

Planning for biodiversity

Guidance



December 2017

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ISBN 978-1-76047-858-2 (pdf)

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1 Purpose and content of this document	2
1.2 Value of biodiversity	2
1.3 The role of the planning system in relation to biodiversity conservation	3
2. Biodiversity planning policy frameworks	5
2.1 Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037	5
2.2 State Planning Policy Framework	5
2.3 Australian Government biodiversity requirements	5
2.4 International biodiversity requirements	5
2.5 Flora and Fauna Guarantee act	6
2.6 Regional Catchment Strategies	6
2.7 Bushfire protection	6
2.8 Guidelines for the removal, lopping and destruction of native vegetation	7
2.9 Local Planning Policy Framework	7
2.10 Municipal Strategic Statement	7
2.11 Local Planning Policies	8
3. Tool kit for biodiversity planning	9
3.1 Choosing a planning scheme tool	9
3.2 Conservation reserves	9
3.3 Zoning	9
3.4 Overlays	12
3.5 Selecting planning tools for biodiversity	13
3.6 Native vegetation precinct plans	14
3.7 Property vegetation plans	15
3.8 State-wide controls for the removal of native vegetation	15
4. Steps to follow when planning for biodiversity	17
5. Sources of biodiversity information and identifying biodiversity assets, values and threats	19
5.1 Defining biodiversity value	19
5.2 Threats to biodiversity	19
5.3 Identifying biodiversity values	19
5.4 Evaluating biodiversity assets	20
Appendix A Planning practice notes	23

1. Introduction

Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), 2017 is Victoria's plan for the future of its biodiversity. The plan states that a healthy natural environment provides vital life-sustaining services for humans, and underpins many of the productive activities that generate value for Victorians.

Changing patterns of land use and development create both threats to, and opportunities for, the protection of biodiversity and native vegetation. To address these changes, state level planning can set goals and priorities for biodiversity protection and conservation at a strategic level. Local government, can assist in achieving these goals through considering biodiversity values when planning for the use and development of land.

Remove native vegetation

For the purpose of this document, the term 'remove native vegetation' also includes to destroy and/or to lop native vegetation.

1.1 Purpose and content of this document

The purpose of this document is to assist local government use the planning system to meet the state-wide and local objectives to protect and conserve Victoria's biodiversity. This document includes the following:

- a discussion of the importance of protecting and managing biodiversity values
- identification of the role of the planning system in protecting and conserving biodiversity
- the various policy frameworks that guide actions to protect and conserve biodiversity in Victoria
- guidance for the process of planning for biodiversity protection and conservation, including the planning toolkit that can be used
- what biodiversity information tools are available to inform planning for biodiversity.

This document does not address protecting and managing native vegetation for other, non-biodiversity values, including minimising land and water degradation and landscape values.

'Planning' definitions

For the purpose of this document, the term 'planning' is defined as activities that occur under the planning system established under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. The term 'strategic planning' is, in a broad sense, the process of defining future directions for land use and development and determining the appropriate tools to implement these. Strategic planning includes planning activities that are undertaken at a greater scale than the individual site. Planning for biodiversity is a coordinated approach that strategically identifies areas of biodiversity value to be protected, and areas where uses and development can occur.

1.2 Value of biodiversity

Biodiversity is defined as the *variety of all life on earth*. It encompasses all components of the living world: the number and variety of plants, animals and other living things, including fungi and micro-organisms, across land, rivers, coast and ocean. It includes the diversity of their genetic information, the habitats and ecosystems within which they live, and their connections with other life forms and the natural world.

Biodiversity conservation is an essential component of responsible environmental and natural resource management. It is fundamental to our quality of life, and supports our environment, economy and community.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity encompasses all components of the living world: the number and variety of plants, animals and other living things, including fungi and micro-organisms, across our land, rivers, coast and ocean. It includes the diversity of their genetic information, the habitats and ecosystems within which they live, and their connections with other life forms and the natural world

In Victoria, the diverse and unique mix of plants, animals, soils, coasts, seas and waterways function together as ecosystems, which in turn produce some of humans' most basic needs – provisions such as clean air and water, productive soils, natural pest control, pollination, flood mitigation and carbon sequestration.

Ecosystems also provide us with food, raw materials for production (such as timber, pastures and fertilisers), genetic resources and pharmaceuticals, while contributing to waste decomposition and detoxification.

There is a long and compelling list of values and benefits provided by Victoria's biodiversity including:

- assisting agricultural production, such as enriching soils, providing shade for animals, pollination of plants and providing goods such as honey, timber and pasture for grazing
- life support functions including providing clean air, water and other resources
- helping to reduce the impacts of climate change, including extreme weather events
- health and wellbeing benefits
- recreation, aesthetic and other social or cultural uses
- Traditional Owner and Aboriginal values/cultural significance
- non-use values that the community derives from knowing that biodiversity exists and that it will be maintained for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

Native vegetation helps maintain Victoria's biodiversity as it forms the basis of Victoria's ecological communities.

1.3 The role of the planning system in relation to biodiversity conservation

Planning plays an important role in achieving biodiversity conservation outcomes in Victoria. Private land covers two-thirds of the Victorian landscape and provides habitat for some of the state's most threatened species and some of its most important and irreplaceable native vegetation.¹

Many of the ecosystems, habitats and threatened species that exist on private land are inadequately represented in the reserve system. For example, in the Victorian Volcanic Plains bioregion, only 1.3 per cent of the native vegetation is in conservation reserves, and the corresponding figure for the Wimmera bioregion is only 1.5 per cent.²

The role of the planning system in protecting and conserving biodiversity in Victoria is established through the objectives under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*:

- *to provide for the protection of natural and man-made resources and the maintenance of ecological processes and genetic diversity*³
- *to establish a system of planning schemes based on municipal districts as the principal way of setting out objectives, policies and controls for the use, development and protection of land.*⁴
- *to ensure that the effects on the environment are considered and provide for explicit consideration of social and economic effects when decisions are made about the use and development of land.*⁵

Planning schemes can guide appropriate outcomes for the use and development of land. Planning assists in achieving conservation outcomes by identifying areas with high biodiversity value and managing uses and development in these areas

¹ Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037, Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning, 2017

² Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037, Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning, 2017

³ Section 4(1)(b)

⁴ Section 4(2)(b)

⁵ Section 4(2)(d)

such that impacts on biodiversity are avoided or minimised.

