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Vegetation assessment for the proposed Torquay Bowls Club upgrade project

Introduction

Okologie Consulting Pty Ltd was engaged by Spectrum Planning Solutions to prepare a vegetation assessment for the proposed Torquay Bowls Club upgrade project, 47 The Esplanade, Torquay.

Torquay Bowls Club propose to construct a third green within the current leased land area. The works associated with the third green will involve alteration to the carpark and realigning access along the northern boundary with Taylor Park to the Esplanade. The vegetation assessment was undertaken to determine the extent of native vegetation and inform the development design.

The proposed removal of native vegetation requires a permit under Clause 52.17 *Native Vegetation* (unless exempt) of the Surf Coast Planning Scheme (DTP 2025) and an application under the *Guidelines for the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation* (the Guidelines) (DELWP 2017).

This report details the findings of the assessment and discusses environmental legislation and policy implications associated with the proposed development.

Site Description

The project area comprises the Torquay Bowls Club leased area, 47 The Esplanade, Torquay (Figure 1). The project area is located in Taylors Park, which extends to the north, west and south of the site, and is bounded by The Esplanade to the east.

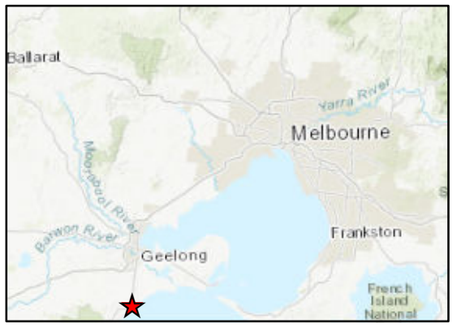
The topography comprises low undulating slopes throughout the project area. The project area comprises a modified landform and substrate (imported fill and hard stand areas) from previous infrastructure works. Planted vegetation extends around the carpark boundary that is contiguous with Taylors Park. The surrounding land use comprises recreational and residential use.

The project area is located within the Otway Plain bioregion, the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority boundary, and the Surf Coast Shire municipality (DEECA 2025a). The Native Vegetation Location mapping shows the project area occurs in Location 1 and 2 (DEECA 2025b). The project area is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) and is not subject to any environmental overlays under the Surf Coast Planning Scheme (DTP 2025).

Figure 1
Site Location
Torquay Bowls Club, The Esplanade, Torquay

Legend

- Project Area
- Torquay Bowls Club Leased Area



0 5 10 20
Metres

Coordinate System: GDA2020 MGA Zone 55
Map Scale when printed @ A3 1:500

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Methodology

Desktop Assessment

The desktop assessment included review of databases and other resources, including:

- NatureKit 2.0 for modelled biodiversity data (DEECA 2025a).
- Native Vegetation Removal Tool for modelled native vegetation information (DEECA 2025b).
- VBA for threatened flora and fauna species records (DEECA 2025c).
- Planning Schemes Online for planning information (DTP 2025).
- Relevant environmental legislation, policies and strategies.

Field Assessment

The vegetation assessment was undertaken on 15 April 2025. The project area was traversed on foot to determine the extent of native vegetation and ascertain the presence of any listed threatened flora or fauna species or associated habitats. The extent of native vegetation was mapped using a Trimble Catalyst DA1 differential GPS (sub-metre accuracy post-processing), recorded to GDA 2020, Zone 55 coordinate system. Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) were determined by reference to the relevant bioregion pre-1750 and extant EVC mapping and benchmarks descriptions.

Assessment Guidelines

The Guidelines (DELWP 2017) has been incorporated into the Victoria Planning Provisions and all planning schemes in Victoria. The purpose of the Guidelines is to set out and describe the application of Victoria's statewide policy in relation to assessing and compensating for the removal of native vegetation in response to permit applications under Clause 52.17.

Native vegetation is defined in Clause 73 of the Victoria Planning Provisions as *plants that are indigenous to Victoria, including trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses*. Plants from other states or overseas are not native and the permitted clearing regulations do not apply if they are being removed (DELWP 2017).

The Guidelines considers the biodiversity value of native vegetation by measuring the following two components:

- Site-based information that can be measured or observed at a site.
- Landscape scale information that cannot be measured or observed at the site and is included in maps and models (DELWP 2017).

Under the Guidelines native vegetation is classified as a *patch* or *scattered tree*.

A patch of native vegetation is:

- An area of vegetation where at least 25% of the total perennial understorey plant cover is native[1]; or
- Any area with three or more native canopy trees[2] where the drip line[3] of each tree touches the drip line of at least one other tree, forming a continuous canopy; or
- Any mapped wetland included in the Current wetlands map.

A scattered tree is:

- A native canopy tree that does not form part of a patch:
- Scattered trees have two sizes, small and large:
    - a small-scattered tree is less than the large tree species EVC benchmark.
    - a large-scattered tree is equal to or greater than the large tree species EVC benchmark (DELWP 2017).

