



# Native vegetation policy

for Western Australia

May 2022

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# Minister's foreword



On behalf of the McGowan Government, I am pleased to release the first native vegetation policy for Western Australia.

Our native vegetation supports our internationally renowned biodiversity and unique flora and fauna, but its importance to Western Australia extends much further than this. It helps address the challenges of climate change by sequestering carbon and sustaining cool and liveable cities. It improves our soils and supports the productivity of agricultural landscapes. It has cultural importance for Aboriginal people and supports important sectors of the State's economy. It is also a key feature of our iconic natural areas which we cherish as Western Australians and which underpin our tourism industry. Western Australia's sustainable future requires that we address the decline of this critical asset.

The management of native vegetation within government is highly decentralised. This policy addresses the longstanding challenge this presents to its protection and enhancement, and aims to achieve increased certainty and confidence for the community and business. Regulation and the conservation estate will always remain vital mechanisms for native vegetation protection – and we will continue to improve and invest in these protections. Yet, enhancing and improving the extent of native vegetation requires action and modern practices across the whole system.

Voluntary restoration, carbon offsets, pricing signals, broadening environmental offsets through revegetation and rehabilitation, and strategic restoration must all be part of the solution. To do this we must engage many stakeholders in coordinated action for maximum impact and effect. This policy provides a framework to do just that.

Other benefits will come from well-considered reforms through implementation. They include:

- fairness and certainty for regulated stakeholders
- robust mapping of native vegetation status and trends to inform decisions and policy-making
- improved transparency
- regional and Aboriginal economic opportunities
- enabling the sustainable economic development and infrastructure Western Australians need to prosper.

The creation of this policy involved extensive consultation, highlighting broad community support. Over the course of its development, the imperative to address the decline in native vegetation has only become clearer. The release of this policy is the start of a coordinated and committed approach to meet this challenge.

**Hon Reece Whitby MLA**  
Minister for Environment; Climate Action

We acknowledge the **Traditional Owners** of the land upon which we live and work, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We recognise the intrinsic connection and cultural responsibility to country that Aboriginal people have developed over more than 40,000 years in Western Australia, and the value of this relationship, both for Aboriginal people and for Western Australia's native vegetation.

We seek to understand how changed landscapes and changed access in relation to native vegetation have affected **Aboriginal people**, and acknowledge the previous and ongoing impacts of colonisation. In implementing this policy, we recognise the traditional practices, expertise, capacity and interest of Aboriginal people in native vegetation. We aim to involve and provide opportunities for Aboriginal people in its management.

In this policy, the terms **indigenous** and native refer only to vegetation. We acknowledge that these terms were historically applied to Aboriginal people, and we recognise the historical and ongoing impacts of previous government policy.



**Traditional Owners:** Aboriginal people who are native title claimants, native title holders or who have otherwise been recognised as having a right and responsibility to speak for country.

**Aboriginal people:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge that many Aboriginal people prefer to be referred to by language group, nation, tribe or clan, with many distinct groups across Western Australia.

**Indigenous:** That which is naturally existing within a given region as a result of natural processes, with no human intervention. In this policy, indigenous refers only to vegetation.

# Policy outcomes

In implementing this policy, the State Government seeks to achieve the following native vegetation outcomes:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outcome 1</b></p> <p>Enable all sectors to contribute to a <b>net gain</b> and <b>landscape-scale</b> conservation and restoration.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid #92d050; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0; text-align: center;">✓ Conserve biodiversity</div> <div style="border: 1px solid #92d050; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0; text-align: center;">✓ Sequester carbon</div> <div style="border: 1px solid #92d050; padding: 5px; margin: 5px 0; text-align: center;">✓ Build the restoration economy and create jobs</div>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outcome 2</b></p> <p>Business certainty through regulatory clarity, efficiency and coordination.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Outcome 3</b></p> <p>Strong, accessible evidence-base for policy-making, decisions and transparency.</p>
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See also **Appendix 1: Exploring net gain and landscape-scale conservation** on page 17, which includes definitions of relevant terms and explores how they will be achieved and measured for a given part of the state.



**Net gain:** For this policy, net gain means that improvements in the extent and/or condition of native vegetation exceed the losses – at *landscape-scale*. It takes into account the sum total of stakeholder actions that influence it, whether these are regulated, voluntary or otherwise. This policy does not introduce net gain as a required outcome at the scale of individual proposals.

