

**Submission
No 160**

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTIONS WITHIN THE VICTORIAN
PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

Organisation: Sustainable Population Australia Vic Tas Committee

Date Received: 31 January 2022



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January 31ST 2022

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE PROTECTIONS WITHIN THE
VICTORIAN PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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Thank you for the opportunity to make submissions on these critical matters.

SPA Vic/Tas branch is impressed with the breadth of issues the Inquiry has seen fit to include in its Terms of Reference, and applauds the Committee's identification of so many issues which are worthy of a root and branch review of the Victorian Planning Framework. We note that so many of the issues named in the ToR are inextricably linked, and as such it is difficult to discuss the issues in their separate headings as set out in the ToR. For this reason our commentary will present as a more holistic view of the matters of most concern to us, and about which we feel we have the most experience and expertise to offer.

Introduction

The assumption behind a Planning and Environment Act is that there will be change that needs to be planned for. The interaction of planning and environment is encapsulated in the pairing of these essentials in the name - Planning and Environment.

There is an inherent assumption that change on a certain scale must be controlled in the public interest especially the long term public interest. This change invariably -

1. places extra demands on or replaces the natural environment
2. replaces a modified or built environment, often with less aesthetically pleasing structures, and replacing it with a more intense usage, imposing even greater demand on the natural environment – vegetation and habitat removal, demand for upgraded services etc.

The most fundamental premise of any planning exercise is for the planner to know and understand the parameters in which the project will be set.

In producing plans for a client's home an architect must know the site dimension, topography, orientation to sunlight, views, waterways, location of utilities, proposed number of occupants, client's budget and preferences, etc. etc. If these parameters are unknown or ignored, the project is likely to be a failure – a home not fit for purpose and an unhappy client.

Planning for the future needs of a region, city, state or nation is surely no different. Unless planners can know where the client wants to end up, the available resources and how much the client has to spend, their task is near impossible. This is evident in the increasingly obvious unending "catch up" exercises of widening roads and freeways, reconfiguring townships, realising the need for more schools (and the folly of having previously closed some and selling the sites for housing estates), and ongoing expansions into the Urban Growth Boundary to accommodate unfettered population growth. Everyone appears to have been caught off guard, despite the impacts of rapid population growth being obvious for decades, and ABS data readily available. It seems planners have been asleep at the wheel for the last twenty or so years.

And yet, the rhetoric around planning, including the lofty language in Planning Schemes and legislation leads citizens to believe that planning is an orderly exercise in achieving a more sustainable and comfortable future. Instead, planners are trapped in a hamster wheel, only

able to be reactive to the unending growth paradigm imposed on them (and us) resulting from Federal government's laissez-faire attitude to population growth – the majority of which is driven by 'encouraged' immigration – and apparently without an accompanying mechanism to proactively plan and prepare for the up to 400,000 extra people annually that have in recent years been added to Australia - without consultation. Planners are doomed to be borrowing from the future – on behalf of all of us - without even knowing if or when we/they can pay it back (which of course they/we cannot). How can we ever pay back lost open space when a housing estate – often referred to as the final crop – has been built over our precious natural spaces, irreplaceable habitat for other species or a priceless heritage asset has been toppled?

Increasingly it seems, protection of the natural environment and built heritage is sacrificed in order to follow an unfortunate and now established ideology that the P&E Act must serve the economy, underpinned by ongoing population growth, above all else.

This economic focus has morphed into an obsession with growth - meaning that changes from natural to built environment and modifications to or destruction of an older built environment will necessarily happen, is assumed to be unavoidable and must be accepted as human population and associated activities increase. The present 'Business as Usual' model is firmly entrenched in the decision makers' mindset, and at our peril they seem incapable of imagining and planning for a future built around sustainable and more equitable use of resources, protection of natural assets and protection of or repurposing of built assets.

Growth has been assumed from the beginning when the founding planners were envisaging a city that did not yet exist. To plan the city of Melbourne they had to provide for a population, traffic and events yet to come. They were visionary in leaving room and this gave Melbourne an exemplary liveability for well over a century. That ability to imagine a different world was possible a century ago, but has been replaced with the acceptance of the lived experience of rushing towards an ill defined future place.

Planners are not at fault per se, however we observe that all levels of government, but especially Federal and state, are now firmly in the thrall of developers, lobbyists, and other

entities of influence. Government heeds the wishes of these influencers, apparently in the belief that what is being demanded of them will be good for the economy, and by extension – everyone. This is of course the failed “trickle down” economic model (Thatcherism/Reaganomics) which we now know does not serve the majority at all well. These “influencers” are afforded armchair rides through open doors into Ministers’ and Premiers’ offices at the click of a finger, and these are the meetings that drive what planners are able to do.

Meanwhile, those of us hoping for an appointment with those same Ministers to discuss saving a heritage place, stopping a risk laden project, loss of local habitat and amenity, logging in our catchments etc. are left outside, wringing our hands. In contrast we are most often only offered a 30 minute hearing with the Minister’s “Adviser” in 3 months time. By then, the environmentally damaging project has occurred, the threatened species has moved closer to extinction, another heritage asset has been lost and concerned citizenry is further exhausted. It’s not difficult to speculate that this was the desired outcome all along.

Without planners having an agreed destination (end point) we are destined to be living through infinite growth imposed on a landscape of finite resources. Planners too are facing a grim future. No longer charged with the noble task of being responsible for a better future for our citizenry, Planners can only react after the fact to the infinite growth paradigm which in itself operates unpredictably,

Factors such as large fluctuations in annual migration numbers, political influence, business and other lobbying interests etc. are being dictated by disparate factors e.g. political/cultural/business influencers, and with large variations in absolute population growth, and then where people choose to live or, due to limited options, find themselves living. We have all unwittingly signed up to this flawed model - and without being consulted. We are creating a dystopian vision – we are no longer ‘Planning’ per se.

In particular metropolitan/greater Melbourne is already experiencing this degradation of amenity, but the push for people to move to rural areas is now also underway, so that

residents in rural Victoria are now experiencing an often unwelcome growing population and loss of amenity well underway as Melbourne's exploding population relocates.

A history of Melbourne's orderly planning



A thoughtful plan for Melbourne prepared by surveyor Robert Hoddle in the 1830s¹

Melbourne in 1838, view of Hoddle Grid with Birrarung in the foreground
(State Library of Victoria)

As used in 'Draft City River Strategy Future Aspirations for
Melbourne's Inner City River'.
City of Melbourne April 2019

In 1954, the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works released its comprehensive plan to guide Melbourne's growth. It also released an accompanying movie², which provides insights into the challenges they faced. From Melbourne's 1954 population of 1.5 million, the MMBW estimated Melbourne's population would be 2 million within the 25 years to 1979. Thus an increase of 20,000 per year for 25 years was the agreed population growth to 1979 that could be efficiently and comfortably accommodated, whilst also protecting our amenity, liveability and preservation of surrounding rural areas. (In fact by 1979 Melbourne's population was 2.8 million, so planners were perhaps already losing control of that visionary egalitarian city plan.

