Mount Alexander Shire Council

DRAFT Biodiversity Strategy

Working together for a healthy, connected shire



Mount Alexander Shire Council

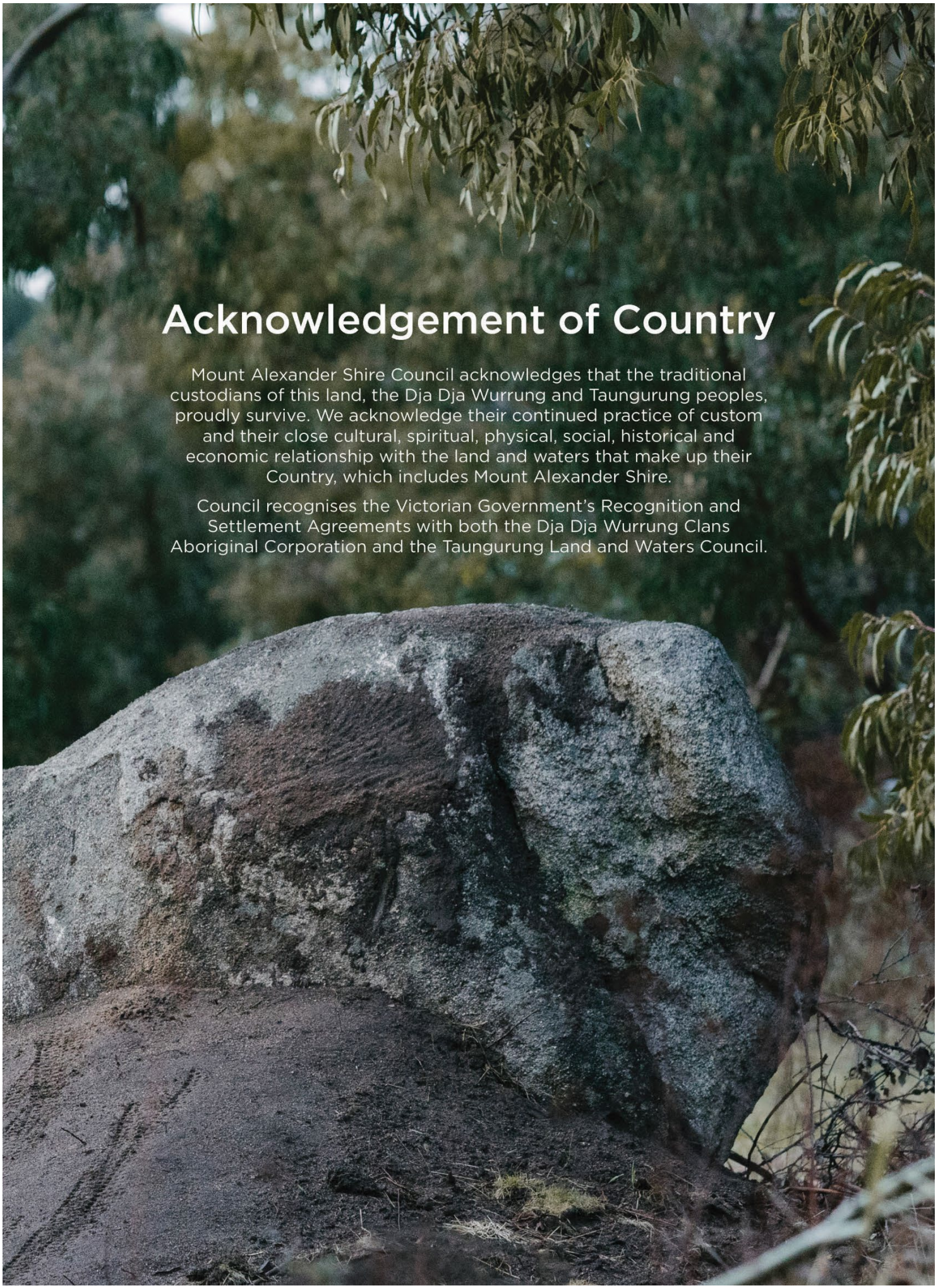
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Acknowledgement of Country

Mount Alexander Shire Council acknowledges that the traditional custodians of this land, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples, proudly survive. We acknowledge their continued practice of custom and their close cultural, spiritual, physical, social, historical and economic relationship with the land and waters that make up their Country, which includes Mount Alexander Shire.

Council recognises the Victorian Government's Recognition and Settlement Agreements with both the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation and the Taungurung Land and Waters Council.

1 Our Biodiversity Strategy

1.1 Overview

Mount Alexander Shire is on Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country. The Shire exists within a cultural landscape that has been managed and cared for by Traditional Owners for millenia.

Mount Alexander Shire is 'a tapestry of interwoven cultural landscapes that are the product of the skills, knowledge and activities of Aboriginal land managers over thousands of generations' ~DJAARA. Biodiversity and the natural environment cannot be separated from this history of care, knowledge and active management of Country.

Mount Alexander Shire is home to a rich and diverse natural environment. The Shire supports nationally significant Box-Ironbark forests and woodlands, important waterways, remnant native grasslands and habitat for many threatened plant and animal species. These natural assets contribute to the environmental health, resilience, character and liveability of the region.

The Mount Alexander Biodiversity Strategy presents an opportunity for Council to partner with Traditional Owners to reintegrate Traditional Owner stewardship and management of cultural landscapes and biodiversity. This includes working with DJAARA to support the principles and practice of Galk-galk Dhelkunya, including opportunities for forest gardening and collaborative management of Council-managed parks and reserves and public spaces.

Like many parts of Victoria, biodiversity in Mount Alexander Shire is facing increasing pressures. Habitat loss and fragmentation, invasive plants and animals, and the impacts of climate change continue to affect the health and connectivity of ecosystems across the landscape. As land managers, we recognise our responsibility to protect and enhance biodiversity.

This Biodiversity Strategy provides a strategic framework to guide Council's efforts to protect and enhance biodiversity. It aligns with the Victorian State Government biodiversity policy and builds on Mount Alexander Shire Council's existing plans, strategies and commitments relating to environmental sustainability, climate resilience and community wellbeing.

What do we mean by biodiversity?

Biodiversity encompasses all components of the living world: the number and variety of plants, animals and other living things, including fungi and micro-organisms, across our land, rivers, coast and ocean.

It includes the diversity of their genetic information, the habitats and ecosystems within which they live, and their connections with other life forms and the natural world.

Australia is considered a mega diverse Country. There are only 12 mega diverse countries in the world, which collectively contain about 75% of earth's biodiversity. Australia has about 1 million species which represents more than 7% of the world's total (Australian Museum, 2023). As a developed nation, we have a responsibility to protect it.

This Strategy primarily guides Mount Alexander Shire Council's actions on Council-managed land and through Council operations, while identifying opportunities for Council to influence and advocate for broader landscape-scale biodiversity outcomes.

1.2 Biodiversity is a shared responsibility

Biodiversity is managed through a complex network of land managers. No single organisation or individual is responsible for protecting biodiversity across the landscape.

