



# ▶▶▶ Maximising native vegetation

## Plan for species per hectare as well as tonnes per hectare

When landholders are deciding where to leave or establish vegetation, there are a number of issues to be considered. These issues can seem complex, but a systematic approach to planning can help weld together the needs of boosting biodiversity with management efficiencies and addressing land degradation.

People retain and establish vegetation for a number of reasons. These can be quite different to reasons they do other things. They can be technical, or simply an altruistic desire to do the 'right' thing by our wildlife. A good vegetation plan also enables landholders to show the broader community they are serious about addressing issues such as biodiversity and salinity.

## Getting started

A way to begin planning for vegetation and biodiversity is for the land managers to decide what issues they need to address so desired benefits flow from the plan. Do issues such as riverine habitats, salinity, soil degradation, long-term productivity, forestry, habitat for special fauna and flora, need for windbreaks and overall biodiversity, need to be taken into account?

A basic knowledge of the original vegetation as well as knowing what the salinity hazards, geology and land types are, would be a good start to planning. By having this type of knowledge, a landowner can decide what type of vegetation is suited to the land and where to allow it to establish for most benefit. The whole farm, not just a small part, needs to be looked at to develop the best plan.



An aerial photo or satellite image is a great aid to vegetation planning. Start by marking different types and growth stages of vegetation at a scale suited to the size of your property. Add what you know about land types, geology, salinity, degradation, watercourses and present land use. This can be done in layers, electronically or by transparencies, so that information can be viewed selectively thus reducing confusion and making matches.

## Plan ahead

Once existing vegetation and stages of growth are marked on a plan along with other features then decisions about where further vegetation regeneration gives the best benefits, in terms of biodiversity and technical issues, like salinity control, can be made. Where conflicts seem to occur in the locations of vegetation or in the economics of the farm business then the decision process may need to be influenced by evaluating the consequences of doing or not doing certain actions.

Look for locations that give multiple benefits. For example areas adjacent to watercourses may be discharge zones for salinity and they are known to be vital areas for maximising biodiversity. So vegetation along watercourses can have multiple benefits for salinity and biodiversity as well



as providing bank stability from slumping. They can also act as important linkages to other vegetation in the landscape.

Vegetation on ridges can have multiple benefits by:

- not adding to recharge into salinity prone landscapes
- reducing soil erosion on ridges as well as
- enhancing to biodiversity

Areas with fallen logs and litter or rocky areas will be of extra benefit for biodiversity if retained or allowed to regenerate.

Linking vegetated areas where possible is of great benefit to biodiversity. A way to enhance these linkages as well as gaining access to technical information is to participate in sub-catchment planning groups.

If it is impractical to form linkages, then clumps of vegetation across the landscape can act as stepping-stones for some wildlife and are still important. These clumps need to be reasonably close together so that fauna can migrate across the gaps between clumps.

Similarly, research work has pointed to mature trees with hollows, even if isolated, are still important to retain in the landscape and are good starting points for regeneration. Glider possums and bats may survive in these trees. Do not use the excuse to knock vegetation out just because they are small or isolated by a purist's definition. Some fauna for example certain reptiles can still survive in small clumps. Small is better than none and the challenge is in improving things over time.

### Making the most of your plan

Once your plan is drawn up and you have decided where vegetation is to be retained and regenerated there is still a bit to do. Some landholders have found it useful to make a diary of necessary actions so that the plan has some clear decision-making behind it and it can be acted on in an orderly way. Working in groups can enhance this process by allowing wider input into the 'how, why, when and where' things are best done.

Decisions about how to best ensure the health of retained vegetation including understorey species and grasses need to be made and acted on so that a wide range of fauna species can find suitable habitat. Threats to the health of these areas can include continuous grazing, weed invasion, uncontrolled fires and chemical drift.

It is also important to devise a monitoring programme so that the land manager knows what affect his or her management is having on biodiversity values. Getting the most out of a vegetation plan does not just involve a spatial exercise but also needs technical backing as well as a diary of how the plan will be put in place.

