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A Decision Support Tool for Biolink projects on the Mornington Peninsula

Prepared for: Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

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1 Introduction

1.1 Biodiversity on the Mornington Peninsula

The Mornington Peninsula contains a wide range of ecosystems, from sandy beaches to freshwater wetlands, and escarpments to woodlands, which support a diversity of flora, fauna and vegetation communities. Since European settlement, vegetation clearance, land use change and other drivers have led to widespread environmental change. Extensive habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation have occurred as a result, with less than a third of the original native vegetation remaining, and many species having declined or become locally extinct. Although the rate of vegetation clearing has slowed, biodiversity on the Mornington Peninsula continues to be impacted by the consequences of historic, broad-scale vegetation loss. Despite this, many areas on the Mornington Peninsula continue to support a high diversity of species, some of which no longer occur in other areas, and are recognised as ecologically significant on a Victorian or national scale.

1.2 The Mornington Peninsula Biodiversity Conservation Plan

The Mornington Peninsula Shire Council recently approved a Biodiversity Conservation Plan to support the Shire's management of biodiversity (Ecology Australia 2019). The Biodiversity Conservation Plan provides guidance and direction for biodiversity management and resource allocation, and identifies long-term goals to protect and improve the resilience of the Mornington Peninsula's natural landscapes, ecosystems and biodiversity.

The Biodiversity Conservation Plan recognises the importance of conservation on all land tenures including private and public land, and the role of habitat connectivity in improving ecosystem resilience, in the following drivers for management:

- The diverse natural environments across the Mornington Peninsula are fragmented, and vary in quality, values and management needs and priorities.
- Many of the Peninsula's biodiversity values (c. 57% of remnant vegetation) are on private land; and
- Increasing the extent, health and connectivity of remnant vegetation and reducing threats, can support biodiversity and its resilience.

The Biodiversity Conservation Plan contains a framework with objectives and actions, sitting under six strategic directions, to develop and implement long-term planning policies to manage biodiversity. This includes a specific action to develop a decision tool to prioritise biolinks, with the objective of enhancing landscape connectivity and building ecosystem resilience (Figure 1). This document addresses this action to create a Decision Support Tool to support the prioritisation of biolinks, and is guided by the drivers and objectives of the Biodiversity Conservation Plan.

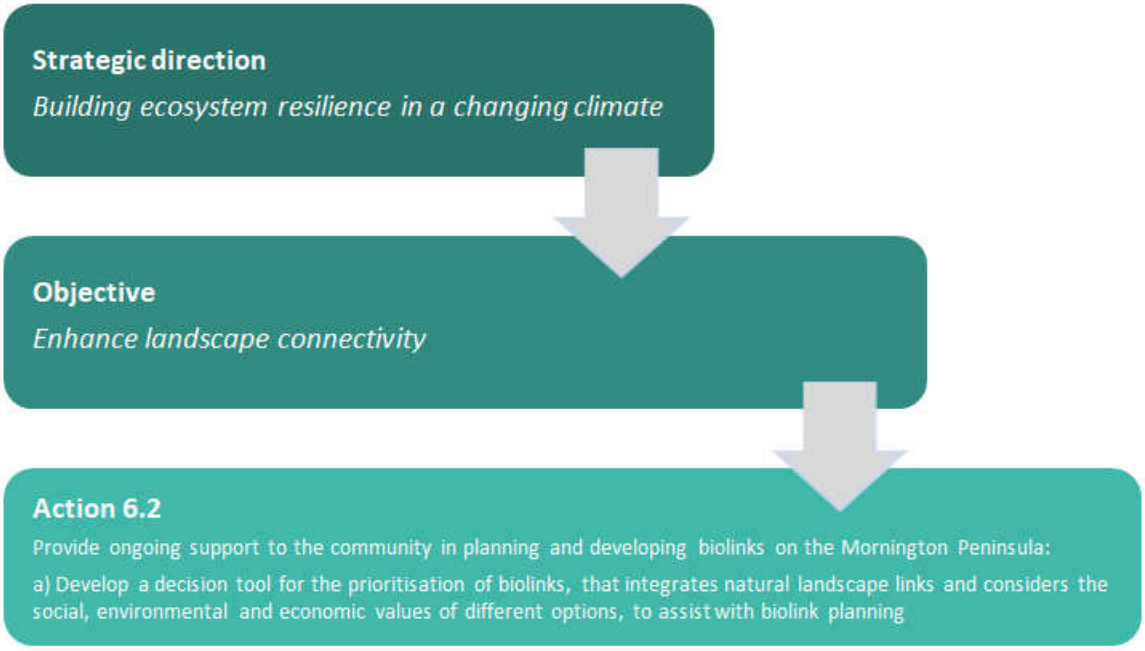


Figure 1 Diagram showing how the Decision Support Tool to prioritise biolinks sits within the Mornington Peninsula Biodiversity Conservation Plan framework.

1.3 Purpose of this document

The Mornington Peninsula Shire seeks to understand how it can best support biolinks projects on an ongoing basis, aligning with the objectives and actions of the Mornington Peninsula Biodiversity Conservation Plan (Figure 1). It also seeks to provide a tool for self-assessment for persons or groups considering creating a biolink. This document provides decision support for the Shire, including scope for suitable projects and a decision tool for prioritising applications. The document contains:

- An overview of biolinks, their benefits and challenges;
- An objective, scope and principles for the provision of support from the Shire;
- Guidance for the decision-making process, including:
  - A Feasibility Checklist to screen applications during the pre-selection stage; and
  - A Decision Support Tool, supported by a sensitivity analysis and scenario testing.
- Information required from applicants to assist with prioritisation using the Decision Support Tool; and
- Suggestions for monitoring methods that applicants can use to report on project progress, completion and outcomes.

2 Overview: Biolinks as a tool for conservation

2.1 What is a biolink?

Habitat loss and fragmentation are key threats to biodiversity in Victoria (DELWP 2016). For native wildlife, vegetation clearance not only results in less habitat being available; remaining habitat is frequently fragmented, degraded and less connected across the landscape (Saunders et al. 1991). Wildlife populations can become isolated in fragmented habitats, if their movement capabilities and dispersal are restricted, leading to increased vulnerability and reduced long-term population viability (Wilcox & Murphy 1985; Gilpin and Soule 1986; Kattan et al. 1994). A biolink, also known as a habitat corridor (Wyborn 2011), links separate habitat patches and aims to support biodiversity by:

- reducing fragmentation by building upon and ultimately connecting habitat patches that have been subdivided, reduced and/or isolated;
- providing habitat for wildlife that can persist in narrow corridors, or use them for foraging, breeding or sheltering;
- providing pathways for individual animals to move between patches;
- facilitating genetic exchange between populations in isolated habitat patches, therefore reducing their risk of local extinction;
- enabling recolonisation of patches where species are locally extinct; and
- enabling species to disperse to areas with more suitable climatic conditions in the face of climate change.

Biolinks have been found to effectively increase movement between patches for a broad range of species (Haddad et al. 2003; Gilbert-Norton et al. 2010). Species that cannot move through unsuitable habitat or that rely upon metapopulation dynamics to recolonise habitat following population declines, are thought to benefit considerably from biolinks.

Connections between habitat patches can also help to maintain species richness (e.g. for plants, Damschen et al. 2006) and can also act as habitat themselves (e.g. for frogs and mammals; Bennett 1990, Hansen et al. 2019). While groups of species that can move through unsuitable areas surrounding habitat patches (the “matrix”), such as birds, may not rely upon biolinks for dispersal, they may still benefit from additional foraging and sheltering resources.

2.2 How is the biolink approach different?

Creating biolinks shifts the focus of conservation from actions to benefit single species to broad, landscape-scale improvements (Wyborn 2012), which should theoretically provide habitat for multiple species and represent more cost-effective investments. Improving landscape connectivity is an appealing and inclusive vision, and can increase opportunities for citizen science and engagement from locals who want to contribute to large, tangible conservation outcomes (Wyborn 2012). However, this landscape-scale, tenure-blind vision must be enacted at a local scale, and needs cooperation and commitment from government, multiple agencies, Non-Government Organisations and private landholders (Wyborn 2011).

2.3 Challenges to creating successful biolinks

Biolinks may seem like a panacea for delivering big biodiversity benefits; however, their importance can be controversial (Lindenmayer & Fischer 2006). They may fall short of their intentions to provide both connectivity and habitat for target species in a number of ways.

2.3.1 Biolinks for connectivity

While landscape connectivity is generally undertaken on a human scale by connecting vegetation patches within and across properties, the scale and requirements for habitat connectivity will vary considerably depending on the target species (Lindenmayer & Fischer 2006). Movement patterns can influence whether a species uses biolinks (Chetkiewicz et al. 2006) and over what time scale. Some species may have small home ranges, disperse at a slow rate, or be unwilling to move through the matrix. As a result, they may not be recorded using a biolink within the expected timeframe if they do not already occur in habitat nearby. In contrast, some species are more mobile or flexible in habitat use, or can easily move through the matrix. These species may not select biolinks over other areas, if they can forage and shelter elsewhere.

2.3.2 Biolinks for habitat

Fragmentation may not be the primary constraint limiting species occurrence — it frequently occurs in concert with other processes, such as habitat loss or degradation, which may be more important drivers of species decline (Fischer and Lindenmayer 2006; Fahrig 2003). If species are more susceptible to changes in habitat quality, it may be more cost-effective to ensure high quality habitat patches persist across the landscape (Wintle et al. 2019), rather than to connect lower quality areas. For example, Gardiner et al. (2018) found that Eastern Bettongs, which can traverse the matrix, occurred in areas supporting a greater total area of higher quality habitat, rather than in larger, or more connected patches.

Some species may not use biolinks if other conditions are sub-optimal, or if the biolink does not contain essential habitat features or physical conditions. Fischer and Lindenmayer (2006) proposed that each species occupies a 'gradient' in the landscape, needing multiple conditions to align for good habitat, e.g. food, shelter and suitable climate. For example, reptiles and frogs were less likely to occur in biolinks that lacked regular flooding or upland areas (Burbrink et al. 1998). As such, detailed habitat preferences and ecological requirements of the target species also need consideration when planning biolinks that aim to create habitat for specific species.

Corridors and small habitat patches tend to have a higher proportion of habitat 'edges', which increases exposure to external threats such as weeds or predators (Fahrig 2003). For example, weed invasion and predation pressure from Red Foxes and Cats can be higher in linear road corridors compared with larger forest patches, making them less suitable for native mammals (Bennett 1990). Similarly, the Black Rat has been recorded in abundance in biolinks, which may limit their use by native species such as Bush Rats (Downes et al. 1997 in Beier & Noss 1998). Further, some species thrive in edge habitats, and can out-compete other wildlife living in small or narrow areas of habitat. For example, Clarke & Oldland (2007) found that the width of habitat corridors in Gippsland Plains Grassy Woodland would need to exceed 300 m to not be entirely occupied by Noisy Miners *Manorina melanocephala*, which favour edge habitats and exclude other woodland birds.

2.4 Practical considerations for planning biolinks

As a permanent fixture in the landscape, subject to ongoing environmental threats, a biolink requires continuing investment and management. Without sustained investment from land managers, or stewardship from the local community, a biolink's capacity to provide quality habitat and support biodiversity is likely to diminish over time. This creates the need for biolink focused projects; many of which require additional resources and funding beyond what the land manager or community group can provide. Requests for resources and funding need to be weighed up based on their benefits to biodiversity and likelihood of success, considering risks and costs associated with each proposal.

Biolink projects may be more effective if a transparent approach to planning is applied, including realistic objectives linking their success to a target species or community, and consideration of economic and social constraints (Miller and Hobbs 2007).