In Mount Alexander Shire, biodiversity outcomes are influenced by the management of public and private land by many different land managers, including Traditional Owners, local government, Australian and state governments, government agencies and water authorities, transport agencies, Parks Victoria, community environmental groups

and private landholders. Each has different responsibilities, land management objectives, resources and legislative obligations.

- **Australian Government:** The Australian Government provides the national framework for biodiversity conservation and has particular responsibility for matters of national environmental significance. The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) is Australia's principal national environmental legislation. It provides for the protection of nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species, internationally important wetlands and other nationally significant environmental matters. The Australian Government also establishes national biodiversity policy, coordinates Australia's international environmental commitments and invests in conservation and recovery programs.
- **Victorian Government:** The Victorian Government has primary responsibility for biodiversity conservation and natural resource management in Victoria. It establishes legislation, policy and regulation for native vegetation, threatened species and ecological communities, manages large areas of public land, and funds and delivers conservation programs in partnership with Traditional Owners, Catchment Management Authorities, councils and communities. Key frameworks include the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, Victoria's planning system and Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037.
- **Local government :** Councils influence biodiversity through their roles as land managers, planning authorities, infrastructure managers and service providers. This includes managing Council reserves, roadsides and waterways, applying planning requirements, considering biodiversity in Council works and decisions, supporting community and landholder action, and advocating for outcomes that require action by other land managers or levels of government.
- **Private landholders:** Private landholders manage a significant part of the landscape and play an important role in protecting remnant vegetation, waterways, scattered trees and other habitat. Under Victoria's Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994, landholders have responsibilities for managing declared noxious weeds and established pest animals on their land. Landholders can also contribute through protecting and restoring habitat, managing other threats and improving connections between areas of native vegetation.

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity therefore requires collaboration across land tenures and with all those who manage and care for land. The health of ecosystems, waterways, habitat corridors and species populations depends on coordinated action, shared knowledge and investment from many partners.

1.3 Achievements to date

Mount Alexander Shire Council has a strong foundation of biodiversity planning, management and partnership projects to build on. Over recent years, Council has strengthened its understanding of biodiversity values across the land it manages, established management plans for important sites and continued practical conservation works across bushland reserves, roadsides and waterways.

Planning and managing for biodiversity

Council manages more than 2,000 hectares of bushland reserves, rural roadsides and waterways. This land contains remnant native vegetation, habitat for threatened species and important connections between larger areas of habitat across the Shire.

Council has progressively established plans to guide the management of important natural areas. These include the Roadside Conservation Management Plan, Castlemaine Urban Waterways Management Plan, Honeycomb Bushland Reserve Environmental Management Plan and Castlemaine Botanic Gardens Flora and Fauna Reserve Environmental Management Plan.

Council has been implementing these plans across the areas where they apply, providing greater consistency and direction for conservation activities.This work has supported ongoing weed and pest management, revegetation, habitat protection and restoration across Council-managed land. In places such as Honeycomb Bushland Reserve and the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens Flora and Fauna Reserve, management is guided by identified ecological values, threats and priorities.

Council has also invested in mapping and information to improve its understanding of biodiversity across the Shire. This includes roadside conservation mapping and information on native vegetation, habitat and other environmental values. These resources provide an important foundation for planning works, identifying priorities and reducing impacts on significant biodiversity values.

Working with the community and partners

Council has contributed as a partner to significant collaborative projects that complement its ongoing management of reserves and waterways.

Many of these projects reflect sustained collaboration. Council works with Traditional Owners, Landcare and Friends groups, North Central CMA, government agencies, water corporations and the broader community to care for biodiversity across different land tenures. Local groups have made a particularly important contribution, contributing significant knowledge, volunteer effort and long-term stewardship of local reserves and waterways. Council supports and works alongside these groups through planning, on-ground projects and ongoing land management.

Council also supports conservation beyond Council-managed land, including through its Trust for Nature rate rebate and participation in broader regional initiatives that encourage revegetation, habitat restoration and improved landscape connectivity.

This work provides a strong base for the Biodiversity Strategy. Council has established site and asset-specific management frameworks, improved its biodiversity information and mapping, undertaken ongoing management across reserves, roadsides and waterways, and contributed to larger partnership projects. The Biodiversity Strategy provides an opportunity to bring these foundations together, establish Shire-wide priorities and guide where Council can make the greatest contribution to biodiversity over the next ten years.



‘Platypus in the creek’ Sid aged 7

1.4 Council's role and scope

This Strategy recognises that Mount Alexander Shire Council is one part of this broader system. While its primary focus is on Council-managed land and Council operations, Council also has an important role in working with others to support positive landscape-scale biodiversity outcomes.

Council manages land with biodiversity values, delivers services and infrastructure, influences land use and planning decisions, supports community action and advocates for investment and policy outcomes that benefit the environment.

It is important to recognise the extent of Council's responsibilities and its ability to influence biodiversity outcomes. Council has a direct responsibility and decision-making authority in some areas, such as council managed land, while in others it can influence or advocate for action by others. The distinctions below clarify Council's role in supporting biodiversity conservation and help set realistic expectations about what Council can achieve through this Strategy.

CONTROL		Areas where Council can directly achieve the desired outcome and has responsibility and decision-making authority. This includes land owned or managed by Council.
INFLUENCE		Areas where Council can influence biodiversity outcomes by changing the way it operates and regulates within its remit, leading by example, and influencing other land managers to undertake complementary works on adjacent land.
ADVOCATE		Areas where biodiversity outcomes depend on decisions made by other organisations, landholders or levels of government. In these situations, Council can advocate for land management approaches, policy reform, investment, funding and action that supports biodiversity conservation across the broader landscape.

1.5 How this Strategy was developed

This Biodiversity Strategy has been developed through an evidence-based and collaborative process. The first stage involved preparing a Biodiversity Background Paper, which brought together available biodiversity data, mapping, policy and legislative context, and information on the key values, threats and opportunities across Mount Alexander Shire.

This evidence base supplemented an extensive consultation process involving Traditional Owners, community members, environmental volunteer groups, high school students, government agencies, Councillors and Council officers. Feedback from this engagement helped identify community values, priorities and aspirations for biodiversity and informed the development of the goals, outcomes and actions contained in this Strategy.



2 Vision

This Biodiversity Strategy sets the long-term direction for how Council will work towards its vision for biodiversity. It provides an eduring framework for protecting and enhancing biodiversity through Council's planning, decision-making, operations and land management. The Strategy will guide Council's ongoing efforts, with goals and outcomes reviewed and updated periodically to reflect progress, emerging priorities and changing circumstances. It also supports delivery of the Mount Alexander Shire Community Vision and Council Plan by contributing to a healthy environment, climate resilience and sustainable communities.

Biodiversity Strategy

Our vision for Mount Alexander Shire is a healthy and resilient landscape where native plants, animals and ecological communities are protected, connected and functioning as part of thriving Djaara and Taungurung Country. Traditional Owners are empowered to lead the care and management of Country, with Council walking alongside them as a partner, and cultural knowledge, values and priorities embedded in biodiversity management and restoration. Biodiversity is valued and cared for by the whole community, there are no further local extinctions of native species, and remnant ecosystems are resilient to the impacts of climate change and other threats.

