

Planning for Melbourne's Green Wedges and Agricultural Land

ACTION PLAN 2024







Accessible version of the document

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



Description of artwork

Aaron (Gunaikurnai) 'Movements Between the Five Clans' 2019, acrylic on canvas.

'The tracks are going between the five clans of the Gunaikurnai and the hands are the symbols of my spirit travelling around the campsites.'

This artwork was created through programs provided by the Torch. The Torch provides art, cultural and arts industry support to Indigenous offenders and ex-offenders in Victoria. The Torch aims to reduce the rate of re-offending by encouraging the exploration of identity and culture through art programs to define new pathways upon release.

Message from the Minister

From our iconic wine regions to market gardens, our green wedges contribute not only to our economy but make Melbourne one of the best cities in the world to call home.

The peri-urban area within 100 km of central Melbourne is home to some of Victoria's most fertile soil and productive agricultural land. The peri-urban area punches above its weight - it produces enough food to meet 41 per cent of Metropolitan Melbourne's food needs, including 80 per cent of its vegetables.

As Melbourne grows, the value of having agricultural land near the city will be increasingly important. It's close to consumers, workers, and food manufacturers, it has good access to water and transport, and has high quality soils.

Within the peri-urban region, Melbourne's twelve green wedges cover the areas just outside Melbourne's urban growth boundary. They are the lungs of Melbourne, providing an essential break between our suburbs.

But our precious green wedges and peri-urban areas are facing increasing pressure from over-development. They are at risk of irreversible change - once they're gone, they're gone forever.

That's why we are taking steps to protect our green wedges and agricultural land by introducing stronger planning controls. This action plan contains 20 actions which will be implemented in the next three years.

Two additional actions have already been completed:

- In partnership with Agriculture Victoria the Department of Transport and Planning established the Agricultural Planning and Advisory Service.
- In February 2023 legislative changes were introduced to provide greater clarity on the development and review of Green Wedge Management Plans by Green Wedge Councils.

I would like to thank all the submitters and those who enthusiastically engaged in the development of the action plan. It is the product of many years of engagement with farmers, local communities and Traditional Owners. This feedback was vital in developing the actions and reinforced how important our green wedges are to the livelihoods and wellbeing of Victorians.

I look forward to implementing the actions and protecting our green wedges for future generations.



The Hon. Sonya Kilkenny MP
Minister for Planning

Executive summary

This action plan explains the 20 actions the Victorian Government will take to protect Melbourne's green wedges and Victoria's agricultural land.

From iconic wine regions and spectacular beaches to the market gardens of the west, Melbourne's green wedges have attracted visitors, produced our fruit and vegetables and grown Victoria's economy for generations.

Great cities successfully manage the balance between urban development and protecting land for food production, conservation and critical infrastructure. Over the past few decades, our green wedges have faced increasing competition from urban development at the fringes of our cities. While Victoria needs more homes, we also need land for agriculture and production.

This action plan strengthens the protection of our green wedges and agricultural land by supporting the right to farm and protecting the open character of our peri-urban region. The action plan will be complemented by other government actions to ensure we make better use of land within the existing footprint of our cities and townships. This includes Victoria's Housing Statement, which supports creating more homes in places with good access to jobs, services and transport.

The actions are grouped under the following six themes:

- Protecting Melbourne's Food Bowl
- Planning for Future Farming
- Securing the Right to Farm
- Establishing Stronger Protections
- Adopting Smarter Land Use
- Setting Tighter Controls

In 2018, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning carried out a technical assessment of green wedge and peri-urban areas within a 100-kilometre radius of Melbourne. The assessment included multiple workshops and public consultations with more than 800 people and received more than 400 submissions.

In 2020, we released a consultation paper outlining 41 planning reform options designed to protect agricultural land and guide decision-making in green wedge and peri-urban areas. The consultation paper received extensive feedback, including 879 public submissions.

This feedback is captured in the accompanying *Community Findings Report*, and complemented by our *Response to Options Report*.

