

Cleared Rural Land

Cleared rural land is characteristic of the land outside the urban area. It contains farms, lifestyle properties, scattered native vegetation and open space. Cleared rural land has been a part of the Nillumbik area since the first settlers cleared land for agriculture and orchards, and felled timber for construction, fuel wood for bakery ovens and steam boilers, and for gold mining infrastructure.

Today, cleared rural land has little native vegetation, and may be used for commercial farming (e.g. grazing, orchards, vineyards, market gardens,) hobby farming (e.g. alpacas or sheep,) or rural lifestyle (e.g. rural living, horses and pet livestock.)

Why cleared rural land is important

Cleared rural land contributes significantly to the broad landscape of Nillumbik. Much of it is currently used for agriculture and rural lifestyle. Its proximity to Melbourne means it currently, or has potential to, play a key role as part of Melbourne's future 'food bowl'.

In conjunction with remnant forests and waterways, cleared rural land provides an attractive rural landscape conducive to agricultural and nature-based tourism, and presents opportunities for people to live a rural lifestyle. It also plays a key role as part of one of Melbourne's Green Wedges.

Cleared rural land can contain patches of native vegetation and large old paddock trees which are important as habitat. The condition of cleared rural land can also affect the health of adjoining forests, woodlands, waterways and wetlands.



The approximate area of cleared rural land in Nillumbik is 10,300 hectares.

What healthy cleared rural land looks like

Healthy cleared rural land has a mix of property sizes including larger holdings that optimise its future potential for agriculture and horticulture. It supports land uses that incorporate protection of the environment, including waterways, patches of remnant vegetation and large old trees both within and adjacent to it.

Healthy cleared rural land has good ground cover made up primarily of perennial pasture species and native grasses. It incorporates bio-diverse shelter belts and insectaries, vegetated farm dams, and is free of erosion, salination and invasive weed species.

It is used and managed sustainably, within the capability of the land, and infrastructure such as fencing, dams and watering points are well maintained.

The threats to our cleared rural land What is needed to keep it healthy

Land parcel size

When lot sizes of cleared rural land are too small or are used as residential land or for non-agricultural industries, they irreversibly lose their potential for agriculture into the future.

Prevent/minimise lot subdivisions

- Identify, map, and use regulatory tools such as planning scheme zones, to prevent further fragmentation of cleared rural land that has good agricultural potential.
- Take advantage of all opportunities to aggregate larger lots.

Incremental urbanization

There are population and economic pressures to use cleared rural land for residential purposes. Increasing land values threaten the economic viability of agriculture and can erode the confidence of people to invest in agriculture. Residential land uses are often incompatible with agricultural land uses.

Minimise the encroachment of urban areas

- Use advocacy and regulatory tools such as the planning scheme to prevent any expansion of the Urban Growth Boundary into cleared rural land.
- Accommodate population growth by directing residential development into activity centres within the Urban Growth Boundary.

Lack of awareness, knowledge, skills and resources

Land owners are often keen to use and manage their land sustainably but may not be aware of their options, have enough knowledge to feel confident to do so, or lack resources such as time or money to tackle major works.

Build skills, share information and provide resources

- Equip land owners with the knowledge and skills to use and manage their land sustainably, by providing information on land capability, property planning, weed management, weed-free fodder, erosion control, and protection of remnant vegetation and paddock trees.
- Provide education to land owners on the need for weed-free fodder.

The threats to our cleared rural land What is needed to keep it healthy

Pest plants, animals and agricultural disease

Invasive weed species can displace good pasture species, be unpalatable or toxic to domestic stock and spread into neighbouring land and native habitat. Pest animals can compete for pasture, and damage crops and infrastructure. Disease can damage crops and stock and reduce the viability of productive land.

Minimise the impacts of pest plants, animals and agricultural disease.

- Focus control efforts on priority invasive weeds.
- Coordinate slashing and other roadside management, so their timing and location minimises the spread of weed seeds, including from one location to another.
- Develop and implement coordinated pest animal strategies. Identify, develop and implement coordinated agricultural disease programs and ensure information is readily available to landowners.

Overgrazing

Overgrazing by domestic stock results in degradation of healthy pastures, exposes soil to wind and water erosion, and increases opportunities for invasive weed species to establish. Overgrazing increases the dominance of annual grasses depleting the higher quality perennial grasses.

Adopt sustainable grazing practices

- Design paddock layouts and align stocking rates to the carrying capacity of the property, to achieve appropriate grazing regimes.
- Select and encourage perennial and native pasture species.
- Link rebates and other incentives to the adoption of best practice regenerative agriculture.

Unsustainable soil management

Poorly planned or unnecessary plowing, ripping and tilling exposes the soil to wind and water erosion, reduces soil structure and fertility and creates opportunities for invasive weed species to establish.

Adopt sustainable soil management practices

- Adopt regenerative and no-till practices that avoid or minimise soil disturbance including direct drill seeding, cover cropping and stubble retention.
- Link rebates and other incentives to the adoption of regenerative agriculture practices.

Impacts on native vegetation and waterways

Different management practices applied to cleared land can affect other landscape assets such as adjoining forests and waterways, in both complementary or detrimental ways.

Practices that are complementary can also have positive influences on the viability of productive land.

Protect native vegetation and waterways

- Install stock exclusion fencing and provide off-stream/dam watering to keep stock out of waterways, dams and remnant vegetation.
- Install fencing to protect paddock trees, and incorporate complementary actions, such as creating insectaries and bio-diverse shelter belts and modifying farm dams to function as wetlands.
- Apply nutrient budgeting practices to match fertiliser application to crop needs.