



CARING  
FOR  
OUR  
COUNTRY

Caring for our Country

# Business Plan

2011-12

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# Ministers' foreword

When the Australian Government established Caring for our Country in 2008, a call to action was made to the Australian community. The community was asked for investment proposals to improve the environment through a new, coordinated management package.

Communities were asked to work together to protect our natural environment, to build natural resilience in our ecosystems and farmlands, and to help the Australian landscape withstand the many pressures it faces. They accepted this call with enthusiasm, evidenced by the remarkable level of interest in the first two Caring for our Country business plans.

The past few years have reminded us that Australia's climate is one of extremes. We have endured floods, cyclones, bushfires and one of the longest droughts on record.

We have just experienced one of the biggest flooding events in recent Australian history and these floods have impacted a range of communities and landscapes across Australia. We will be working with regional natural resource management bodies and key stakeholders to help with the delivery of ongoing projects and appropriate measures to assist with environmental recovery.

As a nation we now have a greater awareness of the effects of a changing climate and the impacts not only to our environment but our way of life. We have to be wiser in using and managing our natural resources. If we don't use them wisely there will be a significant cost to the Australian economy and ultimately to our welfare.

The prolonged drought over much of the last decade has seen many land managers lead the way in adopting more sustainable farming practices. Through initiatives such as Caring for our Country, the Australian Government is supporting rural communities by investing heavily in projects that improve the health, resilience and productivity of our natural environment.

We recognise the need for urgent and continuing action, which is why the Australian Government established the Caring for our Country initiative. In its fourth year this flagship initiative takes a strategic whole-of-landscape approach to safeguarding the environment and making sure our food and fibre industries remain viable.

Caring for our Country empowers regional bodies, landholders, Landcare, environmental, community, industry, and Indigenous groups to take positive action to improve the environment. It also continues to evolve as it supports broader government initiatives to address emerging threats to our native species, farms, rivers, coasts and natural icons such as the Great Barrier Reef.

The Caring for our Country program is an important way of supporting farmers, land managers and community groups to adopt more sustainable farming practices and make a real difference to our environment.

Caring for our Country projects reduce the impact of invasive species, protect coastal environments, protect native habitats and support biodiversity.

The first three years of Caring for our Country show that we are making a difference.

- We have funded a research and breeding program to save the Tasmanian devil from extinction.
- We have helped Indigenous communities to establish over 23.9 million hectares of Indigenous owned and managed lands that will be conserved for their significant natural and cultural values as Indigenous Protected Areas.
- Community Action Grants are supporting 750 community groups to undertake activities such as revegetation, dune rehabilitation, field days, and to improve land management practices.
- We know that improving the ongoing sustainable management of natural resources will redress the decline in the health of Australia's landscapes.

As the hard work of so many of you through the previous business plans has attested, the Australian community is deeply committed to a healthy, sustainable environment.

We look forward to working with you again through the 2011–12 Caring for our Country business plan.

Together we can create a more prosperous and sustainable future for all Australians.

**The Hon Tony Burke MP**  
Minister for Sustainability,  
Environment, Water, Population,  
and Communities

**Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig**  
Minister for Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

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# SECTION 1 Introduction

# 1.1 Caring for our Country

Caring for our Country is an Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

Australia's unique natural environment plays an important part in the lives of all Australians. We rely on the land, its forests, its waterways and the essential ecosystem services they provide. Our environment provides for our economy, our well being and our national identity, yet we often take it for granted.

Habitat degradation and fragmentation, the spread of invasive pest plants and animals, the effects of climate change and human activities are among the biggest threats.

Australia's biodiversity is one of the planet's most unique and diverse. To let it diminish further will impact not only ourselves but future generations of Australians.

Through initiatives such as Caring for our Country, the Australian Government is building resilience into the natural environment and maximising the sustainability of our resource-based industries. Complementary Government initiatives to respond to climate change and water availability are contributing by helping both urban and rural Australians to live and operate more sustainably.

Caring for our Country is based on measurable strategic outcomes at a national scale for the medium-term (five-year) in the context of longer term (20-year) projections. These are both published in the *Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008–2013*.

The outcomes are focused on protecting and building resilience into our environment across six national priority areas:

- natural resource management in northern and remote Australia
- community skills, knowledge and engagement
- the National Reserve System
- biodiversity and natural icons
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices.

In the first five years of Caring for our Country, the Government is investing over \$2 billion to secure strategic outcomes across these six priority areas.

To date, over \$1.7 billion has been invested in the Caring for our Country initiative

To guide further investment, the outcomes are underpinned by detailed shorter-term targets and investment priorities taking into account community, scientific and expert advice. These targets are identified in each annual business plan, setting out the key elements necessary to meet the five-year outcomes.

This 2011–12 business plan identifies the targets and investment focus for the fourth year.

The annual report card informs the Government and community on the likelihood of achieving the five-year outcomes.

## 1.2 Aim of the 2011–12 business plan

The 2011–12 business plan builds upon the foundations set by previous business plans. This business plan identifies the targets for investment in 2011–12 and 2012–13. These targets encourage proposals to ensure we continue to deliver against the Government’s strategic objectives set out in the document *Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008–2013*.

The 2011–12 business plan indicates the types of proposals the Australian Government is interested in funding to address its strategic objectives.

Annual business plans are subject to continual improvement. When developing them for Caring for our Country, we seek stakeholder feedback to identify what works, improve what doesn’t and give appropriate guidance to potential applicants.

In response to feedback and to ensure ongoing progress against the five-year outcomes, the majority of targets from the previous business plan have been retained. Some have been revised to allow more flexibility and greater potential for investment.

Under this business plan we are seeking one and two year proposals which address emerging challenges and continuing problems across the national priorities.

Proposals will not be sought in relation to some targets where significant investment has already occurred and on-ground works are continuing, as these targets are already delivering against the Caring of our Country outcomes. For example, there is no call in this business plan for projects to address cane toads and camels.

This business plan maintains a range of investment approaches to allow Caring for our Country to continue to meet the needs of the community and to help ensure that we remain on track to achieve the five-year outcomes.

## 1.3 How we are going

We are now over half way through the first five years of the Caring for our Country initiative.

When introducing Caring for our Country we wanted investment to achieve real outcomes to benefit Australia's natural resources and to make our productivity more sustainable.

To achieve these goals the Australian Government allocated \$2 billion for the first five years and nominated six national priority areas for investment.

Three years in, over \$1.7 billion has been invested in the Caring for our Country initiative. Through this investment we are aiming for landscape-scale change to the condition of our natural resources as well as effective and sustainable management.

Work on the ground has involved a whole spectrum of professionals and community members, paid and voluntary. We've involved farmers, Indigenous rangers, regional natural resource management organisations, Landcare and other voluntary environmental protection groups. This business plan will build on investment that is already working towards long term, meaningful outcomes.

The Australian Government has committed to a whole-of-ecosystem approach to conserve our unique natural assets. This approach is a realisation that real change will be a long-term process, investing now for results in the future.

Investment priorities have included \$200 million for Reef Rescue. This is helping farmers in the Great Barrier Reef catchment to improve farming practices to reduce sediment and nutrient run-off. It will give this World Heritage icon the best chance of responding to the pressures of climate change and global warming. We will continue to work with farmers to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef Lagoon.

The National Reserve System (NRS) is a critical component of the Government's efforts to protect terrestrial biodiversity. Australia's reserve system now totals more than 9300 protected areas covering nearly 13 per cent of the country. It is also one of the world's great conservation partnerships.

Expanding the NRS, including the number of Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs), has been a priority as it creates a network for conserving examples of our natural landscapes and native plants and animals for future generations. Forty-four properties totalling almost 1.3 million hectares have been added to the NRS with further acquisitions planned.

Since July 2008 Indigenous communities have declared 17 new IPAs covering over three million hectares. Across Australia a total of 42 declared IPAs now cover over 23.9 million hectares of Indigenous owned and managed lands. Thirty-five new IPA consultation projects have also been given support to develop plans of management incorporating Indigenous ecological knowledge.

Australia supports almost ten per cent of the planet's biodiversity. Its rich and complex flora, fauna and other ecological communities make it the most biologically diverse developed country in the world. Through the biodiversity and natural icons national priority, the Government is funding work to reduce the impact of weeds and pest animals such as foxes, wild dogs, camels and cane toads, and key threats to the outstanding natural values of many of Australia's unique World Heritage areas. Targeting this national priority area will increase native vegetation by over two million hectares.

Caring for our Country is also using multi-year funding for long-term projects such as maintaining viable Tasmanian devil populations and reducing damage to Macquarie Island by rabbits, rats and mice.

Through our landmark Environmental Stewardship Program farmers across many parts of Australia are being funded to manage 26 474 hectares of threatened ecological communities on private land. We're hoping this figure will reach 30 000 hectares by June 2011 through funding committed in the 2010–11 financial year.

The Government has invested heavily in achieving long-term outcomes for our coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats. Since 2008 more than 1600 land managers have received Reef Rescue funds to deliver water quality improvements. Major projects are also well underway to improve water quality management in coastal hotspots such as the Gippsland Lakes in Victoria. To date, communities have implemented measures to protect over 9000 hectares of Ramsar wetlands through on-ground activities, research and information gathering and community engagement. Over 1145 community organisations are also involved in coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and conservation.

Through the sustainable farm practices national priority, \$170 million has been approved to help farmers and rural communities improve natural resource management. The funding is helping over 30 000 farmers to adopt improved land management practices that deliver ecosystem services. Around 3000 farmers are also being supported to undertake activities that improve landscape-scale conservation. Additionally, over 27 000 farmers and land managers have improved their skills and knowledge in managing natural resources. Commercial fishers and aquaculturalists are also being supported to improve practices to optimise sustainability.

The community skills, knowledge and engagement national priority area has been integrated within projects covering the many aspects of Caring for our Country. These elements will work towards increasing the capacity and participation of Indigenous people, volunteers and community groups to protect and manage natural resources and environmental assets.

The community skills, knowledge and engagement national priority has been strongly supported through Community Action Grants which have provided 750 groups with more than \$15 million to date. These grants allow groups to undertake activities such as revegetation, pest control, dune rehabilitation, field days, improving land management practices and recording and using traditional ecological knowledge.

Caring for our Country has contributed to the employment and training of up to 660 Indigenous rangers to deliver environmental services across the Indigenous estate. It is proving to be a successful cross-cultural model with strong uptake of ranger positions and rangers undertaking a diverse range of environmental activities across 65 projects to date. Key activities include improved management of fire, threatened species, invasive species, sea country and cultural heritage. All projects rely on and facilitate the transfer of traditional ecological knowledge. Working on Country makes an important contribution to the Government's Closing the Gap agenda through the delivery of real, ongoing jobs and broader social and economic benefits for Indigenous communities.

The Government has been particularly interested in opportunities relevant to Indigenous groups. In the 2010–11 business plan we broadened the scope for Indigenous engagement by introducing two new Indigenous participation targets that focused on projects to implement existing land and sea country management plans and record traditional ecological knowledge.

More than \$120 million has been invested in northern and remote Australia as a priority area. Indigenous people and pastoralists responsible for managing vast areas have been given opportunities and support to undertake projects which deliver against other Caring for our Country targets in this region. Key projects include:

- removing feral camels from biological refugia such as high ecological value aquatic ecosystems in a cross-jurisdictional and multi-partner initiative through central Australia
- supporting Indigenous traditional fire management on over 100 000 square kilometres through early season patch burns to help prevent late season large and destructive wild fires across the northern savanna in the Kimberley, Arnhem Land, the Carpentaria Gulf and Cape York
- Indigenous groups monitoring and protecting coastal and marine environments including the removal of marine debris and ghost nets in northern waters.

The strategic approach has been dynamic and flexible. Community feedback has been noted and, where appropriate, worked into the design of this new plan.

## Further information

Case studies of how Caring for our Country is addressing the national priority areas are available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

The Caring for our Country Report Cards can be viewed at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## 1.4 Budget

The Australian Government is providing over \$2 billion for the first five years of Caring for our Country. Approved investment in single and multi-year projects is shown in table 1.

**Table 1:** Expenditure and approvals under Caring for our Country up to January 2011 (\$ million)

National priority area	Expenses and approvals (GST exclusive)
<b>National Reserve System</b>	<b>121.9</b>
Indigenous Protected Areas	42.1
National Reserve System	79.8
<b>Biodiversity and natural icons</b>	<b>160.0</b>
Natural icons and World Heritage	58.7
Biodiversity protection	47.2
Environmental Stewardship	42.1
Tasmanian devil	10.0
Cane toads	2.0
<b>Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats</b>	<b>264.2</b>
Reef Rescue	152.7
Community Coastcare	69.1
Gippsland Lakes and Eastern Creek Wetlands	5.3
Aquatic habitats	28.5
Tuggerah Lakes	8.7
<b>Sustainable farm practices</b>	<b>170.4</b>
Landcare	138.1
Land management change	32.3
<b>Community skills, knowledge and engagement</b>	<b>220.1</b>
Indigenous rangers	90.0
Indigenous Emissions Trading Scheme	10.0
Community Action Grants	15.2
Caring for our Country Facilitators	39.5
Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement	65.3
<b>Regional base-level funding</b>	<b>644.6</b>
New South Wales	168.3
Victoria	142.5
Queensland	111.7
Western Australia	101.3
South Australia	75.8
Tasmania	28.5
Australian Capital Territory	4.1

Northern Territory	12.4
<b>Administration / Implementation</b>	<b>175.7</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,756.9</b>

Note: Due to rounding some columns may not add exactly to totals. Progress and case study details are available at [www.nrm.gov.au/me/report-cards/index.html](http://www.nrm.gov.au/me/report-cards/index.html).

## Multi-year projects

Many successful proposals have funding approved for multi-year projects, with some running through to June 2013.

This gives project managers greater long-term certainty and allows for better planning to improve on-ground outcomes.

It also means that some of the allocated budget in 2011–12 and 2012–13 has already been committed.

## Funding for the 2011–12 business plan

Under this business plan we are seeking submissions for projects that will be completed by June 2013.

Up to about \$178 million will be available for investment under this business plan.

This includes \$66 million in base-level funding available to regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations yet to submit applications for their full five-year allocation.

Investment will be available through various approaches, including open call, direct negotiation and regional base-level expression of interest.

Table 2 shows the notional multi-year budget and the expected spread of funding.

These notional budgets may change depending on the quality of applications received for each national priority area.

**Table 2:** 2011–12 business plan notional multi-year budget (\$ million)

National priority area	Notional multi-year budget available (GST exclusive)
National Reserve System	35
Biodiversity and natural icons	} 77
Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats	
Sustainable farm practices	
Base-level funding for regional NRM organisations	66
Total notional multi-year budget available	Up to 178
Community skills, knowledge and engagement	Targets in this priority area will be delivered via projects addressing targets in other national priority areas. Community Action Grants are also available to support community groups to undertake projects in other national priority areas.
Northern and remote Australia	Funding for northern and remote Australia is delivered through several targets and activities under other national priority areas.

