

# Biodiversity Assessment for the Traralgon North Development (Extended Study Area), Traralgon, Victoria.

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## 1 Introduction

Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd was commissioned by the Latrobe City Council to undertake a Biodiversity Assessment for an additional 3.41-hectare site as part of the Traralgon North Development Plan, Traralgon (the study area). The purpose of the assessment was to identify the extent and type of remnant native vegetation present within the study area and to determine the likely presence of significant flora and fauna species and/or ecological communities.

Ecology and Heritage Partners previously undertook a detailed flora and fauna assessment of the broader 116-hectare development area (Ecology and Heritage Partners 2011). It is understood that the additional 3.41-hectare area is needed to meet bushfire requirements and measures, as part of the proposed subdivision plans for the Traralgon North Development. The purpose of this report is to summarise and identify ecological values known to, or likely to occur within the study area, and determine the regulatory and legislative implications associated with the proposed action.

## 2 Study Area

The study area is located in Traralgon North approximately 6.5 kilometres from the Traralgon town centre (Figure 1). The study site is split into two areas, the area to the east is bound by Traralgon- Maffra Road and Lighthorse Avenue and is approximately 1.85 Hectares. The site to the west is located on private property off Glendale Road and covers approximately 1.56 hectares.

According to the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Biodiversity Interactive Map (DELWP 2019a), the study area occurs within the Gippsland Plain Bioregion. It is located within the jurisdiction of the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority Catchment Management Authority (CMA) and the Latrobe City Council municipality.

## 3 Methods

### 3.1 Desktop Assessment

Relevant literature, online-resources and databases were reviewed to provide an assessment of flora and fauna values associated with the study area. The following information sources were reviewed:

- The DELWP NatureKit Map (DELWP 2019a) and Native Vegetation Information Management (NVIM) Tool (DELWP 2019b) for:
  - Modelled data for location risk, remnant vegetation patches, scattered trees and habitat for rare or threatened species; and,

- The extent of historic and current EVCs.
- EVC benchmarks (DELWP 2019c) for descriptions of EVCs within the relevant bioregion;
- The Victorian Biodiversity Atlas (VBA) for previously documented flora and fauna records within the project locality (DELWP 2018a);
- The Illustrated Flora Information System of Victoria (IFLISV) (Gullan 2017) for assistance with the distribution and identification of flora species;
- The Commonwealth Department of the Environment (DoEE) Protected Matters Search Tool (PMST) for matters of National Environmental Significance (NES) protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) (DoEE 2019);
- Relevant listings under the Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act), including the latest Threatened and Protected Lists (DELWP 2018; DELWP 2017a);
- The online VicPlan Map (DELWP 2019d) to ascertain current zoning and environmental overlays in the study area;
- Aerial photography of the study area; and,
- Previous ecological assessments relevant to the study area; including;
  - Flora and Fauna Assessment and Net Gain Analysis – Traralgon North Development Plan and Development Contribution Plan, Traralgon North, Victoria (March 2012)

### 3.2 Field Assessment

A rapid assessment of the study area was undertaken by a qualified ecologist on 12 September 2019. The inspections sought primarily to identify the extent and type of remnant native vegetation present within the study area and to identify potential habitat for species and ecological communities listed under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (FFG Act).

### 3.3 Removal, Destruction or Lopping of Native Vegetation (the Guidelines)

Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, Clause 52.17 of the Latrobe City Council Planning Scheme requires a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. The assessment process for the clearing of vegetation follows the '*Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation*' (the Guidelines) (DELWP 2017b).

### 3.4 Assessment Qualifications and Limitations

This report has been written based on the quality and extent of the ecological values and habitat considered to be present or absent at the time of the desktop and field assessments being undertaken.

The field assessment was undertaken during a optimal season for the identification of flora and fauna species (Spring). The 'snap shot' nature of a standard biodiversity assessment, meant that migratory, transitory or uncommon fauna species may have been absent from typically occupied habitats at the time of the field assessment. In addition, annual or cryptic flora species such as those that persist via underground tubers may also be absent.

A comprehensive list of all terrestrial flora and fauna present within the study area was not undertaken as this was not the objective of the assessment. Rather a list of commonly observed species was recorded to assist in determining the broader biodiversity values present within the study area.

Ecological values identified within the study area were recorded using a hand-held GPS or tablet with an accuracy of +/-5 metres. This level of accuracy is considered to provide an accurate assessment of the ecological values present within the study area; however, this data should not be used for detailed surveying purposes.