This Strategy will guide Council's actions to protect and enhance biodiversity on Council-managed land and through Council operations. It also identifies opportunities for Council to influence change where it can within its remit.

There are three goals we are aiming to achieve. Under each goal is a set of outcomes, of which Council will assess performance against in 10 years' time. Our goals are to:

- Protect and enhance biodiversity on Council-managed land
- Embed biodiversity into Council operations and decision-making
- Support biodiversity stewardship

Community vision 2021 - 2031

In 2031, our community is connected to each other, and comes together to build and celebrate an inclusive, creative shire.

We are a healthy community that values the natural beauty of the Djaara Country we live on. We also know that preserving our natural environment means living sustainably and caring for country. We are protecting our shire from the threat of climate change by working together at a local level.

We are a welcoming community where everybody has access to services and supports, and opportunities for housing, education, employment and creative and social pursuits. We're known as a vibrant place which draws upon its creative spirit and shared heritage. We're building a place where everyone can enjoy the beauty, history and friendliness of the shire.

Council Plan 2025 - 2029

This Strategy is designed to assist delivery of Council's *Natural Environment* strategic objectives:

- *We are working to protect local biodiversity and ecosystems*
- *A shire that understands and cares for our environment*
- *A well-prepared, resilient shire where residents are equipped for extreme weather events and disasters*
- *First Nations knowledge and cultural values are embedded into environmental decision-making and organisational processes.*

3 Biodiversity in Mount Alexander

Mount Alexander Shire is rich in biodiversity, supporting a diversity of ecosystems, species and habitats within a highly varied cultural landscape.

Mount Alexander (Liyanganyuk Banyul) is a dominant geological and natural landscape with ancient and continuing contemporary cultural ties to its peaks and surrounding areas, including Mount Tarrengower. The broader river corridor of Bulatjal Yaluk (the Loddon River) remains a vital living landscape, with significant ancient, historic and contemporary Djaara cultural associations. Bullock Creek (Bulop Bayowayi)[1] is a highly sensitive cultural landscape that partly falls with the Shire boundaries and incorporates ancestral valley connections that have continued over millennia to the present day. It contains significant watercourses and associated landforms connected to ancient pathways extending through to the wider region. These places and their connections are just some important features of a living cultural landscape that continues to hold deep significance for Traditional Owners[2].

The distribution of habitat value across Mount Alexander Shire reflects both the diversity of the landscape and its history of land use change (Figure 1). Areas of highest habitat value are concentrated in the larger and more intact forested landscapes, particularly the Box-Ironbark forests and woodland systems that extend through the central and southern parts of the Shire. These areas support important habitat for native plants and animals and provide the foundation for landscape connectivity. Important biodiversity values also occur throughout more fragmented landscapes, including along waterways and roadsides and within small patches of remnant vegetation and scattered habitat trees.

Many Council-managed reserves and roadsides occur within or adjacent to areas of high habitat value, so Council plays and important role in protecting biodiversity across the Shire.

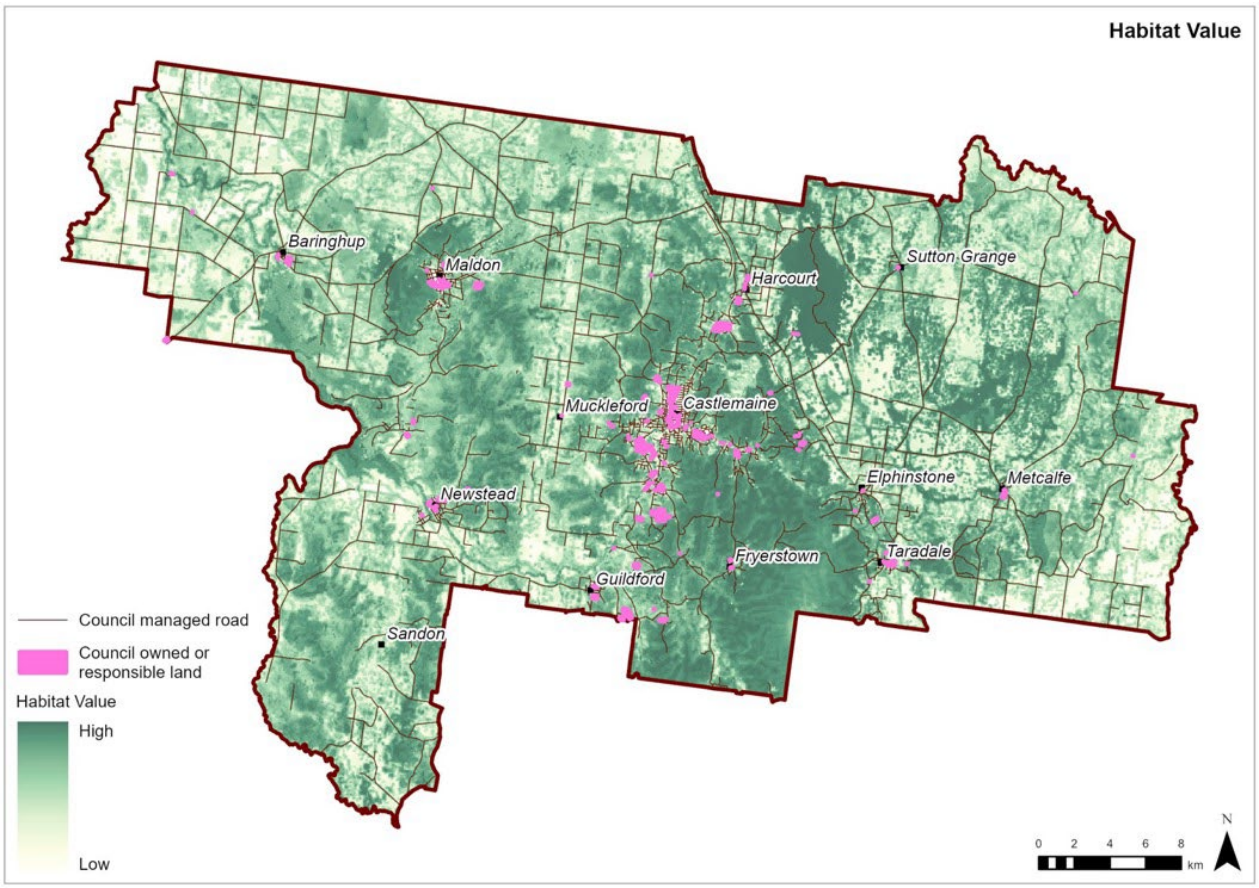


Figure 1: Habitat value map for Mount Alexander Shire (The Habitat Value map combines information on thousands of species habitats to show the relative biodiversity value of landscapes in Victoria DEECA, October 2024).