Monitoring is important to assess whether goals have been met, to adapt methods, to share success stories and to learn from findings, and to demonstrate that investment in biolinks is worthwhile. However, it can be challenging to capture this information without establishing a monitoring framework prior to implementation. Clear objectives that can be assessed with standardised methods, e.g. species richness or individual target species trends, may demonstrate that a biolink is successfully providing connectivity and habitat.

Biolinks may also cross multiple tenures, and occur in densely settled areas; as such, cooperation from a range of stakeholders and land managers is required. Early involvement with stakeholders provides an opportunity to identify any social constraints — ensuring the project is acceptable to the community — and to improve understanding and support for the project (Miller and Hobbs 2007). Development of a shared vision with stakeholders can incorporate the strengths of a diverse community, increase shared ownership and stewardship, and support the successful implementation of the project (Keeley et al. 2018).

3 Objective, Scope and Principles for Biolink projects

3.1 Objective

The overall objective guides the scope for the assessment of biolink projects, and can be used as a self-assessment or performance measure:

"Improve habitat connectivity and enable movement of wildlife across the Mornington Peninsula, by creating new corridors and/or maintaining or improving the quality of existing corridors"

3.2 Scope

Successful biolink projects may fall into one of two categories: those that increase the area of native vegetation, or those that improve or maintain the quality of existing corridors or vegetation, as follows:

1. The project increases the extent of native vegetation, to reduce the distance between neighbouring patches or connect patches of native vegetation:
    (i) The project expands on an existing patch of native vegetation
    (ii) The project creates intermediate patches ('nodes' or 'stepping stones') between existing patches of native vegetation
    (iii) The project links existing patches of native vegetation
2. The project improves the quality of existing corridors or connecting native vegetation to facilitate the movement of wildlife:
    (i) The project reduces the threat of environmental weeds in an existing corridor of native vegetation or revegetation, e.g. environmental weed control
    (ii) The project reduces threats to an existing corridor of native vegetation or revegetation, from herbivores through grazing, browsing or trampling, e.g. fencing of waterways, native vegetation or revegetation
    (iii) The project creates or improves habitat components to enable the movement of wildlife, e.g. shrub layer revegetation
    (iv) The project facilitates the natural regeneration of vegetation to improve habitat quality and enable the movement of wildlife, e.g. fencing to support regeneration

The following actions are not included within the scope for biolinks projects:

- Predator control
- Projects that solely comprise nest box instalment or community engagement or education.

3.3 Principles

The following principles identify themes and project components considered important to achieve the desired outcomes of an intended biolink project, and will help to guide decision making:

- Projects should aim to create or maintain contiguous areas of high-quality native vegetation that:
    - Contain habitat features that enable the movement of wildlife
    - Connect patches of existing habitat; and ultimately
    - Support the occurrence of native plants and wildlife and enable connectivity across the landscape
- Protecting existing high-quality habitat, followed by supporting regeneration of lower-quality habitat, is more cost-effective than creating new habitat, and has better biodiversity outcomes
- Each cohort of successful projects should aim to protect a diversity of species, vegetation communities and landscapes across the Mornington Peninsula
- Projects are more likely to be effective if they have the support of multiple landowners or stakeholders, or if they receive considerable community energy
- Community education and engagement can increase support for, and participation in, biolink projects
- Monitoring and reporting is an integral component of projects to ensure accountability, to track successes and to enable improvement over time.

4 Decision Making Process

4.1 Pre-selection stage: Identifying suitable applications for the Decision Support Tool

Prior to using the Decision Support Tool, potential biolink projects will be filtered (Figure 2) to ensure:

- they are within the scope for Mornington Peninsula biolink projects;
- the applicants have completed monitoring and reporting requirements on previously projects, if relevant; and
- No impediments to project delivery have been identified (that cannot be resolved), using the Feasibility checklist (see Section 4.1.1).

Some applications may not be within the scope for Mornington Peninsula biolink projects; however support may potentially be available through other pathways, for example, ongoing predator control efforts, or once-off projects that prevent irreversible damage to biodiversity assets, e.g. fencing wetlands supporting threatened species. These pathways may vary year-by-year, depending on Mornington Peninsula Shire policy and priorities.

4.1.1 Screening projects for feasibility

Project feasibility, influencing whether a project is successfully delivered, can be affected by a broad range of factors. While feasibility may be impacted by unforeseen events, there are several factors, such as cultural heritage sensitivity, planning restrictions or site access, which may impede project delivery and can be anticipated.

A Feasibility Checklist has been developed to identify aspects of potential projects that lack feasibility during the pre-selection stage (Table 1 and Appendix 1). Applications that are run through the Feasibility Checklist will have one of three outcomes:

1. **Category 1:** No foreseen feasibility issues can be identified, and/or the applicant has identified issues and provided mitigation measures to reduce the risk to successful project delivery.
2. **Category 2:** Feasibility issues could potentially be resolved. Applicants may revise their applications to reduce or remove the feasibility risk, prior to resubmission. Resubmitted applications may then be allocated to Category 1 (if all issues have been revolved or effectively mitigated) or Category 3.
3. **Category 3:** Feasibility issues are identified, and are considered unresolvable. In these cases, the application will be deemed unsuitable.

4.2 Decision Support Tool application

The Mornington Peninsula Shire will be able to use the Decision Support Tool to assess biolink project proposals and consider support via a set of questions against which each proposal is scored, relating to:

- Site values and suitability;
- Community and economic considerations;
- Feasibility and effectiveness; and
- Monitoring and reporting.

The Decision Support Tool is provided and explained in Section 5.

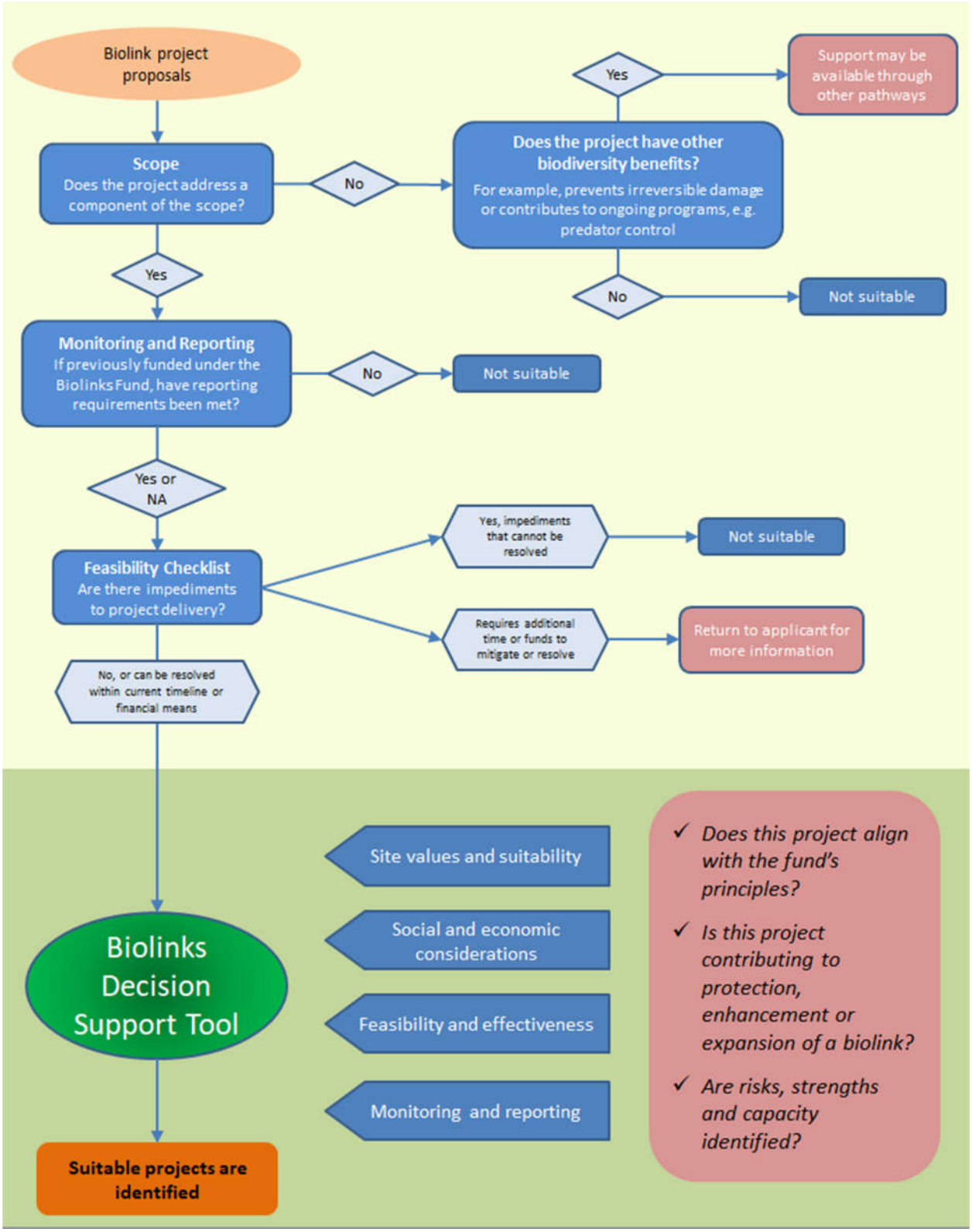
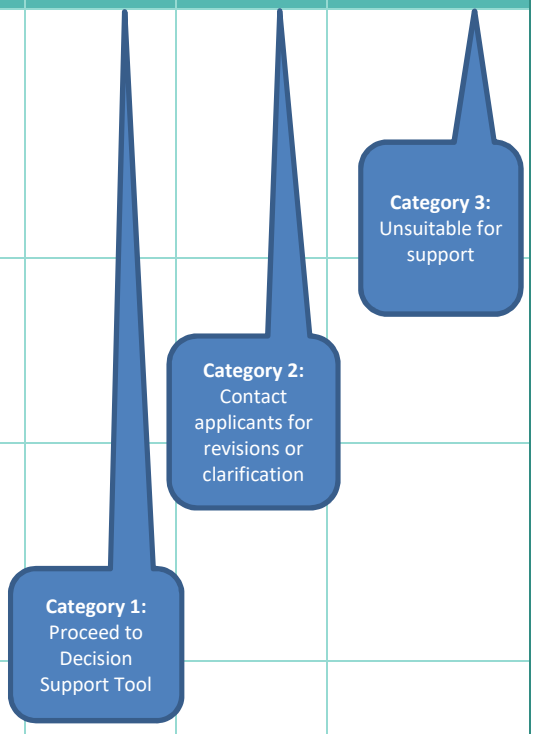


Figure 2 **Flow chart showing the proposed process for identifying suitable biolink projects for support, including a pre-selection stage (cream shading) and the Biolink Decision Support Tool (olive shading).**

Table 1 Feasibility Checklist questions to be used during the pre-selection stage to identify a) projects that are unfeasible and unsuitable, and b) projects that require clarification from applicants to reduce the risk of potential feasibility issues.

