

Self-assessable codes / Accepted Development Codes

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Self Assessable Codes (SACs)

	Outline
1	2015 Review of SACs
2	What has happened in past 3 years?
3	Where are the SACs now?
4	Conclusion





2015 Review of SACs

What is a SAC?

The five 'Thinning Codes':

- ❖ Managing thickened vegetation in the Mulga Lands
- ❖ Managing thickened vegetation in the North West Highlands, Gulf Plains, Cape York Peninsula, Wet Tropics and Einasleigh Uplands bioregions
- ❖ Managing thickened vegetation in the Brigalow Belt, Central Queensland Coast and Desert Uplands bioregions
- ❖ Managing thickened vegetation in the South East Queensland and New England Tableland bioregions

plus

- ❖ Managing clearing to improve the operational efficiency of existing high-value or irrigated high-value agriculture
- ❖ Managing fodder harvesting
- ❖ Managing Category C regrowth vegetation
- ❖ Managing Category R regrowth vegetation
- ❖ Managing encroachment
- ❖ Managing weeds
- ❖ Managing a native forest practice
- ❖ Managing clearing for necessary property infrastructure
- ❖ Managing necessary environmental works
- ❖ Managing clearing for an extractive industry

Department of Natural Resources and Mines

Managing weeds

A self-assessable vegetation clearing code

Effective from 2 December 2013

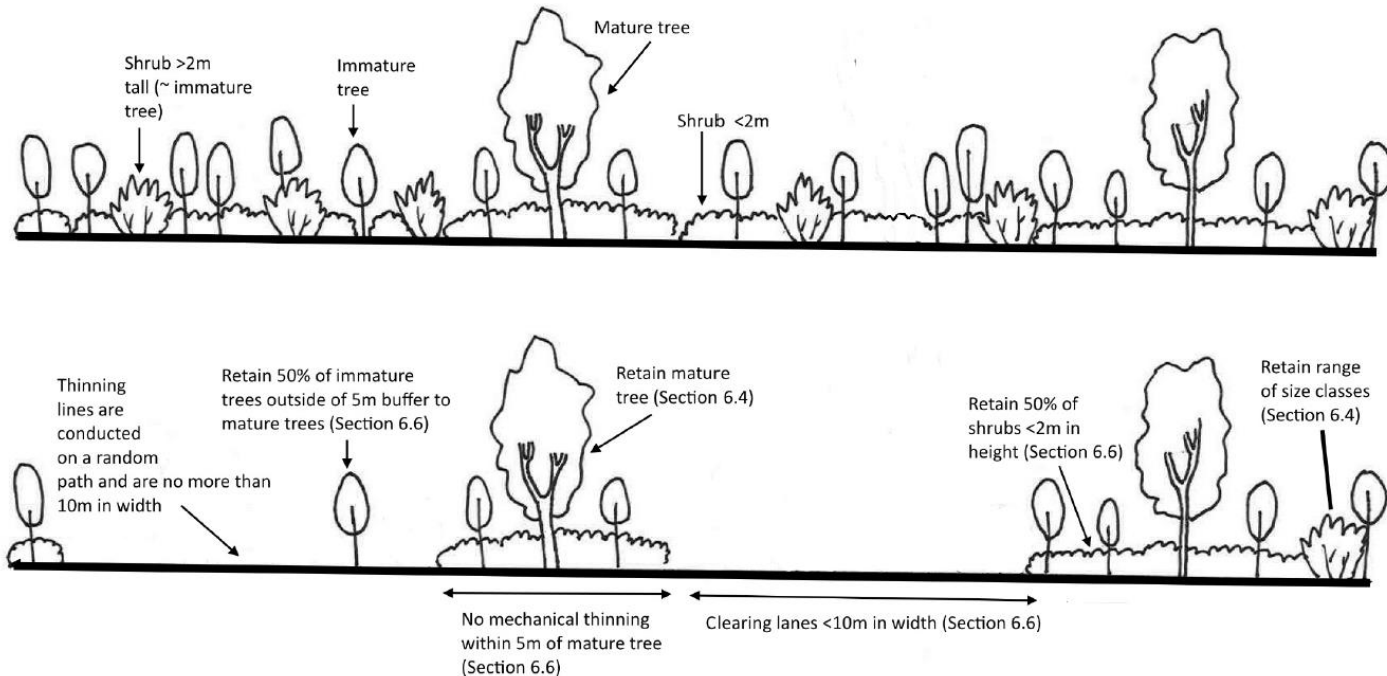
Great state. Great opportunity.





