Surf Coast Energy Group (SCEG)
SPRING CREEK COMMUNITY WOODLAND

EXPLANATORY NOTE FOR DAL STANDING COMMITTEE – 26/04/21

BACKGROUND

1. The Spring Creek valley provides opportunities to build local resilience to climate change and protect globally significant biodiversity values from threatening processes that would otherwise cause irreversible and significant effects. The site also has important social and cultural values, which could be enhanced further through community stewardship.

2. SCEG notes that it is common practice throughout Australia and abroad to secure funding to conserve and enhance threatened ecosystems and important habitat through community-based stewardship models, and we note the following examples as having relevance to Spring Creek; Mt Rothwell, Tiverton Sanctuary, Glenmore (Brisbane Ranges) and Great Cumbung.

3. In Surf Coast DAL Planning Panel hearing (22/04/21) SCEG was invited to submit further information on its plan to create a 'Community Woodland' within the 240 hectare UGZ currently being considered under the DAL process. The Woodland Trust proposal was first outlined in SCEG submission 29/01/21.

4. Accordingly, this explanatory note has been prepared for the Standing Advisory Committee and outline SCEG's concept and the broader opportunity to protect and enhance the significant ecological and social values in the Spring Creek valley.

5. Due to the uncertainty around the future use and zoning options for this land, the details contained within this explanatory note, and attached plan should be considered preliminary until such time as the SPP and zoning provisions are finalised and a complete assessment of options can be completed.

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT POINTS

6. SCEG has scoped the legal, financial and governance requirements for the establishment of a 'Community Woodland Trust' entity, which would be able to acquire and/or manage parcels of land currently zoned for urban growth (UGZ), to advance its broader objectives in relation to Spring Creek, as outlined in our Spring Creek Sustainable Landscapes plan[1]. This plan is contingent on a favourable outcome from the DAL process whereby adequate protections for Bellarine yellow gum grassy woodland ecosystem are enshrined in the final SPP, and impacts from residential development are avoided[2]. Such an outcome would then allow SCEG

[1] See attached Spring Creek Sustainable Landscape Plan document
[2] In SCEG's view, Option 2 contained in the draft SPP for Surf Coast DAL is most consistent with protection of BYG grassy woodland ecosystem

and the 'Trust' to acquire parcels of land in this zone no longer capable of residential development [3].

7. It is SCEG's belief that the market value of land under a Rural Conservation of Farming Zone and protected by a permanent settlement boundary would drop considerably, to the point where purchase by a Community trust (or similar party) becomes feasible. As an example, a 40 hectare parcel of land west of the Option 1 development area sold two years ago for approximately $4million ($100,000/hectare)

8. In the event that Option 2 is enshrined in the final SPP, SCEG would seek assistance from government to enter into negotiations with landholders, with the assistance of our technical partners

9. Under this scenario SCEG (working with community and philanthropic partners[4]) would establish a legal entity in order to purchase a property with high conservation values; preferably with large remnants of Bellarine yellow gum grassy woodland ecosystem in good condition. SCEG would seek assistance from government to enter into negotiations with landholders

10. If such a purchase were possible, SCEG and the 'Trust' would develop a community management model based on a management plan and a local stewardship model with local governance and business plan, incorporating revenue streams and known management costs

11. This approach could be supported by government, philanthropic or impact investor acquisitions of adjacent parcels for conservation, coupled with strengthened commitment of land owners to protect environmental assets on their land.

12. In order to achieve the 'Community Woodland' concept, the land west of Duffields Road may require rezoning; initial legal advice indicates that 'Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ)' or a Special Use Zone Overlay (SUZ), such as that already in place for the Christian College land may be appropriate to accommodate SCEG's proposed approach. Further, our legal advice suggests it should be strengthened by a Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO8).

13. Figure 1 shows boundaries of land parcels in the investigation site, alongside a map showing 'habitat importance' for Bellarine yellow gum. From this information, and from expert witness statements obtained by SCEG and site visits, we believe the highest value properties to be those in the south-east corner of the investigation site.

14. Within this area, specific properties with characteristics suitable to SCEG's aims include properties owned by Christian College and the adjacent Mack property due to the dense stands of mature BYG's, currently fragmented from the main population (where a 40% land protection overlay was recommended in the earlier PSP)

15. SCEG would also like to see consideration given to a Public Acquisition Overlay across the 1km study area of the valley

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[3] This strategy is further detailed in the attached landscape plan under Objective 1, Action 1.