Feasibility issue	No	Potentially	Yes - unresolvable
Are there potential cultural heritage impacts? Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, significant impacts to cultural heritage values may be incurred if activities such as ground disturbance occur within areas of cultural heritage sensitivity, e.g. near waterways. A cultural heritage management plan may be required if the project is within an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.			
Are there potential impacts on non-target biodiversity? Some actions may have unintended negative impacts on other biodiversity values, e.g. fencing may restrict macropod access to habitat; environmental weed control may destroy habitat used by native species.			
Does this project pose any potential impacts on neighbouring landholders and/or land managers? If so, do they consent to the project being delivered? Some projects may have indirect impacts on neighbouring landholders, e.g. reduce access to waterways, affect views, or redirect wildlife to their property.			
Are there potential issues with feasibility of the methods? Methods may be unfeasible, e.g. environmental weed control methods are not fit-for-purpose or chemicals are restricted. Alternatively, the site may be difficult or unsafe to access, especially if needing vehicle access.			
Will maintenance obligations potentially interfere with this project? e.g. Site may be in the vicinity of road, sewerage or gas alignments.			
Are there potential legislative or policy restrictions? There may be restrictions on what vegetation can be added or removed if planning (e.g. Vegetation Protection, defendable space, Clause 52.17), policy (e.g. Green Wedge Management Plan) or legislative issues (e.g. weeds providing habitat to EPBC-listed threatened species) apply.			
Do features of the proposed methods inhibit their effectiveness? e.g. Corridor width is too narrow to support target species.			
Are there other potential impediments the Assessment Panel can identify? The Panel may identify other potential impediments, such as potential risks associated with a changing climate affecting project delivery, e.g. increased frequency of hot, dry weather or floods.			



5 Decision Support Tool

Following the pre-selection stage, all suitable applications will be assessed together using the Decision Support Tool — a set of questions against which each application is scored, from each of four categories:

- **Site values and suitability**

  What is the existing quality of the habitat to be protected or improved, and how will this project improve habitat connectivity at the site?

- **Community and economic considerations**

  What are the social aspects that may improve the likelihood of this project delivering its expected biodiversity outcomes, and are there economic considerations that will influence the successful delivery of the project?

- **Feasibility and effectiveness**

  How likely is it that this project will be effectively delivered, and if so, is it likely to achieve the desired biodiversity outcomes?

- **Monitoring and reporting**

  How will the project's outcomes be monitored and communicated?

Further supporting information on each of the four Decision Support Tool categories is provided in Section 5.2. The Decision Support Tool, including all questions, rankings and associated scores is provided in Appendix 2. A Sensitivity Analysis, exploring the effect on the final DST score of varying the ranking for different questions, is provided in Appendix 3. Appendix 4 provides a series of imagined application scenarios and associated scoring using the DST, to see how different types of applications are likely to be ranked when assessed side-by-side. Appendix 5 lists information required from applicants (to be requested in the application form) to prioritise applications using the Decision Support Tool, and Appendix 6 provides suggested monitoring methods that applicants can use to report on project progress, completion and outcomes.

5.1 Scoring and weighting questions

Where the Mornington Peninsula is considering providing direct or indirect support to biolink projects, an assessment panel will allocate the applications a score for each question in the Decision Support Tool drawing on the following:

- information provided in the application;
- spatial information drawn from online information systems;
- results of the feasibility checklist; and
- records kept by the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

To ensure that resources are allocated to the projects that are most likely to deliver the best biodiversity outcomes, it is important to recognise that some aspects of projects are more important than others in determining their ranking. This is reflected in the weighting associated with each question. Those with relatively higher potential maximum scores or weighting will contribute more to the final scores that prioritise projects for support. Some questions will not be applicable to every application, e.g. questions

regarding the quality of habitat to be improved do not apply to revegetation projects. The Decision Support Tool only counts scores on relevant questions towards the overall score. Relative weightings for specific questions and categories are discussed in the sections below.

5.2 Decision Support Tool categories

5.2.1 Site Values and Suitability

This category assess the ecological values of existing habitat at or adjacent to the proposed project site, including the surrounding habitat that the project site links to. The quality of existing habitat is scored, as is the likelihood that the site supports rare or threatened species or communities, particularly if a project is aiming to improve habitat for that species. This category also examines the potential for the project site to improve connectivity with surrounding vegetation and landscape features, both at present and into the future.

The value statements below indicate how scoring was guided. Questions within the Site Values and Suitability category are generally weighted highly, as the Shire considers it important to protect existing high quality habitat (see Section 3.3). Table 2 provides further details on questions within this category.

Value statements

- Project sites that are adjacent to, or part of, larger areas of native vegetation, areas of higher quality habitat, or areas supporting more significant biodiversity values, rank higher
- Project sites that are close to sealed roads rank lower
- Project sites that support the biodiversity values the project is targeting, rank higher
- Project sites that are closer to existing vegetation, or natural landscape links, rank higher
- Project sites that adjoin areas of revegetation, representing future vegetation, rank higher, but to a lesser extent
- Project sites that sit within the Landcare Biolinks map, representing priority areas for corridors, rank higher

Table 2 Site values and suitability questions in the Biolinks Decision Support Tool.

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
1.1 How large is the existing habitat/vegetation patch at the project site?	Provided by applicant, confirmed with Google Earth Pro or ArcGIS (Panel)	Very high
Reflects the area of habitat that will be connected to the project site, indicating the potential likelihood of ecological values using the project site as a corridor. If the project comprises revegetation of a non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If the project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.		
1.2 What is the average value of the surrounding area according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping?	Biodiversity Significance Mapping (BSM) spatial layer	Very high

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
	(Panel)	
Provides an index of habitat quality in the surrounding area, considering native vegetation condition, patch size, occurrence of significant values etc. If the project comprises revegetation of a non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If the project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.		
1.3 How intact is existing vegetation?	Representative photos (Applicant)	Moderate
Provides a fine-scale index of vegetation quality at the site, reflecting the need for habitat improvement and the likelihood of the habitat to currently support ecological values. If the project comprises revegetation of a non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If the project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.		
1.4 What is the percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site?	Representative photos (Applicant)	Moderate
A broad-scale index of vegetation quality at the project site. Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.		
1.5 How close is the perimeter of the project site to a sealed road?	Provided by applicant, verified by panel using Google Earth Pro	Lower
Proximity to major roads may increase the risk of mortality for fauna using the habitat corridor.		
1.6a What is the average value of the project site according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping?	BSM spatial layer (Panel)	Very high
Provides an index of habitat quality at the project site, considering native vegetation condition, patch size, occurrence of significant values etc. Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.		
1.6b Only if Biodiversity Significance Mapping value is Very Low, have significant values been recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat in the last 5–10 years?	Evidence provided by applicant, e.g. photos or VBA records	High
Complements question 1.6a, by accounting for any significant values recorded since development of the Biodiversity Significance Mapping, or records not submitted to the government database. Considers taxa or communities listed under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*, included in Victorian Government Advisory Lists or Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs) considered Endangered, Vulnerable or Depleted in the Gippsland Plain Bioregion.		
1.7 If the project is targeting specific biodiversity values (e.g. species or EVC), how long since it was recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat?	Evidence provided by applicant, e.g. photos or VBA records	Very high
Provides a further index of habitat quality and project suitability. If the project is aiming to create or improve habitat for a certain species, consider the likelihood that it will use or colonise the habitat.		
1.8 How close is the project site to high-value/intact vegetation?	BSM spatial layer (Panel) Photos or VBA records (Applicant)	Very high
An index of the degree of connectivity that the project will provide to or from existing habitat. High-value or intact		

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
vegetation recognised as having a Very High value on BSM, or occupied by the target species, where relevant.		
1.9 Does the project site adjoin a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage line, coastal dunes etc.	Provided by applicant, verified by panel using Google Earth Pro	Moderate
An index of the degree of connectivity that the project will provide to or from existing habitat.		
1.10 How close is the project site to other sites of revegetation projects?	Provided by applicant, verified by panel using Google Earth Pro or Shire records	Lower
An index of the degree of connectivity that the project will provide to or from areas of future habitat.		
1.11 Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map?	Provided by applicant, verified by panel	Moderate
An index of the importance of the project site for landscape connectivity across the Mornington Peninsula. The Landcare Biolinks map reflects areas of remnant vegetation, natural landscape links and expert opinion.		

5.2.2 Community and Economic Considerations

This category considers the impact of community and economic factors on the likelihood of successful delivery of the proposed project, and the maintenance and protection of biodiversity benefits at the project site. If the applicant is supported by a network or organisation, or a collaboration of neighbours, their application ranks higher. The Community category also considers whether the applicant has a track record of undertaking environmental works on their property, whether on-going maintenance will be required and the capacity of the applicant to deliver the works and ongoing maintenance.

The Economic category considers whether the applicant is providing in-kind contributions, and the degree of ongoing funding or contributions required to maintain the benefits of the works in future. The Application Panel also assess whether the proposed project represents good value-for-money.

The value statements below indicate how scoring was guided. Questions within the Community and Economic Considerations category vary in weighting, and cover a range of different aspects that may influence success of the proposed works. Table 3 provides further details on questions within this category.

Value statements

- Projects that are supported by an official network, e.g. Landcare or Friends group rank higher; those that are supported by an unofficial network rank slightly lower. A network provides technical/logistical support during the project and potentially ongoing
- Applicants that have received other environmental works funding, OR the Conservation Land Rate, rank higher, as evidence of commitment to environmental work son their property
- Projects that are part of a research project rank higher, as do those that contain elements of community engagement or education

- Applicants that can commit to delivering the project, and to ongoing maintenance of the project, either themselves, through community groups or contractors, rank higher
- Applicants that provide a higher level of in-kind contribution rank higher
- Projects that require higher levels of ongoing funding rank lower; projects that have partial or full future funding available rank higher. However, even if ongoing funding is available, if more than $1K is required, full points cannot be achieved, as risk of failure is higher
- Projects that represent good value for money rank higher

Table 3 Community and economic considerations questions in the Biolinks Decision Support Tool.

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
2.1a Is the project part of a broader project involving multiple partners, e.g. LMPL, MPSC, Friends groups, CMA, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria?	Applicant. Provide evidence of auspice if relevant	High
For example, working with Linking Mornington Peninsula's Landscapes (Landcare), Friends groups, the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, the Port Phillip and Western Port Catchment Management Authority, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria. Collaborative landscape projects are likely to have high community energy to support them through logistical challenges and ongoing maintenance, as well as more on-ground and technical expertise and experience to successfully deliver projects.		
2.1b If not, is this project part of a larger landscape project involving multiple applicants, but not under the umbrella of an organisation?	Applicant	Moderate
For example, a group of neighbours putting in applications for projects that all address a set of connected habitat patches. Collaborative local projects are likely to have high community energy to support them through logistical challenges and ongoing maintenance, may be more cost-effective, and are likely to create more extensive habitat improvements.		
2.2a Has the applicant previously received grants to undertake works at the site, which are in progress or have been completed successfully? Not including the Conservation Land Rate.	Applicant. Verified by Shire where possible	Moderate
A history of environmental works at the site may reflect a high level of ongoing dedication to the habitat and increase the likelihood of ongoing maintenance following the project.		
2.2b If no to above, does the applicant receive a Conservation Land Rate? (Previously the Sustainability rebate)	Applicant. Verified by Shire where possible	Moderate
A history of environmental works at the site may reflect a high level of ongoing dedication to the habitat and increase the likelihood of ongoing maintenance following the project.		
2.3 Is the project part of a research project?	Applicant	Lower
Collaborating with a research or teaching organisation may return additional benefits such as filling knowledge gaps, improved monitoring outcomes and high levels of dedication to the project.		
2.4 Does the project contain elements of community engagement or education?	Applicant	Moderate
Although not specifically supported through the program, projects that include a component of community		

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
engagement or education may increase community awareness and interest in the Biolinks program and environmental management in general.		
2.5 Will ongoing maintenance of this project be supported by community initiatives, e.g. LMPL, Friends groups?	Applicant	Lower
If the applicant is part of a community initiative contributing to on-ground works (see 2.1a), they may also support ongoing maintenance and increase the likelihood of its successful delivery.		
2.6 Is the applicant able to commit to delivering the project?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Lower
Some factors may impede an applicant's capacity to deliver the project. For example, applicants do not live on site, site owned by multiple parties, physically incapable etc.		
2.7 Does the applicant have the capacity to maintain the site beyond the term of the grant?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	High
As above, some factors may impede an applicant's capacity to maintain the benefits of the works beyond the term of the project. For example, applicants do not live on site, site owned by multiple parties, physically incapable etc.		
2.8 Is the applicant contributing funding or in-kind contributions to deliver this project?	Applicant	Very high
In-kind contributions increase the magnitude of works and biodiversity benefits possible through a project. They may also reflect dedication to the project and may improve likelihood of delivery and ongoing maintenance.		
2.9a Does this action require ongoing funding or in-kind contributions (in person-days) to sustain benefits beyond the project?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Very high
Projects requiring higher degrees of ongoing funding or in-kind contributions may be considered higher risk, as they may be more prone to lapses in maintenance and declines in longer term biodiversity benefits.		
2.9b If yes, will ongoing funding or in-kind contributions be available beyond this project? (see questions above)	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Moderate
If ongoing funding or in-kind contributions are not available, the project may not be able to deliver all the proposed biodiversity benefits in the longer term.		
2.10 Does this project represent good value for money?	Panel	Very high
An important factor in ranking projects, estimating whether the costing and anticipated benefits represent good value for money.		

