

# ***Green Wedges Coalition***

***- a vision for Melbourne***

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Minister launches Green Wedge Action Plan, but will it protect the Green Wedges?**

The Green Wedges Coalition welcomed the Labor Government's 2018 election pledge to tighten controls to better protect Melbourne's Green Wedges and peri-urban farmland from urban and inappropriate development and overdevelopment. The Planning Minister, Richard Wynne then said: *Only Labor will stop Melbourne's green wedges from inappropriate development and protect our prime agricultural land in the outer suburbs.*

It was no doubt a popular pledge: every community consultation since the 2002 Melbourne 2030 strategy has found that overwhelmingly, the community wants to protect the Green Wedges for their environment and biodiversity, agriculture, open space and scenic rural landscapes.

We are pleased we now have a Minister in Sonya Kilkenny who wants to fulfil her predecessor's promise to '*protect Melbourne's Green Wedges from urban and inappropriate uses*' and to '*permanently tighten controls to better protect Melbourne's green wedges against over development.*'

We welcome the controls the Action Plan plans to tighten, including the new trigger requiring planning permits for cleanfill operations and the prohibition of data centres in the green wedges. Developers offering farmers millions of dollars to dump cleanfill over their properties are a clear threat to Green Wedge agricultural land. And we welcome the extension of Green-Wedge-style protections for agricultural land in the peri-urban areas within 100k of the CBD.

The Action plan has good intentions and correctly identifies issues needing planning reform:

\*resist land speculation and pressure to convert farmland to urban uses.

\* retain rural land for non-urban uses;

\* improve protection for agriculture and significant natural assets;

But there seem to be no actions in this plan to effectively achieve these reforms. We are concerned that the Action Plan fails to address the perennial problem of urban uses encroaching into the Green Wedges. It has no actions to limit the spread of urban uses like schools, places of worship or secondary dwellings in the Green Wedges and indicates more flexibility for farmgate sales, potentially allowing corner stores at farm-gates, mean agricultural land will continue to be lost to urban uses and the Green Wedges will still be threatened by death from a thousand cuts. These urban uses rightly belong inside the UGB where the students and parishioners live. We are disappointed that the very moderate proposals in the 2020 options paper - to require schools and places of worship to be located adjacent to the UGB; on a main road with access to public transport and not in a Bushfire Management Overlay - has been dropped.

The Government practice of taking Green Wedge land for industrial uses, such as the rail stabling and maintenance facility for the Suburban Rail Loop on Sandbelt Parkland in Heatherton and the Big Battery on striped legless lizard habitat in Melton sets a poor example and requires the Minister to hold a firmer line against such overdevelopments, especially when there is appropriately zoned industrial land nearby.

Since the main purposes of the Green Wedges are to protect the natural environment/biodiversity, agricultural land and rural open landscapes, we are surprised there is no action proposed to protect the environment, which is left to Councils to look after via their Green Wedge Management Plans.

We fear Green Wedge protection will still largely be left to local residents, environment and green wedge groups and sometimes Councils fighting unequal battles in VCAT against cashed-up developers with KCs and expensive expert witnesses. This will become even harder if residents' rights to be notified and to object to applications for urban uses such as schools, child care centres telecommunications towers, and major developments in Green Wedges are not restored, or worse, are further eroded.

Fortunately, we sometimes win, and we are glad the Action Plan has been released in time for the proposal for a new planning permit trigger to ensure that cleanfill applications will be unable to proceed without planning permits to be considered as a seriously entertained planning proposal when an application to dump cleanfill on a 15 ha property in the beautiful Lysterfield Valley comes to VCAT later this month. the cleanfill proponent is making a case to a VCAT hearing on 27 March that their application does not require a permit.

We also hope there will be time for Minister Kilkeny to consider closing some of the loopholes indicated above when she amends to the Victorian Planning Provisions to implement the actions in this plan.

We look forward to hearing Emeritus Professor Michael Buxton's assessment of the Green Wedges and Agricultural Land Action Plan when he addresses our Annual General Meeting on 28 March.

*These comments may be attributed to Rosemary West, coordinator of the Green Wedges Coalition Inc. 0418 554 799; For comment, call her or Kahn Franke, President, Green Wedges Coalition Inc (Nillumbik) 0437 906 118.*

*We can put you in touch with people involved in some of the above issues, if you are interested.*