2015 Review of SACs

Each SAC includes an number of “Practices” that are effectively a performance objective and “Guidance” which is a prescription for achieving the Practice.





2015 Review of SACs

The brief?

Independently review the 15 Self-Assessable Codes (SACs), prepared in 2013 under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* (the Act) to assess the extent to which they were:

- ❖ Consistent with the purposes of the Act.
- ❖ Confined to low risk activities.
- ❖ Practical and readable.
- ❖ Comparable to previously-applicable Regional Vegetation Management Codes (RVMCs) ie. the extent of clearing conforming to 'acceptable solutions' and hence likely to be approved.
- ❖ Auditable and supported by a suitable auditing program.





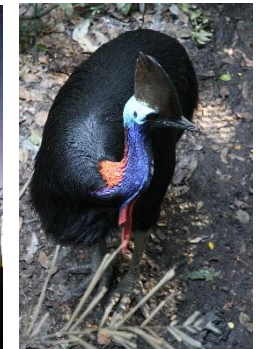
2015 Review of SACs

Purpose of the Act

Regulate the clearing of vegetation so as to:

- a) **conserve** remnant vegetation (of mapped REs in any conservation status category)
- b) conserve vegetation in declared areas
- c) ensure the clearing does not cause land degradation
- d) **prevent the loss** of **biodiversity**
- e) maintain ecological processes
- f) manage the environmental effects of the clearing (of (a) to (e) above)
- g) reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- h) allow for sustainable land use

Our review defined 'conserve', 'prevent loss' and 'biodiversity' as referring mainly to long term or permanent loss of biodiversity at Regional Ecosystem (RE) and species level, and at regional scale.





2015 Review of SACs

Common issues across all (or most) SACs

- ❖ Most of the SAC Practices and Guidelines meet many of the purposes of the Act, but there is potential for clearing contrary to the 'biodiversity' and 'ecological processes' purposes.
- ❖ All SACs require retention of mature trees and live 'habitat trees'.
- ❖ Some of the Practices and Guidance include 'averages' (e.g. stem densities, heights, trunk diameters).
- ❖ Compared to RVMC, the SACs allow some clearing / thinning closer to watercourses and wetlands (i.e. buffer setback distances are narrower).

