



# *Newham & District Landcare Group*

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6 June 2021

## **Submission to MRSC Draft Roadsides Conservation Management Plan**

Newham and District Landcare Group is very pleased to see this draft plan. We have lobbied for over a decade for both a plan and actions to better manage the special environmental assets on Macedon Ranges roadsides. Our many reports and events on the issues are at <https://newhamlandcare.info/rural-roadsides/>

We congratulate the Shire's authors on a well-researched and balanced discussion of the issues surrounding the ecological values within roadsides, fire risk mitigation and road safety. There is much useful reference information detailing legislation, regulation and methodology.

Some specifics:

- We found understanding the **permit requirements on page 14** a challenge. For example:
  - in Table 2, at Cl.52.17 entry for *Remove dead vegetation*, the exception to the rule is trees with a trunk diameter or 40mm or more. However p13 clause 52.17 - the point Dead vegetation effectively states that a permit is not required for removal of dead veg with a trunk of less than 40cm. Which is correct?
  - Mowing /slashing native veg – does this mean any roadside grass can be mown without permit? The permit information on MRSC website at <https://www.mrsc.vic.gov.au/Live-Work/Roads-Drains-Paths/Roads-Traffic/Roadsides/Permits-for-environmental-works> states that mowing of native grasses is discouraged.

**We support the outline of Themes and Objectives (p27), Guiding Principles (p28), and Actions pp30>**, and make the following comments.

- Under the **Conservation theme:**

Phalaris and Cocksfoot should be included as invasive grasses under environmental weeds.

We would recommend increased ecological and cultural burns for both grasslands and some additional roadsides from Appendix 4, for example Shelton's Rd used to be burned by local farmers and is a good example of a biodiverse grassy woodland in need of further burning.

The "ute guide" for council staff gets a big tick as do all the internal protocols and actions or all themes, particularly training of staff and "*toolbox / monthly meetings with Operations staff*" with MRSC Enviro Unit (p40).

- **Fire Risk Management theme:** again, we support the Roadside burning objectives, principles and actions p37-38.

Under the **Road Maintenance theme** (pp39>) we see **weed management** as vital for fire mitigation and for habitat protection. Some of the main points of community dissatisfaction blamed on the Shire, are weeds on roads managed by VicRoads and on properties where DELWP is responsible for notifying landholders and enforcing action. Is there a better way of communication/encouragement with these entities? The problem of gorse growing on adjoining properties to the "very high and high value" roadsides if not addressed means we will be forever removing new infestations from these roadsides triggered from over the fence. If Council can enforce property owners to remove high grass volumes in paddocks, surely they can also address the Gorse issue under the same parameters?

An NDLG member in repeated correspondence with Regional Roads Victoria since November 2018 about woody weeds on Romsey Rd (coming out of Woodend) was at last able to acknowledge works carried out at last in April 2021 (albeit imperfectly)!

More care is needed than in the past to minimise vegetation damage so it is good to see the measures proposed under road widening and reconstruction (p43); chip and return mulch to site providing it does not smother native vegetation (p40), drainage works p45 and spoils piles p47.

We note the issue about "*lack of clarity about vegetation clearance around street signs*" p39 and would add the lack of clarity about spraying around marker posts which has destroyed significant native flora.

- **Recreation theme:** the objective of this theme conflicts with those for conservation on high value roadsides. The issue of horse riding on high conservation value or significant roadsides needs stronger action than internal protocols to *divert* and *engage* (p53). Signage for these areas is urgent and should ban horse-riding and motorised vehicles.
- **Adjoining landholder, permits and licences theme**

It is important that **permit information** for roadside vegetation management for landholders and residents (pp 54>) be clear and concise, and an improved aspect of community education, for example by immediately updating the brochure *Maintaining our Roadsides* (p55). The need for and opportunities for improving **community education** are noted throughout the draft plan, which NDLG believes is critical. We would like to see every new resident receives appropriate information, in for example a "Welcome pack". Landcare and enviro groups would happily assist.

