

RATE REBATE SCHEME FOR PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS NATIVE VEGETATION

Guidelines for Implementation of Scheme

BACKGROUND

Buloke Shire has recognised the need for remnant native vegetation to be protected, for a number of ecological and cultural reasons. The Council believes that offering some incentive to ratepayers, through a rate rebate scheme, is a positive measure that could be introduced to protect and enhance remnant areas of native vegetation from further degradation.

WHY IS CONSERVING NATIVE VEGETATION IMPORTANT?

Remnant Native Vegetation (Which may include trees, shrubs, grasses, forbs and herbs).

Provides the following benefits:-

- * Is the home of many species of native plants and animals that are important in maintaining Australia's biological diversity ("biodiversity").
- * Performs basic ecological processes required for agricultural sustainability, such as the prevention of dryland salinity, provision of clean air and water, the absorption of greenhouse gasses and encourages insect predators.
- * Provides recreation for the community
- * Provides cultural heritage and aesthetic values.
- * Provides shelter for stock from climatic extremes.

The amount of native vegetation remaining today varies between regions, but it is estimated that less than 5% of the original vegetation of Buloke Shire is left. These remnants are small, isolated and fragmented.

WHY IS PRIVATE LAND MORE IMPORTANT IN CONSERVING NATIVE VEGETATION?

In a recent vegetation survey involving a large part of the Shire, 387 plants were found to exist representing 12% of the States indigenous vascular flora.

While the largest area of native vegetation within the Shire is found on public land, including creek frontages and reserves, most of the remaining sites containing remnants of native vegetation are on private property.

With the constant pressure on roadsides from road construction and maintenance, powerline clearance, timber removal for firewood and ploughing of firebreaks, private land becomes more important in ensuring the survival of larger areas of remnant vegetation and native animal habitat.

Privately owned native vegetation has gradually declined in area due to extended cropping and grazing, causing a reduction in quality and quantity of remnant vegetation. The State Government has committed Victoria to achieving no net loss of remnant native vegetation by the year 2001.

Whilst still somewhat fragmented, the privately owned areas are not as widely dispersed as public lands and can still provide a valuable contribution towards increasing biodiversity.

WHY PROVIDE A RATE REBATE TO PROTECT REMNANT NATIVE VEGETATION ON PRIVATE LAND?

A rate rebate will:

- * Compensate landholders for contributing towards the maintenance and protection of native vegetation which in turn will provide all the environmental benefits outlined above.
- * Contribute towards compensating loss of income that may otherwise be obtained from the native vegetation area, such as stock shelter.
- * Be another incentive to landholders to properly manage sections of property that have potential as a significant area of native vegetation, together with incentives for fencing etc
- * Indicate Council's concern for and commitment to the protection, maintenance and enhancement of native vegetation and natural resources within the Shire.

HOW WILL LANDHOLDERS QUALIFY FOR A REBATE ON RATES?

To qualify, the area of land will need to be:

- * Land that contains remnant native vegetation that is of a minimum standard of significance (using regional vegetation plan as a guide).
- * Be regarded as farmland, zoned as farm or agricultural land, which is more than 2 hectares in area with a primary use of agriculture and used for business.
- * Separately managed to other property owned by the applicant, to enable an improvement in conservation and therefore highly likely to be fenced off from other farm areas.
- * Includes flora and fauna species designated as protected remnant vegetation or indigenous to the area.
- * Can be eligible for existing water tariff rebate (such as developed by Wimmera Mallee Water).
- * Land that is covered by a conservation covenant, equivalent agreement on title or Section 113, Planning and Environment Act Management Agreement would automatically qualify.

The landholder will be expected to enter into a management agreement with Council that provides for the ongoing protection and maintenance of the area to preserve its values.

This will require:

- * An initial inspection and report of the site by a person with suitable credentials person eg. D.N.R.E., C.M.A., or Council Officer, or designated person appointed by Council.
- * That control of pest animals and plants is achieved and maintained.
- * That current use of land not be changed in any way that it damages the area's biodiversity.
- * Follow-up random inspections annually of a percentage of approved sites with management agreements in place will be undertaken.
- * That in the event of a change in ownership, the new owner enter into a new agreement to qualify.
- * Protective fencing be maintained to enable proper stock control and use, if stocked.

POWER OF COUNCIL

Council can grant a rate rebate under S.169 of the Local Government Act or alternatively, under S.161, impose a differential rating system. Buloke Shire has chosen to use the rate rebate option for this scheme. Council has the power to revoke any Agreement if Management Agreement is not complied with.

FUNDING THE SCHEME

It is estimated that with a 100% rebate on eligible land, the amount of rate loss to the Shire could be absorbed in its Annual Budgeting deliberations.

“Payment” of the incentive would be applied as a rate rebate in the year following application.

The following application details, conditions/assessment criteria, and application form have been developed in recognition of Buloke's unique characteristics, after consideration of other similar schemes in Councils and other authorities.

