

EcoTender Demonstration 2007/08

The site visit

Information Sheet No. 3

How do I organise a site visit?

Once an Expression of Interest to participate in the project is registered (via the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) Customer Service Centre on 136 186), the EcoTender Regional Implementation Manager will contact the landholder to arrange for a site visit to undertake an assessment.

Landholders should note that it may take some time before you are contacted depending upon the demand for site assessments.

What will the site visit and assessment involve?

The EcoTender Field Officer will meet the landholder or landholder group on site to discuss the concept of EcoTender and gain an overview of the property. During the visit landholders will have an opportunity to show the Field Officer any sites of special interest and to discuss the current land and native vegetation management on the property.

The Field Officer will conduct a site assessment that may involve either assessing existing native vegetation or proposed revegetation areas. Depending on the size of the site, the assessment may take several hours.

After the assessment is complete, the Field Officer will discuss the findings with the landholder, and will discuss proposed management options in further detail. The information collected during the site assessment and the discussion between the landholder and the Field Officer will form the basis of the draft management plan.

All landholders will be provided with a summary of the agreed management actions and commitments at the conclusion of the site visit. Draft management plans are sent to the landholder in the weeks following the site visit.

What is assessed on my site?

The assessment will report on the **significance** of each site from a range of environmental perspectives including terrestrial biodiversity, salinity and river health.

These are assessed in accordance with catchment priorities and using a model that can report on significance at both the site and broader landscape scale.

The **change in environmental outcome** is a measure of the on and off site environmental outcomes resulting from the management commitments and actions that you propose to undertake.

In conjunction with the cost of your bid, the environmental significance and change in environmental outcome will be combined into an **Environmental Benefits Index** that will identify the "value for money" for the environment of each bid.

For more information on the Environmental Benefits Index, please refer to EcoTender Demonstration 2007/08 Information Sheet No. 6 - *Assessment of bids*.

Environmental significance of the site

During the site visit to your property, the EcoTender Field Officer will:

1. Identify the distinct native vegetation or revegetation sites on your property.

For native vegetation sites, the field officer will:

2. Identify the types of native vegetation present and advise you of their conservation status; whether they are considered endangered, vulnerable, rare, depleted or least concern at the regional level.
3. Using existing DSE databases, determine the plant and animal species likely to be present, and advise you of their conservation status. If you have additional information on the presence of significant plants or animals that may enhance your bid, you can discuss this with the field officer.
4. Undertake an assessment of the vegetation quality using the following criteria:

for site condition

- presence of large old trees¹;
- presence of a healthy tree canopy¹;
- presence of appropriate understorey plants;
- weediness;
- presence of regeneration of perennial species where conditions are appropriate;
- appropriate presence of logs¹ and organic litter on the ground.

¹ some criteria are not relevant to some vegetation types e.g. native grasslands

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For each criterion the site will be compared to a benchmark that represents the average characteristics of a mature stand of the relevant vegetation type in fully natural condition.

For revegetation sites, the field officer will:

- determine the appropriate vegetation types for establishment based on DSE databases and observed site characteristics; and
- advise you on the recommended life forms and species for establishment and the target densities required.

For both native vegetation and revegetation sites, the field officer will assess each site:

for landscape context

- the size of the site; and
 - amount and location of other native vegetation in the neighbourhood.
5. Advise you on the significance of your site within the broader landscape from a range of environmental perspectives including terrestrial biodiversity, salinity and river health. A catchment model has been developed to provide this information.

During the site assessment, the field officer will advise the landholder of the general significance of their site.

After all bids are submitted, the significance of each site is scored based on the above factors. This score represents the relative significance valuation for each site in comparison to other offered sites.

Change in environmental outcome

The amount of change in environmental outcome achieved relates to the management actions that a landholder agrees to provide for the duration of the agreement to either maintain or improve the quality of native vegetation on their property or revegetate cleared areas. These landholder actions must be based on management commitments over and above those required by current arrangements and legislation.

The starting point for identifying appropriate actions will be the assessment of the current site and identification of any management issues.

The field officer will discuss the management commitments that will be most effective for improving the quality or extent of native vegetation on your property and that are acceptable to you.

Following the site visit and management discussion with the field officer, you will be provided with a draft management plan that will form the basis of your bid.

At this time, you will also be provided with the scores for each of the environmental outcomes being sought resulting from your proposed commitments.

For any given site, a landholder can influence the amount of environmental outcome achieved by:

- the proposed commitments to protect or improve the quality and quantity of native vegetation on their property (the greater the improvement, the higher your score will be);
- the location of the revegetation/native vegetation and its influence on the environmental outcomes being sought (the better the location, the higher your score will be). The EcoTender Field Officer will be able to advise you on this;
- the amount of area proposed for management (the larger the area, the higher your score will be); and
- the length of the agreement (the longer the agreement, the higher your score will be).

Length of agreement

Landholders will have the opportunity to bid for a five-year management agreement **or** a five-year management agreement **plus** permanent protection of your native vegetation.

The field officer will discuss with the landholder the advantages of these options in terms of the site and the proposed management actions.

Further information

For further information please contact the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit the DSE website www.dse.vic.gov.au or visit the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority website www.ccma.vic.gov.au and search under "EcoTender".

