



## Response to MASC Nature Strip Guidelines

### Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to Council's proposed Nature Strip Guidelines. The Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club (CFNC) endorses Council's commitment to nature strips as having the potential to provide environmental, aesthetic and social health benefits. We do however believe that support for these benefits in the Guidelines could be strengthened in a number of ways, as follows.

**1. We recommend that the guidelines are less restrictive about the types of plants that could be used in nature strips without requiring a permit.**

There are many native non-invasive plants that would help achieve greater biodiversity while generally complying with the principles of not blocking sight-lines or restricting accessibility.

Indigenous herbs such as Magenta Stork's-bill (*Pelargonium rodneyanum*), Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*), Hoary Sunray (*Leucochrysum albicans*) and many others are low-growing, easy-to-manage plants that could be supplied by local nurseries.

Encouraging the planting of appropriate species without having to apply for a permit would enhance nature strips environmentally and aesthetically and reduce Council's workload. In particular, flowering herbs and low-growing shrubs would increase food sources for our rapidly declining insect populations, including butterflies, with additional beneficial flow-on effects up the food-chain.

CFNC has recently published a revised edition of its brochure *Indigenous Plants of Castlemaine and Surrounds*. While this is intended as an identification guide, many of the plants listed in the brochure would be suitable as nature strip plants. The brochure is available at the Castlemaine Visitors Information Centre.

The guidelines could include a link to Cassia Read's excellent guide to suitable native plants for gardens, the *Plant Selector* database (<https://ci.org.au/plantselector/>).

**2. It would be helpful if the Guidelines stressed environmental weeds to be avoided**, giving common examples such as Agapanthus and Gazania, and for a fuller list a link to the Arthur Rylah Institute's 'Advisory list of environmental weeds in Victoria':

[https://www.ari.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0027/125919/ARI-Technical-Report-287-Advisory-list-of-environmental-weeds-in-Victoria.pdf](https://www.ari.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0027/125919/ARI-Technical-Report-287-Advisory-list-of-environmental-weeds-in-Victoria.pdf).

**3. There are many streets in the Mount Alexander district that have ample room for more extensive planting without becoming a hazard or a burden on Council.** The guidelines appear to have been written for relatively narrow nature strips. Where possible native plantings including shrubs and trees should be encouraged to provide bird, animal and insect habitats. This would also be consistent with Council's commitment to a healthier and more climate-resilient environment. Generally speaking, the more that "nature strips" can bring "nature" into our urban environments without causing problems the better, from multiple perspectives.

**4. We recommend that Council creates a list of plants suitable for nature strips and engages with local nurseries** to encourage them to stock these plants and to stop supplying environmental weeds.

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15 March 2025