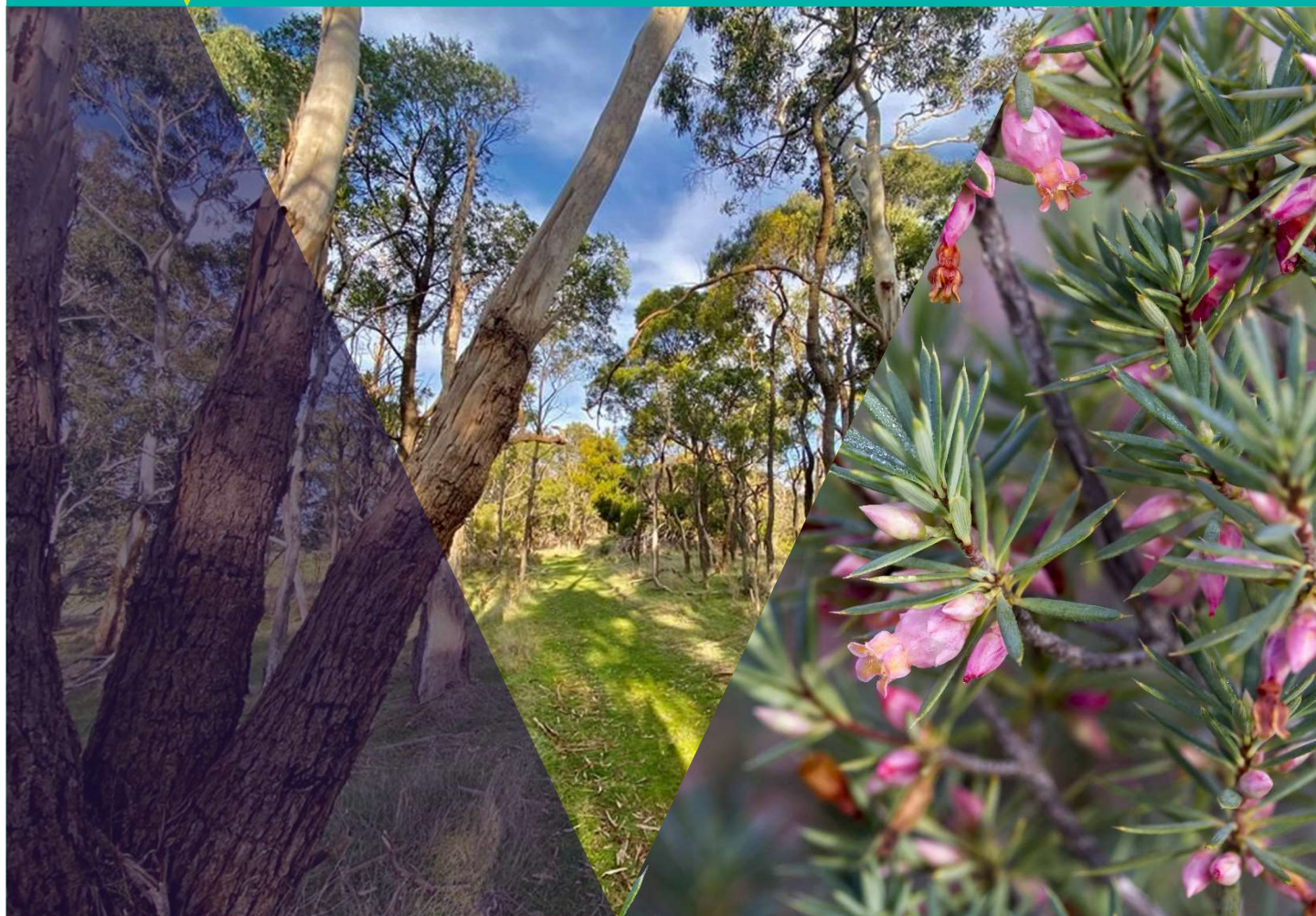


# Annual Report 2019 - 2020

A report on the operations of the native vegetation  
removal regulations



December 2020



Environment,  
Land, Water  
and Planning

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MacArthur, Victoria (Kate Adamson)

Brush Heath near Stawell (Richard Boon)

**Acknowledgment**

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.



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# Introduction

This is the third annual report on the operations of the native vegetation removal regulations. It presents an overview of native vegetation removal and protection during the 2019-2020 financial year.

## The native vegetation removal regulations

The removal of native vegetation in Victoria is regulated by local planning schemes (established under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*).

Clause 12.01-1S, Clause 12.01-2S, Clause 52.16, Clause 52.17 and the incorporated document, the *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation* (DELWP 2017) (Guidelines) included in all local planning schemes in Victoria are collectively referred to as the native vegetation removal regulations (the regulations) in this document.

Clause 12.01-1S sets out the state policy objectives for the protection of biodiversity and Clause 12.01-2S sets out the state policy objective for native vegetation management. Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 establish the need for a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation, and the requirement to secure an offset if approval is granted. These clauses also include several exemptions that provide for native vegetation removal without a planning permit in specified circumstances. *Remove, destroy or lop is referred to as 'remove' in this report.*

The state policy 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.

The Guidelines set out how native vegetation removal is assessed and offset. It also describes how offset sites are established. The Guidelines apply when applications to remove native vegetation are being considered, and when proponents rely on some exemptions from requiring a planning permit.

There are three assessment pathways based on potential risk to, or impact on biodiversity:

- Basic – limited impacts on biodiversity.
- Intermediate – could impact on large trees, endangered ecological vegetation types (EVCs), or sensitive wetlands and coastal areas.
- Detailed – could impact on large trees, endangered EVCs, or sensitive wetlands and coastal areas, and could significantly impact on habitat for rare or threatened species.

All applicants are required to apply the three-step approach:

- avoid removal, destruction or lopping native vegetation
- minimise impacts when removal cannot be avoided
- offset to compensate the biodiversity impact.

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

Clause 66.02-2 sets out referral requirements for native vegetation. The Secretary to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) (as constituted under Part 2 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*) is a recommending referral authority for applications to remove native vegetation:

- in the Detailed Assessment Pathway
- if a Property Vegetation Plan applies
- on Crown land which is occupied or managed by the responsible authority.

## Offsets for the removal of native vegetation

The Guidelines set out what can be an offset, the management requirements at an offset site and how an offset site is secured.

## What is an offset?

An offset is designed to compensate for the biodiversity impact from the removal of native vegetation. The offset delivers a measurable conservation outcome from increased protection and several management actions designed to increase the biodiversity value of the land. The goal of the offset is to achieve no net loss to biodiversity after removal has been avoided and impacts minimised.

An offset can be secured by purchasing a native vegetation credit from someone who has established an offset site (third party offset) or by establishing a new offset site on your own land (first party offset).

## Establishing an offset site

Landowners can commit to permanently protecting and managing their land as an offset site. The offset site is actively managed for ten years to reduce threats and improve the condition of native vegetation. Thereafter, landowners have ongoing management commitments to ensure the improved condition of native vegetation is maintained. The improved security and condition of the native vegetation provides a gain for biodiversity.

An offset site can protect any or a combination of the following provided they meet the minimum eligibility requirements:

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

An offset site must be permanently protected with one of the following on-title security agreements:

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

## Offset type

### First party offset

A first party offset is secured by protecting and managing your own land. First party offset sites can

be protected using any of the three on-title security agreements and should be recorded on the DELWP administered Native Vegetation Offset Register (NVOR).

### Third party offset

A third-party offset is delivered when native vegetation credits from an offset site established by someone else are allocated to a specific approval. Offset sites used for third parties can only be secured with a section 69 agreement or an offset covenant. They generate native vegetation credits that are traded and allocated through the DELWP administered Native Vegetation Credit Register (NVCR).

## Biodiversity value

The biodiversity value of native vegetation is calculated to ensure that losses and gains are comparable and can be traded to achieve no net loss. The way biodiversity value is calculated at removal and offset sites has changed over time with changes to the regulations.

Under *Victoria's native vegetation management – a framework for action* (Framework) biodiversity value was measured in habitat hectares.

Under the *Permitted clearing of native vegetation – Biodiversity assessment guidelines* (2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines) biodiversity value was calculated by combining habitat hectares with landscape scale mapped information and biodiversity value was measured in:

- specific biodiversity equivalence units (SBEU)
- general biodiversity equivalence units (GBEU).

Under the current Guidelines biodiversity value is calculated from site-based information and landscape scale maps, but site-based information plays a greater role and can also be used to supplement mapped information in some cases. Biodiversity value is now measured in:

- species habitat units (SHU)
- general habitat units (GHU).

