Macedon Ranges
Localised Planning Statement

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1. Introduction

The Victorian Government, in partnership with local government, is establishing Localised Planning Statements for four key areas; the Bellarine Peninsula, Macedon Ranges, Mornington Peninsula and the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges.

These highly valued areas have significant geographic and physical features which contribute to the quality of life for Victorians and are a distinctive part of our state. They play an important role in the state as tourist destinations and have strong economic bases driven by tourism, agribusiness and lifestyle, with all areas linking strongly to Melbourne.

The attractiveness, accessibility and proximity of these areas to metropolitan Melbourne, mean that they are increasingly coming under pressure for growth and change. This could potentially undermine the long-term natural or non-urban uses of land in these areas and needs to be carefully managed. Because of this there is a need to identify the key valued attributes and activities important to these areas and put in place objectives and strategies to ensure that they are preserved and enhanced for ongoing use by present and future generations.
2. Overview of the policy area

Macedon Ranges Shire Council (the Shire) is approximately 60 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, midway between Melbourne and Bendigo. The Shire is approximately 1,750 square kilometres in area, predominantly rural in character and includes a number of established regional centres, towns and settlements. The Shire is part of the broader peri-urban region which surrounds the built-up areas of metropolitan Melbourne and is under the indigenous custodianship of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung and Wurundjeri peoples.

The Macedon Ranges Localised Planning Statement policy area applies across the entire Shire. Within this area there are a range of high quality landscapes, both natural and built, with a wide variety of species and structural forms of vegetation on both public and private land. The area’s rural landscapes provide an important buffer between local towns and settlements and the urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne with a range of farming and related rural activities and high quality soils that are a significant food production resource.

Within the broader policy area an additional area referred to as ‘the Rock and the Range’ with distinct geological and environmental values has also been identified for the Macedon Ranges and its immediate surrounds – including Hanging Rock and the townships of Macedon and Mount Macedon. This area is focussed generally on areas of the Rural Conservation Zone bounded by land in the Farming Zone to the east, the Rural Living Zone to the south, the Calder Freeway to the west and local roads to the north. Within this distinct policy area ongoing protection and utilisation of the area for water
supply, tourism and recreation, and nature conservation are to be the primary concern. These areas are identified on Macedon Ranges Framework Plan.

The Macedon Ranges are a prominent land form located central to the policy area. They provide some of the most outstanding natural features north-west of Melbourne and the areas surrounding them are renowned for offering a country lifestyle and landscapes featuring attractive forested slopes, interesting landforms and built features such as gardens and reserves. Along with the significant views and vistas to and from the undulating wooded hills these aspects form the valued environmental and cultural landscape of the area.

Across the policy area native woodlands such as Black Forest and the Cobaw Forest are renowned for their scenic aspects and biodiversity values. Other forests within the area, such as the softwood plantation in the south-east, also perform an important economic function. The closure of sawmills in the area has seen forestry now confined to softwood plantations north and west of Macedon, and some harvesting in the Wombat State Forest. The area also offers significant tourism and recreation assets, from Hanging Rock and Mount Macedon, to wineries and eateries, nature conservation, historic assets and walking and riding trails.

In 2011 the Shire had a population of 42,800 people. The population profile of the Shire is also ageing and by 2036 approximately 25% of the population will be over 65 years. Gisborne and Kyneton are the major population and employment centres within the municipality. Urban growth over the past decade has been greatest in the southern part of the Shire in Gisborne, Romsey and Riddells Creek, with more modest growth occurring in Woodend, Kyneton, Malmsbury, Lancefield, Macedon and Mount Macedon.

The high demand for growth in the region, combined with an increase in tourism and recreation activities, places pressure on the natural assets of the area. The changing nature of agriculture and the economy and the continuing demand for a rural residential lifestyle all combine to put pressure on the rural landscapes and environmental features in the policy area. As the area continues to grow, it is vital that these valued characteristics are retained and that the policy area remains a rural and regional part of Victoria characterised by small towns, agricultural enterprises and environmentally significant landscapes.

Environmental features

The policy area contains many environmental assets that are of ecological, scientific and historical significance. These provide the foundation for the significance of the area and are an important consideration for tourism and agricultural uses. The environmental values and assets of the area are highly valued by the community and are considered fundamental to the long term preservation of the area’s significance.