The strategic planning process is the most effective planning mechanism to protect and conserve biodiversity and to achieve the objectives of the State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) for biodiversity. Considering biodiversity conservation and management through strategic planning allows for:

- identification of areas of higher value biodiversity at a landscape scale
- indirect and cumulative impacts of use or development on biodiversity to be understood and addressed
- the best opportunities to avoid and minimise impacts on biodiversity to be achieved by directing use and development away from higher value areas
- minimising unnecessary or complex regulation by establishing clear expectations for where use and development can occur, and/or by coordinating approvals and offsets.

Decision making and setting conditions for site scale permits required through the planning

system complements strategic level planning for biodiversity. Biodiversity related permit requirements in the planning system create incentives for proponents to avoid and minimise impacts, and provide opportunities for biodiversity to be protected by refusing to grant permits for activities that will cause serious harm. Conditions on permits can ensure the effects of development on biodiversity are mitigated, or require compensation for impacts, such as offsetting for native vegetation removal.

It is important to note that planning is only one tool to achieve biodiversity outcomes in Victoria. Strategic planning and planning policies can set directions for the future, however planning undertaken by local government through their planning schemes, is limited to regulating new use and development only. Planning has limitations in addressing the impacts of historical depletion of biodiversity, or the impacts of existing uses. Government organisations, community groups, research organisations, public land managers and landholders must all undertake a range of complementary programs and actions to ensure the protection and enhancement of biodiversity in Victoria.

2. Biodiversity planning policy frameworks

There are several policy frameworks that are relevant when undertaking planning for biodiversity. These are outlined below.

2.1 Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037

The Victorian Government's long-term plan for biodiversity *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*, DELWP, 2017 includes the overarching goal that Victoria's natural environment is healthy.

The plan includes the following policy objectives that relate to land-use planning:

- embed consideration of the natural environment in decision making and to help create more liveable and climate-adapted communities
- ensure that there is no 'net loss' to biodiversity as a result of the clearing of native vegetation
- stopping the overall decline of threatened species, securing the greatest possible number of species in the wild, and improving the overall extent and condition of native habitats across land, waterways, coasts and seas
- preventing the spread and reducing the impact of weeds and pest animals.

2.2 State Planning Policy Framework

The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) sets the state-wide objectives of the planning system in relation to biodiversity and includes the strategies that should be employed to achieve these objectives.

The strategies included in the SPPF also outline how the planning system assists in achieving the objectives of *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* (DELWP, 2017).

The biodiversity objectives of the SPPF are set out below.

Clause 12.01-1 Protection of biodiversity

- *Objective – To assist the protection and conservation of Victoria's biodiversity.*

This clause requires that important areas of biodiversity be identified and that planning, particularly strategic planning, take steps to protect and conserve of these areas.

A.1.1 Clause 12.01-2 Native vegetation management

- *Objective – To ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation.*

This clause sets out the three-step approach for addressing the removal of native vegetation; avoid, minimise, offset. This is a precautionary approach that aims to ensure that the removal of native vegetation is restricted to only what is reasonably necessary, and that biodiversity is appropriately compensated for any removal that is approved. The clause references the *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation*, DELWP 2017 (the Guidelines).

2.3 Australian Government biodiversity requirements

The Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is the Australian Government's central piece of environmental legislation. The EPBC Act identifies matters of national environmental significance, including nationally threatened species and ecological communities, migratory species, wetlands protected under the Ramsar Convention and world heritage areas. Any action that is likely to have a significant impact on a listed matter of national environmental significance requires assessment and approval.

Local government is not required to implement the EPBC Act when undertaking planning. However, it can consider impacts of use and development on matters of national environmental significance when undertaking strategic planning. This has the potential to assist proponents by reducing regulatory obligations when they develop land, for example by minimising the impacts use or development will have on EPBC matters of national environmental significance.

The Australian Government provides maps and data about the locations of EPBC listed threatened species and communities. For more information see: www.environment.gov.au/epbc.

2.4 International biodiversity requirements

The SPPF requires that planning considers impacts from any change in land use or development that may affect the biodiversity value of sites designated under the following international conventions:

- The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (commonly known as the ‘Ramsar Convention’)
- The Japan-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (JAMBA)
- The China-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (CAMBA)
- The Republic of Korea-Australia Migratory Bird Agreement (ROKAMBA).

For more information see:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity>.

2.5 Flora and Fauna Guarantee act

The *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act) is the key piece of Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species, and for the management of potentially threatening processes.

The objectives and strategies of State planning policy for Biodiversity under the SPPF align with those of the FFG Act. By addressing these when planning for biodiversity protection and conservation local government is contributing to meeting the objectives of the FFG Act.

Specifically, when undertaking planning for biodiversity local government can give regard to the threatened species and the threats that are listed under the FFG Act. Policies and plans for the management of flora or fauna that are made under the Act should also be considered when determining areas for protection, and those where uses and development can occur.

2.6 Regional Catchment Strategies

Regional catchment strategies are references as policy guidance in State planning policy for Biodiversity. Regional catchment strategies are the primary integrated planning framework for the management of land, water and biodiversity resources. They seek to integrate community values and regional priorities with state and federal legislation and policies.

Each catchment management authority (CMA) prepares a regional catchment strategy in partnership with local communities and partners involved in integrated catchment management.

The strategy identifies:

- The region’s land, water and biodiversity resources and how they are used

- The nature, causes, extent and severity of land degradation of catchments
- A long-term vision for the region
- Regionally significant land, water and biodiversity assets and landscapes
- Catchment condition objectives
- A program of management measures for the life of the strategy.

The Regional Catchment Strategies can provide useful information about the biodiversity values that should be prioritise for protection when local government is undertaking planning. By aligning planning with the relevant Strategy for their area, local government are contributing to achieving regional biodiversity objectives.

2.7 Bushfire protection

Often areas with high biodiversity value are also areas at risk from bushfire. Planning schemes prioritise the protection of human life over other policy considerations in planning and decision-making in areas at risk from bushfire. Managing the risk of bushfire on life and property in these areas requires creating defensible space around dwellings, which can result in significant impacts on biodiversity.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commissions found that the ‘planning system should prevent, or strongly discourage, people from living in areas where it is not possible to have the minimum defensible space without excessive costs for biodiversity.’⁶ Strategic planning can minimise bushfire risk and biodiversity impact by directing new development away from these areas.

When considering areas for new settlement and/or subdivision in locations specified in a Bushfire Management Overlay, the loss to biodiversity from defensible space requirements for dwellings and provision of access associated with subdivisions and new settlement must be factored into strategic planning processes and decision making. In addition, the consequential loss of native vegetation without an offset, due to the subdivision of land leading to exemptions from the requirement for a permit to remove native vegetation under Clause 52.17 - *Native Vegetation* and Clause 52.48 -

6. <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Commission-Reports/Final-Report/Volume-2/Chapters/Planning-and-Building.html>

Bushfire Protection: Exemptions must also be taken into account.