MMBW's commentary in 1954 talks of the then

- Indiscriminate subdivision of outer suburbs

¹ <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/bydesign/robert-hoddles-grid-and-the-birth-of-melbourne/5703114>

² *Planning for Melbourne's future* MMBW 1954 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEIZpJ2RiBE>

- rapid and haphazard growth
- over crowded hospitals operating at under maximum efficiency
- new suburbs growing further and further out
- unplanned suburban sprawl and hardship for many people
- increasing distance between home and work creating great problems
- Long tedious journeys to work

This 1954 narrative is precisely where we have arrived at again today! Sadly, it begs the question

“what have we been doing for the last 67 years, why are we now enduring all the same discomforts identified in 1954, and where are today’s visionary thinkers when we need them?”

MMBW concluded in 1954 that “we have neglected our responsibilities to properly plan for the future”, and posed the question “Will we honour our obligations to our fair city and its future or will we ignore the warnings?”

Commendable initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s were achieved by Victorian MP Dick Hamer as Minister for local government and then as Premier in introducing legislation to create and protect our Green Wedges, create networks of regional and urban parks for conservation and recreation, preserve much of Melbourne’s Victorian era heritage, improve schools and other public buildings. It was a golden era of planning and conservation.

In recent years Melbourne has been adding around 100,000 people per annum. The horse has bolted and planners are no longer in control.

Factors encouraging housing as an investment vehicle

The unfortunate contribution to the distortion of the residential property market began in earnest following the 1996 Federal election. John Howard’s Coalition government articulated its vision for governments to get out of the way of people’s management of their economic future, and many government oversights were watered down or dispensed with. Some memorable speeches ensued around the beauty of small government and individual

freedoms, perhaps especially Howard's 'Mum and Dad investors'³ rhetoric, encouraging people to speculate on the residential property market and stock exchange so that they could become rich for their retirement.

To so many people's misfortune that vision has created a generation where many older people have lost their life savings, been mistreated by banks and financial institutions (even after death) and whistleblowers pilloried and legally pursued. We say that shameful era was enabled and continues to operate because successive governments have largely decided they need have no role in managing markets – even now that it is clear that so many of its citizenry are suffering either from having lost their life savings and perhaps even their own home, and many others are suffering crippling living costs to purchase and retain ownership of a home.

Presumably a concerted lobbying effort from all those entities making their substantial livings from the property market, (those same Real estate agents, bankers, financial advisers, lawyers etc. mentioned elsewhere), ensured that governments engaged in Quantitative Easing from time to time, directing Central banks to buy huge amounts of financial assets, putting more money into the economy but also propping up sectors on the verge of collapse.

Presumably so many of these same entities saved from collapse with taxpayer funds would once have been arguing hard for governments to get out of the way, cut red tape, cut social housing expenditure, etc. And so, those vested interest entities survived where so many 'Mum and Dad' investors did not. Meanwhile, with Quantitative Easing averting a dramatic correction in the housing market, the next generation of investors seem to have proportionally even more funds to invest in property than Mr. Howard's Mums and Dads had.

This next cohort of investors is willing/able to pay high prices for homes, and the shameful cycle of homelessness and people living in inadequate accommodation spirals upwards. As well as those who just want a massive showy home, usually minus any natural spaces for other species, this new breed of investors includes many developers who can afford to buy up properties in established suburbs ripe for demolition of perfectly good homes on large blocks that are inadequately protected for Heritage values and inadequately protected by Local

³ Such as this interview on 2UE 23rd February 1998. <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-10734>

neighbourhood character Planning Scheme objectives. The end result is multiple dwellings where once a single home and garden provided ambience and amenity to the neighbourhood.

Recommendation 1. Better define 'Neighbourhood Character' for established residential areas. In new housing areas devise an agreed 'neighbourhood character' to aim for, taking into account a predetermined "carrying capacity" for the area, informed by best available knowledge on optimal tree cover, ground cover, cars per property, water consumption per household etc. (the list could be extensive and should be prescriptive) and then enforce these standards. Develop an agreed state wide definition of heritage values for each Region/LGA, and enforce it.

The cost of rental accommodation and provision of social housing

The present frenzied investment in a property portfolio (effectively no different to stock market speculation), and investor expectation of ongoing growing return on investment; along with stagnant wage growth; employer driven "skilled migration" programs and the related less stable employment arrangements, means tenants are finding it increasingly difficult to find acceptable, affordable homes to rent as the next generation of property speculators moves into the market.

Some of these prospective tenants are either falling off the bottom of the rental market to live in substandard/temporary accommodation away from where they want to or need to live in order to keep their jobs, or become homeless. That our fellow citizens have found themselves in such dire straits for which there is no way out for them is a blight on our supposedly egalitarian and "fair go for all" society.

A toxic culture of 'haves and have nots' has been created, and the idea of what housing should be for all our fellow citizens is now far removed from the egalitarian, planned exercise back when government's accepted responsibility for the provision and maintenance of a social/public housing program.

Addressing this appalling situation should be one of the most pressing tasks for planners, rather than contenting themselves with mopping up the excesses of a failed free market housing model, which to our great puzzlement still attracts almost universal uncritical support

from our governments. We can only assume it's because governments at all levels have been so comprehensively duched by influential developers and corporate entities that they can see no way out for themselves without accepting that they will have to campaign to be re-elected without any of the largesse currently being bestowed on them from these "influencers". Meanwhile the vast majority of governments' constituents, and the aspirations they may have for a better place, are disenfranchised by these "understandings" between the handful of cashed up influencers and a supine government.

By way of example we recall how the Mining industry had no trouble finding \$20+ million dollars to spend on an advertising campaign against the Rudd government's proposed Resource Super Profits Tax culminating in its downfall in June 2010. This is the type of behaviour from influencers which we say is allowing our planning scheme to be debased and your constituents disenfranchised.

The most pressing task for politicians should be to accept that their primary duty is to the vast majority of Victorians, who are not developers, donors, or influential colourful racing and business identities. These influencers are in the vast minority of our community and deserve no more attention than the concerned citizens. Accept that laissez faire economics, especially the privatisation of publicly funded housing and other social services, cannot provide adequate protections for those of us on lower wages, and who cannot survive the vicissitudes of an investor driven housing market.

Recommendation 2 It is patently clear that government intervention in the housing, banking and finance markets. We applaud the calls for a government owned 'people's' bank, noting that when the Commonwealth Bank was government owned it acted as a brake on the commercial banks, setting competitive or lower interest rates and greater security with government guarantees. Again, citizens were hoodwinked into the dominant ideology that governments should get out of the way, and have no place in the market. In a much needed return to a saner economy, we should impose limits on numbers of properties owned by one entity and rent prices should be controlled. A return to Keynesian economics (mixed economy) is well overdue.

Recommendation 3 Mandating a proportion of affordable housing in new housing developments should also be introduced. Of course we anticipate this would be strenuously

resisted by the current predominant style of property developers, to which we say it is time for government to accept that they have to find a better standard of developer to work with. It has been achieved in other countries, notable Scandinavian countries, so surely it is possible here.

