



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water



Australian
National
University

Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Standard



March 2022

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Cataloguing data

This publication (and any material sourced from it) should be attributed as: DAWE 2022, *Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Standard*, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, Canberra, March. CC BY 4.0.

ISBN 978-1-76003-539-6

This publication is available at awe.gov.au/aus-farm-cert-scheme

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Acknowledgements

This document was prepared by the Australian National University in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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Overview of the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme

What is the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme ('the Scheme')?

The Scheme is a voluntary farm certification scheme that recognises 'biodiversity friendly' farmers and farm businesses for maintaining and improving on-farm biodiversity outcomes.

Why have an Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme?

Australian farmers are responsible for managing more than half of Australia's landmass and they play a key role in environmental management in Australia.

The Scheme will recognise the efforts of farmers who are conserving and improving on-farm biodiversity. In doing so, it is intended to promote biodiversity friendly farming and thereby help improve the condition of Australia's biodiversity.

For farmers, the Scheme offers a number of potential benefits, including:

- (a) access to markets that require information on biodiversity impacts;
- (b) the potential to obtain higher prices for products that come from certified biodiversity friendly farms;
- (c) improved access to financing, including from investors who require farm businesses to provide evidence of their biodiversity performance;
- (d) improved access to information and technical support regarding the management of biodiversity, including through a community of practice of like-minded farmers; and
- (e) providing farmers with a cost-effective way of demonstrating their environmental credentials.

The Scheme will also provide consumers with easy to use information on biodiversity stewardship. This will enable consumers to better support biodiversity friendly farms and sustainable land management.

What is the scope of the certification offered under the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme?

This Scheme offers farms and farm businesses with the opportunity to be certified as biodiversity friendly on the basis of the terrestrial habitat they provide for biodiversity. It does not cover the impacts farming operations can have on other aspects of the

environment, including air quality, water quality and the biodiversity found in aquatic environments.

What options are available for certification under the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme?

Three levels of certification are available under the Scheme: gold, green and provisional.

Gold level certification is available to farms that:

- (a) meet the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark and commit to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm; or
- (b) meet the initial certification requirements and commit to achieving specific improvements in the condition of the biodiversity on the farm.

Green level certification is available to farms that meet the initial certification requirements and commit to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm.

Provisional certification will be available to farms that do not quite meet the certification thresholds but commit to specified management activities to improve the condition of the vegetation on the farm for biodiversity and who are projected to meet certification thresholds within a specified timeframe.

What steps are involved in the certification process?

There are seven steps in the certification and re-certification cycle.

- (a) Applicants seeking certification must map their farms and submit an application via the application portal. The application portal provides applicants with an indicative assessment of their eligibility for certification.
- (b) An approved site assessor conducts a site assessment to confirm the nature and condition of the vegetation on the farm.
- (c) Based on the application and the information gathered through the site assessment, a determination is made on the applicant's eligibility for certification and their level of certification.
- (d) A biodiversity management plan is prepared for certified farms and farm businesses that divides the properties into management units, assigns biodiversity condition scores to the management units and the farms or farm businesses as a whole, and provides guidance on the management activities that should be undertaken to improve or maintain the condition of biodiversity.
- (e) Once the biodiversity management plan is prepared and approved, the applicant is able to use the Biodiversity Friendly logo.

- (f) Certified farms and farm businesses must comply with notification requirements that ensure they report:
- i. significant natural and human disturbances that affect, or are likely to affect, the condition of the biodiversity on the certified properties; and
 - ii. changes in the circumstances (for example, the sale or transfer of a certified farm or property).
- (g) At the end of the certification term – 3 years for those with gold and green level certification and 1 year for those with initial provisional level certification – the applicant must apply for re-certification if they want to continue to be certified and use the Biodiversity Friendly logo. To be re-certified, applicants must satisfy the re-certification requirements. A site assessment is conducted as part of the re-certification process to evaluate and score the condition of biodiversity.

How does the certification process work?

There are three main parts of the certification process:

- (a) the initial certification requirements, which are based primarily on the condition of the vegetation for biodiversity on the applicant's farm, relative to regional vegetation condition;
- (b) a biodiversity planning process, involving the preparation of a tailored biodiversity management plan to guide the maintenance or improvement of the biodiversity assets on the farm; and
- (c) the re-certification requirements, which are based on an assessment of the condition of biodiversity on the farm and how it has changed over time.

Initial certification requirements

Eligibility for initial certification is based on the assessment of the relative condition of native vegetation for biodiversity on the farm. The condition of native vegetation for biodiversity is assessed and scored using a scale between 0 (complete loss of native vegetation) and 100 (undisturbed remnant vegetation).

To be eligible for certification:

- (a) a farm's vegetation condition score must be equal to, or greater than:
 - i. the national minimum condition threshold; and
 - ii. the applicable regional condition benchmark; and
- (b) the owner of the property must commit to either:

- i. maintaining the condition of the biodiversity on the farm (for green level certification); or
- ii. improving the condition of the biodiversity on the farm (for gold level certification).

Farms are also eligible for gold level certification if their native vegetation condition score is equal to, or greater than, the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark and the owner commits to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm. The national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark is a vegetation condition score of 50 out of 100.

