



11.1 ESTABLISHMENT OF A SOUTH EASTERN BIODIVERSITY NETWORK

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1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To report to Councillors on the progress made in relation to the request for the establishment of a South Eastern Biodiversity Network (SEBN), put forward as a Notice of Motion at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 16 November 2022.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 At the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 16 November 2022, it was resolved that Council receives a report at the earliest possible opportunity exploring the establishment of a Southeastern Councils Biodiversity Network (consisting of the cities of Hobson's Bay, Glen Eira, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Kingston, Frankston, Mornington Shire and Bayside). The network to be comprised of Councillors and supported by Council officers from the network councils in the Southeastern metropolitan region, with the purpose of:
- information sharing
 - collaboration in relation to joint projects
 - advocacy in relation to common objectives
 - working with State and Federal Governments on environment initiatives
 - exploring wildlife corridors across the region
 - engaging with traditional owners across the region.
- 2.2 In response to the Notice of Motion, Council officers from across the municipalities have met several times since November 2022 and discussed options for the network. These discussions highlighted that it is unlikely that existing networks will be able to accommodate the scope and purpose of the proposed SEBN.
- 2.3 On 11 May 2023 Councillors from across the municipalities met and agreed to continue to work towards the establishment of the network. Bayside City Council is likely to take the lead, and it is proposed that the aim will be to establish a network by late 2023.
- 2.4 Councillors in attendance at the meeting on 11 May 2023 included Deputy Mayor Cr Jo Samuel-King (Bayside City Council), Cr Hadi Saab (Kingston City Council), Cr Sue Pennicuik (Glen Eira City Council), Cr Chris Hill (Frankston City Council). Cr Harvey and Cr Baker (Kingston City Council), Cr Cunsolo and Cr Baxter (City of Port Phillip) and Cr Garad (greater Dandenong City Council) were apologies. Council officers from most municipalities were also in attendance.
- 2.5 The governance model being explored would be based on the South East Climate Change Alliance (SECCA) model and includes a Management Committee (President, VP, Secretary, Treasurer) sitting above Administration (Executive Officer, Project Support), with a Councillor Advisory Group linking to the Management Committee.



- 2.6 The successful establishment of the network will be dependent on buy in and the contribution of administrative resources and funds by interested Councils. The cost and resource implications to the City of Port Phillip for the establishment of a new network are not yet understood.
- 2.7 There are a number of existing networks linking south-eastern Councils, including Living Melbourne, Living Links (City of Port Phillip is not a member), South East Councils Climate Change Alliance, Association of Bayside Municipalities and LGPro Biodiversity Planning Network (City of Port Phillip does not participate). The scope of these existing networks does not cover biodiversity.
- 2.8 Living Melbourne, is coming to the end of its funding in June 2023. There is an opportunity to consider the future of Living Melbourne and whether the scope of any of the existing networks could be expanded to support the goals of the proposed SEBN, rather than establishing a new network..

3. RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 3.1 Notes that Council officers are undertaking this work to respond to the Notice of Motion presented at the Ordinary Meeting of Council on 16 November 2022.
- 3.2 Authorises Council officers to continue discussions with the existing networks to determine whether the scope of these networks could be expanded to include biodiversity and support the goals of the proposed SEBN
- 3.3 Notes that Council officers will undertake a more in-depth options analysis and continue to develop an understanding of the financial and resource implications to Council for the establishment of a new network.

4. KEY POINTS/ISSUES

Existing networks

- 4.1 Council officers have met with representatives from municipalities in the south-east to survey the level of support for the establishment of a new network. To date there have been a range of views about the need for a new network given that a range of networks linking south-east municipalities already exist, including:
 - Living Melbourne
 - Living Links (*City of Port Phillip is not a member*)
 - South East Councils Climate Change Alliance
 - Association of Bayside Municipalities
 - LGPro Biodiversity Planning Network (*City of Port Phillip does not participate*).
- 4.2 The State Government has also committed to various biodiversity forums comprising a range of stakeholders to ensure collaboration is achieved in discussing issues around Victorian biodiversity conservation, however there is still some clarity required from the State Government around how the outcomes from these forums can be maximised, and what role a SEBN may play.
- 4.3 Council officers have explored the purpose of the proposed SEBN and the purpose of existing networks. Bayside City Council prepared the table below to demonstrate the alignments and gaps in these networks:

MEETING OF THE PORT PHILLIP CITY COUNCIL

21 JUNE 2023



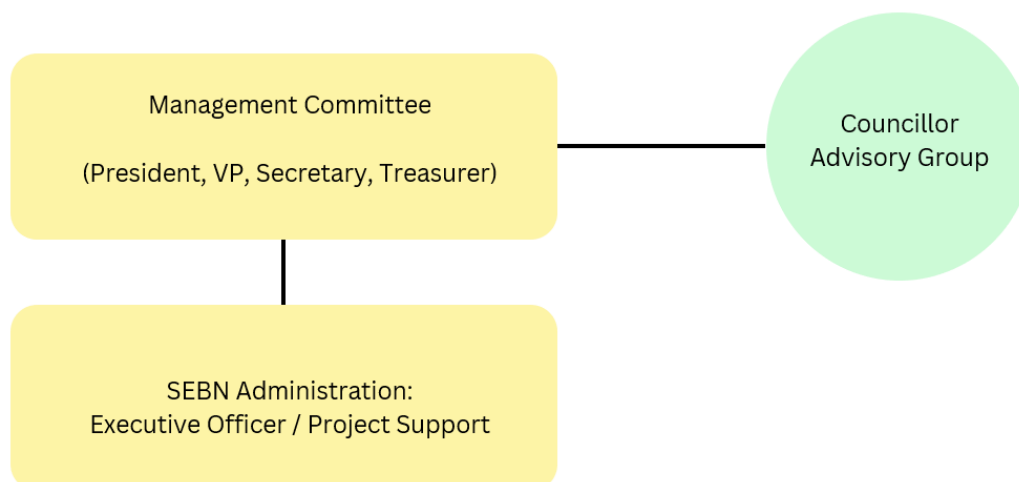
| Intended purpose | Living Links | Living Melbourne | SECCCA | ABM | MAV Biodiversity Network | LGPro Bio Network |
|--|--------------|------------------|--------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Information sharing | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Collaboration on joint projects | X | X | X | Limited focus on projects | X | X |
| Advocacy in relation to common objectives | | | X | X | X | |
| Working with State and Federal Government | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Exploring wildlife corridors across the region | X | | | | | |
| Engaging with Traditional Owners across the region | Indirect | | | Indirect | | |
| Protecting endangered species | X | | | | X | X |
| Has Bayside officer Membership | X | | X | X | Not active | |
| Has a Councillor presence | | | X | X | | No |
| Paid membership | X | X | X | X | | X |

4.4 The City of Port Phillip is a Living Melbourne partner, and a member of SECCA and the ABM, but is not a member of the LG Pro Biodiversity Network or Living Links (out of the catchment).

Proposed structure and resources

4.5 At this point, it is unlikely that any of the existing networks are open to widening their scope to include a SEBN and therefore a new format is likely to be established.

4.6 For Councils that have participated in the discussions to date, if a new structure is created the preferred model has been discussed as being a similar setup to SECCCA, where there is an executive support to oversee delivery of actions/projects, with a Councillor Advisory Group also. The model is as follows:



4.7 With any new network, time and resourcing is required to drive the buy-in at various levels, particularly where a funding commitment will be required. It is anticipated that the establishment of a SEBN would require funding and resourcing from each Council



to support the ongoing administrative activities of the SEBN. The cost and resource implications to the City of Port Phillip for the establishment of a new network are not yet understood.

Living Melbourne

- 4.8 In addition to the proposed SEBN, Council officers have also been meeting to discuss the future of Living Melbourne. Living Melbourne will not be funded after 30 June 2023.
- 4.9 Living Melbourne was launched in June 2019 and is comprised of 41 organisations, including the City of Port Phillip amongst 30 metropolitan Councils, with a collaborative vision to connect, extend and enhance urban greening across metropolitan Melbourne. The Living Melbourne Strategy is the overarching urban forest strategy for Metropolitan Melbourne.
- 4.10 Living Melbourne has enabled practitioners and communities to provide better greening outcomes that enhance liveability, biodiversity and habitat connectivity at scale; and has provided the platform for collaborative projects and research that are of benefit to the City of Port Phillip and all metropolitan Councils by identifying actions that are better addressed collaboratively rather than individually.
- 4.11 For the financial years 2020 and 2021, Living Melbourne has been funded by Greater Western Water, Yarra Valley Water, South East Water and Melbourne Water funded the facilitation, co-ordination and major projects of Living Melbourne. Councils have generally provided in kind support only.
- 4.12 On 22 May 2023 a letter was issued to the CEOs of all Metropolitan Councils asking for support via a financial contribution to enable Living Melbourne to continue.
- 4.13 The direct benefit of the Living Melbourne partnership to the City of Port Phillip includes research outputs and information sharing of:
 - Value analysis of urban greening on private property
 - Let's scale up! Engaging and Motivating Community
 - Urban Greeners Resource Hub – a collation of resources
 - Urban forest data collection and methodologies.

