Enhancing Remnant Vegetation Pilot

Management Protocol: North Central NRM Region (Victoria)

Cataloguing data

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Acknowledgements

We thank the North Central CMA and Dr Dean Ansell, Dr Don Butler and Professor Andrew Macintosh from the Australian National University (ANU) for their assistance in preparing this document.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures and to their elders past, present and emerging.

Contents

Introduction

This document details the eligibility, design, establishment and maintenance conditions that apply to projects under the Enhancing Remnant Vegetation Pilot (ERV Pilot). The conditions fall into two categories: mandatory (expressed in the tables as 'must' or 'must not') and recommended (expressed as 'should'). All projects **must** comply with the mandatory conditions. Compliance with the recommended conditions is not mandatory.

The information is separated into: general conditions that apply across the *project area* as a whole (Table 1); conditions that apply to each *remnant management area* (Table 2); and conditions that apply to each *revegetation area* (Tables 3-5). The Tables contain three columns: column 1 contains a description of the issue covered by the conditions; column 2 provides details on the application of the conditions; and column 3 describes the conditions.

Further advice on any of the conditions listed here can be obtained from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment at agstewardship@awe.gov.au.

People interested in participating in the ERV Pilot should contact their regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) group for advice. Contact details are available at the end of this document. This document should be read together with the ERV Pilot Guidelines available on the ERV Pilot website.

Table 1. General conditions

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
1.1 Regulatory compliance	All projects	*Projects* must be sited, established and managed in accordance with all applicable Commonwealth and State laws relating to planning, environment and heritage.
1.2 Workplace health and safety	All projects	Proponents should prepare a workplace health and safety plan for their *project*.
1.3 Cultural heritage	All projects	In siting, establishing and managing *projects*, proponents should consider cultural heritage impacts and follow relevant Commonwealth and State laws and guidelines concerning the protection and management of cultural heritage sites. Contact your regional NRM group for further information.
1.4 Protection and enhancement of biodiversity values	All projects	Activities that could threaten the protection and enhancement of biodiversity values must not be undertaken within the *project area* for the duration of the agreement.

