



# STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT CASE STUDIES

## CASE STUDY Melbourne Urban Growth

The Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA) provides approval under national environmental law for up to 284,000 homes and associated urban development. The highest quality habitat at the landscape scale was identified and protected in a new 15,000 hectares grassland reserve to the west of Melbourne and a new 1,200 hectares grassy eucalypt woodland reserve north-east of Melbourne. Both reserves were to be established by 2020. The Victorian government is responsible for acquiring and managing the reserves by collecting offset funding from developers at the time of development.

Private sector benefits were estimated at a saving of \$3.2 billion up to 2039 (Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, 2013) by bringing project approvals forward, reducing delay and individual compliance costs.

Whilst there have been delays in land acquisition, reserve establishment, and continuing threats of degradation, posing significant risks to the ecological values of native vegetation within the reserves (Victorian Auditor General, 2020), these issues have been partly addressed by the Melbourne Strategic Assessment (Environment Mitigation Levy) Act 2020, building in regular reviews of levy rates.

Recent changes to the MSA regulatory framework are also likely to help deliver Victoria's commitment to establish the reserves, though governance arrangements would be strengthened by including all delivery partners and separating oversight from management (Victorian Auditor General, 2020).

## CASE STUDY SEA of Perth and Peel@3.5million plan

In May 2015, the WA Planning Commission (WAPC) released its strategic plan for managing future growth in the Perth-Peel region called "Perth and Peel@3.5million" (WAPC 2015). To avoid a large number of future case-by-case environmental assessments, it was agreed by both State and Commonwealth governments that a joint strategic environmental assessment (SEA) be carried out of the Framework documents.

In July 2015, the EPA released a report titled "Perth and Peel @ 3.5 million Environmental impacts, risks and remedies" (EPA 2015), which was an interim assessment of the environmental implications of the draft Framework documents. This advice it contains is non-binding, with no statutory environmental conditions recommended, so it can be considered as an 'informal' SEA.

In December 2015, the State Government released a report titled 'Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan for 3.5 million' (Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2015) known as the Green Growth Plan (GGP), which was the EIS for the joint SEA. The final Perth and Peel@3.5million plan was released on March 2018 (WAPC 2018).

The formal SEA has, to date, not been completed, but a review of the process of arriving at the final Perth and Peel@3.5million plan, including

the interim advice from the EPA, suggests that the discussions and negotiations carried out leading up to the release of the final plan was an informal SEA.

A key outcome was that the area of remnant native vegetation that would be cleared was significantly reduced. Very early on in the process of developing the Framework documents, the WAPC proposed an urban footprint that would lead to clearing of 26,200 ha of native vegetation. However, by the time the draft plan was released the amount of clearing was reduced to 9,800 ha through the process prompting relooking at how to accommodate the predicted increase in overall population.

The GGP proposed a number of other conservation initiatives including expanding the conservation reserve system and increased protection of important wetlands, and whilst this plan has not been formally endorsed or adopted by government, some elements appear to have been adopted, including some offsetting of the loss of pine plantations (feeding habitat for the endangered Carnaby's Cockatoo), and a reversal of plans to urbanise a large area of land within the Peel-Harvey estuary catchment which had the potential to add significantly to the nutrient load entering the already stressed Peel-Harvey estuary system.