The assessment pathway for an application to remove native vegetation reflects its potential impact on biodiversity and is determined from the location and extent of the native vegetation to be removed. The three assessment pathways are:

- Basic – limited impacts on biodiversity.
- Intermediate – could impact on large trees, endangered EVCs, and sensitive wetlands and coastal areas.
- Detailed – could impact on large trees, endangered EVCs, sensitive wetlands and coastal areas, and could significantly impact on habitat for rare or threatened species.

The assessment pathway of an application is determined in accordance with the requirements in Table 1.

Table 1: Assessment pathways

Extent of native vegetation	Location Category		
	Location 1	Location 2	Location 3
Less than 0.5 hectares and not including any large trees	Basic	Intermediate	Detailed
Less than 0.5 hectares and including one or more large trees	Intermediate	Intermediate	Detailed
0.5 hectares or more	Detailed	Detailed	Detailed

Source: DELWP (2017).

[1] Plant cover is the proportion of the ground that is shaded by vegetation foliage when lit from directly above. Areas that include non-vascular vegetation (such as mosses and lichens) but otherwise support no native vascular vegetation are not considered to be a patch for the purposes of the Guidelines. However, when non-vascular vegetation is present with vascular vegetation, it does contribute to cover when determining the percentage of perennial understorey plant cover. The 25% perennial understorey cover is the relative cover of native species vs exotic species.

[2] A native canopy tree is a mature tree (i.e. it is able to flower) that is greater than 3 metres in height and is normally found in the upper layer of the relevant vegetation type.

[3] The drip line is the outermost boundary of a tree canopy (leaves and/or branches) where the water drips on to the ground (DELWP 2017).

Limitations

The preferred survey period for undertaking vegetation assessments in Victoria is spring, which maximises the likelihood of detecting all flora species within a site. Flora surveys provide a valuable 'snapshot' of vegetation at a point in time; however, the limitations of seasonal influence on the presence/absence of flora species (particularly annuals or cryptic species) must be considered.

The information outlined in this report relies on the accuracy of ecological database information, GIS layers and spatial imagery. To minimise potential errors, the most current available data was obtained from relevant sources.

The Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action (DEECA) bioregion and EVC mapping are subject to inherently broad environmental and ecological parameters used in the mapping process. Where the observed EVC was not reflective of what would be expected from EVC mapping and classification, it was attributed to the most appropriate EVC based on combination of its floristic, life form and ecological characteristics, and particular environmental conditions.

Results

Ecological Vegetation Classes

NatureKit (DEECA 2025a) modelling identifies the pre-1750 EVC mapping for the project area predominantly comprised of Grassy Woodland (EVC 175) and Coastal Alkaline Scrub (EVC 858). Extant (2005) mapping shows a sparse cover of Grassy Woodland. No modelled Current Wetlands are mapped in the project area (DEECA 2025b). No remnant native vegetation was recorded within the project area (Figure 2).

Vegetation Assessment

The project area was highly modified and characterised by planted native and non-native trees and shrubs, planted in rows as an even-aged stand for landscaping and amenity purposes, over a modified landform and substrate (imported fill on raised beds). Native vegetation was limited to sparse cover of shrubs and ground covers that have colonised disturbed ground. (Figure 2). A description of the vegetation in the project area is outlined below.

Planted vegetation around carpark boundary comprised native Manna Gum *Eucalyptus viminalis*, Moonah *Melaleuca lanceolata*, Golden Wattle *Acacia pycnantha* and Blackwood *Acacia melanoxylon,* as well as non-native Sugar Gum *Eucalyptus cladocalyx* and Bushy Yate *Eucalyptus lehmannii* (Plates 1 to 4). Planted Moonah was also present along landscaped sections of the carpark (Plates 5 and 6). Planted exotic Radiata Pine *Pinus radiata* and Sugar Gum trees occur immediately adjacent to the carpark boundary (in Taylors Park).

The carpark area adjacent to The Esplanade comprised a scattered cover (<10% overall perennial native cover) of native Golden Wattle and Coast Wattle *Acacia sophorae*, Bower Spinach *Tetragonia implexicoma* and Black-anther Flax-lily *Dianella admixta* that has colonised a modified landform and substrate (imported fill) (<10 years old). Exotic species included Couch Grass *Cynodon dactylon*, Yorkshire Fog-grass *Holcus lanatus*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Ribwort *Plantago lanceolata* and Coast Galenia *Aizoon pubescens* (Plates 7 and 8). This vegetation is mapped as predominantly introduced vegetation (Figure 2).

Listed Threatened Species and Communities

No listed threatened ecological communities, flora or fauna species or associated habitats were recorded, and none are considered likely to occur due to the absence or modified condition of habitat. The project area has been extensively modified from previous infrastructure works, which eliminates the habitat potential for many species.


