

Below are words provided to us by individuals who made verbal submissions to the Nillumbik Planning and Consultation Committee, Tuesday 14 May 2024.

NILLUMBIK BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY PROCESS – 2023/2024 – COMMUNITY RESPONSE

You can see a full recording (these and more presentations) via Council's site:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yia6pPfDHTw&list=PLXuYj56YH49foiKWn289-3NoyGJ42oPHT&index=4>

We hold regard and gratitude for those who shared their words here and in other submissions, and to all who spoke so respectfully, truthfully, and with ongoing commitment to care for biodiversity.

3-minute time limit (as per Council policy)

In order of presentation:

I'm concerned about the decline in ecologically valuable remnant vegetation on nature strips in the Eltham town area, especially in Eltham South.

I've noted on my daily walks, over the last 38 years of living in Eltham South, that there has been destruction of remnant native vegetation, by landowners, builders, contractors.

Removal of vegetation has included dumped contractors waste on a population of *Pterostylis curta* in Banoon Rd.

Our own environmentally assessed area of ecologically significant vegetation has been trashed by contractors for Yarra Valley Water sewerage scheme, who said they had to access our remnant area, with machinery, even though there had been an environmental assessment, a sign in place & bunting to alert workers.

One carefully weeded indigenous nature strip was replaced by agapanthus & variegated pittosporum, whilst others are mown regularly & the cemetery has a long strip of remnant vegetation, which was hand weeded but now is mown regularly. (to mention a few instances.)

The use of nature strips to plant non-indigenous species is common in our area. *Bursaria spinosa* (Sweet Bursaria) a vital plant for the Eltham Copper Butterfly – a threatened species listed under the EPBC Act 1999, in May 2016.

Can Council provide more resources/money towards making vegetation assessments on remaining nature strips, to see what's left, encourage land holders to plant local by providing subsidized or free plants yearly, should they want them, and lead by example by establishing indigenous only areas within our local urban parklands & roadsides, something similar to outside Rosanna RS & Maranoa Gardens, indigenous area, Balwyn.

Hopefully our biodiversity loss can be slowed through gentle persuasion of residents and we can still be a bona fide Green Wedge Shire.

Joy

Place, I grew up on a farm in Western Victoria across ~2 decades, then lived in the Moonee Valley LGA ~3 decades, lived for about a decade in Banyule LGA, then here in Nillumbik over the past decade+. The biodiversity seen in Nillumbik, especially in the bushland reserves is remarkable in comparison to others. [This draft strategy document captures it well](#). Biodiversity in our waterways, our roadsides, our rail corridors, our rural properties and in private backyards should be seen as belonging to the world. Champion stewardship of this universal commons.

Time, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries land use thinking has been dominated by making livelihoods and homes. In the latter 20th and early 21st centuries the accumulated knowledge about ecology and biodiversity value has exploded. We can no longer use ignorance as an excuse to ignore or devalue our BD. Making livelihoods alongside BD should be a goal.

Which body should lead protection of BD? Local government is closest to local biodiversity issues. Nillumbik council officers and volunteers have awareness of local BD jewels and are learning more daily. The UN has

an International Day of BD, Federal and State government protections are important, but the Nillumbik association with this bit of the world commons gives us a particular obligation to protect it.

Implementation (P.27, 10-year timeframe); The Nillumbik strategy document offers valuable guidance, but it is nothing if not implemented Just 110g of printed A4 paper. Let us make a future where all Nillumbik council staff and all who call Nillumbik home feel a pride to work together to protect our BD commons.

Evan Gellert

Some would say that living in Nillumbik is like living in the garden of Eden, and, yes, compared to other suburbs and locations it is ideal.

Yet the beauty and sustainability of this treed leafy locale is undermined every time a mature tree is removed. When intact biodiverse land becomes reduced to ever diminishing, small pockets disconnected from each other, fragmenting the habitat and food source of wildlife. When the pollution of human activity seeps into the underground water table or flows overland to waterways.

Preventative action required as strong, environmental protection with appropriate financial and human resources. Adequate funding to maintain environment programs, along with the education of residents and those working within and for Council. Include measurable, accountable actions to intercept decline, and monitor progress with time specific targets. Powerful deterrents should be applied when trees are removed or land degraded. Also, trees simply need to be valued, not just seen as nuisance and therefore disposable assets.

