



Improving environmental infrastructure for a growing Victoria

A broad-ranging parliamentary inquiry has made more than 50 recommendations to improve the provision of environmental infrastructure for growing populations across Victoria.

The Legislative Assembly Environment and Planning Committee has been investigating community access to parks and open space, bushland, waterways, sporting fields, forests, nature reserves and wildlife corridors for the past 18 months.

“For many Victorians, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a new appreciation of the outdoors and the benefits of connecting with nature,” Committee Chair Sarah Connolly said.

“This is a comprehensive report, which examines many factors relevant to the current and future provision of environmental infrastructure in Melbourne and in our growing regional centres and peri-urban areas.”

While many of the Committee’s 57 recommendations are aimed at increasing the provision of new open space, others call for innovation in the way that open space is provided.

The report urges the State Government to set a target to provide Melbourne residents with access to a network of open spaces located closer to their homes.

It also suggests a simplified process for planning scheme amendments aimed at the provision of public open space.

“As the evidence provided to this inquiry has highlighted, there is much that the Victorian Government can do, in partnership with local government and communities,” Ms Connolly said.

The report also recommends a consistent reporting framework for tree canopy targets and stronger tree canopy controls across Melbourne, as well as the adoption of a tree canopy target for Melbourne’s growth areas.

“We want to preserve and expand our networks of parks and open space, and the ecological services they provide, for future generations,” Ms Connolly said.

The Committee’s recommendations consider the health, economic and social benefits of environmental infrastructure, but also address challenges in different parts of metropolitan Melbourne (central and inner Melbourne; middle ring suburbs; and the outer suburbs), as well as growing regional centres and peri-urban areas.

“Despite a recent pause due to the pandemic, record population growth is expected to resume in Melbourne and other parts of the state in coming years,” Ms Connolly said.

“It’s vital we have the most contemporary framework in place to ensure we can meet the environmental infrastructure needs of our growing populations.”

The inquiry received 264 public submissions and held 10 days of public hearings, speaking with scores of relevant stakeholders.

The Committee consulted planners and developers, environmental and conservation groups, peak recreation and leisure bodies and academics.

Listening to the concerns of relevant government agencies and metropolitan, outer suburban and regional councils in significant growth corridors was also key to the inquiry's terms of reference.

"On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank the many stakeholders who made submissions and attended public hearings for the inquiry," Ms Connolly said.

"The Committee is very grateful for the contributions made by such a wide range of individuals with such extensive knowledge and expertise on these important issues."

To read all of the recommendations and 42 findings contained in the report go to the Committee's [website](#).

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