



Flood and Inundation Policy Position Paper

Overview

In Victoria and across Australia, the convergence of population growth and climate change has created an urgent urban planning issue.

Australians have a love affair with water, choosing coastal and riverine aspects for their homes. In Victoria alone nearly twenty per cent of all Victorians live in coastal areas.

Recent flooding and coastal inundation events however have highlighted the importance for appropriate and timely state and local planning guidelines and controls to be in place to minimise the flooding and inundation risk in these areas. This is particularly the case as the Gippsland region of Victoria continues to grow, the demand for new developments is increasing.

The current State planning framework fails to facilitate timely advice on data, mapping, support and consistency needed for Gippsland council planning regulations and processes to be up-to-date and relevant. State Government action to address this will minimise future risk to the community and ensure that development does not take place on land that is subject to rising sea levels, flood and inundation now and into the future.

About

Gippsland is a geographically, socially and economically diverse region. At approximately 41,000 square km, it is the largest region in Victoria. Home to over 270,000 people and 6 Local Governments, the region annually produces \$14 billion in Gross Regional Product (GRP).

One Gippsland is a peak regional advocacy body representing this diverse region. We aim to connect the dots between government, business and community, while also collectively working together to champion the interests of our region and our people.

It is our mission to create a thriving and dynamic region that harnesses the social, environmental and economic capabilities and assets. Gippsland has remarkable diversity so that we can offer our community opportunities for a great lifestyle and access to services at all stages of life.

Gippsland there have been a range of challenges. A recent report produced by SGS Economics shows that Gippsland has undergone a series of economic shocks that have impacted the economic output of the region. Between 2015 and 2020 the combined effect of the COVID-19 restrictions, bushfires, dairy crisis, drought and hazelwood closure have had the following impacts:

- Direct output loss of \$3.28 billion;



- Combined direct and indirect output loss of \$6.86 billion;
- A total of 10,213 job losses (direct and indirect); and
- Gross Regional Product decrease of \$2.66 billion.

The closure of the native timber industry is expected to negatively impact direct output by \$548 million and will further shrink Gross Regional Product by \$431 million in the next 10 years.

1. Despite these challenges, Gippsland has great growth aspirations including:
2. Being Australia's most liveable region by 2040;
3. Raising the Digital Inclusion Index Score to be in parity with Melbourne;
4. Attracting an additional 75,000 residents by 2040; and
5. Increasing the annual Gross Regional Product to \$23.2 Billion by 2040.

Key Issues

As the Gippsland region of Victoria continues to attract development to support our rapidly growing communities, planning assessments need to be based on clear and timely information. It is the view of the One Gippsland however that the current state planning framework fails to facilitate accurate and timely outcomes on flood and inundation issues.

Addressing this deficit in State Government planning will minimise future risk to our communities and ensure that development does not take place on land that is subject to rising sea levels, flood and inundation, now and into the future.

One Gippsland believes these deficits are attributed to three key issues:

1. The current mapping of flood and inundation mapping is out of date;
2. The current process for assessing applications happens at a localised level but flooding and inundation occurs across local government and catchment authority boundaries – creating an opportunity for an inconsistent approach to assessments;
3. The cost to updating and implementing the most update science into planning schemes (planning scheme amendment) is a lengthy and expensive process which could be better addressed through a statewide approach to assessing flood and inundation risk.

Further One Gippsland recommends that these deficits could be best addressed by the application of an Interim Flood Overlay across the state.

Summary of the Current Planning Framework

In the context of considering the impacts of flooding and inundation, the current land use planning framework is a mosaic of relationships between water authorities and local governments. The distinctive characteristic of Victorian floodplains means that variations between floodplains and even within floodplains must be taken into account.



The working relationship between the two institutions is critical to successful planning outcomes. The water authority can object to new developments.

The Victorian Planning Provisions (VPPs) are a template for the local government authorities to prepare consistent planning schemes. Each planning scheme contains a mandatory Policy Planning Framework, with provision for local councils to include their local planning policies and to select from a series of standard zones and overlays. It is here that the risk to state and local governments, communities and developers grows.

State Guidance on Flood and Inundation Planning

One Gippsland notes there is state government guidance on flood and inundation planning in the form of two key documents:

1. Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022-2026

The Victorian Government released the *Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, 2022-2026*¹ in February 2022.

The plans set out current and future actions for seven key sectors, which are defined by Victoria's Climate Change Act as those most vulnerable to climate change or vital to building the state's climate resilience.

The plans include 127 actions to ensure public assets can better withstand and cope with climate change. The actions include adjusting government policies, operations, and decisions to help Victoria prosper in a changing climate.

In its *Built Environment Action Plan, 2022-2026* "snapshot document"² the Government outlined work underway which included:

- Requiring planning schemes to respond to potential coastal impacts and sea level rise.
- Mapping coastal inundation hazards is underway or completed for many coastal areas.
- Providing guidance for development in flood-affected areas.

Key priorities for the five-year period include:

- Updating building standards to better account for projected impacts such as floods, heatwaves, bushfires and storms.
- Supporting highly exposed regional cities and towns to tackle overlapping climate-related events through resilience and recovery planning that considers all hazards.
- Expanding spatial mapping and hazard exposure modelling to improve decisions on land use and infrastructure planning and investment.

