

# CORRECTED VERSION

## SELECT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LAND DEVELOPMENT

Melbourne — 30 January 2008

### Members

Mr D. Davis

Mr P. Hall

Mr P. Kavanagh

Mr E. O'Donohue

Ms S. Pennicuik

Mr B. Tee

Mr E. Thornley

Chair: Mr D. Davis

Deputy Chair: Mr B. Tee

### Staff

Secretary: Mr R. Willis

Research Officer: Ms C. Williams

### Witnesses

Dr J. Bird, chair, and

Mr R. Youl, member, Landscape Committee, National Trust.

**The CHAIR** — I declare open the public hearing of the Legislative Council Select Committee on Public Land Development. Today's hearing is in relation to the Victorian government's policies relating to the sale and development of public land. I welcome Dr Juliet Bird from the Landscape Committee of the National Trust, and Mr Robin Youl, who is a member of the Landscape Committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council's standing orders. Any comments you make outside the hearing may not be afforded such privilege. We will provide a proof copy of the transcript shortly after the hearing to which you may make minor corrections. I thank you for providing evidence today. We certainly welcome it, and I invite you to make a short statement and then we might ask some questions.

**Mr YOUL** — Thank you very much for this opportunity; the National Trust values it. Within our Landscape Committee we have finalised a policy statement on public land management in Victoria, which you have. We ask that you recognise that there is a very proud heritage of protection and management of public open space in Victoria. Over the last couple of centuries we have created a network of public parks and gardens which rival any in the world, perhaps most notably in Melbourne but also throughout the state; I would say notably in Ballarat. Of course there is the very wide dispersal of public land throughout the state. One-third of Victoria is public land, and that is wonderful, although it is mostly in the east and in the north-west. There are substantial areas like the north, north central and the Western District where there is not all that much public land.

Juliet and I are both on the Landscape Committee of the National Trust. There are about 12 or 13 people on it; all interested in it and mostly with a professional background of some kind in land management. In my case I am a forester. I worked in the Land Conservation Council in the Sam Dimmick days — if anyone remembers that astonishing administrator and public servant. I work for Landcare now so I am on the community side of environmental management. Juliet is a geographer. Her specialities are water and the coast.

We have four factors that underline the importance of public open space. Firstly, it makes a major contribution to liveability, and everyone would be aware that real estate values rise the closer you get to major parks. Anything with a view of or proximity to a park or a reserve will usually cost more. Also these open space areas bring the country into the city. They support the conservation of biodiversity, help maintain air quality and reduce greenhouse gases, both directly through plant growth and indirectly by providing recreational opportunities closer to home, so you do not need to get out the car and drive a long way. I will mention something later that reflects that particularly in this era of climate change. They make a huge contribution to wealth — in some cases that is a problem — and to health and wellbeing. For a start walking is such a basic activity. We should all walk more. It enhances our enjoyment of city life. It is better for us. We meet people, and it does not create greenhouse gases. It is so important for our communities to be pedestrian as much as possible.

Of course in some cities they have already established that high levels of walking are associated with ready access to high-quality parklands, so you might expect the community to be a bit more active when there are larger areas of parks around. There is one thing I will add from my Landcare background, and that is that there is scope for community management by local Landcare groups and environment groups. They also enhance the community and make the community stronger, and develop new skills. We noted when we looked at who had put in submissions that many of them are community groups, so there are vast numbers out there. There are probably a couple of thousand community environment land management groups in this state, and they are all very, very interested in the management of public land. There are something like 800 Landcare groups across the state and at least 500 or 600 'friends of' groups and other groups devoted to environmental projects within Melbourne, and there are various other specialist land management groups. I think that adds up to about 2000, certainly well over 1500.

Within metropolitan Melbourne — less so in provincial cities — the importance of public open space is increasing. With the way we live today we are getting more multiple housing on single blocks. There is an increase in house size. In 1984 it was about 180 square metres and now it is about 220 or 230 square metres. Our houses are getting larger, and I think it would be evident to all of you that the distance to the city edge is increasing as the city spreads in every direction. There are concerns about fitness and obesity. Schools are overcrowded. My children went to an inner-city school where there was virtually no open space for them anywhere nearby. You will find lots of schools that are located near a park that use that park as part of the educational program.

