



CITY OF BALLARAT
**Biodiversity Vision
and Commitment**





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The City of Ballarat acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land we live and work on, the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung People, and recognises their continuing connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging and extend this to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

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Purpose

To outline the Council’s vision and commitment that will be used as a guiding principle to inform the City of Ballarat’s decisions and operations that influence or impact biodiversity in the Ballarat region.

The vision and commitment statement lays the foundations for a Biodiversity Strategy to be developed early in 2023.



Definition

Biodiversity encompasses all components of the living world — the number and variety of plants, animals and other living things, including fungi and micro-organisms, across our land, rivers and sky. It includes the diversity of their genetic information, the habitats and ecosystems within which they live, and their connections with other life forms and the natural world.⁸



Background

Ballaarat – ‘resting place’

Woovookarung – ‘place of plenty’

Before European settlement, the region that is now Ballarat was known to the indigenous community as a place to rest and recuperate thanks to its cool local climate, lush canopy cover and abundance of life. The region then, and now, is at the juncture of the volcanic grassy woodland plains and heathy dry forests, punctuated by the Yarrowee River and escarpment at the southern end of the Great Dividing Range. A diverse range of species were found in abundance in the area including koalas, growling grass frogs, greater gliders, blackfish, platypus, matted flax-lily and ancient manna gum.

Shortly after gold was discovered in 1851, the pristine landscape was systematically turned over in the search for gold and the establishment of agriculture. Unaware of the impact and magnitude of their actions, the early settlers undid thousands of years of symbiotic harmony in a matter of decades, removing nearly all the remnant vegetation and irreparably scarring the landscape.



Ballarat Fine Art Gallery, 'Ballarat in the early times; As it appeared in the summer of 1853-54' by Eugene von Guerard, 1884

While the gold rush remains a defining moment in time for Ballarat and agriculture is vital to a sustainable economy, evidence of its impacts is still clear in the landscape. The Yarrowee River and small waterways bear the brunt of early mining's scarring with contaminants and channelisation still in place, left for invasion by exotic weeds and pest animals.

Similarly, volcanic wetlands and watercourses, cleared and drained many decades ago, are losing the ability to absorb water and support the ecosystem through drought. While modern practices are more environmentally responsible, the lack of restoration of the land, along with on-going detrimental actions such as old tree removal, fragmentation, erosion, pollution, land management practices and climate change are continuing to degrade the natural environment around us, leaving Ballarat an uninviting place for biodiversity to flourish.

Furthermore, with Ballarat's population forecast to grow a further 26.72 per cent to 144,108 by 2036⁶, the pressures we see on the environment today, are only going to grow, making the need for action all the more imperative.

The natural areas of Ballarat have slowly started to regenerate where left alone, or with the assistance of passionate and committed community members. The City of Ballarat and State Government have responded with the adoption of the Comprehensive Koala Plan of Management in 2006, the Environmental Significance Overlay, Schedule 5 (ESO5) gazetted into the Planning Scheme in 2009 and declaration of the Woowookarung Regional Park in 2017, among others.

While these have been significant wins for local biodiversity, much more is needed, with increased urgency in a changing climate and growing development pressures.

Fortunately, the need for bold and urgent action is recognised at every level of government with the 2021 State of the Environment Report Australia¹ identifying the following key findings with respect to biodiversity:

- Biodiversity is essential to human survival, wellbeing and economic prosperity
- Our biodiversity is declining, and the number of threatened species is increasing
- Climate change, habitat loss and degradation, and invasive species are the key threats to Australia's biodiversity
- Protected areas, recovery efforts and better management of pressures can help to secure our most threatened species.

And the Federal Government² recognising that the main threats to our biodiversity are:

- Loss, fragmentation and degradation of habitat
- The spread of invasive species
- Unsustainable use of natural resources
- Climate change
- Inappropriate fire regimes
- Changes to the aquatic environment and water flows.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's (DELWP) Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 sets the vision that *'Victoria's biodiversity is healthy, valued and actively cared for'* with the Goals of: 1. *'Victorians value nature'* and 2. *'Victoria's natural environment is healthy'*.³

And Goal 1 of the *City of Ballarat Council Plan 2021-2025* is 'An environmentally sustainable future' with Goal 1.5 seeking *'Improved stewardship of our natural resources and protection and enhancement of biodiversity'* progressed when we *'Develop policy guidance on biodiversity and natural resources management'*.

