

THE MELBOURNE STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

Melbourne's population is growing, and will continue to grow to an expected five million people by 2030.

To enable development that will cater for this growth over the next 20 years while safeguarding the environment, the Australian and Victorian governments are doing a strategic assessment of the Victorian Government's program to revise Melbourne's urban growth boundary under national environment law (the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*).

What is a strategic assessment?

Strategic assessments provide a big-picture study of an area to assess how environmental, cultural and heritage values can be best protected while allowing sustainable development.

Through strategic assessments, the Australian Government works with partners, such as state or local governments, to ensure a policy, plan or program will adequately safeguard nationally protected matters for the long term.

Strategic assessments ensure long-term environmental protection by looking at impacts on the environment over the whole landscape before development begins, rather than at individual projects.

They reduce red tape by considering federal and state environmental concerns in a single assessment process, and give greater upfront clarity to developers, landholders, planners, industry, government and the community.

The Melbourne strategic assessment is looking at potential environmental impacts that may result from changing the city's urban growth boundary, and the measures to minimise these impacts.

How is the assessment done?

Strategic assessments look at policies, plans or programs to ensure that their environmental impacts are properly considered before they are put into place. Once satisfied this is the case, the federal environment minister may endorse the policy, plan or program, before considering giving approval for the types of activities that will take place in accordance with this program. This replaces the need for individual activities to obtain federal approval under national environment law.

The strategic assessment process relies on best available science and extensive consultation with stakeholders, including environmental experts, non-government organisations, local communities and industry.





Where is the Melbourne strategic assessment up to? What is the next step?

The Australian environment minister has endorsed the Victorian Government's program—Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities—which is designed to accommodate Melbourne's growing population over the next 20 years while safeguarding matters protected under national environment law.

The next step is for the minister to consider giving approval for the types of development or activities that will take place under this program.

How do strategic assessments reduce red tape?

Once a program has been endorsed under national environment law, and the types of development or activities allowed to take place have been approved, individual projects do not need any further approval under national environment law, as long as they are done in accordance with the endorsed program.

What about the impacts on nationally protected matters?

A number of matters protected under national environment law are found within or around the revised urban growth boundary, including Ramsar wetlands, the threatened growling grass frog, southern brown bandicoot, golden sun-moth and striped legless lizard, and two threatened ecological communities—the natural temperate grassland and the grassy eucalypt woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain.

The strategic assessment process ensures that potential impacts on these nationally protected matters are fully considered and minimised before any decision is made.

How will protected grasslands and woodlands be preserved?


The urban growth boundary and transport corridors have been designed to go around areas of protected grasslands, and more than 80 per cent of all protected woodlands within the revised urban growth boundary will be retained.

As part of the program, the Victorian Government will establish and actively manage more than 15,000 hectares of reserves for the natural temperate grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain and the grassy eucalypt woodland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain. This will boost the current two per cent of the protected grasslands currently in reserves to 20 per cent.

How will threatened species and wetlands be protected?

As well as establishing large protected reserves that will provide habitat for threatened species, the program includes several measures to reduce impacts on threatened species and Ramsar wetlands.

For example, the Victorian Government will put in place management plans and conservation strategies. Buffer areas will be established near waterways, and development designs will have to be water sensitive and protect native vegetation.





How can the program be effective for 20 years?

The program has been designed for the long term. It puts in place clear and robust measures to ensure it not only meets the needs and priorities of both the Australian and Victorian governments, but also that development into the future is carried out sustainably.

Mechanisms are built into the program so that it can respond to new information that may become available in the future, and the program will be independently reviewed during its life.

What about land taxes and land acquisition?

The role of the Australian Government is to assess the environmental impacts of the program on matters protected under national environment law, and seek certainty in achieving environmental results. While land acquisition would deliver offsets that are important to the program, the actual mechanism for delivering these results is a matter for the Victorian Government.

Where can I get more information?

More information about this strategic assessment is at www.environment.gov.au/epbc/notices/assessments/melbourne.html and on the Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development's website at www.dse.vic.gov.au, which also provides zoning maps.

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