There is also commercialisation — the uncritical pursuit of money and seeing open space as a resource from which to make money — and we will deal with one or two instances of that as well. That is a huge pressure, and no doubt you have encountered it from many of the people who are speaking to you.

Just a little bit more detail: public space is under threat because of big events. For instance, Albert Park and Royal Park are used for lots of events, including the grand prix. They are hoping for large numbers of visitors from interstate and overseas and people running these events do not want to site them on the periphery. Of course they are said to be in the public interest and so the use of public land tied up for long periods, although it is questioned by the public, is seen to be justified because of the economic and the image and PR benefits.

Also, organised sporting facilities: we have got a long history of this in Victoria. Councils short of funds want to establish some sort of sports ground or facility so they look for public land as a cheap opportunity. Occasionally sports organisations have their headquarters — one I know of is Life Saving Victoria which has its headquarters on the coastal reserve down at Sandridge, just near Webb Dock. I watched it being built and was sort of disappointed because that is a stretch of beach used by the community, particularly the local communities of Port Melbourne and Garden City.

We have also got alienation with car parking, both temporary and permanent. Given the number of cars is increasing all the time, the number of events that are held will need more room for car parking. You are putting cars in public open space and that will cause a bit of deterioration in many cases.

Lack of government funding encourages developments as we have listed above, and a growing belief that all public facilities should pay their way rather than being a charge on rates. You are getting more pressure on organisations to make money so they use public land for that purpose when it is available.

Climate change: we really have got to replan our open space, our parklands, because the climate is really changing. The traditional landscapes from the 19th century — the green, verdant, European look — are not going to be with us unless we pour a lot of resources into maintaining them.

We also probably need to redevelop some of our water features, and accept that there will be more ephemeral wetlands rather than permanent lakes in our urban landscapes. Also, when adjoining land intensifies — multistorey buildings that overlook parkland — you will often find pressure for public land to be used for car parking.

We think, though, there have been some good things happening in this state. We have put in appendix 1, which is a description of Melbourne 2030. I think that is very positive. I was really delighted to see that it has been accompanied by the purchase of about 3000 hectares of parkland right around the metropolis. It also includes things like the saltworks down at Point Cook. That is terrific open space. Once people might not have seen it as open space. Now they realise it is wonderful bird habitat, it has got an interesting history and it is open space and you can see the bay beyond. It is all part of the ethos that you take the open space you can get, but to us that is wonderful landscape and a terrific institution.

The remedies we see: improved public funding, perhaps through a development or subdivision levy — I think there could be a lot more of that; a requirement that all new major subdivisions contribute to big parkland projects and not just little local parks, so there might be a broad fund that people can invest in rather than piecemeal projects; improved parkland and more imaginative use of our space; and insisting on adequate offsets for any unavoidable alienation — this will always happen, perhaps even in the major rural and regional national parks, so if land has to be taken for some infrastructure or economic purpose, then you have an offset and you put money into that to create an equivalent or perhaps much better community resource; better planning as well to avoid development of incompatible uses on adjoining land — respect the parks, their sanctity and their value to people and ensure that there are not noisy roads or intrusive buildings.

We have a couple of suggestions of our own. We are thinking of a review of the role of VEAC, the Victorian Environment — —

**Dr BIRD** — Assessment Council.

**Mr YOUL** — I should know because, of course, the LCC, for which I worked, was a predecessor of VEAC. Perhaps it might be possible, and Juliet might speak on this, for it to examine private land — in places

where there is a public land controversy maybe VEAC could look at substituting private land purchased for the purpose. Did you want to expand there, Juliet?

**Dr BIRD** — I am concerned about the very limited role of VEAC, which has done an excellent job but is constrained by its act in that it is not allowed to look at private land, as I understand it. There have been a number of proposals like the recent Otway one where there are a few blocks of land which would be very appropriately added to the public estate, but VEAC is not allowed to say that. I do not know who is empowered to say it, often quite small pieces of land could be a critical addition to the public amenity. Unfortunately I think the act precludes it doing anything about it. That was one suggestion: that VEAC should have improved or extended powers to review public land.