In short, we have allowed a self interested cohort to infiltrate and degrade our once relatively trustworthy and somewhat egalitarian planning system. We are not just making this up – the many failures and abuses of the planning system; politicians, local councillors and planners have been laid bare in various public hearings for all to see if only we care to look. In our defence, the system has become so tawdry that it is understandable that many just want to look away, as to address this mess is a task too daunting for mere concerned citizens without the might to see it through to a better place.

Thus our built heritage and sense of place and space (neighbourhood values surely) are disappearing from the areas we chose to live in, along with any remaining smaller, cheaper housing in these areas, and many of us decide to move on in vain attempts to find affordable housing in regional areas or because we can no longer put up with the increasing density, noise traffic etc. And hence we then impose ourselves onto a less costly suburban area or a regional town yet to experience the worst of what suburban areas are enduring.

Protecting heritage in Victoria

Our experience to date in asking for Heritage Victoria's support in various campaigns to protect important heritage sites destined for demolition or "redevelopment" and the supine responses received from HV, suggests that possible federal involvement in heritage protection, separating heritage protection from the planning administration, establishing a heritage tribunal to hear heritage appeals and the appointment of independent local and state heritage advisers would be an improvement. It couldn't be any worse.

Again though, unless we have a fundamental shift in how environment, heritage and broader planning issues are managed it would be subject to the unhelpful interfering influences observed above.

However, the foundations of the Planning system still has echoes of a framework to which much well intentioned effort on the part of planners and consultation with community members produced a comprehensive Planning Scheme, which could, if interpreted as we presume it was intended, guide protections for our precious natural and built environments. As it stands now, for the reasons outlined above, it requires a comprehensive makeover, perhaps via IBAC.

Environmental sustainability and vegetation protection, including:

Third party appeal rights

A notable and shameful example of removal of third party appeal rights, and other questionable amendments to the P&E Act's jurisdiction is the creation and implementation of the Major Transport Facilitation Act 2009, intended to "streamline" planning of projects deemed critical to the state. To invoke the Act, the Minister for Planning (alone) declares a 'project area'. This action enables:

- Compulsory acquisition of land from private land holders
- Compulsory acquisition of Native Title land
- Surrender of local Council land to the project proponent
- Restricted access areas to restrict the public

What's more, the Major Transport Facilitation Act takes the place of (overrides) the following Acts or their iterations:

- Coastal Management Act (Now Marine and Coastal Act)
- Conservation, Forests and Lands Act
- Environment Protection Act
- Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act
- Heritage Act
- Planning and Environment Act
- Road Management Act
- Water Act

- Wildlife Act
- National Parks Act

Prior to its implementation, lawyers for Environmental Justice Australia⁴ expressed numerous concerns about the MTF Act including:

- An Impact Management Plan for a project under the Act has NO public consultation
- The Act takes the place of ALL other approvals with the Minister as the sole decision maker
- Anything that was a mandatory consideration or requirement for other approvals is now discretionary for the Planning Minister.

This stealthy re-arrangement of governance around projects deemed “critical” by one person (Planning Minister) is extremely concerning. It invites corruption of the decision making process, and facilitates “fast tracking ” of so many projects where community concerns might be expected, and where the previous level of transparency and appeal rights might have derailed this pet project.

Recommendation 4 The MTF Act, and any similar Acts since which may have been introduced to fast track contentious projects, should be reviewed and updated to allow greater levels of transparency and protection of third party rights and greater levels of scrutiny in determining whether certain projects are really fit for purpose for the very different future we face.

Recommendation 5 Legislation must be upgraded. The P&E Act already specifies penalties for various actions. It needs to be comprehensively upgraded and Departments tasked with upholding the planning law AND supporting the many citizens who are trying so hard to protect their local environments by reporting environmental and heritage damage and either not being taken seriously or (as we have often experienced) waiting for months to hear back about enforcement action on perpetrators of serious environmental vandalism. In one particular instance it took a member of our organisation over 3 months to even receive a

⁴ All dot points in this section were provided by EJA <https://envirojustice.org.au>

formal reply on which entity was the Responsible Authority that the report should be made to.

Penalties need to be substantially larger, and supported by powerful community education and advertising to change community attitudes to wanton acts of environmental and heritage damage or destruction, with serious acts of damage/demolition defined in criminal parlance. We know it is possible to change community attitudes for the better in this way. Powerful campaigns introducing mandatory seat belts, lowering smoking rates, serious consequences for drink-driving and speeding have all successfully reshaped our futures for the better.

Investigation teams must be better funded and appropriately staffed, capable of swift responses with officers equipped to undertake investigations to criminal standard.

Contrary to everything we know about justice needing to be delivered in a timely manner for both the perpetrator and the victim (being in this case perhaps a natural area that needs swift restoration, a heritage site that requires protection, or indeed the environmentalists trying to protect the places we love amidst abuse, derision and exhaustion), the current system is comprehensively failing all players and our natural areas and beloved heritage sites are disappearing - never to be experienced again.

Use of Ministerial “discretion” From a concerned citizen’s point of view, the use of this unilateral power, whereby a Minister is able to ignore the advice of a Panel Inquiry or intervene in legal proceedings to call in a development is patently open to the type of corruption already described elsewhere. When a project is called in by the Minister, he/she has circumvented the public decision making process, either at its early Local government stage (where the largest proportion of concerned citizens effectively have access to the process), or at VCAT or the Supreme Court (as has happened in our experience). This denies natural justice and devalues to zero the countless hours of submission writing, daily attendance at months of Panel Hearing Inquiries, paying for independent Expert Witnesses, letter writing, petitions, personally funded legal proceedings, and the occasional meeting with decision makers (IF these meetings are granted).

After all that volunteer effort, energy and resources one is left to ask why this can or should be allowed to happen. It happens because there is a blatant imbalance of power and

influence between concerned citizens and the proponents, be it government or private developers. If government, there is limitless taxpayer funded resources to finance the desired smooth passage of a project. Developers too have very deep pockets thanks to the obscene amounts of money made in many of their previous developments where once comfortable, leafy, or heritage areas have been developed and degraded into medium or high density areas – devoid of their former amenity and liveability. Concerned citizens however have no such access to the seemingly bottomless bucket of money to be spent in achieving their desired outcome.

Add to this toxic recipe pork barrelling and developers' unfettered access to MPs and senior bureaucrats, political donations (as already described) and we have a system corrupted and no longer capable of delivering what citizens expect of a planning scheme and the spirit in which it was originally written.

Indeed today⁵, media reports confirm what we already passively accept as an open secret – the property industry leads the list of business sectors donating to both parties, giving \$37.4 million to Labor and \$53.1 million to the Coalition. The reported study by the Centre for Public Integrity, an independent organisation, found that more than a third of the cash flowing to the Liberal and Labor parties is coming from shadowy entities that can hide the true source of the funds, and that the main parties collected \$1.2 billion over the past two decades. The study also concludes that too many other donations are being hidden.