Table 2. Remnant Management Area conditions

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
2.1 Composition	All *remnant management areas*	*Remnant management areas:* • must consist exclusively of *remnant vegetation*, with the exception of small features like cleared fence lines and management tracks that do not, in aggregate, constitute more than 5% of the area; and • must not include utility easements. *Remnant vegetation* is uncleared native vegetation or regrowth native vegetation that, with appropriate management, could achieve the structure and composition of the original native vegetation community in the next two decades. For the avoidance of doubt, *remnant vegetation* includes natural features such as rock outcrops and wetlands. *Utility easements* are areas of land that utility providers are legally entitled to use and access for the purposes of providing utility services (e.g. electricity, gas, telecommunications and sewerage).
2.2 Dimensions	All *remnant management areas*	2.2.1 Each *remnant management area* must be at least 1 hectare. 2.2.2 *Remnant management areas* that do not directly adjoin a larger area of *protected remnant vegetation* must have an average minimum width of at least 30m on their short axis. *Protected remnant vegetation* is remnant vegetation located on a public conservation reserve (e.g. a national park, flora reserve) or on an area of private land where the remnant vegetation is permanently protected under a conservation covenant, conservation agreement or other similar legal agreement that attaches to title (i.e. 'runs with the land').
2.3 Livestock grazing	All *remnant management areas.* Note: Where management changes must be made to meet the minimum standards in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, proponents should select 'enhanced grazing control' as a management activity when completing their application.	2.3.1 Stock must be excluded from *remnant management areas* for at least three months of the year, during the primary growing season for native plants in the region. 2.3.2 Livestock grazing must not occur when native plants are in flower or setting seed (i.e. during spring and early summer) and must only be undertaken when the majority of native plants are dormant (i.e. from late summer to early winter, provided the ground is not too wet nor too dry). 2.3.3 Livestock grazing must not be undertaken in a *remnant management area* that was not subject to livestock grazing in the three years immediately prior to the commencement of the *project*. 2.3.4 Livestock grazing should not be undertaken where it represents a threat to the protection and enhancement of biodiversity values of the *remnant management area*. Note: Where grazing or other management practices contribute to the degradation of the biodiversity values of a *project area* during the project term, proponents may be required to negotiate in good faith to find ways to mitigate the impacts and reflect any agreed solutions in a revised *management plan*.
2.4 Fencing	*Remnant management areas* involving 'enhanced grazing control'	If new fencing is constructed to manage grazing pressure in *remnant management areas*: • the top strand of wire must not be barbed, to reduce the chance of wildlife entanglement; • the fence design and style must minimise impacts on the biodiversity of the area, including avoiding impeding the movement of small animals through appropriate selection of mesh size; • disturbance to the *remnant management area* from fence construction and maintenance should be minimised, for example by situating the fence 5m outside the edge of the *remnant vegetation*; • the fence should be inspected regularly to detect any incidence of wildlife entanglement and maintenance requirements; and • fences installed adjacent to riparian areas should be placed in the direction of flow where possible and at least 30m from the current bank of the watercourse. Note: The costing of fencing is capped under the ERV Pilot at a level that is unlikely to cover the total cost of complex fencing designs.
2.5 Watering points	*Remnant management areas* involving 'enhanced grazing control'	2.5.1 Where fencing or other project activities would remove, or substantially restrict, access to water for stock, watering points may be installed as part of the *project*. 2.5.2 The number and capacity of watering points supported through the ERV Pilot must not exceed the number and capacity that is reasonably necessary to meet the watering needs of livestock excluded from the water source(s) by the *project*. 2.5.3 The watering points installed as part of a *project* must not increase grazing pressure within the *remnant management area*. 2.5.4 Watering points should be located away from *remnant management area* boundaries to minimise impacts on the native vegetation caused through concentration of livestock.

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
2.6 Pest control	*Remnant management areas* involving 'enhanced pest control'	Pest control: • must be undertaken using one or more of trapping, shooting, baiting or ripping* (e.g. rabbit warrens); • must not target native species; • must be undertaken in a manner that avoids negative impacts on native species within the *remnant management area*; and • must be undertaken in accordance with applicable Commonwealth and State laws. * Ripping (e.g. rabbit warrens) must not be undertaken in areas with cultural heritage values or within 200 meters of a waterway.
2.7 Weed control	*Remnant management areas* involving 'enhanced weed control'	Weed control: • must not target species that are native to the local area; • must be undertaken consistent with applicable Commonwealth and State laws and the manufacturer's instructions; • must not disturb cultural heritage; • must be undertaken in a manner that avoids negative impacts on native species within the *remnant management area*; • in riparian areas must only be undertaken using herbicides and wetting agents that are approved for use in aquatic environments by the APVMA; • should avoid the use of residual herbicides (i.e. those that persist in the environment) in riparian areas; and • should prioritise the use of manual control over chemical control methods in environmentally sensitive areas (e.g. near threatened ecological communities and threatened species, and in riparian areas).
2.8 Infill plantings	*Remnant management areas* involving '*infill plantings*'	2.8.1 *Infill plantings* must: • aim to re-introduce a native plant species or a component of the vegetation's structure that typically forms part of the local vegetation community or communities (e.g. a shrub layer or perennial tussock grasses); • be limited to species from the local vegetation community or those communities; • be established by hand using only propagated seedling stock (e.g.tubestock) or by hand sowing of seed (hand broadcast, spot sowing or niche seeding); and • be established within two years of commencement of the project unless explicitly authorised by the Department. For the avoidance of doubt, *infill plantings* must not be established through mechanical direct seeding. 2.8.2 Soil preparation undertaken for *infill plantings*: • should involve minimal soil disturbance; and • must not involve ripping. 2.8.3 All livestock grazing must be excluded from an area containing *infill plantings* for the first five years after planting establishment. After that time, livestock grazing in the area: • must be limited to pulse or crash grazing; • must not be undertaken if it has a material adverse impact on the survival of the plantings; and • otherwise must be undertaken in accordance with the requirements in 2.3. The area to which the above livestock grazing requirements apply can be a sub-component of a larger *remnant management area* if the area is fenced to a standard that allows for the exclusion of livestock. For example, if a *remnant management area* consists of two adequately fenced paddocks (paddocks A and B), and the *infill plantings* are undertaken in paddock A only, the requirements do not apply to paddock B. If the area containing the *infill plantings* is not separated from the remainder of the *remnant management area* with adequate fencing, the grazing requirements apply to the entire *remnant management area*. 2.8.4 *Infill plantings* should be protected from livestock and other herbivores using fencing or tree guards. See 2.4 for fencing requirements. 2.8.5 Fire must not be intentionally introduced to *remnant management areas* that contain *infill plantings*. 2.8.6 Proponents should consider watering *infill plantings* at the time of, and immediately following, establishment. 2.8.7 Remedial *plantings* must be established if, after 5 years, the *infill plantings* have not made a material positive difference to the structure and composition of the relevant local vegetation community or communities because of mortality.
2.9 Clearing and thinning	All *remnant management areas*	Native vegetation in *remnant management areas* must not be cleared or thinned.
2.10 Fallen timber	All *remnant management areas*	All fallen timber must be left within the *remnant management area*. Any fallen timber that is moved from firebreaks, access tracks or fences must be placed within the *remnant management area*.
2.11 Fire	All *remnant management areas*	Subject to 2.8.5, fire may be used in the management of *remnant management areas* but must be applied in a manner consistent with the conservation of biodiversity values, as indicated in applicable State or local guidelines. Note: The costs associated with fire are not recoverable under the ERV Pilot.

