Protecting and Connecting EPBC species in the Yarra Ranges

An Action Plan for the lowland Leadbeater's Possum and the Helmeted Honeyeater







Department of Environment and Primary Industries Victo





Published by the Victorian Government Department of Environment and Primary Industries Melbourne, December 2014

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Authorised by the Victorian Government, 123 Brown Street Heidelberg, Victoria.

Print managed by Finsbury Green. Printed on recycled paper.

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1. Introduction

In 2013, the Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA) obtained an Australian Government grant to undertake the project 'Protecting and Connecting EPBC species (Helmeted Honeyeater Lichenostomus melanops cassidix and the lowland Leadbeater's Possum Gymnobelideus leadbeateri) in the Yarra Ranges'. This project is intended to build on previous environmental restoration works undertaken through the PPWCMA-coordinated 'Yarra4Life' program, but with a specific focus on the two threatened species.

The first phase of the project has featured the development of an Ecological Character Description (ECD) and this associated Action Plan, which the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) was commissioned to undertake. An ECD is a conceptual planning tool that attempts to synthesise both scientific and practical sources of knowledge to capture the 'essence' or 'character' of a particular ecosystem (or species) to help guide its restoration. The ECD document for this project is available in a separate report (DEPI 2014).

This Action Plan complements the ECD by directing the actions required for the project's implemention. It is intended to be a concise document outlining steps to interpret priority area mapping from the ECD. A general guide as to the implementation model and next steps are provided. A *Works Plan Template* is also provided to enable assessment of properties, development of site-specific actions, and outline required monitoring and reporting back to the PPWCMA.

Further information on the overall project objectives, methods and background to recommended actions can be found in the ECD report (DEPI 2014). This Action Plan does not attempt to repeat information or concepts outlined in the ECD - readers are therefore advised to refer to these documents together.

2. Action Plan Approach

The Action Plan takes the following approach:

- 1. Adoption of the Zonation model recommendations for restoration works from the ECD (DEPI 2014)
- 2. Refinement of works areas to prioritise private land
- 3. Utilisation of a Landcare-type model to target landholders within the refined works area
- 4. Preparation of a works plan for each targeted property (based on a template within this document) for landholders to use in conjunction with Landcare Facilitators and/or other support personnel
- 5. Guidance on monitoring evaluation and reporting

These steps are further addressed in Figure 1 to help the reader understand the process of implementing onground works associated with this project.

The decision to prioritise private over public land was made for a number of reasons. Namely, funding is available for public land via alternative grant programs. For example, through the past Victorian Environmental Partnerships Program (VEPP), 2 Million trees projects, and Greening Australia is already doing works in the area. Community groups working on public land can access these other grant programs via DEPI, PPWCMA and Parks Victoria. Targeting private land also supports landowners to participate in conservation projects and receive financial benefits.



Figure 1: Action Plan approach

3. Refinement of Priority Work Areas

The Yarra4Life Committee provided guidance on how the 2.5% Zonation model of priority restoration areas outlined in the ECD should be practically implemented. The Yarra for Life Committee commented that some of the cleared areas prioritised within the Zonation model would take more effort to restore than already existing treed areas.

Comments were particularly relevant to the land directly adjoining the eastern side of Warrramate Hills Flora and Fauna Reserve. This area is highlighted as a high priority in the Zonation model but on the ground is a former swamp with tree layers limited to windrow planting. The Committee recommended a practical 'join-the-dots' approach whereby areas with an existing overstorey of native trees - specifically Swamp gums (mountain or lowland) or Manna gum - are targeted first in terms of restoring understorey and connecting patches.

