

Annual report 2017-2018

a report on the operations of the native vegetation
removal regulations



October 2018

Acknowledgements

DELWP proudly acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture and pays respects to their Elders past and present. DELWP recognises Aboriginal people as the Traditional Owners and custodians of the land. Traditional Owners have an intrinsic connection to Country and contribute to the management of land, water and native vegetation.

Photo credit

Musk Lorikeet, DELWP (Ian McCann)

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Dandenong Ranges, DELWP (Penny Croucamp)

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Introduction

This first annual report on the native vegetation removal regulations presents an overview of how the review outcomes were supported and implemented during the 2017 - 2018 financial year.

The review of the native vegetation removal regulations was undertaken to ensure they sensibly protect Victoria's sensitive native vegetation. The review was completed in December 2017, with the outcomes delivered by:

- Planning scheme amendment VC138 gazetted on 12 December 2017 that updated Victoria's native vegetation removal regulations. Details of the amendment can be found on [Planning Scheme Amendments Online](#).
- A program of ongoing improvements described in the *Review of the native vegetation clearing regulations – outcomes report* available on the DELWP website.

The review was informed by extensive community and stakeholder consultation. It was supported by a stakeholder reference group including representatives from industry, local government and environmental groups. The changes to the native vegetation removal regulations provide better protection for Victoria's sensitive native vegetation, enhance the operation of the regulations, and increase transparency by:

- better accounting for the environmental value of large trees, endangered vegetation types and sensitive wetlands and coastal areas
- making the system fairer as some site-based information can be used to supplement mapped information
- improving monitoring and reporting on native vegetation removal and offsets.

Overview of the native vegetation removal regulations

The overarching legislation is the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, which is administered by local government and the Minister for Planning.

Clause 12.01-1, Clause 12.01-2, Clause 52.16, Clause 52.17 and the incorporated document, the

Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation (the Guidelines) included in all local planning schemes in Victoria are collectively referred to as the native vegetation removal regulations (the regulations).

Clause 12.01-1S sets the state policy for the protection of biodiversity and Clause 12.01-2S sets the state policy for native vegetation management. Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 establish the need for a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. These clauses include several exemptions that provide for native vegetation removal without a planning permit in specified circumstances.

The Guidelines set out how native vegetation removal is assessed and describes how offsets are secured. They are applied when a planning permit is required and when some exemptions from requiring a planning permit are relied upon. The Guidelines are also applied when native vegetation removal is considered under an approval sought under the *Pipelines Act 2005* or the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.

When native vegetation removal is approved, an offset must be secured in accordance with the Guidelines. The conditions of approval will specify the offset requirements and that the offset must be secured before native vegetation is removed. This delivers a no net loss outcome for Victoria's biodiversity.

Offset sites are protected in perpetuity by an on-title security agreement under section 69 of the *Conservation Forest and Lands Act 1987*, section 173 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, or by an offset covenant under section 3 of the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

The state objective for native vegetation management is to ensure there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation. This is achieved through the application of the three-step approach of avoid, minimise and offset as set out in Clause 12.01-2S of all planning schemes in Victoria.

Supporting the change

This section describes activities completed during the 2017-2018 financial year that supported the implementation of the changes to the regulations.

Guidance and support

Several guidance and supporting documents were developed and made available on the refreshed native vegetation section of the Department of Environment, land, Water and Planning (DELWP) website. These included:

- *Assessor's handbook – applications to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation* (Assessor's handbook) helps decision makers assess an application to remove native vegetation.
- *Applicant's guide – applications to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation* (Applicant's guide) helps applicants prepare an application to remove native vegetation.
- *Exemptions from requiring a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation – guidance* explains how to interpret and apply the exemptions.
- *Biodiversity information explanatory document – measuring value when removing or offsetting native vegetation* describes the systems, tools and maps referenced in the Guidelines.
- *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2* describes how gain is calculated, and specifies minimum management commitments and standards for an offset site.
- *Preparing a Native Vegetation Precinct Plan* provides guidance for the preparation of a Native Vegetation Precinct Plan, a strategic plan that identifies native vegetation to be retained and removed across a precinct or multiple properties.
- *Planning for biodiversity – guidance* describes how local government can use the planning system to meet statewide (Clause 12.01-1S) and local objectives to protect and conserve Victoria's biodiversity.
- *Native vegetation removal regulations – compliance and enforcement strategy* sets out a risk-based approach to compliance and enforcement of the regulations.

In addition to these materials, DELWP maintains two dedicated email accounts for stakeholders to submit issues, concerns and queries about the implementation and application of the updated regulations:

nativevegetation.support@delwp.vic.gov.au and nativevegetation.farming@delwp.vic.gov.au.

