

A photograph of a grassland with numerous yellow and blue flowers. The flowers are scattered throughout the field, with some in the foreground and others in the background. The grass is green and appears to be a mix of different species. The overall scene is a vibrant and diverse ecosystem.

**Grassy Plains Network**

Presentation to the Inquiry into Ecosystem Decline

**Critically endangered grassland  
in ongoing decline**

# The Grassy Plains Network

- Founded in 2018
- Ecologists, community groups, academics and professionals
- Melbourne and surrounds

# Ecosystem decline

## **One of Australia's most endangered ecosystems**

- Critically endangered under the EPBC Act
- Threatened under Victoria's Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act

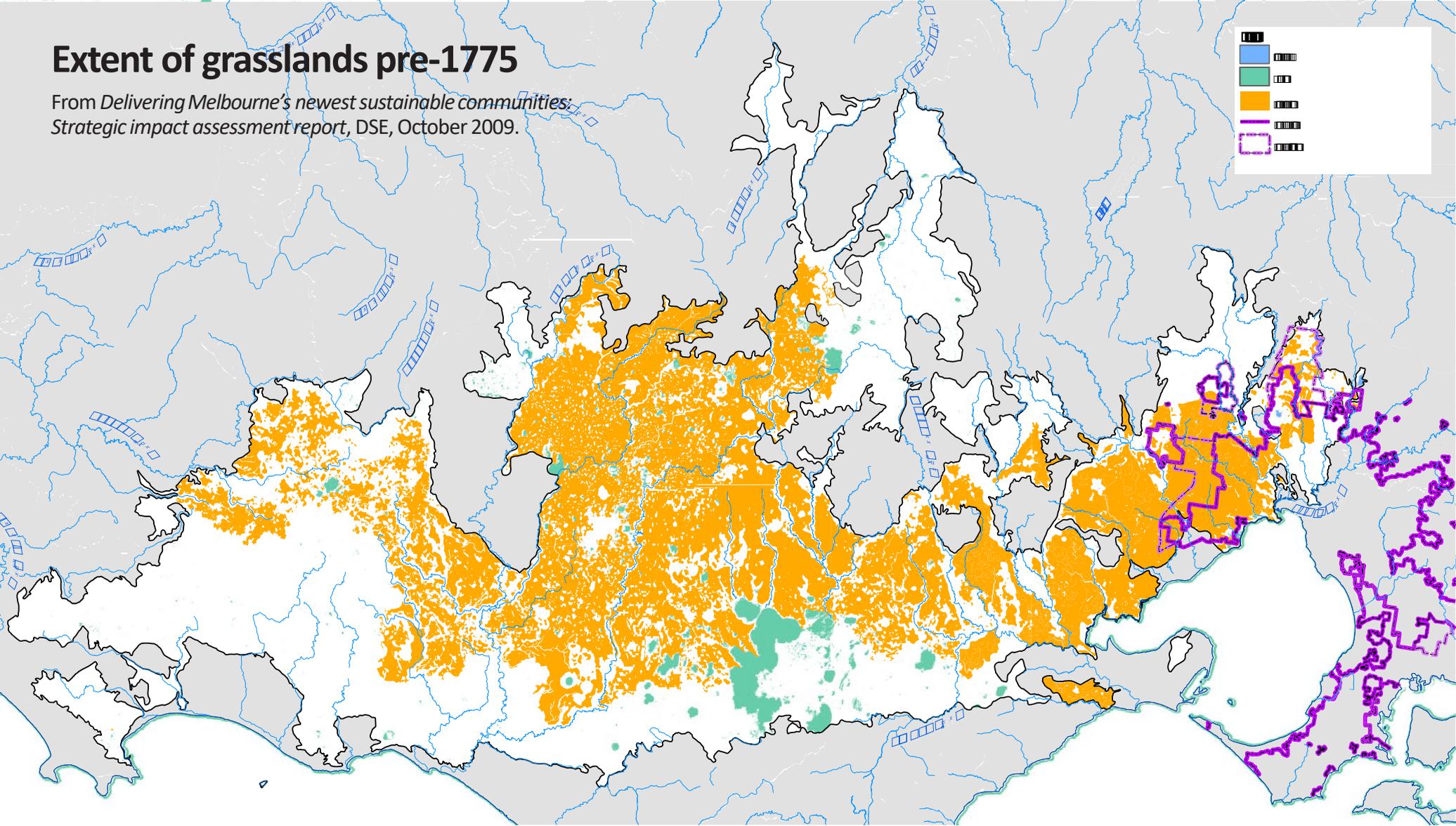
## **Less than 2% remains**

- Much heavily degraded
- Much within or near Melbourne's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)
- Continuing to decline in extent

(<https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/biodiversity/Victorias-Land-Cover-Time-Series>)