3.1 Priority Work Areas

The Yarra for Life Committee requested that priority areas for restoration works are highlighted on a series of maps at a scale where parcel (property) boundaries can be identified and with a partially transparent aerial image so that treed properties can be located. An Overview map (Appendix 1) at 1:25,000 scale highlights all of the top 2.5% priority areas for restoration within the study area. A series of zoomed in maps are also provided at a scale of 1:10,000 with the parcel boundaries identified. Six maps cover the priority areas (Appendix 2 to 7). These maps are titled:

- Healesville
- Warramate
- Woori Yallock
- Mount Tollebewong
- Yellingbo
- Yellingbo South

3.2 Ranking Priority Work Areas

Properties should be further ranked for restoration works based on the following selection criteria, which are listed in order of importance (1=highest, 6=lowest):

- 1. Private land tenure vs. public
- 2. Covered by darker green hatchings on the zoomed-in Zonation maps (Appendices 2 to 7) vs. lighter green or no green hatching
- 3. Larger parcel size vs. smaller
- 4. Provide stepping stones between the larger parcels of high-value land
- 5. Existing native tree or understorey layers vs. no existing native vegetation
- 6. An even spread of parcels of land rather than a selection of parcels in a group will reduce risks of restoration efforts being lost due to unforeseeable events such as wildfire or disease. This point was discussed and agreed to by the Yarra 4 Life Committee.

4. Implementation

The Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority (PPWCMA) recommended the project utilise Landcare Groups to access landholders within the priority work areas. The Yarra Ranges Landcare Network has two Landcare Groups active in these areas: Macclesfield Landcare and Mount Toolebewong Landcare. Both of these groups are well-established and have strong links into the community and to the PPWCMA and Yarra Ranges Shire Council.

A project model for implementation of this program will need to be decided by the PPWCMA. The model will then need to activate a series of next steps to implement the funding set aside for restoration works. Both the project model and next steps are provided in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Project Model

Two project models are available to the PPWCMA:

- The PPWCMA runs a grant grogram using Landcare Groups to initiate contact with target landholders. The PPWCMA would then need to develop works plans with the landholders and distribute funds as it sees fit.
- The PPWCMA sponsors the Yarra Ranges Landcare Network or the two existing Landcare Groups (Macclesfield and Mount Toolebewong) to act as delivery agent(s). The delivery agent(s) then manage the grant program including targeting landholders, developing works plans with the landholders, and distributing funds.

4.2 Next Steps

Once the project model has been selected, the next steps will be:

- 1. Select a project manager from within the PPWCMA or Landcare Groups or Networks.
- 2. Using the zoomed in maps from Appendices 2 to 7, identify target parcels of land for restoration works.
- 3. Rank the target parcels of land in accordance with the principles in Section 3.2.
- Access knowledge of the Landcare Groups, Yarra Ranges Landcare Network and land use data from the Shire of Yarra Ranges to help select landowners that are amenable to undertaking restoration works on their properties.
- 5. Once a short-list of land parcels has been developed from steps 1- 4, each landholder should be contacted and then visited if they are interested in participating in the project. A further refined short-list of properties will be developed at this step.
- 6. The refined short-list of land parcels should be visited and the type of restoration works to meet the project objective (see ECD, DEPI 2014) identified. Such works will fall into the following categories:
 - a. Purchase parcel and protect on-title and manage for conservation.
 - b. Habitat enhancement by putting back elements of habitat (specific species or nest boxes) that are missing. Usually minor works in comparison to revegetation activities.
 - c. Undertake infill planting of vegetation community (general revegetation) to achieve appropriate Ecological Vegetation Class benchmark of condition.
 - d. Management actions required to maintain habitat condition such as controlled burns or modification of hydrological regime.
 - e. Undertake weed control works to allow native vegetation to effectively out-compete weeds.

- f. Undertake fencing activities to reduce grazing pressure on native vegetation.
- g. Undertake direct pest animal control such as rabbit baiting programs or burrow destruction.
- h. Undertake soil manipulation to rectify erosion or hydrological problems.
- 7. Using the *Works Plan Template*, decide upon the course of action(s) with the landholder that can be implemented within one year. This may be simplified if the parcel purchase option is undertaken.
- 8. Develop a project budget for submission with the Work Plan to the delivery agent (i.e. PPWCMA or Landcare Group) for funding approval.
- 9. Complete 'letter of agreement' process with the delivery agent if project proposal is approved.
- 10. Project can now be implemented.