**Mr YOUL** — Finally, our other suggestion is to look at enhancing community management. I work for Landcare, as you know, and it is wonderful just what resources there are in the community, what effort and what energy and what vision you can see. I have got about four brief case studies. Could I run through a couple of sentences in each case and then we will finish off?

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr YOUL** — Firstly, in our committee we have talked about the need for more walking tracks. As petrol rises in price, as people do less long distance travel, we see the need for a better network of walking tracks. Admittedly at present you cannot walk or ride bikes or horses on most roads because of the speed of the traffic; presumably in the future at some time, a couple of decades away, there will be much less traffic.

We see in lots of areas the opportunity to use public land — such as creek frontages, unused roads and old railway lines — and also combine that with Landcare plantings, because many Landcare groups and landowners have shelters and other extensive wildlife corridors across the countryside. We see that there is room for a lot of imaginative action to create, particularly in tourist districts like east of the Grampians or the Mornington Peninsula and the north-east, and enhance these walking tracks.

I went to the north-east a couple of years ago. I was just absolutely delighted to see how much use there is of the old railway line from Bright to Wangaratta. There are scores of these walking tracks, usually based on the old rail reserves, and they get lots and lots of use. I think that is something to look at as a special case that a community would want you to be aware of — to help create walking tracks for bikes, pedestrians and horseriding. We look at those three things: the railway reserves that are being dismantled, and the creek frontages and unused roads.

We think that is really something that would go well. You could do it through Landcare. Any gaps you could negotiate with local landowners, and I think Landcare groups and networks are good at that, because it is a local thing. I do not think you would need government legislation to do it — it would be project by project — but every indication I get out there is that lots of people are interested in it.

The next thing is that one of our members is a geologist — quite an eminent vulcanologist. He is interested in Mount Cottrell. It is south of Melton. It is an important geological feature. He is always reminding us of the need to conserve geological sections and hills and other topography for geological study. He was absolutely delighted recently when Melton shire bought land at the summit of Mount Cottrell as a public open space, so there is a huge role for enlightened local government as well.

The next thing is Lorne. Just talking about the commercial instinct, I was there at Christmas. My children have been swimming in the swimming pool for years. They are a bit old for that now. If you think of Lorne — crowded, with the one road going through, lots and lots of traffic, thousands of vehicles a day I imagine at times, existing shops and restaurants and the coastal reserve — already it has been commercialised to an extent by residential development on the old Erskine House site. Now there is a proposal to put a restaurant in at the old swimming pool, and lifestyle shops. Lorne is really only busy three months of the year. I could imagine that any development on that scale will eliminate the view of the ocean to the north-east from the main street. I think probably that sort of ill-conceived effort to make money out of a site will really just increase the pressure on existing businesses and will increase the traffic in the main street. I must admit I got that all hearsay from a friend who is a local resident. I pulled it out as a sort of example of the commercial instincts that are out there. We can understand why, but perhaps they go a bit too far.

The last thing is my own local Landcare group is Friends of Westgate Park. When you drive over the bridge you look down and you see the two bodies of water. One is a highly saline lake and the other is an ephemeral wetland. It is Parks Victoria territory. There is about 60 hectares there. The friends group does wonderful work. It gets money from various sponsors. It gets rainwater from the nearby factories, and it has a nursery of its own. It also runs a jobs-for-the-dole program, and it is just about to build a bird hide. This is a wonderfully entrepreneurial group — a small number of people who just get on with the job. That is what I really wanted to suggest: there are innumerable groups out there that can do terrific things when given a bit of autonomy, creative freedom and a bit of funding support.

Finally, I believe our committee says, ‘Take a long-term, public-spirited and conservative view so that future generations can hold us in the same high regard as we do with Hoddle and that generation of 19th-century land administrators and planners’. We revere them for the shape and framework of Melbourne and all the things that we enjoy about our city. We just say, ‘Let’s keep that spirit going and let’s be remembered for similar generosity and long-range planning’.

Juliet might like to add something.

**Dr BIRD** — No; I think we will leave that. We wanted to address, as you can see, a general overview about our stance as an NGO on public land management. I see a lot of your submissions will have come related to individual issues. These are general points we wanted to make.