## Data

The data included in this report has come from one of the systems, tools or registers described below. This report has a focus on planning permits and removal under exemptions following written agreement from the Secretary to DELWP. Removal authorised by planning scheme amendments and under other Acts is not included.

### NVIM and EnSym tools

Under the Guidelines, all applications to remove native vegetation must include a *Native vegetation removal report* with a unique identifier.

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 tool (Figure 1) 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. NVIM stores the biodiversity information associated with each report generated.

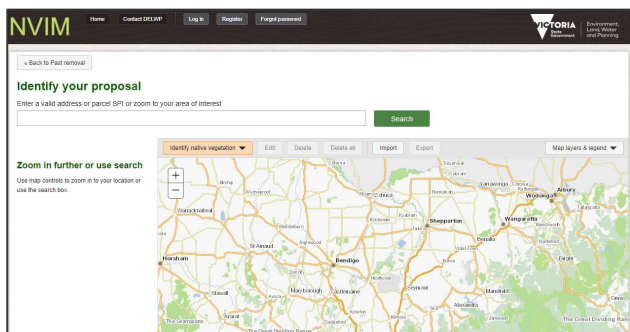


Figure 1. The Native Vegetation Information Management System (NVIM) native vegetation removal tool

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 tool 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. The biodiversity information

associated with each report is stored for reporting purposes.

NVIM and EnSym also have tools that generate *Native vegetation offset reports* and store the associated data.

### Tracking systems and data log tool

Responsible authorities record permit applications in the Planning Permit Activity Reporting System (PPARS). All planning permits referred to DELWP are also recorded in the DELWP Statutory Planning Case Management System (SPCMS).

These systems are designed to track application progress and timeframes but do not record details of the native vegetation proposed to be removed.

DELWP developed and provided a *Native vegetation removal – data log* (data log) to all responsible authorities. The data log provides a simple way to record approved permit numbers and the associated *Native vegetation removal report* unique identifier. The permit number and report identifier are used to link all data sources together.

The data log can also be used to record established first party offset sites, cases of unauthorised removal of native vegetation and any exempt native vegetation removal that the responsible authority is aware of.

### The Native Vegetation Offset Register

The NVOR includes the NVCR. The NVCR tracks the creation, trade and allocation of native vegetation credits. It also provides allocated credit extracts when permit (or other approval) holders purchase and allocate native vegetation credits to their approval.

Landowners are encouraged to record first party offset sites in the NVOR. The NVOR can allocate offsets to approvals and provide an allocated extract as evidence that an offset has been secured. This information is stored in the NVOR.

# Supporting the implementation of the regulations

This section describes activities completed during the 2019-2020 financial year that supported the implementation of the regulations.

## New documents published

DELWP published the *Procedure to rely on the utility installations exemption in planning schemes – Electricity distributors* that sets out the mandatory requirements electricity distributors must comply with when relying on the *Utility exemption* to remove native vegetation for maintenance and some construction activities. Electricity distributors can rely on the exemption once they have the written agreement from the Secretary to DELWP. The procedure and the list of electricity distributors with written agreement are available at:

<https://www.environment.vic.gov.au/native-vegetation/native-vegetation/exemptions-from-requiring-a-permit>

## Support, training and capacity building

### Native vegetation removal regulations

Two email addresses support the implementation of the native vegetation removal regulations:

- [nativevegetation.support@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.support@delwp.vic.gov.au)
- [nativevegetation.farming@delpw.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.farming@delpw.vic.gov.au)

DELWP responded to 614 emails about the regulations and delivered 6 training or information sessions across the state attended by just under 200 people, including:

- 1 professional development program session run through the Planning Institute of Australia Victoria
- 4 general update sessions for responsible authorities, key stakeholders and community members
- 1 session specifically for consultants

### Native vegetation removal regulations online training

An online training course which provides an overview of the native vegetation removal regulations was published. The course is designed for responsible and referral authorities who assess and decide applications to remove native vegetation under Clause 52.16 or Clause 52.17, planning scheme amendments or other approval mechanisms. Thirty-one people completed the online training during the 2019-2020 financial year.

### EnSym and NVIM removal tools

The NVR team provided 1,396 EnSym reports to proponents to support applications to remove or protect native vegetation. NVIM generated 4444 *Native vegetation removal reports*.

### Vegetation Quality Assessment (VQA)

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

During the competency check participants complete a theory and field-based assessment to demonstrate their ability to complete a habitat hectare assessment to the required standard.

DELWP maintains a support email address [habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au), ran seven group competency checks, and confirmed the competence of 70 native vegetation assessors during the year.

Additionally, due to restrictions regarding COVID19, three one on one competency check sessions were run with individuals who urgently needed accreditation.

### Native vegetation offset sites and credit trading

Three separate email addresses provide support for offset site establishment, management queries and native vegetation credit trading:

- [nativevegetation.offsetregister@delpw.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.offsetregister@delpw.vic.gov.au)
- [nativevegetation.offsetmanagement@delpw.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.offsetmanagement@delpw.vic.gov.au)
- [nativevegetation.offsetpayments@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:nativevegetation.offsetpayments@delwp.vic.gov.au)

DELWP responded to 2009 emails about setting up an offset site, offset site management requirements, and credit enquiries during the year.

A service provider day for brokers and site assessors was held and attended by 54 representatives. The day provided an opportunity to network, ask questions, discuss any issues and share information about updates.

Additionally, an overview of how the Victorian offset market operates was provided to 32 Monash University post graduate students.



## Support for the native vegetation credit market

DELWP has signed agreements with service providers to support the establishment of new offset sites (NVCR site assessors) and the trade of native vegetation credits (NVCR brokers).

NVCR site assessors provide advice to landholders interested in establishing an offset site. They complete a gain scoring assessment and prepare the required security agreement and management plan. Site assessors work with the NVCR to establish the offset site.

NVCR brokers help match offsets, facilitate negotiations and finalise trades between credit owners and permit holders. They fill out the required trade and allocation forms and work with the NVCR to finalise a trade or allocation of native vegetation credits.

Trust for Nature provides its own support to landholders and visits each offset site prior to the establishment of the on-title security agreement. The site visit provides an opportunity to:

- ensure the landowners understand the proposed management obligations
- answer any questions relating to the offset program
- ensure that the proposed offset site meets the criteria for protection under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

Trust for Nature also uses brokers to help landowners trade native vegetation credits.

The native vegetation offset section of the DELWP website was updated and further improvements are planned to support landholders and permit holders. All native vegetation trades and their value are updated monthly and published on the DELWP website ([www.environment.vic.gov.au/native-vegetation/native-vegetation](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au/native-vegetation/native-vegetation)).

## Native Vegetation Credit Register online search tool

This search tool helps permit applicants address the requirements of the Guidelines. The tool is available at <https://nvcr.delwp.vic.gov.au> and is used to search the NVCR for credits that match specified offset requirements.

The search tool generates a downloadable report with the results of the search. The report provides evidence that the required offset is available to purchase from an existing or proposed new offset site. The report also lists relevant brokers who can arrange for trades to secure offsets with the NVCR Registrar. During the 2019-2020 financial year, 6,211 searches were completed by 778 different users.

- 690 users used the tool less than ten times indicating that it is widely used by permit holders and others requiring native vegetation offsets
- 67 users used the tool between 10 and 50 times, likely to be larger developers or consultants assisting clients
- 13 users (likely brokers) used the tool more than 50 times, with one using it 816 times.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of number of searches by users.

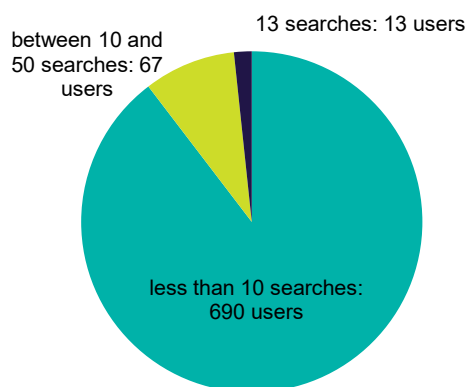


Figure 2. Breakdown of number of searches by users on the Native Credit Register online tool

A survey of NVCR brokers in early 2020 found the tool:

- assisted brokers to find matches for clients
- brought in clients who bring the downloaded report and request a quote for the native vegetation credits
- can show particular credits are available but a credit owner may not wish to trade these in a way that matches the purchaser needs (e.g. trade must be a certain number of units or number of large trees)
- gives purchasers more understanding of their requirements, such as requiring an offset in a certain location, with more clients coming with specific as opposed to general queries.