Clause 65.02 of planning schemes includes a decision guideline when considering an application to subdivide land of the subdivision pattern having regard to the physical characteristics of the land including existing vegetation. When a permit is triggered for subdivision the relevant State and local planning policies relating to biodiversity must be considered in the assessment.

2.8 Guidelines for the removal, lopping and destruction of native vegetation

The Guidelines are an incorporated document into all planning schemes. The main focus of the Guidelines is the assessment and offsetting of native vegetation removal. The methods and approaches outlined in the Guidelines should be used to inform strategic planning processes and the application of appropriate planning controls to ensure Victoria's native vegetation is well managed and protected.

Where the responsible authority considers that a proposed use and/or development is likely to involve, or lead to, the consequential removal of native vegetation into the future, as a result of issuing a permit or approving a plan, the responsible authority should consider whether there is a need for a permit application to be lodged in accordance with Clause 52.17. This ensures consideration and integration of all issues as part of decision making about the proposed use and/or development.

2.9 Local Planning Policy Framework

The Local Planning Policy Framework (LPPF) provides the ability for a planning authority to recognise biodiversity at the municipal level and identify how it is to be protected supporting the objectives and strategies outlined in the SPPF and corresponding reference documents. The LPPF sets a local strategic planning policy context for a municipality. It comprises a Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) and specific Local Planning Policies (LPP).

Local policy should not duplicate controls that are already in planning schemes. If there is inconsistency between content in the SPPF and LPPF, the SPPF is prioritised in planning decision making.

2.10 Municipal Strategic Statement

The MSS includes Clause 21 planning policies and provides the broad local policy basis for making decisions under a planning scheme. It outlines the key strategic planning, land use and development objectives for the municipality, and the strategies and actions to implement these. It provides the direction for how planning tools, including zones and overlays, will be used locally to implement the State's, and any local, biodiversity policy.

The MSS provides the opportunity to articulate the application of the SPPF biodiversity policies at a local level and the articulation of biodiversity protection objectives and strategies which will inform and support the application of relevant zones and overlay controls.

Biodiversity objectives in an MSS can generally fall within the following categories:

- protecting native vegetation and species' habitat
- managing threats to species and ecological communities
- promoting and protecting links between fragmented areas of native vegetation
- maintaining and improving the quality and the health of watercourses, wetlands, terrestrial, coastal and marine environments
- maintaining and improving the quality of soils and their structure.

As a guide, the biodiversity component of the MSS could:

- include a description of the significant threats to local biodiversity from activities that occur in the municipality or bioregion
- identify biodiversity assets and locations where additional policies or controls over the use and development of land may be warranted to reflect their significance
- indicate the role of biodiversity in maintaining ecosystem services
- recognise and apply the precautionary principle
- identify strategies to protect biodiversity. For example:
 - to describe at a local level the native vegetation that is prioritised for protection
 - to ensure that riparian land is used and managed to protect its biodiversity value

- to assist in the restoration of riparian and wildlife corridors
- to describe the mechanisms for implementing the MSS objectives and strategies.

Where local government has additional biodiversity values that it views as locally important, that it wishes to conserve and manage, the MSS must clearly articulate:

- these local biodiversity values
- justification for how the biodiversity values have been determined as locally important
- the planning mechanisms that are to be used to protect and conserve the biodiversity values.

2.11 Local Planning Policies

The Local Planning Policy's (LPPs) include Clause 22 planning policies and provide issue specific policies to assist in exercising discretion when making decisions about planning permit applications. LPPs can be applied in a broad manner covering both strategic directions and outcomes, such as themes or for specific locations and guide decision making. LPPs provide guidance for day-to-day decision making in relation to a specific discretion provided under the auspices of a zone, overlay or other relevant provision in the planning scheme. This helps applicants and the community to understand how a proposal will be considered and what will influence decision making.

If the planning authority is satisfied that the SPPF, the MSS and/or the decision guidelines in the zone or overlay provide sufficient direction for the exercise of discretion, there is no need to include a LPP. A LPP should be practical to implement and provide clear guidance about on-ground outcomes that will be expected as a result of exercising a specific discretion in the planning scheme. LPPs can be used to protect or manage biodiversity assets.

A municipality can have a local planning policy for biodiversity objectives identified in the MSS that either supplements an overlay, or provides specific policy guidance for discretions under a zone or the native vegetation provisions. This type of policy may be appropriate for use in municipalities where the application of overlays in a planning scheme is limited or where biodiversity information is insufficient for the preparation of overlays.

3. Tool kit for biodiversity planning

3.1 Choosing a planning scheme tool

The best combination of planning tools to achieve biodiversity objectives depends on the:

- biodiversity value and characteristics of the area
- intended outcomes of the land-use planning activity
- predominant or preferred land use (consider the impact of existing use rights)
- urban or rural land setting
- land tenure
- type of threats.

3.2 Conservation reserves

Local government has the ability to create conservation reserves for areas that are important for biodiversity and need to be protected from uses or development.

Areas that should be prioritised for reserves are those that are highly sensitive to disturbances, where uses or development need to be limited to ensure their biodiversity value is maintained, and those where the native vegetation types or communities are under-represented in the State reserve system.

Care should be taken not to create isolated reserves, where the necessary links to other biodiversity sites or areas are not available, as the value of the area will diminish over time. Local government should ensure that adequate resources are given to the management of the reserves to enable them to continue to deliver biodiversity value into the future.

Purchasing and rezoning land to be reserved for public purposes with the priority to protect biodiversity is effective in conserving biodiversity values. Reserves established for conservation purposes should be rezoned to the Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ).

Open space, green space and recreational reserves can have biodiversity values, and can assist in protecting and enhancing biodiversity values. These types of reserves would be included within the Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ). However, as the purpose of these areas is not solely biodiversity protection, other uses are allowed and can be prioritised over the management of biodiversity. Open space, green space and recreational reserves offer less

protection for biodiversity values than conservation reserves.

An alternative mechanism to create conservation reserves is transferring land to the Crown land estate. Local government can work with State government to identify areas that would make logical inclusions to Victoria's state conservation reserves system. Local government, developers and individuals can transfer land to the Crown to be reserved under certain circumstances.

For freehold land to be transferred to the Crown it must meet the DELWP's assessment criteria for proposed regional conservation land acquisitions. These criteria include the biodiversity value of the land, its proximity and connectivity to existing conservation reserves, and whether the Victorian Government can bear the cost and risk of managing the land.