Green wedge land

Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas are non-urban areas outside the urban growth boundary.

They were set aside in the 1970s to conserve rural activities and significant natural features and resources between the growth areas of metropolitan Melbourne as they developed along major road and rail links.

Since 2002, green wedge land has been defined under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. There are 12 designated green wedge areas located within the 17 metropolitan-fringe local government areas that border Melbourne's urban growth boundary.

The green wedges and peri-urban areas are places for food production, tourism, quarries, airports, sewage treatment, water catchment, and waste and resource recovery.

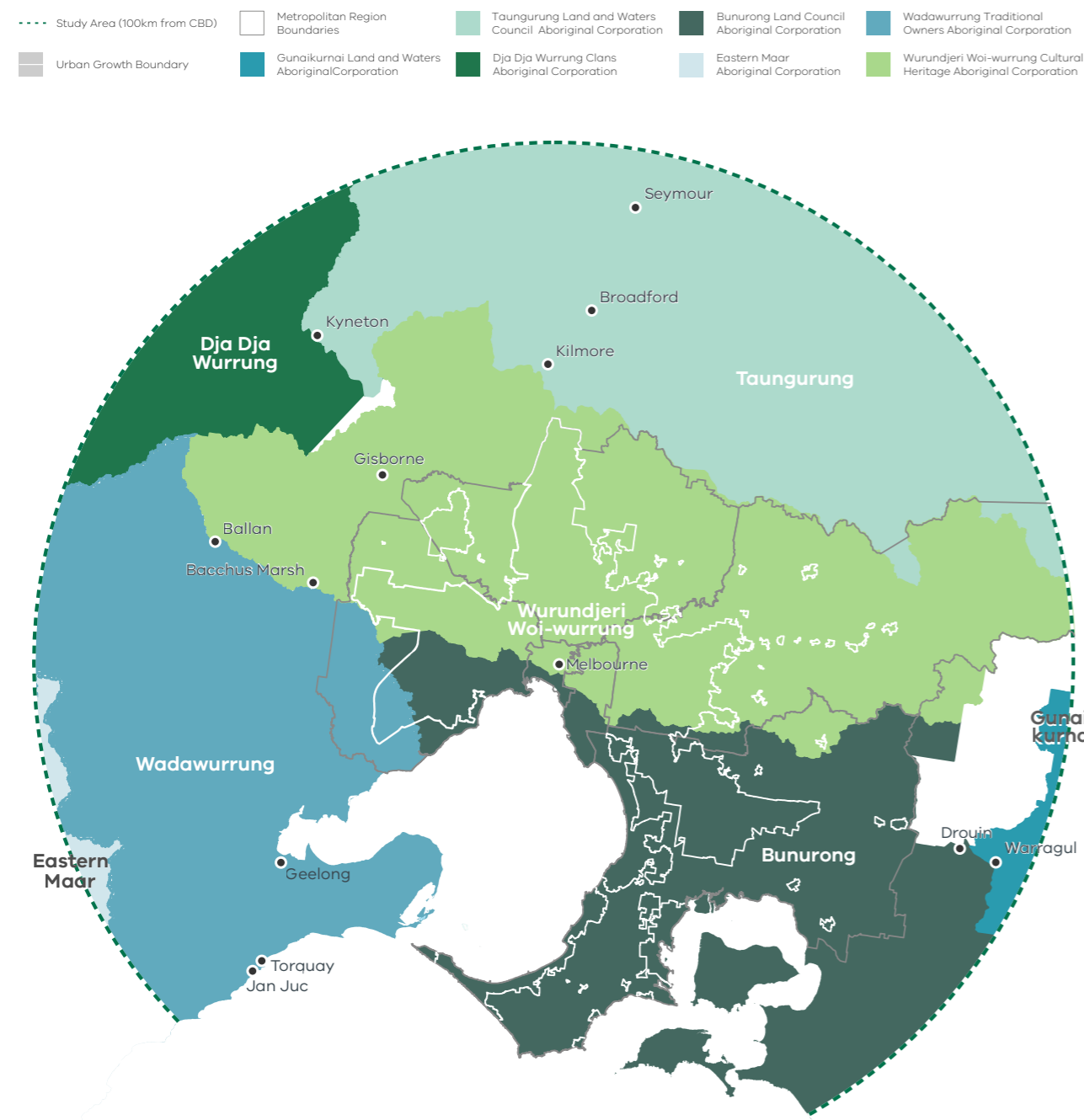
They have some of Victoria's best farmlands – producing 10 per cent of the state's gross value of agricultural production.

