

## CT7440 BUSHLAND MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

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Report Author: Manager Resilient Environment  
Responsible Officer: Director Planning & Sustainable Futures  
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

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*The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.*

### CONFIDENTIALITY

Attachment One is confidential under the terms section 3(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* as it contains information relating to: (g)(ii) Private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.

### SUMMARY

Council operates a panel of contractors to undertake Bushland Maintenance and Fuel Reduction works (CT5476) which concludes on 30 June 2025. Contract CT7440 has been prepared to replace this contract, establishing a panel of Bushland Maintenance, Fuel Management, and service specific contractors.

An advertisement calling for tenders was placed in The Age on 9 November 2024. Tenders closed on 8 January 2025 with twenty-five (25) submissions received. The evaluation panel recommends accepting schedule of rates tenders for twelve (12) suppliers, detailed in the confidential Attachment 1. This contains commercially sensitive information that is not to be disclosed to the public.

Establishing this panel supports Council to meet its legislated land management responsibilities for roadsides and reserves. The estimated spend for 2025-2026 is \$3,656,990 exclusive of GST based on available budget and projected grant funding. With the panel established using a schedule of rates (as opposed to a lump sum), spending can be adjusted to accommodate additional funding sought from external sources. This flexibility allows for enhanced conservation activities as outlined in the Nature Plan.

The schedule of rates is subject to annual Consumer Price Index (CPI) increases for the seven (7) years.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 1. That Council accepts the following tenderers onto a panel of providers for CT7440 Bushlands Maintenance and Fuel Management Contract for an initial period of five years:**
  - (a) Acacia Environmental Management Pty. Ltd.;**
  - (b) Aspect Construction Pty Ltd, trading as Indigwedo-Bushland Restoration;**
  - (c) Diverse Bush Management Pty Ltd;**
  - (d) Hattingh, Gabriel Terence (Fairy Wren Bush Regen);**
  - (e) Forest To Foreshore Pty. Ltd.;**
  - (f) Gilgai Environmental Services Pty Ltd;**
  - (g) Hlm Aust Pty. Ltd. (Habitat Land Management);**
  - (h) Indigenous Design Environmental Services Pty Ltd;**
  - (i) Rowland, David (Pro-Cull);**
  - (j) Platypus Environmental Services Pty Ltd;**
  - (k) Cmore Pty. Ltd. (Treetec); and**
  - (l) Yarra Ranges Fire Management Pty Ltd**
- 2. The Director of Planning and Sustainable Futures be delegated authority to sign the contract documents.**
- 3. The Director of Planning and Sustainable Futures be delegated authority to extend the contract terms by two periods of one year, to a maximum term of seven years.**
- 4. The confidential Attachment 1 to this report remains confidential indefinitely as it relates to matters specified under Section 3 (1) (g) (ii) of the Local Government Act 2020.**

## **RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS**

The contract CT5476 Bushland Maintenance & Fuel Management with 13 suppliers for up to seven (7) years, was awarded by Council on 12 June 2018.

## **DISCUSSION**

### ***Purpose and Background***

Within the 2,500 square kilometres municipal footprint, the Yarra Ranges Nature team manages 900 hectares of bushland reserves and roadsides. These are separated into approximately 600 programmed areas and 1,000 unprogrammed

areas and further divided into three sub-regions with each managed by a Bushland Management Officer, shown in Figure 1.

