

Lake Mokoan Community Information Bulletin No. 5 June 2006

Progress Report

Lake Mokoan Future Land Use Study

The Lake Mokoan Future Land Use Steering Committee (LMFLUSC) has been meeting to develop a vision, strategy and plan for the future land use of the reclaimed site following the decommissioning of Lake Mokoan.

Release of Project Information

As the project has developed, chapters addressing future land use have been prepared by the consultant team for consideration by the LMFLUSC. Key issues have been identified in the Community Information Bulletins 1 to 4 released during the project.

At the last meeting of the LMFLUSC on 29 May 2006, Background Chapters 1 to 12 of the Future Land Use Strategy was approved for release. The chapters may be read / downloaded from the project web site. The chapters address:

1. Introduction
2. Approach
3. Guiding Principles and Assessment Criteria
4. Opportunities
5. Restoration of the Wetland Complex
6. Land Use Concepts
7. Precincts of the Study Area
8. Preliminary Land Use Options
9. Review of Public Comment
10. Classification of Land Use Options
11. Option Development
12. Review of Public Comment

Previous Information Bulletin

Information Bulletin No. 4 (March 2006) described the community's response to the preliminary land use options released in November 2005, and identified that further work has been completed on flora and fauna and heritage issues in January / February 2006. The bulletin also outlined the framework being developed for land use options (refer to explanation opposite).

Community Workshops

Two community workshops were held at the Mokoan Yacht Club and DSE Regional Office in Benalla on 11 April 2006. A total of about 70 people attended the workshops.

The purpose of the workshops was to elicit community views on proposed precinct boundaries and potential land use options.

Two plans were prepared for this community consultation which considered:

- Primary Land Use Options
- Secondary & Tertiary Land Use Options

Each plan showed two precincts as per the attached map.

- Precinct A

Precinct A includes land for which the primary objective is management for ecological and heritage purposes. It includes the footprint of the prior Winton Swamp complex, land that is subject to a 1 in 5 flood event and other ecological or archaeological significant areas.

- Precinct B

Precinct B is the remaining land in the primary study area and generally includes land that is usually dry and with lower ecological and heritage values than Precinct A.

Understanding the Land Use Framework

1. Primary Land Use Options

The primary land use options are those for which fundamental decisions need to be made in regard to the allocation and balance of land across the primary study area. Three land uses, wetland core (wetland and dryland restoration), agriculture and forestry have the potential to occupy the majority of the land available, so decisions about the amount of land allocated for each land use, the location of this land and the balance between them are central to the outcomes of the study.

In particular, the most important decision that needs to be made is the size of the area that needs to be managed for ecological purposes (i.e. the footprint of the wetland complex).

Primary Land Uses: *Wetland restoration, dryland restoration, agriculture, forestry*

2. Secondary Land Use Options

The secondary land use options are dependent on the establishment of the wetland complex (i.e. the wetland and dryland restoration). However, these options will not drive key decisions about the size and balance of the primary land uses (e.g. it is not important for the wetland complex interpretive facilities whether the wetland occupies 4,000, 5,000 or 6,000 hectares).

Secondary Land Uses: *Wetland research & education facilities, wetland tourism facilities, wetland interpretive facilities, interpretive signage, wildlife sanctuary, native seed nursery, recreational / boating*

3. Tertiary Land Use Options

The tertiary land uses include options that could be developed separately, though may be enhanced by linkages to the primary and secondary land uses. For example, a cycle path could be constructed between Benalla, Wangaratta and Glenrowan regardless of the wetland. However, the experience of using such a facility would be enhanced if it was linked to a wetland complex and/or associated interpretive and tourist facilities.

Tertiary Land Uses: *Integrated sporting shooters facility, cycle paths & movement easements, orienteering / marathon course, public art trail, golf course resort, tourism accommodation*

Primary Land Use Options

Options for agriculture and forestry in Precincts A and B include the following:

- Within Precinct A, grazing could be a management tool, focusing in particular on the control of and spread of weeds. Grazing would need to be carefully managed around the Spit, the wetland fringe, drainage lines and areas subject to periodic inundation to avoid ground disturbance, erosion and reduced water quality. A key issue for grazing is whether land can be privately acquired and grazed subject to conservation covenants or whether the land should remain publicly owned and grazed under licences issued by the public land manager.
- Within Precinct A, forestry could also be appropriate for certain tree species. The preference would be for firewood or carbon sinks rather than plantation forestry. Forestry was not considered suitable for the Spit because of the potential damage it could pose through ground disturbance to areas of high cultural significance. A key issues for forestry is how much land would be required. (e.g. should the minimum land area for forestry be 50, 100 or 500 hectares)?
- Within Precinct B, agriculture and forestry can be considered as suitable commercial enterprise options, subject to the management of interfaces with Precinct A. For agriculture, both grazing and cropping may be possible. The preference for forestry would be a mix of species grown for firewood and carbon sequestration, although plantation forestry may be considered. The key issues for these land uses include the area required for these uses, whether housing should be permitted, whether setbacks to Precinct A are required and whether particular management provisions should apply to protect the ecological values of Precinct A.

