

## AMENDMENT C87gpla – INVERLEIGH STRUCTURE PLAN

### SUBMISSION FORM - Impact on The Common

I am opposed to the approval of elements of Amendment C87 to the Golden Plains Planning Scheme because of the potential impact of the rezoning on the 1050 hectare Reserve known as the Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve, the Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve or the Inverleigh Common, and locally and colloquially as The Common.

In addition, the impact of the omission in the amendment to address the anomaly of the northern section of The Common (Inverleigh-Teesdale Road and Bakers Lane) being zoned as farm land, when it is within the boundary of The Common and is looked after by Parks Victoria. The area of The Common south of the Inverleigh-Teesdale road is zoned as Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ). It is reasonable in the context of the Golden Plains Shire's stated role and goal of reassuring the Inverleigh Community of its future, that safeguarding The Common and its significance to the community by including the rezoning as part of the amendment.

I also have concerns of the complete removal of strategies related to The Common. The area is managed by Parks Victoria, however the decisions and impacts of Amendment C87 approval will affect this area and vice versa.

The Structure Plan lists the Inverleigh Community Plan as a key reference point in strategic plans and representation of the community's priorities, however it is a 2013 document, is therefore 6 years old and was, according to the document itself, to be updated every two years (page 6). There is no evidence there has been an evaluation of priorities met or of their ongoing relevance.

### INVERLEIGH NATURE CONSERVATION RESERVE FLORA

**Inverleigh is also famous for its 1,000ha reserve**, three kilometres north of the township. **The Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve** was originally declared as the Inverleigh Common in the 1860's to provide a source of firewood for locals as well as somewhere to graze stock in times of drought. The wildflowers that are found there are so rare and numerous that it is now protected and it is illegal to collect firewood or graze stock. The Common is a space without facilities which is intentional.

The Common has significant and enduring connections with the Inverleigh Community and the community requires reassurance that the development of the land surrounding the Common is respectful, considers current environmental issues and aims to sustain the biodiversity of its flora and wildlife. This is captured through Recollections of The Common by three older gentlemen, whose families have lived here for generations.

West of the Inverleigh Common on Common Road is farmland that is now proposed to be subdivided into 0.4 ha blocks. Whilst wandering dogs cause problems with native animals, the major threat to native wildlife is cats. Domestic and feral cats can travel several kilometres at night or during the day. One conservative figure is that in

established suburban areas each house cat will kill at least 80 birds each year (Melbourne Zoo figures)<sup>1</sup>

The Golden Plains Shire Amendment document and Structure Plan aims for a moderate growth of approximately 27 homes per year. If 50% of those new homes have a domestic cat, in the first year, an additional 1,080 birds will die in the first year, 2,160 in the second year, 3,240 in the third year and on, up to 20,000 per year by the end of the planned development.

Councils are introducing cat curfews and other initiatives to limit prowling and reduce the number of native animals and birds cats kill.

The City of Greater Geelong, The City of Kingston, The City of Greater Bendigo have all introduced a cat curfew between sunset and sunrise. Before implementing their cat curfew, the Mitchell Shire Council recently conducted a survey which showed 70% of people supported a cat curfew from sunrise to sunset bringing them in to line with many other Victorian Councils who have overnight or permanent curfews in place.

This problem is not isolated to Inverleigh with the Golden Plains Shire having a number of Reserves with endangered wildlife needing protection from cats as the population of cats associated with urbanisation increases.

We therefore recommend the following:

- Overlays on all properties opposite the Reserve requiring the owners of cats to install cat nets on their properties<sup>2</sup>
- And in particular Golden Plains Shire implement sunset to sunrise curfews on cats, and
- That the curfew is enforced

The Inverleigh Common is home to many native animals, all of whom are at increased risk of harm, from human population density and proximity, and loss of habitat. Road kill and maiming of our native wildlife increases each year because of an increase in the numbers of humans and their cars and their proximity to the Common. People come to live in Inverleigh to be on the land and enjoy open spaces and proximity to wildlife and nature. Police have been called out to shoot wildlife who have no chance of survival. Surf Coast Animal Rescue Service (SCARS) perform between 700- 1000 wildlife rescues a year. They have stated that there has been a 30% increase in road trauma to wildlife in the Surf Coast Shire associated with increased urbanisation.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-20/nuisance-cats-in-council-crosshairs-in-adelaide/11527730?pfmredir=sm>

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<sup>2</sup> <https://catnets.com.au>

Rural Roads Victoria does not collect data on wildlife injuries and death associated with urbanisation and have sought this data from SCARS who do collect it.

