RMCG

Southern Grampians
SHIRE COUNCIL

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS PLAN FOR NATURE 2023-2033

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Southern Grampians Shire Council acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation.

We acknowledge the Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung and Bunganditj people, the traditional custodians of the lands where we live and work.

We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past and present.

Southern Grampians Shire Council is committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

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Executive Summary

The Southern Grampians Shire (the Shire) holds significant environmental and landscape assets, that are important for their ecosystem values, as well as being an important component of the Shire's tourism industry and its liveability. The natural environment of the Shire consists of outstanding features such as the Grampians National Park (Gariwerd), the Glenelg and Wannon Rivers, ancient geological forms and mountain peaks, and fertile farming land interspersed with magnificent red gums and diverse grasslands that define the landscape values of the area.

The Shire also has a rich Aboriginal heritage, with the original inhabitants the Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung and Wotjabaluk Aboriginal people today represented through the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation. The landscape holds significant cultural values with Traditional Owners maintaining their spiritual connection to lands where they have custodial rights and responsibilities.

Despite these values, the condition of Shire's natural resource base is continuing to decline due to a range of threatening processes, such as climate change, land use change, pest plants and animals and loss of native vegetation.

This Southern Grampians Plan for Nature 2023-2033 (the Plan) aims to address this decline and deliver a shared vision between the Shire Council, community, the region's Traditional Owners and other regional stakeholders to protect and enhance the Shire's biodiversity and natural values.

VISION FOR NATURE IN THE SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS

> *'A thriving landscape of protected volcanic grasslands, red gum woodlands, and waterways (upper Glenelg and Wannon Rivers) that supports biodiversity, healing country, sustainable production and regional tourism.'*

This vision was derived from both the Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy, 2021 and Council's Southern Grampians 2041 - Community Vision Framework.

To achieve the vision, the Plan has the following four goals:

1. **Connections:** Supporting biodiversity and resilience through enhanced bio-links and best practice stewardship
2. **Protections:** Protecting the Shire's natural assets through strategic land use planning and other mechanisms
3. **Country:** Supporting Traditional Owners to care for and heal Country
4. **Working together:** Working with community and stakeholders to value, protect and enhance the Shire's natural areas.

Based on these four goals, the Plan presents four key focus areas, each with a series of time bound strategic actions and a measure of what success looks like.

These actions directly contribute to other Council plans and State and regional strategic plans aimed at protecting the natural environment, in particular the 2021 Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy and Biodiversity 2037.

Key actions focus on:

- Increasing habitat quality at Council managed nature reserves
- Increasing the number of significant roadside vegetation sites
- Improving habitat connectivity to aid species movement
- Increasing the protection of remnant native vegetation and biodiversity values, especially large paddock trees and native grasslands
- Increasing Indigenous cultural landscape management practices into the management of Council nature reserves and roadsides
- Engaging and empowering the regional community to participate and partner in regional biodiversity management.

The Plan has been developed in consultation with the community of the Southern Grampians, agency stakeholders, Traditional Owners and Council staff, and included a community-wide engagement phase between 2022-2023.

ACRONYMS

BGLC – Barengi Gadjin Land Council

CFA – Country Fire Authority

DEECA – Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

EPBC Act – *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

EMAC - Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation

FFG Act – *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*

GHCMA – Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority

GMTOAC - Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation

PV – Parks Victoria

SGSC – Southern Grampians Shire Council

TfN – Trust for Nature

GLOSSARY

Biodiversity – the variety of all life on earth (animals, plants, fungi, microbes), their interactions and the natural patterns they form. This includes the variety (or diversity) of species, the variety within species (genetic diversity) and the variety of ecosystems.

Biolink/Corridor – geographical area that provides suitable conditions for animal and plant movement through the landscape.

Ecosystem – a unique community of living and non-living organisms interacting as a system. Ecosystem services: the benefits provided to humans through the transformation of natural resources (including land, water, vegetation and atmosphere) into essential goods and services, such as clean air, water and food.

Flora – plant species

Fauna – animal species

Habitat – an area which has the right structure and composition of native vegetation to provide food and shelter and opportunities for breeding for a species.

Habitat connectivity – the connections available in the landscape for flora and fauna to access resources and to retain natural patterns of movement and dispersal.

Nature Kit – an online mapping and data exploration tool for biodiversity data integration and decision support.

No net loss – the ‘no net loss’ objective of Victoria’s native vegetation removal regulations means through an avoid, minimise, and offset hierarchy, there will not be a reduction in the state’s biodiversity value from the approved removal of native vegetation.

Stewardship – in a catchment context involves both individual and collective efforts in managing natural systems to generate intergenerational benefits for the environment, people and place.

1 Background

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this 10-year Plan for Nature (the Plan) is to deliver a shared vision between the Shire Council, community, the region's Traditional Owners (Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung and Wotjabaluk Aboriginal people) and other key regional stakeholders to protect and enhance natural values across the Southern Grampians Shire (the Shire). It addresses Council's direct legislative obligations, as well broader objectives to support and advocate for a healthy environment.

THE REGION

The Southern Grampians Shire extends across south west Victoria, from the Southern Grampians in the north east to Penshurst and Mount Napier in the south, and west to the Glenelg River (Figure 1-2). The Shire covers an area of 6,652 square kilometres, and includes significant areas of public land in national and state parks. The Shire is predominantly rural in nature, serviced by the city of Hamilton which is the main service centre and accommodates over half the Shire's population of 16,100[1]. Other towns include Balmoral, Branxholme, Byaduk, Cavendish, Coleraine, Dunkeld, Glenthompson, Hamilton, Penshurst and Tarrington. Much of the rural area is used for agriculture with some mining.

The Shire has a rich Aboriginal heritage, with the original inhabitants the Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Tjap Wurrung and Wotjabaluk Aboriginal people today represented through the Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation, Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation and Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (Figure 1-1). The landscape supports significant cultural values with Traditional Owners maintaining their spiritual connection to lands where they have custodial rights and responsibilities. Traditional Owner culture is expressed through involvement in land and water management, the teaching of cultural practices and knowledge, and continuing to access and enjoy Country.[2] The landscape is also abundant in both plant and animal life – such as black fish, eels, kangaroos and yam daisies – that have been cultivated and harvested to sustain permanent settlements of Aboriginal people in the region for millennia. Aboriginal people have a strong and continuing connection with the land and water across the Shire. They have strong and valuable cultural obligations in managing their lands and waterways meaning that Traditional Owner led management of Country is central to the Shire's future.[3]

TABLE 1-1: THE SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE AT A GLANCE

THE REGION AT A GLANCE	
Total land area	6,652 km^2
Population	16,100 approx.
Tenure	Approx. 17% public land (parks and reserves) and 83% private land (agricultural, residential and other)
River basins	Glenelg Basin and small parts of the Portland Coast and Hopkins Basin
Major waterways	Glenelg, Grange Burn and Wannon
Traditional Custodians	Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Wotjobaluk and Tjap Wurrung Aboriginal people
Wetlands of national importance	Lake Linlithgow Wetlands[4]
Significant natural landscapes or bioregions	The Victorian Volcanic Plains, the Dundas Tablelands and the Grampians
Land use	Primary agricultural production and conservation are the major land uses in the Shire, followed by forestry and extractive industry[5]
Largest contributors to the regional economy	The Shire is world renowned for producing fine wool but the primary industry sector now includes a greater proportion of large-scale cropping, hay production, meat production (lamb and beef) and horticulture. Significant growth is expected in agro-forestry, mining and renewable energy[6]

1 https://profile.id.com.au/southern-grampians/population 10/08/2021
2 GHCMA, 2021
3 GHCMA, 2021
4 (Australian Government) Directory of Important Wetlands (https://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/wetlands/list.pl)
5 https://planning-schemes.api.delwp.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/463985/SouthernGrampians_PS_Ordinance.pdf
6 ibid

