

## “Assessing the role of Land Use Planning in Natural Resource Management”

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## Introduction

- This discussion provides an overview of the practice of land use planning and identifies the aspects that are of benefit to natural resource management, and the limitations in existing practices.
- The Australian state of Victoria is used to illustrate the points made.



## Natural Resource Management Issues

- Australia's landscape is not suited to many of the current land management practices.
- Much of our dryland agriculture is economically marginal and causes both on-site and off-site degradation to land and water.
- We need to develop sustainable land use and land management practices that minimise further harm to natural resources and biodiversity, and that maintain viable rural communities.



## Land Use Planning

- In Ancient Rome industries posing a nuisance were located across the River Tiber.
- As a regulatory system its origins in 19<sup>th</sup> C in England during the industrial revolution, with impacts on property rights.
- Much of the core legislation regarding land use control in the Commonwealth & U.S. was introduced in the first half of the 20th Century.
- Prior to this the common law was used for land use control.



## Land Use Planning

- Balancing the rights of the landholder with rights to set policy and the right of community consultation.
- In the 1980's the British government created incremental changes to the planning system eroding the ability to control land use.
- Normal participatory rights in the planning process were often removed.
- The result was a framework within which market forces and developers could more easily operate.



## Land Use Planning in Victoria

- The planning system was initially derived from British town planning practice, although there has been considerable later influence from the U.S.A.
- The planning system operates in accordance with the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
- This Act requires freehold land to be subject to a planning scheme and administered by a municipality.
- Planning schemes regulate the use or development of land.



## Land Use Planning in Victoria

- Planning schemes include strategic policies, statutory guidelines consistent with the strategies, zones, overlays, and local policies.
- In
- J 1996 the British model of planning reform became the blueprint for Victoria.
- This reform included council amalgamations, standardisation of planning schemes and some centralisation of control.



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## Opportunities for planning to impact natural resource management

- Land use control is central to natural resource management.
- The community consultation involved in strategic planning is a good model for developing catchment strategies.
- Strategic policies could include catchment management issues and objectives.

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## Opportunities for planning to impact natural resource management

- Strategies could identify the areas in which land use change is required.
- State policies could require the adherence to industry codes of practice.
- There are opportunities to create environmental zones or overlays to control changes in land use or land development.

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## Planning schemes and Regional Catchment Strategies

- Victoria has implemented catchment authorities to implement integrated catchment management.
- Both planning and catchment management legislation provide for catchment issues to be included in planning schemes.
- These issues could include floodplain or waterway management, biodiversity, salinity management, land management practices, and control of pests, plants and animals.

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## Limitations in institutional capacity

- Catchment authorities are immature institutions with limited power to enforce land use change.
- Local government does have the power to control land use and the local government legislation requires that environmental issues be considered.
- However, most councils have limited resources for natural resource management.

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## Statutory limitations

- Planning is largely a reactive discipline and only controls proposed changes to land use.
- Much of the State policy framework is general and difficult to specifically apply.
- The zoning structure is not suited to the protection of natural resources.
- Overlay controls do not provide for protection of a broad range of habitats, the quality is variable, and their use by councils is discretionary.

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## Poor access to natural resource information

- There is a lack of knowledge of ecosystem functions and biodiversity in council staff.
- Local government decision-making about land use is hampered by limited access to natural resource information.
- Decisions about land use are based more on economic than environmental considerations.
- Limited modelling of the impact of land use.

## Recommendations

- Planning system is not geared for extensive natural resource management decision-making, and the tools provided will not lead to widespread improvements.
- Develop a whole-of-government policy framework that considers land use sustainability.
- Undertake capacity building of local governments and catchment authorities.

## Recommendations

- Improve the knowledge of natural resource issues in planning decision-makers.
- Improve the information available to local government on the condition of natural resources, areas subject to degradation, priority and risk areas, and the impact of land management practices.
- The community consultation aspects of strategic planning provide an opportunity for public debate on natural resource issues, and policy.