



Media release



Minister for Environment and Climate Change
Minister for Youth Affairs

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New native vegetation reforms deliver better environmental outcomes and less green tape

The Victorian Coalition Government has released reforms to regulations for the permitted clearing of native vegetation to deliver better environmental outcomes and reduce confusion and costly green tape for landholders and farmers.

Minister for Environment and Climate Change Ryan Smith, who today released *Reforms to Victoria's native vegetation permitted clearing regulations*, said the changes were about striking the right balance between protecting the environment and assisting the state's farmers and landholders to make the best possible decisions about managing their land.

The new regulations detail how impacts on biodiversity will be considered in relation to planning applications to remove vegetation for farming, housing and major infrastructure projects, and how permitted clearing is best offset to maintain biodiversity values.

The reforms follow the release last year of the Coalition Government's consultation paper *Future Directions for Native Vegetation in Victoria*.

"Feedback from the consultation paper made it clear that the *native vegetation permitted clearing regulations* needed to be more transparent, with clear objectives for landowners and the environment that can be easily understood and implemented," Mr Smith said.

"Criticisms of the old system from sectors including local councils, planning authorities, farmers and property owners, highlighted the need to address excessive green tape, a lack of clarity between the roles of state and local government, extensive costs for landholders and excessive delays in decision-making.

"The reforms we are announcing today will make the system easier to use for everyone – including local government planners – by creating a clearer and more efficient process for land managers and ensuring better and more targeted environmental outcomes for the state."

Mr Smith said the reforms were part of a package of measures the Coalition Government is introducing to:

- make the approval process for vegetation clearing easier to understand for landholders and planning authorities;
- improve clarity and speed of decision-making;

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- improve the way native vegetation is valued; and
- ensure offsets provide appropriate and better targeted environmental benefits.

Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) figures show around 90 per cent of permits for native vegetation removal have a very low impact on biodiversity values, with many of these relating to house extensions or changes to farming practices.

Under the current system these require extensive site assessment and often the costly use of planning consultants.

“These reforms to the *native vegetation permitted clearing regulations* will significantly reduce the cost and time involved with the majority of these applications through the introduction of an over-the-counter offset purchasing system. The reforms will also ensure that offset requirements more accurately match the level of environmental impact,” Mr Smith said.

“A farmer looking to build a new shed, or a family wanting to build a house or an extension on a rural block will be able to assess the level of biodiversity risk associated with their application.

“Low impact applications may result in the landholder choosing to replant trees on another part of their property, agreeing to fence off and conserve existing remnant vegetation, or purchase offset credits over-the-counter or online,” Mr Smith said.

The more cost effective option of buying over-the-counter credits for low risk/low impact permits has already been trialed in Bendigo and DEPI is working with a number of other local councils to establish similar schemes.

At the other end of the scale, applications that have a more extensive impact on native vegetation will require a more comprehensive assessment and matching offset.

Another key benefit of the reforms is the provision of online maps providing detailed information to landholders about native vegetation on their properties. This will provide greater certainty for landholders and assist them as they consider the potential impacts on biodiversity of activities on their property.

The Department of Environment and Primary Industries is also developing a purpose-built online tool to help landholders access this information and navigate the regulatory process. The tool will be available in late 2013.

The reforms to Victoria’s *native vegetation permitted clearing regulations* are available at www.depi.vic.gov.au/nativevegetation

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