowners.
  
- The financial burden that some residents have faced when dealing with regulations and permit applications process.



**Topic Name: Develop trail network**

**Recommendation**

Complete a purpose built trail network for walking, cycling and horse riding within the next 5 years. Refer to Recreation Trails Strategy (2001) and points 10.1-10.4 & PC 8.3 of current GWMP

**Rationale**

- Completion of Recreation Trails Strategy has been delayed
- Increases tourism & boosts local economy
- Encourages a greater appreciation for our environment
- Improves quality of life for residents
- Safely segregates traffic and recreational uses

## PEOPLE & CULTURE THEME

**Topic Name: Volunteers**

**Recommendation**

Council should continue to encourage, support, promote and celebrate volunteering that assists the Nillumbik Shire to manage the Green Wedge.

**Rationale**

- Partnerships between communities, Landcare groups, volunteer groups and Council are vital for the implementation of the Green Wedge Management Plan
- Promotes opportunities for social cohesion, belonging and ownership of shared, common objectives
- Support community engagement to encourage local leadership
- Promote resilience through community connectedness

**Topic Name: Ageing Population / Community Health**

**Recommendation**

Better support the ageing population of Nillumbik, specifically those living within the Green Wedge. Options should include the need for aged care services within Green Wedge townships, and programs & services to facilitate people ageing in the community where they have lived for many years. Review current progress against action items in the Positive Ageing Strategy and continue to work with community to implement.

Provide support for ageing landholders to maintain the biodiverse qualities of their land.

**Rationale**

- Allow land holders to remain in place as long as possible, ensuring local knowledge is kept in place with respect to land management.
- Helps with community cohesiveness and engagement, more likely that people will get involved with local groups.

**Topic Name: Supporting community facilities in the Green Wedge**

**Recommendation**

Develop and better utilize existing multi-use community spaces in Green Wedge townships and identify possible gaps in terms of services and infrastructure.

**Rationale**

- These should offer multiple services (eg. the model used with the Hurstbridge Community Hub) to facilitate greater community access.
- Improve community cohesion.
- Provide services not locally available to rural residents

**Topic Name: Cultural Development****Recommendation**

Support the creation of a high quality, regional art gallery, supporting the artists of the Nillumbik Green Wedge which in turn support the importance of cultural heritage and sense of place and wellbeing.

**Rationale**

- Support local artists across the whole year, opportunity to display and sell their work.
- Support local tourism, create a destination that people want to visit.
- Promote identify / theme of Nillumbik - "artisan hills".

**Topic Name: Internet Connectivity****Recommendation**

Continue lobbying government/NBN Co. to prioritise the Green Wedge in providing internet connectivity to particularly support landowners, services and local businesses, and providing enhanced mobile phone coverage.

**Rationale**

- Economic imperative for business
- Safety (information for bushfires etc)
- Staying in touch in rural areas
- Community engagement

# ECONOMY THEME

**Topic Name: Rural Business Activities**

**Recommendation**

Support and promote supplementary rural business activities such as farm gate sales, farm stays, and other low environmental and amenity impact enterprise which are consistent with green wedge values.

**Rationale**

- Increase local employment in the green wedge
- Encourage tourism in the green wedge
- Improve the local economy
- Maintain the character of the area

**Topic Name: Right to farm****Recommendation**

Green Wedge landholders should be able to exercise their 'right to farm' on pre-existing cleared agricultural land.

Discourage bush block conversion to agricultural or pastoral use, or any other use that would otherwise degrade/impact vegetation and biodiversity values.

**Rationale**

- The phrase 'right to farm' is associated with having rules that don't prevent people from farming e.g. even if someone next door to you complains about spray drift, noise etc. The Labor policy platform this election includes an intent to create a new planning provision to enshrine a 'right to farm' to maintain Melbourne's Food Bowl (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- Part of Nillumbik's cultural heritage
- Supports the local food movement
- Provides a source of income for landholders
- Creates local job opportunities



**Topic Name: Agriculture**

**Recommendation**

- A. Further fragmentation of agricultural lands to be discouraged, and consolidation of smaller lots in single ownership encouraged - council to facilitate consolidation of titles at zero cost to affected landholders.
- B. Identify opportunities to support community sustainable agriculture (as recommended in previous GWMP Action 7.1, P.48)
- C. Any proposal to change land use should demonstrate that the land is fit for purpose for the new use by preparation of a land management plan

**Rationale**

- A. maintain viability of agricultural land by reducing risk of fragmentation.
- B. Opportunity for community building and sharing local produce, lower carbon footprint, encourages boutique farming/agricultural industry
- C. inappropriate land uses can have adverse impacts on the land, both onsite and offsite.

