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To:

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Response to the draft Mount Alexander Shire Council Climate Change Strategy on behalf of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club (CFNC) strongly supports the Council's commitment to address climate change and applauds the initiative to formalise that commitment through a strategy.

While CFNC has specific interests in the environmental issues resulting from climate change, we also recognise that the critical challenge for Council and all residents is to contribute as much as we can to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, thereby reducing climate change risks. Therefore, we endorse the goals and actions proposed, even where these are not specifically related to environmental issues

The following comments are made in the spirit of strengthening the Strategy:

1. Regarding the opportunity outlined in Pillar 1 that Council "can build climate-resilient physical structures...", CFNC recommends that protecting the Botanical Gardens and Campbell's Creek from repeated extensive and expensive damage from future flooding should be a priority. Damage to the Gardens and further downstream would be ameliorated by restoring, with native species, the flat grassland west of Barkers Creek with properly designed overflow channels to allow absorption of flood waters as naturally as possible.
2. CFNC has a particular interest in, and is very supportive of, Pillar 2, which addresses the need to protect and enhance the natural environment.
 - a. Because Council is not directly responsible for many of the waterways, catchment areas and forests in the shire, it is crucial that it works with the agencies and levels of government that do have this responsibility, to ensure that management practices are coordinated and deliver positive outcomes to the natural environment. CFNC recommends that a commitment to work with other agencies and levels of government is made explicit in the Strategy.
 - b. CFNC is very supportive of the need to deploy DJAARA's cultural burning practices to heal and manage the environment. Too often we have seen hot burns that damage and sometimes destroy rare plants and ultimately lead to an increase in fuel load. This is an example of management practices not necessarily the immediate responsibility of Council, but where Council could work with other agencies for a better outcome.

- c. CFNC recommends that Council uses its influence and exercises its own responsibilities to avoid clearing native forests;
 - d. CFNC recommends that management of roadsides, which may include slashing, burning and dangerous tree mitigation, should be undertaken with best practice conservation management in mind, so that these fragile remnant natural environments and plant and wildlife corridors are protected. An emphasis on the control and removal of woody weeds such as gorse, blackberry, broom and pampas grass, along with the control of the grass Phalaris, would do much to reduce fire hazard while improving the conservation value of roadside corridors.
3. CFNC notes that there are a number of links between the goals and actions included in the Strategy. As a result, coordinated policy actions across all areas of Council's work is essential. This will require changes in current policy and practice.
- a. For example, concurrent with actions to plant trees and maintain and increase the resilience of Council's natural resources (Goal 3), new housing developments see existing trees removed, closely spaced houses with black roofs and minimal garden areas for "Planting trees to help cool our homes and townships" (Pillar 2 Opportunity).
4. Regarding Goal 2 and Goal 6, which we strongly support – , "We transition in a just and equitable way to a zero emissions shire" and "Our shire is zero waste and has a resilient, circular economy – CFNC recommends that Council should:
- a. provide incentives and assistance for households and businesses to use more renewable energy sources and improvements to home insulation; and
 - b. minimise waste to landfill through the better recycling facilities.

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