

**SCHEDULE 5 TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE OVERLAY**

Shown on the planning scheme map as ESO5.

**GRASSLANDS WITHIN THE WERRIBEE PLAINS HINTERLAND****1.0****Statement of environmental significance**

The areas included within this overlay form part of the Victorian Volcanic Plain Bioregion. The native vegetation of the Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion is one of the most depleted in the State. Only 4.5 per cent of the State still has a cover of native vegetation, and less than 1.2 per cent is in formal reserves.

The Werribee Plains hinterland consists of undulating volcanic plains, a scoria cone and steep gorges formed by the Little and Werribee Rivers. Many elements of the flora reflect the low rainfall of this area, which formerly supported extensive areas of Plains Grassland. Although the native vegetation has been extensively cleared and altered for agricultural, urban and industrial use, there are some large areas of predominantly native vegetation as well as some high-quality wetlands, which are important for many threatened fauna species. There are a number of communities and species in this area that do not occur elsewhere in the bioregion. Important species in this area include, for flora, the Button Wrinklewort, Large-fruit Fireweed, Small Golden Moths, Small Milkwort, Small Scurf-pea, Spiny Rice-flower, and the only remaining wild population of Sunshine Diuris; and, for fauna, the Grassland Earless Dragon, Orange-bellied Parrot, Plains-wanderer, Red-chested Button-quail, Striped Legless Lizard and Swift Parrot.

The landscape consists of undulating volcanic plains with red duplex soils. The Werribee and Little Rivers have incised steep and sometimes spectacular gorges into the basalt plain. The scoria cone of Mount Anakie is a significant landscape feature. A band of Tertiary sediments is located along the western edge of this area.

It has a unique and relatively early history of European settlement due partly to the ease of access of the open grassland plains. Because of this the landscape has been radically altered.

The dry plains of the Werribee plains hinterland formerly supported extensive areas of Plains Grassland. These grasslands integrated with Riverina Plains Grassy Woodland (dominated by Grey Box, Buloke and Drooping Sheoak) to the west and south of Melton, and Plains Grassy Woodland in and around the You Yangs and east of the Brisbane Ranges. Riparian areas supported Floodplain Riparian Woodland and Creekline Grassy Woodland with Escarpment Shrubland on steeper escarpments. A variety of wetland communities formerly occurred throughout including Plains Grassy Wetland, Plains Sedgy Wetland, Canegrass Wetland, Lignum Wetland and Aquatic Herbfeld. Scoria Cone Woodland was associated with Mount Anakie and other volcanoes. Areas of Coastal Saltmarsh were found along the shores of Port Phillip Bay. Many elements of the flora reflect the low rainfall including White Cypress-pine and Fragrant Saltbush found along the steep escarpments of the Werribee River, and Woolly Buttons at Little River. The native vegetation has been extensively cleared and altered for agriculture and (increasingly) for urban and industrial use. However, there are large areas of predominantly native vegetation including woodlands, wetlands and grasslands.

The major issue for biodiversity conservation in the Werribee plains hinterland is loss of native vegetation and habitat through clearing for urban development, cropping and infrastructure. The compounding effects of such clearing are the loss of floristic and habitat diversity and increasing fragmentation of habitats and isolation of remnants. Similarly, changes to management of remnant vegetation and increased urbanisation contribute to the proliferation of weeds and feral animals. Degradation of drainage lines and riparian vegetation through erosion, pollution and uncontrolled grazing, depletion of wetlands and changes to the hydrology of wetlands and streams are also serious threats to biodiversity in the region. However, a range of conservation assets are present and significant opportunities do exist to establish relatively large areas and networks of areas that

are managed sympathetically for conservation. Such networks could include a range of vegetation types and land tenures and relatively large and intact areas of open grassland, grassy woodland and wetland communities.

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### Environmental objective to be achieved

- To prevent a decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation and native fauna habitat of the Victorian Volcanic Plain.
- To enhance the environmental and landscape values of the area.
- To avoid the fragmentation of contiguous areas of native vegetation or native fauna habitat.
- To ensure that any use, development or management of the land is compatible with the long-term conservation, maintenance and enhancement of the grasslands.
- To avoid the destruction of habitat for native fauna resulting from the modification of land form and disturbance of surface soils and rocks.
- To enable areas of environmental significance, due to their native vegetation or habitat values, to be identified.