Map 1: Melbourne's green wedge and peri-urban areas



Working with Traditional Owners

Throughout the engagement period, we consulted Traditional Owners on the proposed reforms. We will continue to partner with Traditional Owners to ensure the Government's actions reflect First Peoples' knowledge, priorities and aspirations for land, water and culture and contribute to self-determination.



Why action is needed now

Melbourne's green wedges and urban growth boundary have helped protect farmland and the natural environment from residential and other urban uses. However, these protections need a refresh.

The planning and management objectives of green wedges and agricultural land need to be reviewed to keep up with the changing needs of Victorians and the growing diversity of non-urban land uses. The way we plan and manage land also needs to be updated to ensure our communities remain resilient to climate change and continue to have secure access to food, water and energy.

With that in mind, planning controls for Melbourne's green wedges and peri-urban agricultural land must be strengthened to:

- respond to land speculation and the continued pressure to convert farmland to other uses
- respond to the high demand for 'rural lifestyle' living and the desire to use green wedges and agricultural land for urban activities

- retain land for agriculture and other important non-urban uses, and prevent its incremental loss to other uses
- prevent land use conflict
- ensure the planning system helps farmers to grow, adapt and innovate
- reflect the rising importance of, and need to protect, agricultural production and other resources, such as extractives, near Melbourne
- protect their significant features and assets to improve environmental, economic, cultural and health and wellbeing outcomes
- provide greater certainty and consistency to support local government decision-making and robust planning controls and strategies that ensure a sustainable, growing city and state.



Victoria's Housing Statement

Across Australia, housing affordability is declining. Victorians are finding it harder to buy their first home or find rental accommodation in places they want to live. The Housing Statement will supercharge the state's housing supply so that more Victorians can enjoy an affordable place to call home.

But increasing housing supply doesn't have to come at the cost of agricultural land or our green wedges.

Victoria's Housing Statement sets out a plan for building 800,000 new homes over the next decade. Increasing residential density, choice, and affordability within Melbourne's established suburbs will allow us to protect our green wedge land from inappropriate development while ensuring Victoria remains connected, sustainable and thriving.

