

Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation



(Version 1.1)



Energy,
Environment
and Climate Action

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.

DEECA is committed to genuinely partnering with Victorian Traditional Owners and Victoria's Aboriginal community to progress their aspirations.



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Version control

Version	Release date	Updates
1.0	December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original version
1.1	August 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Updated departmental names – Updated Victoria Planning Provision references – Made minor section realignments – Introduced the term Patch tree to replace tree within a patch – Replaced accredited assessor with certified assessor – Replaced the term rare and threatened species with threatened species to align with the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 Threatened list. • Section 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Included reference to all previous versions of the native vegetation removal regulations – Updated references to new guidance material, and the <i>Marine and Coastal Act 2018</i> • Section 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Clarified that past removal includes applications being assessed simultaneously on the same property by the same applicant. – Updated Mapped wetlands to align with current policy outlined in Native Vegetation Regulations Newsletter 3 (November 2019) – Removed the policy setting that all Mallee and Eucalypt trees from the following ecological vegetation classes are considered large: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Lowan Sands Mallee ◦ Heathy Mallee ◦ Loamy Sands Mallee ◦ Red Swale Mallee – Aligned the policy with NVR Map that all non-site assessed scattered trees are given a condition of 0.200 – Clarified that identified landscape values are landscape values which have been identified in local planning schemes • Section 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Clarified that an offset requirement can be secured in any, or a combination of Catchment Management Authorities (CMA) when impact occurs across multiple CMAs. – Clarified that large tree attributes must be secured within the same CMA or species habitat as they were removed from. • Section 6 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A Native vegetation removal report (NVR) must be submitted to satisfy application requirement 1. • Section 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Realigned this section to better distinguish the different requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Freehold land offset sites ◦ Freehold land transferred to the Crown offset sites ◦ Existing Crown land offset sites

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1. Introduction

The *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation (Guidelines)* are incorporated into the Victoria Planning Provisions and all planning schemes in Victoria.

The Guidelines are the successor to the two previous versions of the native vegetation removal regulations:

- *Victoria's native vegetation management : A Framework For Action (Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2002)*
- *Permitted clearing of native vegetation – Biodiversity assessment guidelines.* (Department of Environment and Primary Industries – September 2013)

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

1.1 Purpose, application and scope of the Guidelines within planning schemes

The purpose of the Guidelines is to set out, and describe, the application of Victoria's statewide policy in relation to assessing and compensating for the removal of native vegetation. This includes:

- the assessment of impacts from removing native vegetation on biodiversity and other values described in **section 3**
- how offsets are calculated and established to compensate for the loss in biodiversity value from the removal of native vegetation.

The Guidelines are an incorporated document at Clause 72.04 of all planning schemes in Victoria. This means it:

- must be considered by planning authorities when preparing a planning scheme amendment, as relevant
- must be considered by responsible authorities when making decisions in relation to development plans, as appropriate
- must be applied when a permit is required under Clauses 52.16 or 52.17 of planning schemes
- must be applied when developing a Native Vegetation Precinct Plan (NVPP)
- may be considered in other planning decisions to meet statewide objectives for native vegetation protection and management.

It is not the intention of the Guidelines to address the specific requirements of overlays that require a permit to remove native vegetation. The Guidelines must not be applied in relation to the requirements and decision guidelines of these overlays, unless the overlay specifically states otherwise.

1.2 Application of the Guidelines for other approval processes

The Guidelines should be applied or considered, as appropriate, in decision making under approval processes for the removal of native vegetation that fall outside planning schemes. For example, approval processes that allow exemptions from requiring a planning permit to remove native vegetation to be relied on, or approvals under the *Pipelines Act 2005* or the *Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990*.



1.3 Other legislation

In addition to the requirements set out in the Guidelines other legislation may apply when native vegetation is removed. This could include:

- *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*
- *Marine and Coastal Act 2018*
- *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Commonwealth).

1.4 Supporting information

The Guidelines are supported by and should be read in conjunction with the following (or their successor):

- *Assessor's handbook – Applications to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation* (Assessor's handbook), that assists decision makers assess an application to remove native vegetation.
- *Native vegetation removal regulations – Basic and Intermediate pathway application guidance*, that helps applicants in the Basic and Intermediate assessment pathways prepare an application to remove native vegetation.

- *Native vegetation removal regulations – Detailed pathway application guidance*, that helps applicants in the Detailed assessment pathway prepare an application to remove native vegetation.
- *Biodiversity information explanatory document – Measuring value when removing or offsetting native vegetation*, that describes the systems, tools and maps referenced in the Guidelines.
- DEECA manuals, systems, tools and maps that support the implementation of the Guidelines.
- *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2* that describes how gain is calculated, and specifies minimum management commitments and standards for an offset site.

These resources are available on the DEECA website <https://www.environment.vic.gov.au>

2. Native vegetation and Victoria's planning system

The Victorian planning system has a variety of policies and provisions for the management and protection of native vegetation.

This section of the Guidelines describes:

- the main policies and provisions of Victoria's planning system that apply, or can apply, to the management and protection of native vegetation
- how those policies and provisions operate
- the role of the Guidelines in relation to those policies and provisions.

2.1 Planning Policy Framework

The Planning Policy Framework (PPF) outlines Victoria's policy objectives and strategies relating to the protection and management of native vegetation. Specifically, the following clauses give policy context and inform decision making:

- 12.01 *Biodiversity*
- 12.05 *Significant environment and landscapes*
- 13.04 *Soil degradation*
- 13.02 *Bushfire*
- 14.02 *Water*
- 15.03 *Heritage*.

Clause 12.01 *Biodiversity* provides specific direction regarding the protection and management of biodiversity and native vegetation in Victoria.

A key strategy identified in Clause 12.01 is to ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation. This is achieved through the following three-step approach, in accordance with the Guidelines:

1. Avoid the removal of native vegetation.
2. Minimise impacts from the removal of native vegetation that cannot be avoided.
3. Provide an offset to compensate for the biodiversity impact from the removal of native vegetation.

The three-step approach is explained in more detail in **section 4**.

Clause 12.01 references the Guidelines and the following key policy documents which planning and responsible authorities must consider as appropriate:

- *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, 2017).
- Any applicable biodiversity strategies, including the relevant Regional Catchment Strategy prepared under Part 4 of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.
- Statewide biodiversity information maintained by DEECA.

2.2 Strategic planning for native vegetation protection and management

The strategic planning process is the most effective planning mechanism to protect and manage native vegetation and to achieve the objectives of the PPF.

Considering how native vegetation will be protected and managed through strategic planning:

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

The methods and approaches outlined in the Guidelines should be used to inform strategic planning processes and the application of appropriate planning controls to ensure Victoria's native vegetation is well managed and protected.

2.3 Particular Provisions

The requirement for a planning permit to remove native vegetation is detailed in the following two Particular Provisions:

1. Clause 52.16 *Native vegetation precinct plan*
2. Clause 52.17 *Native vegetation*.

In all instances where a planning permit is required under either clause, the Guidelines and the three-step approach outlined in **section 4** must be applied.

Other Particular Provisions where native vegetation removal must be to the satisfaction of the Secretary to DEECA, the nominated sections of the Guidelines, as specified in that provision, must be applied.

2.3.1 Clause 52.16 *Native vegetation precinct plan*

This clause provides the ability for a Native vegetation precinct plan (NVPP) to be prepared, incorporated into the relevant planning scheme, and listed in the schedule to this clause. The clause outlines:

- what a NVPP is, and directs that the NVPP be developed in accordance with the Guidelines, and includes the information set out in **section 10** of the Guidelines
- the requirements for a permit to remove native vegetation if a NVPP corresponding to that land is incorporated into the scheme and listed in the schedule to this clause.

A permit is not required to remove native vegetation if:

- the removal is in accordance with an incorporated NVPP and any conditions or specified requirements are met
- the table of exemptions to this clause specifically states that a permit is not required, unless the NVPP specifies otherwise.

Note that there are further exemptions from requiring a permit to remove native vegetation in Clause 52.12 *Bushfire protection: exemptions*.

2.3.2 Clause 52.17 *Native vegetation*

This clause outlines the requirement for a permit to remove native vegetation, including dead native vegetation.

A permit is not required to remove native vegetation if:

- the table of exemptions to this clause specifically states that a permit is not required
- it is native vegetation or an area specified in the schedule to the clause
- a NVPP corresponding to the land is incorporated into the relevant planning scheme.

This clause also outlines:

- the standard permit conditions relating to permits issued in accordance with a Property Vegetation Plan (PVP)
- the need for a permit to be issued with conditions specifying the offset requirements and the timing to secure the offset.

Note that there are further exemptions from requiring a permit to remove native vegetation in Clause 52.12 *Bushfire protection: exemptions*.

2.3.3 Consequential removal of native vegetation

Clause 65 *Decision guidelines* provides a range of standardised decision guidelines that a responsible authority must consider as appropriate before deciding on a permit application or the approval of a plan. Contained within Clause 65.01 are the following native vegetation specific decision guidelines:

- *The extent and character of native vegetation and the likelihood of its destruction.*
- *Whether native vegetation is to be or can be protected, planted or allowed to regenerate.*

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

This can include, but is not limited to, the consideration of an application for a permit to subdivide land that will enable native vegetation to be removed in the future without requiring a permit under Clause 52.16 or Clause 52.17.

2.4 Compliance and enforcement

Adherence to the practices and procedures outlined in the Guidelines will help protect native vegetation. This ensures proposed removal of native vegetation is appropriately assessed, opportunities to avoid and minimise removal are considered, and appropriate offsets are secured.

Landowners and occupiers have a responsibility to comply with the requirements and conditions of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, planning schemes, approved planning permits and agreements made under section 173 of the Act.

Failure to comply with the requirements and conditions will result in appropriate compliance action being taken by responsible authorities and public entities.

3. Native vegetation information

This section sets out:

- the definition of native vegetation, patches, patch trees and scattered trees
- the biodiversity values of native vegetation used in the Guidelines, and the information used to measure these
- the other values of native vegetation used in the Guidelines.

3.1 Definition of native vegetation

Native vegetation is defined in planning schemes as 'plants that are indigenous to Victoria, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses'¹.

The Guidelines further classify native vegetation as a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree. These classifications assist in measuring the value of native vegetation and assessing its removal.

Patch

A patch of native vegetation is:

- an area of vegetation where at least 25 per cent of the total perennial² understorey plant cover³ is native, or
- any area with three or more native canopy trees⁴ where the drip line⁵ of each tree touches the drip line of at least one other tree, forming a continuous canopy, or
- any mapped wetland included in the *Current wetlands map*, available in DEECA's NVR Map.

Patch tree

A patch tree is:

- a native canopy tree⁴ within a patch.

Scattered tree

A scattered tree is:

- a native canopy tree⁴ that does not form part of a patch.