Secondary and Tertiary Land Use Options

Options for the secondary and tertiary land uses in Precincts A and B include:

- Within Precinct A, various passive and active recreation opportunities are considered appropriate, including boardwalks and walking/cycle trails. Five potential activity nodes were identified, four along the northern fringe of the primary study area (three utilising existing facilities including the existing GMW buildings, the existing boat ramp and picnic facilities and potential viewing facilities at the Duck Pond) and one on the southern fringe of the original Winton Swamp. The potential nodes were for research, community, recreation and tourism facilities.
- A range of other tourism and recreation opportunities continue to be considered, including a wildlife sanctuary, the integrated sporting shooters facility and a golf course with supporting tourist accommodation.
- The key issues for the secondary and tertiary land uses include the consideration of whether a single or multi nodal approach to the development of potential activity nodes would be more appropriate, the implications for infrastructure (i.e. the connection of roads and servicing infrastructure) and the compatibility of these activities with adjacent primary land uses.

Community Workshop Findings

The public comments on the primary, secondary and tertiary land use options are summarised in Chapter 12 of the Lake Mokoan Future land Use Strategy.

The key findings were:

Primary Land Use Options

Agriculture

- The majority of respondents supported the use of grazing as a suitable management tool in Precinct A.
- There was high level of support for exclusion of certain areas from grazing in Precinct A.
- There was strong support for applying controls over grazing in Precinct A.
- There was high level of support for grazing and, to a slightly lesser extent, cropping in Precinct B.
- There was strong support for exclusion of certain areas from grazing and cropping in Precinct B. Areas nominated included wetlands and buffer areas.
- There was strong support for applying controls over grazing in Precinct B.
- There was strong support for applying controls over cropping in Precinct B.
- There were a variety of comments and some uncertainty in relation to the area of land required to farm in Precinct B.
- There was a high level of support for exclusion of housing from flood free areas in Precinct B.
- There was a mixed response as to whether land in Precinct B should be in public or private ownership. Some respondents favoured private ownership or a mix of public / private ownership. An equivalent number of respondents favoured public land ownership. Other respondents considered management of the land was more important than ownership.

Forestry

- The majority of respondents supported the use of forestry in Precinct A.
- Of those who supported forestry, there was a mixed response as to what type of forestry would be suitable and / or preferred in Precinct A. A higher number of respondents were in favour of forestry for environmental purposes, being firewood production and carbon sequestration.
- There was a high level of support for exclusion of certain areas from forestry in Precinct A.
- There was support for applying controls over forestry in Precinct A.
- The majority of respondents supported the use of forestry in Precinct B.
- Of those who supported forestry, there was high level support for exclusion of certain areas from forestry in Precinct B. These areas included areas with high cultural heritage values.
- There was a high level of support for applying controls to forestry.
- There were few responses in relation to the area of land required to support forestry in Precinct B.

- There was a relatively even response as to whether land used for forestry in Precinct B should be publicly or privately owned. Slightly more respondents were for public ownership with leases / licenses.

Infrastructure

- Respondents identified the need to upgrade roads and fire access tracks. Reinstatement of a north south road was identified as important.

Secondary & Tertiary Land Use Options

Activity Nodes

- There was a high level of support for the potential activity nodes.
- There was an even spread of response as to the number of activity nodes that should be supported. Some respondents favoured multiple nodes, whilst others favoured a single or two nodes.
- Respondents identified the primary purposes of the nodes as being for tourism and recreation use, community use, education purposes and for access.

Tourism and Recreation Facilities

- There was a very high level of support for imposing controls on tourism and recreation facilities and activities in Precinct A.
- There was a high level of support for imposing controls on tourism and recreation facilities and activities in Precinct B.
- There was no support for development of a golf course.
- There was a high level of support for eco-tourism accommodation facilities. A number of principles were identified by respondents as critical to development
- There was a high level of support for a wildlife sanctuary.
- There was a very high level of support for walking / cycling facilities. Respondents identified opportunities for a perimeter trail, intra-wetland trails and trail links to Benalla / Glenrowan / Wangaratta / Rail Trail. A number of respondents also identified the need for equestrian trails.

Other Comments

- Respondents identified other proposals they would like to see developed or would be prepared to support including:
 - Research / Education Facility
 - Cultural Heritage Experience
 - Game Hunting
 - Integrated Sport Shooters Facility
(more respondents against than for facility)

Steps to Finalise the Future Land Use Strategy

The consultant team is currently finalising the Draft Preferred Land Use Strategy and is taking the comments from the community listed above into account. It is important to understand that the final land use strategy may identify that more than one land use (e.g. agriculture or forestry) is suitable for a particular location. A series of strategic and implementation plans will provide guidance where there are more than one potential land use. It will also describe the ownership and management regime appropriate to certain land uses in certain locations.

The Draft Preferred Land Use Strategy will be presented to the LMFLUSC in mid July 2006. It is intended that the Draft Preferred Land Use Strategy will be released for community review and comment in early to mid August 2006 and finalised following community consultation in late August 2006.

The community consultation to be undertaken during August will include the distribution of another Information Bulletin and a Community Information Session (dates for this session will be publicised in early August 2006).

Victorian Government endorsement of the Final Land Use Strategy is currently envisaged for early September 2006.

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