¹ [Built-Environment-Climate-Change-Adaptation-Action-Plan-2022-2026.pdf \(planning.vic.gov.au\)](#)

² [Built Environment Adaptation Action Plan – a snapshot \(climatechange.vic.gov.au\)](#)



In the *Built Environment Action Plan, 2022-2026* (the *Plan*) the Government details its intended actions including:

- Update building standards relevant to flood, heatwaves and storm exposure.
- Extend spatial mapping and hazard exposure modelling.

The *Plan* highlights the following outcomes being sought:

- Climate-resilient regional and rural cities and townships;
- Climate change considerations incorporated into decision making about future land use planning for cities, towns, suburbs and regional areas;
- Plan and construct buildings with improved resilience to climate-related hazards expected during their design life;
- Urban flood-reduction assets (such as levees, floodways, drains and retention basins) are funded, designed and managed to respond to predicted extremes in flash flooding and sea level rise;
- Community, sporting and tourism sites are designed to be climate resilient; and
- Consider financial, legal and insurance risks associated with climate change³.

2. Guidelines for Development in Flood Affected Areas

The *Development in Flood Affected Areas* was published in February 2019⁴. The purpose of these guidelines is to provide to a range of stakeholders, including local government and flood plain managers, a clear, consistent and transparent process for managing land use and development in flood affected areas in Victoria.

The guidelines indicate that in principle, development should not intensify the harmful impacts of flooding. However, floodplain managers have discretion to vary from the guidelines, considering local circumstances, the nature of the development proposal and the flood risk.

The Missing Link - Bushfire Management Overlay

While One Gippsland acknowledges the framework for addressing the important issue dealing with flood and inundation issues through both the *Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan, 2022-2026* and *Guidelines for Development in Flood Affected Areas*, it also states that the issues associated with delay and inconsistent approaches poses a significant risk to the community and future developments.

One Gippsland, however, also states that implementing a similar approach to the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) is a key mechanism to address this challenge.

³ Built Environment Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan 2022–2026 (2022), pp13-14

⁴ Dwelp, Guidelines for Development in Flood Affected Areas, February 2019



The BMO is a planning scheme provision used to guide the development of land in areas of very high to extreme bushfire hazard. The location, design and construction of development and the implementation of bushfire protection measures must be considered under a BMO. The BMO ensures development is only permitted where the risk to life and property has been assessed and harmful exposure to bushfire can be reduced.

The BMO was developed in response to recommendations 37, 39, 40 and 52 of the Royal Commission findings into the 2009 Victorian Bushfires published in 2010.

The changes introduced through the BMO strengthen the consideration of bushfire at different stages of the planning process and better integrate the planning and building systems. Importantly the BMO was prepared by the State Government and has been included in every planning scheme in Victoria.

The statewide approach being sort by One Gippsland aims to strengthen community resilience to bushfire through the planning system and ensuring that important bushfire protection measures are part of any new development. Further it is the view of One Gippsland that it also provides clear guidance for decision makers any level or in any organisation.

One Gippsland however does recommend that if this approach is adopted by the State Government that consultation with the community occurs to ensure the community is heard on the implications of this change and where possible these implications are addressed (where possible) to strengthen the commitment to this important planning measure.

Enacting a Retreat Policy

Managed retreat or managed realignment is management strategy that allows the shoreline to move inland, instead of attempting to hold the line with structural engineering, creating a new line of defence.

This approach is gaining traction among coastal policymakers and managers in the face of increased coastal hazard risks. There is a growing recognition that attempting to “hold the line” in many places is a losing battle.

Retreat undertakes the process of ensuring development is “moved” out of harm’s way and natural areas are restored to enhance their ecosystem services. Typically, flood defences are set back from the shoreline, and flooding is allowed in the previously defended area.

Managed retreat can be complex and often contentious, as it can include delineating a new line to which structures can be built and home and business owners must be bought out.

Components of managed retreat may include:

- coastal planning;
- relocation and buy-back and buy-out programs;
- regulating types of development allowed;
- designating no-build areas;
- habitat restoration;
- replacement of built environment with green space.



One Gippsland notes that the government's *Marine and Coastal Policy* identifies retreat as one option of a “pathway approach” to managing coastal inundation.

The policy outlines that the “pathway approach” is a decision making strategy made up of a sequence of manageable steps or decision points over time – which retreat is but one option⁵. Other options outlined include non-intervention, avoid, nature-based methods, accommodate, and protect⁶.

The policy also states that in relation to determining an action to retreat, that the timing should be “a strategic and localised decision that needs to be planned for proactively”⁷.

One Gippsland states that due to the complexity outlined above that a clear pathway to enacting retreat needs to be determined at the State level. This is required to provide local government with the tools and data to identify and engage with impacted stakeholders early and in a manner that does not allow for misconception.

Recommendation

- **One Gippsland seeks support from the State Government to address the issues outlined by creating an interim state-wide flooding and inundation overlay as has been put in place to manage bushfire risk.**

For Further Information

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⁵ Marine and Coastal Policy – P36

⁶ Marine and Coastal Policy – P36

⁷ Marine and Coastal Policy - P37