The national minimum condition threshold is a vegetation condition score of 10 out of 100. This threshold serves as a floor in the certification process, ensuring that farms are only eligible for certification if their vegetation condition score is above this level, regardless of the regional condition benchmark.

The regional condition benchmarks ensure farms are assessed against comparable farms, with similar vegetation and land types. This means the benchmarks vary between regions, and between farms within regions, depending on the vegetation and land types that are present on the farms that are being assessed.

The regional assessment of vegetation condition is undertaken using existing datasets and remote sensing information. The assessment of the condition of vegetation on the farm is done using similar information, only it is supplemented with data collected from a site assessment. Site assessments confirm the nature and condition of the vegetation on the farm, and collect information on the presence and distribution of threatened species and ecological communities, and pests and weeds. Eligibility for certification is contingent on the completion of a site assessment by an approved assessor.

Biodiversity management plan

Tailored biodiversity management plans are prepared for farms that satisfy the initial certification requirements. The plans are prepared using the information gathered through the site assessment and identify the types of native vegetation on the farm and areas of high conservation value, judged at the regional level (i.e. the areas of native vegetation that are of greatest significance for biodiversity conservation in the region). They also divide the farm into management units and outline the management actions that are recommended to maintain or improve the condition of biodiversity on the farm.

Importantly, for farms and farm businesses with gold and green level certification, biodiversity management plans are concerned with the maintenance and improvement of on-farm biodiversity values, as reflected in a biodiversity condition score. As with vegetation condition, the biodiversity condition score measures the condition of biodiversity using a scale between 0 (complete loss of biodiversity value) and 100

(biodiversity values completely intact). Biodiversity condition scores are based on the type and condition of the farm's vegetation but account for the uniqueness and conservation status of the vegetation, and the extent to which it supports threatened species.

Re-certification

Farms wanting to maintain their certification must be re-certified every 3 years. Farms and farm businesses with provisional level certification must be re-certified after 1 year and every 3 years thereafter.

Re-certification is based on whether the farm has maintained or improved the condition of its biodiversity, as measured with the farm biodiversity condition score. Farms and farm businesses with provisional level certification must also demonstrate adequate progress in implementing the management actions specified in their biodiversity management plans.

What types of farm businesses can be certified?

All farm businesses are eligible for certification, provided they are located in Australia (including external territories).

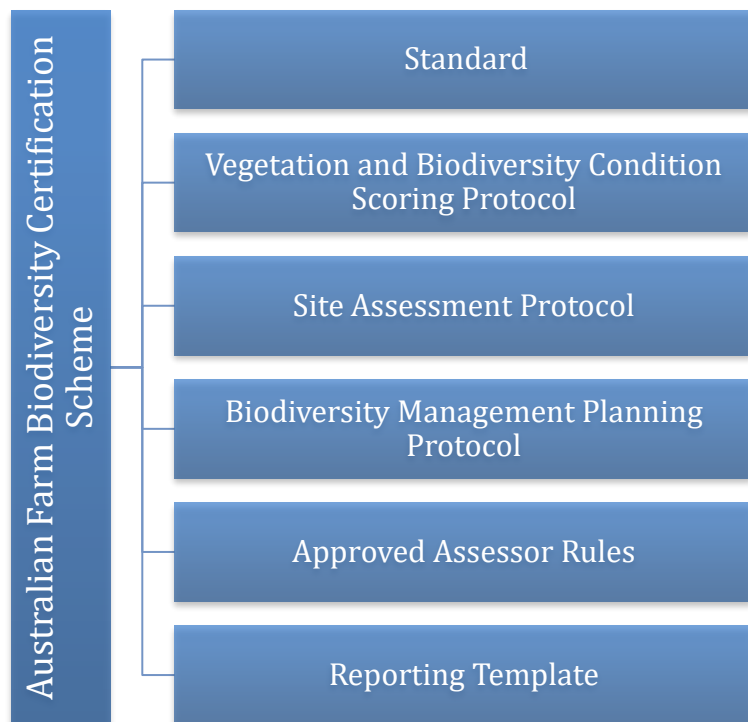
Can a farm business comprised of more than one property be certified?

Yes, farm businesses can be certified. Certification of farm businesses is based on the weighted average vegetation condition across all properties held by the business, relative to the weighted average vegetation condition across the regions in which the properties are located. The same certification levels and thresholds will apply to farm businesses, as will re-certification requirements.

1. Scheme Aim and Principles

- 1.1 The aim of the Scheme is to provide farmers and farm businesses with recognition and support for maintaining and improving on-farm biodiversity outcomes. The Scheme is focussed on recognising sustainable biodiversity stewardship by Australian farmers, and is designed to be practical, robust and cost-effective.
- 1.2 This Scheme offers farms and farm businesses with the opportunity to be certified as biodiversity friendly on the basis of the terrestrial habitat they provide for biodiversity. It does not cover the impacts farming operations can have on other aspects of the environment, including air quality, water quality and the biodiversity found in aquatic environments.
- 1.3 The Scheme reflects the following principles:
 - (a) The Scheme must promote improved biodiversity outcomes.
 - (b) The Scheme must have scientific integrity.
 - (c) To the extent possible, eligibility for certification must be based on biodiversity outcomes (or the condition of on-farm biodiversity) rather than the adoption of particular processes or management activities.
 - (d) The Scheme must be accessible to farmers, with user-friendly systems and processes.
- 1.4 Figure 1 illustrates the administrative components supporting the implementation of the Scheme, including the overarching Standard (this document) and other supporting protocols and rules.