Add to this is the salutary warning of failed and corrupted systems made by a former Port of Melbourne Expert Witness engaged by the PoM during the 2004 and 2007 Channel Deepening Project EES Inquiries, in his subsequent submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the EES process in 2010⁶. The Inquiry was effectively examining whether the Environment Effects Act 1978 was still the appropriate tool to administer the EES process in assessing the possible impacts of proposals with either government or developers as proponents. PoM Expert witness Dr. Edmunds warned:

⁵ Political donations: \$1.2 billion over 22 years, and 'associated entities' dominate
<https://www.theage.com.au/politics/federal/political-donations-1-2-billion-over-22-years-and-associated-entities-dominate-20220130-p59sau.html>

⁶ Dr. Matt Edmunds, Marine Ecologist written and verbal submissions. Written submission at:
http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/enrc/environmental_effects/submissions/Australian_Marine_Ecology.pdf

- Criteria for risk assessments..... are un-standardised . Proponents are free to change the criteria to suit their needs
- Unknowns and Uncertainties are hidden because:
- Risk assessments are heavily assumption based
- Sometimes it is pure guesswork, sometimes to the point of fabrication
- Exacerbated because there is no 'data deficient' or 'unknown' option in risk assessments. It is never left blank even when no facts to support it
- I have been to workshops where participants have been forced to give an answer despite protestations that there is no supporting information
- ***They have been told to "just guess!"***

Dr. Edmunds, a highly credentialed expert in his field, is unlikely to be alone in his unpleasant experiences as a paid expert witness for a very determined proponent. He repeated these warnings in his oral submission to the Inquiry panel of at least six MPs. Many erudite technical and academic submissions were made to this Inquiry into the suitability of the EES process in the 21st Century. Needless to say, little if any substantive changes have since been made to the Environment Effects Act 1978.

Recommendation 6 The Environment Effects Act 1978 and the EES Inquiry process are no longer suitable to prepare us for the very different future we face. Both the Act and the EES process require root and branch review and updating. At the very least, equal funding to both sides of the matters under consideration in an EES/EIS/Panel Hearing must be made available to those of us who have, to date, struggled in vain to match the "purchasing power" and influence of proponents and developers, or find an expert witness who has not already been "engaged" by the proponent so as to be unavailable to advise concerned citizens preparing their cases against a proposal.

The scientific studies completed on behalf of the proponent are presented at the EES, and we and the Inquiry panel are expected to believe the studies. Effectively however, proponents purchase and direct the science and, as has been our observations, exert pressure on their

paid experts to ensure that the expert's recommendations are framed to their liking. In what way is this open, transparent and fair planning? In what way can this ensure protection of our environmental, social and heritage assets?

Possible federal involvement in heritage protection

As with so many issues with joint Federal and state jurisdictions, if this concept were to be successful it would need to be a trustworthy bi-partisan mechanism free from interest group lobbying (developers/donors etc), and MPs' pork barrelling activities so as to ensure their re-election. The tendency for say a Coalition Federal government to block what might be a genuine attempt by a state Labor government to improve ordinary people's access to the rental and residential housing market might be railroaded by an ideological campaign claiming that a socialist ideology is taking over of the housing market and interfering in peoples individual freedoms. Sound familiar?

Separating heritage protection from the planning administration

This would assist the matters specifically pertaining to heritage and clarify whether matters fall into the heritage category. The default should be that heritage is protected and permits and exemptions should be rare. It should be even more rare that Heritage Council over-rule Heritage Victoria in a matter where a permit is denied.

Establishing a heritage tribunal to hear heritage appeals

This is an excellent idea if truly independent and objective

Appointment of independent local and state heritage advisers

This would be very helpful and would assist volunteers with their heavy workload.

Role of Local Councils in heritage protection

Planners working within a local Council framework are working well away from where the decisions are made that ultimately make their jobs so difficult. Better conduits are required between those Authorities making decisions on migration numbers into Australia, and where Planners are tasked with trying to accommodate them. for planners to have any hope of

actually “planning” there need(s) to be agreed targets or upper limits between those Responsible Authorities(Federal government) shaping NOM numbers and the Planners tasked with what numbers can be accommodated and where. This unenviable unachievable task falls largely to the “strategic planners” within local governments. As pointed out elsewhere, how can they possibly plan strategically if they don’t know how many and where people need to be accommodated?

And unless local communities are consulted, and are willing to back government’s plans, social disharmony is to be expected. Until perhaps post WW II, communities developed more organically, with new residents arriving at a slower, steadier pace (as per MMBW’s plan for 20,000 per annum extra people per annum over 25 years). Nowadays in Melbourne, without any consultation or mandate, we are receiving around 100,000 extra persons per annum, and with increasingly less space to accommodate them. Add to this climate change impacts, dwindling open space, available Greenfield and brown field sites, burgeoning numbers, less water resources and ever more costly infrastructure to “secure” our water resources (e.g. DeSal plant) and we are heading towards a cliff.

Illegal demolitions and tree removals

There have been some notable examples of government or councils pursuing perpetrators of illegal demolition however this does not seem to be matched with pursuit of those damaging the natural world.

For the sake of humanity and the other species we share it with, governments and Councils must strengthen their commitment to protecting our natural surroundings. Penalties for damage to the natural environment are not pursued with the vigour to that of other illegal behaviours, and concerned citizens reporting illegal behaviour, in our experience usually feel abandoned by the Responsible Authorities and are left to pursue illegal tree removal by confronting the perpetrators.

As well as the amenity and wildlife habitat afforded by vegetation, a growing body of evidence shows that trees contribute substantially to cooling the environment and reducing the need for artificial air conditioning. A recent Curtin University/CSIRO study⁷ found that one

⁷ <http://ehia.curtin.edu.au/local/docs/CoolCommunities.pdf>

mature tree can transpire up to 150 litres of water per day. In a hot dry location this produces a cooling effect similar to two air conditioners running for 20 hours.

Trees are a very effective means of blocking the sun's radiation and, depending on the species and its maturity, up to 95% of the incoming radiation can be blocked. Trees can reduce a building's temperature by directly blocking radiation through windows and cooling the surrounding air, and can also keep the soil cool thus providing a sink for heat from the building. Evapo-transpiration and shading effects can reduce air temperatures by 1 to 5 °C. In outdoor environments trees provide immediate cooling and protection from the sun's rays, as can be felt as soon as one steps from the sun into the shade of a tree.

Clearly, the benefits of retaining and restoring trees in urban areas must be a key component of planning strategies and policy, so we urge that this significant stand of mature trees, and the irreplaceable habitat and other services they provide, is protected, not removed. Trees are already providing us with irreplaceable protection from runaway affordable or free climate change mitigation, and their future role will be even more important. Protection efforts must be of the highest order.

*Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017-2020*⁸ also confirms that a greener Melbourne means shadier, cooler metropolitan areas, lower flood risk for people and assets and less storm water and nutrients entering waterways, including Port Phillip Bay – all issues relevant to this coastal site.

The Plan also confirms that a greener environment benefits human health, citing research showing that greener cities and towns can reduce mortality, improve general health and wellbeing; increase physical activity and foster social cohesion.

These are matters which do not appear on Councils or governments balance sheet, but they should, and until they do we will not have a decent chance of protecting what we have left to sustain us – even at our current population numbers let alone 10 million by 2050 and 20+ million by 2100.

