

HFNC submission on Southern Grampians Shire Council Plan for 2021-25

6 September 2021

The following comments on the Draft Council Plan 2021-25 represent views of the Hamilton Field Naturalists Club. Unfortunately we could not find on your website any details of the items listed in 4.1, 4.2 of Key Priority No. 4 document. It is, therefore difficult to make any specific comment. However, in looking at the headings Objectives 4.1 and 4.2 there appears to be conflict.

On the one hand there is the desirable objective to '*Protect and enhance biodiversity.*' ('*protecting endemic flora & fauna species throughout the Shire*') but on the other hand there is the objective of '*Balancing environmental protection with Council's support for growth.*' viz. to '*Ensure land use planning balances growth with appropriate levels of environmental stewardship.*' There is a reference also to '*manage significant landscapes and key biodiversity assets.*' This suggests that much of the natural remnant vegetation is of no consequence and there is no real intention to protect and enhance biodiversity. The concept of 'balance' is the problem here. There is no proper balance - what we have left of the natural environment is less than about 10% of the original - so what 'balance' is being considered here? Your policy would see that remnant eroded further, so that in years to come nothing remains! Every effort must be extended to preserving what little there is left and enhancing that small residue. This should be reflected in the Council Plan 2021-25.

We need environmental overlays to protect the remnant native trees on private and public land. An example is the continuing loss of the old River Red Gums on farm lands as a consequence of increased cropping. We also note that there has been in recent years much clearing of Red Gums along public roads where fences have been renewed. One local example is on Nigretta Rd where trees in one paddock were cleared up to 10 m inside the road reserve. Why was that permitted by the Shire?

Furthermore, we also need the Shire to enhance its natural assets by planting appropriate indigenous native vegetation, rather than planting non-native species.

There appears to be no information on the website as to the Shire's plan for wetlands. With regard to '*key biodiversity assets*' we hope that the Shire has regard to our significant wetland reserves. In particular, Lake Linlithgow has, in June 2021, been listed by Birdlife Australia as one of the 6 priority areas in Victoria for migratory shorebirds. 'Hamilton Lakes' (Birdlife Australia's name for the cluster of wetlands around Lake Linlithgow) is now recognized as a key area in Australia for Red-necked Stint, Sharp-tailed Sandpiper and Double-banded Plover. A Site Action Plan has been developed for these wetlands. We had approached the Shire several years ago for support in having the sanctuary status of Lakes Linlithgow and Bulrush restored (it was lost as a result of the 1975 revision of the Wildlife Act) but that was apparently not forthcoming.

We understand that the Shire has decided to divest itself of responsibility or interest in these lakes and swamps. The surrounds of Lake Linlithgow are now being trashed by off-road vehicles, with rubbish dumping and tree destruction. This is a great pity because the lake is a major wildlife asset and could become a major tourist drawcard.

In conclusion, the Council Plan 2021-25 ought not to reference '*balancing environmental protection with Council's support for growth*' as it does in Objective 4.2. Rather, where any development is being considered, it ought to place the emphasis on ensuring environmental protection. Objective 4.2 needs to be redrafted to reflect the necessity of protecting and enhancing what little remains of the native remnant flora and fauna in our very distinctive natural region.

Rod Bird

Secretary
Hamilton Field Naturalists Club