Figure 1: The Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme



The Standard

- 1.5 The Standard (this document) sets out the overarching rules and procedures for the certification of Biodiversity Friendly farms and farm businesses under the Scheme. The Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol, the Site Assessment Protocol, the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol, the Approved Assessor Rules and the Reporting Template must be made in accordance with the requirements of the Standard.

Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol

- 1.6 The Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol contains the method for scoring the condition of vegetation and biodiversity under the Scheme. The Protocol is required to be followed when calculating the vegetation condition scores and applicable regional condition benchmarks that are used when assessing eligibility for certification and the biodiversity condition scores used for re-certification.

Site Assessment Protocol

- 1.7 In assessing eligibility for certification and re-certification, farms must be subject to a site assessment by an approved assessor. The site assessments confirm the nature and condition of the vegetation on the farm, and collect

information on the presence and distribution of threatened species and ecological communities, and pests and weeds. The Site Assessment Protocol contains the requirements that govern how these site assessments are conducted.

Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol

- 1.8 The Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol supports the preparation of tailored biodiversity management plans aimed at maintaining and/or improving on-farm biodiversity outcomes. The Protocol sets out how management plans should be prepared and what they are required to contain, and rules regarding the certification of plans by approved assessors. The Protocol links closely with the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol and the Site Assessment Protocol.

Approved Assessor Rules

- 1.9 The Approved Assessor Rules set down the requirements for becoming an approved assessor and rules regarding the conduct of assessors when undertaking site assessments and preparing biodiversity management plans.

Reporting Template

- 1.10 The Reporting Template sets down the requirements for reporting under the Scheme, including the maintenance of provisional certification, re-certification and where there is an event that materially affects the condition of biodiversity.

2. Scheme Governance

- 2.1 The Department will undertake ongoing consultations with industry regarding the governance and administrative arrangements for the Scheme.

3. Eligibility Requirements

- 3.1 The Scheme provides farmers and farm businesses with the opportunity to be certified as Biodiversity Friendly. Certification is voluntary.
- 3.2 To be eligible for certification as Biodiversity Friendly, farms and farm businesses must meet the following eligibility requirements:

- (a) The farms must be located in the eligible natural resource management (NRM) regions identified below.¹
- (b) Farm businesses must include all of the properties in the business that are located in the eligible NRM regions in the certification application, with the exception of leasehold properties with fewer than 3 years remaining on the term. For the avoidance of doubt, individual farms within a farm business can be certified separately from the farm business. However, this will limit the use of the Biodiversity Friendly logo to produce from the certified farm(s).
- (c) The applicant for certification must have the legal right to control how the relevant property or properties are used (for example, the proponent must hold freehold or leasehold title, or exclusive possession native title to the land to be certified). If a property is held under lease, the remaining term of the lease must be at least 3 years from the date of application, or until re-certification is due.
- (d) Farms and farm businesses must:
 - i. satisfy the initial certification requirements (if they have not been certified before) or re-certification requirements (if they are certified and their certification is up for renewal);
 - ii. have been subject to a site assessment by an approved site assessor; and
 - iii. have an approved biodiversity management plan.

4. Certification process

4.1 There are seven steps in the certification and re-certification cycle:

- (a) Applicants seeking certification must map their farms and submit an application via the application portal. The application portal provides applicants with an indicative assessment of their eligibility for certification.

¹ Farms are only eligible if the majority of the land (≥50%) is located in an eligible region or regions.

- (b) An approved site assessor conducts a site assessment in accordance with the Site Assessment Protocol to confirm the nature and condition of the vegetation on the farm.
- (c) Based on the application and the information gathered through the site assessment, a determination is made on the applicant's eligibility for certification and their level of certification.
- (d) A biodiversity management plan is prepared for certified farms and farm businesses that divides the properties into management units, assigns biodiversity condition scores to the management units and the farms or farm businesses as a whole, and provides guidance on the management activities that should be undertaken to improve or maintain the condition of biodiversity.
- (e) Once the biodiversity management plan is prepared, the applicant is able to use the Biodiversity Friendly logo for the certification term in accordance with the rules prescribed in section 12.
- (f) Certified farms and farm businesses must comply with the notification requirements in sections 8, 9, and 10. These require proponents to report:
 - i. Significant natural and human disturbances that affect, or are likely to affect, the condition of the biodiversity on the certified properties; and
 - ii. Changes in circumstances (for example, the sale or transfer of a certified farm or property).
- (g) At the end of the certification term – 3 years for those with gold and green level certification and 1 year for those with initial provisional level certification – the applicant must apply for re-certification if they want to continue to be certified and use the Biodiversity Friendly logo. To be re-certified, applicants must satisfy the re-certification requirements. A site assessment is conducted as part of the re-certification process to evaluate and score the condition of biodiversity.

5. Levels of certification

5.1 Three levels of certification are available under the Scheme:

- (a) gold level certification;
- (b) green level certification; and
- (c) provisional level certification.

Gold level certification

- 5.2 Gold level certification is available to farms and farm businesses that:
- (a) meet the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark and commit to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm; or
 - (b) meet the initial certification requirements and commit to achieving specific improvements in the condition of the biodiversity on the farm.