Plate 1: Planted Manna Gum & Moonah identified for retention


Plate 2: Planted Moonah shrubs identified for retention


Plate 3: Planted native Blackwood shrubs identified for retention


Plate 4: Planted Golden Wattle shrubs identified for retention

Plate 5: Planted native shrubs (Moonah) identified for removal

Plate 6: Planted native shrubs (Moonah) identified for removal

Plate 7: Planted native and non-native vegetation for removal

Plate 8: Planted native and non-native vegetation for removal

Plate 9: Planted native shrubs (Moonah) identified for removal

Plate 10: Planted native shrubs identified for removal

Plate 11: Golden Wattle and Coast Wattle shrubs for removal

Plate 12: Scattered native and exotic vegetation for removal

Figure 2
Ecological Features
Torquay Bowls Club, The Esplanade, Torquay

Legend

- Project Area
- Torquay Bowls Club Leased Area
- Planted Native and Non-native Vegetation
- Predominantly Introduced and Scattered Native Vegetation
- Predominantly Introduced Vegetation
- Vegetation for Removal

N

0 5 10 20

Metres

Coordinate System: GDA2020 MGA Zone 55
Map Scale when printed @ A3 1:500

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Environmental Legislation and Policy Implications

Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988

The FFG Act is the key piece of Victorian legislation for the conservation of threatened species and communities and for the management of potentially threatening processes.

A permit is required from DEECA to 'take' (kill, injure, disturb or collect) any listed threatened flora species, flora species that are members of listed threatened communities or declared protected flora from public land (DEECA 2025d). Declared protected flora species are classified as either generally protected flora or restricted use protected flora. A permit is required to take generally protected flora on public land, whereas no permit is required to take restricted use protected flora species (DEECA 2024).

One planted species (Moonah) that is a member of listed threatened community (*Coastal Moonah (Melaleuca lanceolata subsp. lanceolata) Woodland Community*) occurs in the project area. Two restricted use protected flora species, Golden Wattle and Coast Wattle, were also recorded in the project area.

The project design indicates the construction works will remove approximately 20 planted Moonah trees, and a permit is required from DEECA to 'take' flora species that are a member of listed threatened community in this instance. An FFG Act permit is not required to take restricted use species.

Planning and Environment Act 1987

The purpose of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* is to establish a framework for planning the use, development and protection of land in Victoria. Native vegetation clearance is managed under the Act and through municipal planning schemes (DTP 2025).

Clause 12.01 *Biodiversity* of the State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) provides specific direction regarding the protection and management of biodiversity and native vegetation in Victoria. A key strategy of Clause 12.01 is to *ensure that there is no net loss to biodiversity as a result of the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation* (DELWP 2017).

To achieve this strategy of Clause 12.01, the following three step approach is applied in accordance with the Guidelines (DELWP 2017):

1. Avoid the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation.
2. Minimise impacts from the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation that cannot be avoided.
3. Provide an offset to compensate for the biodiversity impact if a permit is granted to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation.

A permit is required under Clause 52.17 (Native Vegetation) to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation, including dead vegetation. This does not apply:

- If the table to Clause 52.17-7 specifically states that a permit is not required.
- If a native vegetation precinct plan corresponding to the land is incorporated into this scheme and listed in the schedule to Clause 52.16.
- To the removal, destruction or lopping of native vegetation specified in the schedule to this clause (DTP 2025).

If native vegetation removal is required, a permit application must be categorised as a basic, intermediate or detailed assessment pathway as specified in the Guidelines (DELWP 2017). Each assessment pathway has specific application requirements and decision guidelines that must be considered by the responsible authority.

Clause 66 (Referral and Notice Provisions) requires that the following applications to remove native vegetation be referred to the Secretary to DTP:

- To remove, destroy or lop native vegetation in the Detailed Assessment Pathway
- To remove, destroy or lop native vegetation if a Property Vegetation Plan applies to the site.
- To remove, destroy or lop native vegetation on Crown land, which is occupied or managed by the responsible authority (DTP 2025).

Clause 52.17 – Native Vegetation

The project area was highly modified and characterised by planted native and non-native trees and shrubs, planted in rows as an even-aged stand for landscaping and amenity purposes, over a modified landform and substrate (imported fill on raised beds). Native vegetation was limited to sparse cover of shrubs and ground covers that have colonised disturbed ground (<10 years old).

The impact to planted vegetation is informed by the project masterplan and the arboricultural assessment (Let's Talk About Trees 2025). The works associated with construction of the third green will involve alteration to the carpark and realigning site access to the Esplanade, along the northern boundary of Taylor Park, which will result in unavoidable impacts to planted native and non-native trees and shrubs in the carpark area along the northern boundary (Figure 2). Note the extent of planted vegetation identified for removal on Figure 2 occurs in the Torquay Bowls Club leased area; however, the mapped canopy extends into Taylor Park.