Based on SCAR's experience and knowledge regarding wildlife injuries and death associated with urbanisation, they suggest the following remediations:

- Change Common Road's speed limit to no more than 60 kilometres an hour for the length of Common Road. This will give drivers the chance to avoid hitting wildlife and even if wildlife is hit, will give them a better chance of survival.
- A devoted 400m wildlife corridor on the westernmost part of the property 385 Common Road linking the Reserve with the River at its closest point and using the farmland west of the Inverleigh-Teesdale Road as a buffer zone, where wildlife are kept apart from human activity.

## BIO-LINK

According to the Inverleigh Structure Plan<sup>3</sup> page 41, "A Bio-link of a substantial width of at least 60 metres is to be provided as part of the proposed future rezoning and development of land in Common Road. The location of the Bio-link should align with existing vegetation and be of sufficient width to accommodate increased planting to allow wildlife to travel from the Flora Reserve to the Leigh River as well as provide for pedestrian and maintenance/emergency vehicle access and also be wide enough for the edges to be mown and maintained in a fire-risk reduced state, without compromising the sustainability of the link as a wildlife corridor."

However, according to the Biolink Alliance,

With rising global temperatures ensuring that species can move to more suitable habitat is essential. This means being able to move large distances (200-400 km). So we need to re-connect our important natural places at large scales. Maintaining genetic diversity is also vital for birds, wildlife and plants to be able to adapt to climate change. Habitats need to be connected to allow populations to share their genes. Connection of habitats is key to the long-term health of our ecosystems and the species they contain. Only through keeping them healthy will they be able to continue to provide fresh drinking water, storage of carbon, pollination of plants and crops and all the other things we rely on them for. 'Connectivity conservation' is a new and inclusive approach to address conservation on a large scale. It is about finding ways of restoring and reconnecting habitat, across land tenures, that benefits both people and nature<sup>4</sup>.

The 60-metre green link is not an exclusive wildlife corridor. According to SCARS there should be a major bio-link along the western boundary of the 385 Common

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<sup>3</sup>

<https://www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Inverleigh%20Structure%20Plan.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://biolinksalliance.org.au>

Road subdivision which would be vegetated and planted out, as this borders on rural land and where the Reserve comes closest to the River, linking the Reserve to the River. In the recognition of the effects of climate change, the Common does not have a year around water source for animals and it is essential that they are enabled to safely access to the river in periods of drought in line with what they have been doing for centuries.

## ENDANGERED FLORA IN THE RESERVE

The Inverleigh Nature Reserve is home to an array of flora and fauna of which at least one species is on the endangered species list, refer Attachment 4.<sup>5</sup> Prominent among the wildflowers found in the Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve are its orchids. There are over 50 different species here, the rarest being the Dwarf Spider Orchid. Another rare Spider Orchid which is named after the town is the Inverleigh Spider Orchid (*arachnorchis* sp Inverleigh), [photos.rnr.id.au/2007/10/13/](http://photos.rnr.id.au/2007/10/13/) . This superb pink and white plant flowers between September and October, stands over 30 cm tall and is pollinated by a small thynnid wasp that is tricked into thinking it is mating with a female wasp of its species.

The Dwarf Spider Orchid (*Caladenia pumila*) is listed as “critically endangered” under the Commonwealth Government Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC) Act<sup>6</sup>. After the orchid was first described in 1922, numbers declined until only two specimens were known in 1933. There were no records of the species from then and the species was presumed extinct. In 2009, two specimens were found in the Inverleigh Flora and Fauna Reserve. Efforts are being made to increase numbers. The main threats to the species are habitat degradation, trampling, competition with other species and a lack of genetic diversity.

## IMPLICATIONS OF THE PLANNING SCHEME ON THE COMMON

The Planning Scheme amendments do not address the potential harm to the biodiversity of the Common with the rezoning and development and farming into 0.4 ha blocks. Urbanisation brings with it an increased demand for recreational space and a variety of activities in the space, such as off-road vehicle use, including motor bikes, illegal camping and gatherings in the Common which increase the risk of fires and damage to flora and the disruption to wildlife.

To mitigate the risk to wildlife and flora we therefore recommend the following, as part of the C87 Planning Scheme Amendments:

- Overlays on all properties opposite The Common requiring the owners of cats to install cat nets on their properties
- The Golden Plains Shire implement sunset to sunrise curfews on cats, and
- That the curfew is enforced
- A 173 Agreement for a Developer Contribution to establish a community-led Caretaker Program to work with Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Parks Victoria to mitigate any potential problems to wildlife

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.recreatingthecountry.com.au/wild-plants-of-inverleigh.html#>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/species/pubs/4155-listing-advice.pdf>

- and fauna associated with the urbanisation as a result of the Amendments already included in the Golden Plains Planning Scheme for 385 Common Road and 230 Hopes Plains Road, and future developments around The Common including Inverleigh and Teesdale.
- Rezoning of the north sector of the Common from farmland to Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ) as part of the Amendment C87 approval.