

# Video transcript: Offsetting Native Vegetation Loss on Private Land

## Audit objective

In this audit, we looked at whether the government is achieving its objective of no net biodiversity loss from the clearing of native vegetation on private land.

## Who we examined

We examined the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (or DELWP), 4 councils and the Trust for Nature.

## What we examined

We looked at the way they manage native vegetation clearing on private land.

Councils should only approve native vegetation removal when removal cannot be avoided or minimised.

## What we concluded

We concluded that Victoria is not achieving its no-net-loss objective for native vegetation clearing on private land.

This is partly due to illegal clearing, which DELWP acknowledges contributes significantly to the decline of native vegetation across the state.

Councils are not effectively managing native vegetation clearing in their areas and DELWP has been slow to address known issues to support councils' implementation of the regulations.

## Why this audit is important

Native vegetation provides valuable habitat for many plant and animal species and is critical to Victoria's biodiversity.

The state has committed to no net loss of biodiversity from removing native vegetation on private land.

## Background

Victoria is proportionally the most cleared Australian state.

DELWP estimates that since European settlement, 54% of Victoria's original native vegetation has been cleared.

Victoria has lost 79% of native vegetation on private land.

Removal of native vegetation is regulated in Victoria. DELWP sets the policy and regulations and reports on the no-net-loss objective. Councils are primarily responsible for implementing the regulations. They generally require a vegetation offset as part of issuing a permit to clear native plants and trees on private land.

An offset site is one that is secured and actively managed to ensure a biodiversity gain.

## Issue 1: Victoria continues to lose native vegetation

In spite of efforts to establish offsets, we continue to lose native vegetation cover. DELWP estimates that every year Victoria loses some 10,380 habitat hectares of native vegetation on private land.

We cannot verify the accuracy of this estimate, which DELWP acknowledges is subject to high variability and poorly quantified levels of uncertainty.

DELWP's datasets have data quality issues that affect its native vegetation calculator and offset credit register. For example, limitations in DELWP's assessment tools mean that in some parts of the state DELWP cannot determine the required offset to fully compensate for biodiversity loss.

## Issue 2: Councils' management of native vegetation clearing is not effective

Councils are not effectively managing native vegetation clearing on private land.

When assessing applications, not all audited councils apply the 'avoid, minimise and offset' approach, meaning the state could be losing biodiversity unnecessarily.

And due to limitations in their systems, none of them can reliably tell DELWP how many of these permits they approve.

Also, none of the audited councils could demonstrate that all clearing in their area was either permitted or subject to an exemption.

## Issue 3: DELWP is aware of the issues but slow to act

All 4 councils acknowledged that they have not been able to prevent and take effective action against unauthorised clearing.

DELWP is aware of the issues that need to be addressed and has established a working group to develop an action plan, but progress has been slow.

## What we recommended

We made 2 recommendations to councils about improving their management of native vegetation, and 4 to DELWP to improve data collection, reporting and monitoring, as well as its support for councils.

We also made one recommendation to DELWP and councils about determining strategies for effectively managing clearing on private land.

## More information

For more information, or to read our full report, go to [audit.vic.gov.au](http://audit.vic.gov.au)

Note: To access the complete video, please go to

<https://youtu.be/L7UzJMZkxA>