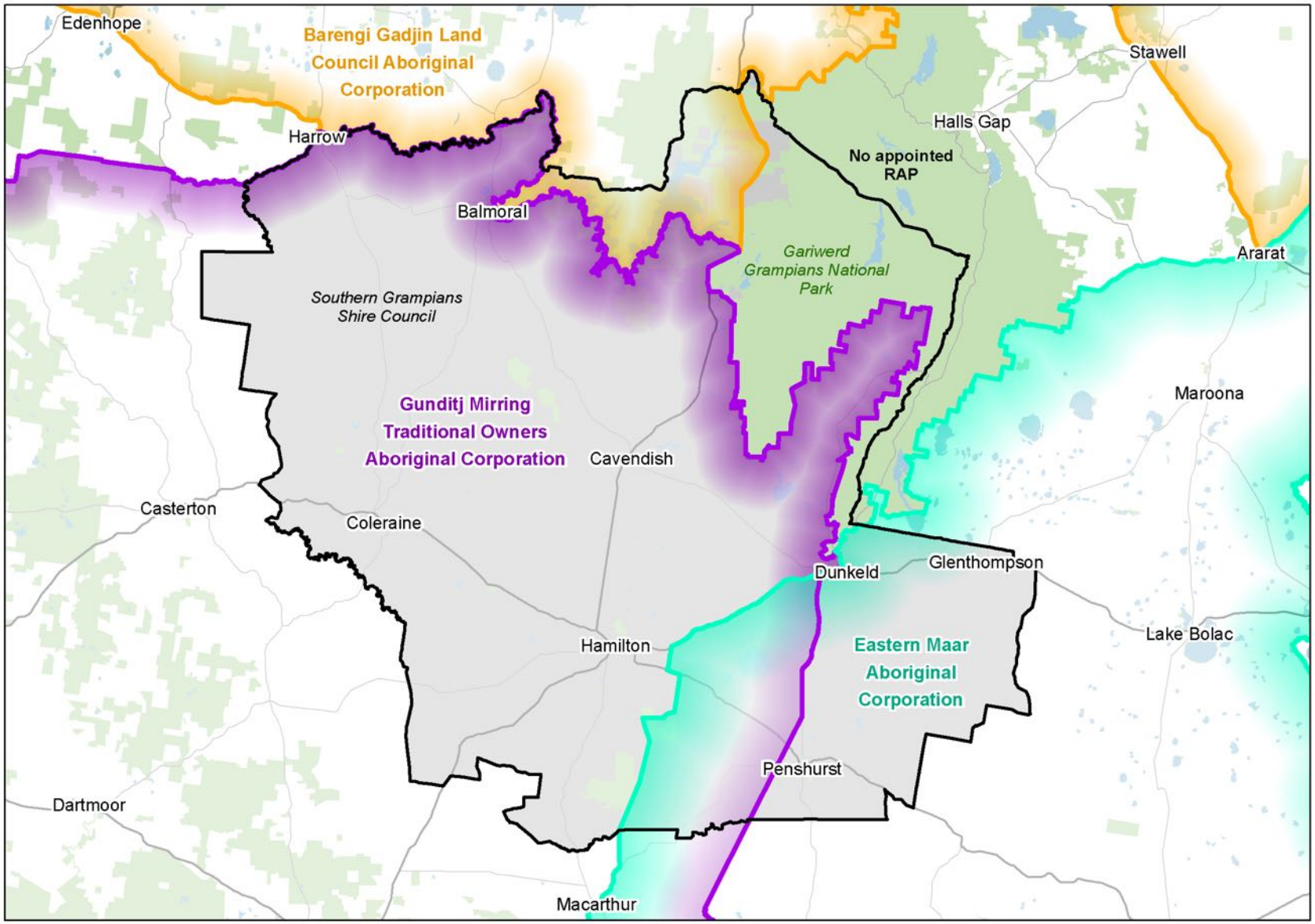


FIGURE 1-1: TRADITIONAL OWNER REGISTERED ABORIGINAL PARTY AREAS

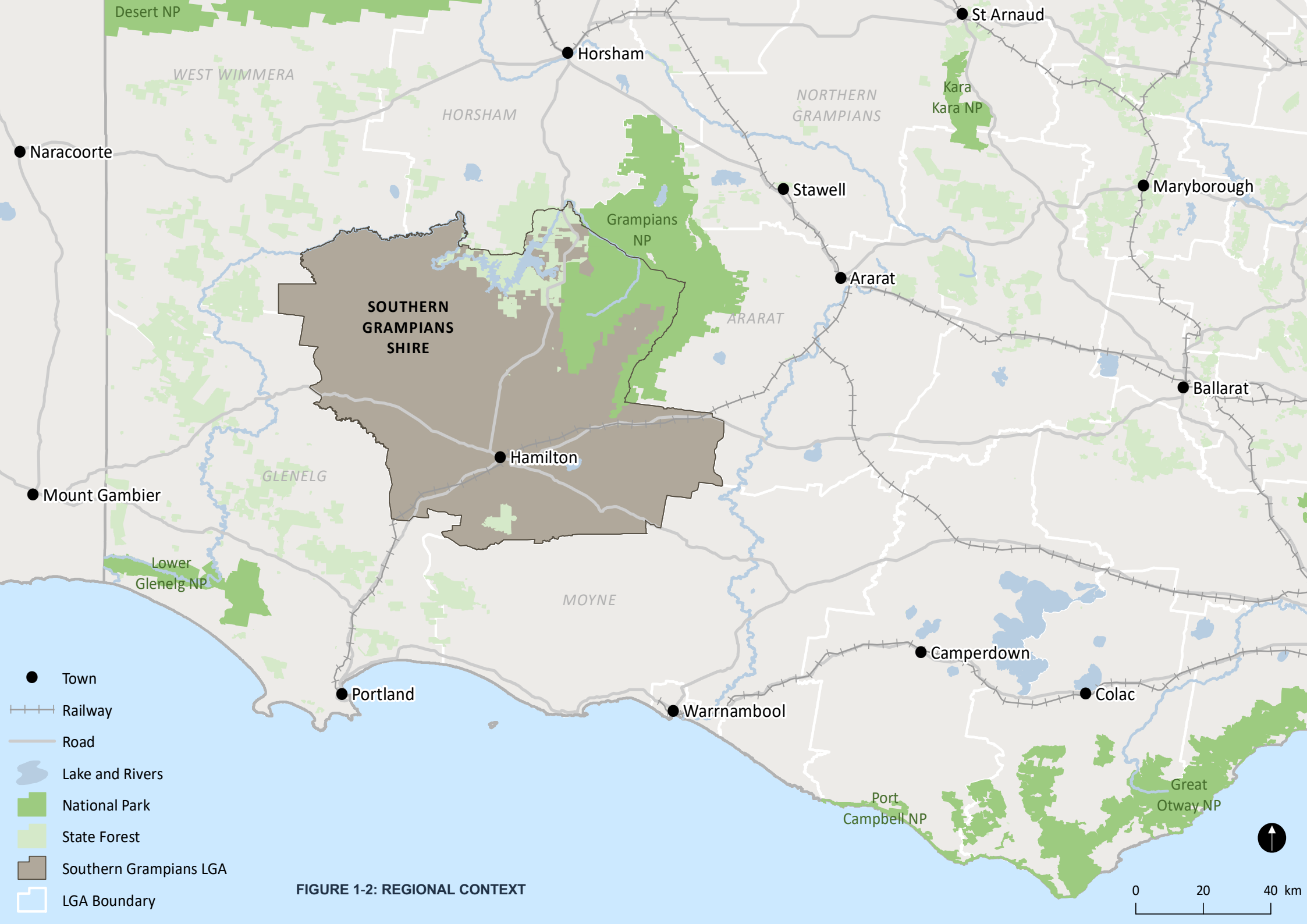


FIGURE 1-2: REGIONAL CONTEXT

NATURAL VALUES

The Southern Grampians holds significant environmental and landscape assets, that are important for their ecosystem values, as well as being an important component of the Shire's tourism industry and its liveability. The natural environment of the Shire consists of outstanding features such as the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, the Glenelg and Wannon Rivers, ancient geological forms and mountain peaks, and fertile farming land interspersed with magnificent red gums and diverse grasslands that define the landscape values of the area.[7]

ENVIRONMENT

The Southern Grampians Shire lies almost entirely within the Glenelg River Basin. The Glenelg River is the largest river in south-west Victoria and contains river reaches in some of the best condition in the broader region. The basin contains more than 150 threatened to near-threatened species and ecological communities and falls within one of 15 listed 'biodiversity hotspots' in Australia, and one of only two in Victoria. Significant tributaries of the Glenelg river within the Shire include the Wannon, Chetwynd and Wando rivers. Other important waterway and wetland assets that have been identified as being exceptional or very highly significant include:

- Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve
- Fulhams Reserve
- Mathers Creek, Downstream of Cameron's Road
- Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve
- Lake Linlithgow Wetlands listed under the Australian Directory of Important Wetlands
- Bryans Swamp
- Gooseneck Swamp.

The Red Gum swamp community and Basalt Plains grassland community are listed as threatened ecological communities under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee (FFG) Act 1988*. The Plains Grasslands and Volcanic Eucalypt Grassy Woodlands are protected by the *Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999*. These EPBC listed natural temperate grassland communities of the Victorian Volcanic Plain are among the most under-represented ecosystems in Australia's conservation estate and are recognised nationally as among the most threatened vegetation types. They are highly fragmented and together are estimated to have been reduced by more than 95 per cent of their pre-European extent.[8] Although less than five per cent of the original extent of these communities remains, there are still patches in good condition. However, these areas are likely to constitute less than one per cent of remnants.[9] Most remnant patches are small, under 10 hectares in size, and many require recovery efforts because of ongoing threats of degradation due to clearing, pesticides, excessive grazing, pest plant and animal infestation and inappropriate fire regimes. The satellite image in Figure 1-3 shows the extent of existing native vegetation in the Shire, together with major waterways.

In addition to threatened ecological communities, the Shire is also home to a number of rare and threatened fauna species listed under the *EPBC Act* (Table 1-2). A full list of rare and threatened flora and fauna species found within the Shire is provided in Appendix 1.

TABLE 1-2: RARE AND THREATENED FAUNA SPECIES[10]

EXTINCT IN THE WILD	Eastern Barred Bandicoot	
CRITICALLY ENDANGERED	Regent Honeyeater	Brush-tailed Rock-Wallaby
	Common Bent-wing Bat	
ENDANGERED	Australian Bittern	Barking Owl
	Blue-billed Duck	Malleefowl
	Red tailed Black Cockatoo	Swift Parrot
	Dwarf Galaxias	Macquarie Perch
	Brown Toadlet	Growling Grass Frog
	Striped Legless Lizard	

7 ibid
8 DEWHA, 2008
9 DSEWPC, 2011
10 DELWP, 2022

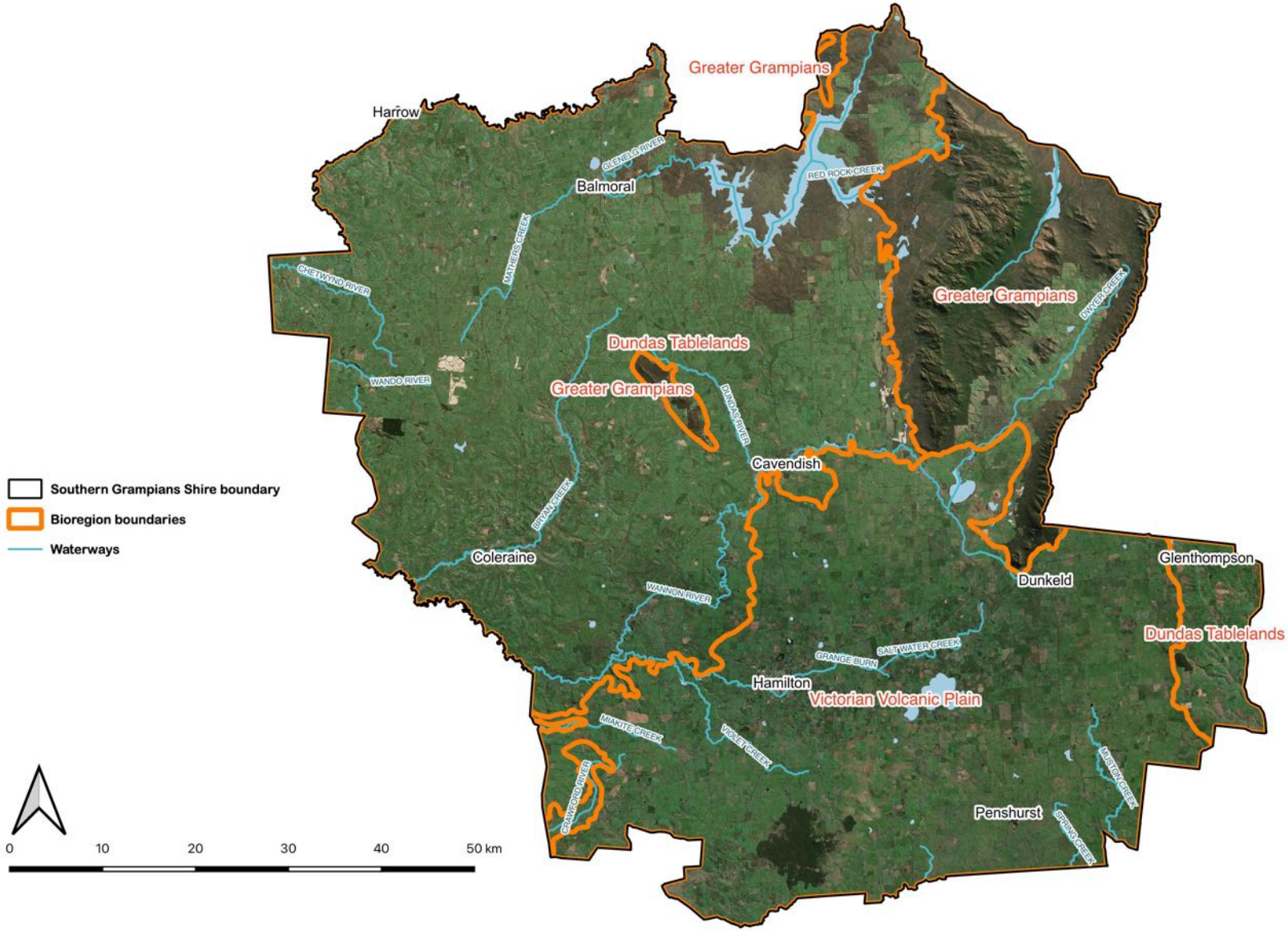


FIGURE 1-3: VEGETATION EXTENT, BIOREGIONS AND MAJOR WATERWAYS

The Shire is characterised by three main land systems or bioregions: the Victorian Volcanic Plains, the Dundas Tablelands and the Grampians[11].

- **The Victorian Volcanic Plains** include a range of geologically unique volcanic features, including Mount Napier, Mount Rouse, Harmans Valley, and the Byaduk Caves and Tumuli.
- **The Dundas Tablelands** are characterised by undulating hills, Red Gum plains and woodlands, and a network of waterways, lakes and wetlands. Key features include the Wannon River, Glenelg River, the Wannon and Nigretta Falls, Coleraine Hills, Mount Baimbridge, Lake Linlithgow and Rocklands Reservoir.
- **The Grampians** are a dramatic series of mountain ranges recognised as a National Park, with sheer cliffs rising sharply above the relatively flat surrounding land. Key landscape features of the Grampians include Mount Abrupt and Mount Sturgeon, Victoria Valley, the Victoria Range and the Black Range.

