

## *The Green Wedges Charter*

### **History and purpose**

The green wedges are a community asset of incalculable value to the people of Greater Melbourne. The Victorian Government has the prime responsibility for protecting them on our behalf.

The 1968-71 Melbourne metropolitan planning process officially established nine green wedges as non-urban zones for open space or parkland between Melbourne's main transport corridors. It outlined acceptable non-urban uses, including recreation, landscape protection, resource utilization, farming, flora and fauna and conservation.

The green wedges were to be Melbourne's breathing spaces: for the leisure, recreation and enjoyment of residents of the inner city as well as those who live in bush surroundings; for future as well as present generations. They were designed to separate the urban development along the transport corridors, to protect the catchments of our creeks and rivers and to link the city with the country, and with a more distant green belt of state forests and national parks.

The green wedges include the lands of the Wurundjeri, Bunurung and Wathurong traditional owners. Within their boundaries, substantial areas of environmentally significant indigenous grasslands, forests, remnant vegetation and wildlife habitat corridors have been protected. Within their boundaries, some of the most fertile land in the state has been conserved for agricultural purposes. Close to the city, market gardens are more sustainable, requiring less irrigation and lowering transport costs and greenhouse gas emissions.

This vision for Melbourne, handed down by our parents' generation, has helped make ours into one of the most livable cities in the world. At a time of unrivalled prosperity, rising community awareness and appreciation of the value of green city spaces to our personal wellbeing, we regard maintaining the green wedges for future generations as a yardstick for our generation's commitment to developing a sustainable city in a sustainable world.

Yet by 2002, Melbourne's green wedges were on the brink of destruction. While development had spread out along the transport corridors, there was increasing pressure on municipal councils to allow development of the green wedges for urban, residential and industrial uses. Rates on green wedge farmers and conservationist landholders were becoming – and still are - prohibitive as market valuations increasingly reflected their development potential and as speculators bought in, closing down farms and other non-urban enterprises.

### **Recent history, current policy**

Green wedges were a Hamer Government legacy and the Liberal Party still has policy to protect them. The Kennett Government, however, deregulated planning in the green wedges by removing prohibitions on commercial, retail, industrial and other urban uses in rural zones and allowing these uses subject to permit.

The Bracks Government was elected in 1999 on a pledge to preserve the green wedges, along with the rest of the City's parks and open spaces. Labor's Greener Cities policy criticised the Kennett Liberal Government for initiating "an unprecedented assault on Melbourne's green spaces that have been protected from subdivision since 1970. Green belts, the Dandenong Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula are all being carved up."

Before the 1999 election, Labor promised to give "local municipalities greater power to protect the heritage and amenity of local communities", but some Councils did not exercise this power to protect residents' wishes and interests in maintaining green wedges. Instead they facilitated developers' proposals to alienate our green wedges.

Labor promised to "put the protection and enhancement of the natural and urban environment at the forefront of planning decision-making," to control "the carve up of agricultural land areas near Melbourne," and to "introduce effective legislation to control the ad hoc subdivision and inappropriate development of Melbourne's

green belt” But with the devolution of planning powers to local government, the erosion of Melbourne’s parks, open spaces and green wedges continued.

Concern at the number of development and rezoning applications going through municipal councils during the development of the Metropolitan Strategy brought together environment and community groups from Melbourne’s green wedges, the Mornington Peninsula and Yarra Ranges to draw up the first draft of this charter for the protection of the green wedges in 2002. .

We called on the Government to incorporate into the Metropolitan Strategy a broader vision for the people of Melbourne, for a city with green open spaces, so we do not end up with wall-to-wall urban sprawl. We noted the need for vision and policy coordination to protect the green wedges across road, transport, housing, population policy and local government as well as planning and the environment.

In the light of Labor’s promises to assess the environmental impact of all cabinet submissions, we asked the Government to consider the impact of State and municipal infrastructure projects on the integrity and purpose of the green wedges. We called on the State Government and the Opposition to provide permanent protection for Melbourne’s green wedges and areas of special significance.

### **Green Wedge Protection**

In September 2002, the Bracks Government responded with a package of legislative and planning measures to protect the green wedges as part of Melbourne 2030. The Opposition supported the green wedge protection legislation (which required a vote of Parliament for any further subdivision in the green wedges) when it was introduced to Parliament soon after.

The green wedge package incorporated our main charter points by:

- Preparing legislation to protect the non-urban zones in Melbourne’s green wedges and environmentally important fringe areas;
- Putting a halt to the rezoning of green wedge land until the legislation is adopted;
- Defining and legislating boundaries to include all of what is left of Melbourne’s green wedges;
- Resisting further rezoning of non-urban green wedge land for residential or industrial subdivisions or for the reduction of allotment sizes;
- Introducing new green wedge zoning to protect against accepted rural uses such as service stations and other commercial or industrial enterprises.

Our broader charter points still stand as a call to present and future governments to stem the development pressures on the city’s remaining green wedges:

- Co-ordinate policy to protect the green wedges across transport, roads, housing, population policy, agriculture and local government portfolios as well as planning and environment;
- Reform rural subsidy and rating policies so that green wedge councils receive pro rata rural subsidies to be passed on as rate rebates to protect green wedge landholders from excessive rates and to compensate them for conservation costs;
- Review the impact of all State and municipal infrastructure projects on the integrity and purpose of the green wedges, consider alternatives before such projects can proceed and refrain where impacts would be adverse;
- Continue the principle of green wedge protection by developing linear parks along watercourses and preserving and extending adjacent wetlands all the way to the sea;
- Encourage better transport planning based on European models for improving public transport and existing road systems, instead of freeways which attract new residential and industrial development to the green wedges;
- Review the performance of current infrastructure and planning authorities.

The Government’s green wedge protection provisions have largely protected the green wedges from the residential and industrial subdivision threats of 2002. Only one housing development has been approved, as part of a marina development at Wyndham Cove. However, the Urban Growth Boundary was altered to increase the growth corridors by 11,500 hectares in 2005 and loopholes have emerged, partly through pressure from tourism and industry on the 2003 submission process, lax administration and VCAT decisions which

