

10th December 2010

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council
Level 6, 8 Nicholson Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

LEADWEST SUBMISSION – METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE INVESTIGATION

Please find attached a submission by LeadWest to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council on matters relating to the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation.


LeadWest is a regional organisation for Melbourne's west. It is governed by a ten-member Board of Directors comprising five local government representatives (one each from the cities of Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham), four elected by the corporate members and an independent chairperson.

LeadWest's objective is to foster and undertake actions that will support sustainable growth and development of the region. We aim to build on the region's social, economic and environmental capacity and to plan and create a sustainable future for the wellbeing of its communities.

Consequently, LeadWest and the organisations it represents have a keen interest in the contribution of public land to the liveability of Melbourne's west and seek to promote the opportunities for enhancing this contribution.

Please feel free to contact me if you require further information on LeadWest and its submission.

Yours sincerely,



Anton Mayer
Chief Executive Officer
LeadWest Ltd

LEADWEST SUBMISSION TO VICTORIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT COUNCIL ON THE METROPOLITAN MELBOURNE INVESTIGATION

LeadWest applauds the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) for inviting submissions to inform the Metropolitan Melbourne Investigation and welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission.

LeadWest is a regional organisation formed in 2007 by the councils of Melbourne's west. LeadWest was created to foster and undertake actions that will support sustainable growth and development of the region. In this respect it aims to provide leadership across the region, to ensure co-ordination of key regional activities, to be an advocate for the region, to promote and market the region, and to develop regional planning. In this quest, LeadWest aims to adopt an active partnership approach between business, government and the community working together on behalf of the region.

LeadWest has been established as a company limited by guarantee and its Board of Directors comprises five Directors drawn from the following councils: Brimbank, Maribyrnong, Melton, Moonee Valley and Wyndham; plus four Directors elected from non-council members (presently a Director from each of City West Water, Moonee Valley Racing Club, Nufarm Ltd and Victoria University). The Board of Directors has an independent chairman, the Hon. Ralph Willis.

More information about LeadWest is available at www.leadwest.com.au

Discussion Paper Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction to the Discussion Paper shows the investigation area divided up at two levels, municipal and areas inside and outside the urban growth boundary. An update is required to reflect the change in the urban growth boundary and the proposed grassland reserves in Melbourne's west.

LeadWest and its stakeholders are somewhat concerned by the lack of recognition of at the regional level of Melbourne's west. The implications of this are that some important regional directions could be missing or underplayed in decision-making about the future of public land. The implications associated with biological connectivity and open space are addressed later in this submission.

We highlight that Melbourne's west is recognised as a sub-region within the broader metropolis. This is evidenced by:

- The councils in the region combining together with other major stakeholders to form LeadWest as a consortium to lobby for their interests. Another network for the west is the councils' Mayors and CEOs Forum.
- Regional Development Australia recognising the region through an area-based committee (Western Melbourne RDA).
- Tourism being coordinated in the region through Western Melbourne Tourism Inc.
- Parks Victoria recognising the region in its report *Linking People and Spaces* (2002).
- The Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Authority holding a separate forum for the area in developing its next generation of Catchment Management Strategy.

A major Victorian Government regional initiative, the Vision for Werribee Plains (V4WP), was launched in 2002. The then Premier Steve Bracks said of the Victorian Government's plans for the region, "Our aim is to make the Werribee Plains a region that is world renown for sustainable development."

It is the desire of the people of the region to fulfil this Vision and their hope that the VEAC review supports the government's aspiration.

The V4WP has specific objectives to (a) protect and restore biodiversity values, and (b) improve access to and quality of public open spaces. A list of projects that have received co-investment is attached (see Attachment 1).

In Stage 1, the V4WP project concentrated on distributing recycled water from the Western Treatment Plant. A major beneficiary was the Werribee Tourism Precinct.

In Stage 2 there have been a broader range of projects supported – including recycled water and stormwater for around 20 sports fields, an all-abilities playspace at Brimbank Regional Park, and support for new shared trails – Melton-Werribee, Altona North.

Improving the liveability of Melbourne's western suburbs is a mantra for the Mayors and CEOs of the region's local governments. The contribution of public land to liveability is a key issue.

Arising out of the V4WP, a Werribee Plains Environmental Sustainability Framework was launched in March 2010. Many stakeholders have contributed to the development of this environmental sustainability framework for Melbourne's west. It can be viewed at www.leadwest.com.au.

The Framework seeks to set a vision for the region – to progressively become environmentally sustainable in water and energy, and to protect the region's biodiversity by a series of biolinks connecting the coastline to the top of the catchments. In implementing the framework (under the auspices of LeadWest) the public land across the region is a key asset and considered as part of a wider regional system.

Chapters 2 and 3

LeadWest and its stakeholders are somewhat concerned by an apparent lack of connection between Chapters 2 and 3 and subsequent chapters.

In particular:

- How do issues of climate change, biodiversity, population trends, heritage and culture, and geology – inform the values we place on public land?
- Why is stormwater omitted from the report yet public land may be used to mitigate stormwater flows and modify water quality entering streams – especially silt, litter, elevated chemicals?

Regional Parks

- There is no mention of Toolern Creek Regional Park Regional Park.