The arboricultural assessment (Let's Talk About Trees 2025) included review of the construction impact to planted vegetation within and immediately adjacent to the development area, which identified no major impacts under *AS4970-2009 Protection of Trees on Development Sites* (Australian Standards 2009).

The permit exemption under Clause 52.17-7 *Planted Vegetation*, states: *Native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped that was either planted or grown*

as a result of direct seeding. This exemption does not apply to native vegetation planted or managed with public funding for the purpose of land protection or enhancing biodiversity unless the removal, destruction or lopping of the native vegetation is in accordance with written permission of the agency (or its successor) that provided the funding (DTP 2025).

Planted native Moonah shrubs identified for removal (Figure 2) were planted for landscaping and amenity value and were not planted for land protection or enhancing biodiversity using public funding. The removal of planted native vegetation is considered to meet the exemption under Clause 52.17-7 *Planted Vegetation*.

Scattered native vegetation that have colonised modified landform and substrate in the carpark area are less than 10 years old and meet the permit exemption under Clause 52.17-7 *Regrowth*: *Native vegetation that is to be removed, destroyed or lopped that has naturally established or regenerated on land lawfully cleared of naturally established native vegetation, and is less than 10 years old* (DTP 2025).

Conclusion

The project area was highly modified and characterised by planted native and non-native trees and shrubs, planted in rows as an even-aged stand for landscaping and amenity purposes, over a modified landform and substrate (imported fill on raised beds). Native vegetation was limited to sparse cover of shrubs and ground covers that have colonised disturbed ground (<10 years old). No listed threatened ecological communities, flora or fauna species or associated habitats were recorded, and none are considered likely to occur due to the absence or modified condition of habitat.

One planted species (Moonah) that is a member of listed threatened community (*Coastal Moonah (Melaleuca lanceolata subsp. lanceolata) Woodland Community*), and two restricted use protected flora species, Golden Wattle and Coast Wattle, occur in the project area. A permit is required from DEECA to 'take' approximately 20 planted Moonah trees as the removal area is on public land. An FFG Act permit is not required to take restricted use species.

The removal of planted native Moonah shrubs is considered to meet the *Planted Vegetation* exemption under Clause 52.17-7, as they were planted for amenity and landscaping purposes. The scattered native vegetation that has colonised disturbed ground is less than 10 years old and meet the permit exemption under Clause 52.17-7 *Regrowth*.

Please contact me on 0419 786 533 if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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DEECA 2024. *Declared Protected Flora Guidelines. Declaring flora taxa to be protected under s.46 of the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*. Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

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DEECA 2025b. Native Vegetation Removal Tool. Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action: https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/nvr/

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DEECA 2025d. *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 – Threatened List*. Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.

DTP 2025. VicPlan. Department of Transport and Planning: https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/

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Appendix 1 – Flora Species Recorded

Table 1: Flora species recorded within the project area

Scientific Name	Common Name
Acacia sophorae	Coast Wattle
Acacia melanoxylon	Blackwood#
Acacia pycnantha	Golden Wattle#
Aira elegantissima	Delicate Hair-grass*
Anthoxanthum odoratum	Sweet Vernal-grass*
Briza maxima	Large Quaking-grass*
Cenchrus clandestinus	Kikuyu*
Chenopodium candolleanum	Seaberry Saltbush#
Cynodon dactylon var. *dactylon*	Couch*
Dactylis glomerata	Cocksfoot*
Dianella admixta	Black-anther Flax-lily
Ehrharta erecta	Panic Veldt-grass*
Eucalyptus cladocalyx	Sugar Gum#
Eucalyptus lehmannii	Bushy Yate#
Eucalyptus viminalis	Manna Gum#
Galenia pubescens var. *pubescens*	Galenia*
Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire Fog*
Hypochaeris radicata	Flatweed*
Lolium perenne	Perennial Rye-grass*
Medicago polymorpha	Burr Medic*
Melaleuca lanceolata	Moonah#
Paspalum dilatatum	Paspalum*
Pinus radiata	Radiata Pine*
Plantago coronopus	Buck's-horn Plantain*
Plantago lanceolata	Ribwort*
Pomaderris paniculosa subsp. *paralia*	Coast Pomaderris#
Raphanus raphanistrum	Wild Radish*
Sporobolus africanus	Rat-tail Grass*
Tetragonia implexicoma	Bower Spinach#
Trifolium arvense var. *arvense*	Hare's-foot Clover*
Trifolium campestre var. *campestre*	Hop Clover*
Vulpia myuros	Rat's-tail Fescue*

Notes: *Exotic species; #Planted