



# Biodiversity Policy

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**Date of Adoption:** 25 August 2014  
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**Responsible Officer:** Team Leader Environment

## DEFINITION

Biological diversity or “biodiversity” is the variety of life forms, including plants, animals, micro-organisms and the ecosystems of which they are a part. Biodiversity encompasses all living things and, importantly, the functions and processes that link and sustain them. At a visual level, we see biodiversity in our local landscapes, natural systems, vegetation and wildlife.

## BACKGROUND

Biodiversity is part of all life on earth and is essential for life. It provides us with the foundation of our health and wellbeing as well as shaping our quality of life, providing recreation opportunity, economic sustainability, social values, visual aesthetics, amenity and also by connecting us with our cultural history.

Wyndham’s biodiversity has evolved over millions of years and is a significant asset we have inherited. Wyndham has a vast array of valuable and irreplaceable land, freshwater and marine ecosystems, including critically endangered natural temperate grasslands of the Victorian Volcanic Plains, nationally significant seasonal herbaceous wetlands and coastal estuaries within and adjoining the internationally significant Port Phillip Bay (Western Shoreline) and Bellarine Peninsula Ramsar Wetland. Wyndham is also host to sites of particularly high value, such as the Western Treatment Plant where 300 species of birds have been recorded, as well as a number of flora and fauna species protected under state and federal legislation and international agreements. It is estimated by RMIT and University of Melbourne ecologists that Wyndham hosts more endangered species than in Kakadu National Park (Source: *The Age*, 21/12/2004).



Photo by Chris Tzaros

*Orange Bellied Parrot*

There are a number of vital natural assets within Wyndham with a number of threats to their long-term survival. Wyndham’s geographical position on Melbourne’s urban fringe will see the municipality subject to urban expansion and development in accordance with the Melbourne West Growth Corridor Plan. This has the potential for biodiversity impacts through disturbance, pressure and, widespread and rapid removal of native vegetation and habitat for local species.

In addition to urban development, other pressures exist in both rural and urban environments which threaten local flora, fauna and ecosystems. These include impacts of pest plants and animals, land water and air pollutants, littering, inappropriate land management and climate change.

State and Federal government processes, policies and strategies concentrated on Melbourne’s growth areas affect Wyndham’s ability to influence strategic and statutory planning within the municipality. Council’s role in biodiversity conservation however, remains significant. It will strive to be a leader in conservation of biodiversity, as well as advocate for protection of environmental values from external threats.

This policy is the result of community and partner consultation which identified biodiversity as critical both for today and also for future generations.

***“We should adapt to the environment instead of making the environment adapt to us” – Wyndham community member, responding to the biodiversity survey***

## POLICY STATEMENT

Council values the health, wellbeing and quality of life for the Wyndham community and its visitors. Further, Wyndham values its biodiversity and its ecosystems and will maintain, manage, enhance, protect and promote them as an asset of the City as outlined in this Policy and the future development of a biodiversity action plan.

This policy framework will support and provide direction for Council's planning, decision-making and operations. It will also guide relevant strategic documents to ensure important biodiversity principles are supported throughout the organisation. These strategic documents include, but are not limited to:

- Wyndham Municipal Strategic Statement
- City Plan
- Wyndham Quality Community Plan
- Environment & Sustainability Strategy
- Various Council policies, strategies, plans, guidelines and manuals

This Policy is an initiative from the Council-adopted *Environment and Sustainability Strategy 2011 – 2015*. The Wyndham Biodiversity Policy will deliver a short and long term integrated approach to biodiversity conservation and education in a fast growing municipality and a changing environment and climate. It will guide the design and delivery of Council's programs that influence or effect biodiversity. Its use will provide support to the Wyndham community's vision of preserving local biodiversity.

Through this document Wyndham City outlines its biodiversity principles, and is committed to:

- **Enhance:** Local flora, fauna and ecosystems make an important contribution to life in our community. Wyndham City is committed to ongoing, high quality management and improvement of its own natural assets
- **Plan:** Wyndham City has a responsibility to lead by example and influence the protection of biodiversity on behalf of the community, with a focus on strategic conservation gains in planning and decision making and long term resilience of biodiversity in a changing environment and climate.
- **Educate:** An educated and engaged community will value, support and protect the conservation of local biodiversity
- **Partner:** Sustained partnerships will maximise conservation outcomes within Wyndham and the wider region
- **Monitor, Learn and Adapt:** Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) is integral to ensure that management regimes are effective and benefiting biodiversity

## 1. Enhance

*Local flora, fauna and ecosystems make an important contribution to life in our community, and Wyndham City is committed to conservation of our ecological assets*



Werribee Blue Box

Wyndham City manages a number of reserves and open spaces which contain examples of Wyndham's key natural systems – grasslands, waterways, wetlands and coast. These conservation reserves and natural areas are managed across multiple departments, and many are best ecological sites within the municipal boundary. To maintain their values, Wyndham must undertake informed, dedicated and strategic management.

