



How healthy is your watercourse? Assessing stream bank vegetation

Well managed watercourses are valuable assets for both the community and for individual landholders

A healthy watercourse has a relatively stable channel and well vegetated banks, provides good quality water for a range of domestic and productive uses, and is home for a wide variety of birds, fish, frogs, lizards and other animals.

Why assess your stream bank vegetation?

Stream bank or riparian vegetation has an important role in maintaining a healthy watercourse. Riparian vegetation:

- controls bank erosion by binding and holding the banks together and by absorbing the force of flowing water.

Well managed watercourses provide many benefits to the community and individual landholders.

They also provide important habitat for native wildlife and plants.

- improves water quality by filtering sediments and pollutants in run-off from adjacent land uses.
- provides habitat and food for birds, fish and other wildlife living in the water and on the banks.
- gives shade and shelter.

However, the ability of riparian vegetation to provide these valuable functions is inhibited or lost when:

- it is cleared or reduced in width.
- it becomes dominated by weeds or exotic plants.
- its structure is reduced through the loss of one or more types of plant (e.g. no ground covers or grasses are present, or only grasses are present).




The pictures on the reverse side of this fact sheet will help you to assess the health of the stream bank vegetation on your property.





How healthy is your stream bank vegetation?

← Increasing bank stability and watercourse health ←

	Assessment	Options
	<p>There is little or no vegetation cover on the stream bank or vegetation is only grass.</p> <p>Banks are unstable with active erosion and bare areas.</p>	<p>Seek advice on treating bank erosion. The Department of Natural Resources and Water can help.</p> <p>Spell the area from stock to allow cover to return.</p> <p>Consider managing stock access to allow for natural regeneration and plan and implement a planting program to help restore stability.</p>
	<p>Stream bank vegetation is sparse or there is a limited range of plant types and forms.</p> <p>There are few or no native seedlings or small plants.</p> <p>Woody or invasive weeds may be present.</p> <p>Banks may have early signs of instability.</p>	<p>Improve vegetation cover and diversity on the banks by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing stock access to encourage natural regeneration, and/or, • Fencing and planting native stream plants, or, • Fencing and spreading native plant seed. <p>Control woody and invasive weeds.</p>
	<p>Stream bank vegetation is in good condition.</p> <p>A range of plant types and forms are present (i.e. ground cover, shrubs and trees).</p> <p>Many native seedlings and young plants are present.</p> <p>Few weed plants are present.</p> <p>Banks are mostly stable.</p>	<p>Control woody and invasive weeds as necessary.</p> <p>Manage stock access to maintain healthy condition.</p> <p>Keep up the good work!</p>

Adapted from LWRDC Occasional Paper No 03/95: Rivercare

Further information

For further information on stream bank vegetation contact your local office of the Department of Natural Resources and Water, or the nearest Greening Australia extension officer. Landcare groups, if operating in your area, are also a valuable source of information and may have particular expertise in addressing local issues and needs.

March 2006

R34

For further information phone 13 13 04

See also in this series

- R30 Stream bank vegetation is valuable
- R31 Stream bank planting guidelines and hints
- R33 Managing stock in and around waterways.