Public land excluded from the report

There appears to be many parcels of land excluded from the VEAC report. The parcels of land listed are quite well protected; however there is no opportunity to comment on other parcels of land (smaller parcels) held by the Crown.

These could well go “under-the-radar” unless they are listed. In particular where is the list of public land titled ‘surplus to requirements’?

The inclusion of the former public land in the Otway Plains Bioregion, now being developed as a residential development under the name ‘River Walk’ (page 79), is an anomalous inclusion in a discussion of public lands, as it has been the subject of an excision process for over five years. It should be noted there was no compensation in acquisition of public land for the loss of this parcel. The parcel of land was also part of the Western Treatment Plant, so should be treated as part of that complex; not as normal public land.

Chapter 10.1 General recommendations

Connectivity

There is a need to consider the issue of connectivity when considering the future use of public land. The Victorian Government's *Land and Biodiversity White Paper 2009* highlights the importance of a system of biolinks to strengthen connectivity across Victoria.

The role of public land is an important component of enhancing this connectivity both in existing areas of conservation significance and other areas of public where there is a potential capacity to restore connectivity. Major regional biolinks, involving nature reserves, regional parks, natural features reserves and coastal reserves are important for future resilience of native species and communities to climate change enabling movement in response to changing conditions.

Future investment is crucial in making the linkages along public lands - waterways and other areas of public land. For example, connectivity between grasslands will increase the capacity for large areas to support biodiversity assets.

In Melbourne's west, the Werribee Plains Regional Environment Sustainability Framework (2010) has highlighted the importance of biological connectivity in its report on biodiversity *Werribee Plains Biodiversity Connectivity: Resilience of natural assets and systems to climate change and fragmentation by urbanisation* (2010).

Under the Framework, planning is currently commencing for a Werribee River Land Use and Biodiversity Strategy that will look at all the natural assets (private and public) along the river corridor and the development of biolinks from the coast to the Lerderderg Gorge.

In this regard, the issue of biodiversity as a key asset for open spaces, such as regional parks, needs to be acknowledged. Without such an approach, regional parks could potentially become long lasting barriers to the development of regional biolinks.

Accordingly, LeadWest and its regional stakeholders suggest the need for inclusion of the role of public land in the protection and enhancement of regional connectivity in the draft recommendations for:

- Nature conservation reserve and private protected area;
- Regional Park;
- Natural features reserve; and
- Coastal Reserve.

Open space

With respect to open space, LeadWest and its regional stakeholders submit that:

- The Vision for Werribee Plains (V4WP) has open space access as one of its targets - this should be acknowledged, along with the projects in which V4WP has invested.
- Recognition of the early planning to link public areas with shared trails (including biodiversity) is required. Longer stretches need points for (a) toilets and (b) rest and refreshment (e.g. cafes, kiosks, etc). LeadWest and its regional stakeholders also suggest that the investigation reference Parks Victoria's report *Linking People and Parks*.
- Management of feral animals (e.g. rabbits, foxes, and cats), noxious weeds (e.g. serrated tussock, Chilean Needle grass) and environmental weeds (e.g. Galenea, boxthorn) is crucial, so that environmental and recreational values are maintained. A park denuded of groundcover by rabbits, leaving only coverage by Galenea and boxthorn is totally unacceptable to the public - as has been noted in recent experience with Brimbank Park.
- Inappropriate access to public areas can greatly reduce the value of a public area (e.g. trail bikes and walkers with dogs accessing the Cheetham wetlands, a RAMSAR site, thereby driving off the migratory birdlife and destroying the very reason the wetlands are so attractive).
- Limited ecotourism can be used on public lands (e.g. Western Treatment Plant, Werribee Tourism Precinct, coastal marine parks). Lakes and waterways could be better managed for kayaking and paddleboats by sensible location of launching points and parking for vehicles.
- Neighbourhood parks can have better local commitment through supported 'interest groups' in maintaining the park - graffiti removal, tree planting, mulching, reporting damage and inappropriate behaviour, monitoring/recording usage of the park, surveying neighbourhood about their views on the park.
- 'Parks & People Foundation' and 'Friends of the Zoo' represent incorporated organisations to support key public assets. Perhaps another more generic Foundation is needed to support Council-managed/owned assets - especially if registered with ATO for tax deductibility for donations which could be used to finance specialised 'all-abilities' equipment.

- There should be no further alienation of public lands (without a direct or net gain in swapping land within the Urban Growth Boundary) with rapid population growth.
- The fragile natural environment in Melbourne's west - prone to weed and pest invasion (rabbits) and soil erosion and salinisation – needs more care and investment; too often do we hear that PV field staff have insufficient funds for managing public land.
- There needs to be more use of recycled water and stormwater to assist in management of recreation areas (e.g. ovals, public gardens, and high traffic areas).
- There is a need for overnight tenting facilities at places such as the You Yangs and the Werribee Regional Park.
- We need to recognise that people in the western suburbs regularly access public open spaces outside the region (e.g. the You Yangs, Brisbane Ranges, Geelong, Surf Coast, Inner Metro, bayside beaches, Dandenong Ranges). New grassland reserves on edge of the Urban Growth Boundary will also play a role.