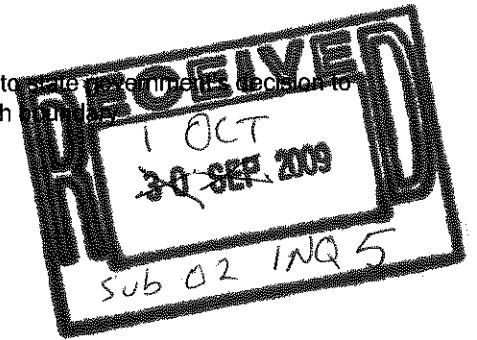




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01/10/2009 04:47 PM

To <osisdc@parliament.vic.gov.au>  
cc  
bcc  
Subject Submission to inquiry into State Government's decision to change the urban growth boundary



To: Sean Coley  
Executive Officer  
Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee  
Legislative Council  
Parliament of Victoria  
Spring Street, East Melbourne, 3002

1. My submission concerns the impact on the environment of the State Government's decision to change the urban growth boundary and in particular on the impact on the future of the green wedges. My interest results from my involvement for more than 60 years with the protection, planning and management of this type of protected area. My Masters thesis was on this topic in Britain and I have been involved with efforts to protect such areas in peri-urban fringe locations around Australia for many years. I have lived in the area of the Nillumbik Green Wedge since 1990 and have been a member of the Community Advisory Group on the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan since 2006. At the international level I was a member of the governing body of the World Conservation Union (IUCN) from 1981 to 1988 and have been a member of IUCN's World Commission on Protected Areas since 1979.

2. The green wedges which form a green belt around Melbourne and had their origin in the 1960s drew their inspiration from earlier green belts including those around London and Sydney. They were designed originally and in Melbourne 2030 to perform two roles: to make the outward expansion of Melbourne more efficient by confining it to urban growth corridors; and to provide planned amenity areas for conservation, recreation and agriculture.

3. While the federal government appears to have given up on the task of maintaining lists of Australia's protected areas classified according to the internationally recognised system of protected area categories these categories are referred to in the federal EPBC Act. The category into which the green wedges most closely fits is 'Category V - protected landscape/seascape'. In *Guidelines for Applying Protected Area Management Categories* (2008) this is defined as:

*A protected area where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character with significant ecological, biological, cultural and scenic value; and where safeguarding the integrity of this interaction is vital to protecting and sustaining the area and its associated nature conservation and other values.*

The guidelines also discuss the objectives, distinguishing features, role, unique features and issues for consideration. The objectives include the provision of: opportunities for enjoyment, well being and socio-economic activity through recreation and tourism; and natural products and environmental services; a framework to underpin active involvement by the community in the management of valued landscapes or seascapes and the natural and cultural heritage they contain; and to act as models of sustainability so that lessons can be learned for wider application.

What is envisaged is that the protected areas of this type will be living and working landscapes, not museum pieces, and that the objectives will be achieved by a combination of development control and positive action. Most of the land will be in private ownership and used for agricultural production.

4. Regrettably the Victorian government's decision to extend the urban growth boundaries has taken little account of the important functions of the green wedges in urban planning or amenity provision. Quite simply the government has such an overwhelming commitment to growth that it is blind to the effect of moving the UGB into the green wedges on these roles. Not only are the green wedges seen as expendable but the Government has totally failed to examine the option of controlling population growth. This is not 'government' but lack of government'. Added to this there appears to be a high degree of government ignorance over the nature and role of the green

wedges. This is illustrated by the proposal to acquire grassland reserves as some sort of compensatory action for the loss of green wedge areas. What it appears to show is that the government and its public servants do not understand the nature of the green wedges and what can be achieved there through covenants, etc and that they are fixated on the national park (ie public ownership) approach to conservation.

5. Presumably the low value placed by the present Government on the green wedges and its desire to be able to easily dispense with them is the reason why the arrangements for their long term security, funding and governance are so second rate in Victoria. There is no adequate explanation of the purpose and value of the green wedges in the legislation. Their planning and management costs are met by local ratepayers and there are no special arrangements for their governance. Some idea of how deficient these arrangements are can be obtained by a comparison with the arrangements for category V areas in Britain. Although named as 'national parks' and 'areas of outstanding natural beauty' in Britain these areas are, as in the green wedges, places where people live, are 80-90% privately owned and are mainly used for agriculture. These areas in Britain are funded by central government and are governed by special authorities. Their boundaries are very secure. A comparison focusing on the Peak District National Park which also acts as the green lungs for a large urban population is attached.

