

Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas

Fact Sheet



Some of Victoria's most productive agricultural land is within Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas. These areas are vital for providing food to our growing city, supporting local economies and are an important export industry for Victoria.

Green wedge and peri-urban areas grow 10 per cent of Victoria's gross value of agricultural production and contribute \$3.3 billion to our economy¹.

Agricultural land around Melbourne has significant competitive advantages: including proximity to markets, access to labour and good infrastructure, fertile soils, proximity to sources of recycled water and a concentration of supporting rural industries.

However, beautiful and scenic agricultural landscapes near Melbourne are an attractive location for urban development and new houses. These urban uses compete with agriculture, resulting in the permanent loss of agricultural land and associated businesses. Residential development within agricultural areas also increases land prices, land speculation, conflicts between farming and neighbouring uses and breaks up rural landscapes. Without protection, agricultural production around Melbourne will continue to decline. This will threaten our ability to support local jobs and produce food locally.

The Victorian Government is committed to protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas. This commitment was outlined in Melbourne's metropolitan planning strategy *Plan Melbourne 2017-2050* and confirmed by the Victorian Planning Minister in the lead up to the 2018 Victorian Election.

In future, there will be stronger controls in the planning system to protect and support strategic agricultural land. Victorians are encouraged to join the conversation about how to identify the areas with the greatest agricultural potential and how the planning system can support the long-term agricultural productivity of these areas.

This fact sheet has been prepared to help the community understand the value of agriculture in the green wedge and peri-urban areas of Melbourne, the pressures on this land and the process for determining how to protect it.

While the focus of this conversation is strategic agricultural land, we know there are a range of other important values in green wedge and peri-urban areas. We plan to come back to the community to discuss the

¹ Financial data source: ABS table 7503.0 - Value of Agricultural Commodities Produced, Australia, 2015-16

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balance of non-urban land around Melbourne and how we can also strengthen planning controls for these areas.

Key definitions:

- **Strategic agricultural land:** Areas of land identified from a combination of features including: soils, landscapes, rainfall, access to water, resilience to climate change, infrastructure investment and integration with industry, that make it highly valuable for agricultural production.
- **Green wedge:** The non-urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne that are currently protected by laws and include agricultural areas, bushland, water supply areas, tourism and recreation use, natural resources and other non-urban uses.
- **Peri-urban areas:** land beyond the green wedges but within 100 km of central Melbourne. The areas are predominantly rural with small townships.
- **Commercial agriculture:** Commercial businesses that grow and produce food and fibre with the intention of making a profit. Food and fibre production are the main sources of income.
- **Planning controls:** Rules that guide the purpose and use of an area of land. The purpose of planning controls is to make sure that decisions about how a piece of land is used or developed is in the best interests of the whole community, both now and in the future.

Why is agricultural land in the green wedge and peri-urban area important?

- It produces 10 per cent of Victoria's gross value agricultural production.
- Highly perishable foods such as leafy greens and berries are mainly grown in the green wedge areas because they are close to markets in Melbourne.
- Due to suitable combinations of soil, landscape and climate, some crops are grown almost entirely in these areas for example, over 90 per cent of Australia's asparagus is grown in Koo Wee Rup.
- There are pockets with some of Victoria's best soils, for example Ferrosols that support intensive horticultural cropping (e.g. potatoes and berry production).

- Approximately 10,000 people are employed on-farm, and over 9,000 additional people are employed in food processing in these areas.
- Green wedge and peri-urban areas have the potential to be relatively drought resistant due to access to recycled water from treatment plants.
- They are located close to labour and populations who buy and eat the food and have good access to surrounding community services and infrastructure.

Challenges facing agriculture production in green wedge and peri-urban areas

Agricultural production in green wedge and peri-urban areas is experiencing -pressure from a variety of local and global issues. Proximity to Melbourne, the rapid pace of growth and change, and the range of other land uses competing for space, make these areas some of the most contested in the state.

Current planning policies and controls are not doing enough to protect agricultural land or support industry growth and investment in green wedge and peri-urban areas. Under the current planning system, the amount of agriculture has decreased. Without changes the industry's future is at risk.

Percentage of Victoria's 2015-16 food grown in the green wedge and peri-urban area:

- 76% of chicken meat
- 64% of eggs
- 59% of vegetables
- 22% of beef meat
- 21% of dairy
- 16% of wheat, barley, cereals and hay
- 7% of lamb meat

Data sourced from ABS table 7503.0

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urban areas, are forecast to experience less impacts from climate change than northern and western Victoria². Farms in this region also have potential access to recycled water from treatment plants, which has the potential to make them relatively drought resistant. As farming becomes harder in other parts of Victoria, we will rely more on agricultural land in green wedge and peri-urban areas to grow food.

Population growth and development trends in and around Melbourne

Melbourne is growing and will continue to grow. Over the past decade, the edges of the city have expanded to allow population growth. Between 2002 and 2010 around 55,000 hectares of land was removed from the green wedges to provide for Melbourne's urban expansion. As housing prices and density increase, more people are also choosing to move out to towns in green wedge and peri-urban areas or take up rural living within these areas.

Land use conflicts between farms and urban neighbours

As residential development – particularly rural living – moves more into agricultural areas, land-use conflict may arise between urban and rural neighbours. Neighbours may seek to reduce or restrict agricultural activities that already occur in an area, due to impacts from dust, noise and odour associated with various farming practices. Illegal dumping of rubbish, theft and dog attacks on livestock may also increase. Restrictions on farmers can reduce the efficiency and profitability of farming in these areas.

Distorted land prices and speculation

The increasing demand for rural lifestyle near Melbourne is pushing land prices above the agricultural value of the land. This makes farming less profitable in the region due to high property rates and the high cost of purchasing new land for farm expansion. The potential for the land to be rezoned from rural to urban-residential may encourage people to buy farm land and wait to make profits by turning it into new housing estates (known as 'land banking'). 'Banked' land is often not adequately maintained or looked after well and is not used for productive agricultural purposes.

Limitations to expansion

Productive farms need space to grow to achieve economies of scale. This is because larger farms can be more efficient and therefore make more profit. Increasing residential development means there is less land for farmers to buy and make their farms bigger. If they cannot grow their farm it may reduce their profits and restrict future opportunities. In some cases, people choose to sell their land and move to another area with more available or cheaper land.

² Timbal, B, Ekstrom, M, Fiddes, S et al. (2016) Climate change science and Victoria.



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Current zones do not prioritise agricultural uses

The Farming Zone, Green Wedge Zone, Rural Conservation Zone and Rural Activity Zone are the main zones applied to land used for agriculture. The current planning controls do not effectively protect and support commercial farming in the farming zone. The land can be used for other uses such as horse racing, hobby farms and rural living. Individual local councils can try and encourage farming in their agricultural areas, but this can be challenged in court (VCAT).

Going to court to protect the land for agriculture can be very expensive and take a lot of time. Often local council decisions are overturned, resulting in the land being used for activities that are incompatible with farming. Once land is used for residential and rural living it is very hard to turn it back into a commercial farm.

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Identifying strategic agricultural land

Action 17 in *Plan Melbourne* seeks to strengthen protection for strategic agricultural land around Melbourne for the future and to improve land use and development decision-making in these areas.

Action 17: Support strategic planning for agriculture

Improve planning decision-making to support sustainable agriculture by identifying areas of strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedges and peri-urban areas. This will give consideration to climate change, soils and landscape, access to water, integration with industry and significant government investment in agricultural infrastructure. It will also protect the right to farm in key locations within green wedges and peri-urban areas.

This work is about more than protecting strategic agricultural land. It is also about providing greater certainty for agricultural businesses in key precincts to support long term investment.

What happens to agricultural land not identified as strategic?

Not all agricultural land will be identified as strategic agricultural land. It will depend on the nature, extent and significance of the land as assessed against a common set of criteria. Agricultural land may still be locally significant even if it does not meet the criteria required to be considered strategic agricultural land. These areas will not be turned over to residential development. Existing planning controls that apply will remain in place and not be weakened.

