Flora and Fauna Assessment for Potential Redevelopment site at Gronn Place, Brunswick

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Author: Clare Kenny (Senior Project Manager / Botanist)

Project Manager: Andrew Hill (Director / Principal Ecologist)

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1 Introduction

Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd was commissioned by Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a Biodiversity Assessment at Gronn Place, Brunswick (the study area). The purpose of the assessment was to identify the extent and type of remnant native vegetation present within the study area and to determine the presence of significant flora and fauna species and/or ecological communities. This report presents the results of the assessment and discusses the potential ecological and legislative implications associated with the proposed redevelopment. The report also provides recommendations to address or reduce impacts.

The study area is being considered for a redevelopment, and the feasibility for the land for this purpose is being investigated. We understand that the results of this assessment will be used to establish parameters for a preliminary investigation for redevelopment of the site.

2 Study Area

Gronn Place, Brunswick

The Gronn Place study area ("Gronn site") is located at Gronn Place, Brunswick approximately seven kilometres north of Melbourne's CBD (Figure 1). The site covers approximately 1.3 hectares and is bound by Dunstan Reserve to the north, Albion Street to the south, Kitchener Street to the west, and Peacock Street to the east.

According to the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Biodiversity Interactive Map (DELWP 2016a), the study area occurs within the Victorian Volcanic Plain Bioregion and is also located within the jurisdiction of the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority (CMA).

3 Methods

3.1 Desktop Assessment

Relevant literature, online-resources and databases were reviewed to provide an assessment of flora and fauna values associated with the study area. The following information sources were reviewed:

- The DELWP NVIM Tool (DELWP 2016b) and Biodiversity Interactive Map (DELWP 2016a) for:
    - Modelled data for location risk, remnant vegetation patches, scattered trees and habitat for rare or threatened species; and,
    - The extent of historic and current EVCs.
- EVC benchmarks (DELWP 2016c) for descriptions of EVCs within the relevant bioregion;
- The Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA) for previously documented flora and fauna records within the project locality (DELWP 2016d);
- The Flora Information System (FIS) (Viridans 2014a) and Atlas of Victorian Wildlife (AVW) (Viridans 2014b) for assistance with the distribution and identification of flora and fauna species;
- The Commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy(DoEE) Protected Matters Search Tool (PMST) for matters of National Environmental Significance (NES) protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) (DoE 2016);
- Relevant listings under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act), including the latest Threatened and Protected Lists (DELWP 2015a; DELWP 2015b);
- The Planning Maps Online (DELWP 2016e) and Planning Schemes Online (DELWP 2016f) to ascertain current zoning and environmental overlays in the study area;
- Other relevant environmental legislation and policies as required; and
- Current and historical aerial photography of the study area.

3.2 Site Inspection

Assessment of the study area was undertaken by a qualified ecologist on 8 December 2016. The site visit sought primarily to identify the extent and type of remnant native vegetation present within the study area and to identify potential habitat for species and ecological communities listed under the Commonwealth EPBC Act and Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act).

3.3 Permitted Clearing Assessment (the Guidelines)

Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987,* Clause 52.17 of the Planning Schemes requires a planning permit from the relevant local Council to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. The assessment process for the clearing of vegetation follows the 'Permitted clearing of native vegetation - Biodiversity assessment guidelines' (the Guidelines) (DEPI 2013). The 'Biodiversity assessment handbook - Permitted clearing of native vegetation' (the Handbook) provides clarification regarding the application of the Guidelines (DELWP 2015c).

3.3.1 *Risk-based Pathway*

The Guidelines manage the impacts on biodiversity from native vegetation removal using a risk-based approach. Two factors – extent risk and location risk – are used to determine the risk associated with an application for a permit to remove native vegetation. The location risk (A, B or C) has been determined for all areas in Victoria and is available on DELWP's Native Vegetation Information Management (NVIM) Tool (DELWP 2015b).

