

Site 100. Former Forest Lodge, Boronia Rd, Wantirna

A patch of remnant eucalypts (some of them large) with traces of native groundcover.

Summary of significant features:

- Locally significant: Vestiges of a regionally-endangered plant community, dominated by the locally-endangered Mealy Stringybark (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*);
- Locally significant: an ecological stepping-stone for daily and seasonal movements of birds and insects.

Aerial photograph and plan: See page 360, which covers this site, Site 52 and Site 53.

Boundaries

The site is as outlined with red dashes on the aerial photograph, labelled 'Site 100'. Clearing associated with the EastLink project in 2005–8 forced a major contraction of the site originally described in the first edition of this report, to 0.95 ha. This edition further contracts the site to 0.65 ha, due to further tree losses.

Land use & tenure: Road reservation for EastLink and the possible construction of an interchange with the proposed Healesville Freeway.

Site description

This site retains eucalypts that are remnants of the regionally-endangered vegetation type, Valley Heathy Forest. Some of the eucalypts are particularly old and large. Hardly any native understorey survived the site being scarified and sowed with exotic grass in 2007 as part of the EastLink project. The site's drainage was substantially altered by EastLink's construction, probably contributing to the slow deaths of eucalypts ever since. The surviving remnant vegetation has been supplemented with trees and shrubs that have been planted since EastLink was constructed.

Relationship to other land

This site probably still serves as an ecological stepping-stone between Koomba Park and the Bateman Street Bush (Site 49, p. 332).

Bioregion: Gippsland Plain

Habitat types

Valley Heathy Forest (EVC 127, **Endangered**), reduced to remnant eucalypts with scant native understorey.

Canopy trees: *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa* and *E. melliodora*, plus one *E. goniocalyx*. In 2008, there were also small numbers of *E. macrorhyncha* and *E. radiata*.

Sub-canopy trees: A few sapling *Acacia dealbata* were present until they were cleared in 2006–7. A solitary *Acacia mearnsii* remains.

Shrubs: Small numbers of *Acacia paradoxa* and *Solanum laciniatum* were present in 2008 but have died out. A small number of *Kunzea* sp. (Upright form) may be solely the result of planting.

Vines and Ferns: None found.

Groundcover: *Rytidosperma racemosum*, *Rytidosperma setaceum* and *Schoenus apogon* form patches in a small fraction of the site. *Juncus amabilis*, *J. pallidus* and *J. subsecundus* are very scarce and there is a single, small *Dianella* that may be the result of planting. In 2008, there were also small numbers of *Microlaena stipoides*, *Austrostipa rudis*, *Lomandra filiformis* subsp. *coriacea* and *Themeda triandra*. *Dianella revoluta* was destroyed shortly before then.

Plant species

The following wild, indigenous plant species were observed by the author on 7th March 2008 and/or 12th August 2024. Those seen only in 2008 are asterisked. A few additional species would probably be detectable in other seasons. The column headed 'Risk' indicates the indigenous species' risk of dying out in Knox, with 'C'=Critically endangered, 'E'=Endangered and 'V'=Vulnerable.

Risk Wild indigenous vascular species

- V *Acacia mearnsii*, Black Wattle
Acacia paradoxa, Hedge Wattle*
Austrostipa rudis subsp. *rudis*, Veined Spear-grass*
Dianella ?tasmanica, Tasman Flax-lily (planted?)
E *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*, Mealy Stringybark
V *Eucalyptus goniocalyx*, Bundy
C *Eucalyptus macrorhyncha*, Red Stringybark*
E *Eucalyptus melliodora*, Yellow Box
E *Eucalyptus radiata*, Narrow-leaved Peppermint*
Eucalyptus hybrid
Juncus amabilis, Hollow Rush

Risk Wild indigenous vascular species

- Juncus pallidus*, Pale Rush
E *Juncus subsecundus*, Finger Rush
Kunzea sp. (Upright form), Forest Burgan (perhaps descended from adjacent planted plants)
Lomandra filiformis subsp. *coriacea*, Wattle Mat-rush*
Microlaena stipoides, Weeping Grass*
Rytidosperma racemosum, Clustered Wallaby-grass
Rytidosperma setaceum, Bristly Wallaby-grass
Schoenus apogon, Common Bog-rush
V *Solanum laciniatum*, Large Kangaroo Apple*
Themeda triandra, Kangaroo Grass*

Fauna habitat features

Some of the eucalypts have hollows suitable for nesting or roosting by native birds, bats, possums or invertebrates.

Significance ratings

The following is an assessment of the site's biological significance against the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action's standard criteria (Amos 2004).

Ecological Integrity and Viability

Site 100 and the surrounding revegetation is likely to represent an ecological stepping-stone for birds and perhaps bats or flying insects moving between the Dandenong Creek corridor and the Bateman Street Bush. As such, the vegetation fits the description in criterion 1.2.6 of Amos (2004) of a 'Corridor or component of 'stepping stones' ... Local scale link between individual remnant habitat blocks or within subcatchment'. **Local** significance applies to sites meeting this description.

Regionally Threatened Ecological Vegetation Class

Valley Heathy Forest is listed by the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action as regionally Endangered. However, the representation in the Forest Lodge site does not have sufficient canopy cover or understorey to qualify as a 'remnant patch' under criterion 3.2.3, and therefore its status as an example of an endangered EVC is not formally significant.

Locally-threatened plant species

Eucalyptus cephalocarpa and *E. melliodora* are locally endangered and the dominant species in this site. The former species and perhaps the latter have viable populations, thereby meeting criterion 3.1.5 for a site of **Local** significance.

Threats

- Clearing for construction of an interchange between EastLink and the proposed Healesville Freeway (should it go ahead);
- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter);
- Continuing debilitation and deaths of trees due to changed site drainage and the abovementioned droughts and storms;
- Lack of replacement of eucalypts as they die, due to ongoing mowing and use of herbicide, as well as reproductive problems resulting from the small numbers of most of the eucalypt species in the site;
- Loss or decline of understorey species whose populations are dangerously small, due to inbreeding, poor reproductive success or localised chance events such as being struck by a falling tree limb.

Strategic planning

- Schedule 4 of the Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO4) currently applies to the larger version of this site appearing in the previous (2010) edition of this report. Despite the loss of some eucalypts and some plant species, VPO4 remains justified but only in the smaller area delineated in this edition. It is therefore recommended to amend the VPO4 boundary to match the one adopted here;
- On the basis of a 1998 report on Knox's vegetation, Schedule 2 of the Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO2) is currently mapped as applying to this site and most of the remainder of the former Forest Lodge property. However, the permit trigger for VPO2 only applies to a schedule of particular trees, none of which occur in this site. VPO2 is therefore impotent in regard to this site. Even if that were not so, construction of EastLink has rendered the basis of VPO2 in this site obsolete. It is therefore recommended to remove VPO2 from this site and adjacent land.

Information sources used in this assessment

- The 1998 '*Scoresby Transport Corridor Environment Effects Statement*', particularly Supplement Volume H: Flora and Fauna by Williams L.M., Yugovic J.V., McGuckin J., Humphrey P. and Larwill S. (1998);
- Site surveys undertaken during this study by Dr Lorimer on 30th August 2002 and Rik Brown on 15th May 2002, for the first edition of this report. This included a description of the vegetation composition, compilation of a list of indigenous and introduced plant species, incidental fauna observations, and checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats and management issues;
- A report, '*Assessment of Native Vegetation on the Mitcham to Frankston Freeway Alignment in Knox*', by Dr Lorimer in July 2003 for Knox City Council;
- A site inspection, including compilation of a plant list, for approximately 20 minutes by Dr Lorimer on 7th March 2008 to reassess the site following construction of EastLink;
- An inspection of the site by Dr Lorimer on 12th August 2024, recording and mapping indigenous plant species and noting other features relevant to this report;
- A search of records of flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia, of which there are none within the site;
- Aerial and satellite imagery from between 1946 and 2025;
- The Victorian Government's 'NatureKit' website;
- Maps of geology, topography and strategic planning information produced by agencies of the Victorian Government.