CURRENT CONDITION AND TRENDS

Extensive tracts of native vegetation have been lost in the Shire[12], particularly on private land as per Figures 1-6 and 1-7, which show changes in modelled vegetation cover from 1750 to 2005. The broader Glenelg catchment has approximately 28 per cent of its original native vegetation cover. This has also had an impact on the heath of the Shire's waterways, including the Glenelg and Wannon Rivers. On a State-wide scale the extent of the Shire's woodlands is limited, fragmented and extremely depleted. Perennial native grassland communities are also extremely limited. The loss of native vegetation cover is reflected in the significant number of very rare or threatened species.

For example, the Red Gum swamp community and Basalt Plains grassland community are listed as threatened ecological communities under the *FFG Act*. The Plains Grasslands and Volcanic Eucalypt Grassy Woodlands are protected by the *EPBC Act*. The protection of remaining areas of remnant vegetation is therefore a high priority both for its contribution to biodiversity and the provision of habitat.

The Eastern Barred Bandicoot is one of Victoria's most endangered animals; the species is listed as a threatened species under the *FFG Act*. Formerly widespread across the basalt plains of western Victoria, it has suffered a greater than 99 per cent reduction in range and abundance, and is now the subject of a captive breeding enclosure as part of the Hamilton Community Parklands.

Remnant native vegetation on roadsides within rural areas and townships (e.g. Dunkeld) provides critically important habitat links and needs to be managed in the context of a drier climate and threats from weeds (e.g. pine wildings) and fire. The importance placed on the conservation value of roadside reserves is captured in a 2011 assessment involving 2,176 kilometres of roadsides within the Shire using a combination of the standard Roadside Conservation Advisory Committee (RCAC) and the North Central CMA methods (refer Figure 1-4). Highways and tourist roads were not included.

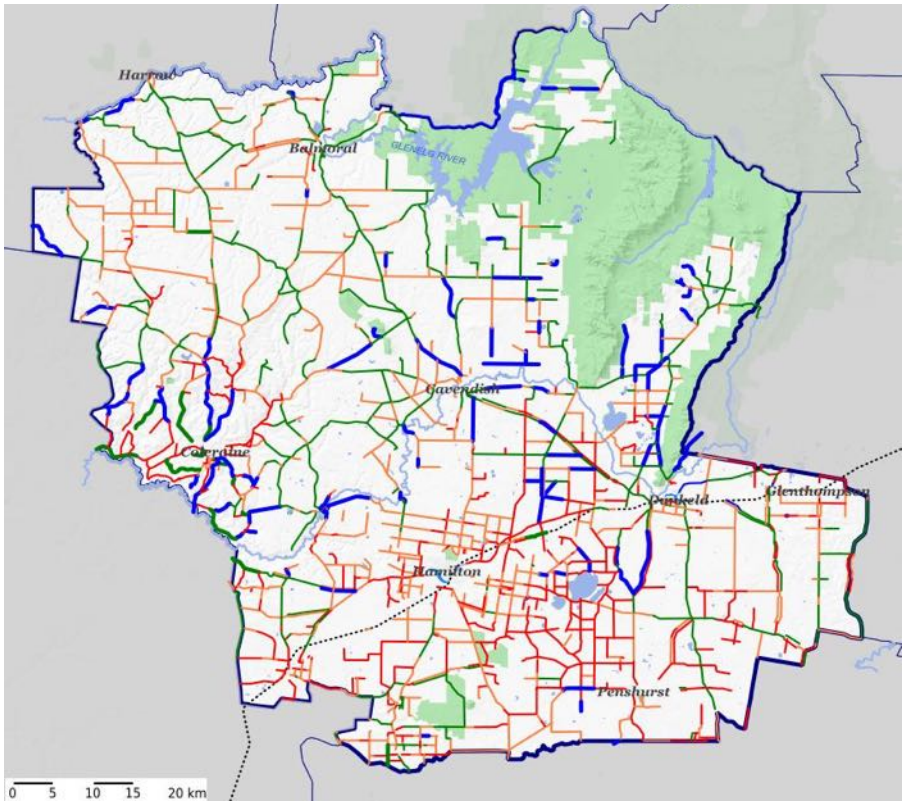


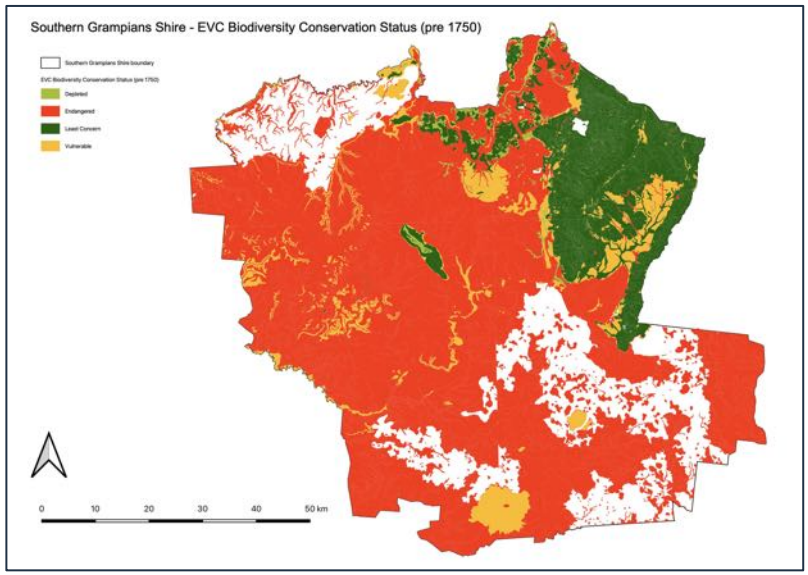
FIGURE 1-4: ROADSIDE CONSERVATION STATUS (where blue indicates very high, green – high, orange – medium, and red – low conservation status).

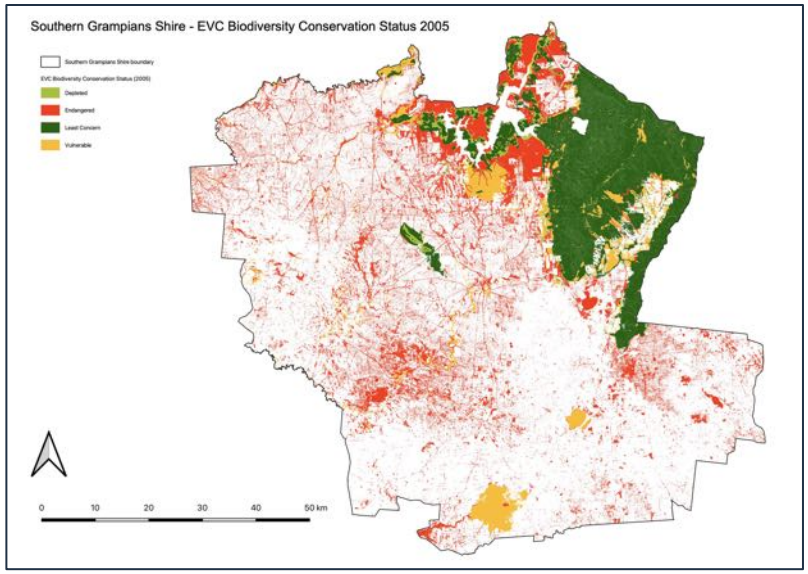
[11] https://planning- schemes.api.delwp.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/463985/SouthernGrampians_PS_Ordinance.pdf

[12] GHCMA, 2013

Overall, the condition of the Shire's natural resource base is declining due to such threats as salinity, water quality decline, erosion, land management practices, pest plants and animals and loss of native vegetation.

FIGURE 1-5: RED GUM ON THE DUNDAS TABLELANDS





FIGURES 1-6, 1-7: EVC BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION STATUS 1750, 2005[13]

[13] https://www.data.vic.gov.au/

LANDSCAPE AND TOURISM

The region's natural landscape features important drawcards for regional tourism. The South West Landscape Assessment Study[14], was undertaken in 2013 and provides a comprehensive understanding of landscape values of Southern Grampians. Detailed assessments of the landscape character types led to the designation of five significant landscapes within Southern Grampians Shire (refer Figure 1-8 below).

One landscape has been assessed as having state level significance or higher:

- The Grampians (Gariwerd).

Three landscapes have been assessed as having state level significance:

- Wannon and Nigretta Falls
- Mount Rouse
- Mount Napier and Harmans Valley Complex.

One landscape has been assessed as having regional level significance:

- Merino Tablelands.

Several of these significant landscapes extend beyond the Shire boundary. Views (or vistas) of state and regional significance were also identified by the study. One view of State significance has been identified for Mount Rouse. One view of regional significance has been identified for Lake Linlithgow.

The volcanic peaks and landscape features are major elements in the Shire and form part of a major geological feature of western Victoria. The Wannon River, Nigretta Falls and the Wannon Falls are some of the Shire's most outstanding landscape features and a major tourist attraction. These landscapes are also significant cultural sites for the region's Traditional Owners with links to the Budj Bim landscape in the neighbouring Glenelg and Moyne Shires. Their protection and management are important for scientific, cultural, community and tourist-recreational purposes, and are currently the subject of the 2022 Volcanic Trail Masterplan.

The tourism industry in the Southern Grampians Shire region, which includes the Henty and Grampians Wine regions, makes a substantial contribution to the local economy by bringing income into the region that is spent on a wide range of services, from the retail sector to accommodation, restaurants, attractions and events. In the 2019/20 financial year, the broader Grampians region generated $251 million in total tourism ($134 million in direct and $117 million in indirect)[15].

[14] DPCD, 2013
[15] TRA, 2020

The region's natural landscape features and associated reserves (including the Hamilton Community Parklands bandicoot enclosure) are important drawcards for regional tourism, supported through their proximity to the Great Southern Touring Route, which brings visitors north from the Great Ocean Road to the southern Grampians. The protection and management of these reserves and landscapes, will therefore play an important role in maximising the visitor experience and increasing regional tourism, including from international and interstate visitors.