3.3.2 *Vegetation Assessment*

Native vegetation (as defined in Table 1) is assessed using two key parameters: extent (in hectares) and condition. Extent is determined through a field assessment. The condition score for Moderate and High Risk-based pathways must be assessed through a habitat hectare[1] assessment conducted by a qualified ecologist. The condition score for Low Risk-based pathways may be based on either modelled data available on the NVIM Tool (DELWP 2015b), or through a habitat hectare assessment.

Table 1. Determination of remnant native vegetation (DEPI 2013)

Category	Definition	Extent	Condition
Remnant patch of native vegetation	An area of vegetation where at least 25 per cent of the total perennial understorey plant cover is native. OR An area with three or more native canopy trees where the canopy foliage cover is at least 20 per cent of the area.	Measured in hectares. Based on hectare area of the remnant patch.	Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual (DSE 2004).
Scattered tree	A native canopy tree that does not form part of a remnant patch.	Measured in hectares. Each scattered tree is assigned an extent of 0.071 hectares (30m diameter).	Scattered trees are assigned a default condition score of 0.2.

Notes: Native vegetation is defined in the Victoria Planning Provisions as 'plants that are indigenous to Victoria, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses'.

4 Results

The study area is highly modified and does not support remnant native remnant vegetation or indigenous scattered trees. Field observations for are summarized below. Site photographs are provided in Appendix 1.

4.1 Vegetation

The study area is dominated by common garden ornamentals and invasive species. Planted native and exotic trees surround the existing buildings. Dominant invasive weed species included Kikuyu *Cenchrus clandestinus*, Common Sowthistle *Sonchus oleracea*, Annual Meadow-grass *Poa annua*, and Ivy. Planted trees included London Plane Tree *Platanus*, Sugar gum *Eucalyptus cladocalyx,* Sweet Pittosoprum *Pittosporum undulatum,* and Silky Oak *Grevillia robusta.* While there are native trees present in the study area, aerial photographs of the site from 1945 show an absence of trees, indicating that they have been planted (Appendix 1, Plate 4).

[1] A 'habitat hectare' is a unit of measurement which combines the condition and extent of native vegetation.

4.2 Fauna Habitat

The study area provides suitable foraging habitat for common generalist bird species that are tolerant of modified areas. Fauna observed using this habitat included; Magpie Lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*, Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Red Wattlebird *Anthochaera carunculata*, Dove *Columba spp.*, Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Indian Myna *Sturnus tristis*, and Little Raven *Corvus mellori*.

4.3 Significance Assessment

4.3.1 Flora

The VBA and FIS contain records of nationally significant State significant flora species previously recorded within five kilometres the study area (DELWP 2016d; Viridians 2014a). The PMST nominated additional nationally significant species which have the potential to occur but have not been previously recorded in the locality (DoEE 2016). Desktop results are provided in Appendix 1. Refer to Figure 2 for significant flora results.

Based on the highly modified condition of the study area, the quality and type of habitat present, landscape context and the proximity of previous records, the study area does not support suitable habitat for National and State significant flora species.

4.3.2 Fauna

The VBA and AVW contain records of nationally significant, State significant and regionally significant fauna species previously recorded within five kilometres of the study area (DELWP 2016d; Viridians 2014b). The PMST nominated additional nationally significant species which have not been recorded in the locality but have the potential to occur (DoEE 2016). Desktop results are provided in Appendix 1. Refer to Figure 3 for significant fauna results.

However, based on the highly modified condition of the study area, quality and type of habitat present, landscape context and the proximity of previous records, the study area is unlikely to contain limiting or important habitat for any national, State or regionally significant fauna species.