The assessment requirements for native vegetation removal that does not meet the definition of a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree are addressed in **section 5.1**.

3.2 Biodiversity value of native vegetation

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

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

1 Victoria Planning Provision – Clause 73-01 (General terms).

2 Plant species that have an annual growth form, or typically have significant seasonal fluctuations in foliage cover (to the extent it would influence whether an area is/is not considered a patch on a seasonal basis) are not included in the perennial understorey plant cover estimate for the purpose of defining a patch.

3 Plant cover is the proportion of the ground that is shaded by vegetation foliage when lit from directly above. Areas that include non-vascular vegetation (such as mosses and lichens) but otherwise support no native vascular vegetation are not considered to be a patch for the purposes of the Guidelines. However, when non-vascular vegetation is present with vascular vegetation, it does contribute to cover when determining the percentage of perennial understorey plant cover.

4 A native canopy tree is a mature tree (that is, it is able to flower) that is greater than 3 m in height and is normally found in the upper layer of the relevant vegetation type.

5 The drip line is the outermost boundary of a tree canopy (leaves and/or branches) where the water drips on to the ground.

Victoria's diverse and unique mix of plants, animals, soils, seas and waterways function together as ecosystems, which in turn produce some of humans' most basic needs – provisions such as clean air and water, productive soils, natural pest control, pollination, flood mitigation and carbon sequestration. Victoria's ecosystems provide us with food, raw materials for production (such as timber, pastures and fertilisers), genetic resources, and pharmaceuticals, while also contributing to waste decomposition and detoxification.

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

Understanding the biodiversity value of native vegetation is important to inform decisions about:

- where to focus efforts to avoid and minimise impacts from the removal of native vegetation
- whether native vegetation removal should be approved
- what offsets are required if native vegetation removal is approved.

This section describes the biodiversity values of native vegetation that need to be considered when the Guidelines are applied. It also describes the information used to measure the biodiversity value of native vegetation.

There are two components to this information:

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

Spatial data products are used to represent site-based and landscape scale information across Victoria. These products can be viewed using DEECA systems and tools available on the DEECA website. Spatial data products will be updated periodically. The version available in DEECA's NVR Map is used when applying the Guidelines.

Further information is included in *Biodiversity information explanatory document – Measuring value when removing or offsetting native vegetation*, the Assessor's handbook and the application guidance documents.

3.2.1 Site-based information

Site-based information can be measured or observed at a site, it can also be presented in maps and models. Site-based information includes:

- extent of native vegetation
- Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)
- large trees
- native vegetation condition
- sensitive wetlands and coastal areas.

EXTENT OF NATIVE VEGETATION

The extent of native vegetation is the area of land covered by a patch and/or a scattered tree. Extent is measured in hectares. Extent is used when determining the assessment pathway for an application to remove native vegetation (**section 6**) and when calculating biodiversity losses and gains (**section 5** and **9.5**).

Extent of native vegetation = extent of patches (ha) + extent of scattered trees (ha)

Patch

The extent of a patch is the area of the patch in hectares, which must include the extent of understorey vegetation (for example native grasses) and extends around the drip line of any overhanging patch trees within the patch.

Scattered tree

The extent of a scattered tree depends on whether the scattered tree is a small or large tree. How large trees are defined is set out below. All scattered trees that are not large trees are small scattered trees.

The extent of a small scattered tree is the area of a circle with a 10 m radius, with the trunk at the centre. The extent of a large scattered tree is the area of a circle with a 15 m radius, with the trunk at the centre.

Past native vegetation removal

When determining the assessment pathway of an application for the removal of native vegetation, extent of native vegetation also includes past native vegetation removal. Past removal includes the extent of native vegetation currently being assessed for another approval, already approved to be removed, or that was removed without the required approvals, on the same property or on contiguous land in the same ownership as the applicant, in the five-year period before the application for a permit is lodged.

Assumed losses and consequential removal

When calculating extent, all areas of native vegetation that will be impacted by the proposed use or development are included, regardless of whether the native vegetation will be directly removed. This includes assumed losses, and consequential removal of native vegetation described in **section 2.3.3**.

The Assessor's handbook describes assumed loss and consequential removal in more detail.

Mapped Wetlands

The Current Wetlands map shows the spatial coverage of Mapped Wetlands in Victoria. Mapped Wetlands are included when measuring the extent of native vegetation to be removed. The modelled condition score is used for Mapped Wetlands unless a site assessment, in accordance with **section 6.5**, is carried out when the wetland has been inundated or waterlogged for at least one month.

Consideration of Mapped Wetlands ensures that applications account for wetland-associated native vegetation at periodically inundated wetlands, where it may be temporarily undetectable or degraded at the time of assessment. These ephemeral wetlands often dry out seasonally by late summer and can be dry for many years in periods of prolonged drought.

During dry periods, wetland plant species may not be easy to detect as they may be present in a form that is not expressed above ground (for example, as rhizomes or corms). Most wetland plant species are adapted to dry periods and have a strategy to persist between periods of inundation. When inundated, typically in winter and spring for seasonal wetlands, propagule dormancy breaks, with wetland vegetation responding quickly.

A Mapped Wetland (or part thereof) may be removed from consideration or have its boundary adjusted if it is:

- covered by a hardened, artificial surface (for example, a road)
- geospatially misaligned with on-ground wetland
- an artificial waterbody or permanently inundated waterbody, or
- unable to support wetland-associated native vegetation.

If a Mapped Wetland (or part thereof) is excluded from the assessment processes, any native vegetation present within the Mapped Wetland area must still be assessed in accordance with the Guidelines.

The Assessor's handbook details the process for removing a Mapped Wetland (or part thereof) from consideration, which in some circumstances requires written approval from the Secretary to DEECA.

Total extent

The total extent of native vegetation is calculated by adding together the extent of any patches of native vegetation (including Mapped Wetlands) that are proposed to be removed, and the extent of any scattered trees that are proposed to be removed.

This includes any assumed losses and consequential removal of native vegetation.



ECOLOGICAL VEGETATION CLASS

EVCs are the standard unit for classifying native vegetation types in Victoria. EVCs are described by a combination of floristics, lifeforms and ecological characteristics. EVCs include a benchmark for the characteristics of the vegetation type in its mature, natural (pre-1750) state.

EVCs can be determined by a certified native vegetation assessor completing a site assessment, as detailed in **section 6.5**.

When native vegetation is not subject to a site assessment, the EVC is determined from EVC maps. EVC maps present a modelled distribution of EVCs in Victoria.

An EVC has a bioregional conservation status of endangered, vulnerable, depleted, least concern or rare. Endangered EVCs are included in the *Location map* used to determine the assessment pathway of an application to remove native vegetation (**section 6.2**). EVCs are also used to determine the size class of a tree.

LARGE TREES

The presence or absence of large trees is used to determine the assessment pathway of an application to remove native vegetation (**section 6**). Large trees are often the oldest part of an ecological system and are difficult to replace in the short term. To address this and to ensure the protection of large trees in the landscape, when large trees are approved to be removed, the secured offset must include an equivalent number of large trees (see **section 5**). Large trees are also an attribute at offset sites (**section 9.5.3**).

A large tree can be either a large scattered tree or a large patch tree.

A large tree is a native canopy tree with a Diameter at Breast Height (DBH)⁶ greater than or equal to the large tree benchmark for the relevant bioregional EVC⁷. The DBH can be determined by measuring the circumference⁸ (in centimetres) of a tree at 1.3 m above ground level.

Some EVCs do not list a large tree DBH benchmark, or list multiple large tree DBH benchmarks, in these cases a large tree is determined as follows.

When native vegetation is subject to a site assessment, as detailed in **section 6.5**:

- in EVCs with multiple large tree DBH benchmarks, the relevant canopy tree species benchmark determines whether a tree is large
- in EVCs that do not list a large tree DBH benchmark the appropriate large tree DBH benchmark in a related EVC within the bioregion determines whether a tree is large.

When native vegetation is not subject to a site assessment:

- in EVCs with multiple large tree DBH benchmarks, the relevant canopy tree species benchmark determines whether a tree is large
- in EVCs that do not list a large tree DBH benchmark, a large tree DBH benchmark of 40 cm (equivalent to a circumference of 126 cm) determines whether a tree is large.

NATIVE VEGETATION CONDITION

Native vegetation condition is represented by the condition score. The condition score of native vegetation is a measure of how close native vegetation is to its mature, natural state, as represented by benchmarks for the relevant EVC. The condition score indicates how well the native vegetation can sustain itself and the species that live in, or depend on it. The condition score is used in calculating biodiversity losses (**section 5**) and gains (**section 9.5**).

The condition score of a patch can be determined by a certified native vegetation assessor completing a Vegetation Quality Assessment (VQA), as described in *Native vegetation: sustaining a living landscape. Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual – Guidelines for applying the habitat hectares scoring method, Version 1.3* (Herein referred to as *Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual*).⁹ A VQA is a component of a site assessment as detailed in **section 6.5**. Scattered trees are assigned a standard condition score of 0.200.

A map of modelled condition scores across Victoria has been developed from site assessed data. This is shown in the *Native vegetation condition map* and is used to determine the condition score when a patch of native vegetation is not subject to a site assessment, as detailed in **section 6.5**.

6 DBH over bark. Defined as the diameter of the main trunk of a tree measured over bark at 1.3 m above ground level.

7 As shown in the pre-1750 EVC map or refined during a site assessment by a certified native vegetation assessor. See the DEECA website for further information on EVCs.

8 DBH = Tree circumference / π . Circumference of the main trunk of a tree measured over bark at 1.3 m above ground level.

9 Or its successor. For the purposes of the Guidelines the native vegetation condition score is the 'Habitat score', as described in the *Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual*, divided by 100 to achieve a value between 0 and 1. For the purpose of assessing native vegetation removal and offsetting in Victoria, the advice within the *Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual* regarding habitat zone (patch) delineation has been superseded. The revised advice is provided in the Assessor's Handbook.

SENSITIVE WETLANDS AND COASTAL AREAS

Sensitive wetlands and coastal areas consist of:

- wetlands designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention)
- wetlands listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia
- internationally important sites for Migratory Shorebirds of the East Asian–Australasian Flyway.

The presence of any sensitive wetlands or coastal areas is used to determine the assessment pathway of an application to remove native vegetation (see **section 6.2**).

3.2.2 Landscape scale information

Landscape scale information cannot be measured at a site. It represents the importance (or biodiversity value) of one location relative to all other locations in Victoria. Landscape scale information includes:

- strategic biodiversity value
- habitat for threatened species.

STRATEGIC BIODIVERSITY VALUE

Strategic biodiversity value is a rank of a location's complementary contribution to Victoria's biodiversity, relative to other locations across the state. The strategic biodiversity value is represented by the strategic biodiversity value score, a score between 0 and 1, shown in the *Strategic biodiversity value map*.