Targeted flora or fauna surveys were not undertaken, as this was beyond the preliminary scope of the project. Nevertheless, the terrestrial flora and fauna data collected during the field assessment and information obtained from relevant desktop sources is considered to adequately inform an accurate assessment of the ecological values present within the study area.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Vegetation

The study area across the two sites were both highly modified and dominated by exotic vegetation; predominantly pastures, which is being used for livestock grazing. No remnant patches of native vegetation, as defined by the Guidelines, were identified within the study area.

All areas were dominated by commonly introduced pasture species such as Cocksfoot *Dactylis glomeratus*, Toowoomba Canary-grass *Phalaris aquatica*, Prairie Grass *Bromus catharticus*, Perennial Rye-grass *Lolium perenne*, Couch *Elymus repens* and White Clover *Trifolium repens* (Plate 1 and Plate 2).

Other exotic species found throughout the study areas included Flatweed *Hypochoeris radicata*, Onion Grass *Romulea rosea*, Capeweed *Arctotheca calendula*, Mallow *Malva parviflora*, Rush *Juncus* spp., Ribwort *Plantago lanceolata* and Broad-leaved Dock *Rumex obtusifolius*.

Noxious weeds are present throughout the study area, with scattered occurrences of Spear Thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, along with the Weeds of National Significance (WONS), Blackberry *Rubus fruticosus* (Plate 4).



**Plate 1.** Study area covered with highly modified pastoral grasses (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).



**Plate 2.** Study area covered with highly modified pastoral grasses (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).



**Plate 3.** Capeweed present throughout the study area (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).



**Plate 4.** Blackberry present in eastern parts of the study area, around scattered trees and fence line (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).

#### 4.2 Scattered Trees

A total of six scattered Gippsland Red Gums *Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *mediana* were recorded predominantly at the eastern end of the study site (Plate 5 and 6, Appendix 1).



**Plate 5.** Large Gippsland Red Gum present in eastern end of study area (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).



**Plate 6.** Four Gippsland Red Gums present near fence line along Traralgon-Maffra road (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).

#### 4.3 Fauna habitat

Remnant scattered and hollow bearing Gippsland Red Gums present within the study area are considered to be moderate to high habitat value for arboreal fauna species and birds (Plate 7). The study area is likely to be used as a foraging resource by common generalist bird species which are tolerant of modified open areas. Although not observed during the assessment, fauna species likely to use this habitat included; Australian Magpie *Cracticus tibicen*, Common Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Little Raven *Corvus mellori*, Magpie-lark *Grallina cyanoleuca*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Willie Wagtail *Rhipidura leucophrys*, Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes* and European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*.

Ephemeral drainage lines and dams are present within the study area; however, they are considered to be of low quality. The drainage line fluctuates between containing water and drying out throughout winter and summer months. Farm dams within the study area are of low-quality habitat, with poor water quality due to the presence of livestock (Plate 8).



**Plate 7.** Scattered Gippsland Red Gum found throughout eastern end of study area with hollows present (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).



**Plate 8.** Low quality dam found within study area (Ecology and Heritage Partners Pty Ltd 12/09/2019).

#### 4.4 Significance Assessment

##### 4.4.1 Flora

No national or State significant flora were recorded during the site assessment. Seven (7) records of Matted Flax-lily *Dianella aemona* have been recorded within a 5-kilometre radius of the study area, with the most recent record in 2005. Based on the modified nature of the study area, landscape context and the proximity of previous records, significant flora species are considered unlikely to occur within the study area due to the and high levels of disturbance and absence of suitable habitat.

##### 4.4.2 Fauna

Based on the modified nature of the study area, landscape context and the proximity of previous records, significant fauna species are considered unlikely to rely on habitat within the study area for foraging or breeding purposes due to the lack of suitable and/or important habitat features.

##### 4.4.3 Communities

No national or State-significant communities are present within the study area.

One nationally listed ecological community are predicted to occur within 10 kilometres of the study area (DoEE 2019).

- Gippsland Red Gum (*Eucalyptus tereticornis* subsp. *mediana*) Grassy Woodland and Associated Native Grassland

Scattered Gippsland Red Gums are present within the study area, however due to the absence of key indicator species, the low diversity of native flora and high cover of exotic pastural vegetation, the study area did not meet the condition thresholds that define any national or State-significant communities

## 5 Legislative Implications

### 5.1 *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Commonwealth)*

The proposed action is highly unlikely to have a significant impact on any matter of NES. As such, a referral to the Commonwealth Environment Minister is unlikely to be required regarding matters listed under the EPBC Act.

### 5.2 *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (Victoria)*

No FFG Act listed flora species were recorded during the field assessment. Five flora species listed as threatened under the FFG Act have been recorded within 10 kilometres of the study area, with an additional six threatened species or their habitat potentially occurring within the local area (Ecology and Heritage Partners 2012). Although not listed, Black Wattle was recorded on site which is broadly protected as an *Acacia* sp. by the FFG Act. However, the study area is privately owned, as such a permit under the FFG Act is not required.

### 5.3 *Planning and Environment Act 1987 (Victoria)*

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* outlines the legislative framework for planning in Victoria and for the development and administration of planning schemes. All planning schemes contain native vegetation provisions at Clause 52.17 which require a planning permit from the relevant local Council to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation on a site of more than 0.4 hectares, unless an exemption under clause 52.17-7 of the Victorian Planning Schemes applies or a subdivision is proposed with lots less than 0.4 hectares<sup>1</sup>. Local planning schemes may contain other provisions in relation to the removal of native vegetation (Section 5.3.1).

#### 5.3.1 *Local Planning Schemes*

The study area is located within the Latrobe City Council municipality. The following zoning and overlays apply (DELWP 2019f, 2019g):

- Commercial 1 Zone (C1Z)
- General Residents Zone Category 1 (GRZ1)

#### 5.3.2 *The Guidelines*

The State Planning Policy Framework and the decision guidelines at Clause 52.17 (Native Vegetation) and Clause 12.01 require Planning and Responsible Authorities to have regard for the 'Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation' (the Guidelines) (DELWP 2017a).

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal's (VCAT) decision *Villawood v Greater Bendigo CC* (2005) VCAT 2703 (20 December 2005) all native vegetation is considered lost where proposed lots are less than 0.4 hectares in area and must be offset at the time of subdivision.

### 5.3.3 Implications

Although six scattered trees of native vegetation are found within the study area, no vegetation is proposed to be removed at this stage. If native vegetation is proposed to be impacted with future planning and development, a planning permit from the Latrobe City Council is required to remove, destroy or lop any native vegetation.

### 5.4 **Wildlife Act 1975 and Wildlife Regulations 2013 (Victoria)**

The *Wildlife Act 1975* (and associated *Wildlife Regulations 2013*) is the primary legislation in Victoria providing for protection and management of wildlife. Authorisation for habitat removal may be obtained under the *Wildlife Act 1975* through a licence granted under the *Forests Act 1958*, or under any other Act such as the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Any persons engaged to remove, salvage, hold or relocate native fauna during construction must hold a current Management Authorisation under the *Wildlife Act 1975*, issued by DELWP.

### 5.5 **Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (Victoria)**

Weeds listed as noxious under the CaLP Act were recorded during the assessment (Blackberry). A Weed Management Plan and a pest fauna eradication plan may be required.

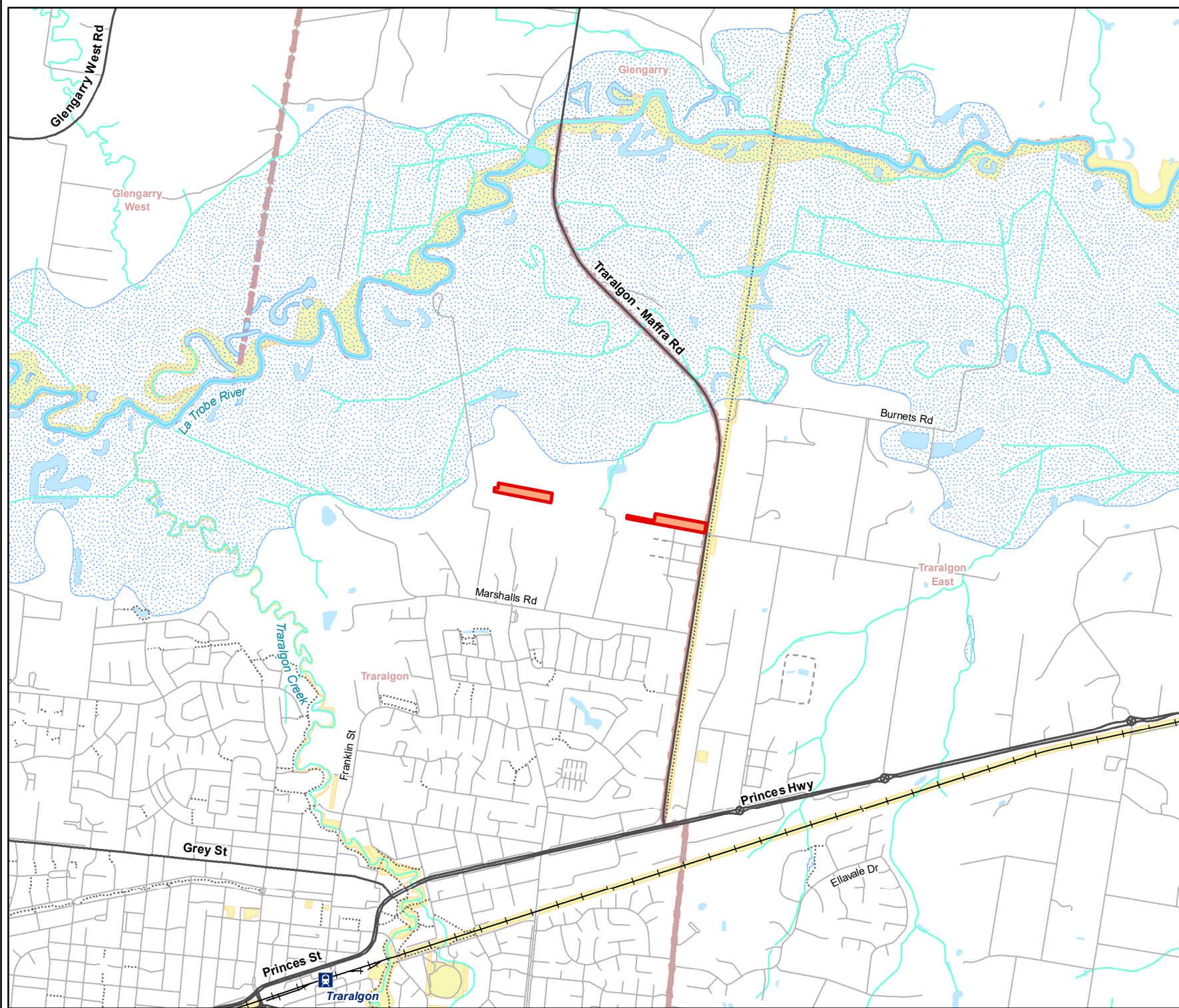
## 6 Discussion

At this stage, scattered trees found within the study area are not proposed to be removed. As such, there are no offset requirements associated with the removal of native vegetation, and the application to remove native vegetation does not fall under any of the risk-based pathway categories.

However, a planning permit from the Latrobe City Council is required to remove, destroy or lop any native vegetation, and a planning permit should be obtained prior to the disturbance of any native vegetation within the study area.

## 7 References

- DELWP 2017a. *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* Protected Flora List – June 2017. Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Melbourne, Victoria.
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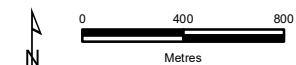
**Legend**

- Study Area
- Railway
- Major Road
- Minor Road
- Proposed Road
- Walking Track
- Minor Watercourse
- Major Watercourse
- Permanent Waterbody
- Land Subject to Inundation
- Crown Land
- Localities



**Figure 1**

**Location of the study area**  
*Biodiversity Assessment for*  
*Traralgon North Development*  
*Plan, Traralgon*



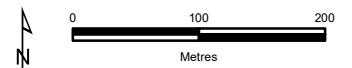
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- Legend**
- Study Area
  - ★ Scattered tree
  - Permanent Waterbody
  - Land Subject to Inundation
  - Current Wetlands



**Figure 2**  
**Ecological features**  
*Biodiversity Assessment for Traralgon North Development Plan, Traralgon*













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**Legend**

 Study Area

**Significant Flora**

-  Bog Gum
-  Grey Billy-buttons
-  Hypsela
-  Matted Flax-lily
-  Purple Blown-grass
-  River Swamp Wallaby-grass
-  Southern Blue-gum
-  Spotted Gum
-  Willow Needlewood
-  Yarra Gum



**Figure 3**  
**Previously documented significant**  
**flora within 5km of the study area**  
*Biodiversity Assessment for Traralgon*  
*North Development Plan, Traralgon*



VBA 2018. Victorian Biodiversity Atlas // Sourced from: 'VBA\_FLORA25', 'VBA\_FLORA100', 'VBA\_FAUNA25' and 'VBA\_FAUNA100', March 2018 © The State of Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. Records prior to 1949 not shown.

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