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### Permit requirement

A permit is not required to:

- Construct a building or construct or carry out works or to remove, destroy or lop vegetation (including dead vegetation) in accordance with an agreement under Section 69 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*.
- Construct or carry out works or to remove, destroy or lop vegetation (including dead vegetation) by or on behalf of a public authority or public land manager involving revegetation, or preparatory works associated with revegetation.
- Construct a building or construct or carry out works for an extension or alteration of an existing dwelling (other than the erection of an outbuilding normal to a dwelling) provided that the gross floor area of that extension or alteration does not exceed 50 square metres and the extension or alteration is more than 5 metres from any existing native vegetation.
- Remove, destroy or lop any vegetation, including dead vegetation:
  - Where the vegetation is non-native.
  - Where the vegetation is a plant proclaimed as a weed under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.
  - In order to enable the use and maintenance of a building constructed or approved by a planning permit granted under this planning scheme or by a building permit granted under the Building Act 1993, before 6 August 2010. This exemption does not apply to vegetation located more than 10 metres from a building.
  - Where the vegetation has been planted or grown for aesthetic or amenity purposes, including agroforestry (the simultaneous and substantial production of forest and other agricultural products from the same land unit), shelter belts, woodlots, street trees, gardens or the like. This exemption does not apply if public funding was provided to assist in planting or managing the vegetation for conservation purposes and the terms of the funding did not anticipate removal or harvesting of the vegetation.
  - For the purpose of maintenance, where no more than one third of the foliage is removed from any individual plant. This exemption does not apply to the pruning or lopping of the trunk of a tree or shrub or to native vegetation within a road or railway reservation.

- To mow or slash grass in a lawn, garden or other planted area for maintenance only.
- To maintain an existing fence where the removal of vegetation is within a combined maximum width of 4 metres either side of the fence.

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#### Application requirements

An application must be accompanied by:

- A description of any proposed disturbance of surface soil or rocks associated with the proposal.
- The total extent of vegetation on the property and the extent of native vegetation proposed to be removed, lopped or destroyed.
- A description of the steps that have been taken to avoid and minimise the removal of native vegetation including the practicality of alternative options which do not require removal of the native vegetation.

An application must also be accompanied by, as appropriate:

- A flora and fauna assessment of the land prepared by a suitably qualified and experienced person to the satisfaction of the responsible authority. The assessment must include:
  - A flora and fauna survey.
  - A habitat hectare assessment.
  - Identification of the vegetation and habitat significance of the property.
  - A description of the effect of the proposed development in relation to other areas of native vegetation or native fauna habitat, including any proposed conservation reserves, streams and waterways.
- A land and environmental management plan prepared by a suitably qualified person identifying, as appropriate:
  - Any proposals for revegetation, including proposed species, and ground stabilisation.
  - How any vegetation removal will be offset (an offset plan), in accordance with Victoria's Native Vegetation Management: A Framework For Action (Department of Natural Resources and Environment 2002).
  - Weed management, including species to be targeted and proposed management techniques.
  - Pest animal management, including species to be targeted and proposed management techniques.

If in the opinion of the responsible authority a flora and fauna assessment of the land or a land and environmental management plan is not relevant to the assessment of an application, the responsible authority may waive or reduce the requirement.

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#### Referral of applications

In accordance with Section 55 of the Act, an application must be referred to the relevant referral authority specified in the schedule to Clause 66.04.

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#### Decision guidelines

Before deciding on an application, the responsible authority must consider, as appropriate:

- The conservation significance of any vegetation to be removed and its habitat value for native fauna.
- Measures to protect and enhance native vegetation and native fauna habitat of the Victorian Volcanic Plain, including the retention of land form, surface soils and rocks.

- Measures to maintain contiguous areas of native vegetation or native fauna habitat.
- Any relevant strategic grasslands management plan, particularly the potential impact of management activities, such as burning, on any proposed new use or development.
- The impact of any use, development or management of land on the grasslands including the potential impacts of nutrient and water run-off, increased weed and pest invasion or recreational impacts.
- Measures to encourage ecological restoration, regeneration and revegetation with indigenous species.
- The need to adopt a precautionary approach in the absence of scientific certainty.
- The reason for removing any vegetation and the practicality of any alternative options.
- The impact on the integrity of the site from the proposed development, disturbance and removal of rock, indiscriminate weed control, habitat fragmentation and isolation and disturbance and destruction of habitat of threatened species.
- The proposed management practices for the land including:
  - The linking and enlarging of areas of significant flora and fauna habitats.
  - Effective and targeted weed control.
  - Programs to control or eliminate introduced predatory and pest animal species, in particular foxes, rabbits and hares.
  - Rehabilitation of degraded areas through fencing, revegetation with appropriate native species and ongoing management.
  - Collection of seed and other plant propagules for rehabilitation projects on and off site.
- The results of any flora and fauna survey and assessment of the land.
- Any Native Vegetation Precinct Plan, Conservation Management Plan, Precinct Structure Plan or other management plan approved for the area by the Minister for Planning or Minister for Environment and Climate Change.
- Any action statement, significant impact guidelines or prescriptions for listed species or habitat of listed species occurring or likely to occur on the land.

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### Reference

- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Strategic Impact Assessment Report for the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Department of Sustainability and Environment 2009)
- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Report for Public Consultation, Urban Growth Boundary Review (Department of Planning and Community Development 2009)
- Delivering Melbourne's Newest Sustainable Communities: Background Technical Report 2a: Biodiversity Assessment of Melbourne's Western Investigation Area (Biosis Research 2009)