The first step to achieve Action 17 is to determine what agricultural land within 100 km of Melbourne is strategic and should therefore be protected. The study area does not include land within Melbourne's urban area or within existing green wedge and peri-urban townships. Only areas within a zone that already includes agriculture as a key purpose can be identified as strategic agricultural land.

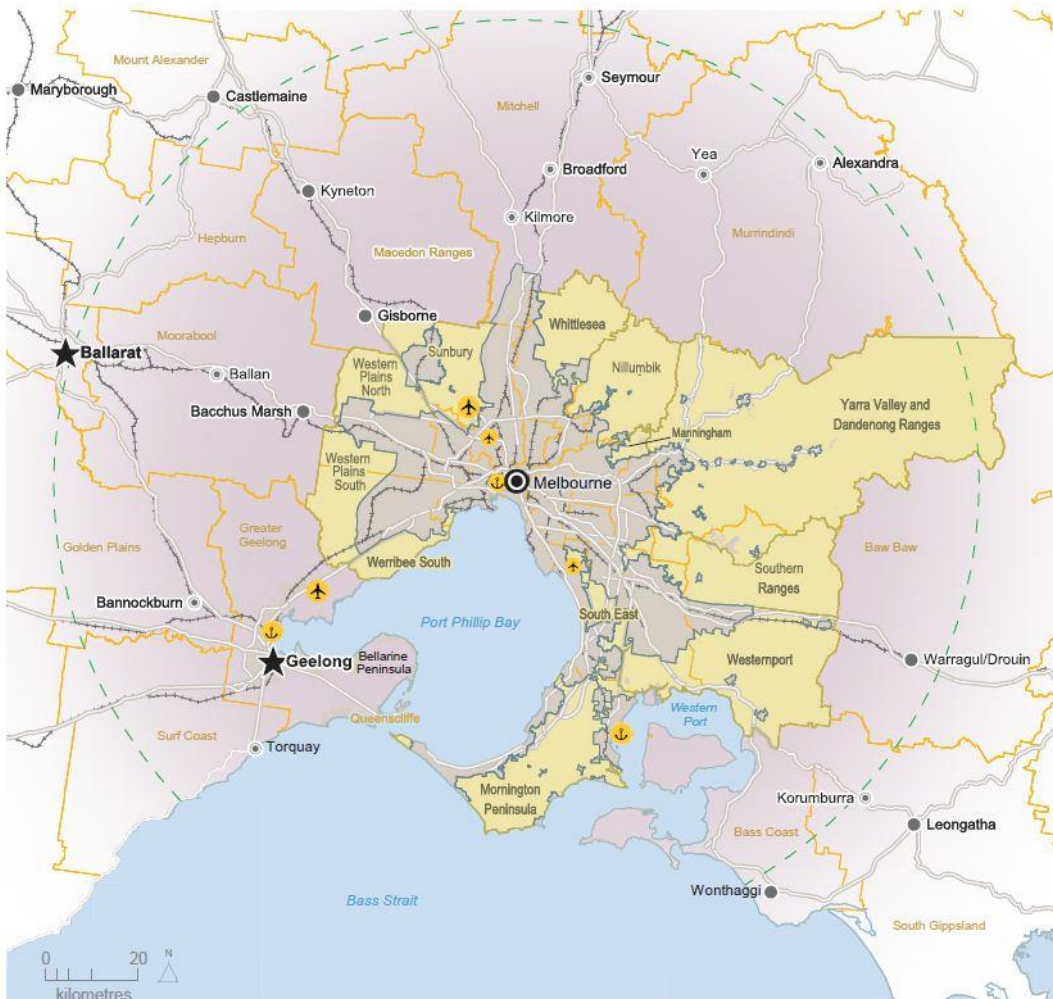


Figure 1: The area of this project – outside the urban growth boundary and within 100kms from central Melbourne

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Process to protect strategic agricultural land

Step 1: Identify strategic agricultural land (early 2019)

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has been working with Agriculture Victoria and Deakin University's Centre for Rural and Regional Futures to better understand the suitability and capability of land in the region. Knowing the suitability and capability of land is important for assessing the value of land for agriculture.

DELWP has developed draft criteria to identify strategic agricultural land. The draft criteria considers the naturally occurring features of the land as well as current land uses, location of important infrastructure and links to processing and supply industries. DELWP want to test and refine these criteria with the community, the agricultural industry, local government and key authorities.

Step 2: Decide what planning measures will be used to protect strategic agricultural land in this region (late 2019)

Planning for our strategic agricultural land should aim to:

- Provide confidence for agricultural industries to establish and grow
- Provide flexibility for agricultural businesses to expand, adopt new technology, and respond to changing markets and consumer preferences
- Protect the 'right to farm'
- Ensure separation from sensitive uses and minimise risk of land use conflict
- Prepare for climate change by safeguarding areas with recycled water access and high resilience

DELWP are asking the community about how strategic agricultural land should be protected, supported and encouraged. It will then review emerging areas of strategic agricultural land and the community's feedback when considering potential planning measures.

How you can provide input into the process

Victorians are encouraged to join the conversation.

Anyone can provide their input about what strategic agricultural land we protect and how, by attending a community workshop or participating online at engage.vic.gov.au/protecting-melbournes-ag-land.

The website is open for input for six weeks from **Tuesday 12 March to Tuesday 23 April 2019**.

Community workshops will be held in the last week of March and first week of April. The locations and dates are:

- **Bacchus Marsh – 6pm to 8pm, Wed 27 March**
- **Mornington – 6pm to 8pm, Thu 28 March**
- **Koo Wee Rup – 10am to 12pm, Tue 2 April**
- **Kilmore – 6pm to 8pm, Wed 3 April**
- **Yarra Junction – 6pm to 8pm, Thu 4 April**

You can RSVP for a workshop online, or by calling Phone: (03) 8392 5595.

You can also host your own conversation with your community or a group using our engagement pack. The pack includes:

- Tips for hosting a conversation
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Draft maps and criteria
- A feedback form

You can download the pack from the website or ask for it to be sent to you by contacting Phone: (03) 8392 5595.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Response
What is this project about?	<p>The Victorian Government is committed to protecting the long-term future of strategic agricultural land in the green wedge and peri-urban areas of Melbourne and has identified the planning system as one way to achieve this.</p> <p>The green wedge and peri-urban areas contain some of Melbourne's most productive farming land. However, there is pressure to use this land for residential development as Melbourne grows. Decisions need to be made about how we manage competing pressures in the future and protect strategic agricultural land.</p> <p>This project will protect strategic agricultural land to secure Melbourne's food production for the future and give greater certainty to agricultural businesses to support long term growth, investment and innovation.</p> <p>The first step to protect food production in our green wedge and peri-urban areas is to identify what land has the greatest agricultural potential. Agricultural potential can be influenced by factors such as good fertile soil, access to quality water, suitable climate and good quality infrastructure.</p> <p>A lot of technical work has been done to ensure that we have a good evidence base for identifying strategic agricultural land. A common set of criteria to help guide the assessment process has been developed. Now we want to test this work with stakeholders and the community before determining land that should be classified as strategic agricultural land or the best planning response for these areas.</p> <p>While the focus of this conversation is strategic agricultural land, we know there are a range of other important values in green wedge and peri-urban areas. We plan to come back to the community to discuss the balance of non-urban land around Melbourne and how we can also strengthen planning controls for these areas.</p>
What is the green wedge and peri-urban region?	<p>Green wedges are large non-urban areas of metropolitan Melbourne that form a ring around the built up urban area. There are 12 designated green wedge areas across 17 municipalities. These areas are currently protected by legislation, and include farms, food production areas, bushland, water supply areas, tourism and recreation uses, natural resources and other non-urban uses.</p> <p>Peri-urban areas are land beyond the green wedges but within 100 km of central Melbourne. These areas are predominantly rural with small townships.</p>
Why is agricultural land in the green wedge and peri-urban areas important?	<p>Some of Victoria's most productive agricultural land is within Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas. During the 2015-16 financial year, the region produced 10 per cent of Victoria's gross value of agricultural production, including 59 per cent of the state's vegetable production. The region has many advantages for agriculture including being close to consumers, access to labour, good infrastructure, quality soils and potential access to high-quality recycled water.</p> <p>As the climate changes it will impact where crops are grown. Farming in northern Victoria will be more impacted by hotter and drier conditions than the southern areas, including the green wedge and peri-urban area. Farms in the green wedge and peri-urban area may also have access, or have potential for access in the future, to recycled water from treatment plants or stormwater, which make them relatively drought resistant.</p> <p>This means as farming becomes harder in other parts of Victoria, we will rely more on agricultural land in the green wedge and peri-urban area to grow food.</p>



Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas

How will you decide what agricultural land is strategic?

