

Native Vegetation

Sustaining
a living
landscape

Calytrix Tetragona
Common Fringe-myrtle



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Overview of native vegetation management in Victoria

Improving the quality and amount of native vegetation in Victoria is critical to achieving our expectations of a healthy and productive natural environment for all.

One of the most practical ways we can help maintain land and water health and protect biodiversity is by making sure that we have healthy and sustainable native vegetation across the state.

Why native vegetation is important

More than half of Victoria's native vegetation has been cleared. The native vegetation that remains is critical for maintaining catchment and landscape health, and protecting the habitats of threatened flora and fauna.

We now understand that, as a result of the policies and practices of the past, too much native vegetation has been cleared, particularly in the most fertile and accessible landscapes that were the natural location of agricultural, residential and industrial activities. This has resulted in increasingly recognised salinity, water quality and erosion problems, which impact on land managers and affect the productive capacity of our land and water resources. The vegetation remaining in these landscapes is now particularly important for many threatened habitats and species. While this clearing brought significant benefits to economic development, the land degradation problems we now face also have significant economic consequences.

Clearing also contributes significantly to the greenhouse effect. It is estimated that 45 million tonnes of the main greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, were released due to clearing in Victoria between 1972 and 1987.

Here are some interesting facts:

1. Victoria has the highest proportion of high stressed bioregions/natural regions, and four of the five most heavily cleared bioregions in Australia. (NLWRA 2001)
2. 12 per cent of Victoria's remaining native vegetation is on private land. However, private land supports 30 per cent of Victoria's important locations for threatened species.
3. 21 per cent of agricultural land is at risk of being affected by dryland salinity and the health of our land. (NLWRA 2001)
4. In many locations, large trees are found mainly on private land and these provide important habitat for threatened wildlife.
5. 34 per cent of assessed rivers are in poor or very poor condition (VCMC 2002)

Our population continues to grow, and as a result there will continue to be a demand for residential development in the outer growth areas of Melbourne and provincial Victorian cities. This development brings with it economic prosperity and job creation, but it must be managed in a way that does not compromise areas of valuable biodiversity and the health of our land.

Improving the quality and quantity of native vegetation on private land will provide real benefits for landholders, the environment and the community.



Why the quality of native vegetation is important

Most concern for native vegetation is understandably focused on the rates of clearing and revegetation, but the importance of maintaining good quality native vegetation is now receiving deserved attention.

Native vegetation is part of a dynamic system that must regenerate and mature in order to play its on-going role. Mature trees are deep-rooted, reduce the effects of wind and erosion, provide food and shelter for native fauna, and store carbon. They are of particular concern since they are easy to lose but slow to replace.

Weeds plus pressure from grazing livestock reduce the diversity of plants in the understorey and the opportunities to recruit young plants to take root. Logs and leaf litter on the ground are habitat for insects and microflora that in turn provide important food and nutrients for other native flora and fauna.

As we experience the consequences of past actions, rural and urban Victorians are developing a deeper appreciation of the landscape, its biodiversity and its place in their quality of life. But still, more needs to be done.



A New Approach to Managing Native Vegetation in Victoria

We need to improve the health of our native vegetation and strategically revegetate so that the natural processes that we rely on for clean air and water, for natural heritage protection and for “clean and green” agriculture are guaranteed.

While landholders have made a great start over the past decade to the long-term task of recovering native vegetation, the government recognises that we need to further support and strengthen these efforts.

Victoria's Native Vegetation Management Framework

Victoria's Native Vegetation Management – A Framework for Action establishes the strategic direction for the protection, enhancement and revegetation of native vegetation across Victoria.

The goal is ‘...to achieve a reversal, across the entire landscape of the long term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation, leading to a net gain.’

Many Victorian farmers are at the forefront of native vegetation efforts in this country and programs such as Landcare, Bushcare and Land for Wildlife have taken deep root in the community, where most people now view the conservation of their environment as part of their everyday lives.



Native Vegetation

Sustaining a living landscape

Net gain is the outcome for native vegetation and habitat where overall gains are greater than overall losses and individual losses are avoided where possible.

The three steps to apply the net gain approach to protection and clearance decisions are:

1. Avoid the removal of native vegetation
2. Minimise the removal of native vegetation through appropriate planning and design
3. Appropriately offset the loss of native vegetation

A New Strategic 'Whole-of-Landscape' Approach

The new strategic 'whole of landscape' approach focuses on the need to restore the health of the environment while at the same time building a sustainable and competitive economy.

The strategic 'whole-of-landscape' approach will improve the clarity and flexibility of native vegetation management, reduce the administrative burden on local government, provide greater certainty for development, both urban and rural, and improve biodiversity outcomes.

Strategic and regional planning

The new approach focuses on achieving the objectives of the Framework at a regional level. High value native vegetation will be identified early in the planning process and, where possible, avoided when designating future urban growth areas.

Precinct plans

A key feature of the new approach is identifying high value native vegetation early in the planning process, so that these sites are kept intact when designating future urban growth areas. Precinct Plans can be developed to manage the conservation of native vegetation in

a larger, predetermined area, rather than on an ad hoc site-by-site basis. To preserve the most valuable native vegetation, Precinct Plans will specify what vegetation can be removed and what vegetation must be retained based on the conservation significance of the vegetation. The Precinct Plans will form part of the overall development plan for each precinct.