3.3 Zoning

Zoning can be an effective planning tool for the protection and conservation of biodiversity as it sets expectations about what use and development can occur on land. Zoning can be used to direct development away from areas of high value biodiversity and can manage indirect and cumulative impacts of use and development on biodiversity. The use of schedules to zones can also assist in directing use and development to facilitate the protection and conservation of biodiversity, such as through specifying particular conservation values under the schedule to the Rural Conservation Zone or minimum lot sizes for subdivision under the schedule to the Farming Zone.

Appropriate zoning means that decisions about protection and conservation of biodiversity are not left solely to the individual site scale permit application assessment process. This can reduce conflict and negative outcomes in the permit application assessment process as the zone sets out intended uses of the land, can require permits or prohibit uses and development, and sets limits of development, like minimum lot sizes.

Zones can be more effective in providing strategic protection for biodiversity than overlays given their ability to regulate land use in addition to development (noting overlays only relate to development). The role of overlays is discussed in section 3.4. However, zoning does not provide blanket protection for biodiversity as not all land uses are prohibited. If a high level of protection is

required for biodiversity, then land should be reserved solely for conservation.

In outer urban areas including growth corridors, biodiversity objectives may influence zoning decisions. For example, on the urban fringe, zoning can be used to control the expansion of urban land uses into areas with higher biodiversity values. In areas designated for urban development, the design of new subdivisions should be influenced by biodiversity objectives. Tools such as the Development Plan Overlay (DPO), and precinct planning processes may be used for this purpose.

In predominantly urban environments, zoning may not be the best way to achieve biodiversity objectives for locations with high biodiversity values, such as waterways, open space areas or recreation uses such as golf courses.

The zones listed below can be used to facilitate the protection and conservation of biodiversity. All other zones (while some include references to biodiversity) are predominately focussed on uses that are not inherently compatible with the protection and conservation of biodiversity, including residential, commercial, farming, and industrial uses.

The application of zones not listed below in areas of higher biodiversity value should be considered carefully as those zones create implied rights for uses that may be contrary to biodiversity protection.

3.3.1 Public Conservation and Resource Zone

The Public Conservation and Resource Zone (PCRZ) should be used for conservation reserves that local government manages. The zone only applies to land in public ownership, which includes land owned by the local government. A key purpose of the zone is to 'protect and conserve the natural environment and natural processes for their historic, scientific, landscape, habitat or cultural values.'

Note that this zone also allows a range of recreational and land management activities to occur. It also has the following purposes:

- to provide facilities which assist in public education and interpretation of the natural environment with minimal degradation of the natural environment or natural processes
- to provide for appropriate resource based uses.

3.3.2 Public Park and Recreation Zone

The Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) should be used for reserves that local government manages. The zone only applies to land in public ownership, which includes land owned by the local government. Although a key purpose of the zone is to '*recognise areas for public recreation and open space*', it also includes the purpose to '*protect and conserve areas of significance where appropriate.*'

3.3.3 Rural Conservation Zone

The Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ) is a rural based zone that can be used to facilitate the protection and conservation of biodiversity. RCZ can be applied to private land in areas with high biodiversity value. Agriculture is allowed in the RCZ provided it is consistent with the environmental and landscape values of the area. Unlike the other rural zones, farming is subordinate to the environmental values of the land.⁷

Key features of the RCZ include:

- a purpose '*to protect and enhance natural resources and the biodiversity of the area*'
- a permit is required for most agricultural activities
- prohibits uses such as intensive animal husbandry, industry (other than Rural industry) and warehouses (other than Freezing and cool storage and Rural store)
- decision guidelines require consideration of whether a use or development protects and enhances the environmental, agricultural and landscape qualities of the site and its surrounds.

3.3.4 Rural Living Zone

The Rural Living Zone (RLZ) is generally used to facilitate residential use in a rural environment. The emphasis of this zone is to protect residential amenity. RLZ is typically applied on the outskirts of settlements or township areas. This zone can be used where areas of biodiversity value are intermixed with residential areas and are not mutually exclusive. Note that this zone allows land to be subdivided to smaller lots. When residential development increases around biodiversity it will impact on its value.

A proposal for RLZ must include an assessment of the locality's environmental features and how these

7. Planning Practice Note 42, Applying the Rural Zones, June 2015

features could affect, or be affected by, rural residential development. The assessment of the environmental features must include native vegetation, significant wildlife and associated habitat or corridors, and any other biodiversity assets. Natural physical features including topography, slope, waterways, drainage lines and wetlands must also be identified.⁸

Key features of the RLZ include:

- a purpose *'to protect and enhance the natural resources, biodiversity and landscape and heritage values of the area'*
- a permit is required for a Broiler farm, Timber production and Rural industry
- decision guidelines require consideration of the impact of a use or development and the need to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the area.

3.3.5 Rural Activity Zone

The Rural Activity Zone (RAZ) is generally used to facilitate agricultural land use. The zone is used to enable sustainable agricultural land management practices that protect and enhance natural resources and the biodiversity of an area. The emphasis of this zone is, however, to provide flexibility for agriculture and other land uses to co-exist.

Key features of the RAZ include:

- encouraging sustainable farming activities and providing opportunities for productive agricultural uses.
- provision for other uses and development, in appropriate locations, which are compatible with agriculture and the environmental and landscape characteristics of the area.
- ensuring use and development does not adversely affect surrounding land uses.
- providing for use and development of land for specific purposes identified in a schedule to the zone.

The RAZ can provide for tourism, commercial and retail uses to be considered in the zone, but they need to be compatible with the environmental qualities of the area. Decision guidelines require consideration of the impact of a use or development

on the flora, fauna and landscape features of the locality.

3.3.6 Farming Zone

The Farming Zone (FZ) is generally used to facilitate agricultural land use. This zone is strongly focussed on protecting and promoting farming and agriculture.⁹ The zone is used to enable sustainable agricultural land management practices. While decision guidelines require the need to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the area to be considered, the emphasis of this zone is to ensure that non-agricultural uses, including dwellings, do not adversely affect the use of land for agriculture.

3.3.7 Green Wedge Zone

The Green Wedge Zone (GWZ) is generally applied to Melbourne's green wedge areas and used to facilitate agricultural land use on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne outside the Urban Growth Boundary. There are 12 municipalities that have green wedge areas. The GWZ recognises and protects non-urban land for its agricultural, environmental, historic, landscape or recreational values, or mineral and stone resources. GWZ includes the purpose *'to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the area.'*

Key features of the GWZ include:

- a purpose *'to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the area.'*
- decision guidelines require consideration of the impact of a use or development on the need to protect and enhance the biodiversity of the area, including the retention of vegetation and faunal habitat.

