

## **2. THE REGION AND ITS FUTURE**

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### **2.01 Introduction**

The Regional Strategy Plan has been developed within the context of State policy and in the firm conviction that to retain the special features and character of the Region, active and positive planning is required. The Upper Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges are an environmental precinct of high quality requiring sensitive policies and planning.

The dynamic nature of the Region's natural systems, and the requirements of the residents and visitors, must be recognised and balanced. This involves the specification of objectives for areas and activities, so that more detailed planning can occur within a framework which is acceptable for the preservation of the Region's natural features, and the enhancement of the lifestyle of its residents and visitors.

### **2.02 The importance of the Region**

The Region covers some 2500 square kilometres, between the eastern fringe of metropolitan Melbourne and the catchment of the Thompson River. The Region is important to Melbourne and Victoria because it provides water, agricultural and forest products, scenic landscapes, plant and animal communities, and an extensive range of recreational and tourism opportunities. The majority of the Region's 135,000 population value living within its scenic and bushland environment.

The Region supplies about 80% of Melbourne's domestic water requirements, mostly from closed forest catchments in the upper reaches of the Yarra River and its tributaries.

The Region is an important area for conservation, not only within a metropolitan, but also within a State and national context, as it contains a great diversity of vegetation types, landforms, land uses, and historic and scenic landscapes. These provide a wide range of habitats for birds, animals and plants (many of which are rare or endangered). They also accommodate sites of cultural, educational and recreational value.

Rural activities in the Region are important in the local and Victoria's economy. The Region accounts for over 30% of total Victorian establishments for nurseries, cut flowers and turf growing. Other products important in the Region's economy include fruit and vegetables, cattle grazing and dairying. Rural activities which are establishing or expanding include cashmere goat and deer farming, production of exotic fruits such as nashi pears and chinese gooseberries (Kiwi Fruit), and the growing of peaches and nuts.

An expanding wine industry reflects the historical reputation of the Yarra Valley as an ideal location for cool climate vineyards and wineries. The Yarra Valley is quickly gaining recognition throughout Australia and overseas for the quality of its wines.

The Region is a very important tourist asset for Victoria. More than two million people visit the Region each year, making a considerable contribution to the local and regional economy. This contribution will be significantly increased by the sensitive expansion of facilities, particularly for tourist accommodation.

Finally, the residents of the Region value a lifestyle which comes from living in an area less densely populated than metropolitan Melbourne, from a relationship to natural elements that cannot be easily obtained in the suburbs, from an ability to relate to a community of people at a scale where personal identity is facilitated, and from the opportunity to enjoy the Region's unique culture and traditions.

This Regional Strategy Plan is directed towards the enhancement of those conditions by which the local communities within the Region can thrive and prosper, and in so doing, fully enjoy the value of their natural environment.

### **2.03 State Government Planning Policies for the Region**

The Victorian Government has formulated a number of strategic policies, some of which have particular relevance to the Region and its future. The Regional Strategy Plan, and the local section of planning schemes that implement it, must have regard to these policies.

The most relevant Government policy to the Region is the former Statement of Planning Policy No. 3 - Upper Yarra Valley & Dandenong Ranges Region, now expressed as State Planning Policy for the Region.

The policy aims to contain urban development to a level compatible with conservation of the Region's rich environmental features and with its high standards of amenity. The Regional Strategy Plan is directed towards defining, in a very positive manner, boundaries and principles upon which containment is to be handled. It includes specific policies which deal with the transition between the Region and metropolitan Melbourne.

### **2.04 Land Conservation Council**

Recognition must be given to the recommendations of the Land Conservation Council, that have been adopted by Government, particularly in its review of the Melbourne Area, District 2, which covers all areas of Public Land within the Region. The Land Conservation Council recommendations, once adopted by the State Government, will specify the range of land uses for Public Land within the Region.

### **2.05 Pressures faced by the Region**

The Region is facing increasing pressures from a number of directions. There is the pressure resulting from metropolitan Melbourne's urban growth to consume more and more valuable agricultural and environmentally sensitive land for housing and urban infrastructure.

There is pressure to maintain the viability of agricultural pursuits, be they intensive cropping, broadscale grazing, mixed and/or part-time farming.

There are also economic pressures for the Region to protect itself from external and world market fluctuations, and from government economic policy changes, whilst seeking new opportunities for employment, education, recreation, leisure, artistic and cultural development, and tourism.

Finally, there is pressure to maintain and protect the Region's unique and scenic landscape features. Its flora and fauna, soil and water resources are constantly under threat from increasing human activities.

Whilst change is inevitable, it is important that change is managed in a way that will enhance the Region's desirable features. The challenge is to achieve a balance between protecting its natural environmental values and amenity, and developing a comprehensive economic and social infrastructure to adequately service the current and future needs of the Region's residents and visitors.

This challenge will intensify in future years as new elements and factors are expected to come into effect. These include such items as an aging of the population, increased leisure time of the workforce, an increase in the environmental awareness of the population, a change in employment patterns and family/household composition, and a need for regions to be more self-reliant as necessary structural changes in the State and national economy take effect.

## **2.06 Vision for the Future**

Among the most outstanding features of the Region are the beauty of its landscapes and the intrinsic value of its remnant vegetation. The recognition of these assets is only one step towards their preservation. In order to protect such valuable resources, certain land uses will remain strictly controlled, and appropriate land management practises will be maintained to ensure that their quality remains unspoiled.

If the Region is to establish itself as a sustainable community in economic, social and environmental terms, a number of directions need to be clarified, programs implemented, and some initiatives undertaken.

For the Region to develop a sustainable economy in the short to medium term, support will be given to the establishment, maintenance and growth of new local enterprises, thereby expanding employment opportunities for the Region's workforce, and reducing travelling time and costs for residents having to find such opportunities elsewhere.

New and expanded tourism facilities will also be an important contribution to this objective. Opportunities for supporting and expanding (where appropriate) the agricultural base of the Region will also be supported.

As part of an overall economic and social development strategy, the establishment of adequate tertiary education opportunities will be encouraged so as to stop the leakage of secondary school graduates (and hence future skilled workforce) from the Region, and to provide new avenues for the Region's workforce to increase and/or diversify their skills.

Government Departments, Public Authorities and community groups will be consulted in order to assess the strategic implications of regional land use planning strategies on the provision of physical, transport and human services, and to assist the adequate and equitable distribution of such services and resources available to the Region's residents.

## **REGIONAL STRATEGY PLAN - THE REGION AND ITS FUTURE**

Finally, in order to maintain control over the way development impacts on the Region's environment, and to assist the provision of an appropriate range of services and facilities for the Region's residents, a limit to the size of the Region's urban and other residential areas will be set at a level where no further residential development can take place beyond that which is provided for in the Regional Strategy Plan.