**Landscape-scale:** A scale that permits understanding and management of ecological processes across space, jurisdiction and time, with a focus on ecological corridors, resilience, connectivity and global change (including climate change).

# Policy purpose

This policy guides State Government agencies to work together and with stakeholders, applying and adjusting their policies and practices to achieve the policy outcomes.

This means setting up:

1. the right **policy settings** – both statewide and through regional planning for native vegetation
2. the right practices – for consistency, transparency, and to collate decision data
3. the right information and systems – for accessible data to support informed decisions by all.



**Policy settings:** A coordinated suite of policy instruments and policy positions which together aim to achieve desired outcomes; for example, a mix of regulation, funding and economic incentives, services or information, and how they work together to guide stakeholder choices.

## Policy scope

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This policy applies to Western Australian State Government **agencies**, focusing on areas of responsibility that influence and interact with native vegetation (see Table 1, page 11). Primarily it applies through the policy-making, regulatory, land management, land planning and funding roles of agencies. They may choose to refer to the policy in their advice, including to independent boards and committees.

This policy sets strategic direction for agencies, with a long-term view.

It will be implemented:

1. broadly, through agencies choosing to consider their current policies and practices and making changes in line with the direction set by this policy
2. specifically, through agencies leading and/or supporting the tangible actions in the implementation roadmap over the next four years (see **How agencies will implement this policy** on page 14).



**Agency:** A department or SES organisation as defined in the *Public Sector Management Act 1994*.



See also **Appendix 2: Exploring this policy's scope** on page 18, which describes how this policy will influence all sectors, how it relates to regulation, and where it fits within legislation and policy hierarchies.

# What agencies will do

To protect and enhance native vegetation now and for the future, agencies will make coordinated, deliberate, well-informed and transparent decisions – whether to protect it, restore it or to accept impacts to it in favour of other priorities.

In developing and implementing their policies, plans, programs, projects, processes and systems, agencies will identify and progress reforms to:

1. consider and transparently account for the values of native vegetation in decision-making that affects it, based on the best information available at the time
2. apply the **mitigation hierarchy** steps to any planned impacts on native vegetation at both strategic and project scale – avoid, minimise, then rehabilitate – before considering offsets
3. improve the spatial capture of their regulatory, land management, land planning and funding decisions that affect native vegetation, applying common data standards to facilitate data sharing
4. work together with other agencies and stakeholders to expand and apply the native vegetation knowledge base, improve mapping and monitoring of its status and values, and broaden the availability of spatial data.

Agencies will collaborate to design and apply whole-of-government policy settings which:

5. achieve conservation and restoration of native vegetation while also delivering other state priorities like regional prosperity, Aboriginal wellbeing and a strong economy
6. maximise the **co-benefits** of sustainable native vegetation management, for ecological, community and economic outcomes
7. inspire and support all sectors to conserve and restore native vegetation, complementing the state's conservation estate and regulatory functions
8. support coordinated, outcome- and risk-based decision-making across all of the State Government's regulatory, land management, land planning and funding functions that affect native vegetation, including through approaches which:
  - a. are tailored to bioregional differences or specific challenges
  - b. include targets and thresholds where they are warranted and achievable
  - c. leverage environmental offsets and other funding streams to address impacts at a landscape scale.



**Mitigation hierarchy.** Steps that must be taken to limit impacts on native vegetation – avoid, minimise, rehabilitate – before considering offsets. See also the *WA Environmental Offsets Policy and Guidelines*.

**Co-benefits:** Added benefits from managing native vegetation (e.g. urban cooling, carbon sequestration, erosion control).

# Why we need a policy on native vegetation

## ► We acknowledge

Western Australia's native vegetation is internationally renowned for its biodiversity and gives character to the state's unique and iconic landscapes. It is intrinsically valuable, provides habitat for native animals, binds carbon, supports soil health, cleanses water, prevents erosion, controls salinity, provides oxygen, cools cities and towns, feeds livestock and provides timber and **bush products**. It is culturally and spiritually significant to Aboriginal people, underpins community health and wellbeing, and supports important sectors of the state's economy.



**Bush products:** Includes industries derived from Australian native plants, botanicals-based products and foods from native plants (e.g. honey).