⁸ https://www.climatechange.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/60729/Victorias-Climate-Change-Adaptation-Plan-2017-2020.pdf

Recommendation 7 It is possible to estimate the “economic” value to society of particular environmental services⁹. This “costing” exercise should be mandatory in every planning exercise at local, state and Federal level. A benefit/cost analysis should assess what environmental assets and services might be lost or degraded in comparison to the project’s risks and costs to properly inform (as never before) the decision on whether the project should proceed.

Ensuring residential zones are delivering the type of housing that communities want

In the last few decades various levels of government in tandem have effectively taken away the housing that people want and which they had been enjoying for the previous few decades. The main ingredient of this housing was a reasonable ratio of land to house. Without going into the aesthetics and architectural qualities that our organisation generally agrees would be preferred, we submit that a good starting point would be to look at the amount of land which is suitable for a young family.

This ratio of house to land will most likely suit most of us. Has anyone ever heard complaints of “under crowding” when it was a back and front garden was commonplace?

Wondering what people actually want is disingenuous. We had it and it was taken from us.

Population policy, state and local

We submit that in effect all levels of government in Australia do not have a functioning, forward looking population policy. What we have is a market based, laissez faire arrangement, subject to the whims of whoever is in power Federally and who is lobbying the hardest. Then we have population “managing” strategies at state and local levels which have no ability to plan effectively for what may come their way. all round it is a recipe for eventual collapse of hard won community standards, environmental degradation and reducing quality of life for all citizens and other species we share our neighbourhoods with.

⁹ Eg: *The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital*, Nature 387, 253-260 Costanza et al 1997, and numerous since.

Role of Population growth

In recent decades very fast population growth has put pressure on the planning system in Victoria necessitating Victorian Governments to come out with various planning blueprints to accommodate this growth. The rate of growth has eroded our democracy as significant changes to people's environment imposed from a government authority are almost always distressing. The sorts of changes include - loss of parkland, change of use of parkland, densification of suburbs, loss of tree canopy (just as our suburbs are getting hotter and exacerbating this), loss of natural areas in the suburbs, pressure on Green Wedges, disruption and expense from replacement of infrastructure, constant building works, pressure for people (especially older people) to relocate when this is against their inclinations and their best interests. This has resulted in people's time being absorbed in valiant attempts simply to keep the existing amenity rather than gaining any improvement.

The reckless level of open ended population growth that now seems to be assumed as normal also assumes infinite capacity. That is to say infinite capacity of a city to absorb population growth. At present this is accommodated by increasing density, increasing height and increasing suburban sprawl. In Melbourne in particular we do all three, and increasingly also impose this ethos in "lifestyle" areas such the Surf Coast, Bellarine and Mornington Peninsulas and many regional towns.

In all these areas permanent populations are beginning to suffer the same fate as Melbournians with increasing density, building heights, loss of open space, amenity and the natural environment that has until now nurtured these residents.

In fact the much touted justification for forced rapid population growth is that we live on a large continent. If it is in fact large and can accommodate a much larger population, why plan to squeeze them all into a few cities, disrupting the lives of those who now live in them?

Planning a liveable future means firstly, an agreed upon vision and then a plan to get there. The word "planning" inherently includes the future. We cannot envisage the future without an intention that the way we live will be **sustainable** in the long term from a human perspective.

Impacts of disorderly population growth

The many hidden costs of unrestrained population growth include:

- Costs disproportionately on local and state governments: roads, drainage, waste management, public facilities, schools, hospitals, etc. etc....
- leaving less funding available to protect local biodiversity
- Australia's growth doubled, lurching between below 1% to over 2 % per annum in the decade to 2015 So it has been estimated that we must spend extra 2% p.a. to avoid infrastructure deficit, and costs far exceed the increased revenue generated by additional people¹⁰
- Expanding capacity merely to maintain level of service already provided per person provides no net gain in utility. **It's not an investment, it's a recurrent cost – drain on budget**

It is axiomatic then that seemingly endless growth must result in ever worsening environmental outcomes as:

- it places endless demands on natural world
- Limits capacity to respond to climate change, peak oil, peak food, etc.
- Disables orderly planning

There is no logical end-point without population stabilization, or at least an agreed population "target"

¹⁰ O'Sullivan JN (2012) The burden of durable asset acquisition in growing populations. *Economic Affairs* 32 (1): 31–37. See also Productivity Commission Annual Report 2010-11



Where is the logical end point?

©Sustainable Population Australia Vic/Tas

An anonymous, repetitive Melbourne suburb. July 2018

Its landscape is almost totally dominated by humans. Note high site coverage throughout and the only discernible open space for the thousands of residents appears to be a football oval. Also note lack of any discernible habitat connectivity for other species. A planning error that continues to be repeated as Melbourne's growing population encroaches ever further into our once natural spaces.

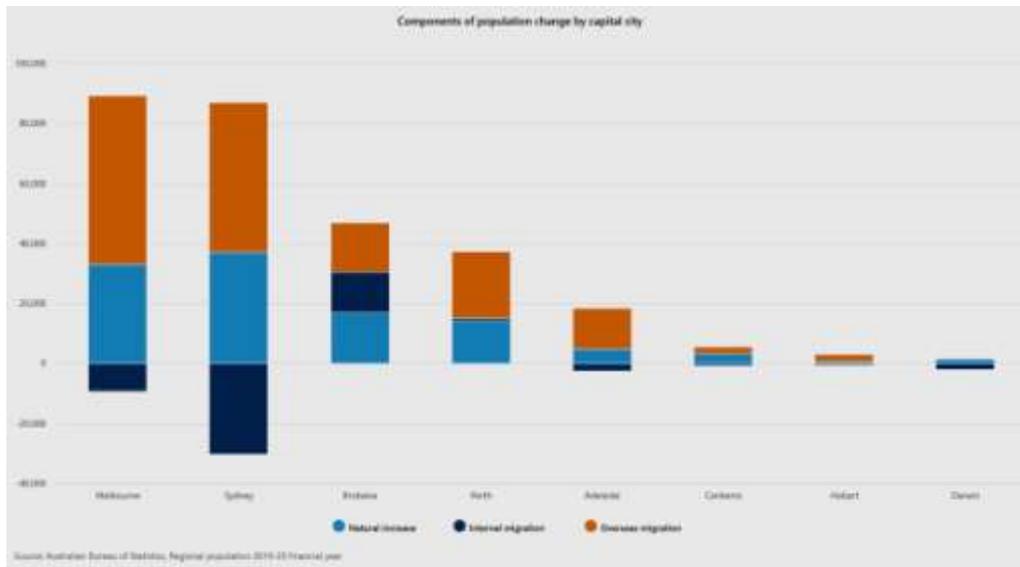
ABS latest data release 2019-2020 FY¹¹, released in March 2021. Key statistics

- People living in the capitals increased by 245,300 (1.4%).
- Capital city growth comprised overseas migration (162,800), natural increase (112,700) and internal migration (-30,200).
- Melbourne had the largest growth (80,100 people), Brisbane had the highest growth rate (1.9%).
- Regional Australia grew by 86,200 (1.1%).

Of course, other than natural increase - which could be estimated in advance from Medicare pregnancy data - we are only provided with migration data collected well after the event. So

¹¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release>

how can we possibly plan effectively to have infrastructure and social services ready for the influx?



