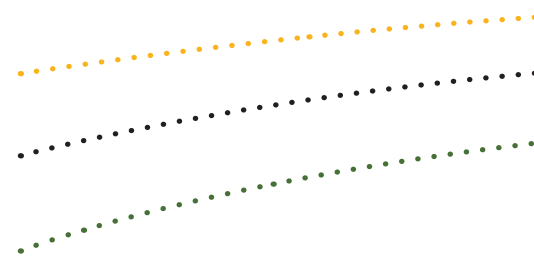




**Australian Government**

**Department of Sustainability, Environment,  
Water, Population and Communities**



# FARMING AND NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT LAW

*The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act)*

Farmers need to know about Australia's national environment law as some agricultural activities may need federal government approval. This could be in addition to state or local government approvals.

National environment law protects matters that are of national environmental significance. Those most relevant to farmers are:

- nationally threatened and migratory species
- nationally threatened ecological communities
- wetlands of international importance
- world and national heritage properties, and
- the Great Barrier Reef.

New farm activities, such as land clearing, may require approval from the federal environment minister under national environment law.

If you are unsure, it is best to check by calling the department's environment liaison officer on **1800 704 520**. You should also check state and local governments' approval requirements.

## Protected matters on your farm

National environment law only applies to matters of national environmental significance. You can check if there are likely to be protected matters on or near your property by contacting the department's environment liaison officer or by using the environment reporting tool at [www.environment.gov.au/farming](http://www.environment.gov.au/farming).

## Do I need federal approval for all my farming activities?

No. You can continue routine farm activities without approval if they began before national environment law was introduced in July 2000. Only new farm activities that are likely to have a significant impact on a protected matter may need approval.

## Will my activity have a significant impact?

Whether or not the impacts of an activity are significant depends on several factors, including how long the impact will last and the sensitivity of a nationally protected matter. The environment liaison officer can give you advice, and guidelines are available at [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/guidelines-policies.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/guidelines-policies.html). If you are unsure, you should check, otherwise you may accidentally break the law.



[environment.gov.au/farming](http://environment.gov.au/farming)  
[nff.org.au/policy/nrm](http://nff.org.au/policy/nrm)



## How do I get approval?

If you think your activity could have a significant impact on a protected matter, or you just want to be certain that it won't, you will need to refer your actions to the federal environment department. A referral form is available at [www.environment.gov.au/epbc](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc).

Once referred the department will notify you within 20 business days whether or not approval is required, and if so how it will be assessed. You can contact the environment liaison officer for help or a more detailed explanation of the process.

## What happens if I break the law?

If you think you may have broken the law, it is best to contact the federal environment department as soon as possible to explain what has happened. The department may be able to work cooperatively with you to repair any damage to the environment.

The department investigates all alleged breaches of the law and takes compliance very seriously. Not knowing the law or your obligations under it is not an excuse. There can be significant penalties for non-compliance with the law including gaol terms and penalties of up to \$5.5 million.

## Can I get government assistance?

There are several programs to help farmers and others manage our natural resources and nationally protected matters, such as threatened species and ecological communities. You can contact the environment liaison officer for more information.

### Where can I get information?

The department has an environment liaison officer, Jol Taber, outposted at the National Farmers' Federation, specifically to help farmers. He is available to give you free advice on matters relating to national environment law and how it applies to your farm business.

Jol is available on **1800 704 520** or via email at [environment@nff.org.au](mailto:environment@nff.org.au).

There is also information, including examples of compliance cases and farm activities that have been referred for approval at [www.environment.gov.au/farming](http://www.environment.gov.au/farming).



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