CONDITIONS AND ASSESSMENT CRITERIA (FOR REVEGETATION OF OTHER ELIGIBLE MATTER)

1. Each application will be checked against the assessment criteria for eligibility, and will involve an on-site inspection of the property concerned.
2. The funding program will be administered by Buloke Shire and widely advertised through local and regional newspapers
3. All applicants seeking a rate rebate through this scheme must do so using the attached application form. Any relevant supporting information can be attached to the application form.
4. Any works in relation to the scheme with the exception of fencing must be undertaken only after all relevant permits and approvals have been obtained.

RATE REBATE SCHEME FOR PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS NATIVE VEGETATION

<i>Office Use Only Records Department</i>	File No: <input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>	Document No: <input style="width: 90%;" type="text"/>
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Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____ Fax: _____

Property No. _____
(From Rate Notice)

I/We hereby make application for a general Shire Rate Rebate for land containing remnant native vegetation as hereunder described, located within the Buloke Shire.

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Property Description Parish/Crown Allotment	Identifying Address Fire Map Reference	Area of Allotment (Hectares)	Main Vegetation (ie Species of tree, native grass)

CONDITIONS

- To be eligible for a rate rebate for remnant native vegetation on privately owned or leased land, the following conditions apply:
1. The area must contain remnant native vegetation, ie “Area containing plants that are indigenous to the particular locality, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses”.
 2. The nominated area of native vegetation must be rateable, be either totally non-productive or subject to approved controlled grazing, and be fenced off or managed separately from the rest of the property.
 3. A sketch plan showing the dimensions and/or other features of the native vegetation area relating to this claim is to be completed on page 2 of this application form.
 4. The area of native vegetation must be managed in accordance with the management agreement outlined on page 3 of this form, or a pre-existing management agreement approved by the Shire.
 5. To qualify for the rate rebate, the property in question must have a minimum area of 2 (two) hectares.
 6. Land occupied by farmhouses, yards, shed and other farm buildings cannot be included within the area applied for.
 7. Eligible areas, which meet the criteria and are approved following inspection, shall obtain a rebate equivalent to the rate in the dollar multiplied by the Capital Improved Valuation of the land, with a minimum payment/rebate of \$15.00 per ratepayer.
 8. To be eligible, rebate applications must be processed and approved by December 31 prior to the commencement of the rating year.
 9. The area of the remnant native vegetation will be excluded from the calculation of the site valuation of the relevant assessment.

MANAGEMENT

EXISTING AGREEMENTS:

Indicate with a tick (✓) any pre-existing agreements which may already apply to a particular assessment.

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation Covenant | Property No. _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Planning & Environment Act (S. 173) | Property No. _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bushcare or Save the Bush | Property No. _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wimmera Mallee Water | Property No. _____ |

MANAGEMENT AGREEMENT

The applicant agrees and declares the following in regard to the Application for the Rate Rebate for Protection of Native Vegetation.

The properties/sites nominated for Rate Rebate:

- (a) will be managed to conserve flora and fauna and enhance biodiversity values;
- (b) will may be subject to approved, controlled, managed grazing by livestock;
- (c) will not be used for cropping;
- (d) will not be subject to firewood collection or cutting of fence posts;
- (e) will be managed to control priority or designated environmental weeds eg. box thorn, prickly pear or bridal creeper;
- (f) will be managed to control rabbits, foxes and feral cats;
- (g) may be subject to periodical monitoring visits, as determined by Buloke Shire, by either Shire staff or Catchment Management Authority/Department Natural Resources and Environment Officers;
- (h) will have fencing relevant to protecting remnant vegetation sites, unless expressly authorised otherwise by Buloke Shire;
- (i) May be subject to revegetation with indigenous species approved by the Shire, only to enhance or extend the life of the remnant element.

In the event of other parties occupying the land under licence, lease, or share farming arrangement, these other parties shall be notified as to the existence of this Management Agreement.

In the event of the sale of the land, the vendor (seller) will advise impending purchasers of the existence of the Management Agreement and the relevant Rebate.

This Agreement shall wholly apply unless modified or replaced by a separate Agreement approved by Buloke Shire Council.

DECLARATIONS

Landholder

I/We hereby certify that specified area(s) of remnant native vegetation is separately controlled from other property owned/leased by myself and is being managed in accordance with this Approval Management Agreement.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

We respect your privacy. We will not sell or give away your personal information, unless required by law. Occasionally, we may use your details for our own research purposes or to let you know about other council information. If you want to see your personal data, modify your details, or if you receive information from us you do not want in the future, please contact 1300 520 520.

Buloke Shire Verification

I hereby certify that the specified land area(s) of remnant native vegetation is eligible for the Buloke Shire Rate Rebate Scheme for protection of Native Vegetation and is being managed in accordance with an approved Management Agreement.

Name: _____ Signed: _____ Date: _____

Position: _____

Office Use Only: Application No: _____ Approved: Yes No

Forward applications to Buloke Shire Council, P.O. Box 1, Wycheproof 3527