On page 56 under firewood collection the first sentence states that "*Community members apply for a (sic) Environmental Activity on Roadsides permit to undertake ANY (our emphasis) works on roadsides*". Does this apply to all activities? We note that on page 54 **Lack of policy** is listed as an issue ie "*Council lacks a clear policy to guide its decision about whether a local laws permit should be issued for vegetation management on roadsides.*"

Relevant to this, **NDLG strongly advocates for a by-law or restrictions on boundary plantings** (p58) to deal with the proliferation of non-native windbreaks like Cypress hedges too close to roadsides. An article in our latest newsletter no.63 outlines some of the problems, just a few being flammability, impact on native roadside vegetation and movement of native species, impact on views, costs to ratepayers for lopping.... There are excellent lists available of suitable plantings which should be made available.

NDLG believes here need to be better **compliance management**, for example to reduce illegal removal of native planting, dumping and unauthorised plantings on roadsides (eg noted on p55). Our Roadsides Management Group has in the past notified MRSC of such activities but found follow-up to be sporadic.

**Firewood** is a fraught issue for many residents. We agree with the draft plan's outline of issues and actions (p56-57) and would welcome the use of suitable locations for firewood collection resulting from tree safety works, also on p39 "*consider stockpiling (felled material) allowing free firewood collection for residents*".

### **Part 3 – Implementation Plan**

We argue that the short-term actions listed on page 60 are essential, and would like to know that the resources listed as existing are in fact available and will be used within the next 2 years, particularly with regard to internal processes and communications materials. We note that extra resources between \$5000 and \$25000 are required for some actions in this time period and ask whether these are budgeted for in the current draft Budget for 1921-22. It is regrettable that actions like spoils management and restoration rely on large dollar amounts (\$50-100,000) and listed as waiting for medium or long-term.

NDLG fully supports the Community engagement annual program on p62. We are engaged in many of the activities described and happy to promote further.

### **Appendix 3 - List of high value roadsides**

We note the Methodology (p19) matrix preferences the presence of trees and hence the need for a special category for grassland areas. We question the categorisation of some roads we know well, such as Jim, Hennebergs and Sheltons which are all rated as HIGH. We know via full botanical surveys (Just) that the latter two have rich, diverse ground layers vastly superior to Jim rd, albeit in sections. We note that the Newham area has no Very High roadsides listed, and argue that **Hennebergs and Sheltons rds** are worthy of special protection and potential listing as VERY HIGH after improved woody weed control and remediation of bad practices like spoils dumping and drainage work impacts which we pointed out during 2016 and onwards (eg our photos on p25). It is an example of rare scoria cone grassy woodland with relict Snow Gums (*Euc. pauciflora pauciflora*) and threatened, locally and regionally significant species (see p43 K Just - *Flora Assessment of High Value Roadside Reserves in Newham, Victoria*).

The following two roadsides are not mentioned.

**Waterworks Rd.** There is a Significant Roadside Vegetation Sign at the Romsey Rd end which seems unwarranted considering how the lower section from Romsey Rd has exotic grasses and woody weeds on the western side and on the east has been badly impacted by landholder mowing and understorey removal, leaving only tree canopy. However, despite a bad Vinca infestation the section from Clyde Avenue to Mt Macedon Rd is potentially a high value stretch with a density of Cherry Ballart and Peppermints, specimens of *Pomaderris racemosa* and patches of Bulbine Lilies. Owls, koalas and

possums have been noted on family spotlight expeditions, and there are many woodland birds (a *Sitella* nest noted), the road being adjacent to Macedon State Park northern section.

**McKinley Track** is not listed but is worthy of consideration for its flora and fauna (the 2020 Newham Roadside Nocturnal Fauna Surveys recorded high numbers of arboreal marsupials here).