

NEIGHBOURHOOD ENVIRONMENT IMPROVEMENT PLANS – DEVELOPING A VOLUNTARY PROPOSAL

Publication 846

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This information bulletin is designed to assist people in developing a voluntary Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan (Neighbourhood EIP) proposal. It contains information to consider before beginning a Neighbourhood EIP and should be read in conjunction with *Guideline for Submitting a Voluntary Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal* (EPA publication 847).

The guideline outlines the statutory requirements for submitting a Neighbourhood EIP proposal required under the *Environment Protection Act 1970* (the Act).

Section 1 provides an introduction to Neighbourhood EIPs. Section 2 of this document outlines some of the issues to think about when considering whether to develop a proposal, including potential benefits, processes and outcomes. A brief section on the requirements for a plan is included in Section 10, and Section 12 has details of further EPA publications and the EPA website on Neighbourhood EIPs.

1. NEIGHBOURHOOD EIPs – AN INTRODUCTION

Neighbourhood EIPs are a way for communities to enhance their local environment and contribute to a sustainable neighbourhood. They are action plans designed to tackle issues that are important to the

health, safety and enjoyment of local areas, by the people who live, work and play there.

Neighbourhood EIPs are broad reaching and can be adapted to a range of environmental issues that different neighbourhoods and communities face. They are designed to build on and support other efforts to protect Victoria's environment and achieve sustainability.

1.1 Basic Requirements of a Neighbourhood EIP

The basic requirements for a Neighbourhood EIP are for an open and public process to:

- Bring together community members and establish environmental concerns;
- Develop and obtain EPA's endorsement of a Neighbourhood EIP proposal in accordance with guidelines;
- Develop a Neighbourhood EIP with agreed actions for improvements in the neighbourhood;
- Provide for the regular review and updating of the Neighbourhood EIP; and
- Gain EPA approval and Gazettal of the final plan that reflects the commitment of all participants in the Neighbourhood EIP.

Neighbourhood EIPs are intended to address environmental issues of importance to the community at the local scale, such as the cumulative impacts of many small sources of pollution, or working towards a sustainable neighbourhood. They are not intended to address environmental impacts from one industry or source, such as a single factory or premises. EPA has a range of other statutory instruments to address these issues, such as site Environment Improvement Plans, licences or other statutory notices.

1.2 Purpose of a Proposal

Developing a proposal is a sensible first step before launching into planning. It is also necessary under the Act, which requires a Neighbourhood EIP proposal to be provided to EPA for endorsement prior to commencing the development of and ultimately submitting the final, agreed plan. The proposal should describe the neighbourhood to which the proposed plan applies and the goals of the proposed plan.

For example, the neighbourhood to which the plan applies could be a subcatchment of a waterway. The goal of the Neighbourhood EIP could be to improve water quality in the local waterway, improve relationships within the community, and improved amenity for the park surrounding the waterway. Developing the proposal should assist in setting that vision for the participants in the plan.

You should consider whether a Neighbourhood EIP is a useful way to tackle issues in your neighbourhood.

2. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF A NEIGHBOURHOOD EIP

2.1 Key Questions to Ask

The following section outlines some questions designed to help a community to develop a Neighbourhood EIP proposal. In particular, the questions should help you to assess whether this is the most appropriate way for your neighbourhood to address your environmental issues, to clarify what it is that you want to achieve, and what process you want to adopt in developing and implementing a Neighbourhood EIP.

You are encouraged to contact your local EPA office for advice and assistance early on in the process of considering whether you want to develop a Neighbourhood EIP. EPA's contact details can be found in Section 11 of this information bulletin.

Is there a demonstrated environmental or related issue or problem(s) in the neighbourhood?

There may be particular or a range of environment related issues in your local area, for example localised air quality or odour problems, noise, litter or poor stream water quality. Alternatively, concerns in the neighbourhood may be about a range of interlinked environmental issues or about ecologically sustainable development.

Is there a high level of community concern?

Concern can be demonstrated through complaints to council, EPA, or another agency. Alternatively, community members may have started a 'friends' or another local group addressing particular environmental or other concerns in an area. Consider whether a Neighbourhood EIP would generate leadership and ownership of problems

while encouraging participation, and commitment to finding solutions. Are there leaders in the community willing to put time and resources into a Neighbourhood EIP?

Are there multiple or diffuse sources causing environmental problems?

A Neighbourhood EIP may be useful when there are multiple sources of pollution and where a joint effort is required to develop and implement solutions. For example, stream water quality may be affected by litter, the impacts of erosion from building sites, or householders and businesses putting wastes into drains. The source of the environmental problem or problems could be individuals, households, motor vehicles, small business or larger industry, or most likely a combination of all of these. Solutions will lie with a number of parties.