5.2.3 Feasibility and Effectiveness

This category draws upon the outcomes of the pre-selection feasibility check, to confirm that the applicant has adequately removed or reduced any risks associated with the proposed works. It also

considers whether the proposed works are dependent upon other actions, and whether it will deliver biodiversity outcomes if only partially delivered. The Panel can use information provided by the applicant to assess whether the works are needed at the site, and whether there is evidence that the proposed actions can deliver the anticipated biodiversity benefits, particularly on the Mornington Peninsula. The Panel will also assess the likelihood of the works delivering all the biodiversity benefits stated in the application, as well as the time until biodiversity benefits will be apparent, and how long they will endure before significant additional works are required.

The value statements below indicate how scoring was guided. Questions within the Feasibility and Effectiveness category are generally weighted highly. Table 4 provides further details on questions within this category.

Value statements

- Actions that are dependent on other actions will rank lower, particularly if those actions are not funded
- Removing feasibility issues ranks higher than mitigating issues; mitigation strategies that are not certain to work will rank lower
- Projects that will provide proportionate or greater than proportionate benefits, if only partially delivered, will rank higher
- Projects will rank higher if they can provide evidence (e.g. photos) that the action is needed, and that the action works (e.g. local success)
- Projects that involve revegetation over a larger area, or improve a larger area, will rank higher
- Projects that have a high likelihood of delivering all the proposed biodiversity outcomes will rank higher
- Projects that provide immediate benefits rank higher, which balances out with projects that provide benefits for longer duration ranking higher

Table 4 Feasibility and effectiveness questions in the Biolinks Decision Support Tool.

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
2.1a Have potential risks to the project been identified (by the panel or applicant) and strategies to remove or mitigate risk been proposed? E.g. alternative environmental weed control measures, shifted project site away from neighbouring boundaries	Pre-selection stage (Feasibility Checklist)	High
Provides the applicant with an opportunity to think about and identify risks and to provide risk mitigation strategies to resolve these issues if they should occur.		
2.1b Is this action dependent upon other actions to succeed?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	High
Dependencies on other projects may increase the risk that the project will not be fully delivered or may not be effective.		

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
2.2a Will the action still provide benefits if only partially delivered?	Assessed by Panel	Moderate
Some projects may provide benefits proportional to the level of delivery, e.g. half an area revegetated, while others require full delivery to be effective, e.g. fencing sensitive areas.		
2.2b From evidence the applicant has provided, is it clear that this action is needed on-site? E.g. Photos of degraded habitat, presence of threatened species confirmed etc.	Information provided by applicant, e.g. photos, description, assessed by Panel	Very high
Is there evidence that this action is needed at the site to improve the existing habitat or to protect existing/ adjacent values?		
2.3 Is there evidence that this action can provide the desired biodiversity outcomes?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Very high
Have the actions been proved to work to benefit biodiversity as proposed by the applicant? There may be published evidence, local anecdotes that suggest it will work.		
2.4 How likely is this project to achieve all the biodiversity benefits it proposes?	Assessed by Panel	Very high
In light of feasibility and effectiveness issues highlighted above, is this project likely to deliver the biodiversity benefits proposed in the application?		
2.5 When will this project provide the stated biodiversity benefits? i.e. what is the time lag until benefits are realised.	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Moderate
Revegetation projects will have a delay in delivering biodiversity benefits, as they require the habitat to mature; fencing will have immediate benefits; environmental weed control will have benefits in the short term.		
2.10 How long will the biodiversity benefits of this project last for?	Some information provided by applicant, assessed by Panel	Moderate
Different actions will have benefits of varying duration, e.g. revegetation will last for longer periods, while environmental weed control may need to be repeated frequently		

5.2.4 Monitoring and reporting

This category considers whether the applicant has monitored both the delivery of previous works, and the progress towards anticipated biodiversity outcomes, on previously supported projects. It also considers whether these monitoring results were reported to the Shire as/if required.

The value statements below indicate how scoring was guided. One question requires confirmation that applicants have correctly signed the requirements to monitor and report on the proposed project, but does not contribute to the DST score. Questions within the Monitoring and Reporting category are ranked highly, reflecting the importance of monitoring and reporting to continual improvement and assessment (see Section 3.3). Table 5 provides further details on questions within this category.

Value statements

- Projects that have successfully monitored and/or reported in the past will rank higher
- Only projects that satisfy monitoring and reporting requirements will be assessed (not scored)

Table 5 Monitoring and reporting questions in the Biolinks Decision Support Tool.

Explanation	Information source	DST weighting
4.1 Does the application satisfactorily describe how successful project progress and completion will be monitored?	Applicant	NA
Monitoring is needed to determine whether the project has been completed, e.g. revegetation has been completed and maintained.		
4.2 If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on *project delivery* as stated in the application?	Applicant, confirmed with Shire records	High
If the application is for ongoing support, or if the applicant has received support previously from the Shire, did they complete the monitoring and reporting of project delivery as they intended in the application?		
4.3 If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on the *project's biodiversity outcomes* as stated in the application?	Applicant, confirmed with Shire records	High
If the application is for ongoing support, or if the applicant has received support previously from the Shire, did they complete the monitoring and reporting of project effectiveness in delivering biodiversity outcomes, as they intended in the application?		

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7 Glossary

Biodiversity	The variety of all life-forms, plants, animals, fungi, protists (including algae) and bacteria, their encoded genes, and the ecosystems of which they form a part
Bioregion	Defined geographical regions of Australia with similar climatic and geophysical characteristics, and which generally contain a suite of distinct ecosystems and species
Conservation status	Categorisation of the threat risk to biological assets (plant and animal species, EVCs or plant communities) at a defined scale (e.g. national, state), as determined by specific criteria
Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC)	A vegetation classification described through a combination of its floristic composition, life form and ecological characteristics, and its association with particular environmental attributes. EVCs may include one or more floristic communities that occur across a biogeographic range, and have similar habitat and ecological processes operating
Endemic	Naturally found only in a defined geographic area
Environmental weeds	Plants that invade native ecosystems and adversely impact indigenous flora and fauna
EPBC Act	Commonwealth *Environment Protection and I Conservation Act 1999*
Exotic	Plants, animals, fungi and other organisms that have been introduced (deliberately or accidentally) to Australia or a given area after European settlement
FFG Act	Victorian *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988*
GIS	Geographic Information System. A digital platform for creating, analysing and viewing maps and other spatially referenced data
Habitat	A place where wildlife live, comprising a suite of physical features, e.g. hollow-bearing trees, shallow wetlands, coastal dunes, and bio-physical conditions, e.g. rainfall patterns, average temperatures, sympatric species, that enable them to find shelter and food and successfully reproduce.
High quality habitat	Habitat that supports a high diversity of wildlife and/or relatively large populations and/or comparatively successful reproduction and recruitment.
High threat weeds	Introduced species (including non-indigenous 'natives') which, as invading species, have highly deleterious impacts on indigenous vegetation and faunal habitats
Indigenous	Plant and animal species found naturally in pre-European Australia within a specific geographic region
Indigenous vegetation	Vegetation native to Australia or native to a specific geographic region
Introduced	Deliberately or accidentally brought to Australia or part of Australia, usually by human agency

Life form	An abbreviated description of the habit, growth form and longevity of a plant species (e.g. tree, shrub, vine, annual, submerged aquatic)
Native	Species occurring in Australia as part of the pre-European flora or fauna, but not necessarily indigenous to areas where it is recorded
Pest Animals	Animal species, typically introduced species, which have detrimental impacts on native plants and animals
Vegetation community	Term for interacting plant populations forming vegetation. A vegetation community in formal classifications may have characteristic plant species, composition and structure
Wildlife	Native animals indigenous to the Mornington Peninsula and surrounds, and those whose distributions have shifted naturally into the Mornington Peninsula since European arrival.

Appendix 1 Feasibility checklist to screen applications in the pre-selection stage.

Project title:		Applicant:	

Feasibility Question	Response		
	No	Potentially	Yes - unresolvable
Are there potential cultural heritage impacts? Under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*, significant impacts to cultural heritage values may be incurred if activities such as ground disturbance occur within areas of cultural heritage sensitivity, e.g. near waterways. A cultural heritage management plan may be required if the project is within an area of cultural heritage sensitivity.			
Are there potential impacts on non-target biodiversity? Some actions may have unintended negative impacts on other biodiversity values, e.g. fencing may restrict macropod access to habitat; weed control may destroy habitat used by native species.			
Does this project pose any potential impacts on neighbouring landholders and/or land managers? If so, do they consent to the project being delivered? Some projects may have indirect impacts on neighbouring landholders, e.g. reduce access to waterways, affect views, redirect wildlife to their property.			
Are there potential issues with feasibility of the methods? Methods may be unfeasible, e.g. weed control methods are not fit-for-purpose or chemicals are restricted. Alternatively, the site may be difficult or unsafe to access, especially if needing vehicle access.			
Will maintenance obligations potentially interfere with this project? e.g. Site may be in the vicinity of road, sewerage or gas alignments.			
Are there potential legislative or policy restrictions? There may be restrictions on what vegetation can be added or removed if planning (e.g. Vegetation Protection, defendable space, Clause 52.17), policy (e.g. Green Wedge Management Plan) or legislative issues (e.g. weeds providing habitat to EPBC-listed threatened species) apply.			
Do features of the proposed methods inhibit their effectiveness? e.g. Corridor width is too narrow to support target species.			
Are there other potential impediments the Assessment Panel can identify? The Panel may identify other potential impediments, such as potential risks associated with a changing climate affecting project delivery, e.g. increased frequency of hot, dry weather or floods.			

Project is feasible		Further information is required		Project is unfeasible	

Appendix 2 Decision Support Tool template.