3.3.8 Green Wedge A Zone

Like the Green Wedge Zone the Green Wedge A Zone (GWAZ) is also applied to Melbourne's green wedge areas where rural living development is a predominant form of existing land use. The GWAZ is generally used to facilitate and provide for agricultural land use, whilst recognising and protect the environmental and amenity value of rural living areas. The GWAZ is applied to land on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne outside the Urban Growth Boundary. It includes in its purpose the protection, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

Key differences between the GWAZ and the GWZ are the greater range of land uses that are

8. Planning Practice Note 37 June 2015 Rural Residential Development

9. Planning Practice Note 42, Applying the Rural Zones, June 2015

prohibited under the GWAZ and a smaller State standard minimum lot size of 8 hectares for subdivision in the GWAZ compared to a 40 hectare minimum lot size for subdivision under the GWZ. Although the greater focus of the GWAZ on rural living land use may reflect greater development intensity, both zones promote the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

3.3.9 Other zones

All other zones are not considered compatible with protecting biodiversity values. Site based controls can still be used to control activities that will significantly impact on biodiversity, and can require compensation (offsets) for biodiversity when native vegetation is removed. However, the purpose of these zones is to facilitate activities that are not compatible with the retention of biodiversity value, and these values are at risk of being degraded or lost in these areas.

Some areas of biodiversity value exist within areas zoned for uses incompatible with biodiversity protection, such as a waterway. In these cases, it may be appropriate to apply an overlay to give the additional control over activities that impact on biodiversity. See section 3.4 below.

3.4 Overlays

Overlays impose additional requirements for permits, and additional decision making guidelines in designated areas.

Overlays can be used where there are areas of important biodiversity value which may not be addressed through zoning and would benefit from additional protection. Overlays are supported by schedules which can be tailored to identify and respond to the local characteristics of an area. Schedules to an overlay can relate to a particular area or issue and can describe the context for how the overlay is applied. Schedules to an overlay also include the objectives, permit requirements and decision guidelines for the overlay.

Schedules to environmental overlays can be used to either schedule out vegetation which does not require a permit for removal, or to schedule in vegetation which does require a permit for removal. Councils can use this mechanism to distinguish between the vegetation removal that it wants to control and that which it doesn't.

The following principles apply when developing overlays for biodiversity objectives:

- overlays must link back to an objective in the SPPF or LPPF
- overlays cannot change the intent of a zone, and therefore they usually control development but not uses
- the reason for applying an overlay must align with its purposes and reflect the roles of any schedules to the overlay
- application of an overlay should be supported by a schedule that has a clear statement of environmental objectives and strategies to achieve these objectives in their schedule. These must be able to justify the application of planning permit conditions or the refusal of a planning permit
- overlays should be informed by up to date information and data, see section 5.3
- overlays must not duplicate other controls and should not be applied where, in most cases, they would not change the outcome for permit applicants
- overlays should be developed in consultation with effected parties and with clear justification that the costs they impose are outweighed by the benefit they provide.

The key purposes of developing overlays to meet biodiversity objectives include:

- to control impacts on biodiversity from development activities, other than the removal of native vegetation
- to impose additional controls over an of area of biodiversity value
- to meet local biodiversity objectives set out in the LPPF. Note that DELWP will generally not be a referral authority for overlays designed to meet local objectives.

Overlays and the removal of native vegetation

Environmental overlays contain less exemptions from the requirement for a permit to remove native vegetation, so they require a permit to remove native vegetation in more circumstances than the Clause 52.17 Particular Provision for Native vegetation.

The provisions that control the removal of native vegetation (Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17) are considered sufficient to meet the Victoria government's objective to manage the biodiversity impacts of the removal of native vegetation at the State level. Overlays that are applied to only control

the removal of native vegetation should relate regional or local biodiversity objectives.

The application of an overlay provides the ability to schedule in or out the type of vegetation for which permits are sought. Hence, this mechanism should be carefully considered to ensure confusion over what is sought to be regulated does not disrupt any intention to continue supporting existing uses.

3.4.1 Environmental Significance Overlay

The Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) can be used to achieve biodiversity objectives by identifying areas where development may be affected by environmental constraints and to ensure development is compatible with identified environmental values. The schedule to the ESO specifies the biodiversity outcome that the overlay is seeking to achieve and how decision making when applying the overlay delivers on this objective. The schedule should give clear guidance of the outcomes sought to assist in decision making for a permit application including a statement of environmental significance, objectives and decision guidelines.

The ESO contains additional controls over the construction of buildings, works, fence construction, subdivision and the removal of vegetation. It can be used to control impacts on biodiversity from development activities other than the removal of native vegetation. The ESO has broader applicability than the VPO and is the preferred overlay when seeking to achieve biodiversity outcomes.

The ESO could be used to control impacts on biodiversity in the following contexts:

- along waterways
- to rare or threatened species habitat that is non-native vegetation, for example the golden sun moth lives in non-native as well as native grasses
- where development or works other than the removal of native vegetation may have a significant impact on high value biodiversity, for example earthworks
- on a biodiversity value that is locally important and is articulated in the LPPF.

3.4.2 Vegetation Protection Overlay

The Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO) can be used to provide additional controls on the removal of native vegetation. Unlike the ESO, the VPO is limited to regulation of the removal of vegetation and does not require permits for buildings and works or subdivision. The VPO is focussed on vegetation protection and conservation for habitat, land management, amenity or cultural purposes. It is not specifically designed to meet biodiversity objectives, but does relate to habitat values provided by vegetation. A VPO should clearly state which objectives it is seeking to achieve within its schedule.

The VPO can be used to meet local objectives for the management of vegetation.

3.4.3 Other environmental overlays

There are a range of other overlays available with the planning scheme to achieve environmental objectives. While some may have an indirect benefit for biodiversity, their objectives are distinct from biodiversity, and their application should clearly align with those objectives.

- **Significant Landscape Overlay** – is designed to identify significant landscapes and conserve and enhance their character. This may be for the aesthetic, amenity or cultural importance of a landscape. It is not appropriate to use this overlay for the protection and conservation of biodiversity values.
- **Erosion Management Overlay** – is designed to protect areas prone to erosion, landslip or other land degradation processes, by minimising land disturbance and inappropriate development.
- **Salinity Management Overlay** – is designed facilitate the stabilisation of areas affected by salinity, to encourage revegetation of areas which contribute to salinity and to encourage development to be undertaken in a manner which brings about a reduction in salinity recharge.

3.5 Selecting planning tools for biodiversity

Table 1 sets out situations where the different biodiversity planning tools available may be appropriately utilised.