Notes: Notional budgets are approximate and described in whole millions. Not all available budget under Caring for our Country will be offered through the 2011–12 business plan. This will ensure that funds are available for new projects in 2012–13.

Regional NRM organisations as a group are allocated \$138 million per year in base-level funding to deliver Caring for our Country targets (see table 3). Individual organisations must apply to access their share of the

remaining funds (\$66 million over two years) where agreement is yet to be reached with Government on how these funds will be invested.

Table 3 shows how the identified regional NRM organisations will invest base-level funding against each priority area.

They will continue to use the base-level funding to contribute to outcomes and targets. For more information on their role see section 1.5.

**Table 3:** Regional base-level funding (\$ million) allocations to date

National priority area	How regional base-level funding has been applied					
	2008–09	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2012–13	Total
National Reserve System	0.2	1.3	1.6	1.0	1.0	5.1
Biodiversity and natural icons	50.9	40.8	47.3	36.6	35.3	210.8
Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats	36.1	25.1	21.8	17.9	14.6	115.6
Sustainable farm practices	35.1	45.4	45.0	45.3	45.4	216.2
Community skills, knowledge and engagement *	36.7	25.4	22.3	5.7	6.8	96.9
<b>Total approved</b>	<b>159.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>106.5</b>	<b>103.1</b>	<b>644.6</b>
<b>Remaining funding</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>66.4</b>
<b>Base-level funding to regions</b>	<b>159.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>138.0</b>	<b>711.0</b>

**Notes:** \* Regional NRM organisations play an important role in engaging the public in NRM issues through a range of community skills, knowledge and engagement investments.

Due to rounding some columns may not add exactly to totals.

## 1.5 How we will invest—different approaches

Caring for our Country will continue to use a mix of investment approaches designed to most effectively deliver on each target and achieve identified outcomes.

Caring for our Country provides funding for a broad range of sustainable land management and environmental protection work.

We believe it is important to be flexible when designing how best to deliver on certain targets and when selecting the most appropriate investment approaches to meet the needs of specific stakeholder groups.

We recognise that groups will work differently to achieve outcomes and a variety of investment approaches is required. In some cases a negotiated investment approach will ensure the best outcome.

The range of available investment approaches that will help applicants direct their efforts and time as effectively as possible when seeking funding is outlined below. The approach applicable to each target is outlined in section 2.

Application closing dates are outlined in section 3, along with details on how to apply and how proposals will be assessed.

The Australian Government reserves the right to negotiate with applicants to establish the most appropriate project for investment and delivery of Caring for our Country funds.

### Open call

In this business plan, proposals are invited through the open call investment process which range in value from \$20 000 to \$1 million.

The exception to the \$1 million cap is land acquisition proposals under the National Reserve System (NRS) where land value is a factor.

The open call investment process is the principal way in which funding for projects can be sought under this business plan. It provides the opportunity for diverse groups and organisations to obtain funding.

For example, applicants can submit open call applications to address targets related to Ramsar wetlands, coastal hotspots, the NRS, coastal community engagement, sustainable farm practices and Indigenous participation.

Applicants should plan their projects to meet these Caring for our Country targets.

### Partnerships with business and industry

The Government encourages groups and organisations to leverage matching funding from business and industry sectors for projects which directly contribute to Caring for our Country targets and outcomes.

There is an increased focus in business and industry on issues such as climate change adaptation, supply chain and corporate social responsibility. This is an opportunity for them to achieve natural resource management (NRM) outcomes—partnered and working with regional NRM organisations, local and state government agencies, non-government organisations, local community groups, research institutions and Indigenous organisations.

Examples include a mining company working with a local community group to improve local wetlands, and

fishing cooperatives supporting Landcare to improve riparian vegetation and minimise the effluent run-off from dairy farms to improve water quality for fish habitat and oyster farming.

These proposals will require a specific commitment in writing from the co-investors.

Organisations and groups working together can achieve positive change. The Government encourages partnerships but understands that developing and maintaining them takes time, effort and commitment.

There is no absolute requirement to develop new partnerships for proposals under this business plan, unless the partnership is critical to the delivery of the project.

## Regional investment

The Government remains committed to providing secure base-level funding to the identified regional organisations in the NRM regions.

The 22 regional NRM organisations yet to commit their full allocation are invited to submit an expression of interest for their remaining base-level funding that addresses the Caring for our Country targets and outcomes. For more information on how to develop an expression of interest for regional base-level funding see section 3.1.

Regional NRM organisations are well placed to interact with Indigenous groups and increase Indigenous participation in environmental protection and natural resource management at a regional and local scale.

Wherever possible, Indigenous communities should be involved in the delivery of regional programs. The Government is seeking significant investment in engaging Indigenous communities through base-level funding.

Regional organisations are also well placed to develop multi-regional and cross-jurisdictional projects.

It is expected that regional programs will:

- assist local communities—including environmental, Indigenous, Landcare and Coastcare groups—to access knowledge and skills in sustainably managing natural resources by providing, for example, easily accessible free information to groups and individuals, or training for local groups
- provide support for community groups to undertake local projects, for example through the provision of devolved grants schemes, or provision of facilitation/coordination services
- undertake communication activities to increase broader community engagement in and understanding of NRM
- adopt rigorous monitoring and evaluation processes to support continuous improvement
- deliver timely and accurate reporting on the achievement of milestones and outcomes of projects.

## Community Action Grants

While timing is still being finalised, it is anticipated that the 2011–12 Community Action Grants round will open for applications around May 2011. Applications will be invited from environmental, Indigenous, Landcare, Coastcare and sustainable agriculture community groups for grants of between \$5000 and \$20 000 (GST exclusive) for a broad range of activities that will contribute to Caring for our Country national priorities.

Community Action Grants aim to increase community group participation in natural resource management, including increasing the engagement and participation rates of urban and regional communities. Grants will fund activities such as revegetation, dune rehabilitation, field days, improving land management practices and recording and use of traditional ecological knowledge.

These grants are tailored to groups currently operating in the environmental and sustainable land management arena and established and emerging Indigenous groups. Community groups working

across all geographic areas and land tenures are encouraged to apply.

Guidelines and eligibility criteria will be available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) when the 2011–12 Community Action Grants round opens.

## One-off environment recovery responses

The Government may assist in the recovery of the natural environment from the sudden and extreme effects of natural disasters where it aligns with Caring for our Country targets and outcomes and where it will achieve a positive outcome for the environment.

Significant requests for assistance are generally coordinated through the relevant state or territory government and such assistance will be considered on a case-by-case basis and negotiated separately. Investment proposals for individual projects that address the Caring for our Country targets and at the same time assist in environmental recovery following a natural disaster will be considered through the normal open call, regional base-level expression of interest under this business plan or Community Action Grants investment processes.

Such activities should not duplicate other programs that address natural disasters such as under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements. Funding is not available to provide business assistance to affected industries.

## 1.6 Supporting maps and other information

A range of maps is available to help in preparing proposals under the 2011–12 Caring for our Country business plan.

The maps contain the best information available on the location of the areas and issues targeted for Caring for our Country investment.

In some cases a specific geographic location is targeted, such as a Ramsar wetland. Applicants are strongly advised to consult the maps first to ensure their proposal is within the correct geographic area identified for investments where relevant.

Maps are available to view online at the Caring for our Country website and are also available on an accompanying CD to the hard copy document. To arrange delivery of the CD please contact us on 1800 552 008.

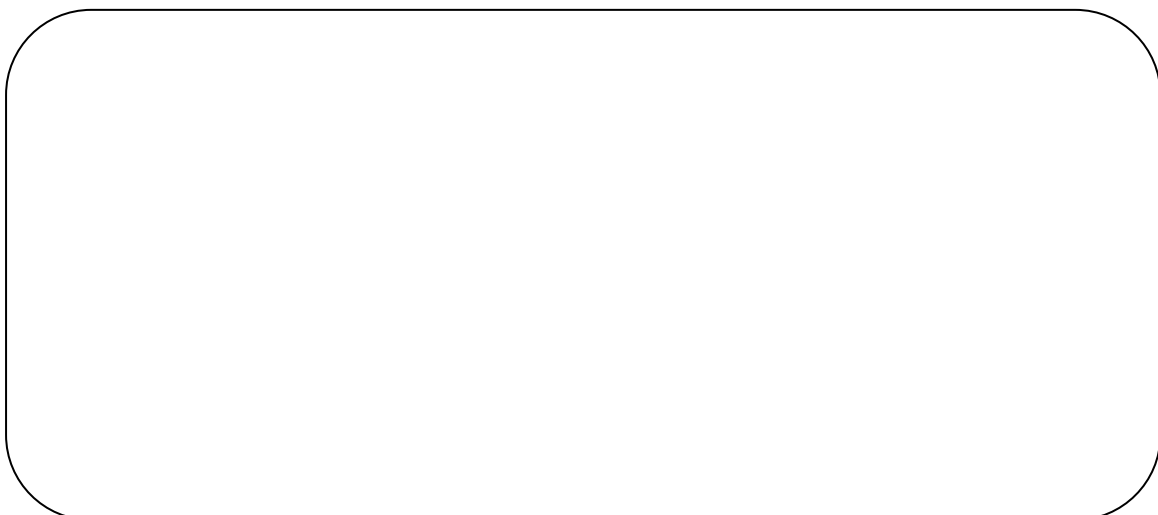
Maps have been produced at three different spatial scales appropriate to the range of investments, the target focus and the data available.

### National maps

Maps are available at a national scale to show distributions across Australia of:

- extent of threatened ecological communities (predominantly native vegetation)
- bioregions under-represented in the National Reserve System
- extent of threatened species, mammals, reptiles, birds and flora
- priority state-managed World Heritage areas
- distribution of Weeds of National Significance
- location of priority Ramsar wetland, high ecological value aquatic ecosystem and coastal hotspot sites.

### Example of a national map



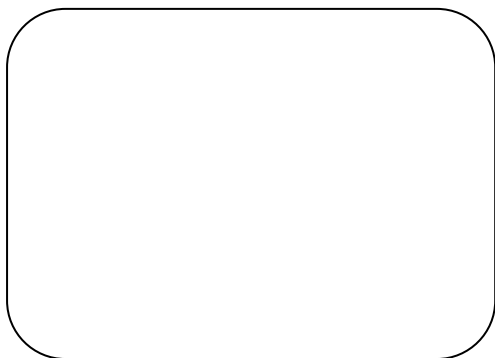
## State maps

Maps at the state level provide more detailed information on indicative distribution of threatened ecological communities (predominantly native vegetation) in QLD, NSW, VIC, TAS, SA, WA, NT and ACT.

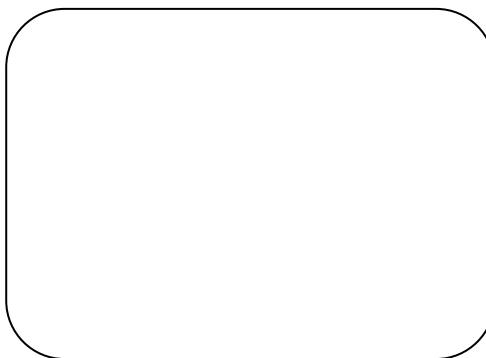
## Site maps

More detailed site-specific maps are provided for priority Ramsar wetland, high ecological value aquatic ecosystem and coastal hotspot sites.

### Example of a state map



### Example of a site map



Maps are available from the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au). For a list of available maps see the appendix at section 5.3.

## Other information

The range of supporting information provides essential guidance for applicants in developing applications for this business plan. It includes site specific information for World Heritage areas, the National Weeds Strategy, environmental state recovery plans and conditions around funding under the National Reserve System.

It also covers information developed specifically to focus investment under this business plan, such as specific site investment guides for priority Ramsar wetlands and critical aquatic ecosystems.

Further details of this supporting information are contained in relevant areas of section 2.

# SECTION 2 Priorities for investment

## 2.0 Priorities for investment

Short-term targets will support the achievement of the five-year outcomes (from July 2008 to June 2013) across the six national priority areas:

- natural resource management in northern and remote Australia
- community skills, knowledge and engagement
- the National Reserve System
- biodiversity and natural icons
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices.

The following information outlines the targets for which investment proposals are being sought under this business plan. Information includes the rationale, targeted investment approaches, priority locations and activities, and eligibility criteria for each target where appropriate.

This information is important. Applicants should consider it carefully before developing and submitting an investment proposal.

Definitions of terms are in the glossary at the end of the business plan.

## 2.1 Northern and remote Australia

The Australian Government aims to secure better environmental and natural resource outcomes in northern and remote Australia, with a particular emphasis on working with Indigenous groups. Proposals for activities in northern and remote areas of Australia must deliver against targets in another Caring for our Country priority area.

The Australian Government understands that the environmental and sustainable farming challenges faced by northern and remote Australia may require a tailored approach for natural resource management.

This is because of its geographic scale, cost structures and unique environmental assets and cultural values.

The small and dispersed population and social, economic and environmental challenges require different approaches from those in more developed areas.

Northern and remote Australia contains some of our most intact high conservation value landscapes and valuable productive resources.

Northern and remote Australia also has some of Australia's most important agricultural production systems. We are seeking projects that can integrate sustainable production with the maintenance and improvement of environmental services and protection of important biodiversity.

We will also fund work to manage World Heritage areas, protect Ramsar wetlands, improve the management of high ecological value aquatic ecosystems, and improve land management practices and the knowledge and skill of land managers.

Proposals for activities in northern and remote areas of Australia are sought against targets in other Caring for our Country priority areas.

### Northern and remote Australia

Insert map

## 2.2 Community skills, knowledge and engagement

Caring for our Country recognises that community engagement and building knowledge and skills within the community are vital if we are to protect and restore our unique and valuable environment and productive land base.

Many community groups and organisations have progressively become more skilled and knowledgeable in managing the natural resources in their regions. The Australian Government recognises the work of these community groups and organisations, such as Landcare, Coastcare and ‘friends of’ groups, and the valuable contribution they make to the health and resilience of our environment and productive land.

The unique knowledge and skills of Indigenous people and communities is also acknowledged. The Government recognises the vital role they play in managing and protecting our environment to help achieve conservation outcomes.

**Table 4:** Community skills, knowledge and engagement

Five-year outcomes	Targets	Summary of investment approaches
<p>Ensure the continued use, support, and reinvigoration of traditional ecological knowledge to underpin biodiversity conservation.</p>	<p><b>Indigenous participation</b></p> <p>To resource at least 20 projects which directly involve Indigenous organisations or groups to achieve Caring for our Country outcomes.</p>	<p>To ensure that Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed throughout the business plan, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the targets where it makes sense to do so.</p> <p>Activities will only be supported as part of a broader proposal which contributes to the on-ground delivery of other targets.</p> <p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <p>Proposals are sought from Indigenous organisations against this target.</p> <p>Indigenous organisations may choose to include non-Indigenous organisations as partners in their application.</p> <p>Non Indigenous organisations can also apply. However, they must demonstrate genuine partnerships with Indigenous organisations or groups.</p>

Through this business plan, community groups and organisations have the opportunity to undertake community skills, knowledge and engagement activities, including workshops, field days and communication initiatives (refer to communication requirements in section 4.2). They can also seek support for facilitation or coordination.