## **Recognition & Support for Landowners Maintaining Land**

### **Recommendation**

Improve communication between council and landowners in the Green Wedge with respect to their rights & responsibilities for land management, and the support & services available to them. This information should be provided in a clear concise and accessible manner. Develop an online portal providing a user friendly one-stop-shop for everything a landowner need to know about about a property.

### **Rationale**

- Alleviate frustrations with respect to council and their engagement with landowners.
- Assist with eliminating misinformation or ignorance amongst landowners with respect to their rights & responsibilities.
- Reduce sales of land parcels within the Green Wedge where prospective owner's intended use is not suitable

Evidence for this recommendation - low uptake of green wedge land management incentive program opportunities. Refer page 63 GWMP Background Report August 2018.

**Topic Name: Tourism****Recommendation**

We recommend that council refer to the existing management plan, specifically points 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 & 5.2 (economy actions). We also recommend that council aim to implement “destination points” within the Shire to capture ‘through traffic’ where possible. We would also like council to regularly maintain and/or upgrade the existing tourist destinations, such as Watsons Creek Indigenous Trail.

**Rationale**

- We believe the current points in the existing management plan are viable and do not require amendment.
- Promoting the landscape we have on offer and providing tourists a rest point/ destination point is a low cost yet efficient way of promoting tourism within the shire. For example, recognising the significance of landscapes, with respect to urban settlements, creates a certain identity for each and enhance streetscapes.
- We would like to emphasise that council should aim to provide tourists with easy access to the various destinations within the shire that they can visit, for example an online portal or maps (4.1) which pinpoint certain destinations such as St Andrews Market, tourist routes or the Wattle Festival.
- The regular maintenance or upgrade of existing destinations is necessary and important. E.g. providing safe road cycling for tourists.

**Topic Name: Hobby Farms****Recommendation**

To recognise the contribution well managed “hobby farms”\* can make to the beauty and biodiversity of Nillumbik and that they form a significant part of the Green Wedge. Hobby farmers should be required to maintain their land using sustainable land management practices.

**Rationale**

- \*hobby farm; a place where some agricultural activities are undertaken but they are subsidiary to living there. More of a lifestyle than a business. No size limitation defined in the planning scheme (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- 47% of the Green Wedge consists of hobby farms, rural residential & low density residential; 20% of which is agricultural land (GWMP Part 1 - background & context 2.1)

**Topic Name: Public transport and related infrastructure**

**Recommendation**

Improve public transport options within the Green Wedge.

**Rationale**

- Endorse, from the current GWMP, actions 8.1-8.4 (People & Communities)
- Advocate strongly for the introduction of smarter services, such as community buses or mini buses to service a wider area - they are more cost-effective and efficient and have greater flexibility to respond to requests as they arise
- Linking Green Wedge townships to existing railway network
- Reduce car usage
- Make travelling more accessible for those who cannot, or prefer not to use private transport

# Minority Report #1

**Topic Name** *Minority Report 1.*

**Recommendation**

*Please refer to the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan Minority Report 2018 in the attached document.*

**Rationale**

*This report has been prepared by resident hobby farmers of the Nillumbik Green Wedge as part of the Community Advisory Panel process.*

**Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan: Minority Report 2018**

*Recommendations from Green Wedge Residents on the Community Engagement Panel*

Prepared for the Shire of Nillumbik by:

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Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan: Minority Report

*Recommendations from Green Wedge Residents on the Community Engagement Panel*

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**References**

1. IAP2 – International association for public participation Australasia Quality Assurance Standard for

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

2. 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.

**1. PREFACE**

**1.1 Stakeholders**

The Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan Community Panel fails to adequately represent the key stakeholders in the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP); the landowners and land managers. Most panel members do not live in the Green Wedge. They are residents of Nillumbik and may have an emotional attachment to the Green Wedge but are not central to the sustainability of it. This is contrary to the standards of the International Association for Public Engagement 2 (IAP2) and compromises the legitimacy of the community panel process.<sup>1,2</sup>

Many panel members who are landowners and land managers have been made to feel intimidated, belittled and condemned by an aggressive and vocal minority of the panel, most of whom do not reside within the Green Wedge. It is surprising how many members of this panel were instrumental in the creation of the previous GWMP and have a very high level of ownership of it. This has made many discussions more difficult than they should have been. The facilitators unwillingness to manage the emotional invective against Nillumbik Green Wedge land owners, land managers and residents over the duration of the program has been very challenging.

As Nillumbik Green Wedge private landowners and land managers, we manage 79% of Nillumbik's Green Wedge now, and will continue to do so into the future. We have an **interest and a stake** in the sustainability of the Nillumbik Green Wedge. The social, economic and environmental issues involved in management of the Green Wedge matter to us and have a direct impact on our lives.