Is there a definable 'neighbourhood'?

Defining your neighbourhood is a requirement of developing a proposal. It may be useful to tackle issues on a geographical basis – for example, as part of a water catchment or air shed – or the neighbourhood may be better defined by a social or administrative boundary like a township. This is discussed further in Section 5 of this bulletin. You may like to also consider how a Neighbourhood EIP could be used to generate and link action in other areas, for example, upstream or downstream of your neighbourhood.

Will you see a more 'liveable neighbourhood' over time?

You should consider whether there is the potential to achieve and measure improvement - qualitatively or quantitatively - if a Neighbourhood EIP is

implemented. Think about how you could measure and see improvement over time to make your neighbourhood more liveable, that is, what your milestones might be. Also consider how Neighbourhood EIP participants could develop and sustain the effort involved in developing and implementing the plan. Is community-based, local improvement possible, and is a Neighbourhood EIP therefore a good way to achieve environmental improvements? The local community Neighbourhood EIP might also like to achieve related social and economic benefits in their neighbourhood and this may be a secondary goal for your more liveable neighbourhood.

Are there existing programs or plans in your neighbourhood that impact on the environment?

In some communities, activities are already in place to assist in protecting, restoring and enhancing parts of the local environment and related matters such as land use or health plans. These plans or programs may be created under legislation or may be voluntary, for example, municipal planning strategies, Landcare and 'friends' efforts. In these circumstances, a Neighbourhood EIP can support, link and build on existing plans and programs.

In some neighbourhoods there may not be such plans or programs. A Neighbourhood EIP is a way to enable people to achieve the real environmental improvements they aspire to in their local area.

Existing approaches for environmental improvements are not working?

A Neighbourhood EIP may be useful where there is no other program or plan tackling that issue, or existing efforts are ineffective, not linked, under-resourced or are at crossed purposes. The

responsible parts of government may not be clearly identified, there may be a lack of linkage between the programs or plans, or a lack of resourcing that means plans or programs are not being effectively implemented. A Neighbourhood EIP can potentially establish better links between existing efforts and encourage greater commitment and accountability through a public and statutory document.

Are resources available or could a Neighbourhood EIP attract more resources?

Consider the effective use of available resources, and whether developing a Neighbourhood EIP could ensure that all efforts work towards a common goal using combined resources. . Your plan may be able to attract resources or funding from a variety of sources through clear articulation of the issues and action needed and statutory backing for commitments by all the partners in the Neighbourhood EIP.

3. STARTING A NEIGHBOURHOOD EIP

An open process with public and inclusive participation and consultation is essential when establishing a Neighbourhood EIP. When EPA is asked to endorse a proposal, the proposal needs to clearly demonstrate an effective community engagement process. It must also identify the partners in the proposal and that they have agreed to participate in developing the Neighbourhood EIP. Plan development must include those people or groups who may be required to carry out 'works', or contribute substantially to the implementation of the final plan.

The following section is designed to assist you by describing some possible tools and methods which could be used to assist you in developing your proposal. Over time, EPA is seeking to document and share ways different communities develop Neighbourhood EIP proposals and plans.

4.1 Shaping a vision

Part of developing the proposal is finding out and agreeing on what environmental issues the community as a collective want to take action on.

Having a shared understanding and agreement of the primary goals of the Neighbourhood EIP is critical and should be well established in developing the proposal. Key partners must be established and a process for engaging further participants outlined. This will mean that significant discussion across the neighbourhood community and amongst key partners should have occurred prior to submitting the Neighbourhood EIP proposal.

To begin shaping a vision, one method is to convene an open meeting or use an existing community event to brainstorm. The type of questions you can ask to facilitate this could be:

- ‘What do you want the environment in our neighbourhood to be like in 10 or 20 years?’
- ‘What do you think are the most important environmental problems in our neighbourhood now and possibly in the future?’
- ‘What changes or improvements would you like to see in our local environment?’
- ‘What are the values our community holds for our local environment?’

While initially the Neighbourhood EIP may focus on a particular problem or issue, it is important that a cross section of the community is present at such an event to gain an accurate representation of the needs, aspirations and values of the diverse people and groups in the neighbourhood. See Section 4 for more information about ‘proposed outcomes’ of your Neighbourhood EIP.