Proposals nominating community skills, knowledge and engagement activities will only be supported as part of a broader proposal which contributes to the on-ground delivery of other Caring for our Country targets.

Funding is also available under sustainable farm practices (section 2.6) to improve knowledge and skills. Activities addressing this target will not be supported unless they are part of a broader proposal which contributes to the improving management practices target and/or the landscape scale conservation target.

Applicants seeking support for community skills, knowledge and engagement must be able to explain how the activities will contribute to other targets.

Applicants seeking smaller amounts can contact their regional natural resource management organisation to discuss local grant options (devolved grants) or to identify other groups they could partner with to submit a larger proposal.

Community Action Grants are also available to community groups. It is anticipated that the 2011–12 Community Action Grants round will open for applications around May 2011. For more information see section 1.5.

# Indigenous participation

## Why Indigenous participation is a priority

Indigenous people have significant and unique knowledge, skills and land and sea management responsibilities. These help achieve Caring for our Country outcomes and support the Council of Australian Governments' commitment to Closing the Gap.

## Target

### Indigenous participation

The target is to resource at least 20 projects which directly involve Indigenous organisations or groups to achieve Caring for our Country outcomes.

## Investment approach

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

## Investment scope

Indigenous organisations or groups are encouraged to apply against this target. They may include non-Indigenous organisations as sponsors or partners in their application.

Non-Indigenous groups may also apply but must demonstrate genuine partnerships with Indigenous organisations or groups.

Regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations are also encouraged to direct their funding to the achievement of this target by demonstrating a strong partnership with relevant Indigenous organisations or groups.

We anticipate investments in projects will be up to about \$200 000 over two years to 2012–13. Funding will reflect the number of targets delivered, land use type, management practices and relative size of the NRM problem.

## Developing your proposal

Proposals to address Indigenous participation must demonstrate that activities will contribute to the on-ground delivery of other targets in the business plan and will be assessed against the criteria for the relevant target.

Proposals should also consider whether the use, support and reinvigoration of traditional ecological knowledge could be incorporated into the proposal.

Proposals which include the use and recording of traditional ecological knowledge must:

- include how knowledge will be stored, so that access to sensitive cultural information is managed through traditional cultural protocols and assists Indigenous people to manage their information on culture and country
- demonstrate how it will be used to underpin biodiversity conservation outcomes (where activities are a part of a broader proposal or through a partnership).

Proposals may also support the implementation of land and sea country plans, if the on-ground activities support outcomes and targets, as discussed in section 2.

Proposals implementing Indigenous land and sea country management plans must demonstrate the following criteria:

- they must provide evidence of an existing plan that is ready to be implemented
- if they include a component to build the governance of Indigenous groups to deliver their plans and funding is requested to cover it, the proposal must demonstrate how this support will contribute to achieving targets.

These requirements will be taken into consideration when assessing a proposal as well as those outlined in section 3.

Non-Indigenous organisations applying for funding under this target may be asked for evidence of the nature of the partnership with the Indigenous organisations or groups named in your application.

If Indigenous people are directly employed or contracted in the project, the number of full time equivalent employees and total number of people engaged per year must be supplied.

Potential applicants should contact one of the Caring for our Country Indigenous Land Management Facilitators to discuss their proposal before applying.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

All organisations are eligible to apply for this target. Priority will be given to those not currently funded for traditional ecological knowledge projects or to implement land and sea country management plans.

## Regional NRM organisations

Regional NRM organisations must deliver projects that address the range of targets appropriate to their region to receive base-level funding.

They are encouraged to explore opportunities to partner with Indigenous organisations or groups in open call proposals where appropriate.

It is expected that Indigenous communities will be involved in the planning and delivery of regional programs.

## How can Indigenous people participate?

Indigenous people can participate through avenues such as:

- proposals from land councils, groupings of land councils or smaller Indigenous organisations or groups
- by joining in proposals with partners such as regional NRM organisations, non-government organisations, industry and the commercial sector.

To ensure that Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of targets where it makes sense to do so.

The Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program is also of particular relevance to Indigenous people. The Sea Country Partnerships Grants Program is a competitive small grants program that helps Indigenous communities to undertake projects in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park that align with one or more of the Reef Rescue Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program priority areas. In the first grants round eligible communities (Traditional Owner groups) could apply for funds to implement sea country initiatives such as research and monitoring of dugong and marine turtles, environmental improvement programs and the development and implementation of sea country management plans. This new grants program is being delivered through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Further details can be found on the authority's website at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

Community Action Grants of between \$5000 and \$20 000 (GST exclusive) are also of relevance to Indigenous communities. They are available to environmental, Landcare, Coastcare, Indigenous and sustainable agriculture community groups for a broad range of activities. Community Action Grants seek to support those undertaking both on-ground and engagement activities which align with Caring for our Country national priority areas. For more information see section 1.5.

## Working on Country and Indigenous Protected Areas

The Working on Country and Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) programs meet Indigenous aspirations to manage traditional land and sea estates.

Indigenous rangers and land owners manage and conserve the natural and cultural features of Australia's lands and waters, including 42 declared IPAs covering over 23.9 million hectares of Indigenous owned and managed lands. The Australian Government has committed \$295.5 million until June 2013 to employ and train up to 660 Indigenous rangers, and to improve and expand IPAs. Caring for our Country funding constitutes \$90 million of that commitment with a target to employ up to 300 Indigenous rangers, as well as \$50 million to expand the contribution of IPAs to the National Reserve System by between 8 and 16 million hectares.

Indigenous rangers and Indigenous land owners are undertaking a diverse range of environmental activities across Australia such as fire management, threatened species survey and management, weed and feral animal control, water quality monitoring, transfer of traditional ecological knowledge and cultural heritage management.

The programs work together closely to deliver broader social and economic benefits and contribute to the Australian Government's Closing the Gap agenda.

As a result of their success, both Working on Country and IPA funds are currently fully committed.

Further information is available from the:

Working on Country website at [www.environment.gov.au/workingoncountry](http://www.environment.gov.au/workingoncountry)

Indigenous Protected Areas website at [www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa](http://www.environment.gov.au/indigenous/ipa)

or you can call 1800 552 008.

## Further information

The contact details for Caring for our Country Indigenous Land Management Facilitators are available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## 2.3 Increasing the National Reserve System

The National Reserve System is helping to conserve distinctive landscapes, plants and animals through a comprehensive, adequate and representative system of reserves across Australia.

The notional multi-year budget available under the 2011–12 business plan is \$35 million.

**Table 5:** National Reserve System

Five-year outcomes	Targets	Summary of investment approaches
<p>Expand the area that is protected within the National Reserve System to at least 125 million hectares (a 25 per cent increase), with priority to be given to increasing the area that is protected in under-represented bioregions.</p>	<p><b>Increasing the National Reserve System</b></p> <p>To increase the area that is protected within the National Reserve System by five million hectares a year (including Indigenous Protected Areas) with a priority in under-represented bioregions.</p>	<p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Financial assistance is available to buy land for new reserves through applications for one-off purchases of properties that offer high biodiversity values for protection.</li> <li>2. Financial assistance is available to covenanting organisations to help establish perpetual conservation covenants on private land that transfer with title. These covenants must be primarily aimed at protecting biodiversity values.</li> </ol>

# Increasing the National Reserve System

## What is the National Reserve System?

Australia's National Reserve System (NRS) is a nation-wide network of reserves and protected areas set up to conserve Australia's unique natural environment for current and future generations.

The aim is to protect a comprehensive range of ecosystems and other important environmental values within each of the 85 bioregions. Each bioregion is a large area of similar climate, geology, landform and vegetation features such as the Australian Alps, the Nullarbor Plain or the Wet Tropics.

## Why the National Reserve System is a priority

Establishing a well managed, comprehensive, adequate and representative NRS meets an important international obligation under the 1993 Convention on Biological Diversity. Areas are protected and managed for biodiversity conservation outcomes for current and future generations.

Protected areas are the cornerstone of Australia's biodiversity conservation effort. Enhancing and expanding the protected area network and linking reserves to other protected habitats is an effective strategy for creating landscape scale sanctuaries where plants and animals are left undisturbed, reducing threats and assisting native biodiversity adapt to climate change. Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) are a crucial part of the NRS. They are non-statutory protected areas declared by Indigenous landowners over land and sea country where the Indigenous owners or managers have made a commitment to manage and conserve the ecological and cultural values on behalf of all Australians. .

The Australian Government will work with state and territory governments, Indigenous groups, conservation organisations and other landholders to ensure protected areas continue to be added to the NRS (including IPAs). Priority will be given to under-represented bioregions that have less than ten per cent of their remaining area currently protected in reserves. Preference will also be given to projects that contribute to large scale conservation outcomes that improve connectivity in the landscape. As part of this approach, preference will be given to projects that contribute to region and landscape-scale partnerships and collaboration.

## Target

### Increasing the National Reserve System

The target is to increase the area protected within the NRS by five million hectares a year (including IPAs) with a priority in under-represented bioregions.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in open call proposals.

There are two types of investment approaches relevant to the NRS.

### 1. Financial assistance to buy land for new reserves

Applications are invited for investment proposals for one-off purchases of properties that offer high biodiversity values for protection and increase connectivity in the landscape. These proposals are solely intended for delivery of NRS priorities and outcomes and will be competitively assessed on this basis.

### 2. Financial assistance to establish perpetual conservation covenants on private land

Applications are invited from covenanting organisations for funds to help landholders voluntarily establish perpetual conservation covenants on privately-owned land that should be added to the NRS. These

covenants must primarily be aimed at protecting biodiversity values. A perpetual conservation covenant that is secure and transfers with title is a key requirement.

## Investment scope

### 1. Financial assistance to buy land for new reserves

The Government will provide up to two-thirds of the purchase cost for an approved property that is identified as available for voluntary sale. This property will then be owned and managed as part of the NRS by the landholder.

Applicants must confirm:

- the property contains significant biodiversity values that will enhance the comprehensiveness, adequacy and representativeness of the NRS
- their long-term capacity to establish and manage the property for the primary purpose of protection and maintenance of biological diversity with associated ecosystem services and cultural values
- security of legislative or other means to protect the land in perpetuity
- they have one third of the funds required to purchase the land and establish the reserve.

Proposals to purchase priority land may seek funding for:

- up to two-thirds of the purchase price of a property
- specified establishment costs. Limited assistance may be available to non-government organisations and must be applied for at the time of application. The amount of funds will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Eligible costs include:
  - registration costs of establishing a perpetual conservation covenant on the purchased property
  - urgent on-ground works to ensure protection of biodiversity values under immediate threat
  - the costs of developing a management plan where this is considered to be outside the core business of the land owner.

### 2. Financial assistance to establish perpetual conservation covenants on private land

The Government will provide funding for covenanting organisations to help land owners to voluntarily establish perpetual conservation covenants on privately-owned land through:

- registering and holding statutory conservation covenants
- monitoring compliance with conservation covenants to ensure management arrangements are valid
- raising the awareness of landowners to influence their uptake of conservation covenants on their land.

Priority will be given to proposals that will directly lead to and/or achieve on-ground establishment of conservation covenants to protect biodiversity values and meet standards for inclusion in the NRS.

Proposals should include a record of successful contact with land owners, evidence of land-owner demand for conservation covenants in priority bioregions and that these activities are additional to or will accelerate the covenanting activities that are the core business of the organisation.

Limited funding assistance for specified establishment costs for new covenants may also be provided and must be applied for at the time of application. The amount of funds will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Eligible activities include:

- registration costs of establishing a perpetual conservation covenant

- the costs of developing a management plan where this is considered to be outside the core business of the landholder.

Private land owners cannot directly access funds to register individual covenants on their land.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, funding is not available for:

- the establishment of revolving funds to begin perpetual conservation covenants for properties to be on-sold
- incentive payments
- management activities, including threat abatement
- covenanting activities that are normally the core business of state, territory or regional organisations
- activities incompatible with biodiversity conservation
- endowment funds for management
- activities on existing covenants.

## Due diligence

Proposals successful in obtaining initial funding approval will be subject to a due diligence assessment of the property to ensure it is a sound investment.

This will include, for example, identification of any mining leases, plans for removal of stock, any subdivision requirements and encumbrances, a recent property valuation and an assessment of the applicant's capacity to provide effective immediate and long-term management of the property.

## Developing your proposal

All proposals will be assessed according to how well they address the NRS priorities and contribute to landscape-scale conservation. Funds will be allocated to proposals that most successfully meet the following priorities:

- improve resilience and ecological connectivity within the landscape and assist capacity for biodiversity to adapt to climate change
- provide sanctuaries that protect as many species as possible
- contribute to landscape-scale conservation outcomes including building corridors that link reserves and other protected habitats to maintain ecological processes across the landscape
- add to the protection of under-represented bioregions that have less than ten per cent of their area protected in the NRS (see key information sources)
- contribute to the conservation of matters of national environmental significance
- add to the representativeness of the NRS
- ensure the area contributes to the adequate protection of the ecological viability and integrity of populations, species and ecological communities at a bioregional scale
- add areas that have significant biodiversity values such as high diversity of ecosystems or species, or contain significant habitat for rare, migratory or threatened species
- identify areas based upon a strategic assessment of reserve options and meet key reserve system

design criteria

- consider and address Indigenous interests, socio-economic interests and scientific importance
- feasible in terms of a property's availability and cost-effective in terms of purchase, establishment and management
- demonstrate the ability of the landholder to manage and mitigate threatening processes and ensure persistence of ecosystems and species over time.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

## Key information sources

- A map of under-represented bioregions is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).
- The following information can be accessed online at [www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/getting-involved/funding.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/getting-involved/funding.html).
  - conditions for receiving funding for land purchase
  - guide to completing the application form for land acquisitions in 2011–12
  - conditions for receiving funding for covenanting activities on private land
  - priorities for expansion of the NRS
  - standards for inclusion in the NRS
  - contribution to a comprehensive, adequate and representative NRS.

## Further information

- National Reserve System: [www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/index.html).
- Scientific framework for National Reserve System selection of areas to be included in the National Reserve System: [www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/scientific-framework.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/science/scientific-framework.html).
- Australia's strategy for the National Reserve System 2009–2030: [www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/nrsstrat.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/nrsstrat.html).
- Australian guidelines for establishing the National Reserve System: [www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/guidelines.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/guidelines.html).

## 2.4 Biodiversity and natural icons

The Australian Government acknowledges the need to take action to protect our biodiversity and natural icons. Priorities for funding will include protecting World Heritage areas, tackling weeds and pest animals that threaten biodiversity, and improving outcomes for nationally threatened species and communities.