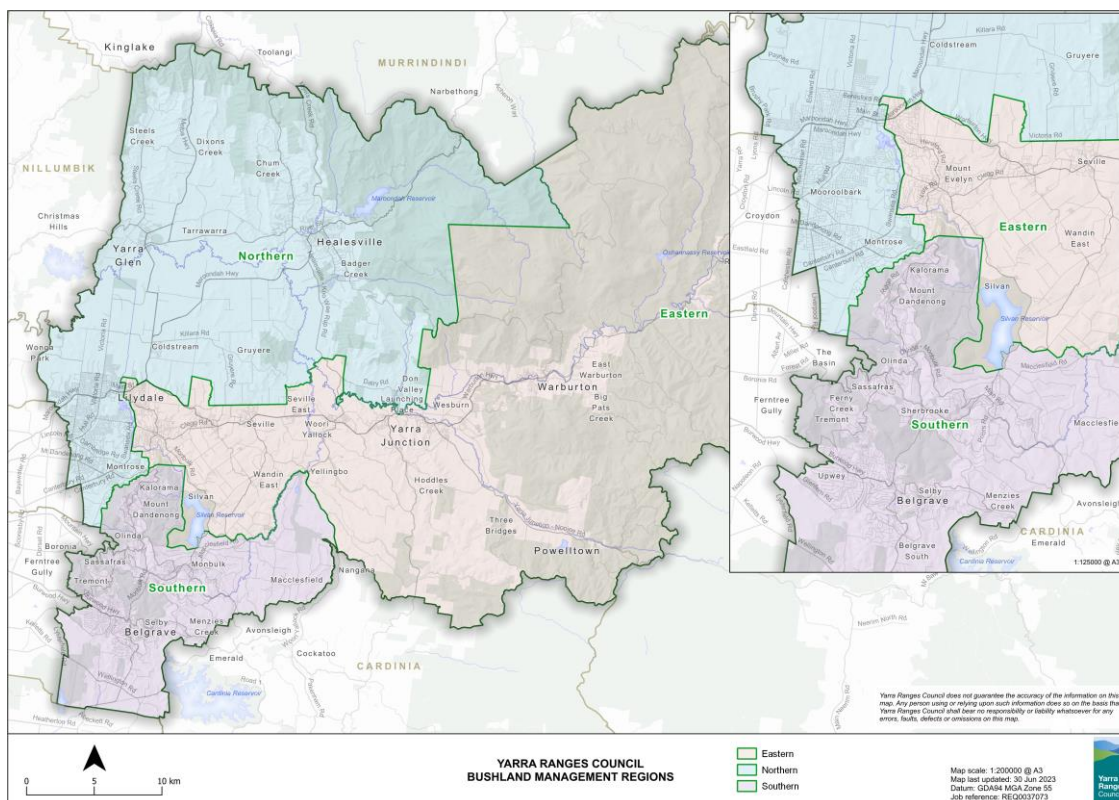


Figure 1. Yarra Ranges Council Bushland Management Regions.

The new Bushland Maintenance Contract CT7440, replacing expiring contract CT5476, ensures Council owned and managed roadsides and reserves are maintained and improved to meet legal land management responsibilities and preserve conservation values.

For conservation sites, the Bushland team employs tools such as weed control, targeted slashing, fencing, cool burns, and revegetation. Each bushland area has been mapped to determine conservation value which is recorded in Intramaps and communicated to contractors annually. Each Bushland Management Officer (BMO) oversees around 200 sites, with three to four general bushland contractors assigned per area based on capacity, skillset, and performance, tracked quarterly through contract KPIs. Conservation values and return on investment guide prioritisation of site spend, with highly valuable sites receiving increased investment. A keystone action of the Nature Plan is a Biolinks strategy that will also help enhance future investment prioritisation.

Fuel Management services include bushfire management operations across the municipality. Council's Fuel Management Officer uses the panel contractors for fuel reduction works, determined by state fire risk prioritisation data and an annual works schedule endorsed by the CFA through the Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee (MFMP). Managing reserve conservation value can also serve as proactive fuel management. For instance, treating weed species that, if left untreated, would significantly increase fire fuel risk.

All activities under this contract are undertaken by contractors with respect to available budget and in achieving agreed outcomes related to biodiversity, environmental and amenity value, and bushfire risk management.

This contract, in addition to the general bushland maintenance and fire management requirements, also includes the following services:

- Exclusion Fencing
- Pest animal control
- Tree Climbers for nest box monitoring
- Planned burn delivery

The objectives of the Contract panel are to:

1. Annually complete works assigned at nominated sites.
2. Protect and maintain a sustainable population of indigenous plant communities.
3. Complete revegetation plantings with appropriate planting practices to achieve a high success rate.
4. Maintain existing ecological systems during all works in accordance with the current Yarra Ranges Council Code of Environmental Practice.
5. Reduce and/or contain weeds to agreed standards within nominated sites.
6. Undertake fire fuel management as directed to achieve positive environmental outcomes.

Undertake other services as directed to achieve positive environmental outcomes.

### ***Options considered***

The procurement process for the Bushland Maintenance Contract was carried out in accordance with the requirements of Council's Procurement Policy.

Given the scope and contract tenure, the tender was advertised for eight (8) weeks from 9 November 2024 to 8 January 2025. Advertisement included a newspaper article in The Age newspaper and posting on Council's public tender portal.