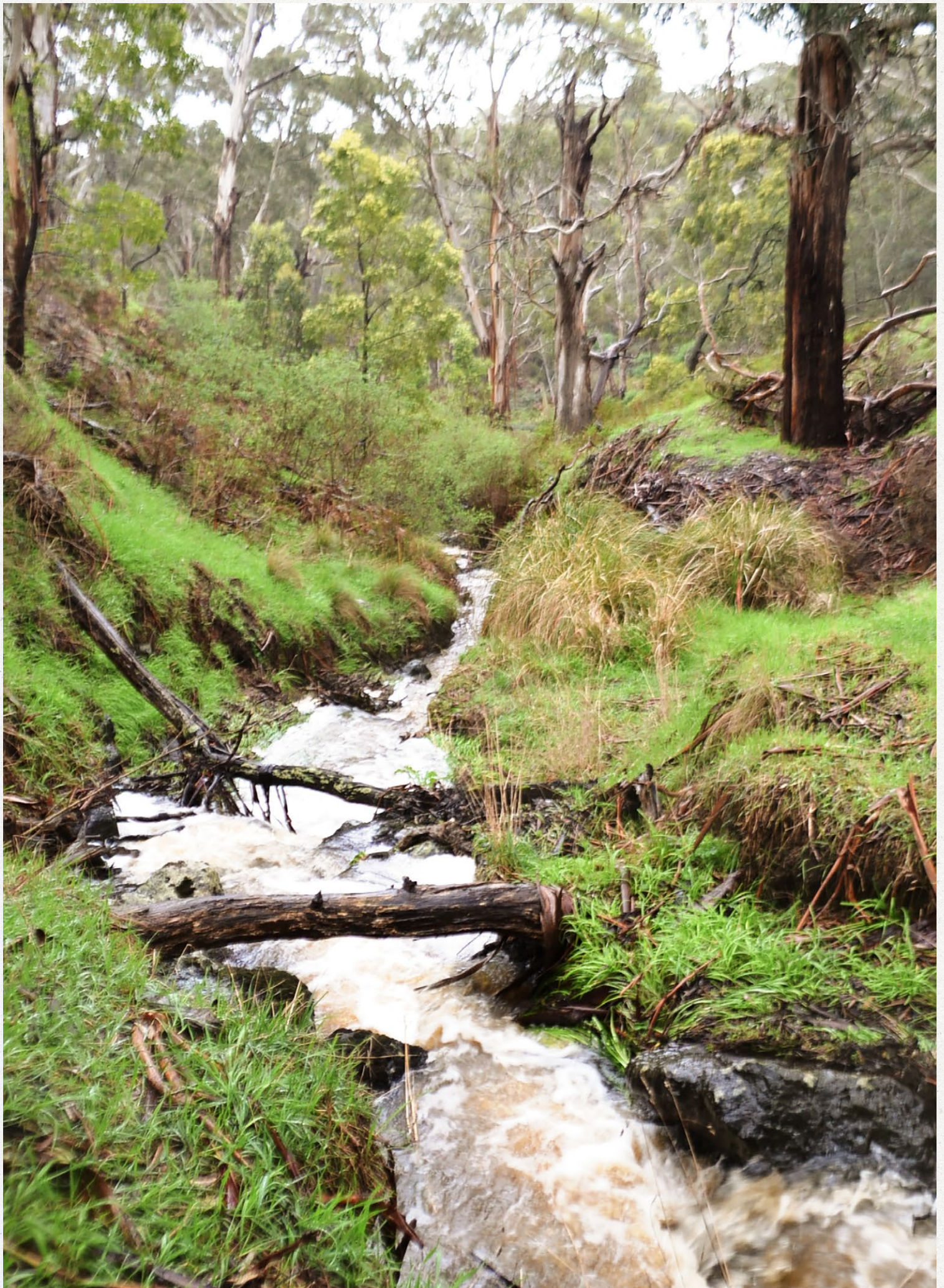
While Ballarat's history has resulted in many challenges, the passion and commitment shown by the community and government holds us in good stead as we strive to be a resting place of plenty once again.