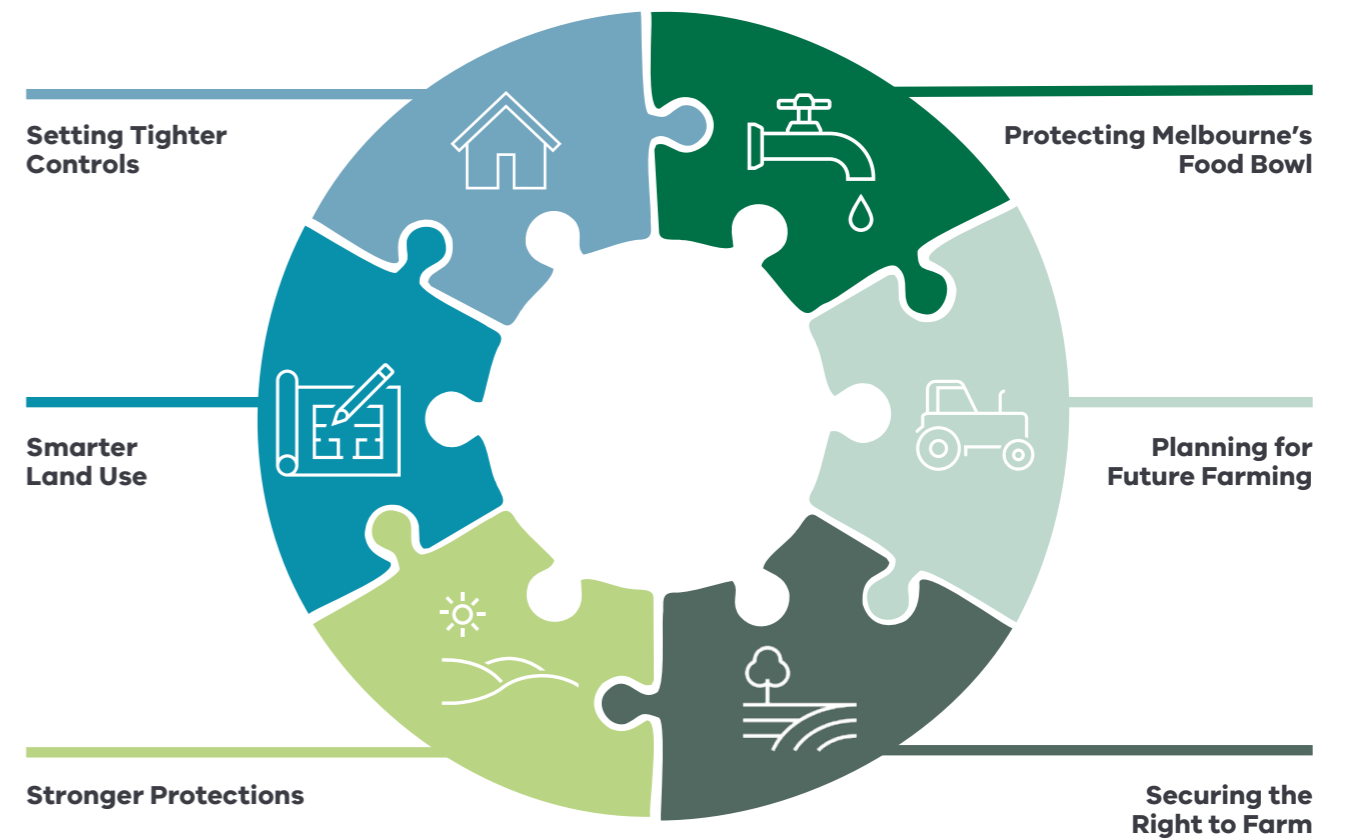
Melbourne's urban growth boundary

The Victorian Government is committed to maintaining a permanent urban growth boundary (UGB) around Melbourne to contain the city's footprint and protect our green wedges, rural landscapes and agricultural land.

Victoria's Housing Statement, affirms the current UGB location as the city's outer limit for growth so that we can create a more consolidated and sustainable city.

Actions to shape the future of Melbourne's green wedges and agricultural land

This section explains the 20 actions the Victorian Government will implement to better protect our green wedges and agricultural land. We acknowledge that implementing these important reforms is a significant body of work and for some actions additional consultation with key stakeholders will be needed.



Protecting Melbourne's Food Bowl

Melbourne's population is projected to hit 6.2 million by 2031 and 8 million by the 2050s. This population growth, together with the impacts of climate change, will increase the importance of food production close to Melbourne.

Although relatively small, the farmlands close to Melbourne produce 10 per cent of Victoria's gross value of agricultural production. The land around Bacchus Marsh and Werribee also include some of the state's most productive farmlands.

These farmlands must be protected.

That is why this action plan includes new protections to help these areas remain productive and resilient, while supporting increased use of recycled water and treated stormwater where these provide improved reliability and water quality to help facilitate expanded agricultural production.