Table 3. Revegetation Areas – design conditions

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
3.1 Revegetation establishment method	All *revegetation areas*	Revegetation **must** be undertaken within *revegetation areas* using one or more of the following methods: • *natural regeneration*; and • *planting* of seed or propagated seedling stock (e.g. tubestock). *Natural regeneration* is the assisted regeneration of native ecosystems through one of more of: • the control of livestock and non-native animals; • the control of *weeds*; and • the cessation of clearing and or cultivation.
3.2 Prohibited areas	All *revegetation areas*	3.2.1 *Revegetation areas:* • **must not** include mature *remnant vegetation*, being uncleared native vegetation or regrowth native vegetation that has the structure and composition of the original native vegetation community. For the avoidance of doubt, isolated paddock trees are not *remnant vegetation* for the purpose of this protocol; and • **must not** include *utility easements*. 3.2.2 *Natural regeneration* also: • **must not** occur *in* areas dominated by dense exotic pasture species; and • should not be undertaken in areas that have been intensively fertilised using synthetic fertilisers. 3.2.3 Plantings **must not** add trees and shrubs to areas that did not naturally support trees and shrubs (e.g. grasslands and some wetlands).
3.3 Plant species composition and density	All *revegetation areas*	*Plantings* **must** be either a *local vegetation community planting*^ or a *simple mixed native planting*. A *local vegetation community planting* is a *planting* that: • as far as practical reflects the structure and composition of the relevant *ecological vegetation community* (*EVC*) or *EVC*s *; and • consists of at least ten species from that vegetation community or those communities, planted at densities and proportions sufficient to achieve the structure and composition of the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s *. A *simple mixed native planting* is a *planting* that: • as far as practical performs similar ecological functions to the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s and generates benefits for local native biodiversity; and • consists of at least ten *species* that are native to the local area# planted at densities and proportions sufficient to reflect the structure of the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s *. ^ *Local vegetation community plantings* will receive higher biodiversity benefit scores, all else being equal. *See Appendix for resources to assist in identification of relevant *EVC*s. #*Species that are native to the local area* are plant species that naturally occurred within 100km of the *project area*, and within the river catchment, prior to European settlement. Proponents should consider the following with respect to species composition: • drought resilience and the potential effects of climate change†; • the availability of tubestock and seed from local nurseries and seed suppliers; • that a diverse and dense mid-storey (where appropriate to the local vegetation type) provides benefits for native birds; and • that ground cover plants require effective control of introduced plant species to achieve high survival rates. To make *plantings* more resilient to climate change, the seed for *plantings* should comprise 70% locally sourced, 20% from hotter and drier climates and 10% from cooler, wetter climates. For the avoidance of doubt, the species **must** still be native to the local area. † For further information on considering climate change in your *plantings* see the publication *Climate ready revegetation: A guide for natural resource managers* available on the web.
3.4 Dimensions of planting	All *revegetation areas*	3.4.1 Individual *revegetation areas*: • **must** be at least 0.25 hectare in size; and • **must** have an average minimum width of 30m (stem-to-stem) on their short axis. 3.4.2 In aggregate, the *revegetation areas* included in a project **must not** comprise more than 20 per cent of the total *project area*. For example, a proposed project with a *project area* of 5 hectares could not include more than 1 hectare of *revegetation areas*.
3.5 Distance from other vegetation, including plantings	All *revegetation areas*	All *revegetation areas* **must** directly adjoin at least one *remnant management area*.
3.6 Fire risk	All *revegetation areas*	*Revegetation areas*: • **must not** be within 50m of buildings used for residential or commercial purposes; and • should not be within 50m of any other buildings.