4.3.3 Communities

Seven nationally significant ecological communities are known to, or are predicted to occur within 5 kilometres of the study area (DoEE 2016). These communities are:

- Grassy Eucalypt Woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plains (*Critically Endangered*);
- Grey Box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*) Grassy Woodlands and Derived Native Grasslands of South-eastern Australia (*Endangered);*
- Natural Damp Grassland of the Victorian Coastal Plains *(Critically Endangered);*
- Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain *(Critically Endangered);*
- Subtropical and Temperate Coastal Saltmarsh *(Vulnerable);*
- White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland *(Critically Endangered),* and;
- Woodland and Derived Native Grassland (*Critically Endangered*)

Vegetation within the study area does not meet the condition thresholds that define any National or State-significant communities.

5 Legislative and Policy Implications

5.1 Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999

The EPBC Act establishes a Commonwealth process for the assessment of proposed actions (i.e. project, development, undertaking, activity, or series of activities) likely to have a significant impact on matters of NES, or those that are undertaken on Commonwealth Land.

Given the highly modified nature of the study area, it is unlikely development will have a significant impact on any matter of NES. Therefore, an EPBC Act referral is not required.

5.2 Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

The FFG Act is the primary legislation dealing with biodiversity conservation and sustainable use of native flora and fauna in Victoria. Proponents are required to apply for an FFG Act Permit to 'take' listed and/or protected[2] flora species, listed vegetation communities and listed fish species in areas of public land (i.e. within road reserves, drainage lines and public reserves).

There is no suitable habitat within the study area for species protected under the FFG Act. Additionally, the study area is highly modified and vegetated with planted flora. Therefore a FFG Act Permit will not be needed for the development of the study areas.

5.3 Planning and Environment Act 1987

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* outlines the legislative framework for planning in Victoria and for the development and administration of planning schemes. All planning schemes contain native vegetation provisions at Clause 52.17, which require a planning permit from the relevant local Council to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation on a site of more than 0.4 hectares, unless an exemption under clause 52.17-7 of the Victorian Planning Schemes applies or a subdivision is proposed with lots less than 0.4 hectares[3].

5.3.1 Local Planning Schemes

The study area is located within the Moreland Council municipality. A Planning Permit from this Council is required to remove or disturb any native vegetation. Given the absence of remnant native vegetation within the study area, DELWP would not be a mandatory referral authority for future planning permit applications. The study area is not covered by an Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) or Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO).

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[2] In addition to 'listed' flora species, the FFG Act identifies 'protected' flora species. This includes any of the Asteraceae (Daisies), all orchids, ferns (excluding Pteridium esculentum) and Acacia species (excluding Acacia dealbata, Acacia decurrens, Acacia implexa, Acacia melanoxylon and Acacia paradoxa), as well as any taxa that may be a component of a listed ecological community. A species may be both listed and protected.

[3] In accordance with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal's (VCAT) decision Villawood v Greater Bendigo CC (2005) VCAT 2703 (20 December 2005) all native vegetation is considered lost where proposed lots are less than 0.4 hectares in area and must be offset at the time of subdivision.

The Gronn Place study area is currently zoned as General Residential Zone (GRZ1) under the City of Moreland Council scheme. This study area is also affected by a Development Contributions Plan Overlay (DCPO).

5.3.2 Permitted clearing of native vegetation - Biodiversity assessment guidelines

The State Planning Policy Framework and the decision guidelines at Clause 52.17 (Native Vegetation) and Clause 12.01 require Planning and Responsible Authorities to have regard for 'Permitted clearing of native vegetation - Biodiversity assessment guidelines' (the Guidelines) (DEPI 2013).

No scattered trees or patches of native vegetation, as defined by the Guidelines, were identified within the study area. Therefore, there are no implications (e.g. offsets) under the Guidelines for any future development of the study area

5.4 *Wildlife Act 1975* and Wildlife Regulations 2013 (Victoria)

The *Wildlife Act 1975* (and associated Wildlife Regulations 2013) is the primary legislation in Victoria providing for protection and management of wildlife. Authorisation for habitat removal may be obtained under the *Wildlife Act 1975* through a licence granted under the *Forests Act 1958*, or under any other Act such as the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Any persons engaged to remove, salvage, hold or relocate native fauna during construction must hold a current Management Authorisation under the *Wildlife Act 1975*, issued by DELWP.