Key actions

- **Action 1:** Introduce a new planning scheme overlay to protect key irrigated agricultural areas in Werribee and Bacchus Marsh
- **Action 2:** Develop criteria to guide the application of the new planning scheme overlay
- **Action 3:** Explore opportunities for water authorities' views to be considered in the assessment of planning permits for Melbourne's peri-urban areas where there is current or planned recycled water supply
- **Action 4:** Develop a new regional policy to preserve future opportunities for irrigated agriculture around Melbourne

Planning for Future Farming

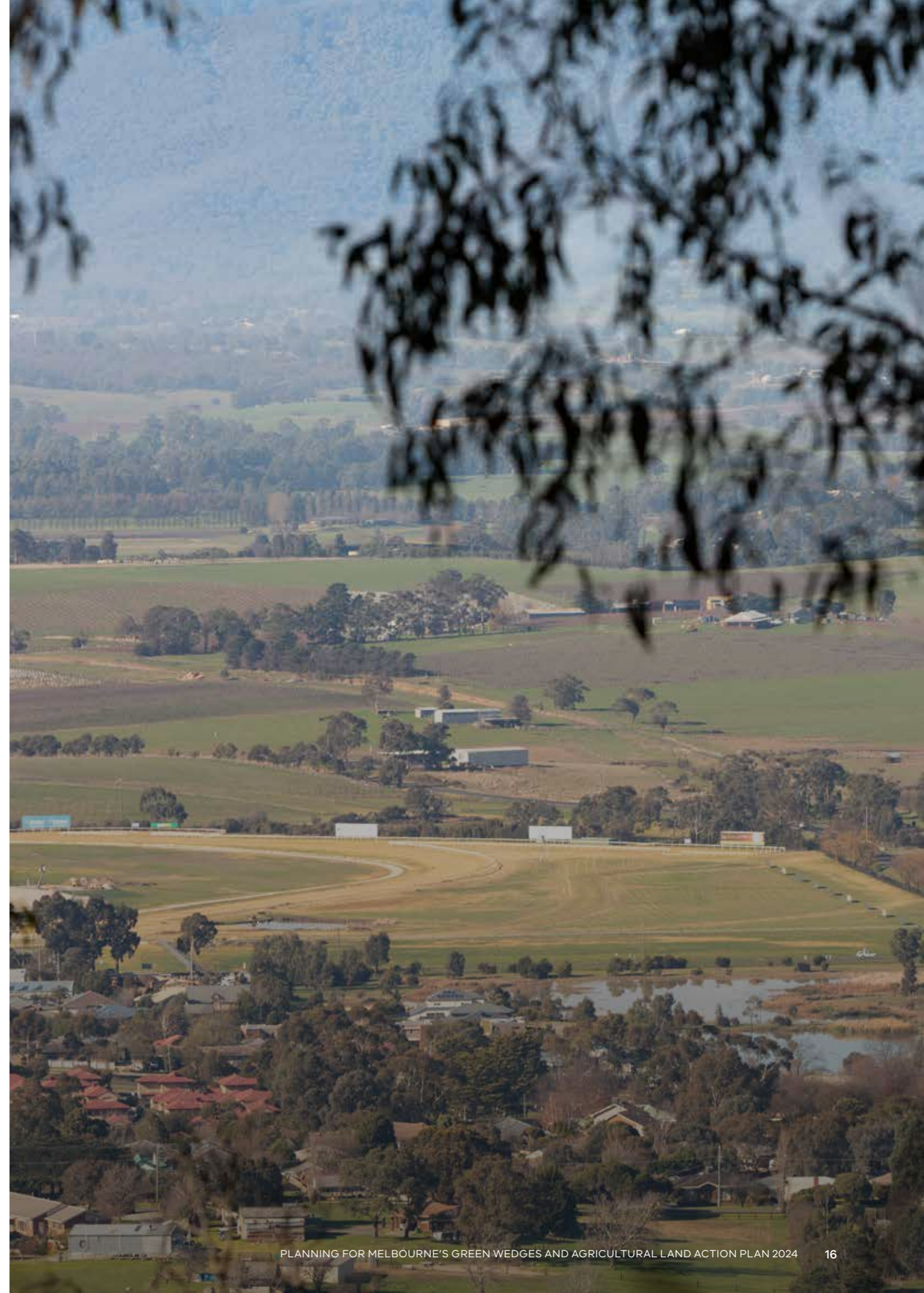
Farmland on Melbourne's urban fringe is highly productive. It is also extremely valuable due to its proximity to city markets and infrastructure.