Maintain existing biodiverse areas. Revegetate with indigenous species to enrich soil microbiome. Use site appropriate plants adapted to this area, not from the modelling data of possible climate scenarios. Remove plant weed species and sensitively remove pest animals.

Please utilise reputable Science. Use good governance.

This leafy tree locality calls upon us to respond. To listen to its needs from a compassionate caring heart space. To understand that we are all connected. Intertwined. Nillumbik sits within arbitrary borders yet is related with neighbouring Shires and greater Melbourne. All in relationship. We have entered the place of this biodiverse treed environment, moved into the world of trees. We need to appreciate the benefits of this integrated system, understand that the health and vitality of environment enables health and vitality in us.

Marie Hearn

Councillors.

My name is Wayne Kinrade. As an economist and an expert in public policy development at state and federal levels, I bring my insights from both professional and environmental stewardship perspectives.

For over two decades, I've convened the Friends of the Eltham Copper Butterfly. My wife and I also care for a bush block in Eltham, housing an Eltham Copper colony and critically endangered Wine-lipped Spider Orchids.

I commend your dedication to revitalizing the Nillumbik Biodiversity Strategy.

However, the current draft fails to address the severity of nature's decline. This is occurring in our own Nillumbik backyard.

We must use all available policy tools to reverse this trend, including local government powers.

Regrettably, the draft strategy is deficient in five pivotal areas:

Firstly, the overarching goal of the policy – that biodiversity in Nillumbik is – and i quote –'healthy' - lacks clarity. Furthermore, the goal's associated so-called 'targets' are either not measurable, unambitious or both. Good goals are smart (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely). This goal does not satisfy those criteria

In December 2022 the United Nations committed the globe to reversing the decline of nature by 2030. That's a clear goal! Why can't Nillumbik – the Green Wedge Shire - do the same?

This document [the UN Convention]- is not even referred to in the draft strategy (it's just listed in the bibliography). Nor is the Commonwealth Government's response referred to.

Secondly, there is a conspicuous absence of quality, detailed baseline measurements for Nillumbik's biodiversity well-being, hindering our ability to gauge current status or progress.

Thirdly, the document neglects to explore the potential of rating and planning policies to address the issue of enhancing biodiversity on private land and connectivity, leaving a significant policy vacuum.

Fourthly, no evidence on the effectiveness of existing biodiversity programs is presented, overlooking opportunities for their improvement.

And finally, the absence of a commitment to transparently publish the shire's budget for biodiversity enhancement undermines accountability. The federal government publishes detailed program allocations on budget night. Why isn't this standard good enough for Nillumbik ratepayers?

The draft is heavy on rhetoric but light on meaningful, measurable action.

Rectification of these shortcomings will help the community better action the strategy

Thank you.

Wayne Kinrade

Friends of the Eltham Copper Butterfly

Thank you for the opportunity to present tonight. While there are myriad reasons to support this strategy, tonight I would like to focus on one of the roadblocks to protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

A few years ago I applied for, and received, a small grant from council, via the Place Shapers program, to revegetate a small plot of vacant land on Mt Pleasant Rd. Approval was given by one branch of council for the site selected; indigenous tube-stock had been collected from Edendale; volunteers were lined up ready to start planting.

And then the plug was pulled, and I was told that the project as planned could not go ahead. The reasons for this, as I understand it, were that the revegetation project was located on a major secondary road which was the boundary between the bushfire management overlay on the south side, and the neighbourhood residential zone on the north side. And one resident had complained about the fire risk that would result from revegetating this area with indigenous plants.

I was told that, although I was not allowed to plant anything, I could carry out an ecological restoration project on this land. A local botanist surveyed the land, and was only able to identify a handful of indigenous species that had survived there, consisting of, apart from a few canopy trees, a small clump of native grasses. Unfortunately I did not have the resources to try to restore 90-95% of the area via this process. I was relying on the planting of desired species to suppress the unwanted non-native weedy grasses.