There are many factors that influence successful agricultural production. These can be natural or man-made. Examples include soil quality, current and future climate, distance to markets where produce is sold, access to labour, access to high-quality recycled water and stormwater, and having similar industries nearby.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has reviewed all these factors and more to develop a common set of criteria. These criteria will be used to guide the assessment process in order to determine areas of strategic agricultural land.

DELWP now wants to work with stakeholders and community to seek local knowledge and test the criteria and explore issues that need to be addressed by the planning response.

What happens to agricultural land not identified as strategic?

Not all agricultural land will be identified as strategic agricultural land. It will depend on the nature, extent and significance of the land as assessed against a common set of criteria. Agricultural land may still be locally significant even if it does not meet the criteria to be considered strategic agricultural land. These areas will not be turned over to residential development. Existing planning controls that apply will remain in place and not be weakened.

While the focus of this conversation is strategic agricultural land, we know there are a range of other important values in green wedge and peri-urban areas. We plan to come back to the community to discuss the balance of non-urban land around Melbourne and how we can also strengthen planning controls for these areas.

What about strategic agricultural land outside of the green wedge and peri-urban areas?

The Victorian Government recognises that agricultural production across the State is important. However, agricultural land in the green wedge and peri-urban areas is more at risk than in other areas. Therefore, this work focuses on land within 100km of central Melbourne. What we learn from this project will provide a useful foundation should the Government decide to expand the approach state-wide.

How will strategic agricultural land be protected?

In the future, strategic agricultural land will be recognised and protected in the planning system.

The exact planning control (legislation, zones, overlays etc) has not yet been decided. Victorians are encouraged to join the conversation about how the planning system could support the long-term viability, sustainability and agricultural productivity of these key areas.

How could I be impacted by this project?

All Victorians will benefit from protecting food production around Melbourne. It will mean we have enough food to feed our population now and in the future. It will also provide certainty to farmers that they will be able to continue farming on their land and encourage them to invest in their businesses.

In the future, if you own land in an area that is assessed as strategic agricultural land, agricultural uses will be supported and enabled and opportunities for non-agricultural uses may be limited. This could include sub-dividing land for housing development.

How will my input influence decisions?

This is the first step in the process to protect strategic agricultural land. DELWP will review community and stakeholder feedback as they refine the criteria used to identify strategic agricultural land.

DELWP plan to release a summary of the outcomes from this consultation stage and more details on the planning response later in the year.

When will planning controls be changed?

The exact planning controls and timing of implementation has not been decided yet. This will likely occur over the next 12 months. The Victorian Government will communicate with affected stakeholders as this project continues and provide updates about the planning changes and when change will be made.

Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas

How will possible areas of strategic agricultural land be protected in the interim, while permanent protections are being developed?

The State Planning Policy Framework contains existing policy at Clause 14.01-1R to "Protect agricultural land in Metropolitan Melbourne's green wedges and peri-urban areas to avoid the permanent loss of agricultural land in those locations". This existing policy will continue to apply and guide decision making. The current policy framework does not currently distinguish between areas of strategic agricultural land and other rural land. As this project progresses and the location of strategic agricultural land is confirmed, planning mechanisms to strengthen protection for our prime agricultural land will be put into place.

What was the process to develop the proposed criteria?

DELWP partnered with Agriculture Victoria Research and Deakin University's Centre for Rural and Regional Futures to undertake an agricultural assessment of the area. The work included:

- Land Capability Assessment of Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-Urban Areas (Agriculture Victoria Research). This work classified agricultural land based on its natural attributes such as soil, landscapes, climate and rainfall.
- Land Suitability Assessment for Melbourne's Green Wedge and Peri-urban Areas (Deakin University). This work modelled 12 different commodities both now and under future climate change scenarios for 2030, 2050 and 2070 to understand the versatility of land into the future.

DELWP worked with Agriculture Victoria, Deakin University, and experts from across DELWP and the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR) to develop and test potential criteria to determine strategic agricultural areas. We now want the community's feedback on the draft criteria and on areas that have been identified for investigation.

What information has been considered in the map of the investigation areas for strategic agricultural land?

Land in towns or land that has already been allocated to other uses in the planning scheme (such as environmental uses, extractive resources or residential areas) has not been considered for agricultural significance. The assessment has considered land in existing agricultural areas.

Land with naturally high capability (class 1 and 2) has been included in the investigation area whilst land with low capability (class 5) has been excluded. All other areas with moderate capability (Class 3 and 4) were subjected to further tests to determine whether or not it should be included in the investigation area. These areas were included if:

- It had good water access or potential to access recycled water or stormwater in the future.
- It was an area mapped as having a high versatility for a wide range of crops under climate change modelling.
- It was an area of existing intensive higher-value land use.

Investigation areas were removed if land was constrained – such as land already allocated to other land uses in the planning scheme, areas with restricted access, and areas that were isolated and small in size.

Is there any weighting between the different criteria?

The land capability assessment forms the foundation of this assessment where land with a naturally high fertility (class 1 and 2 land capability) has automatically been considered as having the potential to be strategic agricultural land. Additional tests applied to moderately capable land (class 3 and 4) have not been weighted.



Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas

Why does the criteria not consider intensive animal husbandry (e.g. piggeries and poultry sheds) and protected cropping (greenhouses)?

The approach to identifying strategic agricultural land is focused on industries that depend on quality soils, landscapes, water resources and suitable climates to support production.

It is about identifying those precincts that contain our best agricultural land that offers the greatest potential and versatility for productive agricultural use now and into the future, in the context of our changing climate.

High quality agricultural land is a finite resource and should be protected to preserve opportunities for productive use.

How has DELWP considered the potential for future developments in water supply and access?

Consideration of water supply either through natural rainfall or man-made means is a key element in determining the investigation areas for strategic agricultural land. Climate change may have a significant impact in terms of water quantity and quality and may affect the long-term productive use of land. Significant amounts of water will be generated by Melbourne's growth areas via storm water run-off and recycled water. The amount generated will be more than what can be re-used in urban areas or discharged elsewhere. This water is a valuable resource and there is significant potential to use this water for agricultural use. Potential opportunities for recycled water use have been included in the assessment.

