

THE SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE OVERLAY

The Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) is the most appropriate planning scheme tool for protecting and managing significant landscapes. Its purpose is to identify significant landscapes, and conserve and enhance their character. The SLO can require a permit to construct a building or construct or carry out works, construct a fence, and remove, destroy or lop any vegetation.

A number of landscapes of regional or state significance are proposed to be protected and managed with the SLO as part of this study. The detailed determination and analysis of character, together with the assessment of the relative significance of the landscapes, provides a sound strategic basis for such recommendations, particularly in this region, where the community places high value on the aesthetic and other qualities of landscape, and where existing planning controls are not necessarily achieving the desired outcomes.

It should be noted that the approach to drafting the SLO schedules has also been influenced by the identification, and emphasis on the management and protection of, wholistic landscapes, rather than individual landscape features. This is particularly evident in areas such as the Volcanic Cones, Lakes and Stony Rises district, where the collection, or concentration, of features and their settings is what is most significant about the landscape, rather than each individual cone or lake being of State significance in its own right. The proposed SLO and its schedule reflects this.

THE SCHEDULES TO THE SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE OVERLAY

Some 38 SLO areas (20 new, 18 existing) have been mapped, and individual schedules prepared and/or amended. Existing but amended schedules retain their current SLO number, and new SLO schedules have not been numbered. SLO areas are named according to the identified significant landscape previously identified, and/or geographical area, and/or landscape feature (s) being covered.

The following is a summary of how the proposed SLO schedules have been prepared, with the headings derived from the SLO schedule.

Statement of nature and key elements of landscape

This section of the schedule reads as a 'statement of significance' for the landscape area. It describes the character and significance of the landscape, based on the contents of the relevant Significant Landscape(s) and Significant View(s) Assessment Papers undertaken as part of the study. The statements are generally structured so that the first sentence establishes the level of significance and goes on to describe the aesthetic qualities of the landscape and its significance. If applicable, the name, location and description of any significant view follows (and its significance level), if it (or the 'essence' or 'focus' of the view) is contained within the proposed SLO area. The third part of the statement describes the other cultural values associated with the landscape.

Landscape character objective to be achieved

The objectives relate to the most significant aspects of the landscape, and may include reference to specific views. Again, they are based on information contained in the relevant Significance Assessment Paper(s), as well as the 'Future Landscape Character Directions' section of the relevant Landscape Character Type(s) and Area(s) Analysis Papers.

Permit requirement

The requirements specified in the schedules are based on the sensitivity to change of the landscape, and the potential threats to the landscape that have been identified. A standard set of exemptions are provided for landscapes of regional significance, and a standard set of (fewer) exemptions are outlined for landscapes of state significance. These are based on the current requirements of the zone (generally the Farming Zone), with consideration of the proposed Reformed Rural Zones (draft only at the time of the preparation of these recommendations), together with past experience in the drafting such schedules for similar studies, and their assessment by Planning Panels Victoria, and support by Council officers and the community.