Graph from ABS 2019-20 data <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release>

Just one example of growing, costly infrastructure demands and associated environmental impacts as population growth soars, in just one sector of the transport sector, is shipping and truck traffic through the Port of Melbourne.

In Melbourne's portside suburbs, it has been estimated that 1,000 truck trips per hour, mostly emanating from the Port of Melbourne (PoM), move through inner west portside suburbs.¹² For many years it has been known that diesel exhaust in particular is carcinogenic, and childhood asthma rates in inner west Melbourne are the highest in Australia, double the national average¹³.

For many decades locals have been exposed to the growing environmental, health and safety risks of the swiftly growing numbers of pollution belching ships arriving at the PoM, and increasing truck trip numbers through their suburbs.

¹² 'Deliver us from Diesel'. Maribyrnong Truck Action Group

¹³ Yarraville trucks linked to high asthma rate <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/yarraville-trucks-linked-to-high-asthma-rate-20151219-glrp19.html>

In 2014, truck trips through Melbourne were 291,492. However in 2013 a state government Freight & Logistics Plan¹⁴ had estimated that by 2046 truck trips through Melbourne would increase to 648,896.

For well over a decade now portside locals have (mostly unsuccessfully) tried engaging with government to remove this scourge from their local amenity.

Despite this compelling evidence of the overwhelming negative impacts from the growing transport sector as it expands to cater for unprecedented growing population numbers in recent decades, Victoria's projections remain firmly interlinked with the prevailing Business as Usual (BAU) model – despite it becoming ever clearer that it is precisely this economic paradigm. Reliant as it is on ever increasing traditional economic growth and consumption of finite natural resources that has created so much of the environmental, social and economic conundrums we find ourselves in.

Recent growth projections for Victoria:

- 2020: Population 6.6 million
- 2050: Population 10.1 million¹⁵
- 2020: 3 million containers through PoM
2050: 12 to 15 million containers p.a.¹⁶ (Assuming 2 container ports)

Comparing 2020 real data to 2050 projections reveals alarmingly:

2020: 0.45 containers per head of population are moved through the PoM, suburbs and regional areas

¹⁴ Victorian government's Freight & Logistics Plan 2013: Page 12

¹⁵ ABS 'Series C' (conservative range)

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/allprimarymainfeatures/5A9C0859C5F50C30CA25718C0015182F?opendocument>

¹⁶ <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/scrap-truck-curfews-build-east-west-link-to-help-us-grow-says-port-of-melbourne-20170411-gvit2v.html>

2050: With the projected population of 10.1 million people in Victoria, container movements through the portside suburbs, suburbia, and the regions translates to approx. 1.4 containers per person p.a. imposing that additional strain on Melbourne and Victoria.

To support this business model we would need an Over 320% increase in per capita consumption in just 28 years!

The obvious question we must ask ourselves: When is enough enough?

This mind boggling data emphasises just how irrational and unsustainable a reliance on perpetual growth as our current economic model is for the future well being of humanity and the planet. And yet it is all our planners seem capable of envisioning!



*Dear Santa ... please could you send us a massive ship full of Christmas presents all the way from China*¹⁷
The Age Nov 11th 2006

¹⁷ <https://www.theage.com.au/national/dear-santa-please-could-you-send-us-a-massive-ship-full-of-christmas-presents-all-the-way-from-china-20061111-ge3jmq.html>

This vessel, China Shipping Line's 295-metre-long CSCL New York, nicknamed by the media as "SS Chadstone", and carrying 4,200 containers, entered the Port of Melbourne in 2006. Its cargo comprised thousands of cameras, surf boards, outdoor furniture, decorations, clothing, shoes etc. all bound for multiple shopping centres and all made in China

"SS Chadstone" entered the PoM no problems, well before the controversial Channel Deepening Project (CDP) commenced. Since then, following two Planning Inquiries, the CDP was completed in 2009, with the express purpose of increasing deeper draught ships carrying twice SS Chadstone's load to enter the Port.

The CDP was undertaken at great risk to the health of the Bay, but also expressly to facilitate the projected doubling of truck traffic through portside suburbs and thence our suburbs and regional areas. Planners were tasked with imposing a project onto the community that would expose them to multiple negative impacts. Objectors to the project were also pleading with government to examine whether that projected rate of growth was environmentally sustainable, economically achievable or believable, and able to be physically accommodated within our city and suburbs.

Meanwhile, despite these well known health risks, the people of Yarraville, Maribyrnong and Williamston continue to be exposed to carcinogenic air pollution whilst the planning exercises to improve their health and amenity moves at cripplingly slow speed. Surely the planning task would be eased if our economic "fortunes" were not tied to an unsustainable, endless growth model.

Recommendation 7 It is irrational that states continue to compete with one another for port trade, whilst trade & transport are National & International issues. The Victorian government should advocate for a rationalisation of infrastructure so that unnecessary completion and duplication of essential infrastructure does not occur unnecessarily across the Nation – leading to environmentally damaging and costly projects- which may well become stranded assets in the very different future we face.

At the very least we need a National approach to Freight & Logistics planning but importantly that planning must have protection of environmental assets and health and safety at forefront of the planning task. Clearly in this the matter of Transport and Logistics alone, we need alternative solutions and policies to drive a visionary planning task.

It is yet to be publicly demonstrated that the CDP achieved its stated purpose of providing unfettered access to the PoM for 14 metre vessels, at all stages of the tide and all met-ocean conditions, or that the many changes to marine and coastal assets around Port Phillip Bay noted since are not related to the CDP impacts. Nor can we establish how many vessels have made full use of the additional depth at The Heads, and thus whether the purported economic benefits of the project have been realised.

Recommendation 8 That proponents be required to transparently present to the public, a pre- mortem and post mortem full Cost Benefit analysis of the project, including economic, social and environmental assessments, for an agreed number of years post completion, so that decision makers can acquire greater knowledge of possibly unexpected impacts and costs to remediate to better inform their future decision making on our behalf.

Recommendation 9

Scenario Planning. We suggest a new way to plan for the future is for planners to routinely utilise the now well established planning tool of ‘Scenario planning’¹⁸. Scenario Planning is not just a fringe or crack pot idea. It has been well researched and is already widely used in various private and public entities around the world.

Scenario Planning assists teams of planners and other decision makers and community members to “imagine” various options for the future and how a proposed project might fit within that vision. This frees planners from the increasingly oppressive assumption that they have to keep doing things they way they have always been done and helps participants to imagine a different, do-able, future - something we very much need to do to extricate

¹⁸ Just two of such models: ‘*Scenarios for Australia in 2050. A synthesis and proposed survey*, Journal of Futures Studies, March 2015, 19(3): 49-76. 441; and *Moving beyond evidence-free environmental policy* J. Russell-Smith et al. Front Ecol Environ 2015; 13(8): 441–448, doi:10.1890/150019

ourselves from the Business as Usual paradigm, which we submit is the root cause of the multiplicity of problems we now face as a community.

