

Contact: Bruce Smith  
Telephone No: (03) 51539500  
Email: feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au

15 July 2011

The Secretary  
Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Secretary

**Re: Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health**

The East Gippsland Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make submission to the Inquiry into Environmental Design and Public Health.

Council's submission reflects the belief that public health is best served by the implementation of environmentally sustainable planning and design which supports the social model of health, a confluence of the elements of social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing. Public health outcomes are improved where there is an intentional connection between these elements and environmentally sustainable design, a design philosophy which also supports an increased commitment to environmental stewardship and conservation. Such actions can result in an optimal balance of cost, environmental, societal, and human benefits while meeting the mission and function of the intended facility or infrastructure.

There are existing synergies between environmental planning and public health through their common missions and perspectives. Both aim to improve human well-being, emphasize needs assessment and service delivery, manage complex social systems, focus at the population level, and rely on community-based participatory methods. Current Victorian legislative frameworks concerning public health and environmental planning and design have yet to fully realize this commonality. Review of the current frameworks requires a greater integration of the mechanisms surrounding the development of healthy communities and requires broader multidisciplinary coalitions and definition of the legislative interface. Such multidisciplinary coalitions would be better equipped to develop indicators and measures of sustainable communities and to elucidate their association with public health (Srinivasan et al 2003).

Of particular interest for Council is the well documented (Pretty 2005, Bird 2007) role of open space and the natural environment in promoting health and wellbeing. East Gippsland Shire is located in south-east Victoria with a population of approximately 43,000 people. It is the second largest Shire in Victoria, covering 21,000 square kilometres. The Shire features beautiful coastal scenery, extensive lakes and river systems, rugged high country, and national parks and forests renowned for their biological diversity, landscapes and recreational opportunities. Council wishes to ensure that

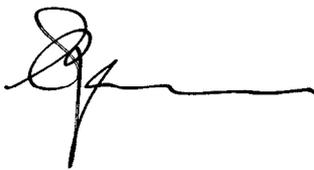
future planning proposals are guided by the importance of place and community benefit in order to align with its *Long Term Community Vision 2030* and the Liveability aspects of the *East Gippsland Shire Council Plan 2009-2013*. Recognition that place influences health also contextualises the view that health is more than the prevention of disease for the individual but encompasses a broader community health and wellbeing agenda.

Council submits that there is a need for a review to be undertaken into the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* in order to identify the legislative and procedural interface with the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. The review should see the development of specific objectives and incorporated guidelines within the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* which show clear policy and procedural mechanisms which establish the social and health impacts of future planning proposals.

Discussion on the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry is attached and provides greater detail of Council's response to the particular issues being raised by the Inquiry.

The East Gippsland Shire Council look forward to the outcomes of the Inquiry in the expectation that they will provide for much needed integration between the Shire Council's responsibilities for environmental planning and design planning and the health and wellbeing of the East Gippsland community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Steve Kozlowski', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**STEVE KOZLOWSKI**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

## Discussion

Council has chosen to make comment on the following areas of the Committee's Terms of Reference.

### ***(1) review the evidence of the contribution of the natural and built environments to the promotion of health and well being;***

Although Council has not undertaken a review of the evidence connecting planning and public health we believe that there are some key challenges for providing the evidence that environmental design and planning contributes to healthy communities. These challenges are:-

- (1) the necessity of dealing with the possible health consequences of myriad public and private sector activities;
- (2) the lack of valid and reliable indicators of the built environment to monitor the health effects of urban planning and policy decisions, especially with regard to land use mix; and
- (3) the effects of cumulative growth which requires analysis of health effects across geographical and social boundaries.

As Northridge et al (2003) suggest, the current public health planning does not account effectively for the spatial dimensions of communities and planning research fails to engage effectively with "the distribution of health determinants within and across social groups defined by age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality"(p.566). They also contend that "in order to plan effectively for healthy cities, we need to reinvigorate the historic collaborative link between urban planning and public health professionals, and together conduct informed science. Perhaps then we can amass sufficient empirical data to make convincing "weight of the evidence" appeals for essential planning and policy changes to improve the health and lives of urban populations"(p.566).

### ***(2) identify and report on those elements of Environmental planning and design which provide the most promising opportunities for improving health outcomes in Victoria;***

Environmental planning and design methodologies seek to provide for sustainable development in order to create sustainable communities. Commentators on the development of sustainable communities (Kearns and Turok, 2004) suggest that there needs to be "recognition that new ways of planning and managing development."(p.1) are required to adapt to the effects of the "increasing wealth and consumption in contemporary society, greater population mobility, as well as persistent social and spatial inequalities" (p.1). They identified the need for policy on community sustainability that examined the issues concerning the growing emphasis on localised resourcing for communities, the effects of population growth and its spatial scale, the relationship between social, economic and environmental dimensions and the urban and regional contexts of communities.