<b>Table 6: Biodiversity and natural icons</b>		
<b>Five-year outcomes</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Summary of investment approaches</b>
Increase, by at least one million hectares, the area of native habitat and vegetation that is managed to reduce critical threats to biodiversity and to enhance the condition, connectivity and resilience of habitats and landscapes. This is additional to the 125 million hectares that is to be protected within the National Reserve System.	<p><b>Increasing native habitat</b></p> <p>To increase by at least 400 000 hectares by June 2013 the area of native habitat and vegetation that is managed to reduce critical threats to biodiversity and enhance the condition, connectivity and resilience of habitats and landscapes.</p>	<p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <p>We are calling for projects focused on increasing native habitat, building ecological resilience and connectivity. We will fund projects across a range of sizes with an upper limit of \$1 million for any one project over two years.</p> <p><b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b></p> <p>Regional NRM organisations yet to commit their full base-level funding are expected to submit an expression of interest for a portion of their allocation against these targets, where appropriate.</p>
Reduce the impact of invasive species in at least four priority areas to be defined through the annual Caring for our Country business plans.	<p><b>Reducing the impact of vertebrate pest animals</b></p> <p>To reduce or manage the impact of vertebrate pest animals to maintain and improve biodiversity outcomes. This will allow regeneration and recovery of at least 10 000 hectares of high quality native habitat or vegetation that supports critically endangered, endangered and threatened species and communities.</p> <p><b>Reducing the impact of weeds</b></p> <p>To reduce or manage the impact of Weeds of National Significance to maintain or improve biodiversity where the impact occurs in priority areas identified in nationally-agreed strategic plans for each Weed of National Significance on public and private land (including agricultural land). The impact will be reduced more effectively through collaborative activities that control outlier infestations, strengthen containment lines and/or bring core infestations under management control, or eradicate where feasible, to reduce the risk of new infestations.</p>	<p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <p>We are calling for collaborative proposals over two years.</p> <p><b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b></p> <p>Regional NRM organisations yet to commit their full base-level funding are expected to submit an expression of interest for a portion of their allocation against these targets, where appropriate.</p>
Secure management arrangements for all World Heritage areas that meet the requirements of the World Heritage Convention.	<p><b>Managing World Heritage areas</b></p> <p>To address identified key threats to the outstanding natural values of state-managed World Heritage areas</p>	<p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <p>Proposals are being sought for five state-managed World Heritage sites and must address specific actions</p>

and to achieve on-ground outcomes by June 2013.

which are identified for each World Heritage area.

Proposals will also be accepted for activities that target emerging significant threats to the outstanding natural values at the remaining state-managed World Heritage areas.

We will fund projects across a range of sizes with an upper limit of \$1 million for any one project over two years.

## Increasing native habitat

### Why managing native habitat is a priority

Increasing the area of well-managed native habitat and vegetation is an important practical step to conserving our native plants, animals, birds, insects and other species.

It is critical to ensuring that ecological functions and the services they provide persist over the long-term. Improving the management of native habitats and vegetation will also maintain and build a healthy, diverse and resilient environment that can absorb shocks such as increasing climate variability.

Optimal and sustained habitat increases can be achieved through improved land management practices and effort in landscape-scale conservation. Priority will be given to projects that build resilience and connectivity in the landscape.

### Why does native habitat need better management?

More than 600 000 native species have evolved in Australia's native habitats and vegetation systems. They are unique and dynamic. However, since European settlement, native habitats and vegetation have been degraded as rapid changes and threats have disrupted key ecosystem functions and processes. Addressing critical threats is essential for better management.

Critical threats include fragmentation of habitats and native vegetation, ecologically unsustainable land uses, weeds and introduced pests and inappropriate fire regimes. The cumulative impact of these threats is likely to be exacerbated by climate change. Through better management, native habitat and vegetation can continue to deliver the essential ecological functions that support Australia's ecosystems, safeguarding the cycling of nutrients, water, carbon dioxide and oxygen, storing of carbon, providing shelter, breeding grounds and food for wildlife, and protecting streams, wetlands and estuaries.

### Target

#### Increasing native habitat

The target is to increase by at least 400 000 hectares by June 2013 the area of native habitat and vegetation that is managed to reduce critical threats to biodiversity and enhance the condition, connectivity and resilience of habitats and landscapes.

### Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

### Investment scope

Priority will be given to:

- projects that incorporate the conservation of nationally threatened species and ecological communities listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*—for example, Brigalow (*Acacia harpophylla* dominant and co-dominant)
- native habitat and vegetation considered important to the long term persistence of nationally threatened species or ecological communities.

Projects should focus on landscape-scale efforts to manage and restore native habitat condition and

strengthen connectivity and build ecological resilience across geographic areas, including agricultural lands.

We anticipate investing in projects across a range of sizes up to \$1 million over two years for any one project.

We are interested in investing in projects which address the increasing native habitat target through any combination of the following:

- large-scale restoration works that are linked to complementary land uses and vegetation management practices
- managing and protecting important ecological and evolutionary refugia to strengthen opportunities for biodiversity to adapt to a changing climate
- linking critical habitat, remnant vegetation and management practices to ensure native wildlife is protected
- creating buffers around protected areas
- using systematic approaches to regional conservation planning (which should include resilience-based assessment) to identify priorities, strengthen management of nationally threatened species or ecological communities and to identify opportunities for their adaptation in the face of climate change
- using appropriate market-based approaches to achieve the targets.

## Developing your proposal

We want proposals which maximise direct investment in on-ground activities that make a measurable contribution to achieving targets.

Support for activities such as strategic planning, applied research and information may be necessary but applicants must justify these costs as a proportion of their total budget. In general, proposals that focus on planning or applied research will be less attractive for investment.

Proposals addressing threatened species or ecological communities should demonstrate compatibility with the recovery and/or threat abatement actions as detailed in the current recovery plan or conservation advice.

Proposals should carefully consider the relationship between input costs and benefits achieved. Value for money proposals are not necessarily the cheapest but those that deliver cost-effective improvements in vegetation extent and condition.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

Indigenous land managers are encouraged to submit proposals, particularly those that build on traditional ecological knowledge, local knowledge and best available science to restore and maintain native habitat.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

There is significant scope for aligning investments with other Caring for our Country targets, including those identified under section 2.2 community, skills knowledge and engagement and section 2.6 sustainable farm practices.

## Key information sources

Threatened ecological species and communities listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*: [www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/epbc/index.html).

Maps at a national and state level showing the extent of threatened ecological communities (predominantly native vegetation) are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Five maps at a national level showing the extent of threatened species, including mammals, reptiles, birds and flora are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Ecological community webpage: [www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/communities.html).

## Environmental Stewardship Program

The objective of the Environmental Stewardship Program is to maintain and improve the condition and extent of targeted matters of National Environmental Significance, as listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, on private land. To date the program has targeted the conservation of listed ecological communities on private land.

The program uses competitive tenders and other market-based approaches to engage private land managers in financial contracts for up to 15 years to manage targeted ecological communities.

Caring for our Country aims to secure at least 30 000 hectares of nationally threatened ecological communities through the Environmental Stewardship Program by June 2011.

Investment to June 2010 has secured 26 474 hectares. It is anticipated that the target of 30 000 hectares will be reached by June 2011 through funding rounds delivered in the 2010–11 financial year.

There will be no additional investment towards the Environmental Stewardship Program through this business plan.

# Reducing the impact of vertebrate pest animals

## Why better management of vertebrate pest animals is a priority

In August 2009 a report commissioned by the Invasive Animal Cooperative Research Centre estimated the direct economic cost of invasive animal pests on agriculture in Australia, including expenditure on research and management, totals \$743.5 million a year.

Controlling feral animals costs governments and landholders more than \$122 million a year, and research to find better methods of management costs governments and organisations about \$20 million a year.

On-farm management of vertebrate pest animals, that otherwise destroy or compete with vegetation, improves the resilience of the farming system and benefits soil condition, water quality and biodiversity.

Vertebrate pest animals can alter the character of the environment. For example, in northern Australia buffalo cause soil erosion by wallowing, trampling and disturbing. This can lead to the channelling of flood waters, increased intrusion of saltwater into freshwater habitats and destruction of wetland vegetation. Trampling and soil disturbance also promote the spread of weeds across the landscape.

Pest animals can eat large volumes of grasses and other plants, removing this food source from native wildlife. Some carry diseases that threaten cattle or sheep, particularly tuberculosis, brucellosis or foot rot.

Under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, threat abatement plans have been developed for some feral species such as rabbits, foxes, cats, pigs and goats. These plans list key threatening processes to nationally threatened species and endangered ecological communities and also outline the research, management and other actions that should be used, if relevant, in the development of proposals. See further information for links to threat abatement plans.

## Target

### **Improved regeneration of native vegetation and productive landscapes from better management of invasive vertebrate pests**

The target is to reduce or manage the impacts of vertebrate pest animals to maintain and improve biodiversity outcomes. This will allow regeneration and recovery of at least 10 000 hectares of high quality native habitat or vegetation that supports critically endangered, endangered and threatened species and communities.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

## Investment scope

We anticipate investing in projects across a range of sizes, up to \$300 000, over two years for any project addressing this target.

The Government is calling for proposals that:

- demonstrate and communicate best practice management on a landscape or regional scale and have a strategic plan to maintain the site as an on-going best-practice management demonstration site
- address the impact of vertebrate pests on nationally threatened species and communities

occurring in World Heritage areas and critical aquatic habitats (including buffer zones), noting that pests that have already received significant funding under previous rounds of Caring for our Country (camels, cane toads, rodents on off-shore islands excluding Lord Howe Island and foxes in Tasmania) will not be a priority for funding in 2011–12

- are consistent with the Australian Pest Animal Strategy and specifically address the objectives and actions of the relevant EBPC Act threat abatement plans and, where appropriate, any other relevant jurisdictional management plans
- use technically feasible, recognised, and effective control methods for the area being managed. Control methods must be consistent with any relevant codes of practice and standard operating procedures for humane pest animal control. These documents are available from [www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/vertebrate-pests/codes/humane-pest-animal-control](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/pests-weeds/vertebrate-pests/codes/humane-pest-animal-control)
- in relation to feral animals (for example, rabbits, foxes and goats), the focus is on the regeneration and/or recovery of critically endangered and endangered species and communities as listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* threat abatement plans.

It is likely that proposals under this target will also link directly to biodiversity outcomes, including Ramsar wetlands, coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats, World Heritage areas and/or sustainable farm practices targets.

Note: if your proposed project will occur on agricultural land and will lead to significant private benefits then your application should be lodged under the relevant sustainable farm practices target. This will allow you to access the appropriate cost-sharing arrangements.

## Developing your proposal

Proposals should demonstrate:

- evidence of the impact of the pest species on the threatened species or ecological communities listed in your proposal and how your activities will mitigate threats
- the World Heritage area or critical aquatic habitat your proposal targets (see sections 2.4 and 2.5 for lists of World Heritage areas and critical aquatic habitats)
- the cost effectiveness of any control methods
- how the cost effectiveness of control methods will be measured
- a long-term commitment to awareness-raising activities about on-ground control methods beyond the life of the project
- a comprehensive communication component (in line with section 4), including contacting the Australian Pest Animal Strategy coordinator ([www.apas.net.au/](http://www.apas.net.au/)) about activities being undertaken.

Proposals should address the targets in one or more of the following ways:

- undertaking a targeted and cost-effective suite of on-ground actions to reduce the impact of pest animals by using management techniques that are effective, humane, safe, socially acceptable, cost effective and have a high likelihood of success
- demonstrating the most effective, humane and appropriate on-ground control methods for local conditions to encourage their wider adoption
- distributing information about on-ground control options through extension activities including training workshops, demonstration sites, field days, and development of frameworks to guide land managers nationally to improve knowledge.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project where it makes sense to do so.

Proposals may also allocate a proportion of funding to employ facilitators to help achieve project outcomes.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, investment is not available for the following:

- activities where land and coastal managers are legally responsible to control vertebrate pests as part of their normal duty of care management responsibilities
- research projects.

## Further information

Australian Pest Animal Strategy:

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/pest-animal-strategy.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/pest-animal-strategy.html)

[www.apas.net.au/](http://www.apas.net.au/).

Threatened species and ecological communities:

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/index.html).

Conservation advices by NRM region:

[www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/conservationadvice.pl?proc=main](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/conservationadvice.pl?proc=main).

Protected matters search tool:

[www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html).

The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* threat abatement plans for feral rabbits, foxes, cats, pigs and goats should be used if your proposal addresses these pest animals. The threat abatement plans can be found at:

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/rabbits08.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/rabbits08.html)

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/foxes08.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/foxes08.html)

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/cats08.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/cats08.html)

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/pig.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/pig.html)

[www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/goats08.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/tap/goats08.html).

# Reducing the impact of Weeds of National Significance

## Why reducing the impact of Weeds of National Significance is a priority

Weeds damage the health and resilience of Australia's native animals and plants and reduce agricultural productivity. Over 2700 exotic plant species have become weeds in Australia, of which over 340 are listed as noxious under state and territory legislation. The annual cost to Australian agriculture is over \$4 billion and the cost to the environment is similar.

Weeds take over the habitat of threatened species or ecological communities and can make their recovery and conservation impossible without effective control on public and private land (including agricultural land). Successful weed management requires a coordinated approach that involves all stakeholders as there are many methods available. The most effective are prevention, early detection and eradication. Follow-up monitoring and control are required to ensure that reinfestation does not occur.

Weeds threaten the integrity of nationally and globally significant sites such as Ramsar wetlands, cultural heritage sites and declared World Heritage areas.

Weeds of National Significance are agreed by the Australian and all state and territory governments as priority species for sustained nationally-coordinated action under the Australian Weeds Strategy. A list can be obtained from [www.weeds.org.au/natsig.htm](http://www.weeds.org.au/natsig.htm).

## Target

### Reducing the impact of weeds

The target is to reduce or manage the impact of Weeds of National Significance to maintain or improve biodiversity where the impact occurs in priority areas identified in nationally-agreed strategic plans for each Weed of National Significance on public and private land (including agricultural land). Their impact will be reduced more effectively through collaborative activities that control outlier infestations, strengthen containment lines and/or bring core infestations under management control, or eradicate where feasible to reduce the risk of new infestations.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

## Investment scope

We anticipate investing in projects across a range of sizes, up to \$300 000, over two years for any project addressing this target.

The Government is calling for collaborative proposals that:

- demonstrate and communicate best practice management on a landscape or regional scale and have a strategic plan to maintain the site as an on-going best-practice management site
- control outlier infestations and/or strengthen containment lines of Weeds of National Significance where an adverse impact on biodiversity or other important environmental and/or productivity assets can be demonstrated
- address the impacts of Weeds of National Significance on nationally threatened species or

communities occurring in and around World Heritage areas and critical aquatic habitats as listed in section 2.

For newly-declared Weeds of National Significance, projects that develop best practice management tools and demonstrate the use of these tools through collaborative activities are also encouraged.

Projects that seek to manage core infestations will be considered where it can be demonstrated they reduce the risk of new infestations to acceptable levels.

At a local level Community Action Grants are also available, particularly for outliers. For more information see section 1.5.

