

VICTORIA GOVERNMENT  
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**SPECIAL**

*State Electricity Commission Act 1958*

CODE OF PRACTICE  
FOR TREE CLEARING

2 S 41 27 October 1987

*Victoria Government Gazette*

The following Code of Practice for Tree Clearing is to become the prescribed code under section 65 of the State Electricity Commission Act 1958, when Regulations are made to that effect.

**CODE OF PRACTICE FOR TREE CLEARING**

**CLEARANCE OF TREES  
FROM ELECTRIC LINES AND  
PRIVATE ELECTRIC LINES**

**Section 65 : State Electricity  
Commission Act 1958**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This Code specifies the standards and practices and the duties of Responsible Persons named or referred to in section 60 of the Act to be observed in tree pruning or clearing in the vicinity of electric lines.

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## 1 SCOPE

This Code specifies the standards and practices and the duties of Responsible Persons named or referred to in section 60 of the Act necessary in order to establish and maintain the appropriate minimum separation between trees and overhead electric line conductors and electrical equipment of voltages up to and including 66 kV.

The Commission is responsible for and carries out all tree pruning and clearing for voltages above 66 kV. The Commission may elect to carry out tree pruning and clearing of 66 kV overhead electric lines in certain areas.

The primary purpose of the Code is to—

- ensure public safety;
- minimise the risk of fires caused by contact between trees and overhead electric lines;
- reduce the number of interruptions to supply caused by trees;
- protect the Commission's assets from damage; and
- minimise the impact on the environment by ensuring tree pruning and clearing activities are related to particular tree growth, species and vegetation structure.

The value of trees and vegetation in the landscape must be recognised and wherever possible trees should be retained. Where tree pruning or clearing is required the appropriate tree surgery techniques shall be used.

## 2 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of interpretation of this Code, the following definitions apply:

Act	The State Electricity Commission Act 1958
Area of Particular Significance	An area determined by the Minister to be so classified. NOTE: The procedure for identification of these areas is described in Appendix 1.
Category 1 Area	Includes Urban Areas which:— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• will not be allocated a fire hazard rating by the Fire Control Authority; or</li> <li>• have been allocated a fire hazard rating of "low" by the Fire Control Authority; or</li> <li>• have been allocated a fire hazard rating of "low moderate" by the Fire Control Authority and after consultation between the Commission, the Responsible Person and the Fire Control Authority, the risk of fire ignition is not considered high; or</li> <li>• are yet to have a fire hazard rating allocated by the Fire Control Authority but where, in the opinion of the Fire Control Authority, the combination of normal build-up of vegetation and general weather conditions could reasonably be expected not to produce conditions conducive to the ignition and/or rapid spread of fire.</li> </ul>
Category 2 Area	Includes:— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all Rural Areas; and</li> <li>• Urban Areas for which the Fire Control Authority has allocated a fire hazard rating of "high moderate"; and</li> <li>• Urban Areas which have been allocated a fire hazard rating of "low moderate" by the Fire Control Authority and where, after consultation between the Commission, the Responsible Person and the Fire Control Authority, the risk of fire ignition is considered high, but for other reasons the "low moderate" classification was assigned; and</li> <li>• Urban Areas which are yet to have a fire hazard rating allocated by the Fire Control Authority but where, in the opinion of the Fire Control Authority, the combination of normal build-up of vegetation and general weather conditions could reasonably be expected to produce conditions conducive to the ignition and/or rapid spread of fire; and</li> <li>• Any area not otherwise defined.</li> </ul>