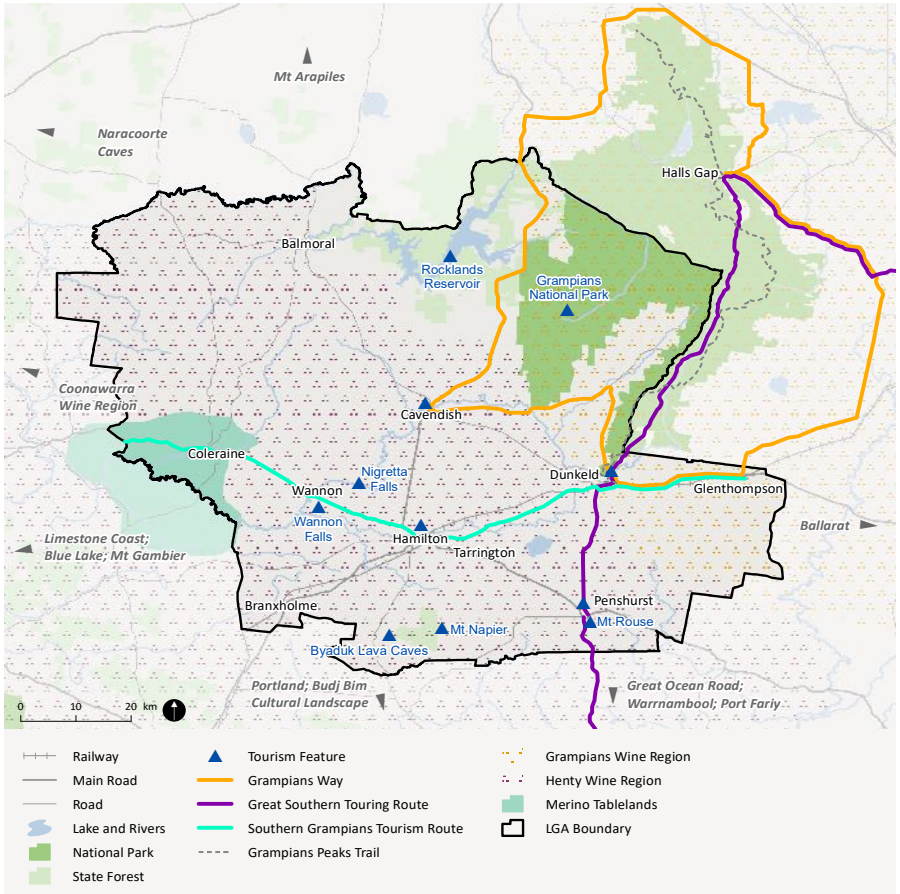


FIGURE 1-8: MAJOR TOURISM AND LANDSCAPE FEATURES[16]

[16] RMCG, 2019

FUTURE DRIVERS AND EMERGING ISSUES

CLIMATE CHANGE

The Great South Coast region of Victoria is already experiencing the effects of climate change, which are likely to be exacerbated into the future. Likely impacts include increasing year-round temperatures, fewer frosts, more frequent and more intense rainfall events, more hot days and warm spells, less rainfall in autumn, winter and spring, harsher fire weather and longer fire seasons.[17]

Climate change is expected to have an increasing impact on the region's natural environments and the health and function of terrestrial ecosystems as follows:

- **Native vegetation and waterways**

  Extended dry periods and drought with reduced rainfall and increased temperatures will impact on the availability of soil moisture and water availability for surface and groundwater systems, including wetlands. This will result in a change in the composition of vegetation communities as some species are replaced by those suited to warmer, drier environments.

  Grasslands species composition may be affected by elevated carbon dioxide and changes to soil moisture. An increase in the density of tree and shrub species in favour of grassland species is already occurring.

  Increased frequency and intensity of bushfires will impact on long-lived species and may lead to significant long-term changes to some vegetation communities. It will also lead to erosion, loss of topsoil and nutrients and pollution of waterways.

- **Native fauna**

  Decline or loss of local populations and species extinctions may occur as a result of climate change and amplification of threatening processes including habitat fragmentation, decline in habitat quality, poor water quality, altered hydrological regimes, competition from invasive plants and animals and altered fire regimes.

  The potential impacts of higher temperatures on plants and animals include changes in the timing of life cycle events, as well as changes in distribution. For example, temperature sensitive plants and animals, such as those found in the Grampians, are generally expected to move to higher latitudes and altitudes in response to increasing temperatures. Plants and animals with highly specific habitat requirements, limited dispersal ability or those in fragmented habitats may find this difficult, leading to more local extinctions.

As the climate becomes less suitable for existing vegetation communities, it is likely that there will be a gradual change in species composition and dominance as some species and communities are replaced by others, leading to a shift in the floristics and structure of the community.

PEST PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Pest plants and animals are a major problem for the Shire, as they compete with native species for resources, prey on native fauna, such as the Eastern Barred Bandicoot, cause erosion and other physical disturbances, and can affect the functioning of ecosystems. Established pest animals in the region include rabbits, foxes, feral goats, carp, pigs, feral cats and feral deer[18]. Invasive animals declared under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, such as rabbits and foxes, are well established in the Shire and broader Glenelg Hopkins catchment. Pest plants provide habitat for pest animals, create fuel loads for fire and invade native vegetation posing a risk to regional biodiversity and agriculture.

LAND USE CHANGE

A long-term history of land clearing has led to the removal of over 50% of Victoria's native vegetation, and the loss of over 81% native vegetation within the broader Glenelg Hopkins catchments[19]. While large contiguous tracts of high-quality native vegetation are conserved in the state's parks and forests, such as the Grampians bioregion, a proportion is in fragmented landscapes – largely on private land. As reported by the Victorian Catchment Management Council in 2012 and 2017[20], the losses from clearing on private land are thought to exceed the gains from revegetation and regeneration. In the region, past large-scale land clearing has led to raised watertables and leached salt into groundwater, rivers, wetlands and the upper layers of the soil. It also continues to contribute to the widespread loss of native species and loss of ecosystem function.

[17] SGS, 2020b p. 41
[18] GHCMA, 2013 p. 64
[19] GHCMA, 2021
[20] VCMC, 2017 p. 53

Land-use changes that are causing the accelerated loss of native vegetation and natural landscapes include raised-bed and broadacre cropping, rock crushing and subsequent pasture improvements, increased use of pivot irrigation systems, removal of large paddock trees to facilitate GPS tractor operations, blue gum plantations and rural residential development[21]. In many cases land-use change also leads to degradation of wetlands, native grasslands, soil and water resources and impacts on threatened species and habitats. This is a particularly relevant pattern for Victorian Volcanic Plains. The Victorian Volcanic Plains vegetation community has been extensively modified for agriculture, including the drainage of intermittent and semi-permanent wetlands and is now listed nationally as critically endangered.

The loss of the region's seasonal herbaceous wetlands is also accelerating in response to land use change combined with a drying climate. These wetlands, which are rich in native grasses and herbs that hold water over the wet months of the year, before drying out over summer, occur largely on private land across the Victorian Volcanic Plains and the Dundas Tablelands, and are listed as a critically endangered ecological community under the *EPBC Act*.

STRATEGIC BIODIVERSITY VALUES

The Victorian Government's NatureKit is an online mapping and data exploration tool for both biodiversity data integration and to support stakeholders in making effective investment and management decisions that support biodiversity protection in line with Biodiversity 2037.

The following map (Figure 1-9) has been derived from NatureKit to provide an indicative focus for strategic biodiversity values within the Shire, with the darker the shade the higher the value.

These higher values correspond with existing areas of the public land, including the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, nature reserves, roadsides and waterways, as well as, areas of private land, including native grasslands on the Victorian Volcanic Plains and red gum woodlands on the Dundas tablelands.

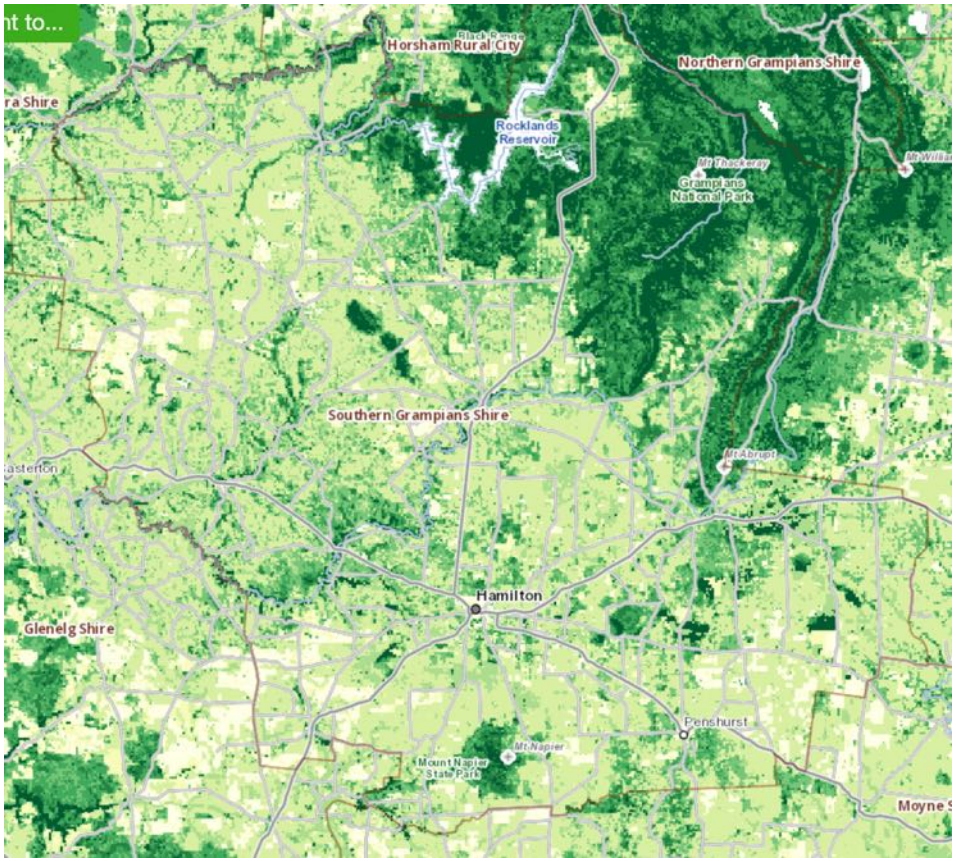


FIGURE 1-9: MAP OF STRATEGIC BIODIVERSITY VALUES IN THE SHIRE[22]

[21] GHCMA, 2013 p. 64

[22] https://maps2.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/Html5viewer/index.html?viewer=NatureKit

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?

A number of public agencies play direct roles in natural resource management across the Shire.

SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE COUNCIL

The Council has a number of key responsibilities for the protection of natural areas in the Shire:

1. **Direct management** – as owners of public reserves and roadsides and the Committee of Management for significant areas of Crown land, the Council has a responsibility to ensure its land is maintained and protected for future generations and provides adequate habitat for the region's native plants and animal species to thrive. Many of these natural areas (e.g. Grange Burn, Wannon Reserve, Nigretta Falls Reserve and Mount Rouse) are also valued for the significant recreational and tourism values they provide.
2. **Regulatory** – under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the Council is also responsible for administering the Southern Grampian Planning Scheme and for land use and development controls that protect native vegetation and other significant environmental assets. This includes compliance under the planning scheme and applicable by-laws and policies.
3. **Advocacy** – Council has a role facilitating and coordinating environmental projects with project partners (refer below), delivering community education and awareness programs and supporting community groups (e.g. Landcare and Friends Groups).

Council also has a responsibility to manage threats to the environment, agricultural production and other industries through the control of pest plant and animals, particularly on its roadsides and reserves, and through its regulatory planning role.

OTHER PARTNERS

In addition to Council, the following agencies, Traditional Owners, not-for-profit and community groups have a role in natural resource management across the Shire:

- Victorian Government Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA)
- Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authority (GHCMA)
- Parks Victoria (PV)
- Trust for Nature (TfN)
- Wannon Water
- Barengi Gadjin Land Council Aboriginal Corporation (BGLC)
- Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation (EMAC)
- Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOAC)
- Community Committees of Management (i.e. Coleraine Rail Trail, Dunkeld Public Lands)
- Nature Glenelg Trust
- Landcare/Community Groups (refer Appendix 3).