Note: if your proposed project will occur on agricultural land and will lead to significant private benefits then your application should be lodged under the relevant sustainable farm practices target. This will allow you to access the appropriate cost-sharing arrangements.

## Developing your proposal

We are calling for proposals that:

- involve the relevant National Weeds of National Significance coordinators in the development of proposals. Coordinators must be involved to ensure proposals are consistent with the nationally agreed strategic plan for each Weed of National Significance species and, where appropriate, any other relevant jurisdictional management plans. Applicants are asked to contact coordinators early in the development of a project
- work with coordinators for the duration of the project to help identify other types of potential collaborative partnerships and to provide the most recent information on distribution and priority actions
- communicate outcomes and raise awareness of the impact of the weed
- follow agreed Weeds of National Significance strategic plans for each proposed species and use the national core attributes for surveying and mapping nationally-significant weeds
- control outlier infestations, strengthen containment lines and/or (where feasible) manage core infestations in a measurable, cost-effective manner to help protect biodiversity, improve outcomes for nationally-threatened species and communities and support actions to mitigate threats to World Heritage areas, and coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats. For more information see sections 2.4 and 2.5
- identify in hectares the amount of high quality native vegetation that will be protected
- engage the broader community in the project to build skills and knowledge and raise community awareness of weeds management
- are partnerships between one or more groups such as: state and territory agencies, regional organisations, industry, or Indigenous and other community groups that demonstrate and communicate best practice management on a landscape or regional scale and have a strategic plan to maintain the site as an on-going best-practice management site
- include activities taking place on public land or private land (including agricultural land)
- include a comprehensive communication component (in line with section 4.2)
- demonstrate planning and commitment to monitoring, evaluating and maintaining control efforts over the long term.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, investment is not available for the following:

- activities that are normal duty of care management responsibilities of land and coastal managers
- research projects
- projects that do not demonstrate a real chance of controlling outliers, thereby reducing the risk posed by core infestations to acceptable levels or strengthening containment lines
- projects that cannot demonstrate strong links with, and support from, the Weeds of National Significance coordinators
- proposals that only seek support for community engagement activities.

## Weeds of National Significance coordinators

Caring for our Country supports a network of Weeds of National Significance coordinators. These positions facilitate collaborative multi-jurisdictional activities to implement each Weeds of National Significance strategic plan.

Contact details for coordinators are available at [www.weeds.org.au](http://www.weeds.org.au), or applicants can call 1800 552 008 for the contact details of relevant coordinators.

## Key information sources

Weed spread and management action maps: these maps indicate where information is available, weed presence, containment lines, state level eradication targets, outlier control targets and core infestations. Maps showing priority areas for investment are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Weeds of National Significance: [www.weeds.gov.au/weeds/lists/wons.html](http://www.weeds.gov.au/weeds/lists/wons.html).

The Australian Weeds Strategy: [www.weeds.org.au/nws.htm](http://www.weeds.org.au/nws.htm).

Further information on core attributes for mapping weeds:

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[www.weeds.org.au/docs/Weeds\\_Manual.pdf](http://www.weeds.org.au/docs/Weeds_Manual.pdf).

Conservation advices by NRM region:

[www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/conservationadvice.pl?proc=main](http://www.environment.gov.au/cgi-bin/sprat/public/conservationadvice.pl?proc=main).

Protected matters search tool: [www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc/index.html).

Environmental reporting tool: [www.environment.gov.au/apps/boobook/mapservlet?app=ert](http://www.environment.gov.au/apps/boobook/mapservlet?app=ert).

# Managing World Heritage areas

## Why World Heritage areas are a priority

World Heritage properties are recognised under the World Heritage Convention as being of international significance because of their outstanding natural and/or cultural values. Many World Heritage properties provide sanctuaries for the conservation of flora and fauna. These areas may contain:

- outstanding examples of major stages of the earth's ecological, biological or geological processes
- significant natural habitats for biodiversity conservation
- superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty
- outstanding cultural values.

The Australian Government, in partnership with the states, has an international obligation to manage World Heritage values for current and future generations. World Heritage values are a matter of national environmental significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Australia has a number of World Heritage listed properties. For more information see [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/index.html).

## Target

### Managing World Heritage areas

The target is to address identified key threats to the outstanding natural values of state-managed World Heritage areas and to achieve on-ground outcomes by 2013.

## Investment approach

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

Proposals will be invited for eligible activities for five priority state-managed World Heritage areas. Proposals may be negotiated directly with the relevant World Heritage area managers.

Proposals which address emerging significant threats to the outstanding natural values of the remaining state-managed World Heritage areas will also be accepted.

## Investment scope

Proposals related to eligible activities will be accepted for the following areas:

1. Australian fossil mammal sites (Naracoorte/ Riversleigh)
2. Fraser Island
3. Lord Howe Island Group
4. Purnululu National Park
5. Ningaloo Coast—funding will only be made available if the coast is inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 2011 meeting of the World Heritage Committee
6. Other state-managed World Heritage areas.

The Government is seeking to invest in actions to improve on-ground management practices that protect

World Heritage values on public and private land (including agricultural land) and reduce high order threats to those values. The following are the eligible activities for each World Heritage area.

#### **1. Australian fossil mammal sites (Naracoorte)**

- Institute long-term planning and actions that focus on the strategic interpretation of the site's World Heritage values.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fossil-naracoorte/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fossil-naracoorte/index.html).

#### **Australian fossil mammal sites (Riversleigh)**

- Protect, interpret and present the site's World Heritage values.
- Employ an executive officer to engage with community and scientific/technical experts to assist with the management and communication of World Heritage values.
- Increase the community's understanding of, and capacity to assist in, the conservation of World Heritage areas through developing and disseminating interpretative materials.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fossil-riversleigh/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fossil-riversleigh/index.html).

#### **2. Fraser Island**

- Monitor and address water quality in island water bodies.
- Increase the community's understanding of, and capacity to assist in, the conservation of World Heritage areas through developing and disseminating interpretative materials.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fraser/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fraser/index.html).

#### **3. Lord Howe Island Group**

- Reduce the impact of invasive species.
- Employ a World Heritage Officer to develop and implement programs to protect the site's World Heritage values.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/lord-howe/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/lord-howe/index.html).

#### **4. Purnululu National Park**

- Engage with community and scientific/technical experts to obtain information to help manage properties.
- Address the direct impact to World Heritage values from a potential increase in bushfire frequency as a result of climatic change by trialling fire reduction techniques to prevent wildfires reaching the surface of the Bungle Bungles, including the massif's distinctive cyanobacteria banding.
- Address the direct impact to World Heritage values from damage caused by increasing visitation resulting from World Heritage listing by re-routing and constructing boardwalks to minimise foot traffic damage to the Bungle Bungle massif.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/purnululu/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/purnululu/index.html).

#### **5. Ningaloo Coast**

- Support the effective management of the proposed Ningaloo Coast World Heritage area, including the implementation of management plans through cooperative arrangements with key stakeholders.
- Develop a Karst ecosystem protection program focusing on protection of key World Heritage values.
- Institute a nature conservation program to address key processes that include fox and cat control

to reduce their impact on threatened turtle and mammal populations, goat control and fire management to reduce their impact on rangeland habitats particularly for the threatened black footed rock wallaby.

- Support marine conservation activities including for whale shark, dugong, turtle, manta ray and whale conservation and management actions.
- Establish an executive committee to engage with community and scientific/technical experts to help manage properties and communication of World Heritage values.

Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/nominations/ningaloo/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/nominations/ningaloo/index.html).

#### **6. Other state-managed World Heritage areas**

- Activities which target emerging significant threats to the outstanding universal value of the property. For example, eradication of an invasive species which has recently been identified as a threat to the property or a captive breeding program for a species which has recently been listed as endangered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Further information is available at: [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world).

### **Developing your proposal**

Proposals which include any activity within the World Heritage area must include the agreement of the World Heritage area property manager.

The Government cannot guarantee investment in each of the World Heritage areas.

The applicant's proposed level of investment in the project will be considered in the assessment process.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

### **Exclusions and ineligible activities**

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, proposals will not be accepted for Kakadu, Uluru–Kata Tjuta, the Great Barrier Reef, Macquarie Island, Royal Exhibition Building and Carlton Gardens, Sydney Opera House or Heard and McDonald Islands World Heritage areas. These have other funding sources. The World Heritage Australian Convict Sites are also excluded under this business plan.

### **Key information sources**

A map of the areas eligible for investment is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Further information on Australia's World Heritage areas, including their values, is available at [www.environment.gov.au/heritage/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/heritage/index.html).

## 2.5 Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats

Our coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats face a range of threats.

The Australian Government continues to deliver the Great Barrier Reef Rescue package, protect and rehabilitate areas for critically endangered and endangered species and migratory shorebirds, improve the quality of water discharged into coastal environments, and protect Ramsar wetlands.

**Table 7:** Coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats

Five-year outcomes	Targets	Summary of investment approaches
Deliver actions that sustain the environmental values of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>priority sites in the Ramsar estate, particularly sites in northern and remote Australia</li> <li>an additional 25 per cent of (non-Ramsar) priority coastal and inland high conservation value aquatic ecosystems* including, as a priority, sites in the Murray–Darling Basin</li> </ul>	<b>Protecting Ramsar wetlands</b> To address identified key threats to the ecological character of priority Ramsar listed wetlands by June 2013.	<b>Open call proposals</b> Preference will be given to proposals for the 12 priority sites. Proposals will also be accepted for the remaining 45 Ramsar sites to address key threats to the ecological character posed by weeds and pest animal species, and agricultural and land management practices. We will fund projects across a range of sizes with an upper limit of \$1 million for any one project over two years. <b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b> 57 Ramsar wetlands are eligible.
	<b>Protecting critical aquatic habitats</b> To address identified key threats to the environmental values of priority high ecological value aquatic ecosystems through implementing on-ground management actions by June 2013.	<b>Open call proposals</b> Proposals will be accepted for all 44 sites with a preference for the 12 priority sites. We will fund projects across a range of sizes with an upper limit of \$1 million for any one project over two years. <b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b> 44 aquatic ecosystems are eligible.
Improve the water quality management in the Gippsland Lakes in Victoria, the Tuggerah Lakes Estuary in New South Wales and in all priority coastal hotspots.	<b>Improving coastal hotspots</b> To address the threats contributing to poor or declining water quality of priority coastal hotspots through implementing on-ground management actions identified in Water Quality Improvement Plans by June 2013.	<b>Coastal hotspots</b> There will be no open call. Community groups and organisations can apply for on-ground activities at coastal hotspots through the coastal community engagement target. <b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b> 13 coastal hotspots are eligible.
Increase the community's participation in protecting and rehabilitating coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats.	<b>Increasing coastal community engagement</b> To engage at least 500 community organisations in coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and conservation actions by June 2013.	<b>Open call proposals and regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b> Applications are sought for proposals between \$20 000 and \$50 000 that will engage community groups in on-ground coastal and marine

rehabilitation, restoration and preventative conservation actions. Organisations wishing to engage a number of community groups across a broad geographic region, for example through a process of targeted competitive devolved grants, can apply for up to \$1 million.

\* High conservation value aquatic ecosystems (HCVAE) are now known as high ecological value aquatic ecosystems (HEVAE).

# Protecting Ramsar wetlands

## Why Ramsar wetlands are a priority

Ramsar wetlands are internationally important sites for flora, fauna and/or the ecological communities they support. They are listed under the international Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and identified as having national environmental significance in the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Aquatic habitats—encompassing Ramsar wetlands—are significant environmental assets of fundamental importance to the Australian environment, lifestyle and economy.

The priority for Caring for our Country is those sites whose ecological character is under threat.

## Target

### Protecting Ramsar wetlands

The target is to address identified key threats to the ecological character of priority Ramsar listed wetlands by June 2013.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

## Investment scope for open call

The Government is calling for proposals that address, through on-ground activities, key threats to the ecological character of Ramsar wetlands. Preference will be given to proposals that target the following 12 sites:

1. The Macquarie Marshes (NSW)
2. Gwydir Wetlands: Gingham and Lower Gwydir (Big Leather) Watercourses (NSW)
3. Myall Lakes (NSW)
4. Gippsland Lakes (Vic)
5. Western District Lakes (VIC)
6. Currawinya Lakes (Currawinya National Park) (QLD)
7. Bowling Green Bay (QLD)
8. Apsley Marshes (TAS)
9. "Riverland" (SA)
10. Coongie Lakes (SA)
11. Peel-Yalgorup System (WA)
12. Vasse-Wonnerup System (WA).

These 12 priority sites were selected because:

- they have identified management actions consistent with the scope of investments (for example, not the provision of water)
- urgent action is needed to reduce the impact of identified threats to their ecological character
- they have management plans or current ecological character descriptions to guide strategic investment.

We are seeking projects for identified on-ground management actions on public and private land (including agricultural land).

Site investment guides are available for each of the priority sites. They set out the key threats and management actions eligible for investment.

Each site investment guide is different and includes activities such as:

- containing and managing weeds
- reducing grazing pressures by fencing off access to the site
- targeted control of pest animal species
- revegetating habitats for significant flora and fauna.

Proposals will also be accepted for the remaining 45 Ramsar sites for on-ground actions to address key threats to the ecological character posed by weeds and pest animal species, and agricultural and land management practices.

## Developing your proposal

Projects must demonstrate:

- delivery of on-ground actions as outlined in the relevant site investment guide (for priority sites)
- delivery of on-ground actions to address factors affecting the ecological character posed by weeds, pest animal species, and agricultural and land management practices (for the other 45 Ramsar sites)
- involvement and support of the site/land managers.

All proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

Proposals should demonstrate how the broader community will be engaged in the project to build community skills and knowledge in NRM.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

## Investment scope for regional NRM organisations

Fifty-seven Ramsar wetlands are eligible for regional base-level funding.

Eligible management actions for the 12 priority sites are set out in the site investment guides.

For the remaining 45 we want on-ground actions that address key threats to the ecological character posed by weeds, pest animals and agricultural and land management practices.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, investment is not available for:

- Ashmore Reef National Nature Reserve
- Coral Sea Reserves (Coringa-Herald and Lihou Reefs and Cays)
- Elizabeth and Middleton Reefs Marine National Nature Reserve
- Pulu Keeling National Park (North Keeling Island)
- The Dales and Hosnies Spring (Christmas Island)
- The Coorong (Lake Alexandrina and Albert Wetland).

These either have existing funding arrangements or fall outside regional NRM organisation boundaries.

## Key information sources

A map of the 57 Ramsar sites eligible for open call investment and information about the eligible on-ground actions is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Site investment guides for the 12 priority Ramsar sites are also available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Further information on the factors affecting the ecological value of each of the 57 Ramsar sites is available on the *Ramsar Information Sheets* on the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities website at [www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/topics/wetlands/index.html).

Caring for our Country does not fund activities that focus on the provision or extraction of water or water use efficiency. The Australian Government's Water for the Future program focuses on these issues. Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/water-for-the-future/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/water-for-the-future/index.html).

