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NEW MAPPING WORK TO STREAMLINE PLANNING

A new project to map native vegetation in Wyndham is underway so native habitat can be protected or offset in future development.

The project is being funded as part of the \$3.5 million allocated by the Brumby Government to streamline planning processes in Melbourne's Growth Areas over the next two years.

Growth Areas Authority chief executive officer Peter Seamer said the mapping would help protect the environmental assets for future generations and also fast track the development process by up to a year.

In the past, native vegetation has been considered as a separate issue for every proposed housing or industrial subdivision, often causing delay.

"After the mapping, we will be able to consider the native vegetation issues at an ecosystem level, and get better outcomes for the environment and the community," Mr Seamer said.

"The project envisages mapping a total of up to 20,000 hectares mainly in areas that haven't been looked at before and this information will help us plan new communities by making assessments of native vegetation at a much wider level," he said.

"What we learn about native vegetation will inform the master planning of new communities by identifying potential reserve areas, biodiversity corridors and areas with potential to provide offsets for vegetation lost as a result of urban development," he said.

Landholders in and around the growth areas are being approached by specialist flora and fauna contractors Biosis Research, ENSR and Practical Ecology. They've been engaged by the Growth Areas Authority and will be asking landholders to arrange access to their properties to carry out the mapping work.

The survey will take place across the growth areas within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and in neighbouring areas outside the UGB where there is high value habitat.

"We need in some cases to look outside the Urban Growth Boundary because ecosystems don't necessarily stop at planning boundaries," Mr Seamer said.

"This is important information that Victorians need so that we design our new neighbourhoods while protecting the value of plants, trees and animal habitat," he said.

"Then we can make strategic planning decisions about planning for new urban communities well ahead of residential and employment development," he said.