



SUBMISSION TO THE NORTH EAST LINK ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS STATEMENT

6 June 2019

Attn: North East Link EES Independent Advisory Committee
C/- Engage Victoria Online Submissions
<https://engage.vic.gov.au/north-east-link-project>

Dear Committee

INTRODUCTION

My name is Dr Sharron Pfueller and I am a former Monash University researcher and educator in environment and sustainability.

I am pleased to make this submission on behalf of Sustainable Gardening Australia (SGA) in relation to the North East Link Project (NELP) Planning Scheme Amendment and Works Approval Application.

I will also be happy to provide evidence at the hearings of the Committee in support of this submission.

It is not our intention in this submission or during the EES process to duplicate the efforts of many other organisations and experts who will no doubt address the various ecological and social impacts of the NELP. Suffice to say that we are particularly concerned about the impacts of vegetation loss, increase of road and impervious surfaces, waterway degradation and related biodiversity and climate change impacts.

Instead, we are proposing a way for the project to offset some of these and other impacts of the NELP by providing additional environmental and community benefits through the establishment of a North East Link Sustainability Centre.

We note and support the submission of Bulleen Art and Garden (BAAG) as an integral part of the local community, our host, and a champion of sustainable living.

Should a NEL Sustainability Centre be established, we would propose to move from BAAG at that time. However, we strongly support BAAG to remain at their current location, and for the EES Environmental Performance Requirements (EPRs) to be revised to support the continued viability of BAAG, as this contributes to the achievement of long term planning objectives for the area, as submitted by BAAG.

IMPLICATIONS OF CLOSURE OF SGA

If BAAG was required to move, this could cause closure of SGA. Thanks to BAAG, SGA and its largely volunteer workforce occupy a small office space at the rear of the BAAG nursery. Losing that space would very significantly and adversely affect SGA's ability to operate. This would have significant impacts on the provision of knowledge and practical ideas about how to protect the natural environment while engaging in gardening activities both at home and in public spaces for:

- SGA's 5,000 subscribers, a significant percentage of whom reside in the north to north-eastern metropolitan area through which the NEL Project will be located
- The 100,000 – 150,000 unique visitors to our website each month (varying according to season),
- The over 21,000 social media followers, and
- The local government partners and community members for whom we provide training. Over the last 2 years we have run over 53 community workshops and 22 masterclasses with 1,708 participants.

SGA's BACKGROUND

SGA was established in the late 1990s as a not-for-profit, non-government organisation. We are a registered charity on the federal Register of Environmental Organisations supported by donations, grants and dedicated volunteers.

We work towards creating vibrant and sustainable communities and a healthy, biodiverse planet, by:

- encouraging, educating and enabling home and professional gardeners to adopt sustainable gardening practices to protect and enhance the natural environment; and
- providing information and education, and carrying on research about, the natural environment.

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We aim to inspire, empower and connect individuals, communities and organisations to garden sustainably. Our activities are summarised in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Summary of SGA's strategic directions.

SGA provides significant education and training services, maintains a high-profile online presence with www.sgaonline.org.au and has an active social media presence. SGA's activities focus on:

- Providing well-researched information about the natural environment and practical gardening advice to home, community and professional gardeners
- Reconnecting people to the natural world through gardening
- Encouraging the inclusion of habitat elements in gardens to support local fauna
- Providing information to encourage and enable local food production to minimise food miles and their environmental impacts
- Reducing spread of weeds
- Researching garden products so that they are appropriately classified for their impact on the environment and human health, and
- Assisting people develop an understanding of their connection with global communities and the impacts that sustainable living decisions have on the environment well beyond their neighbourhood.

Please see attachments 1 and 2 for our most recent Annual Report and our partnership training offerings through Local Government.

We are co-located with the Bulleen Art and Garden Nursery in Bulleen, which is within the construction zone of the NELP, as shown below.

