FACT SHEET:
Managing bush blocks

Bush blocks are privately-owned properties that support remnant native vegetation.

Areas of remnant native vegetation have plants, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses, which are indigenous to the local area. These areas also support animals considered indigenous to the local area.

More detailed information on Nillumbik's plants and animals can be found in the fact sheets *Flora and Fauna in Nillumbik and Managing Fauna in Nillumbik*.

Threats to remnant vegetation

Second to vegetation clearance, weed infestation is the biggest threat to remnant vegetation. The control of weeds on bush blocks is an important management action to protect your bushland.

Pest animals are also a serious threat to bushland. They predate native animals, significantly disturb native vegetation, particularly through over grazing or browsing, and they aid the spread of weeds and increase soil erosion.

When controlling pest animals it is important to work with your neighbours to ensure pest animals are controlled across the landscape. Refer to the *Pest Animal Control* and *Legal Responsibilities* fact sheets.

Protecting your bush block

You can protect your bush block by placing a Trust for Nature conservation covenant on your property title or by participating in the Land for Wildlife program through the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

There are incentive programs such as the Victorian Government BushBroker program which provide landholders of bush blocks with financial benefits for protecting and managing native vegetation. These incentive programs can provide advice to landholders on how to best manage ecological values through providing management plans and funds to implement them.

Legal responsibility

Owning a bush block comes with responsibilities. Legislation and policy at national, state and local levels exists to protect native flora and fauna.

The primary national legislation is the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. This Act contains provisions to protect environmental issues of national significance including listed threatened species.

State legislation includes the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988, Wildlife Act 1975, Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* contains legislation which requires landholders to apply for a planning permit to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation.

Local legislation includes the Nillumbik Planning Scheme, which details overlays such as Environmental Significance Overlay and the Significant Landscape Overlay. These overlays provide additional protection for sites of environmental significance and outline additional permit requirements to ensure any works or development is compatible with identified environmental values.

What you can do

- Find out what vegetation types, habitats and flora and fauna species occur on your land.
- Offer habitat to whatever indigenous species your property can support, particularly threatened species.
- Create a management plan with goals and methods to give you direction in your vegetation management.

You may consider:

- fencing off remnant vegetation from grazing pressures
- protecting trees with hollows and dead stags

- maintaining logs
- undertaking weed control
- linking existing vegetation with other areas of vegetation through restoration works.

The *Weed Control* and *Weed Mapping and Monitoring* fact sheets provide details on planning, carrying out and reviewing weed control.

Useful links

DSE Native Biodiversity Resource Kit

Greening Australia Native Vegetation: A Guide to Research and Resources

Nillumbik Environmental Weeds List
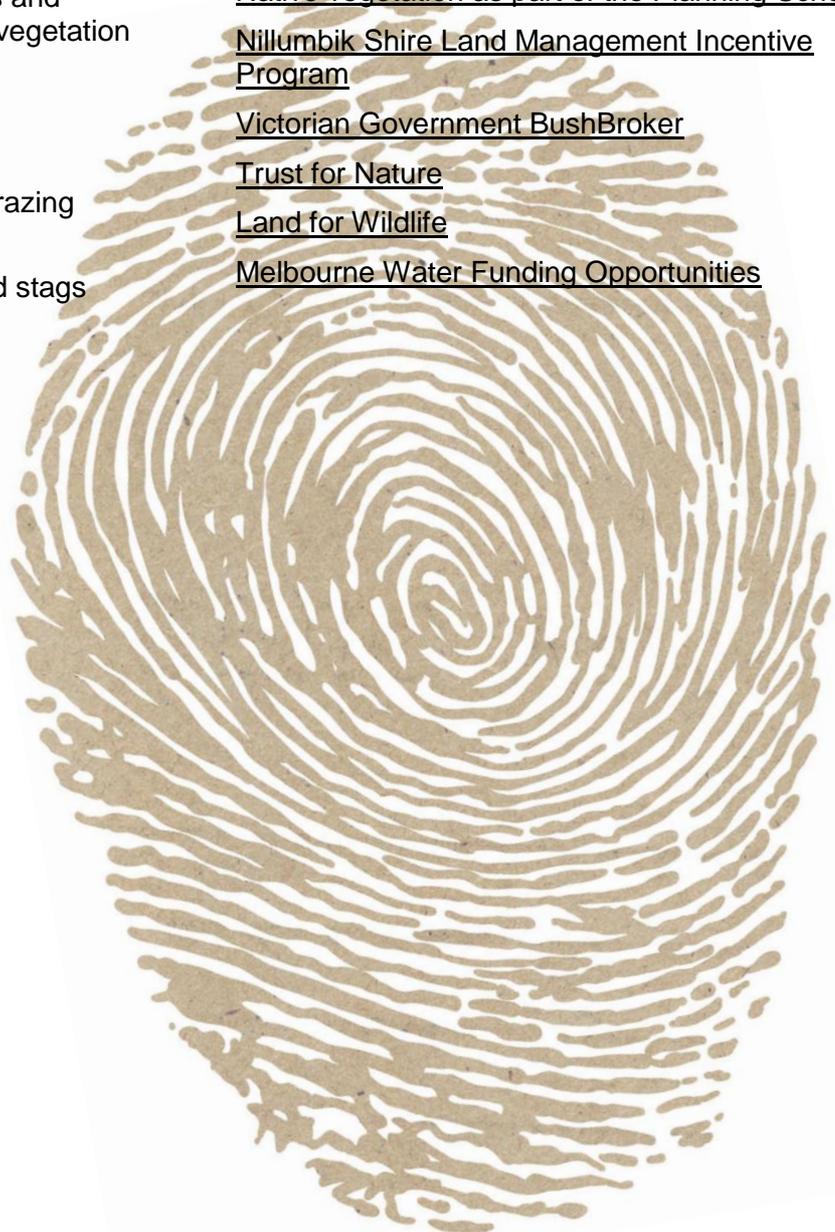
Native vegetation as part of the Planning Scheme

Nillumbik Shire Land Management Incentive Program

Victorian Government BushBroker

Trust for Nature

Land for Wildlife

Melbourne Water Funding Opportunities

CASE STUDY:
Michael and Sue Aldred's property - Caring for a bush block in St Andrews

Michael and Sue Aldred purchased a 40 hectare bush block on Mittons Bridge Road, St Andrews in 2006.

The property was covered by a Trust for Nature covenant when purchased, a Section 173 agreement and two Environmental Significance Overlays under the Nillumbik Planning Scheme.

The property supports various intact vegetation types including Herb Rich Foothill Forest, Grassy Dry Forest, Valley Grassy Forest and Riparian Forest vegetation.

Native vegetation on the property is part of an identified habitat link. It is also listed by Nillumbik Shire Council as Core habitat.

Two regionally rare flora species are known on the property: Common Sunray (Triptilodiscus pygmaeus) and Shining Buttercup (Ranunculus glabrifolius).

Significant fauna known to use the property include the Brush-tailed Phascogale, the Barking Owl and the Painted Honey Eater.

When purchased, there were some dense infestations of woody weeds including Sweet Pittosporum (Pittosprum undulatum) and Blackberry (Rubus fruticosus spp. Agg). Burgan (Kunzea leptospermoldes) was also out of balance in some areas.

Grassy species such as Panic Veldt Grass (Ehrharta erecta) and Sweet Vernal Grass (Anthoxanthum odoratum) also occur. Since the 2009 fires, seedlings of Spear Thistles (Cirsium spp.) and Fleabane (Conyza canadensis) are more prevalent.

Neighbours have not returned since the fires and woody weeds on the adjacent block have emerged to threaten the property, including Bluebell Creeper (Sollya heterophylla), Early Black Wattle

(Acacia decurrens) and Bracelet Honey Myrtle (Melaleuca armillaris). Roadsides and adjacent paddocks are also potential sources for windblown weed seeds.

Rabbits occur on the block, and with increased new growth since the 2009 fires, numbers have increased. Also, some of the drainage lines in the property have developed erosion problems since the fires.

The Aldreds cut and painted Sweet Pittosporum with herbicide early on and this has not required much follow up control.

They have participated in Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage program to control invasive Blackberry along the creek. This has allowed native plants to thrive.

Burgan was being thinned in high biodiversity areas prior to the fire. Since the fires other native wattle species have re-established in high density.

Burgan is regenerating to some extent, but is greatly reduced and is no longer the dominant mid-storey species as it was on some areas of the property before the 2009 fires.

Michael and Sue continue to target new and emergent weeds as they see them, and occasionally, continue their weed works onto the neighbouring property.

The Aldreds have avoided the poison-baiting of rabbits and have explored other options. They have implemented a successful 'soft jaw' trapping program, assisted by a local contractor, and control rabbits by shooting.

Immediately after the fires, they applied measures to control soil erosion caused by a lack of protective vegetation.

Measures included simply moving fallen burnt timber across slopes, log check dams, coir logs, and planting native understorey species as well as grasses and sedges in waterways and gullies.

They now continue with control measures using rocks and engineering works through the national Caring for Our Country funding scheme.

"As time goes on we are seeing the bush here recovering from the fires," said Sue.

"One of the first things we did was to just pull fallen branches across slopes to stop soil being washed away.

"It was amazing how effective it was. One of the biggest things we have learned since the fires is that you have to be patient and to sometimes let nature take its course. For the future, we just want to keep this place as natural as possible.

"The only introduced plants we plant here are veggies in our garden. We have lots of hollows for animals but we are thinking of putting a couple of nesting boxes close to the house so we can see what is about and are also considering installing a remote sensor camera."