During the 2017-2018 financial year the native vegetation regulation team provided responses to 630 emails received by the native vegetation support email and four received by the new email for farmers.

Training and capacity building

Training and capacity building focused on two areas:

- understanding and applying the updated regulations
- confirming competence in applying the Vegetation Quality Assessment method.

Training on the updated regulations

A training course on the proposed changes to the regulations was developed and delivered across Victoria. Some of the sessions were live streamed via video and recorded for stakeholders who were unable to attend.

From October to December 2017, 495 participants attended 12 training sessions. These were open to local government, native vegetation assessors and key industry stakeholders. Attendees left with an understanding of the proposed changes to the regulations.

Following the gazettal of the updated regulations, a further 438 people attended one of 15 training or industry information sessions presented between January and June 2018.

A training course *Applying the native vegetation guidelines* was developed to form part of the PLANET professional development program run by the Planning Institute of Australia – Victoria.

Figure 1: The training course on how to apply the updated regulations



Vegetation Quality Assessment (VQA)

The Guidelines specify that native vegetation assessors who prepare reports for applicants applying for approval to remove native vegetation must be accredited. Accreditation is gained by demonstrating competence in completing a VQA.

During the 2017-2018 financial year, 13 competency checks were offered and the competency of 139 native vegetation assessors was confirmed by DELWP. During the competency checks participants complete a theory and field-based assessment to demonstrate their ability to complete a habitat hectare assessment to the required standard. This assessment determines the condition of native vegetation.

Figure 2: native vegetation assessors attend a VQA competency check



Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder consultation was a key element of the review and included stakeholder workshops, a stakeholder reference group and opportunities to provide formal comments on proposed changes. Consultation remains important to ensure effective

and consistent implementation of the regulations. This is achieved in part by the support email and training and capacity building previously described and through stakeholder groups and newsletters.

DELWP/DEDJTR working group

DELWP worked closely with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) throughout the review and a working group was established between the two departments. The objective of the working group is to collaborate on relevant ongoing improvements.

Advisory group

A native vegetation advisory group was established in June 2018. The purpose of the advisory group is to gather feedback on the functioning of the regulations to inform continuous improvement. It provides an opportunity for ongoing engagement and has similar representation to the stakeholder reference group that supported the review.

Native vegetation newsletter

A *Native vegetation newsletter* has been established to address frequently asked questions about implementing the updated regulations. The first newsletter was sent out in March 2018 to over 2000 key stakeholders who interact with the regulations.

Figure 3: The first native vegetation newsletter



Transitional arrangements

Transitional provisions are included in Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17 of local planning schemes. They facilitate transition to the updated regulations by enabling proposals that were significantly progressed at the time of the amendment to be assessed using the decision guidelines that were in place prior to the VC138 amendment.

During the 2017-2018 financial year the secretary to DELWP (or his delegate) provided 71 written statements that enabled access to the transitional provisions.

Authorised native vegetation removal

This section provides information about proposals to remove, destroy or lop (referred to as remove in this document) native vegetation. Data about planning permits was not available for this annual report. DELWP is working with Victoria's local councils to improve the data availability for future reports.

Applications to remove native vegetation

The regulations are risk based. Any application to remove native vegetation is categorised into one of three assessment pathways based on the potential risk or impact to biodiversity. The three assessment pathways are: Basic, Intermediate and Detailed.

All applicants are required to apply the three-step approach of avoid, minimise and offset to ensure the no net loss objective for native vegetation management is achieved.

DELWP has developed systems, tools and maps to support the implementation of the regulations. Applicants use the Native Vegetation Information Management System (NVIM) native vegetation removal tool to view biodiversity information and map vegetation they propose to remove. The NVIM system analyses relevant maps and produces a *Native vegetation removal report* that contains all required biodiversity information to support an application in the Basic or Intermediate Assessment Pathway.

The Environmental Systems Modelling Platform (EnSym) native vegetation regulations tool is used for all applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway. Applications in this assessment pathway are supported by a site assessment completed by an accredited native vegetation assessor. The EnSym system analyses site assessed information and relevant maps and produces a *Native vegetation removal report* that together with the site assessment report contains all required biodiversity information to support an application in the Detailed Assessment Pathway.

Applications for a planning permit are made to the responsible authority (usually local council). Detailed Assessment Pathway applications must be referred to DELWP for assessment. Applications for

pipelines, mines and quarries are made to DEDJTR who refers proposals to DELWP for assessment.

DELWP provides comments and recommendations back to the relevant authority who decides to approve or refuse the application.

