

# Victorian planning controls for 'net gain'

By NINA ROGERS

**T**HE STATISTICS are concerning. An estimated 66% of Victoria's native vegetation has been cleared over the past 170 years. On private land, 92% of native vegetation has been removed.

The protection, management and restoration of native vegetation are seen as key to protecting the long-term productive capacity and environmental values of land and water resources.

Statewide planning controls for native vegetation retention have been in place in Victoria since 1989, and these have had a major impact on the extent of clearing.

Now the Native Vegetation Management Framework (2002) is introducing a more sophisticated approach to native vegetation assessment and management. This includes applying the concept of 'net gain' by local government.

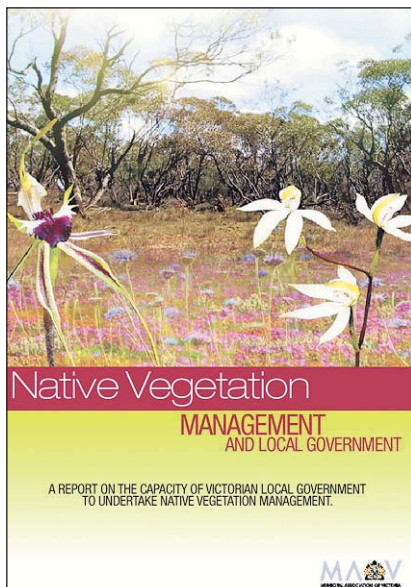
The Municipal Association of Victoria has released a report titled 'Native vegetation management and local government' looking at the capacity of local government in Victoria to undertake native vegetation management, recognising the sector has faced considerable difficulty in fulfilling its existing responsibilities in this area.

The report details the costs and capacity-building needs of Victorian non-metropolitan local governments for native vegetation management, with particular emphasis on the statutory planning system.

On a positive note, Victorian councils continue to demonstrate innovation and leadership in introducing and maintaining diverse programs and projects for native vegetation management.

Most Victorian rural and regional councils have voluntarily completed, or are preparing, a roadside management plan with a focus on protecting biodiversity and native vegetation on roadsides.

Further, councils are actively



working to support community and landholder education and training, providing financial incentives to landholders for improved land management, and using special protection measures for native vegetation in their planning schemes.

The report also found resource constraints in many councils have resulted in staffing levels inadequate to administer increasingly complex planning controls over native vegetation.

It identified a need for greater consistency between councils in assessment and decision-making on removing native vegetation. The report also noted the confusion in roles between councils and various state departments for processing of clearing applications.

It affirmed councils are committed to their role in managing and



**ABOVE:** Conservation works in Nillimbik Shire. Photo courtesy of Nillimbik Shire Council.

**LEFT:** Front cover of the MAV report: Native Vegetation Management and Local Government.

**BELOW:** Roadside reserve plantings. Photo courtesy of South Gippsland Shire.



restoring native vegetation to protect the long-term productive capacity and environmental values of our land and water resources.

However, resource constraints are threatening the capacity of councils to administer increasingly complex native-vegetation planning controls. 🇦🇺

**Contact:** For copies of the report, see MAV website, <[www.mav.asn.au](http://www.mav.asn.au)>; or phone Nina Rogers, manager – Environment Policy and Programs, MAV, (03) 9667 5519, email <[nrogers@mav.asn.au](mailto:nrogers@mav.asn.au)>.