

To whom it may concern, please find my submission below.

SUBMISSION TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES AND DEVELOPMENT SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF STATE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO CHANGE THE URBAN GROWTH BOUNDARY

Terms of reference:

the Committee has been asked to investigate the State Government's decision to change the Urban Growth Boundary, and in particular:

The impact of the State Government's decision to change the urban growth boundary on landholders and the environment and plans announced by the Government to introduce an increased development contribution for land in designated growth areas, including -

- (a) the likely quantum of the collections by Government;
- (b) mechanisms to ensure the contributions are directed only to the intended purposes;
- (c) the likely impact on the housing and development industries;
- (d) any unintended consequences including the impact on all landholders and purchasers to be impacted;
- (e) any displacement or replacement of Government spending likely to result from the increased collections; and
- (f) any alternative options, including any used in other jurisdictions;

We like living in the Western Plains Green Wedges (WP Green Wedge). We have lived here for 37 years and are enjoying a high quality of life.

We are 'life-stylers,' my husband and myself gained an income from working in the region, and our house and land is enjoyed for it's rural ambience. We also appreciate the expansive views, being able to ride our bikes, and the relative proximity to the Great Dividing Range and the southern coastal beaches.

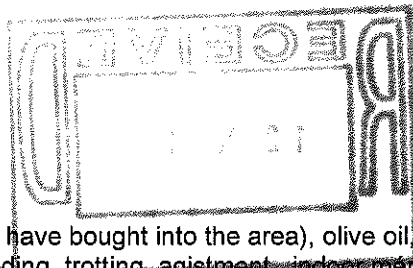
We are have been actively participating in the rural community, the CFA, Progress Association and the landcare groups.

Most of the people who live here are employed in the western region of Melbourne, and have worked hard and saved for many years to realise a dream of owning some land in order to pursue small scale hobby farm pursuits. This dream is under threat with the proposed moving of the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB).

The WP Green Wedges range from Caroline Springs and the Laverton North industrial area opposite Port Phillip Prison (opposite which share farming cropping is practiced) to west of the Werribee River (where there are larger holdings, cropping and stock production).

The 'broad hectare' land use for the larger holdings is in dry land farming, which includes share farming, of barley, hay, canola, sheep and cattle. These have not been successful recently due to drought conditions (the only stock operation most likely to have been sustainable is grazing on irrigated pastures, using recycled water from the Melton Treatment Plant). Dry land farmers have needed to diversify their interests.

Land use in the smaller holdings is in intensive agriculture which includes irrigated market



gardens (Werribee South gardeners have bought into the area), olive oil, viticulture, poultry, equestrian industry (race horse breeding, trotting, agistment, indoor menages, holiday farm accommodation, and pony clubs) A large trotting complex has been established in Melton, catering for this interest. Hobby farm stock includes alpacas, sheep, chooks and goats. Commercial poultry farms are also located here as well as dog boarding kennels, and greyhound training establishments.

There is a thriving mini-industry of people who hire out their services, ploughing, slashing grass, weed control, water cartage and other agricultural services.

Perhaps surprisingly some of these agricultural industries also occur within the Urban Growth Boundary.

There is one Agricultural College located on Derrimut Road, Tarneit, City of Wyndham.

There are two stock feed outlets, one sells irrigated lucerne hay, and one operates from a local business complex. Olive oil, free range egg outlets, irrigated lucerne and wineries operate at the farm gate.

Tourism is linked to viticulture (Witchmount winery winning world acclaim for it's shiraz), restaurants and the olive oil industries. Linking of the natural features such as the volcanic cones of Mt. Cotterell, Mt. Atkinson the native grasslands and the main heritage features such as the dry stone walls is likely to enhance the amenity of the region as well as encourage tourism.

These businesses have thrived in the Green Wedges and contributed towards quality of life not only for the people who live here but also for the nearby urban residents in Wyndham and Melton. In other words they are really acting as the 'lungs' of Melbourne.

Community Reserves have been set aside for watering stock (stock reserves at river crossings). While some of them haven't been used for this purpose for many years, no doubt they could be if the need arose. Some of them are used as Public Recreation Reserves.

Amalgamation of blocks

Chartwell, 1957 subdivision of 491 township sized blocks on open farmland, in the middle of the Western Plains South Green Wedge without sewerage and reticulated water, compulsory acquisition was put into place compelling purchasers to buy four adjacent allotments. Information from pg 97, Vol 2. Shire of Melton Heritage Study 2007

Native Grasslands

The expansion of the UGB threatens these Western Basalt Plains Grasslands of Melbourne. This region contains a substantial area of the critically endangered native grasslands in Victoria, less than 1% remain. They are protected under the EPBC Act.

Melbourne 2030 policy has not prevented approximately 200 hectares of native grasslands from being destroyed annually in Melton and approximately 300 hectares annually in Wyndham. Extinction of species in this region continues to take place under the current policies.

It is important to maintain the current UGB, because the direct destruction of grasslands by ploughing, rock crushing/rolling and herbicide application occurs on grasslands near the UGB. If the boundary is moved, the destruction will recommence in the new location.

Intact grasslands with the full suite of grasses resist weed invasion, such as serrated tussock. They also drought proof properties, making them sustainable providing they are not overgrazed.

To enable the few remaining grasslands to be saved, a plan to boost existing incentive schemes is needed, these being Bush Broker and Bush Tender. These need to be made more meaningful

and more realistic to landholders in terms of current land values. Bush Broker in it's current form is not financially attractive to landholders with native grass paddocks.

Melton Council has purchased the summit of Mt. Cotterell for Native Vegetation regional offsets, this action complements the existing Wildlife Corridors on public land in the Exford and Mt. Cotterell regions. This action is commended.

One major counterproductive action by the present government to the GW Policy was permitting the new town of Eynesbury to be developed in the middle of a rural area in the Western Plains South Green Wedge. A bitumen road has been allowed by VCAT, to divide the substantial grey box woodland, thereby compromising the threatened wildlife in the region. Further, housing has also been permitted south and west of the woodland, where previously golf fairways were proposed as buffers to the woodland, these were relocated when the golf course was moved. It has had a major detrimental impact on the amenity of the region.

What initiatives need to be completed over the next five years?

Financial incentives for those land-owner agri-businesses, especially for dry-land farmers, who practice agriculture as a main source of income are urgently needed.

Green Wedge Management Plans need to be formed, introduced and implemented to address the current imbalance in planning between Green Wedges and Urban Wedges.

As you can see, most people are generally happy living in these Western Plains Green Wedges, we are a mix of life-stylers and productive agri-business landholders and wish to remain undisturbed.

The threat of the proposal to move the current UGB to a new location will impact on all who live here disrupting lives, agribusiness, tourism and will have a major impact on the natural biodiversity of the native grasslands of the region.

This proposal in it's present form cannot be supported.

yours sincerely,

Frances Overmars

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