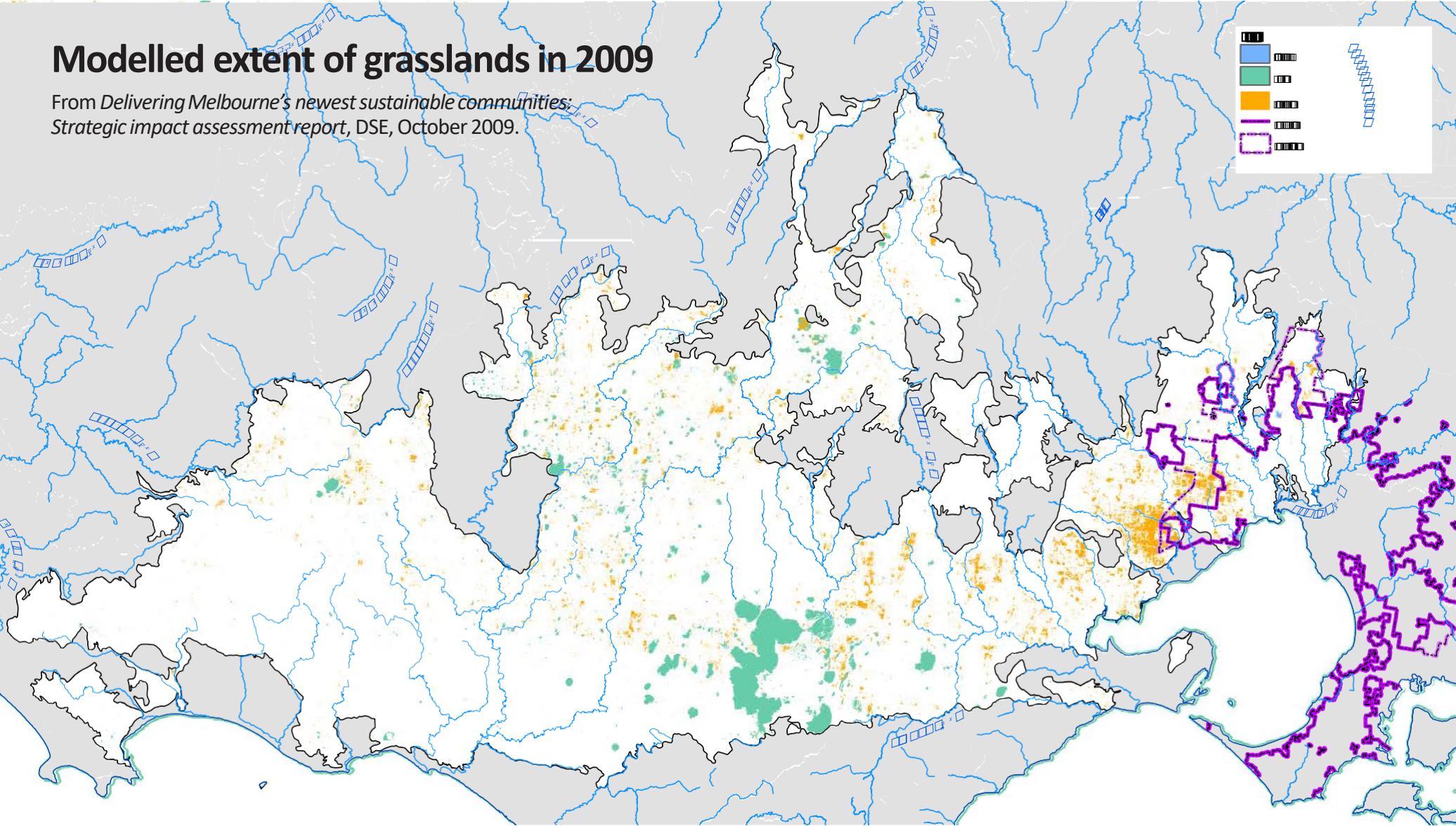
# Extent of grasslands pre-1775

From *Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities: Strategic impact assessment report*, DSE, October 2009.