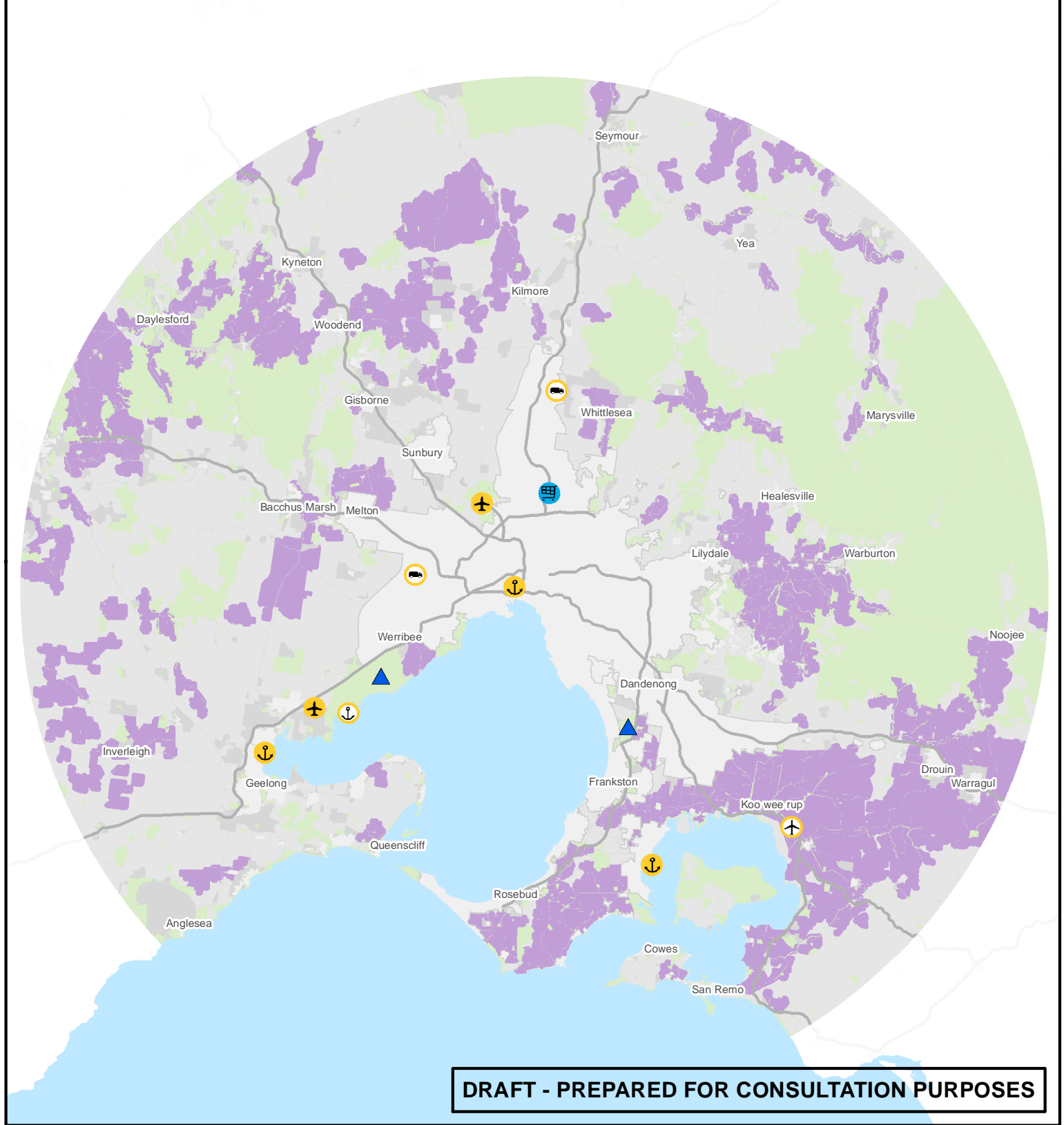
What is meant by "intensive higher-value land uses"?

Intensive higher-value agricultural land use (as described in the Land Capability Assessment for Green Wedge and Peri-Urban Areas, Agriculture Victoria Research, 2018) are areas where intensive soil-based agriculture (e.g. potato cropping, market gardening) is carried out, usually involving cultivation and/or addition of fertiliser and amendments and usually irrigation with available water resources. More intensive livestock production (typically dairy) is included in land use mapping, occurring in higher rainfall areas and can also involve irrigation. Some general cropping (e.g. cereal production) has also been included but is more extensive in nature. Viticulture and orchard production is also included but this can occur on soils that are less suitable for other forms of intensive horticultural production where regular cultivation is required.

Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas

Proposed criteria

LAND CAPABILITY	
Naturally fertile land with minimal constraints and highly capable for intensive, soil-based agriculture	<p>Land identified as highly capable for intensive, soil-based agriculture, taking into account the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High quality soil: soils that are high value due to their year-round and multi-purpose properties. • Niche soil: soils that are particularly good for certain crops and support niche industries. • Suitable terrain and landscapes: land with minimal slope, rock outcrop, and no presence of coastal acid sulfate soils, salinity or other noxious components. • Reliable rainfall: areas with reliable long-term natural rainfall that provides adequate supply for agricultural production. • Low risk of land degradation: Land with very low risk of land degradation such as flooding risk, inundation, land slips and erosion hazard.
WATER ACCESS	
Farmland with access to a secure water supply	<p>Access to irrigation infrastructure: access to existing irrigation infrastructure that provides a reliable water source for agricultural regions. Green wedge and peri-urban irrigated areas include Werribee and Bacchus March irrigation districts.</p> <hr/> <p>High potential for access to alternative water sources: Areas identified through the Metro Melbourne Integrated Water Management Forums as having potential future alternative water access. These include Bunyip Food Belt, Western Irrigation Network, Coldstream, Whittlesea Community Farm</p> <hr/> <p>Access to good quality groundwater: access to a significant source of good quality groundwater. In green wedge and peri-urban areas Groundwater Management Areas that provide a verified source of groundwater resources include....</p>
RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY	
Land that is resilient to the potential impacts of climate change	<p>Climate resilience: Highly versatile agricultural areas suitable for producing a greater range of cropping, horticulture and pasture purposes both currently and under forecast climate scenarios for 2030, 2050 and 2070.</p>
EXISTING LAND USE & INTEGRATION WITH INDUSTRY	
Land that is currently used for intensive agricultural purposes or supports the viability of an agricultural area	<p>Existing intensive higher-value agricultural land use: Areas that currently support intensive soil-based agricultural industries including dairy, horticulture, viticulture and general cropping.</p> <hr/> <p>Post-farm-gate processing and value adding: Areas that support industries with critical links including processing plants and major packing houses.</p> <hr/> <p>Industry clusters: areas where industries have successfully clustered to achieve significant efficiencies.</p>
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS - EXCLUSIONS	
Factors that may prevent land from being classified as Strategic Agricultural Land	<p>Limited size and extent of area: The size and extent of the area identified as potential Strategic Agricultural Land is a scale and size that is unlikely to support sustainable agricultural production.</p> <hr/> <p>Poor Access: locations that are too remote to existing markets, labour and transport, including airports and logistics facilities.</p> <hr/> <p>Land set aside for other purposes or land use values: Land already allocated for another defined use in planning schemes or set aside for conservation purposes. Only Zones with an agricultural purpose are eligible to be included in SAL (i.e. Farming Zone, Rural Activity Zone, Green Wedge Zone, some Special Use Zones (Cardinia), and the Rural Conservation Zone).</p>



DRAFT - PREPARED FOR CONSULTATION PURPOSES

Investigation Areas for Potential Strategic Agricultural Land

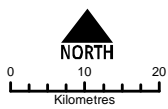
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- Strategic Agricultural Land
- Urban Growth Boundary
- Urban Area
- Public or Commonwealth Land
- Other excluded Planning Zones
- Area within 100km of Melbourne
- State-significant road corridor
- ✈ Transport gateway - major airport
- ⚓ Transport gateway - seaport
- 🚚 Interstate freight terminal (indicative)
- ✈ Transport gateway - possible airport (indicative)
- ⚓ Transport gateway - possible seaport (indicative)
- 🏢 Melbourne Wholesale Market - Epping
- ▲ Wastewater Treatment Plant