4.2 Steering Group

Someone needs to support the development of the proposal. Key interested parties, who then seek to canvass the neighbourhood community, could initiate proposal development. A Neighbourhood EIP steering group could be formed through various means including election or by calling for expressions of interest. The steering group would seek to capture and represent the views of the community including key partners. Ultimately, they

could draft the Neighbourhood EIP proposal and ensure a process to bring partners on board and confirm community wishes

4.3 Engaging partners

If you are aware of a number of possible participants or ‘partners’ in your community who may wish to be involved in developing a Neighbourhood EIP, you could invite them along to an initial meeting to begin discussing the concept.

Broad community awareness and participation could be initiated through community events, meetings, existing community networks, open letters, newspaper stories, leaflets or email lists. Use the methods that the community use already to communicate in the neighbourhood. Do not turn people away if they are interested as teams can be formed around different issues. A steering group can help to link these efforts and make sure there is good communication across all partners in the Neighbourhood EIP.

Although facilitation and mediation may be required, effectively engaging people from the beginning, setting shared aims and objectives and defining issues, is beneficial because people are more likely to work successfully together to improve the neighbourhood. See Section 7 for more information about ‘partners’ in a Neighbourhood EIP.

4.4 Prepare a draft proposal

Some people find it easier to respond to written documents or suggestions rather than start from scratch. To this end, elements or options for a Neighbourhood EIP proposal could be drafted to help inform and engage the neighbourhood

community, particularly key potential partners. A draft proposal could undergo a number of versions in its development. These should include input and consideration by all participants and a full public process to develop a shared vision and scope.

A number of the methods above – shaping a vision for your neighbourhood, engaging partners and drafting a proposal – could be used to begin the process, but there is no ‘right’ way. As long as the process is open to all parts of the community at all stages of development and implementation, your neighbourhood can develop the final proposal in the way that suits it best.

4. PROPOSED OUTCOMES OF YOUR PLAN

The neighbourhood community needs to have a collective vision of what they are aiming to achieve by developing a Neighbourhood EIP. What do you want the environment in your neighbourhood to look like in 10 or 20 years? The objectives of the Neighbourhood EIP should be stated in the proposal, for example, improved water or air quality, improvements in levels of biodiversity, reduction in pollution, or progress in broader issues such as improving neighbourhood sustainability. Measures to show improvement should be included in the proposal, or outline how these will be developed. Note that the proposed objectives and measures can be refined during the process of developing the plan, but should be consistent with the original vision for the Neighbourhood EIP.

Your proposal should outline your objectives for the proposed plan. These will be specific to your

neighbourhood, representing community consensus including that of the partners involved.

Some examples of potential primary outcomes and benefits include:

- *Sustainability* – assisting communities to move towards ecologically sustainable development, encouraging holistic approaches to resolving complex issues, building ability to sustain community improvement, recognition that addressing social, economic and environmental issues together drives a sustainable community.
- *Environment* – for example, improvements in environmental quality and amenity.
- *Health and safety* – improvements in health and safety in the neighbourhood.

Secondary benefits and outcomes in the neighbourhood could also include:

- *Improved community capacity and better relationships* – greater sense of wellbeing, community empowerment, ownership and understanding, building relationships and partnerships across all community members, friendships and social networks.
- *Business and industry* – better resource efficiency, improved reputation and cleaner production benefits.
- *Resource use* – increasing effectiveness of resource use in communities, improving co-ordination of existing programs, improving the ability of the community to drive action and attract resources.

- *Learning* – developing and sharing Neighbourhood EIP models with other neighbourhoods, developing a model to tackle complex, intractable or long term issues, reaching a shared understanding that everyone contributes to environmental problems and that everyone can contribute to the solution.

5. DEFINING YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

The *Environment Protection Act* does not specify what a neighbourhood is. This enables flexibility in each plan – one plan may operate within natural geo-physical boundaries and another may coincide with administrative boundaries. Again, there is no ‘correct’ definition but typically a neighbourhood will be smaller than a municipality.

Example of a Neighbourhood

Your neighbourhood could cover a local stream catchment, a township, a local air shed or some other area.

The neighbourhood to which your plan applies should be determined by participants the Neighbourhood EIP and should reflect the nature of the issues that the participants want to address. It should be of a scale such that the participants can address environmental issues at a local level, in a meaningful way. Neighbourhood EIP partners should keep in mind their shared vision and objectives for the Neighbourhood EIP, the partners involved and the available and required resources

when determining the boundaries of the neighbourhood.

Your proposal must include the boundaries of where your plan will operate. Where necessary your proposal can outline that part of the process of developing the plan will fine-tune the ‘neighbourhood’ boundaries. A map should be provided when you submit your proposal to show your plan’s neighbourhood.

6. SPONSOR

Although there is a great deal of flexibility in how to develop a proposal, there are still a number of formal requirements that must be met.