[1] DJAARA Statement of Cultural Significance Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct Marong
[2] First Peoples Relations: https://ichl.achris.vic.gov.au/stratplan.html

A landscape shaped by change

> *Hundreds of years ago, our Country was mostly covered in open forests and woodlands, providing us with the plants and animals that we used for food, medicine, shelter and customary practices. Today, though our Country is vastly changed, it still holds many important values*
> *- Dhelkunya Dja-Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Country Plan 2014-2034*

Native vegetation across Mount Alexander Shire has been substantially modified since European colonisation through clearing, mining, agriculture, urban development and infrastructure. Comparison of modelled pre-1750 and current Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) shows the extent of this change (Figures 2 and 3).

The Shire contains 24 Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), many of which are threatened at the bioregional scale. Large areas of Box-Ironbark Forest and Heathy Dry Forest remain, while vegetation communities, including Grassy Woodland, Plains Woodland, and Plains Grassy Woodland have experienced substantial losses and now persist as smaller and more fragmented remnants.

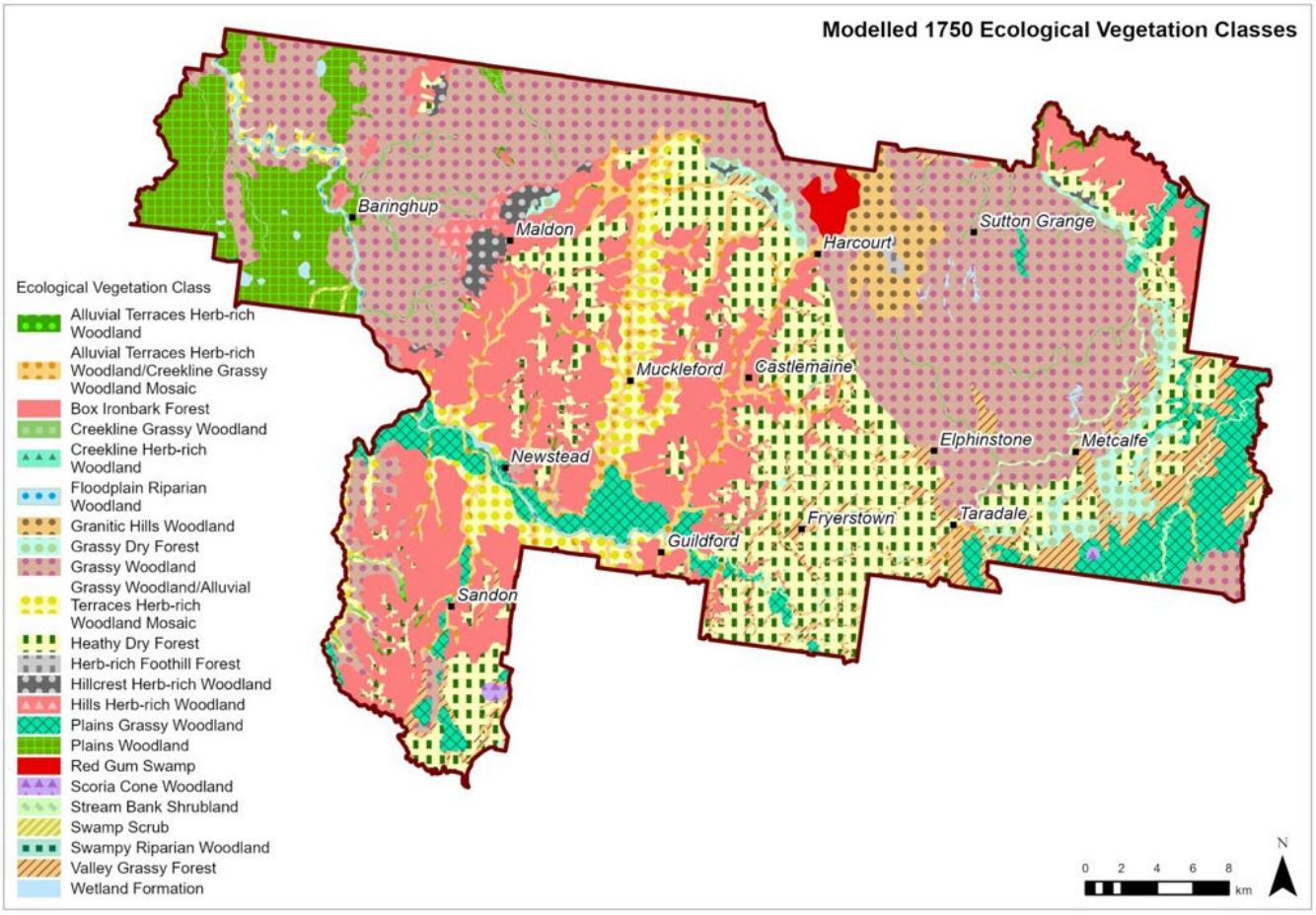


Figure 2: Modelled Ecological Vegetation Classes 1750 – this map shows the likely extent of different vegetation communities prior to European settlement.

