

MASC Biodiversity Strategy – Initial Feedback

This is a joint submission from three groups that are actively engaged in and contribute to biodiversity conservation in Mount Alexander Shire. These groups are:

Connecting Country (Mount Alexander Region) Inc

Friends of Box Ironbark Forests

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

This summary sets out some high level feedback offered collectively by the three organisations following our participation in the first round of public consultation on the development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Mount Alexander Shire.

Representatives from our organisations attended the public session held at Mount Alexander Golf Course on 22 May 2026 and the session for landcare and other groups held at Harcourt Recreation Reserve on 3 June.

Our organisations welcome the development of a Biodiversity Strategy.

We are making this submission now because we are concerned about the potentially limited scope of the strategy, as it was explained by representatives of RMCG (the consultants engaged by Council to develop the strategy). The framing communicated to participants at the consultation sessions was that the strategy would use a framework of “control, influence, advocate”, modelled on the Yarra Ranges Shire Council’s Nature Plan. Within this framework, we took the understanding that the MASC strategy would focus primarily on land controlled directly by Council.

Set out below are the key points we believe need to be incorporated in a Biodiversity Strategy for Mount Alexander. It is essential to address these points now while the strategy is in development so the draft version released for public consultation in September/October is credible, ambitious and aligned with community expectations.

Key points for consideration

Set a bold and inspiring vision - Frame biodiversity conservation as fundamental to the health, identity and future resilience of Mount Alexander Shire, rather than simply an environmental issue.

Tell the story of the Shire’s biodiversity – Explain what we have and what is unique; describe how and why it has declined since the arrival of Europeans; Explain current and emerging threats

Clearly communicate the consequences of inaction - Explain what continued biodiversity decline means for species, ecosystems, climate resilience and community wellbeing.

Organise the strategy around a small number of memorable themes - A simple framework such as Protect, Enhance, Connect, Advocate and Engage provides clarity and focus.

Embed biodiversity across all council functions - Ensure biodiversity is considered in planning, engineering, roadsides, parks, climate action, asset management and infrastructure decisions. Avoid the creation of silos. Let the strategy guide action.

Prioritise protection of existing habitat - Preventing the loss of remnant vegetation, mature trees and ecological processes should be the highest priority.

Identify and map strategic habitat corridors - Use landscape-scale connectivity planning to guide investment and restoration efforts over coming decades.

Commit to long-term monitoring and reporting - Include measurable indicators and regular evaluation to track progress and adapt management.

Place Traditional Owner partnerships at the centre - Support genuine shared stewardship, cultural knowledge and caring for Country outcomes.

Build community stewardship and ecological literacy - Invest in education, participation and citizen science so conservation becomes a shared responsibility.

Include institutional and policy reform - Commit to stronger planning controls, dedicated biodiversity expertise, improved governance and secure long-term resourcing.

Critical observations

1. The strategy must extend beyond land that is directly managed by council. For example, council can influence:
 - a. the management of other land e.g. weed and pest animal control
 - b. retention of native vegetation
 - c. what areas are available for development or retention of native vegetation
 - d. control of domestic animals
 - e. encroachment into waterways, wetlands etc.
 - f. responsible use of natural areas
2. There needs to be strong governance around delivery of the strategy. We suggest:
 - a. Formation of a Community Advisory Panel to guide implementation of the strategy and hold Council accountable for its delivery
 - b. There should be measurable goals/targets with milestones at 3, 5 and 10 year timeframes.
 - c. The strategy should be reviewed at 3-year intervals, measured against the milestones and milestones updated at each review. It must be a living strategy