Green level certification

- 5.3 *Green level certification* is available to farms and farm businesses that meet the initial certification requirements and commit to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm.

Provisional certification

- 5.4 *Provisional certification* is available to farms and farm businesses that:
- (a) meet the national minimum condition threshold but fall below the applicable regional benchmark; and
 - (b) commit to undertaking specified management actions that are projected to raise the farm vegetation condition score above the applicable regional benchmark within a decade.
- 5.5 The management actions must be outlined in an approved biodiversity management plan. If a farm or farm business does not demonstrate sufficient progress in implementing the management activities, they can be de-certified.
- 5.6 A farm or farm business may only carry provisional level certification for a total of 10 years. If after that time, improvements in on-farm biodiversity do not meet thresholds required to meet green level certification, the farm or farm business will be de-certified.

6. Certification requirements

- 6.1 The certification process has three main elements:
- (a) the initial certification requirements, which provide the basis for determining whether farms and farm businesses are eligible for certification and what level of certification they are eligible for;

- (b) the biodiversity management planning process, which leads to the preparation of a tailored biodiversity management plan to guide the maintenance or improvement of the biodiversity assets on the farm; and
- (c) the re-certification requirements, which provide the basis for determining whether certified farms and farm businesses can renew their certification.

Initial certification requirements

- 6.2 Eligibility for initial certification is based on the assessment of the relative condition of native vegetation for biodiversity on the farm.
- 6.3 The condition of native vegetation for biodiversity is assessed and scored using a scale between 0 (complete loss of native vegetation) and 100 (undisturbed remnant vegetation). The method for scoring native vegetation at the property and region-scale is detailed in the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.
- 6.4 There are different initial certification requirements for each level of certification.

Gold level certification- initial certification requirements

- 6.5 To be eligible for gold level certification, the following requirements must be satisfied.
 - (a) The farm vegetation condition score must be equal to or greater than:
 - i. the national minimum condition threshold; and
 - ii. the applicable regional condition benchmark, and
 - iii. the applicant must commit to improving the condition of the biodiversity on the farm; or
 - (b) the farm vegetation condition score must be equal to or greater than the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark and the applicant must commit to maintaining the condition of biodiversity on the farm.
- 6.6 The national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark is a farm vegetation condition score of 50 (out of 100).

Green level certification- initial certification requirements

- 6.7 To be eligible for green level certification:

- (a) the farm vegetation condition score must be equal to or greater than:
 - i. the national minimum condition threshold; and
 - ii. the applicable regional condition benchmark, and
- (b) the applicant must commit to maintaining the condition of the biodiversity on the farm.

Provisional level certification- initial certification requirements

6.8 To be eligible for provisional level certification:

- (a) the farm vegetation condition score must:
 - i. be equal to or greater than the national minimum condition threshold; and
 - ii. be no more than 5 points below the applicable regional benchmark; and
- (b) the applicant must commit to undertaking specified management actions that are projected to raise the farm vegetation condition score above the applicable regional benchmark within 10 years.

6.9 A farm or farm business may only carry provisional level certification for a total of 10 years. If after that time, improvements in on-farm biodiversity do not meet the thresholds required to meet green level certification, the farm or farm business will be de-certified.

Vegetation condition assessment

6.10 The assessment of the condition of vegetation for biodiversity has two parts:

- (a) the regional condition assessment; and
- (b) the farm comparison.

6.11 The regional condition assessment involves three main steps.

- (a) *Identification of agricultural areas in the NRM region.* The agricultural areas in the applicable NRM region are identified and mapped, while the non-agricultural areas are excluded from the analysis. The non-agricultural

areas include public and private conservation reserves and areas used for urban, commercial and industrial purposes.²

- (b) *Land use and land cover zoning.* The agricultural areas in the relevant NRM region are divided into land use and land cover zones. Land use refers to how the land is currently used; for example, irrigated agriculture and grazing. Land cover refers to the biophysical cover on the land; for example, remnant vegetation, crops, plantations, bare soils, exposed rocks and water bodies.
- (c) *Condition scoring for land use and land cover zones.* The average condition of native vegetation for biodiversity in each of the land use and land cover zones is assessed remotely using existing datasets and assigned a score between 0 and 100. The output of the process is a vegetation condition map with estimated average vegetation condition scores for each land use and land cover zone across the region.

6.12 The farm comparison involves five main steps.

- (a) *Land type zoning (pre-clearing vegetation types and land capability).* The farm and the region are divided into land types. Wherever suitable data are available, the land types are based on combinations of pre-clearing vegetation types and agricultural land capability. In regions where vegetation and/or land capability data are lacking, suitable proxies are used to identify land types (e.g. land system mapping, or pre-clearing vegetation types without land capability data). Details of the datasets that are relied on for these purposes are provided in the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.
- (b) *Regional condition scoring for land type zones.* Using the vegetation condition map from the regional condition assessment, average vegetation condition scores are assigned to each land type zone across the region.
- (c) *Farm vegetation condition score.* A weighted average vegetation condition score is calculated for the farm based on the land use and land cover zones

² Where a farm is located in two or more eligible NRM regions, all regions are included in the assessment and the regional condition benchmark is calculated as a weighted average across the relevant regions. Where part of an eligible farm is located in an ineligible NRM region, the portions located in the ineligible region are treated as part of the adjoining eligible NRM region for the purposes of the assessment.

across its land types and vegetation condition data gathered through the site assessment.

