

**South Australia's
Native
Vegetation
Council
Strategic Plan
2021–2023**



Native Vegetation Council



Government
of South Australia

Message from the Minister

2021 was an exciting year for the Native Vegetation Council. I appointed a new Presiding Member, Mr Vaughan Levitzke PSM, to reinvigorate the Council and redefine its purpose. Vaughan has brought with him a lifetime of knowledge and experience, and his impact on the Council so far has been noticeable.

I am ambitious for what the Native Vegetation Council can achieve in-line with the goals stipulated in its Strategic Plan for 2021-2023. I am looking forward to seeing how the Council can engage with the community and stakeholders; bringing applicants along on the journey, educating them on the importance of preserving South Australia's native vegetation and exploring different options to protect and revegetate our natural environment.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Speirs'.

**Hon Minister
David Speirs**

Minister for Environment
and Water

Message from the Presiding Member

On behalf of the Native Vegetation Council, (NVC) I am proud to present our strategic plan for 2021–2023.

The strategic plan clearly articulates the NVC's **purpose** and **vision**, and provides the right framework for a contemporary approach to the management of South Australia's **native vegetation**.

The plan will help guide the NVC to identify and prioritise initiatives in line with our strategic goals, while also allowing flexibility for new opportunities as they arise.

It articulates **achievable, future-focused** actions that also **provide direction** for the NVC over the long-term to **fulfil our vision** and **purpose**.

It reflects our **commitment** to working with the **community, industry** and all levels of **government** in an open, collaborative, evidence-based and responsive manner.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vaughan Levitzke'.

**Vaughan
Levitzke PSM**

Presiding Member



Our purpose

The NVC stewards South Australia's environment and recognises the need for sustainable, resilient natural assets through a landscape scale approach to managing the State's rich biodiversity assets. The NVC is partnering with the South Australian Government to grow South Australia as a liveable and prosperous State.

Who we are

The Native Vegetation Council (NVC) is a seven member Council, appointed by the Minister for Environment and Water, who have a range of backgrounds with knowledge and experience from across the State.

The NVC is supported by the South Australian Department for Environment and Water.

What we do

The South Australian natural environment is fundamental to our economic prosperity and quality of life. The NVC promotes, supports, and drives contemporary approaches to building resilient natural assets driving vibrant and prosperous regional communities.

We deliver outcomes to all of South Australian's through a partnering approach to deliver landscape scale solutions to some of the States complex environmental challenges.

Our collaborative approach to the management of the States natural assets is based on international best practice principles.

How we operate

- The NVC is a trusted regulator in South Australia.
- The NVC is an expert in South Australian native vegetation.
- The NVC operates with integrity and consistency in all our activities and decisions.



Our vision

Promoting the economic and other benefits of contemporary and evidence-backed approaches to managing South Australia's native vegetation assets.

Principles underlying the development and implementation of the Strategy:

1. Native vegetation provides essential ecosystem services and is a crucial component of our State's biodiversity.
2. Our native vegetation is important to our State's identity and integral to our First Nation's People's relationship with country.
3. South Australia's ongoing socio-economic status, sustainable development potential and many industries are intricately linked to healthy, functioning native vegetation and the services it provides.
4. Our natural assets are finite and require a contemporary approach to their management to promote sustainable use that conserves biodiversity and builds resilience in our ecosystems

Our strategic goals

Native vegetation across the landscape is sustainably managed in recognition of its enduring environmental, social, cultural and spiritual values.

Building a climate-resilient and ecologically vibrant State by partnering to deliver programs that increase the states biodiversity.

Growing market-based mechanisms and developing innovative policy to balance demand and helping to ensure the State's natural resources into the future.

The value of our native vegetation

Native vegetation has many intrinsic values; economic value; ecological value; social value; and Aboriginal heritage value.

Economic values

Agricultural and pastoral production is the primary land use and source of income in the State's regions. Any economic benefit that native vegetation could bring to a property or region is likely to be at the forefront of a land manager's incentive to maintain and manage it.

The economic benefits of native vegetation vary from direct sources of income to in-direct, whereby native vegetation results in, for example, increased production. Some regions are typified by low and unpredictable rainfall. Perennial native vegetation (trees, shrubs and ground cover) can provide benefits to stock in the form of shade, shelter and fodder (particularly in drought years).