# Protecting critical aquatic ecosystems

## Why critical aquatic ecosystems are a priority

Aquatic ecosystems are significant environmental assets of fundamental importance to the Australian environment, lifestyle and economy.

Some with high ecological value are recognised through key international agreements and conventions such as the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, World Heritage Convention, and the East Asian–Australasian Flyway Site Network.

High ecological value aquatic ecosystems (HEVAEs) include rivers, wetlands, floodplains, lakes, inland saline ecosystems, groundwater dependent ecosystems and estuaries. They do not include the marine environment.

A draft framework to identify HEVAEs is based on criteria relating to international recognition, diversity, distinctiveness, vital habitat, evolutionary history, naturalness and representativeness.

## Target

### Protecting critical aquatic ecosystems

The target is to address identified key threats to the environmental values of priority high ecological value aquatic ecosystems through implementing on-ground management actions by June 2013.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

## Investment scope for open call

Proposals are being called for on-ground actions that will address identified key threats to the environmental values of HEVAEs. Strong preference will be given to projects at the following 12 sites:

1. Paroo River System, Lake Wyara, Lake Numalla and the Eulo Artesian Springs Supergroup (NSW and QLD)
2. Barwon–Darling River System (upstream of Bourke) and Northern Tributaries (NSW and QLD)
3. Lowbidgee Floodplain (NSW)
4. Cotter River (ACT)
5. Lower Ovens River System (VIC)
6. Lower Glenelg and Discovery Bay (VIC and SA)
7. Lower Snowy and Brodribb River Systems (VIC)
8. Derwent Estuary (TAS)
9. Pike Mundic Wetland Complex (SA)
10. Chain of Bays (SA)
11. Lake MacLeod (WA)

## 12. Howard Sand Plains (NT).

These 12 priority HEVAEs were identified by state and territory agencies and the Australian Government and remain the preference for investment in 2011–12. In identifying these sites, consideration was given to:

- the draft HEVAE criteria
- their ecological importance
- defining the key threats to the environmental values that need to be urgently addressed but have good prospects for recovery as a result of carefully targeted actions
- focusing investment on sites in the Murray–Darling Basin.

We are seeking projects for identified on-ground management actions on public and private land (including agricultural land) in all 44 HEVAE sites with a preference for investment in priority sites.

Site investment guides are available for each of the 44 HEVAEs. They set out the key threats and management actions eligible for investment.

Each site investment guide is different and includes activities such as:

- containing and managing weeds
- reducing grazing pressures by fencing off access to the aquatic ecosystem
- targeted control of pest animal species
- revegetating habitats for significant flora and fauna.

## Developing your proposal

Projects to protect and/or restore the environmental values of the HEVAE sites must demonstrate:

- delivery of on-ground actions as identified in the relevant site investment guide
- involvement and support of the site/land manager(s).

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

Proposals should demonstrate how the broader community will be engaged in the project to build community skills and knowledge in NRM.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

## Investment scope for regional NRM organisations

A total of 44 HEVAEs are eligible for regional base-level funding.

We will only invest in identified on-ground management actions to address the identified key threats to the environmental values of these HEVAE sites. These are outlined in relevant site investment guides.

For further information regional NRM organisations should contact their Australian Government regional liaison officer or NRM facilitator.

## Regional NRM organisation exclusions and ineligible activities

Other aquatic ecosystems not identified within this business plan are not eligible for investment.

Caring for our Country will not invest in the development of management plans for HEVAEs.

Caring for our Country does not fund activities with a focus on the provision or extraction of water or water

use efficiency. The Australian Government's Water for the Future initiative focuses on these issues. Further information is available at [www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/water-for-the-future/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/water-for-the-future/index.html).

## Key information sources

A map of the HEVAE sites eligible for open call investment is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Site investment guides for the HEVAE sites eligible for open call investment are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

# Improving coastal hotspots

## Why coastal hotspots are a priority

Our coast faces difficult pressures and requires better management and protection to ensure its ecological values are retained for future generations.

Caring for our Country is investing in a number of priority coastal hotspot locations around Australia to reduce the impact of poor water quality on these critical aquatic coastal habitats.

A priority coastal hotspot is a coastal aquatic ecosystem:

- with high ecological, social, cultural and/or recreational values
- that encompasses one or more matters of national environmental significance
- that is under pressure from the impact of population growth and declining or poor water quality
- with an existing Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) or one that is being developed.

A WQIP must be consistent with the national Framework for Marine and Estuarine Water Quality Protection. A WQIP provides an ecosystem-based approach to integrated water cycle management, supported by science. It is designed to address the key threats to water quality and environmental flows and deliver significant reductions in the discharge of pollutants to an agreed aquatic ecosystem.

## Target

### Improving coastal hotspots

The target is to address the threats contributing to poor or declining water quality of priority coastal hotspots through implementing on-ground management actions identified in WQIPs by June 2013.

## Investment approaches

This target will be delivered through investing in regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

Proposals should address water quality issues that are considered within a broader portfolio of integrated investment proposals and existing regional planning frameworks.

This target is outside the scope of the open call for applications under this business plan.

Community groups should contact their regional NRM organisation if they are interested in partnering.

Other organisations and community groups wanting to work in the coastal zone, including on-ground works that lead to implementation of WQIPs, can apply for funding under the next section: Increasing coastal community engagement.

## Investment scope for regional NRM organisations

Thirteen coastal hotspot sites are eligible for regional base-level funding:

1. Adelaide Coastal Waters including Port Waterways (SA)
2. Botany Bay (NSW)
3. Corner Inlet (VIC)
4. Darwin Harbour (NT)

5. Derwent Estuary (TAS)
6. Gippsland Lakes (VIC)
7. Great Lakes (NSW)
8. Hunter River Estuary (NSW)
9. Moreton Bay (QLD)
10. Peel Inlet and Harvey Estuary (WA)
11. Port Phillip Bay and Western Port (VIC)
12. Swan Canning Estuary System (WA)
13. Vasse-Wonnerup and Geographe Bay (WA).

We are seeking projects from regional NRM organisations for on-ground actions identified in the relevant WQIP that improve declining or poor water quality for the 13 priority hotspots, such as:

- rehabilitation and protection of waterways and wetlands including fencing and stock exclusion
- reduction of sediments and nutrients entering waterways through best practice rural groundcover and fertiliser management
- urban stormwater management and water sensitive urban design
- engagement of the community in the implementation of on-ground activities

On-ground action can be on public and private land, including agricultural land.

Regional NRM organisations submitting proposals within their base-level funding must demonstrate how the additional investment will build on existing activities and contribute to the outcomes being sought.

For further information contact your Australian Government contact officer.

## Regional NRM organisation exclusions

Other coastal hotspots identified in previous business plans are not eligible and proposals for them will not be considered. They have existing funding to address water quality improvements.

## Developing your proposal

Proposals must demonstrate all of the following:

- delivery of on-ground management actions identified in the relevant WQIPs
- involvement and support of the site/land managers.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

Proposals should demonstrate how the broader community will be engaged in the project to build community skills and knowledge in NRM.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

## Increasing coastal community engagement

### Why coastal community engagement is a priority

Coastal communities and environments face many difficult challenges including climate change, population growth and degradation of coastal environments.

Community organisations, such as 'friends of' groups, Indigenous communities, Landcare and Coastcare groups, play a vital role in protecting and restoring the environmental values of our coast.

### Target

#### Increasing coastal community engagement

The target is to engage at least 500 community organisations in coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and conservation actions by June 2013.

### Investment approach

This target will be delivered through investing in open call proposals and through regional NRM organisation base-level funding.

We are calling for proposals between \$20 000 and \$50 000 from individual community groups for on-ground coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and preventative conservation actions around the Australian coastline.

Organisations wishing to engage a number of community groups across a broad geographic region, for example through a competitive process of targeted devolved grants, can apply for up to \$1 million.

Applications can be made for one or two-year projects to be completed over the 2011–12 and 2012–13 financial years.

Community groups can also access grants of between \$5000 and \$20 000 under Caring for our Country Community Action Grants. For more information see section 1.5.

### Investment scope

Proposals should focus on actions that:

- protect the conservation values of coastal and marine ecosystems and environments
- protect, rehabilitate and enhance coastal and marine habitats, waterways and wetlands by stabilising dunes, preventing coastal erosion, establishing wildlife corridors and enhancing remnant coastal vegetation
- implement actions in recovery plans of threatened coastal and marine species and threat abatement plans, such as removing marine debris
- protect and minimise disturbance to sensitive coastal and marine areas, including working with Indigenous communities to protect Indigenous cultural landscapes and culturally sensitive sites
- improve near-shore coastal ecosystems such as inshore reefs and seagrass meadows by reducing local stressors (for example, fishing pressure, water quality, or habitat disturbance) or implementing sustainable practices including Indigenous traditional use
- prevent the decline of water quality in coastal and marine habitats through management of point source pollution, establishment of buffer zones and off-stream stock watering points

- increase participation of individuals and communities in coastal and marine conservation projects, including enhancing skills and knowledge and raising community awareness
- enhance the skills and knowledge of Indigenous Australians, volunteers and communities in the delivery of on-ground actions in saltwater country through the use of traditional ecological knowledge, existing land and sea country management plans, local knowledge and best available science.

## Developing your proposal

Coastal community projects must demonstrate all of the following:

- delivery of coastal and marine rehabilitation, restoration and preventative conservation actions
- the cost of the project demonstrates value for money given the size and complexity of the project
- involvement and support of the site/land managers
- a plan for maintaining any fixed infrastructure beyond the life of the project.

Proposals will be assessed against these requirements as well as those outlined in section 3.

Proposals must demonstrate appropriate duty of care levels when undertaking activities.

Proposals should demonstrate how the broader community will be engaged in the project to build community skills and knowledge in NRM.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

Priority actions have already been identified for Ramsar, high ecological value aquatic ecosystems (HEVAE) and coastal hotspot sites. Groups proposing to undertake projects located in or around these sites must align their activities with the investment information for each. Proposals that do not address the identified threats or management actions eligible for investment in those sites will not be considered.

Details of Ramsar wetlands, HEVAEs and coastal hotspot sites can be found in the relevant pages of this section.

## Exclusions and ineligible activities

In addition to exclusions and ineligible activities listed in section 3.2, investment is not available under the increasing coastal community engagement target for the following:

- preparation of management plans
- large infrastructure or significant engineering works
- removal of exotic trees from coastal foreshore reserves, where there is little or no remnant native vegetation
- development of recreation facilities or projects principally focused on improving amenity
- the costs of managing Marine Protected Areas
- biosecurity activities related to marine pests such as the management of vessels and ports
- structural adjustment packages for fisheries.

## Key information sources

Maps and site information for the 12 priority Ramsar wetlands, 12 priority HEVAE sites and 13 priority coastal hotspot sites eligible for investment are available on the Caring for our Country website at

[www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Protecting the Great Barrier Reef—Reef Rescue

Through Reef Rescue the Australian Government has committed \$200 million over five years to improve the quality of water entering the Great Barrier Reef lagoon.

Reef Rescue is helping agricultural land managers across the Reef's catchment to adopt improved land management practices that will reduce the amount of nutrients, sediments and chemicals being discharged to the Reef lagoon and improve the Reef's resilience to climate change.

The government is working closely with natural resource management groups and industry partners to facilitate delivery of Reef Rescue incentives to land managers in the wake of recent flood events and Cyclone Yasi. The training and incentives provided by Reef Rescue are providing tangible improvements in land management practices that will reduce the discharge of sediments and other pollutants from future extreme weather events.

During the first three years of Reef Rescue, regional NRM organisations and their industry partners have engaged farmers and graziers across the catchment to undertake training and adopt land management practices that improve water quality outcomes.

In 2011–12 an additional \$3.8 million will support a catchment-wide integrated water quality monitoring, modelling and reporting program that will measure the difference we are making to end-of-river pollutant loads.

Expressions of interest to participate in the Reef Rescue Research and Development Program were invited through the 2010–11 Caring for our Country business plan. This research will enhance our understanding of the water quality benefits of improved land management practices and support the development of new technologies that improve our ability to monitor nutrient, chemical and sediment run-off from agricultural lands.

Reef Rescue funded monitoring and research activities will enhance our understanding of the impacts of extreme weather events on the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

Under this business plan there will be no open call or expression of interest for the above programs. In 2011–12 these programs will continue with existing delivery agents.

The Sea Country Partnerships Grants Program, funded through Caring for our Country, is a small grants program that seeks to engage Indigenous communities in the management and protection of the Reef's marine resources and cultural diversity. The program is delivered through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. More details can be found at [www.gbrmpa.gov.au](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au).

## 2.6 Sustainable farm practices

The choice of management practices by farmers and fishers impacts the condition of Australia's natural resources. The Australian Government is committed to increasing the adoption of management practices that continue to maintain and improve production, while delivering ecosystem services that benefit the whole community.

<b>Table 8: Sustainable farm practices</b>		
<b>Five-year outcomes</b>	<b>Targets</b>	<b>Summary of investment approaches</b>
Assist at least 30 per cent of farmers to increase their uptake of sustainable farm and land management practices that deliver improved ecosystem services.	<p><b>Improving management practices</b></p> <p>To increase by 10 000 the number of farmers adopting management practices to improve soil health by reducing the risk of soil acidification, soil loss through wind and water erosion and/or increasing the carbon content of soils by June 2013.</p> <p>Improve the management practices of an additional 55 million hectares of land under cropping, horticulture and grazing.</p> <p>To increase by 250 the number of commercial fishers and aquaculture farmers who have improved practices to optimise sustainability by June 2013.</p>	<p>We are calling for sustainable farm practice projects in the following six categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improving management practices—soil condition</li> <li>• improving management practices—commercial fisheries and aquaculture</li> <li>• innovative management practices to improve resource condition</li> <li>• landscape-scale conservation—extending and/or improving the condition of native vegetation</li> <li>• landscape-scale conservation—agroforestry</li> <li>• native grasslands and vegetation in northern and remote Australia.</li> </ul> <p>Activities addressing the improving knowledge and skills target will only be supported as part of a broader proposal which contributes to the improving management practices target and/or the landscape-scale conservation target.</p> <p><b>Open call proposals</b></p> <p>We are seeking proposals for funding of between \$20 000 and \$1 million for up to two years in the categories outlined above.</p> <p><b>Regional NRM organisation base-level funding</b></p> <p>Regional NRM organisations yet to commit their full base-level funding are expected to submit an expression of interest for a portion of their allocation against these targets, where appropriate.</p>
Increase the number of farmers who adopt stewardship, covenanting, property management plans or other arrangements to improve the environment both on-farm and off-farm.	<p><b>Landscape-scale conservation</b></p> <p>To increase by 3700 the number of farmers adopting activities that contribute to the ongoing conservation and protection of biodiversity by June 2013.</p>	
Improve the knowledge, skills and engagement of at least 30 per cent of land managers and farmers in managing our natural resources and the environment.	<p><b>Improving knowledge and skills</b></p> <p>To increase by 15 000 the number of farmers and fishers improving their knowledge and skills in natural resource management by June 2013.</p>	

## Sustainable farm practices

### Why healthy agricultural landscapes are a priority

There are numerous benefits to the Australian community in having healthy, productive and resilient agricultural landscapes. Benefits include:

- continuing sustainable food and fibre production
- economic growth
- maintaining the resilience of natural systems to climate change
- the provision of environmental services
- supporting rural and regional communities.