## Stakeholder engagement

Communication remains important to ensure effective and consistent implementation of the regulations. This is achieved by email and telephone enquiries, training and capacity building and through meetings and newsletters.

### Advisory Group

The native vegetation advisory group met 3 times during the 2019-2020 financial year. 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 includes representatives from:

- Councils – Corangamite Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire, Yarra Ranges Shire
- Municipal Association of Victoria
- Victorian Farmers Federation
- Environmental Farmers Network
- Ecological Consultants Association
- Environmental Justice Australia
- Victorian National Parks Association
- Urban Development Institute of Australia
- Trust for Nature
- Minerals Council of Victoria.

General feedback on the updated regulations remains positive. Discussion focussed on:

- The desire for more information and examples of offset sites to raise awareness and a greater understanding of the opportunity that offset sites offer landholders. DELWP continues to improve the website to address this.
- The application of planning permits in Bushfire Management Overlay areas, this remains confusing for some and stakeholders are encouraged to visit the DELWP planning website for guidance.
- Ongoing concern around the need to continue to improve data collection and reporting to ensure that mapping products can be updated and to assist in the evaluation of the regulation's objective of 'no net loss'.
- The need to continue to focus on illegal removal and enforcement including capacity building, additional training and reporting.

DELWP will continue to address these matters with local councils and other stakeholders.

### Native vegetation newsletter

The native vegetation newsletter (Figure 3) addresses frequently asked questions about implementing the updated regulations. The third newsletter was sent out in November 2019 to over 2000 stakeholders.



Figure 3. The November 2019 native vegetation newsletter

# Approved removal of native vegetation

This section provides information about planning permit applications to remove native vegetation under Clause 52.16 and Clause 52.17 that were approved during the 2019-2020 financial year. The December 2017 update to the regulations included transitional provisions that allowed some permit applications to be considered under the 2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines. This section of the report includes information about permits granted under both the 2013 and 2017 regulations.

## Introduction

Planning permit applications are made under one of 82 planning schemes in Victoria administered by 79 councils and the Minister for Planning. Each planning scheme applies to a Local Government Area (LGA) and is administered by a responsible authority. The Minister is the responsible authority for the Alpine Resorts, French Island and Sandstone Island, and Port of Melbourne planning schemes. Councils are the responsible authorities for the other 79 planning schemes. Responsible authorities (RAs) make decisions on applications and ensure compliance with planning schemes including the regulations.

## Data collection, collation and analysis

The data log was advertised in news articles in *Planning Matters* and the *MAV Planning and Environment Bulletin*. DELWP also contacted all RAs by phone and email to encourage them to record approved permits in the data log.

### Data collation and verification

Native vegetation information (from the *Native vegetation removal report*), decision outcome (from PPARS) and evidence of allocated credit extracts (from the NVCR) were joined to the permit records using the RA approval reference and NRV report ID recorded in the data log and/or SPCMS.

### Responsible authority data

Some records had no useable information (no extent, permit number or *Native vegetation report* ID) and are not included in this report. In addition, 15 records were reported last year and have been excluded. DELWP received data logs with 306 useable records from 40 LGAs, including three where no permits were granted to remove native

vegetation (Towong Shire, Glen Eira City and Melbourne City).

Twelve records included extent information but could not be linked to a *Native vegetation removal report* (these applications were likely progressed under the 2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines). 294 records could be linked to a *Native vegetation removal report* (refer Figure 4). 46 per cent of RA records could not be matched to a record in PPARS, potentially as a result of different ways permit numbers are recorded in each system.

**Important note:** The data presented below is not all approved permits, some RAs were unable to provide information for this year. Information in this section underestimates the extent of native vegetation that was permitted to be removed in the 2019-20 financial year.

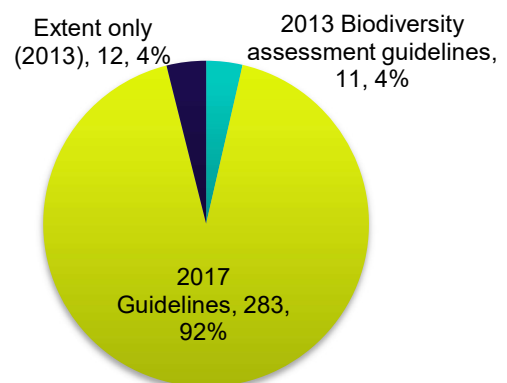


Figure 4. Native vegetation removal records from Council

Table 1 provides a summary of the reported council permit data for native vegetation approved to be removed under the 2013 and 2017 regulations.

Figure 5 shows the assessment pathway breakdown of the 283 permits granted under the 2017 Guidelines. Most of the applications were in the Intermediate Assessment Pathway (47 per cent) or Basic Assessment Pathway (34 per cent) that do not require specialist site assessments. Detailed Assessment Pathway applications made up 19 per cent of all permit approvals reported. Figure 6 shows the extent of removal breakdown for these permits, 87 per cent of all the applications were for the removal of less than 0.5 hectares (refer).

Table 1: Summary of records of reported council permits granted to remove native vegetation under Clause 52.16 and 52.17

Regulations	No. Permits	Total extent (ha)	Large trees	GBEU/GHU actual	Additional GHU equivalent*
Extent only (2013)	12	7.730	n/a		
2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines	11	6.209	n/a	0.685 GBEU	
2017 Guidelines	283	85.886	492	27.933 GHU	6.522
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>99.925</b>	<b>492</b>		

\* This is the amount of species offsets required converted to a 'GHU equivalent' value. The species offsets that were required for the 6.522 GHU equivalent units are detailed in Table 2. These are for four permits, one permit required four species offsets, and the remaining three each required one species offset.

Table 2: Details of species offset requirements for the permits granted to remove native vegetation

Common name	Scientific name	SHU
Coast Saltwort	<i>Salsola tragus subsp. pontica</i>	1.180
Coast Twin-leaf	<i>Zygophyllum billardiarei</i>	4.172
Dandenong Wattle	<i>Acacia stictophylla</i>	0.601
Fairy Tern	<i>Sterna nereis nereis</i>	5.472
Prickly Arrowgrass	<i>Triglochin mucronata</i>	4.612
Tiny Arrowgrass	<i>Triglochin minutissima</i>	1.649
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	4.624

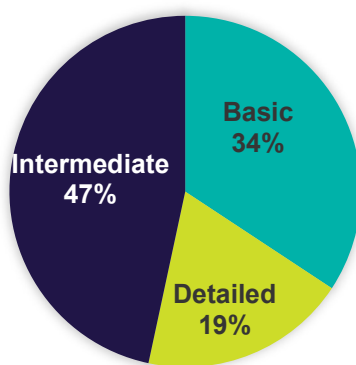


Figure 5: Breakdown of assessment pathways of Native vegetation removal reports

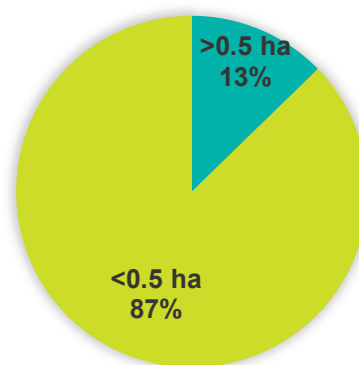


Figure 6: Breakdown of extent of native vegetation proposed for removal in Native vegetation removal reports



### Catchment Management Authority breakdown

The breakdown of the permits granted under the 2017 Guidelines per Catchment Management Authority (CMA) area is shown in Table 3

**Table 3: Breakdown of reported approved permits per CMA**

CMA area	No. permits	Total extent (ha)	Large tree count	GHU Actual	Additional GHU equ.
Corangamite	55	18.062	42	5.099	4.696
Glenelg Hopkins	13	1.255	9	0.530	
Goulburn Broken	32	11.160	169	2.889	
Mallee	1	0.507	0	0.471	
North Central	22	4.342	56	1.802	
North East	11	2.762	34	1.359	
Port Phillip and Westernport	137	40.675	130	13.405	1.826
West Gippsland	10	2.776	22	1.155	
Wimmera	2	4.347	30	1.224	
Corangamite	55	18.062	42	5.099	4.696
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>283</b>	<b>85.886</b>	<b>492</b>	<b>27.933</b>	<b>6.522</b>

### Analysis of all permit approvals reported over the last two financial years

This section reports on all data received from responsible authorities and verified DELWP SPCMS data. DELWP records all referred applications in SPCMS. Where SPCMS data included a permit number these were matched to PPARS and the NVCR. If a match was found in either of these databases, it was regarded as verified. Any verified record that had not already been reported by council was added and this is a summary of all permits:

- 864 permits were reported from 68 LGAs; 707 of these were from the responsible authority and 157 were from DELWP records
- 91 per cent of the records had full data available, four per cent only had extent data,

two per cent had offset requirements only three per cent had no data available at all

- 55 per cent of these permits were matched to an allocated credit extract (ACE) meaning their offsets had been secured. Offsets are secured before removal not at the time of granting a permit
- 83 per cent of permits for under the current regulations, 12 per cent under the 2013 regulations and five per cent were unknown
- 80 per cent of permits were for the removal of less than 0.5 hectares, 16 per cent for more than 0.5 ha and four per cent were unknown.