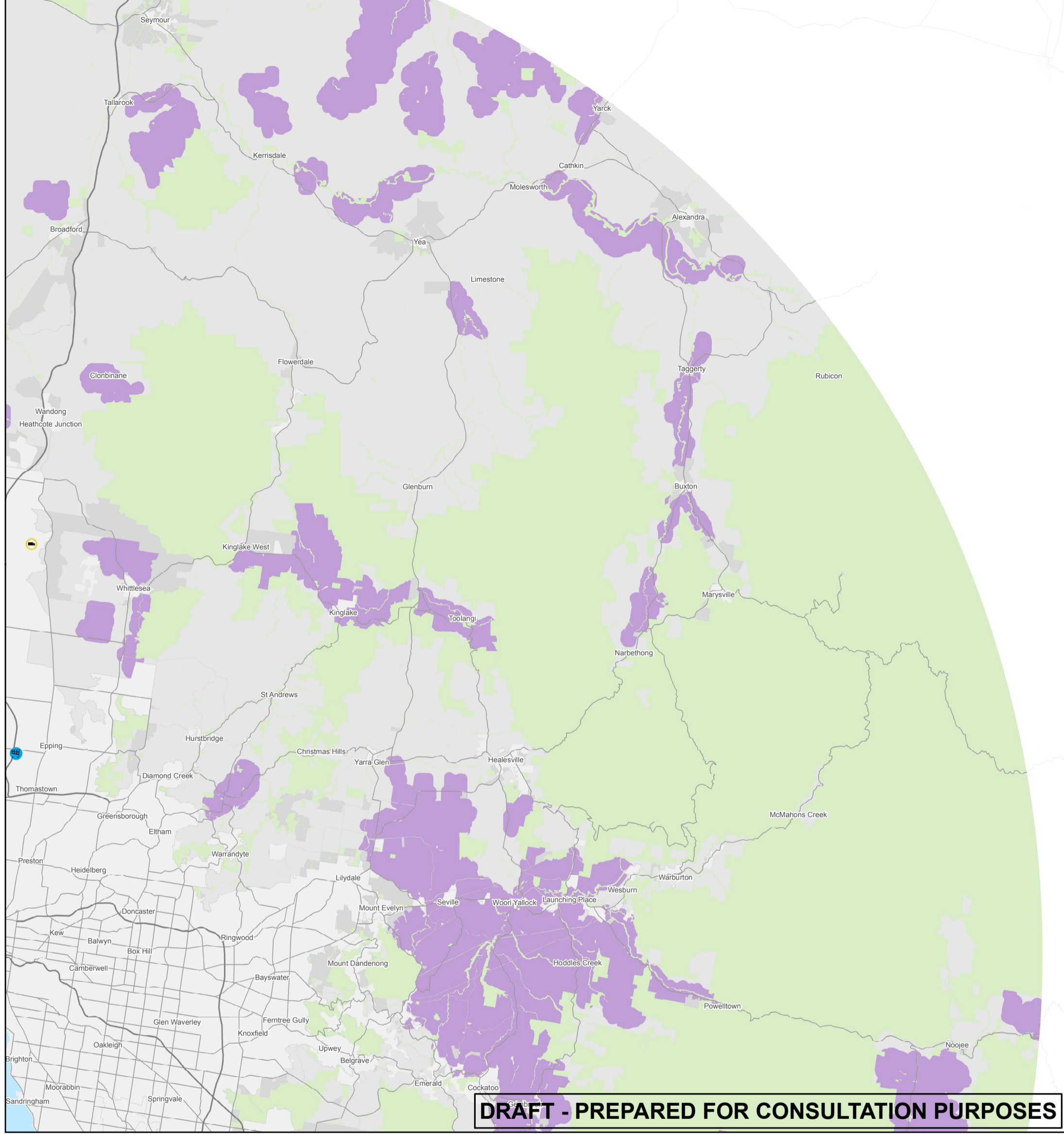
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Investigation Areas for Potential Strategic Agricultural Land

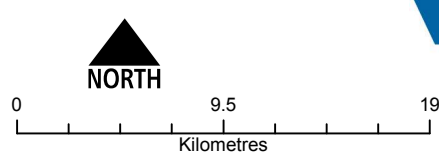
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Submission by the Shire of Nillumbik

For: Engagement Program: Protecting strategic agricultural land in Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas.

To: Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning (DELWP)

Nillumbik Shire Council welcomes the Victorian Government's engagement ("the engagement") and its policy commitment to protect agricultural land on the outskirts of Melbourne. Agriculture is an intrinsic part of Nillumbik's history, economy, identity and its present day community life.

Three maps are attached to assist DELWP to understand key points made in Council's submission. The first shows the current pattern of planning scheme zones in the Shire's Green Wedge. The second shows the pattern of current land uses in the Nillumbik green wedge, derived from Council's rates data base. The third shows the diversity and distribution of agricultural activity, much of which occurs on relatively small blocks of land that are not necessarily contiguous.

Context to Council's Submission - The Nillumbik Green Wedge

Most (91 percent) of Nillumbik Shire is non-urban green wedge land and a notable portion (16 percent) of the Shire's green wedge is currently used for agriculture. The principal agricultural products of Nillumbik are beef cattle, orchard fruit, grapes, horses and hay, although there is also a wide range of other farm products including sheep, pigs, goats, alpacas, horses (primarily for recreation), poultry, egg production, mushrooms and organic vegetable production. Supply to metropolitan markets is augmented by local farmers markets and trading in hay to support livestock.

Examples of the offering of agricultural enterprises in the Shire of Nillumbik are:

- Over 30 boutique wineries with open cellar events being a popular attraction.
- A large commercial orchard which has been growing apples and pears for over 100 years across five generations at Arthurs Creek.
- A garlic farm that specialises in Australian grown quality garlic and a variety of garlic and chilli food products.
- A local, family-run olive grove in Cottles Bridge that has been producing award-winning olive oil for ten years.

Council is currently revising its Green Wedge Management Plan. Throughout 2018, Council facilitated a major community engagement program, including a community panel, to understand the best way to manage Nillumbik's green wedge now and into the future. Over 600 people contributed their views and the community panel made 32 recommendations to Council. Four recommendations of the panel, supported by Council, directly relate to the value of agriculture in the Shire:

- Sustainable agriculture and consolidation of smaller agricultural lots in common ownership are encouraged and the further fragmentation of agricultural lands is discouraged.

- Landholders should be able to exercise their “right to farm” on pre-existing cleared agricultural land and Council looks forward to State planning reform in this direction.
- The support and promotion of supplementary rural business activities such as farm gate sales, farm stays and other low environmental amenity impact enterprises which are consistent with green wedge values need to be prioritised.
- It is time to define and recognise the role of hobby farms within Nillumbik and that policy and program development is necessary to support sustainable land management and agriculture at their scale.

Comments on the Scope of the DELWP Project

Council finds there are a number of short-comings in the scope of DELWP project, which we request be addressed. These are detailed as follows:

There is too much emphasis on identifying and protecting existing key agricultural areas and not enough on doing the same for smaller-scale local agricultural production

DELWP’s engagement places importance on lands that can produce the greatest volume of food for metropolitan Melbourne and calls these “strategic”. There is an implication that future reform will be limited to only protecting the agricultural potential of these lands. We argue that local agriculture is also of value to the functioning of the green wedge itself, which in the case of Nillumbik is a mosaic of farming, nature conservation, townships and rural living. This value should also be protected for its contribution, not only to the overall agricultural objective for green wedges, but also to metropolitan objectives for tourism, landscape and cultural heritage. In Nillumbik, although agriculture is generally undertaken at a smaller scale and is interspersed with other land uses, it is also worthy of the “right to farm” protections being contemplated by government.

Council’s recent work on a new economic development strategy for Nillumbik has identified that there is opportunity for agribusiness in Nillumbik to grow, in its own right and in association with tourism. Particular strengths lie in Nillumbik’s proximity to the Melbourne Wholesale Market in Epping and to local and regional farmers markets. Tourism oriented diversification opportunities lie in:

- Farm-stay accommodation. There are unique wineries in Nillumbik which could offer a quality agribusiness and winery experience within close proximity of Melbourne
- Destination dining using local produce (i.e. farm to table)
- Developing ‘meet the maker’ experiences at wineries
- Improvement of coffee culture/café culture to meet target market expectations.
- Farm gate experiences such as a cidery in Strathewen, olive farm gate experience in Kangaroo Ground and berry and fruit picking.

The DELWP project should appreciate and assist these types of agricultural opportunities as part of its objective of identifying and protecting Melbourne’s strategically valuable agricultural land.

The project should consider beyond soil-based agriculture

A further matter for Council regarding the scope of the project is that the engagement has limited itself to soil-based agriculture. Whilst this makes sense in terms of traditional agriculture, it misses the possibility of future planning for non-soil based forms of agriculture on less fertile land (such as hydroponics) that will take advantage of access to markets, water and energy for food production. We recommend that this should be studied further to expand the potential of Melbourne's future "food bowl".

The project should recognise and develop the contribution of hobby farming

We request that hobby farming be better recognised by the project as making a legitimate contribution to agriculture and policy developed to support its role. Generally, current planning policy regards hobby farming disparagingly. This stance is also reflected in DELWP's project, which as noted above, appears to narrow its scope to intensive higher-value agricultural land use.

However, hobby farming is a reality in Nillumbik (and potentially other green wedges), because of its historically small subdivision pattern, and this style of farming could make a substantial contribution to local production, sociability and farm-to-plate activity if supportive policy was put in place. Council's request that greater recognition be given to hobby farming is consistent with protecting future food production near to Melbourne, as local hobby farming may become a stronger contributor to agricultural production if areas further north of Melbourne experience reduced productivity due to the anticipated impacts of climate change and if the cost of transporting food from further afield becomes more expensive.

The project should not only better protect agriculture land, but also facilitate ease of proper management

We request that the review of planning controls ensures, not only that agricultural land be protected, but also that it be able to be farmed without unreasonable red tape or neighbourly intervention and be able to adapt and diversify in line with changing economic circumstances, emerging technologies and the pressures of climate change.

A Response to the Proposed Selection Criteria

DELWP has provided a map which uses the proposed selection criteria to identify land of strategic agricultural value in proximity of Melbourne. In the Shire of Nillumbik, this map appears to denote land containing the rich Kangaroo Ground soils as the only land which is of strategic importance. Council advises that this map does not capture the main concentrations of agricultural and pastoral activity in the Shire, which primarily occur in the north-west of the Shire (at Arthurs Creek, Doreen, and Strathewen) and to a lesser degree, on significant tracts of leased land owned by Melbourne Water at Christmas Hills. These concentrations of activity can be seen in the second and third attached maps.

The fact that DELWP's proposed criteria has not sufficiently identified agricultural activity in the Shire, points to a significant short-coming in the criteria. Council suggests that the problem here is that too much weight has been given to the capability of soil (first criterion) and insufficient emphasis given for other important considerations, such as the existing pattern of agricultural activity and the importance of local agriculture.

In addition to the above, Council is of the opinion that the proposed criteria do not adequately consider and capture the existing and potential strategic agricultural value provided to land by:

- proximity to wholesale distribution
- opportunities for consolidation
- opportunities provided by technological change
- opportunities provided by changing and emerging markets e.g. tastes in food

Council notes that many of the short-comings it has pointed to in the proposed criteria relate directly to the issues that it has articulated earlier in this submission regarding the scope of the project. The short-comings in the criteria particularly relate to one of Council's key earlier points, which is that the project focuses too heavily on existing high-level agricultural production and does not sufficiently concern itself with smaller scale agricultural activity (e.g. pasture and hobby farming). As Melbourne's situation changes because of climate change, changing markets and emerging technologies, smaller scale agricultural activity and associated land-holdings could become significantly more important to the city's food bowl.

Whilst it is harder to identify the potential or future strategic agricultural value of land, it is nevertheless highly important to do so, as the land needs to be adequately protected and managed now so that its potential significance can be realised at a later date. On this, the inability of the proposed criteria to capture a sufficiently wide breadth of agricultural land has implications for the rest of the project, as it means that any improvements to planning controls proposed later by the project will not be adequately applied around Melbourne and in the case of Nillumbik will not be applied to much of the Shire's existing or potentially valuable agricultural land.

In addition to the above issues with the proposed criteria, Council contends that there are shortcomings with the criterion pertaining to water access. The first of these shortcomings is that the water access criterion is not well explained. The wording of the criterion states the following will be considered; access to irrigation infrastructure, access to good quality groundwater and high potential for access to alternative water sources. There appears to be no mention in this criterion of water in existing waterways, either in the definition of the criterion, or in the Department's response to its Frequently Asked Question "*How has DELWP considered the potential for future developments in water supply and access?*" If this omission is because there are existing or intended restrictions on access to water from waterways for environmental or other reasons, this should be detailed so as to provide clarity and rigour in the criterion pertaining to water access.

In addition, the Department's mapping of the water access criterion suggests the criterion, or how it has been interpreted, is overly-restrictive. The Department's "Water Access" map appears to show no existing or potential access to water in the Shire of Nillumbik. However, the Shire of Nillumbik contains Sugarloaf Reservoir, the Maroondah Aqueduct, has proximity to Yan Yean Reservoir and contains, or borders, a number of waterways (e.g. a significant length of the Shire's boundary is the Yarra River). Even if these waterways and water infrastructure have not been considered as potential sources of water due to environmental reasons, or the water is dedicated to Melbourne's drinking supply, there are other factors

which Council contends could realistically provide a future supply of water for agriculture in the Shire. These are explained as follows:

Proximity to Urban Growth Areas

The Department's response to its frequently asked question regarding water access (referred to above) states that:

“Significant amounts of water will be generated by Melbourne’s growth areas via storm water run-off and recycled water. The amount generated will be more than what can be re-used in urban areas or discharged elsewhere. This water is a valuable resource and there is significant potential to use this water for agricultural use.”

A significant area of the Shire's green wedge, particularly its primary agricultural area, is in close proximity to urban growth areas located in the City of Whittlesea. In fact, there is an extensive boundary, along Yan Yean Road, between the Shire's green wedge and an urban growth corridor. On the basis of the proximity of growth areas to a sizeable area of Nillumbik's green wedge and the Department's statement regarding the potential for urban growth areas to produce water for agriculture, Council would expect the Department's water access criterion to identify that a significant part of the Shire's green wedge, including its major agricultural area, has future potential access to water.

Possibilities for Emerging Technologies

We are living in a period of rapid technological change and innovation, including in relation to public infrastructure. As part of this, Council contends it is reasonably likely that emerging technologies, particularly in response to the anticipated pressures of climate change, will make big advances in the capacity to store and distribute water locally for agriculture. For example, there could be advances in the ability of urban Melbourne, not just urban growth areas, to capture, recycle and distribute water to the city's food bowl. If this does occur, the Shire of Nillumbik's green wedge is well located to take advantage of such advances given the Shire's close proximity to much of urban Melbourne.

Considering all the above points regarding the water access criterion, Council contends the relevant criterion should be better explained and more particularly, be re-structured or re-interpreted to identify potential for the Shire's green wedge to have access to water for agriculture.

Improving the Relevant Planning Provisions

As noted in the discussion paper the current suite of green wedge zones does not always prioritise agricultural uses. Currently in Nillumbik, the Green Wedge Zone applies to the concentration of agricultural properties in the Doreen and Arthurs Creek areas in the north-west corner of the Shire. In general terms, this seems to be a workable situation.

We do wish however to draw attention to the Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ) which, significantly, applies to approximately three-quarters of the Nillumbik green wedge, including the rural district of Kangaroo Ground, parts of the Strathewen valley and Christmas Hills and a number of scattered agricultural properties.

An issue with the RCZ is that it does not allow agriculture “as-of-right”, even when the land is pre-existing cleared agricultural land. Council contends that the requirement for a planning

permit for agriculture (and associated development) on pre-existing cleared land is unreasonable for a combination of the two following reasons:

- The requirement for a permit is reasonably unlikely to assist the RCZ to protect conservation and landscape values.
- The requirement poses a significant burden or hindrance for landowners who wish to conduct agriculture and/or construct supporting infrastructure.

These issues with the RCZ may stem from the fact that the zone is expected to manage significantly different land uses and values, including conservation, agriculture and rural living and this likely causes the zone to be omnibus in nature and heavy on the requirement for planning permits for most activities and associated structures.

To address the issue with the RCZ highlighted above, it may be appropriate to undertake one or more of the following actions; micro-zone agricultural land to a more facilitative zone, modify the RCZ to better distinguish and accommodate agricultural activity that is reasonably unlikely to impact on conservation and landscape values (e.g. activity on pre-existing cleared agricultural land) or place greater emphasis on legislation and policy outside the planning scheme to minimise any potential environmental impacts from agriculture (such as State legislation and programmes to control noxious weeds). Consideration of these options appears necessary to achieve the objectives of your review.

Conclusion

In summary, Council contends that the scope and proposed criteria of DELWP's project has the following key short-comings:

- There is too much emphasis on capturing current high-level agricultural production and not enough on smaller-local production, including hobby-farming, which is still significant to the viability of Melbourne's green wedges and may have further significance to Melbourne's food bowl in the future.
- The project should consider non-soil based agriculture, as this could also become a significant contributor to Melbourne's food bowl.
- The proposed selection criteria appear significantly flawed, as:
 - First and foremost for the Shire, the criteria have failed to capture the key area of agricultural activity within the Shire of Nillumbik. The cause for this error appears to be an over-emphasis in the criteria on soil condition and insufficient consideration of existing localised agricultural activity.
 - The proposed criteria do not sufficiently capture land of potential strategic agricultural value. Whilst this is harder to capture than existing strategic value, it is nevertheless highly important to capture, as the land needs to be adequately protected and managed now so that its potential significance can be realised at a later date.
 - The proposed criterion pertaining to water access is not well explained and for the Shire of Nillumbik, and possibly for other areas, does not appear to adequately capture the future potential for water access to be provided for agriculture.
- The project should not only seek to protect agricultural land, but also assist proper management of this resource. For example, to address a situation which exists in much

of Nillumbik's green wedge whereby a planning permit is required to conduct agriculture on pre-existing cleared agricultural land.

Council asks that these shortcomings are addressed. If this is not done, Council contends that the findings and recommendations of the DELWP project will be significantly compromised.

We look forward to working with you to progress this important initiative. For further information, please contact Paul Fyffe, Senior Strategic Planner on 9433 3218 or paul.fyffe@nillumbik.vic.gov.au.

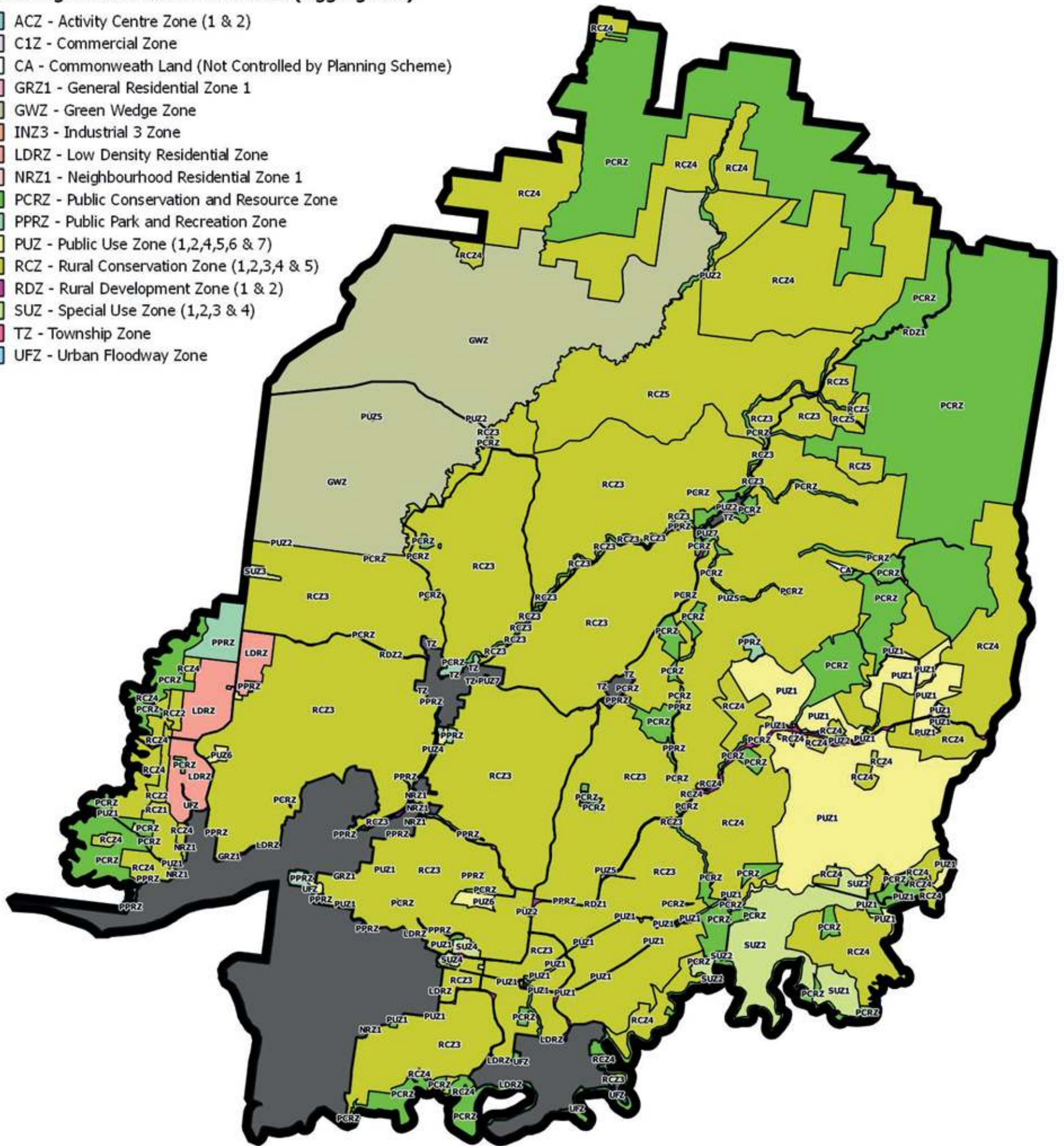
Attachments

Shire of Nillumbik, *Green Wedge Management Plan, Background Report Community Panel, August 2018*. Maps 1, 2 and 15.

DRAFT

Planning Scheme Zones Nillumbik (Aggregated)

- ACZ - Activity Centre Zone (1 & 2)
- C1Z - Commercial Zone
- CA - Commonwealth Land (Not Controlled by Planning Scheme)
- GRZ1 - General Residential Zone 1
- GWZ - Green Wedge Zone
- INZ3 - Industrial 3 Zone
- LDRZ - Low Density Residential Zone
- NRZ1 - Neighbourhood Residential Zone 1
- PCRZ - Public Conservation and Resource Zone
- PPRZ - Public Park and Recreation Zone
- PUZ - Public Use Zone (1,2,4,5,6 & 7)
- RCZ - Rural Conservation Zone (1,2,3,4 & 5)
- RDZ - Rural Development Zone (1 & 2)
- SUZ - Special Use Zone (1,2,3 & 4)
- TZ - Township Zone
- UFZ - Urban Floodway Zone