Table 4. Revegetation Areas – establishment conditions

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
4.1 Site preparation – weed control	All *revegetation areas*	Where weed control is carried out using herbicides, the herbicides **must** be applied in accordance with all applicable Commonwealth and State laws and the manufacturer's instructions.
4.2 Site preparation – soil	All *revegetation areas*	Soil preparation **must not** be done by ripping in *revegetation areas*: • with significant biodiversity or natural or cultural heritage values, including areas that contain remnant native vegetation, old native *trees*, patches of native grass or sites of Indigenous cultural significance; or • within 200m of a waterway.* *Contact North Central CMA for further information.
4.3 Total grazing pressure management	All *revegetation areas*	4.3.1 All livestock grazing **must** be excluded from *revegetation areas* for the first five years after planting establishment or the commencement of regeneration. After that time, livestock grazing: • **must** be limited to pulse or crash grazing; and • **must** not be undertaken if it has a material adverse impact on the survival of planting or regeneration in the *revegetation area*. 4.3.2 Total grazing pressure should be managed as necessary to protect the present and future biodiversity value of the site. 4.3.3 Grazing and threats from significant disturbance by vertebrate pests (e.g. rabbits, goats, deer and pigs) and invertebrate pests should be managed where they present a threat to the plantings or regeneration. 4.3.4 Grazing and threats from significant disturbance and overabundant native species (including kangaroos) should be managed where they present a threat to the plantings or regeneration using non-lethal means.
4.4 Timing	All *revegetation areas*	*Revegetation areas* **must** be established within two years of commencement of the project unless explicitly authorised by the Department. *Plantings* should be undertaken in Autumn or Spring.
4.5 Planting protection	All *revegetation areas*	4.5.1 *Plantings* **must** be protected from livestock and should be protected from other herbivores; 4.5.2 If new fencing is constructed to manage grazing pressure in *revegetation areas*: • the top strand of wire around plantings **must not** be barbed, to reduce the chance of wildlife entanglement; • the fence design and style **must** minimise impacts on the biodiversity of the area, including avoiding impeding the movement of small animals through appropriate selection of mesh size; • the fence should be constructed at least 5m from the edge of the revegetation (i.e. from the drip line of the canopy) to minimise impacts of fence construction on the vegetation and reduce maintenance requirements from fallen tree limbs; • the fence should be inspected regularly to detect any incidence of wildlife entanglement and maintenance requirements; and • fences installed adjacent to riparian areas should be placed in the direction of flow where possible and at least 30m from the current bank of the watercourse. Note: The costing of fencing is capped under the ERV Pilot at a level that is unlikely to cover the total cost of complex fencing designs (e.g. total exclusion fencing).
4.6 Watering	All *revegetation areas*	Proponents should consider watering *plantings* at the time of, and immediately following, establishment.