(d) *Regional condition benchmark.* A regional condition benchmark is calculated for the farm using regional average condition scores for the land types on the farm and weightings that reflect the relative extents of the land types across the farm.

(e) *Condition score comparison.* The farm vegetation condition score is compared to the regional condition benchmark and the national minimum condition threshold.

6.13 The methods and datasets that are relied on for the purposes of conducting the regional condition assessment and farm comparison are detailed in the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.

6.14 The national minimum condition threshold is a farm vegetation condition score of 10 out of 100. This threshold serves as a floor in the certification process, ensuring that farms are only eligible for certification if their vegetation condition score is above this level, regardless of the regional condition benchmark.

6.15 The regional condition benchmarks ensure farms are assessed against comparable farms, with similar land types. This means the benchmarks vary between regions, and between farms within regions, depending on the land types that are present on the farms being assessed.

6.16 Farm businesses comprised of more than one property are certified on the basis of an area-weighted average native vegetation condition score across all eligible properties. The regional condition benchmarks for farm businesses are calculated using area-weighted averages based on the regions in which the businesses properties are located. In simple terms, the properties owned by the business are treated as a single farm for the purposes of the assessment. Further details on the methods used for farm businesses are provided in the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.

6.17 The regional condition assessment and calculation of the regional condition benchmark are undertaken remotely using existing datasets and remote sensing information. The assessment of the condition of vegetation on the farm is done using similar information, only it is supplemented with data collected from a site assessment.

Site assessments

- 6.18 Site assessments must be conducted by an approved site assessor in accordance with the Site Assessment Protocol. Site assessments confirm the nature and condition of the vegetation on the farm, and collect information on the presence and distribution of threatened species and ecological communities, and pests and weeds. Eligibility for certification is contingent on the completion of a site assessment by an approved assessor (see section 4).
- 6.19 The regional condition assessments and farm comparisons are undertaken using the version of the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol that is in force at the time of the assessment. Where the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol is amended, the results of the regional condition assessments and farm comparisons may change.
- 6.20 For the avoidance of doubt, farms and farm businesses do not need to be re-certified, and will not be de-certified, on account of changes in the datasets or methods that are relied on for the purposes of regional condition assessments and farm comparisons.

Certification terms

- 6.21 For farms and farm businesses with gold or green level certification, the certification term is 3 years.
- 6.22 For farms and farm businesses with provisional level certification, the initial certification term is 1 year and every 3 years thereafter.

Unsuccessful applications

- 6.23 The administrator must provide unsuccessful applicants with a statement of reasons explaining why they were not eligible for certification.
- 6.24 Unsuccessful applicants may reapply after 2 years.

Biodiversity management planning and biodiversity condition scores

- 6.25 A biodiversity management plan must be prepared for:
- (a) farms and farm businesses seeking certification that meet the initial certification requirements; and
 - (b) farms and farm businesses seeking re-certification that meet the re-certification requirements.

- 6.26 Farms and farm businesses cannot be certified or re-certified unless they have an approved biodiversity management plan.
- 6.27 Biodiversity management plans must be prepared by an approved site assessor in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol and the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.
- 6.28 Biodiversity management plans are prepared after the site has been assessed. Site assessors do not need to conduct a separate site assessment for the purposes of preparing or approving a biodiversity management plan; they can use the data gathered through the site assessment.

Biodiversity condition scores

- 6.29 Biodiversity management plans divide certified farms into management units and assign biodiversity condition scores to each management unit in accordance with the methods detailed in the Biodiversity Management Planning Guide and the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol. Farm biodiversity condition scores are the area-weighted average of the scores assigned to the management units on the farm.
- 6.30 Biodiversity condition scores range between 0 (complete loss of biodiversity value) and 100 (biodiversity values completely intact). There are three main steps in the calculation of farm biodiversity condition scores.
- (a) *Vegetation condition scoring for management units.* Following the steps outlined in sections 6.11 and 6.12, vegetation condition scores are calculated for each of the management units. In some cases, the management units will be the same as the land type zones in section 6.12, meaning there will be no need to re-calculate the vegetation condition scores.
- (b) *Weighting for uniqueness, conservation status and threatened species.* The vegetation condition scores assigned to the management units are weighted to account for the uniqueness and conservation status of the vegetation types they contain, and the extent to which they support threatened species. For these purposes, conservation status is judged at the regional level (i.e. the areas of native vegetation that are of greatest significance for biodiversity conservation in the NRM region).
- (c) *Farm biodiversity condition score.* The farm biodiversity condition score is calculated as the area-weighted average of the scores assigned to the management units.

- 6.31 Whether certified farms and farm businesses meet their objectives of maintaining or improving the condition of biodiversity will be assessed using their farm biodiversity condition score.

Management actions

- 6.32 Biodiversity management plans will provide guidance on the management actions that are recommended to maintain or improve the condition of biodiversity on the farm.
- 6.33 Where a farm or farm business has provisional level certification, the biodiversity management plan must specify management actions that are projected to raise the farm vegetation condition score above the applicable regional benchmark within 10 years. Progress in implementing the management actions and meeting the projected improvements in the farm vegetation condition score are assessed after 1 year and 3 years thereafter (see re-certification requirements below).