Table 4 shows the breakdown of permits granted per local council area. Reminder that some local councils were unable to report, and this may not include all permits granted to remove native vegetation during the last two financial years.

**Table 4. Summary of all reported permits from July 2018 to June 2020**

Local government area	No. permits	Extent (ha)	Large trees	GHU /GBEU	ACE
Alpine resorts	7	0.406	23	0.166	5
Alpine Shire	1	0.017	0	0.018	1
Ararat Rural City	11	0.697	8	0.352	6
Ballarat City	3	1.142	3	0.090	3
Banyule City	8	0.903	4	0.219	5
Bass Coast Shire	17	3.092	24	1.007	11
Baw Baw Shire	5	1.307	62	0.540	5
Benalla Rural City	14	12.876	59	2.019	8
Borough of Queenscliffe	4	0.028	0	0.016	3
Brimbank	10	4.549	3	0.733	3
Buloke Shire	7	0.960	0	0.808	4
Campaspe Shire	19	5.829	54	2.250	7
Cardinia Shire	13	3.081	11	1.102	7
Central Goldfields Shire	2	0.367	10	0.290	2
City of Casey	22	2.365	13	0.873	7
Colac Otway Shire	14	4.673	7	2.376	7
Corangamite Shire	12	0.676	2	0.353	8
East Gippsland Shire	16	5.157	17	4.083	9
Frankston City	21	3.318	14	1.407	12
French and Sandstone Islands	2	0.671	0	0.000	
Gannawarra Shire	7	10.199	9	2.738	1
Glenelg Shire	5	2.861	1	1.032	3
Golden Plains Shire	11	54.862	29	0.904	3
Greater Bendigo City	23	13.325	29	6.900	18
Greater Dandenong City	9	1.611	5	0.126	3
Greater Geelong City	49	27.150	32	5.327	30
Greater Shepparton City	19	9.514	55	1.804	6
Hepburn Shire	1	0.108	0	0.104	1
Hindmarsh Shire	3	4.444	30	1.276	3
Hobsons Bay	2	0.618	0	0.011	1
Horsham Rural City	7	0.697	8	0.279	3
Hume City	22	4.039	29	1.471	15
Indigo Shire	8	1.831	21	0.978	5
Kingston City	8	6.728	0	0.161	5
Latrobe City	13	5.707	38	1.756	5

Loddon Shire	6	10.823	15	2.742	5
Macedon Ranges Shire	19	2.752	16	0.905	8
Manningham City	12	1.051	5	0.198	5
Mansfield Shire	13	3.540	42	0.842	9
Maroondah City	6	0.662	5	0.133	4
Melton City	23	19.568	40	5.089	12
Mildura Rural City	8	4.965	72	1.816	7
Mitchell Shire	9	2.872	4	0.562	9
Moira Shire	16	11.970	128	3.129	8
Monash City	1	1.461	0	0.000	
Moorabool Shire	2	0.198	2	0.122	1
Moreland City	1	2.778	0	0.355	1
Mornington Peninsula Shire	40	11.285	73	3.779	18
Mount Alexander Shire	20	8.044	43	4.938	12
Moyne Shire	1	0.052	0	0.000	
Murrindindi Shire	10	2.528	13	1.317	6
Nillumbik Shire	99	27.129	149	8.255	46
Pyrenees Shire	8	2.104	26	0.670	5
Queenscliffe Borough	1	0.040	0	0.019	1
South Gippsland Shire	3	2.019	13	1.014	1
Southern Grampians Shire	5	2.041	7	0.272	2
Strathbogie Shire	9	1.759	9	0.643	7
Surf Coast Shire	24	2.820	29	2.032	14
Swan Hill Rural City	15	3.802	64	1.260	7
Towong Shire	3	1.019	13	0.441	3
Wangaratta Council	11	3.385	17	0.908	6
Warrnambool City	7	0.659	0	0.349	4
Wellington Shire	1	0.666	0	0.488	1
Whittlesea City	11	2.758	28	1.041	8
Wodonga City	11	2.909	28	1.256	6
Wyndham City	1	0.108	0	0.080	1
Yarra Ranges Shire	72	19.102	129	6.924	39
Yarriambiack Shire	1	2.203	0	0.149	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>354.878</b>	<b>1570</b>	<b>95.301</b>	<b>472</b>

# Removal under an exemption

Clauses 52.16 and 52.17 contain tables of exemptions from the requirement to obtain a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. These exemptions:

- allow for the maintenance of areas where native vegetation has previously been removed
- ensure activities can occur for public safety
- clarify certain rights to use land that involves the removal of native vegetation
- allow access to an approval process outside the Victorian planning system that implements the objectives of Victoria's policy for the removal of native vegetation
- avoid duplicative processes where the removal of native vegetation is approved under a separate Act or approval process
- ensure activities for land management and biodiversity improvements can occur
- allow removal of native vegetation where the costs of obtaining a planning permit would outweigh the cost to the environment of the native vegetation being removed.

## Native vegetation removed under exemptions

There is generally no requirement to gain approval for, or to report native vegetation removal under an exemption. Information about native vegetation removed under an exemption is difficult to obtain but the following are reported as exemptions that are most often relied upon:

- Defendable space
- Planted vegetation
- Site area
- Fences.

## Removal under exemption with approval from the Secretary to DELWP

Access to the *Conservation work*, *Crown land*, *Road safety*, *Railways* and *Utility* exemptions is granted by the Secretary to DELWP. Relying on these exemptions requires compliance with any relevant procedure, and the application of the three-step approach of avoid, minimise, offset. The procedures generally require that native vegetation removal to establish new infrastructure, or expand existing infrastructure be endorsed by DELWP and offset in accordance with the Guidelines. This also allows for all offset requirements to be combined and secured by the 30 September each year.

### Removal under the *Road safety* exemption

The purpose of the *Road safety* exemption is to enable road authorities to maintain the safe and efficient function of an existing road without obtaining a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. Road authorities who have access to this exemption are listed on the DELWP website and must comply with the *Procedure to rely on the road safety exemption in planning schemes*.

### Removal under the *Railways* exemption

The purpose of the *Railways* exemption is to enable rail managers to maintain the safe and efficient function of an existing railway or railway access road without obtaining a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. Rail managers who have access to this exemption are listed on the DELWP website and must comply with the *Procedure to rely on the railways exemption in planning schemes*

### Removal under the *Utilities* exemption

The purpose of the *Utilities* exemption is to enable the maintenance and construction of new utilities without obtaining a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. Electricity distributors who have access to this exemption are listed on the DELWP website and must comply with the *Procedure to rely on the utility installations exemption in planning schemes* – Electricity distributors.

Table 5 details the native vegetation removed under these exemptions that was endorsed by DELWP during the 2019-2020 financial year.