The strategic biodiversity value score is used in calculating biodiversity losses (**section 5**) and gains (**section 9.5**) and is an attribute for offset requirements (**section 5**) and at offset sites (**section 9.5.3**).

HABITAT FOR THREATENED SPECIES

Habitat importance maps show areas of Victoria that are habitat for threatened species. Threatened species are those species listed as critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable, or threatened on the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* Threatened List.

The importance of a location in the landscape as habitat for a particular threatened species, in relation to other suitable habitat for that species, is represented by the habitat importance score. The habitat importance score ranges between 0 and 1 and is shown in the *Habitat importance map* for a threatened species. If native vegetation is mapped habitat for multiple threatened species it has habitat importance scores for each species.

Habitat for threatened species is used to determine the assessment pathway of an application to remove native vegetation (**section 6.2**), and as an attribute for offset requirements (**section 5**) and at offset sites (**section 9.5.3**). Habitat importance scores are used when calculating biodiversity losses (**section 5**) and gains (**section 9.5**).

Habitats for threatened species are divided into two groups depending on their area of occupancy – '*highly localised habitat*' or '*dispersed habitat*'.

Highly localised habitats for threatened species

Highly localised habitats for threatened species are limited in area (less than 2,000 ha) and are typically geographically restricted.

All locations within a highly localised habitat for a particular species are considered equally important and therefore have the same habitat importance score.

Dispersed habitats for threatened species

Dispersed habitats for threatened species are less limited in area (more than 2,000 ha) and are usually less geographically restricted than highly localised habitats.

Each dispersed habitat for threatened species has two *Habitat importance maps*. One shows the total habitat for the species and the other shows important areas of habitat within the total species' habitat. The ranking provided by the habitat importance score and data from the Victorian Biodiversity Atlas is used to determine important areas of habitat within dispersed species habitats.

3.3 Other values of native vegetation

The other values of native vegetation that need to be considered when the Guidelines are applied are described below. The PPF and Municipal Planning Strategy include more details.

3.3.1 Land and water protection

Native vegetation has an important role in land and water protection especially when it is within 30 m of a waterway, on land with steep slopes, on land subject to erosion or in proximity to salinity discharge or recharge sites.

Native vegetation helps control soil erosion and maintain land stability by protecting soil and stream banks. Native vegetation reduces land degradation and salinity and improves water quality and availability.



Impacts on land and water are considered when native vegetation removal is proposed, and specific on-site or off-site mitigation measures may be required. The Environmental Reference Standard 2021 under the *Environmental Protection Act 2017* may be helpful when considering the value of native vegetation for land and water protection.

3.3.2 Identified landscape values

In some areas, native vegetation plays an important landscape function and contributes to the character of a place. Planning schemes can identify native vegetation that is contributing to landscape values. In these cases, the landscape values identified in planning schemes are considered when an application to remove native vegetation is assessed.

3.3.3 Native vegetation protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*

Aboriginal culture includes relationships to native vegetation and the land. These relationships hold physical, social, spiritual and cultural significance and carry obligations and responsibilities for caring for and sharing of Country. These connections continue today and Aboriginal people retain an affinity with all landscapes.

Special considerations apply to native vegetation protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*. Local council and First Peoples – State Relations can help determine when this value is present on site.

A summary of the biodiversity and other values of native vegetation considered in the Guidelines is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Summary of the values of native vegetation considered in the Guidelines

Biodiversity value of native vegetation	Other values of native vegetation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of native vegetation • Large trees • Native vegetation condition • EVC • Sensitive wetlands and coastal areas • Strategic biodiversity value • Habitat for threatened species* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land and water protection • Identified landscape values • Native vegetation protected under the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i>

*Threatened species includes species listed as critically endangered, endangered, vulnerable or threatened on the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 Threatened List*.

4. The three-step approach

The three-step approach (avoid, minimise, offset) is the key policy in relation to the removal of native vegetation to achieve no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal of native vegetation. It is a precautionary approach that aims to ensure that the removal of native vegetation is restricted to only what is reasonably necessary, and that biodiversity is appropriately compensated for any removal of native vegetation that is approved.

Efforts to avoid the removal of, and minimise the impacts on, native vegetation should be commensurate with the biodiversity and other values of the native vegetation and focused on areas of native vegetation that have the most value.

Areas of native vegetation to be retained must be able to maintain the same values in the future and should not be degraded over time by a proposed use or development associated with the removal.

1) Avoid

Avoid the removal of native vegetation.

Maintaining native vegetation that currently exists is an effective way to ensure native vegetation continues to deliver its important values into the future.

Avoiding the removal of native vegetation can be achieved by locating or designing a development so that native vegetation is not removed.

An application to remove native vegetation must demonstrate or provide appropriate evidence to show that no options exist to avoid native vegetation removal, that will not undermine the objectives of the proposed use or development.

2) Minimise

Minimise impacts from the removal of native vegetation that cannot be avoided.

Minimising ensures that impacts from native vegetation removal on biodiversity or other values are kept to the minimum necessary.

Minimising can be achieved by:

- siting and/or designing the use or development to reduce the amount of native vegetation that has to be removed
- siting and/or designing the use or development so that impacts are restricted to areas of native vegetation that have the least biodiversity or other values
- managing the use or development to minimise any impacts on surrounding native vegetation, for example stormwater control measures.

An application to remove native vegetation must demonstrate or provide appropriate evidence to show that no options exist to further minimise the impacts of native vegetation removal, that will not undermine the objectives of the proposed use or development.

3) Offset

Provide an offset to compensate for the biodiversity impact from the removal of native vegetation.

An offset is required to compensate for the loss to biodiversity from the removal of native vegetation.

The Guidelines refer to the biodiversity and other values of native vegetation. Offsetting only addresses the loss in biodiversity value that results from native vegetation removal.

The calculation of biodiversity loss and offset requirements is set out in **section 5**.

An application to remove native vegetation must include an offset statement that includes evidence that an offset that meets the offset requirements for the proposed native vegetation removal is currently available or achievable, and explains how the offset will be secured if a permit is granted.

5. Offset requirements and calculating biodiversity value

The Guidelines require consideration of the biodiversity impacts of native vegetation removal. Biodiversity impacts are detailed as part of the application requirements (**section 6.4**), and form part of the decision guidelines for determining the outcome of an application (**section 7**). If the removal of native vegetation is approved, the biodiversity impacts are required to be offset.

This section sets out:

- the requirement for offsets
- how to calculate biodiversity loss
- how to determine offset requirements.

5.1 Requirement for an offset

The biodiversity loss from the removal of native vegetation is required to be offset in accordance with the Guidelines. Offsets are designed to compensate for the biodiversity value of native vegetation only, not its other values.

An offset is not required if the native vegetation to be removed does not meet the definition of a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree as set out in **section 3.1**, although a permit is still required.

5.2 Calculating biodiversity value

A combination of site-based and landscape scale information is used to calculate the biodiversity value of native vegetation to be removed. This information is used to determine the loss in biodiversity value that needs to be compensated for with an offset that provides an equivalent gain in biodiversity value.

Biodiversity value is represented by a general or species habitat score, calculated as follows.

The extent and condition score of the native vegetation to be removed are combined to determine the habitat hectares. This is a site-based measure of biodiversity value.

Habitat hectares = extent of native vegetation × condition score

The habitat hectares is then combined with a landscape factor to obtain an overall measure of the biodiversity value of the native vegetation to be removed. This is done in a way that gives site-based biodiversity information (habitat hectares) more influence in the calculation than landscape scale information. There are two types of landscape factor derived from landscape scale information described in **section 3**.

General landscape factor – this is determined using an adjusted strategic biodiversity value score.

Species landscape factor – this is determined using an adjusted habitat importance score for each threatened species habitat mapped at a site in a *Habitat importance map*.

The biodiversity value of native vegetation at a site is calculated as follows:

General habitat score = habitat hectares × general landscape factor

Species habitat score = habitat hectares × species landscape factor

5.3 Determining offset requirements

There are three components to offset requirements:

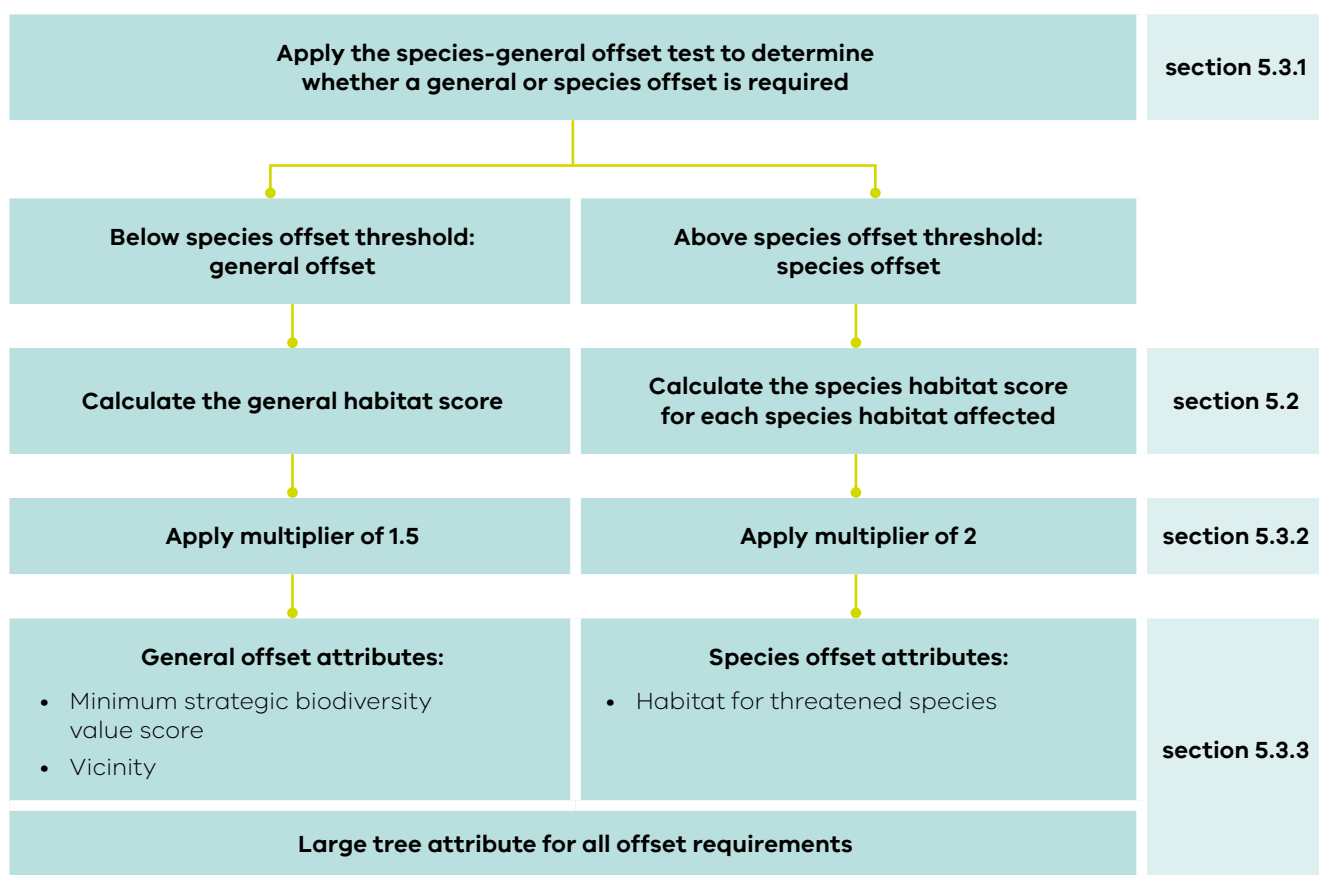
1. Offset type (general or species).
2. Offset amount (measured in general or species habitat units).
3. Offset attributes
 - Minimum strategic biodiversity value score
 - Vicinity
 - Large trees.