Re-certification requirements

- 6.34 Farms and farm businesses that are certified are only eligible for re-certification at the end of their certification term if they satisfy the eligibility requirements in section 4.
- 6.35 The re-certification requirements for each level of certification are outlined below.

Re-certification requirements for farms with gold level certification

- 6.36 A farm or farm business with gold level certification that was certified on the basis of meeting the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark must have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to, or greater than, their previous farm biodiversity condition score.
- 6.37 A farm or farm business with gold level certification that was certified on the basis of a commitment to improve biodiversity condition must have a biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to or greater than the target score specified in their biodiversity management plan.
- 6.38 Where a farm or farm business does not meet the re-certification requirements in 6.36 and 6.37 they can:
- (a) transfer to a green level certification if they have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to, or greater than, their original farm biodiversity condition score; or

(b) transfer to provisional level certification if they have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is within 5 points of their original farm biodiversity condition score.

6.39 A farm or farm business that transfers from gold to green level certification in accordance with 6.38 may re-apply for gold level certification at any time during their certification term if they have taken corrective action to improve biodiversity condition on the relevant farms. Re-instatement of their gold level certification is based on the satisfaction of the requirements in 6.36 or 6.37, whichever is applicable. The previous farm biodiversity condition score for these purposes is the farm biodiversity condition score assigned at the certification before they transferred to green level certification. Similarly, the target score is the score they were assessed against when they transferred.

6.40 A farm or farm business that transfers to provisional level certification in accordance with 6.38 must commit to corrective actions that are projected to raise their farm biodiversity condition score to their previous or original farm biodiversity condition score within 10 years. The corrective actions must be contained in their biodiversity management plan.

Re-certification requirements for farms with green level certification

6.41 A farm or farm business with green level certification must have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to or greater than their original farm biodiversity condition score.

6.42 Where a farm or farm business does not meet the re-certification requirement in 6.41, but their farm biodiversity condition score is within 5 points of their original farm biodiversity condition score, they may transfer to provisional level certification.

6.43 A farm or farm business that transfers to provisional level certification in accordance with 6.42 must commit to corrective actions that are projected to raise their farm biodiversity condition score to their original farm biodiversity condition score within 10 years. The corrective actions must be contained in their biodiversity management plan.

Re-certification requirements for farms with provisional level certification

6.44 A farm or farm business with provisional level certification, other than those who transfer under 6.38 or 6.42, must have:

(a) made adequate progress in implementing the management actions specified in their biodiversity management plan;

- (b) have a farm vegetation condition score that is equal to or greater than their previous farm vegetation condition score; and
 - (c) have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to or greater than their original farm biodiversity condition score.
- 6.45 A farm or farm business that transfers to provisional level certification in accordance with 6.38 or 6.42 must have:
- (a) made adequate progress in implementing the corrective actions specified in their biodiversity management plan; and
 - (b) have a farm biodiversity condition score at the date of re-certification that is equal to or greater than their previous farm biodiversity condition score.

7. Transfers between certification levels

- 7.1 A farm or farm business with provisional level certification may apply for transfer to green or gold level certification.
- 7.2 An application for transfer under 7.1 must be accompanied by:
- (a) A site assessment report prepared in accordance with the Site Assessment Protocol and Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol that confirms that the farm vegetation condition score is equal to or greater than the applicable standard; and
 - (b) A revised biodiversity management plan prepared in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol that is suitable for the level of certification that is sought.
- 7.3 Decisions on transfer from provisional level to green or gold level certification will be based on whether they satisfy the applicable initial certification requirements.
- 7.4 A farm or farm business with green level certification may apply for transfer to gold level certification if they satisfy the initial certification requirements for gold level certification.
- 7.5 An application for transfer under section 7.4 must be accompanied by:
- (a) a site assessment report prepared in accordance with the Site Assessment Protocol and Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol that confirms that the farm biodiversity condition score is equal to or greater than the previous farm biodiversity condition score; and

- (b) a revised biodiversity management plan prepared in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol that meets the requirements for gold level certification.
- 7.6 Decisions on transfer from green level certification to gold level certification will be based on whether they satisfy the initial certification requirements for gold level certification.
- 7.7 A farm or farm business with gold level certification may apply for transfer to green or provisional level certification.
- 7.8 An application for transfer under section 7.7 must be accompanied by:
 - (a) a site assessment report prepared in accordance with the Site Assessment Protocol and Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol that confirms that the farm or farm business meets the requirements for transfer in 6.37; and
 - (b) a revised biodiversity management plan prepared in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol that meets the requirements for the applicable level of certification.
- 7.9 Decisions on transfer from gold level certification to green or provisional level certification will be based on whether they satisfy the requirements in 6.38.

8. Natural disturbances

- 8.1 Where a farm or farm business with gold or green level certification experiences a natural disturbance event that affects its farm biodiversity condition score, they:
 - (a) must provide written notice of the event to the administrator within 90 days; and
 - (b) may elect to use a previous biodiversity score when seeking re-certification.
- 8.2 The following rules apply to the use of a previous biodiversity score for re-certification following a natural disturbance event.
 - (a) The land areas affected by the natural disturbance event must be re-mapped into new management units in accordance with the Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol. Disturbance affected management units must be comprised wholly of areas affected by the natural disturbance event.

