

Protecting the Macedon Ranges . . .

. . .the Macedon Ranges . . . the ridge line, headwaters of rivers, catchments, rolling foothills, vegetation types . . . landscapes that define all we value, landscapes that are all-encompassing, not just the scenic look-outs and photo points, landscapes that are the totality of the biogeographic region and the ecological processes that underpin and sustain all life . . . within which we all live. Notwithstanding all we have imposed since European settlement, freeways, regulating natural water systems, agriculture and building our towns, we live in this landscape, we are part of it . . . we can't live apart from it . . . and, as our numbers grow, we have a simple choice: will we choose to live and work with nature or seek to further control nature in some ultimately doomed belief that our technological mastery will prevail?

This choice becomes ever more pressing with the challenges of climate change, water supply and a growing population.

We cannot 'protect' the environment of the Macedon Ranges as if it is some separate entity by drawing lines on a map or segmenting it into human-centric categories that suit our 'management' structures. The totality of the landscape in which we live, of which we are an integral part, is not two dimensional. This landscape is multi-dimensional . . . a complex and integrated system . . . and our planning processes must encompass this complexity.

For far too long planning has been two dimensional – how we use land - and without regard to the impact of land management on the total system and further down the catchment. The planning and political process too often claims the need for 'balance', itself a two dimensional construct . . . and, nearly always, the environment (as an economic 'externality') is compromised . . . a hectare here or there . . . but slowly and progressively degraded.

We have the capacity and, increasingly, the will to live with nature, to see ourselves as part of nature and it is this nascent understanding and transformation that must be harnessed in how we plan our future . . . the role and creation of biolinks, regenerative farming, new housing models . . . these are the elements that give us hope that we can live sustainably . . . but time is against us!

*- these thoughts underpin the following submission . . .*

## **Macedon Ranges Localised Planning Statement**

**Submission by [REDACTED], Feb 2018**

Planning is at best an imprecise art, drawing on the best information we have available at any given time, and therefore should be guided by principles, notably the precautionary principle given climate change, population growth, water security considerations and the need to take the long view.

The subsidiarity principle should also be prominent in any framework of fundamental principles.

There is no statement of underlying principles in the LPS rather a 'vision' that segments the Macedon Ranges into ten dot-points which are then taken up in nine 'themes', continuing the segmentation of the integrated 'whole' of the Macedon Ranges.

My interest in the LPS is as a resident of the Macedon Ranges region, informed by reading the Consultation Draft, attending the Kyneton information session (30 January), and meetings organised by Macedon Ranges Residents Association (MRRRA) and the Forum for Democratic Renewal.

I want to make the following points and recommendations:

### **The Localised Planning Statement Consultation Draft**

I submit that the Draft LPS is flawed in substance and process.

Generally, I endorse the criticisms made by MRRRA of the substance of the draft, in particular that it deletes Statement of Planning Policy No. 8, ignores the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, endorsed by the Minister and Macedon Ranges Council, and does not contain the planning provisions necessary to achieve the protection promised by government and required by the proposed legislation. It is weak in its

use of vague strategies: 'manage', 'encourage', 'recognise', 'maintain' . . . statements of hope, rather than definite actions that give an assurance of action – 'will' and 'shall'. The LPS needs information regarding how it will be implemented to overcome the distrust it has generated.

The consultation process to date is deeply flawed. When people see fundamental elements and Ministerially- and Council-endorsed recommendations ignored they are understandably distrustful. In none of the material put before the community is there any explanation why these recommendations have been ignored – consultation must be an iterative, two-way process or it is simply 'ticking-a-box'.

Releasing a draft in December, with briefings starting 30 January, for submissions by 19 February for something as important as the long-term protection of the Macedon Ranges is short-changing the community, the process and the future. For something with such far-reaching consequences the LPS consultation process needs more time – regardless of time pressures: the bureaucracy and its consultants have had months and years, while the community with all its diversity and limited resources gets weeks! (Putting this into an even longer perspective, the traditional owners lived here successfully for tens of thousands of years until 200 years of European settlement changed it radically and only in the last 30 years have we really started to come to terms with what the problems are and what needs to be done – getting the protection needed right in a matter of weeks is unrealistic.)

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That the Draft LPS be re-drafted taking account of SPP No. 8 and the recommendations of the Advisory Committee, Council(s) and the Macedon Ranges community and based on key principles, including the precautionary principle.
2. That a genuine, iterative consultation process, with sufficient time, be undertaken that will ensure the views of the community are heard.

#### **Nature and significance of Macedon Ranges region**

The intention of the Victorian Government 'to protecting and enhancing the state significant values in the Macedon Ranges region' is commendable. I submit that 'to recognise the importance of the distinctive areas and landscapes to the people of Victoria and to protect their unique features for future generations' requires an all-inclusive approach, not simply cherry-picking the well-known landmarks and re-drawing town boundaries as settlement boundaries for some of the main towns.

