

Dear Mr Nicholls CEO, Councilors and relevant officers,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Council Plan 2017-2022.

I write in support of a separate pillar for the natural environment within the plan. This initiative has been flagged a number of times within the community consultation process and also been favourably received by certain Councilors and staff.

The current draft continues the historical approach by the Golden Plains Council of integrating the natural and built environments. The result is the natural environment often appears to be something Council should be mindful of when considering development rather than standing alone and being valued in its own right. This is illustrated in the Organisational Structure graphic shown on Page 12 where the Environment and Sustainability is captured under Development.

I submit that the wider community has developed a strong and growing appreciation of the importance of protecting and enhancing the natural environment, not only for its own sake but also for the positive impacts on the health and well-being of community members.

The Golden Plains community wants to see the Council "Preserving and enhancing the natural environment and open space" and "Promoting and educating the community on caring for our environment" (page 19).

Many of the nearby rural councils have in the past succeeded in giving the environment its own theme or pillar within their plans. Examples include the Surf Coast, Moorabool, and the Corangamite Shires. They have recognised that environmental considerations attend most areas of Council business.

The Council has a role in not only managing its own reserves, roadside areas and open spaces but also partnering with our many community groups and with other agencies who are dedicating time, money and other resources to protecting the Shire's many environmental assets. It continues to play an indispensable role in the fight against invasive species including educating new residents about their environmental responsibilities and will need to address the challenges inherent in a changing climate.

Having its own pillar would allow a natural environmental perspective to inform other policies of Council. For instance continuing to foster renewable energy projects within the Shire and exploring agricultural opportunities for the growing recycled water resource are sensible initiatives for Economic Development. Programs such as the Council's Trailblazer Walkers foster community interaction with and appreciation of our natural environment and open spaces while promoting Healthy and Active communities.

In conclusion there are few areas of Council responsibility which are not impacted in some manner by environmental considerations. If the Golden Plains Council truly wishes to be seen as forward thinking and progressive then giving the natural environment its own pillar would be a major advance in achieving this worthwhile objective.

Regards,

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