"[The United Nations Environment Programme's sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6)] shows that the overall environmental situation globally is deteriorating and the window for action is closing."

United Nations Environment Programme, 2019⁴

"My hope is that the biodiversity policy is not another glossy document that goes nowhere in particular. My hope is that it can be supported very strongly by council through budget and resourcing and encouraging people's participation."

Community member⁵



Flowing water – Image by Peter Darveniza

Vision Statement

Championed by an actively engaged and informed community, the natural environment is protected, restored and connected for health and resilience.

Commitment Statement

The City of Ballarat is committed to protecting and restoring the natural environment for the benefit of all plants, animals and people that inhabit and benefit from it. Council and the City of Ballarat acknowledges:

- The continuing connection of the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung who have a deep understanding of the land, water and sky, and value their partnership in managing and determining their future.
- The community's role in protecting and restoring the natural environment and continued sharing of knowledge and experience through active engagement.
- The intrinsic and irreplaceable value of our forests, waterways, grasslands, large old trees and urban forestry, including street trees, that make up the mosaic of landscapes of Ballarat and region.
- Its role in supporting the invaluable services provided to us through the water cycle, nutrient cycle and other natural processes for the health of all.
- That biodiversity does not stop at borders, and it is our role as a regional centre to lead and facilitate responsible stewardship of the land.
- That biodiversity comes in many forms and that flora and fauna across all landscapes have inherent value worthy of protection and support.
- That flora and fauna have the right to exist and that it is our duty to live in harmony with, rather than external to, the natural environment.

“That the City of Ballarat vision involves the community in valuing the natural environment by: protecting and restoring the diverse natural values on public and private land, involving the community in proactive, innovative policies, practices, and programs.”

Community member⁵



Cleared land – Image by Michael Rootes



Focus Areas

Community consultation in August 2022⁵ highlighted key areas that the community sees as focus areas to achieving a biodiverse Ballarat. They are:

- 1. Urgency**
We take action now and continue following through with our commitments to create protected and resilient ecosystems.
- 2. Environmental outcomes**
Positively influence our efforts to protect, restore and connect environments across our region at a local to landscape scale.
- 3. Community**
Being informed, engaged, and collaborative in the pursuit of protecting and improving the natural environment.
- 4. Development**
Redirected away from valuable environmental assets and, where it occurs in sensitive areas, that development is done responsibly and ensuring those that detrimentally impact the environment through development are held accountable.
- 5. Government**
All levels are aligned to facilitate, fund and re-enforce efforts that protect and advance environmental stewardship.



1. Urgency

The Climate and Extinction Crises are real and present dangers to life as we know it. Fortunately, we have a small window of time to protect the biodiversity we have and secure its resilience for future generations.

The City of Ballarat commits to:

- 1.1 Producing a Biodiversity Strategy in the first half of 2023 to identify actions over the short to long term that enhance biodiversity and begin enacting the strategy as soon as it is adopted.
- 1.2 Acting with urgency for biodiversity in Ballarat and region.
- 1.3 Providing human and material resources dedicated to environmental management and restoration in Ballarat.
- 1.4 Take bold action toward stopping urban deforestation and fragmentation while also supporting regeneration and landscape connections in the Ballarat region.
- 1.5 Celebrating the beautiful natural assets the region already has through enhancing their accessibility.

“Immediate action with innovative management and collaboration can turn things around”

State of the Environment Report 2021¹



Planting day – Image by FoCC et al

2. Environmental outcomes

Ecological systems and environments are complex, varied and critical to sustain the flora and fauna that inhabit them in unique and often intricate ways. A healthy and connected landscape is more resilient and better able to support biodiversity.

The City of Ballarat commits to:

- 2.1 Increasing our natural carbon sequestration (plants) and reducing our carbon emissions to reduce the impacts of climate change in line with the latest science.
- 2.2 Bringing biodiversity into the everyday lives of its residents and visitors.
- 2.3 Supporting the ecological communities in Ballarat, from urban to rural, to be more resilient to the threats of climate change.
- 2.4 Concerted action to protect and enhance rare and established vegetation, waterways and wetlands.
- 2.5 Supporting the establishment of the environmental infrastructure, like seedbanks, needed to deliver the swift and dramatic landscape scale changes that are required.