Table 5. Records of exempt native vegetation removal endorsed by the DELWP during the 2019 2020 financial year

Description	Count	Extent (ha)	Large trees	GHU	Offsets
<b>Removal under the <i>Road safety</i> exemption</b>					
Ararat Rural City	2	0.354	11	0.194	2
Bass Coast Shire	1	0.392	0	0.206	1
Buloke Shire	1	0.017	0	0.014	
Campaspe Shire Council	1	0.397	3	0.194	1
Colac Otway Shire	1	0.004	0	0.005	1
East Gippsland Shire	3	0.950	5	0.307	
Golden Plains Shire	1	0.140	1	0.038	1
Greater Bendigo City	4	3.083	19	1.632	4
Hepburn Shire	1	0.113	0	0.066	1
Hindmarsh Shire	1	0.123	1	0.110	1
Horsham Rural City	1	0.332	0	0.074	
Loddon Shire	1	0.142	1	0.101	1
Macedon Ranges Shire	1	0.121	1	0.021	1
Melton City (formerly Melton Shire)	1	0.024	0	0.008	1
Mildura Rural City	1	0.027	2	0.009	1
Moorabool Shire	2	0.100	0	0.044	2
Mount Alexander Shire	3	0.349	2	0.125	3
Murrindindi Shire	2	0.754	0	0.631	2
Northern Grampians Shire	2	0.301	1	0.191	1
Pyrenees Shire	1	0.070	1	0.038	1
Pyrenees Shire Council	2	0.429	15	0.214	2
Surf Coast Shire	4	0.242	1	0.078	4
VicRoads / RRV	50	22.253	93	9.327	46
Wellington Shire	1	0.438	12	0.291	1
Yarra Ranges Shire	9	0.835	6	0.417	9
<b>Road safety subtotal</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>31.895</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>14.335</b>	<b>87</b>
<b>Removal under the <i>Railways</i> exemption</b>					
ARTC	5	0.938	0	0.816	5
V/Line	1	0.268	0	0.223	1
<b>Railways subtotal</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.206</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.039</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>33.101</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>15.374</b>	<b>93</b>

\* number of events with offsets secured as at 1 December 2020

DELWP is following up with councils and other authorities which have not provided evidence of secured offsets. Not securing offsets is a breach of

the exemption procedures and may result in access to the exemption being withdrawn.

### Removal under the *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 six conservation work plans to rely on this exemption during the 2019-2020 financial year.

### Removal and counterbalance under the *Crown land exemption*

The *Crown land* exemption provides for native vegetation removal to the minimum extent necessary to manage Crown land by or on behalf of the Secretary to DELWP or Parks Victoria (PV). Removal must be in accordance with the *Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land* (Crown land procedure). The Crown land procedure classifies native vegetation removal as either a maintenance activity or as new removal of native vegetation.

Works associated with bushfire management including planned burn areas, hazardous tree removal, fire control lines and infrastructure associated with a planned burn or bushfire response are maintenance works and not included in this report. Fuel breaks that are not associated with bushfire management and planned burns are recorded under new removal of native vegetation.

The Crown land procedure requires that:

- native vegetation removal must be to the minimum extent necessary
- new removal of native vegetation be recorded and reported in habitat hectares annually
- counterbalancing activities be recorded and reported in habitat hectares annually.

The Crown land procedure also provides for a five yearly detailed assessment to determine if DELWP and PV operations on Crown land achieve as a minimum, no net loss to biodiversity

The habitat hectare loss and gain from managing Crown land is measured using modelled condition scores and modified gain scores.

This is the second time DELWP and PV have reported on native vegetation losses and gains under the *Crown land* exemption.

### *New removal of native vegetation*

The total extent of new removal reported by DELWP and Parks Victoria was 780 hectares, equivalent to a loss of 555 habitat hectares (extent × mapped condition). The main activities reported are shown in Table 6 and Figure 7 shows the location of all activities.

**Table 6. New removal on Crown land by DELWP and Parks Victoria**

Activity	Extent (ha)	Habitat hectares
Roads and Tracks	579	446
Fuel breaks	152	72
Trails	21	17

### *Counterbalancing activities*

The total extent of counterbalancing activities reported by DELWP and Parks Victoria was 1,008,203 hectares, equivalent to a gain of 5007 habitat hectares (extent × modified gain score). Table 7 shows the activities reported, and Figure 8 shows the locations of all activities.

**Table 7. Counterbalancing activities on Crown land by DELWP and Parks Victoria**

Activity	Extent (ha)	Habitat hectares
Native animal control	216,123	1,080
Exotic animal control	692,015	3,460
Revegetation/restoration	10,597	19
Weed control	89,471	447

### *Biodiversity incentive funding activities*

Biodiversity improvement activities which were specifically funded under biodiversity incentive programs have been excluded from counterbalance gains.



Figure 7. Map of new removal on Crown land by DELWP and Parks Victoria (2019/2020)

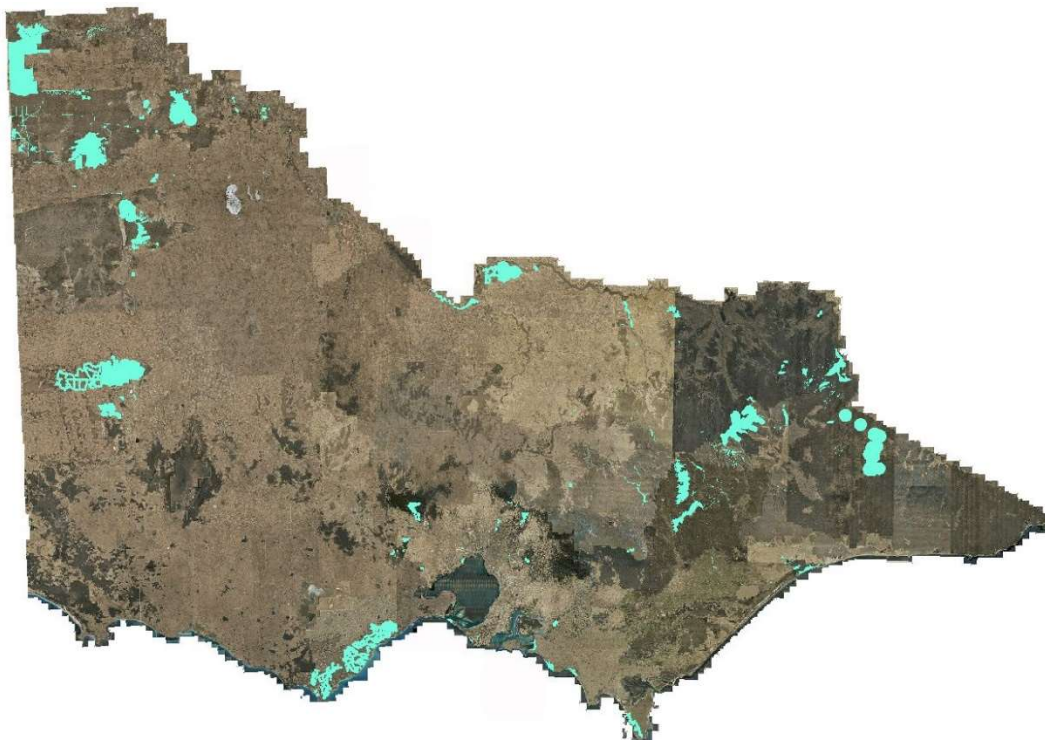


Figure 8. Map of counterbalancing activities on Crown land by DELWP and Parks Victoria (2019/2020)

# Unauthorised native vegetation removal

## Compliance and enforcement strategy

A compliance and enforcement strategy published in December 2017 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 focuses 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.

Unauthorised removal of native vegetation remains an area of concern for many stakeholders.

## DELWP response

The DELWP Senior Executive Team established a whole of department working group to develop an action plan to address illegal removal. Actions were grouped around four themes:

1. Education and awareness of landowners to ensure they are aware of the requirements of the regulations.
  - info sheets have been finalised and provided to DELWP regions for circulation as required
2. Capability and capacity of local councils as the responsible authority for compliance under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.
  - a training course of best practice administration and enforcement of native vegetation removal was developed for delivery to responsible authorities in July 2020
  - an enforcement toolkit for councils in in final draft form
3. Improve knowledge and establish networks to support compliance action.
  - working group continues to meet and identify opportunities within existing networks to share compliance cases

4. Legislative considerations including the effectiveness of enforcement orders and planning infringement notices.

## Illegal removal and compliance actions

There is no statewide system for councils and DELWP to report or record cases of illegal native vegetation removal and any associated enforcement actions.

With limited recording of unauthorised removal, it is not possible to provide statistics or to verify the full extent and impact of unauthorised removal on biodiversity. DELWP will work with RAs to establish a method for recording and reporting known illegal removal cases.

## Examples of enforcement actions

Several councils undertook enforcement action during the 2019-2020 financial year to address cases of illegal native vegetation removal. Some examples include:

- Removal of 30 native trees without a planning permit at the Magistrates court the fine, legal costs and offsets cost approximately \$100,000
- Removal of 5 native trees resulting in a requirement to plant 15 trees as a remedial action
- Removal of an area of native vegetation which was self-reported to council. The company responsible will revegetate with native vegetation
- Removal of over 20 native trees resulting in landowner required to enter into a 173 agreement and replant native vegetation

In addition, there are also a number of cases that are still under investigation where potential enforcement may be taken.

