

Draft Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040

Submission from Betty Russell

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Contact Details:

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important document.

This submission focuses on the environment. It explains three issues of concern, then suggests additions and improvements to address them.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

1. The Draft Community Vision fails to reflect the priorities of the Community

This [Draft Vision](#) claims that it “captures the essence of what is most valued about our community and our Shire. ... our community has told us that the following elements are particularly important in Nillumbik as we move towards 2040:” [Message from Council, p. 4.].

Then follows a list of items which are not consistent with findings of the major community engagement program ‘Our People, Our Place Our Future, conducted earlier this year. The report of this major survey has not been uploaded to the Council website, but a ‘Summary Report’ is [here](#), and a ‘Key Findings’ graphic is [here](#). This survey revealed that the top 3 things valued in Nillumbik were

1. Preservation of the Green Wedge
2. Protection of environment and biodiversity
3. Action on Climate Change

The list of items given as our priorities on p 4 of the Draft Vision downgrades action on Climate Change to fourth position and omits biodiversity completely. How could the “Top 3 things valued in Nillumbik” **not** be included in the Draft Community Vision?

They must be!

2. It seems that Council staff have difficulty recognizing the priority placed on ‘biodiversity’ and the value the community places on action on Climate Change

It is not only the Draft Vision which has a problem with biodiversity, but the Council Officers’ Summary Report on the Integrated Community Engagement - which informs the Community Vision (Council Meeting Agenda May 25, 2021). Here also the community’s top three priorities are not reflected, even although this is the same Agenda which attaches the one page “*Our People Our Place Our Future. Key Findings 15 February – 28 March*”, which clearly identifies “the top three things valued in Nillumbik”. However, In the Council Officers’

Summary Report, protection of the environment and the Green Wedge are downgraded to fourth, Climate Change comes fifth and biodiversity is again overlooked.

Unsurprisingly then, important aspirations on biodiversity are missing from the Draft Vision under all the themes.

How can this be? How is it that it is one of Nillumbik's top three priorities, yet council officers' summaries of these priorities omit it altogether? This overlooking raises the question whether council officers have the requisite in-depth knowledge and understanding of 'biodiversity' to envisage how to address this priority or how it is relevant to each of the themes? Are they unsure what can be done about it, so gloss over it or leave it out?

Did the large turn-over of senior staff during the term of the previous council so deplete environmental expertise – especially in the context of a Green Wedge Shire, as distinct from urban expertise – that such environmental issues are re-interpreted into the Officers' understandings and overlookings?

There were three CEOs during that 4 year term. Staff turnover, previously around 5% per annum was high: 2014 – 5%; **2016 - 12.94%; 2017 -10.31%; 2018 – 17.57%; 2019 - 26.01%**; 2020 – 12.70% including 20 involuntary departures. [Source: Annual Financial Report for the year ended 30 June for each of the years quoted]

3. The priorities of the Community Engagement must drive the Vision because this Vision drives our other strategic documents

The problem is already apparent in the fact that the Draft Plan reflects the Draft Vision, which does NOT reflect the priorities of the Community Engagement. It does NOT reflect the top three things valued in Nillumbik.

If the Draft Community Vision 2040 does not reflect the priorities of the Community Engagement, nor will the administration of Council, so then what was the point of the engagement?

SUGGESTIONS

1. An **Introductory section** needs to include:

- The **purpose for which this shire was created**

The Shire of Nillumbik was formed for the purpose of conservation with the Green Wedge as its strategic focus.

- An **overarching Summary Statement** of the Vision

In 2040 Nillumbik is a leader in: community stewardship of the environment, biodiversity reinvigoration, climate change mitigation & preparedness, townships of distinctive character befitting the Green Wedge Shire, community support and connection, a vibrant arts scene, celebration of our cultural heritage, and a thriving economy consistent with the environmental values of the community as expressed in the Community's priorities.

2. A Message from Council

The top three things valued in Nillumbik need to be stated here, because Council's list of what they have heard, omits two of those three priorities. Also most people writing submissions would be unaware of this document or of our top three priorities.

