

Submission in response to
Moorabool Planning Scheme Amendment C109moor:
Merrimu Precinct Structure Plan (PSP)

Joint submission by

Thursday 9th April 2026

Introduction

We oppose Amendment C109moor its current form due to the position of the proposed precinct being adjacent to the sensitive and significant Long Forest Conservation Reserve, Pyrites Creek (a tributary of the Werribee River system), aspects of the rezoning proposal which increase risk to the Werribee River's catchment, ecology, flora and fauna, and lack of adequate measures in the rezoning proposal to protect these biodiversity values. These concerns are outlined further throughout this submission.

However, if Amendment C109moor does go ahead, it will require a much more rigorous approach to protecting the Pyrites Creek corridor, Long Forest Conservation Reserve, and ecological values present on and adjacent to the precinct. We appreciate the initial efforts made toward including these matters in the PSP, however more detail is needed on preventing erosion, sediment runoff, construction waste-related pollution, light pollution (both during and after construction), and weed incursion. The PSP also fails to adequately address protection of the adjacent Pyrites Creek, barely mentioning this creek throughout the document.

Below we have made our recommendations in response to parts of the PSP. There are more details we would have liked to add to our submissions, however the consultation period was too short for full participation of volunteer groups such as our groups, especially given we have also spent hundreds of hours over the past month dealing with environmental pollution issues from current developments in Moorabool Shire.

Our recommendations and requests are as follows:

1.2 “Function of the PSP”

- Function of the PSP should also include protecting biodiversity and other environmental values of the precinct and of neighbouring environmentally sensitive areas.

1.4 Regional context

- We note that this section states that, “Bacchus Marsh is a regional centre... 3 kilometres north-east of Bacchus Marsh”. Although the latter part of this sentence is a minor typo in the larger scheme of things, it does potentially demonstrate a concerning lack of proof-reading and attention to detail.
- We also note that the reason Bacchus Marsh is experiencing rapid growth, is not primarily “due to the lifestyle and amenity opportunities”, as stated in the PSP, but due to pressure from State Government for Moorabool Shire Council to open up further areas for greenfields urban development, mostly in areas with soil-types and environmental values which make the areas unsuitable for large-scale urban development. The rate of growth in Bacchus Marsh is not the natural growth associated with people moving for lifestyle and amenity opportunities. We are concerned that the State Government continues to pressure Moorabool Shire Council to find space for large-scale urban developments, given the areas of this shire not already used for productive agriculture, contain highly dispersive and sodic soils (unsuitable for building on) and areas of high conservation value, including critically endangered grassland ecosystems and fauna. A large body of empirical research shows that greenfields developments in peri-urban areas do not address affordable housing shortages, and instead contribute to biodiversity loss, species extinction, poor quality builds and associated financial stress (e.g. building on sodic soils leading to houses cracking, as has occurred in Bacchus Marsh and other areas), increased car use (even within ‘walkable’ developments), and burdens on local communities. Greenfields housing developments in the Bacchus Marsh area so far have caused a high degree of environmental pollution and other impacts, which we as community volunteers have had to spend thousands of hours rectifying. It needs to be acknowledged that this exceptionally high rate of rapid urban growth in Bacchus Marsh is associated with the State Government’s desire for urban growth in this area, despite the well-known limitations of this approach to urban planning.

1.5 Precinct features

- The PSP correctly states that, “The precinct contains areas of high ecological significance, including habitat for Matters of National Environmental Significance such as Natural Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (NTGVVP), Golden Sun Moth (GSM), Spiny Rice Flower (SRF), and potential Victorian Grassland Earless Dragon (VGED) habitat.” We argue that this, along with its proximity to the Long Forest Conservation Reserve, and the presence of highly dispersive soils which have caused collapse of escarpment edges and roads nearby, make the site unsuitable for urban development. We note that the Temperate Grassland of the Victorian Volcanic Plain (NTGVVP) is one of the most endangered ecosystems worldwide.
- This section fails to mention Pyrites Creek as being adjacent to the precinct, as does most of the PSP. This is a major and highly concerning omission, given the importance of protecting Pyrites Creek from impacts of the development. Pyrites Creek contains significant ecological

values which need to be protected. Pyrites Creek also discharges to Werribee River which again contains significant ecological values which need to be protected.