[4] Outlined in the attached Spring Creek Valley Sustainable Landscapes Plan, our partners include Trust for Nature, GreenFleet, Carbon Landscape and Odonata.

16. Attached with this Explanatory Note, in good faith, is SCEG's internal project plan for the Spring Creek Valley Sustainable landscapes initiative. This plan provides important context on how Bellarine yellow gum woodland conservation can be achieved long-term through the entire project site, and highlights relevant activities that have already commenced further west in the valley towards Bellbrae.

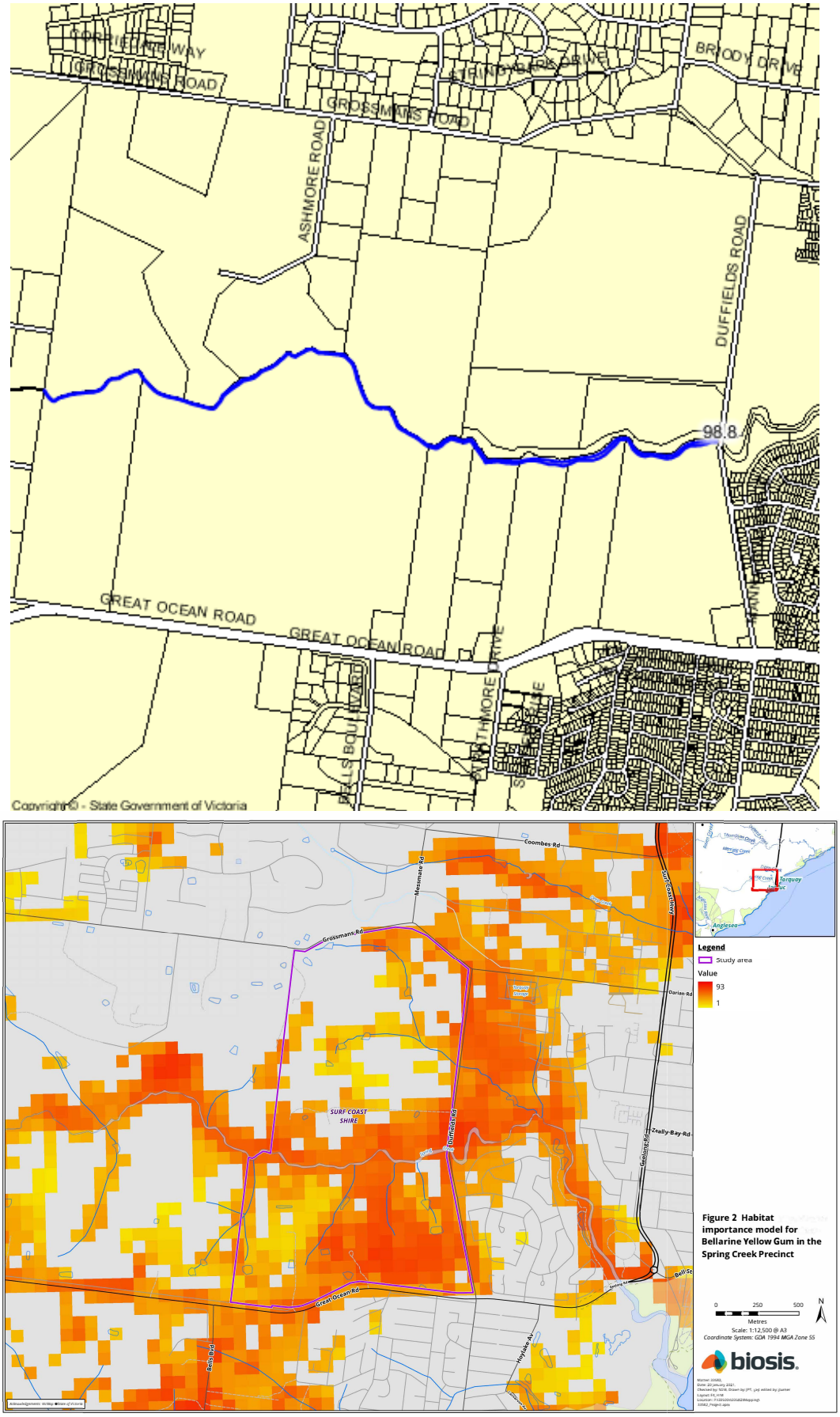

Figure 1. Property boundaries (top) and habitat importance (Source; S. Mueck evidence) (bottom)