

Fact Sheet 19: Vegetation Clearing

Noosa Plan 2020 – As amended 26 September 2025

Clearing vegetation in Noosa Shire

Noosa Plan 2020 aims to protect, rehabilitate and enhance ecologically important areas across the Shire. As a result, vegetation clearing is regulated to prevent adverse environmental impacts.

When do I need approval to clear vegetation?

Vegetation clearing becomes assessable development¹ if the clearing is on land:

- mapped as having biodiversity significance or within the protected vegetation overlay (unless exempt); or
- identified as a riparian buffer area².

What is considered vegetation?

Vegetation includes any tree, plant, or organism of vegetable origin, **excluding**:

- Declared pest plants under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*;
- Weeds or undesirable species (see below); and
- Plants listed in Noosa Council's pest management plan.

What does 'clearing' include?

Clearing refers to any action that destroys or interferes with vegetation, including:

- Cutting, pruning, lopping, or uprooting;
- Poisoning or ringbarking;
- Damaging root zones through excavation or compaction;
- Attaching harmful objects or devices;

- Using tree climbing spikes that may cause harm.

Requirements for clearing under Noosa Plan 2020

Any application seeking approval for vegetation clearing must demonstrate compliance with the Biodiversity, Waterways and Wetlands Overlay Code, including how the proposal:

- conserves and enhances ecologically important areas;
- maintains or improves habitat connectivity;
- avoids clearing in riparian buffers;
- protects koala habitat and movement corridors;
- incorporates bushfire management that supports biodiversity; and
- preserves scenic amenity.

SEQ koala habitat areas

To address the decline in koala populations, the Queensland Government introduced the South East Queensland (SEQ) Koala Conservation Strategy 2020–2025. This strategy includes mapping and regulating key habitat areas to protect and restore koala populations.

The strategy identifies four key mapped areas:

- koala priority areas
- core koala habitat areas
- locally refined koala habitat areas
- koala habitat restoration areas³.

Development in these areas is regulated under the *Planning Regulation 2017* as follows:

¹ Assessable development requires a Development Permit

² Refer to Council's interactive mapping to confirm overlays
<https://www.mapping.noosa.qld.gov.au/>

³ <https://environment.desi.qld.gov.au/wildlife/animals/living-with/koalas/mapping/legislation-policy#rules-regs>

Noosa Plan 2020 – Vegetation clearing

- **prohibited development** - development that involves interfering with koala habitat in an area that is a koala habitat area *within* a koala priority area;
- **assessable development** - development that involves interfering with koala habitat in an area that is a koala habitat area *outside* a koala priority area. These proposals must:
 - comply with the requirements of the Biodiversity, Waterways and Wetlands Overlay Code under Noosa Plan 2020; and
 - be referred to the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) under Schedule 10 of the Planning Regulation 2017;
- **exempted development** – development that meets the definition of *exempted development* under the Planning Regulation 2017.

State Assessment Requirements

Where referral to SARA is required, development is assessed against State Code 25: Development in SEQ Koala Habitat Areas, which ensures that the proposal:

- does not result in a net loss of koala habitat;
- does not fragment existing habitat;
- provides for safe koala movement; and
- does not increase the risk of koala injury or death during construction.

For detailed guidance, it is recommended to contact SARA directly⁴.

Are there any exemptions for clearing vegetation?

Yes. Under Noosa Plan 2020, clearing is exempt if it:

- meets the definition of *exempt clearing* under Noosa Plan 2020;
- occurs within an approved building envelope; or
- is for bushfire management, subject to State Government requirements⁵.

Where vegetation clearing meets the exemption criteria under *Noosa Plan 2020*, a development permit may not be required. However, it is important to note that even if clearing is exempt at the local level, as outlined above, State Government regulations may still apply in koala habitat areas. In such cases, a development permit may still be required under the *Planning Regulation 2017*.

What is exempt clearing under Noosa Plan 2020?

Exempt clearing (on all freehold lots) can include:

- (a) clearing which is *reasonably necessary*⁶ for *property maintenance*, such as:
 - Maintaining or constructing farm tracks and sheds for agricultural purposes (outside riparian buffers);
 - Installing fences (up to 5m either side, outside riparian buffers);
 - Maintaining crops, pasture, or cleared land (including slashing grass and harvesting crops);
 - Pruning or removing orchard species;
 - Surveying, collecting firewood (non-commercial), or removing pest plants;
 - Activities listed in a Property Vegetation Management Plan⁷.
- (b) emergency works, including clearing for emergency access or in response to an accident.
- (c) Other activities, such as:
 - clearing under an existing development approval;
 - clearing for utility services;
 - clearing in agricultural conservation overlay areas;
 - fire management or forest practices;
 - clearing under a permit issued under former local laws; or
 - in accordance with the following table:

the purpose that is prudent and feasible and that would avoid clearing or significantly reduce the extent of vegetation clearing.

⁷ **property vegetation management plans** were made under the former local law for vegetation management on a lot and expire once ownership of the lot changes.

