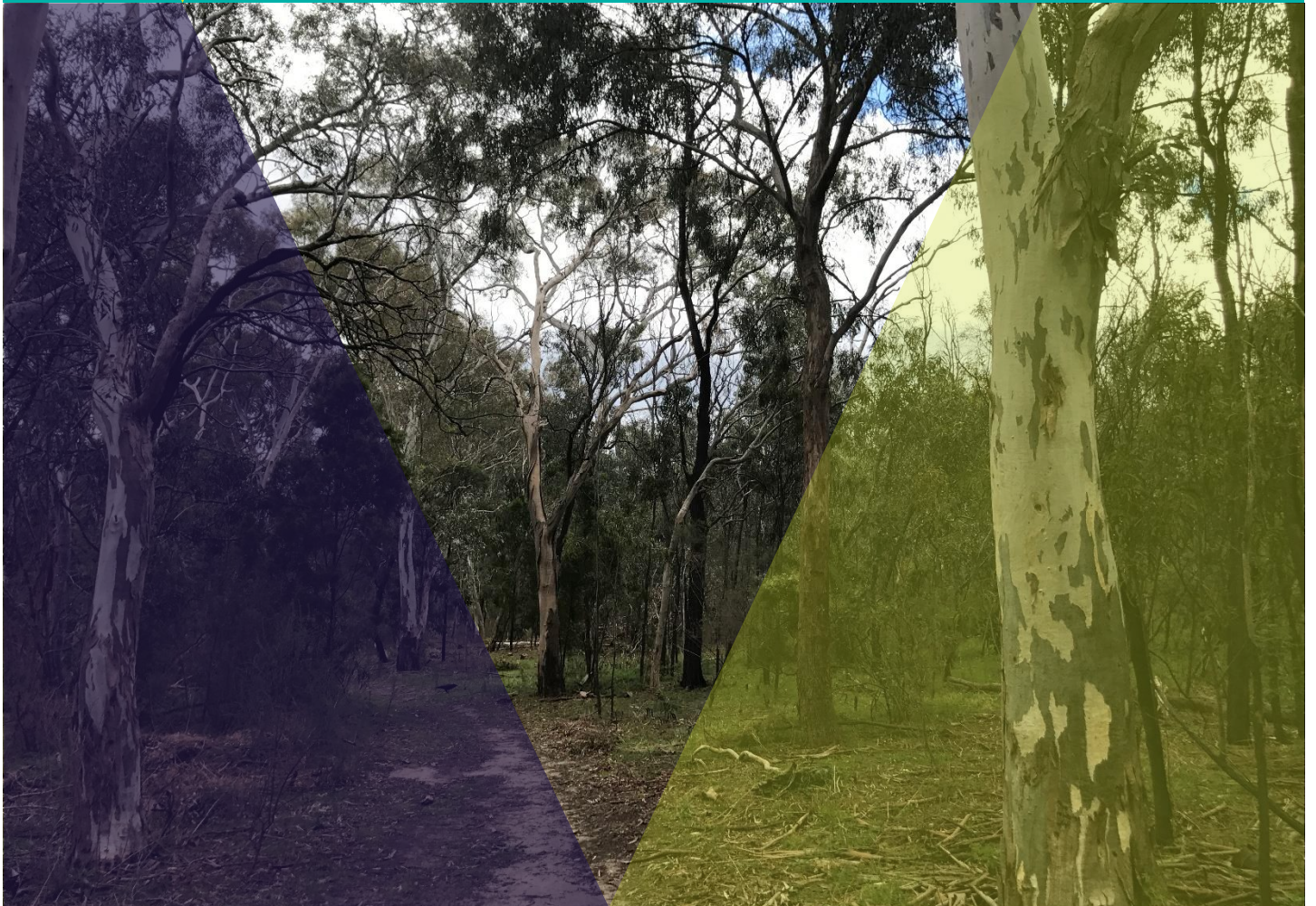


Native vegetation removal regulations - Crown land exemption

Removal and counterbalance activities 2019/20



Acknowledgment

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

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



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1. Background

The native vegetation removal regulations aim to achieve a no net loss to biodiversity when approval is given to remove native vegetation. They are generally implemented through the local planning schemes in Victoria.

1.1 Regulatory context

Clause 52.17 is included in all planning schemes in Victoria. The clause applies to all land and sets out the requirement for a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation unless the removal can proceed under a relevant exemption.

The *Crown land* exemption is listed in Clause 52.17 and provides for native vegetation removal to the minimum extent necessary to manage Crown land by or on behalf of the Secretary to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), or Parks Victoria (PV), and in accordance with the *Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land* (Crown land procedure).

The Crown land procedure was approved and came into effect on 30 May 2018. The Crown land procedure requires that:

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

1.2 This report

This report is the second prepared under the Crown land procedure and attempts to present the impacts on (losses) and benefits for (gains) biodiversity from a defined set of works undertaken on Crown land during the 2019/2020 financial year. State-wide losses and gains to biodiversity are calculated in habitat hectares.

The Crown land procedure provides for a five yearly detailed assessment and report, this report will demonstrate if DELWP and PV operations on Crown

land achieve as a minimum, no net loss to biodiversity.

This report does not capture native vegetation removal as a consequence of firefighting activities which are covered by a separate fire protection exemption within Clause 52.17.

1.3 Roles and responsibilities

The operational business units of DELWP and PV are responsible for recording removal and counterbalancing activities in a spatial database and providing that data to DELWP's Native vegetation regulation team.

The Native vegetation regulation team is responsible for adding condition and gain scores to the data, determining habitat hectares loss and habitat hectares of gain for the financial year and consolidating all received data into a report for DELWP's Chief Fire Officer, who provides the report to the Secretary

1.4 Habitat hectares

The native vegetation removal regulations describe standard measures for determining the biodiversity loss from removing native vegetation and biodiversity gain from protecting and managing native vegetation:

- Habitat hectares of loss from removing native vegetation is calculated by multiplying the extent of native vegetation by its condition score. *Habitat hectares loss = extent × condition score.*
- Habitat hectares of gain from managing native vegetation for conservation outcomes is calculated by multiplying the extent of native vegetation by a gain score for that management action(s) undertaken. *Habitat hectares gain = extent × gain score.*

1.4.1 Measuring loss from new removal of native vegetation

Native vegetation condition scores can be determined on site following the habitat hectare method. DELWP has also published a *Native vegetation condition map* that is used in the native vegetation removal regulations.

Habitat hectares of loss from removing native vegetation in this report have been determined using condition scores in the *Native vegetation condition map*.

1.4.2 Measuring gain from counterbalancing actions

Gain is determined in accordance with the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual* following a gain scoring assessment and usually comprises four components: prior management gain, maintenance gain, improvement gain, and security gain. Native vegetation offset sites require an intensive 10-year management plan, ongoing maintenance and security of land in perpetuity to be eligible for all gains. These intensive and ongoing management actions as well as the improved protection

determines the gain score used at native vegetation offset sites.

Crown land counterbalance activities are single management actions undertaken over a single year. Counterbalancing gain scores have been determined by dividing the relevant component score detailed in the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual* by 10 to represent gain for individual activities over 1 year

The gain scores detailed in the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual* for a Crown land offset site and those used in this report are shown in the following table.

Table 1 Counterbalance activity gain scores

Activity	Adapted from Gain scoring manual for Crown land offset sites	Counterbalance gain for 1-year action
Remove access to stock and public (<i>gain is only available if threats i.e. weed and pest animals are controlled, and vegetation is maintained</i>)	0.02	0.002
Maximum of 0.15 is available if ALL threats i.e. weeds and pest animals are controlled, and vegetation is maintained AND ALL high threats are controlled i.e. grassy, herbaceous and woody weeds as well as any native or introduced herbivore that can impact native vegetation condition. For the purposes of this report, these 0.15 points are broken down into three parts	0.15	0.015
Weed control	0.05	0.005
Pest animal control	0.05	0.005
Over abundant wildlife control	0.05	0.005
Supplementary planting	0.01	0.001
Habitat feature restoration	logs	0.02
	other	0.05
Ecological burning, watering, thinning, grazing	0.1	0.01
Increase level of protection (to reserve for conservation from another purpose)	10% condition score	
Land acquisition into parks and reserve system	10% condition score	

3. New removal of native vegetation

3.1 Activities to be included

The Crown land procedure defines new removal as:

- Construction of a new asset, or the expansion of an existing asset beyond its existing footprint:
 - Roads, including bend realignment
 - Tracks, including fire access tracks
 - Fire infrastructure (e.g. towers)
 - Recreational assets, including boat ramps
 - Water point assets
 - Borrow pits
 - Fuelbreaks (including strategic fuelbreaks)
 - New fences
- Hazardous tree removal which:
 - is not associated with planned burning, or emergency response

- has not been assessed by an arborist, trained departmental staff or a contractor with appropriate accreditation and found to be of immediate risk of failure

- Mechanical fuel reduction treatments

3.2 New removal recorded by PV and DELWP

The table below outlines the new removal activities undertaken by PV and DELWP for the 2019 -2020 financial year.

3.2.1 Bushfire response works

Native vegetation removed as part of bushfire recovery works has not been captured under the Crown land procedure and reported upon in this report. These are activities occur in the act of fighting bushfires, so are not incorporated within yearly work plans. For the purposes of the Crown land procedure, native vegetation removed in firefighting situations are not captured as new removal activities.

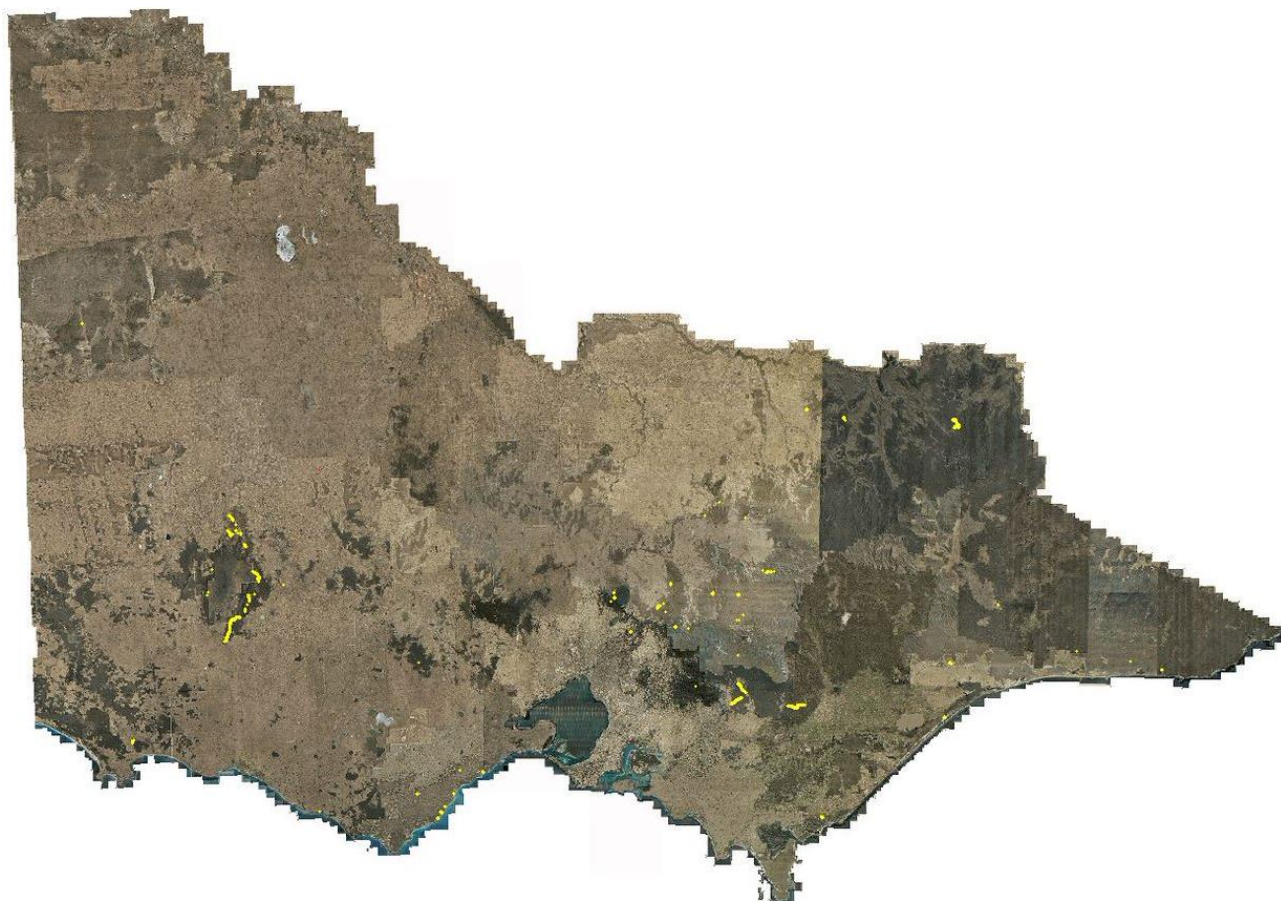
DELWP is currently developing processes to capture and report the extent of native vegetation removal which occurs during bushfire respond activities.

Table 2 New Removal activities by DELWP and PV

*New removal activity	Count	Hectare loss	Habitat hectare loss
Bridge	28	0.51	0.41
Burrow pit	1	2.50	1.01
Campsites	3	2.00	1.59
Culvert	10	20.23	8.46
Cutting	1	0.28	0.22
Fuel breaks	6	33.48	22.29
Fuel breaks - Mechanical method	17	118.89	49.55
Recreation Area	5	2.05	1.19
Road/Track - Fire access	12	76.68	55.80
Road/Track - Other	8	485.68	377.15
Road/Track - Recreation	1	16.60	13.55
Trail	2	21.04	17.14
Water Point	1	0.39	0.15
Grand Total	95	780	555

* New removal activities do not include native vegetation removed for bushfire response (firefighting) activities.

Figure 1: Location and extent of DELWP and PV new removal (yellow polygons)



4. Counterbalance

4.1 Counterbalance

Counterbalance activities are defined as DELWP and PV management activities that either increase the extent or quality of native vegetation. They are standard management activities and contribute to the no net loss to biodiversity objective, which is administered through the native vegetation removal regulations for the approved removal of native vegetation. Activities contributing to counterbalance may include:

- Vegetation establishment
- Habitat restoration
- Weed control
- Pest animal control
- Control of over abundant wildlife
- Threatened species response
- Removal of licences, leases and permits for activities that decrease the condition of native vegetation.

- Ecological grazing
- Ecological watering
- Ecological burning
- Ecological thinning
- Permanent road closures
- Change of land tenure to one with a higher level of protection for native vegetation
- Acquisition of land into parks and reserve.

The above activities are classified into the four categories as per the Biodiversity 2037 Activity Data Requirements (Refer to Table 3).

4.2 Biodiversity incentive programs

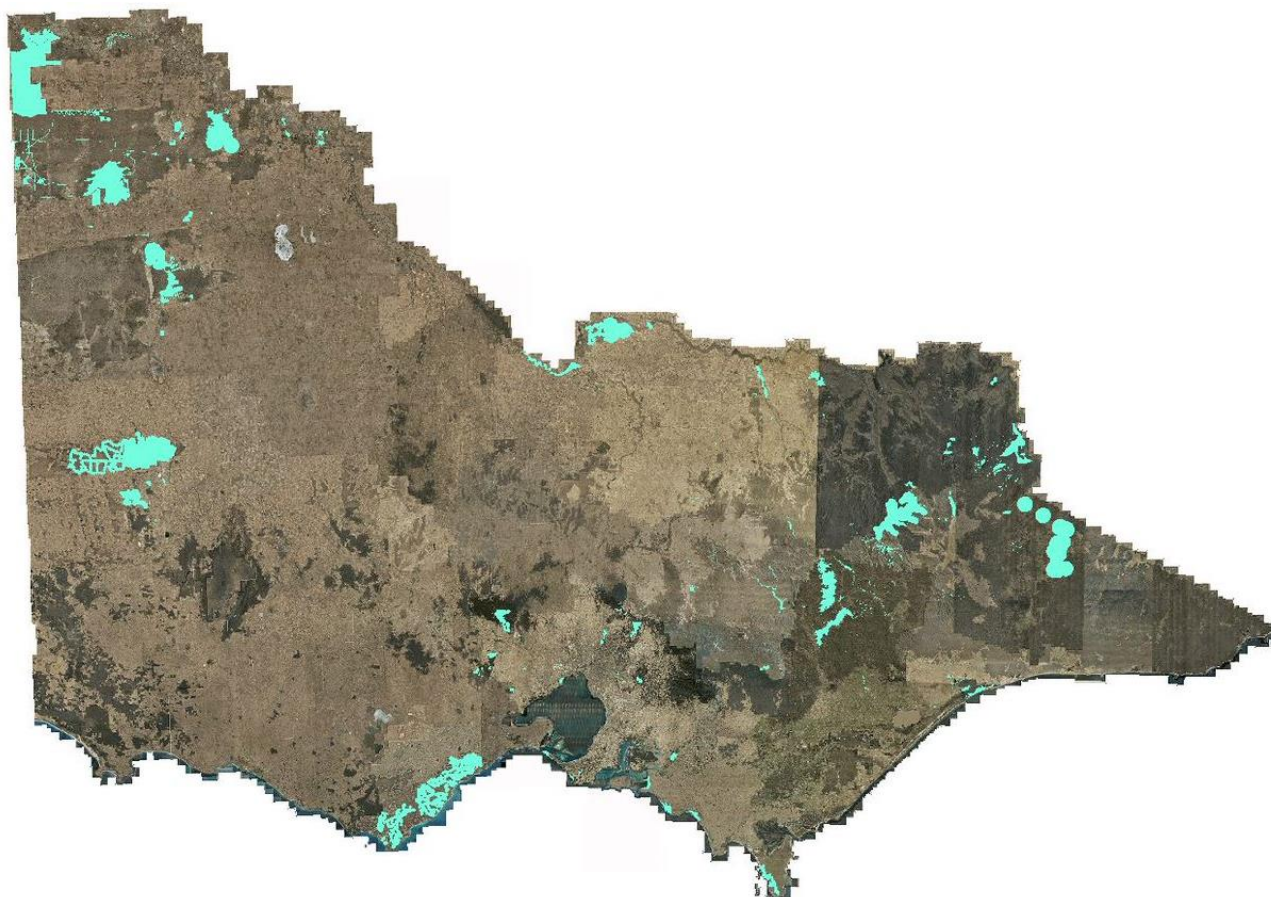
Management activities funded under biodiversity incentive programs (e.g. Biodiversity response planning) are excluded from contributing to counterbalance under the Crown land procedure. These activities will contribute to recording under *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*.