Clearance	The clearance of an object from an electric line is the distance of that object from the nearest conducting component of that line.	
Clearance Space	Space surrounding an overhead electric line conductor which must be maintained clear of any vegetation. The extent of this space is dependent on the voltage concerned, the maximum sag of the conductors and the regrowth characteristics of the trees.	— —
Commission	The State Electricity Commission of Victoria.	
Declared Urban Area	An Urban Area which has been declared by the Governor in Council by Order in Council in accordance with section 65 of the Act.	
Fire Control Authority	The Fire Control Authority is— Authority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board, if the area is within the metropolitan fire district; or</li> <li>• the Director-General for Conservation, Forests and Lands, if the area is within a fire protected area within the meaning of the Forests Act 1958; or</li> <li>• the Country Fire Authority, if the area is within the country area of Victoria within the meaning of the Country Fire Authority Act 1958.</li> </ul>	— —
Inspection Space	Space additional to the Clearance Space, in which further tree pruning or clearing may be necessary due to the unsafe condition of a tree or limbs to ensure that no contact occurs between the tree or limbs and any overhead electric line conductor under extreme storm conditions.	
Minister	The Minister responsible for administering the State Electricity Commission Act 1958.	
Overhead	Overhead, in relation to an electric line, means a line which is constructed above ground level.	
Responsible Person	The person responsible as determined under section 60 of the Act for the maintenance of a private electric line or for the keeping of the whole or any part of a tree clear of an electric line. NOTE: Depending on the situation the Responsible Person is normally either the person or body responsible for the management of public land, the Commission, the Road Construction Authority, or, for a private electric line or a low voltage electric service line only, the land occupier or the land occupier's neighbour.	
Rural Area	An area which is not an Urban Area.	
Urban Area	This is specifically defined in section 58 of the Act and is an area for which the Fire Control Authority has not allocated a fire hazard rating of "high" or "very high" and which is:— <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) predominantly— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• subdivided into allotments which, in the case of land used or to be used for residential purposes, are not greater than 0.4 hectares; and</li> <li>• able to be used or developed under a planning scheme or interim development order for residential, industrial or commercial purposes; and</li> <li>• provided with constructed streets and public utility services; and</li> <li>• provided with street lighting which is installed at not less than three lanterns in every 500 metres; or</li> </ul> </li> <li>(b) any other area that may from time to time be agreed upon between the Commission, the Fire Control Authority and any person responsible for the management of public land in the area in accordance with section 58 of the Act;</li> </ol>	— — — —

### 3 PRINCIPLES

3.1 Adequate clearance between trees and overhead electric lines is essential for the safety of the community. It minimises the risk of fire caused by contact between trees and overhead electric lines and promotes the maintenance of a safe and continuous electricity supply to customers. The amount of tree pruning or clearing required is dependent on the voltage concerned, the maximum sag of the conductors and the regrowth characteristics of the trees.

3.2 Each Responsible Person shall ensure that tree pruning and clearing work is carried out safely.

3.3 Special attention shall be paid to botanically important vegetation, significant trees, vegetation of outstanding aesthetic or ecological significance, or the habitat of rare or endangered species.

### 4 TREE PRUNING OR CLEARING FOR NEW OVERHEAD ELECTRIC LINES

Where new overhead electric lines are being established, or additions to or the major reconstruction of existing overhead electric lines are required and clearing is necessary, the Commission shall consult with the Responsible Person at the planning stage or well in advance of the project commencement date. This consultation should preferably be three months and not less than one month prior to the project commencement date.

The Commission shall consult with the Responsible Person to review the extent of tree pruning or clearing necessary and shall bear the cost of initial pruning, clearing and removal of debris. Note: These costs may be passed from the Commission to another party for whose benefit the work is being carried out.

The Commission will give consideration in conjunction with the Responsible Person to the possibility of relocating the overhead electric line on aesthetic, environmental or economic grounds and will take special precautions to protect trees listed on the Register of Significant Trees.

To minimise tree pruning or clearing along a route, alternative constructions which have a minimum impact on established trees (e.g. offset construction, taller poles, alternative pole locations, insulated conductors and underground cable) should be considered.

The Commission will negotiate with the Responsible Person regarding these alternatives with the proviso that any substantial additional costs to the Commission for more expensive forms of construction are borne by the Responsible Person or any other party proposing the alternative construction or requesting the electricity supply. In considering the additional costs all parties shall take account of any subsequent benefits accruing to them due to reduced tree pruning or clearing requirements.

