



# Clearing native groundcover

This fact sheet provides guidance for rural landholders in understanding the various forms of native groundcover and how it is considered under the NSW Land Management Framework. It outlines the circumstances where approval to clear native groundcover may be required.

## What is native groundcover?

The term native groundcover includes various types of non-woody (herbaceous) vegetation. Native groundcover is most often dominated by native grasses. In some areas such as native grasslands, the native groundcover grows on its own with no associated woody vegetation. In other areas, such as grassy woodlands, it grows as the groundlayer under native trees and shrubs.

## What types of native groundcover are there?

**Native grasslands** are naturally occurring native vegetation communities, dominated by native grasses and with less than 10% tree or shrub cover. Many native grasslands have a rich diversity of native grasses and other native herbaceous plants such as wildflowers, sedges and rushes.

**Secondary grasslands** are non-natural grasslands created by clearing of native trees and shrubs, leaving only the native groundcover component of the natural vegetation. They can be difficult to distinguish from natural grasslands when there is little remaining evidence of the original tree or shrub cover.

The native groundlayer within woody vegetation such as **grassy woodland** or **grassy forest** is another form of native groundcover which is often used for livestock grazing. In these cases, the trees and shrubs are still present, but the native groundcover supports grazing livestock.

Many **native pastures** have been created by clearing of woody

vegetation. They are often highly modified from their natural vegetation structure and composition, and bear little resemblance to the original natural vegetation. The trees and shrubs have often been largely or completely removed, they have different dominant native grass species, and have lost much of their plant diversity.

## Where is native groundcover found?

Native groundcover can be found throughout much of NSW. The species making up this groundcover vegetation varies from one region to another, but most are dominated by native grasses. Native groundcover is found in the open with no trees, or in lightly or heavily timbered country, in areas that were originally open grassland, woodland or forest.

## Want to know more?

*We're here to help*

**Find us online:** [lls.nsw.gov.au](https://lls.nsw.gov.au)

You'll find other land management resources including fact sheets

**Call us:** 1300 795 299 and ask for an officer to advise you on land management

**Email us:** [slm.info@lls.nsw.gov.au](mailto:slm.info@lls.nsw.gov.au)

**See us:** drop into your nearest Local Land Services office



**Local Land Services**

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## What native groundcover can I clear?

Native groundcover varies widely in condition, largely as a result of the way it has been grazed, fertilised or cleared since European settlement. Its condition reflects how modified it is from its original natural state. This is indicated by the dominant grass species, plant species diversity and abundance of weeds.

The Land Management Framework recognises three condition states - Low, Moderate and High Conservation Value. What you can clear and the approvals needed depend on the condition. Under the Framework the following regulations apply:

**Low Conservation Value (LCV)** native groundcover is not regulated (Category 1 - exempt) and may be cleared without approval. In many situations you can self-assess LCV groundcover (see table below for more information). We can give you expert help to identify the condition of your groundcover. Groundcover vegetation can not be cleared from areas mapped as Vulnerable land, except under certain limited circumstances. See this map: <https://www.lmbc.nsw.gov.au/Maps/index.html?viewer=NVRMap>

**Important:** Groundcover condition must be assessed in a scientific and objective manner, at a time of year when the proportion of native vegetation cover is likely to be at its maximum. It must also not be assessed until it has recovered from any significant disturbance such as drought, fire or heavy grazing. Field conditions must allow all plant species to be identified. Please refer to the *Assessing Native Groundcover* fact sheet for detailed guidance.

**Moderate Conservation Value (MCV)** native groundcover is regulated (Category 2 - Regulated) and may be cleared under certain conditions, with approval from us. This approval would require you to establish a set-aside area.

**High Conservation Value (HCV)** native groundcover is categorised as sensitive (Category 2 - Sensitive) regulated land. Clearing this type of vegetation will generally not be approved. However you can still sustainably graze these areas.

## What condition is my native groundcover in?

LCV native groundcover can be identified in two ways including less than 50% native cover, Significantly Disturbed or Modified, or with the Interim Grassland and other Groundcover Assessment Method (IGGAM). LCV native groundcover areas may then be cleared with no approval required from Local Land Services. See table below for more detail. MCV and HCV groundcover can only be identified using the IGGAM which can only be applied by someone with suitable expertise. Local Land Services can provide expert assistance to help you identify the condition of native groundcover.

## What about Commonwealth laws?

In addition to the Land Management Framework which regulates native vegetation management at the state level, there are Commonwealth laws to consider when making native vegetation management decisions. Some natural grassland and grassy woodland communities in NSW, and some plant and animal species within them, are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act)*.

Applications to clear groundcover may therefore require referral to the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy for assessment under the EPBC Act. Local Land Services is available to help you identify whether the EPBC Act applies to your landholding and guide you through the referral process. Where an EPBC Act referral is required, clearing should not take place until approval has been granted by the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Energy.

## Where can I get help?

Local Land Services can help you with expert advice on identifying native groundcover, assessing whether and under what conditions it may be cleared or information on possible funding assistance for conservation.

Call: 1300 795 299, drop into: your nearest Local Land Services Office or email [slm.info@lls.nsw.gov.au](mailto:slm.info@lls.nsw.gov.au)

Identification method	Condition threshold	Assessment by
Low Conservation Value (LCV)	<50% native groundcover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-assessment OR</li> <li>with Local Land Services' help</li> </ul>
Compromised Native Groundcover	<50% native groundcover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-assessment &amp; Local Land Services' Notification OR</li> <li>Local Land Services voluntary Certificate</li> </ul>
Significantly Disturbed or Modified	evidence of substantial modification by repeated disturbance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>landholder decision to clear with Local Land Services technical support</li> </ul>
Interim Grassland and other Groundcover Assessment Method (IGGAM)	IGGAM Calculator determines conservation value - LCV or MCV or HCV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Land Services OR</li> <li>suitable expert</li> </ul>