

# Habitat Hectare Assessment

## Fact sheet

### What is the Habitat Hectare method?

The Habitat Hectare method is a site-based vegetation assessment method that measures the condition of native vegetation against a benchmark for the same vegetation type or Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC). The benchmark represents the average mature condition of the EVC, prior to European settlement.

The current condition of the native vegetation is combined with the area to determine the amount of Habitat Hectares in a patch of vegetation.

This is the method approved by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for assessing native vegetation for the purposes of regulation and investment. Qualified assessors undertake Habitat Hectare assessments to determine the loss from clearing native vegetation and gains available at offset and investment sites.

### What is the current method?

The current method is described in the Vegetation Quality Assessment Manual – Guidelines for applying the Habitat Hectare scoring method version 1.3. (DSE 2004). This methodology is applied for decisions made in accordance with the native vegetation permitted clearing regulations. The method must be applied as described in the manual and includes the assessment and scoring of Landscape Context, which contributes 25 percent of the habitat condition score.

### Who can complete a Habitat Hectare assessment?

Generally, Habitat Hectare assessments are undertaken by qualified ecologists. For the purposes of the native vegetation permitted clearing regulations, assessments must be carried out by qualified assessors. This includes those who are registered on DELWP's Vegetation Quality Assessment Competency Register. Other experienced ecologists familiar with the method may also undertake the assessment. The quality and accuracy of assessments is routinely checked by DELWP when it is a referral authority for applications for permits to remove native vegetation.

Habitat Hectare assessments cannot be carried out by inexperienced people with limited ecological knowledge.

### What is involved in undertaking a Habitat Hectare assessment?

The assessor must be able to define and map the relevant EVCs within an area and delineate any areas of observable differences in condition. They will then assign the species observed to their appropriate life form categories. Assessors are required to estimate the cover and health of plants and accurately measure relevant habitat features. They must also be able to identify all weeds species present and the threat they pose at that location.

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## What is the VQACC?

DELWP's Vegetation Quality Assessment Competency Check (VQACC) is a voluntary accreditation process for experienced native vegetation assessors. Under some programs, registration on the VQA Competency Register is required in order to undertake assessments, for example to achieve accreditation under the Native Vegetation Credit Register.

The VQACC was postponed subject to expected changes to the assessment methodology. Due to the extended delay and the ongoing demand for the VQACC accreditation, the program has been reinstated while the changes to the methodology are made.

## How do I become registered?

VQACC dates are published periodically on the DELWP website. Interested participants can register their interest, stating the session they wish to attend by emailing [habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au). You will subsequently receive an emailed response notifying you of an availability.

All assessors previously registered on the VQA Competency Register whose registrations have now expired, must successfully complete a new VQACC in order to remain registered as competent. Assessors need to successfully complete the VQACC every 2 years to remain registered.

## Is Habitat Hectare training available?

Formal training is not currently available. DELWP is developing a strategy for the external delivery of comprehensive vegetation assessment training. Further information will be available late in 2016.

## Where can I get further information?

Further information can be sought by emailing: [habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au](mailto:habitat.hectares@delwp.vic.gov.au)

Other information regarding native vegetation, including DELWP's native vegetation permitted clearing regulations and associated fact sheets can be found at:

[www.depi.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation](http://www.depi.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation)

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