6. In conclusion if the changes to the urban growth boundary were to go ahead Melbourne's green belt would be further weakened. At the very least the move should be suspended until full consideration has been given to: 1) population policy; and 2) ways of improving the planning, management, governance and funding of the green wedges with reference to the relative success of the British model.

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Sixty Year celebrations.doc

## A STORY OF TWO GREEN LUNGS

We are told that if we look after our lungs they will look after us. But what about our green lungs beyond the city rim? Should not the same apply to them? My story concerns two different green lungs in two different countries and a very different story of care.

Growing up in the English Peak District in the 1930s through to the 1950s I was a first hand witness to one of the greatest conservation success stories in history. With over 20 million people living within an hours journey of the region it seemed only a matter of time before the area was absorbed into the surrounding cities which included such giants as Manchester, Sheffield and Stoke on Trent. Then something seemingly miraculous happened. In 1951 this “green lung” was declared a National Park to protect the area’s beautiful rural landscapes and the urban sprawl was stopped in its tracks. Today the population of the Park is no greater than it was in 1951 but it receives twenty two million visitors a year – the second largest number in the world after Japan’s Mt Fuji.

For the last twenty years I have lived in one of Melbourne’s green wedges and what an incredibly different story it is. Like the British national parks the green wedges have been given protection for their rural character and are commonly referred to as Melbourne’s “green lungs”. As in the British parks nearly all of the land is privately owned and used for farming and grazing and development is controlled through planning. Originating in 1971 the green wedges were supposedly given enhanced protection in 2002 as part of the Melbourne 2030 plan but that is where the comparison with the British system ends. But first let me take you back to the UK to try to see what it is that makes the difference.

This year is the sixtieth anniversary of the British 1949 National Parks

and Access to the Countryside Act and year-round celebrations are in full swing. Combining the protection of rural and wild beauty with the provision of widespread access for all, this British conservation achievement is world class and one many other nations could take inspiration from.

Sixty years on there are 15 National Parks, 50 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 294 Nature Reserves, together covering twenty three per cent of England and Wales. In addition to the public rights of way on ancient footpaths across the land there are also 4,670 kilometres of high profile National Trails. The Peak District was the first National Park and the fifteenth was the South Downs National Park declared in March this year. The first National Trail –The Pennine Way – running from the Peak in the south to the Scottish Border was inaugurated in 1965.

Many people contributed to the decision to make these profound advances in planning and conservation which were not so much a miracle as the result of great foresight and hard work. Not least amongst the on-ground advocates were the members of the open air movement of the inter war period whose activities included organised mass trespasses on the grouse moors of the Southern Pennines. Their efforts were complemented by the persistent lobbying of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England but it was the ‘we can do anything’ mood of post-war reconstruction that finally delivered the goods.

Remarkably, the main principle behind the 1949 Act was one that had been enunciated very clearly by England’s most famous romantic poet William Wordsworth 200 years ago. Concerned about the threat to the scenery of his beloved Lake District, in 1809 he wrote that he hoped he would be joined in his conservation efforts by those who showed by their repeated visits that they thought of the area as “ a sort of national property in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to see and a heart to enjoy”.

Although it took a long time for Wordsworth's dream to take shape if he was alive today he would surely be pleased by what has been achieved in the last sixty years.

Unfortunately, here in Victoria I see a very different situation to that which exists in my birthplace. In Britain the Park boundaries are sacred in terms of security, here they are temporary as plans to alienate more and more green wedge land for residential development clearly shows. Back there the building of a freeway through a National Park would be unthinkable, here, as the construction of Eastlink through green wedge land and the plan to drive the Frankston ByPass through the Mornington Peninsula Green Wedge indicates, our politicians think nothing of it. In the one place the protected areas are treasured, in the other they are expendable. In the United Kingdom central government meets all the costs of park planning, development control, management and positive action including providing information and facilities for visitors. Here it is a burden on local ratepayers, so no wonder it is second rate. How many Melburnians even know of the existence of their green wedges and if they do where could they stay? What bike and walking tracks can they use?

If our Green Wedges are going to have the best possible chance of serving as the lungs of our cities they need to be treated as very important places where people can tend the land and grow food and where visitors can exercise, relax, enjoy the difference, and learn about their environment and not just as means to put temporary limits on urban sprawl.

There is probably no better place for understanding how those potentials can be realised than in Britain today in this year of celebration. So Victorian politicians, if you really care about Melbourne's lungs, I suggest you take a trip over there, join in the celebrations, and above all, learn how to look after them.

(Dr) Geoff Mosley

Geoff Mosley is a member of the World Commission on Protected Areas and the Community Advisory Group for the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan.