Site 52. Winton Farm, Boronia Rd, Wantirna

Remnant Mealy Stringybarks (some large) and vestiges of understorey on the former Winton Farm property.

Site Significance Level: *Local*

- 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 east-west movements of birds and insects.

Boundaries

The site comprises the area outlined with magenta dashes and labelled 'Site 52' north of Boronia Rd on the aerial photograph on page 360. The boundary has been drawn to circumscribe the continuous area of remnant trees, which is mostly on the EastLink reservation but includes a large, old Swamp Gum on 771 Boronia Rd.

Land use & tenure: Former grazing land now mostly forming part of the verge of EastLink, extending slightly onto land occupied by a landscaping supplies business.

Site description

In 2004 when the first edition of this report was prepared, Site 52 was of State significance and occupied 7.89 ha within Winton Farm, circumscribing a seasonal wetland and an arc of remnant trees surrounded by pasture. Most of that area was cleared for construction of EastLink. That reduced the significance level to Local and led the second (2010) edition to reduce the site to 0.87 ha, containing a fully-natural cover of remnant Mealy Stringybarks (*Eucalyptus cephalocarpa*) with little native understorey. The site has been further reduced here to 0.45 ha due to removal of eucalypts on 771 Boronia Rd. The survival of some of the remaining eucalypts is threatened by their root zone suffering from stockpiled earth and soil compaction caused by trucks and heavy machinery.

The managers of EastLink planted indigenous shrubs and groundcover species some years ago to supplement the handful that were there naturally at the completion of the road's construction. Blackberries, other noxious weeds and Sweet Pittosporums now threaten to out-compete those plants in most of the site.

Relationship to other land

Neighbouring areas of native vegetation are shown on the aerial photograph on page 355. The site is probably used by some birds as an ecological stepping-stone between Dandenong Creek (500 m away) and the Bateman St Bush (Site 49).

Bioregion: Gippsland Plain

Habitat type

Valley Heathy Forest (EVC 127, **regionally Endangered**)

Canopy trees: *Eucalyptus cephalocarpa* and one *E. ovata*, with crowns overlapping slightly in the densest areas.

Sub-canopy trees: *Acacia melanoxylon* is scattered and there are a few *A. mearnsii*, some of these trees perhaps planted. There is a single *Exocarpos cupressiformis*.

Shrubs: *Kunzea* sp. (Upright form) is fairly abundant, perhaps solely due to planting. At least some of the scattered *Bursaria spinosa* are wild. The origin of a solitary *Leptospermum continentale* is uncertain.

Vines: None.

Ferns: None.

Groundcover: Mostly pasture weeds. Of the indigenous species, there are patches of *Microlaena stipoides* and *Rytidosperma racemosum* and very small numbers of *Juncus amabilis, J. sarophorus* and *Lomandra filiformis* subsp. *coriacea*.

Plant species

All the wild, indigenous plant species seen in the site are included above. Of the introduced species, the dominant species are Cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*) and Kikuyu Grass (*Cenchrus clandestinus*), followed by blackberry (*Rubus anglocandicans*).

Fauna habitat features

Some of the large eucalypts probably have hollows suitable for habitation by fauna.

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 52 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

Locally-threatened plant species

Eucalyptus cephalocarpa is locally endangered and the dominant species in this site. Because there is a viable population (in combination with Bateman Street Bush), criterion 3.1.5 is met for a site of **Local** significance.

Threats

- Human-induced climate change, which is predicted to cause more severe droughts, heatwaves and storms, as well as substantially lower rainfall (particularly in winter);
- Potential destruction of the large, old Swamp Gum on 771 Boronia Rd, either for the purposes of the business there or due to soil compaction or smothering of its root system by stockpiled earth;
- Debilitation or death of other eucalypts whose root systems extend into 771 Boronia Rd, due to the same causes;
- Displacement of indigenous flora and fauna by environmental weeds, exacerbated by debilitation of the native vegetation by the impacts of climate change. The most impactful species of environmental weeds appear to be blackberry, Cocksfoot and Kikuyu Grass.

Strategic planning

- An outcome of the previous (2010) edition of this report was that its version of this site is now covered by Schedule 4 of the Vegetation Protection Overlay. The justification given was that the site is probably an ecological stepping-stone and it contains (in the words of the VPP Practice Note on Biodiversity) 'scattered living food trees with an exotic understorey'. Within this edition's smaller version of the site, the original reasons for applying VPO4 remain. The only recommended change is to amend the VPO4 boundary to match the one adopted here;
- The state-wide baseline planning controls over removal of native vegetation continue to apply to the few eucalypts that remain on 771 Boronia Rd;
- The whole of EastLink and 771 Boronia Rd are zoned Transport Zone 2 – Principal Road Network (TRZ2).

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);
- An ecological survey by Rik Brown on 15th May 2002 for the first edition of this report. This included vegetation mapping, descriptions of the composition and condition of the vegetation types, compilation of two lists of indigenous and introduced plant species (one for the wetland and one for the treed area), incidental fauna observations, and checks for fauna habitat, ecological threats, management issues and populations of scarce or threatened plant species;
- 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;

- An inspection by Dr Lorimer on 7/3/08 to determine what conservation values remained 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 check for records of flora and fauna observations stored in the Atlas of Living Australia, but finding only a record of a Grey Butcherbird;
- 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.