## Enforcement outcomes

Enforcement action generally includes one or a combination of the following:

- Planning Infringement Notices issued with fines and replanting requirements.
- Charges under the *Planning and Environment Act* at the Magistrates court. When found guilty, charges with fines and costs ranging from \$1,000 to \$49,000 are awarded.



- VCAT Enforcement Orders with requirements to remediate in the form of revegetation, monitoring and management of the revegetation area for specified timeframe. This often aligned with additional costs of between \$1,000 and \$7,000.

### **Third-party offsets secured**

During the 2019-2020 financial year, native vegetation credits were allocated to seven cases of illegal removal of native vegetation, across seven local councils and secured 0.585 general habitat units and eight large trees.

Since the December 2013 update to the regulations, when mapped information could be used to determine offset requirements following illegal removal of native vegetation, 30 allocations totalling 2.289 GHU equivalent and nine large trees have been made to compensate for known illegal removal across 18 local councils.

# Native vegetation offset sites

Offset sites are established once a security agreement has been signed by the landowner and a statutory body and the agreement has been recorded on the land title. Each site has its own agreement and over time landholders may choose to register a few sites on their property.

Offset sites established to trade native vegetation credits must be protected by a section 69 agreement under the *Conservation Forests and Lands Act 1987* or an offset covenant under section 3 of the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972* and be registered on the NVCR.

Offset sites used by a landowner to offset their own native vegetation removal should be recorded in the NVOR and can be established with a section 173 agreement under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* administered by local council or one of the above-mentioned agreements.

## Roles and responsibilities

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

- Landowners must implement required management actions and report annually to the relevant statutory body.
- The statutory body must ensure management actions are undertaken in accordance with offset site management plans by reviewing annual reports and conducting on-ground monitoring of offset sites to check compliance with management plans.

The NVCR tracks the establishment, trade and allocation of native vegetation credits. All third-party offsets are registered in the NVCR and are reported in this section of this report. First party offset sites established with a section 173 agreement are not required to be recorded and DELWP does not have full records of these sites. Those that have been recorded are included in this report. Figure 9 shows the breakdown of all offset sites in the NVOR as at 30 June 2020.

## New sites added this financial year

During the 2019-2020 financial year, 26 new offset sites were registered in the NVCR. This added 1,250 hectares, including 14,731 large trees to the area of land protected at offset sites. The new sites were secured as follows:

- 21 new sites on private property protected with a section 69 agreement
- 3 new sites on private property protected with an offset covenant
- 2 Crown land offset sites.

## All sites in the register

On 30 June 2020, the NVOR included 359 offset sites. The sites are in 59 local government areas and across all ten CMA areas and their locations are shown in Figure 10. Table 8 shows what these sites protect, and Table 9 and Figure 11 show the breakdown per CMA.

## What the sites protect:

- 16,702 hectares of land
- 94,958 large trees
- 190,025 new recruits.

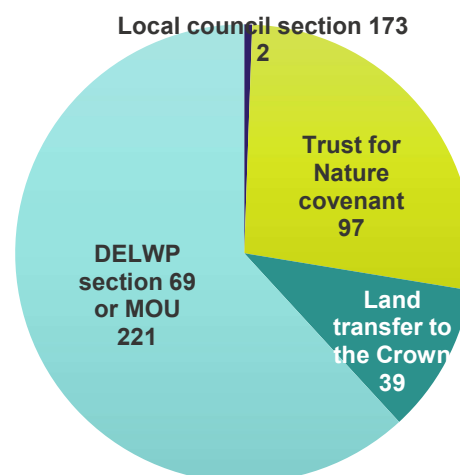


Figure 9. Number of offset sites by security mechanism

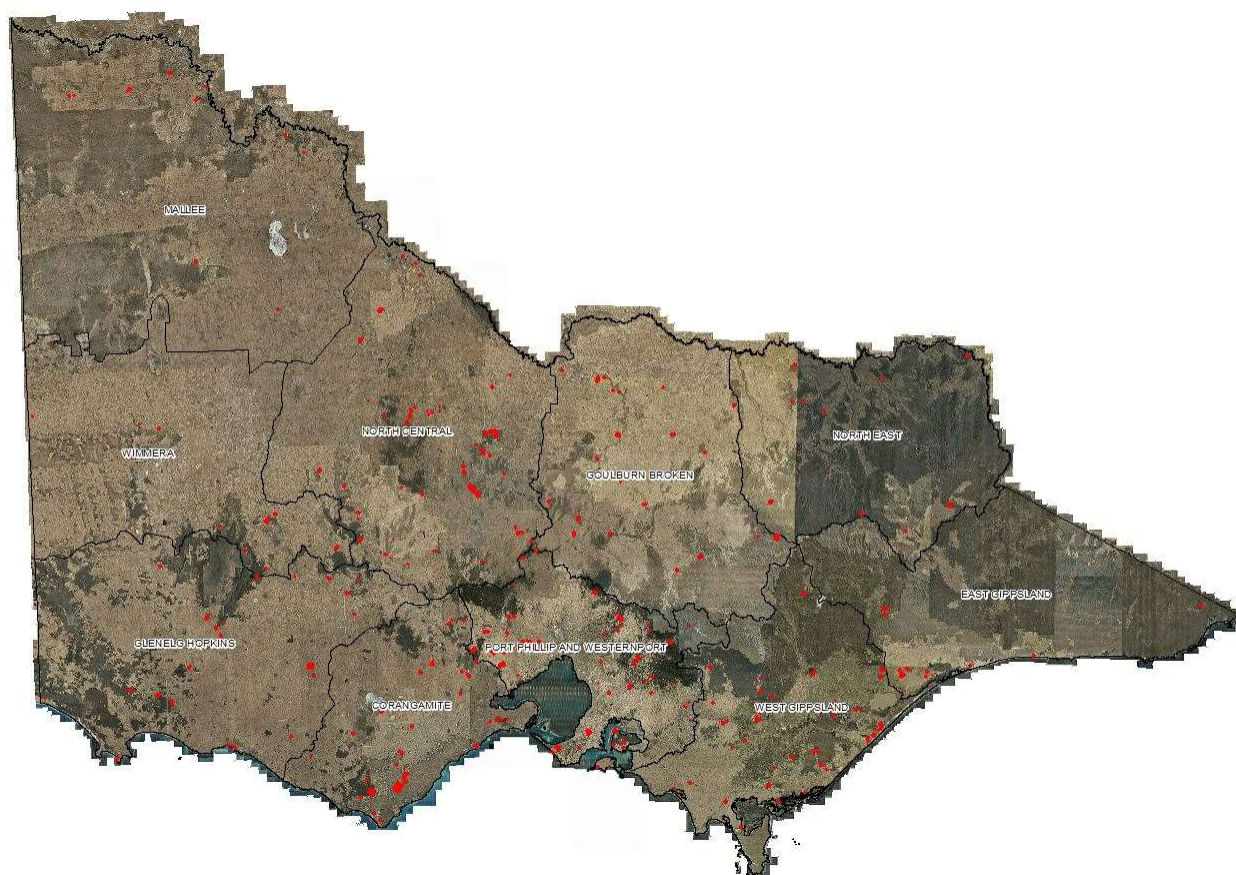


Figure 10. Map of all offset sites registered in the NVCR as at 30 June 2020, with Catchment Management Authority boundaries

Table 8. Land protected at these offset sites

Vegetation type	Extent (ha)	Large trees	New recruits
Patch	16,194	94,310	0
Revegetation	358	90*	190,025
Scattered Tree	150	558	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16,702</b>	<b>94,958</b>	<b>190,025</b>

\* Note: under the Framework revegetation offset sites were established around large scattered trees

Table 9. Breakdown of offset sites per CMA

CMA area	Extent (ha)	Large trees	New recruits
Corangamite	3,046	25,484	1,204
East Gippsland	884	1,754	0
Goulburn Broken	1,927	8,129	44,993
Glenelg Hopkins	1,518	6,653	18,145
Mallee	325	8,295	0
North Central	3,271	8,864	56,261
North East	722	4,725	0
Port Philip and Westernport	2,519	15,590	17,886
Wimmera	411	688	0
West Gippsland	2,077	14,776	51,536
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16,702</b>	<b>94,958</b>	<b>190,025</b>

