

# Green land cut back as Melbourne grows much bigger

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A map of the urban growth boundary expansion.

Melbourne has today become much, much bigger.

Already one of the world's largest cities by geographic footprint - stretching 100 kilometres from east to west - Victoria's Parliament has just voted in favour of expanding Melbourne by another 43,600 hectares.

The land - roughly equal to four Phillip Islands - is on the city's western, northern and south-eastern fringes.

The expansion is the biggest change to the size of Melbourne in almost a decade and will destroy thousands of hectares of Melbourne's green-wedge land - once dubbed the city's "lungs" - as well as fertile food-growing areas to Melbourne's east.

Developers argue the decision, and any subsequent residential development, will ease pressure on housing supply and affordability.

But questions remain about services, including public transport, in these areas.

The government says it has an integrated housing and transport plan with housing-growth areas tied to existing or planned transport links.

Housing expansion in the west is expected to be served by the planned new Regional Rail Link and, in the north, the South Morang rail extension.

Melbourne's outer suburbs have limited access to public transport — especially rail — and residents rely much more heavily on cars to travel to the city than inner-suburban dwellers.

The plan was first revealed by Premier John Brumby in December 2008 - long before the term "sustainable growth" became the favoured catch-cry in the national political lexicon.

The expansion is to accommodate an additional 134,000 homes for Melbourne and provide 20 years of land supply for new housing.

City of Casey mayor Lorraine Wreford said she was very disappointed the council's concerns about the use of fertile food-growing land for housing had been ignored.

"It is very fertile food-growing land," she said.

"If you keep pushing your food production further and further out from the city then it costs more for people to eat."

Housing Industry Association Victorian executive director Gil King said members were very pleased with the expansion.

"It means that there will be more land released for housing to be constructed on. It will help the underlying demand. It will assist in making houses more affordable for all Victorians," he said.

Urban Development Institute of Australia executive director Tony De Domenico said he was delighted "that there is more access to land because that is going to help supply and demand".

"It will put Victoria in a better position to retain its competitive advantage over other states in terms of housing affordability - it is a pity it took so long to do," he said.

While Property Council of Australia Victorian executive director Jennifer Cunich welcomed the additional land for housing, she had a cautionary note for Melbourne's planners.

"We now need to have the debate about density - it is not the long-term solution to continually move the boundary," she said.

Rosemary West, from the Green Wedges Coalition, said the expansion "really means the death of the green wedges".

"It takes some of the best of the western plains grassland, of the grassy woodlands in the Maribyrnong and Merri Creek catchments and of course 4000 hectares of prime Casey foodbowl market garden land," she said.

A spokeswoman for Planning Minister Justin Madden said the planning scheme amendment to expand the urban growth boundary was "fundamental to maintaining housing affordability".

"Expanding the boundary is a major component of the Brumby Labor Government's long-term plan to manage growth, keep house prices affordable and ensure our city remains one of the world's most welcoming and livable cities," she said.