



# Farmnote

## Environmental Management Systems for Agriculture

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*An environmental management system enables a business to identify and manage its impacts on the environment. Independent accreditation of an environmental management system also enables a business to be recognised for its "environmental friendliness" by markets and local communities alike. Environmental management systems may soon be common in Australian agriculture.*

## What is an environmental management system?

An environmental management system is a management tool that any business can use to control the impacts that its activities have on the environment. It is a structured framework for achieving continual improvements in environmental performance, based on a standard management cycle. This cycle is summarised in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: The environmental management system cycle*

Once an environmental management system has been established, a business may choose to have its system certified. Certification is used to verify that the system is operational and enables a business to make public declarations of its environmental responsibility, often through the use of an eco-label.

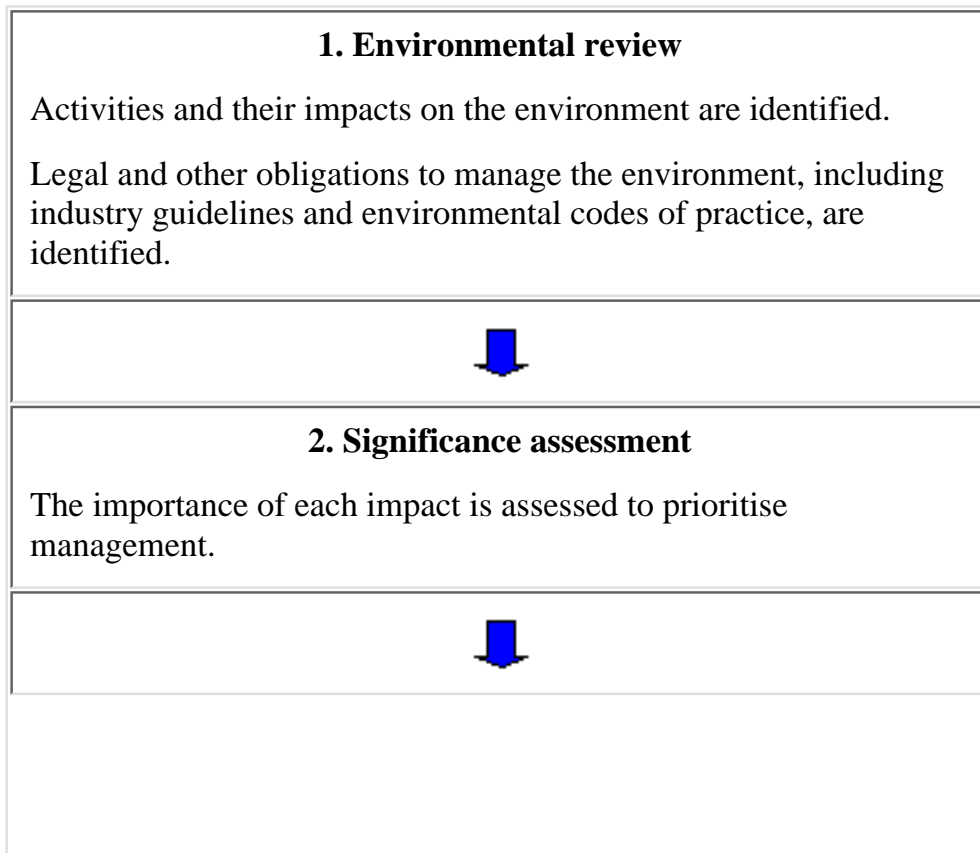
# Why use an environmental management system?

In recent years, environmental management systems have been successful in meeting the environmental management needs of many businesses, particularly in the mining and manufacturing industries. The benefits of environmental management systems are now being sought in Australian agriculture. These benefits include:

- **Market access** - satisfying customer demands for environmentally certified produce.
- **Preventing trade barriers** - avoiding trade limitations in the event of the environment becoming a non-tariff trade barrier.
- **Community goodwill** - greater public confidence in agriculture through a demonstration of environmental responsibility.
- **Increased operational efficiencies** - through more effective use of inputs, and reduced spending on correcting environmental problems.
- **Improved resource management** - through systematic identification of opportunities for environmental improvement.
- **Reduced legal liability** - a way of demonstrating due diligence to reduce legal liabilities.
- **Property values** - potentially enhanced through better resource management.

## Environmental management systems for Australian agriculture

Agwest is working cooperatively with farmer groups to develop a framework for an environmental management system that is designed for Australian agriculture. This framework will require a producer to work through the following steps:



### **3. Objectives and targets**

Management goals for each significant impact are established in an environmental policy and in a series of objectives and targets. Appropriate indicators are selected so that progress can be monitored



### **4. Management practices and procedures**

Management practices are selected or developed to control significant impacts. These practices are written down as formal procedures to allow consistency between operators.



### **5. Action plans**

Action plans are developed to set out the tasks, timeframes and responsibilities needed to meet objectives and targets.



### **6. Monitoring**

Once objectives and targets have been established it is important to monitor if they are being achieved and if management procedures are being effectively implemented.



### **7. Documentation**

Keeping and maintaining relevant documents and records (eg. spray records, procedures and monitoring results) makes sure there is a consistent and traceable approach to environmental management. Documentation also enables the system to be independently audited and certified.



### **8. Audit and review**

Regular self-audits of the EMS show if required management actions are occurring and where improvements need to be made. An annual review of the entire system ensures it continues to meet environmental management goals.



### **9. Optional independent audit**

Once an EMS is up and running, a business may choose to undergo an independent certification audit so that their claims of environmental responsibility are independently verified.

This framework is likely to be harmonised with the SQF (Safe, Quality Food) quality management system. SQF is an internationally recognised system for managing food safety and quality in the agri-food industry.

An SQF-based environmental management system will offer producers the advantages of a system that is:

- flexible and specific to agriculture;
- aligned with an internationally recognised food safety and quality system, to strengthen the credibility of an EMS eco-label and to unite quality and environmental management into one system;
- based on the HACCP risk assessment methodology;
- capable of providing independent certification;
- user-friendly, straightforward and affordable;
- able to ensure legal compliance;
- able to promote a continuous improvement in environmental performance;
- compliant with the requirements of ISO 14001, an international standard for environmental management systems.

The demand for verified environmental management in agriculture is growing. An environmental management system enables a business to improve its environmental performance whilst meeting market and community demands for goods that are proven to be "environmentally friendly." The benefits that can be gained from environmental management systems make their use in agriculture good business sense.

## **Further information**

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