

I advocate for a full rate exemption for all properties in Victoria with conservation covenants. This would align with NSW, which offers a complete exemption in-perpetuity for land with conservation covenants (see NSWs' Local Government Act [s 555 \(1\) \(b2\)](#))

Under a conservation covenant on the land title, landholders commit in perpetuity to:

1. provide protected land for the National Reserves System under the Protected Area criteria established by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The land is counted by both Victorian and Australian governments as part of their international obligations.
2. protecting and enhancing the land for conservation purposes as **directed** by a Conservation Management Plan drawn up by the Trust for Nature under the Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972.
3. have to carry out management activities at their own cost focussed on biodiversity management, not focussed on farm enterprise management or property development for monetary reward.
4. forego development rights often at significant personal cost.
5. provide substantial gains for the local council and community, for example by retaining and enhancing tourism potential by maintaining the environmental values.
6. aid other State Government programs such as threatened species recovery plans, catchment management plans, soil conservation, biolink connectivity, and water recharge to aquifers. Other benefits of covenants include ecosystem resilience, weed and vermin control, and lowered cost to local government for environmental management activities including reduced road-side management. Native vegetation regeneration and restoration and ground cover sequesters huge amounts of carbon dioxide.

The State government has committed to permanently protect an additional 200,000 ha of private land under its Biodiversity 2037 strategy. To achieve this goal 11,000 ha per year need to be covenanted, and at the present rate of covenanting this goal will exceed 15,000 ha per year by 2024. To get anywhere near the governments own target, incentives need to be provided to landholders to help defray some of the additional costs of managing covenanted land and the best incentive is to reduce rates on covenanted land to zero.

The bottom line is that conservation covenants on private land should be recognised as a 'public good' and supported/incentivised through effective policy such as exemption from municipal rates.