These partners have specialised roles as follows:

- **Agriculture Victoria -** works in partnership with farmers, industries, communities and other agencies to grow and secure agriculture in Victoria, and is a partner in the delivery of sustainable agriculture across the Shire.
- **DEECA -** develops and implements statewide policies for integrated catchment management, climate change and biodiversity conservation. It also provides investment to support delivery of priority outcomes in these areas by working in partnership with Traditional Owner groups, CMAs, other agencies and local government, and manages areas of Crown land across the Shire.
- **GHCMA -** leads the development and implementation of the Glenelg Hopkins RCS. It also engages with the broader community and partners in on-ground delivery of integrated catchment and waterway management, and coordinates investment from the Australian and Victorian governments for the delivery of regional environmental outcomes.
- **PV -** was established to protect, conserve and enhance PV managed public land across the state, including its natural and cultural values. This includes the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park and Black Range State Park.
- **TfN -** works closely with private landholders, government, community groups and businesses to help restore, protect and manage biodiversity on private land. It uses a variety of methods such as on-title agreements, or conservation covenants, to protect private land in perpetuity.
- **Wannon Water -** provides water and wastewater services to urban communities within the Shire. It works in partnership with the Council on projects aimed at the environmental health and sustainability of the region, such as integrated water management, and onsite wastewater management.

STRATEGIC FOUNDATIONS

The Council has strong strategic foundations in place to support the delivery of the Plan.

SIGNIFICANT NATURAL ASSET BASE

The Shire has significant and well recognised natural areas, and existing management arrangements, including:

- Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park
- Glenelg River
- Wannon River (including the Nigretta Falls and the Wannon Falls)
- Victorian Volcanic Plains (threatened ecological communities), including seasonal herbaceous wetlands
- Public reserves such as the Grange Brun waterfront and Parklands Reserve in Hamilton
- Significant roadside vegetation
- High value native grasslands
- Volcanic landscapes geotrail
- Red Gum open woodland landscape throughout the Shire.

COUNCIL STRATEGIES

The Shire has a number of strategies that provide direction for environmental management and complement national, state and regional strategies and plans:

Southern Grampians 2041 - Community Vision Framework

Southern Grampians 2041 is the key document that drives the strategic direction of Council. Council has mapped its short, medium and long-term priorities based on a shared understanding with the community and stakeholders for the Shire's future.

The Framework highlighted a number of state and regionally significant assets within the Shire, including the volcanic grasslands and plains landscape, the Grampians National Park and wind resources. Community input to the Framework identified the environment as a key theme alongside the challenges arising from climate change and water security. Other points of relevance include:

- Seeking better maintenance of the Lake Hamilton environment.
- Seeking recognition of parklands and wildlife such as bandicoots and platypus as major assets
- The growing pressure on river red gums, and the importance of landscape or other planning overlays to provide adequate protection
- The importance of adequate Council resources to manage environmental outcomes, as well as partnerships with other organisations
- Working with the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to improve firebreak management to protect native grasslands.

Council Plan 2021 - 2025

The Council Plan 2021 -2025 identifies Council's five priority areas over four years:

- Support our Community
- Grow our Regional Economy and Businesses
- Maintain and Renew our Infrastructure
- Protect our Natural Environment
- Provide Strong Governance and Leadership.

Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017- 2027

The objectives of the Climate Change Adaptation Plan include:

- Leading community and business to build resilience and proactively consider climate risk
- Actively working with key financial partners to increase consideration of climate change for collective positive outcomes
- Implementing adaptation solutions that are cost effective and sustainable and minimise adverse environmental impacts.

Southern Grampians Rural Land Use Strategy, 2023

The Rural Land Use Strategy establishes a planning vision and strategies that seek to support established rural industries such as agriculture and forestry, promote emerging opportunities in rural tourism and recognise and protect important environmental and landscape values. An Implementation plan includes recommendations for changes to the Southern Grampians Planning Scheme and further strategic work.

In reference, to natural areas the Rural Land Use Strategy aims to:

- Encourage diversification of rural land use, including tourism, renewable energy and sustainable development of natural resources.
- Retain residential growth within established townships to create a network of integrated and prosperous settlements.
- Direct rural residential development to appropriate locations adjoining established townships.
- Protect and enhance the environmental and landscape qualities of the land.

Southern Grampians Shire Volcanic Trail Masterplan, 2022

The volcanic sites within the Southern Grampians Shire (such as the Wannon River, Nigretta Falls and the Wannon Falls) have remained relatively undeveloped and largely overlooked as tourist destinations. The Volcanic Trail Masterplan provides an opportunity to both develop the visitor economy of the Shire and to preserve and protect these important sites for future generations. The development of the Volcanic Trail Masterplan has also considered the context of established tourist routes in the surrounding regions, such as the Coonawarra, the Great Ocean Road and Grampians National Park, as well as synergy with the development of tourism for the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape that shares the same volcanic history.

Management Plans

Management plans have been prepared for the following Council-managed sites:

- Wannon and Nigretta Falls (2005)
- Mount Rouse (2016-2020)
- Grange Burn and river frontages (2005)
- Hamilton Parklands Reserve (Bandicoot Enclosure) (2002)

A full list with additional details can be viewed in Appendix 2.

OTHER STRATEGIES AND PLANS

In addition to Council's strategies, there are a range of national, state and regional plans, strategies and programs that guide biodiversity management and protection within the Shire. They include:

National

- Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030 (Commonwealth of Australia)
- National Landcare Program (NLP) – Regional Land Partnerships (RLP).

State

- Agriculture Victoria Strategy (2017)
- Our Catchments Our Communities: Building on the Legacy for Better Stewardship (2020-24)
- Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037 (2017)
- Water for Victoria – Water Plan (2016)
- Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2017 - 2020)
- Victorian Waterway Management Strategy (2013).

Regional

- Barenji Gadjin Land Council (Growing What is Good) Country Plan 2017
- Eastern Marr (Meerreengeeye ngakeepoorryeeyt) Country Plan 2015
- Glenelg Hopkins Floodplain Strategy (2018 - 2027)
- Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy (2021- 2027)
- Glenelg Hopkins Regional NRM Climate Change Strategy (2016-2023)
- Glenelg Hopkins Waterway Strategy (2014-2022)
- Great South Coast (Integrated Water management) Strategic Directions Statement (2019)
- Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan (2021).

A number of the actions within these strategies have been integrated into the current operations of Council program as well as this Plan for Nature.

CONSULTATION

HOW WE ENGAGED?

Community and stakeholder engagement was sought to inform the development of the Plan and allow wider public participation. This involved targeted interviews with agency stakeholders and community groups in 2021 and discussions with Traditional Owners through the development of a Southern Grampians Shire Traditional Owner Engagement Framework. This was further supported by a community wide engagement phase held between 25 November 2022 and 27 January 2023 that involved:

- A tailored project website on the City's 'Have Your Say' webpage
- Media articles
- An eleven question Survey Monkey – online survey
- An interactive map-based survey using Social Pin Point.

The surveys targeted community opinions on four themes:

- Enjoyment and value of natural areas
- Perceived threats and challenges to natural areas
- Opportunities for the enhancement of natural areas
- Current or desired involvement in preserving or enhancing natural areas.

WHAT WE HEARD?

The following is a summary of the feedback we heard from stakeholders, Traditional Owners and the community and what they would like to see from this Plan for Nature.

Stakeholders:

- **GHCMA** - alignment with the Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy, where applicable. The Regional Catchment Strategy captures information that was derived through community workshops and workshops with Shire staff.
- **DEECA** – alignment with Biodiversity 2037, Regional Catchment Strategy, Biodiversity Response Planning, Traditional Owner Country Plans, Victorian Deer Control Strategy and Bushfire strategy
- **Wannon Water** – better interaction between government organisations such as Council and CMAs i.e. share database of information across agencies
- **PV** – alignment with Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan and Traditional Owner engagement
- **Hamilton Field Naturalists Club** – important local areas of biodiversity to be protected
- **TfN** – a review of planning schemes and zoning by Council that encourages and attracts individuals to protect natural values in the Shire; systems for rate relief to align with biodiversity protection
- **CFA** – commitment from Council to increase biodiversity in low conservation roadsides, especially the wider road reserves; community engagement about the value of high conservation roadsides; and support for volunteers to undertake strategic and effective roadside fire management.

Traditional Owners:

As part of the development of Traditional Owner Engagement Framework for Council, discussions were held with representatives from the EMAC, GMTOAC and BGLC. The key themes raised through these discussions included:

- Greater engagement by Council based on the principles of Traditional Owner self-determination
- Use of traditional knowledge of Country to improve biodiversity planning and management practices
- Opportunities to meet on Country.

Community:

The following present a summary of the results of the online surveys organised by theme.

- **Enjoyment and value of natural areas -** the natural beauty and links to historical landscapes were the most frequently mentioned topics in respondents' answers. The enjoyment of waterways, lakes and waterfalls along with the variety of recreational opportunities presented by natural areas were also highly valued in the responses. Other respondents mentioned flora and fauna, ease of access and diversity of sites as their most valued attributes of the natural sites. Specific sites that were mentioned as being highly valued were the Grampians National Park, Wannon and Nigretta Falls, Lake Hamilton and the Volcanic Grasslands.

- **Favourite places to enjoy nature –** the most common favourite place being Gariwerd (Grampians National Park), followed by Wannon Falls, Nigretta Falls and other council reserves. The other areas mentioned by respondents were Rocklands Reservoir, Hamilton Botanic Gardens, Yatmerone and the Hamilton – Coleraine rail reserve. Figure 1-10 highlights some of the key terms collected from the surveys.

FIGURE 1-10: KEY TERMS COLLECTED FROM THE SURVEYS

- **Perceived threats to nature -** the greatest threat identified was **weed invasion**, followed by **pest animals**, **climate change impacts** and **habitat loss**.
- **Opportunities for the enhancement of natural areas -** the most important was to create more opportunities for the community to become engaged in projects to protect nature. Support for community groups and wildlife corridors were also high-ranking opportunities.

FIGURE 1-11: RECENT TREE PLANTING AT GRANGEBURN IN HAMILTON[23]

[23] SGSC

2 The Plan

VISION

Plan for Nature vision statement:

- *A thriving landscape of protected volcanic grasslands, red gum woodlands, and waterways (upper Glenelg and Wannon Rivers) that supports biodiversity, healing country, sustainable production and regional tourism* [24]

GOALS

To achieve the vision, the Southern Grampians Plan for Nature has established the following goals:

1. **Connections:** Supporting biodiversity and resilience through enhanced bio-links and best practice stewardship
2. **Protections:** Protecting the Shire's natural assets through strategic land use planning and other mechanisms
3. **Country:** Supporting Traditional Owners to care for and heal Country
4. **Working together:** Working with community and stakeholders to value, protect and enhance the Shire's natural areas.

Based on these four goals, the next section of the Plan presents four key focus areas, each with a series of strategic actions and a measure of what success looks like described as target outcomes. The timeline for commencement of each of the actions has been identified as:

- Short-term (within 1 to 2 years)
- Medium-term (within 2 to 5 years)
- Long-term (within 5 to 10 years).

Estimated resourcing for each action is listed based on:

- **Orange:** external alternative resources required
- **Yellow:** medium level of resources required, budget implications yet to be identified
- **Green**: existing resources are sufficient.

The establishment of baselines and SMART targets for reporting and evaluating the success of the actions and outcomes have been in detailed in the section on Monitoring and Evaluation.

[24] Derived from both the Glenelg Hopkins Regional Catchment Strategy, 2021 and Council's Southern Grampians 2041 - Community Vision Framework.

FOCUS AREA 1: CONNECTIONS

CONTEXT

Council has a responsibility to ensure its public reserves and roadsides are maintained and protected for future generations and to provide adequate habitat for the region's native plants and animal species to thrive. Many of these natural areas are also valued for the significant recreational and tourism values they provide.