There is a strong belief in the community and among stakeholders that the importance of all agricultural land around Melbourne should be recognised by the planning system. The more sustainable Melbourne's agricultural production becomes, the more competitive the city will be.

That is why this action plan will deliver clearer guidelines and advice to councils on planning for future farming activities. This initiative will protect agricultural land and create greater certainty for farmers.

Key actions

- **Action 5:** Update agricultural planning policy to better protect agricultural land within 100 kilometres of Melbourne and make the best use of our fertile soils
- **Action 6:** Contribute to better decisions by providing more guidance for local government planners in assessing planning permit applications within agricultural areas through the development of a Planning Practice Note



Securing the Right to Farm

Farming and urban living are not always compatible. Conflicts can occur when land close to farms is developed for residential use – constraining production of food, fibre, and raw materials.

The best way to prevent land-use conflict is to prevent incompatible land use and development close to farmland through measures such as buffer areas and the ‘agent of change’ principle.

That is why this action plan is committed to support the right to farm through changes to the Victoria Planning Provisions, policy, zones, overlays and guidelines.

Key actions

- **Action 7:** Strengthen the ‘right to farm’ by expanding the ‘agent of change’ principle within 100 kilometres of Melbourne – assign responsibility for mitigating the impacts of sensitive uses on lawful agricultural operations to the permit applicant to achieve better land use management
- **Action 8:** Update the Planning Policy Framework to encourage appropriate siting, design and scale of sensitive uses and development in rural areas within 100 kilometres of Melbourne – thereby avoiding conflicts with agricultural uses

Stronger Protections

Existing legislation has helped restrict the subdivision of green wedge land. But, to deliver on actions outlined in *Plan Melbourne*, legislative provisions have been further strengthened to enable strategic planning for and management of green wedge land.

The importance of local Green Wedge Management Plans is widely recognised as both a key land use strategy and a land management tool.

We will improve guidance and directions for councils in planning for green wedge areas to ensure their rich values and rural uses are protected.

Key actions

- **Action 9:** Update planning policy to emphasise the non-urban values, purpose and character of the green wedges
- **Action 10:** Update Planning Practice Note 31 ‘Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan’ to better direct green wedge planning at the local level
- **Action 11:** Develop a new Planning Practice Note for urban-rural interface areas that manages land use pressures and supports a permanent edge to growth

Smarter Land Use

Melbourne’s green wedges and agricultural areas are major tourism and recreation attractions, offering parks, vineyards, rolling hills, grasslands, winding rivers, coasts and estuaries.

These landscapes must be protected from poorly designed, inappropriately placed development that detracts from their appearance, character and values.

That is why this action plan sets out stronger and clearer guidance on the appropriate size, scale, siting and design of land use and development in the green wedges. This guidance places strong regard on the landscape characteristics and other considerations within specific areas.

In the green wedges and across Victoria, the sale of produce at farm gates provides farmers with extra income and contributes to tourism. Expanding the source of produce that is sold at the farm gate – without making them shops – will provide more flexibility to farmers and tourism operators.

Key actions

- **Action 12:** Review and update decision guidelines and application requirements for planning applications within green wedge zones
- **Action 13:** Introduce mandatory site coverage, setbacks and building heights for discretionary uses in the Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone as a pilot project
- **Action 14:** Increase flexibility for primary produce/farm gate sales

Setting Tighter Controls

As land prices in urban areas rise, there is increased pressure to locate discretionary uses on the non-urban side of the urban growth boundary – within green wedges.