The process to determine offset requirements for the proposed removal of native vegetation is summarised in **Figure 1** and is explained in more detail below.

Information and standards for establishing offset sites are described in **section 9**.

DEECA systems and tools determine offset requirements for native vegetation to be removed. Further information about determining offset requirements is included in the application guidance documents and the *Biodiversity information explanatory document – Measuring value when removing or offsetting native vegetation*.

Figure 1: Process for determining offset requirements



5.3.1 Type of offset (species or general)

There are two types of offset that may be required.

Species offset is required when the removal of native vegetation has a significant impact on habitat for a threatened species.

Species offsets must compensate for the removal of that particular species' habitat.

General offset is required when the removal of native vegetation does not have a significant impact on any habitat for threatened species.

For the purposes of the Guidelines, a significant impact on habitat for a threatened species is when the proportional impact is above the species offset threshold and a species offset is required.

If the native vegetation is habitat for one or more threatened species according to the *Habitat importance maps*, described in **section 3.2.2**, the species-general offset test is completed for each species, to determine if a species or general offset is required.

If the native vegetation is not habitat for any threatened species according to the *Habitat importance maps*, a general offset is required.

The species-general offset test measures the proportional impact from the removal of native vegetation on the habitat of threatened species, according to the *Habitat importance maps*, and compares this to the species offset threshold. The test is done for each species habitat, described in **section 3.2.2**, as follows:

1. For each threatened species calculate the extent of habitat in the relevant *Habitat importance map* that is to be removed.¹⁰ Multiply this extent by the relevant habitat importance score of the native vegetation to be removed, and then multiply the result by the condition score of the native vegetation to be removed.
2. Divide the value calculated in step 1 by the total value of the species' mapped habitat across the state. This is the total extent of habitat in the relevant *Habitat importance map* across Victoria multiplied by the total of the habitat importance scores, and then multiplied by the total mapped condition score for the mapped habitat. This gives the proportional impact on the species' habitat from the proposed native vegetation removal.
3. When the proportional impact is greater than the species offset threshold a species offset is required for that species.

A species offset is required for a threatened species when:

$$\frac{\text{Value of the species' habitat to be removed}}{\text{Total value of the species' habitat included in the statewide map}} \times 100 = \text{Species offset threshold}$$

A general offset is required for areas of native vegetation removal that do not require a species offset. A proposal to remove native vegetation may require both species and general offsets.

Multiple species

Native vegetation can provide habitat for multiple threatened species. A species offset may be required for multiple species, in this case each species offset requirement must be secured in the offset(s).

5.3.2 Offset amount

The offset amount is the amount of gain required to compensate for the removal of native vegetation. A multiplier is included when calculating the offset amount. The multiplier balances the risk that some of the predicted gain is not realised at the offset site. It also considers that the impact (or loss) is immediate while the gain is expected to be realised at a time in the future, once security and management actions have resulted in improved vegetation condition. Including a multiplier applies the precautionary principle to ensure no net loss to biodiversity is achieved as a result of native vegetation removal.

A multiplier of 1.5 is applied to all general offsets. A multiplier of 2 is applied to all species offsets. A higher multiplier is applied to species offsets to account for the greater loss in biodiversity value (where there is a significant impact to threatened species), and the increased risk to biodiversity if the gains are not achieved.

The offset amount in habitat units is calculated as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{General habitat units} &= \text{general habitat score} \times 1.5 \\ \text{Species habitat units} &= \text{species habitat score} \times 2 \end{aligned}$$

¹⁰ The extent of past native vegetation removal, as described in section 3.2.1, is included when applying the species-general offset test.

5.3.3 Offset attributes

Offsets must meet the following attribute requirements, as relevant.

GENERAL OFFSET ATTRIBUTES

The general habitat units secured must meet the following attribute requirements.

Minimum strategic biodiversity value score

The strategic biodiversity value score of the offset must be at least 80 per cent of the strategic biodiversity value score of the native vegetation to be removed. This ensures offsets are located in areas with a strategic biodiversity value that is comparable to the native vegetation to be removed.

Vicinity

The offset must be located within the same Catchment Management Authority (CMA) boundary or municipal district as the native vegetation to be removed. This maintains a link between the location of the offset and the site of the native vegetation to be removed.

If native vegetation removal crosses two or more CMAs or municipal districts the offset can be provided in any, or a combination, of the CMAs or municipal districts where the removal takes place.

SPECIES OFFSET ATTRIBUTES

The species habitat units secured must meet the following attribute requirements.

Habitat for threatened species

The offset must be located in an area of habitat for the relevant species, according to the *Habitat importance map* for that species. This requirement is to ensure offsets are located in areas that provide habitat for the species impacted by the removal of native vegetation.

If an application to remove native vegetation requires multiple species offsets, a single offset site can satisfy the requirements for more than one species offset provided it contains sufficient species habitat units for each relevant species. If a single offset site does not contain sufficient species habitat units for all species offsets required, then other offset sites need to be secured.

LARGE TREE ATTRIBUTE FOR ALL OFFSET REQUIREMENTS

In addition to the offset amount and the general and/or species offset attribute requirements, offsets may require a large tree attribute.

The offset must include at least one large tree for every large tree being removed. This includes large patch trees and large scattered trees. This ensures large trees are protected across the landscape.

Large tree offset attributes for general offsets must be secured within the same CMA or municipal district as where the tree removal occurred. Large tree offset attributes for species offsets must be secured within the habitat for that species.

If the secured offset site meets the requirements for the offset amount and general and/or species offset attributes, but does not contain the required number of large trees, additional general or species habitat units that include large trees must be secured. These additional species or general habitat units that contain large trees can be located anywhere in Victoria if the general and/or species offset amount and attribute requirements have already been met.

General and species offset requirements are summarised in **Table 2**.



Table 2: Summary of offset requirements

Offset requirements	General offsets	Species offsets
Offset amount	General habitat units required = general habitat score × 1.5	Species habitat units required = species habitat score × 2
Strategic biodiversity value score	The offset has at least 80% of the strategic biodiversity value score of native vegetation to be removed	No restriction
Vicinity	The offset is in the same CMA boundary or municipal district as the native vegetation to be removed	No restriction
Habitat for threatened species	No restriction	The offset is mapped habitat according to the <i>Habitat importance map</i> for the relevant species
Large trees	The offset includes protection of at least one large tree for every large tree to be removed	The offset includes protection of at least one large tree for every large tree to be removed



6. Applications to remove native vegetation



Applications to remove native vegetation are categorised into one of three assessment pathways with corresponding application requirements and decision guidelines.

This section details the assessment pathways and corresponding application requirements for permit applications to remove native vegetation.

6.1 Assessment pathways

The assessment pathway for an application to remove native vegetation reflects its potential impact on biodiversity and is determined from the location and extent of the native vegetation to be removed. The three assessment pathways are:

1. **Basic** – limited impacts on biodiversity.
2. **Intermediate** – could impact large trees, endangered EVCs, and sensitive wetlands and coastal areas.
3. **Detailed** – could impact large trees, endangered EVCs, sensitive wetlands and coastal areas, and could significantly impact habitat for threatened species.

The assessment pathway determines the information that accompanies an application and the decision guidelines that are considered in determining the outcome of an application.

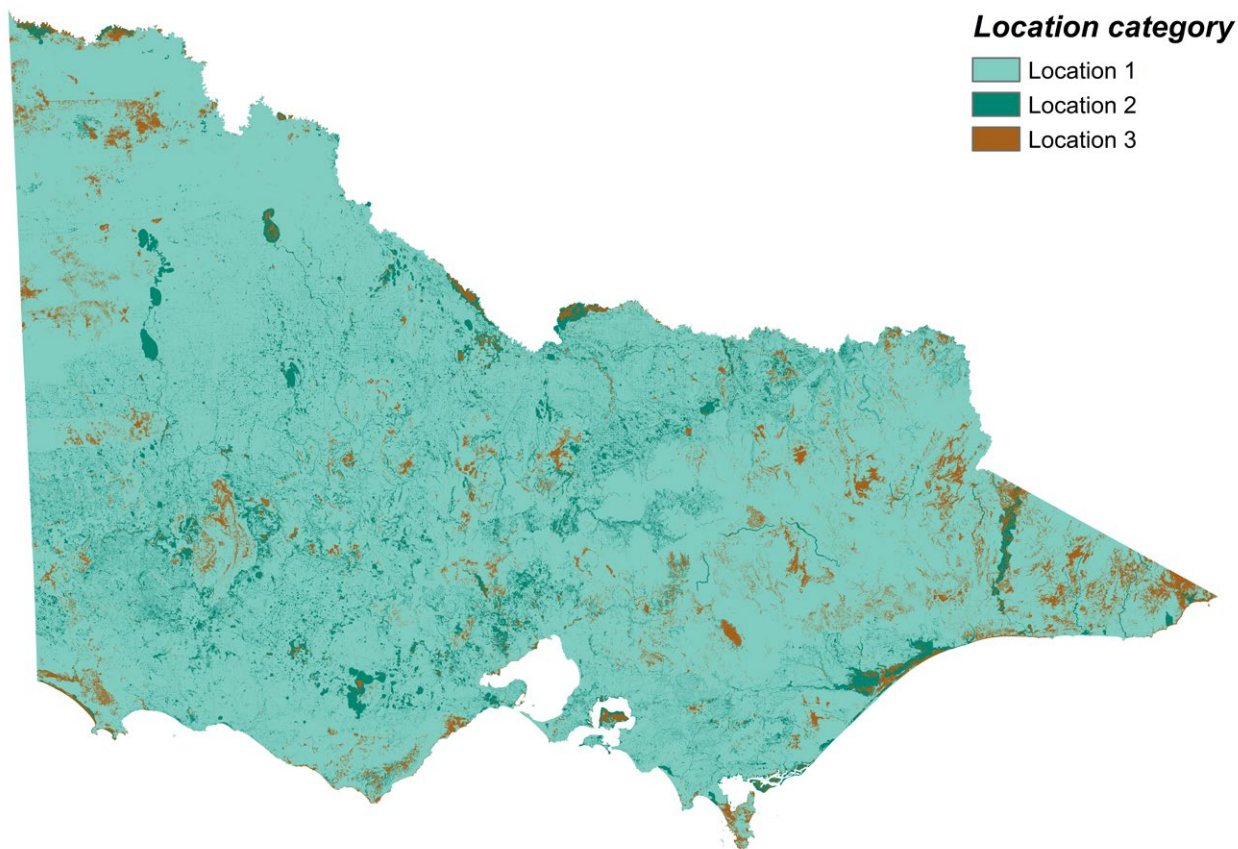
6.2 Location risk map

There are three location categories that indicate the potential risk to biodiversity from removing native vegetation. These location categories are shown in the *Location risk map* as Location 3, Location 2 and Location 1, see **Figure 2**.