Native vegetation removal data

Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17 permit data

Permit applications are tracked in the Planning Permit Activity Reporting System (PPARS). All planning permits referred to DELWP are recorded in the Statutory Planning Case Management System (SPCMS). All applications to remove native vegetation include a *Native vegetation removal report* generated by NVIM or EnSym. These reports now have a unique identifier.

A *Native vegetation removal – data log* (data log) has been developed and provided to all local councils. From July 2018, local councils will use the data log to record approved planning permit numbers and the associated *Native vegetation removal report* identifier. This will enable DELWP to extract and merge data from the PPARS, SPCMS, NVIM and EnSym.

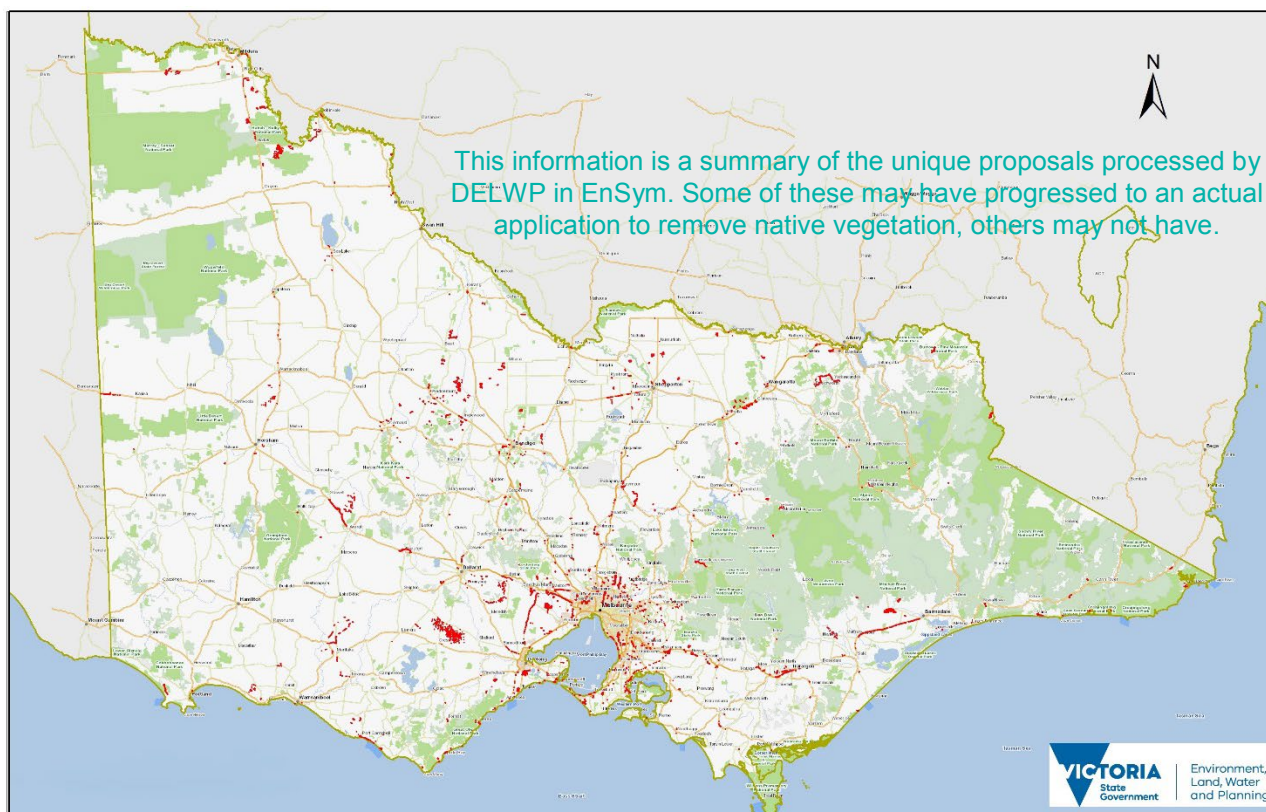
Information about the extent of native vegetation permitted to be removed can then be analysed and summarised in future editions of this report.

EnSym native vegetation regulations tool

During the 2017-2018 reporting period, DELWP generated 1278 *Native vegetation removal reports* of possible native vegetation removal scenarios:

- 60 per cent of the reports were generated after the updated regulations came into effect:
 - 45 per cent of these reports, took advantage of the transitional provisions
 - 55 per cent of these reports were prepared under the updated regulations
- 32 per cent of all reports were not unique and may represent alternative layout investigations.
- 68 per cent of all reports were unique, representing 865 proposals, the locations of these proposals are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Map of Victoria showing the location of 865 unique native vegetation removal proposals processed in EnSym – these are not formal applications to remove native vegetation (data not to scale).