Scenario planning assumptions include

- The future is unlike the past, and is significantly shaped by human choice and action
- The future cannot be foreseen, but exploring possible futures can inform present decisions
- There are many possible futures; scenarios therefore are mapped as possibilities
- Scenario development involves rational analysis and creative thinking

In 2014 several SPA members and supporters attended a week long scenario planning exercise for the Westernport Catchment Region. Facilitated by renowned academic Dr. Robert Costanza, an American/Australian ecological economist and Professor of Public Policy at the Crawford School of Public Policy at The Australian National University, it was attended by key regional decision makers, strategic planners, scientists, business people, local government planners, Councillors, Community representatives and social and environmental NGOs. And although the planning exercise began with a focus on the expansion of the proposed Port of Hastings, it took on a much broader review of alternative futures for the entire Westernport Bay Region. And, unlike the prevailing rhetoric at the time, Port expansion is only one of many alternative strategies that governments could investigate as part of their planning for the Westernport Bay Region.

Four different teams imagined various future scenarios, including some which might be comfortable or uncomfortable – diminishing local ecology or jobs, prosperous or not etc.

This inspiring exercise allowed the participants in the one group tasked with imagining and then planning for a future which was “just right”. The team named their scenario ‘Lagom’ – a Swedish word meaning: *“enough, sufficient, adequate, just right, in moderation, in balance, perfect, simple and suitable.”*

Whereas words like "sufficient" and "average" suggest some degree of abstinence, scarcity, or failure; Lagom carries the connotation of appropriateness, although not necessarily

perfection. We cannot think of a better aim for a revised Planning and Environment Act than to aim for 'Lagom'

The 'Lagom' Scenario team planning a future for the Westernport Catchment region produced the following inspiring vision for the future:

LAGOM

Introduction

Back in 2015 Government rejected the expanded Hastings port proposal on economic, social and environmental grounds and began planning to retro fit the existing port for the very different future we faced

Adoption of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals inspired us to review every aspect of sustainable living in our area. We identified the unique opportunity to change our future course and by 2016, we had begun transition to participatory democracy: more citizen participation in decision making, which has provided us with much greater empowerment than representative democracy which had become so unrepresentative by 2015. We accepted the science of climate change and re-committed to investment in independent science

By 2040 egalitarianism has emerged as a critical driver of future development. The change from consumerism toward sustainability and egalitarianism has brought us many benefits.

Governance

Whereas for many years, Australia focussed on its place in a global market, we have moved towards a regional perspective. Our governance structures reflect this by prioritising trade and development within our geographical region, sharing what we do well with other regions, and developing economic specialties that fill niche gaps in the production of food, technologies, and environmental services.

Our governance has expanded to include all members of our community – women, indigenous, disabled. Decision making, especially on contentious issues is via plebiscites, binding on government and underpinned by funding and community education around the issue

Our primary, secondary, tertiary and expanded TAFE and community education provides free access to all those formerly excluded from pathways to economic and social success, and provides us with competent leaders of the future.

Living within our environmental foot print is now possible since a thorough analysis of the carrying capacity of our area has been conducted, and education initiatives to stabilise our population are a key responsibility of government.

Economy

The change from an externally focused economy to one focused on the well being of our area has brought with it many economic opportunities.

At a National level, we have undertaken an ethical review along the entire supply chain of what we trade in and who we trade with. This now informs our regional infrastructure requirements.

Technology innovation hubs cater for a growing business sector eager to implement their ideas for a cleaner, more equitable and less energy-intensive world. Small scale factories, some located in previously abandoned facilities, cater to our commitment to repair and re-use items critical to living a good life without further draining our natural resources. Refuse, Reduce, Re-use, Recycle, and Repurpose policies means many new businesses have emerged

The notion of work and wealth has changed to be one of contributing to the community even when in paid work. We make good livings from local tourism, marine and coastal industries and renewable energy production.

Food is produced following permaculture principles and is traded regionally and nationally. Our small retro-fitted Port is a hub of activity as food produce and other export items are transported to other coastal locations. Rather than reliance on outmoded container vessels which require massive landside crane and storage areas, small fuel efficient vessels with on board cranes to load/unload cargo to existing wharf infrastructure.

The concept of a massive container port covering a 5 km stretch of our coastline is now a redundant model – thankfully not a \$multi billion stranded asset.

Community

Along with the rest of Australia we now enjoy a stable population linked to our carrying capacity. We have good quality open space facilities, play spaces etc and have implemented wellness initiatives and encourage self sufficiency. Access to universal free health care has been preserved following its near demise in the 2010s. Privately run retirement investment schemes, so rapacious in the 2010s, have been replaced by a national superannuation scheme operated by government as an extension of the former pension scheme.

The notion of work and wealth has changed to be one of contributing to the community even when in paid work. We encourage community leadership and programs of skill sharing and make use of co-operative living initiatives, self sufficiency and innovation in business, community and personal endeavours.

We offer free access to education at all levels, enhanced by a final “transition year” of community learning and travel.

Built Infrastructure

Coastal inundation mapping from early 21st Century¹⁹ informed our work to respond to climate change induced sea level rise in our largely low lying region. We have implemented a one kilometre buffer zone around the coastline.

¹⁹ Such as: *Assessing Development in relation to Sea Level Rise*, V Brenner, M Edwards & S Peacock Department of sustainability and Environment Victorian government 2012, and Victorian government ‘Future Coasts’ program, Victorian Coastal Inundation Dataset www.climatechange.vic.gov.au

Outmoded hard engineering “solutions” such as seawalls have proven ineffective and prohibitively costly to build and maintain. We were inspired by early 21st Century research by Costanza et al²⁰ which found that US coastal wetlands were estimated to provide \$23.2 Billion per year in storm protection services alone.

Our extensive rehabilitation of salt marsh, mangroves and wetlands provides effective low cost coastal protection against storm surge and sea level rise and these natural areas provide economic, social and environmental benefits to our local tourism economy which traditional protective works had so comprehensively failed to do.

Whilst supporting local tourist activities, coastal zone infrastructure is low impact: walking paths, interpretive centres, viewing platforms etc. that can be easily removed or relocated.

We live in small scale local villages with mixed building types. Bike paths/car sharing is the norm.

Public transport has increased (land and sea) driven by renewable energy, with a dedicated light rail corridor to/from Dandenong/Nobbies. Ferry services between Hastings, French Island, Stony Point and Cowes.

We are removing or repurposing outmoded infrastructure and built alternative energy production and distribution networks, with two solar plants (one on 3000 Ha at Hastings formerly earmarked for Port expansion) providing base load energy (molten salt storage), and wind and tide power plants.

Blue Scope steel plant and other outmoded industrial sites are repurposed as additional energy production sites, University campus, market places, schools etc. A Hi-tech hospital ship makes regular visits to the Port of Hastings for specialist services

²⁰ **Costanza, R.**, O. Pérez-Maqueo, M. L. Martinez, P. Sutton, S. J. Anderson, and K. Mulder (2008). The value of coastal wetlands for hurricane protection. *Ambio* 37:241-248.

Natural environment

We have realised that the late 20th and early 21st Century trajectory of population growth, water use, forest degradation, and GDP growth was unsustainable. The planet's resources were being depleted at a rate which threatened the survival of humans and many other species.

The UN SDGs have been implemented with enhanced principles applying to RAMSAR, and the Westernport Biosphere program is now fully realised and committed to.