- **Location 3** – includes locations where the removal of less than 0.5 ha of native vegetation could have a significant impact on habitat for a threatened species.
- **Location 2** – includes locations that are mapped as endangered EVCs and/or sensitive wetlands and coastal areas (**section 3.2.1**) and are not included in Location 3.
- **Location 1** – includes all remaining locations in Victoria.

The higher category is used if the native vegetation to be removed includes more than one location category.

Figure 2: Overview of the *Location risk map*. A detailed map can be viewed using DEECA’s NVR Map



6.3 Determining the assessment pathway of an application

The assessment pathway of an application is determined in accordance with **Table 3**.

The terms in **Table 3** have the following meaning:

- Location category is determined for the native vegetation proposed to be removed using the *Location risk map*.
- Large tree includes a large patch tree or a large scattered tree, as defined in **section 3.2.1**.

Extent of native vegetation is in hectares and includes:

- the extent of any patches and scattered trees proposed to be removed, as described in **section 3.2.1**¹¹
- the extent of past native vegetation removal, as described in **section 3.2.1**.

DEECA systems and tools determine the assessment pathway of an application from the extent of native vegetation mapped by applicants.

Table 3: Determining the assessment pathway

Extent of native vegetation	Location category		
	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
Less than 0.5 ha and not including any large trees	Basic	Intermediate	Detailed
Less than 0.5 ha and including one or more large trees	Intermediate	Intermediate	Detailed
0.5 ha or more	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed

¹¹ If the native vegetation to be removed does not meet the definition of a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree outlined in section 3.1, the application is considered in the Basic Assessment Pathway.

6.4 Application requirements

The application requirements for a permit to remove native vegetation relate to the assessment pathway of the application. All applications must include the requirements listed in **Table 4**, as appropriate.

Applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway must also include the requirements listed in **Table 5**, as appropriate.

The application guidance documents assist applicants prepare an application and describes how to meet the application requirements.

6.4.1 All applications

All applications to remove native vegetation must include the information set out in **Table 4**, as appropriate.

Table 4: Application requirements for all applications for a permit to remove native vegetation

Number	Application requirement
1	<p>A Native Vegetation Removal Report generated from DEECA's systems and tools, which includes the following Information about the native vegetation to be removed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The assessment pathway and reason for the assessment pathway. This includes the location category of the native vegetation to be removed. • A description of the native vegetation to be removed that includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – whether it is a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree (or a combination of each) – the extent (in hectares) – the number and circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) of any large patch trees – the number and circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) of any scattered trees, and whether each tree is small or large – the strategic biodiversity value score – the condition score – if it includes endangered EVCs – if it includes sensitive wetland or coastal areas • Maps showing the native vegetation and property in context and containing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – scale, north point and property boundaries – location of any patches of native vegetation and the number of large patch trees within the patch proposed to be removed – location of scattered trees proposed to be removed, including their size • The offset requirement, determined in accordance with section 5 of the Guidelines, that will apply if the native vegetation is approved to be removed.
2	<p>Topographic and land information relating to the native vegetation to be removed, showing ridges, crests and hilltops, wetlands and waterways, slopes of more than 20 per cent, drainage lines, low lying areas, saline discharge areas, and areas of existing erosion, as appropriate. This may be represented in a map or plan.</p>
3	<p>Recent, dated photographs of the native vegetation to be removed.</p>

Number	Application requirement
4	Details of any other native vegetation; currently being assessed for another approval, approved to be removed, or that was removed without the required approvals, on the same property or on contiguous land in the same ownership as the applicant, in the five year period before the application for a permit is lodged.
5	<p>An avoid and minimise statement. The statement describes any efforts to avoid the removal of, and minimise the impacts on the biodiversity and other values of native vegetation, and how these efforts focused on areas of native vegetation that have the most value. The statement should include a description of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic level planning – any regional or landscape scale strategic planning process that the site has been subject to that avoided and minimised impacts on native vegetation across a region or landscape • Site level planning – how the proposed use or development has been sited or designed to avoid and minimise impacts on native vegetation. • That no feasible opportunities exist to further avoid and minimise impacts on native vegetation without undermining the key objectives of the proposal.
6	A copy of any Property Vegetation Plan contained within an agreement made pursuant to section 69 of the <i>Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987</i> that applies to the native vegetation to be removed.
7	<p>Where the removal of native vegetation is to create defensible space, a written statement explaining why the removal of native vegetation is necessary. This statement must have regard to other available bushfire risk mitigation measures.</p> <p>This statement is not required when native vegetation removal to create defensible space is in conjunction with an application under the Bushfire Management Overlay and does not exceed the distance specified in the tables to Clause 53.02 of the local planning scheme.</p>
8	If the application is under Clause 52.16, a statement that explains how the proposal responds to the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan considerations at decision guideline 8.
9	<p>An offset statement providing evidence that an offset that meets the offset requirements for the native vegetation to be removed has been identified, and can be secured in accordance with the Guidelines.</p> <p>A suitable statement includes evidence that the required offset:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is available to purchase from a third party, or • will be established as a new offset and has the agreement of the proposed offset provider, or • can be met by a first party offset.

6.4.2 Additional requirements for applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway

In addition to the requirements specified in **Table 4**, an application in the Detailed Assessment Pathway must also include the information and documents set out in **Table 5**, as appropriate.

Table 5: Additional application requirements for applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway

Number	Application requirement
10	<p>A site assessment report of the native vegetation to be removed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Vegetation Quality Assessment of any patches of native vegetation, including the condition, extent (in hectares), EVC and bioregional conservation status • the location, number, circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) and species of any large patch trees • the location, number, circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) and species of any scattered trees, and whether each tree is small or large.
11	<p>Information about impacts on threatened species habitat, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relevant section of the <i>Habitat importance map</i> for each threatened species requiring a species offset • for each threatened species that the native vegetation to be removed is habitat for, according to the Habitat importance maps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the species' conservation status – the proportional impact of the removal of native vegetation on the total habitat for that species – whether their habitats are highly localised habitats, dispersed habitats, or important areas of habitat within a dispersed species habitat. <p><i>Note: When proposed native vegetation removal is identified accurately, a Native Vegetation Removal Report generated from DEECA's systems and tools contains the information required to address this application requirement.</i></p>



6.5 Site assessments

A site assessment includes:

- A VQA of any patches of native vegetation, including the condition, extent (in hectares), EVC and bioregional conservation status.
- The location, number, circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) and species of large patch trees.
- The location, number, circumference (in centimetres measured at 1.3 m above ground level) and species of scattered trees, and whether each tree is small or large.

A site assessment must be completed by a certified native vegetation assessor.

Certified native vegetation assessors are those currently listed on DEECA's Vegetation Quality Assessment Competency Register and have current certification (less than two years old at the time the site assessment is completed). A site assessment report must be current, as detailed in the Assessor's handbook.

6.5.1 Basic and Intermediate Assessment Pathway

Applications in the Basic Assessment Pathway and Intermediate Assessment Pathway do not require a site assessment by a certified native vegetation assessor. A responsible authority cannot require an applicant whose development is in the Basic or Intermediate Assessment Pathway to engage a certified native vegetation assessor.

The applicant may choose to engage a certified native vegetation assessor to assist them, or to conduct a site assessment. If this is done, the site assessed information is used in place of the mapped information.

If through a site assessment, an endangered EVC is identified on site for a Basic Assessment Pathway application, decision guideline 9 about impacts to endangered EVCs is applied.

6.5.2 Detailed Assessment Pathway

All applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway require a site assessment. The site assessed information is used when applying the decision guidelines for Detailed Assessment Pathway applications.

6.6 Referral of planning permit applications

Under Clause 66 *Referral and Notice Provisions* of planning schemes, the following applications are referred to the Secretary to DEECA (as constituted under Part 2 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*):

- to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation in the Detailed Assessment Pathway
- to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation if a PVP applies to the site
- to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation on Crown land which is occupied or managed by the responsible authority.



7. Decision guidelines

The purpose of this section is to set out the decision guidelines that the responsible or referral authority must consider when deciding on an application to remove native vegetation. These decision guidelines are set out in **Table 6**.

An application to remove native vegetation that does not meet the definition of a patch, a patch tree or a scattered tree as set out in **section 3.1** is assessed using the decision guidelines for the Basic Assessment Pathway, as appropriate, but no offset is required if a permit is granted.

If the application is for a permit under 52.16 or 52.17 of the planning scheme, the responsible authority must also consider all relevant parts of the planning scheme, including Clause 65 *Decision guidelines*.

The Assessor's handbook provides more information on how to apply these decision guidelines.