As Western Australia's population and economy grows, pressures on our native vegetation continue. Since European settlement, the loss and degradation of Western Australia's native vegetation has been ongoing. The South West is one of 36 global biodiversity hotspots – recognising it is already more than 70 per cent cleared, subject to multiple urgent threats, and supports thousands of endemic and irreplaceable species. Clearing has also caused costly problems like salinity, erosion and intensifying urban temperatures. In some areas, what remains is rare, significant and fragmented, and under threat from climate change, bushfires and invasive species. Cumulative impacts are leading to increasingly protracted regulatory assessments. If they continue unchecked, they will work against Western Australia's [Climate Policy](#) and our progress towards net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

To reverse the decline in native vegetation, we need effective coordination and a systematic approach. There are many organisations and individuals involved in conserving, restoring, utilising and clearing native vegetation, for many purposes. They are subject to various legislative and other frameworks at international, national, state, regional and local levels (see Table 1 and Figure 3). Adding to this complexity, Western Australia has a great diversity of vegetation types. Around the state, the historic impacts and the main threats, land uses and tenures all vary. So do the regulatory and other decision-making pathways, and the solutions to address native vegetation decline.

We need a way to untangle the complexities, plan ahead and work together across the public, private and community sectors. With the right strategies, we can achieve ecologically sustainable management of native vegetation together with other state priorities, such as economic and regional development, community safety and traditional practices.

Strategic, regional planning for native vegetation is a solution that can deliver the consistency, transparency and clarity stakeholders seek, yet there are various policy-making models to consider. The models span all three tiers of government, with various purposes, scopes and regional boundaries. Choosing the right model for a given part of the state will need careful analysis of the problems to solve, their geographic extent and the main decision-making pathways. We will do this work, together with stakeholders, in implementing this policy (see **More on regional planning for native vegetation** on page 11).

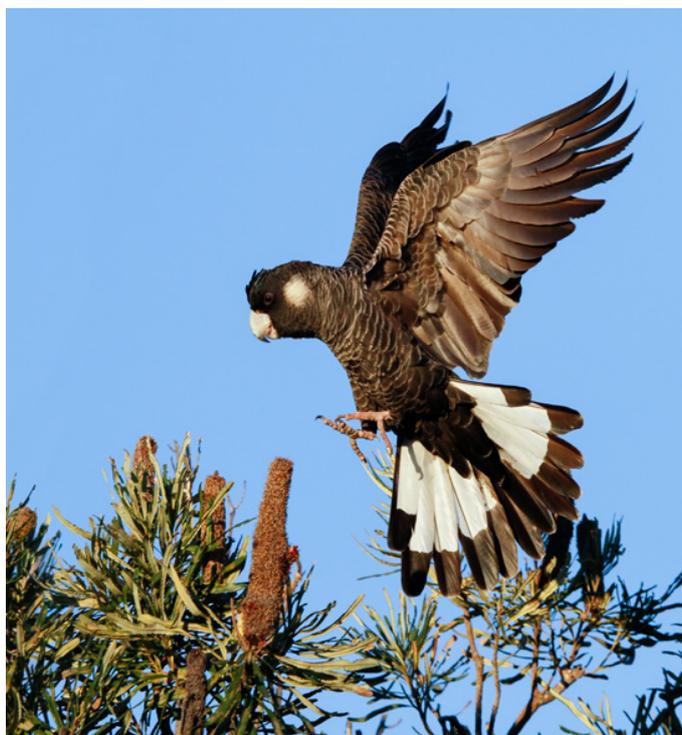


Photo: K. Lightbody

<p><b>International obligations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UN Convention on Biological Diversity</li> <li>• UN Convention to Combat Desertification</li> <li>• Convention on Migratory Species</li> <li>• World Heritage Convention</li> <li>• Ramsar Convention on Wetlands</li> <li>• Sustainable Development Goals</li> <li>• UN Framework Convention on Climate Change</li> </ul>	<p><b>National frameworks and strategies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australia’s Strategy for Nature</li> <li>• Australia’s Native Vegetation Framework</li> <li>• Threatened Species Strategy</li> <li>• Australian Pest Animal Strategy</li> <li>• Australian Weeds Strategy</li> <li>• Australia’s Strategy for the National Reserve System</li> </ul>
<p><b>Areas of government responsibility</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal affairs and engagement</li> <li>• Aboriginal heritage and heritage regulation</li> <li>• Agriculture</li> <li>• Biodiversity and conservation reserve planning and management</li> <li>• Climate action</li> <li>• Emergency services planning</li> <li>• Environmental regulation</li> <li>• Forestry planning and management</li> <li>• Mining and petroleum regulation</li> <li>• Natural resource management funding</li> <li>• Pastoral lands management</li> <li>• Regional and state development</li> <li>• Road safety</li> <li>• Transport planning and delivery</li> <li>• Tourism</li> <li>• Urban and land use planning</li> <li>• Water regulation, planning and management</li> </ul>	

