

HAMILTON FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB



PO Box 591, Hamilton, Victoria, 3300
hamiltonfnc@live.com.au



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VEAC SUBMISSION REMNANT VEG INVESTIGATION DISCUSSION PAPER

HFNC is glad to be have the opportunity to respond to this discussion paper. We recognise the need for a strategic approach to be the basis for long term planning. We cannot cover all the issues raised in the paper but will confine ourselve to those areas in which we have some expertise and interest.

Many of our comments have been made in previous submissions to government agencies but still need to be addressed.

RESOURCING

We agree that more resources will be required to adequately protect biodiversity in areas where native vegetation remains. As an example, funds could be redirected away from National Parks visitor programs and towards better monitoring of environmental values.

PREVENTING FURTHER LOSS

We agree that regardless of other initiatives the most important actions will involve minimising further loss of native vegetation either in area or condition. We regard offsetting of loss of high conservation value as a dubious exercise which rarely provides adequate compensation for the loss.

ROADSIDES.

Roadworks

Much of the remnant grasslands of the Western Victorian Volcanic Plains is restricted to roadsides. We have observed significant losses in both area and condition over the last 20 years. Almost every time roadworks take place along a stretch of high consevation value grassland some degradation ensues. Not only is more education of roadmaking management and workers required but regular follow-up to ensure that proper procedures are being followed.

Weeds

Many sites of high conservation value are adjacent to patches of invasive weeds. In our area some of these are *Sparaxis* (Harlequin Flower), *Phalaris*, Tall Wheat Grass, and St John's Wort.

Neither local councils nor DPI regard these as weeds of significance.

More funding is needed for this problem to be adequately addressed.

Local councils could "employ" suitably trained volunteers to deal with these threats.

Many field naturalists and pensioners would be glad to offer their services just for "petrol money".

In this way small patches of emerging weeds could be controlled before they become a major problem.

Fire Control Lines

We recognise the need for prescribed burning on roadsides, indeed we think that this mangement practice has benefitted some high conservation grasslands. However, we have observed many instances of over-zealous establishment of fire control lines prior to burning.

We would recommend that a maximum width of 3 metres as close to the fenceline as practible be adopted and adhered to as a standard for fire control lines. Landowners, CFA officers and municipal officers should be aware of and monitor this standard.

Although it is not part of the present discussion paper we feel strongly that landowners should be encouraged to construct fire control lines on their own properties rather than relying on roadsides and other public lands.

PLAINS GRASSY WOODLAND

This EVC is represented in our area by the Woolpooher State Forest woodland between Woolpooher and Cherrypool bordering the Grampians Gariwerd NP and the Black Range SP.

We feel that such a rare EVC should be better represented in the GGNP. Accordingly we would strongly recommend that a major part of this woodland be incorporated into the National Park.

FUEL REDUCTION BURNING

We accept that some fuel reduction is necessary to protect built infrastructure and human life.

We regard the current policy of a 5% annual area of fuel reduction across the state to be excessive and not in the interests of environmental values. It is vitally important that fire regimes for different EVCs in different parts of the state be treated differently. In our area the “quota” system is resulting in areas being burned too frequently and before adjacent burnt areas have recovered sufficiently for adequate recruitment.

We also question the “landscape scale” of prescribed burn planning. True mosaics can only be achieved by strategic small-scale fires. There is little doubt that more large prescribed burns will result in more breakaways with resulting loss of habitat and threats to infrastructure and human life.

WETLANDS

This is a complex area. The effects of climate change are as yet unknown but is highly possible that wetlands in the north of the state will become drier, possibly permanently. Every effort must be made to maintain those wetlands which exist and, where possible, increase their number and extent.

There is a need for more smaller, seasonal wetlands as well as for larger regional ones. Landowners should be encouraged to re-instate some of the smaller wetlands on their properties by simply blocking drains. This could be done at relatively little cost. Some form of financial incentive should be provided. At a minimum, a reduction in Municipal Rates.

When Major Mitchell visited Australia Felix he commented on the “Great Swamp” north and east of Mt Napier. Although much of what is now known as Buckley's Swamp has been drained and is privately owned we would welcome an investigation into the feasibility of its re-instatement as a major wetland.

ISOLATED LARGE TREES

We recognise the ecological significance of these isolated “paddock”trees.. Every effort should be made to protect them and encourage recruitment. An education campaign stressing that, though such trees are long-lived, their lives are finite and therefore action to ensure replacement is an investment in the future.

Consideration of subsidies for fencing and/or tree guards should be investigated.

PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION

We agree that there is a need for better public access to data concerning remnant vegetation. This would help to broaden the appreciation of matters concerning native vegetation. Every effort should be made to enhance community awareness.

Dave Munro

Vice-President

Hamilton Field Naturalists Club