The following information is required to be collected prior to on-ground works commencing so that project success can be tracked. The *Works Plan Template* contains prompts for these data types to be recorded:

- 1. Hand draw or use mapping program to mark out a mud map of the project and where each type of works are to be undertaken.
- 2. Mark on the map the location of photo-points so that photos of the project on-ground works can be taken every 6 months.
- 3. Mark out any threats occurring such as erosion points, rabbit burrows, tree dieback, deer or other animal trails.
- 4. Current approximate percentage cover of weeds and dominant type e.g.. Willow at 30% cover
- 5. Current approximate cover of native species and layer e.g. ground cover grasses, mid storey shrubs, overstorey dominant Eucalypt species.
- 6. Document in point form the actions that will be undertaken, including site preparation, planting, weed control and baiting etc.
- 7. Document in point form the ongoing management actions that will be undertaken e.g. herbicide application every 6 months to Canary grass patches.
- 8. Outline the time frequency for collection of information on the works e.g. photos will be taken in September and March each year on zero zoom at each photo monitoring point.

5. Works Plan

A Works Plan Template is provided in Appendix 8. Information is included to establish the site-based project, document threats, outline the proposed works, and monitoring and reporting requirements. Common Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) for the standard vegetation communities within the priority areas are included in Appendix 9 for reference in selecting species and planting densities when developing the works plan. Further information on mapped EVCs and associated benchmarks can be found at:

http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/environment-and-wildlife/biodiversity/biodiversity-interactive-map.

6. References

- DEPI (2014) Protecting and Connecting EPBC species in the Yarra Ranges: Ecological Character Description. Unpublished report prepared for Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority, Department of Primary Industries and Environment May 2014.
- SER (2004) Society for Ecological Restoration International Science & Policy Working Group: SER International Primer on Ecological Restoration, version 2 October 2004. Accessed at <u>http://www.ser.org/resources/resources-detail-view/ser-international-primer-on-ecological-restoration</u> on 6 May 2014.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Overview map Yarra for Life, Protecting and Connecting EPBC species in the Yarra Valley ECD (Action Plan) Overview of Targeted Restoration Areas



Appendix 2: Healesville targeted restoration work areas



Appendix 3: Warramate targeted restoration work area



Appendix 4: Woori Yallock targeted restoration work area



Appendix 5: Mount Toolebewong targeted restoration work area



Appendix 6: Yellingbo targeted restoration work area



Appendix 7: Yellingbo South targeted restoration work area



Appendix 8: Works Plan Template

WORKS PLAN TEMPLATE

1. Administrative details

Applicant name and affiliated group	
Postal address	
Phone number	
Email	
Date of submission	
Specific location details (GPS coordinates, or attach Google Earth kmz shape file)	
Which zoomed-in Zonation map is the property located on?	

2. Purpose of Action

Threats to be addressed	
Desired outcome of action	
Summary of proposed action	

3. Site Description

Size (area) of proposed restoration works(ha)				
Perimeter length (m)				
Shape of site				
Land tenure				
Current site condition description	Native vegetation presence and type (see Appendix 9 for EVC types)		Adjacent land use	
	Weed presence/extent		Current land use	
	Introduced animals presence/damage		Other	
Summary of factors potentially affecting success and required management approach				
Previous rehabilitation activities undertaken at site?	Y/N	Detail :		

4. Map of Site



5. Site Preparation

Action	Detail
Weed control	What (target species):
	When:
	How often:
	Technique:
Proposed ground preparation	What:
	When:
	How often:
	Technique:
Has expert advice been sought on site preparation requirements and what are the recommendations?	
Are there any required approvals for the proposed works and have they been obtained?	