Extent

The following comments relate to the extent of native vegetation removal proposed in the 865 unique sets of data submitted to DELWP and presented in Figure 5. It does not include data from NVIM. Most data processed in NVIM will be for an extent of less than 0.5 hectares.

- Extent of proposals ranged from less than 0.001 hectares to 493 hectares, with an average of 4 hectares.
- 44 per cent of proposals were for less than half a hectare of removal and together they accounted for two per cent of all proposed removal.

The total percentage of proposals to remove less than 0.5 hectares would be significantly higher if NVIM data was available and included. NVIM is used for most applications to remove less than 0.5 hectares of native vegetation.

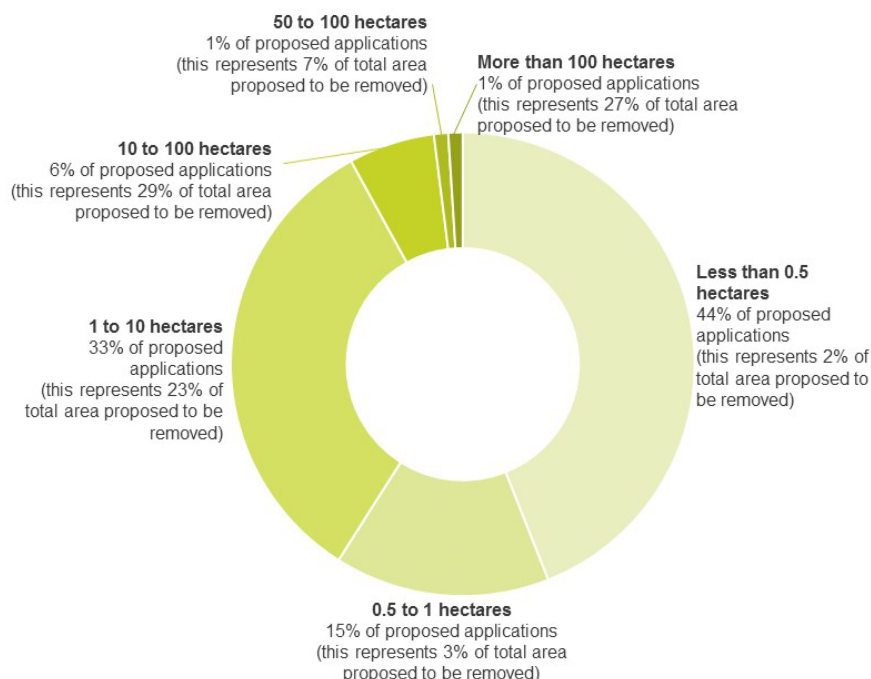
Removal under exemptions to Clause 52.16 or Clause 52.17

Currently, there is no formal method for recording or collecting information about native vegetation removed under an exemption. Four exemptions are accessed with the written agreement from the Secretary to DELWP. The Secretary's agreement requires compliance with a specified procedure that includes processes to record and report new native vegetation removal.

Removal of native vegetation under the following exemptions will be included in the next report:

- *Crown land* exemption
- *Road safety* exemption
- *Railways* exemption
- *Utility installation* exemption.

Figure 5: Summary data of unique proposals to remove native vegetation represented in different size classes

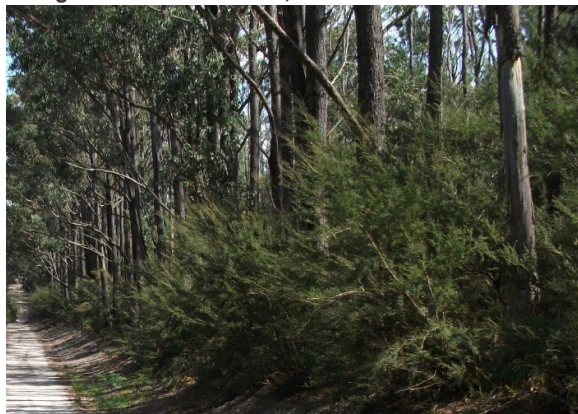


Conservation work exemption

Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 of the updated regulations include a *Conservation work* exemption. The *Conservation work* exemption is for work that provides an overall improvement for biodiversity. Access to the exemption is with the written agreement from the Secretary to DELWP. The Secretary will only provide written agreement when the loss to biodiversity from the removal of native vegetation is outweighed by the expected benefits the work will deliver for biodiversity.