Our stable population has made it easy to ensure that urban consolidation is within existing town boundaries and that no more Greenfield land is released for development. We have worked hard to manage introduced pests, protect indigenous fauna, increase indigenous plantings and to conserve water.

As in the early 21st Century, our fertile land still supports the production of significant volumes of primary produce. Our market gardens provide local jobs, local and high value tradeable food. Food production underpins some regional, national and international trade in high value foods.

We have responded positively to climate change, and have realised economic opportunities and environmental benefits associated with climate change initiatives including wind, tide and solar energy. Ships are using efficient fuels/sails/renewable energy.

WE HAVE ADAPTED!

Of course we are not suggesting that this 'Lagom' Plan is the only way forward for our community. It is however an inspiration to think differently, and which could produce great benefits for our future citizenry.

The Lagom exercise filled participants with hope for the future – and that surely would be a positive for planners to feel inspiration rather than the drudgery we are sure most of them

must feel, reined in by government's obsession with maintaining endless growth in population and consumption and ignoring the unavoidable negative ecological and amenity impacts that the dystopian 2050 vision described elsewhere must engender in them. Just as we imagine planners must feel, we know our fellow citizens are mostly dispirited about our future. How much more rewarding, stimulating and environmentally prudent scenario style planning could be for planners and community groups, rather than dealing with the endless dispiriting demands of Business as Usual on a finite planet.

Conclusions

We need to move to a different mindset about home ownership. Thanks to the advertising, reality entertainment and real estate industries, many of us have fallen into the trap of thinking that when we now buy a home we are performing an investment exercise, rather than an exercise in acquiring a comfortable home to live out our lives.

Whenever they can, people choose to live in areas that appeal to them. If they wanted to start their new life in a high rise building they would do so. If they choose a peaceful regional area it should be a reasonable assumption that when you purchase your home you can expect the neighbourhood to remain to your liking. Sadly, the obsession with the housing industry underpinning the economy, is taking that away from so many of us. We no longer like where we live, so if we have the means we feel we must move on to a quieter place, perhaps in one of those regional areas already feeling the strain of burgeoning populations. The real estate industry is happy, removalists, lawyers, conveyancers and those businesses relying on "renewal", are all happy - not to mention the Victorian Government that reaps ever growing stamp duty and land tax revenue. The ordinary citizen is not happy.

And so the dystopian cycle continues.

Planning should be about ensuring an optimum degree of amenity which is largely achieved by limiting density. The planning system should give an ironclad guarantee that density will remain reasonably constant otherwise the community is under stress and in serial battles against the erosion of their amenity. The duty of the planning system is to direct and limit

density. This is the opposite of what has happened in recent decades where planning blueprints have been about increasing density.

About 20 years ago, Melbourne residents were invited to contribute their ideas towards a new planning blue print which turned out to be Melbourne 2030. People all over Melbourne gave their time to sit at tables of about 6 and, using butchers' paper they nussed out their priorities on a number of parameters all with the underlying and immutable assumption of growth in population.

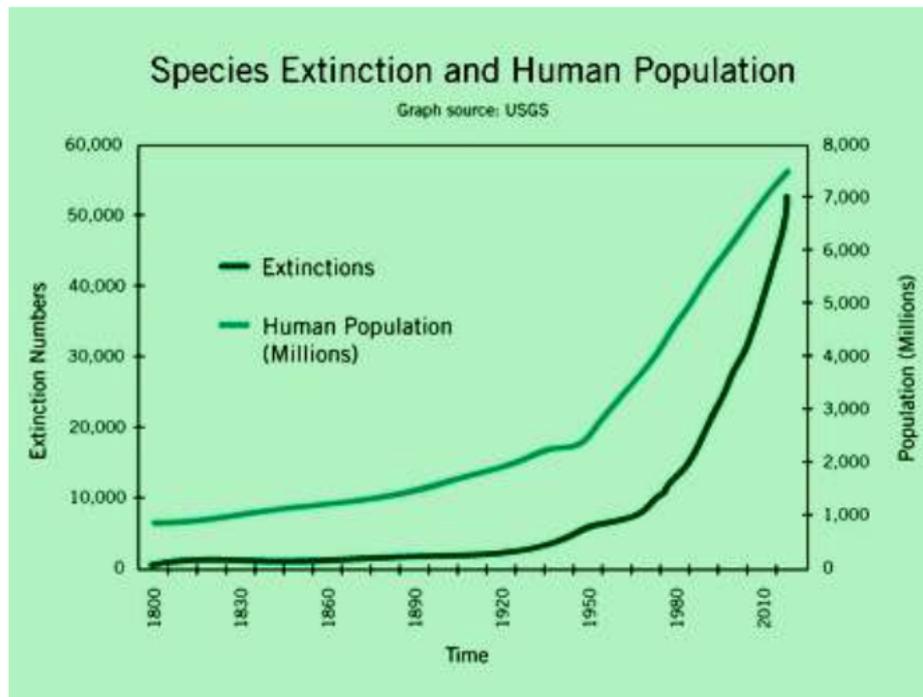
Thousands of your constituents have, with noble intentions, spent countless volunteer hours on countless occasions engaged in these seemingly pointless exercises.

The illusion of democracy, and that the average person can actually determine outcomes of change continues with such exercises as Engage Victoria. We no longer meet in public venues interacting face to face but now send our desires, ideas, preferences, and knowledge into an apparent vortex. Both exercises are unrewarding but the latter perhaps more so.

We can almost hear the cries of 'NIMBY' in reaction to the aforesaid, but planning should be about protecting amenity in our city, suburbs and countryside. If it isn't that, then why not allow laissez-faire construction?

Newton's Third Law (1689), put simply says: For every action (force) in nature there is an equal and opposite reaction. It is an immutable, observable law of Nature, so it is indeed puzzling why after 350 years we are surprised when nature responds according to a fundamental law of the universe.

We seem incapable of understanding the fundamental principle that our actions (and inactions) will always have consequences. Newton's Third Law is particularly obvious in modern man's incessant tinkering with our natural world, the recent loss of focus in planning a better future, and is well demonstrated in the many clearly observable changes to our coastlines, tree cover, species decline etc. in recent years.

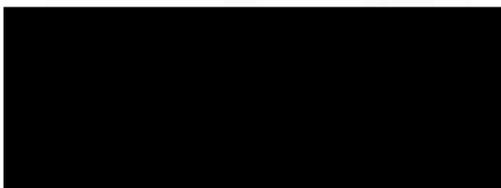


This graph is a stark reminder of how human population expansion is inextricably linked to the decline of those other species we share our world and local environments with. It is to all our shame that we and the MPs and other decision makers acting on our behalf, appear unable or unwilling to make any meaningful concessions to the natural world to address this shocking reality.

It certainly behoves decision makers, despite whatever pressures they may encounter, not to bend to demands from those with vested interests in the indiscriminate self-interested use of our irreplaceable priceless ecological assets. Otherwise we and the species we share our environment with will pay the price.

We look forward to your response to our submissions

Yours sincerely



Ms. Jill Quirk
Secretary
SPA Vic/Tas Committee