Table 1 Planning tools for biodiversity

Biodiversity issue	Planning tool
Large relatively intact natural areas where land use under the existing zone may result in the loss of important biodiversity. For example, an area that has been zoned for rural living that has not yet been subdivided/developed, and contains important biodiversity values.	Rural Conservation Zone
Areas that have important biodiversity values that are expected to be subdivided, and the subdivision will lead to subsequent loss of native vegetation that will not be assessed and offset due to exemptions Clauses 52.17. For example, subdivisions that result in lots sizes less than 4,000m ² .	Environmental Significance Overlay
Important habitat for rare or threatened species that is in non-native vegetation, or an area with no vegetation. For example, the golden sun moth lives in non-native grasses, or a cave that is key habitat for bats.	Environmental Significance Overlay
Protection is required of native vegetation from impacts of a development, that does not necessarily involve direct removal of native vegetation. For examples to control the impacts on biodiversity of earthworks.	Environmental Significance Overlay
Waterways, wetlands, riparian and coastal habitats.	Environmental Significance Overlay
Areas of biodiversity that have particular local importance and native vegetation provisions do not provide for them being retained at the level that the local community expects. For example, the community may be concerned about the cumulative impact of a range of landowners removing trees in a peri urban area, but this removal of native vegetation would be permitted and offset (in the Basic Assessment Pathway) under Clause 52.17. In this case the overlay must be clearly designed to target the regulation of the particular native vegetation considered locally important and of value for retention.	Environmental Significance Overlay
Areas of native vegetation where that the local government has identified in its MSS as a priority for retention, as habitat or to enhance wildlife corridors through links with other patches of native vegetation.	Vegetation Protection Overlay
Highly modified areas whose features are relied on by significant migratory and nomadic species. For example, salt works and treatment plants.	Local planning policy
Areas of potentially local important biodiversity significance where limited information is available to prepare an overlay.	Local planning policy
An area with native vegetation that has multiple landowners and is subject to major coordinated land use change, and/or development, which will occur over a period of time. For example, a new urban development precinct.	Native vegetation precinct plan

3.6 Native vegetation precinct plans

Native vegetation precinct plans (NVPPs) are a tool that provides for the protection, management and removal of native vegetation. They can manage native vegetation where there are a range of landholders or sites, that make up a larger area for development. NVPPs are a strategic mechanism provided under Clause 52.16 – *Native Vegetation Precinct Plan* that can be developed on their own or as part of the precinct planning process. An NVPP is appropriate to use when there is agreement between the landholders

of a site, or group of sites, that they are going to be developed in a coordinated manner.

The benefits of NVPPs are that they:

- consider biodiversity at a larger scale than site-level decision making
- direct development away from areas of high biodiversity value, and can allow for securing offsets, in a more efficient and coordinated way
- streamline approvals for future development as site scale permits are not required to remove

native vegetation when this occurs in accordance with the incorporated NVPP.

Landholders or a group of landholders can initiate a NVPP and local government usually drafts the NVPP. NVPPs are incorporated into the planning scheme and can only be changed through a planning scheme amendment. Section 10.1 of the Guidelines sets out what a NVPP must contain.

3.6.1 When to use a NVPP

Developing a NVPP can be an appropriate strategic planning tool when the following factors are present:

- the precinct contains native vegetation
- an understanding of the importance of the native vegetation in the area is required to inform the planning process
- there are environmental and economic benefits from consolidating offset requirements
- the area contains a number of properties and land owners and a plan could coordinate development and native vegetation conservation
- the development is to occur over an extended period of time.

3.6.2 What to consider when developing a NVPP

The following should be considered when developing a NVPP:

- the contribution that the native vegetation in the precinct makes to biodiversity values
- native vegetation that makes a significant contribution to biodiversity values should be protected
- any retained native vegetation should remain viable into the future in the context of development and other threats
- retained native vegetation can be used to meet, or partially meet, offset requirements for the native vegetation to be removed if it meets the offset site eligibility requirements and can be secured and conserved in accordance with the Guidelines
- offset requirements that are unable to be met using retained native vegetation within the NVPP area can be sourced elsewhere
- native vegetation does not necessarily have to be retained within the area.

The NVPP template sets out the detail of how a NVPP should be developed and is available at www.environment.vic.gov.au/native-vegetation

3.7 Property vegetation plans

A property Vegetation Plan (PVP) provides for the long term strategic management of native vegetation for a single property. A PVP is useful where a landowner wishes to undertake staged native vegetation removal on their property over a longer period of time, for example a timber harvesting operation over a 10 year period.

A PVP:

- is developed in accordance with the Guidelines, and in accordance with the relevant PVP template
- identifies areas of native vegetation that will be removed
- identifies how the native vegetation removal will be offset
- is approved by the Secretary to DELWP
- is attached to planning permit for the removal of native vegetation that is valid for 10 years.

Further information on how to develop a PVP is available on the DELWP website.

3.8 State-wide controls for the removal of native vegetation

The particular provisions in planning schemes include statewide controls for the removal of native vegetation at the individual site scale (Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17). These controls require that the statewide biodiversity impacts of the removal of native vegetation are considered when assessing an application for a permit to remove native vegetation.

The controls can help to achieve biodiversity objectives by:

- providing incentives to avoid and minimise impacts on biodiversity by requiring a permit and offsets for the removal of native vegetation
- not granting a permit to remove native vegetation where the removal will have significant impacts on Victoria's biodiversity
- requiring that where a permit is granted, an offset is secured to compensate for the impact of the removal of native vegetation on Victoria's biodiversity.

These provisions operate at the site scale, with each application to remove native vegetation being assessed on its stand-alone impact and merits. They have limitations in addressing cumulative loss, or in their capacity to provide coordinated protection of native vegetation. In addition, they cannot address biodiversity impacts that do not relate to the removal of native vegetation.

Local government should not solely rely on the native vegetation provisions to achieve biodiversity objectives, but use these controls alongside the other tools set out in this document.

4. Steps to follow when planning for biodiversity

Local government must consider economic, social and environmental objectives in planning and decision making. A balance should be sought between providing for development and growth and protecting areas of high biodiversity value. The following steps should be taken in future strategic planning processes. These steps can be carried out as a standalone process for biodiversity considerations, or as part of a broader strategic planning exercise that includes biodiversity considerations.

Step 1: Consider broader strategies and responsibilities

Identify international, Commonwealth and State strategic policy frameworks and determine the roles and responsibilities of government, organisations, business and individuals.

Step 2: Identify areas of high biodiversity value

Identify areas of high biodiversity value using the information outlined in section 5. Any mapped information should be at an appropriate scale and in a form suitable for use in planning schemes.