The Macedon Ranges form part of the Great Dividing Range and are the remainder of more extensive Upper Devonian volcanic granite formations, which overlook the surrounding region. Its maximum elevation is approximately 1000 metres at Mt. Macedon and Camels Hump with lower parts of the formation being at 600-770 metres in the Black Forest at the western foot of Mt. Macedon and 490-550 metres in areas north of Macedon Ranges.
The Cobaw Range and Mount William in the north and north-east reach elevations of over 750 metres, while the lowest point is at Deep Creek in the south east at an elevation of 160 metres.

The variations in geology, landform, soil, sand and climate are reflected in the marked changes of vegetation throughout the policy area. Over very short distances, dry forests and woodland merge into wet open forest and this range of habitats provides for a diversity of fauna. The area retains rich native biodiversity with extensive areas of remnant native vegetation, including significant forested areas, which are an integral part of the area’s unique landscape. Key features include Mt Macedon and the Macedon Regional Park, the Wombat State Forest around Woodend and the Cobaw Ranges, Bald and Black Hill Reserves, and Mount William.

The area also features significant exotic vegetation, including boulevards of tree plantings in many towns, Avenues of Honour in Macedon and Woodend, and significant ornamental gardens on Mount Macedon that are fundamental to local landscape quality.

**Water Supply**

The policy area contains significant water catchment areas, including many open potable water catchments. These constitute a significant water supply asset for both the policy area and the broader region. The main streams which drain the area to the south of the Macedon Ranges and form headwaters of the Maribyrnong River system are Deep Creek, Emu Creek, Riddells Creek and Jacksons Creek. North of the Macedon Ranges, Five Mile Creek flows into the Campaspe River system.

Major water catchment storages are also located in the western part of the Shire, being the Upper Coliban, Lauriston and Malmsbury storages on the Coliban River near Malmsbury and the Rosslynn Reservoir on the Maribyrnong River near Gisborne.

In total there are 24 proclaimed open potable water supply catchments in the area, including the headwaters of the Campaspe, Coliban, Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers. Special Water Supply Catchments wholly or partly within the area include Djerriwarrh, Eppalock, Lake Merrimu, Lake Merrimu (Goodmans Creek), Lake Merrimu (Lerderderg River), Lancefield (Deep Creek), Macedon (Bawden Creek), Mollison Creek (Pyalong), Monument Creek, Romsey (Upper Bolinda Creek), Rosslyn Reservoir (Jackson Creek), Sunbury (Cherlies Creek and Main Creek).

**Recreation**

The policy area is highly valued and utilised for a variety of recreation uses. Bush walking, cycling, picnicking and bird watching are just some examples of activities that occur. There are a number of nature reserves both within and outside of settlements that are home to valuable flora and fauna, as well as providing for passive recreation opportunities.

The 2,379 hectare Macedon Regional Park protects forested land along the ridge of the Macedon Ranges and surrounds the highest peak at Mount Macedon. The park offers great opportunities for bushwalking, scenic drives, picnics, and magnificent views are provided from the Mount Macedon Memorial Cross and Camels Hump viewing platforms.
Tourism

The policy area is located within Victoria’s broader Daylesford and the Macedon Ranges tourism region which is extremely popular with both domestic and international visitors due to its rich history, natural attractions, top quality wineries, historic gardens and proximity and accessibility to the Melbourne metropolitan area. Current strengths of the area as a tourist location include food and wine, vibrant townships, arts and culture, festivals and events, nature based tourism, heritage and history and an emerging strength in day spas and wellbeing services.

The Macedon Ranges have been appreciated for their recreational and tourist value since the mid 1800’s when development of the area as a holiday and health resort began. The Macedon Ranges themselves are a key recreation and tourism asset for the region and features the historic ornamental gardens of Mount Macedon, the unique geology of Camels Hump and the Mount Macedon Memorial Cross. Hanging Rock is also a significant tourism asset and with its unique geological formation it provides scenic views, bushwalking and picnicking as well as hosting periodic performances at the base of the rock.

The area features a number of historic built heritage assets influenced by the Goldfields era, including its towns and settlements, many of which still retain a unique heritage character and village atmosphere. Day trippers and visitors are attracted to the region for pleasure driving, picnicking and sightseeing and recreational pursuits such as rock climbing, bush walking and riding. The equine and wine industries, as well as weekend markets, also attract tourism and economic activity to the area.
Agriculture

Farming activities make a valuable contribution to the area and include broad acre cropping and grazing as well as specialist activities such as viticulture, timber plantations, stock raising and a strong equine industry. Agriculturally productive high quality soils are situated between Lancefield and Romsey, in the Kyneton district and north of Woodend/Newham and Hesket.

