Warringal Conservation Society

WARRINGAL CONSERVATION SOCIETY'S COMMENTS ON
NORTH EAST LINK – PROPOSED TEMPLESTOWE ROAD SOCCER FACILITIES

Warringal Conservation Society (WCS) is a community based environmental group caring for the retention and enhancement of green space in Banyule. Over 50 years we have seen Banyule Flats Reserve transformed from cattle paddocks to an area recognised as of State Ecological and Conservation Significance (Practical Ecology 2017).

WCS concerns are as follows:

1. Banyule Flats is directly across the Yarra River from the site being proposed for this soccer facility. The 200m riparian zone forms one of Victoria's most significant wildlife corridors and must be maintained and enhanced as the challenges of drought and climate change increase. The proposed development is closer than 100m to the Yarra River which encroaches the riparian zone.

2. Broadly, the Master Plan is a good and economical use of the portion of the site which sits outside the Yarra River floodplain. The carpark sits well next to Templestowe Road, though more trees within the carpark area would add shade in summer.

3. Tiering of the site to accommodate carpark and amenities, soccer fields and a wetland adjacent to the river will involve management of surface run-off. Melbourne Water must have oversight of final plans.

4. Grass soccer fields will need irrigation. Will mains water or river water be used?

5. Import of soil to effect raising the planned facilities above the floodplain is problematic, bringing foreign soil and potential weed infestation. All excavated soil should remain on site.

6. Excavation of wetlands is proposed to accommodate the portion of the floodplain that has been raised. This superficially appears to present a good environmental outcome, but surely these excavated areas will need to be empty during the wettest part of the year when floods are likely. Therefore, we are concerned that flood retarding basins are being oversold as wetlands. The reference plan also shows the soccer pitches falling within the 1% AEP flood level, with possible impact on flood water flow and velocity.

7. We are concerned that reclaiming the Yarra River floodplains for construction is not consistent with the 10-year performance objective of the draft Yarra Strategic Plan (Executive Summary p.7) "Improving the water quality of the Yarra River and protecting its land, floodplains and billabongs to achieve greater biodiversity." WCS would prefer no encroachment into the floodplain.

8. The Surface Water report suggests a one metre drainage channel along the northern and eastern boundaries of Fields 2 and 3 to effect drainage. WCS suggests adjacent plantings along the limit of the raised land to act as a sound barrier to reduce wildlife disturbance.

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We work on the country of the Wurundjeri people. We acknowledge them as traditional owners and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

9. The Yarra's southern 100m riparian zone is seriously degraded with foreign grasses and weeds and little native vegetation. The Project presents an opportunity to greatly improve habitat for wildlife and amenity for the local community. Both canopy trees, smaller trees, and understorey must be planted.

10. The Ecology report fails to use the ecology report prepared for Banyule Council, *Warringal Parklands and Banyule Flats Ecological and Conservation Values Assessment (1).* This restored parkland falls well within the 5km limit of the study area, and not to consider the adjacent bank of the Yarra River seems a significant oversight.

11. The Project acknowledges the presence of a breeding pair of Powerful Owl using land in close proximity to the river. While WCS commends the designation of albeit a very small area of habitat to be protected for these owls, we emphasise that the Powerful Owl is a top predator and needs an intact food chain, and significant area of suitable habitat to thrive. Even more reason to protect and enhance the riparian zone.

12. Powerful Owl is listed as threatened under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (*FFG Act) and is reported to nest in the area regularly. The Ecology report only cites the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (DELWP) and Nature Kit as sources of species records. WCS believes that the occurrence of a listed species should trigger ongoing monitoring prior, during and three years post construction of the Project. We are not aware that Deakin University is monitoring owls in this area as stated in the ecology assessment.

13. Nocturnal animals, especially Powerful Owls, are sensitive to light disturbance. Night-time lighting during construction must be sensitive to wildlife occupying the riparian zone and, we agree, must "follow the new *National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife* (DoEE 2020) as closely as practicable" (Ecology Report page 30). Lighting towers erected for night-time soccer games must have baffles and be directed away from the Yarra River.

14. Although not part of this plan WCS is opposed to any bridge spanning the Yarra River in this location. The Powerful Owl habitat is too sensitive and a bridge would take up too much land area, and facilitate a loss of undisturbed habitat.

15. Of 298 trees identified, 207 will be impacted by the reference plan. Impact to trees must be strenuously minimised, and where trees are removed, they must be replaced with indigenous native trees. Replacement with tube stock is of course a long-term plan and does not make up for the immediate loss of habitat or integrity of the wildlife corridor.

16. The reference plan includes a wetland in the northern section of the site. Permanent wetlands must have a source of water and that source is not enlarged on. If this is a means of managing surface run-off from the site, the design must comply with Melbourne Water guidelines and meet SEPP (Waters) regulations.

17. A barbecue and picnic area are suggested in the northern section of the site. While not opposed to leisure facilities we suggest public toilets would be necessary to prevent use and pollution of land and waterways. Secluded public toilets are problematic.

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WCS' overriding concern is that:

- The Yarra River corridor be improved and maintained as a wildlife corridor of merit,
- Habitat in the southern riparian zone is enhanced with complex native plantings of all heights,
- Powerful Owl habitat be protected and disturbance minimised.

References:

1. Practical Ecology (2017). *Warringal Parklands and Banyule Flats Ecological and Conservation Values Assessment*. For City of Banyule.

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