Table 6: Decision guidelines for applications to remove native vegetation

Number	Decision guidelines to be considered
1	<p>Efforts to avoid the removal of, and minimise the impacts on, native vegetation should be commensurate with the biodiversity and other values of the native vegetation, and should focus on areas of native vegetation that have the most value. Taking this into account consider whether:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the site has been subject to a regional or landscape scale strategic planning process that appropriately avoided and minimised impacts on native vegetation• the proposed use or development has been appropriately sited or designed to avoid and minimise impacts on native vegetation• feasible opportunities exist to further avoid and minimise impacts on native vegetation without undermining the key objectives of the proposal.
2	<p>The role of native vegetation to be removed in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• protecting water quality and waterway and riparian ecosystems, particularly within 30 m of a wetland or waterway in a special water supply catchment area listed in the <i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i>• preventing land degradation, including soil erosion, salination, acidity, instability and water logging particularly:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– where ground slopes are more than 20 per cent– on land which is subject to soil erosion or slippage– in harsh environments, such as coastal or alpine areas• preventing adverse effects on groundwater quality, particularly on land:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– where groundwater recharge to saline water tables occurs– that is in proximity to a discharge area– that is a known recharge area.
3	<p>The need to manage native vegetation to preserve landscape values identified in the local planning scheme.</p>

Number	Decision guidelines to be considered
4	Whether any part of the native vegetation to be removed, destroyed or lopped is protected under the <i>Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006</i> .
5	The need to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation to create defensible space to reduce the risk of bushfire to life and property, having regard to other available bushfire risk mitigation measures.
6	Whether the native vegetation to be removed is in accordance with any Property Vegetation Plan that applies to the site.
7	Whether an offset that meets the offset requirements for the native vegetation to be removed has been identified and can be secured in accordance with the Guidelines.
8	<p>For Clause 52.16 applications, consider in relation to the native vegetation to be removed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose and objectives of the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan. • The effect on any native vegetation identified for retention in the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan. • The potential for the effectiveness of the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan to be undermined. • The potential for the proposed development to lead to the loss or fragmentation of native vegetation identified for retention in the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan. • Offset requirements in the Native Vegetation Precinct Plan.
9	<p>For applications in both the Intermediate and Detailed Assessment Pathway only – consider the impacts on biodiversity based on the following values of the native vegetation to be removed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extent. • The condition score. • The strategic biodiversity value score. • The number and circumference of any large trees. • Whether it includes an endangered EVC. • Whether it includes sensitive wetlands or coastal areas.
10	<p>For applications in the Detailed Assessment Pathway only – consider the impacts on habitat for threatened species. Where native vegetation to be removed is habitat for threatened species according to the <i>Habitat importance maps</i>, consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of species' habitats. • The species habitat(s) that require a species offset(s). • The proportional impact of the native vegetation removal on the total habitat for each species, as calculated in section 5.3.1. • The conservation status of the species (per the <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 Threatened List</i>). • Whether the habitats are highly localised habitats, dispersed habitats, or important areas of habitat within a dispersed species habitat.



8. Permit conditions

If a permit is granted to remove native vegetation under Clause 52.16 or 52.17 it must include a condition that an offset that meets the offset requirement, determined in accordance with the Guidelines, is secured.

Offset requirements are secured in one of the following ways:

- Credit extract(s) are allocated to the permit from DEECA's Native Vegetation Offset Register.
- A first party offset site is established, including a signed security agreement and management plan described in **section 9**.

Standard offset permit conditions are provided in the Assessor's handbook.

Permit conditions include:

- evidence is provided to the responsible authority that the offset is secured
- the offset is secured before that native vegetation is removed
- the offset is secured to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

9. Establishing offset sites

An offset is required to compensate for the loss in biodiversity value from the removal of native vegetation, as described in **section 5**.

An offset provides long term security for the native vegetation and the management actions maintain or improve the condition of the native vegetation to achieve *gain*.

This section describes how offsets are established, how gain is calculated at offset sites, and how offsets are recorded and traded. The calculation of gain in habitat units for offset sites is comparable to the calculation of offset amount for native vegetation that is to be removed (**section 5**).

Offset type

An offset can be either a:

- **first party offset** – on a property owned or managed (in the case of Crown land) by the party requiring the offset
- **third party offset** – on another party's property and traded as native vegetation credits through DEECA's Native Vegetation Offset Register.

Native vegetation category at an offset site

An offset can be any or a combination of the following, provided it meets the eligibility criteria in **section 9.1**:

- a patch of native vegetation
- scattered trees
- revegetation.

9.1 Eligibility requirements for offset sites

9.1.1 General eligibility requirements

All offset sites must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- Current and future land use(s) must be compatible with managing the native vegetation for conservation. Native vegetation management to reduce the risk of bushfire must be considered. Fuel reduction activities (including burning) or recreational use of the site are not generally considered compatible with managing a native vegetation offset site.
- The native vegetation to be protected is not already being used to offset the removal of other native vegetation or species habitat, required under Victorian or Commonwealth legislation.
- The native vegetation to be protected is not subject to a current agreement or initiative to generate carbon credits.
- The native vegetation to be protected is not subject to a current agreement under a biodiversity or native vegetation related incentive or grant program.
- The landowner or manager can control significant threats to the condition of the native vegetation.

9.1.2 Managing bushfire risk of offset sites

Managing an offset site for conservation objectives may be in conflict with managing native vegetation to reduce the risk to life and property from bushfire. To eliminate this conflict all offset sites must meet the following eligibility requirements in relation to managing bushfire risk. An offset cannot be established within:

- 150 m of a dwelling¹² or any area (approved building envelope) to be used for a dwelling in the future if the dwelling or area is within a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)
- 50 m of a dwelling¹² or any area (approved building envelope) that will or may be used for a dwelling in the future, when the dwelling or area is not within a BMO.

The distance can be reduced if the landowner or manager of the offset site has written approval from the Country Fire Authority, or relevant fire authority as defined by the planning schemes, that this distance can be safely reduced.

9.1.3 Patches of native vegetation

A patch of native vegetation must meet the following eligibility requirements to be an offset:

- Patches of native vegetation that are assessed by a certified native vegetation assessor must:
 - have a minimum 'site condition score' of 30 out of 75,¹³ and
 - any treeless EVCs must also have a minimum 'lack of weeds score'¹⁴ of 7 out of 15.
- As a guide, patches of native vegetation (within a first party offset) that are not assessed by a certified native vegetation assessor should have a minimum condition score of 0.4 out of 1, in the *Native vegetation condition map*.

9.1.4 Scattered trees

A scattered tree must meet the following eligibility requirements to be an offset:

- The tree must have a DBH greater than or equal to 75 per cent of the large tree DBH benchmark for the relevant bioregional EVC. See **section 3.2.1**.
- Each scattered tree must have an area of land secured around it to provide space for recruitment. The area protected around each scattered tree must be a circle with a diameter of at least 30 m, with the tree in the centre of the circle. When a certified native vegetation assessor completes a gain scoring assessment (**section 9.5.4**), the area protected must be twice the canopy diameter of the scattered tree or the 30 m circle, whichever is greater in area.

9.1.5 Revegetation

Revegetation offset sites can only generate general habitat units, not species habitat units.

Revegetation of native vegetation must meet the following eligibility requirements to be an offset:

- Revegetation must be for a woody vegetation type.
- Revegetation offset sites must meet the following size requirements:
 - For revegetation not abutting a patch of native vegetation the area of revegetation must have an area to perimeter ratio¹⁵ of at least 20.
 - For revegetation abutting a patch of native vegetation the combined area of revegetation plus adjacent patch of native vegetation must have an area to perimeter ratio of at least 20.

¹² Dwelling includes any building used for accommodation.

¹³ This is the site condition score determined in accordance with the Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual. Native canopy trees within a patch of native vegetation with a site condition score below 30 out of 75, and that are greater than or equal to 75 per cent of the large tree DBH benchmark for the relevant bioregional EVC, can be protected as scattered trees.

¹⁴ This is the lack of weeds score determined in accordance with the Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual.

¹⁵ The area to perimeter ratio is calculated by dividing the area (metres squared) by the perimeter (metres).

9.2 Freehold land offset sites

Freehold land can be used as an offset site if it meets the following criteria.

9.2.1 Security requirements

Freehold land can be secured as an offset by entering into a security agreement with a relevant statutory body that:

- contains a legally enforceable provision
- has no termination date
- is registered on the land title
- contains an offset management plan as detailed in **section 9.2.2**.

Agreements that comply with these requirements include:

- an agreement with the Secretary to DEECA under section 69 of the *Conservation Forest and Lands Act 1987*
- an agreement with a responsible authority under section 173 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- an agreement with Trust for Nature to register an offset covenant under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

Third party offset sites can only be secured with:

- an agreement with the Secretary to DEECA under section 69 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*, or
- an agreement with Trust for Nature to register an offset covenant under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

9.2.2 Offset management

The required management of an offset site is detailed in an offset management plan. This plan includes 10 years of management commitments for the offset site. It also includes ongoing management actions and requirements to maintain the vegetation at the improved condition, following the initial 10-year period.

All freehold land offset sites must have an offset management plan. The offset management plan must be attached as a schedule to the offset security agreement described in **section 9.2.1**.

Offset management plans must accord with the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2*¹⁶, DEECA's NVOR standards for establishing offset sites, and include the following minimum requirements:

- Retain all trees, including dead trees that are standing.
- Exclude stock and other threats.
- Ensure that herbaceous and grassy weed cover reduces or at least does not increase beyond the level recorded when the site was being established as an offset.
- Monitor for new and emerging weeds (weeds not present when the site was established as an offset) and eliminate to less than one per cent cover with no mature individuals.
- Retain all logs, fallen timber and organic litter.
- Actively control pest animals including rabbits when they are present.
- For certain grassland vegetation types, native grass biomass management may be a requirement.
- When the offset site comprises scattered trees, at least five recruits need to regenerate, or be planted in the area around each protected tree. The recruits must be native canopy tree species as specified in the relevant bioregional EVC benchmark. If the recruits die during the life of the 10-year management plan they must continue to be replaced until at least five recruits are established.
- For revegetation offsets, the revegetation must be in accordance with the minimum planting standards specified in the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2*¹⁶
- Report annually on management actions for the first 10 years, and upon request by the relevant authority thereafter.
- Actively maintain the vegetation condition in perpetuity beyond the initial 10 years, which will require the ongoing exclusion of other uses and active weed and pest control.

16 Or its successor

9.3 Freehold land transferred to the Crown offset sites

Freehold land transferred to the Crown land estate can be used as an offset site if it meets the following criteria:

9.3.1 Eligibility

In addition to the eligibility criteria outlined in **section 9.1**, freehold land transferred to the Crown must also meet all the following eligibility requirements to be an offset:

- The land meets the assessment criteria for proposed regional conservation land acquisitions.
- The minister responsible for administering the applicable Act has agreed that the land can be accepted into the Crown land estate with any restrictions or obligations attached as part of the security agreement.
- The land is reserved in the parks and reserve system under either the *National Parks Act 1975* or *Crown land (Reserves) Act 1978*.
- The Crown land manager responsible for the land agrees to manage the area as an offset site as per DEECA's NVOR standards and requirements.

9.3.2 Security requirements

Freehold land transferred to the Crown land estate is secured as an offset when:

- the Crown land manager and the Secretary to DEECA sign a Crown land offset Memorandum of Understanding (Crown land offset MOU), and
- the land is reserved in the Parks and reserve system under either the *National Parks Act 1975* or *Crown land (Reserves) Act 1978*, and
- the Crown land offset MOU is listed as an encumbrance on the Crown land register.

9.3.3 Offset management

Freehold land transferred to the Crown land estate must include a management plan and commitment to exclude public access and recreational use as well as fuel reduction burning if they are to receive the maintenance and improvement gain described in **section 9.5**.

Freehold land transferred to the Crown land estate without a management plan, can only receive prior management and security gain.