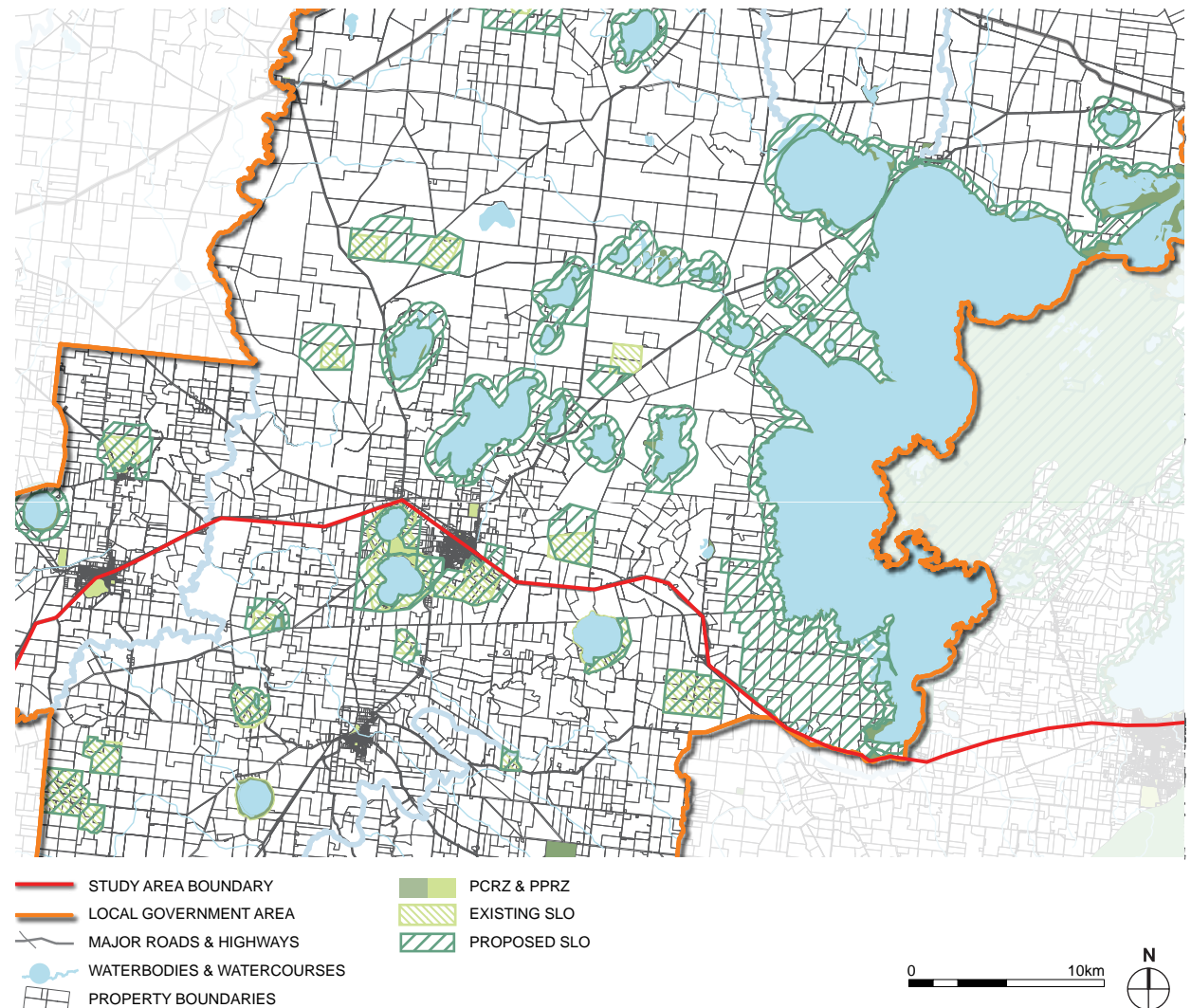
Decision guidelines

The guidelines are based on the content of the relevant Significance Assessment Paper(s), together with the Landscape Management Guidelines that have been prepared for each Landscape Character Type. The decision guidelines are pertinent to the local conditions of each landscape area and its significance, and aim to proactively protect landscape features of particularly high value, while supporting strong siting and design outcomes.

The South West Victoria Landscape Assessment Study 2013 is also included as a 'reference document' in each of the proposed SLO schedules.

Utilising experience gained in the preparation of this and previous landscape assessment studies, it is recommended that DPCD prepare a Practice Note for 'Applying the Significant Landscape Overlay'.

Example Significant Landscape Overlay map from a Municipal Toolkit



MAPPING THE SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE OVERLAY

The following considerations have been used to determine the most appropriate location for SLO boundaries:

- The nature of the landscape feature(s) itself, including the type of feature and its physical characteristics.
- The setting (or appropriate buffer) of the landscape feature(s), and its interface with the landscape beyond.

The definition of 'setting', and the starting point and justification for calculating various 'setting distances' is outlined in the following section of this introduction.

- Views towards the landscape and/or landscape feature(s) from public roads, including:
 - highly trafficked roads considered as primary viewing corridors (category 1 & 2 roads, tourist roads and major arterials); and/or,
 - other public roads or minor roads that access the landscape as a secondary consideration.
- Ease of administration i.e. boundaries have been drawn to match cadastre boundaries and road edges for ease of administration, where appropriate.

The Setting

In mapping the proposed SLOs, much consideration has been given to the landscape features that form part of the landscape, or are the subject of significant views within that landscape, and their setting. 'Setting' is defined as:

The immediate and extended environment that is part of, or contributes to, its significance and distinctive character.

Source: 2005, ICOMOS Xi'an Declaration on the Conservation of Settings

The determination of the exact boundaries of the proposed SLOs as part of this study has been based on the fact that the setting is greatly influenced by the visual impact of the landscape feature itself. As such, as a starting point to the mapping, this influence has been quantified with an assessment of the height, width and distance relationships, and the status of the landscape and landscape feature) as either regionally or state significant.

DETERMINING THE SETTING DISTANCES

As a starting point, the following visibility distances have been used (based on the viewer being located at ground level, rather than in an elevated viewing location):

- **5,000m** – Feature is visible, though not a dominant aspect of the landscape
- **3,000m** – Feature is clearly discernible in the landscape
- **1,000m** – Feature dominates the landscape

(These distances are based on previous visual amenity work undertaken by Planisphere involving a best practice review of visual assessment methods.)

For the purpose of this study, landscape features that provide relief from flat or undulating terrain have been grouped into two categories:

- **Minor features (<5km wide)** which include volcanic cones and granitic outcrops such as Mount Emu and the Island Uplands.
- **Larger features (or State significant features of any size) (>5km wide)** which have the height and width to dominate landscapes completely at close range (up to 3000m) and are clearly visible on the horizon from much greater distances (such as the You Yangs, Pyrenees Ranges or the Grampians) or have been assessed as State significant landscapes.

The setting, or buffer, for minor features has been calculated at 1:5, or a 500m offset from the feature per 100m in height. The height of the surrounding land has been taken into account, with the height of the feature measured from the 'break of slope,' where the change in elevation is most evident. For example, Mount Emu is approximately 150m high, and is therefore proposed to have a setting of approximately 750m.

The setting for large landscape features, or State significant features, has been set at 1:10. As the width of the feature increases as does its visual dominance from greater distances; State significant features have also been given a wider buffer to ensure a higher level of protection. For example, the Grampians Ranges have an average elevation of 800m, therefore the proposed setting offset (and SLO boundary) is 8,000m and Mount Elephant, which is a State significant landscape feature, has a height of approximately 170m and therefore a buffer zone of 1,700m.

The offset for lakes has been set at 500m. Smaller lakes have a low profile in the landscape and unless viewed from the edge have minimal visual impact. One of the most significant aspects of the lakes within the study area is the collection or grouping of them in some areas, rather than their overall visual impact. The buffer is sufficient to capture these groupings in most instances, and to prevent inappropriate development from occurring adjacent to their perimeters.



Major landscape features: Grampians Ranges



Lake edges protected with a 500m offset



Minor landscape features: Mount Emu



The SLO protects prominent hills slopes and ridges such as The Bluff in the Parwan Valley (pictured above)