Unless we and other key stakeholders support the Plan, it will fail to achieve its goals and Council will be perceived to have failed the Nillumbik Green Wedge, its residents, and the community as a whole.<sup>1,2</sup>

### **1.2 Evidence base**

The resources provided to the panel are not adequate to inform consideration of the serious issues involving the social, economic and environmental facets of managing the Green Wedge. Many panel members are unable to participate in panel deliberations in a meaningful way. The process fails to live up to the standards of the IAP2.

Very few speakers were organised ahead of the panel meetings. Unsurprisingly, most highly regarded experts identified were unable to drop everything on 5 days' notice to come and educate the panel. This means the panel heard from a collection of well-intentioned but largely unqualified speakers on some topics, and no speakers at all on others. Consequently, the panel's recommendations are supported largely by individual panel members' personal convictions rather than evidence.

We have read widely outside the panel process to inform our recommendations. Victorian Government policy, guidance notes and legislation, mandate social, economic and environmental planning for all Green Wedge areas. This panel has demonstrated an inability to appropriately respond to these issues.

### **1.3 Conclusion**

The recommendations of this minority report are evidence-based and support a **sustainable** future for the Nillumbik Green Wedge.

#### References

1. IAP2 – International association for public participation Australian Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement
2. 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. 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.

### **2.1 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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

#### **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.<sup>4</sup>

#### 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



### **3. 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 Wedge 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.

#### **3.1 Rationale**

Bushfire is the greatest risk to the safety of property, human life and biodiversity in the Nillumbik Green Wedge.<sup>1,2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

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 Victorian 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.

#### 4. 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.<sup>1</sup>
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.<sup>2</sup>
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.<sup>3</sup>

#### 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>

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Governance**

#### ***5.1.1 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

The environmental conservation sections of the previous Green Wedge management plan were underpinned by environmental information that is now 25 years old.<sup>4</sup> 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](http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au))
3. State Planning Minister dumps unpopular law ([www.medianet.com.au/releases/126266/](http://www.medianet.com.au/releases/126266/))
4. NEROC Report 1997

#### ***5.1.2 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.<sup>2</sup>

### **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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2,3</sup>

### **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>

### **5.1.3 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.

### **5.1.4 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.<sup>1</sup>

#### **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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

#### 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.

## **5.2 Land Use and Regulation**

### **5.2.1 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

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.<sup>6,7</sup>

#### 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.

### **5.2.2 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

#### References

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

### **5.2.3 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.<sup>1</sup>

#### **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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

#### **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.



## **5.3 Planning Scheme**

### **5.3.1 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.<sup>1,2</sup>

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.

### **5.3.2 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

#### References

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

## **5.4 Social and Cultural Development**

### **5.4.1 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.<sup>1,2</sup>

Volunteers have been shown to live longer, happier, more fulfilled lives and are a valuable resource for their communities.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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.

### **5.4.2 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

### **5.4.3 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.

### **5.4.4 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2,3</sup>

Volunteers promote social cohesion and resilience through improving community connectedness.

#### References

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

## **5.5 Economic Development**

### **5.5.1 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.<sup>1</sup> Currently, economic activity includes agriculture, restaurants linked to agriculture, and agistment of livestock.<sup>2,3</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>1</sup>

#### References

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

### **5.5.2 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

#### 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.

### **5.5.3 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.<sup>1,2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>5,6</sup>

#### **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.

### **5.5.4 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 21<sup>st</sup> Century the internet is recognised as an essential service and a basic human right.<sup>1</sup>

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.



## **5.6 Tourism**

### **5.6.1 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)

## **5.7 Environmental Management**

### **5.7.1 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>

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)

### **5.7.2 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 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

### **5.7.3 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.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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

### **5.7.4 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.<sup>1</sup>

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

### **5.7.5 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.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

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

### **5.7.6 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

# Minority Report #2

We have identified that the statistics between the online and in room voting signified 9% (86% online, 77% in-room) representing 1.5 persons. Resulting in the elimination of what had been a valued recommendation.

<b>Topic Name: Green Wedge Management Authority</b>
<b>Recommendation</b> Advocate for the establishment of a body that provides expert advice and support to both state and local government on green wedge issues.
<b>Rationale</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Green Wedges present specific and unique challenges when compared to other areas, in terms of planning, economics, environment, local government etc.</li><li>• State-based planning department/personnel that is primarily dealing with Green Wedge issues e.g. social, economic, zoning, environmental and has coordinating oversight to address the tendency for state and local departments to operate in isolation.</li><li>• Make recommendations for state government and local council to consider</li><li>• The body could be set up like an Advisory body with the aim to bring together multiple areas of governance (planning, environment, local government).</li></ul>