Farming land provides an important non-urban buffer between the towns and settlements in the Shire and the urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne. A significant portion of the policy area is designated for agricultural purposes with the majority of large farm holdings being located predominantly to the north. However, traditional farming activities are declining in favour of more intensive forms of agriculture, such as vineyards and other horticultural pursuits.

The equine industry is a significant part of the local agricultural economy, with horse breeding supporting other related industries such as vets, farriers, dentists, trainers, instructors, suppliers of horse related products as well as fencing and other horse related property building and maintenance. The keeping of horses also provides a considerable contribution to the community through its recreational activities such as pony and adult riding clubs, trail riding clubs, dressage clubs and local competitions and training.

The area is experiencing substantial growth in investment for equine related infrastructure and facilities. This is, in part, due to the decline of competitive facilities in metropolitan Melbourne and the higher cost of property. Preserving areas for agricultural and farming activities is important for maintaining viable local industries and the valued agricultural landscapes that provide the non-urban breaks between towns and settlements.

In order to retain sustainable farming areas, land use and agricultural practices need to be both adaptable and viable, but also have regard to the environmental values of the area. Equally, the landscape values of farming areas need to be preserved through careful management and siting of dwellings, agricultural structures and other infrastructure so that the open agricultural landscapes and characteristic of the area are retained and built form is minimised to that which is essential to agricultural activity.

Towns and settlements

Within the policy area housing is predominately detached, and is dispersed across settlements that range from large towns to smaller rural localities. In addition, the area has a considerable supply of rural residential land with dispersed housing in the rural balance. The Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan designates Gisborne and Kyneton as Regional Centres that will accommodate higher levels of growth. The towns of Romsey and Riddells Creek will accommodate more modest growth appropriate to their role as District Towns. Other settlements such as Macedon and Mount Macedon are to be limited to little to no growth given infrastructure and environmental constraints. Council manages the growth of its towns and settlements through its Settlement Strategy.
There are many sites and features of national, state, regional and local historic, architectural and cultural significance in the area, including sites of Aboriginal cultural significance. Many towns and locations in the area were developed prior to the gold rush. Development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has also been significant. Examples of this heritage are seen today in streetscapes, buildings and other landmarks. In the rural areas early settlement and farming practices represent significant cultural associations and relationships for the community.

Townships in the area have their own distinctive character with tree lined avenues and “turn of the century” streetscapes, houses, commercial and public buildings. Wide main streets are a feature of Romsey, Gisborne and Woodend. There is continuing strong demand across the Shire for small acreage lots driven by the desire of many urban workers to live in semi-rural environments. Given the policy area’s location within the peri-urban region of metropolitan Melbourne, and combined with its natural qualities, it is an attractive location for new residents as well as visitors. The high quality transport links provided by the Calder Freeway and fast rail link, as well as proximity to Melbourne Airport, further contribute to the demand for land and building in the area.

**Non-urban breaks**

Because of the high demand for growth, development needs to be carefully balanced with the protection of natural and agricultural landscapes that characterise the area. Protection of the unique natural environment and management of land use conflicts need to be carefully considered to ensure the area remains a predominantly rural location characterised by towns and settlements within a natural landscape.

Non-urban breaks of farmland, agricultural landscapes, forests, nature reserves and environmental assets are highly valued and contribute to the overall character of the area. These will be retained through maintaining growth boundaries around towns, managing urban growth through strategic planning and encouraging urban consolidation where it is appropriate to the character of the area and the capacity of available infrastructure. Maintaining rural buffers between the major recreational and scenic attractions, water catchments and forest resources of the area and the broader metropolitan urban areas, including Sunbury and Melton, is critical to achieve harmony with the natural environment and to maintain both the generally rural character of the area and protect its valuable landscapes.
The key challenges facing the policy area