6 Conclusion

The study area is dominated by introduced flora species, and buildings associated with the existing residential complexes. Given that there is no remnant native vegetation present within the study area, there are no permit or offset requirements associated with the removal of vegetation. With regards to the scope of this biodiversity assessment, there are no related legislative or policy implications associated with any future development of the study area.

References

DELWP 2015a. *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* Protected Flora List – October 2015. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Melbourne, Victoria.

DELWP 2015b. *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* Threatened List - May 2015. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Melbourne, Victoria.

DELWP 2015c. Biodiversity assessment handbook, Permitted clearing of native vegetation – Version 1.0. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Melbourne, Victoria.

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Viridans 2014b. Victorian Fauna Database. Viridans Biological Databases, Bentleigh East Victoria.

Appendix 1 – Gronn Place Data

Photographs

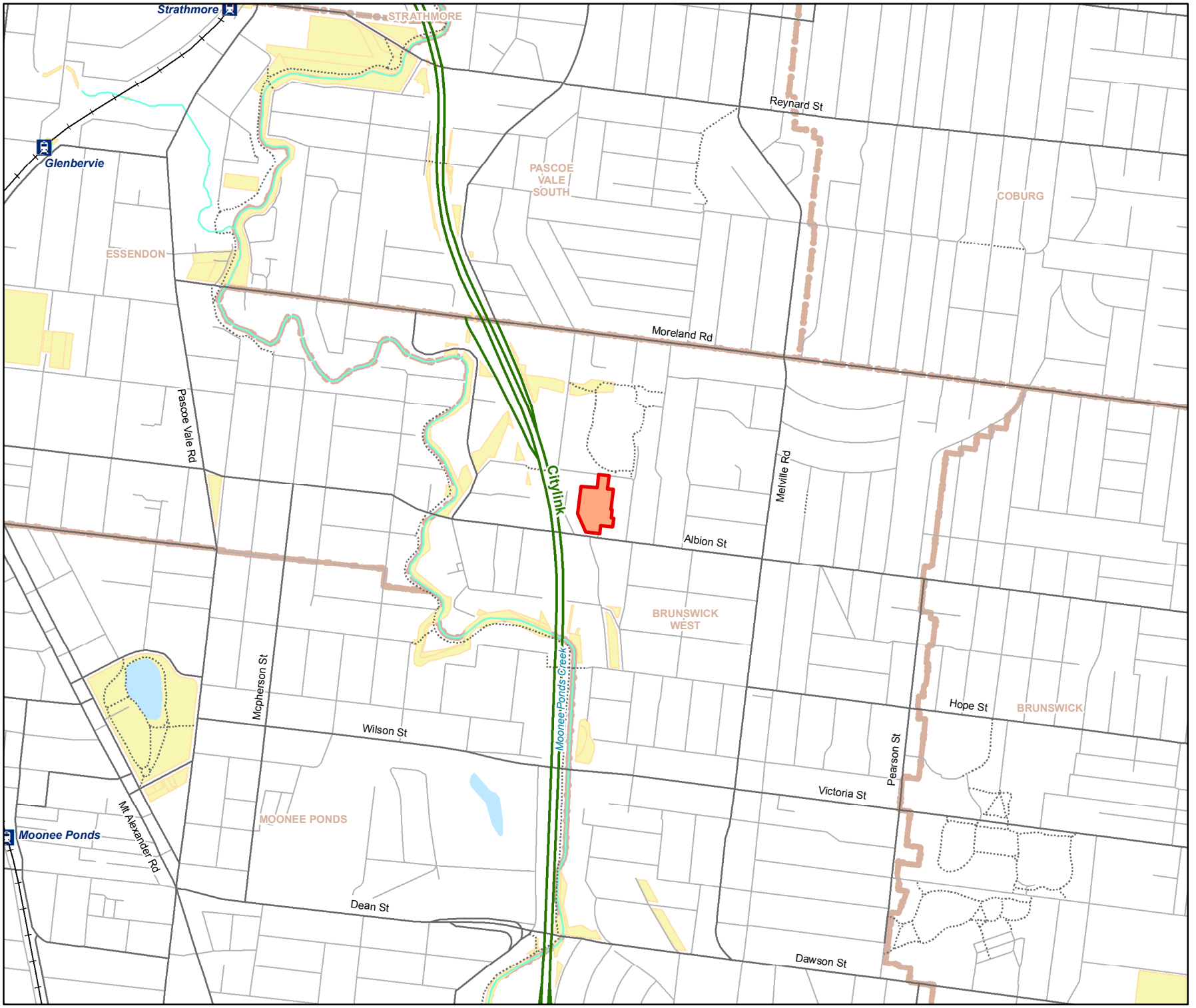
Plate 1. Planted trees and ornamentals (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 8/12/2016).