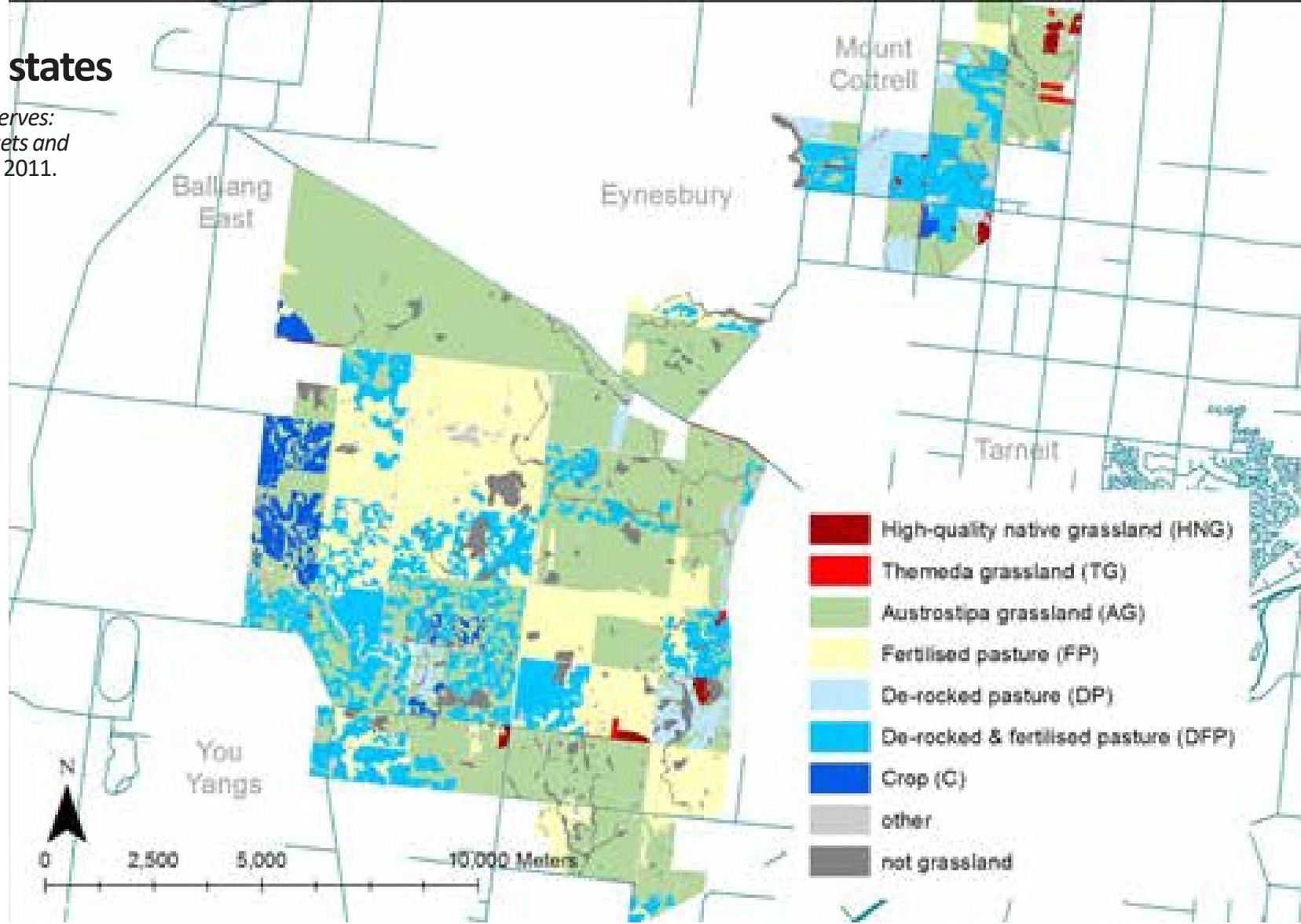
# Modelled extent of grasslands in 2009

From *Delivering Melbourne's newest sustainable communities: Strategic impact assessment report*, DSE, October 2009.



# WGR grassland states

From *Western Grassland Reserves: Grassland management targets and adaptive management*, DSE, 2011.



# The Melbourne Strategic Assessment (MSA)

- 2010
- Intention to minimise conflict between conservation and development
- Initiated under the Brumby Government
- Final strategy and funding package approved by Baillieu / Napthine government
- Identified areas for conservation within the UGB
- Proposed the Western Grassland Reserve (WGR), 15,000 ha outside the UGB
- WGR subject to Public Acquisition Overlay (PAO) and Environmental Protection Overlay (EPO)

# The MSA is failing

## Damning Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) report

- Only 10% acquired within promised 10-year timeframe
- Remaining 90% without appropriate interim management
- Offsetting loss of high quality grassland while funding degraded grassland

### State of EPBC-listed Natural Temperate Grasslands acquired by DELWP

Grassland state	Ranking	Area (hectares)	% of total EPBC land
Herb-rich	More desirable	22.9	2.3
<i>Themeda</i>	More desirable	12.2	1.2
C3 Grassland	Less desirable	164.6	16.5
Nutrient enriched	Less desirable	937.7	93.8
De-rocked and nutrient enriched	Less desirable	84.2	8.4

Note: Data as at 2015.

Source: VAGO, from information provided by DELWP.

# The MSA is failing

## **Conservation Areas within UGB**

- Mostly not yet transferred to public ownership
- On-going management arrangements not clear
- Continuing decline from lack of interim management

## **Other high quality grasslands within UGB**

- Missed by MSA and under imminent threat from development

# Solutions

## 1. Buy the high quality grasslands

- In the WGR
- Those identified by the MSA within the UGB
- Work with local government to secure those missed by the MSA

## 2. Resurvey WGR land to prioritise action

## 3. Improve management and restoration by

- Creating a Grassy Plains Recovery Team that includes species-specific teams and advisory groups
- Establishing an authority that coordinates across land tenures and managers
- Ensuring effective interim management of grasslands still in private ownership

## 4. Have a vision for the WGR that is more than just a conservation vision

# The WGR can be one of the world's great parks

The WGR can:

- Protect the flora and fauna of our critically endangered grasslands
- Showcase grasslands as an iconic part of Australia's culture
- Create jobs
- Kickstart the Australian native seed industry
- Strengthen Indigenous people's connection to Country
- Bring tourism
- Provide unique play, hiking and recreation facilities