9.4 Existing Crown land offset sites

Existing Crown land can be used as an offset site if it meets the following criteria:

9.4.1 Eligibility

In addition to the eligibility criteria outlined in **section 9.1**, existing Crown land must meet the following eligibility requirements to be an offset:

- The offset site is reserved¹⁷ and can be managed for conservation objectives.
- The offset site is only used to either:
 - offset clearing on Crown land, or
 - to provided species offsets that are not available on freehold land.

9.4.2 Security requirements

Existing Crown land is secured as an offset when:

- the Crown land manager and the Secretary to DEECA sign a Crown land offset MOU, and
- the Crown land offset MOU is listed as an encumbrance on the Crown land register.

9.4.3 Offset management

Existing Crown land must include a management plan and commitments to exclude public access and recreational use as well as fuel reduction burning.

To receive security gain, the reservation status of the offset site must be increased to conservation as the primary purpose and the land reserved in the parks and reserve system under either the *National Parks Act 1975* or the *Crown land (Reserves) Act 1978* ensuring greater protection of conservation values. Existing Crown land is not eligible for prior management gain.

9.5 Gain and generation of habitat units

Gain is the predicted improvement in biodiversity value of native vegetation due to active management and increased security provided at the offset site.

The gain generated through management and security of an offset site compensates for the biodiversity losses from the removal of native vegetation. To allow this to occur, gain at offset sites is calculated in a manner that is comparable with the calculation of offset requirements when native vegetation is removed, that is, in general or species habitat units (**section 5**).

¹⁷ This means land of the Crown that has been reserved or set aside for a purpose under an Act.

9.5.1 Types of gain

Different types of gain can be generated by landowners, these include:

- **Prior management gain** – this acknowledges past management undertaken by a landowner on a freehold site, prior to establishing the offset site. Prior management gain only applies to existing native vegetation.
- **Security gain** – this is generated when a landowner increases the protection of native vegetation on their land.
- **Maintenance gain** – this is achieved by giving up currently allowed land uses and controlling threats that affect native vegetation condition to avoid the expected decline in native vegetation condition predicted to occur over a 10-year period.
- **Improvement gain** – this is achieved from management commitments that are predicted to improve the current vegetation condition over a 10-year period.

Gain can only be generated by management actions and commitments that are in addition to existing obligations under legislation, existing agreements or contracts.

A gain score is calculated for each habitat zone in an offset site, and scattered trees are assigned a standard gain score. Gain at an offset site is determined in accordance with the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2*.¹⁶ The gain score is the sum of prior management gain, security gain, maintenance gain and improvement gain, as relevant.

9.5.2 Calculating biodiversity gain in habitat units

A combination of site-based and landscape scale information is used to calculate the amount of gain generated by the native vegetation to be protected as an offset. This is done in a way that is comparable to the calculation of biodiversity loss when native vegetation is removed as described in **section 5**.

Biodiversity gain at an offset site is represented by general or species habitat units. These are calculated as follows.

For the purposes of the Guidelines the gain score, determined in accordance with **section 9.5.1**, is divided by 100 to achieve a value between 0 and 1. This is combined with the extent (in hectares) of the native vegetation to be protected or the area of revegetation to determine the habitat hectares of gain, a site-based measure of gain at the offset site.

Habitat hectares of gain

$$= \text{extent of native vegetation} \times \frac{\text{gain score}}{100}$$

The habitat hectares of gain is then combined with a landscape factor to obtain an overall measure of the gain from the native vegetation to be protected. This is done in a way that ensures site-based information has more influence in the calculation than landscape scale information. This ensures that security and site-based management actions have more influence in determining gain at the offset site.

There are two types of landscape factors derived from landscape scale information described in **section 3**.

General landscape factor – this is determined using an adjusted strategic biodiversity value score.

Species landscape factor – this is determined using an adjusted habitat importance score for each threatened species habitat mapped at a site in a *Habitat importance map*.

The overall biodiversity gain at an offset site is measured as follows:

$$\text{General habitat units} = \text{habitat hectares of gain} \times \text{general landscape factor}$$

$$\text{Species habitat units} = \text{habitat hectares of gain} \times \text{species landscape factor}$$

DEECA's systems and tools uses site data from applicants to calculate biodiversity gain in habitat units that can be achieved from undertaking management actions and establishing security agreements on native vegetation at an offset site.

9.5.3 Attributes of an offset site

Offsets to compensate for the biodiversity loss from the removal of native vegetation must meet certain attributes as detailed in **section 5.3.3**.

Information about an offset site that is considered for this purpose includes the following.

For general habitat units:

- the Catchment Management Authority
- the strategic biodiversity value score
- the number of large trees.

For species habitat units:

- the threatened species that the units are generated for
- the number of large trees.

9.5.4 Gain scoring assessment

A gain scoring assessment is an assessment of a potential offset site completed by a certified native vegetation assessor. It includes:

- a site assessment as outlined in **section 6.5**, and
- calculation of the gain score in accordance with the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2¹⁶*, and
- an assessment of a site's eligibility, including any significant threats to the condition of the native vegetation.

For species offsets, the habitat characteristics of the native vegetation to be protected must be consistent with the habitat requirements of the threatened species for which it generates habitat units. If a gain scoring assessment finds habitat characteristics that are clearly inconsistent with the requirements of a species that is mapped at a proposed offset site, species habitat units cannot be created for that species.

A gain scoring assessment must be undertaken in the following circumstances:

- all third party offset sites
- first party offset sites generating species habitat units, or that are located within wetland vegetation types.

DEECA has systems and tools that calculate a simplified gain score. These tools can be used instead of undertaking a gain scoring assessment for first party offset sites generating general habitat units only, that are not located within wetland vegetation types.

9.6 Offset trading and registration

The Native Vegetation Offset Register contains information relating to existing offsets including the number of habitat units that an offset generates and when these offsets have been used to offset the removal of native vegetation. The Native Vegetation Offset Register includes the Native Vegetation Credit Register that tracks the creation and sale of third party offsets.

9.6.1 Third party offsets

Third parties can sell the habitat units that their offset generates (known as credits) to permit holders needing to meet offset requirements.

Third party offset sites must be recorded on the Native Vegetation Credit Register.

9.6.2 First party offsets

First party offsets are established on land owned by the holder of a permit to remove native vegetation in order to meet their own offset requirements. The habitat units generated at a first party offset site cannot be sold to another party.

First party offset sites should be recorded on the Native Vegetation Offset Register.

Any first party offset that will be allocated over time to a number of approvals must be registered on the Native Vegetation Offset Register. This ensures that units are correctly allocated.

9.6.3 Crown land offsets

Crown land offsets must be visible to all current and future Crown land managers and the public. All first and third party Crown land offsets must be registered on the Native Vegetation Offset Register.

10. Strategic plans for native vegetation protection and management

This section sets out two strategic plans that can be used in the planning system for the protection and management of native vegetation; a NVPP and a PVP.

The methods and approaches outlined in the Guidelines should be used when developing a NVPP or PVP.

10.1 Native Vegetation Precinct Plan

A NVPP provides for the strategic management of native vegetation for a defined area or precinct. A NVPP is established via a planning scheme amendment that incorporates the plan and lists it in the schedule to Clause 52.16.

Preparing a Native Vegetation Precinct Plan (DELWP, 2017), available on the DEECA website, provides guidance and a NVPP template for planning authorities.

As part of the process for preparing a NVPP for incorporation into a planning scheme, a planning authority must:

- demonstrate that the objectives for native vegetation management have been met
- demonstrate that the NVPP has been developed in accordance with the Guidelines, including the application of the three-step approach described in **section 4**
- include information listed at **Table 4** and **Table 5** of the Guidelines, noting that the site assessment report must:
 - be for the total area to which the NVPP applies, and
 - include information for the native vegetation to be removed and the native vegetation to be retained.

A NVPP prepared for incorporation into the planning scheme after the commencement of Amendment VC 138 must:

- specify the purpose and objectives of the plan
- specify the area to which the plan applies
- map and describe the native vegetation that can be removed, destroyed or lopped
- map and describe the native vegetation to be retained
- set out the offset requirement, determined in accordance with **section 5** of the Guidelines, for native vegetation that can be removed, destroyed or lopped
- specify management responsibilities and actions for native vegetation to be retained, and
- provide an offset statement that includes evidence that an offset that meets offset requirements for the removal of native vegetation is available, and explains how it will be secured in accordance with **section 9** of the Guidelines, if the plan is incorporated. This statement must also include how the responsibility for securing offsets is to be divided amongst multiple properties or parties, where relevant.

A NVPP must also include mechanisms for tracking the removal of native vegetation and corresponding securing of offsets, to ensure that this occurs in accordance with the NVPP.

A NVPP may include any other information necessary to achieve the purpose and effective implementation of the plan.

10.2 Property Vegetation Plan

A PVP provides for the strategic management of native vegetation for a single property. A PVP relates to the management of native vegetation within a property contained within an agreement made pursuant to section 69 of the *Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987*. This definition of a PVP can also be found at Clause 73 of the Victoria Planning Provisions.

A PVP must:

- be developed in accordance with the Guidelines, and in accordance with the relevant PVP template
- identify areas of native vegetation that will be removed
- identify how the native vegetation removal will be offset
- be approved by the Secretary to DEECA.

A planning permit is required to remove the native vegetation specified in the PVP. The responsible authority must include conditions that the native vegetation removal must start within two years and be completed within 10 years of the date of issuing a permit.



11. Alternative arrangements

This section describes circumstances where alternative arrangements may apply in relation to the offset requirements specified in **section 5**, and the gain generated specified in **section 9.5**.

11.1 Use of site-based information to supplement mapped information

Site-based information may be used instead of the *Habitat importance map* for a threatened species as described in **section 3** in some circumstances. The circumstances where this can occur are as follows.

11.1.1 Native vegetation removal

SPECIES HABITAT MAPPED AT THE SITE

Habitat for threatened species, as shown in a *Habitat importance map*, can be removed from consideration in the assessment of an application for a permit to remove native vegetation, in the following circumstances:

- a competent ecologist confirms that the native vegetation to be removed has habitat characteristics¹⁸ that are clearly inconsistent with the habitat requirements of that particular species, and
- written approval is provided by the Secretary to DEECA.

SPECIES HABITAT NOT MAPPED AT THE SITE

Habitat for threatened species can be considered in the assessment of an application when the species' *Habitat importance map* does not show the native vegetation to be removed as its habitat, in the following circumstances:

- there is recent evidence of the species using the native vegetation to be removed as habitat, and
- the native vegetation to be removed has habitat characteristics¹⁸ that are clearly consistent with the habitat requirements of that species.

This arrangement allows for consideration of threatened species habitat as described at decision guideline 10, as relevant. It does not provide for authorities to require applicants to conduct species surveys or secure species offsets for that particular species.