In identifying the opportunities for improving healthy outcomes through sustainable communities, the Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA), amongst others, suggests "Sustainable communities are liveable. They are diverse, affordable, inclusive and healthy; they enhance social interaction and ownership, are safe and caring and improve people's well-being." (Green Star Communities National Framework p.8). The GBCA provides a

high level framework for structuring sustainability actions and ideas for projects. It does so through its five principles, which are:

- Enhance liveability;
- Create opportunities for economic prosperity;
- Foster environmental responsibility;
- Embrace design excellence; and
- Demonstrate visionary leadership and strong governance.

To ensure the achievement of sustainable communities the Green Building Council of Australia also recognises that “planning plays a major role in defining the character and development of communities from a structural perspective” (p.7) and that adopting integrated planning framework practices with respect to density, connectivity, land use, water and climate change, in a community context, will work towards connectivity between transport, communication, social and physical infrastructure.

***(3) assess the extent to which these factors are currently taken into account in environmental planning and design in both the public and private sectors, and their effectiveness, with particular reference to new growth areas***

Council supports the position of the Municipal Association of Victoria in this matter.

***(4) determine opportunities to influence environmental planning and design for health, including consideration of the role of legislation, guidelines, and public-private partnerships, and the costs and benefits of various options; and***

An objective of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, Sec 4 (2) (c) and (d) is to “to enable land use and development planning and policy to be easily integrated with environmental, social, economic, conservation and resource management policies at State, regional and municipal levels”; and “to ensure that the effects on the environment are considered and provide for explicit consideration of social and economic effects when decisions are made about the use and development of land”. The Act shows intent to provide broad frameworks from which local government planners can promote more environmentally sustainable design with the view towards greater community benefit. Any review of the Act should consider the actions required to provide greater detail on the potential health and wellbeing impacts of planning. As there are no current mechanisms for this within the Act, the East Gippsland Shire Council is developing a Social Impact Assessment process in order to ensure that social health impacts are not only considered but are one of the defining characteristics and outcomes of best practice planning. There is an opportunity as part of a review of the Planning System in Victoria to develop specific objectives and incorporated guidelines which show clear policy and procedural mechanisms which establish the social and health impacts and benefits of future planning proposals.

Supporting documentation informing the potential for these actions to be considered are available in a number of publications including “Environments for Health” (Department of Human Services, 2001) and “Food Sensitive Planning and Urban Design” (Heart Foundation,2011). Both documents inform the health planning requirements of Local Government to produce Municipal Public Health Plans (MPHP), in

accordance with the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*. This Act, which has been recently reviewed, now provides a broader scope for defining community health and wellbeing using the social model of health as a framework.

The East Gippsland Shire has, as part of developing the MPHP, introduced proposals for integration of Social Impact Assessment (SIA) into Council planning processes. The aim is three fold;

1. to improve community health and wellbeing through identifying the connections between the social, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions of community.
2. to ensure that in the absence of specific mechanisms under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* there were processes available which, under specific trigger situations, Council would use to evaluate the social impact of planning proposals.
3. to develop a planning amendment for inclusion of a set of objectives and guidelines for implementing a SIA into Council's Municipal Strategic Statement.

**(5) provide recommendations for future planning and investment; and that the Committee will consider:**

**(a) the effectiveness of the Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework;**

*The Environments for Health Municipal Public Health Planning Framework* (Department of Human Services, 2001) has been used to develop the *East Gippsland Community Wellbeing Plan 2009-2013*. The framework provides acknowledgment of the need to recognise place as a determinant of healthy communities and makes the linkages between the built environment, urban planning and sustainable communities. The framework however does not provide an appropriate level of direction on how the connections between planning and the elements of sustainable communities can be monitored and evaluated. The questions posed with relation to urban planning (p.28) may promote "critical analysis about the future of cities " but falls short of providing the appropriate mechanisms for putting this into practice.

**(b) the State Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Transport Integration Act 2010 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987;**

The Victorian State *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* is the legislative framework for the development of Council's Municipal Public Health Plan. The Act describes the need for Councils to develop plans which recognise health determinants and inequalities develop strong evidence base for strategy development and action planning and involve communities in the process of development through to evaluation. There is direction in the Act which requires the MPHP to be consistent with both the Council Plan, prepared under the *Local Government Act 1989* and the Municipal Strategic Statement prepared under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. The East Gippsland Shire Council has developed its MPHP cognisant of these legislative drivers especially ensuring that there is connectivity with the Council Plan and the current social, economic and

environmental impacts on communities within the municipality. As discussed above (4) Council has commenced the development of mechanisms to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of development proposals, in the absence of objectives within the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* which would provide an integration of local land use planning instruments with health and wellbeing goals.