Roadside conservation

In accordance with the importance placed on the conservation value of roadside reserves, an assessment involving 2,176 kilometres of roadsides within the Shire was undertaken in 2011 in line with the then 2009 Southern Grampians Shire Roadside Management Plan. This survey, which didn't include tourist roads and highways noted that the Southern Grampians Shire contains some of the most scenic and botanically interesting roadsides in Victoria, with many plant species endemic to the Shire[25].

Given the sheer number of roadsides under Council management (2,176 kilometres), the management and protection of roadside ecology within should be prioritised to high value and high-risk sites. To support this process, a re-assessment of the conservation status of roads (including roadside verges within towns) should be undertaken on annual basis, with a review of all conservation values and management directions undertaken every 10 years as part of the update of the Plan for Nature.

This process should also take into consideration updates to the DEECA Biodiversity mapping and NatureKit when applying these categories.

Given the size of the task, it is recommended that Council also develops and maintains a robust roadside spatial database to both track conservation status and works scheduling, as well as monitor progress with roadside protection. This database should be shared with key partner agencies DEECA, Glenelg Hopkins CMA and CFA to assist with broader biodiversity and fire management planning.

Public reserve management

There are a range of plans that guide the management of key public nature reserves as detailed in Appendix 2. Many of these plans are significantly out of date and in need of renewal, with little information available on the status of completed actions or outcomes. For some, there is no plan in place. This remains a major issue for Council, as these public land assets require significant ongoing investment to protect, manage and maintain. Currently, there is no strategy in place to determine the priority or process of renewal, and the priorities of each renewed plan. This is further complicated for assets involving a range of management agencies such as the Grange Burn, or in the case of the Byaduk caves are managed by other partner agencies with competing management priorities. Committee of Management volunteers also play an important role in managing a number of public reserves, but with an aging cohort and declining numbers of younger volunteers, will require greater support to maintain their capacity.

GOAL

Connections: Supporting biodiversity and resilience through enhancement of bio-links and best practice stewardship.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- Increase in habitat quality of Council managed nature reserves.
- Increase in the number of significant roadside vegetation sites.
- Improved habitat connectivity across Southern Grampians Shire to aid species movement.
- More connected urban greenspaces, including enhancement of nature strips through indigenous plantings.

FIGURE 2-1: LAKE HAMILTON RESERVE[26]

[25] SGS 2011 Biodiversity Services, An Overview and Manual

[26] RMCG, 2020

ACTION

TABLE 2-1: DESCRIPTION, RESOURCING AND TIMING OF ACTIONS

NO.	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
Short-term		
1	Establish baseline of connectivity for priority landscapes (i.e. identifying and mapping key biolinks) in partnership with DEECA, PV and GHCMA (such as from Mt Rouse to Mt Napier).	
2	Prioritise all public reserves and clarify priorities within each reserve (based on asset value and risk, and national, state and regional priorities), and include reference to the Volcanic Trail Masterplan.	
3	Review the status of existing management plans to ensure currency and coverage. Priority for review will be based on the reserve's biodiversity priority and the time elapsed since the last update.	
4	Incorporate all public reserves into Council database of managed natural managed assets, to track and monitor the implementation and renewal of each plan, including its current conservation status.	
5	Identify Council roadside management priorities (based on asset value and risk) in line with the objectives of the latest revised 2019 Southern Grampians Shire Roadside Management Plan.	
6	Link roadside conservations status to existing national, state and regional priorities and DEECA Biodiversity mapping.	
7	Develop and maintain a spatial database of roadsides within rural areas and townships (based on the four conservation status categories) and share with key partner agencies, CFA, GHCMA and DEECA.	
8	Prioritise roadside reassessments on an annual basis when significant changes take place, with a review of all conservation values and management directions undertaken every ten years as part of the update of the Plan for Nature.	
Medium-term		
9	Based on the above baseline mapping and review of Council assets, manage threats to the function and resilience of Council's protected areas (nature reserves and roadsides) that support conservation and habitat values.	
10	Based on the above baseline mapping, revegetate priority roadsides and nature reserves to create appropriate links between remnant habitats.	
11	Budget sustained control of weeds and pest animals across nature reserves and roadsides to maximise benefits to habitat and species.	
12	Work cooperatively with partners to ensure control is cross tenure to maximise benefits on private and public land.	
13	Support incentives for permanent protection and on-going management of priority remnants, with a focus on restoring paddock trees and their role in maintaining regional biodiversity.	
Long-term		
14	Work with agency partners to investigate new options (e.g. rate rebates or other concessions or mechanisms) that encourage permanent protection and stewardship of high value remnants.	
15	Introduce and promote measures to improve greenspaces in urban areas of Hamilton and other towns, such as enhancement of nature strips through indigenous plantings.	

FOCUS AREA 2: PROTECTION

ACTIONS

CONTEXT

The area of the Shire is host to extensive areas of rare and threatened vegetation communities (including native grasslands), habitat for significant fauna, and significant waterways and wetlands. However, there has been very limited application of local government planning provisions to ensure their long-term protection and enhancement.

The previous 2018 review of the Southern Grampians Planning Scheme highlighted these limitations, as well as the effectiveness of the current schedules to Vegetation Protection Overlay and Environmental Significance Overlay (refer Figure 2-2) as follows:

1. **Vegetation Protection Overlay – Schedule 1 (VPO1)** – was applied to the township of Dunkeld in response to the significant contribution mature Red Gums make to the environment and township character of Dunkeld. The review found that the VPO1 is reasonably effective in managing the retention of Red Gums within Dunkeld and is an efficient use of the planning scheme. It was noted that other townships could also benefit from the same approach with a red gum VPO to Cavendish and Balmoral where these trees are a feature of the town, as well as a VPO to manage the significant manna gums, wattles and understory in Tarrington.
2. **Environmental Significance Overlay Schedule 1 Eastern Barred Bandicoot area (ESO1) -** applies to the Grange Burn to protect the habitat of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot. The Bandicoot population has declined as a result of predators such as foxes and feral cats and there is now little benefit from the ESO and its requirements in managing these threats. The overlay also applies to public land under Council management, and so again is not an effective regulatory tool compared to other management provisions. There are, however, bandicoots surviving in the 'wild' around the northern area of the breeding enclosure, which is not covered in the current ESO1. An assessment of the effectiveness of the ESO as a tool to protect and enhance populations of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot is a short-term management priority.
3. **Environmental Significance Overlay Schedule 2 and 3** - ESO2 applies to the Wannon River and Salt Creek corridors in Dunkeld to maintain the natural drainage function, stream habitat, wildlife corridors and landscape values, whereas ESO3 applies to the Wannon River Escarpment precinct in Dunkeld to ensure development reflects the environmental constraints and protects flora and fauna habitat on the Wannon Water escarpment.

Whilst there are no major issues identified with these overlays, the review noted that there are riparian areas adjoining other waterways in the Shire which are vulnerable to the spread of weeds as a result of housing and domestic gardens or removal of vegetation. Whilst the review highlights there may be a case to consider protecting environmental values of the riverine environment from the Wannon Falls to Cavendish, further consideration should be given to adoption of planning controls for intermittent wetlands throughout the Shire, such as those on the Victorian Volcanic Plains, and whether more effective regulatory tools would be more effective, such as incentives or protection under covenants.

The 2018 Planning Scheme Review[27] also highlighted the potential role of the Biodiversity Mapping project undertaken for the South West region of Victoria by the former Department of Sustainability and Environment (now DEECA) in the early 2000's. It was noted that this mapping was undertaken at a scale that is difficult to justify for the application of planning controls and given the time that has lapsed would need to be reviewed. The Review went on to recommend that the sites of biodiversity significance mapping project be completed with support from DEECA and, based on this information, the Southern Grampians Planning Scheme be amended to include new and expanded schedules to the Vegetation Protection Overlay or Environmental Significance Overlay to protect significant flora and fauna. The recently completed Rural Land Use Study[28] highlighted a more detailed vegetation assessment may also have benefits for agriculture, landscape protection, regional tourism and other rural industries.

Changes to the Native Vegetation Framework in 2017 now require applicants seeking to remove vegetation of high ecological value, including for agricultural development, to provide "compelling justification if avoidance and/or minimisation cannot be demonstrated." Mapping of vegetation of high ecological significance will assist landholders to identify areas of the farm with high ecological values where intensive agricultural development such as cropping may be less suitable. The mapping may also identify areas suitable as native vegetation offsets.

The Rural Land Use Strategy[29] also supports the recommendation to undertake further strategic work to map and document the environmental values of Southern Grampians with a view to introducing planning controls to the Southern Grampians Planning Scheme.

[27] The Planning Connection, 2018 pp. 22-23
[28] RMCG, 2023 p. 41
[29] Ibid.

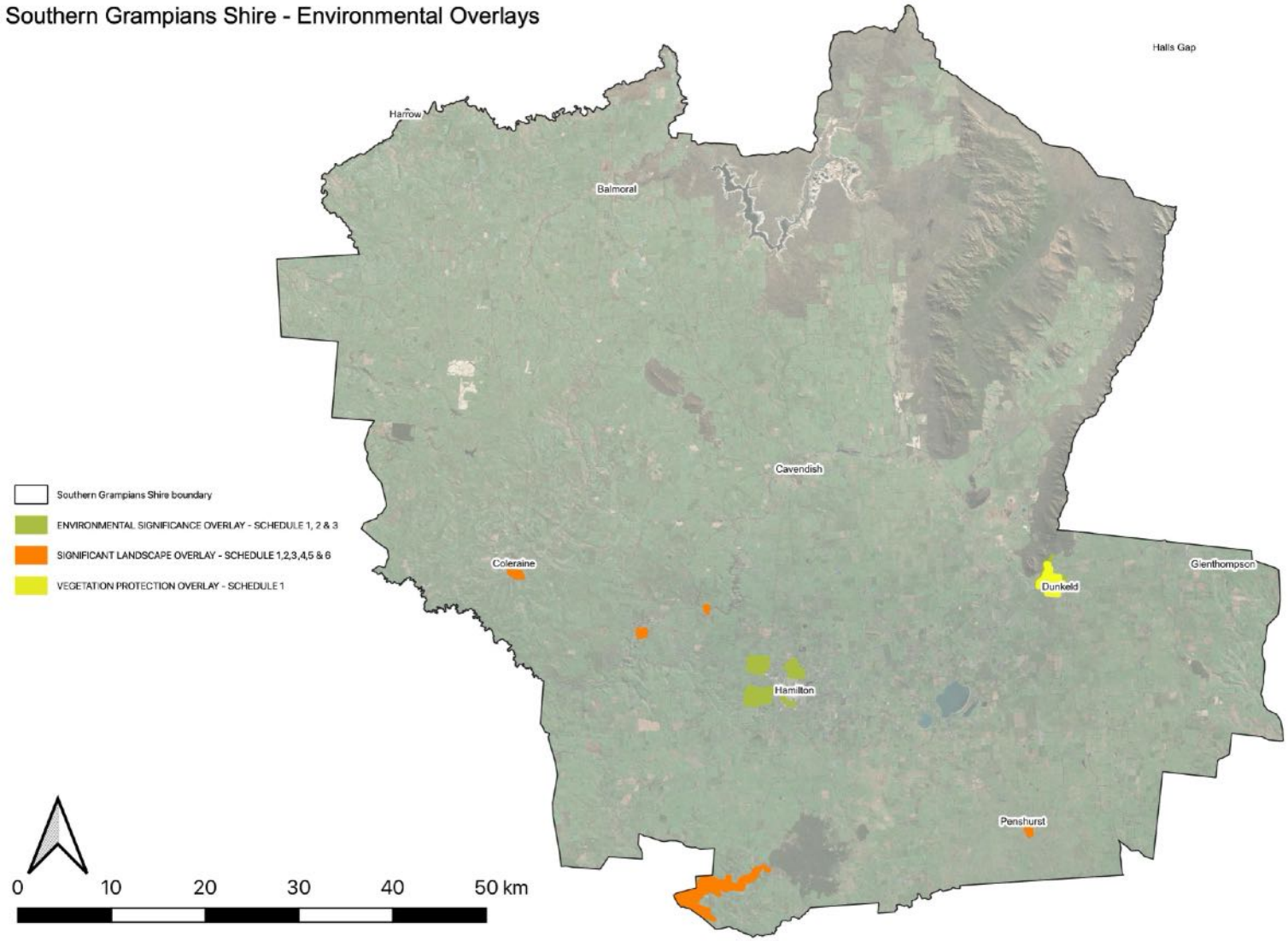


FIGURE 2-2: LOCATION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL OVERLAYS[30]

[30] Southern Grampians Planning Scheme (https://planning-schemes.app.planning.vic.gov.au/southerngrampians/maps)

GOALS

Protections: Protecting the Shire's natural assets through strategic land use planning and other mechanisms.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- No net loss of native vegetation on Council managed land or through Council activities across Southern Grampians Shire.
- An increase in the protection of remnant native vegetation and biodiversity values, especially large paddock trees and native grasslands.
- Reduced impacts to wildlife from domestic and wild pest animals.
- Increase in the protection of natural areas on private and public land, through covenants and reclassification of Crown land.