2.1 PSP vision

- We support the PSP's statement, "By planning in consultation with WWCHAC and other key stakeholders, the precinct will identify and celebrate important Aboriginal cultural heritage connections with Country and respond to cultural sensitivities of the existing landscape."
- We would like to see greater emphasis on protecting biodiversity values, including adjacent biodiversity values of Pyrites Creek and Long Forest Conservation Reserve, in this vision.

2.2 PSP purpose

- This section needs to also include responding to the precinct's environmental values, not just environmental constraints. It also needs more emphasis on protecting surrounding areas of ecological significance, including Long Forest Conservation Reserve and Pyrites Creek.
- Although we agree with, "12. An integrated and sustainable approach to management of water that responds holistically to drainage considerations and prioritises sustainable consumption and blue-green infrastructure.", this also needs to more explicitly include prioritising protection of local creeks.

Plan 2 Place-based plan

- This place-based plan seems to be missing many of the existing wetlands on the site. Existing wetlands should be retained in the precinct, due to both their environmental value, and because filling and building on wetlands results in houses cracking on the types of soils present in this area (as shown in empirical research and demonstrated by multiple houses with cracking issues which were built on filled wetland areas of Stonehill Estate, Bacchus Marsh).
- The wildlife corridors on this place-based plan need to be labelled, so that they aren't used for other incompatible purposes in the future. The wildlife corridors also need to connect the western escarpment to the eastern escarpment, as otherwise wildlife will attempt to cross developed areas of the precinct, leading to safety issues for both wildlife and humans (including traffic safety issues).

3.1.2 Requirements and guidelines – viable densities

- We are pleased to see the following mentioned in parts of this section: Topographical features, slopes and break of slope; Areas of ecological and cultural significance; Any current and future Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register places, objects and values; Existing native vegetation, including but not limited to high and critical retention value trees; Existing native fauna areas, including but not limited to Golden Sun Moths; Existing and future drainage and waterway areas; Existing landscape values and framed vistas; Historic heritage, including existing structures and dry stone walls.

We note that dry stone walls can also contain high habitat values for native fauna, and this also needs to be considered in other sections related to dry stone walls.

- We are pleased to see walking, cycling and street trees encouraged in this section. We advocate that these need to be designed in environmentally sensitive ways, including use of permeable surfaces where possible (which are available for all-abilities access) and following the Australian Guidelines on Wildlife Sensitive Lighting (2023), including ensuring nighttime lighting is not used near conservation areas and along wildlife corridors. This has been achieved in other developments and local government areas by designating ‘dark corridors’ that are only for daytime use by humans (allowing night-time use by wildlife), and prioritising lighting (in wildlife sensitive ways) only in areas humans need to access at night.
- R6 should also include demonstrating protection of the local environment.
- R8 states, “Lots facing drainage reserves must have a road or open space buffer between them and a wetland or waterway.”

Our observations are that open space buffers to wetlands, waterways and conservation areas are preferable to road buffers, for the following reason:

- Road buffers make it easy for people to dump rubbish alongside/into the wetland, waterway or conservation reserve. This has become a major issue in Bacchus Marsh and Hopetoun Park in recent years of urban growth. Areas where the buffer is an appropriate reserve, perhaps with a walking path for passive surveillance don’t experience much dumping, whereas adjacent areas where the buffer is a road experience high levels of dumping.
- Roads require night-time lighting. Night-time lighting is highly detrimental to biodiversity values of wetlands, waterways and conservation reserves. Open space areas that don’t require night-time lighting allow a dark ‘buffer’ between the wetland/waterway/conservation reserve and other uses, whereas roads don’t.

Any open spaces used as buffers for these purposes need to be compatible with protecting the biodiversity values of the wetland, waterway or conservation reserve, including no use of weed species (including weedy grasses that could spread to waterways and conservation reserves), and not using artificial light at night.

3.2 Safe, Accessible, and Well-connected

- We advocate for use of pervious surfaces for walking and cycling paths, as this:
 - allows water to penetrate the ground underneath
 - reducing stormwater runoff (reducing negative impacts on Pyrites Creek and reducing pressure on stormwater infrastructure),
 - increasing availability of groundwater to trees and other vegetation (increasing their survival),
 - allows movement of small animals such as lizards and skinks (which tend to avoid wide concrete paths)
 - reduces reflective heat, in turn increasing pedestrian and cyclist use of paths on warm days
 - is usually a more comfortable surface for jogging/running than concrete
 - increases visual amenity, compared to concrete

Pervious surfaces are readily available for all-abilities access, and have been successfully used in other local government areas.

