



ENVIRONMENT  
INSTITUTE OF  
AUSTRALIA AND  
NEW ZEALAND

## **“Practising good environmental policy in Victoria”**

### ***2014 Victorian State Election position statement***

The Environment Institute of Australian and New Zealand (EIANZ) stands for excellence in environmental practice. As the peak professional body for environmental practitioners, we recognise that excellence in environmental practice and policy is characterised by:

- Protecting and enhancing the environment by avoiding and mitigating harm and adapting to change.
- Supporting resilient and functioning biological systems as essential to sustain our human well-being.
- Environmental practice that is evidence-based, honest and transparent.
- Environmental practice as a central part of policy and planning (beyond legal requirements).
- Recognising that environmental practice is multidisciplinary and collaborative.

With the 2014 Victorian state election nearing, the EIANZ’s Victorian Division has identified a set of policy priorities that reflect these values. These have been informed by our members’ deep knowledge and experience in environmental practice. The following policy position statement draws heavily from submissions by our membership and existing policy statements (see [www.eianz.org](http://www.eianz.org))<sup>1</sup>.

Although sustainable planning and environmental policy covers a range of issues, the following areas were identified as being the highest priorities for Victoria over the next four years.

### ***Supporting resilient systems – climate change mitigation and adaptation***

Climate change is an essential factor in any future economic or social planning.

Addressing climate change in coastal planning, energy policy, social programs and natural resource management is essential to ensure the Victorian economy and environments are protected for the medium to long term.

In the absence of clear Commonwealth strategies to account for systematic climate change, the EIANZ advocates for the incoming State government to provide leadership to Australia and the international community in addressing and planning for this challenge.

The EIANZ support reducing greenhouse gas and carbon emissions through policy that accounts for the cost of emissions, that supports energy efficiency, that provides support to transition energy intensive industries and provides planning certainty for sustainable energy and low emissions technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> While this policy statement draws on submissions by our membership and existing policy statements to advocate for good environmental policy, it does not purport to represent or reflect the views of all of our members.

These mitigation steps must be supplemented with adaptation. This requires strategic, evidence based and adaptive land use policy to protect and transition vulnerable areas (such as agricultural and coastal communities) towards a stable climate modified future.

These strategies would also provide long-term opportunities to lower energy and insurance costs to consumers and benefit the Victorian economy.

### ***Planning for the future – Transport, Waste and Energy***

Victoria's population is predicted to hit 10 million by 2051 with more than 80% of that growth in the Greater Melbourne area.<sup>2</sup> We realise that all sides of government recognise the need to manage this growth to maintain our status as one of the world's most liveable communities.

The EIANZ recognises and supports the key growing pressures identified in Plan Melbourne<sup>3</sup>, namely congestion, accessibility, housing affordability, climate changes and the loss of agricultural land through rural encroachment.

The EIANZ calls for the incoming State government to undertake strategic land-use planning that incorporates sustainable investment in transport infrastructure and public transport. This directly addresses the social and environmental implications of higher urban density and a growing urban boundary.

We also support programs and policies to support sustainable building practices. This includes measures to address the properties of materials in new developments (i.e. their thermal efficiencies, recyclability, etc.), to increase energy efficiency and reduce (or reuse) building waste.

Strategic planning requires balancing a broad range of issues (economic, environmental, social etc.). In addition to specific challenges of transport, waste and energy, the EIANZ advocates that planning for Victoria's future should consider

- A precautionary approach;
- The integration of environmental, social and economic considerations;
- Broad community involvement and transparency; and
- Correct valuation and pricing of natural resource use, incorporating losses that are (otherwise) external to corporations and inequity among and between generations.

### ***Managing biodiversity as part of development***

Australia is home to an estimated 570,000 different species, giving it more than 5% of the world's plants and animals. Biodiversity loss is a serious environmental problem in Australia and globally. Australia has experienced the largest documented decline in biodiversity of any continent over the past 200 years, and the rate of species decline is the highest in the OECD<sup>4</sup>.

The *Planning the Environment Act 1987* is the key piece of legislation that deals with planning schemes through the Victoria Planning Provisions and planning approvals in Victoria. The purpose of the

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<sup>2</sup> DTPLI. 2014. "Victoria in Future 2014: Population and household projections to 2051". [www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/victoria-in-future-2014](http://www.dtpli.vic.gov.au/victoria-in-future-2014).

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Government. 2014. "Plan Melbourne, Metropolitan planning strategy". <http://www.planmelbourne.vic.gov.au>

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2010. "Australia's biodiversity". Article included as part of the Year Book 2009-10. Release number 1301.0. [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

Act is to establish a framework for planning the use, development and protection of land in Victoria in the present and long-term interests of all Victorians.

Despite this, biodiversity has long been seen as a road block to development through the planning system and Governments are responding through reducing 'red and green tape' to streamline the regulatory process. The Melbourne Strategic Assessment and the Permitted Clearing of Native Vegetation – Biodiversity Assessment Guidelines (the Guidelines) are examples of recent Victorian green tape reduction and simplified planning processes.

The Melbourne Strategic Assessment was introduced by the Victoria Government as a new approach to conserving biodiversity in Melbourne's growth corridors. It provided 'time stamped' native vegetation data and maps and a biodiversity conservation strategy for Melbourne's growth areas, which was approved by the Commonwealth Minister for Environment under part 10 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The Permitted Clearing of Native Vegetation - Biodiversity Assessment Guidelines replaced the Framework (Victoria's native vegetation - A framework for action) in all Victorian Planning Schemes in December 2013. At its core, the Guidelines aim to ensure that the permitted clearing of native vegetation results in no net loss in the contribution made by native vegetation to Victoria's biodiversity.

While in theory the Melbourne Strategic Assessment and the Guidelines should be balancing biodiversity values against development pressures across the State, this balance is not always achieved. The long-term success of these approaches relies not only on streamlining development (which we recognise as an important goal) but also on adaptive monitoring and commitment to biodiversity outcomes. We support the development of new strategic planning approaches to biodiversity, and the strengthening of existing measures to ensure:

- Impact assessment is based around objective and measurable biodiversity goals
- Principles of avoid-mitigate-offset are employed to achieve net gain outcomes
- Decision frameworks (including targets, models and methods) are evidence-based and adaptively updated based on ongoing monitoring and research
- A consistent and transparent planning process, to provide certainty for developers, communities and environmental professionals.

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EIANZ Victorian Division  
15<sup>th</sup> November 2014