The Secretary provided written agreement for three conservation work plans to rely on this exemption during the 2017-2018 financial year. All proposals were in the Latrobe City Council area to manage Burgan overabundance within council managed reserves.

Figure 6: Dense Burgan stands along walking path in Crinigan Bushland Reserve, Morwell



Conservation work exemption case study – Managing Burgan overabundance in Latrobe City Council bushland reserves

Burgan is a naturally occurring native plant within many vegetation types and plant communities throughout south-eastern Australia. It spreads easily when disturbed and can form dense stands that dominate and exclude other species from germinating.

Three bushland reserves had areas of dense Burgan cover that outcompeted other native species. Council controlled Burgan in one of these reserves under a planning permit issued in 2009 that did not require offsets. This showed an improved understorey diversity and vegetation condition. That permit expired and since 2013 Burgan removal required mandatory offsets. The local volunteer management committee did not have funds for the offset and Burgan control ceased.

The new *Conservation work* exemption provides a mechanism to address the impacts of Burgan on other native vegetation in the council managed reserves. LaTrobe City Council prepared conservation work plans that showed how Burgan cover would be managed and maintained at levels applicable for the vegetation type. The plans showed that the benefits for biodiversity exceeded the potential biodiversity impact from the works and clearly demonstrated no net loss to biodiversity. Benefits include an overall improvement in vegetation condition and an increase in understorey diversity, particularly woody shrubs, herbs and groundcovers.

Figure 6 Photo Credit:
<https://www.facebook.com/CriniganRoadBushMorwell/photos>

Unauthorised native vegetation removal

This section provides a brief overview about native vegetation removed without required approvals. Unauthorised removal is raised as a significant issue by many stakeholders, but there is currently no compliance data to report comprehensively on this.

Authority to address offences under the *Planning and Environment Act, 1987* lies with the responsible authority, usually local council. DELWP can provide guidance and assistance as required.

Guidance

A compliance and enforcement strategy released as an outcome of the review helps local councils develop risk-based compliance plans. Risk-based compliance plans focus on things that cause the greatest risk or harm to the environment. They ensure the level of intervention is proportional to the harm, and focus on effective and efficient actions that make the best use of existing resources.

The strategy explains that compliance and enforcement activities include three steps:

- encourage compliance by capacity building and suitable communications
- monitor compliance based on potential risk or harm to the environment
- respond to non-compliance based on risk-or harm to the environment.

Supporting compliance

To support the implementation of the strategy, DELWP appointed two regionally located Project officers. Their role is to support and promote the consistent implementation of the regulations within the department, local government, duty holders and stakeholders. These officers work across DELWP and local councils to identify key drivers of unauthorised removal and develop tools to help address these.

Data gathering

Councils generally do not collect data on unauthorised native vegetation removal but most estimated that they have 12 or less cases per year.

Five local councils successfully issued enforcement orders or planning infringement notices for seven cases that required native vegetation offsets be secured. Collectively these seven cases secured 1.038 general biodiversity equivalent units at offset sites during the 2017-2018 financial year.

DELWP did not have a consistent approach to recording cases of unauthorised native vegetation removal during the 2017-2018 financial year. Three regions collected data, recording between three and ten cases each. Three regions did not record cases of unauthorised native vegetation removal.

With limited recording of unauthorised removal, it is not possible to provide useful statistics. It is also difficult to verify the full extent and impact of unauthorised removal on biodiversity. Anecdotal evidence suggests that unauthorised removal occurs across Victoria, is most often associated with fence lines or roadsides, and often includes the removal of scattered trees.

DELWP will continue to work with local council to implement the three steps – encourage, monitor, respond.

Successful action against unauthorised removal

A case of unauthorised native vegetation was reported to Mansfield Shire Council in May 2017. Following investigation it was found that over 73 hectares of native vegetation was removed since 2015.

DELWP and Mansfield Shire Council considered enforcement action under the *Planning and Environment Act 1978* included a Planning Infringement Notice and action at the Magistrates Court or Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. However, a negotiated outcome was chosen as it is often cheaper and can achieve similar (or better) results.

A settlement was reached in August 2018 that required Buxi Pty Ltd to enter into a Trust for Nature Conservation Covenant to protect 60 hectares of native vegetation on their property, and to purchase additional offsets within the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority region, at an estimated cost of \$300,000. In addition, Mansfield Shire Council issued a press release to publicise the outcome of this negotiation to educate and deter landholders from conducting unauthorised native vegetation removal.

This low cost option for council achieved appropriate environmental compensation, and did not lead to any formal record against the landowner.