**The CHAIR** — I begin by thanking both of you for your contribution, which is enlightening and does, as you say, provide a very useful overview. It is certainly useful to have the formal policy statements, too, so we know where the landscape committee has its view. I guess the first simple question that I would ask is: do you think the amount of open space is increasing or is it decreasing in the recent period? I am specifically thinking about the last couple of years or so under Melbourne 2030.

**Mr YOUL** — You have a go, and I will follow you.

**Dr BIRD** — You are talking about the Melbourne metropolitan area covered by Melbourne 2030?

**The CHAIR** — I am talking more generally, but specifically I am interested in that Melbourne situation.

**Dr BIRD** — It is a very hard question to answer in that sort of holistic way.

**The CHAIR** — Unless you are aware of some analysis that has been done. I thought you might know.

**Mr YOUL** — I am happy to have a go while you — —

**Dr BIRD** — Twenty-five per cent of the Melbourne 2030 is public open space. That has increased, I think, but whether it has increased commensurate with the population increase of the city, that is something — —

**The CHAIR** — The general manager indicated that she was unaware of how much public open space was available in Melbourne.

**Dr BIRD** — Yes. I was looking through this the other day, and I cannot remember the source of it. I came across a figure of 25 per cent. But it is always ambiguous as to what they define as public open space — for example, would they include the creek reserves, or are they merely thinking of gazetted public parklands? As you know yourselves, public open space is a very hard thing to define. So I do not know — —

**The CHAIR** — Probably not; I think there are quite a few accepted definitions. But you do not have a definition that you are able to relate to a precise amount?

**Dr BIRD** — Can I just go and look to see if I left a note of the source of this figure?

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr YOUL** — These are my observations. I was moved by a magazine cover the Natural Resources Conservation League of Victoria did maybe 20 years ago — it was 1986, actually. It used as a cover the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works plan for 1929. It was the depression era, but it showed the possible green

tentacles coming out from Melbourne along the river. So we know what 19th century Melbourne looked like, and then this showed to me that there was some really good and progressive thinking going on in the 1930s. The board of works, I suppose, wound down in the 1980s, and when the Cain government came in there was a big push for all sorts of reforms, as you will recall, but there was also a big push to look at government land, including in townships, because there were lots of blocks of land in the cities and even in little villages and provincial cities. They were looked at in a pretty commercial, hard-headed way. I reckon there was a lot of land sold to make money for coffers because it was seen to be surplus.

I was just watching from a distance, and this is my opinion. But at the same time I started to hear about public open space in housing developments. I reckon for the last 20 years — at that time I worked under Joan Kirner, I was involved with urban forestry, it was a wonderful time, and one became much more aware that developers were being asked to include open space in their planning. That is where I got interested in the community management side of things, too. Then to read of the green wedges in our appendix 1, of the 3000 hectares of new parkland that has been purchased — the Lysterfield Ranges, Point Cook, the Maribyrnong Valley — —

**The CHAIR** — Since that point you have had development pressure.

**Mr YOUL** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — We have heard a number of these examples — Kew Cottages is one we have heard a lot about. Land was to be sold there that was previously public land.

**Mr YOUL** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — You are not really aware of any audit or stock take that actually looks at that public land, and in particular the open space component of it in any systematic way?

**Mr YOUL** — No, I am not; I just thought the philosophy of providing open space with development and then offsets came later in the 1990s with the native vegetation protection — —

**The CHAIR** — Sure.

**Mr YOUL** — So philosophically I think — and probably there is some action as well — there is probably greater awareness now of the need for — —

**The CHAIR** — You are not actually aware of any analysis that has nailed this down, as it were?

**Dr BIRD** — This figure came from the *Melbourne Atlas*, a Department of Primary Industries publication. It was for 2002, when it gave a figure for the area of Melbourne as being 1787 square kilometres, of which 452 square kilometres was open space.

**The CHAIR** — Right. That is a useful reference.

**Dr BIRD** — But I have not followed it up again.

**The CHAIR** — We will certainly follow it up.

**Dr BIRD** — Yes, the *Melbourne Atlas* is possibly the most recent attempt to quantify.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. We will certainly follow up that point. The other point I want to ask you about is your suggestion on VEAC and a review on its role to look at, in a sense, juxtaposed private land. I am inventing and putting a word in your mouth there.