SITE VALUES AND SUITABILITY		Ranking from high to low							
EXISTING HABITAT								**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
What is the existing quality of the habitat to be protected or improved?										
1.1	How large is the existing habitat/vegetation patch surrounding the project site? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	>50 ha	10–50 ha	5–10 ha	2–5 ha	<2 ha				Very high
		8	6	4	2	1				
1.2	What is the average value of the surrounding area according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	VH	H	M	L	VL				Very high
		10	8	5	2	0				
1.3	How intact is existing vegetation? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	All vegetation layers are generally intact	One vegetation layer is in poor condition	Two vegetation layers are in poor condition	All vegetation layers are in poor condition	NA				Moderate
		4	3	1	0	NA				
1.4	What is the percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	>80	61–80	31–60	1–30	NA				Moderate
		3	2	1	0	NA				
1.5	How close is the perimeter of the project site to a sealed road?	>100 m	50-100 m	<50 m	Road adjacent to site	Road passes through site				Lower
		2	1	0.5	0	-1				
1.6a	What is the average value of the project site according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.	VH	H	M	L	VL				Very high
		8	6	4	2	0				
1.6b	*Only if Biodiversity Significance mapping value is Very Low*, have significant values (EPBC, FFG or Adv List species or communities, End, Vul or Dep EVCs) been recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat in the last 5-10 years?	≥5	2 to 4	1	None/Unsure					High
		8	6	3	0					
1.7	If the project is targeting specific biodiversity values (e.g. species or EVC), how long since it was recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat?	<2 years	2–10 years	>10 years	Never	NA				Very high
		8	6	3	0	NA				
CONNECTIVITY								**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Will this project improve habitat connectivity?										
1.8	How close is the project site to high-value/intact vegetation? E.g. VH on BSM, occupied by target species	adjacent/within	<100 m	100–500 m	500–1000 m	>1 km				Very high
		6	3	2	1	0				
1.9	Does the project site adjoin a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage line, coastal dunes etc.	adjacent/within	<100 m	100–500 m	>500 m					Moderate
		4	2	1	0					
1.10	How close is the project site to other sites of revegetation projects?	adjacent	<100 m	100–500 m	>500 m					Lower
		1.5	1	0.5	0					
1.11	Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map?	Yes	No							Moderate
		3	0							

Total category value	**Potential maximum**	**Weighted category score**

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS		Ranking from high to low							
COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS								**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are there social aspects that may improve the likelihood of the project's success?										
2.1a	Is the project part of a broader project involving multiple partners, e.g. LMPL, MPSC, Friends groups, CMA, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria?	Yes	No							High
		3	0						3	
2.1b	*If not,* is this project part of a larger landscape project involving multiple applicants, but not under the umbrella of an organisation?	Yes	No							Moderate
		2	0							

2.2a	Has the applicant previously received grants to undertake works at the site, which are in progress or have been completed successfully? Not including the Conservation Land Rate.	Completed or received in last year	Yes, completed in last 5 years	Yes, more than 5 years ago	Yes, but not completed	No			Moderate
		3	2	1	0	0			
2.2b	*If no to above,* does the applicant receive a Conservation Land Rate? (Previously the Sustainability rebate)	Yes, for more than 3 years	Yes, for 1–3 years	Yes, for less than 1 year	No	NA (multiple properties)			Moderate
		3	2	1	0	NA			
2.3	Is the project part of a research project?	Yes	No						Lower
		1.5	0						
2.4	Does the project contain elements of community engagement or education?	Yes	Partially	Potentially	No				Moderate
		3	2	1	0				
2.5	Will ongoing maintenance of this project be supported by community initiatives, e.g. LMPL, Friends groups?	Yes	Partially	Potentially	No				Lower
		1.5	1	1	0				
2.6	Is the applicant able to commit to delivering the project?	Yes	Contract out	Potential impediments					Lower
		1.5	1	0					
2.7	Does the applicant have the capacity to maintain the site beyond the term of the grant?	Yes	Contract out/Community	Partial	No	NA			High
		4	3	1	0	NA			
ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS							**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How will economic considerations affect the success of the project?									
2.8	Is the applicant contributing funding or in-kind contributions to deliver this project?	>30%	10–30%	1–10%	No				Very high
		15	10	5	0				
2.9	Does this action require ongoing funding or in-kind contributions (in person-days [pd]) to sustain benefits beyond the project?	No	<1K or 1–5 pd p.a.	1–5K or 5–10 pd p.a.	>5K or >10 pd p.a.				Very high
		10	8	6	3				
2.10	If yes, will ongoing funding or in-kind contributions be available beyond this project? (see questions above)	Complete	Partial	No	NA				Moderate
		2	0.5	0	NA				
2.11	Does this project represent good value for money?	Very good	Good	Moderate	Poor				Very high
		15	10	5	0				

Total category value	**Potential maximum**	**Weighted category score**

FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS		**Ranking from high to low**						
IS THE ACTION FEASIBLE?							**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How likely is it that this project will be effectively delivered?									
3.1	Have potential risks to the project been identified (by the panel or applicant) and strategies to remove or mitigate risk been proposed? E.g. alternative environmental weed control measures, shifted project site away from neighbouring boundaries	No, or application has been altered to remove risk	Yes, applicant has proposed satisfactory strategies to reduce risk	Yes, applicant has proposed strategies that may reduce risk					High
		4	3	1					
3.2	Is this action dependent upon other actions to succeed?	No	Yes, funded action	Yes, partially funded action	Yes, unfunded action				High
		4	3	1	0				
3.3	Will the action still provide benefits if only partially delivered?	Yes, greater than or proportionate benefits	Yes, less than proportionate benefits	No	NA				Moderate
		2	1	0	NA				
IS THE ACTION EFFECTIVE?							**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Is the action likely to achieve the desired biodiversity outcomes if successfully delivered?									
3.12	From evidence the applicant has provided, is it clear that this action is needed on-site? e.g. Photos of degraded habitat, presence of threatened species confirmed etc.	Yes	Partially	No	NA				Very high
		8	4	0	NA				

3.13	Is there evidence that this action can provide the desired biodiversity outcomes?	Yes, published evidence and/or local success	Yes, published evidence, not previously used locally	Potentially, some evidence that could work	No			Very high
		8	5	2	Not supported			
3.16	How likely is this project to achieve all the biodiversity benefits it proposes?	Very likely	Likely	Possibly	Unlikely			Very high
		8	5	2	0			
3.17	When will this project provide the stated biodiversity benefits? i.e. what is the time lag	Immediately	<1 year	1–3 years	3–10 years	>10 years		Moderate
		4	3	2	1	0		
3.18	How long will the biodiversity benefits of this project last for?	Indefinitely	>10 years	3–10 years	1–3 years	<1 year		Moderate
		4	3	2	1	0		

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score

MONITORING AND REPORTING								Ranking from high to low
How will the project's outcomes be monitored and communicated?						Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
3.1	Does the application satisfactorily describe how successful project progress and completion will be monitored?	Yes	No					
		NA	requires revision					
3.2	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on *project delivery* as stated in the application?	Fully	Partially	No	NA			High
		4	2	0	NA			
		4	2	0	NA			
3.5	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on the *project's biodiversity outcomes* as stated in the application?	Fully	Partially	No	NA			High
		4	2	0	NA			

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score

Category	Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
Site suitability			
Community and economic considerations			
Feasibility and effectiveness			
Monitoring and reporting			
Full score	**Total value**	**Potential maximum**	**Weighted total score**
All categories combined			

Appendix 3 Sensitivity analysis of the Decision Support Tool.

The following figures show the impact of changing values for different DST questions, on the final DST score. They demonstrate the variation in sensitivity of the DST to some features of applications over others:

- the DST is more sensitive to changes in the biodiversity significance value for the broader area of habitat, than the significance value of the project site area alone (Figure 3);
- the DST is more sensitive to the amount of ongoing resources required, than the availability of funds (Figure 4);
- the DST is similarly sensitive to the amount of in-kind contributions provided (Figure 5), and value for money estimates of the proposed project (Figure 6), and relatively less sensitive to the likelihood of delivering all biodiversity outcomes stated in the application (Figure 7).

Further indications of the sensitivity of the DST can be obtained in Section 5.2. The importance of the questions indicates if it has a greater impact on the final score of the DST.

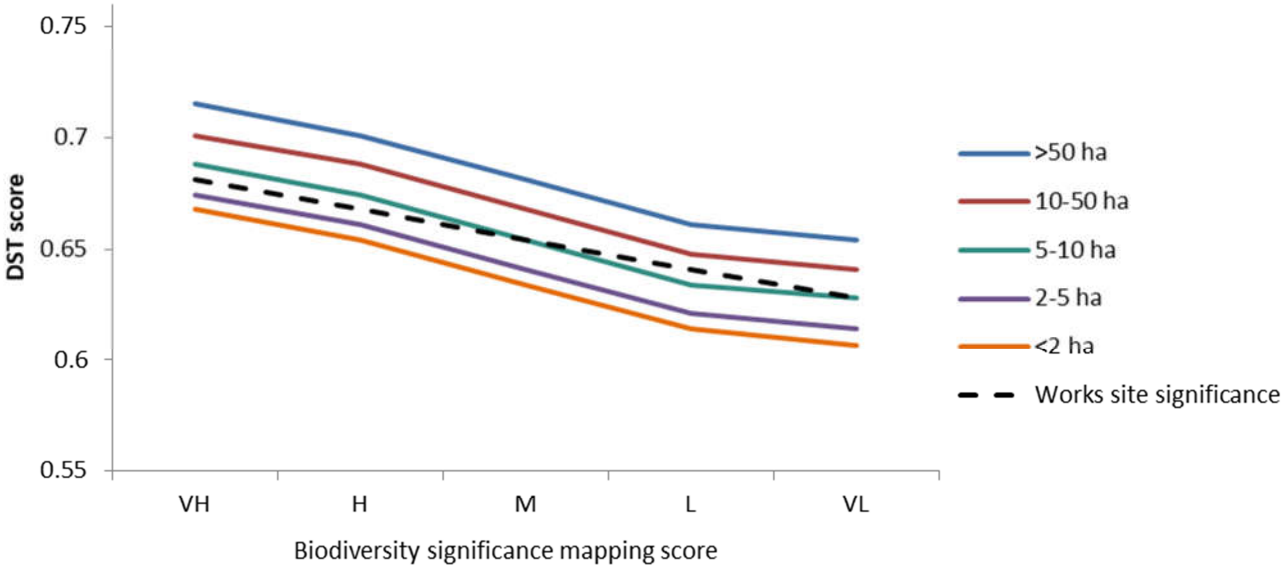

Figure 3 Variation in the DST score due to different values for biodiversity significance mapping (BSM) across the broader habitat area, and different sizes of the broader habitat area. The dashed line shows variation in DST score for different values in BSM of the project site, keeping BSM of the broader area constant (at M) and size of broader area constant (at 5–10 ha).