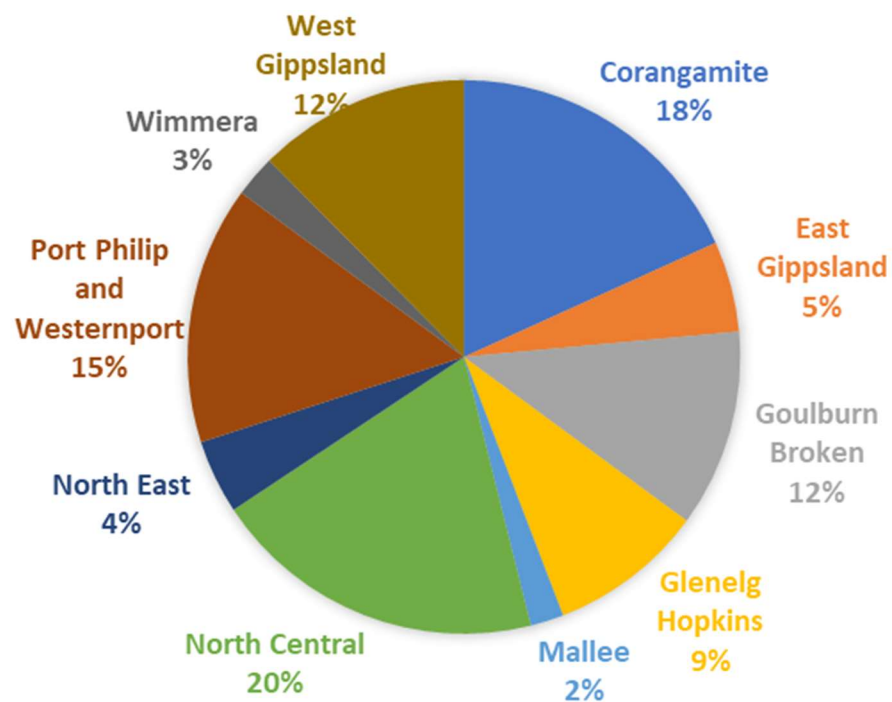


Figure 11. Percentage breakdown of extent of offset sites per CMA area



## Offset site monitoring and reporting

### The statutory body

DELWP is responsible for the administration, reporting, monitoring and compliance of offset sites established under section 69 of the *Conservation Forest and Lands Act 1987*. At the end of the 2019-2020 financial year DELWP was responsible for 223 offset sites located on 186 properties across Victoria. These are owned or managed by 139 entities.

Thirty-eight land transfer offset sites are not monitored by DELWP. They were transferred to the Crown for incorporation into the Crown land conservation reserve system to be managed by Parks Victoria in line with established service agreements. The gain available from these sites is limited to security gain from this increased protection.

Trust for Nature is responsible for the administration, reporting, monitoring and compliance of all offset sites established under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*. Trust for Nature currently monitor compliance at 97 offset sites located on 78 private properties across Victoria.

DELWP and Trust for Nature use two processes to check compliance with agreements:

- reviewing annual reports submitted by landowners
- monitoring visits.

### Reporting by landholders

Reporting by landholders helps confirm that management actions are implemented. Landowners must provide annual reports on the management commitments and actions they have undertaken each year. DELWP and Trust for Nature 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 their 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

Site monitoring 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 monitoring, 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.

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.

Trust for Nature has a standard approach to monitoring offset sites once they have been established. Every offset site is visited at least four times over the 10-year active management period. The frequency of visits can be increased when a compliance issue is identified or if a landowner needs some additional guidance. The visits occur at the end of year one, four, seven and nine. Thereafter sites are monitored in line with the Trust's standard conservation covenant stewardship program, approximately once every five years.

### Trust for Nature compliance results

Trust for Nature reviewed 49 annual reports and all were compliant. They also conducted 17 monitoring visits. Three of these were year one visits, one of these was a year four visit and 13 were year seven visits. The visits confirmed that the offset sites were meeting their obligations under the offset management plan and covenant.

### DELWP compliance results

179 annual reports were reviewed during the 2019-2020 financial year. Some of the annual reports covered multiple sites on single properties. The results were as follows:

- 65 per cent were compliant
- 35 per cent have some compliance issue.

The common reasons for non-compliance were:

- lack of annual report submission: 65 %
- lack of or insufficient weed control: 16%
- lack of fencing to standard: 13%
- lack of or insufficient pest animal control: 13%

- lack of achieving planting standard: 8%.

Many of the offset sites were non-compliant with more than one matter. For example, one site did not have adequate fencing, pest animal or weed control and had not reported. This site is counted three times in the percentages above.

A dedicated monitoring officer was appointed in February 2020 and completed 68 monitoring visits by 30 June 2020. In general, the sites were compliant with nine requiring issues to be resolved (erosion, illegal access by motorbikes and illegal log removal). Monitoring visits have been well received by landholders and the department has found the exercise valuable and insightful.

The monitoring has shown that landowners can easily complete actions such as fencing and woody weed control, but that herbaceous weed control and in some cases pest control is more challenging and requires extensive follow up work to achieve success.



**Figure 12: *Pimelea spinescens* Spiny Rice flower near Stawell (Photo credit: Richard Boon)**

Determining progress with controlling or eliminating herbaceous weeds is one of the biggest challenges. This is because it requires comparisons of estimated cover at the time of monitoring with cover estimates done by landowners included in annual reporting and the original cover done by site assessors at the time of the site assessment. Comparisons are difficult because cover is determined by factors including the season, recent growing conditions, observers' ability to find and identify weeds and differences in the way's individuals estimate cover. This is even

harder when sites have many zones, the vegetation is dense, or the topography is difficult. The NVR team is working on ways to try and improve how cover is estimated for annual reporting, to assist with our assessments.

### Compliance action

DELWP and Trust for Nature 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.

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.

### Trust for Nature

Trust for Nature withheld one payment due to a third-party breach of the offset covenant. This breach was caused by damage during recent fire suppression activities and Trust for Nature is currently working with the landowner to address this. Trust for Nature is also withholding payments to the landholders of 21 sites who had not reported within required timeframes and is engaging with the individual landowners to overcome any barriers to reporting and management. Some of these delays were due to travel restrictions relating to COVID-19.

### DELWP

DELWP withheld payment to 32 landholders during the year who had not reported within required timeframes, whose reports were inadequate, or who had not completed the management works to the specified standards. DELWP continues to work with landholders to achieve compliance, 14 of these have been addressed during the year and payments made, 18 are still to be resolved.

At the end of the financial year credits were frozen on 11 properties. A further six properties had their credits frozen during the year, but the non-compliance issue was resolved, and they can trade again. Lack of reporting remains the most common reason for compliance action. DELWP continues to work with all landowners with outstanding issues.



### Offset site compliance in northwest Victoria

An offset site was monitored after several years of not submitting annual reports had resulted in payments being halted and credits frozen. A poor report that lacked detail and evidence that supplementary planting targets were being met was eventually submitted. The monitoring found that:

- the planting shortfall was less than originally thought
- browsing pressure resulted in the use of expensive measures to protect plantings see Figure 13, resulting in insufficient funds to complete the planting
- completed plantings were very successful
- good work had been done to control woody weeds, erect fences and remove rubbish.

Monitoring provided an opportunity to connect face to face, build a relationship and see the issues firsthand, allowing for practical solutions to be found.

As substantial progress had been made with planting, DELWP found the landowner compliant and made a payment to enable further progress with planting and other works. The term of active management has also been extended to account for the years of no reporting and no evidence of management to ensure that all management commitments can be met.



Figure 13: protection fencing around each planted tree



Figure 14. *Teucrium racemososum* Grey Germander near Shepparton (Photo credit: Richard Boon)

## Observations after 10-years of management

On 30 June 2020, 64 offset sites had reached or passed their 10-year active management period:

- 22 are land transfers to the Crown, adding 4,591 hectares with 33,130 large trees to the conservation reserve system
- 42 are sites on private properties and protect 996 hectares with 4,237 large trees and 39,715 new recruits from revegetation.

DELWP completed a pilot review at five of these private offset sites where good baseline data was available. The aim of the review was to evaluate if predicted maintenance and improvement gains were achieved and could be observed or quantified.

### Method

A pilot review was conducted in autumn 2020. Landowners were interviewed and general observations about the following were noted; recruitment, supplementary planting success, effect of biomass management in grasslands, signs of pest animals, fencing/exclusion of stock and unauthorised access. The following site data was collected and compared to the baseline data from when the site was established:

- Percentage cover of each lifeform present
- Percentage of tree canopy cover
- Percentage of organic litter cover
- Percentage of weeds cover and presence of high threat weeds
- Number of species present in each lifeform category as well as in the tree canopy
- Total list of weed species present.