Wyndham City is committed to:

- 1.1 Retain, maintain, manage and enhance biodiversity within areas of its control
- 1.2 Mitigate threats to biodiversity
- 1.3 Support well-resourced, knowledgeable and well trained environment and conservation staff, who in turn can assist in embedding policy principles throughout the organisation
- 1.4 Ensure its employees are aware of and value Wyndham's natural biodiversity and relevant legislation in order to make informed decisions that provide biodiversity protection and improvement to the natural environment
- 1.5 Recognise that in an increasingly fragmented environment, planted and natural vegetation in urban areas play an important role in habitat connectivity between our natural reserves
- 1.6 Retaining existing and reconnect fragmented biodiversity corridors where possible, including to neighbouring municipalities.

## 2. Plan

*Wyndham City has a responsibility to lead by example and influence the protection of biodiversity on behalf of the community, with a focus on strategic conservation gains in planning and decision making*

While some biodiversity assets are protected under state or federal legislation or agreements and managed accordingly, many are at risk as some of our local biodiversity assets are not recognised as significant at a state or federal level.

Local government policy is important for local biodiversity conservation because it influences directly how and where development takes place which in turn shapes ecology and landscapes.

Wyndham City is committed to:

- 2.1 Develop an action plan that strives to achieve the biodiversity objectives of this Policy
- 2.2 Ensure this Policy influences relevant new and reviewed strategies, plans, policies, guidelines and manuals
- 2.3 Value and protect its biodiversity and ensure habitat quality and vegetation quantity within Wyndham is maintained and enhanced where possible
- 2.4 Support the establishment, management and protection of western grassland reserves as a permanent conservation area for grassland ecosystems

- 2.5 Discourage and critically assess development proposals which will disrupt ecological functions based on habitat connectivity with other natural areas and value at both landscape-scale and a localised context
- 2.6 Critically assess permits to remove native vegetation with a view of achieving the best possible biodiversity outcomes and no net loss in accordance with the current native vegetation regulations
- 2.7 Advocate for offsets for removed or destroyed vegetation to remain within the Wyndham municipality, and to be appropriate to compensate for the vegetation and habitat removed or destroyed
- 2.8 Advocate for Wyndham's future growth, land use, land zoning and urban design to be sympathetic to existing natural areas and habitat corridors
- 2.9 Strategically secure local land for conservation of local ecosystems, focussing on linking existing biodiversity sites and conserving high quality flora, fauna and ecosystems.

### 3. Educate

*An educated and engaged community will value and support the conservation of local biodiversity*



*Rakali (native Water Rat)*

Community awareness and education are critical in conserving Wyndham's biodiversity now and in the future. Numerous programs that are implemented and required to engage and involve the community provide opportunities for recreation, health and wellbeing as well as increase biodiversity values and improve the natural environment in Wyndham.

The City will play a coordinating role in planning and sharing information to promote collaboration and create synergies between Wyndham's landowners, business and community.

Wyndham City is committed to:

- 3.1 Improve community understanding of biodiversity, including the importance of biodiversity at a local, regional, state and national context
- 3.2 Provide ongoing support to the community via biodiversity extension/incentive programs, education and other on-ground and innovative projects
- 3.3 Promote Wyndham's biodiversity through various forms of media, publications and environmental events
- 3.4 Encourage businesses operating in Wyndham to be involved in biodiversity planning and protection.
- 3.5 Encourage community ownership, pride and respect of conservation areas.
- 3.6 Advise the community on biodiversity values, conservation and legislation.

## 4. Partner

*Sustained partnerships will maximise conservation outcomes within Wyndham and the wider region*

Given the array of social, economic and environmental factors that affect biodiversity, an integrated approach to biodiversity conservation is critical. This requires governments at all levels, businesses, communities, private landholders and non-government organisations to play their part and where possible work in collaboration.

Our ecosystems and species exist without regard to municipal or other land tenure boundaries, so we must ensure that land managers are connected across these boundaries along with our species and habitats.

Wyndham City is committed to:

- 4.1 Cultivate positive partnerships and consistent decision-making processes with relevant agencies and authorities
- 4.2 Develop partnerships for regional biodiversity projects and activities to create most efficient use of resources
- 4.3 Provide clear and consistent advice and response to internal and external customers including landholders and the community
- 4.4 Increase partnerships and data information sharing arrangements with external organisations to increase efficiency and accuracy of data used for management and monitoring
- 4.5 Engage the community to promote a shared understanding of biodiversity values, benefits and its importance.

## 5. Monitor, Learn and Adapt

*Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) are integral to ensure that management regimes are effective and benefiting biodiversity*

Although biodiversity is complex and difficult to measure, it is critical that criteria and goals be benchmarked, monitored and reported against.

Monitoring, evaluating, reporting and improvement is undertaken by many councils throughout Australia and assists with system and productivity improvements, planning, management, policy and resourcing, cost savings, and forecasting.

Wyndham City is committed to:

- 5.1 Implementing MERI to measure overall health of and analyse trends in the effectiveness of remedial action and achievements in biodiversity, its management, protection and enhancement
- 5.2 Design management programs and operations to enable environmental monitoring, evaluation and reporting for continuous improvement, and apply adaptive management to refine future projects and processes
- 5.3 Report regularly to Council and the community on the condition of Wyndham's biodiversity
- 5.4 Encourage biodiversity research of Wyndham's natural and conservation systems
- 5.5 Monitor the effectiveness and achievement of this Policy.
- 5.6 Review this Policy on a regular basis (3-5 years) or as required.