⁴ <https://www.planning.qld.gov.au/planning-framework/state-assessment-and-referral-agency>

⁵ <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/vegetation/clearing-guides/fire/exempt>

⁶ **reasonably necessary** means vegetation clearing for a particular purpose where there is no alternative way of achieving

Noosa Plan 2020 – Environmental Values and Vegetation Clearing

Property size of 3000m ² or less (Category 1 Lot)
<p>Clearing where the vegetation is not required to be retained in accordance with a development approval and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is within 3 metres of an existing building or Class 10 structure (eg sheds, carports, fences); or ▪ the clearing is <i>reasonably necessary</i>⁶ to provide access to a building or Class 10 structure; or ▪ the clearing has been approved in a landscape plan.
<p>Clearing where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pruning of native vegetation for maintenance or hazard reduction; or ▪ results in no more than 20% loss of the tree's live canopy volume within a 12-month period; and ▪ does not involve lopping or topping the tree.
<p>Clearing regrowth vegetation, except where the vegetation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in a mapped landslide hazard area (as shown on the Landslide Hazard Overlay map³); ▪ listed as endangered, vulnerable and near threatened under the <i>Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006</i>; ▪ listed as critically endangered or vulnerable flora under the <i>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>; ▪ heathland; ▪ riparian vegetation (in proximity to a waterway); ▪ located in a critical habitat under the <i>Natural Conservation Act 1992</i>; ▪ in an area previously cleared unlawfully.
Property size more than 3000m ² but less than 2 hectares (Category 2 Lot)
<p>Clearing where the vegetation is not required to be retained in accordance with a development approval and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is within 10 metres of an existing building or Class 10 structure (eg sheds, carports, fences); or ▪ the clearing is <i>reasonably necessary</i>⁶ to provide access to a building or Class 10 structure; or ▪ the clearing has been approved in a landscape plan.
<p>Clearing where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ pruning of native vegetation for maintenance or hazard reduction; or ▪ results in no more than 20% loss of the tree's live canopy volume within a 12-month period; and ▪ does not involve lopping or topping the tree.
<p>Clearing regrowth vegetation, except where the vegetation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ in a mapped landslide hazard area (as shown on the Landslide Hazard Overlay map³); ▪ listed as endangered, vulnerable and near threatened under the <i>Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006</i>; ▪ listed as critically endangered or vulnerable flora under the <i>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>; ▪ heathland; ▪ riparian vegetation (in proximity to a waterway); ▪ located in a critical habitat under the <i>Natural Conservation Act 1992</i>; ▪ in an area previously cleared unlawfully.
Property size of 2 hectares or more (where not subject to a Property Vegetation Management Plan ⁶ (Category 3 Lot)
<p>On a lot less than 10 hectares in area</p> <p>Clearing where the vegetation is not required to be retained in accordance with a development approval and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ is within 10 metres of an existing building or Class 10 structure (eg sheds, carports, fences); or ▪ the clearing is <i>reasonably necessary</i>⁶ to provide access to a building or Class 10 structure; or

Noosa Plan 2020 – Vegetation clearing

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the clearing has been approved in a landscape plan.
<p>On a lot greater than 10 hectares in area</p> <p>Clearing where the vegetation is not required to be retained in accordance with a development approval and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is within 30 metres of an existing building; or is within 10 metres of a Class 10 structure (eg sheds, carports, fences); or the clearing is <i>reasonably necessary</i>⁶ to manage bushfire risk to the building or Class 10 structure.
<p>Clearing where:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> pruning native vegetation for maintenance or hazard management; or there is no more than 20% loss of the tree's live canopy volume within a 12-month period; and it does not involve lopping or topping.
<p>Clearing regrowth vegetation, except where the vegetation is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in a mapped landslide hazard area (as shown on the Landslide Hazard Overlay map³); listed as endangered, vulnerable and near threatened under the <i>Nature Conservation (Wildlife) Regulation 2006</i>; listed as critically endangered or vulnerable flora under the <i>Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i>; heathland; riparian vegetation (in proximity to a waterway); located in a critical habitat under the <i>Natural Conservation Act 1992</i>; in an area previously cleared unlawfully.
<p>Freehold Lot of 2 hectares or more which is subject to a Property Vegetation Management Plan⁷ (Category 4 Lot)</p>
<p>Clearing identified as exempt clearing under a Property Vegetation Management Plan⁷ prepared and approved in accordance with the former Local Law No. 10 (Vegetation Management);</p>
<p>On a lot greater than 10 hectares in area</p> <p>Clearing where the vegetation is not required to be retained in accordance with a development approval and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is within 30 metres of an existing building; or is within 10 metres of a Class 10 structure (eg sheds, carports, fences); or the clearing is <i>reasonably necessary</i>⁶ to manage bushfire risk to the building or Class 10 structure.

Noosa Plan 2020 – Environmental Values and Vegetation Clearing

What is exempted development under the State's Planning Regulation and koala mapping?

Under the *Planning Regulation 2017*, certain types of clearing in mapped koala habitat areas are classified as *exempted development*. This means they do not require development approval, provided they meet specific criteria outlined in Schedule 24 of the Regulation. Due to the complexity of interpreting these requirements, it is **strongly recommended** that landholders or developers seek professional advice or contact the State Assessment and Referral Agency (SARA) before proceeding.

