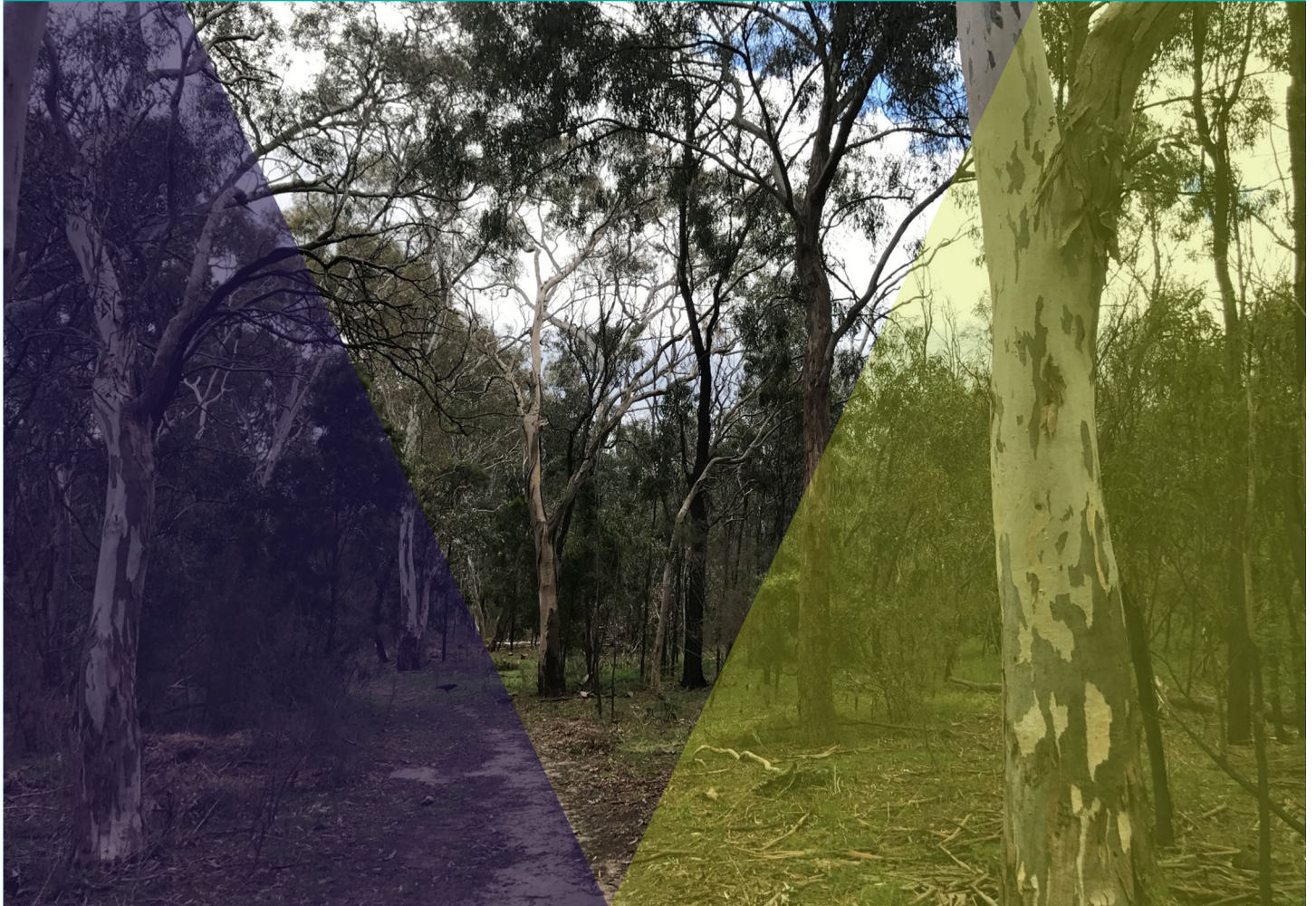


Native vegetation removal regulations - Crown land exemption report

Removal and counterbalance activities 2020/21



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 regulations¹ aim to achieve a no net loss to biodiversity when approval is given to remove native vegetation. They are generally implemented through local planning schemes.

1.1 Regulatory context

Clause 52.17 is included in all planning schemes in Victoria. The clause applies to freehold and Crown 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 52.17-7 and states:

The requirement to obtain a permit does not apply to native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped 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), the Great Ocean Road Coast and Parks Authority (GOR Authority) or Parks Victoria (PV), and in accordance with the Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land.

The *Procedure for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation on Crown land* (Crown land procedure) came into effect on 30 May 2018. It requires that:

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

1.2 This report

This report is the third prepared under the Crown land procedure and attempts to present the impacts (losses) and benefits (gains) to native vegetation from a defined set of works undertaken on Crown

land by DELWP and PV during the 2020-2021 financial year. State-wide losses and gains to native vegetation are calculated in habitat hectares.

This report does not capture native vegetation removal because of firefighting activities (e.g. planned burns) which are covered by a separate fire protection exemption within Clause 52.17.

The GOR Authority has only recently gained access to the *Crown land* exemption and was not relying on it in the 2020-2021 year. The data below excludes the GOR Authority.

Native vegetation removal and counterbalance activities by the GOR Authority will be included in next year's *Crown land* exemption report.

1.3 Roles and responsibilities

The operational business units of DELWP, PV and the GOR Authority 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, calculating habitat hectares of loss and habitat hectares of gain for the financial year and consolidating all received data into this report.

1.4 Habitat hectares

Under the *Crown land* exemption, native vegetation removal and improvement is measured in habitat hectares.

- Habitat hectares of loss from removing native vegetation is calculated by multiplying the extent of native vegetation by its modelled condition score. *Habitat hectares loss = extent × condition score.*
- Habitat hectares of gain from counterbalance activities is calculated by multiplying the extent of native vegetation by a gain score for the management action(s) undertaken. *Habitat hectares gain = extent × gain score per hectare.*

1.4.1 Measuring gain from counterbalancing actions

Gain for Crown land counterbalance activities is calculated over a single year. Each management activity has been given a specific gain score by

¹ *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation* (DELWP, 2017)

dividing the relevant component score detailed in the *Native vegetation gain scoring manual* by 10 to represent gain for individual activities over 1 year, rather than the 10-year period used for native vegetation offset sites.

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

Table 1 Crown land offset vs Counterbalance activity gain scores

Activity	Adopted from Gain scoring manual for Crown land offset sites (per ha)	Counterbalance gain per ha for 1-year action
Remove access to stock and public (gain is only available if threats i.e. weed and pest animals are controlled, and vegetation is maintained)	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/revegetation	0.01	0.001
Habitat feature restoration logs	0.02	0.002
other	0.05	0.005
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. This report categorises new removal to construct various assets into four purposes:
 - Recreation
 - Roothing (non-fire related)
 - Bushfire risk reduction
 - Strategic fuel breaks.

Strategic fuel breaks (SFB)

The SFB Program has recorded all native vegetation removal, including vegetation removed for maintenance of existing footprints. SFBs are typically adjacent to roads, which are incorporated into the width of the fuel break. In 2020-21, a default mapping of 40 metres wide was adopted, although the average width of most of the breaks was 20 metres.

3.2 New removal recorded by PV and DELWP

The table below outlines the new removal activities undertaken by PV and DELWP for the 2020-2021 financial year.

3.2.1 Bushfire response works

Native vegetation removed as part of bushfire response and recovery activities have not been captured under the Crown land procedure and reported in this report. These 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 is not captured as a new removal activity.

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

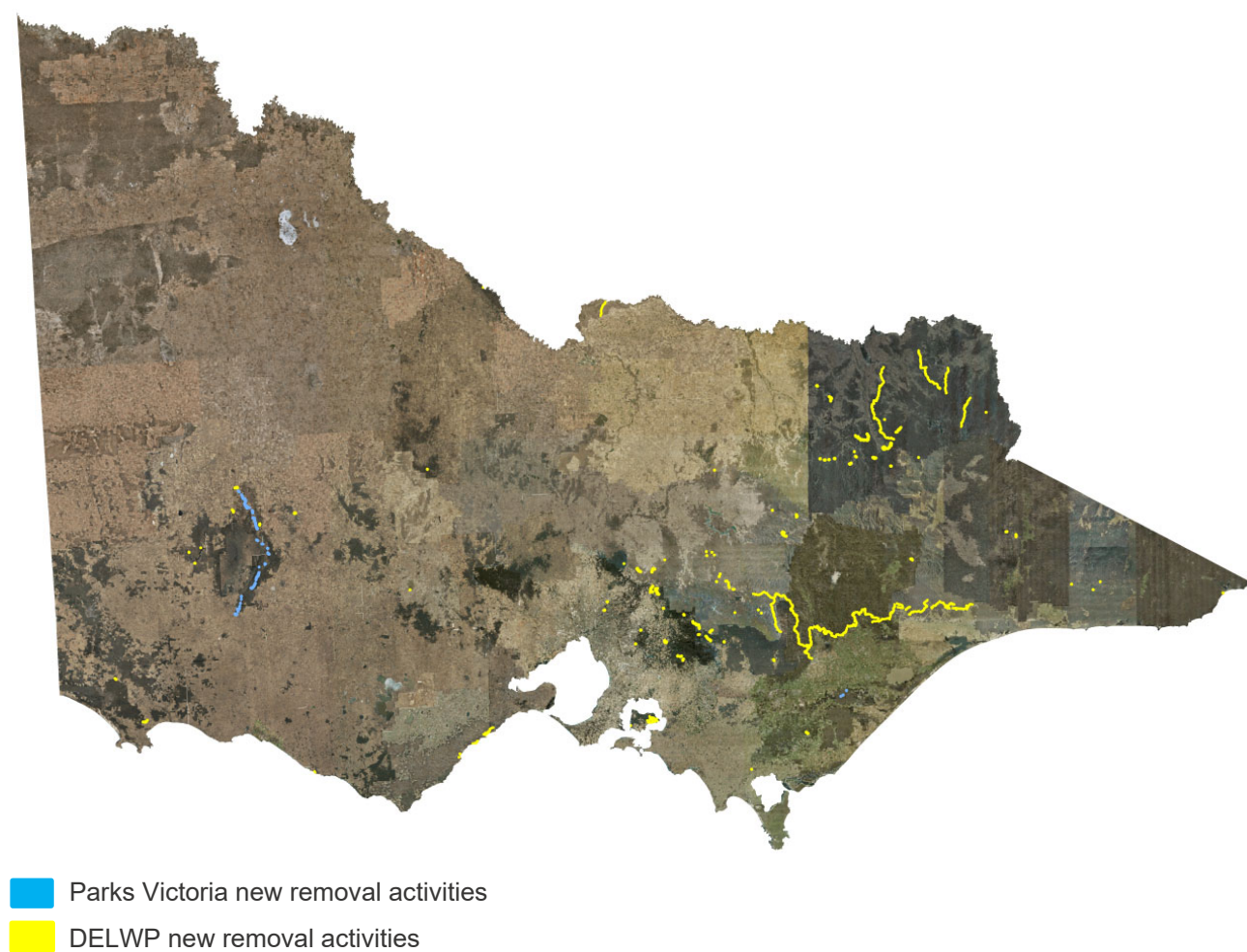
3.3 Data collection

The information presented in Table 2 has been compiled from data supplied by PV and DELWP operational units. Planned new removal activities captured in this data may not have occurred yet. It is possible that other new removal activities may not have been captured by internal data collection processes.

Table 2 New Removal activities by DELWP and PV

Organisation	New removal purpose	Hectare loss	Habitat hectare loss
DELWP	Recreation	30.3	22.70
	Roothing (non-fire related)	5.1	2.40
	Bush fire risk reduction	376.9	281.30
	Strategic fuel breaks (>6m wide)	2,322.50	944.24
DELWP Total		2,734.8	1,250.64
Parks Victoria	Recreation	5.8	4.70
Statewide Total (DELWP and PV)		2,740.6	1,255.34

Figure 1: Location of DELWP and PV new removal activities



- ❖ Locations of new removal activities are not to scale. This figure is included for presentation purposes only.

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 on Crown land they manage. They are business as usual management activities that counter the impact from new removal activities. Activities contributing to counterbalance are categorised under the following categories:

- Herbivore control
- Revegetation/restoration
- Weed control.

4.2 Data collection

The information presented in Table 3 has been compiled from data supplied by PV and DELWP operational units. It is possible that other counterbalance activities may not have been captured by internal data collection processes.

4.2.1 Biodiversity incentive programs

Management activities funded under biodiversity incentive programs (e.g. Biodiversity response planning) are excluded from contributing to counterbalance activities under the *Crown land* exemption.

These activities will contribute to net-gain accounting under *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037* (BIO2037 Plan).

Areas of overlap between counterbalance activities and biodiversity incentive funded activities will be included in the BIO2037 Plan's net gain accounting.

4.2.2 Crown land offset sites

Areas of existing Crown land and freehold land transferred to the Crown land estate which are secured as offset sites to satisfy the offset requirements of third parties are not included as counterbalance activities.

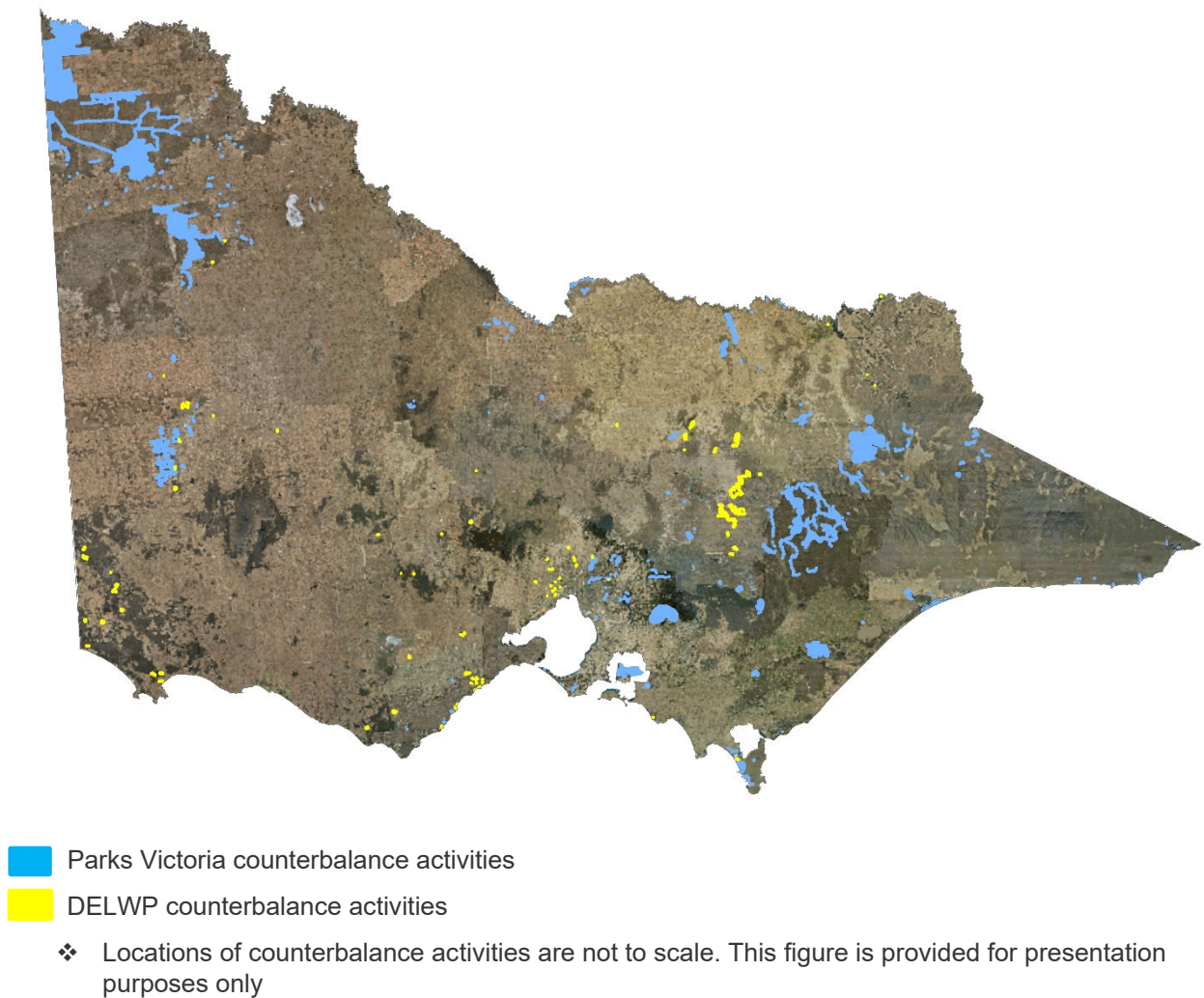
Table 3 Counterbalance activities by DELWP and PV (2020-2021)

Organisation	New removal purpose	Hectares treated	Habitat hectare gain
Parks Victoria	Herbivore control	286,406.73	1,432.03
	Revegetation/restoration	13.24	0.01
	Weed Control	29,402.12	147.01
Park Victoria Total		315,822.09	1,579.06
DELWP	Revegetation/restoration	2,578.4	25.6
	Weed Control	7,914.9	39.0
DELWP Total		10,493.2	64.6
Statewide Total (DELWP and PV)		326,315.29	1,643.66

The extent of counterbalance activities is less than the previous year's report. This is due to:

- Improved data analysis which better distinguishes between activities contributing to counterbalancing under the *Crown land* exemption, and those contributing to broader net gain accounting.
- The exclusion of predator control activities which do not directly improve native vegetation extent or condition.

Figure 2: Location of DELWP and PV counterbalance activities



5. No net loss summary of recorded data

Table 4 provides a summary of native vegetation loss from new removal activities and native vegetation gain from counterbalance activities captured under the *Crown land* exemption.

Data shows that in the 2020-21 year, management activities have resulted in an overall gain in habitat hectares within the Crown land estate managed by DELWP and PV.

Table 4 Summary of native vegetation gains and losses for 2020/21

Activity	Hectare	Habitat hectare
*New removal activities	2,740.6	1,255.34
^Counterbalance activities	326,315.29	1,643.66

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

^Counterbalance activities exclude those activities undertaken with biodiversity incentive funding.

6. Report improvements

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

Works continue with DELWP, PV and the GOR Authority to improve internal recording of new removal and counterbalance activities to ensure reporting accurately reflects on ground actions.

The following improvements were made during the past financial year:

New removal activities

Impacts from native vegetation removal to refresh existing strategic fuel breaks (>6m wide) has been included.

Counterbalance activities

Improved analysis has been applied which better distinguishes between counterbalance activities contributing to gain under the *Crown land* exemption and biodiversity incentive funding activities which contributes to the broader net gain accounting.

GOR Authority

An internal process for recording new removal and counterbalance activities has been developed by the GOR Authority. This data will be included in next year's annual report for the first time.