- At R26, reference needs to be made to the National Light Pollution Guidelines for Wildlife (DCCEEW, 2023), including avoiding night-lighting altogether in areas which it would negatively

impact conservation values. Artificial light at night, including both direct and indirect light, has a highly negative impact on Golden Sun Moths and other important ecological values present on and adjacent to the precinct site. See also our related comment on section 3.1.2.

3.4 High Quality Public Realm

- We are pleased to see protection of environmental values included in this section.
- We agree with the points listed at R36, however also request that the developer be required to clear rubbish and weeds throughout the development and building phases, not just after completion.
Otherwise, the rubbish and weeds blow into surrounding environmentally sensitive areas as has occurred at the Underbank and Stonehill developments in Bacchus Marsh. Bacchus Marsh Platypus Alliance volunteers have removed over 50,000 litres-worth of construction waste (including 16,000 litres at our most recent clean-up) from just one section of the reserve between Fulham Circuit and Werribee River in Underbank development, Bacchus Marsh. If we had not removed it, this 50,000 litres of construction waste would be in the river system. Developers need to keep their reserves clean during development, not just before handover.
- There also need to be requirements here or elsewhere that developers or their contractors do not push rubbish and weeds out of the public space area they are working on, into adjacent areas. At Underbank development, the developer or its contractors have pushed large volumes of rubbish and weeds (e.g. by bulldozer) toward the river or over escarpments when preparing areas of public open space. This first occurred in 2018/19 and most recently occurred in early 2026.
- We note that many warm climate grasses commercially available are weed species in the local context. The grass species chosen need to be sensitive to the ecological values of the area.
- Concrete pedestrian paths should not be stipulated, given part of water-sensitive urban design is to reduce impervious surfaces. As outlined earlier, we strongly advocate for use of pervious surfaces for walking and cycling paths, as this:
 - allows water to penetrate the ground underneath
 - reducing stormwater runoff (reducing negative impacts on Pyrites Creek and reducing pressure on stormwater infrastructure),
 - increasing availability of groundwater to trees and other vegetation (increasing their survival),
 - allows movement of small animals such as lizards and skinks (which tend to avoid wide concrete paths)
 - reduces reflective heat, in turn increasing pedestrian and cyclist use of paths on warm days
 - is usually a more comfortable surface for jogging/running than concrete
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Pervious surfaces are readily available for all-abilities access, and have been successfully used in other local government areas.

- Setbacks from conservation areas need to be more than 50 metres, given the negative impacts of construction waste and light pollution from other developments in Moorabool Shire have impacted sensitive areas more than 100m from their source.

- At R50 and other sections throughout the document, environmental protection needs to be for all ecologically sensitive receptors, not just matters of state and national environmental significance.

3.4.3 Objectives – Biodiversity and Threatened Species

- We are pleased to see this section included, however the natural environment outside of the precinct also needs to be protected during the development and building phases, and post development, including protection of Long Forest Conservation Reserve and Pyrites Creek. Many parts of the PSP need further work to improve protection of biodiversity values both on the precinct, and in areas adjacent to / connected with the precinct.

General comments regarding erosion, sediment runoff and containment of construction waste

- Although erosion, sediment runoff and containment of construction waste are mentioned briefly in some parts of the PSP, these need to be addressed in much more detail, given the high level of environmental degradation caused by these issues in current developments in Moorabool Shire. Bacchus Marsh Platypus Alliance volunteers have spent thousands of volunteer hours each year addressing these issues since mid-2019, and we have amassed a detailed understanding of these issues over this time. The Merrimu precinct is located on the same soil types and similar elevations to these developments, and much more detailed consideration of these issues is needed. We urge you to consider the human and environmental costs of building on this area.
- Building on the same types of soils present on the Merrimu precinct has lead to tunnel erosion under houses, slumping and cracking of house walls, environmental degradation of land and water, and other impacts detrimental to both residents and the environment in similar areas in Bacchus Marsh and Maddingley (including those on flat plateaus above the escarpments).
- The Merrimu escarpments themselves are also highly likely to recede over time, as has occurred nearby on Anthony's Cutting, where a whole section of road unexpectedly collapsed as part of the escarpment opened up. If the development does go ahead, much wider buffer zones will be needed from the escarpment, to avoid or slow down deterioration of roads, paths and other assets.
- Our local knowledge and experience in the geology and ecology of this area is complemented by committee members with formal training and experience in environmental science and related areas.

We thank you for considering our joint submission. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or wish to discuss anything further.

Sincerely,