Other States have found that agriculture has reported increases in milk production, increased fertility in ewes and lambs, increased wool production and meat production where stock have suitable ecosystem services provided through adjacent native vegetation.

In cropping areas native vegetation can

reduce moisture loss by acting as a wind break increasing yields, while deep rooted perennial species help maintain low water-tables. Native vegetation is also effectively used to control and reverse other forms of land degradation, such as erosion. Rising water tables, and associated salinity, and erosion are national problems that can be very costly to control or reverse. Native vegetation can be used as a preventative measure against these land degradation problems and as a means of control, potentially saving millions of dollars.

Native vegetation corridors such as roadside vegetation reduce the prevalence of pests and disease in agricultural regions. Linear tracts of vegetation, be it in the roadside or as shelterbelts contribute to a reduction in the prevalence of serious biosecurity issues for agricultural production. By the same token, clearance of large areas of roadside vegetation can result in the establishment of serious agricultural pests such as cabbage aphid a serious pest to crops such as canola and common cut worm, a serious pest in areas such as western Eyre Peninsula.

Native vegetation provides habitat for common and threatened species. Even single paddock trees can provide suitable habitat for some species and in some cases are critical habitat for threatened species. Insectivorous species, such as birds and bats, can affect agricultural production by consuming vast amounts of insects (typically moths, bugs, flies, etc), that are known to be crop pests, throughout the year. One small insectivorous bat (weighing about 10 grams) can eat approximately 250 to 300 grams of insects a year, whereas a wading bird might consume this amount in one day.

Agriculture depends on multiple ecosystem services. Most concerning is the findings that, agricultural practices impact negatively on various ecosystem services, which may be the services it depends on for production (H.S. Sandhu et al, 2012). There is a need to better understand and implement measures to address erosion and loss of ecosystem services in agriculture and food production, South Australia has gone some way to addressing this issue through the NV Act and its supporting policies.

Native vegetation also underpins the State's tourism economy, providing ecosystem services that contribute to the wellbeing and productivity of regional communities. Nature based tourism has increased significantly in SA over a very short period of time, driven by the state government's vision and actions to make South Australia a world leader in nature-based tourism, while supporting the ongoing conservation of our state's natural and cultural heritage.

The South Australian Tourism Commission states that tourism through to the end of March 2021 contributed \$4.4 billion to the South Australian economy.

Ecological values

Along with the economic benefits of using native vegetation to control rising water tables and land degradation problems it also provides ecological benefits by maintaining a healthy soil and sub-soil surface environment while simultaneously contributing to biodiversity.

Soil can be further improved by native vegetation through nutrient cycling. Vegetative matter that falls from vegetation is broken down by soil organisms and other microbes, resulting in nutrients re-entering the soil to be used by other plants. Native vegetation provides other ecological benefits by stabilising stream banks, improving water quality, absorbing carbon dioxide and acting as carbon sinks. These carbon sinks are of significant and growing financial opportunities for farming communities.

Social values

A growing body of epidemiological evidence indicates that greater exposure to, or 'contact with', natural environments (such as parks, woodlands and beaches) is associated with better health and well-being among our communities. This has become particularly important since the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in lock downs and travel limitations.

Native vegetation plays a vital role in the health and prosperity of South Australia's ecosystems, agroecosystems, and communities. Less than 30 percent of native vegetation remains in South Australia's agricultural areas, with some regions lower than 10 percent.

Aboriginal cultural heritage

Native vegetation is often associated with sacred or significant sites. These may be symbols or marks on trees, rock formations or an area with other historical significance, providing a spiritual link with their past.

Native vegetation also provides a link to the traditional way of life for indigenous Australians and remains a source of natural medicines, fibres, implements and raw materials for artwork.

The NVC seeks to promote the value of native vegetation and its benefits to the State's economy.

Partnering and collaboration

The NVC embraces a collaborative partnership approach in connecting people to programs and policies that further the health of our biodiversity. The NVC will continue to take this approach to the codesign of new initiatives and with partners from a range of different sectors – all levels of government, private enterprise, industry organisations, community groups and individuals.