- (b) When calculating the farm biodiversity condition score, the proponent can elect to use the pre-event biodiversity condition score for disturbance affected management units. The pre-event biodiversity condition score is calculated using the vegetation condition scores and weightings that were used in the certification process immediately prior to the natural disturbance event. The calculation of biodiversity condition scores for disturbance affected management units must be in accordance with the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol.
- (c) A proponent can only elect to use a pre-event biodiversity condition score for a disturbance affected management unit if they take management actions to support the recovery of biodiversity in the area. The management actions must be contained in their biodiversity management plan.
- (d) A proponent can only elect to use a pre-event biodiversity condition score for a disturbance affected management unit for the three re-certification processes following the relevant natural disturbance event. An extension may be granted to allow a pre-event biodiversity condition score to continue to be used for a disturbance affected management unit where the proponent demonstrates they have taken appropriate corrective action to restore the biodiversity values of the area.

9. Human-induced degradation of biodiversity values

- 9.1 A proponent of a certified farm or farm business must provide written notice to the administrator within 60 days if a person engages in conduct that materially degrades, or is likely to materially degrade, the biodiversity values of the farm. The notice must include sufficient information to allow the administrator to conduct an initial desktop assessment of the seriousness of the impacts.
- 9.2 Where the administrator becomes aware that a person has engaged in conduct that materially degrades, or is likely to materially degrade, the biodiversity values of the farm, they can:
 - (a) require the proponent to provide further details of the incident and impacts on biodiversity;
 - (b) require an independent site assessment to be conducted at the proponent's expense to assess the impacts on the event on the biodiversity values of the farm;
 - (c) require the farm or farm business to be re-certified; or

(d) suspend or de-certify the farm or farm business.

- 9.3 The administrator must provide the proponent with an opportunity to make submissions and be heard prior to any decision to suspend or de-certify the farm or farm business.

10. Changes in circumstances

- 10.1 For the purposes of the Standard, a material change in circumstances occurs if a certified farm or farm business no longer meets the eligibility requirements in 3.2(b), (c) or (d).
- 10.2 Where there is a material change in circumstances, the proponent must provide the administrator with written notice of the changes within 90 days.
- 10.3 Subject to 10.4, where there is a material change in circumstances, the farm or farm business must be de-certified.
- 10.4 Where part of a certified farm or farm business is sold or otherwise rendered ineligible by virtue of a change in circumstances, to retain its certification, the farm or farm business must be re-certified.
- 10.5 The administrator can modify the requirements for a re-certification triggered under 10.4. The modifications must be permissible (as defined under 10.8) and not materially affect the rigour and legitimacy of the process.
- 10.6 Where a certified farm or all or part of a farm business is sold or leased, and the new landholder or business owner wants to certify the transferred farm or farm business, they can apply for expedited certification. Applications for expedited certification must be in writing and be provided through the application portal.
- 10.7 If the administrator approves a request for expedited certification, they can modify the requirements for initial certification. The modifications must be permissible (as defined under 10.8) and not materially affect the rigour and legitimacy of the process.
- 10.8 The following are permissible modifications that can be made to the certification process:
- (a) waiver of the requirement for a site assessment; and
 - (b) waiver of the need to prepare a new biodiversity management plan – provided the applicant adopts the biodiversity management plan that previously applied to the farm or farm business.

11. Register

- 11.1 The administrator must establish and maintain a certification register on their website.
- 11.2 The certification register must contain the following:
- (a) Details of the number of applications for certification and re-certification.
 - (b) Details of all certification decisions.
 - (c) Details of the farms and farm businesses that are certified and their level of certification.
 - (d) Where consent is provided by the proponent, the biodiversity management plan of certified farms and farm businesses.

12. Use of the Biodiversity Friendly Logo

- 12.1 Scheme participants will be able to use the logo (shown on the front page of this document) in accordance with rules determined by the Department. They will be notified of these rules when certification is provided.

13. Appeals

- 13.1 Proponents may ask for a reconsideration of a decision in relation to the following matters.
- (a) The eligibility of a farm or farm business for initial certification and their level of certification.
 - (b) The eligibility of a farm or farm business of re-certification and their level of certification.
 - (c) Decisions regarding de-certification.
 - (d) Decisions regarding non-compliance with the reporting requirements.
 - (e) Decisions about expedited certification and modifications to the certification process made under section 10.
- 13.2 All applications for the reconsideration of a decision must be in writing and must provide details of the decision in question and the grounds for reconsideration.

- 13.3 Applications for the reconsideration of a decision should be determined by an officer of the administrator who was not involved in the original decision.
- 13.4 The administrator may refer an application for reconsideration of a decision to the governing body for determination.
- 13.5 The person responsible for determining an application for the reconsidering of a decision may:
- (a) refuse to reconsider the decision, including on the grounds the application is inadequately particularised or there is insufficient evidence to support the claim;
 - (b) uphold the original decision;
 - (c) substitute an alternative decision for the original decision; or
 - (d) request further information from the applicant or another party before making a final decision.
- 13.6 A decision made under 13.5(a), (b) or (c) is final.

