



8 February 2018

Ms Margot Stork
CEO, Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Re: MRSC Budget allocations for 2018-19

Dear Ms Stork

Newham and District Landcare Group (NDLG) welcomes your appointment as CEO of Macedon Ranges Shire Council and looks forward to seeing 2017's improvements in our Council's practices and consultation continue.

We write to request increased budget allocations to environmental programs in the 2018-19 financial year. We have a long history of working with the Shire on environmental matters, and have developed a fruitful relationship with Council officers on issues relating to management of public reserves, weeds and roadside remnant vegetation. The Council is to be congratulated on current development of a biodiversity strategy.

Our priorities for increased funding are:

1. Supporting the Environment Department to organise ecological burns, for which timing is critical. These are important for maintaining indigenous vegetation and weed control on our increasingly endangered and rare native grasslands, such as Woodend grassland reserve, and also some particularly high value conservation roadsides. Shelton's Road for example in the past had well-managed burning by landholders – no longer possible - which helped maintain an unusually diverse variety of indigenous species which are now under threat.
2. Individual members and NDLG have made budget submissions in the past for the development of a roadside management plan so were very pleased when this was finally budgeted in 2017. We would like an increase in funds to complete the mapping program, and for consultation in the implementation of the plan's forthcoming recommendations. While noting the scope of the Shire's annual weeds program and the ongoing co-operation with our Landcare group on Chilean Needle grass and other weed removal on roadsides, more needs to be done to improve Operations Dept practices on roadside maintenance. We have documented and communicated the many instances of damage caused by inadequate machinery (use of graders, rather than excavators) and lack of training, and argue for increased capital expenditure to either hire or buy improved equipment. *(eg Correspondence with Shane Power, Manager Operations MRSC, and Michelle Wyatt, noting meeting of 31/8/16: "in an ideal world there would be 3 teams with excavator and tip truck clearing drains, picking up spoils.... Capital cost \$1million, with ongoing costs every year... This approach would also give better outcomes for residents and save some road destruction (and therefore some costs) in times of heavy rain" - Shane Power. A suggestion was made for a pilot study as part of the Roadsides management plan, that on a few high value roadsides, drainage maintenance works be managed pro-actively rather than reactively; scope the methods and costs of using excavators and tip trucks instead of graders for drainage works in a limited area such as Shelton's, Hennerbergs and Whitebridge Rds.)*

3. An increase in Environment Department staff. Resources to manage public land and bushland reserves for which the Shire is responsible have been too-thinly spread and sporadic, and it has often been up to Landcare and Friends groups to advocate and work to try and maintain their environmental values. Funding a staff officer dedicated to reserves would be a step forward.
4. We note that the Shire's tourism and planning strategies often highlight the high environmental and biodiversity values and assets of the Macedon Ranges but look to exploit rather than protect. Added to this is lack of awareness on the part of landowners regarding the value and management of biodiversity, so we argue for funds to educate and raise awareness of landowners in particular, but also residents generally. This could be an important issue for the biodiversity strategy to take on.

NDLG's many activities are outlined in newsletters and other pages on our website at www.newhamlandcare.info. An example of our latest newsletter is attached.

Yours sincerely



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