11.1.2 Native vegetation protection

SPECIES HABITAT MAPPED AT THE SITE

When species habitat is mapped in a *Habitat importance map* at a proposed offset site, species habitat units cannot be created, in accordance with **section 9.5.2**, if a competent ecologist confirms that the species' habitat requirements are clearly inconsistent with habitat characteristics¹⁸ of the site.

SPECIES HABITAT NOT MAPPED AT THE SITE

Species habitat units can be created at a proposed offset site for a threatened species where its habitat is not mapped at the site in a *Habitat importance map*, with the approval of the Secretary to DEECA. For this to apply a competent ecologist must confirm that:

- there is recent evidence of the species using the site as habitat
- the habitat characteristics¹⁸ of the site are clearly consistent with the habitat requirements of that species.

¹⁸ Information gathered during a habitat hectare assessment is sufficient to confirm habitat characteristics. Targeted species surveys are not required.

11.2 Alternative arrangements for general offsets

The strategic biodiversity value score attribute for general offsets can be reduced by a maximum of 10 per cent (that is, to no less than 70 per cent of the strategic biodiversity value score of the native vegetation to be removed) if the offset secured includes protection of any (or all) of the following:

- 10 per cent more general habitat units than are required
- At least two large trees for every large tree to be removed.

This facilitates the protection of native vegetation in fragmented landscapes that may have biodiversity value, including the presence of large trees. These areas can have lower strategic biodiversity value scores than larger connected areas of native vegetation.

11.3 Alternative arrangements for species offsets

An inability to secure a species offset may indicate that the proposed removal of native vegetation will have an unacceptable impact on habitat for that species, and a responsible authority may decide not to grant the permit.

If a suitable species offset cannot be identified an applicant may:

- consider further steps to avoid or minimise impacts to reduce offset requirements
- appoint a competent ecologist to review offset requirements and/or species habitat units available at an offset site
- consider activities or alternative management actions that will generate additional gain for the species at an offset site
- contact landowners or land managers of sites that may be able to be used to generate species habitat units that meet the offset requirements.

If the above actions do not address the inability to secure a species offset, the applicant can propose an alternative offset for the species habitat. The alternative offset must generate direct habitat improvements for the species, that provide equivalent compensation for the removal of its habitat.

Alternative arrangements for species offsets are considered for approval on a case by case basis by DEECA and must be to the satisfaction of the Secretary to DEECA. If offsets are available, the cost of the offset is not a valid reason for proposing alternative offset arrangements.

11.4 Avoid, minimise and offset for native forest timber harvesting

Avoid, minimise and offset requirements for an application to remove native vegetation for timber harvesting can be met when removal occurs in accordance with a native forest timber harvesting PVP endorsed by DEECA, that applies to the land. For this to occur, the PVP must be developed in accordance with *Property vegetation plan template – Native forest timber harvesting*.

The *Property vegetation plan template – Native forest timber harvesting* refers to specific standards and minimum requirements¹⁹ for:

- avoiding and minimising impacts on biodiversity and other values of native vegetation
- regeneration.

A native forest timber harvesting PVP can be developed for the following harvesting types:

- clearfall harvesting with a coupe size of 20 ha or less
- retention harvesting with a coupe size of 40 ha or less
- selective harvesting or thinning with a coupe size of 120 ha or less.

Any native forest timber harvesting application that does not include a DEECA endorsed native forest timber harvesting PVP must comply fully with the Guidelines.

The native forest timber harvesting PVP can also be the Timber Harvesting Plan under the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014*.

The *Property vegetation plan template – Native forest timber harvesting* is available on the DEECA website.

¹⁹ Standards and minimum requirements are detailed in the *Code of Practice for Timber Production 2014 (as amended 2022)*, *Management guidelines for private native forests and plantations*, and the *Management Standards and Procedures for timber harvesting operations in Victoria's State forests 2014*.

Glossary

Avoid – A use or development has successfully avoided the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation when native vegetation is not removed and there are no impacts on biodiversity or other values.

Biodiversity value of native vegetation – Values of native vegetation considered in the Guidelines that relate to biodiversity including extent of native vegetation, large trees, native vegetation condition, EVC, sensitive wetlands and coastal areas, strategic biodiversity value, and habitat for rare or threatened species.

Bioregion – A landscape-scale approach to classifying the environment using a range of attributes such as climate, geomorphology, geology, soils and vegetation. There are 28 bioregions identified within Victoria.

Canopy tree – A mature tree (that is, it is able to flower) that is greater than 3 m in height and is normally found in the upper layer of the relevant vegetation type.

Certified native vegetation assessor – A native vegetation assessor listed on DEECA's Vegetation Quality Assessment Competency Register. A certified native vegetation assessor must have a current certification.

Condition score – A score that describes how close native vegetation is to its mature natural state. The condition score is a value between 0 and 1. For the purposes of the Guidelines the condition score is the 'Habitat score', as described in the Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual, divided by 100 to achieve a value between 0 and 1.

Coupe size – A coupe is an area of forest from which timber is harvested in one operation. Coupe size is measured as the net harvested area of the coupe, that is, it does not include the area excluded from harvesting.

Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) – The diameter of the main trunk of a tree measured over bark at 1.3 m above ground level.

Dispersed habitat – A habitat for a threatened species that is more than 2,000 ha and is usually less geographically restricted than a highly localised habitat.

Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) – A native vegetation type classified on the basis of a combination of its floristics, lifeforms, and ecological characteristics.

Extent of native vegetation – The area of land covered by a patch and/or a scattered tree, measured in hectares.

Gain – The predicted improvement in biodiversity value of native vegetation due to active management and increased security provided at an offset site.

Gain score – The sum of prior management gain, security gain, maintenance gain and improvement gain, as relevant. For the purposes of the Guidelines the gain score determined in accordance with the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual, Version 2* (or its successor) is divided by 100 to achieve a value between 0 and 1.

General habitat score – A measure of the overall biodiversity value of native vegetation.

General habitat unit – A measure of loss and gain in overall biodiversity value of native vegetation.

General habitat units are used to measure offset amount and gain generated at an offset site.

General offset – An offset requirement specified in general habitat units to compensate for the biodiversity loss from native vegetation removal.

Habitat hectare assessment – An assessment of native vegetation to determine its condition, extent (in hectares) and EVC. The assessment must be completed by a certified native vegetation assessor following methodology described in *Native vegetation: sustaining a living landscape. Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual – Guidelines for applying the habitat hectares scoring method, Version 1.3* (or its successor) and updated in the Assessor's handbook.

Habitat hectares – A site-based measure of biodiversity value that is calculated by multiplying the extent of native vegetation by its condition score. $Habitat\ hectares = extent \times condition\ score$.

Habitat importance score – A measure of the importance of a location in the landscape as habitat for a particular rare or threatened species in relation to other locations of habitat for that species. The *Habitat importance map* for a rare or threatened species shows its habitat importance scores.

Highly localised habitat – Habitat for a threatened species that covers less than 2,000 ha and is typically geographically restricted.

Landscape factor – A value used when calculating habitat units, determined using landscape-scale information. There are two types of landscape factor – general and species:

The general landscape factor is determined using an adjusted strategic biodiversity value score.

The species landscape factor is determined using an adjusted habitat importance score for each rare or threatened species habitat mapped at a site in a *Habitat importance map*.

Large tree – A native canopy tree with a Diameter at Breast Height (DBH) greater than or equal to the large tree benchmark for the relevant bioregional EVC. A large tree can be either a large scattered tree or a large patch tree.

Location category – There are three location categories that indicate potential risk to biodiversity from removing less than 0.5 ha of native vegetation. These categories are shown in the *Location map* as Location 3, Location 2 and Location 1.

Mapped wetland – Any wetland included in the *current wetlands* layer.

Minimise – Locating, designing or managing a use or development to ensure that the impacts of native vegetation removal on biodiversity and other values are kept to the minimum necessary.

Native vegetation – Native vegetation is defined in Clause 73 of the Victoria Planning Provisions and all local planning schemes as 'plants that are indigenous to Victoria, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses'.

Native Vegetation Credit Register – A statewide register of native vegetation credits that meet minimum standards for security and management of sites. The register is administered by DEECA and records the creation, trade and allocation of credits to meet offset requirements.

Native Vegetation Offset Register – A statewide register containing information relating to existing and potential offsets including the number of habitat units that an offset generates and when these offsets have been used to offset the removal of native vegetation. The Native Vegetation Offset Register is administered by DEECA, and includes the Native Vegetation Credit Register.

No net loss – The outcome that the native vegetation removal regulations achieve by ensuring that native vegetation removal is avoided, minimised and offset.

Other values of native vegetation – Values of native vegetation considered in the Guidelines that are not biodiversity values are land and water protection, identified landscape values and native vegetation protected under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*.

Patch – A patch of native vegetation is:

- an area of vegetation where at least 25 per cent of the total perennial understorey plant cover is native, or
- any area with three or more native canopy trees where the drip line of each tree touches the drip line of at least one other tree, forming a continuous canopy, or
- any mapped wetland included in the *Current wetlands map*, available in DEECA systems and tools.

Patch tree – A native canopy tree within a patch.

Perennial – A species that has living material present above-ground for more than one year.

Property – land under common occupation particularly for the purpose of rating, billing or habitation. Property is typically described by street addresses, standard property identifier or a municipal rate assessment number. A property can consist of one parcel, many parcels, or part of a parcel, where a parcel is the smallest unit of land able to be transferred within Victoria's cadastral system.

Scattered tree – A native canopy tree that does not form part of a patch.

Sensitive wetlands and coastal areas – These areas are included in Location 2 of the *Location map* and specifically relate to wetlands designated under the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (the Ramsar Convention); wetlands listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands of Australia; and internationally important sites for Migratory Shorebirds of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.



Species habitat score – A measure of the biodiversity value of native vegetation at a site for a particular rare or threatened species. This score is calculated for each threatened species that the site provides habitat for.

Species habitat unit – A species habitat unit is the measure of loss and gain in biodiversity value of native vegetation for a particular threatened species. Species habitat units are used to measure offset amount and gain generated at an offset site.

Species offset – An offset requirement specified in species habitat units to compensate for the impact on a threatened species habitat from native vegetation removal.

Species-general offset test – A test used to determine whether a general or species offset is required based on the impact of native vegetation removal on habitat for threatened species.

Strategic biodiversity value score – A rank of a location's complementary contribution to Victoria's biodiversity, relative to other locations across the state. The strategic biodiversity value score of native vegetation is shown in the *Strategic biodiversity value map*.

Threatened Species – A species that is listed as critically endangered, endangered, or vulnerable on the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 Threatened List*, or its successor.

Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual – This is the Department of Sustainability and Environment 2004 published document titled *Native vegetation: sustaining a living landscape. Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual – Guidelines for applying the habitat hectares scoring method, Version 1.3* or its successor.



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