The NVC seeks an inclusive and diversity based approach to partnering in the delivery of this strategy.

Strategic links

Our work has important links with other sectors across local, state and federal governments, including planning, health, and sport and recreation. Wherever possible, our actions under this plan will align with and contribute to, current and forthcoming plans and strategies to ensure we are working with our partners towards shared outcomes.

Some of the strategies and plans to which our Strategy align include:

- State Landscape Strategy (2021)
- All Regional Landscape Board Plans
- South Australian Government Climate Change Action Plan 2021-2025
- Directions for a Climate Smart South Australia (2019)
- Game On: Getting South Australia Moving framework (2020)
- Blue Carbon Strategy for South Australia (2019)
- Australia's Strategy for Nature (2019-2030)
- South Australia's State Planning Policies (2019)
- The 30-Year Plan for Greater Adelaide (2017 update)
- Healthy Parks Healthy People action plans (over multiple years)
- Metropolitan Adelaide and Northern Coastal Action Plan (2009)
- Relevant council strategies and plans.

We will also ensure that we meet legislative obligations such as the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 and be an active contributor to state and national environmental reporting such as the State of Environment Report.

Native Vegetation Council Strategic goals and actions

1. Native vegetation across the landscape is sustainably managed in recognition of its enduring environmental, social, cultural and spiritual values.

Actions 6–12 months (to March 2022)

- Monitor trends, including spatial analysis and inform evidence-based approaches to decision-making.
- Build strong relationships with other agencies, statutory boards and committees, non-government organisations (NGOs) and First Nations People that have interests in native vegetation protection and regeneration, conservation, habitat, and landscapes management.
- Partner and engage with universities and other organisations to gain insights into research and data to inform decision-making.

Actions 12–24 months (to March 2023)

- Implement recommendations of various government commissions and regulatory reviews.
- Review and update policy positions and metrics based on best available scientific data.
- Evaluate programs and investments, and ensure continuous improvement.
- Review different approaches to revegetation to build climate change resilience into our landscape.

2. Building a climate-resilient and ecologically vibrant State by partnering to deliver programs that also increase the state's biodiversity.

Actions 6–12 months (to March 2022)

- Design a broad-based communication and engagement approach, including:
 - Promoting the benefits of managing native vegetation for climate resilience.
 - Promoting how the Act and Regulations support industry and the community.
 - Raising the profile of existing initiatives that increase the States biodiversity and empower landowners to participate.
- Build on existing relationships and develop further positive collaborative working relationships across all levels of government, with the community, and with industry.

Actions 12–24 months (to March 2023)

- Develop and implement an engagement framework that ensures direct and broad engagement with key partners such as industry, the community and local government.
- Promote the benefits of early engagement with planning authorities, developers and the broader community.
- Conduct an 18-month review of the engagement strategy to date, target engagement to different groups, and promote what is working well.
- Build on, and establish, relationships with First Nations Groups and draw upon these relationships in future engagement activities.
- Continue to develop the NVC's profile as a leader in the environmental sector in South Australia.
- Partner with Landscape Boards to continue building capacity in regions, to communicate the economic value of native vegetation and its role in the continued growth and productivity of the State.

3. Ensure a contemporary approach to regulating native vegetation management across South Australia.

Actions 6–12 months (to March 2022)

- Determine a set of consistent and defined metrics for evaluation of actions against strategic goals.
- Determine capabilities and engage resources for key initiatives identified in the strategic plan.
- Progressively update guidance material to be modern, contemporary and relevant, and to reflect the NVC's valuable position in the South Australian Government.
- Promote voluntary compliance through ongoing community and industry education.

Actions 12–24 months (to March 2023)

- Continuing to review key policies, the Act and regulations to make sure they are fit for purpose and supporting the State Growth Agenda and other key Government strategies.
- Develop a business case for an integrated and web-based native vegetation assessment management system.
- Support accredited consultants and their contribution to the ongoing streamlining of assessment processes.
- Develop key criteria to support decisions regarding land purchase and expenditure from the Native Vegetation Fund.

**Native Vegetation Council
Department for Environment and Water**

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