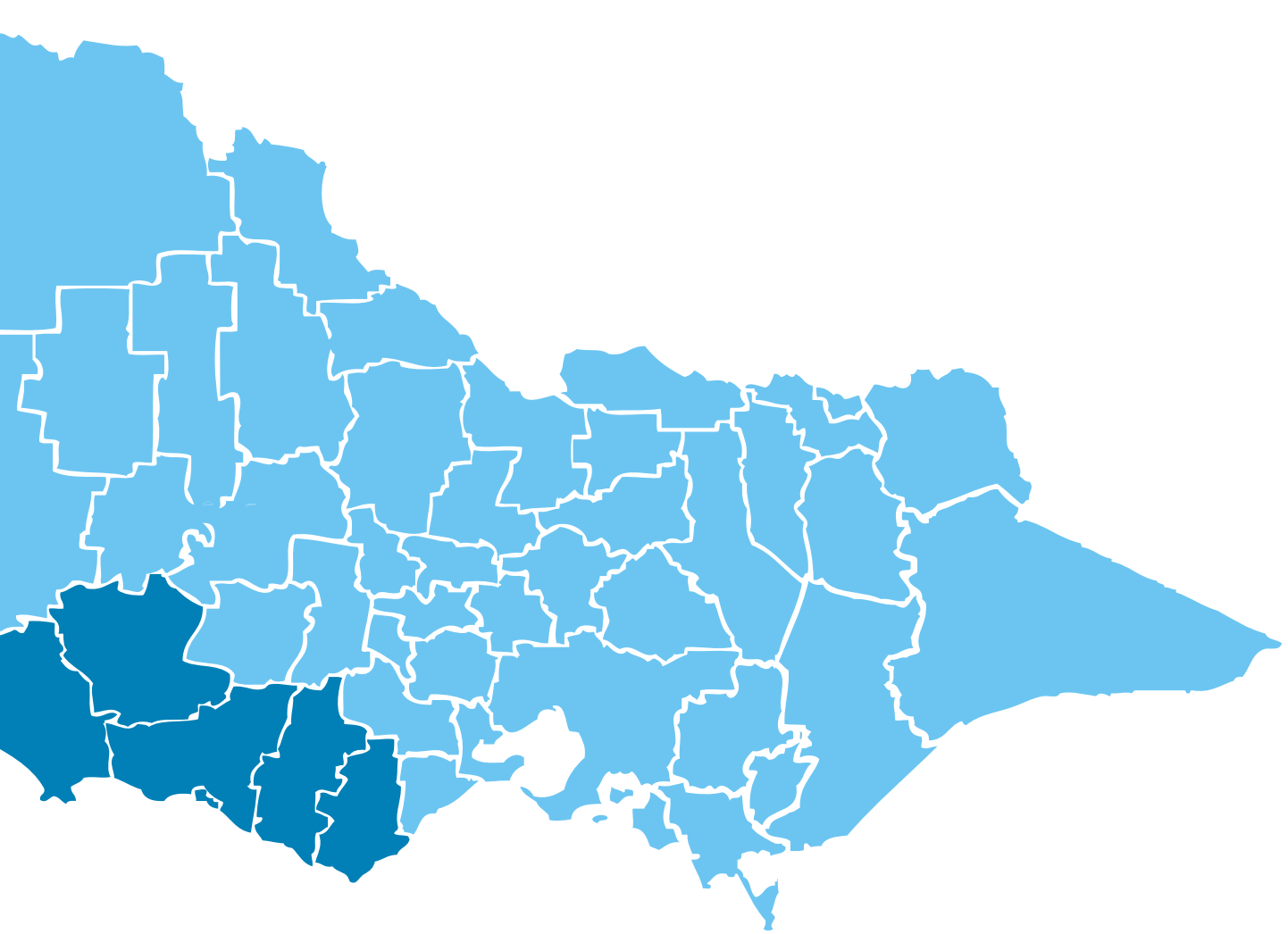




TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE SOUTH WEST



PRIORITIES DIRECTION STATEMENT 2010-2012



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A co-operative project initiated by the Natural Assets Alliance of the South West Sustainability Partnership and supported by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

PHOTO : Glenelg River Estuary, *GHCMA*.



PHOTO : Mt Napier, K. Lothian.

INTRODUCTION

The commencement of the Regional Strategic Planning Initiative (RSPi) across Victoria in 2009 both highlighted gaps in our regional sustainability planning and stimulated action to address this problem. Even though the South West region has excellent local initiatives identifying sustainability priorities and actions at the scale of local government authorities or smaller, there are few regional documents or strategies, and none of them are current. With the RSPi due to be completed by mid 2010, regional catchment strategies due for renewal now, sustainable water strategies under development, as well as green and white papers in biodiversity and climate change, amongst others, then there is an urgent need for clarification and agreement on key regional sustainability directions.

Identifying the need for regional perspectives and directions is, of course, far easier than arriving at such a position. The difficulty of the task is exacerbated when dealing with the great complexity and cross-sectional nature of sustainability issues. Despite this, the Direction Statement has been able to, with the generous support of many players, identify the major environmental themes and sub-themes (3 & 10), issues (12), priority goals (10) and actions (30) required to maintain and enhance the SW region's sustainability.

The danger of identifying key regional issues or priorities is that matters of local significance are ignored, or items not listed are implied as being unimportant. The Natural Assets Alliance has been mindful of these pitfalls and has striven to overcome them by attempting, wherever possible, to include overarching, strategic or

'flagship' initiatives that carry many smaller issues and actions within them. It has also been at pains to state explicitly that the great majority of environmental actions are valuable and necessary, that responses are required at different scales, and that this document seeks to present some of the major, regional, strategic themes and initiatives which should be taken into account for regional planning and action, not an exhaustive list of all that should occur in our region.

As important as being sensitive to different scales of activity and perspectives is the need to be responsive to changing physical and cultural conditions, policies and knowledge. As such, the Direction Statement should be reviewed regularly and it is recommended that this should occur every two years.

NAA Direction Statement Working Group

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Direction Statement are to:

- Summarise environmental sustainability policy and expert opinion in the South West
- Determine regional environmental sustainability priorities
- Provide clarity and direction for regional planning and action

THE SOUTH WEST

CONTEXT, OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES¹

NATURAL RESOURCES

Population change, accelerated land use change and climate change will combine to place unprecedented pressures on terrestrial and aquatic systems state and nation wide. Due to the highly modified and fragmented nature of the South West's landscape, regional biodiversity is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, in particular drought.

Water security advantage will be a key driver for capital investment and land use change in the region. The South West's water security is tied to the reliability of supplies sourced from the Otway Ranges, the Dilwyn aquifer and good natural rainfall. Sustainable management of the region's groundwater and surface water's natural capital will underpin the forecast residential, agricultural and industrial development of the region.

The SW's distinct natural assets provide a foundation for existing and new primary production industries. The effective management of natural assets across marine, soil, freshwater and natural ecosystem resources will ensure the region maintains its capacity to provide primary production productivity, meeting the fibre and food needs of domestic and global markets.

Tourism activity growth, especially nature-based tourism, is reliant on the integrity of natural capital. The region has great strengths in nature based tourism with iconic destinations and experience opportunities (Grampians National Park, Otways National Park, Great Ocean Road, the Great South West Walk) and with new experiences and new attractions under development (proposed Wild Grampians Walk, the UNESCO declared Kanawinka Geopark, Lake Condah wetlands and indigenous culture systems re-establishment).

Many of the natural resources of the region are in a poor to moderate condition. A range of land use changes (raised bed and broad acre cropping, rock crushing and subsequent pasture improvements, increased use of pivot irrigation systems, bluegum farming and rural residential development) has seen an acceleration of the loss of native vegetation and of natural landscapes with impact on threatened species' habitats. The majority of SW river basins are in poor to moderate condition. Algal blooms in water ways occur more frequently. Many wetlands have been drained. There are significant areas of dryland salinity and soil acidification. It is essential that resilient, connected ecosystems are identified and targeted for enhancement in the coming years.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY

The region has a strong mix of wind energy, wave energy and geothermal resources. The region has access to extensive offshore gas resources. The existing 550KV Portland powerline gives the State a low-cost linkage to new energy generation. The powerline currently operates at only 25% of its design capacity. VENCORP estimate that there is the potential for SW wind energy facilities to contribute an additional 3000-4000MW of power to the national grid. The power output of existing and planned SW windfarms combined with the output of the Mortlake Gas Fired Power Station (which is currently under construction) will input approximately 2500 MW. The capacity of the national grid to integrate power derived from the region's wave and geothermal sources has yet to be determined. The escalation of climate change impacts and development of appropriate adaptation and mitigation responses will stimulate the growth of new climate change related goods and service industries. In the SW region a range of existing industries and services are well positioned to exploit climate change opportunities particularly

in the areas of water management technologies, energy and water auditing, specialised engineering (including coastal engineering), construction and design, education, financial and legal services. The massive investment in the alternative energy sector will likewise see a significant increase in demand for local specialist support services and trades and potentially drive the expansion of the education sector's capacity through the development of green energy research and training facilities. Strategic planning must ensure that the region's labour force is suitably prepared to maximise the economic benefits associated with these new employment opportunities and that land use change protects and enhances valuable ecosystem services.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The SW region is fortunate to possess a comparatively strong soil, freshwater and marine resource base. These resources are the basis of the region's robust tourism, agricultural and fishing industries. The region also possesses one of the best deep water ports in Australia, has an established rail network and commercial airports and is serviced by a power transmission line which is operating at only 25% of its capacity. These assets are important components of the existing and future economic and liveability strengths of the region.

To maximise the natural and built infrastructure advantages which the region possesses, it is critical that a responsive, integrated regional governance framework is developed. Such a framework must establish formal partnerships and regular dialogue across all sectors, formalise information exchange networks, particularly grass roots exchanges, and ensure that community and industry network representatives are embedded into government and agency partnerships.



PHOTO : Mt Napier from Mt Rouse, K. Lothian.

At a local level, it is important that communities and small businesses are assisted in adapting to climate change. Existing community networks such as the South West Climate Change Forum along with the DPI initiative, Victorian Climate Change Adaptation Program, are good examples of efforts focused on building capacity at a local scale.

EDUCATING COMMUNITIES ABOUT RESOURCE CONSUMPTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS

One of the biggest challenges faced by communities and government is to reverse unsustainable consumption patterns. We must find ways of decoupling resource consumption from economic growth. Educating households, communities and businesses about product lifecycles and resource depletion is the first step towards widespread community behavioural change. The momentum for change needs to be generated and maintained through the coordinated actions of government, community and business sectors.

A predicted increase in extreme weather-related events such as heat waves, bushfire, severe storms, and coastal and riverine flooding will place additional pressures on the region's communities, particularly those communities located adjacent to forested areas and low lying coastlines and estuaries. Social tensions and community dislocation arising from climate change impacts will vary according to the vulnerability of individuals and communities, the effectiveness of emergency responses, and the resources available to provide post-event support.

It is expected that government will take a lead role in managing longer term social tensions and community dislocation arising from climate change impacts. The management of community expectations around property risks associated with extreme events will require significant resources and coordination between government and community agencies. There is a strong need to develop a suite of engagement/education programs particularly in vulnerable coastal locations in order to strengthen community resilience and preparedness. Development of national or state standardised community emergency response plans is a critical component of this work.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR TRANSITION TO A LOW CARBON ECONOMY

The CSIRO publication *Growing the Green Collar Economy* predicts that a rapid transition will require a massive mobilisation of the education/training sector, firstly to equip new workers with new skills in new jobs, and secondly to retrain existing workers in existing jobs. However, the CSIRO report states that "no systematic and comprehensive data gathering appears to have occurred with regard to the skills and knowledge base of business leaders and work force to be necessary to make the shift to a low carbon or 'environmentally friendly' economy... gathering data on skill requirement and shortfalls is thus an urgent priority." The dividends accrued from a rapid transition include: cost savings, greater competitiveness and productivity, social stability (resulting from a shorter period of social adaptive stresses), and reduced environmental impact. However, the challenges in achieving a rapid transition to a low carbon economy are significant, and will require strong coordinated action between the three tiers of government, the business and industry sector, the labour market and educational and training institutions.

¹ *Background Paper - Towards a South West Regional Strategic Plan, June 2009*

METHODOLOGY

DEFINITIONS

The Direction Statement is an environmental sustainability statement, that is, a statement that focuses on the natural environment and its more immediate and obvious connections with social and economic spheres. As such, its core is concerned with the maintenance of the ecological processes on which life depends - processes and issues to do with water, land and biodiversity - with extension, where appropriate, into matters of climate change, capacity building and land use planning. Although of relevance and importance, the Statement does not address issues of urban design, transport and population as they were considered beyond the reach of an 'environmental sustainability' statement and should more properly be dealt with elsewhere in the SWSP or similar regional forum.

The term 'sustainability' has a plethora of often confusing and contradictory definitions, but in this statement the most well-known definition has been adopted for simplicity and clarity. This definition reads: "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development – 'Brundtland Commission' – 1987).

The geographical scope of the document is the approximate area of the six shires and cities of south west Victoria sometimes referred to as the 'South West': Glenelg Shire, Moyne Shire, Southern Grampians Shire, Warrnambool City, Corangamite Shire and Colac Otway Shire.

POLICY SETTING

The Direction Statement sits within a context of related and influencing policies. Every attempt has been made to filter and integrate these policies for regional needs and direction. Key influencing policies and guiding documents are listed in the diagram right:

National

- ▼ Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme - White Paper 2008
- ▼ Mandatory Renewable Energy Target Overview 2008
- ▼ National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality 2000

State

- ▼ Climate Change - Green Paper 2009
- ▼ Land and Biodiversity at a Time of Climate Change (White & Green Papers 2008/2009)
- ▼ Our Water, Our Future 2004
- ▼ Our Common Future: Victoria's Environmental Sustainability Framework 2005
- ▼ Victorian Coastal Strategy 2008
- ▼ Provincial Victoria: Directions for the Next Decade 2009

Regional

- Corangamite and GH CMA Regional Catchment Strategies 2003
- Is SW Victoria Sustainable? (vols. 1-4) 2005
- SW and G21 Regional Strategic Planning Initiative Plans (Draft) 2009/2010
- Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy (Draft) 2010
- Climate Change and Managing Coastal Risk in SW Discussion Paper 2009
- Climate Change Green Paper SW Response 2009
- Wannon Water Sustainability Strategy 2008
- Priorities for Victoria's Western Coast 2009
- South West Sustainability Blueprint 2001
- South West Victoria Charter for Sustainability 2008

Local

- ▲ Local Environmental Sustainability Priority Statements (x 6 LGAs) 2006-
- ▲ Local Environment/ Sustainability Strategies – draft or complete (x 5 LGAs) 2007-
- ▲ Council Plans and Municipal Strategic Statements (x 6 LGAs) 2009

PROCESS

The Statement has been developed through the following process in figure 1.1:

Sources:

Natural Assets Alliance (NAA)

In 2008-9 the NAA of the South West Sustainability Partnership surveyed its members as to regional NRM priorities and these were refined to four broad themes: native vegetation, wetlands, biodiversity and coast and marine environments.

The South West Regional Strategic Planning Initiative

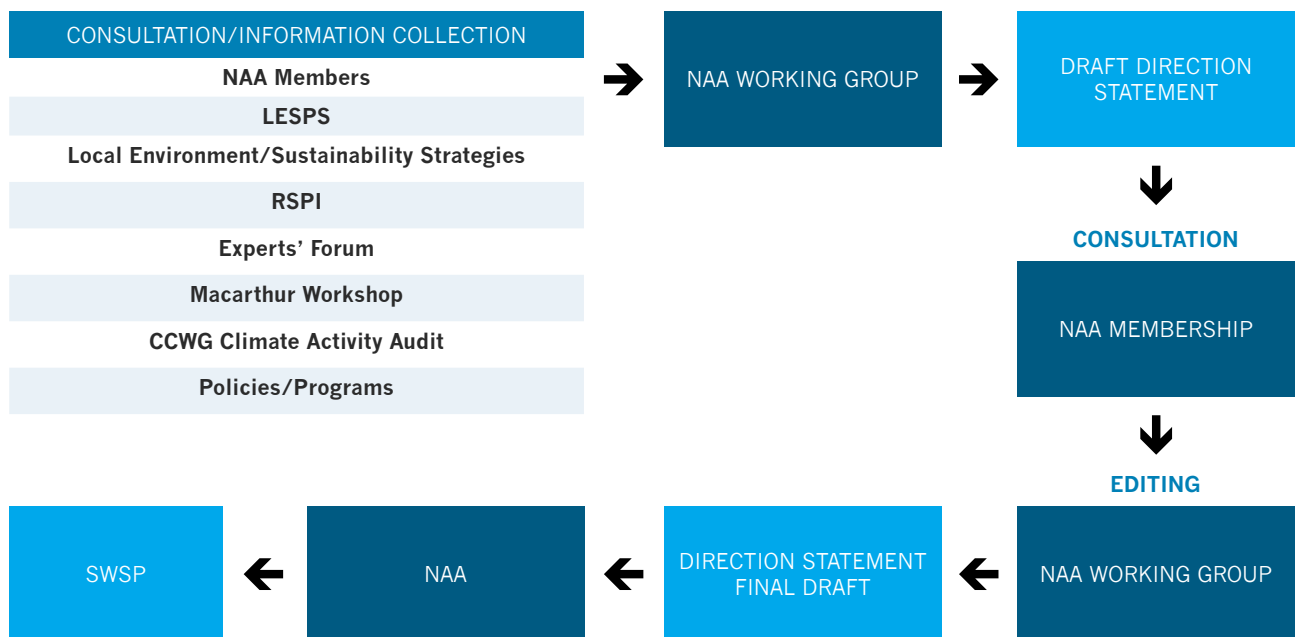
has undertaken detailed analysis of the background information and policy as regards NRM and related issues and suggested that the key issues/ themes for South West Victoria are: renewable energy, natural resource management and regional capacity building. Issues of carbon emission reduction, biodiversity protection and resilience, coastal planning and management and regional capacity building are developed in the draft document.

Experts' Forum and Surveys: NRM and related managers with extensive experience of South West issues attended a forum at DPI Hamilton in June 2009 to identify key themes and issues. Initial results were further refined via email survey, scoring and ranking and dominant themes, issues and initiatives for the future were identified. Most of these are incorporated in this document and the major themes were determined to be: climate change/ energy, water, capacity building/ governance, land, biodiversity, and coast and marine.

Local Environmental Sustainability Priority Statements (LESPPS) and Local Environment/Sustainability Strategies (LES/LSS):

the LGAs of the region have all completed priority statements and have full or draft strategies. Although priorities vary, their dominant themes are similar and conform to those identified in a statewide analysis of LESPPs in 2009: waste, greenhouse, biodiversity, education, water, governance.

Figure 1.1



Macarthur workshop: in September 2009 regional LGA planners and NRM managers attended a workshop to identify regional priorities and these results confirmed those of the DPI Experts' Forum in June and made some valuable additions. Priority themes identified were: climate change/energy, water, land, biodiversity, waste, capacity building, liveability/social change.

Climate Change Work Group (CCWG) of Barwon South west Regional Management Forum – audit and forum: the CCWG undertook an audit of climate change activity in the region and at a later forum in November 2009 identified key directions for climate change activity in Barwon South West. These directions were: greater integration and collaboration, establishment of a centralised database and communications system, increased partnerships with community and business, and additional research into program effectiveness and drivers.

Priorities for Victoria's Western Coast Project: extensive research and workshops revealed the following priorities: identifying and assessing coastal natural and built assets, positioning the region to respond to climate change, addressing the pressures of population growth and development, clarifying roles and facilitating collaborative arrangements, and improving awareness and engagement of communities and stakeholders.

In addition, a range of discussion papers and policies were assessed, their priorities identified and tested against the responses of local 'experts' at the forums and in surveys recorded above. While there was often agreement as to priorities, there was also local divergence and in all cases the regional perspective was given precedence over isolated, local priorities.

The Natural Assets Alliance formed a workgroup comprising L Parker, B Henderson, R Martin, M Fendley and H Brook to collate, circulate and refine this information and produce draft and final documents. The guidelines that the group developed to select regional directions were as follows:

That key regional directions:

- Address issues of regional scale or regional significance
- Focus on causes rather than symptoms
- Have the ability to include or carry clusters of smaller or more local issues
- Have the potential to have regional impact
- Have the potential to be supported and implemented.

In addition, the NAA Workgroup applied the criteria of the SW RSPI Workgroup that regional initiatives need to:

- Consolidate co-operation across municipal boundaries and between state government agencies
- Provide long-term benefits, and
- Recognise the intrinsic link between a healthy environment and productivity/liveability factors.

KEY THEMES, ISSUES, PRIORITY GOALS & ACTIONS

THEME	SUB-THEME	KEY ISSUE/PROBLEM	PRIORITY GOAL
Governance, Planning and Capacity Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional governance - Regional planning - Community capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Regional planning undeveloped - Land use planning lagging behind rapid land use change - Community capacity: input ad hoc and networks insufficient 	1. Endorse, support and ensure strong, representative and effective regional sustainability planning structures with sufficient resources to have the capacity to shape land use change
			2. Build measurement, communication and understanding of sustainability in the South West
			3. Assist and build community capacity to engage with and manage the regional environment
Natural Assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water - Land - Biodiversity - Coast and Marine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Water extraction/diversion increasing - Water quality decreasing - Food security threatened by reduction in area of productive land in south - Aquatic systems (rivers & wetlands) threatened by climate and land use change - Plains Woodlands and Grasslands declining - Coastal erosion & inundation predicted to increase - Saltmarsh, estuarine and tidal systems threatened 	4. Support the development and application of decision-making tools for extraction/diversion proposals that fully assess and compare economic, environmental and social uses of water
			5. Provide environmental information for cost-benefit analyses of selected reclaimed water proposals
			6. Support the development and application of decision-making tools to prioritise land use locations and options within the region
			7. Support and assist climate change risk analyses of major environments so as to determine key sites for protection, restoration, management and adaptation in light of altered climatic conditions
			8. Enhance the protection and biodiversity-management of the region's identified flagship locations/habitats
Climate Change, Energy and Resource Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Climate change - Energy - Waste management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Green energy industry poorly developed - Retrofitting operating at a scale too small in relation to building stock - Organic wastes not being captured and converted into useful products 	9. Ensure that new/alternative energy development in the region is informed by environmental, social and economic objectives
			10. Support waste minimisation and resource recovery initiatives



PHOTO : Caladenia orchid, I. Bail.



PHOTO : Brolga, I. McCann.

ACTION(S)

- 1.1 Endorse and support existing and new regional planning structures with appropriate resources, for example:
 - 1.1.1 Structures: South West Sustainability Partnership, Western Districts Natural Resource and Catchment Authority, Barwon South West Regional Management Forum;
 - 1.1.2 Resources: appropriate numbers of planning staff with sufficient skills and access to planning tools
- 2.1 Extend and fully integrate the 'SW Sustainability Indicators Program'
- 3.1 Assist and build community capacity through development of:
 - 3.1.1 Education programs, e.g. a 'ClimateWatch' program or similar in schools
 - 3.1.2 Leadership programs with a sustainability focus
 - 3.1.3 Landholder capacity and networks, e.g. Landcare
 - 3.1.4 Community networks, e.g. Climate Action Groups, Transition Towns, Climate Communities, Community Gardens
 - 3.1.5 'Green' skills/jobs training, e.g. for housing and industry retrofitting or distributed energy supplies and structures
- 4.1 Support and assist the development of extraction/diversion decision-making tools in conjunction with the:
 - 4.1.1 Wannon Water Supply Demand Strategy; and
 - 4.1.2 Western Region Sustainable Water Strategy
- 5.1 Provide information and support for proposals or trials, such as:
 - 5.1.1 Casterton Reclamation Plant
 - 5.1.2 Stormwater harvesting in Warrnambool
 - 5.1.3 Decentralised water systems
- 6.1 Extend and apply land-capability studies
- 6.2 Support programs to identify the region's food production priorities, agricultural capability and opportunities for diversification and protection of productive agricultural land
- 7.1 Support and assist climate change risk analyses of:
 - 7.1.1 Index of Wetland Condition
 - 7.1.2 Index of Stream Condition
 - 7.1.3 Index of Land Health
 - 7.1.4 Coastal habitats, e.g. estuaries
- 8.1 Support the development of a priority list of protection and biodiversity-management actions for:
 - 8.1.1 South West (primarily woodlands from Portland to Little Desert)
 - 8.1.2 Greater Grampians
 - 8.1.3 Otways (southern)
 - 8.1.4 Western Volcanic Plain (primarily Grassland & Plains Woodland)
 - 8.1.5 Western District Ramsar Lakes and other key wetlands
 - 8.1.6 Marine National Parks and Sanctuaries
- 8.2 Initiate ecosystems services valuation studies (including economic values) of critical habitats:
 - 8.2.1 Grasslands
 - 8.2.2 Plains Woodland
 - 8.2.3 Estuarine habitats
- 9.1 Support the development of business cases for the establishment of distributed energy supplies and structures, e.g. solar photo-voltaics, dairy effluent capture and conversion, equipment bulk buy, localised wind power generation, biofuel generation
- 10.1 Support and assist the development of proposals to divert organic wastes from landfill

MAJOR NATURAL ASSETS OF THE SOUTH WEST

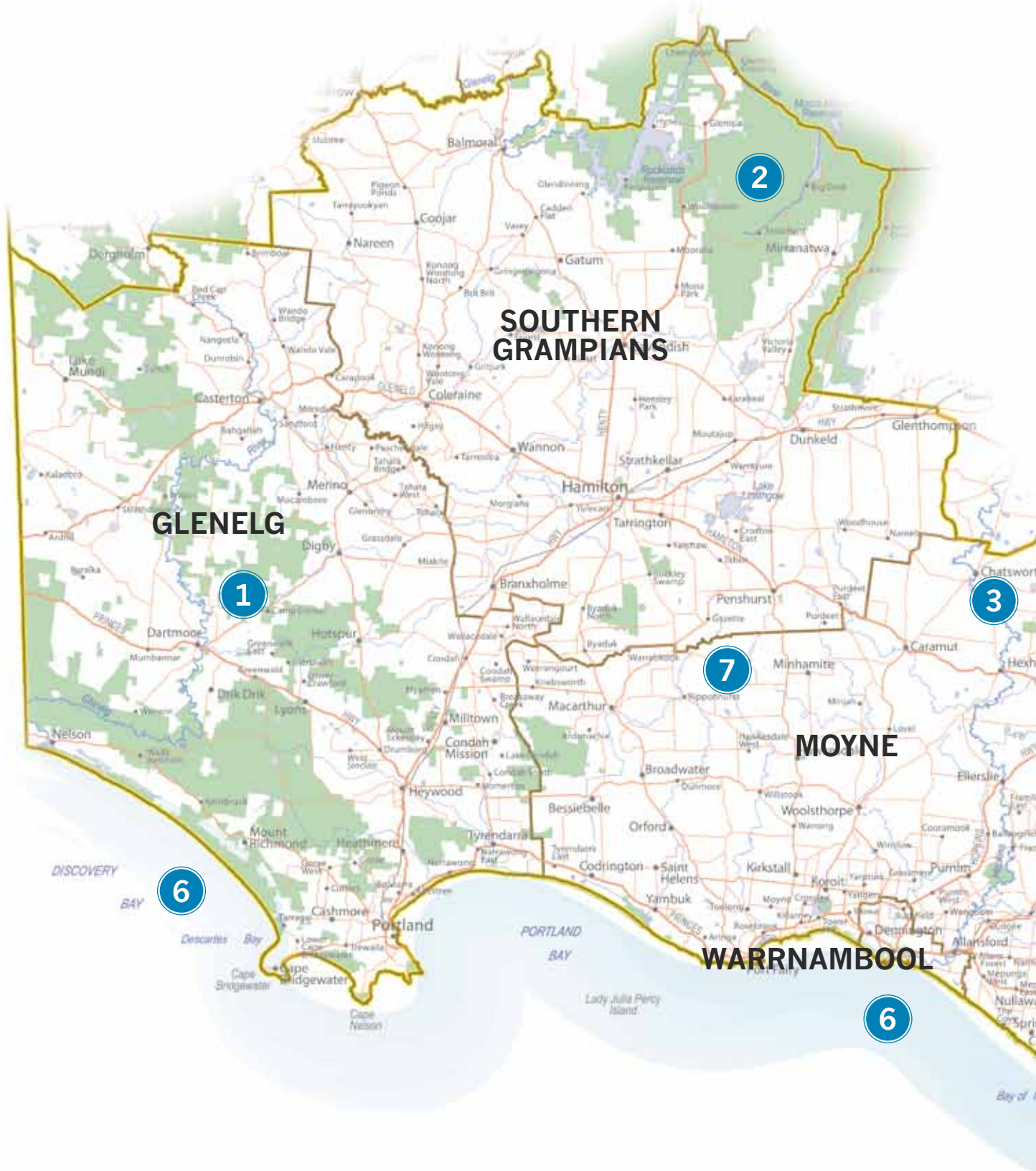
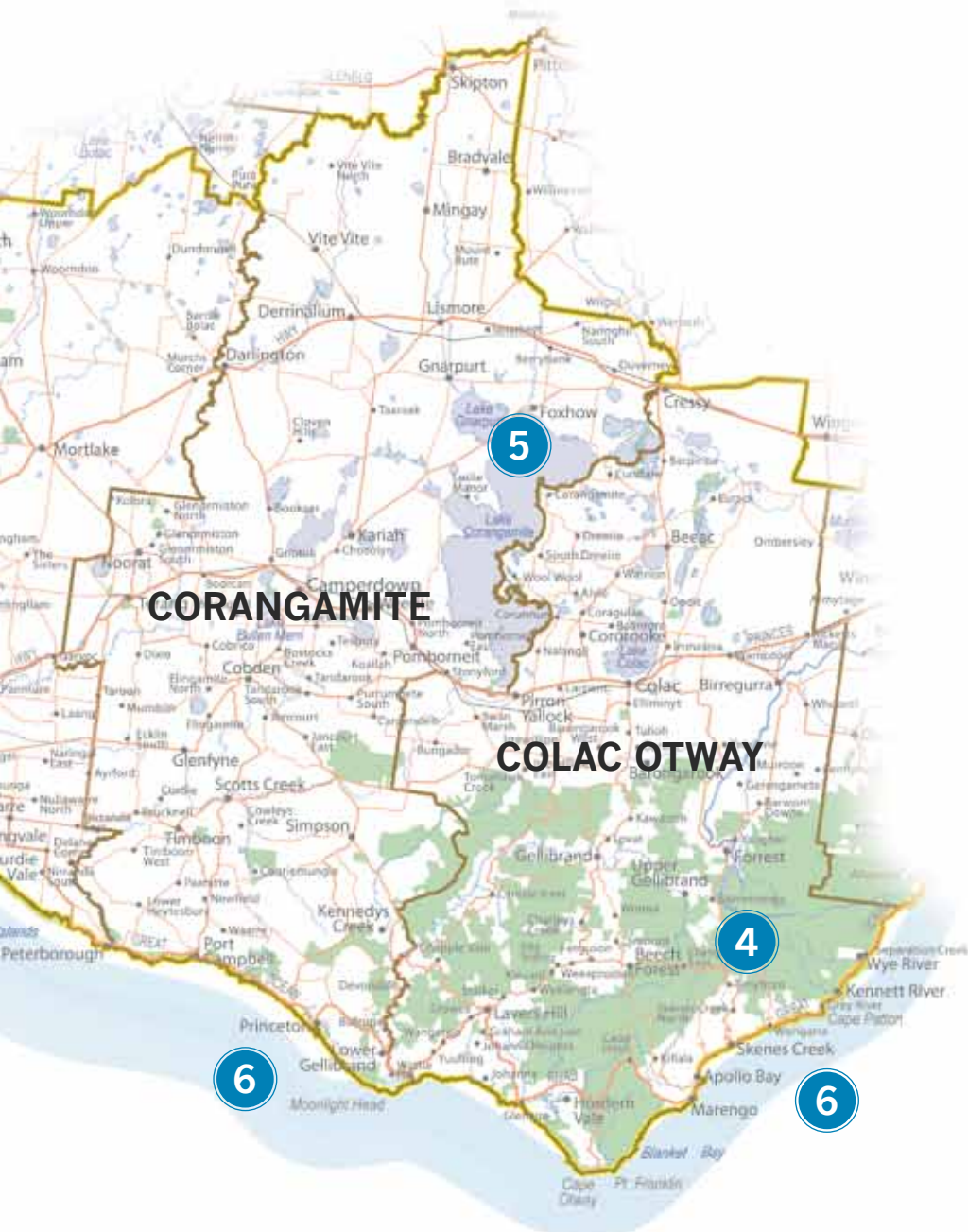




PHOTO : Australasian Gannets, DSE.



PHOTO : Heathland with Grass Trees, I. Bail.



- 1 South West (Woodlands)
- 2 Greater Grampians
- 3 Western Volcanic Plains (Grasslands/Pl. Woodland)
- 4 Otways (Southern)
- 5 Western District Ramsar Lakes
- 6 Marine & Coastal Parks & Sanctuaries
- 7 Rivers and Wetlands (region-wide)

APPLICATION

It is hoped that the Direction Statement can usefully inform other regional planning initiatives and programs either underway or about to get underway. For example:



The Direction Statement forms part of a three-stage process of the NAA of the SWSP to develop an integrated sustainability vision (Charter), direction and measurement system (Indicators project to follow).

The Vision for SW Victoria developed by the SWSP is for:

- significantly improved health of waterways, atmosphere, coast, soil and land;
- increased economic production that is integrated with the above;
- vertically integrated sustainable production systems producing 'clean' and green' goods;
- progress towards emissions-reduction targets and application of indicators programs;

- the operation of high-level sustainability technologies and services (including for renewable energy) supported by a skilled labour-force;
- a sustainability aware and engaged community;
- low waste production and high material reuse;
- active information exchange and sustainability leadership.



PHOTO : Nigretta Falls, L. Jemmett (GHCA).

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PHOTO : Brolgas & Grampians wetland, GHCMA.

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PHOTO : Dunkeld Aboretum, *GHCMA*.



PHOTO : Growling Grass Frog, *GHCMA*.

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