### Results

In summary, the following observations are made:

- Maintenance gain for large trees was achieved
- Maintenance gain for tree canopy cover was achieved but improvement gain required supplementary planting to occur
- Maintenance gain for understorey was achieved but improvement gain was only

partially achieved unless supplementary planting occurred

- In general, the amount of species diversity remained unchanged (except when supplementary planting had taken place) which was successful in reinstating understorey shrubs
- Weed cover generally remained the same but improved (decreased) in 25 per cent of the zones monitored
- The weed species present did change, and high threat perennial and woody weeds were largely eliminated. Annual grassy and herbaceous weeds are a concern.
- There was little evidence of pest animals, however in some locations kangaroos were present in high numbers resulting in limited recruitment and impacts on native grasses.

### Landowners reported:

- An overall good experience in the program, although some frustration with inability to introduce new on-site management actions not included in approved management plans
- Many benefits from DELWP monitoring including opportunity to identify new threats including weeds, discuss other management options and share experience and learnings
- An understanding of their ongoing obligations to maintain vegetation condition (however one landholder had not completed any management actions for two years since the 10-year period was reached.

### Learnings

It is important that offset sites are monitored regularly by landholders and at least three times by DELWP during the 10-year active management plan period. This ensures new threats (weeds, unauthorised access, pest animals etc) are identified as they emerge, and management can be adapted to address them.

Monitoring should also aim to evaluate the success of management and inform required updates to the site management plan to ensure that gains are realised. For example, there may

be a need for biomass management in grassland or supplementary planting where recruitment does not progress in woodlands.



# Credit trading and allocation

Offset sites registered in the NVCR can trade their gain as native vegetation credits to third parties. The value of trades completed during the 2019-2020 financial year was just under \$28.4 million, about \$8.4 million more than the previous year.

## Allocated Credit Extracts

Native vegetation allocations must match approval conditions and may be for habitat hectares, biodiversity equivalence units or habitat units. For ease of reading, the general habitat unit (GHU) equivalent value of all allocations is included in this section.

The NVCR completed 754 allocations to 686 different approvals to remove native vegetation during the year. Seventy-nine per cent were under the 2017 Guidelines, 17 per cent were under the 2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines, and four

per cent were under the Native Vegetation Management Framework (2003).

Most allocations were for planning permits (91.4 per cent) or planning scheme amendments (8.1 per cent). Two allocations were for mining approvals under the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*, one was for an approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and one for an approval under the *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*.

The breakdown of all the allocations is shown in Tables 10, 11 and 12.

The species offset allocations in Table 10 were for six different approvals. Two permits required four species offsets, one required two and the rest each had one species offset requirement.

**Table 10. Breakdown of native vegetation credit allocations for approvals under the 2017 Guidelines.**

2017 Guidelines	Number	GHU	Large trees
<b>General offsets</b>			
• Planning permit	555	62.526	1,095
• Planning permit and EPBC Act	1	2.573	
• Planning Scheme Amendment	34	30.069	799
• EPBC Act	1	0.819	
• Mining	1	0.240	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>592</b>	<b>96.227</b>	<b>1,905</b>
<b>Species offsets</b>		<b>GHU equivalent</b>	
• Planning permit	5	13.803	1
• Planning Scheme Amendment	2	6.472	81
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20.276</b>	<b>82</b>
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>		<b>SHU</b>
Coast Twin-leaf	<i>Zygophyllum billardierei</i>		4.172
Fairy Tern	<i>Sterna nereis nereis</i>		5.472
Grey-headed Flying-fox	<i>Pteropus poliocephalus</i>		3.761
Heath Spear-grass	<i>Austrostipa exilis</i>		8.152
Lilac Bitter-cress	<i>Cardamine lilacina s.s.</i>		0.031
Prickly Arrowgrass	<i>Triglochin mucronata</i>		4.171
Rock Grevillea	<i>Grevillea willisii</i>		0.300
Small Golden Moths	<i>Diuris basaltica</i>		8.157
Squirrel Glider	<i>Petaurus norfolcensis</i>		1.847
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		4.624
Woolly Billy-buttons	<i>Craspedia maxgrayi s.s.</i>		0.051

The 2013 specific offset allocations detailed in Table 11 were for 11 different approvals. One permit required 19 different specific offsets, one required three, one required two and the rest each had one.

**Table 11. Breakdown of native vegetation credit allocations for approvals under the 2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines.**

2013 Biodiversity assessment guidelines	Number	GHU equivalent	GBEU
<b>General offsets</b>			
• Marine and Coastal Management Act	1	1.009	0.190
• Planning permit	101	13.985	9.401
• Planning Scheme Amendment	12	15.821	4.681
<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>30.814</b>	<b>14.273</b>
<b>Specific offsets</b>		<b>GHU equivalent</b>	<b>GBEU equivalent</b>
• Planning permit	8	41.679	33.271
• Planning Scheme Amendment	5	5.903	2.164
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>47.582</b>	<b>35.435</b>
<b>Common name</b>	<b>Scientific name</b>	<b>SBEU</b>	
Alpine Bog Skink	<i>Pseudemoia cryodroma</i>	20.850	
Alpine Marsh-marigold	<i>Psychrophila introloba</i>	9.715	
Alpine Stackhousia	<i>Stackhousia pulvinaris</i>	1.218	
Broad-leaf Flower-rush	<i>Carpha nivicola</i>	7.118	
Carpet Sedge	<i>Carex jackiana</i>	16.088	
Dandenong Wattle	<i>Acacia stictophylla</i>	0.132	
Dark Wire-grass	<i>Aristida calycina</i> var. <i>calycina</i>	0.406	
Diosma Rice-flower	<i>Pimelea flava</i> subsp. <i>dichotoma</i>	0.332	
Dwarf Bottlebrush	<i>Callistemon subulatus</i>	0.858	
Felted Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus muelleri</i>	2.122	
flatworm	<i>Spathula tryssa</i>	0.796	
Fog Club-sedge	<i>Isolepis montivaga</i>	7.598	
Green Billy-buttons	<i>Craspedia aurantia</i> var. <i>jamesii</i>	7.783	
Gunn's Alpine Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus gunnianus</i>	9.464	
Mossy Knawel	<i>Scleranthus singuliflorus</i>	6.266	
Mountain Aciphyll	<i>Aciphylla simplicifolia</i>	7.896	
Mountain Daisy	<i>Brachyscome foliosa</i>	9.094	
Mountain Wallaby-grass	<i>Rytidosperma oreophilum</i>	6.665	
Purple Blown-grass	<i>Lachnagrostis punicea</i> subsp. <i>punicea</i>	0.039	
Red-chested Button-quail	<i>Turnix pyrrhothorax</i>	3.900	
Rough-barked Apple	<i>Angophora floribunda</i>	3.240	
Rye Beetle-grass	<i>Tripogon loliiformis</i>	0.037	
Snow Aciphyll	<i>Aciphylla glacialis</i>	20.765	
Sticky Fleabane	<i>Pappochroma nitidum</i>	5.653	
Striped Legless Lizard	<i>Delma impar</i>	11.170	
Tussock Woodrush	<i>Luzula alpestris</i>	10.448	
Veined Plantain	<i>Plantago alpestris</i>	9.102	
Whiteroot	<i>Lobelia purpurascens</i>	5.933	
Wine-lipped Spider-orchid	<i>Caladenia oenochila</i>	1.323	

**Table 12. Breakdown of native vegetation credit allocations for approvals under the Framework.**

<b>Framework</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>GHU equivalent</b>	<b>HHa</b>	<b>VLOT</b>	<b>LOT</b>	<b>Recruits</b>
• Planning permit	18	2.564	2.84	14	191	755
• Planning permit and EPBC Act	1	9.088	10.89			
• Planning Scheme Amendment	8	11.915	14.98		4	
• Mining	1	4.049	4.10			
<b>Total Framework allocations (4%)</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>27.616</b>	<b>32.81</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>755</b>

# Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
ACE	Allocated Credit Extract
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
EnSym	Environmental Systems Modelling Platform
EVC	Ecological Vegetation Type
GBEU	General Biodiversity Equivalence Units
GHU	General Habitat Units
LGA	Local Government Area
NVCR	Native Vegetation Credit Register
NVIM	Native Vegetation Information Management System
NVOR	Native Vegetation Offset Register
PPARS	Planning Permit Activity Reporting System
PV	Parks Victoria
RA	Responsible Authority
SBEU	Specific Biodiversity Equivalence Units
SHU	Species Habitat Units
SPCMS	Statutory Planning Case Management System
VQA	Vegetation Quality Assessment