The selection of overhead electric line routes in or abutting major areas of publicly owned land such as State Forests or National Parks is a matter for resolution between the Commission and the appropriate planning or controlling bodies and any sharing of cost penalties incurred by the choice of route is to be agreed upon between the parties to that choice of route.

### 5 GENERAL (APPLICABLE TO ALL AREAS)

5.1 All tree pruning and clearing shall be carried out in such a manner as to ensure both the safety of the public and persons performing the work and the protection of Commission assets. This shall be the prime consideration of officers planning and supervising the work and of persons performing the work.

5.2 Wherever a Responsible Person considers that tree pruning or clearing may be unsafe due to the proximity of conductors or other electrical equipment the Responsible Person shall refer the matter to the Commission. The Commission shall review the situation and make appropriate arrangements normally at its cost, for the safety of the persons performing the work, such as—

5.2.1 by de-energising the conductors where this can be done until the Responsible Person has established clearances which will permit safe completion of the work; or

5.2.2 by suppressing the automatic reclosing facility on the circuit breakers supplying high voltage overhead electric lines; or

5.2.3 by providing Commission employees to establish clearances to Commission overhead electric lines which will ensure safe completion of the work by the Responsible Person.

5.3 The Responsible Person shall give due consideration to the species and its height when carrying out the planting or replacement of trees to ensure that safe clearances can be maintained at all times from the Commission's overhead electric lines.

In particular, the replacement of unsuitable species should be considered whenever roadworks or other similar significant works are to be carried out, which necessitate disruption to the existing environment.

Guidance on species selection can be obtained in the Commission's published booklet "Guide to Tree Planting Near Power Lines"\*. Preference should be given to planting indigenous species and preferably from seed or cuttings of local plants. Where plantings are established, species should be used which are the same or similar to maintain the existing character of the area. These may be native or exotic species.

It is recognised that replacement of isolated trees should follow the established species pattern of surrounding trees.

\* Copies are available from SEC District Offices.

5.4 The Responsible Person should consult the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands or the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) for assistance in locating or determining botanically or historically important vegetation or significant trees.

Every endeavour should be made by the Responsible Person to ascertain where such important vegetation or significant trees are located. Use shall be made of the Register of Significant Trees produced by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).

The Responsible Person shall consult the Commission concerning any variations proposed to normal tree pruning or clearing practices to take account of these special situations.

Cutting of botanically or historically important vegetation or significant trees should only be undertaken after consultation between the Responsible Person, the Local Municipality and the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands or the National Trust of Australia (Victoria) as appropriate.

5.5 In the event of uncertainty or dispute as to whether the condition of a tree or limb requires its felling or removal, the expertise of a Commission Forestry Officer and an appropriate officer representing the Responsible Person shall be called on and if necessary an officer of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands may be consulted.

If agreement cannot be reached, the Minister shall determine the dispute.

5.6 The Commission may, by notice in writing, require a Responsible Person to undertake tree pruning or clearing within a specified period as set down under section 62 of the Act.

5.7 Trees shall be left as aesthetically pleasing as practicable to resemble their natural form and cutting is to be done using appropriate tree surgery techniques. The Victorian College of Agriculture and Horticulture or similar authoritative source may be consulted regarding tree surgery techniques.

5.8 Trees may only be removed or cut near ground level, and/or chemically treated as appropriate following agreement between the Responsible Person and the Commission.

In non-declared Urban Areas, tree cutting at ground level of unsuitable species may be carried out only after agreement between the Commission, the Council and, where appropriate, the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands.

5.9 Trees should not be planted in locations which prevent safe access to any electrical equipment.

## 6 NON DECLARED CATEGORY 1 URBAN AREAS

The Responsible Person shall ensure that trees are maintained so that the clearances described in Section 7.2.3 apply.