The 1 page Source document, *"Our People Our Place Our Future. Key Findings 15 February – 28 March"* [Attachment to Council Meeting Agenda May 25, 2021] **needs to be included in the *Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040* as an attachment.**

This is because few people are aware of the existence of this document, which:

- is not referenced in the *Draft Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040*
- is not referenced in the Participate Nillumbik submission information
- does not come up with a search on the Council website
- appears to only exist as an attachment to Council Meeting Agenda May 25, 2021]

The Source document should be quoted in the body of the Draft Vision, in the context of what the community has told us on p.4

Suggested wording:

In endorsing this draft document, our community has told us that the following are

The top three things valued in Nillumbik:

- Preservation of the GW
- Protection of environment and biodiversity
- Action on climate change

Source: *"Our People Our Place Our Future. Key Findings 15 February – 28 March"* [Attachment to Council Meeting Agenda May 25, 2021 and to this document]

The following elements are also particularly important in Nillumbik as we move towards 2040:

A second dot point should be added to the listed elements so as to more accurately reflect the community priorities:

"Our indigenous flora and fauna, their habitat and the biodiverse ecological systems which support them, are healthy, interconnected and flourishing."

3. Aspirations should be introduced more positively: "In 2040 the Nillumbik Community ..."; "In 2040, Nillumbik is a place where ..." and the listed aspirations should be stated in such a way that they drive actions to get there, as in the following suggestions, which should be included in the list

- **Our People:**

In 2040 the Nillumbik Community:

- Are knowledgeable, respectful, proud and inclusive of the Wurundjeri-Woiwurrung people, culture and heritage, including their bushfire mitigation techniques
- Share a culture of stewardship of the land and natural environment throughout the whole of the shire, actively caring for it, reversing biodiversity decline, practicing environmentally

sensitive farming and gardening techniques, participating in land regeneration projects and protecting the Green Wedge for future generations

- Actively support Nillumbik's Climate Change mitigation efforts of carbon neutrality and enhanced biodiversity
- Share a culture of waste avoidance and careful recycling

• **Our Place**

In 2040, Nillumbik is a place where:

- Our Green Wedge and its environmental integrity are protected and enhanced to ensure a safe haven for native wildlife, thriving biodiversity and native vegetation communities (from tall canopy trees to grasses, herbs and fungi) and wildlife corridors
- Where native vegetation and natural habitats are more widespread, healthier, and better connected than they were in 2021
- The decline in biodiversity occurring in 2021 has halted, and local populations of rare and threatened flora and fauna are healthy and thriving
- Our Green Wedge has the same extent it had in 2021, and land use planning within our Green Wedge prioritizes and serves the needs of biodiversity conservation and sustainable, environmentally friendly agriculture over all else
- Responsibility for action on biodiversity increase and its use for climate change mitigation by helping to absorb excess carbon is shared throughout the whole shire, in towns, parks, individual gardens, nature strips, farmland, community groups, and Council
- Mitigation of Climate Change is a strong focus, along with adaptation to it and community resilience
- Aboriginal, European and natural history and heritage is valued, respected, protected and showcased
- Planning for development and design of the built environment is protecting, expanding and strengthening Nillumbik's social, natural, historical and artistic values
- Nillumbik is carbon positive, off-grid and has a network of vehicle charging stations

• **Our Council**

- Demonstrates leadership in the reversal of biodiversity decline, demonstrated by Council's high priority on environmental management, reflected in:
 - the Management Structure
 - the level of expertise in environmental biodiversity in council staff
 - clear application of planning laws and enforcement of conditions
 - action on illegal land use (eg clearing, soil dumping)
 - a shared culture of community stewardship of the environment.
- Is carbon-positive, exceeding its Climate Active carbon neutral certification
- Manages traffic effectively by: providing and promoting interconnected active and public transport modes; by careful forward planning; and by lobbying and liaison with other responsible authorities for clever road design
- Consistently fosters equality, diversity, compassion and non-violence

• **Nillumbik community profile**

To be consistent with the community's Top Three Values, this needs to include an environmental profile too, including flora and fauna. The *Nillumbik State of the Environment Report 2014* appears to be the most recent information, eg: "Approximately 30,000 ha of remnant native vegetation still remains within the Shire, with the largest portion of intact vegetation on private land (67%)" and "The Shire of Nillumbik contains **1031 indigenous flora** species, 64 of which are listed as significant species.**350 indigenous fauna** species, 70 of which are listed as significant species.'

- **Nillumbik Now and into the future** (Vision, p.17)

Missing from this section is an environmental perspective.

The table covers 'Population demographics', 'Land area' and 'Domains of liveability'. However, to reflect the priorities identified in the Engagement process, another category of "Environmental data needs to be added.

The section of the table could base some of the "Now" column on information from the *Nillumbik State of the Environment Report 2014*. This could include:

- Mitigation of Carbon emissions
- Biodiversity
- Current prevalence of wildlife through diverse areas of the Shire
- Area of Green Wedge
- Threatened species
- Friends Groups
- Current health of soils, creeks, rivers, billabongs, and ephemeral waterways

Many thanks
Betty Russell