**Mr YOUL** — That is fine.

**The CHAIR** — There is also another aspect about VEAC. I do not think it has ever reviewed city land.

**Dr BIRD** — No, I do not think it is part of its brief. It is not allowed to look at urban areas. So in a sense, although it has done a very useful job, its hands are tied with some peripheral issues which would be usefully addressed by such a body.

**Mr TEE** — I do not have any questions, although I do want to thank you for your submission, which I have read, and for the passion and commitment you have to public open space and Melbourne 2030. Thank you.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — I am very interested in your submission and I have made some green highlights over it. I just want to ask a general question. Many submissions that we have received have been about the sale of surplus land by government departments. We have struggled in many ways to identify the criteria by which land is assessed as being surplus to requirements and having no other public values. Some of those examples involve not necessarily the idea of open space, but public land which does provide some open space but may also have cultural values in terms of built forms on it. I am sure the trust has an interest in many of those sites without me making a list of them. Do you have some comments about the processes that are involved there and your experience with those sales and perhaps trying to put submissions to government or persuade government not to do it? And what ideas might you have for improving the process? There is a lot there.

**Mr YOUL** — I suppose we generally hear about it when a controversy is generated. We are a little committee that meets every couple of months. Usually we hear by word of mouth or a complaint to the National Trust from the local regional community.

**Dr BIRD** — Yes, I do not think we have formalised a way of handling such. We get requests for assistance and we are asked if we can support local groups, and in fact we are so strained in resources that really we do not have the capacity to do that, which is why we developed this policy. We thought at least we can say to you, ‘This is what we believe in, and if it is useful you can take it’. But I do not know whether that specifically addresses your question, Ms Pennicuik, which is how you identify what is surplus. Presumably that is where community consultation, education and notification comes in. It is very hard to communicate with people and say, ‘This is what is happening. What do you think about it?’, and to make people aware of issues so that they do not come to you three months later and say, ‘You never told me this was going to happen and I do not agree with it’.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Perhaps part of the answer in your answer is that you are finding out by the issue when there is a controversy. Probably part of the answer is groups such as the National Trust being included or being consulted by government departments in terms of helping them to identify any values they have not necessarily identified with a piece of government or Crown land that has been proposed for sale. I know the National Trust has registers of buildings, for example.

**Dr BIRD** — Yes.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Excuse my lack of knowledge here, but does it have a register of open space?

**Dr BIRD** — Not specifically of open space, but of landscape we do. We have identified what we think are the important landscapes around the state, but that identification is not tied to land ownership, so that will embrace a mixture of public and private land. We have not specifically addressed the issue of registering public land areas.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — And what values or criteria do you use to identify those?

**Dr BIRD** — An identifiable parcel of land with a common landscape. For example, regarding the South Gippsland hills, I think most of us would have a fairly good image of what we mean by the South Gippsland hills. So it is identifiable. It has certain qualities. People have found a number of ways of identifying landscape quality. Some of them have attempted to do it in terms of criteria like slopes, the presence of water, the presence of native vegetation, so that is a kind of a feature based way of assessing landscape value. People have sought to do it in terms of local perception. Local people feel this is a valuable landscape. That is worth as much as the expert opinion as to quantum. Because we are the National Trust, if it has a richness of heritage that we can identify and say, ‘Well, yes, this was certainly the perception at such and such a time, we can see it was common tradition that started’ — for example — ‘in the Western District, the stone walls would automatically give it high landscape value because of the heritage aspect. So I would say the identification runs three ways. That is a broader designation than one simply involving public versus private land.

**Mr YOUL** — And there could be historical, cultural and artistic links as well, so it is all combined. How many different classifications would we have?

**Dr BIRD** — There are about 120, and a lot of them are now not up to the standard we expect these days, which is a long and very detailed classification process.

**Mr YOUL** — But we are reviewing them all the time, and they are often used in planning hearings, so that is quite a practical application.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — I just have a question on that proposal that VEAC should be able to purchase private land. Is that right?

