

Getting the balance right

Protecting and improving native vegetation in South Australia



Native Vegetation Council



Government
of South Australia



Getting the balance right

Since European settlement our native vegetation has been under pressure, firstly as an essential resource for housing and fuel, and then as an obstacle to our early agricultural prosperity. Widespread clearance resulted in soil erosion, salinity, and waterlogging. Both agriculture productivity and biodiversity suffered as a result.

Legislation introduced in the 1980s was a tangible signal of community concern that something needed to be done to address the rate of land clearance. There has since been giant strides towards a practical approach to protecting our remaining vegetation in a way that strikes a balance between competing pressures for limited resources.

The framework is now in place for a positive future with simpler processes to manage clearance applications and related off-set options, more people trained to consistently assess native vegetation, a biodiversity credit market and a clear aim of no net loss of native vegetation.

Our native vegetation is one of our most valuable assets. We have a shared responsibility to care for, protect and improve for now and for future generations, so they too can enjoy the benefits.

Why we need to look after native vegetation

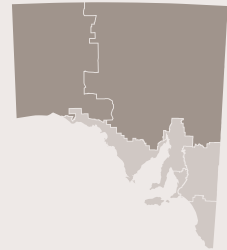
South Australia's native vegetation – from ground covers and native grasses to towering red gums and the seaweed on our coasts – is vital to the health of our environment, our wellbeing and our prosperity.


Native vegetation:

- helps protect our land and water against problems like erosion, salinity and climate change
- provides essential habitat for our native animal species
- improves agricultural productivity by providing windbreaks, shelter for stock and habitat for natural crop pest predators
- allows us to experience our natural beauty and provides us with a sense of place
- helps tackle climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

How much is left?

While native vegetation is largely intact in the state's northern pastoral area, it's a different story in the agricultural regions of the state, with less than 50% remaining across 24 million hectares. In some areas, the figure is lower than 30%.



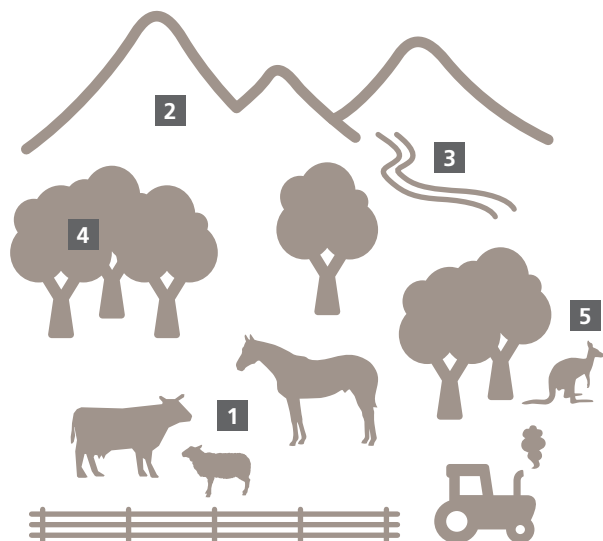
 Pastoral region almost 100% remaining

 Agricultural region less than 50% remaining

Why do we need it?



7 to 8 trees provide enough oxygen for one person per year



Rural vegetation can:

- 1 create shelter for stock
- 2 improve soil stability
- 3 filter nutrients
- 4 buffer pollution
- 5 create animal habitat



Urban vegetation can:

- 6 help cooling in summer months
- 7 decrease noise pollution
- 8 bring wildlife to backyards
- 9 improve the health of people
- 10 filter pollution
- 11 increase property values



Coastal vegetation can:

- 12 assist in stormwater filtration and protection
- 13 support international migratory birds
- 14 provide nursery habitat for fish
- 15 provide recreational space



Native vegetation milestones

Before European settlement

The Aboriginal peoples of South Australia had complex systems for managing the land. Their intimate knowledge of managing native plants through fire and other techniques sustained them for thousands of years. This knowledge lives within the landscape with traces of Dreaming ancestors and stories across South Australia.



1836

Proclamation

Native vegetation provided the raw materials for housing, and fuel for transport and production of other goods. Colonisation also affected the relationship between Aboriginal people and the landscape.



1940s

Post-war clearance

South Australia's early agricultural prosperity relied on the availability of cleared land for primary production. Less than 50% of native vegetation remains in the state's agricultural regions.



Land degradation

1970s

Extensive clearance of native vegetation resulted in serious problems such as erosion, salinity and waterlogging.



New legislation

1980s

The *SA Planning Act 1982* was introduced to help address the rate of land clearance. This was followed by the *Native Vegetation Management Act 1985*, the most progressive legislation in Australia at that time.



Native Vegetation Act

1991

Our remaining native vegetation has been protected by legislation since 1991, so both the extent and connectivity have stabilised. Improved land management, re-vegetation, natural regeneration and pest plant and animal control have helped to stabilise native vegetation cover.

Government legislation permits the clearance of native vegetation, but the clearance must be offset by additional on-ground works.





Partnering for success

Many South Australians have worked hard to ensure that their impact on the landscape is sustainable. In South Australia's agricultural regions:

- close to one million hectares of native vegetation are protected by heritage agreements
- more than 1.7 million hectares are protected by the national park system
- many have adopted improved and sustainable farming practices.

How do heritage agreements work?

A heritage agreement is a conservation area on private land established by agreement between a landholder and the state government. Native plants and animals in the specified area are protected from the time the agreement is made. Landholders entering into a heritage agreement are provided with reduced rates on the agreement land.

Native Vegetation Regulations 2017

The Regulations seek to balance clearing land for everyday activities with the need to protect and restore the remaining vegetation in South Australia.

Offsetting loss

When approval is provided to clear native vegetation, an offset may be required to ensure that we achieve a no net loss of native vegetation in South Australia. Options for offsetting the loss of native vegetation include using credit sites across South Australia, delivering offsets on your own land or paying into a fund held by the Native Vegetation Council. The council then invests this money into on-ground projects.

Pastoralist partners in conservation

Thanks to the Native Vegetation Offset fund, the South Australian outback will accommodate two new conservation areas on pastoral properties thanks to a new stewardship program that has been trialled in the region. As part of the trial – the first of its kind in Australia – pastoralists on Billa Kalina and Wirraminna stations have agreed to conserve important habitat areas on their properties in return for a stewardship payment having progressed through an expression of interest and evaluation.

The areas, totalling 194 square kilometres in size, will provide long-term protection for the region's significant plants, animals and habitats.

The trial has created a new way to increase the spread of conservation refuges to protect some of our highest conservation value landscapes, supporting opportunities for adaptation in the face of our changing outback climate and environment.

Importantly, the stewardship project enables pastoralists to diversify their business, sourcing new streams of income while supporting conservation outcomes as part of a viable pastoral business.

On track to conserve, sustain and prosper

We are getting the basics right with:

- effective legislation and policy
- clear and simple processes
- consistent vegetation assessment standards and practice
- a biodiversity credit market that offers flexibility for better outcomes
- on-ground projects to offset clearances
- a focus on no net loss of native vegetation.



'The next step forward will be the next cultural change where we're not just glad that we've stopped clearance, but we're proud of the fact that we've reinstated some of the native vegetation and we've looked after it, we've actually enhanced it.

This becomes something that is not questioned, not even thought twice about. It's just understood that it's the responsible way we want to live.

You only have to look around... and you can't help but be caught up in the magic of it.'

Bruce Munday

Grazier, scientist and past member
of the Native Vegetation Council

To learn more about
protecting and improving
native vegetation visit:

**[www.environment.sa.gov.au
/nativevegetation](http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/nativevegetation)**



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