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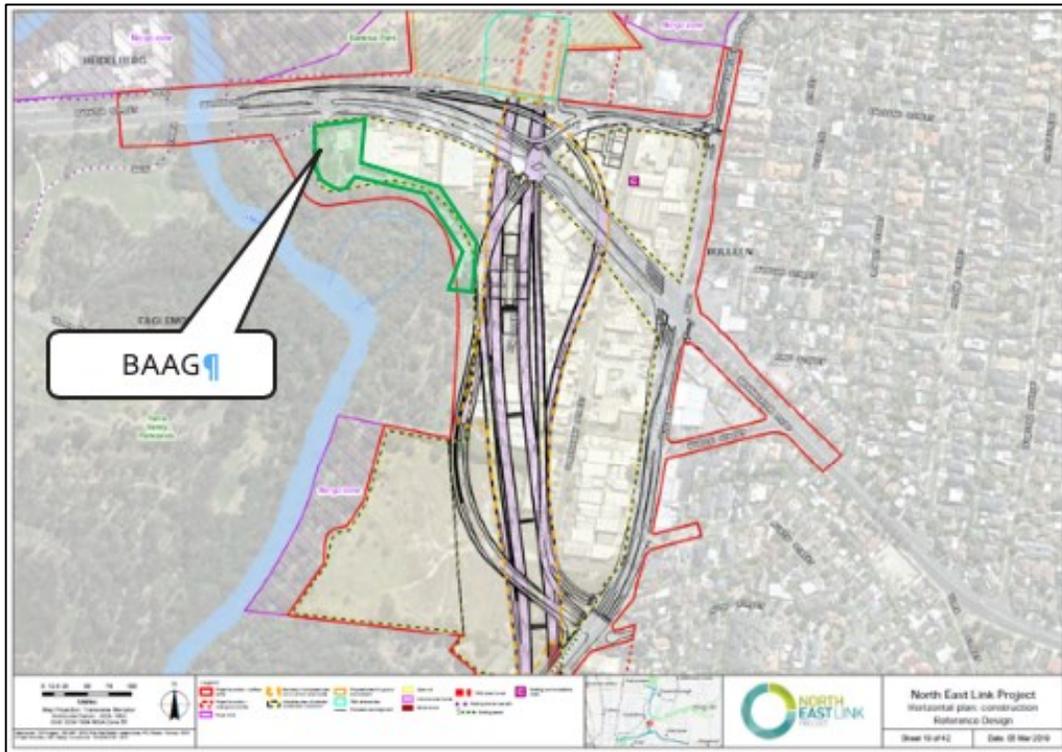


Figure 2: NELP Design Sheet 19, Construction Plan

As previously mentioned, many of SGA’s 5,000 subscribers reside in the north to north-eastern metropolitan area of Melbourne, as shown in Fig. 3 below.

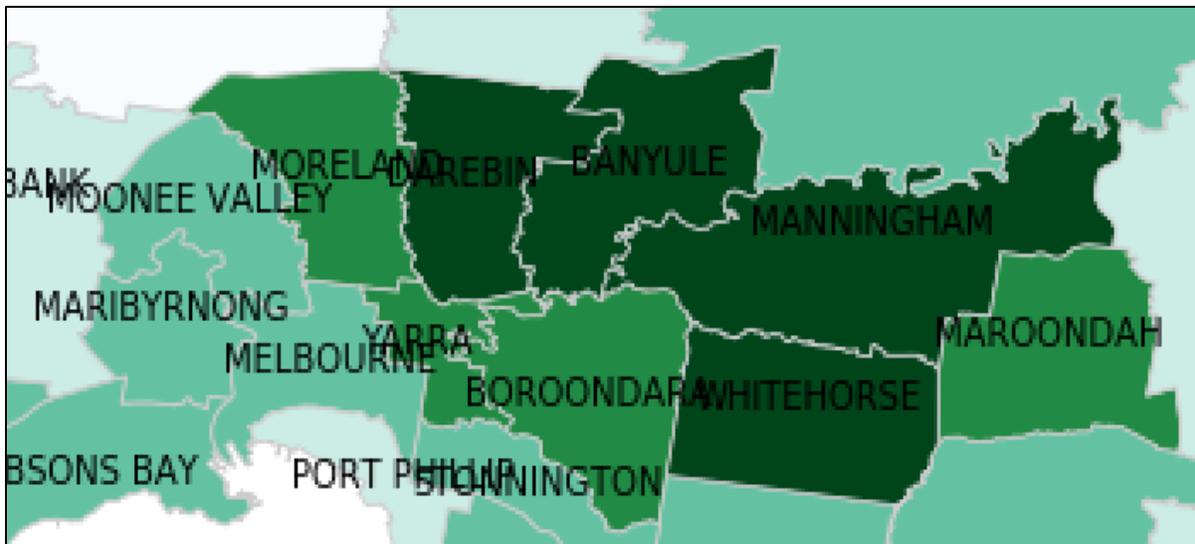


Figure 3: SGA Subscribers by Municipality
(Colour coded by density of subscribers)

ESTABLISHMENT OF A NEL SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE – THE CONCEPT

The north-east of metropolitan Melbourne has many environmental assets worth protecting and celebrating but limited environmental sustainability centres for community engagement and education. Within an approximate 20 kilometre radius of the NEL, the only related facilities are CERES Community Environment Park, Edendale Environment Community Farm and Latrobe University Wildlife Sanctuary. While all excellent facilities, their education programs, apart from CERES, are primarily focused on children rather than the broader community. They all have limited capacity for expansion or to service the community affected by the NELP.

The purpose of the proposed Sustainability Centre would be to provide a focus for environmental learning and behavioral change, to demonstrate how individuals, families, communities and business can minimise their environmental footprint and finally, to build capacity in the community to regenerate urban environments into thriving, healthy and biodiverse ecosystems. The primary focus will be connecting communities to environmental programs and education, training and information services in both physical and online settings, through a centre located in the north to north-eastern metropolitan area.

SGA is spear-heading this proposal and has been able to engage with other organisations that share the intersection between the areas of environment, biodiversity, gardening and food. It is an excellent position to start from since it is central to humanity's ecological footprint – we all must have food, and food production contributes to a large share of environmental degradation due to land clearing, biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, soil quality decline and water quality degradation.

We propose that the centre would have a broad sustainability scope and address:

- Biodiversity conservation and regeneration,
- Reducing greenhouse house emissions in all aspects of urban life,
- Local healthy food production,
- Energy and water conservation,
- Improving water and air quality,
- Passive solar, low energy house design,
- Lower resource use,
- Waste minimisation, and
- Sustainable transport.

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We and our supporters envisage that the NEL Sustainability Centre would embody:

- Offices for up to 4 organisations engaged in sustainability activities,
- Demonstration projects for sustainable living,
- Meeting / training rooms for use by community groups and local councils,
- A high-tech online training studio to develop and deliver digital education programs,
- Flexible social enterprise incubator spaces, for small environmental business start-ups,
- Outdoor and community gardens,
- A starting point for self-guided nature walks,
- Co-located recycling drop-offs in partnership with Council transfer stations, and
- Electric car recharging points as part of a sustainable transport initiative

The centre would be inclusive and innovative, utilising smart communication and other technologies to ensure maximum participation by community members.

As mentioned above, gardening is central to urban sustainability and would be a key component of the Centre. In an article titled *Scaling up from Gardens: Biodiversity Conservation in Urban Environments*, Goddard et al¹ (2010) point out that wildlife-friendly gardens would contribute even more to biodiversity if they were aggregated across neighbourhoods. Gardens, largely because of trees, also make significant contributions to our economy and wellbeing as indicated in an article by G. Moore² *Urban Trees: Worth More than they Cost* (2009). There is a significant body of academic work that indicates the many health and other benefits of gardening in the home and in the community. Please see some references and articles in Attachment 3: *Benefits Of Home And Community Gardening*.

As well as encouraging the positive effects of gardening, SGA also conducts research on the potential negative impacts of gardening through our unique Garden Products Guide (Safe For You 'n' Nature).



Figure 4: SGA Garden Product Guide Web Cover

¹ MA Goddard, AJ Dougill, TG Benton (2010) Trends in Ecology & Evolution, 2010.

² G Moore (2009) The 10th National Street Tree Symposium 2009

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This Product Guide is a project initiated by Burnley Horticultural College (now part of the University of Melbourne) in collaboration with SGA, developing the first rating system for garden chemicals, fertilisers and soil conditioners in Australia. The assessment of over 1000 gardening products is based on regulatory poison schedule ratings, such as the Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Medicines and Poisons (SUSMP) rating, information from the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA), international databases and manufacturers' Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

SGA is currently working on making a full list of garden product ratings available as a Web App with details of their active constituents, their potential for water quality degradation and their toxicity for humans and other mammals, birds, aquatic organisms and bees. This will be an important contribution to sustainability as it will make information about both human health and safety and environmental impacts available to the general public in an easily accessible form.

We can focus on delivering this Web App if our future location is resolved as well as with the support of other Foundation Partners co-located at a NEL Sustainability Centre and more widely. We submit that this could significantly increase exposure to this valuable information, with many related environmental benefits.

MODELS FOR A SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE

There are precedents for such a centre including CERES Community Environment Park, as well as the Port Phillip EcoCentre which are now well-established contributors to sustainable living programs in their local communities.

The CERES Community Environment Park is an award-winning, not-for-profit, sustainability centre located on 4.5 hectares on the Merri Creek in East Brunswick, Melbourne.



Figures 5 and 6: CERES Community Environment Park

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Figures 7 and 8: Port Phillip Eco Centre

The Port Phillip Eco Centre in St Kilda uses the physical world as a classroom to connect people with their natural world. Each of their programs are tailor-made through a local lens and focus on collaboration and community connectedness.

The Eco Centres work as part of a wide network of individuals, groups and organisations and their collective impact since 1999 has transformed the way Melbourne understands wildlife, waterways and wellbeing in the age of climate change.

As models that a NEL Sustainability Centre could follow, we submit that we could deliver even more benefits to the programs and services delivered at these locations alongside other Foundation Partners and linked organisations.

We further submit that to offset the ecological and social impacts of the NELP, the State Government should establish a minimum 30 year lease (with 2x30 year options) of a ½ to 1 acre site (with or without an existing building) for use as a NEL Sustainability Centre.

