There are many issues surrounding native vegetation in an agricultural environment. The Yarra Ranges has a Green Wedge Management Plan to support agricultural land in the region.

One issue relates to reclaiming previous agricultural land which has not been used for production purposes for many years. Often land previously used for agriculture is sold to hobby farmers and lifestyleers who during their ownership allow segments of native vegetation to take hold in areas on the land. Once these properties are available for sale and are again potential agricultural land, they are often no longer suitable for future agricultural use due to these ‘pockets’ of native vegetation. These areas of native vegetation are unable to be cleared, thus reducing the availability for farmers in the region to increase their farm size and remain competitive and sustainable, or for new crops to be planted when paddock fencing or general farm planning cannot be done where the native vegetation stands.

Currently farmers who wish to plant wind breaks are restricted by the types of trees suitable for windbreaks that can be planted. Farmers would be more inclined to plant native vegetation wind breaks if they were allowed to do so under a permit system, that allowed native plants to be removed at a later date when necessary for farm planning and management. Should a producer wish to change the layout of the farm, change paddock sizing or for new crop planting then existing windbreaks would need to be removed. Currently there is an "incentive" for growers to plant classified noxious weeds hedges and wind breaks, with species such as Willow and Pinus Radiata as no permit is required for their removal.

A permit system for horticulture and agriculture that would allow growers to remove ‘native vegetation’ hedges and windbreaks would increase the number of native vegetation plantings. Cypress Canker Virus is decimating substantial populations of cypress wind breaks across the region. Controls that allow native vegetation plantings to replace these windbreaks would be an asset.

Having the ability to register a native hedge for horticultural production, ie foliage or flowers, that could then be later removed without a permit would increase native vegetation planting. This would not impact on already existing native vegetation but allow an increase in short term native plantings.

Another issue raised in the region and would be relevant to other Victorian farming regions is native vegetation removal on dam walls. Melbourne Water deems it necessary to remove vegetation that can destroy the integrity of a dam. Indeed for large farm dams they require an engineer’s assessment every 5 years and removal of any large trees is vital to the dam structure’s integrity and must be removed. However Yarra Ranges Council do not approve the removal of such trees.

We understand there are conflicts with land use and native vegetation, and wish to strike a balance with sustainable agriculture and the retention of high value native vegetation.