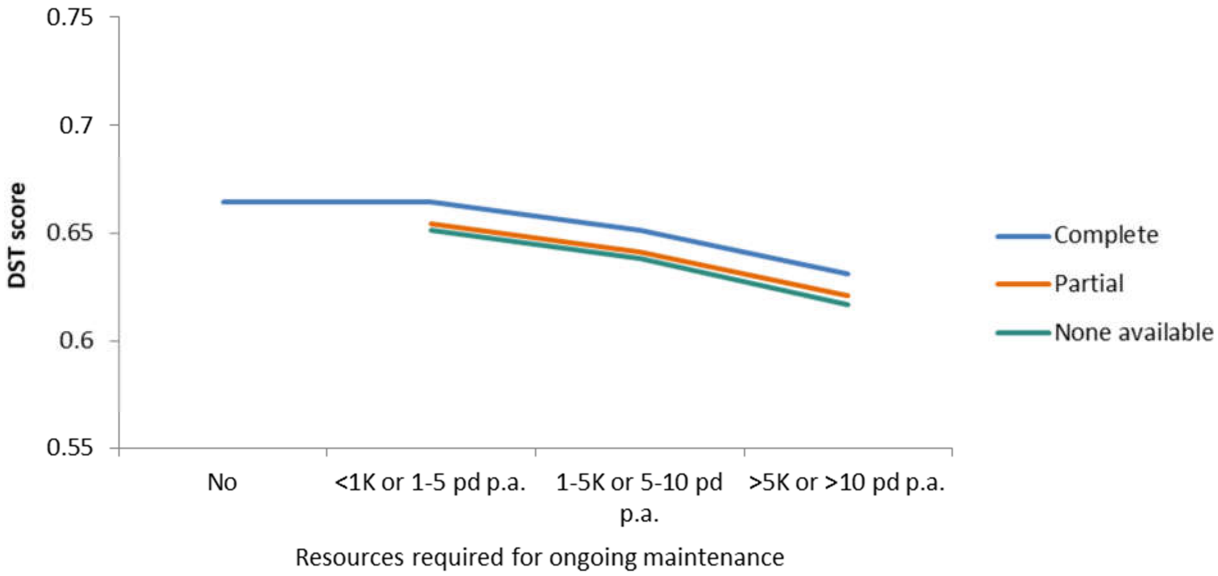

Figure 4 **Variation in the DST score due to different amounts of resources required for ongoing maintenance, either as financial cost or in-kind contribution, measured in person-days (pd). Variation due to different levels of resources currently available for ongoing maintenance is also shown.**

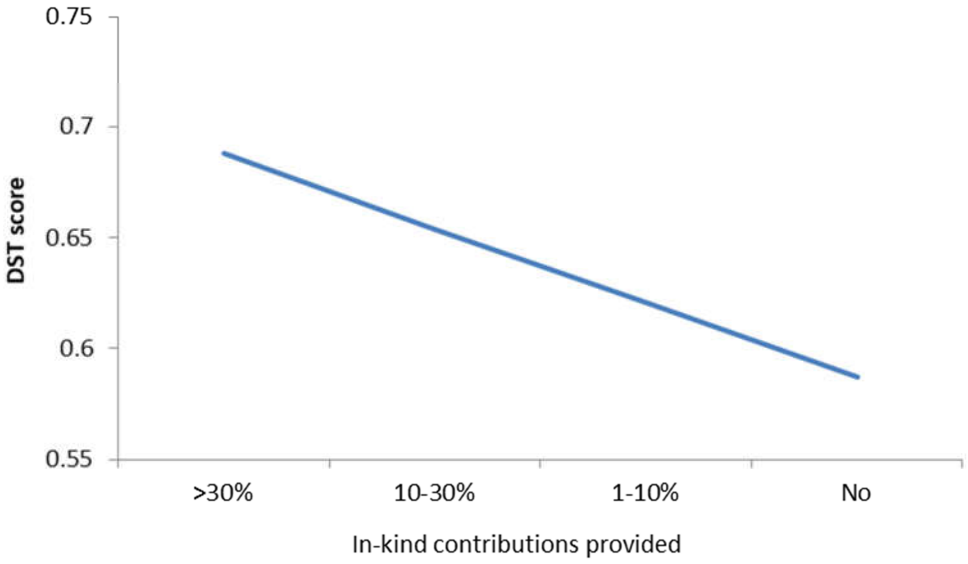

Figure 5 **Variation in the DST score due to different levels of in-kind contribution provided by the applicant, measured as a proportion of the total amount of resources required.**

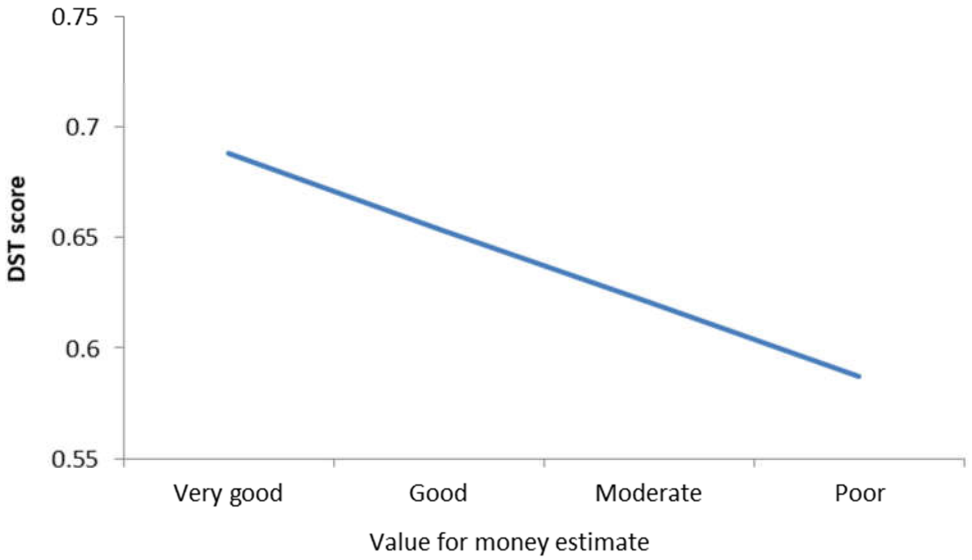

Figure 6 **Variation in the DST score due to different estimates of value-for-money in terms of proposed biodiversity benefits for amount of resources required, represented in the application.**

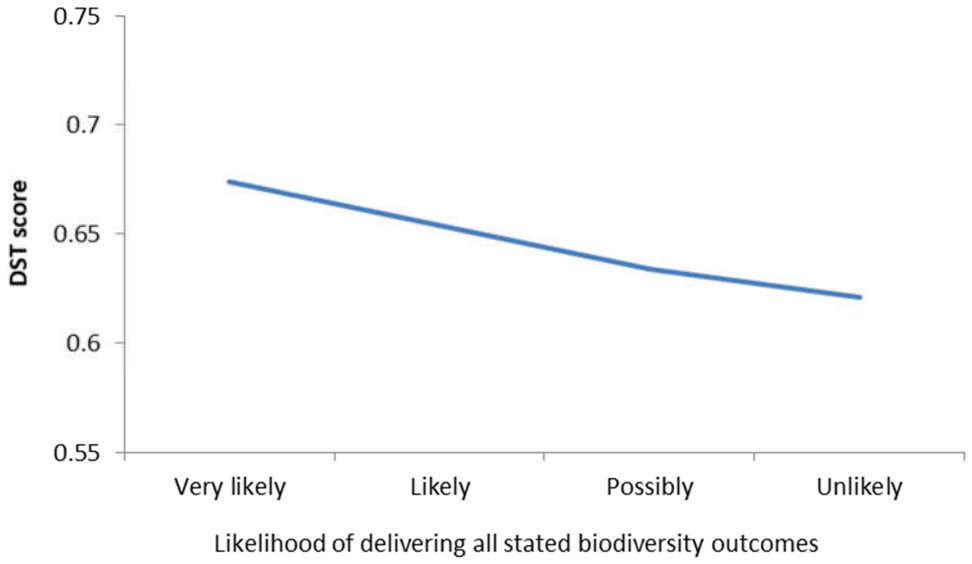

Figure 7 **Variation in the DST score due to different estimates of the likelihood that the project will deliver all the proposed biodiversity outcomes stated in the application, as estimated by the panel.**

Appendix 4 Scenario testing of applications using the Decision Support Tool.

Scenario 1: Small-scale habitat improvement project to restore mid-storey vegetation

A Mornington Peninsula resident has worked with their local Landcare group to develop a schedule of management actions to improve existing native vegetation on their property.

The area to be improved is 0.25 ha in size, and is part of a larger habitat corridor along a waterway, over 100 ha in size. The broader habitat area ranks between high and very high according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping (BSM). The remnant is considered high quality, with an intact canopy and intact ground layer, but mid-storey is comprised almost entirely of environmental weeds, including both woody and broad-leaved weeds.

Although the applicant has not previously received grant funding for environmental improvement works on the property, they have received the Conservation Land Rate for the last two years, to improve fencing and undertake small-scale environmental weed control. This is the resident's first application assessed by the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The applicant is proposing to provide c. 40% of the value of the project in in-kind contributions, in the form of hand weeding and physically removing broad-leaved weeds. Otherwise, the applicant proposes to hire an experienced contractor to undertake environmental weed control works. The project site will require some ongoing maintenance to prevent weed encroachment and to control any weeds regenerating from the existing seed bank. The applicant will be able to manage some of this work; otherwise they will be partially supported by fellow Landcare members. The panel consider this application to represent good value for money.

No feasibility issues were identified in the pre-selection stage. The applicant proposes to use standard environmental weed control measures, and has considered potential off-target damage, e.g. only spraying areas of blanket weed cover, and leaving killed woody weeds standing in the first instance, to avoid covering the regenerating ground layer. The applicant has provided photos to demonstrate the quality of the current habitat, and the need for management actions. They have provided a map showing the area of habitat to be improved. The applicant estimates that the works will lead to partial natural regeneration of the ground layer, in 1–3 years. The works should provide biodiversity benefits in <1 year; benefits are expected to last for 1–3 years. The outcomes of the Decision Support Tool are shown below.

Category	Score tally	Potential maximum	Weighted score
Site values and suitability	37	49.5	0.747
Community and economic considerations	41.5	57.5	0.722
Feasibility and effectiveness	35	42	0.833
Monitoring and reporting	NA	NA	NA
Total	**113.5**	**149**	**0.762**

SITE VALUES AND SUITABILITY				
EXISTING HABITAT		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
What is the existing quality of the habitat to be protected or improved?				
1.1	How large is the existing habitat/vegetation patch surrounding the project site? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	>50 ha		VH
		8	8	
1.2	What is the average value of the area according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	VH/H		VH
		9	10	
1.3	How intact is existing vegetation? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	One vegetation layer is in poor condition		Mod
		3	4	
1.4	What is the percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	>80		Mod
		2	3	
1.5	How close is the perimeter of the project site to a sealed road?	50-100 m		Lower
		1	2	
1.6	What is the average value of the project site according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.	H		VH
		6	8	
1.7	*Only if Biodiversity Significance mapping value is Very Low*, have significant values (EPBC, FFG or Adv List species or communities, End, Vul or Dep EVCs) been recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat in the last 5–10 years?	NA		High
		NA	NA	
1.8	If the project is targeting specific biodiversity values (e.g. species or EVC), how long since it was recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat?	NA		VH
		NA	0	
CONNECTIVITY		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Will this project improve habitat connectivity?				
1.9	How close is the project site to high-value/intact vegetation? E.g. VH on BSM	<100 m		High
		3	6	
1.10	Does the project site adjoin a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage line, coastal dunes etc.	<100 m		Mod
		2	4	
1.11	How close is the project site to other sites of revegetation projects?	>500 m		Lower
		0	1.5	
1.12	Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map?	Yes		Mod
		3	3	

Total category value	**Potential maximum**	**Weighted category score**
37	49.5	0.747

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS				
COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are social aspects likely to improve the project's success?				
2.1	Is the project part of a broader project involving multiple partners, e.g. LMPL, MPSC, Friends groups, CMA, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria?	Yes		High
		3	3	
2.2	*If not,* is this project part of a larger landscape project involving multiple applicants, but not under the umbrella of an organisation?	No		Mod
		0	NA	
2.3	Has the applicant previously received grants to undertake works at the site, which are in progress or have been completed successfully? Not including the Conservation Land Rate.	No		Mod
		0	3	
2.4	*If no to above,* does the applicant receive a Conservation Land Rate? (Previously the Sustainability rebate)	Yes, for 1–3 years		Mod
		2	NA	
2.5	Is the project part of a research project?	No		Low
		0	1.5	

COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS		Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
Are social aspects likely to improve the project's success?				
2.6	Does the project contain elements of community engagement or education?	No		Mod
		0	3	
2.7	Will ongoing maintenance of this project be supported by community initiatives, e.g. LMPL, Friends groups?	Partially		Low
		1	1.5	
2.8	Is the applicant able to commit to delivering the project?	Contract out		Low
		1	1.5	
2.9	Does the applicant have the capacity to maintain the site beyond the term of the grant?	Partial		Mod
		1	4	
ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How will economic considerations affect the success of the project?				
2.10	Is the applicant contributing funding or in-kind contributions to deliver this project?	>30%		VH
		15	15	
2.11	Does this action require ongoing funding or in-kind contributions (in person-days [pd]) to sustain benefits?	<1K / 1–5 pd p.a.		Mod
		8	10	
2.12	If yes, will ongoing funding or in-kind contributions be available for this project? (see questions above)	Partial		Mod
		0.5	NA	
2.13	Does this project represent good value for money?	Good		VH
		10	15	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
41.5	57.5	0.722

FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS				
IS THE ACTION FEASIBLE?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How likely is it that this project will be effectively delivered?				
3.1	Have potential risks to the project been identified (by the panel or applicant) and strategies to remove or mitigate risk been proposed? E.g. alternative environmental weed control measures, shifted project site away from neighbouring boundaries	No, or application has been altered to remove risk		High
		4	4	
3.2	Is this action dependent upon other actions to succeed?	No		High
		4	4	
3.3	Will the action still provide benefits if only partially delivered?	Yes, greater than or proportionate benefits		Mod
		2	2	
IS THE ACTION EFFECTIVE?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are desired biodiversity outcomes likely if successfully delivered?				
3.4	From evidence the applicant has provided, is it clear that this action is needed on-site? E.g. Photos of degraded habitat, presence of threatened species confirmed etc.	Yes		VH
		8	8	
3.5	Is there evidence that this action can provide the desired biodiversity outcomes?	Yes, published evidence and/or local success		VH
		8	8	
3.6	How likely is this project to achieve all the biodiversity benefits it proposes?	Likely		VH
		5	8	
3.7	When will this project provide the stated biodiversity benefits? i.e. what is the time lag	1–3 years		Mod
		3	4	
3.8	How long will the biodiversity benefits of this project last for?	1–3 years		Mod
		1	4	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
35	42	0.833

MONITORING AND REPORTING				
How will the project's outcomes be monitored and communicated?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
4.1	Does the application satisfactorily describe how successful project progress and completion will be monitored?	Yes		
		NA	0	
4.2	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on project delivery as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	
4.3	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on the project's biodiversity outcomes as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
0	0	0

Scenario 2: Larger-scale improvement of high quality habitat

Residents wish to undertake environmental weed control in a large area (3 ha) of high quality (ranks VH on BMS) native vegetation on their property. The property is part of a large habitat corridor along a waterway, more than 100 ha in size (ranks high–very high on BMS). The vegetation is intact (has a native canopy, mid-storey and ground layer) but has moderate cover of woody weeds such as Blackberry.

The residents have approached Landcare to help develop a set of environmental weed control actions to improve the habitat on their property. While the residents have done environmental weed control in the past and received funding from alternative grants, they have been unable to keep on top of the problem in recent years. The applicants have offered an in-kind contribution of 40%, if successfully supported. The works will require ongoing maintenance of $1–5,000 p.a.; this may be partially met by support through community groups, but the landowners are not capable of undertaking the works themselves, and would hire a contractor. The panel considers this project to represent good value for money.

No feasibility issues were identified in the pre-selection stage. The applicant proposes to use standard environmental weed control measures, cutting and painting blackberry to avoid off-target damage. The applicant has provided photos to demonstrate the quality of the current habitat, and the need for management actions. They have provided a map showing the area of habitat to be improved. The applicant expects that the environmental weed control will lead to improved natural regeneration of the mid-storey in 3 years. The works should provide biodiversity benefits in <1 year; benefits are expected to last up to 3 years. The summary of the Decision Support Tool outcomes is shown below, to compare the final score for this project to Scenario 1.

Category	Score tally	Potential maximum	Weighted score
Site values and suitability	42	49.5	0.848
Community and economic considerations	39.5	57.5	0.687
Feasibility and effectiveness	35	42	0.833
Monitoring and reporting	NA	NA	NA
Total	**116.5**	**149**	**0.782**

Scenario 3: Fencing and revegetation of wetland

A landholder has submitted an application to fence a shallow dam, and to revegetate with aquatic vegetation, as well as the area surrounding the dam, to connect to a habitat corridor at the back of the property which contains a waterway.

The area to be revegetated is 0.6 ha, enclosing a waterbody c. 0.2 ha in size. The dam is situated in the corner of the property; as such it is currently fenced on two sides. On the other side of the fence is a corridor of native vegetation of c. 40 ha, containing a waterway. The adjacent corridor has a high value on average from BSM, with a mid-storey in poor condition; however there are pockets of very high value vegetation within 100 m.

The applicants have not previously received grant funding for environmental improvement works on the property, but have received the Conservation Land Rate for the last two years, to undertake small-scale environmental weed control and protect habitat features such as large old trees. This is the resident's first application to the Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The applicants will provide c. 40% of the value of the project in-kind contributions, by fencing the site and doing the revegetation planting themselves. They are not working as part of a broader landscape project. The works will require ongoing maintenance (e.g. weeding and watering of revegetation). The applicants also propose to undertake all maintenance themselves (through in-kind contribution).

Potential impacts on non-target biodiversity were identified in the pre-selection stage, as fencing the dam could restrict access to water for wildlife. As such, the fencing will be designed to allow access for wildlife to reduce this risk. The applicant has provided photos to demonstrate the quality of the adjacent habitat, and the need for management actions. They have provided a map showing the area to be revegetated and its position relative to existing corridors. The applicant estimates that the revegetation of the dam will lead to increased use of the waterbody by frogs within 1–3 years, and revegetation of the connecting habitat will lead to increased use by birds and reptiles within 10 years. The works should provide biodiversity benefits in <1 year; benefits are expected to last for >10 years. The outcomes of the Decision Support Tool are shown below.

Category	Score tally	Potential maximum	Weighted score
Site values and suitability	29	38.5	0.753
Community and economic considerations	45.5	57.5	0.791
Feasibility and effectiveness	38	42	0.905
Monitoring and reporting	NA	NA	NA
Total	**112.5**	**138**	**0.815**

SITE VALUES AND SUITABILITY				
EXISTING HABITAT		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
What is the existing quality of the habitat to be protected or improved?				
1.1	How large is the existing habitat/vegetation patch surrounding the project site? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	10–50 ha 6	8	VH
1.2	What is the average value of the area according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing	H 8	10	VH

	habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.			
1.3	How intact is existing vegetation? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	One vegetation layer is in poor condition		Mod
		3	4	
1.4	What is the percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	NA		Mod
		NA	NA	
1.5	How close is the perimeter of the project site to a sealed road?	>100 m		Lower
		2	2	
1.6	What is the average value of the project site according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.	NA		VH
		NA	NA	
1.7	*Only if Biodiversity Significance mapping value is Very Low*, have significant values (EPBC, FFG or Adv List species or communities, End, Vul or Dep EVCs) been recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat in the last 5–10 years?	NA		High
		NA	NA	
1.8	If the project is targeting specific biodiversity values (e.g. species or EVC), how long since it was recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat?	NA		VH
		NA	0	
CONNECTIVITY		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Will this project improve habitat connectivity?				
1.9	How close is the project site to high-value/intact vegetation? E.g. VH on BSM	<100 m		High
		3	6	
1.10	Does the project site adjoin a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage line, coastal dunes etc.	adjacent/within		Mod
		4	4	
1.11	How close is the project site to other sites of revegetation projects?	>500 m		Lower
		0	1.5	
1.12	Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map?	Yes		Mod
		3	3	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
29	38.5	0.753

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS				
COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are social aspects likely to improve the project's success?				
2.1	Is the project part of a broader project involving multiple partners, e.g. LMPL, MPSC, Friends groups, CMA, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria?	No		High
		0	3	
2.2	*If not,* is this project part of a larger landscape project involving multiple applicants, but not under the umbrella of an organisation?	No		Mod
		0	NA	
2.3	Has the applicant previously received grants to undertake works at the site, which are in progress or have been completed successfully? Not including the Conservation Land Rate.	No		Mod
		0	3	
2.4	*If no to above,* does the applicant receive a Conservation Land Rate? (Previously the Sustainability rebate)	Yes, for 1–3 years		Mod
		2	NA	
COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are social aspects likely to improve the project's success?				
2.5	Is the project part of a research project?	No		Low
		0	1.5	
2.6	Does the project contain elements of community engagement or education?	No		Mod
		0	3	
2.7	Will ongoing maintenance of this project be supported by community initiatives, e.g. LMPL, Friends groups?	No		Low
		0	1.5	
2.8	Is the applicant able to commit to delivering the project?	Yes		Low
		1.5	1.5	
2.9	Does the applicant have the capacity to maintain the site beyond the term of the grant?	Yes		Mod
		4	4	

ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS		Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
How will economic considerations affect the success of the project?				
2.10	Is the applicant contributing funding or in-kind contributions to deliver this project?	>30%		VH
		15	15	
2.11	Does this action require ongoing funding or in-kind contributions (in person-days [pd]) to sustain benefits?	1–5K / 5–10 pd p.a.		Mod
		6	10	
2.12	If yes, will ongoing funding or in-kind contributions be available for this project? (see questions above)	Complete		Mod
		2	NA	
2.13	Does this project represent good value for money?	Very good		VH
		15	15	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
45.5	57.5	0.791

FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS				
IS THE ACTION FEASIBLE?		Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
How likely is it that this project will be effectively delivered?				
3.1	Have potential risks to the project been identified (by the panel or applicant) and strategies to remove or mitigate risk been proposed? E.g. alternative environmental weed control measures, shifted project site away from neighbouring boundaries	Yes, applicant has proposed satisfactory strategies to reduce risk		High
		3	4	
3.2	Is this action dependent upon other actions to succeed?	No		High
		4	4	
3.3	Will the action still provide benefits if only partially delivered?	Yes, less than proportionate benefits		Mod
		1	2	
IS THE ACTION EFFECTIVE?		Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
Are desired biodiversity outcomes likely if successfully delivered?				
3.4	From evidence the applicant has provided, is it clear that this action is needed on-site? E.g. Photos of degraded habitat, presence of threatened species confirmed etc.	Yes		VH
		8	8	
3.5	Is there evidence that this action can provide the desired biodiversity outcomes?	Yes, published evidence and/or local success		VH
		8	8	
3.6	How likely is this project to achieve all the biodiversity benefits it proposes?	Very likely		VH
		8	8	
3.7	When will this project provide the stated biodiversity benefits? i.e. what is the time lag	<1 year		Mod
		4	4	
3.8	How long will the biodiversity benefits of this project last for?	>10 years		Mod
		3	4	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
38	42	0.905

MONITORING AND REPORTING		Application score	Potential maximum	Question weighting
How will the project's outcomes be monitored and communicated?				
4.1	Does the application satisfactorily describe how successful project progress and completion will be monitored?	Yes		
		NA	0	

4.2	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on project delivery as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	
		NA	0	
4.3	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on the project's biodiversity outcomes as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
0	0	0

Scenario 4: Increasing the extent of threatened species habitat

A Friends group has submitted an application to increase the area of habitat for the threatened Swamp Skink at a Council-managed reserve. They propose to revegetate an area surrounding a waterbody, to close the gap between areas of suitable habitat, and to expand the area of habitat into adjacent exotic pasture. The project site is adjacent to an 80-ha area of largely native vegetation, also on average of high value. The area lies outside the Landcare Biolinks map. Swamp Skinks were recorded at the site in adjacent vegetation in the last year.

The applicants have previously done maintenance works at the site, weeding revegetation and undertaking surveys for rare and threatened species. They have arranged for students at the local TAFE to undertake a research project at the site, to study how Swamp Skinks colonise the new habitat over time. The students will have the opportunity to help with plantings and will undertake monitoring, accompanied by an experienced supervisor. The Friends group is providing in-kind contributions to the value of 30% of the proposed resources required, by undertaking the planting and hand weeding. Additional resources will purchase plants and pay for environmental weed contractors for broad-scale environmental weed control within the first two years. The application panel considers this project to represent very good value for money.