Table 5. Revegetation Areas – maintenance conditions

Issue	Application	ERV Pilot conditions – North Central (Vic)
5.1 Longevity	All *revegetation areas*	*Revegetation areas* **must** be protected and maintained for at least the duration of the *project*.
5.2 Remedial planting	All *revegetation areas*	5.2.1 *Remedial plantings* **must** be established in a *revegetation area* if: • it was originally designed to reflect the structure and composition of the relevant *EVC* or *EVCs*; and • mortality results in the *planting* no longer reflecting the structure and composition of the relevant *EVC* or *EVCs*. 5.2.2 *Remedial plantings* **must** be established in a *revegetation area* if: • it was originally designed to perform similar ecological functions to the relevant *EVC* or *EVCs* and generate benefits for local native biodiversity; and • mortality results in the *planting* no longer performing similar ecological functions to the relevant *EVC* or *EVCs* and generating benefits for local native biodiversity. 5.2.3 *Remedial* plantings **must** have the same characteristics as that of the original *planting* in the *revegetation area*
5.3 Fallen timber	All *revegetation areas*	All fallen timber **must** be left within the *revegetation area*. Any fallen timber that is moved from firebreaks, access tracks or fences **must** be placed within the *revegetation area* or adjoining *remnant management area*.
5.4 Clearing and thinning	All *revegetation areas*	Native vegetation in *revegetation areas* **must not** be cleared or thinned.
5.5 Invertebrate pest control	All *revegetation areas*	5.5.1 Invertebrate pests should be managed where necessary to protect the present and future biodiversity value of the site. 5.5.2 Where pest control is carried out using pesticides, the pesticides **must** be applied in accordance with all applicable Commonwealth and State laws and the manufacturer's instructions.
5.6 Fire	All *revegetation areas*	Fire **must** not be intentionally introduced to *revegetation areas*.
5.7 Watering	All *revegetation areas*	Proponents should consider watering *plantings*, particularly tubestock *plantings*, during the first summer after *planting* if there is inadequate rainfall. Note that the ERV Pilot does not provide funding for watering of *natural regeneration*.

Glossary

Defined terms under the ERV Pilot

Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC) are the standard unit for classifying vegetation types in Victoria. *EVC*s are described through a combination of floristics, lifeforms and ecological characteristics, and through an inferred fidelity to particular environmental attributes. Each *EVC* includes a collection of floristic communities (i.e. lower level in the classification) that occur across a biogeographic range, and although differing in species, have similar habitat and ecological processes operating. For further information, see here.

Ground cover plants means herbaceous (non-woody) plants, including grasses and forbs.

Infill planting means a *planting* established by hand in a *remnant management area* in accordance with the requirements in Table 2.

Local vegetation community planting means a *planting* that:

- as far as practical reflects the structure and composition of the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s; and
- consists of at least ten species from that vegetation community or those communities, planted at densities and proportions sufficient to achieve the structure and composition of the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s.

Management plan means the plan annexed to the ERV Pilot agreement between the landholder and the Australian Government that specifies the management activities to be undertaken by the landholder as part of an ERV Pilot project.

Natural regeneration means the assisted regeneration of native ecosystems through one or more of the methods specified in Table 3 (3.1).

Planting means:

(a) as a verb, to put or set in the ground tree, shrub and (where relevant) ground cover species using propagated seedling stock or direct seeding; and

(b) as a noun, an area of trees, shrubs and (where relevant) ground cover species established using propagated seedling stock or direct seeding.