Twenty-five (25) conforming tenders were received and considered by the evaluation panel. These details are contained within the confidential Attachment One to this report. The evaluation panel scored the tenders against the pre-established evaluation criteria, as published in the tender document.

Table 1 - Selection Criteria used for CT7440 tender evaluation:

Selection Criteria	Weighting
Price	40%
Capability and capacity to undertake work	40%
Commitment to quality, sustainability and community benefit	20%

Confidential information contained in Attachment One relates to contractual matters and contains commercially sensitive information including, but not limited to, the name of tendering parties, the evaluation panel members, the tendered prices and the evaluation of the tenders received against the published evaluation criteria.

***Recommended option and justification***

The evaluation panel, following four evaluation sessions and reference checks, have recommended twelve (12) suppliers to form the final Bushland Maintenance Panel:

No.	Tenderer
1	Acacia Environmental Management Pty. Ltd.
2	Aspect Construction Pty. Ltd. (Indigwedo-Bushland Restoration)
3	Diverse Bush Management Pty. Ltd.
4	Hattingh, Gabriel Terence (Fairy Wren Bush Regen)
5	Forest To Foreshore Pty. Ltd.
6	Gilgai Environmental Services Pty. Ltd.
7	Hlm Aust Pty. Ltd. (Habitat Land Management)
8	Indigenous Design Environmental Services Pty. Ltd. (Id Ecological Management)
9	Rowland, David (Pro-Cull)
10	Platypus Environmental Services Pty. Ltd.
11	Cmore Pty. Ltd. (Treetec)
12	Yarra Ranges Fire Management Pty. Ltd.

The final suppliers demonstrated:

- extensive experience in bushland maintenance.
- a high level of plant identification knowledge.
- experience in weed control in sensitive environments.
- experience in undertaking fuel management works within high conservation reserves.
- specialised skills for select services procured as part of the tender.
- value for money and demonstrated community benefit.

## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Tenderers were asked to provide a schedule of rates for panel services, offering a flexible approach that reflects the variable budget over the seven (7) year term. For 2025/26, an estimated budget of \$3,656,990 is available across the Nature operational budgets for Bushfire Preparedness, Bushland Environmental Maintenance and associated panel services.

By recommending suppliers that present a best value outcome, this report supports Council's strategy for long term financial sustainability.

Increases were factored through yearly CPI increases with no price-reset points over the panel period, locking the schedule of rates in for the seven (7) years. By establishing the panel with a schedule of rates instead of a lump sum, spending can be adjusted to reflect annual budgets and incorporate additional funding from external sources, should grant applications be successful.

Historically the Nature team has been very successful in receiving grant funding through Melbourne Water's 'Liveable Communities Liveable Waterways' (LCLW) grant program. This has seen an increased investment through the previous contract period, detailed below.

Table 2 - Spend on CT5476 for last four (4) years compared with estimated spend

Financial Year	Actual Spend (ex. GST)	LCLW Funding Component* (ex GST)
2021/2022	\$2,611,017	\$270,200
2022/2023	\$2,647,647	\$336,750
2023/2024	\$2,989,675	\$679,337
2024/2025 (Forecast Spend)	\$3,280,903	\$605,700

\*LCLW Funds not exclusively spent through CT5476.

Calculations for the current panel are inclusive of the increased investment anticipated with future Melbourne Water grant funding. Whilst not guaranteed, it has been projected to increase over the seven (7) year period based on current investment with CPI.

Table 3 - Projected annual contract spend with CPI increase of five percent:

<b>Contract Year</b>	<b>Projected Spend (ex. GST)</b>	<b>Estimated Grant Funding Component (ex. GST)</b>
1 – 2025/2026	\$3,656,990	\$700,000
2 – 2026/2027	\$3,839,840	\$735,000
3 – 2027/2028	\$4,031,831	\$771,750
4 – 2028/2029	\$4,233,423	\$810,337
5 – 2029/2030	\$4,445,094	\$850,854
6 – 2030/2031	\$4,667,349	\$893,397
7 – 2031/2032	\$4,900,716	\$938,067

Allocating the projected spend across bushland reserves and roadsides results in \$2,600 available per site annually. Prioritisation is then guided by conservation values, return on investment, and fuel management, ensuring higher investment in key areas.

## **APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES**

This initiative contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan:

- Protected and Enhanced Nature Environment.
- Quality infrastructure and liveable places.
- Vibrant economy, agriculture and tourism.
- Connected and healthy communities.