**Table 1.** The context for managing native vegetation is complex. There are many international and national considerations, and it interacts with many areas of government responsibility.

► **More on regional planning for native vegetation**

<p><b>Some benefits</b></p> <p>Regional planning for native vegetation will provide clear regionally tailored objectives, supporting accountability, business certainty, and guiding individual decisions so they count towards strategic goals.</p> <p>It can help address cumulative impacts, offsets and competing priorities in a transparent way. This may help reduce complexities when assessing individual proposals.</p> <p>It can provide strategic solutions for environmental offsets, enabling the best long-term environmental benefit from existing and emerging funding streams such as environmental grants, carbon markets and environmental offsets.</p>	<p><b>Potential policy-making models</b></p> <p>Some models can apply broadly, like strategic advice or assessments under state and federal environmental legislation. Some only apply to one type of decision-making pathway, such as the various models under the <a href="#">State Planning Framework</a>. Other models guide investment, like conservation reserve planning or the <a href="#">State Natural Resource Management Framework</a>. Regional planning is also possible under federal environmental legislation.</p>
<p><b>Types of outputs</b></p> <p>Regional planning for native vegetation will produce outputs such as policy documents that outline clear objectives and priorities (including targets and thresholds where warranted), maps or corridor concepts, strategic restoration plans, strategic offsets plans or schemes.</p>	

## ► We recognise

In developing this policy, the State Government recognises values, practice and opportunities and challenges.

### Values

1. Native vegetation is vital for all life on earth and is intrinsically valuable. Some ecosystems are irreplaceable. All Western Australians depend in some way on the **ecosystem services** and co-benefits that native vegetation provides.
2. Western Australia's unique flora and iconic ecosystems are nationally and globally significant for biodiversity conservation.
3. Native vegetation is of cultural value to Aboriginal people, who have a long history of sustainable management and use of native vegetation.
4. Native vegetation sustains community health and wellbeing and provides a unique sense of place.
5. Native vegetation is of economic value. It sustains important sectors of the economy and provides valuable ecosystem services that are costly to replace.

### Practice

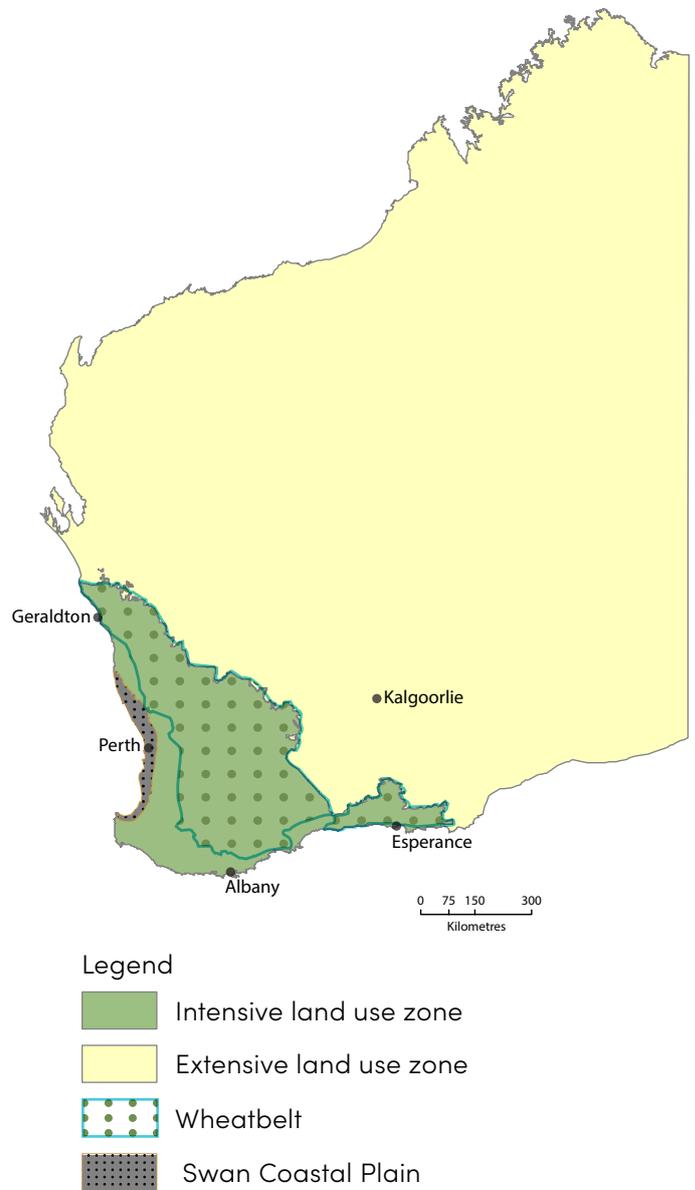
6. Conservation of biological diversity and ecological integrity should be fundamental considerations in protecting and managing native vegetation.
7. A comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) reserve system is an important mechanism for conserving native vegetation, species and communities.
8. Stewardship of native vegetation by all land managers is vital to ensure landscape health – including through its integration with other productive land uses (e.g. agriculture, mining), or through its ecologically sustainable use (e.g. beekeeping, pastoralism, forestry).
9. Maintaining the ecosystem services and co-benefits of native vegetation is an intergenerational responsibility and shared across all sectors and levels of government. The health, diversity and productivity of native vegetation must be maintained or enhanced for the benefit of current and future generations.
10. Decision-making for vegetation must be underpinned by sound science; reliable information on its ecological, social, cultural and economic values; and understanding of cumulative impacts. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason to postpone measures to prevent environmental degradation.



**Ecosystem services:** The benefits people derive from ecosystems, including provisioning (e.g. food, fibre, fuel), regulating (e.g. erosion control, water filtration), supporting (e.g. biodiversity conservation) and cultural services (e.g. sense of place, nature-based or cultural tourism).

### Opportunities and challenges

11. Western Australia’s native vegetation is in decline and biodiversity loss is escalating. Reversing the decline requires coordinated management across all land tenures to improve the extent, condition, connectivity and resilience of native vegetation to maintain ecosystem function.
12. A net gain in native vegetation will store carbon and contribute to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. We must support native vegetation’s resilience to climate change and its impacts on water, fire and temperature regimes.
13. Traditional Owners, with their rich cultural knowledge of ecosystems, have important roles in co-managing, conserving and restoring native vegetation, and in planning for its management.
14. Ecologically sustainable development is essential to the wellbeing and prosperity of Western Australians, and requires integrating environmental, economic and social considerations in decision-making.
15. In the intensive land use zone, in particular the **Swan Coastal Plain** and the **Wheatbelt** (see Figure 1), historic clearing has been extensive. Strategic coordination and stewardship across sectors is needed to restore landscape and ecosystem function.
16. In the extensive land use zone (see Figure 1), native vegetation is subject to a range of degrading processes. Coordinated management of the threats to native vegetation is needed to maintain and enhance its condition and ecosystem function.



**Figure 1.** Intensive and extensive land use zones, Swan Coastal Plain and Wheatbelt



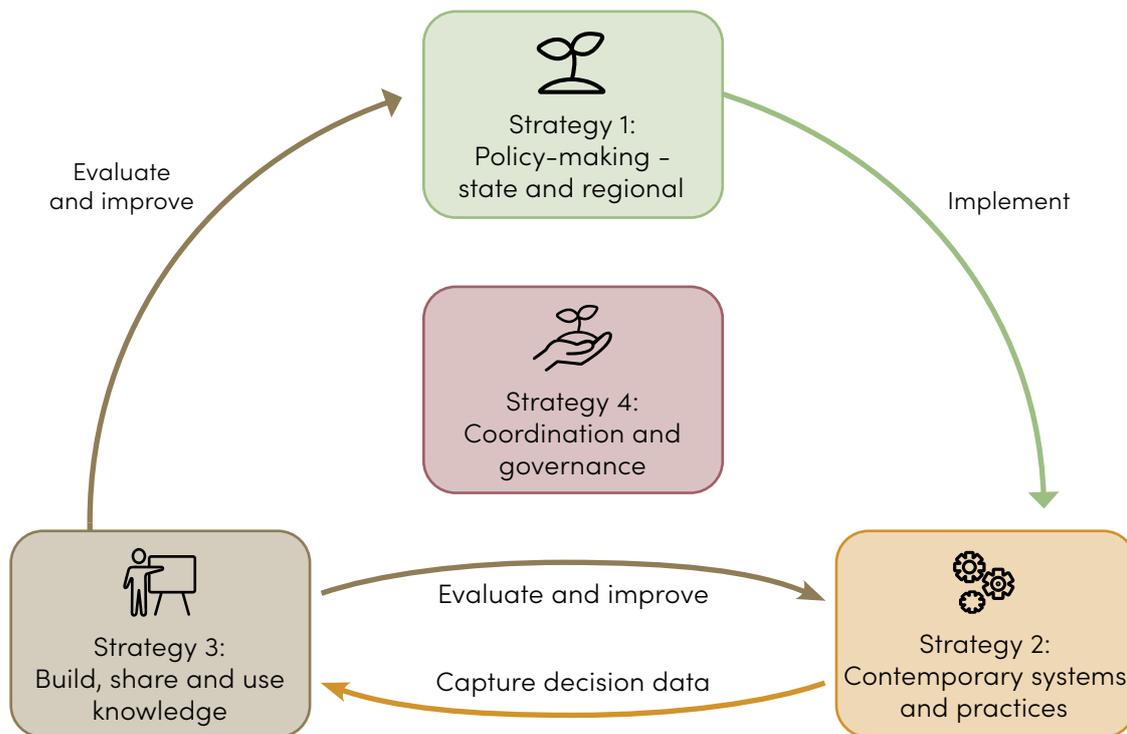
**Swan Coastal Plain (SCP):** For this policy, the SCP means the Perth subregion (SWA02) of the SCP bioregion in the [Interim Biogeographic Regionalisation for Australia, version 7](#). Note: The Dandaragan Plateau subregion (SWA01) of the SCP bioregion (SWA01) comes under this policy’s definition of the Wheatbelt.

**Wheatbelt:** For this policy, the Wheatbelt coincides with the area of broadacre farming in the [Generalised Land Use of Western Australia](#) map (Department of Agriculture and Food WA, 2017).

# How agencies will implement the policy

## ► Policy strategies

Agencies will implement the policy through actions under the following strategies (see Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** The policy strategies provide for evaluation and improvement, supporting a contemporary policy evaluation cycle

## ► Implementation roadmap

The *Implementation roadmap* sets out the tangible actions that the State Government will take over the next four years to achieve the policy outcomes.

### Monitoring and reporting on progress

The lead agency for policy implementation is identified in the *Implementation roadmap* and will report annually on the roadmap’s progress and outcomes. To support the lead agency’s public reporting, agencies will report on their progress against roadmap actions via a committee of agencies’ Directors General.

In scoping and reporting on each roadmap action, agencies will articulate the action’s success measures, reflecting on how the action contributes to one or more of the policy outcomes<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For example, some roadmap actions will develop the data, systems and practices to assess our progress towards net gain and landscape-scale conservation. Other actions may improve stakeholder experience around transparency or certainty, which may be assessed through existing reference groups, regulatory statistics or stakeholder surveys.

## ► Guidance for roadmap agencies

Along with the broad strategic direction that this policy provides, all agencies with roadmap responsibilities should be guided by the following considerations when designing and delivering the actions.

1. In relevant roadmap actions, explore how a net gain in both condition and extent might be defined, measured (including baseline and timeframes) and achieved in the context of the roadmap action.  
 Either adopt the definition to guide the action, or articulate why it is not appropriate to adopt (e.g. in the context of other state priorities) and adopt an alternative (e.g. improve condition and connectivity of remnant vegetation).  
 See also **Appendix 1 Exploring net gain and landscape-scale conservation and restoration** (page 17).
2. Align with the [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) and the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) in the way the action is achieved and in its outcomes, including appropriate co-design and consultation.
3. Enable stakeholders to contribute innovative solutions which contribute to the policy outcomes.  
 For example: local and Aboriginal-led solutions for managing native vegetation that also deliver economic, social and cultural benefits, such as jobs in cities and regional areas.
4. Consider all the **policy instruments** available for complementing effective regulation with other measures to achieve the policy outcomes.  
 For example: coordinating and promoting existing incentives that support voluntary conservation and restoration on various land tenures; or building public awareness of how native vegetation and its ecosystem services sustain community health and wellbeing.



**Policy instrument:** Tools used by governments to pursue a desired outcome, such as regulation, funding and economic incentives, or providing services or information.

## Regional planning for native vegetation

5. In collaboration and informed by analysis and consultation, determine which regional planning model to use (see **More on regional planning for native vegetation** on page 11) and whether a strategic offsets plan is required, in line with the regional planning steps outlined in the *Implementation roadmap*.
6. Develop clear, regionally tailored objectives and priorities to promote strategic coordination across State Government functions. Once implemented consistently, these should:
  - a. support business certainty and fairness and regulatory efficiency; and enable outcome-based decisions and risk-based streamlining
  - b. clarify environmental standards, supporting transparency and accountability
  - c. coordinate efforts and investment by the public, private and community sectors, helping every decision to count towards common strategic goals.
7. Consider the following in developing regionally tailored objectives and priorities:
  - a. native vegetation values (environmental, social, cultural and economic), informed by sound science, traditional and local knowledge
  - b. cumulative impacts, competing priorities and consideration of how targets and thresholds could support achievement of the objectives
  - c. managing threats to improve the condition and resilience of remnant vegetation (e.g. climate change, invasive species, inappropriate fire regimes, inappropriate water regimes and quality, unsustainable use)
  - d. opportunities to complement the conservation reserve system and its management, including by identifying land with strategic value for restoration or conservation
  - e. ecosystem services and their co-benefits (e.g. habitat protection, soil health, carbon sequestration, flood mitigation, salinity and erosion mitigation, water provision, temperature control, human health, sustainable grazing, timber and bush products).



# Appendix 1: Exploring net gain and landscape-scale conservation and restoration

This policy guides agencies to use a range of policy instruments (see definition page 15) in complementary ways, encouraging stakeholders to **conserve** and **restore**. Net gain is to apply at landscape scale (see definition page 7), taking into account the sum total of stakeholder actions that influence it – regulated, voluntary and otherwise.

Acknowledging the many challenges in net gain definitions and accounting, this policy guides agencies to explore how to define, measure and achieve net gain at landscape scale, through the policy's roadmap actions (see **Guidance for roadmap agencies**, point 1 on page 15).

## ► Benefits of net gain

Aiming for a net gain will conserve biodiversity, sequester carbon and build market demand for ecosystem restoration services, resulting in new economic and employment opportunities.

It will also support the many other ecosystem services that native vegetation provides.

## ► Benefits of landscape-scale conservation and restoration

Regional planning for native vegetation will set the scene for landscape-scale conservation and restoration. It will guide decisions and investment at the property or local scale to contribute to a landscape-scale plan to support connectivity and resilience, so that the environmental benefits are greater than the sum of their individual parts.



**Conserve:** Protect native vegetation from harm, loss or change.

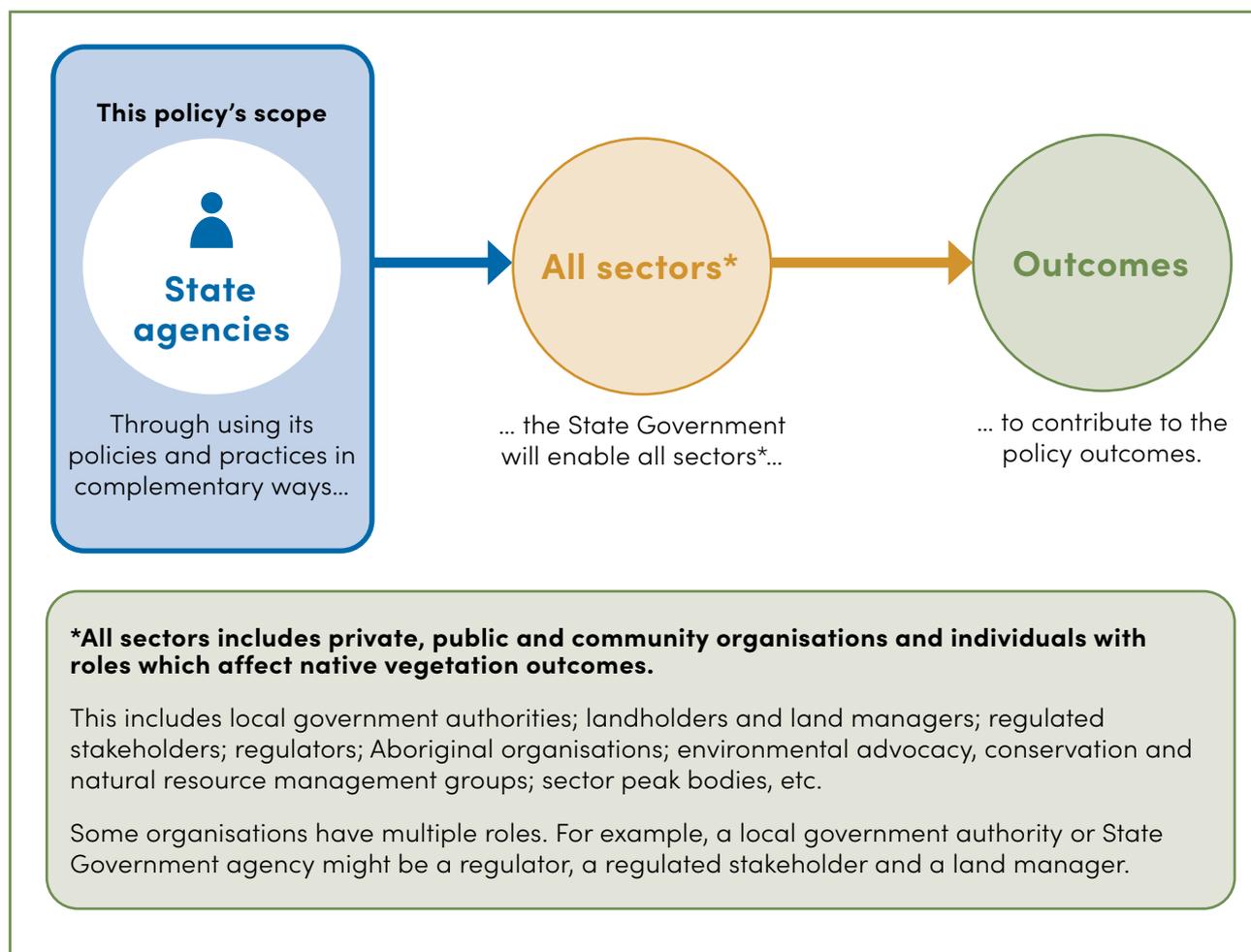
**Restore:** Supporting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed. Includes revegetation, rehabilitation, repair of ecosystem processes and management of threats.



## Appendix 2: Exploring this policy's scope

### ► How this policy will influence all sectors

Agencies' policies and practices influence the decisions and actions of many stakeholders which conserve, restore and clear native vegetation. Through using its policies and practices in complementary ways, the State Government can influence stakeholder choices and the resulting outcomes (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** How this policy will influence all sectors

### ► A whole-of-government policy

This is a whole-of-government policy. It does not sit under any one piece of legislation or a policy hierarchy. Rather, it guides coordinated use of statutory and non-statutory functions under various pieces of legislation.

This policy recognises that we must complement regulatory controls with a range of other measures if we are to achieve a net gain in native vegetation.

Literature on **system stewardship** as a model for public policy may provide more clarity on the policy's position within the legislation and policy hierarchy.



**System stewardship:** Creating the right conditions to steer complex systems towards desired outcomes, rather than relying solely on imposing top-down decisions.

### ► How this policy relates to regulation

As a result of some roadmap actions – particularly those for regional planning for native vegetation – regulatory standards may become clearer or change. In line with the usual processes, the State Government will fully consult with regulated stakeholders on any relevant changes.

This policy's definition of **native vegetation** is broader than the state's regulatory definition of it, because it guides better coordination of actions, regulated, voluntary or otherwise.



**Native vegetation:** For this policy, native vegetation means vegetation that comprises terrestrial or aquatic plants within their natural distribution, including living and non-living components, and voluntarily-restored native vegetation.





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