## 7 DECLARED URBAN AREAS

### 7.1 General

7.1.1 To assist the Responsible Person in respect of public land, the Commission shall carry out a survey each year and compile a list of those streets or locations in which trees are liable to cause interference in urban areas. This list shall be forwarded to the Responsible Person concerned prior to the end of May in that year.

7.1.2 The Responsible Person shall be responsible for the disposal of tree pruning or clearing debris, including that produced by Commission employees carrying out emergency cutting as provided for in Section 7.1.3 or when they have undertaken preliminary cutting to establish clearances under Section 5.2.3.



7.1.3 Emergency cutting for restoration of faults or to ensure safety may be carried out by the Commission without reference to the Responsible Person and, in this case, the Commission shall notify the Responsible Person as soon as practicable after the event.

## 7.2 Category 1 Area

### 7.2.1 Objective

To ensure that trees and foliage growing on street reserves shall at all times be sufficiently clear of overhead electric lines to ensure continuity of supply and provide an adequate level of public safety.

### 7.2.2 Performance Standards

- The Responsible Person shall prune, clear and maintain trees so that no growth shall make contact with overhead electric lines in windy, hot and windy, or wet and windy conditions.
- Clearance shall be sufficient to prevent tree-induced conductor to conductor clashing, abrasion by trees of bare or insulated conductor and insulated cable, and contact with conductors by persons who may climb trees which are readily climbable without specialised equipment.

### 7.2.3 Minimum Clearances

To meet the performance standards set out in Section 7.2.2 the Responsible Person shall ensure that trees are maintained to achieve the MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances from overhead electric lines set out in Table 1.

## 7.3 Category 2 Area

The Responsible Person shall ensure that trees are maintained so that the clearances described in Section 8 apply.

Table 1 : MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances for Category 1 Urban Areas. Refer also to diagrams.

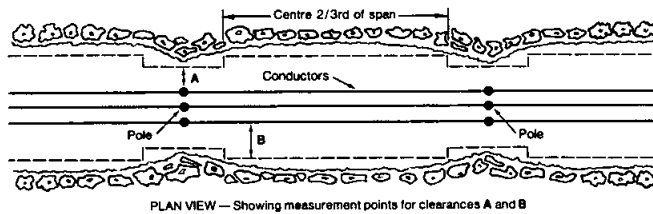
VOLTAGE	CLEARANCE AT POLE (A)	CLEARANCE TO STILL CONDUCTOR ALONG CENTRE 2/3 OF SPAN (B)		
		Span Length		
		Up to 40 m	40m—70m	Over 70m Refer Note 5
Insulated Low Voltage Mains and Insulated Low Voltage Service Cable	300 mm	300 mm	600 mm	1.5 times sag or 600 mm whichever is the greater
Bare Low Voltage	1.0 m	1.0 m	1.5 m	(1.25 times sag + 0.5) m or 1.5 m whichever is the greater
Bare 6.6 kV, 11 kV, 22 kV	1.5 m	1.5 m	2.0 m	(1.25 times sag + 0.5) m or 2.0 m whichever is the greater
66 kV	2.25 m	2.25 m	3.0 m	(1.5 times sag + 1.0) m or 3.0 m whichever is the greater

## NOTES TO TABLE 1

- 1 The clearances stated are minimum to a STILL conductor and an ADDITIONAL clearance shall be provided to allow for anticipated regrowth, which depends on the tree species, the growth pattern and on the frequency of tree pruning or clearing (normally three years).