Property vegetation plans

Landholders can develop a property vegetation plan which sets out the future management of native vegetation for a property or farm. The plan identifies any native vegetation that may be removed and any offset arrangements over a ten year period. It also identifies areas within the property that may attract government incentives for better management of native vegetation.

Property vegetation plans will provide a whole farm approach for landholders managing native vegetation and avoid the need for planning permits for vegetation removal that is consistent with the approved plan. This will provide greater certainty and flexibility for landholders while still ensuring compliance with native vegetation regulations.





Works Programs

Works Programs can identify how native vegetation will be managed in major capital works projects such as the construction or maintenance of roads, railway lines or public utility services.

Regional Native Vegetation Plans

Regional Native Vegetation Plans provide important information on regional direction and priorities for protecting and restoring native vegetation. They can identify particular natural assets that may be a priority for native vegetation in the region.

Copies of regional native vegetation plans for the following areas are available from the relevant Catchment Management Authority:

- Mallee
- Wimmera
- Glenelg-Hopkins
- Corangamite
- North Central
- Goulburn Broken
- North East
- East Gippsland
- West Gippsland
- Port Phillip and Westernport

Flexible offset arrangements

BushBroker, Victoria's native vegetation credit registration and trading system, will facilitate the new approach to native vegetation management.

In most cases the clearing of any native vegetation that requires planning approval must be **offset** by a gain elsewhere. Offsets are permanently protected and linked to a particular clearing site.

Offsets can often be generated on the permit applicant's own property, but there are situations where this is not possible. (For example, where there is no suitable site on the property or the applicant is not able to manage the native vegetation in the long-term.)

BushBroker represents a new direction for native vegetation management. It provides a system where offsets can be located on a different property to where the native vegetation is being cleared through the purchase of native vegetation credits.

A native vegetation credit is a gain in the quality and/or quantity of native vegetation that is subject to a secure and ongoing agreement. Native vegetation credits are listed on the BushBroker register and these can be bought by another party and subsequently used as an offset for the approved clearing of native vegetation.

The trading of native vegetation credits provides benefits for landholders, developers and other land managers, the economy and the environment.

Landholders are offered an opportunity to improve biodiversity on their property as well as a potential new income stream. **Developers and land managers** are provided with a convenient and cost-effective option to secure offsets. **For the environment**, BushBroker will lead to more sustainable offset arrangements with larger, more intact, areas of native vegetation and better biodiversity outcomes. It will help avoid the



Native Vegetation

Sustaining a living landscape

problems of managing numbers of small isolated areas of native vegetation which are unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term.

For more information on BushBroker contact the Department of Sustainability and Environment on 136 186 or visit www.dse.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation.

Permit applicants may source offsets through the BushBroker register. In some cases, where permit applicants make payments in lieu of offsets, the Department of Sustainability and Environment will use

these fees to establish an offset, generally through a credit auction.

A trust facility will be able to receive and hold in-lieu fees and other funds. The trust will publish reports on its financial operation and the acquittal of its offset obligations.

Incentive Programs

The government has introduced a range of incentive schemes to assist landholders with their native vegetation management efforts. These programs help landholders actively manage and improve native vegetation on their land, resulting in both environmental and commercial gains.

BushTender

Following a successful trial period, the Government is currently expanding the BushTender program.

Under BushTender, landholders can receive payment for entering agreements that improve the quality and/or quantity of native vegetation on their land. The services are based on management commitments beyond those that are required by current obligations and legislation.

Landholders establish their own price for the management services they are prepared to offer to improve their native vegetation. The price is submitted as their bid and the successful bids are those that offer the best value for money. Landholders receive periodic payments for their services under management agreements signed with the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

More information on the BushTender program is available from www.dse.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation.





CarbonTender

A CarbonTender program is being conducted on a trial basis in parts of Victoria.

CarbonTender involves purchasing management contracts from private landholders, for the permanent revegetation of land for carbon sequestration and biodiversity gains. The funding is allocated through a tender system that prioritises projects based on the amount of carbon they will absorb from the atmosphere.

For more information on CarbonTender, visit www.greenhouse.vic.gov.au/carbontender

Other programs

In addition, Catchment Management Authorities sometimes fund native vegetation improvement works. Local Government may also have programs to support native vegetation managers, for example by offering rate rebates. For more information contact your local Catchment Management Authority or Council.





Native Vegetation

Sustaining a living landscape

Further Information

For more information on native vegetation management, please call the Department of Sustainability and Environment's Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit www.dse.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation.

DSE Regional Office locations

North East Regional Office

35 Sydney Road
Benalla VIC 3672
Ph 5761 1611

Port Phillip Regional Office

30 Prospect Street
Box Hill VIC 3128
Ph. 9296 4400

Gippsland Regional Office

71 Hotham Street
Traralgon VIC 3844
Ph. 5172 2111

North West Regional Office

Cnr Midland Highway and Taylor Street
Bendigo VIC 3550
Ph. 5430 4444

South West Regional Office

Cnr Mair and Doveton Street
Ballarat VIC 3350
Ph. 5336 6856



