



## Fence lines and roadside vegetation: guidelines for better management



*This unnecessarily extreme clearing for fence replacement will result in poor biodiversity outcomes. Photo C. Wilson*



*Careful clearing to minimise the impact of replacing the fence. Photo C. Wilson*

**R**oadside vegetation plays a very important role in maintaining the State's biodiversity, particularly in agricultural regions. In some areas it is often the only remaining natural vegetation left in the landscape, providing valuable habitat and linkages between bush patches. Across the southwest, roadside vegetation contains rare flora, with over 50% of these species having at least one population on a roadside, and a number being dependent on the roadsides for their survival. Our State's fauna also use roadside vegetation, either as part of their extended home range, or as their own highway to move throughout the landscape.

Roadside vegetation also has important benefits for Landholders. The existing vegetation, especially when it has structural diversity (trees, shrubs and ground covers), provides an excellent windbreak and shelterbelt, meaning better milk, wool and meat production from stock and higher crop yields. Existing woody vegetation is also very efficient at tapping into the water table, helping to keep water levels low, and therefore reducing the risk of secondary salinity and water logging.

Sadly roadside vegetation faces many threats. Clearing of the vegetation to erect and maintain boundary fences is one of these threats. It can have a dramatic effect, especially in road reserves where only a few meters width of vegetation remain. With this in mind, this VergeNote aims to highlight ways in which Landholders can work with road managers on fence line issues to ensure the continuity, longevity and health of roadside vegetation for personal, community and environmental benefits.

### How can you help?

The installation of a new boundary fence can have a damaging impact on roadside vegetation. However, there are ways in which Landholders can minimise this impact, each with its own advantages.

*Set the fence back into the paddock to avoid disturbing the adjacent vegetation in the road reserve through one of the following strategies:*

- **Erect the new fence directly next to the old fence:** this option means that the old fence stays in position, reducing time and effort in removing it and the time and effort in having to clear vegetation back from the old fence to install the new one.
- **Erect the new fence 1.5m back from the old fence:** this option leaves the old fence in place and as with the above option reduces the time, effort and money spent on removing the old fence and clearing vegetation. This option allows for the establishment of a 1.5m fence maintenance zone without the need to clear any vegetation the first time around.
- **Erect the new fence 3m back from the old fence:** this option again, leaves the old fence in place with the above-mentioned benefits. In this case, however, there is room for the firebreak between the two fences. This is an option for maximising the benefits to the roadside vegetation while minimising the loss of productive ground and adding the protection of a firebreak to the fence without the need to disturb the roadside vegetation.
- **Enclose additional vegetation:** if there is additional vegetation on your side of the fence, then the best idea is to fence off that vegetation when redoing the fence to "add" it to the roadside vegetation. There are funding opportunities for fencing off remnant vegetation that may be accessible.
- **Revegetate adjacent to the road reserve:** with each of the above options, there is the opportunity to enhance the width and viability of the roadside vegetation. Planting locally native species adjacent to the road reserve will increase the value of the roadside vegetation, both as shelter, windbreaks and as habitat. Again, funding opportunities are available to assist in this.



Minimising the fence maintenance zone helps to preserve roadside vegetation. Photo C. Denton



Setting the fence back has created a fence maintenance zone without disturbing the native vegetation. Photo D. Mickle



Fencing off vegetation adjacent to the roadside vegetation improves habitat and biodiversity values. Photo C. Denton

Replace the fence on the original alignment. Should you decide to replace the fence on the original alignment, then please consider the following management strategies:

- **Minimise clearing:** please consider how much clearance you really need on the other side of the fence, both for maintenance and for installation. Minimising clearing will help to reduce weed growth and maximise the shelter and habitat values of the roadside vegetation. A maximum of 0.5m clearing should be adequate, if work is done from the property side.
- **Use a chainsaw:** using a bulldozer or other machinery makes it hard to minimise the extent of clearing. It also disturbs the soil, potentially resulting in compaction and weed invasion, both of which are detrimental to native vegetation.
- **Remove only branches:** most understorey plants, like shrubs and native grasses are unlikely to damage the fence. Therefore, removal of them is usually unnecessary when installing a new fence or maintaining an existing fence. It's best to only remove branches and dead material that is likely to fall onto the fence and damage it.

There are several other things that Landholders can do to reduce the impacts of farming on the roadside vegetation, including minimising spray drift, keeping firebreaks on the inside of fences and avoiding grazing during stock movement. These are outlined in the *VergeNote A Roadside Note for Landholders*, available from the RCC and via the RCC's website (an internet search for "Roadside Conservation Committee" will take you there).

## So where's my boundary?

Setting your fence back doesn't mean that the Shire or Main Roads gets more land. If you are worried about maintaining an identifiable boundary after repositioning the fence, leave the old fence in place. With or without the wire, the posts should continue to stand for many years to come, thus identifying the boundary. Alternatively, speak to the Shire or Main Roads about having a written agreement or acknowledgement of the new fence alignment, to ensure that the arrangement is documented.

## Legalities of clearing

Under the clearing provisions of the *Environmental Protection Act 1986* and the Environmental Protection (Clearing of Native Vegetation) Regulations 2004, certain clearing to install or maintain existing fence lines may be undertaken without the requirement for a clearing permit, provided the area is not within an environmentally sensitive area declared by the Minister for the Environment and permission has been obtained from the managing authority of the roadside on which any clearing is to occur. Further information on fence line clearing and a map viewer for environmentally sensitive areas can be found at [www.dec.wa.gov.au/nvc](http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/nvc) or by contacting the Department of Environment and Conservation on (08) 9334 0333.

### Ask how we can help with:

- Roadside vegetation value mapping
- Environmental management training
- Roadside vegetation management plans

### Roadside Conservation Committee



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