Caring for our Country aims to optimise the services provided by agricultural landscapes:

- services to the community include carbon sequestration, air quality, water quality, biodiversity, species habitats
- services to the farmer include levels of food and fibre production, pollination, regulating climate, integrated pest management, stock shelters and wind control.

The amount and quality of services provided by the landscape depend on the condition of the natural resource base: soil, vegetation, water and air.

Farmers manage up to 70 per cent of the Australian landscape and can make a significant contribution to maintaining and improving the natural resource base by adopting sustainable farm practices.

Caring for our Country is supporting the increased adoption of more sustainable farm practices. Indigenous land managers pursuing sustainable practices targets are eligible to apply. Proposals can draw on the use of traditional ecological knowledge.

To achieve healthy agricultural landscapes, projects will need to:

- deliver a mix of private and public benefit
- contribute funding to support the private benefits of the project
- engage with community and industry
- be underpinned by good science, planning and technical assistance.

Similarly, fishing can affect the productivity and amenity of marine and other aquatic ecosystems.

Maintaining sustainable fisheries is important to ensure the long-term health of marine biodiversity and delivery of ecosystem services. For the aquaculture industry, sustainable practices can improve the quality of water within which the business operates.

### Targets

#### Improving management practices

The targets are to, by June 2013:

- increase by 10 000 the number of farmers adopting management practices to improve soil health by reducing the risk of soil acidification, soil loss through wind and water erosion and/or increasing the carbon content of soils

- improve the management practices of an additional 55 million hectares of land under cropping, horticulture and grazing
- increase by 250 the number of commercial fishers and aquaculture farmers who have improved practices to optimise sustainability.

### **Landscape scale conservation**

The target is to increase by 3700 the number of farmers adopting activities that contribute to the ongoing conservation and protection of biodiversity by June 2013.

### **Improving knowledge and skills**

The target is to increase by 15 000 the number of farmers/fishers improving their knowledge and skills in natural resource management by June 2013.

## Target requirements

Building knowledge and skills is important to increase the adoption of improved sustainable agriculture practices.

Projects addressing the improving knowledge and skills target must be delivered as part of a project that also contributes to the improving management practices targets and/or the landscape scale conservation target.

## Investment approaches

These targets will be delivered through investing in:

- open call proposals
- regional natural resource management (NRM) organisation base-level funding.

Investment is available for projects between \$20 000 to \$1 million in total for up to two years.

## Investment scope

Proposals must contribute to the target(s) and address at least one of the following investment scope categories:

1. improving management practices—soil condition
2. improving management practices—commercial fishing and aquaculture
3. innovative management practices to improve resource condition
4. landscape scale conservation—extending and/or improving the condition of native vegetation
5. landscape-scale conservation—agroforestry
6. native grasslands and vegetation in northern and remote Australia.

Information sheets for each investment scope that contain more detailed information are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

### **1. Improving management practices—soil condition**

Activities eligible for funding include:

- the development of industry guidelines and codes of practice
- information dissemination through extension activities including training, workshops, demonstration

sites and field days

- trialling practices to adapt them to local conditions
- employing facilitators and/or extension officers
- disseminating information on practices and how they can be built into farm management systems to improve long term sustainability and productivity—this should only be part of the project
- activities to facilitate the adoption of practices, and reporting frameworks for systems and practices that maintain productivity and improve the environment.

Activities not eligible for funding are:

- similar projects receiving funding under the Reef Rescue initiative
- individual property management plans.

Examples of sustainable management practices include:

- cropping methods that increase ground cover through reductions in tillage; reductions in the use of periods of fallow; and stubble retention
- grazing management strategies and practices to achieve appropriate regional ground cover targets
- horticulture industry practices such as the maintenance of inter row cover, terracing and contour planting
- the planting of salt-affected land to help reduce soil loss from wind and water erosion, and to build up soil carbon.

## **2. Improving management practices—commercial fishing and aquaculture**

Commercial fishing activities eligible for funding include:

- effective application of ecosystem-based fisheries management or environmental management systems
- promoting avoidance methods/practices and bycatch reduction strategies including the use of excluder devices, scarers, gear arrangements, as well as practices designed to limit mortality of animals that are incidentally caught
- employing facilitators and/or extension officers.

Commercial fishing activities not eligible for funding include:

- the costs of managing Marine Protected Areas
- oil spill cleanup activities
- biosecurity activities related to marine pests
- structural adjustment packages for fisheries
- research
- purchase of or modification of fishing gear
- support for normal business activities
- recreational activities and practices.

Sustainable commercial fishing practices commonly involve applying technologies and operational practices to minimise any impact on protected and at-risk bycatch species and habitats, as well as any

undesirable impact on target species.

Aquaculture activities eligible for funding include:

- development of industry guidelines and codes of practice
- information dissemination through extension activities including training workshops, demonstration sites and field days
- trialling practices to adapt them to local conditions
- employing facilitators and/or extension officers.

Aquaculture management practices include improved water exchange and treatment, feed and chemical use, and stocking rates to minimise waste thereby increasing efficiencies in input use and a reduction in the impact of chemical, nutrient and sediment discharge.

### **3. Innovative management practices to improve resource condition**

Activities eligible for funding to assist farmers and fishers adopt innovative practices, approaches and technologies and farming systems that improve resource condition include:

- developing innovative practices, where a proof of concept has already been researched. We expect a 50 per cent cash contribution by the applicant.
- demonstrations, pilots, trials to adapt practices and systems to regional conditions.

The activities must be supported by:

- a rigorous monitoring program
- development of guidelines for implementation beyond the life of the project
- a comprehensive communication strategy.

### **4. Landscape scale conservation—extending and/or improving the condition of native vegetation**

There are a range of practices that can be implemented on-farm that will improve the connectivity and condition of native vegetation and contribute to improving biodiversity assets.

At a landscape scale this could involve applying practices:

- on adjoining properties which share a common biodiversity asset (such as remnant native vegetation, including native grasslands and riparian vegetation)
- on unconnected properties across the district that have shared biodiversity assets (such as paddock trees, rocky outcrops and wetlands)
- on a very large property that links biodiversity assets, in partnership with relevant expertise.

Activities eligible for funding include:

- developing and implementing management plans to facilitate activities being adopted that support landscape-scale biodiversity conservation during and after the project (compulsory element of all activities). These plans would include agreements with farmers where on-ground activities are to take place
- revegetation
- fencing
- prevention, early detection and eradication of emerging weeds
- strategic actions from pest and Weeds of National Significance plans

- provision of off-stream watering points
- the payment of incentives for on-ground works. This is only eligible where there is a clear high public benefit. For example, fencing is eligible for protecting remnant native vegetation and revegetation that could be damaged by stock.

The opportunity exists to link the project with the targets and activities under section 2.4 Increasing native habitat. For example, this investment area will assist farmers to protect native wildlife.

### **5. Landscape scale conservation—Agroforestry**

Agroforestry is a form of revegetation that can deliver private and public benefits and contribute to landscape-scale conservation and environmental outcomes, including biodiversity.

Activities eligible for funding include:

- management plans to support ongoing biodiversity outcomes past the project timeframe through management of thinning and replanting at a similar density to retain connectivity (compulsory activity)
- preparation and distribution of guidelines for planting—species type and management activities
- development of industry guidelines and codes of practice
- information dissemination through extension activities including training workshops, demonstration sites and field days
- disseminating information on agroforestry practices and how they can be built into farm management systems to improve long term sustainability and productivity. This should only be part of the project
- employing facilitators and/or extension officers.

### **6. Native grasslands and vegetation in northern and remote Australia**

Northern and remote Australia covers 575 million hectares, 70 per cent of which is used for agriculture. Sustainable management of agriculture requires a tailored approach, given the area's geographic scale, climate, soil types, biodiversity assets, cultural values and remoteness.

Large scale projects are sought to deliver extensive native vegetation to improve groundcover and biodiversity.

The practices and activities eligible for investment under this category are the same as outlined in categories 1 and 4 above, and should focus on:

- improving management practices—grazing practices on native grasses to improve groundcover and species richness
- landscape scale conservation—extending and/or improving the condition of native vegetation, that have high value biodiversity assets.

## **Developing your proposal**

Proposals will be assessed against their contribution to the following investment principles as well as those outlined in section 3.

Proposals must consider the information sheets available on the website. They will help applicants when developing a project proposal to meet sustainable farm practices targets.

Investment principles:

1. The contribution to the targets must be based on an adoption model identifying:
  - the actual number of farmers/fishers and area that will change practices
  - the number of farmers/fishers and area influenced by the project
2. The practices being promoted or implemented must align with the issue being addressed and must improve the resource base and environmental outcomes
3. The activities must be appropriate for the chosen target and outcomes sought
4. To increase the likelihood of adoption, the proposal must be technically feasible. It must be based on the best available science and consider social and economic factors in designing effective delivery mechanisms
5. The level of contribution (cash and/or in-kind) must be appropriate for the private benefit received from the project.

To ensure Indigenous participation opportunities are addressed, it is expected that all proposals seeking funding will explore opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the project.

## Landcare facilitators

A national network of Regional Landcare Facilitators is supported through Caring for our Country to work with community and regional groups including farming groups to promote sustainable farm practices and enhance the knowledge and skills of farming communities.

In particular, facilitators can help applicants to engage relevant farmers, community groups, industry and NRM organisations in developing projects and brokering partnerships and networks to communicate information and knowledge.

Regional Landcare Facilitator contact details can be requested via the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Key information sources

Visit the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) for key information including:

- more detailed information on the six investment scope categories
- information related to each of the key assessment principles.

## Further information

Maps providing information on:

- the current level of uptake of practices and soil condition
- indicative locations where improving soil and land management practices can reduce erosion (wind and water), soil acidification and improve soil carbon

are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Other related Australian Government programs

Climate Change Adjustment Program: [www.daff.gov.au/climatechange/australias-farming-future/climate-change-adjustment-assistance](http://www.daff.gov.au/climatechange/australias-farming-future/climate-change-adjustment-assistance).

Australian Pest Animal Research Program: [www.daff.gov.au/brs/land/feral-animals/aparp](http://www.daff.gov.au/brs/land/feral-animals/aparp).

National Weeds and Productivity Research Program: [www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/invasive/national\\_weeds\\_productivity\\_research\\_program](http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/invasive/national_weeds_productivity_research_program).

Farm Ready: [www.farmready.gov.au/](http://www.farmready.gov.au/).

Science and Innovation Awards for Young People in Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry: [www.daff.gov.au/abare-brs/conferences-events/scienceawards](http://www.daff.gov.au/abare-brs/conferences-events/scienceawards).

Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure Program, On Farm Irrigation Efficiency and Irrigation Modernisation Planning Assistance: [www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/water/policy-programs/index.html).

# SECTION 3 How to apply

## 3.1 Submitting a proposal for investment

Caring for our Country funding is available for successful projects that will contribute to the achievement of targets listed in the priorities for investment section in this 2011–12 business plan.

To apply for funding visit the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au). It contains information for proposals on all investments that are outlined in this business plan.

The application form will be available online.

When applying it is important to clearly identify the measurable quantity of target that you will deliver and the timeframe. This applies across all the funding mechanisms.

Caring for our Country offers a range of different funding opportunities to suit the various targets and outcomes sought.

In recognition of the recent natural disasters we will accept proposals that have a reduced delivery time in the first year of the project.

All applicants must register via the Caring for our Country website and then select from the list of funding opportunities.

- **Open call**—For the majority of proposals an open call online application form will need to be completed. Further details and the online application form are available from the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au). Applications close on **30 May 2011**.
- **Regional base-level funding**—Regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations can submit an online expression of interest for their remaining base-level funding. They will then be contacted by an Australian Government officer to negotiate the detail of their proposal. For more detail see the section below on expressions of interest for regional NRM organisation base-level funding. To apply you must submit the regional base-level expression of interest form available from the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au). All regional expressions of interest close on **16 May 2011**.
- **Community Action Grants**—It is anticipated that the 2011 round of Community Action Grants will open in early **May 2011**. Further information about these grants, including guidelines and eligibility criteria, will be available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) at that time.

### Closing dates

All proposals must be **submitted by 30 May 2011** except for the following:

<b>Regional base-level expression of interest</b>	16 May 2011
<b>Community Action Grants</b>	closing dates to be advised

Closing dates are as at 5:00pm Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST) as appropriate.

We recommend that applicants register and apply online where possible. If you are unable to access the internet, you can contact the Australian Government on 1800 552 008 to ask for a hard copy form. You should not request a hard copy form if you can apply online.

Further information on how to apply online is available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Open call applications

This is the main avenue for competitive Caring for our Country funding.

Proposals are invited that will either deliver against multiple targets in an integrated way, or deliver against a single target.

An integrated proposal is only valuable where linking multiple targets makes sense and will deliver better outcomes than a single focused project.

You will be asked to nominate up to a maximum of three targets. These are the targets against which your proposal will be assessed. You should therefore carefully select those targets for which your proposal can achieve the greatest measurable difference.

There may be circumstances where a proposal could feasibly address more than three targets. Applicants will have the opportunity to broadly describe contributions to other targets in the application form and, if successful, during the contracting and reporting stage.

All proposals need to demonstrate ability to achieve against the nominated targets. An integrated proposal which seeks to address multiple targets will need to identify and explain the linkages between the various selected targets and how the proposal delivers against each of them.

Additional details about your project deliverables will be asked of successful applicants and will be used in our contract with you, unless changes or conditions are required.

## Proposal expectations

Proposals are expected to:

- clearly and logically explain how and why project activities will deliver improvements against targets, for example, have a program logic
- outline a strong governance structure for delivery of the project, including any partners, sub-contractors and interest groups engaged in the delivery
- involve effective partnerships where this adds value and more effectively delivers the outcomes sought. For example, with relevant industry, community groups (including environmental, Landcare and Coastcare), Indigenous groups, government and non-government organisations, research and development corporations and providers and on-ground regional officers
- consider the risks involved in the project delivery and how these can be managed and/or mitigated
- consider a communication strategy to disseminate information to the broader community where this is relevant
- provide detail of any project manager or facilitator costs (if required), why they are essential and how such services will demonstrably lead to improved on-ground outcomes for the project
- consider relevant past and current projects
- explore and address any opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the targets
- consider if and how community groups such as environmental, Landcare and Coastcare groups could be actively engaged in project planning and/or delivery.

In preparing your proposal you must carefully consider the information provided in section 2. Additional information is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Expressions of interest for regional NRM organisation base-level funding

In 2011–12 regional NRM organisations can submit a single online expression of interest for multiple-year proposals up to the maximum level of their available base-level funding. They will then be contacted by an Australian Government regional officer to negotiate the detail and balance of investment to deliver targets and outcomes. The Australian Government reserves the right to redirect investment at this negotiation stage.