FIGURE 2-3: HAMILTON PARKLANDS BANDICOOT ENCLOSURE[31]

ACTIONS

TABLE 2-2: DESCRIPTION, RESOURCING AND TIMING OF ACTIONS

NO.	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
Short-term		
1	Undertake a review of the sites of biodiversity significance mapping project in partnership with DEECA.	
2	Based on the findings of the review of biodiversity significance mapping establish baselines and targets to measure success.	
Medium-term		
3	Based on the findings of the review of biodiversity significance mapping, review relevant clauses of the Southern Grampians Shire Planning Scheme and consider expanding the coverage of the Vegetation Protection Overlay and/or Environmental Significance Overlays or update of the overlay schedules.	
4	Review habitat of the Eastern Barred Bandicoot to inform an update or amendment of the ESO1, including land to the north of the breeding enclosure, or other appropriate regulatory and/or management tools to deliver improved species outcomes (e.g. predator control).	
5	Consider updates of the ESO2 to include other significant waterways and wetlands in need of protection, subject to a review of alternative regulatory and/or management tools to deliver improved ecological and landscape outcomes.	
6	Review neighbouring planning schemes for West Wimmera Shire and Glenelg Shire in relation to applicable environmental and landscape planning controls and overlays that could also be adopted in the Southern Grampians Shire.	

[31] RMCG, 2020

FOCUS AREA 3: COUNTRY

CONTEXT

Prior to colonisation, the broader Southern Grampians landscape was healthy and provided sustenance for the people and wildlife that lived here[32]. With European settlement new plants and animals were introduced along with changed land and water management practices, which impacted Country and its people, forcing many out of the landscape. South-west Victoria has a particularly brutal history of violence and massacres. The First Peoples Assembly of Victoria and the Victorian Government have made a shared commitment to truth telling through the Yoo-rrook Justice Commission. The Commission is expected to establish an official record of the impact of colonisation on First Peoples in Victoria and make recommendations about practical actions and reforms needed. This is expected to inform future land, water and biodiversity management within the State and the Southern Grampians Shire.

Through the recent development of the Glenelg Hopkins RCS[33], the Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Wotjobaluk and Tjap Wurrung Aboriginal people identified the following insights (as summarised) for future management of the broader catchment of which the Shire forms a part:

- The use of Aboriginal place names, and plant and animal names, and where possible Aboriginal language content, as a basic part of observing and communicating Aboriginal connection to Country.
- Understanding that healthy Country and healthy people are linked, and increasing the use of language that reflects these relationships, such as 'healing Country' and 'caring for Country'.
- Understanding relationships with Country as intimate and familial and defined by care and obligation, rather than by ideas of management and use.
- The importance of seasonal calendars and their implicit and explicit Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, observing and learning about Country at different times of the year.
- The role of cultural management activities in looking after Country. For example, identifying and caring for tangible cultural heritage such as scar trees, burial sites, dwelling places and massacre sites, and intangible cultural heritage such as stories (e.g. creations stories) and the places, people and species connected to them.
- Recognising that because of the dispossession, massacres and forced removal from Country and confinement on missions, Traditional Owners in the south-west of Victoria are often in a position of needing to relearn and reconnect with what has been lost. Partner organisations and agencies can play a key role supporting Traditional Owner groups in this relearning process.
- Seeing ecosystems and parts of Country as connected and not separate.
- Understanding Country in terms of cultural landscapes which are defined and named for their culturally significant species, and looking after cultural landscapes according to what those animals and plants need to thrive.
- Identifying that fragmentation and isolation of Country is one of the biggest threats to Country and people.

Council also supports these insights and is confident this Plan for Nature provides a step forward on partnering with Traditional Owners to heal Country.

GOAL

Country: Supporting Traditional Owners to care for and heal Country.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- Traditional Owner rights, interests, obligations and access to Country and water, across the Shire are acknowledged and improving.
- The Indigenous cultural landscape management practices of the Bunganditj, Gunditjmara, Wotjobaluk and Tjap Wurrung Aboriginal people have increased across the Shire based on the principles of Aboriginal self-determination; and are increasingly being incorporated into the management of Council nature reserves and roadsides.

ACTIONS

TABLE 2-3: DESCRIPTION, RESOURCING AND TIMING OF ACTIONS

NO.	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
Short-term		
1	Collaborate with the Traditional Owners and use traditional knowledge of Country to improve biodiversity planning and management practices across the Shire with a focus on nature reserves under Shire management.	
Medium-term		
2	Partner with Traditional Owners to promote knowledge exchange, cultural education, and the use of language in the management of nature reserves and biodiversity.	

[32] GHCMA, 2021.

[33] Ibid.

FOCUS AREA 4: WORKING TOGETHER

CONTEXT

Council recognises its community, and its agency partners are critical to the long-term and sustainable management of the Shire's biodiversity and natural values. There are a range of individuals, groups and organisations that have a role in valuing, protecting and enhancing the Shire's natural areas. This includes active and passionate groups such as Landcare and local environment groups. Figure 2-4 below highlights the number of environmental volunteer groups by type (modified to include local group information). A full list of active environmental volunteer groups is provided in Appendix 3.

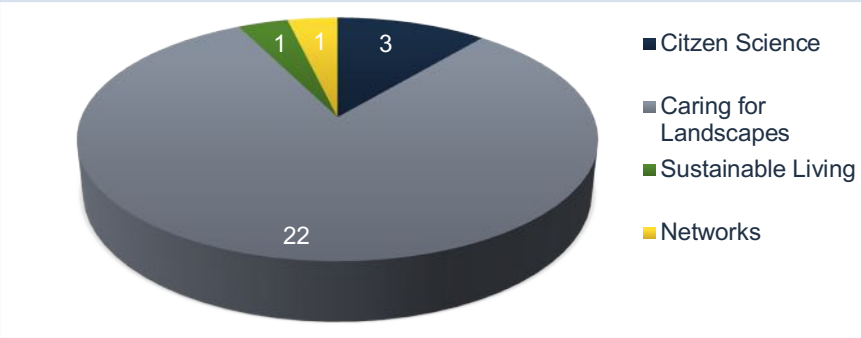


FIGURE 2-4: ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEER GROUPS IN SGS BY TYPE[34]

GOAL

Working together: Working with community and stakeholders to value, protect and enhance the Shire's natural areas.

WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- The regional community is more engaged and empowered to participate and partner in regional biodiversity management (including Council reserves and roadsides).
- The regional community recognises that the social, cultural and economic benefits of people connecting with nature depends on a healthy environment.[35]
- Agencies are working together to manage jointly held public assets.

[34] DEECA, 2023

[35] This target is linked to the Biodiversity 2037 goal that 'Victorians value nature' and that Victorians understand that their personal wellbeing and the economic wellbeing of the state are dependent on the health of the natural environment.

ACTIONS

TABLE 2-4: DESCRIPTION, RESOURCING AND TIMING OF ACTIONS

NO.	DESCRIPTION	RESOURCES
Short-term		
1	Review opportunities to engage the community and community groups as partners in biodiversity management and onground works such as revegetation and weed removal, as well as, citizen science projects.	
2	Encourage and support land stewardship by landholders, Landcare and other community groups (including Committee of Management volunteers for reserves) through incentives and awareness raising activities.	
Medium-term		
3	Advocate for joint management of key council assets, such as the urban river frontage of the Grange Burn, particularly where they are shared with other agencies (i.e. DEECA, Wannon Water or Glenelg Hopkins CMA) to ensure a consistent strategic management approach.	

FIGURE 2-5: COMMUNITY INVOLVED IN TREE PLANTING[36]

[36] SGSC

IMPLEMENTATION AND RENEWAL

Successful governance and implementation of the Plan requires the combination of long-term and annual monitoring, and regular evaluation so actions can be improved.

This section describes the annual cycle to renew the implementation of the Plan and the longer-term cycle to update the Plan every 10 years.

The Southern Grampians Plan for Nature will be delivered via annual Council budget cycles focussed on achieving the actions and targets.

FIGURE 2-6: SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS PLAN FOR NATURE IMPLEMENTATION

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Council is committed to monitoring and evaluation, as this formalises the collection of lessons from the implementation of the Plan. It further enables continuous improvement, as collected learnings will inform future actions.

A key focus for measuring the success of the strategy will be collecting appropriate baseline information against each of the focus areas and the development of SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) targets.

TABLE 2-5: MONITORING REQUIREMENTS

WHAT NEEDS MONITORING?	BASELINE EXISTS	WHEN?
Status of management plans for management reserves	No	Every 10 years (needs updating now)
Habitat quality of reserves	No	Every five years
Roadside conservation values	Yes	Every 10 years (needs updating now)
Environmental volunteer group health	No	Every five years
No. of nature reserves where language, stories or cultural practice is established	No	Every five years
Nature reserves where collaborative relationships exist between Traditional Owners and Council	No	Every five years

The evaluation of the success of this Plan will also be guided by the following themes and key evaluation questions (KEQs).

TABLE 2-6: THEMES AND KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS

THEMES	KEY EVALUATION QUESTIONS (KEQS)
Plan design ▪ Focuses on whether the governance and actions were appropriately designed to deliver the intended targets (and goals)	1. Was the design of the Plan appropriate to deliver the intended outcomes?
Plan implementation ▪ Focuses on whether the actions of the Plan were delivered as planned and seeks to identify how these approaches have ensured efficient and cost-effective delivery.	2. To what extent have the Plan actions been delivered as planned? 3. To what extent was the delivery good value for money?
Plan impact ▪ Focuses on what the Plan has achieved to date against the intended targets (and goals). ▪ At the end of the Plan term, the focus is also on the legacy of the program and to what extent the impact of the actions will extend beyond the life of the Plan (long-term outcomes).	4. To what extent did the actions lead to the achievement of the targets? 5. What impact will the actions have beyond the life of the Plan?