- The pressure of demand for further subdivision and development in non urban areas and its impact on the valuable natural and agricultural landscapes, recreation, water and nature conservation resources.
- Escalating land prices which undermine viable agricultural uses and results in increasing pressures for further subdivision.
- Use of elevated and steeply sloping land for residential purposes that impact on landscape protection, soil conservation, drainage, access and provision of services.
- The increased risk of bushfire associated with more settlement at the forest interface which can result in an increased number of deliberate and accidental bushfire ignitions.
- The risk of bushfire associated with the topography and ecology of the area, characterised by tall forests on steep terrain. This type of forest has the potential for high fuel hazards which can result in high-intensity bushfires.
- The potential conflict between the provision of access for effective fire protection and the restriction of public access in the interests of the conservation of flora, fauna and water.
- The urban development of nearby areas, such as Sunbury, Melton and Wallan, which will increase demand for water from catchments in the area.
- The potential for conflict between the interests of metropolitan and local communities and the importance of adequate recognition of both.
- The existing and potential conflict between recreation activities on both water catchment management and nature conservation.
- Changing economic factors influencing the continued viability of agricultural land use and fragmentation of land through inappropriate subdivisions and development that is inconsistent with policy.
- The potential for conflict between current and future agricultural land uses and new residents seeking a ‘rural living’ lifestyle.
- The threat of climate change impacts on the natural environment and biodiversity of the area.
3. Macedon Ranges Framework Plan

Macedon Ranges Localised Planning Statement

[Map showing Macedon Ranges with localised planning statement and policy areas]

- Localised Planning Statement policy areas
- The Range and The Rock policy areas
- Municipal boundaries
- Settlement
- Public land
- Native vegetation extent
- Non-urban breaks
- Proclaimed water supply catchments
- Major transport corridor
- Freeways and highways
- Arterial and sub arterial roads
- Railway line
4. **Significance of the policy area**

The significance of the Macedon Ranges Localised Planning Statement policy area derives principally from its abundance of natural attributes and high environmental values combined with its proximity to Melbourne.

The Macedon Ranges provide interesting geological landforms and scenic views across the surrounding natural and rural landscape with many features of ecological, scientific, historic and educational significance. They comprise a wide diversity and contrast of landscape types including State, regionally and locally significant areas of remnant vegetation within the Macedon Regional Park, Black Forest, Cobaw Forest and Wombat Forest and surrounds. These bushland areas are home to exceptional flora, fauna and natural habitats.

The outstanding quality and range of the natural environment and distinctive rural character of the area, with ‘country towns’, are highly valued by the local and broader community and differentiate the area from metropolitan Melbourne and its urbanised and suburban development. Maintaining clear non-urban breaks between settlements and the policy area and the broader metropolitan Melbourne area are critical to protecting valued natural attributes and preserving the area’s rural character.

The policy area offers a rare concentration of a wide variety of plant species and vegetation types on both public and private land within a relatively small area providing habitats for the wide variety of native fauna. The area also provides an important water resource to urban and local water supply systems.

There is a broad range of assets valued by both residents and visitors to the area. The high quality natural and built landscapes and the heritage character of existing towns and settlements are key assets for the area and contribute to its physical attractiveness. These assets, combined with the area’s proximity to metropolitan Melbourne, increasingly generate demand for development and need to be carefully managed. The area offers a range of increasingly diverse and important rural activities associated with agricultural production, equine and other emerging agribusinesses.

**The Range and The Rock**

The area immediately surrounding Mt Macedon and the Macedon Range itself is of particular significance to the broader policy area for its value as a tourism and recreation attraction and, above all, its unique geology and environmental and biodiversity values. This includes Hanging Rock, a rare volcanic formation.

This part of the broader policy area needs more explicit policy direction that identifies the unique combination of natural environmental features found here and reinforces its importance as a key area of landscape and conservation significance. Ongoing protection and utilisation of the area for water supply, tourism and recreation, and nature conservation are to be the primary concern.
5. Policy objectives and strategies

Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to protect and preserve the Macedon Ranges as an area of natural beauty, interest, importance and special significance and to preserve the continuing value and utility of the area’s natural and built resources for the local community as well as the broader Victorian community and visitors to the area.
Environment

Objective:

To protect and enhance environmental resources and landscape assets, with particular regard to water supply and nature conservation.

Strategies:

- Protect landforms and geological features of special scientific or educational value, including forests and other valued landscapes, from development.
- Protect water quality by minimising development in proclaimed water supply catchment areas and elevated areas.
- Maintain high value vegetation for biodiversity protection and conservation purposes.
- Maintain views across the landscape from public land by minimising development along ridgelines and within prominent view line areas and vantage points.
- Facilitate the integrated management of water catchments and recreation areas to minimise environmental impacts.
- Support the provision of strategic actions that mitigate the impacts of climate change on the natural environment and biodiversity.
Tourism and recreation

Objective:

To preserve important recreation areas for both residents and visitors and to support tourism related development that complements the sustainable use of recreation and environmental attractions.