Project (or ERV project) means a project that aims to protect and enhance the condition of *remnant vegetation* in accordance with an agreement between the landholder and the Australian Government as part of the ERV Pilot.

Project area means the remnant management areas and revegetation areas that are managed as part of a project in accordance with an ERV Pilot agreement between the landholder and the Australian Government.

Protected remnant vegetation is remnant vegetation located on a public conservation reserve (e.g. a national park, flora reserve) or on an area of private land where the remnant vegetation is permanently protected under a conservation covenant, conservation agreement or other similar legal agreement that attaches to title (i.e. 'runs with the land').

Remedial planting means a *planting* undertaken to address the mortality of *plantings* in *infill plantings* or *revegetation areas* that meet the requirements in Table 2 (2.8.7) or Table 5 (5.2) respectively.

Remnant management area means an area of *remnant vegetation* that meets the eligibility requirements outlined in Table 2 and that a landholder is required to protect and enhance as part of an ERV project.

Remnant vegetation means uncleared native vegetation or regrowth native vegetation that, with appropriate management, could achieve the structure and composition of the original native vegetation community in the next two decades. For the avoidance of doubt, *remnant vegetation* includes natural features such as rock outcrops and wetlands.

Revegetation area means an area where native vegetation is regenerated through *natural regeneration* or *plantings* (direct seeding or planting propagated seedling stock) in accordance with the requirements in Table 3 as part of an ERV project.

Shrub means a species of woody plant that:

- is generally less than 2m tall if single-*stemmed*; or
- if multi-*stemmed* from the base (or within 20cm from ground level), is generally less than 2m tall or, if more than 2m tall, its largest stem typically has a diameter less than 5cm measured 130cm above the ground.

Simple mixed native planting means a planting that:

- as far as practical performs similar ecological functions to the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s and generates benefits for local native biodiversity; and
- consists of at least ten *species* that are native to the local area planted at densities and proportions sufficient to reflect the structure of the relevant *EVC* or *EVC*s.

Species that are native to the local area are plant species that naturally occurred within 100km of the project area, and within the river catchment, prior to European settlement.

Stem, in relation to the ERV Pilot, means the ascending axis of a plant and is generally the main structural component of the above-ground portion of trees and shrubs.

Thinning means the selective removal of trees or shrubs for any purpose.

Tree, in relation to the ERV Pilot, means a species of woody plant that at maturity is generally more than 2m tall and either has a single stem with branches well above the base or, if multi-stemmed from the base (or within 20cm from ground level), its largest stem typically has a diameter greater than 5cm measured 130cm above the ground.

Utility easement means an area of land that utility providers are legally entitled to use and access for the purposes of providing utility services (e.g. electricity, gas, telecommunications and sewerage).

Weeds in the context of the ERV Pilot means exotic plants as well as Australian plant species that are not native to the local area.

Appendix A: Guidance in identifying the relevant local vegetation communities for your planting