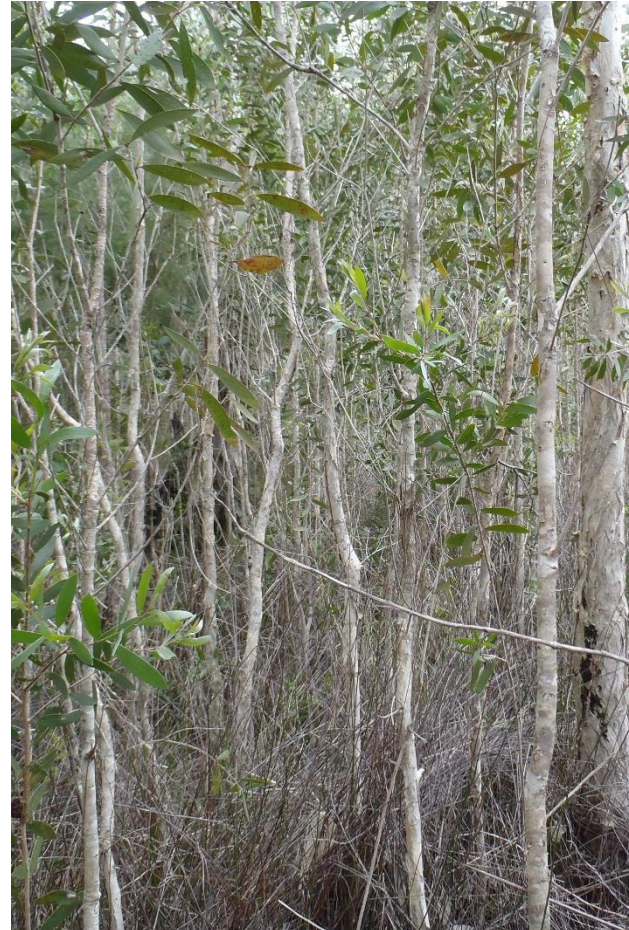




2015 Review of SACs

Other issues

- ❖ Is thickening is a threatening process??
- ❖ The SACs permit thinning on the assumption that thickening has occurred (RVMC applications had required evidence of thickening).
- ❖ The SAC's potentially allow greater areas of remnant and regrowth vegetation to be cleared and/or thinned, for a wider range of purposes, than did the acceptable solutions of the equivalent RVMCs.





2015 Review of SACs

Auditing

- ❖ SACs are a substantial improvement in compliance checking compared to RVMCs, provided officers are trained and data is captured consistently.
- ❖ Some potential loopholes remain with respect to audit site selection and averaging of scores.





2015 Review of SACs

Conclusions of review

- ❖ We found that in general, the self-assessable codes are appropriate for 'low-risk' activities.
- ❖ Many SAC Practices meet the purposes of the Act but clearing activities could impact biodiversity / ecological processes, where the SACs allow REs to be simplified:
 - ❖ where they provide insufficient guidance or conflicting terminology.
 - ❖ where there are 'relaxations' in buffers to waterways and wetlands.
- ❖ More science needed!!
- ❖ Auditing was OK.





What has happened in past 3 years?



Image: Cairns Post



What has happened in past 3 years?

- ❖ Herbarium review (Jan 2016 – Jan 2018)
- ❖ CSIRO peer review (Feb 2018)

Resulted in immediate updates through three new codes:

- ❖ ~~Managing thickened vegetation (interim) (8 March 2018)~~
- ❖ **Managing fodder harvesting (8 March 2018)**
- ❖ **Managing Category C regrowth (8 March 2018)**



A guide to using accepted development vegetation clearing codes: ~~Managing thickened vegetation and fodder harvesting~~



Where are the SACs now?

SACs out.

‘Acceptable Development
Vegetation Clearing
Codes’ (ADVCC) in.

Sooooo much harder to say ADVCC than SAC!!!





The ADVCCs



New interim "thinning" code introduced & removed.
Thinning / managing thickened vegetation no longer self-assessable.



Eight remaining codes presently unchanged:

- ❖ Managing encroachment (2 December 2013)
- ❖ Managing clearing for an extractive industry (8 August 2014)
- ❖ Managing clearing to improve the operational efficiency of existing agriculture (2 December 2013)
- ❖ Managing Category R regrowth vegetation (2 December 2018)
- ❖ Managing a native forest practice (8 August 2014)
- ❖ Managing necessary environmental works ((8 August 2014)
- ❖ Managing clearing for necessary property infrastructure (2 December 2013)
- ❖ Weed control (2 December 2013)



What does this mean for landholders?

- ❖ Must notify DNRME prior to any vegetation clearing under the Codes
- ❖ Clearing cannot occur until notice is received from DNRME
- ❖ Notifications made under superseded SACs are **invalid**
- ❖ Must re-notify for clearing activities under the new codes
- ❖ Can continue to clear under other current codes until they are renewed, then must re-notify under new code
- ❖ Clearing 'thickened' vegetation ceased to be self-assessable at the commencement of the Bill and now requires development approval
- ❖ Category C High Value Regrowth is now mapped in a number of areas which were previously mapped as Category X
- ❖ Category R Reef Regrowth Vegetation is now mapped 50m from all waterways in the Great Barrier Reef Catchment
- ❖ Can **only** clear Category C and Category R under an Acceptable Development Vegetation Clearing Code
- ❖ PMAVs lodged or certified before 8th March 2018 unaffected



Conclusion

- ❖ Review of SACs demonstrated there was room for improvement.
- ❖ Changes to the Acceptable Development Vegetation Clearing Codes align with the findings of the Cardno, Qld Herbarium and CSIRO reviews, and the purpose of the VMA.
- ❖ HVR is back.
- ❖ Managing Thickened Vegetation is the new 'Thinning'; but no longer self-assessable.
- ❖ We can expect further refinement of the Accepted Development Vegetation Clearing Codes in 2018.