Next steps

- 4.14 There is a potential opportunity to consider the future of Living Melbourne in conjunction with the establishment of a SEBN as the goals of both are strongly complimentary.
- 4.15 The next steps for the establishment of the SEBN is to establish the level of commitment each Council can contribute. Bayside City Council will likely take the lead on this work, supported by officers from each Council proposed in the network.
- 4.16 Should Council wish to commit to the development of a network, the level of financial and resourcing commitment will need to be established.

5. CONSULTATION AND STAKEHOLDERS

- 5.1 Council officers have been consulting with officers from Hobsons Bay, Glen Eira, Melbourne, Port Phillip, Kingston, Frankston, Mornington Shire and Bayside.
- 5.2 To date, work on the SEBN has included officers from the Open Space team. Further consultation with other teams throughout Council will be required in the next steps.



6. LEGAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no known legal implications associated with this report.

7. FINANCIAL IMPACT

- 7.1 Networks like the proposed SEBN have the potential to give greater value in terms of research capability and expertise, knowledge sharing, leveraging, project funding (particularly for joint Council projects) than Council could support individually. The success of which is dependent on the success of the network via the support and contributions of all participating Councils.
- 7.2 There are considerable administrative needs to establish and operate these networks. Once established, additional funds are expected to be required in order to provide a multiyear financial commitment to the network. It is not currently known what the cost of this will be as it will be informed by the number of participating Councils and the resourcing required. There is no budget provision at this stage.
- 7.3 Once the network is established, additional funds are expected to be required over a multi-year period to support the continued operations of the network.
- 7.4 Living Melbourne are asking for a \$15,000 annual commitment for four years.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

8.1 Habitat loss and fragmentation is a main factor in the decline and disappearance of many species in Port Phillip and throughout Australia. Protecting and enhancing the biodiversity throughout the City of Port Phillip and within the region benefits local plants and wildlife and provides ecosystem services that cool the city and contribute to flood mitigation and improved water quality.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 9.1 Throughout recent community engagements, our community has emphasised the importance of biodiversity for connection to place and community, for amenity and provision of ecosystem services to mitigate against urban heat islands and flooding, and the value of biodiversity, plants, birds, animals and insects as important in and of itself.
- 9.2 Being involved in the establishment of a new biodiversity network and continuing to support Living Melbourne demonstrates the City of Port Phillip's value of biodiversity and commitment to improving biodiversity both within Port Phillip and across the region.
- 9.3 Biodiversity and ecological connectivity contributes to a sense of place and amenity for Port Phillip residents, and contributes to a connection with Country for many. Strengthening biodiversity improves greener public places and has been demonstrated to have positive health and wellbeing benefits.

10. ALIGNMENT TO COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICY

The strategic objective Sustainable Port Phillip in the *Council Plan 2017-27* includes the following actions:

- 10.1 The City is actively mitigating and adapting to climate change and invests in designing, constructing and managing our public spaces to optimise water sustainably and reduce flooding (blue/green infrastructure).



- 10.2 We will provide urban forests to increase tree canopy, vegetation, greening and biodiversity and reduce urban heat, in line with Council's Greening Port Phillip and Act and Adapt strategies, prioritised within available budgets each year

11. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

11.1 TIMELINE

11.1.1 Council officers will continue discussions with the existing networks to determine whether the scope of these networks could be expanded to include biodiversity and support the goals of the proposed SEBN.

11.1.2 Council officers will undertake a more in-depth options analysis and continue to develop an understanding of the financial and resource implications to Council for the establishment of a new network.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

11.2.1 Council officers will report back to Councillors with a recommendation once an options analysis has been completed and the financial and resource implications of establishing a new network have been realised.

12. OFFICER DIRECT OR INDIRECT INTEREST

12.1 The officers involved in the preparation of this briefing have the following direct interest in the matter.

12.2 Jennifer Witheridge is a volunteer member of the Living Melbourne Advisory Group, a group with representation from Councils, DEECA, private industry and University of Melbourne to establish the future of Living Melbourne when existing funding concludes in June 2023.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil