

Mapping our native grassland – FAQs

Why is Council doing work to map native grassland?

Hobsons Bay includes areas of Plains Grassland (native grassland). This provides habitat to an impressive range of flora and fauna, including many rare and threatened species.

It is important that these areas are retained and are managed to ensure that their biodiversity values and any habitat links are protected and enhanced into the future.

What is native grassland?

Some of the industrial areas in Hobsons Bay include native grassland areas that belong to the **Plains Grassland Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)**. This is a critically endangered ecological community listed under the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. There is currently less than 1 per cent of these grassland environments remaining in Victoria. The grasslands provide habitat for many threatened species, including the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon plana*), Striped Legless Lizard (*Delma impar*) and Spiny Rice-flower (*Pimelea spinescens*).

How is industrial land relevant to the project?

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (Victorian Government) has conducted modelling (based on 2005 data) to outline locations of Plains Grassland in Victoria including Hobsons Bay. This mapping shows land that has the right conditions (soil, climate etc.) for the Plains Grassland and related significant species to be located on it. Further investigation is required to determine the condition and prevalence of important species and the condition of the overall environment.

Council officers have compared the 2005 modelling to recent aerial photography to identify remaining vacant sites that may include native grassland. From this review, 35 sites have been identified as having potential grassland. These are in industrial areas in the western part of Altona, generally around Kororoit Creek Road and the Laverton railway line.

Council is focusing only on properties included in the 2005 maps that have **not** been developed and therefore may contain remaining native grassland.

If you have been contacted by Council with a request for permission to inspect your property, your land has been identified as potentially containing native grassland.

Why is Council asking for permission to inspect my property?

Council has identified areas of interest which may contain native grasslands or areas of high biodiversity values based on:

- mapping from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). These maps are based on habitat models (modelled data)

released in 2005. The modelling considers factors such as soil, climate and topography to estimate the location of the native grassland. Council is also aware that over time, some of the properties included in the modelling have been cleared or developed.

- Council officer's local knowledge, on-ground experience and desktop reviews.

With this in mind, Council is focusing only on properties included in the modelled maps that have **not** been developed and therefore may contain remaining native grassland.

The best way to verify if grassland is present is to inspect each of these remaining sites. For this reason, Council is writing to the relevant property owners to request permission to inspect their property.

Who will do the inspection?

Council will engage an independent environmental consultant to inspect the property and determine if native grassland is present.

How will the inspection be done?

There are three options for inspecting the property, which are dependent on a landowner's consent. These options include:

Landowner provides consent:

- **On-site:**
 - Vacant land: An environmental consultant will walk across vacant areas.
 - Developed land: If an area of interest is not accessible for safety reasons (i.e., due to business operations), the consultant will conduct a visual inspection from a safe distance within the property.
- **Aerial photography:** By using a drone to record video footage of relevant areas of the property. Council will engage an accredited drone operator to conduct the filming.

Council will ask landowners for permission to inspect their property and how the inspection should be done. The property will not be inspected without landowner consent.

Landowner does not provide consent:

- **Roadside/perimeter inspection:** A consultant will conduct a visual inspection outside of the landowner's property boundary (i.e., along an adjoining footpath or local public road). The consultant may photograph or film vacant areas of the property.

Do I need to be at the property during the inspection?

No. If you give permission for your property to be inspected, Council will contact you to coordinate any access arrangements for the consultant or drone operator.

Can I refuse permission for an inspection?

Yes. If the land is not inspected, Council will continue to use the state government 2005 modelled data maps and information obtained from the roadside/perimeter inspections. This information may be used to inform draft planning controls for your land.

Any future development on the property will need to verify whether native grassland will be removed as part of the planning permit application.

What happens if I refuse permission?

If a landowner declines an on-site or aerial photography, a visual inspection will be done from outside the property, such as from an adjoining public road.

A visual inspection from outside the property is limiting in terms of the ability to accurately determine important traits such as:

- the quality and extent of grassland areas and their biodiversity value
- whether other protected species may be present (i.e. species protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*)
- the potential for establishing biodiversity corridors, habitat connectivity and bio links
- the potential habitat value.

For these reasons, Council will take a more conservative approach for sites that can only be inspected from outside the property. If these inspections suggest that native grasslands or areas of biodiversity significance exist on the site, Council will consider draft planning controls for the entire property.

I am concerned about the use of drone footage for a site inspection on my property. Where can I find information about the use of drones?

If permitted, an accredited drone operator will conduct the aerial filming. The operator will comply with the relevant laws and requirements set out by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA). Video footage from the inspection will only be used for the purposes of this project.

To find out more information about the use of drones, please visit www.casa.gov.au.

What happens if native grassland is found on my property?

If inspections confirm native grassland on the property, this information may be used to draft new maps and planning controls that would be introduced into the Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme. This would likely be an Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) that would be applied to the part of the property where native grassland was confirmed.

It is important to note that if native grassland **currently** exists on the property, a planning permit is **already** required to remove the grassland under Clause 52.17 (Native Vegetation) of the planning scheme. Therefore, introducing an ESO would

not create a new permit requirement but would provide greater transparency and clearer guidelines on how the grassland should be managed.

What happens if native grassland is not found on my property?

If native vegetation is not present on your property this would also provide certainty for Council officers and developers.

Depending on the recommendations and findings of the environmental consultant, your land may not be considered for future planning controls which focuses on protecting native grasslands or areas of high biodiversity value.

What is Clause 52.17 – Native Vegetation?

This is part of the planning scheme that manages the removal of native vegetation and offset requirements to compensate for biodiversity impacts. For more information about native vegetation and biodiversity offsets, see [Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation](#).

Can I develop my land if it has native grassland?

Most of the land proposed to be inspected is within a Special Use Zone (SUZ), specifically SUZ2 – Petroleum Refinery Area, SUZ3 – Petrochemical Complex Area, or SUZ4 – Altona Special Industrial Area. These zones are intended for industrial uses as described, with some associated uses such as warehousing. A planning permit is required for new development in these zones.

As part of any planning permit application, the impact on native grassland would need to be determined and assessed in accordance with the ESO control and Clause 52.17 (which currently triggers a permit for native vegetation removal). A landowner would need to survey the property for native grassland as part of the information required to be submitted with the permit application.

What happens after the inspections?

Following inspections, the consultant will evaluate the findings from each property and prepare a report for Council. This work will verify or provide an assessment on the likelihood of native grassland being present on the site.

The level of accuracy / confidence in the assessment will in part be determined by the level of access to the site. For example, roadside inspections may limit the ability to accurately determine the quality and extent of native grassland areas.

For this reason, Council may take a more conservative approach for sites assessed by roadside inspections.

What are the future planning controls?

The planning controls would be informed by the findings of the consultant work. This would result in Council drafting an Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO)

for properties where native grassland has been confirmed or where a high probability has been established.

The ESO would include a description of the environmental significance of the native grassland and the environmental objectives to be achieved. This would be a useful planning tool as it would provide transparency for landowners, developers, investors and Council officers in terms of the location, values and management of the native grassland.

Will the planning controls make it difficult to develop my land?

An ESO would not prohibit development. The overlay would provide clarity and certainty in terms of Council's objectives for how the grassland should be managed. In terms of a planning permit application, the proposal would need to consider the environmental objectives set out in the ESO.

The planning scheme *already* requires a planning permit to remove grassland. However, currently there is no specific guidance on where or how grassland should be preserved. An ESO would provide clear and transparent information about the location of grassland and how it should be managed.

Properties within the ESO would be required to consider the grassland environmental objectives in their permit applications. Council may ask applicants to amend their proposal so that it better responds to the ESO.

Can I object to future planning controls being introduced?

Yes. A planning scheme amendment would be required to introduce the ESO. The amendment process would include public notice to all affected landowners and the opportunity to make a submission to Council. The submission can include reasons why you object to or support the amendment.

Council will consider all submissions and determine whether changes should be made. Any submissions that cannot be resolved will be referred to an independent planning panel. If adopted by Council, the amendment would then be sent to the Minister for Planning for approval. Please refer to Council's fact sheet for more information on the amendment process [here](#).

What happens next?

Council will wait to hear back from landowners regarding the inspection request. When this has been determined, Council will instruct the consultant which properties can be inspected, and which method can be used.

The consultant will conduct inspections based on Council's instructions, assess the findings, and prepare a report.

Council will use the findings of the consultant report to begin preparing planning controls and planning scheme amendment documentation. The planning scheme amendment process will begin early next year.

How can I find out more?

You can find out more about the project by visiting
www.hobsonsabay.vic.gov.au/Grasslands

If you have questions, please contact us below:

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