Strategies:

- Protect the area's key tourism assets, including the heritage character of towns and settlements valued by tourists.
- Facilitate recreation and leisure uses that are primarily directed toward activities which require natural or semi-natural surroundings.
- Support recreational uses that are consistent with desired conservation outcomes and long term water catchment management objectives.
- Require tourism related land uses to demonstrate they will not compromise the use of rural land for agricultural purposes.
- Facilitate appropriate tourism development which is in keeping with the landscape and environmental values of the region.
Agriculture

Objective:

To support current and future agricultural land use as a key part of a productive rural landscape.

Strategies:

- Protect agricultural land from inappropriate subdivision and the impacts of other uses so that a viable agricultural based economic function is maintained.
- Support the development of appropriately sited specialist agricultural uses, such as equine industry and viticulture uses.
- Support agricultural practices that respond to and encourage adaption to climate change impacts.
- Support compatible value adding activities to existing agricultural uses such as farm door sales and agritourism.
Communities and settlements

Objective:

To manage population growth by directing urban development to a hierarchy of settlements and protect the township and rural character, their landscape features and surrounds.

Strategies:

- Facilitate and reinforce the growth of settlements in accordance with their role identified in adopted structure plans and the settlement strategy.
- Protect and maintain the significant heritage characteristics of towns and settlements including street tree plantings.
- Avoid bushfire and flood risk by limiting expansion of settlements in high risk locations.
- Maintain non-urban breaks between all settlements, including metropolitan Melbourne and the Sunbury and Hume growth corridors.
- Support the provision of drainage, sewerage, utilities and social services consistent with the special demands and constraints of the policy area.
The Range and The Rock

This policy applies to The Range and The Rock area as identified on the Macedon Ranges Framework Plan.

Objective:

To prioritise the conservation and utilisation of the area both as a water catchment for urban and local supply and as a location of State, metropolitan and local importance for recreation activity and nature conservation.

Strategies:

- Prioritise the protection of the resources of the area for water supply, tourism and recreation, and nature conservation.
- Limit and regulate all development in proclaimed water catchments and elevated areas to protect water quality and maintain or enhance natural systems and landscape character.
- Direct planning for recreation and leisure towards activities which require natural or semi-natural surroundings and integrate this with planning for water catchment management and nature conservation so as to minimise conflicts.
- Avoid further subdivision for outward urban extension of the Mount Macedon settlement or for extension generally northerly of the Macedon township.
- Ensure that development is planned to achieve harmony with the natural environment and maintains both the generally rural character and high landscape values of the area.
• Ensure that all development is connected to or provided with an approved system for the treatment and disposal of waste materials and effluents.

Implementation:

In implementing the above strategies every public authority, planning authority and responsible authority, where appropriate to its function, must have regard to the following implementation actions:

• Prepare a comprehensive conservation and recreation strategy for the area which takes account of the various values of all land in the policy area for nature conservation and for satisfying a broad range of recreational needs.

• Prepare a system of natural vegetation management that provides adequate variety and extent of habitat to enable the conservation of locally indigenous biodiversity.

• Ensure the integration of water supply policies with overall land use planning policy to create efficiencies in catchment management and prevent pollution of water supplies.

• Regulate the use and development of land to minimise fire hazard.

• Design, construct and regulate of an integrated network of fire control access routes that provide for minimum interference with the environment values of the area.

• Enforce existing restrictions on subdivision in accordance with identified future land use expectations.

• Review and evaluate existing subdivisions with regard to their capacity to be developed without material detriment to the area and formulate equitable policies to avoid such detriment.

• Formulate appropriate policy and controls designed to reduce the potential intensity of land use and development in the area, particularly with regard to identified areas of landscape and environmental value.

• Preserve and enhance landscape character by reserving land and appropriately regulating land use with regard to significant landscape areas and vantage points and visual sequences along access routes.

• Preserve landforms and geological features of special scientific or educational value.

• Formulate appropriate policy and controls for the siting and appearance of buildings and other developments, particularly in recreation and tourist areas and areas of special landscape value.

• Provide drainage, sewerage, utilities and social services in keeping with the particular needs and capacity of the area.

Reference Documents

Statement of Planning Policy No. 8 – Macedon Ranges and Surrounds approved by the Victorian Government in 1975.