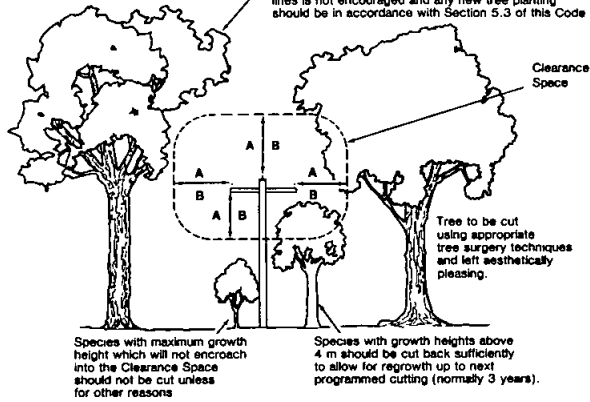
- 2 It is recognised that the clearances of individual trees will not normally be specifically measured but will be estimated by an experienced observer from ground level or a suitable elevated vantage point.
- 3 The Table allows for the normal whip by trees in high winds (50 km/h); however, an additional allowance, as determined in consultation between the Responsible Person and the Commission, may have to be made for very slender trees. Similarly it may be necessary to make additional allowances in high wind areas where trees occur sparsely.
- 4 Closing up of tree branches above the Clearance Space surrounding either low voltage or high voltage conductors (up to and including 22 kV) is acceptable provided clearances A and B as stated in the Table are met, limbs are sound and the tree is not readily climbable above the level of the conductors. Any unsound limbs are to be removed. In this context, the closing up of branches above the Clearance Space is not encouraged and any new tree planting should preferably be in accordance with Section 5.3 of this Code.
- 5 Very few spans over 70m exist in Declared Urban Areas. The Responsible Person should contact the nearest Commission office for guidance as to what clearance shall apply for each situation. The minimum clearance shall be in accordance with the Table.

Diagrams applicable to Table 1 : MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances for Category 1 Urban Areas.



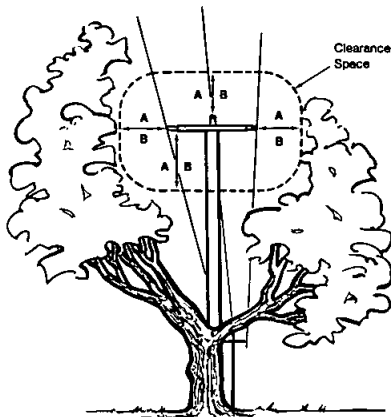
PLAN VIEW — Showing measurement points for clearances A and B

NOTE: The closing up of branches above overhead electric lines is not encouraged and any new tree planting should be in accordance with Section 5.3 of this Code



Species with maximum growth height which will not encroach into the Clearance Space should not be cut unless for other reasons

Species with growth heights above 4 m should be cut back sufficiently to allow for regrowth up to next programmed cutting (normally 3 years).



NOTE: The closing up of branches above overhead electric lines is not encouraged and any new tree planting should be in accordance with Section 5.3 of this Code.

Applicable both diagrams  
Clearances A and B to be measured at points along the span as indicated on plan view

## 8 CATEGORY 2 URBAN AREAS AND ALL RURAL AREAS

8.1 Subject to the provisions of Section 9 the Responsible Person shall ensure that trees are maintained so that no limb shall overhang the Clearance Space or any conductor.

8.2 In the Inspection Space every limb or tree which is liable to break off and/or fall and if it did break or fall could contact a conductor, shall be removed.

8.3 Subject to the provisions of Section 9 the Responsible Person shall ensure that trees are maintained to achieve the MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances from overhead electric lines set out in Table 2.

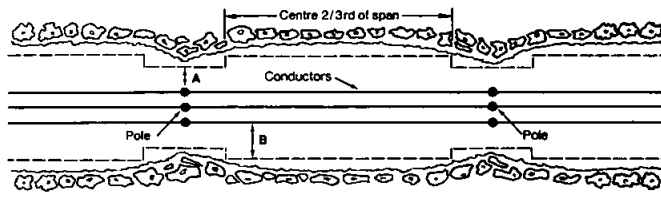
Table 2: MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances for Category 2 Urban Areas and all Rural Areas. Refer also to diagrams.