I submit that the Macedon Ranges in its entirety is of immense importance to all Victorians and especially the residents of Melbourne present and future. In the absence of an accepted term I submit that the Macedon Ranges region *is* the landscape . . . the biophysical, including human, processes that form an integrated system. It is part of the peri-urban arc that is essential for the future well-being of millions of metropolitan residents and that is argument for greater protection: it should be seen as an extension of and part of the green wedges. The importance of the Macedon Ranges for Melbourne and the State was emphasised by Professor Buxton at Gisborne, 13 February.

The Draft proposals for revised 'settlement boundaries' for four of the towns (but not Gisborne, Romsey – which is intriguing - or any of the smaller towns) is causing concern which will doubtless be represented by those respective communities. While re-drawing these boundaries (somewhere in the bureaucracy?) seems cavalier, it also illustrates the flaws of, firstly, taking towns out of an integrated view of the regional landscape and, second, the insidious 'balance' argument. As stated in my introduction 'balance' is a 2-dimensional construct that invariably sees the environment come off the loser. This is why we must seek to take an integrated, whole-of-region approach to planning that sees all towns as part of the total landscape. The 'so-far-no-further' argument is also seductive but demonstrably false in this situation in that it is invoked precisely when boundaries *are* being re-drawn, literally at the stroke of a pen, to extents that will radically change town character.

We also need a discussion about how we live in the Macedon Ranges in a changing climate, not just where: issues of higher density, urban sprawl, rural lifestyles, landscape and township character. How we live is fundamental to protecting the Macedon Ranges.

The public challenge that this LPS 'protection' draft is a 'growth' strategy must be answered.

[Notwithstanding these comments, I am aware of, and commend, the very good work Macedon Ranges Council is doing to document biodiversity values, visual landscapes and in the farming zone. This is all part of having the best information available to assist comprehensive integrated planning.]

**Recommendations:**

3. That a re-drafted LPS take an integrated approach to protecting the whole of the Macedon Ranges . . . the landscape in its totality . . . and avoid a fragmentation into (separate?) 'manageable' sectors.
4. That a future LPS include statements regarding population policy and projections and clearly place the region in a State-wide context with particular reference to metropolitan Melbourne.
5. That all towns (say > 200 or with reticulated water services) be included in the LPS.
6. That a wide-ranging conversation about where we live and how we live should run alongside the consultation for a revised LPS.

**Scope of the region and the proposed protection**

The explanatory information and fact sheet handed out at the public consultation sessions makes repeated references to the Macedon Ranges region (or simply Macedon Ranges). Macedon Ranges Shire Council is referred to variously, 'in collaboration with' and 'informed by the structure planning work and community consultation . . . undertaken'. The LPS Consultation Draft is similarly general and regional until we get to the crunch: 'In this statement, the *policy area* is the municipal district of the Macedon Ranges Shire Council'.

So, region *or* municipality?

Do the values of the total landscape end at the municipal boundary? Do catchment boundaries conform to Shire boundaries? Biolinks, ecological processes . . . farming land, townships . . . are these more deserving of protection one side of the boundary fence than the other?

I live in [REDACTED], which has far more in common with the Macedon Ranges than the rest of Hepburn Shire, the administrative (and rating) entity in which I find myself. On the same counts of landscape, water catchments, biolinks, farming systems . . . we are not only contiguous with Macedon Ranges but continuous in how land is used. We also share other characteristics: rapid population growth (2.5 - 3% per year) and socio-economic links (analysis of census data shows that of every 10 Trentham residents who commute for work, 9 travel east to, presumably, Melbourne, Kyneton, Woodend, Bendigo with only 1 in 10 travelling west). Trentham's rate of growth places it clearly within the peri-urban zone but it is not part of any advocacy to ensure proper planning or that it has adequate infrastructure.

By far the most significant connection between Trentham and the Macedon Ranges is that Trentham and district, in the headwaters of the Coliban river, is an important part of the drinking water catchment of Kyneton and other towns further down the catchment.

Municipal boundaries are also 2-dimensional lines on a map, last drawn in the Kennett-era amalgamations. Municipal boundaries are arbitrary, anthropocentric and largely political and do not relate to any underlying realities such as water catchments (and will doubtless be re-drawn again . . . the sooner the better for some of us) and so are not a good basis for planning or protecting regional values.

Hepburn with a population approximately 1/3 that of Macedon Ranges (and a growth rate of (0.9%) does not have the capacity (or will?) to do the strategic planning necessary to protect the total landscape values addressed in the LPS for Macedon Ranges. The Trentham Structure Plan was last subject to a full review in 2006 since when the town has more than doubled in size.

**Recommendations:**

7. That the Macedon Ranges Protection legislation and Planning Statement be based on meaningful regional (rather than municipal) boundaries.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and am willing to discuss it further.

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