4.3 Counterbalance activities recorded by DELWP and PV

Table 3 Counterbalance activities by DELP and PV (2019-2020)

Activity	Activity count	Hectare	Habitat hectare gain
Native Animal Control	9	216,123	1080.62
Exotic Animal Control	241	692,015	3460.08
Revegetation/restoration	353	10,597	18.64
Weed Control	455	89,471	447.35
Grand Total	1059	1,008,203	5,007

Figure 2: Location and extent of DELWP and PV counterbalancing activities (green polygons)



5. No net loss summary of recorded data

Table 4 provides a summary of biodiversity loss from new removal activities and biodiversity gain from counterbalance activities captured under the Crown land procedure. Data shows that in the 2019/20-

year, management activities have resulted in an overall gain in biodiversity value within the Crown land estate managed by DELWP and PV.

Table 4 Summary of biodiversity gains and losses

Activity	Activity count	Hectare	Habitat hectare
*New removal activities	95	780	555 (loss)
Counterbalance activities	1059	1,008,203	5007 (gain)

*New removal activities do not include native vegetation removed for bushfire response (firefighting) activities.

6. Future reporting improvement

This is the second year of implementing the Crown land procedure and DELWP and Parks Victoria and the second report on native vegetation removal works and counterbalancing activities under the *Crown land* exemption.

6.1 Improvements adopted for this report

The following improvements were adopted for this report, which has resulted in a more accurate and detailed picture of the counterbalance activities occurring on the Crown land estate.

Counterbalance activities

Only biodiversity improvement projects delivered as part of routine management actions from recurrent operating budgets have contributed to counterbalance gain under the Crown land procedure.

Activities delivered under the following biodiversity incentive funding programs have been excluded from contributing to counterbalance gain under the Crown land procedure. These projects are funded to deliver biodiversity outcomes that go beyond the routine operation.

- Biodiversity on-ground actions
- Biodiversity response planning

- Weeds and pests on public land
- Bushfire Biodiversity Response and recovery Program

Capturing counterbalance activities

Counterbalance activities were recorded using the *Biodiversity 2037 activity data requirements* for activities undertaken by Parks Victoria, which contributed to most counterbalance activities (984,982 hectares of a total of 1,008,203 hectares).

6.2 Improvements have been identified for future years:

Simplify new removal activity terminology

Review the new removal activity categories so they better reflect on-ground actions, avoid confusion when recording activities and result in a more meaningful report. Update the geodatabase template to reflect any changes.

Continue to review counterbalance recording and gain scoring

Work with operational staff to adopt the *Biodiversity 2037 activity data requirements*, while reviewing gain to ensure it accurately captures biodiversity improvement.