**Mr YOUL** — Not to purchase, no.

**Dr BIRD** — No, to review the use of, as to whether it would be an appropriate addition to the public estate.

**Mr YOUL** — Make recommendations to government, presumably.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — I see. Do you have examples of where that should happen?

**Dr BIRD** — No, because they are not able to. As we understand it, VEAC is not able to make representations regarding private land.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — But could you suggest an example of where they should be able to do that?

**Dr BIRD** — I am aware of small blocks in the Otways which are privately owned and which in some cases are virtually surrounded by public parkland. It would seem to be appropriate that at least somebody could look at the public benefit of incorporating them into the park.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — So you would like to see them incorporated into the park?

**Dr BIRD** — I would like to see VEAC have the powers to look at it.

**Mr KAVANAGH** — Without purchasing the property?

**Dr BIRD** — I did not buy into that argument.

**Mr YOUL** — I guess that will be a matter for government, but sometimes there is private and philanthropic money available as well. You have the Trust for Nature which specialises in buying land with environmental significance and passing it on to sympathetic private landowners or passing it on to the public land estate as well.

I can remember one example of that, and it goes back to the Sam Dimmick days in the Land Conservation Council. In South Gippsland too there were two parks in the Strzeleckis, Tarra Valley and Bulga parks, and there was privately owned land connecting them. I am pretty sure that in the recommendations from the council it was proposed that the intermediate land would be purchased. To the best of my knowledge the park now includes both Tarra Valley and Bulga and the intermediate land. I guess it is conceivable that there might be — I will just dream this up — a proposal for, say, a gas terminal at Wilsons Promontory and it was the only place it could go. Say we needed gas desperately and we had to bring it ashore at Wilsons Promontory. So you would do that, but then you would look at an offset in nearby land on, say, the Yanakie peninsula to add to the park. That is the sort of thing I had in mind when Juliet was speaking. The act could look broadly at the private land estate where some sort of environmental restoration or balancing was required. I guess this is not really my field, but does that sort of cover it from your perspective?

**Dr BIRD** — No, I was not seeking to buy into offsets at that point, only that there are — just as the Summerland Peninsula was added in the days of Joan Kirner, some private land was purchased back to add to the penguin reserve.

**Mr YOUL** — That is a very good example, actually. I guess we are saying that there might be something that you could do to review the act. Anyway, I guess you have got the access, and you will have a bigger picture than us, but we think that it would be well worth looking at and just saying, 'Does the act, which is several years old, fit the present needs and future needs?'

**Mr O'DONOHUE** — Just to pick up a point, I suppose the Summerland Peninsula on Phillip Island identifies flaws in the way land is purchased by government for conservation purposes, because 25 years on the

process is still going. It is likely to go on to 2010 and beyond. For those residents who are still there — there are still some residents who are there full time — it has been a quarter of a century of pain and uncertainty. We are looking at the sale or alienation of public land, but looking at private land bought for public purposes, there are obviously real deficiencies in that process as well. Summerland is perhaps one of the best examples of that.

**Mr YOUL** — Yes.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — You made the recommendation that we should look — and we have heard this before — at the role of VEAC. In your submission you talk about public land — I am trying to find the phrase you used; it is a good one. I cannot find it now. It was about making sure that public space is addressed in terms of strategic and long-term values and that it is protected and conserved with those values in mind. I just wondered whether you had any other recommendations regarding the legislative framework or the administrative framework in terms of public land that you could offer the committee in addition to what you have already said.

**Mr YOUL** — You would need some sort of coordination, wouldn't you? Were you implying earlier that different departments these days make decisions themselves and sell off the land? Did I get that sort of message from what you were saying, David?

**The CHAIR** — I think it would be fair to say that some of us think the process is inadequate.

**Mr TEE** — And others have a different view.

**Mr YOUL** — I guess I am no administrator.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — If I could say, from what we understand a government department would identify — for argument's sake it could be the department of education — a parcel of land somewhere and say, 'We think this is surplus'. It is then assessed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment for its value, and if that department says it has no value, then it is able to be sold. But we have had before us in this committee a plethora of examples where the community has not agreed with that, and land with values that the community has and which the National Trust would share I think in many cases has been and is being sold and developed. I was just wondering whether you had any ideas as to other recommendations you could put to the committee, even if you cannot do that now off the top of your head.