So my plea is this – can council please lobby state government for an amendment to the Bushfire Management Overlay where this overlay falls within the urban growth boundary. There is an urgent need to protect and restore biodiversity across the shire, and I would like to see this overlay removed altogether. But in urban areas it makes even less sense, and the flourishing of a wide range of life forms is being hindered by restrictive overlays that not only permit removal of indigenous vegetation by landowners without a permit, but prevent degraded public areas from being enhanced by appropriate planting regimes.

I would also like to see council responding to residents who are concerned about fire risk with an alternative approach that doesn't involve cancelling revegetation projects. For example, encouraging residents to appreciate the immeasurable value of indigenous vegetation for its role as wildlife habitat, its benefits for our health and wellbeing, and its contribution to the survival of the planet in mitigating climate impacts, instead of seeing it as so-called 'fuel load' to be chopped down, slashed or mown.

Elizabeth Doig

Vicky Shukuroglou speaking, also representing Nillumbio, with acknowledgement for Traditional Custodians across this land, and across time.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

The World Economic Forum states that the greatest risks we face arise from environmental degradation.

The World Health Organization echoes similar pressures.

Science across all fields points to the same conclusion – we must change our practices and significantly ramp up our pro-active responses for the protection and reinvigoration of our environment.

This is the most pressing matter for humanity.

Australia's State of the Environment report presents a grim future if we continue the current trajectory.

Nillumbik's State of the Environment report is much the same.

Nillumbik has been my home-base for most of my life. It offers immeasurable nourishment to me, its creatures bring great joy, and I am compelled to speak up for their wellbeing.

In recent years, we have seen dramatic loss of biodiversity primarily through land clearing, invasion by introduced species, and urbanisation. As a result, indigenous plants, animals, fungi and soils, lose resilience, making them vulnerable to disease, predation, and death, thereby exacerbating the cycle of decline.

The Biodiversity Strategy presents a terrific opportunity.

The Strategy must place Nillumbik in the broader context of greater Melbourne and beyond. This Municipal area has distinct qualities and challenges and does not exist in isolation. Importantly, Nillumbik is known as the lungs of Melbourne.

Given Local governments are responsible for managing air pollution through their urban planning processes, Nillumbik has great fortune in our natural environment. Council must demonstrably honour the true value of ecosystems.

The Biodiversity Strategy must outline how base-line data will be gathered, organised and used, in the short and longer term. It must outline ambitious targets, with clear measurables of annual achievement.

Decades of Scientific evidence is abundant and readily accessible, as are courses of appropriate action.

Does Nillumbik Council have the heart, courage, imagination and leadership, to make bold decisions, to create an appropriately funded Biodiversity Strategy, leading the community through education and action, that will build a healthy future for all?

Innumerable international agreements focus on environmental protection, and many are outlined in the International Environmental Agreements Database. These could be a guideline.

All indicators show that both the future economy and human health depend on the health of our environment.

We are all accountable.

We have a potent obligation to Australia's Indigenous people, to return to caring for Country.

Vicky Shukuroglou

Nillumbio

While I don't live in within Nillumbik, I absolutely love spending time in parks along the Yarra river and the diamond creek. The environment in Nillumbik is very important to me as I enjoy seeing wildlife and healthy ecosystems. I am keen observer of fauna and flora and I recently noticed that there is more deer and a lack of diversity among the midstory.

I found this troubling as introduced pests have found a foothold and will not stop until more work is undertaken.

The lack of diversity among the midstory, does not contribute to healthy biodiversity particularly in vitally important riparian zones and wildlife corridors. Additionally, I have observed heavy amounts of erosion along the diamond creek which I visit regularly.

When I read the Nillumbik Shire biodiversity draft, I was disappointed the goals listed in the document were not ambitious.

To me, terms like 'improve' and 'seek' discount the aim of this document, this can be seen in the fourth guiding principle "We seek to protect, maintain and improve the quality and extent of native vegetation cover, terrestrial and aquatic wildlife habitats."

We should instead aim higher, go beyond what is necessary to truly make a dent in improving biodiversity and get in front of the 8 ball.

Overall, the biodiversity strategy, lacks clarity, depth, photos and a focus on biodiversity. I understand that this is an overarching document that guides other more specific documents down the line but to really improve diversity in Nillumbik we need, a stronger message with ambitious goals and a council willing to go above and beyond.

Ryan David Reynolds