The Friends group proposes to use a suite of indigenous ground-layer species, planted in an arrangement to create suitable habitat for Swamp Skinks. During the pre-selection process, the application panel discussed alternative uses of the project site and concluded that it is suitable for the project. They propose to use tree guards to protect plantings from browsing, to avoid restricting wildlife access to the waterbody. The applicants anticipate this work will create c. 0.5 ha of additional habitat, and that Swamp Skinks will be recorded in the habitat within 3 years. This project should take 1–3 years to provide habitat, and benefits should last for >10 years, once established. The outcomes of the Decision Support Tool are shown below.

Category	Score tally	Potential maximum	Weighted score
Site values and suitability	32	46.5	0.688
Community and economic considerations	53.25	57.5	0.926
Feasibility and effectiveness	35	42	0.833
Monitoring and reporting	NA	NA	NA
Total	**120.25**	**146**	**0.824**

SITE VALUES AND SUITABILITY				
EXISTING HABITAT		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
What is the existing quality of the habitat to be protected or improved?				
1.1	How large is the existing habitat/vegetation patch surrounding the project site? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	10–50 ha		VH
		6	8	
1.2	What is the average value of the area according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat.	H		VH
		8	10	
1.3	How intact is existing vegetation? If project comprises revegetation of non-vegetated area, only consider adjacent habitat. If project comprises improvements to existing habitat, include the project site and adjacent habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	Two vegetation layers are in poor condition		Mod
		1	4	
1.4	What is the percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat. *Provide representative photos to support answer*	NA		Mod
		NA	NA	
1.5	How close is the perimeter of the project site to a sealed road?	50–100 m		Lower
		1	2	
1.6	What is the average value of the project site according to Biodiversity Significance Mapping? Only relevant if project comprises improvements to existing habitat.	NA		VH
		NA	NA	
1.7	*Only if Biodiversity Significance mapping value is Very Low*, have significant values (EPBC, FFG or Adv List species or communities, End, Vul or Dep EVCs) been recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat in the last 5–10 years?	NA		High
		NA	NA	
1.8	If the project is targeting specific biodiversity values (e.g. species or EVC), how long since it was recorded at the project site or in adjacent habitat?	<2 years		VH
		8	8	
CONNECTIVITY		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Will this project improve habitat connectivity?				
1.9	How close is the project site to high-value/intact vegetation? E.g. VH on BSM	adjacent/within		High
		6	6	
1.10	Does the project site adjoin a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage line, coastal dunes etc.	<100 m		Mod
		2	4	
1.11	How close is the project site to other sites of revegetation projects?	>500 m		Lower
		0	1.5	
1.12	Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map?	No		Mod
		0	3	

Total category value	**Potential maximum**	**Weighted category score**
32	46.5	0.688

COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS				
COMMUNITY CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are social aspects likely to improve the project's success?				
2.1	Is the project part of a broader project involving multiple partners, e.g. LMPL, MPSC, Friends groups, CMA, Melbourne Water or Parks Victoria?	Yes		High
		3	3	
2.2	*If not,* is this project part of a larger landscape project involving multiple applicants, but not under the umbrella of an organisation?	No		Mod
		0	NA	
2.3	Has the applicant previously received grants to undertake works at the site, which are in progress or have been completed successfully? Not including the Conservation Land Rate.	Yes, completed in last 5 years		Mod
		2	3	
2.4	*If no to above,* does the applicant receive a Conservation Land Rate? (Previously the Sustainability rebate)	No		Mod
		0	NA	
2.5	Is the project part of a research project?	Yes		Low
		1.5	1.5	

2.6	Does the project contain elements of community engagement or education?	Yes		Mod
		3	3	
2.7	Will ongoing maintenance of this project be supported by community initiatives, e.g. LMPL, Friends groups?	Yes		Low
		1.5	1.5	
2.8	Is the applicant able to commit to delivering the project?	Yes/Contract		Low
		1.25	1.5	
2.9	Does the applicant have the capacity to maintain the site beyond the term of the grant?	Contract/comm		Mod
		3	4	
ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How will economic considerations affect the success of the project?				
2.10	Is the applicant contributing funding or in-kind contributions to deliver this project?	>30%		VH
		15	15	
2.11	Does this action require ongoing funding or in-kind contributions (in person-days [pd]) to sustain benefits?	1–5K / 5–10 pd p.a.		Mod
		6	10	
2.12	If yes, will ongoing funding or in-kind contributions be available for this project? (see questions above)	Complete		Mod
		2	NA	
2.13	Does this project represent good value for money?	Very good		VH
		15	15	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
53.25	57.5	0.926

FEASIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS				
IS THE ACTION FEASIBLE?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
How likely is it that this project will be effectively delivered?				
3.1	Have potential risks to the project been identified (by the panel or applicant) and strategies to remove or mitigate risk been proposed? E.g. alternative environmental weed control measures, shifted project site away from neighbouring boundaries	Yes, applicant has proposed satisfactory strategies to reduce risk		High
		3	4	
3.2	Is this action dependent upon other actions to succeed?	No		High
		4	4	
3.3	Will the action still provide benefits if only partially delivered?	Yes, greater than or proportionate benefits		Mod
		2	2	
IS THE ACTION EFFECTIVE?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are desired biodiversity outcomes likely if successfully delivered?				
3.4	From evidence the applicant has provided, is it clear that this action is needed on-site? E.g. Photos of degraded habitat, presence of threatened species confirmed etc.	Yes		VH
		8	8	
IS THE ACTION EFFECTIVE?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
Are desired biodiversity outcomes likely if successfully delivered?				
3.5	Is there evidence that this action can provide the desired biodiversity outcomes?	Yes, published evidence and/or local success		VH
		8	8	
3.6	How likely is this project to achieve all the biodiversity benefits it proposes?	Likely		VH
		5	8	
3.7	When will this project provide the stated biodiversity benefits? i.e. what is the time lag	1–3 years		Mod
		2	4	
3.8	How long will the biodiversity benefits of this project last for?	>10 years		Mod
		3	4	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
35	42	0.833

MONITORING AND REPORTING				
How will the project's outcomes be monitored and communicated?		**Application score**	**Potential maximum**	**Question weighting**
4.1	Does the application satisfactorily describe how successful project progress and completion will be monitored?	Yes		
		NA	0	
4.2	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on project delivery as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	
		NA	0	
4.3	If the applicant has previously received support from the Shire, did they monitor and report on the project's biodiversity outcomes as stated in the application?	NA		High
		NA	0	

Total category value	Potential maximum	Weighted category score
0	0	0

Appendix 5 Application Form questions to obtain information for the Decision Support Tool.

The Decision Support Tool requires a range of information, both qualitative and quantitative, to prioritise applications. Below is a list of information that is required from applicants to use the Decision Support Tool.

Information source	Questions
Site values and suitability	
Map of project site. Ideally a map using satellite imagery, with the outline of the project site displayed. This can be used by the Shire to obtain or verify a range of information including the project site size, and estimates of average values from Biodiversity Significance Mapping.	1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 1.6a, 1.6b, 1.7, 1.8, 1.9, 1.10, 1.11
Size of project site (to be confirmed by Shire).	1.1
If relevant, estimate of number of vegetation layers that are intact at the project site, with photos to demonstrate. Photos should show adjacent habitat if the project is proposing complete revegetation, or existing habitat, if the project is proposing habitat improvements such as environmental weed control or mid-storey revegetation.	1.3
If relevant, estimate of cover of native vegetation at the site, with photos to demonstrate. Photos should show adjacent habitat if the project is proposing complete revegetation, or existing habitat, if the project is proposing habitat improvements such as environmental weed control or mid-storey revegetation.	1.4
Distance to sealed road (to be confirmed by Shire).	1.5
Evidence of significant or target biodiversity values at or near the site in the last 5–10 years, e.g. photos, VBA records or other records.	1.6b, 1.7, 1.8
Distance from the project site to a natural landscape link, e.g. waterway, drainage or ridge line or coastal dunes (to be confirmed by Shire).	1.9
Distance from the project site to other sites of revegetation projects (to be confirmed by Shire).	1.10
Does the project site fall within the Landcare Biolinks map (to be confirmed by Shire).	1.11
Community and economic considerations	
Evidence of partnership with either an established group, e.g. Landcare, Friends group. This evidence should explain the role of the established group, and whether they will provide support for the project and/or ongoing maintenance.	2.1a, 2.5, 2.7
If applicants are proposing to work on public land, they will need to provide a statement from the public land manager that they consent to the project and will act as auspice.	2.1a
Evidence of partnership with neighbouring landholders, e.g. a letter.	2.1b
Evidence of previous support received from the Shire or under other programs, to be verified by the Shire.	2.2a

Information source	Questions
Evidence of participation in a research project, e.g. a letter from a university staff member or student.	2.3
Explanation of how the project will contain elements of community engagement or education.	2.4
Explanation of how they will deliver the project and any ongoing maintenance, if relevant.	2.5, 2.6, 2.7
Commitment to financial or in-kind contributions, including how much, what it will be used for, and whether for project delivery or ongoing maintenance.	2.8, 2.9, 2.10
Feasibility and effectiveness	
Any risk avoidance or mitigation strategies to increase the feasibility of the project. Applicants could be provided with points from the feasibility checklist to consider during the application.	3.1, Feasibility checklist
Explanation of whether the action is dependent upon other actions to succeed.	3.2
Evidence that the action is needed, e.g. photos of degraded habitat, evidence of threatened species or weeds present.	3.4
If proposing novel techniques, evidence of their effectiveness.	3.5
Estimates of time lag to proposed biodiversity benefits, and duration of biodiversity benefits.	3.7, 3.8
Monitoring and reporting	
When submitting the application, applicants should need to sign/tick a box to agree to monitoring and reporting on both project delivery and biodiversity outcomes, as a condition of support.	4.1
If relevant, confirmation that they monitored and reported on past projects supported by the Shire.	4.2, 4.3

Appendix 6 Monitoring and reporting guidelines.

It is recommended that monitoring and reporting on outcomes to the Mornington Peninsula Shire are conditions of support for biolink projects.

The application may contain recommended forms of monitoring that applicants can use to confirm project delivery, as well as whether the project has delivered the expected biodiversity outcomes. Below are suggested monitoring options that applicants could use to report on project progress, completion and outcomes.

Monitoring project delivery	Monitoring biodiversity outcomes
Revegetation or supplementary plantings	
☐ Number of seedlings planted ☐ Number (or percentage) of plants survived after one year (or life of project) ☐ Number of maintenance visits/ in-fill plantings ☐ Before/after photos of project site (use set photo points)	☐ Percentage cover of native vegetation at the project site ☐ Observations of wildlife using plantings in the project site, e.g. photos, incidental records, survey data ☐ Photos of plantings over time (use set photo points)
Environmental weed control	
☐ Number of contractor visits and hours spent undertaking weed management ☐ Estimate of number (or percentage cover) of weeds surviving following works (optional) ☐ Before/after photos of project site (use set photo points)	☐ Estimate of weed cover post-weed control ☐ Evidence of natural regeneration ☐ Observations of wildlife using the project site, e.g. photos, incidental records, survey data ☐ Photos of environmental weed control site over time (use set photo points)
Fencing	
☐ Before/after photos of project site (use set photo points)	☐ Estimate of cover of native vegetation on either side of the fence (optional) ☐ Evidence of natural regeneration ☐ Evidence of revegetation survival (if relevant) ☐ Observations of wildlife using the project site, e.g. photos, incidental records, survey data ☐ Photos of fenced area (and unfenced area for comparison) over time (use set photo points)