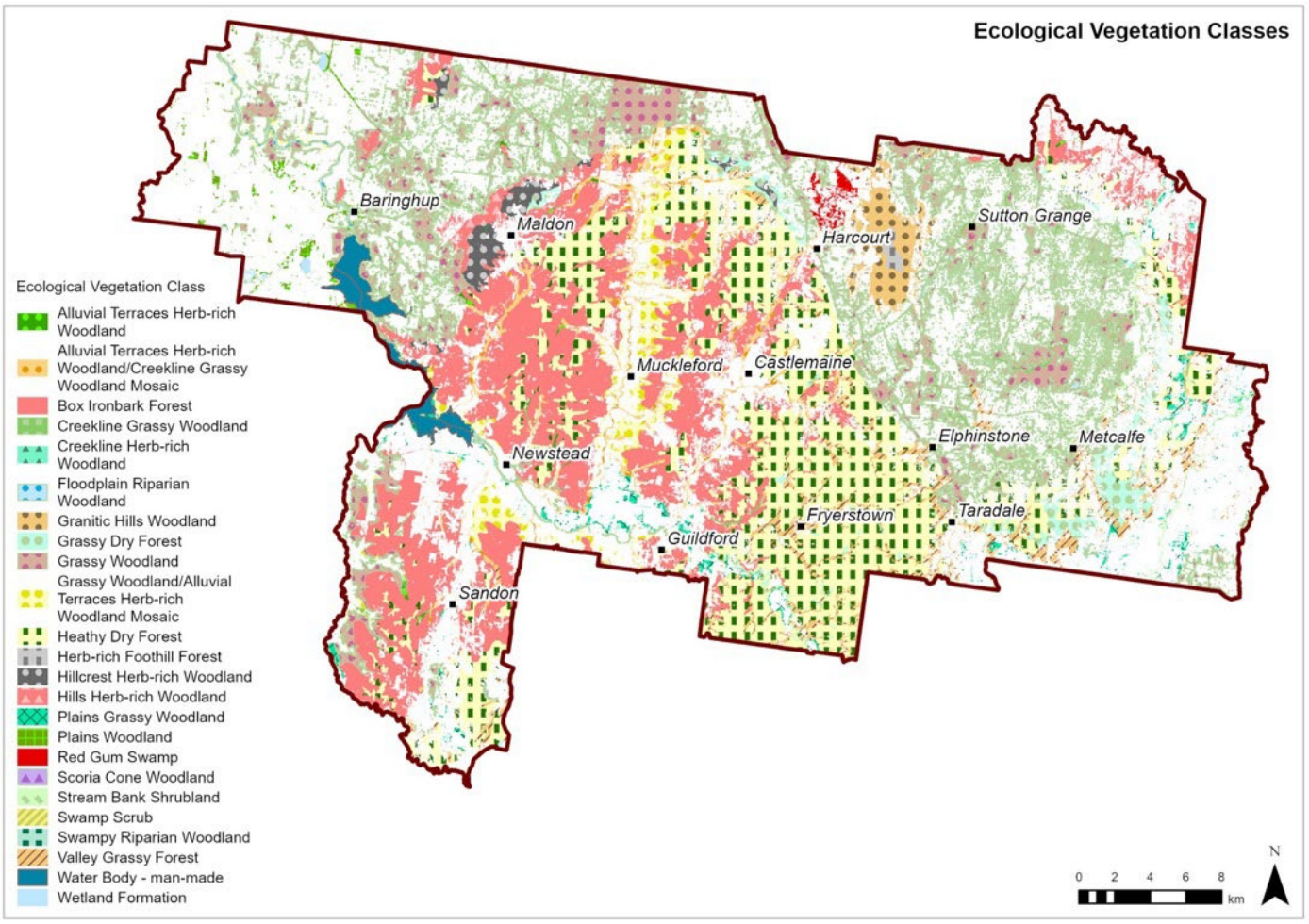


Figure 3. Modelled Ecological Vegetation Classes (updated July 2026) – this map shows how much those ecological vegetation communities have changed since European settlement. It shows areas that have been cleared for agriculture, grazing and mining.

Small remnants play an important role

The history of vegetation loss and fragmentation means that remaining patches can have ecological value well beyond their size. Roadside vegetation, riparian corridors, scattered habitat trees, large old trees and remnant patches on both public and private land provide habitat, movement corridors and stepping stones for native species. Their protection and management are just as critical as the larger areas to maintaining ecological function and improving habitat connectivity.

Areas of high biodiversity value are under pressure

Mount Alexander Shire supports habitat for many threatened species, including nationally significant populations of the Eltham Copper Butterfly and habitat for species such as the Brush-tailed Phascogale, Powerful Owl, Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater.

The Biodiversity Threat Risk Index (Figure 5) highlights areas where threatened species habitat is concentrated and under the greatest pressure. When considered alongside habitat value and EVC conservation status mapping, these areas emerge as priorities because they support biodiversity and cultural values that are both significant and vulnerable. Protecting and improving habitat in these landscapes is likely to deliver the greatest benefit for threatened species and biodiversity more broadly.

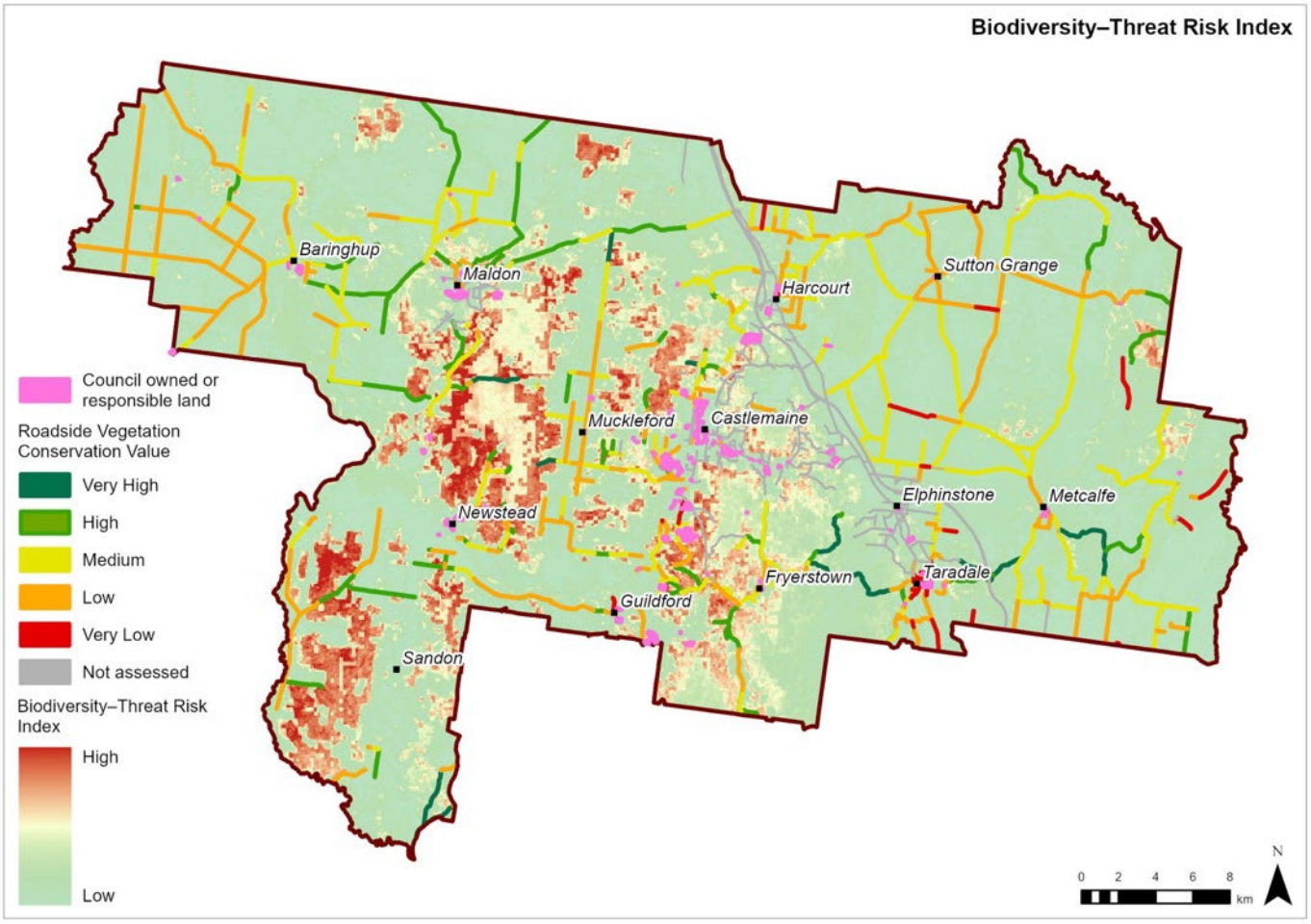


Figure 5. Biodiversity-Threat Risk Index.

These maps demonstrate that while Mount Alexander retains significant biodiversity values, many of its most important ecosystems and species are concentrated in fragmented landscapes and require targeted protection.