Administrative boundaries

- Nillumbik Shire Boundary
- Urban or township areas

Map 1. Planning Scheme Zones

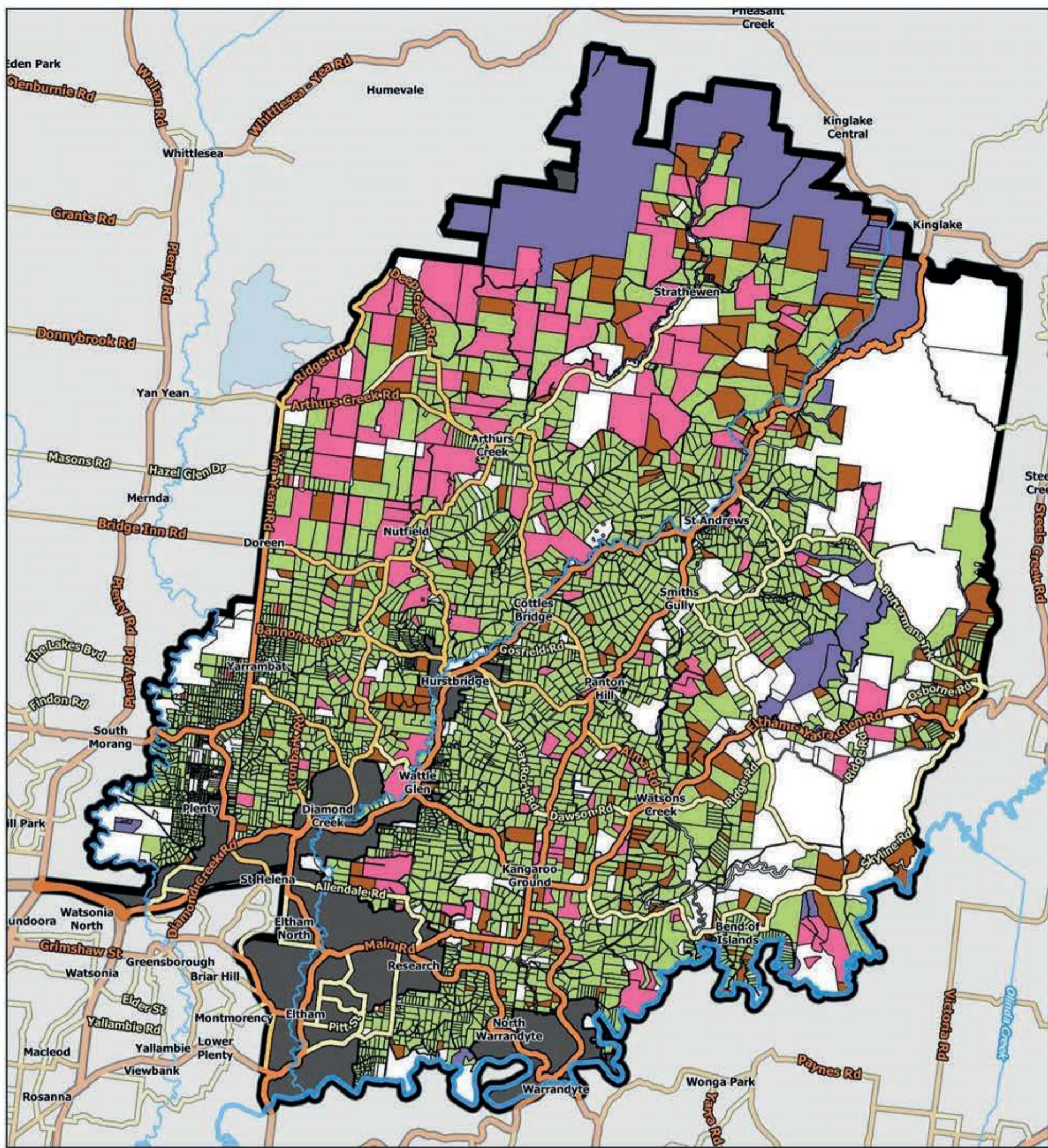
Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan
review 2018

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Watercourse

- Hierarchy: High
- Hierarchy: Medium

Roadways

- Freeway
- Highway
- Arterial
- Sub Arterial
- Collector

Green Wedge status

- Outside Green Wedge Area

Rural Land Use Category

- Rural residential
- Vacant Rural
- Agricultural
- Conservation and Recreation
- Other land uses

Major water bodies

- Reservoirs

Administrative boundaries

- Nillumbik Shire Boundary

Map 2. Rural Land Uses

Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan review 2018

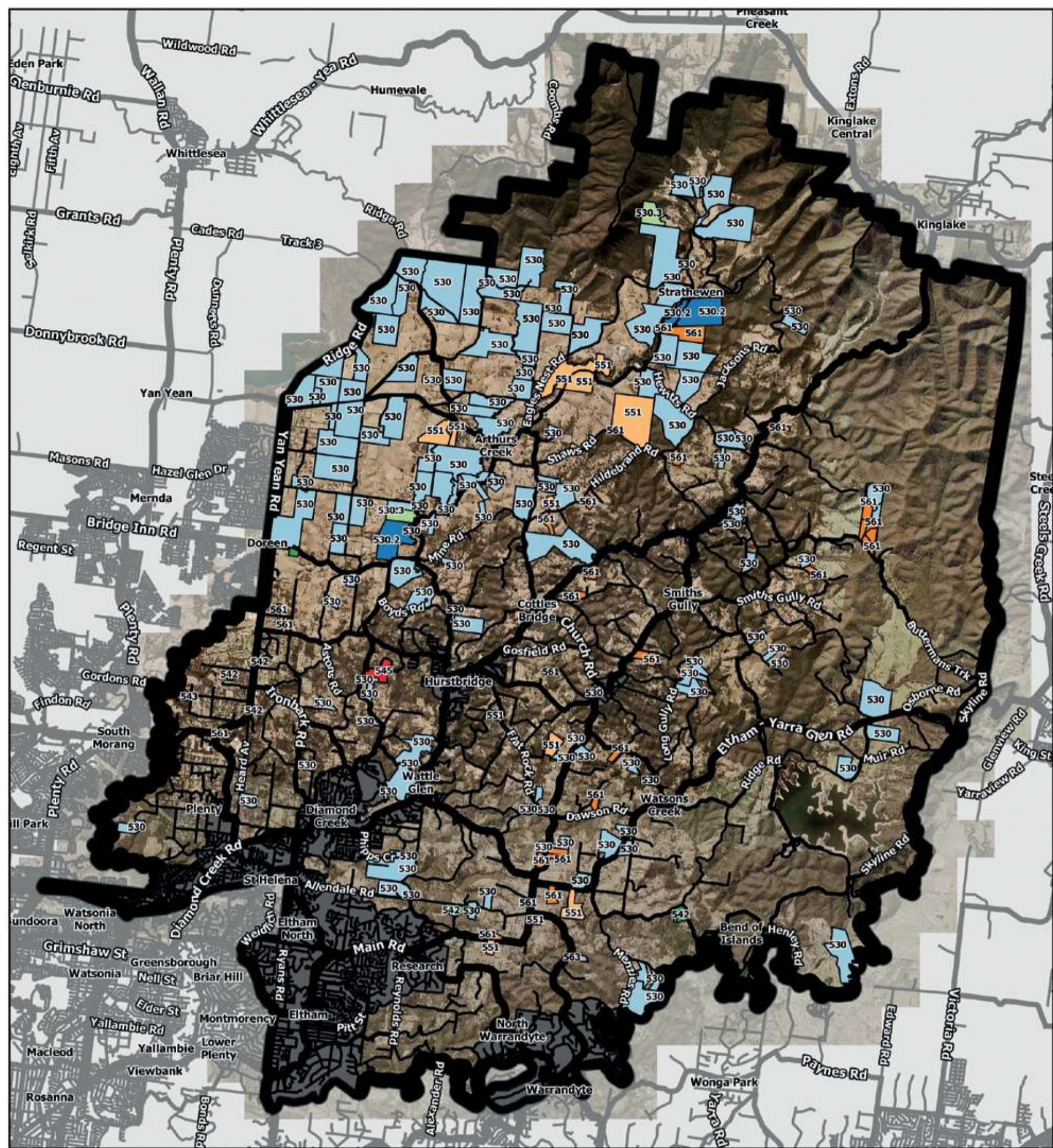
Source: Australian Valuation Property Classification Code

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Map 15. Agricultural Land Uses within the Green Wedge

Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan review 2018

Source: Australian Valuation Property Classification Code

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