Local government should engage DELWP early in the process as they can provide advice about the use of biodiversity information products.

The community, including local indigenous groups, should also be engaged as they may have valuable knowledge and information on local biodiversity assets that have previously not been recorded.

Step 3: Identify any local biodiversity objectives not addressed in step 1 and 2

Identify information gaps and determine how these may be addressed. Discuss broader strategic objectives for biodiversity and the practical application of information in the local planning scheme such as delineating overlay areas.

Determine if there are any local biodiversity objectives that are inconsistent with broader strategies, or that were not identified in step 1.

Step 4: Identify areas where there is demand for development and changes in use

Identify areas where there is likely to be future demand for development, and changes in use. Consider the local government's strategic plans for growth, any relevant regional and state plans for development, and any economic and social policies that will impact on the development of the municipality.

Step 5: Determine potential conflicts between development and biodiversity values

Consider areas identified in steps 1 - 3 and determine where this conflicts with areas identified in step 4.

Determine if these conflicts can be reduced and where trade-offs are possible that achieve local government's objectives for development and biodiversity. Consider how changes in use and development can be directed away from areas of high biodiversity value.

Assess the costs and benefits of taking the planning action by weighing up the benefits to biodiversity that it will deliver, compared to any costs that it will impose on the community and economy.

Step 6: Use the planning tool kit to develop or update the strategic plan accordingly

Review current planning tools including zones, overlays and other strategic plans, that have biodiversity objectives, and determine how they align with the values identified in steps 1 - 3. As required, consider alternative tools, or update existing tools, so they address the trade-offs identified in step 5.

Choose the appropriate planning tools mindful of what protection the existing planning scheme provides.

Prepare the local provisions (LPPs and schedules to overlays) and ensure that they provide an adequate level of protection.

Outdated tools should be removed or updated.

Step 7: Consultation about the proposed planning changes

The community must be consulted with as part of the strategic planning process. Strategic planning for biodiversity needs to be supported with clear objectives and data so that planning decisions can be justified to affected parties and the community. Consultation should gather information about any social or economic impacts the planning action will have. It needs to be demonstrated that the environmental benefits of the planning action outweigh any costs it will impose.

Step 8: Establish a monitoring system, performance targets and indicators

Establish a monitoring system and indicators for measuring the effectiveness of the planning scheme tools in achieving biodiversity objectives.

Step 9: Amend the planning scheme

Following the required public consultation regarding any proposed amendments, and once local government has approved the changes, the planning scheme amendment is submitted to the Minister for Planning for approval and gazettal.

5. Sources of biodiversity information and identifying biodiversity assets, values and threats

5.1 Defining biodiversity value

Planning for biodiversity should be informed by up to date information and focus on the protection and conservation of high value biodiversity. The information described in this section can assist in identifying high value biodiversity in Victoria.

Areas with higher biodiversity values include:

- larger, well connected areas of native vegetation
- areas with higher strategic biodiversity value scores
- areas that are highly localised habitat for rare or threatened species, particularly if they are areas of highly localised habitat for multiple rare or threatened species
- important areas of habitat within dispersed habitats for rare or threatened species or areas of habitat for many dispersed rare or threatened species
- native vegetation in good condition (i.e. with higher condition scores)
- areas with large trees, including consideration of their age and size
- areas of native vegetation that are an endangered Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)
- waterways and sensitive wetlands and coastal areas including:
 - wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention
 - wetlands listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia, and
 - internationally important sites for Migratory Shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.
- National parks and conservation reserves
- significant roadsides and wildlife corridors

Areas with lower biodiversity values include:

- areas with no native vegetation
- areas with lower strategic biodiversity value scores
- native vegetation in poor condition (i.e. with lower condition scores)

- native vegetation that is small in area and isolated from other native vegetation, unless it provides highly localised habitat for rare or threatened species.

5.2 Threats to biodiversity

Victoria's biodiversity continues to be placed under threat from land use and development. Incremental removal of vegetation continues to occur for housing, infrastructure, subdivision of land, agricultural activities, and for protection from bushfire. Degradation in the quality of remaining vegetation also occurs from uses including from agricultural runoff and overgrazing, industry, and recreational activities. Planning can assist in minimising and managing these threats.

There are other threats to biodiversity that planning cannot directly control, these include climate change, and threats caused by past activities or existing use rights. Planning can however take these into account in decision making, to ensure the ongoing impacts from such threats are minimised. Information products measuring biodiversity values set out in section 5, such as the threatened status of EVCs, account for historic impacts on biodiversity, but not the potential future impacts.

Some of the key threats to biodiversity that should be considered when undertaking planning include:

- loss of habitat
- degradation of habitats, including the spread of weeds and pests
- fragmentation of habitat
- inappropriate fire and flood regimes
- overuse of water resources
- pollution and effluent
- salinity and erosion
- climate change.

5.3 Identifying biodiversity values

Identifying the value and quality of biodiversity assets within a municipality is an important task for local government.

Values should be identified using the most up to date information available on the presence and significance of biodiversity assets and threatening processes for the municipality.

The information used to measure the biodiversity value of native vegetation is described in the Guidelines and *Biodiversity information explanatory document – measuring value when removing or offsetting native vegetation* (DELWP, 2017). There are two components to this information:

- site-based information that can be measured or observed at a site
- landscape scale information that cannot be measured or observed at the site and is included in maps and models.

Mapped products are used to represent site-based and landscape scale information across Victoria.

Table 2 (below) sets out biodiversity information products that DELWP provides and how to use (or not use) these products when identifying values, as outlined in section 5, for strategic planning.

Mapped biodiversity information is becoming increasingly available and accurate. However, the quality, resolution and completeness of the information varies across the State and it is important to note that all maps have limitations in terms of scale and accuracy. Table 2 includes limitations associated with the use of mapped biodiversity information. These limitations should be considered when undertaking planning for biodiversity.

For further information about how the products listed go to www.environment.vic.gov.au/native-vegetation. To access the mapped products go to maps.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/viewer/?viewer=NatureKit

5.3.1 Local government and site gathered biodiversity information

Local government may have their own photography or mapping, or may wish to collect additional site-based biodiversity information, to inform strategic planning.

This information should be robust and how it has been collected and used in strategic planning must be made transparent.

In many cases mapped information can be used to inform planning, as set out in Table 2. However, some level of ground truthing may be required before it can be relied on in planning, such as to determine the boundaries of an overlay.

It is important to ensure that information is up to date, is presented at an appropriate scale for the purpose it is used for, and that it contains all the required information to be used for that purpose, for example native and non-native habitat for a species.