Foundation Partners (tenants) could include SGA, with other like-minded non-profit organisations. We note that the 3000 Acres group has already indicated a willingness to be a Foundation Partner at the centre, with others expected to follow.

SUPPORT FOR A NEL SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE

We believe there is broad and high-level support for the State Government to establish a North East Link Sustainability Centre as a NELP offset.

Since the publication of the relevant EES documentation, we have been talking to many organisations (3000 Acres, Cultivating Community, Kevin Heinze Grow, Sustain: the Australian Food Network, National Trust of Victoria) and Local Governments (such as Boroondara and Banyule) who have indicated their support for the concept outlined in this submission.

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Many people we have spoken to have expressed their concern that the north to north east metropolitan area is poorly served by such critical infrastructure, especially at a time when personal action to live more sustainably leverages benefits for the community.

LOCATION OF A NEL SUSTAINABILITY CENTRE

We understand that there may be opportunities to co-locate a NEL Sustainability Centre as part of other sporting related offsets proposed by others.

We would recommend some analysis of the potential of sites such as the Henderson Seed Farm and the Bulleen Driving Range.

In addition, we submit that a NEL Sustainability Centre should ideally be located within the NELP construction zone or within the north to north-eastern metropolitan area, close to subscribers and partners.

An indicative ‘heatmap’ of BAAG supporters who have signed a petition to protect BAAG’s future may be instructive as to potential locations, as shown in Fig. 9.

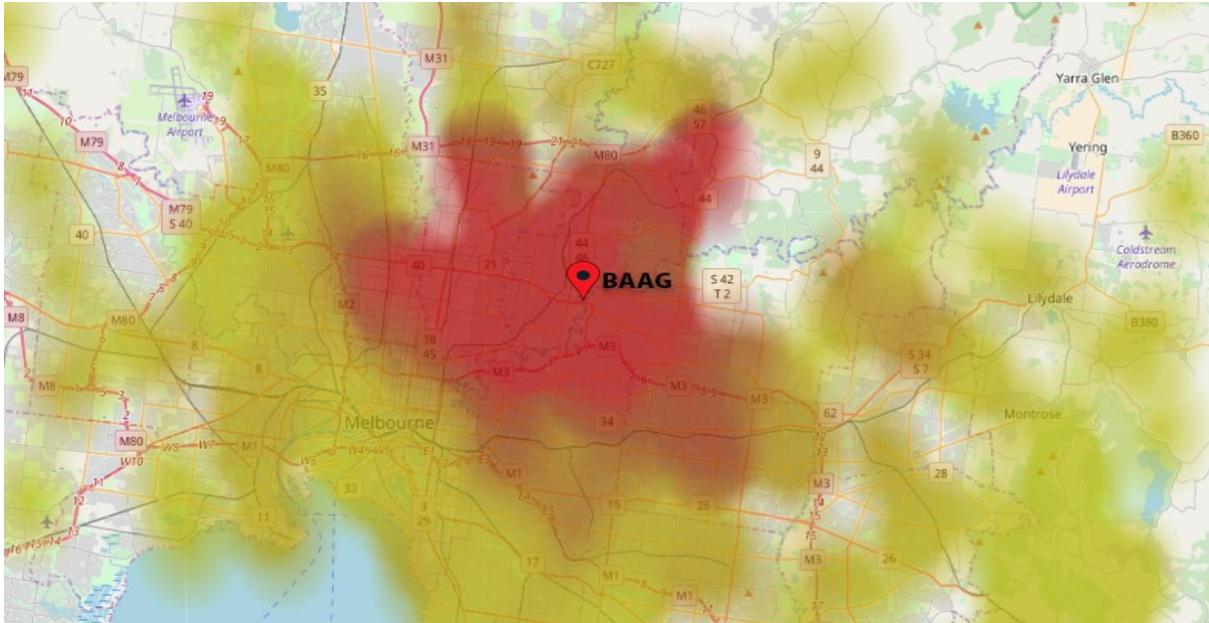


Figure 9: Heatmap of Petition Signatories to Save BAAG, June 2019.

It is noteworthy that this heatmap also reflects the concentration of SGA’s 5,000 subscribers as shown in Fig. 3.

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CONCLUSION

We submit that the establishment of a NEL Sustainability Centre and the delivery of programs and services to residents within and close to the NELP catchment will improve their community connections, improve their quality of life, and leverage clear social and ecological benefits.

As such, we believe the centre would offset some of the social and ecological impacts of the NELP.

Finally, we have included our latest Annual Report for further background information about our activities and focus. We have also included our Community Workshops Brochure for partnerships with local government.

If you would like to discuss this submission further, please feel free to contact me at s.pfueller@sgaonline.org.au or 0422 481 933 or in the period 25-06-2019 to 19-07-2019 r.rowe@sgaonline.org.au or 0419 312 094.

Yours sincerely



Dr Sharron Pfueller