The following are examples of clearing activities that may qualify as exempted development in koala habitat areas:

- Clearing of native vegetation up to a combined total area of 500m² per lot.
- Clearing to establish a fence, road, or vehicular track, where:
 - the vegetation is regulated regrowth or a least concern regional ecosystem in a Category B area; and
 - the maximum clearing width is 5 metres for lots 5 hectares or less or 10 metres for lots greater than 5 hectares.
- Clearing that is necessary for *essential management*, including:
 - creating or maintaining a firebreak to protect infrastructure (other than a fence, road or vehicular track) - up to 20 metres wide, or 1.5 times the height of the tallest adjacent vegetation, whichever is greater;
 - establishing a fire management line (up to 10 metres wide);
 - removing vegetation that poses an imminent risk of serious injury or damage to infrastructure;
 - hazard reduction burning under the *Fire Services Act 1990*;
 - Maintaining a garden or orchard, provided no canopy trees are removed from remnant vegetation.
- Clearing for *routine management*, being clearing to source timber for establishing necessary infrastructure on the site, where:
 - The clearing does not cause land degradation; and
 - The vegetation is replaced with a similar type and density.

- Clearing necessary to conduct a cadastral, geotechnical or geological survey, limited to:
 - 100m² in the survey area; and
 - 10 metres wide for access to the survey site.

This Fact Sheet is intended to assist with interpreting Noosa Plan 2020 and **should not be solely relied on to inform decisions**.

Prior to making decisions or undertaking any development, it is strongly recommended that applicants:

- Review all the requirements of Noosa Plan 2020, and/or
- Seek advice from a qualified planning professional.

Noosa Plan 2020 is available online at:
www.noosa.qld.gov.au/noosa-plan-2020

For further information or assistance, contact Council's Development Assessment team:

☎ (07) 5329 6500

✉ planning@noosa.qld.gov.au

Noosa Plan 2020 – Environmental Values and Vegetation Clearing

What is an *undesirable plant species*?

Under Noosa Plan 2020, ***undesirable plant species*** include the following:

Botanical name	Common name
Agave spp	
Anredera cordifolia*	Madeira Vine
Arecastrum romanzoffianum	Cocos Palm
Aristolochia durior*	Dutchman's Pipe
Aristolochia elegans*	
Aristolochia macrophylla* Exotic species of Aristolochia is poisonous to the Richmond Birdwing butterflies	
Bambusa spp	Bamboo all varieties
Bougainvillea spp	Bougainvillea
Buddleja madagascariensis	Buddleja
Bryophyllum spp*	Mother of Millions
Callisia fragrans	Purple succulent
Canna indica	
Cardiospermum grandiflorum*	Balloon Vine
Cassia obtusifolia	Sicklepod
Celtis sinensis	Chinese Elm
Cinnamomum camphora	Camphor Laurel
Cortaderia selloana	Pampas Grass
Corymbia torelliana	Cadaghi Gum
Diospyros kaki	Persimmon Tree
Duranta repens	Butterfly Bush
Euphorbia cyathophora	Dwarf Poinsettia
Ficus elastica	Rubber Tree
Fraxinus griffithii	Himalayan Ash
Gloriosa superba*	Glory Lily
Impatiens walleriana	Balsam
Ipomoea acuminata*	
Ipomoea cairica*	Mile a Minute
Ipomoea indica*	Morning Glory
Koelreuteria elegans	Golden Rain Tree
Lantana camara	Lantana
Lantana montevidensis	Creeping Lantana

Botanical name	Common name
Leucaena spp	Leucaena
Ligustrum lucidum	Broad Leaf Privet
Ligustrum sinense	Small Leaf Privet
Lonicera japonica*	Honeysuckle
Macfadyena unguis-cati*	Cats Claw Creeper
Murraya exotica	Mock Orange
Nephrolepis cordifolia	Fishbone Fern
Ochna serrulata	Ochna
Passiflora suberosa*	Corky Passion Vine
Pinus spp	Exotic pine trees
Protoasparagus africanus*	Asparagus Fern
Protaspargus densiflorus*	Asparagus Fern
Protaspargus plumosus*	Climbing Asparagus Fern
Radermachera sinica	Asian Bell Tree
Rhapiolepis indica	Indian Hawthorn
Sansevieria trifasciata	Mother in Laws Tongue
Schefflera actinophylla	Umbrella Tree
Schinus molle	Pepper Tree
Schinus terebinthifolia	Broad Leaf Pepper Tree
Senna coluteoides	Easter Cassia
Senna floribunda	Winter Cassia
Spathodea campanulata Fallen flowers are a hazard to pedestrians in paved areas	African Tulip Tree
Tecoma stans	Yellow Bells
Tithonia diversifolia	Japanese Sunflower
Thunbergia alata*	Black-eyed Susan
Tradescantia albiflora*	Wandering Jew
Wedelia trilobata*	Singapore Daisy
Zebrina pendula	Wandering Jew
All declared noxious weeds	