Plate 2. Planted *Melaleuca sp.* (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 8/12/2016).

Plate 3. Planted Sugar Gum (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 8/12/2016).

Plate 4. 1945 Aerial view of site (http://1945.melbourne/ 22/12/2016).

Figure 1 – Gronn Place Study Area



Legend

- Study Area
- Railway
- Freeway
- Collector Road
- Minor Road
- Walking Track
- Minor Watercourse
- Permanent Waterbody
- Crown Land
- Localities

Figure 1

Location of the study area

Flora and Fauna Assessment for Gronn

N

0 250 500

Metres

ecology & heritage partners

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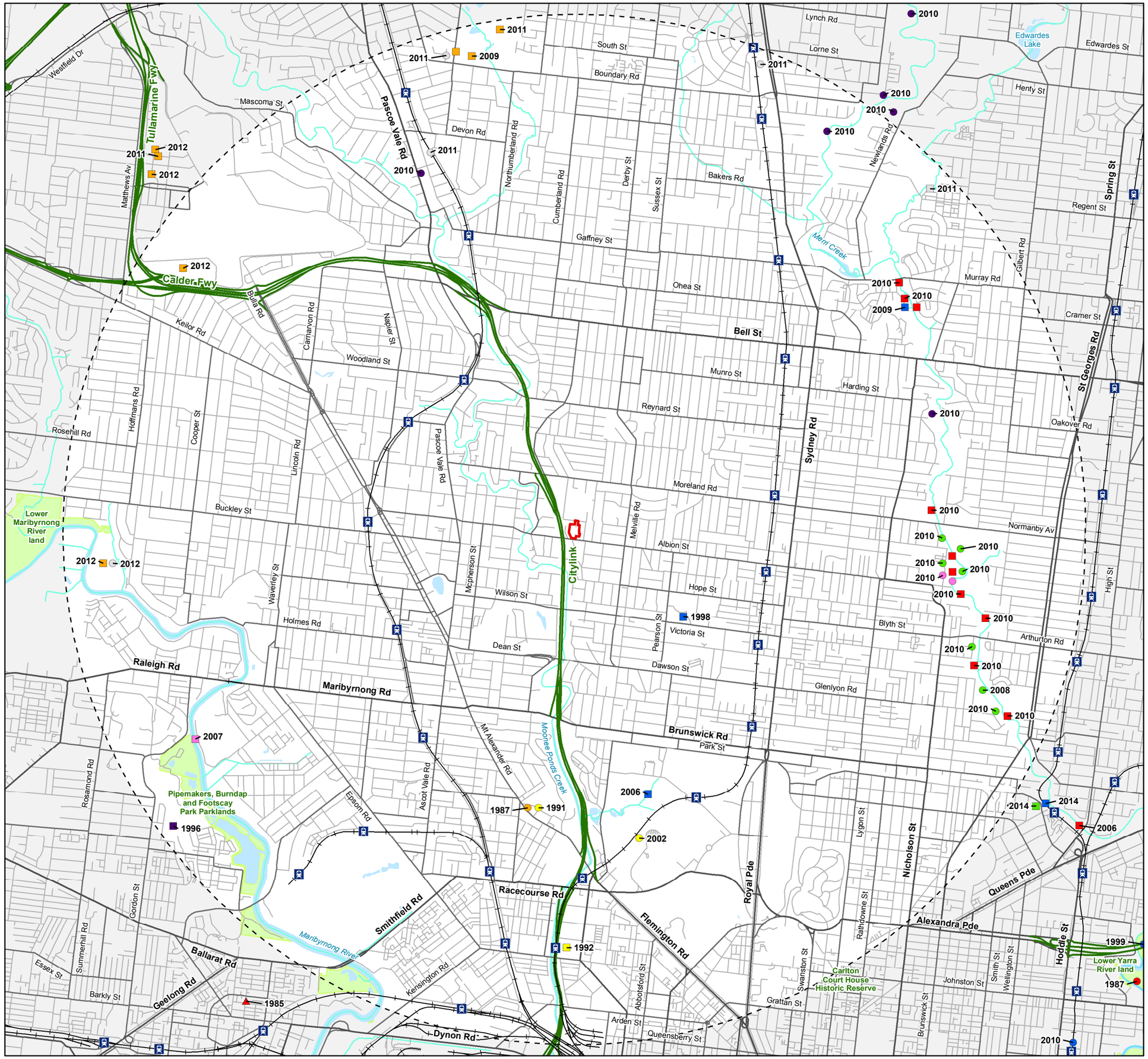
Figure 2 – Gronn Place Significant Flora