Associated works:	e.g. fencing
Other comments or actions proposed:	
p.opood.	

6. Works Program

Works Program Action	Details	
Photo-point details: location, date, camera settings, etc.		
Proposed pest plant control	Weed control (not eliminated)	Weed eradication (intention not to leave any on site)
<i>i.e.</i> estimate the cover of vegetation to be controlled or eliminated from the restoration area on the following scale:	Estimated area (ha): Grasses:	Estimated area (ha): Grasses:
0-5%; 6 – 20%; 20 - 50%; 50 – 80%; >80%	Mid storey <5m in height:	Mid storey <5m in height:
	Overstorey >5m in height:	Overstorey >5m in height:

Works Program Action	Details
Proposed pest animal control	Estimated area (ha) of pest animal control: Pest animal control technique: Signs of pest animal return?
Proposed planting density of native plants	Estimated area of planting (ha): Total number of tube stock: Total number of different species:
Proposed planting diversity (native)	Total number of Grasses: Total number of mid storey <5m in height: Total number of overstorey >5m in height:
Proposed soil manipulation activities:	
Ongoing maintenance requirements:	

7. Monitoring and Reporting

To be completed every 12 months and submitted to PPWCMA

Project name		
Site location		
Contact name and details		
Photo point details: location, date, camera settings		
Monitoring technique,	Weeds	Native
frequency and schedule	Grasses:	Grasses:
i.e. estimated cover of weeds and native vegetation on the following scale:	Mid storey <5m in height:	Mid storey <5m in height:
0-5%; 6 – 20%; 20 - 50%; 50 – 80%; >80%	Overstorey >5m in height:	Overstorey >5m in height:
Pest Animal control	Estimated area (ha) of pest animal cont	rol:
	Pest animal control technique:	
	Signs of pest animal return?	
Number of native plants		
	Estimated area of planting (ha):	
	Total number planted:	
	Total number of different species:	
	Total estimated number of plants survi	ved:
	Any signs of natural recruitment?:	
Mapping		
Insert map of where works have been undertaken using the template in Section 4 of Works Plan		
Update on any issues with implementing works:		
Ongoing maintenance requirements:		

Appendix 9: Ecological Vegetation Class benchmarks

EVC 18: Riparian Forest Highlands – Southern Fall bioregion

Description: A tall forest along river banks and associated alluvial terraces with occasional occurrences in the heads of gullies leading into creeks and rivers. The soil is fertile alluvium, regularly inundated and permanently moist. Dominated by tall eucalypts to 30 m tall, but also has an open to sparse secondary tree layer of wattles and scattered dense patches of shrubs, ferns, grasses and herbs.

Large trees: Species Eucalyptus spp.		DBH(cm) 90 cm	#/ha 20 / ha		
Tree Canopy	Character Species			•••••	n Name
40%	Eucalyptus obliqua Eucalyptus viminalis			Messmate Manna Gur	Stringybark m
Understorey:					
Life form		#Sp	p s	%Cover	LF
code Immature	e Canopy Tree		5	5%	IT
Understorey Tre	e or Large Shrub	4	2	20%	Т
Medium Shrub		8	2	20%	MS
Small Shrub		1	1	1%	SS
Prostrate Shrub		1	1	1%	PS
Large Herb		2	-	1%	LH
Medium Herb		6	-	10%	MH
Small or Prostra	te Herb	2	-	1%	SH
Large Tufted Graminoid		3	-	10%	LTG
Large Non-tufted Graminoid		2	-	5%	LNG
Medium to Small Tufted Graminoid		3	-	5%	MTG
Medium to Tiny Non-tufted Graminoid		2	-	5%	MNG
Ground Fern		5	_	20%	GF
Tree Fern		1	-	0%	TRF
Scrambler or Cli		3	-	5%	SC
Bryophytes/Lich	ens	na	2	20%	BL