Discretionary uses can support key green wedge values, but these uses are often more appropriately located in urban areas.

There is strong community support for strengthening planning controls in green wedges, and prohibiting and restricting some discretionary uses.

Key actions

- **Action 15:** Prohibit new data centres in the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and the Rural Conservation Zone
- **Action 16:** Prohibit subdivision of small lots below the minimum lot size in some zones within 100 kilometres of Melbourne
- **Action 17:** Insert new conditions for exhibition centres, group accommodation and hotels in green wedge zones
- **Action 18:** Strengthen the link between host farm accommodation and operating agricultural properties
- **Action 19:** Introduce a new permit trigger for soil dumping (clean fill)
- **Action 20:** Introduce a new land use term for ‘community hall’



Implementation

Delivery of the initiatives in this action plan will provide an unprecedented level of protection for green wedges and agricultural land.

The following table outlines the 20 actions together, detailing their implementation timing and affected land. Short-term actions will be delivered within the first year of the action plan's publication, while

medium-term actions will be delivered within three years. Affected land is described as land within Melbourne's green wedges, within 100 kilometres of Melbourne, or statewide.

Action	Protecting Melbourne's food bowl	Timing	Affected land
1	Introduce a new planning scheme overlay to protect key irrigated agricultural areas in Werribee and Bacchus Marsh	Medium	100km
2	Develop criteria to guide the application of the new planning scheme overlay	Short	100km
3	Explore opportunities for water authorities' views to be considered in the assessment of planning permits for Melbourne's peri-urban areas where there is current or planned recycled water supply	Medium	100km
4	Develop a new regional policy to preserve opportunities for irrigated agriculture around Melbourne	Short	100km
Action	Planning for future farming	Timing	Affected land
5	Update agricultural planning policy to better protect agricultural land within 100 kilometres of Melbourne and make the best use of our fertile soils	Short	100km
6	Contribute to better decisions by providing more guidance for local government planners in assessing planning permit applications within agricultural areas through the development of a Planning Practice Note	Medium	Statewide

Action	Securing the right to farm	Timing	Affected land
7	Strengthen the 'right to farm' by expanding the 'agent of change' principle within 100 kilometres of Melbourne – assign responsibility for mitigating the impacts of sensitive uses on lawful agricultural operations to the permit applicant to achieve better land use management	Medium	100km
8	Update the Planning Policy Framework to encourage appropriate siting, design and scale of sensitive uses and development in rural areas within 100 kilometres of Melbourne – thereby avoiding conflicts with agricultural uses	Short	100km
Action	Stronger protections	Timing	Affected land
9	Update planning policy to emphasise the non-urban values, purpose, and character of the green wedges	Short	Green wedges
10	Update Planning Practice Note 31 'Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan' to better direct green wedge planning at the local level	Medium	Green wedges
11	Develop a new Planning Practice Note for urban-rural interface areas that manages land use pressures and supports a permanent edge to growth	Medium	Green wedges
Action	Smarter land use	Timing	Affected land
12	Review and update decision guidelines and application requirements for planning applications in green wedge zones	Medium	Green wedges
13	Introduce mandatory site coverage, setbacks and building heights for discretionary uses in the Green Wedge Zone and Green Wedge A Zone as a pilot project	Medium	Green wedges
14	Increase flexibility for primary produce/farm gate sales	Medium	Statewide
Action	Setting tighter controls	Timing	Affected land
15	Prohibit new data centres in the Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and the Rural Conservation Zone	Short	Statewide
16	Prohibit subdivision of small lots below the minimum lot size in some zones within 100km of Melbourne	Short	100km
17	Insert new conditions for exhibition centres, group accommodation and hotels	Short	Green wedges
18	Strengthen the link between host farm accommodation and operating agricultural properties	Medium	Statewide
19	Introduce a new permit trigger for soil dumping (clean fill)	Medium	Statewide
20	Introduce land use term for 'community hall'	Medium	Statewide