**Dr BIRD** — Presumably one of the problems with DSE would be it would be reluctant to take on a lot of extra land because of its funding situation. Just as the National Trust in Britain keeps being offered wonderful properties and says, 'We would love to have it, but we cannot afford to run it', DSE must be in a similar situation. Although it might look at a block of land and say, 'Yes, we realise it has value for additional public open space, but where is the money going to come from to maintain it?'. Presumably that is an issue. Again we would be back with the fact that we need to have a very good system of funding. If we are going to have public open space, it has to be backed by a very good system of funding.

**Mr YOUL** — There is one other thing. I can only speak generally about this, but I am thinking about a very specific situation. There is a possibility of the community taking on the management of reasonably substantial areas of natural vegetation. I just know of one opportunity for this. It is under way with Landcare. We are working on it, so that might be something. If you are interested in pursuing community management later on, Richard could get in touch in a couple of months. I imagine Trust for Nature also has substantial reserves that it involves the community in management of. What I am saying is that it does not necessarily have to fall to DSE to manage these new acquisitions.

**The CHAIR** — There are other models.

**Mr YOUL** — There are community trusts and other organisations. Sometimes there is of course a role for commercialisation there. I would not want you to think that we are anti-commercialisation. Sometimes that can really make the difference. The trust has lots of commercial operations of its own; it has to survive. That can be a very good side of things. Maybe we should think about that one. If you wanted more specific answers, perhaps Richard and ourselves and Wendy Dwyer, our project officer, could talk about it.

**Ms PENNICUIK** — Yes, if you could just take that on notice and get back to us.

**The CHAIR** — I have one very brief final question. Does the National Trust support the concept of an explicit budget target for the sale of government land? The current situation is that every year in the budget there is a target set to flog off, as it were, so many millions of dollars of public land. Do you support that concept of an explicit target?

**Dr BIRD** — I do not think we can speak for the National Trust there, without running it past them.

**The CHAIR** — Your landscape committee?

**Dr BIRD** — Yes. Our landscape committee I think would not support it, but we would believe that in the interests of sustainability you should make decisions to sell off government land only when there are very good reasons for doing so and no good reasons for keeping it.

**Mr TEE** — If I could get your view on another issue — that is, the view that what Melbourne 2030, effectively the green wedges, and this is a view of the Liberal Party,— does add to the cost of housing. Therefore the Liberal Party is opposed to it. I am wondering if you have a view on that position?

**Dr BIRD** — I do not think that really falls within our brief. We have read the newspaper debate on it, with those who say restricting land supply increases housing costs and those who say it has nothing to do with it. I do not think it falls within the remit of the National Trust to comment there.

**Mr YOUL** — If I could just add one thing to that, I have heard speakers — and again I could mention it to Richard — on the need with climate change to grow a lot more food within 150–250 kilometres from Melbourne. So one senses that there is at least some scope for that, even though a lot of the land is under hobby farms, lifestyle, residential, going back to bush. A lot of that is really positive, I must say. There are people thinking about how we might intensify food production. It has always been one of the best areas for agriculture in Victoria, the country in proximity to Melbourne, because there is water, it is close to transport and there are opportunities for intensification, and they are probably still there. There are other factors in green wedges. Some of that farmland is really worth maintaining as a very useful source of agricultural income.

**Mr TEE** — They are different values, the land available and the offsets, is what you are saying?

**Mr YOUL** — Yes.

**Mr TEE** — You need to have a broader context; you need a broader view?

**Mr YOUL** — You do. You need to look at climate change — with everything we do now, that is part of the checklist — and you look at food production, recreation, scenery, landscapes and peripheral businesses. There is a vast number of business opportunities, aren't there? You do not want to knock them out. There are no doubt lots of businesses you can have in the green belt and still preserve the general environment. You could have people coming and going for commercial purposes as well as recreation.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you, Dr Bird and Rob Youl, for your contribution. It has been very welcome and had a lot of useful ideas for us. As you have flagged, you may well have some further communication with the committee staff in the next little period. Thank you very much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**