LF Code	Species typical of at least part of EVC range Acacia dealbata	Common Name Silver Wattle
Ť	Pomaderris aspera	Hazel Pomaderris
Т	Acacia melanoxylon	Blackwood
MS	Coprosma guadrifida	Prickly Currant-bush
MS	Prostanthera lasianthos	Victorian Christmas-bush
MS	Goodenia ovata	Hop Goodenia
MS	Olearia lirata	Snowy Daisy-bush
MH	Viola hederacea sensu Willis (1972)	Ivy-leaf Violet
MH	Acaena novae-zelandiae	Bidgee-widgee
MH	Hydrocotyle hirta	Hairy Pennywort
MH	Geranium potentilloides	Cinquefoil Cranesbill
SH	Oxalis corniculata s.l.	Yellow Wood-sorrel
LTG	Carex appressa	Tall Sedge
LTG	Lepidosperma elatius	Tall Sword-sedge
LTG	Gahnia sieberiana	Red-fruit Saw-sedge
LNG	Tetrarrhena juncea	Forest Wire-grass
MTG	Poa australis spp. agg.	Tussock Grass
MTG	Dianella tasmanica	Tasman Flax-lily
MTG	Isolepis inundata	Swamp Club-sedge
MNG	Poa tenera	Slender Tussock-grass
MNG	Microlaena stipoides var. stipoides	Weeping Grass
GF	Blechnum nudum	Fishbone Water-fern
GF	Pteridium esculentum	Austral Bracken
GF	Blechnum wattsii	Hard Water-fern
GF	Polystichum proliferum	Mother Shield-fern
TRF	Cyathea australis	Rough Tree-fern
SC	Clematis aristata	Mountain Clematis

Recruitment:

Continuous

Organic Litter:

50 % cover

Logs:

30 m/0.1 ha.

Weediness:

LF Code	Typical Weed Species
MS	Rubus fruticosus spp. agg.
MH	Hypochoeris radicata
MH	Prunella vulgaris

Common Name Blackberry Cat's Ear Self-heal

Invasive high high high

Impact high Iow Iow

EVC 56: Floodplain Riparian Woodland Highlands – Southern Fall bioregion

Description:

An open eucalypt woodland to 15 m tall over a medium to tall shrub layer with a ground layer consisting of amphibious and aquatic herbs and sedges. Occurs along the banks and floodplains of the larger meandering rivers and major creeks, often in conjunction with one or more floodplain wetland communities. Elevation and rainfall are relatively low and soils are fertile alluviums subject to periodic flooding and inundation.

Large tree Species Eucalyptus	5	DBH 80 cm	(cm) #∕ 157	'ha 'ha
Tree Cane %cove 20%	ppy Cover: r Character Species Eucalyptus ovata Eucalyptus viminalis	5		Common Name Swamp Gum MannaGum
Understord Medium SI Large Herl Medium H Small or P Large Tuft Large Non Medium to	m Canopy Tree ey Tree or Large Shrub hrub o erb rostrate Herb ed Graminoid -tufted Graminoid o Small Tufted Graminoid	#Spp 4 3 4 3 2 3 3 5 5	%Cove 5% 15% 10% 10% 5% 15% 20% 15%	IT T MS LH MH SH LTG LNG MTG
	o Tiny Non-tufted Graminoid or Climber s/Lichens Species typical of at le Acacia dealbata	1 3 na east part o	5% 10% 10% of EVC range	MNG SC BL e Common Name Silver Wattle
T T MS LH LH LH MH MH SH LTG LTG LTG LTG LNG MTG MTG MNG SC	Melaleuca ericifolia Acacia melanoxylon Bursaria spinosa ssp. spinosa Hymenanthera dentata s.l. Senecio quadridentatus Senecio pinnatifolius Acaena novae-zelandiae Crassula helmsii Persicaria decipiens Dichondra repens Juncus sarophorus Juncus gregiflorus Carex appressa Poa labillardierei Phragmites australis Schoenoplectus tabernaemont Juncus amabilis Carex inversa Microlaena stipoides var. stipoi Calystegia sepium			Swamp Paperbark Blackwood Sweet Bursaria Tree Violet Cotton Fireweed Shrubby Fireweed Variable Groundsel Bidgee-widgee Swamp Crassula Slender Knotweed Kidney-weed Broom Rush Green Rush Tall Sedge Common Tussock-grass Common Reed River Club-sedge Hollow Rush Knob Sedge Weeping Grass Large Bindweed