The *Environment Protection Act 1970* specifies that a ‘protection agency’ must submit the Neighbourhood EIP proposal to EPA. A protection agency is defined in the Act as a ‘person or body ... having powers or duties under any other Act with respect to the environment or any segment of the environment in any part or parts of Victoria’. The protection agency acts on behalf of the neighbourhood community to take the proposal through the formal stage of gaining EPA endorsement and approval of the final plan. Examples of protection agencies include local councils, catchment management authorities, water authorities or government departments such as the Department of Natural Resources and Environment or the Department of Infrastructure.

The protection agency’s role could be described as one of ‘sponsor’ for the Neighbourhood EIP.

The sponsor’s role will depend on each situation. For some Neighbourhood EIPs, the sponsor may play

a large leadership role in developing or implementing the Neighbourhood EIP. In others, the Neighbourhood EIP may be driven more by members of the community, with the sponsor acting as one of many participants and playing the additional formal role of taking the agreed proposal to EPA for endorsement.

The choice of sponsor may depend on the issues being addressed by the Neighbourhood EIP. Although there is no 'correct' sponsor, some agencies may be better suited to deal with particular issues. For example, if the Neighbourhood EIP is focussed on addressing water quality issues in a local area, a catchment management authority may be an appropriate sponsor. If the Neighbourhood EIP is primarily addressing air quality issues in an urban area, then a local municipality may be an appropriate sponsor.

Note that EPA cannot sponsor a Neighbourhood EIP or act as a protection agency. EPA or any other agency created under the *Environment Protection Act 1970* – including regional waste management groups or Ecorecycle Victoria - do not satisfy the Act's definition of a protection agency, thus cannot sponsor a Neighbourhood EIP. In most cases, however, EPA will be a partner in Neighbourhood EIPs, and the Authority, EPA's Chairman, has a separate formal role in endorsing Neighbourhood EIP proposals and approving final plans.

7. KEY PARTNERS

A Neighbourhood EIP involves the participation of a broad range of people in the neighbourhood. Potential partners in a Neighbourhood EIP should involve all parts of the community and may include:

- Individuals and households,
- Social groups and services such as community health centres, legal aid centres, sporting clubs, neighbourhood houses, schools, childcare or daycare centres and neighbourhood service organisations such as Rotary or the Country Womens Association;
- Local businesses and industry - both large and small – and business organisations such as Chambers of Commerce;
- Green groups such as 'friends' groups, Waterwatch, Greening Australia and Conservation Volunteers;
- Government agencies such EPA, the local council, VicRoads, Victoria Police, your catchment management authority and the Department of Infrastructure;
- Green peak bodies such as Friends of the Earth, Australian Conservation Foundation and Environment Victoria;
- Professional associations; or
- Financial institutions.

Each Neighbourhood EIP will be comprised of different partners, which will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis. Partners should include those groups, businesses or people contributing to the environmental problems in your neighbourhood as well as those concerned about it and with the responsibility to act on it.

Establishing key participants is critical to developing the Neighbourhood EIP proposal. By the time a

Neighbourhood EIP proposal is submitted to EPA, the key partners must be identified, and a process for ensuring full community consultation and engagement established.

8. RESOURCES AND TIMELINES

Resources will be required to develop the Neighbourhood EIP proposal, the final plan and, most importantly, implementing the plan. The proposal needs to identify what resources are likely to be required to develop the plan, and where those resources will come from. The planning process itself will debate and commit resources to implementing the Neighbourhood EIP.

Resources required for developing a Neighbourhood EIP may include time and places to meet, group facilitation expertise, communication tools like newsletters, data collection and analysis, and technical support and advice. Such resources may be provided by volunteers, in-kind support, direct donations, government grants, or by other means. Some of these resources may already exist with Neighbourhood EIP partners, and some may not. EPA may be able to offer expertise in areas such as scientific monitoring and assessment, environmental auditing, and an understanding of environmental law and government programs. This can be discussed further with your regional EPA office. Overall, your proposal should include an estimate of resources needed to develop the Neighbourhood EIP, and the commitments of partners and any other sources to providing these resources.

Timelines for developing a Neighbourhood EIP will vary for each neighbourhood. It is important to

recognise that all community-based projects take time – partly because many community members have their own commitments and priorities, and will take time to develop and feel comfortable with such a process. More importantly, building a shared vision, and an understanding of problems and options to address them all takes time. The investment in building broad community understanding and capacity to address environmental issues is needed to achieve clean and healthy, sustainable neighbourhoods.