VOLTAGE	CLEARANCE AT POLE (A)	CLEARANCE TO STILL CONDUCTOR ALONG CENTRE		
		2/3 OF SPAN (B)		
		Span Length		
		Up to 40 m	40m—70m	Over 70m Refer Note 5
Insulated Low Voltage Mains and Insulated Low Voltage Service Cable	600 mm	600 mm	1.0 m	1.5 times sag or 1.0 m whichever is the greater
Bare Low Voltage	1.5 m	1.5 m	2.0 m	(1.25 times sag + 0.5) m or 2.0 m whichever is the greater
Bare 6.6 kV, 11 kV, 22 kV	1.5 m	1.5 m	2.0 m	(1.25 times sag + 0.5) m or 2.0 m whichever is the greater
66 kV	2.25 m	2.25 m	3.0 m	(1.5 times sag + 1.0) m or 3.0 m whichever is the greater

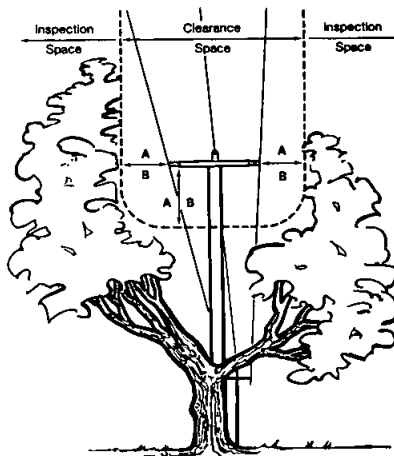
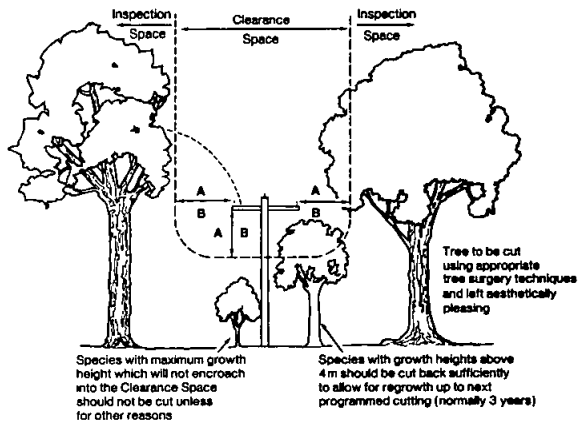
## NOTES TO TABLE 2

- 1 The clearances stated are minimum to a STILL conductor and an ADDITIONAL clearance shall be provided to allow for anticipated regrowth, which depends on the tree species, the growth pattern and on the frequency of tree pruning or clearing (normally three years). When tree cutting is being undertaken by a Responsible Person other than the Commission the ADDITIONAL clearance for anticipated regrowth shall be determined in consultation between the Responsible Person's officers and the Commission.
- 2 It is recognised that the clearance of individual trees will not normally be specifically measured but will be estimated by an experienced observer from ground level or a suitable elevated vantage point.
- 3 The Table allows for the normal whip by trees in high winds (50 km/h); however, an additional allowance, as determined in consultation between the Responsible Person and the Commission, may have to be made for very slender trees.

Diagrams applicable to Table 2 : MINIMUM horizontal and vertical clearances for Category 2 Urban Areas and all Rural Areas.



PLAN VIEW — Showing measurement points for clearances A and B



Applicable both diagrams  
Clearances A and B to be measured at points along the span as indicated on plan view

## 9 AREAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE

### 9.1 General

The procedure for identifying these areas is described in Appendix 1.

In determining an area as being one of Particular Significance the Minister may impose additional specifications for tree pruning, clearing or planting as appropriate.

### 9.2 Provisions Relating to Category 2 Areas of Particular Significance

9.2.1 The clearances described in Section 8.3 shall apply with the exception that limbs may overhang conductors provided that ALL of the following conditions are satisfied:

- The Clearances 'A' and 'B' in Table 2 are maintained in all directions from each conductor.
- The tree is healthy.
- In the opinion of a Commission Forestry Officer the tree species concerned is unlikely to shed limbs, even under strong wind conditions.
- Arrangements have been made to reduce the fire hazard by such means as reduction of ground level combustible materials and/or adoption of special construction configurations.