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THREATENED SPECIES

TABLE A-1: THREATENED FLORA SPECIES

NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	EPBC LISTED	FFG LISTED
Adamson's Blown-grass	*Lachnagrostis adamsonii*	Endangered	Vulnerable
Basalt Sun-orchid	*Thelymitra gregaria*		Endangered
Buloke	*Allocasuarina luehmannii*		Endangered
Candy Spider-orchid	*Caladenia versicolor*	Vulnerable	Endangered
Clover Glycine	*Glycine latrobeana*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Clumping Golden Moths	*Diuris gregaria*		Endangered
Curly Sedge	*Carex tasmanica*		Vulnerable
Downy Star-Bush	*Asterolasia phebalioides*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Elegant Spider-orchid	*Caladenia formosa*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Gorae Leek-orchid	Prasophyllum diversiflorum	Endangered	Endangered
Grampians Bitter-pea	Daviesia laevis	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Grampians Duck-orchid	Caleana disjuncta		Endangered
Grampians Spider-orchid	Caladenia grampiana		Vulnerable
Hairy Tails	Ptilotus erubescens		Vulnerable
Large-headed Fireweed	Senecio macrocarpus	Vulnerable	Endangered
Matted Flax-lily	Dianella amoena	Endangered	Endangered
Metallic Sun-orchid	Thelymitra epipactoides	Endangered	Endangered
Ornate Pink-fingers	Caladenia ornata	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Plump Swamp Wallaby-grass	Amphibromus pithogastrus		Endangered
Purple Blown-grass	Lachnagrostis punicea subsp. filifolia		Rare
Purple Diuris	Diuris punctata		Vulnerable
Salt-lake Tussock-grass	Poa sallacustris	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Slender Club-sedge	Isolepis congrua		Vulnerable
Small Milkwort	Comesperma polygaloides		Vulnerable
Small Sickle Greenhood	Pterostylis lustra		Vulnerable
Southern Pipewort	Eriocaulon australasicum	Endangered	Endangered
Spiny Rice-flower	Pimelea spinescens subsp. spinescens	Critically endangered	Endangered
Spiral Sun-orchid	Thelymitra matthewsii	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Swamp Everlasting	Xerochrysum palustre	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Western Purple Diuris	Diuris daltonii		Vulnerable
White Sunray	Leucochrysum albicans subsp. tricolor	Endangered	Endangered

TABLE A-2: THREATENED FAUNA SPECIES

NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	EPBC LISTED	FFG LISTED
Australasian Bittern	*Botaurus poiciloptilus*	Endangered	Endangered
Australian Bustard	*Ardeotis australis*		Critically endangered
Baillon's Crake	*Porzana pusilla palustris*		Vulnerable
Barking Owl	*Ninox connivens*		Endangered
Blue-billed Duck	*Oxyura australis*		Endangered
Brolga	*Grus rubicunda*		Vulnerable
Brown Toadlet	Pseudophryne bibronii		Endangered
Brush-tailed Phascogale	Phascogale tapoatafa		Vulnerable
Brush-tailed Rock-wallaby	*Petrogale penicillata*	Vulnerable	Critically endangered
Bush Stone-curlew	*Burhinus grallarius*		Endangered
Caspian Tern	*Hydroprogne caspia*		Near threatened
Chestnut-rumped Heathwren	*Calamanthus pyrrhopygius*		Vulnerable
Common Bent-wing Bat (southern ssp.)	*Miniopterus schreibersii bassanii*	Critically endangered	Critically endangered
Diamond Firetail	*Stagonopleura guttata*		Near threatened
Dwarf Galaxis	*Galaxiella pusilla*	Vulnerable	Endangered
Eastern Barred Bandicoot	*Perameles gunnii*	Endangered	Extinct in the wild
Eastern Great Egret	*Ardea modesta*		Vulnerable
Freckled Duck	*Stictonetta naevosa*		Endangered
Glenelg Spiny Crayfish	*Euastacus bispinosus*	Endangered	Endangered
Golden Sun Moth	*Synemon plana*	Critically endangered	Critically endangered
Grey Goshawk	*Accipiter novaehollandiae novaehollandiae*		Vulnerable
Grey-crowned Babbler	*Pomatostomus temporalis temporalis*		Endangered
Grey-headed Flying-fox	*Pteropus poliocephalus*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Growling Grass Frog	*Litoria raniformis*	Vulnerable	Endangered
Heath Mouse	*Pseudomys shortridgei*	Endangered	Near threatened
Hooded Robin	*Melanodryas cucullata cucullata*		Near threatened
Intermediate Egret	*Ardea intermedia*		Endangered
Lewin's Rail	*Lewinia pectoralis pectoralis*		Vulnerable
Little Bittern	*Ixobrychus minutus dubius*		Endangered
Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta nigripes*		Endangered
Long-nosed Potoroo	*Potorous tridactylus tridactylus*	Vulnerable	Near threatened
Macquarie Perch	*Macquaria australasica*	Endangered	Endangered
Magpie Goose	*Anseranas semipalmata*		Near threatened
Malleefowl	*Leipoa ocellata*	Vulnerable	Endangered
Masked Owl	*Tyto novaehollandiae novaehollandiae*		Endangered
Painted Honeyeater	*Grantiella picta*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Platypus	*Ornithorhynchus anatinus*		Vulnerable
Powerful Owl	*Ninox strenua*		Vulnerable

NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME	EPBC LISTED	FFG LISTED
Red-chested Button-quail	*Turnix pyrrhothorax*		Vulnerable
Red-tailed Black-Cockatoo	*Calyptorhynchus banksii graptogyne*	Endangered	Endangered
Regent Honeyeater	*Anthochaera phrygia*	Critically endangered	Critically endangered
Rufous Bristlebird	*Dasyornis broadbenti*		Near threatened
Scarlet-chested Parrot	*Neophema splendida*		Vulnerable
Smoky Mouse	*Pseudomys fumeus*	Endangered	Endangered
Southern Brown Bandicoot	*Isoodon obesulus obesulus*	Endangered	Near threatened
Speckled Warbler	*Chthonicola sagittatus*		Vulnerable
Spot-tailed Quoll	*Dasyurus maculatus maculatus*	Endangered	Endangered
Square-tailed Kite	*Lophoictinia isura*		Vulnerable
Striped Legless Lizard	*Delma impar*	Vulnerable	Endangered
Striped Worm-Lizard	*Aprasia striolata*		Near threatened
Swamp Skink	*Lissolepis coventryi*		Vulnerable
Swift Parrot	*Lathamus discolor*	Critically endangered	Endangered
Variegated Pygmy Perch	*Nannoperca variegata*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Western Swamp Cray	*Gramastacus insolitus*		Critically endangered
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucogaster*		Vulnerable
White-browed Treecreeper	*Climacteris affinis*		Vulnerable
Yarra Pygmy Perch	*Nannoperca obscura*	Vulnerable	Vulnerable
Yellow Sedge-skipper Butterfly	*Hesperilla flavescens*		Vulnerable
Yellow-bellied Sheathtail Bat	*Saccolaimus flaviventris*		Data deficient

APPENDIX 2: MANAGEMENT PLAN STATUS

TABLE A-3: MANAGEMENT PLAN STATUS FOR KEY NATURE RESERVES WITHIN THE SHIRE

RESERVE	MANAGER	STATUS
Boral Quarry Lease site	Owned by SCS Council adjoining Mt Napier	Unknown or unavailable
Bryan Swamp	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Byaduk Caves and Mount Napier	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Dundas Range Scenic Reserve	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Dunkeld Arboretum	Committee of Management	Dunkeld Arboretum Management Plan and Biodiversity Assessment (2011) and Dunkeld Arboretum Management Plan (2022/23-2028)
Flora Reserves (Gatum Gatum, Wannon, Gringegalgona)	Southern Grampians Shire Council, Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Fullham Streamside Reserve Camping Area	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Glenelg River and river frontages	Southern Grampians Shire Council, Landholders, DEECA	Unknown or unavailable
Grange Burn and river frontages	Southern Grampians Shire Council, Landholders, DEECA	Grange Burn – Hamilton - Master Plan (2005)
Greater Gariwerd Landscape Management Plan	Parks Victoria	Recently updated in 2021
Hamilton Coleraine Rail Trail	Community Committee of Management	Unknown or unavailable
Hamilton Lake	Southern Grampians Shire Council	Migratory Shorebird Site Action Plan (December 2020) Southern Grampians Shire Council Action Plan for the Improvement of Water Quality - Lake Hamilton (2012)
Hamilton Parklands Reserve (Bandicoot Enclosure)	Southern Grampians Shire Council, Community, DEECA	Hamilton Parklands Reserve (Bandicoot Enclosure) – (2002)
Harmans Valley		Unknown or unavailable
Hewett Park	Southern Grampians Shire Council	Assessment - Vegetation Offset site
Lake Linlithgow, Bullrush, Kennedy	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Mount Rouse	Southern Grampians Shire Council	Mount Rouse Reserve Management Plan (2016-2020)
Nigretta Falls Flora Reserve	Parks Victoria	Unknown or unavailable
Roadsides	Southern Grampians Shire Council	Southern Grampians Shire Council Roadside Management Plan (revised 2019)
Rocklands Reservoir	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	Unknown or unavailable
Salt Creek Water Frontage, Dunkeld	DEECA	Unknown or unavailable
State Forests (Claude Austin, Fergusons, Rocklands, Balmoral, Beear, Glenisla, Black Range, Cherrypool, Woohlpooer)	DEECA	Unknown or unavailable
Walker Swamp	Nature Glenelg Trust	Walker Swamp Restoration Reserve
Wannon and Nigretta Falls	Southern Grampians Shire Council	Management Plan for Wannon Falls and Nigretta Falls (2005) Wannon Falls Scenic Reserve & Nigretta Falls Scenic Reserve: Works Plan (2010) Native Vegetation Management Plan – Management for hedge wattle and forest Burgan (2019)
Wannon River and river frontages	Southern Grampians Shire Council, Landholders, DEECA	Unknown or unavailable
Yatmorone	Parks Victoria (Friends of Group)	Unknown or unavailable

APPENDIX 3: ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERS

TABLE A-4: ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING GROUPS IN THE SHIRE

VOLUNTEER GROUP	TYPE
Bandicoot Group Hamilton	Citizen Science
Balmoral Land Management and Tree Group	Caring for Landscapes
Birdlife Australia - Hamilton	Citizen Science
Bulart Land Management Group	Caring for Landscapes
Bunnugal Landcare Group	Caring for Landscapes
Caring for our Grange Burn Group	Caring for Landscapes
Community Garden Association Hamilton	Sustainable Living
Culla Pigeon Ponds Land Management Group	Caring for Landscapes
Dunkeld Arboretum Development Group Inc.	Caring for Landscapes
Field Naturalists - Hamilton	Caring for Landscapes
Friends of Yatmerone	Caring for Landscapes
Friends of the Forgotten Woodland	Caring for Landscapes
Gazette Land Action Group	Caring for Landscapes
Glenthompson Landcare Network	Networks
Gringe Improvement Group	Caring for Landscapes
Hamilton-Coleraine Rail Reserve Committee of Management	Caring for Landscapes
Hamilton-Coleraine Railway Line Landcare Group (HCRLLG)	Caring for Landscapes
Hamilton Institute of Rural Learning (HIRL)	Citizen Science
Lyne Camp Creek Land Management Group	Caring for Landscapes
Mirranatwa Landcare Group	Caring for Landscapes
Mooralla Landcare Group	Caring for Landscapes
Nature Glenelg Trust	Caring for Landscapes
Panyyabyr Landcare Group	Caring for Landscapes
Pierrepoint Land Protection Group	Caring for Landscapes
Wando River Landcare Group Inc	Caring for Landscapes
Wannon Nigretta Community Group	Caring for Landscapes
Wennicott Creek Landcare Group	Caring for Landscapes

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