Recruitment:

Episodic/Flood. Desirable period between disturbances is 10 years.

Organic Litter:

40 % cover

Logs:

30 m/0.1 ha.

Weediness:			
LF Code	Typical Weed Species	Common Name	Invasive
T	Fraxinus angustifolia ssp. angustifolia	Desert Ash	high
Ť	Salix fragilis	Crack Willow	high
Ť	Salix cinerea	Grey Sallow	high
Ť	Crataegus monogyna	Hawthorn	high
MS	Solanum pseudocapsicum	Madeira Winter-cherry	high
MS	Prunus cerasifera	Cherry Plum	high
LH	Cirsium vulgare	Spear Thistle	high
LH	Solanum americanum	Glossy Nightshade	high
LH	Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort	high
LH	Rorippa palustris	Marsh Yellow-cress	high
LH	Sonchus asper s.l.	Rough Sow-thistle	high
LH	Verbena bonariensis s.l.	Purple-top Verbena	high
LH	Aster subulatus	Aster-weed	high
LH	Rumex pulcher ssp. pulcher	Fiddle Dock	high
LH	Rumex crispus	Curled Dock	high
LH	Rumex conglomeratus	Clustered Dock	high
LH	Echium plantagineum	Paterson's Curse	
MH		Cat's Ear	high
MH	Hypochoeris radicata		high
	Ranunculus repens	Creeping Buttercup	high
MH	Anagallis arvensis	Pimpernel Capa Wood	high
MH	Arctotheca calendula	Cape Weed	high
MH	Gamochaeta purpurea s.l.	Purple Cudweed	high
MH	Lotus corniculatus	Bird's-foot Trefoil	high
MH	Atriplex prostrata	Hastate Orache	high
MH	Stellaria media	Chickweed	high
SH	Trifolium repens var. repens	White Clover	high
SH SH	Modiola caroliniana	Red-flower Mallow	high
	Callitriche stagnalis	Common Starwort	high
LTG	Phalaris aquatica	Toowoomba Canary-grass	high
LNG	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog	high
LNG	Pennisetum clandestinum	Kikuyu Xallaw Flag Iria	high
MTG	Iris pseudacorus	Yellow Flag Iris	high
MTG	Paspalum dilatatum	Paspalum	high
MTG	Lolium perenne	Perennial Rye-grass	high
MTG	Cyperus eragrostis	Drain Flat-sedge	high
MTG	Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal-grass	high
MTG	Agrostis stolonifera	Creeping Bent	high
MTG	Setaria gracilis var. pauciseta	Slender Pigeon Grass	high
MTG	Bromus catharticus	Prairie Grass	high
MTG	Poa annua	Annual Meadow-grass	high
MTG	Lolium rigidum	Wimmera Rye-grass	high
MTG	<i>Ehrharta erecta</i> var. <i>erecta</i>	Panic Veldt-grass	high
MTG	<i>Agrostis capillaris</i> s.l.	Brown-top Bent	high
MNG	Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot	high
MNG	Leersia oryzoides	Rice Cut-grass	high
MNG	Paspalum distichum	Water Couch	high
MNG	Poa pratensis	Kentucky Blue-grass	high
SC	Rubus sp. aff. armeniacus	Blackberry	high
SC	Vinca major	Blue Periwinkle	high
SC	Tradescantia fluminensis	Wandering Jew	high
SC	Galium aparine	Cleavers	high