Native vegetation offsets

Offset sites overview

When native vegetation is approved to be removed a native vegetation offset must be secured before the removal occurs. The Guidelines set out what can be an offset, the management requirements at an offset site and how an offset site is secured.

Landowners can commit to permanently securing and managing their land as an offset site. An offset site is actively managed for ten years to reduce threats and improve the condition of native vegetation. Landowners have ongoing management commitments to ensure the improved condition of native vegetation is maintained. The offset site is permanently secured under one of the following on-title security agreements:

- section 173 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* with local council
- section 69 of the *Conservation Forest and Lands Act 1987* with DELWP
- offset covenant under section 3 of the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* with Trust for Nature (the Trust).

What is an offset

An offset compensates for the impact to biodiversity when native vegetation is removed. An offset is delivered by protecting and managing native vegetation at an offset site. This protection and management improves the security and condition of the native vegetation providing a benefit for biodiversity.

An offset can be first party or third party and the offset site protects any or a combination of:

- a patch of native vegetation
- one or more scattered trees
- an area of revegetation.

First party offset

An offset site used exclusively to meet a landowners' own offset requirements provides a first party offset and can be secured by any security agreement listed above. Historically any offset site secured with a section 173 agreement has not been

recorded in any statewide system. Landowners are now encouraged to record these first party offsets in the Native Vegetation Offset Register (NVOR) administered by DELWP. The NVOR can allocate offsets to approvals and provide an allocated credit extract as evidence that an offset has been secured. One first party offset site was recorded in the NVOR during the 2017-2018 financial year.

Third party offset

An offset site used to meet other parties offset requirements can only be secured with a section 69 agreement or an offset covenant. These third party offsets must be registered in the Native Vegetation Credit Register (NVCR) administered by DELWP.

The Native Vegetation Credit Register

Anyone with an offset requirement can purchase a third party offset. Third party offsets are traded as native vegetation credits and must be recorded in the NVCR.

The NVCR regulates the creation, trade and allocation of native vegetation credits and provides allocated credit extracts when native vegetation credits are allocated to a specified approval. Allocated credit extracts provide the required evidence that an offset has been secured.

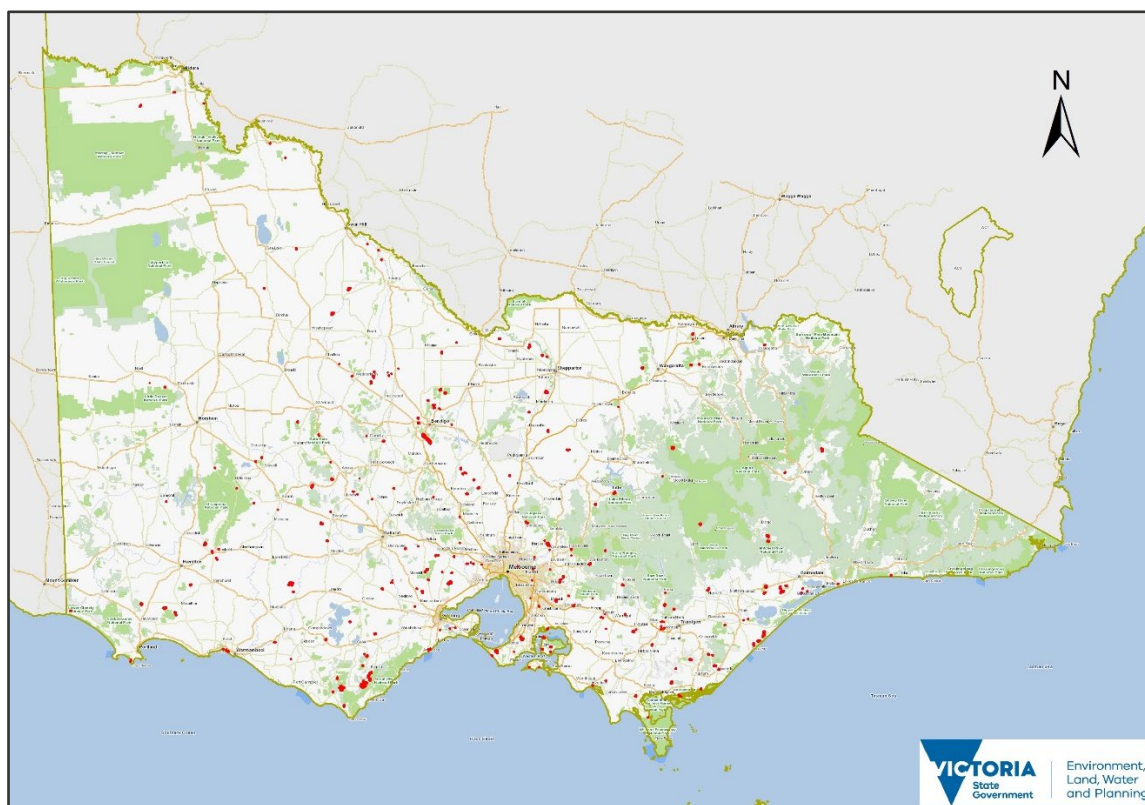
Current offset sites in the NVCR

During the 2017-2018 financial year, 21 new offset sites were registered in the NVCR. This added 900 hectares of land to the area of land secured at offset sites. The location of these offset sites is shown in Figure 7.

