

Chapter 3

THE PLANNING AREA AND ITS ADMINISTRATION

The area for which the Melbourne Metropolitan Planning Scheme has been prepared is shown in map 4. As defined by the Town and Country Planning (Metropolitan Area) Act 1949, it includes all the area within a general radius of 15 miles from the Central Post Office at the corner of Bourke and Elizabeth Streets, with extensions southerly to the 26 mile radius to include the townships of Dandenong and Frankston. Within this area of 684 square miles (438,000 acres) are the territories of 35 municipal councils and portion of the territories of 7 others. Approximately two-thirds of the area is rural land.

In preparing plans for guiding the future development of this large area it was first essential to obtain a thorough knowledge of its characteristics. Its physical formation, both topographical and geological, and its climate have in the past influenced, and will in the future continue to influence, the pattern of growth of the city. Its natural resources and agricultural potentialities must be taken into account so that valuable assets will not be wasted by the wrong use of land. The existing use of land expresses, to a large degree, the needs and desires of the people, and from its study can be gleaned a knowledge of the vast asset represented by the bricks, stone and mortar, and the public works and other improvements of the city and its environs.

To facilitate this and subsequent studies, this complex area has been divided into the five statistical districts shown in map 4. Not only have these districts physical differences, but they also tend to have distinctive sociological features.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Topography

As will be seen from map 5, the metropolitan area rises gradually from the shores of Port Phillip Bay towards the boundaries of the area, where in places it reaches elevations of about 800 feet. It is roughly bisected by the River Yarra, a comparatively small stream flowing generally from north-east to south-west. From the north, nine main valleys fall generally southerly, seven to junction with the main Yarra valley, and two to fall into Port Phillip Bay.

To the south, the valleys of the Koonung and Gardiner's Creeks run westerly to join the Yarra, and further south a

series of comparatively shallow valleys fall generally northerly to Port Phillip Bay from the low ridge which extends from Sandringham to Nunawading. West and south of this ridge the country falls to the Dandenong Creek and the low-lying area behind Chelsea and Frankston. At the southern extremity of the planning area the country rises somewhat abruptly to the heights of Mount Eliza.

Geology

The underlying bedrock of most of the metropolitan area consists of strata of sandstone and mudstone, which were originally laid down horizontally in that period of the earth's history known to geologists as the Silurian period, but, which were subsequently severely folded by strong compressional forces. These folded silurian rocks were subjected to erosion during a prolonged geological period, and the hills of the metropolitan area are the remnants of what must formerly have been a high mountain chain. This bedrock is dense and practically impervious. It varies considerably in hardness, in some places being so hard that explosives are necessary for its economical excavation.

In the comparatively recent Tertiary era, the sea level was at least 200 feet higher than at present, and the coastline extended inland as far north as Keilor. During this period, a widespread sheet of sands and gravels was laid down, partly under shallow marine conditions and partly as broad, low-lying river flats. Later, elevation of the land exposed these sands and gravels, forming a coastal plain sloping gently down towards the present bayside. In the steeper reaches of this plain, where the sand deposit was thin, the water-courses soon cut through it, thus exposing the underlying bedrock, and leaving patches of sand and gravel capping the hills. Towards the coast between St. Kilda and Mordialloc, where there were no large streams, the deposits were little eroded.

Shortly before these sands were laid down, volcanic activity broke out near Melbourne and a limited flow of lava occurred in the metropolitan area. These lavas were partly removed by erosion before the sands were laid over them, but some remained and are found in places between Essendon and South Melbourne, generally in a decomposed state. They are referred to as Older Basalts, to distinguish them from the extensive basaltic flow which occurred after the disposition of the sands. These latter volcanic deposits, referred



4 MUNICIPAL AND STATISTICAL DISTRICTS