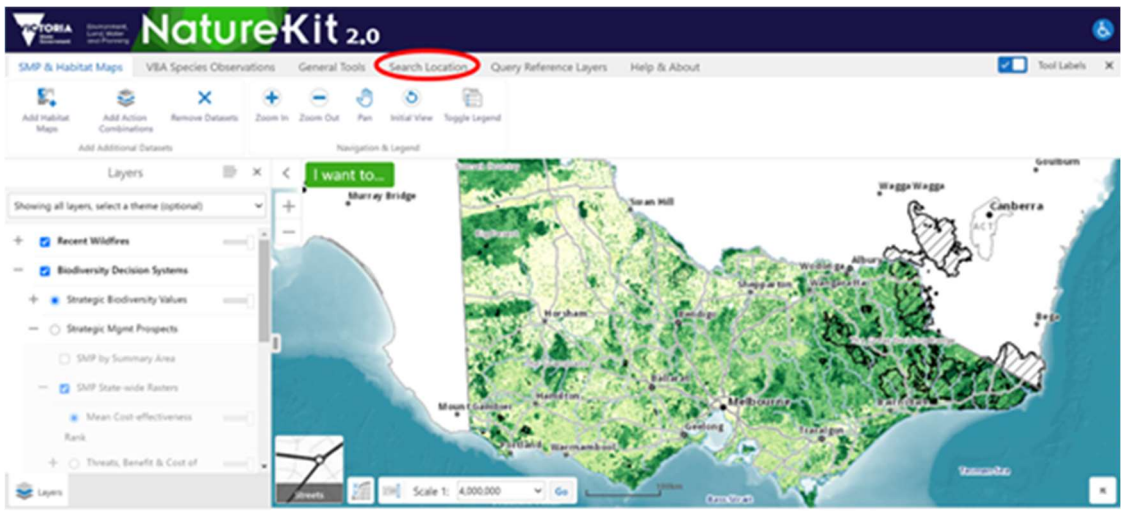
This Appendix sets out some sources for information on natural vegetation in your region. The sources selected are generally the most up to date, which are accessible online. It's not a comprehensive list and most parts of Australia are covered by numerous published guides and studies that can also help with plant species selection, particularly for simple mixed native plantings. Sources of native plants and seeds, such as nurseries, can also help, as can your local Natural Resource Management body or Landcare group.

If you have confidence in your understanding of the natural vegetation across the areas in which you are planting you may not need more information to decide on an appropriate species mix. For example, if there are enough paddock trees or roadside patches and other reminders of the native vegetation you might have enough to design a local vegetation community planting that closely reflects local ecosystems.

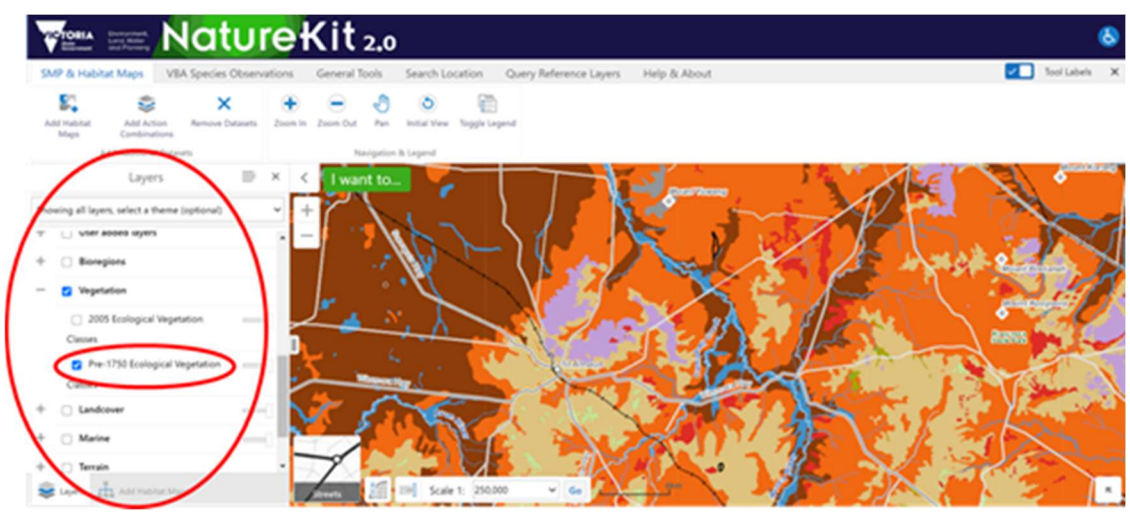
However, even if you know your local plants, the data described here, plus other local sources, should be consulted to confirm natural combinations of species in your region, and also to confirm the scientific names and natural range for species you might know best by a common name. The Atlas of Living Australia is a valuable national resource for biodiversity information.

The Victorian Government's "Nature Kit 2.0" application is a one stop shop for information on Victoria's biodiversity.