As at the 30 June 2018, 311 offset sites protecting 14,250 hectares of land were secured on 261 different properties:

- 222 offset sites are secured by a section 69 agreement under the *Conservation Forests and Lands Act 1987* administered by DELWP
- 89 offset sites are secured by an offset covenant under section 3 of the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* administered by TfN.

Figure 7: Map of all offset sites registered in the NVCR as at 30 June 2018 (not to scale)



Offset site monitoring and compliance

Landowners, and the statutory body responsible for the security agreement are responsible for ensuring management actions are undertaken in accordance with offset site management plans:

- landowners implement required management actions and report annually to the relevant statutory body
- the statutory body (local council, DELWP and the Trust) conducts on-ground monitoring of offset sites to check compliance with management plans.

Records of offset sites established by a section 173 agreement with council are not currently available. Monitoring and compliance of these sites is not covered in this section.

The responsible statutory body

DELWP has legal responsibility for the administration, reporting, monitoring and compliance of offset sites established under section 69 of the *Conservation Forest and Lands Act 1987*. DELWP currently monitors compliance at 182 offset sites located on 150 private properties across Victoria.

The Trust is responsible for the administration, reporting, monitoring and compliance of all offset sites established under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. They currently monitor compliance at 89 offset sites located on 70 private properties across Victoria.

DELWP and the Trust charge fees to enter into these agreements. The fees cover administration and monitoring costs.

Reporting by landholders

Reporting by landholders helps confirm that management actions are implemented. Landowners must provide annual reports on the management actions and commitments they have undertaken each year. DELWP and the Trust review these reports and on successful completion of actions, landowners receive their annual payment. The amount they will receive is determined by the sale or trade of their native vegetation credits to third parties and the payment schedule included in the security agreement.

Landowners may be required to submit further evidence of completed actions when issues are identified. Issues may be identified during on-ground monitoring or in annual reports.

On-ground compliance monitoring

DELWP applies a risk-based approach to prioritise monitoring of offset sites under a section 69 agreement. In general, an offset site will be monitored three times within the 10 year active management period but is varied based on compliance and risk.

Site visits provide an opportunity to check for compliance with management commitments and actions and to discuss any issues or concerns the landowner may have. During the site visit, an assessment of the general condition of native vegetation is completed and any threats or issues are noted. Compliance issues or new threats are discussed with the landowner. A monitoring report that details any required follow up actions with timing for completion is sent to the landowner after the visit.

The Trust has a standard approach to monitoring offset sites. Every offset site will be monitored five times over the 10 year active management period. This can be varied when a compliance issue is identified and more visits are required, or when an offset site is established with a landowner who already has other offset sites and does not need the initial information sharing visit. The initial visit is within 3 months of the establishment of the offset site and ensures landowners understand their management obligations, answer any questions and help plan on-ground works. This is followed by triennial visits at year one, four, seven and 10. Thereafter sites are monitored in line with the Trust's stewardship program. All visits are an opportunity to provide advice and monitor compliance.

DELWP and the Trust withhold annual payments to landowners if reports are not received or if sites are found to be non-compliant. Payments resume once corrective actions are implemented and compliance is confirmed.

Section 69 monitoring results

During the 2017-2018 financial year DELWP completed 57 monitoring visits. Progress on implementing management actions was checked including:

- fencing and protection of sites from grazing and security threats
- pest animal control
- woody weed control
- herbaceous weed control
- supplementary or revegetation planting targets.

Nearly 60 per cent of sites needed no or minimal follow up actions to ensure the landowner remained compliant in coming years. About 40 per cent of sites required further action such as erection or maintenance of fences, additional planting or further pest plant and animal control. Most of these sites were implementing management actions but not to the standard needed to achieve the required outcome. Some of these sites demonstrated a lack of or poor management.

Compliance action

Landowners who were non-compliant received monitoring reports detailing agreed actions and their annual payments were put on hold until the completion of required management actions. Six landowners were able to complete these and report back before 30 June 2018. It is expected that the remaining sites will address outstanding issues during the 2018-2019 financial year.