“Community leadership, we can’t leave it all to government.”

Community member⁵

“Nature Comes First!”

Community member⁵

3. Community

With private property making up most of the land mass and habitat in Ballarat, the community has considerable influence on biodiversity in the region. It is upon each of us to make decisions and actions that support biodiversity.

The City of Ballarat commits to:

- 3.1 Include the community in the decision-making process where practicable in accordance with our Community Engagement Policy.
 - 3.2 Educating and informing people from all walks of life about the intrinsic value of biodiversity so that it is understood and appreciated.
 - 3.3 Being transparent with the community, acknowledging the past to heal and grow.
 - 3.4 Listening to and learning from the community who have a large amount of lived knowledge and expertise in the area.
 - 3.5 Working with the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung to support their cultural connection with Country, including recognising women as the holders of relevant cultural knowledge.
 - 3.6 Delivering equitable and inclusive initiatives that acknowledge the needs of people of different genders, abilities and other intersectional attributes.
 - 3.7 Facilitating and supporting the public and community groups in the endeavour of environmental activism and connecting with nature.
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“Supporting community volunteer groups, [are] great opportunities for council.”

Community member⁵

4. Development

Development has a vital role in the economy and when well managed it can prevent fragmentation, urban vegetation loss, stream channelisation and a range of other detrimental outcomes. Described as Ballarat's second gold rush, the housing and development boom in Ballarat needs to be undertaken with appropriate weight and care given to biodiversity.

The City of Ballarat commits to:

- 4.1 Applying the Planning Scheme in a manner that achieves the best biodiversity outcomes practicable, particularly for waterways, established trees and wildlife corridors.
- 4.2 Challenging and instigating change in the Planning Scheme to achieve better outcomes for biodiversity at a municipal scale and restore balance in conflicting priorities.
- 4.3 Requiring the City of Ballarat and new private development proposals to plan biodiversity into the proposal.
- 4.4 Promote and incentivise the value of incorporating and protecting trees, waterways and biodiversity into developments.
- 4.5 Lifting the standards expected of the City of Ballarat and private development towards sustainability and ecology.
- 4.6 Holding those accountable that detrimentally impact the environment through development.

"Biodiversity is both essential for our existence and intrinsically valuable in its own right."

Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, 8 August 2022²



Lake Wendouree – Image by Judith Bailey



Two koalas – Image by Stephanie Davison



Stone circle – Image by Jeff Rootes

5. Government

Governments at all levels play a key role in influencing the trajectory for biodiversity, be it federal, state or local. It is imperative for all levels of government to work together to progress biodiversity, and to minimise the ‘red tape’ and ‘silos’ that can inadvertently hamper positive efforts.

The City of Ballarat commits to:

- 5.1 Upholding this vision and championing the commitments from an organisational to officer level as leaders in creating more biodiverse environments.
- 5.2 Working collaboratively with all tiers of government and land and water managers, recognising that biodiversity does not end at municipal or organisational boundaries.
- 5.3 Advocating to State and Federal Governments for funding and legislative reforms that protect and enhance biodiversity.
- 5.4 Achieving a ‘new normal’ where biodiversity is at the centre of life, with our decisions and actions reflecting that accordingly.
- 5.5 Considering biodiversity in all of the City of Ballarat’s projects and operations, particularly where not considered relevant in the past.

“Our current approach has not been working. If we keep doing what we’ve been doing, we’ll keep getting the same results. Australia is the mammal extinction capital of the world.”

Minister for the Environment and Water Tanya Plibersek⁷



Old Tree – Image by Heath Steward c/o Susan Moodie, Black Swamp

References

1. <https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/biodiversity/key-findings>
2. <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/biodiversity/conservation>
3. <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan>
4. <https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-6>
5. Ballarat City Council Biodiversity Policy Community Engagement Workshops 'What was said' report, August 2022, Mosaic Lab
6. Council Plan 2021-2025
7. <https://minister.dcceew.gov.au/plibersek/media-releases/minister-launches-threatened-species-action-plan-toward-zero-extinctions>
8. <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-plan>

- This document can be found in PDF format on our website ballarat.vic.gov.au
- To receive this document in another format, phone 5320 5500, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required.



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