Climate change is amplifying existing challenges

Climate change is already, and will continue to, amplify pressures on biodiversity through hotter and drier conditions, more intense rainfall events and increased fire weather. These changes increase the importance of protecting climate refuges, maintaining and restoring habitat connectivity, improving the condition and resilience of native vegetation, supporting healthy waterways and retaining water in the landscape.

Biodiversity underpins the health and livability of the shire

Biodiversity provides many of the benefits that communities rely on every day. Healthy ecosystems support clean water, fertile soils, pollination, carbon storage, erosion control and peoples health and wellbeing. Protecting and restoring biodiversity helps maintain these ecosystem services and supports the resilience of communities in a changing climate.

Past vegetation loss and fragmentation have created impacts that cannot be fully reversed, and some ecological decline will continue because of these legacy pressures and climate change. This makes each remaining habitat area increasingly important. Council cannot reverse all historical change, but it can help prevent further incremental loss through its land management, planning, infrastructure and regulatory functions, while protecting and restoring habitat, strengthening connectivity and influencing biodiversity outcomes beyond Council-managed land.

Please refer to our *Biodiversity Background paper* for more information on Mount Alexander's biodiversity.

4 Strategy framework

This chapter sets out how the Biodiversity Strategy will be delivered. The principles provide overarching guidance for decision-making and should be considered in the design and delivery of all biodiversity projects and activities. The prioritisation framework guides where Council will focus its investment to achieve the greatest long-term biodiversity benefit. The goals and actions then describe what Council will do over the next 10 years to protect and enhance biodiversity and support stewardship across the municipality.

4.1 Principles for Strategy delivery

These principles will guide the delivery of this Strategy and should be considered in Council projects, operations and decision-making. We also encourage partners and the community to consider these principles in their own biodiversity projects and activities.

Dja Dja Wurrung country is a cultural landscape that is more than just tangible objects; imprinted in it are the dreaming stories, Law, totemic relationships, songs, ceremonies and ancestral spirits, which give it life and significant value to Dja Dja Wurrung People. The values Dja Dja Wurrung People hold for their country are shaped from their belief systems that all things have a murrup (spirit) – water, birds, plants, animals, rocks and mountains. Dja Dja Wurrung People see all the land and its creatures in a holistic way, interconnected with each other and with the people. Prior to European colonisation, all natural places within Dja Dja Wurrung country were well known, had a name and song and were celebrated as a part of country and culture.

~ Recognition Statement: Dja Dja Wurrung Recognition and Settlement Agreement

- Avoid and minimise impacts on biodiversity – Biodiversity impacts should be considered early in project planning and design. The avoid–minimise–offset hierarchy will be applied to Council projects, with offsets considered only as a last resort and in accordance with legislative requirements.
- Work in partnership with Traditional Owners – Council will work in partnership with Traditional Owners and seek to embed cultural outcomes and Caring for Country approaches in biodiversity projects and land management activities. This includes djandak wi (cultural fire) and other approaches that form part of the Galk-galk Dhelkunya toolkit where appropriate.
- Plan for a changing climate – Biodiversity actions should consider projected climate conditions and support ecosystem resilience, water retention and landscape connectivity. This should include, prioritising the successful establishment of local indigenous species that will be the most resilient under future climates, considering the use of species of non-local provenances, retaining and restoring structural diversity (canopy, mid-story, understory) to improve resilience and integrating water sensitive urban design approaches.
- Focus investment where it will achieve the greatest benefit – Investment should be guided primarily by state and national conservation priorities, while recognising local ecological knowledge and locally significant species where this information improves conservation outcomes.
- Manage biodiversity alongside wildfire risk – Biodiversity outcomes should be balanced with the protection of human life and property. On-ground works should consider wildfire risk, including appropriate plant selection near built up areas, removing priority woody weeds that contribute to fuel loads and considering cultural land management approaches, which reduce wildfire risk such as djandak wi (cultural fire) where appropriate.
- Align with legislative and policy responsibilities – Biodiversity management will be guided by relevant legislation, policies, codes of practice and statutory responsibilities.
- Use the best available evidence – Decisions will be informed by the best available biodiversity data, biocultural data, monitoring, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, local knowledge and contemporary science.

4.2 How we will prioritise investment in biodiversity

Council manages a diverse portfolio of bushland reserves, roadsides, waterways and open spaces. The scale of biodiversity values and the resources available to manage them means that it is not possible to undertake all works, everywhere, at once. To help direct investment where it will achieve the greatest benefit, this Strategy sets out a prioritisation framework to identify locations where actions are likely to deliver the greatest long-term biodiversity outcomes. An overview of the prioritisation framework is provided in Figure 6, with further details on the approach provided in Appendix 5 of the background report.