It also contributes to the following Council strategies:

- Environment Strategy 2015-2025
- Nature Plan 2024-2034
- Liveable Climate Plan 2020-2030
- Stormwater Management Plan 2024-2034
- Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2044

## RELEVANT LAW

The work of the Nature unit responds to Council's responsibilities under the

- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*
- *Environment Protection Act 2017*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and Flora and Fauna Guarantee Amendment Act 2019*
- *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*
- *Local Government Act 2020*
- *Climate Change Act 2017*

## SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

### ***Economic Implications***

Supporting Yarra Ranges biodiversity will positively impact local tourism economies reliant on the natural environment. This initiative supports regenerative land management practices and collaborative threat management, supporting a strong agricultural sector that benefits the productivity of land and environmental values.

### ***Social Implications***

Local and social sustainability was considered as part of the evaluation process with an overall weighting of 20 percent.

### ***Environmental Implications***

The changing climate has increased the rate of extinction of flora and fauna species. The natural environment has intrinsic value warranting protection, and its decline poses significant risks to community health and wellbeing.

The work of the Nature team contributes to achieving the objective of the Council Plan 'Protected and Enhanced Natural Environment'. The activities of the team benefit the natural environment and help build resilience to projected local climatic changes.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The extensive community engagement for the Nature Plan assists in informing this tender, given the significant alignment of themes and specific actions.



The Nature Plan was released for community consultation over an eight-week period in August 2022. During this time, a diverse range of community members provided feedback, including 130 unique submissions from individuals, Council Committees, Groups and Organisations.

Specific feedback emphasised the need for increased investment in improving habitat in bushland reserves, strengthening existing programs and enhancing fuel management practices. This feedback underscores the importance of this contract and supports Council to achieve its legislated land management responsibilities.

## **COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

The inclusion of additional services through this iteration of the bushland maintenance contract reflects continuous improvement practices by ensuring the panel is fit-for-purpose and able to meet best practice land management approaches. As a Council panel, the contracted services are available to all teams within Council.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Risk has been considered as part of the project specification, contract terms and conditions and the evaluation process. See Attachment Two – CT7440 Risk Assessment Schedule. Alongside these operational risks, this panel helps contribute to the mitigation of the following strategic risks:

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invasive species introduction</li> <li>- Pollution of water sources</li> <li>- Climate Change</li> <li>- Extreme Weather Events</li> <li>- Topsoil losses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Disruption, degradation, destruction to local ecosystems and biodiversity</li> <li>- Poor public image</li> <li>- Poor health and wellbeing outcomes</li> <li>- Land management responsibilities not met</li> </ul>	<p>Habitat restoration efforts play a crucial role in preserving biodiversity and preventing ecosystem collapse.</p> <p>By restoring native vegetation and creating healthy habitats, they support the survival of flora and fauna species.</p> <p>These actions enhance ecosystem resilience, ensuring that natural processes continue to function effectively.</p>

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Consequences</b>	<b>Mitigation</b>
Disruption to organisation's financial wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rate Capping</li> <li>- Supply chain disruptions</li> <li>- Economic downturn</li> <li>- Natural disasters</li> <li>- Legal liabilities</li> <li>- Unexpected expenses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Funding insufficient to meet operational needs</li> <li>- Poor public image</li> </ul>	Establishing this panel through a schedule of rates enables flexibility to available budget, safeguarding the organisation's long-term operational wellbeing.
Organisation exposed to liability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Poor contract management</li> <li>- Inadequate risk controls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Damage to environment</li> <li>- Damage to public image</li> <li>- Injuries</li> <li>- Land management responsibilities not met</li> </ul>	<p>The contract manager establishes a clear contract management plan which supports the monitoring and evaluation of contractor performance, including but not limited to annual contractor briefing, shared data systems, KPI's, auditing.</p> <p>A risk schedule guides contract management.</p>

Furthermore, given the most recent bushfire in Montrose, consistent fuel management practices and a focus on healthy resilient landscapes will ensure Councils bushfire readiness and reduces the risk of bushfire.

## **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

All members of the tender evaluation panel signed a conflict-of-interest declaration. Any declared conflicts of interest were managed in accordance with procurement policy.

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

## **ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT**

1. CT7440 Bushland Maintenance Contract Evaluation Report (Confidential)
2. Risk Assessment Schedule