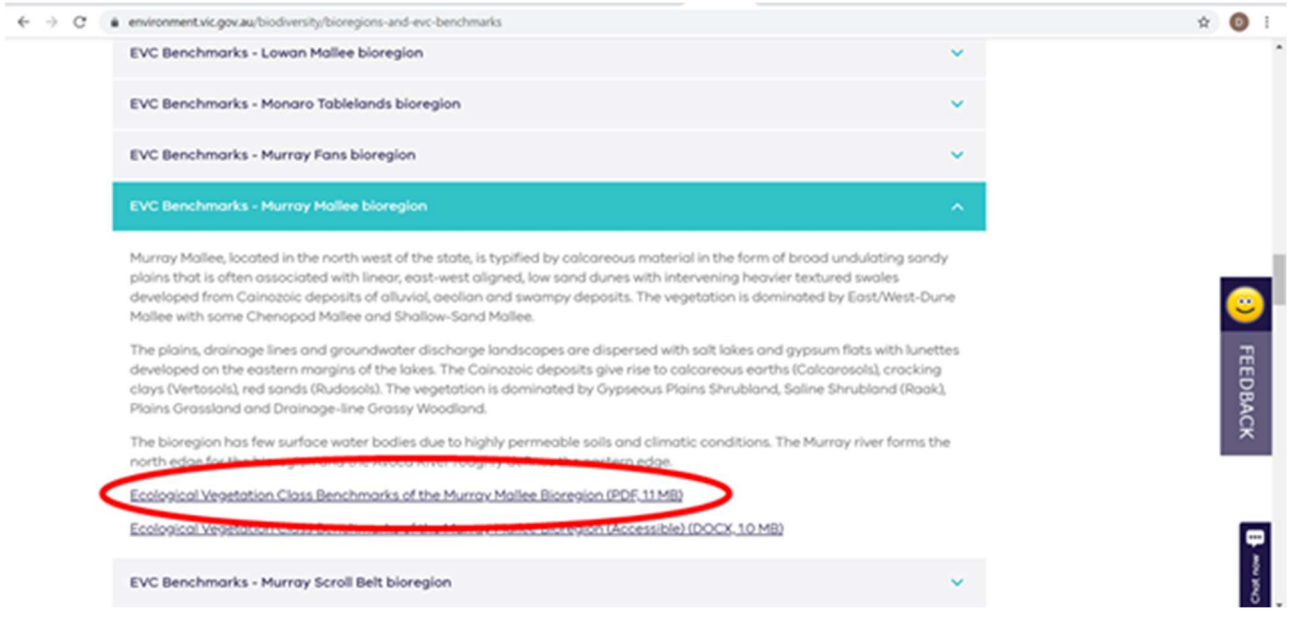
1. Go to https://maps2.biodiversity.vic.gov.au/Html5viewer/index.html?viewer=NatureKit
2. Use the search location tab and map controls to locate the remnant management areas and revegetation areas in which you are undertaking the plantings.



3. In the layer window on the left of the screen, scroll down to the category labelled "Vegetation", click the radio button beside "Vegetation" to make the layers visible and select the "Pre-1750 Ecological Vegetation" layer to display.



4. Click on the map within your area to query the pre-1750 vegetation layer, you may need to scroll past other layers in the results window to find the pre-1750 result.
5. Note the bioregion and *EVC* number returned from the map query and use that information to find the appropriate *EVC* benchmark for your bioregion from the bioregion summaries.



6. Find the relevant *EVC* number in the bioregion *EVC* benchmark document and check that the description is appropriate for your site. If so, use the species listed in the benchmark as a guide to select species for your planting, particularly for local vegetation community plantings. Shrubs that could feature in plantings are indicated by the MS or MT life form labels. If the *EVC* description does not fit the site, assess the *EVC*'s indicated for comparable landscape positions in other comparable parts of the landscape across your neighbourhood and seek additional information and advice on a more appropriate *EVC* to guide species selection.

Questions and feedback

Any questions or feedback about this document should be sent to agstewardship@awe.gov.au or you can contact the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment on 1800 329 055.