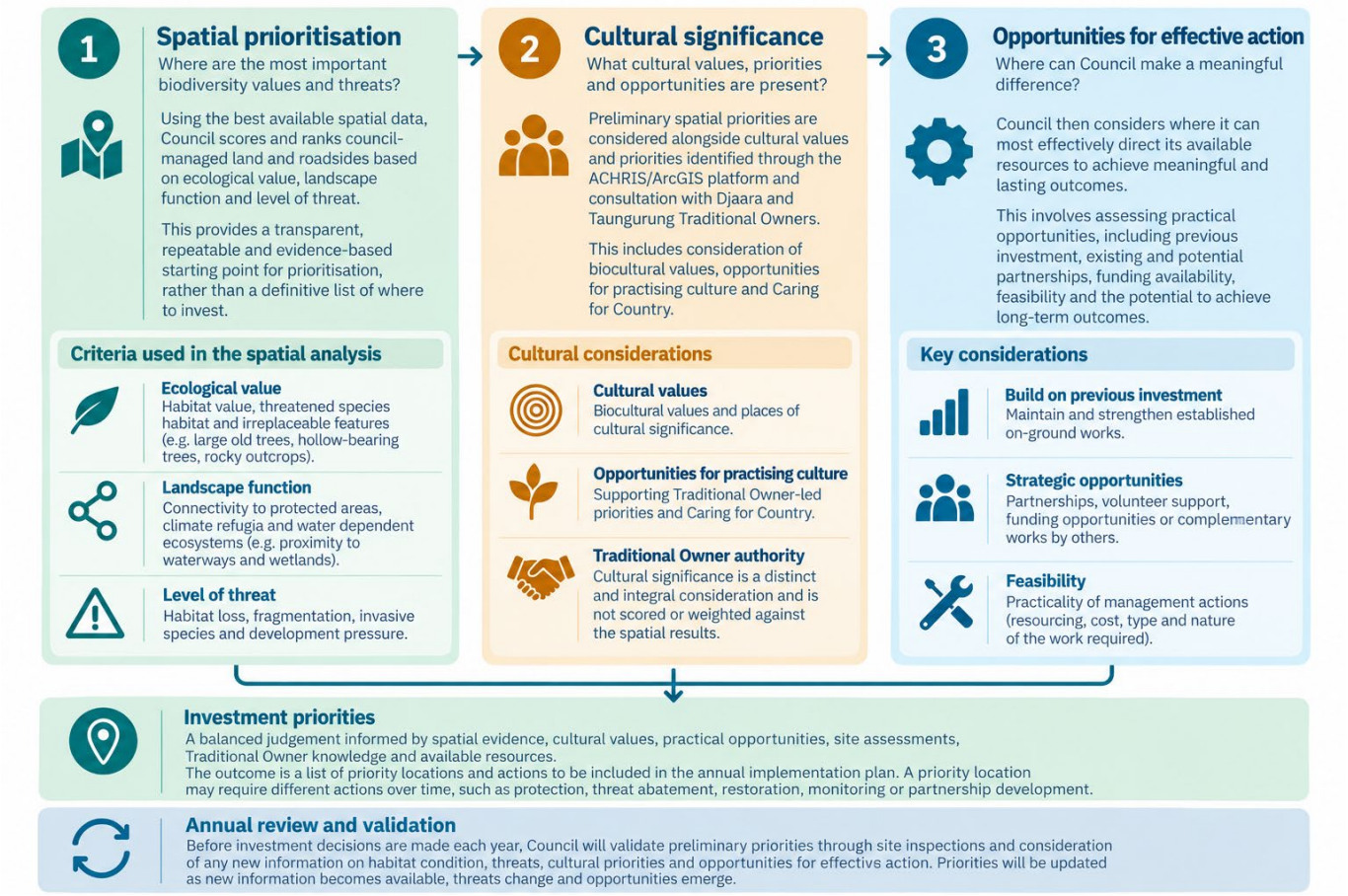


Figure 6. Overview of prioritisation framework

Applying the framework

The three steps establish a clear sequence for decision-making, moving from identifying areas of ecological importance, to considering cultural significance, and finally assessing opportunities for effective action. Only the spatial prioritisation stage uses a quantitative scoring system. Cultural significance and opportunities for effective action are qualitative considerations that inform subsequent decisions. They are not weighted or scored against the spatial results.

Each year, before investment decisions are made, Council will validate preliminary priority areas through site inspections and consideration of factors that cannot be adequately assessed through spatial analysis alone and are subject to change (current state of irreplaceable habitat features, and opportunities for effective action). The final priorities for the year will be addressed in the annual implementation plan.

4.3 Our goals

The following goals provide the strategic direction for Council's biodiversity work over the next 10 years. They reflect the different ways Council can contribute to biodiversity outcomes: through the direct management of Council-managed land, by embedding biodiversity into its operations and decision-making, and by working in partnership with others to support biodiversity stewardship across the municipality. The success of the strategy will be measured against the outcomes in 2036.

Goals		What council will focus on
	**Protect and enhance biodiversity on Council-managed land**	We will target investment in priority reserves, roadsides and waterways to improve native vegetation extent, condition and connectivity, protect habitat for threatened species and support on-ground stewardship in partnership with Traditional Owners and the wider community.
	**Embed biodiversity into Council operations and decision-making**	We will strengthen the way biodiversity is considered across Council's planning, projects, operations and statutory functions by building staff capability, improving access to information and embedding biodiversity into systems and decision-making processes.
	**Support biodiversity stewardship**	We will improve access to biodiversity information, support private land conservation and strengthen partnerships and coordination with Traditional Owners, community groups, landholders and other agencies to deliver biodiversity outcomes across the municipality.

4.4 Goal 1: Protect and enhance biodiversity on Council-managed land



Why this matters

Mount Alexander Shire supports a diverse range of ecosystems, including Box-Ironbark forests, grassy woodlands, native grasslands, waterways and remnant vegetation. However, the landscape has been extensively modified since European colonisation and many native vegetation communities now persist as fragmented remnants. Grassy Woodland, Plains Woodland and Plains Grassy Woodland have experienced the greatest declines and now often occur as scattered patches on roadsides, waterways and public reserves.

Council manages bushland reserves, old landfill sites, roadsides and waterways that support important biodiversity values across the municipality. These areas provide habitat for native plants and animals, support threatened species and play an increasingly important role in maintaining connectivity across the landscape.

These biodiversity values continue to face pressures from habitat fragmentation, weeds, pest animals, altered hydrology and climate change. Hotter conditions, longer dry periods, more intense rainfall events and increased risk of wildfire are likely to place further pressure on already fragmented ecosystems and reduce their resilience to future change.

Our approach

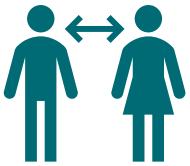
This goal focuses on improving biodiversity outcomes on Council-managed land by directing investment to priority locations where Council can achieve the greatest long-term ecological benefit. Council will deliver on-ground works to improve native vegetation condition and connectivity, protect habitat for threatened species and support ecosystems to be resilient to future change. This work will be undertaken in partnership with Traditional Owners, community and other land managers.

If we are successful, by 2036 we expect to see improvements in locations where Council has invested time and resources in conservation, including:

- **Increased extent and condition of native vegetation**
- **Targeted habitat for threatened species is protected and improved**

Desired outcome by 2036	Action areas
Increased extent and condition of native vegetation in priority investment locations on Council-managed land	1.1. Council teams deliver targeted on-ground restoration and threat reduction works in priority investment locations, including: – Revegetation informed by Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) – Weed management – Actions guided by site-specific conservation management plans for relevant reserves and roadsides and / or the needs of the specific site 1.2. Where appropriate, Council teams deliver on-ground works that improve water retention in the landscape and increase aquatic and riparian ecosystem function 1.3. Council teams undertake strategic planning for large old tree and habitat tree succession on Council managed land 1.4. Support Traditional Owners to practice cultural land management, including djandak wi (cultural fire), reintroduction of culturally important species and threatened species, and other biodiversity focussed actions as per Dhelkunja Dja, Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Country Plan, Galk-Galk Dhelkunya Strategy 2022-2034 and Taungurung Buk Dadbagi, Taungurung Country Plan 1.5. Support community volunteering on Council managed land (e.g. environmental volunteering days, joint projects) 1.6. Where practical, align on-ground works with existing community and private stewardship activities and partner investment to build on established volunteer effort.
Habitat for threatened species is protected and improved on Council managed land in priority investment locations	1.7. Deliver targeted habitat improvement works for priority threatened species, informed by conservation management plans for relevant reserves and roadsides, species recovery plans and / or the needs of the specific site

4.5 Goal 2: Embed biodiversity across Council operations and decision making



Why this matters

Council delivers a broad range of services that shape the natural environment, from strategic and statutory planning through to infrastructure delivery, road and roadside maintenance, open space management, recreation and emergency management. The decisions made through these functions can have significant implications for biodiversity.

Council must balance environmental outcomes alongside many other responsibilities and community expectations, including public safety, service delivery, infrastructure needs, recreation, wildfire management and financial sustainability. As biodiversity loss and climate change continue to place increasing pressure on natural systems, there is an increasing need to ensure biodiversity is considered consistently across Council's operations and statutory functions.

Our approach

This goal focuses on embedding biodiversity into Council's everyday business by improving staff capability, access to information and the systems and processes that guide planning, project delivery and maintenance activities.