5.4 Evaluating biodiversity assets

Once biodiversity values have been identified for a municipality, they can be evaluated to determine their significance and their influence on planning decisions.

The more important the biodiversity asset, the more critical are decisions about its future. The level of significance of a biodiversity asset may assist in determining which planning control is most appropriate.

Whether or not a planning control is effective in managing biodiversity values will depend on the size and distribution of the biodiversity asset and its resilience or sensitivity to change.

Table 2 Biodiversity information products and strategic planning

Biodiversity information product	What is shows	How to use in strategic planning and limitations
<p>Strategic biodiversity values map</p>	<p>The <i>Strategic biodiversity values map</i> represents the biodiversity importance of each location in Victoria, relative to other locations across the landscape. The map is a modelled layer that prioritises the importance of locations across the state based on rarity and level of depletion of vegetation type, rare and threatened species habitats, and condition of native vegetation.</p>	<p>USE TO INFORM – This map can be used to identify areas of important biodiversity value when undertaking strategic planning about protecting areas of high biodiversity value.</p> <p>LIMITATION – The prioritisation of the importance of locations in this map is across the whole of Victoria. The priority of values may vary if the analysis is completed for a municipality.</p>
<p>Strategic management prospects</p>	<p><i>Strategic management prospects</i> represent the contribution that management actions will make to improve biodiversity outcomes over the next few decades at each location in Victoria, relative to other locations. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A spatial ranking map for Victoria • Threat maps showing areas impacted by some of the main threats to biodiversity • Benefit maps showing how biodiversity will benefit from defined management actions. 	<p>USE TO INFORM – These maps can be used to identify areas where biodiversity protection and conservation would achieve the best outcomes and can be used to assist in identifying areas where biodiversity is under threat.</p> <p>LIMITATION – The spatial ranking map is for the whole of Victoria. Results may vary if the analysis were completed for a municipality. Strategic management prospects does not consider all possible management actions and threats.</p>
<p>Habitat importance maps for rare or threatened species habitat – highly localised habitats</p>	<p>Highly localised habitat maps show habitat for rare or threatened species that are very limited in extent and typically are also geographically highly restricted. The area of habitat for one species covers less than 2,000 hectares.</p>	<p>USE TO INFORM – These maps can be used to identify areas of habitat for rare or threatened species that are highly depleted or restricted (small in area).</p> <p>LIMITATION – These maps only show habitat that is in native vegetation so they are not useful for considering species habitat that is not located in native vegetation. Data limitations for some species has resulted only point data (VBA records) being included as habitat in their map.</p>
<p>Habitat importance maps for rare or threatened species habitat – dispersed habitats</p>	<p>Dispersed habitat maps show habitat for rare or threatened species that are less limited in extent and less restricted than highly localised habitats. Dispersed habitats often where originally widespread habitats that have become depleted and fragmented.</p> <p>Each dispersed habitat for rare or threatened species has two <i>Habitat importance maps</i>. One shows the total habitat for the species and the other shows important areas of habitat within the total species' habitat. The ranking provided by the habitat importance score and data from the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas is used to determine important areas of habitat within dispersed species habitats.</p>	<p>USE TO INFORM – The maps that show important areas of habitat within the total species' habitat can be used to inform strategic planning to determine important areas of habitat for rare or threatened species.</p> <p>LIMITATION – These maps only show habitat that is in native vegetation so they are not useful for considering species habitat that is not located in native vegetation.</p>

Biodiversity information product	What it shows	How to use in strategic planning and limitations
Aerial photos NatureKit	Aerial photos are available for the whole of Victoria and show land cover at the time of photography.	USE TO INFORM – This imagery can be used to locate and identify native vegetation and inform strategic planning. LIMITATION – The images are not current and changes may have occurred in the landscape since they were taken. Always seek to use the most up to date imagery available for a location.
EVC maps	EVC maps present a modelled distribution of EVCs in Victoria. These maps were developed using aerial photograph interpretation and on-ground mapping and provide an indication of what EVC may be there. Some of the EVCs specified in the maps include mosaics of different vegetation types (for example a mix of grassland and wetland communities).	USE TO INFORM – These maps can be used to identify areas of Endangered EVC that can be used to indicate areas of high biodiversity value. LIMITATION – EVC maps may show a mosaic of different vegetation types. Site-based EVC mapping can create a more refined version of the statewide EVC maps.
Sensitive wetlands and coastal areas	Sensitive wetlands and coastal areas consist of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands designated under the Ramsar Convention • Wetlands listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia, and • Internationally important sites for Migratory Shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. 	USE TO INFORM – These maps can be used to identify areas of high biodiversity value that can inform strategic planning.
Victorian Biodiversity Atlas	The Victorian Biodiversity Atlas is a database for site based records of flora and fauna (both threatened and common).	USE TO INFORM – This database may provide some information about the potential for a site to be habitat for rare or threatened species.
Native vegetation condition map	The <i>Native vegetation condition map</i> is a modelled layer of how close native vegetation in a location is to its mature natural state, as represented by a benchmark reflecting pre-settlement attributes of the native vegetation type	INDICATIVE USE ONLY – This map gives an indication of the condition of native vegetation across the state. A site assessment will always be more accurate than the condition scores from this map.
Native vegetation extent map	The <i>Native vegetation extent map</i> is a state-wide map based on modelling that shows areas of native vegetation. It includes intact areas typical of national parks and state forests as well as smaller patches and scattered trees typical of rural and peri-urban landscapes.	INDICATIVE USE ONLY – This map gives an indication of native vegetation presence and absence across the state. An assessment undertaken at a site will always be more accurate than the extent shown in this map.
Location map	The <i>Location map</i> has been developed solely as an input into determining the assessment pathway of an application for a permit to remove native vegetation that is less than 0.5 hectares in area.	DO NOT USE – This map is not a map of the biodiversity value or conservation significance of native vegetation across Victoria. This map has not been designed for strategic planning to protect and conserve native vegetation for biodiversity.

Appendix A Planning practice notes

The following are relevant practice notes that can assist when undertaking planning for biodiversity protection and conservation. For more information see

<https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/publications/planning-practice-notes>

PPN02: Public Land Zones

PPN04: Writing a Municipal Strategic Statement

PPN07: Vegetation Protection in Urban Areas

PPN08: Writing a Local Planning Policy

PPN10: Writing Schedules

PPN42: Applying the Rural Zones

PPN50: Preparing a native vegetation precinct plan

PPN53: Managing Coastal Hazards and the Coastal Impacts of Climate Change

PPN62: Green Wedge Planning Provisions

PPN64: Local planning for bushfire protection