Previous experience that EPA, businesses and community members have found in developing environment improvement plans based around an industrial site have shown that plan development has typically taken two years and the implementation and review is an ongoing process.

9. PROPOSED APPROACH TO DEVELOPING THE PLAN

Your Neighbourhood EIP proposal should outline the process envisaged for how the plan will be developed. A key aspect of this is how you will seek to build representation from a cross of the community, particularly those who need to act to improve the environment.

The following table has suggested elements of a possible process for developing your plan. You should also refer to EPA Publication (847) *Guideline for Submitting a Voluntary Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal*, which contains information on the formal requirements for developing a proposal.

Possible process for developing the plan

For example:

- On-going public process of engagement and participation
- Outline on-going process for participation, communication and consultation within the neighbourhood to develop, and agree on, the plan
- Further analysis of problems or issues
 - for example, surveys, investigations and audits
- Refining goals and priorities
 - for example, through visioning, group facilitation and mediation
- Identifying and analysing options to address issues
- Agreeing preferred options
 - for example, associated responsibilities, resourcing and timelines
- Process to measure progress, milestones and review
 - for example, short and longer term indicators of progress towards goals

10. NEXT STEPS

Interested parties should contact EPA early on when developing a Neighbourhood EIP proposal. EPA contact details are provided below.

You should also refer to the *Guideline for Submitting a Voluntary Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal* (EPA Publication 847)

for information on how to submit your proposal.

This guideline outlines the statutory requirements for proposals and provides a checklist of information to include in the proposal.

Finally, while developing your proposal, it is advisable to keep in mind the following requirements for the later stage of developing and submitting a plan. Note that these are not requirements for this proposal submission but are included here for your information.

The Act states:

'19AI. Approval of neighbourhood environment improvement plan

- (3) The Authority may only approve an neighbourhood environment improvement plan if the plan--
 - (a) specifies the area in respect of which the plan operates; and
 - (b) is consistent with any applicable State environment protection policy or industrial waste management policy; and
 - (c) provides for the monitoring of compliance with the neighbourhood environment improvement plan and the reporting of the implementation of agreed outcomes; and
 - (d) requires consultation with all persons whose interests are affected by the plan; and
 - (e) provides for the participation of the persons who were involved in the development of the plan in the evaluation of the plan's effectiveness in achieving the agreed outcomes; and

- (f) provides the mechanism for review of the plan by the relevant protection agency; and
- (g) provides for the identification and allocation of resources to fund the implementation of the plan and any review and amendment of the plan; and
- (h) takes account of any relevant environment improvement plan, regional waste management plan or regional catchment strategy within the meaning of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*; and
- (i) takes account of any relevant planning scheme approved under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* or any municipal strategic statement within the meaning of that Act; and
- (j) where it requires the undertaking of specified works, states that the person who is to undertake those works has agreed to do so; and
- (k) provides for contingency or emergency plans; and
- (l) requires responsible authorities within the meaning of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* to have regard to the plan when exercising their powers, functions and duties in relation to the segment of the environment to which the plan relates.'

11. CONTACTING EPA

For information about your neighbourhood, contact your EPA Operations region:

West Metropolitan and Yarra (Melbourne Metropolitan) Regions

Herald and Weekly Times Tower
40 City Road
Southbank Victoria 3006
Tel: (03) 9695 2722
Fax: (03) 9695 2780

South Metropolitan Region

45 Princes Highway
Dandenong Victoria 3175
Tel: (03) 9794 0677
Fax: (03) 9794 5188

Gippsland Region

7 Church Street
Traralgon Victoria 3844
Tel: (03) 5176 1744
Fax: (03) 5174 7851

North East Region

24 Ely Street
Wangaratta Victoria 3677
Tel: (03) 5721 7277
Fax: (03) 5721 2121

North West Region

43 Williamson Street
Bendigo Victoria 3550
Tel: (03) 5442 4393
Fax: (03) 5443 6555

South West Region

State Government Offices
Cnr Little Malop & Fenwick Streets
Geelong Victoria 3220
Tel: (03) 5226 4825
Fax: (03) 5226 4632

Maps of the regions are also available on EPA's website at:

<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/contact.asp>

12. OTHER REFERENCES

- 1 <http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/Neighbourhood/>
- 2 *Environment Protection (Liveable Neighbourhoods) Act 2001*
http://www.dms.dpc.vic.gov.au/sb/2001_Act/A00831.html
- 3 Other EPA publications, including legislation,
<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/Publications>

Neighbourhood EIP Information Series:

Guideline for Submitting a Voluntary Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal (s.19AE Environment Protection Act 1970), EPA Publication 847.

NEIGHBOURHOOD EIP PROCESS