9.2.2 Bearing in mind the increased costs involved, consideration shall be given to reducing the period of the tree pruning or clearing cycle in order to minimise the extent of tree pruning or clearing carried out at any given time.

## APPENDIX 1

### AREAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE

Areas of Particular Significance are those so determined by the Minister following a detailed proposal submitted by a person or body. Proposals would normally be submitted by municipalities, special interest groups or government instrumentalities. Proposals may also be submitted which recommend alterations to areas determined or even removal of the "Particular Significance" status from an area should the factors warranting the original determination change significantly.

The Commission will maintain a register of all areas currently determined as being of "Particular Significance" and information contained in the register will be available from the Commission's Secretary on request.

### 1 CRITERIA TO BE MET BY AREAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE

To qualify for determination as being of "Particular Significance" an area should satisfy one or more of the criteria listed below. It is important to recognise that it is not sufficient for an area merely to satisfy one or more of the criteria but that the qualities or features typified by the criteria must be placed at significant risk by the application of the normal provisions of this Code of Practice. The area should also be one of significant size and should not be identified merely to preserve a single feature which could more properly be protected by a process of consultation between the proposer and the Responsible Person at a local level.

The criteria are—

- The area is an outstanding example of natural or exotic vegetation.
- The area is one which contains rare or endangered plant or animal species or communities or provides a demonstrated flora or fauna corridor for these species or communities.
- The area is a significant part of an outstanding complex of areas or landscape categories. In this context each individual part of the complex may not necessarily be in itself "outstanding" but the bringing together of those parts into the complex as a whole presents overall qualities which then meet the requirement to be judged "outstanding". These landscape categories may include landscapes which are significant by virtue of their historic or cultural connotations, their vegetation or their architectural characteristics.
- It is an area which has special tourism potential, attraction or amenity.

### 2 FORM OF PROPOSAL

Any proposal for the determination of an area as being one of Particular Significance should provide a detailed explanation of how the area meets the appropriate criteria. The area must be clearly defined in terms of a map or other appropriate specification of its boundaries and all available

supporting evidence for the proposal should be provided. Possible sources of such information would include—

- Planning strategies developed by appropriate regional planning authorities or municipalities.
- The Commonwealth Register of the National Estate.
- The Historic Buildings Register, which is maintained by the Historic Buildings Council of the Ministry for Planning and Environment.
- The Land Conservation Council.
- National Trust
  - The Register of Significant Trees which is maintained by the National Trust of Australia (Victoria).
  - Landscape Committee, which deals with landscapes of particular scientific, cultural and aesthetic value.
  - Urban Conservation Committee, which deals with historic precincts.
- Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands
  - The Roadsides Conservation Plan in relation to High Conservation Value sites.
  - The Royal Botanic Gardens maintains a register of rare and endangered plants, knowledge of the flora of Victoria, botanically important sites, vegetation surveys and historic landscapes.
  - Register of Historic Places.
- Register of Rare and Endangered Species maintained by the Department of Biological Science, Latrobe University.
- Arboricultural Association of Australia, tree management and maintenance advice.

### 3 PROCEDURE FOR THE IDENTIFICATION OF AREAS OF PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE

In preparing any proposal the person putting forward the concept should consult with the Commission's Chief Engineer, Distribution, 15 William Street, Melbourne, 3000. The proposal should then be formally submitted to the Minister via the Chief Engineer, Distribution.

In assessing a proposal the Minister would normally seek advice from such parties as the Commission, the Tree Clearance Consultative Committee and other appropriate sources of expertise depending on the nature of the proposed area and the reasons put forward for its determination.

The areas that are determined by the Minister to warrant classification as being of Particular Significance would then be added to the register maintained by the Commission and would become subject to the special provisions of Section 9 of this Code.

The Act requires this Code to be reviewed within four years.

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