Legend

Study Area

Significant flora

- Arching Flax-lily
- Austral Tobacco
- Brown Beetle-grass
- Cup Wattle
- Fragrant Saltbush
- Giant Honey-myrtle
- Large-flower Crane's-bill
- Matted Flax-lily
- Melbourne Yellow-gum
- Rosemary Grevillea
- Slender Bindweed
- Small Burr-grass
- Southern Blue-gum
- Spotted Gum
- Tasman Grass-wrack
- Tough Scurf-pea
- Yellow Burr-daisy

Figure 2

Previously documented significant flora within 5km of the study area

Flora and Fauna Assessment for Gronn

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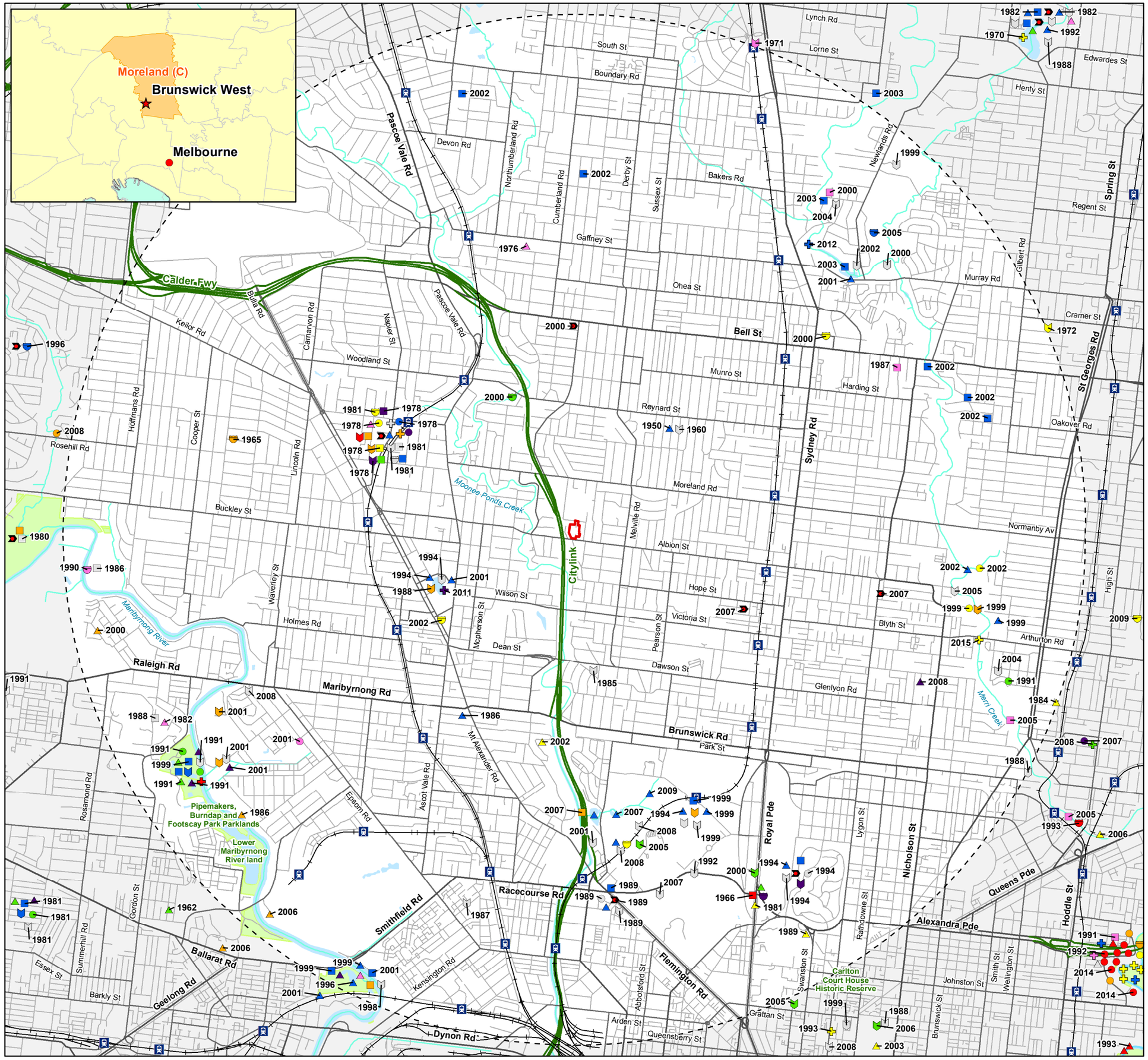
Figure 3 – Gronn Place Significant Fauna



Legend

Study Area

Significant fauna

- Australasian Shoveler
- Australian Grayling
- Australian Mudfish
- Azure Kingfisher
- Baillon's Crake
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Barking Owl
- Black Falcon
- Caspian Tern
- Common Bent-wing Bat
- Common Sandpiper
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Eastern Curlew
- Eastern Great Egret
- Eastern Snake-necked Turtle
- Fairy Tern
- Freshwater Catfish
- Golden Perch
- Grey Goshawk
- Grey-headed Flying-fox
- Growling Grass Frog
- Hardhead
- Intermediate Egret
- Latham's Snipe
- Lesser Sand Plover
- Lewin's Rail
- Little Egret
- Macquarie Perch
- Major Mitchell's Cockatoo
- Murray Cod
- Murray Hardyhead
- Murray River Turtle
- Nankeen Night Heron
- Pacific Gull
- Pied Cormorant
- Plains-wanderer
- Powerful Owl
- Red-backed Kingfisher
- Regent Honeyeater
- Royal Spoonbill
- Sanderling
- Southern Myotis
- Striped Legless Lizard
- Swift Parrot
- Turquoise Parrot
- Tussock Skink
- Whiskered Tern
- White-faced Storm-Petrel
- White-throated Needletail

Figure 3

Previously documented significant fauna within 5km of the study area

Flora and Fauna Assessment for Gronn

N

0 0.75 1.5

Kilometres

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