The new *Transport Integration Act (TIA) 2010* provides linkages to the sustainability of the transport systems within the State, stating clearly that the transport system needs to be sustainable – in economic terms, in environmental terms and in social terms – strongly establishing transport as a triple bottom line issue. The Act also provides opportunities to integrate land use and transport planning and decision-making by extending the framework to land use agencies whose decisions can significantly impact on transport. The Act defines interface bodies and particularly all planning authorities under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* have become interface bodies under the Transport Integration Act. This requires persons acting for an interface body to satisfy an assessment of the significance of the proposals impact on the public transport system, including public safety.

The East Gippsland Shire Council sees merit in using the interface model discussed within the TIA as a template for improving the connectivity between land use planning and public health outcomes. The review of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* will need to mandate the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* as interface legislation. The process should support the development of sustainable communities and include mechanisms by which there can be meaningful connections between legislations, including assessment of the social and health impacts of future development proposals.

***(c) international experience such as the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Healthy Cities initiative;***

Council has used the WHO Healthy Cities initiative to construct both its Municipal Public Health Plan and the strategies which support it. The initiative promotes comprehensive and systematic policy and planning for health and emphasizes:

- a. the need to address inequality in health and urban poverty;
- b. the needs of vulnerable groups;
- c. participatory governance; and
- d. the social, economic and environmental determinants of health.

This is not about the health sector only. It includes health considerations in economic, regeneration and urban development efforts.

***(d) the consistency of policy approaches across the Victorian Government to promote health through evidence based environmental planning and design measures; and***

Although as described above the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* has aspirational objectives which refer to public health and community wellbeing, the protection of the environment and community sustainability they do not provide a designated interface with either the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* or the municipal public health planning contained within it. The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* does not provide a framework which references health determinants nor requires an evidence base which assesses the social health impacts of planning proposals. The East

Gippsland Shire Council is developing its own mechanisms to address this but the need for consistency with regard to social and health impacts between relevant Acts requires a process of review to ensure the necessary integration and interface relationships are established and written into legislation.

**(e) the role of public open space in promoting health;**

As discussed above the East Gippsland Shire Council area contains beautiful coastal scenery, extensive lakes and river systems, rugged high country, and national parks and forests renowned for their biological diversity, landscapes and recreational opportunities. The provision of good quality open space significantly improves the quality of life and wellbeing of local communities and encourages physically active, engaged and healthy communities. There is evidence that nature contact enhances emotional, cognitive, and values-related development in children, especially during middle childhood and early adolescence and nature contact has been credited with reducing stress and enhancing work performance.

The important role of land use planning in maintaining the function of open space in the community supports the discussion above which requires there to be reviews of land use planning legislation to ensure the interface between planning and social health and environmental sustainability.

---

**References**

Beeton, RJS 2006, *'Society's forms of capital: a framework for renewing our thinking'* paper prepared for the 2006 Australian State of the Environment Committee, Department of the Environment and Heritage, Canberra

Bird W. (2007) *Natural Thinking*; A report for the RSPB; Available at [www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health](http://www.rspb.org.uk/policy/health)

Bowler D., Knight T., Pullin A. (2008) The value of contact with nature for health promotion: a review of reviews. CEBC publication.

BTCV (2008) Green Gym. <http://www2.btcv.org.uk/display/greengym>

Green Building Council Australia (2010) *The Green Star Communities Framework*

Kaplan, R. & Kaplan, S, (1989). *The Experience of Nature*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kearns and Turok, (2004) *Sustainable Communities: Dimensions and Challenges*, ESRC/ODPM Postgraduate Research Programme Working Paper 1, available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/146853.pdf>

Northridge, M., Sclar, D., and Biswas, P., (2003) Sorting Out the Connections Between the Built Environment and Health: A Conceptual Framework for Navigating Pathways and Planning Healthy Cities, *Journal of Urban Health:*

*Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine Vol. 80, No. 4, December 2003, The New York Academy of Medicine*

Pretty J, Peacock J, Sellens M, Griffin M (2005) The mental and physical health outcomes of green exercise. *International Journal of Environmental Health Research* 15(5):319-337

Pretty J., Griffin M., Peacock J., Hine R., Sellens M. and South N. (2005) *A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise*. Executive summary. Countryside Recreation Network

Srinivasan, S., O'Fallon, L., and Dearry,A. (2003) Creating Healthy Communities, Healthy Homes, Healthy People: Initiating a Research Agenda on the Built Environment and Public Health, *American Journal of Public Health*

World Health Organisation (2008) *Zagreb Declaration for Healthy Cities*