If we are successful, by 2036 we expect to see:

- **Staff across the natural environment, parks and open space, planning, engineering and works/operations teams actively integrate biodiversity protection and enhancement into their day-to-day work**
- **Biodiversity is consistently embedded in the design, approval and delivery of Council projects, capital works and maintenance activities**
- **Planning tools are used to strengthen protection of native vegetation and biodiversity values across the shire**
- **Loss of native vegetation from avoidable or unauthorized clearing is prevented through consistent education, monitoring and compliance**

Desired outcome by 2036	Action areas
Staff across the natural environment, parks and open space, planning, engineering and works/operations teams actively integrate biodiversity protection and enhancement into their day-to-day work	2.1. Provide training and guidance for staff and civil/earthmoving contractors on local biodiversity values within the Mount Alexander Shire and how to protect and enhance them through project design, works and maintenance operations 2.2. Establish an internal working group for biodiversity to support the delivery of this Strategy
Biodiversity is consistently embedded in the design, approval and delivery of Council projects, capital works and maintenance activities	2.3. Include biodiversity screening in project scoping and apply a proportionate level of biodiversity assessment and controls to projects with the potential to affect biodiversity values 2.4. Improve collection, management and sharing of ecological data to support evidence-based decision-making
Planning tools are used to strengthen protection of native vegetation and biodiversity values across the shire	2.5. Work collaboratively across Council's natural environment and planning teams to identify and, where supported by evidence, progress the use of planning scheme tools, including appropriate planning zones and vegetation and environmental overlays, to strengthen the protection of native vegetation and biodiversity values on public and private land
Loss of native vegetation from avoidable or unauthorized clearing is prevented through consistent education, monitoring and compliance	2.6. Review Council's policies (e.g. contractor management), local laws, community education and enforcement processes to ensure they support effective protection of native vegetation and appropriately respond to unauthorised vegetation clearing 2.7. Monitor and enforce civil development/earthmoving contractor compliance with planning conditions and contract specifications for biodiversity protection

4.6 Goal 3: Support biodiversity stewardship

Why this matters



Biodiversity in Mount Alexander Shire is managed across a complex landscape of public and private land. Council, Traditional Owners, Landcare groups, community organisations, government agencies, water authorities and private landholders all play an important role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity. No single organisation has responsibility for managing biodiversity across the municipality and many of the opportunities and challenges extend beyond Council-managed land.

Consultation highlighted strong community interest in biodiversity stewardship and the importance of partnerships, information sharing and coordinated investment across land tenures. It also highlighted the need for improved access to biodiversity information and stronger alignment of priorities, projects and funding opportunities. Areas where there is existing community stewardship, volunteer capacity, partner investment or active on-ground works present opportunities to leverage resources, build local ownership and improve the likelihood of long-term success.

Our approach

This goal seeks to support and enable biodiversity stewardship across the municipality by improving access to biodiversity information, supporting private land conservation and strengthening coordination between Council, Traditional Owners, community groups, agencies and landholders.

Council will continue to play an important role as a partner, facilitator and advocate for biodiversity outcomes beyond Council-managed land by sharing knowledge, supporting community action and aligning investment with others.

By strengthening partnerships and supporting community stewardship, Council can help achieve biodiversity outcomes that extend beyond its own land and contribute to a healthier, more connected and resilient landscape.

If we are successful, by 2036 we expect to see:

- **Improved access to biodiversity information and stewardship opportunities**
- **Private land conservation is supported through Council advocacy, partnerships and incentives**
- **Biodiversity investment is better coordinated across land tenures to maximise landscape-scale outcomes**

Desired outcome by 2036	Action area
Improved access to biodiversity information and stewardship opportunities	3.1 Build and publicly share biodiversity knowledge including: – Biodiversity values and threats – Reporting on the delivery of this Strategy – Gardens for wildlife – Establish demonstration sites on Council managed land that showcase biodiversity values and best practice land management to support community learning and stewardship – Explore opportunities for biodiversity and cultural interpretative signage in bushland reserves 3.2 Promote the use of citizen science and community monitoring programs to contribute to local knowledge and inform future decision-making
Private land conservation is supported through Council advocacy, partnerships and incentives	3.3 Advocate, where necessary, to maintain landholder incentives programs for biodiversity protection and enhancement 3.4 Continue as a partner in landholder capacity building programs such as *Healthy Landscapes Program* 3.5 Provide landholder information packages to new landholders outlining best practice biodiversity management on urban, peri-urban and rural lands
Biodiversity investment is better coordinated across land tenures to maximise landscape-scale outcomes	3.6 Coordinate Council on-ground works with Landcare groups, other agencies and Traditional Owners (i.e. prioritise areas where everyone is working) to align investment 3.7 Continue to provide access to community funding for environmental projects 3.8 Participate in agency or community led pest animal management programs (this requires a cross-tenure approach)

5 Measuring and sharing progress

5.1 Monitoring

This Strategy is supported by an annual implementation plan, which identifies the actions to be delivered each year based on available resources, emerging priorities and funding opportunities. While implementation priorities may change over the life of the Strategy, Council will consistently collect information to demonstrate progress towards the desired outcomes. Monitoring information will also be used to support adaptive management and inform future investment decisions.

The Strategy seeks to achieve three types of outcomes:

- Ecological outcomes, such as improvements in vegetation condition, habitat and biodiversity values in locations where Council has invested
- Organisational outcomes, such as changes to Council's systems, processes and decision-making
- Partnership and stewardship outcomes, such as improved collaboration, information sharing and community participation.

Given the complexity of ecological systems and the many individuals and organisations that influence biodiversity outcomes, monitoring will primarily focus on changes in areas where Council has invested and on the extent to which Council has changed its practices and partnerships. This should also include an assessment of how the partnership is functioning by Traditional Owners. To support effective monitoring and evaluation, baseline information will be established for the outcomes early in the implementation of this Strategy. This information will provide a starting point against which progress can be measured over time and help demonstrate the contribution of Council's actions towards achieving the desired outcomes.

5.2 Reporting

Annual reporting

Council will prepare an annual implementation plan and yearly actions will be delivered subject to available resources and annual budget processes. At the end of each year, Council will report on:

- Actions delivered
- Progress against the outcomes
- Key achievements and partnerships
- Emerging issues, risks and opportunities
- Priorities for the following year.

Mid-term review

In 2032, Council will undertake a mid-term review to assess progress towards the Strategy's desired 10-year outcomes, consider emerging priorities and determine whether any adjustments to implementation are required.

10 year outcome evaluation

In 2037, Council will undertake an evaluation of the Strategy to assess the extent to which the desired outcomes have been achieved. The evaluation will draw on the monitoring information collected throughout implementation and identify lessons to inform the development of the next Biodiversity Strategy.

The 10 year Strategy evaluation will focus on the following evaluation questions:

- To what extent has biodiversity improved on Council managed land?
- To what extent did Council change the way it works to embed biodiversity into operations and decision-making?
- To what extent did Council work in partnership to support biodiversity protection and enhancement across the Shire?

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