Any landowner with serious compliance issues may, in addition to having their annual payment withheld, have their native vegetation credits frozen so that they are unable to trade or allocate native vegetation credits. During this reporting period, one landowner had their credits frozen, and DELWP is working with the landowner to rectify the matter.

Case study – Remnant vegetation site near Yarram

This 120 hectare remnant patch offset site in the Gippsland Plain Bioregion is predominantly covered by Grassy Forest with some Swamp Scrub. The site was unfenced where it abuts forested public land. At the time the site was established, the vegetation was generally in very good condition with minimal weed cover and many large old trees.

During monitoring after year one, DELWP discovered unauthorised removal of logs and several trees. Required remedial actions to reduce the risk of unauthorised access included:

- regular inspections of the site
- erection of signage
- repairing of damaged fences and gates and erection of new fencing.

The landowner initially refused to comply. Their native vegetation credits were frozen, and all scheduled payments withheld. It was essential that the landowner addressed all non-compliance issues and various DELWP officers maintained communication with the landowner who eventually completed remedial actions. Credits were unfrozen, and payments reinstated.

Figure 8: Unauthorised felling of trees



Figure 9: Repaired fence and new sign



Biodiversity benefits from offset sites

Offset sites registered in the NVCR protect 14,250 hectares. These sites are managed to deliver benefits for Victoria's biodiversity. The benefits of offset sites are shown in the following case studies.

Case study – Revegetation near St Arnaud

An 11 hectare offset site was established in 2008 as a cleared paddock with minimal native vegetation and very high cover of herbaceous annual weeds. The site borders a large remnant of Box Ironbark Forest, and this vegetation type was mapped as the historical vegetation type at the offset site. The 10 year active management period was completed in 2017 and it is now moving into the ongoing maintenance phase.

The site had to establish 20,000 plants of various species indigenous to Box Ironbark Forest in the Goldfields Bioregion. Revegetation was difficult given the soil composition, structure and the history of native vegetation removal. Active and ongoing management was needed.

Monitoring in 2017 found that this had been achieved and that plants were healthy and well established. understorey included a good cover of native grasses that were spreading to new areas.

Figure 10: Site at year three



Figure 11: Site at year ten



Figure 12: Google image showing extent of revegetation



Credit trading and allocation

Offset sites registered in the NVCR can trade native vegetation credits to third parties. During the 2017-2018 financial year \$9.2 million dollars' worth of native vegetation credits were traded from 107 offset sites owned by 44 landowners. 19 offset sites have traded all their native vegetation credits.

Native vegetation credits are allocated to specific approvals that have a requirement to secure a native vegetation offset. During the 2017-2018 financial year there were 653 allocations to specific approvals.

Type of units allocated

The regulations have been in place since the late 1980s. Historically the impacts from native vegetation removal were measured in habitat hectares and impacts on trees. In December 2013 following a reform of the regulations the impact was measured in a biodiversity equivalence unit. The regulations were reviewed and updated in December 2017 and the impact is now measured in habitat units. Native vegetation allocations take place under one of these three regulatory systems. As expected, most allocations were for proposals approved under the 2013 regulations:

- four per cent of allocations were in habitat hectares and trees (pre 2013 regulations), including the allocation of
 - 3.81 habitat hectares
 - 111 Very Large Old Trees
 - 983 Large Old Trees
 - 497 Recruits
- 90 per cent of allocations were in biodiversity equivalence units (the 2013 regulations), including the allocation of
 - 48.058 General Biodiversity Equivalence Units
 - 25.469 Specific Biodiversity Equivalence Units providing offsets for 21 different species
- six per cent of allocations were in the updated habitat units (2017 regulations), including the allocation of
 - 2.534 General Habitat Units
 - 3.810 Species Habitat Units providing offsets for two species
 - together, these habitat units protected 137 large trees.

Future improvements

Improvements to monitoring and reporting

DELWP has developed a monitoring and reporting plan (MER) to improve monitoring and reporting on:

- approved native vegetation removal and associated offsets
- levels of known non-compliance with the regulations, including management and protection of offset sites
- gains achieved at offset sites.

The following improvements have been made to improve data collection:

- all *Native vegetation removal reports* now include a unique report identifier to enable data analysis by DELWP
- a *Native vegetation removal – data log* has been provided to all local councils and DELWP regions. This data log provides a simple way to record approved permits and established offset sites. Unauthorised native vegetation removal can also be recorded in the data log.

Improved data collection will enable improved reporting and an evaluation of the no net loss objective in years to come.