Glossary

Administrator: the body responsible for administering the Scheme.

Approved assessor rules: document that sets down the requirements for becoming an approved assessor and the rules regarding the conduct of assessors when undertaking site assessments and preparing biodiversity management plans.

Approved site assessor: a person who has been approved by the administrator to conduct site assessments and draft biodiversity management plans.

Biodiversity: generally defined as variability among living organisms from all sources (including terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part), and includes diversity within species and between species, and diversity of ecosystems.³

Biodiversity condition score: a measure of the condition of biodiversity that uses a scale between 0 (complete loss of biodiversity value) and 100 (biodiversity values intact). See the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol for further detail on the calculation of the biodiversity condition score.

Biodiversity Friendly logo: a certification stamp or logo which scheme participants will be able to use on their products or in their marketing to demonstrate they are protecting biodiversity. The stamp must be used in accordance with rules determined by the Department.

Biodiversity management plan: a document drafted by an approved assessor in collaboration with the proponent that includes a biodiversity condition score for the relevant property or properties, and sets out property management activities for maintaining biodiversity condition, or achieving projected improvements in biodiversity condition over time. Biodiversity management plans are revised and updated as part of the re-certification cycle.

Biodiversity Management Planning Protocol: is a document that supports the preparation of tailored biodiversity management plans aimed at maintaining and/or improving on-farm biodiversity outcomes. The Protocol sets out how management plans should be prepared and what they are required to contain, and rules regarding the

³ *Convention on Biological Diversity of 5 June 1992, Article 2; Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cth), s 528; Biodiversity Working Group (2019) Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019–2030, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra.*

certification of plans by approved assessors. The Protocol links closely with the Vegetation and Biodiversity Condition Scoring Protocol and the Site Assessment Protocol.

Biodiversity management unit/s: an area of land within a property that may be specified within a Biodiversity Management Plan for particular management actions.

Certification term: is the period of time for which the certification of a farm or farm business under this Scheme is valid. Farms or farm businesses that have been certified at a green or gold level have a certification term of 3 years. Farms or farm businesses that have been certified at provisional level have an initial certification term of 1 year, and a subsequent certification term of 3 years.

Farm business: a farming enterprise with the legal rights to control a property or properties seeking certification under the Scheme.

Farm comparison: the process summarised in 6.12 that allows for the condition of vegetation for biodiversity to be compared to applicable benchmarks for the purposes of initial certification.

National minimum condition threshold: for the purposes of certification, the national minimum condition threshold is a vegetation condition score of 10 out of 100 (where 0 represents complete loss of remnant vegetation and 100 represents undisturbed remnant vegetation). Farms with a vegetation condition score less than 10 are not eligible for certification. See the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol for further detail.

National biodiversity friendly condition benchmark: for the purposes of certification, the national biodiversity friendly condition benchmark is a vegetation condition score of 50 or greater (where 0 represents complete loss of remnant vegetation and 100 represents undisturbed remnant vegetation). See the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol for further detail.

Natural resource management (NRM) region: one of 54 regions in Australia responsible for implementing NRM plans and programs, and delivering on-ground natural resource management activities.

Pre-event biodiversity condition score: the biodiversity condition score calculated for a farm or farm business immediately prior to a natural disturbance event (such as a fire or flood). The use of this score may enable a farm or farm business to retain their level of certification while recovering from a natural disturbance.

Property level vegetation condition score: a measure of the condition of vegetation for biodiversity that uses a scale between 0 and 100 where (0 represents complete loss of native vegetation and 100 represents undisturbed remnant vegetation). The method

for determining property level vegetation condition scores is detailed in the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol.

Regional condition assessment: the process for assessing and scoring the condition of vegetation for biodiversity in NRM regions, summarised in 6.11 and detailed in the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol.

Regional condition benchmark: an estimate of the weighted average condition of vegetation for biodiversity in the NRM region or regions in which applicant properties are located. See 6.12 and the Vegetation Condition and Biodiversity Scoring Protocol.

Register: a list of Biodiversity Friendly farms and farm businesses maintained by the administrator as a record of certification under this Scheme.

Remnant vegetation: is uncleared native vegetation or regrowth native vegetation that, with appropriate management, could achieve the structure and composition of the original native vegetation community in the next two decades.

Reporting template: is a document that sets down the requirements for reporting under the Scheme, including the maintenance of provisional certification, re-certification and where there is an event that materially affects the condition of biodiversity.

Site assessment: an assessment of a site subject to certification or re-certification under the Scheme by an approved assessor, according to the requirements outlined in the Site Assessment Protocol.

Site Assessment Protocol: a document that outlines the requirements for conducting site assessments by an approved site assessor in order to calculate biodiversity condition scores and draft (or revise) biodiversity management plans for a farm or farm business.

Standard: (this document) which sets out the overarching rules and procedures for the certification of Biodiversity Friendly farms and farm businesses under the Scheme.

Vegetation and biodiversity condition scoring protocol: a document published by the administrator that contains the method for scoring the condition of vegetation and biodiversity under the Scheme. The Protocol is required to be followed when calculating the vegetation condition scores and applicable regional condition benchmarks that are used when assessing eligibility for certification and the biodiversity condition scores used for re-certification.