Expressions of interest should demonstrate a clear commitment to delivering outcomes, including coordinating projects at the regional and local levels to address the targets outlined in this business plan.

Indigenous communities should be involved in the delivery of regional programs to address targets.

Expressions of interest should incorporate community skills, knowledge and engagement activities. However, proposals relating solely to these activities will not be funded.

Regional NRM organisations may also apply to use a portion of their base-level funding to improve their governance arrangements. This is restricted to specific investments that will directly improve core governance such as improving decision-making, fiscal accountability, organisational effectiveness, strategic planning, internal and external communication, or monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI).

Organisations may also apply to use a portion of their base-level funding to update regional NRM plans to identify the regional expression of national priorities. Preference will be given to those that focus on building resilience and connectivity across the regional landscape.

An organisation which already has some approvals in place over multiple years will need to take this into account if submitting an expression of interest in 2011–12. The focus is on those regions with funds not yet approved.

Where part or all of a base-level funding for 2011–12 is already approved, an expression of interest can be submitted for funding for 2012–13. An example of the possible budget for a multi-year proposal is shown in table 9.

When preparing expressions of interest, organisations should use the principles of MERI to identify the monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements of the activities proposed. Regional NRM organisations will need to revise existing MERI plans to take into account new targets and activities funded under the 2011–12 business plan. A MERI plan is not required to be submitted with an expression of interest. Further information on MERI plans can be found in section 4.1.

When preparing an expression of interest, organisations are encouraged to contact the Australian Government Land and Coasts team and Caring for our Country regional officers.

**Table 9:** Example of budget for a regional NRM organisation multi-year proposal

Region X has an annual base-level funding of \$2 million and was successful in securing approval for multi-year projects in 2009–10 and 2010–11.

	Approved	Not yet approved (available for investment)
2009–10	\$2 000 000	0
2010–11	\$2 000 000	0
2011–12	\$1 000 000	\$1 000 000
2012–13	\$ 500 000	\$1 500 000
Total	\$5 500 000	\$2 500 000

Region X can submit a multi-year expression of interest of up to \$2.5 million through this business plan if the timeframe for the individual targets are consistent with this scenario.

## How you can access assistance

Frequently asked questions are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

The Australian Government Land and Coasts team can provide information on factual matters such as the assessment process and eligibility, clarification of terms, targets, priorities or relevant information sources.

Contact with, or assistance from, the team or Caring for our Country regional officers does not guarantee that any project will be funded. All project proposals will be subject to a rigorous assessment, evaluation and approval process.

If you have any questions regarding the application process, please contact us using one of the following:

Australian Government Land and Coasts  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: **1800 552 008**  
Email: **[business.planning@nrm.gov.au](mailto:business.planning@nrm.gov.au)**  
Web: **[www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au)**

## 3.2 Eligibility requirements

Caring for our Country is available to legal entities for work that will contribute to achieving one or more of the Caring for our Country targets.

### Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for Caring for our Country investment you must meet all of the following:

- be a legal entity
- clearly identify in your proposal which targets you seek to address
- have or be able to obtain, before agreed commencement, all necessary planning, regulatory or other approvals
- have no overdue reports or acquittals from previous Australian Government funding
- have the agreement of the lead partner organisation and key partner organisations to submit the proposal (for example, chief executive officer of the company, president of the community group, chief executive of the government department).

Individual targets may have additional specific eligibility requirements. The relevant target information in section 2 details any additional specific criteria.

### Exclusions and ineligible activities

Caring for our Country funding is not available for:

- activities that fail to deliver against one or more targets
- activities that have a significant negative impact on any matter of national environmental significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- the introduction of plants, animals or other biological agents known to be, or that could become, environmental or agricultural weeds or pests
- activities that are not considered good value for money or integral to achieving project outcomes
- activities that are the core responsibility or business of state/territory/local governments and land managers/farmers/fishers
- activities that are the legislative and regulatory responsibility of others, such as managing or controlling certain weeds or compliance activities
- activities that are inconsistent with key national, state, territory, regional natural resource management strategies or plans
- retrospective activities—activities that have been undertaken before the signing of Caring for our Country contracts, with the exception of land purchased in the past two years that is proposed for inclusion in the National Reserve System
- the direct subsidisation of commercial activities, business start-up or where the primary purpose is commercial gain
- activities that are more appropriately funded by other initiatives or programs such as the Australian Government's Water for the Future and Australia's Farming Future
- water use efficiency, water savings, water quantity activities, development and implementation of

water sharing plans such as those that are eligible under the Australian Government's Water for the Future Program

- major water infrastructure such as large salt interception or engineering works
- large capital works that do not directly achieve the targets, such as the construction of buildings and car parks
- public amenity projects where the primary purpose is for recreation, safety, or tourism including toilet blocks and amenity plantings
- administration or legal costs other than those directly related to the delivery of the project
- activities outside Australia.

## 3.3 Assessment process

The contributions that proposals can make to the targets set out in this business plan form a very important part of the assessment process.

The following investment principles will be considered in the assessment process:

- proposals must demonstrate ability to make clear and measurable achievements against the 2011–12 Caring for our Country target(s) the applicant has chosen to address. In assessing this we will take into account:
  - demonstrated capacity of the applicants and/or partnership to deliver results and manage contractual obligations
  - demonstrated technical feasibility
  - relevance of proposed activities to the chosen targets
  - engagement with relevant stakeholders and partners
  - the most effective delivery mechanisms
  - the scale and degree of intervention proposed
  - the likely degree of adoption where relevant
  - potential to raise community awareness and enhance skills, including for Indigenous groups where appropriate
  - the proposal is based on the best available science at the time and builds on the collective knowledge of what works best
  - the maintenance of benefits into the future (where appropriate).
- alignment with national strategies where appropriate, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy or the Australian Weeds Strategy
- the risk of activities not being able to proceed as planned and the risk mitigation plan in place
- the public or broader community benefit derived from the project:
  - applicants seeking to work on private land should be prepared to contribute to the cost of their project. Cost sharing arrangements need to take into account the levels of public and private benefits to be obtained.
- value for money:
  - proposals that achieve the greatest benefit against targets, for every dollar invested, will receive a higher priority.

Weightings may apply to some assessment criteria. The Government reserves the right to undertake external assessments or feasibility studies and use the information provided in proposals for this purpose.

Applicants may be asked to nominate two referees who can attest to an organisation's capacity to undertake the work set out in a proposal. Referees must not have any financial or contractual interest in the proposal.

The assessment process allows for a wide range of projects to be considered. It includes the necessary expertise and technical specialists required for components such as the National Reserve System, Indigenous and sustainable farm practices projects.

It is overseen by an independent expert panel to ensure it is robust, transparent and equitable.

Please consider carefully the information in this business plan before preparing your proposal.

## 3.4 Conditions of grant

### Reporting of successful grants

You should be aware that if your application is successful, Commonwealth policy requires the Australian Government to publish information about you, including, but not limited to:

- name of the person or entity receiving the grant
- amount of funding received
- term of the grant
- title and summary of the project
- type of project and funding location.

The information may be published online to comply with Commonwealth policy and to meet mandatory reporting requirements.

By submitting an application you consent to publication of the above information if awarded funding.

All information in the application will be handled in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*.

If successful, you will be responsible for managing your project within agreed timelines, monitoring and reporting and acquitting your expenditure (see section 4).

### Planning approvals

Before beginning your project you are expected to obtain all necessary planning approvals, including the permission of the land owner or land manager for any project on private or public land.

### Insurance

You will not receive funding unless you have public liability insurance for the period of the grant.

### Project financial reporting and acquittal

One of your most important obligations as a recipient of public monies is to report on progress and acquit the funds you have received. The timing for project reporting (including financial reporting) is specified in funding deeds between applicants and the Government. Other monitoring, reporting and communication obligations are set out in section 4.

### Acknowledgement

Successful applicants are required to acknowledge the grant in accordance with the Recognition of Caring for our Country Guidelines. These guidelines can be found on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

### Taxation and GST

Grants are subject to normal taxation treatment and no special arrangements will apply. You should seek independent advice on the taxation implications of receiving a grant.

All applications for funding will be GST exclusive. Payment of GST on the grant will be dependent on the organisation's GST status.

# SECTION 4 Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement

## 4.1 Measures of success

A simple, efficient, reliable and cost-effective mechanism for measuring and reporting on outcomes from Caring for our Country investment will occur through the monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) strategy.

### How will achievements be measured?

The Australian Government is taking a strategic approach to measuring achievement of Caring for our Country investment. Monitoring, evaluating and reporting on project performance will provide evidence about the appropriateness, impact, effectiveness, efficiency and legacy of investment made at any point in time.

The Caring for our Country MERI strategy will enable us to:

- effectively monitor and report on performance against the five-year outcomes
- support learning and improvement in the design and delivery of investment
- provide advice to the community on monitoring and reporting on the state and trends of biophysical, social and economic assets relevant to Caring for our Country.

The Caring for our Country MERI strategy is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Successful applicants will have to meet high standards of accountability and provide performance information on the results of their actions.

Funding deeds with applicants will clearly identify the results expected from investments. All applicants with projects over \$80 000 in value must develop and implement a MERI plan as described in the Caring for our Country MERI strategy. Projects of \$80 000 and under must develop a program logic.

Guides on how to develop a MERI plan and a program logic can be downloaded from the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au). These documents explain the step-by-step processes in the context of natural resource management and include examples.

Applicants with existing projects who apply successfully for additional funding must update their MERI plan or program logic to reflect the extended scope of the project.

Monitoring and reporting on the state and trend of assets where the investment is made, and at a broader scale through defining baseline conditions of selected assets, will reassure us that our investments are appropriate and will help in future investment choices.

The Australian Government and the community will be kept informed of the progress of the Caring for our Country initiative and the delivery of its outcomes through the release of an annual report card.

## 4.2 Communications requirements

All successful applicants are required to incorporate communication activities into their projects to raise community awareness of the project, its activities and achievements.

Successful applicants with projects over \$80 000 must develop a communication plan as part of their monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) plan. The plan should outline activities and products to promote the project and communicate its activities and outcomes.

Communication activities should be costed as part of the MERI budget for the project.

Examples of activities that may be included in communication plans are:

- promotional activities that engage the community and raise awareness about the project, its activities and achievements
- engagement with local media to promote the project—through media releases or interviews with local radio, TV or newspapers
- newsletters
- brochures
- signage
- events such as local field days
- content on websites including digital photography recording key activities and achievements of the project
- social media activities.

A MERI plan template, including a communications activity plan template, is available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au/publications/guidelines/pubs/meri-plan-template.pdf](http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/guidelines/pubs/meri-plan-template.pdf).

Projects of \$80 000 and under should plan communication activities that are proportionate to the size of the project.

Applicants are required to acknowledge the Australian Government's contribution through Caring for our Country in all project materials and activities.

Guidelines on the requirements for Recognition of Caring for our Country are available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au/publications/guidelines/recognition-guidelines.html](http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/guidelines/recognition-guidelines.html).

# SECTION 5 Additional resources

## 5.1 Glossary

This glossary defines the terminology used in the 2011–12 business plan in relation to Caring for our Country.

**Actively participate**—Where a group or individual is fully consulted on the development and direction of an investment proposal and is directly involved in that project’s implementation and decision making process.

**Adequate**—Under the National Reserve System, ‘adequate’ refers to how much of each ecosystem should be included within a protected area network to provide ecological viability, resilience and integrity of populations, species and communities.

**Australian Weeds Strategy**—The Australian Weeds Strategy (first developed in 1997 as the National Weeds Strategy) provides a framework to establish consistent guidance for all parties, and identifies priorities for weed management across the nation with the aim of minimising the impact of weeds on Australia’s environmental, economic and social assets.

**Biodiversity**—The variety of all life forms on earth—the different plants, animals and micro-organisms and the ecosystems of which they are a part.

**Bioregions**—Large areas having similar climate, geology, hydrology, landform, soils and native ecosystems such as the Australian Alps, the Nullarbor Plain or the Wet Tropics. Under-represented bioregions are those bioregions that have less than 10 per cent of their area protected in reserves.

**Caring for our Country**—Caring for our Country is an Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

**Closing the Gap**—The Australian Government, together with the states and territories through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), has set specific and ambitious targets to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. COAG has identified targets and priority areas where action is required to effect positive life improvement through outcomes that are interconnected and linked to early childhood, schooling, healthy homes, safe communities, health, economic participation and governance and leadership.

**Coastal environments**—Include intertidal zones, beaches, dune systems, estuaries and coastal wetlands, island and reefs and the associated coastal vegetation. They also include coastal waters within three nautical miles from the coast and those areas immediately landwards of the coastal waters where there are processes or activities that affect the coast and its values.

**Coastal hotspot**—A coastal aquatic ecosystem with high ecological, social, cultural and/or recreational values which encompasses one or more matters of national environmental significance, is under pressure from the impacts of population growth and declining or poor water quality and has an existing water quality improvement plan consistent with the national Framework for Marine and Estuarine Water Quality Protection.

**Community**—A group of people who live in the same area or have shared interests.

**Comprehensive**—Under the National Reserve System, ‘comprehensive’ refers to the inclusion within protected areas of samples of all the ecosystems discernable at a regional scale.

**Condition of native vegetation**—The capacity to support the full range of native species that might be expected to use a stand of vegetation of a particular type under natural circumstances. Any native vegetation patch can be assessed relative to the average characteristics of a mature and long-undisturbed patch of the same vegetation type.

**Connectivity**—The location and spatial distribution of natural areas in the landscape to provide species and populations with access to resources (food, breeding sites and shelter), increase habitat availability and facilitate population processes (dispersal, migration, expansion and contraction) and enable ecological processes (evolution, water, fire and nutrients). In fragmented landscapes, connectivity is most likely to occur where there are a series of close habitat areas arranged like ‘stepping stones’.

**Conservation covenants**—A voluntary agreement made between a landholder and an authorised body (such as a Covenant Scheme Provider) that aims to protect and enhance the natural, cultural and/or scientific values of certain land. The owner continues to own, use and live on the land while the natural values of an area are conserved by the landholder in partnership with the Covenant Scheme Provider.

**Core business**—An organisation’s daily or main activities.

**Core infestation**—A situation where a weed has a well-established self-regenerating population and the risk of further establishment is high.

**Cost sharing**—The sharing of the cost between the Australian Government and individuals, groups, businesses and industry, organisations, governments and the general community.

**Critically endangered**—A native species or ecological community deemed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* as facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future.

**Devolved grants**—Where the granting of Caring for our Country funds is transferred from the Australian Government to be managed by another party.

**Due diligence**—The investigation of various items before a contract is signed to ensure there is a sound basis for the investment of Australian Government funding and the outcome being funded can be achieved.

**Duty of care**—The obligation of one party to take reasonable care of another.

**Ecological character**—The structure and inter-relationships between the biological, chemical and physical components of a wetland. These derive from the interactions of individual processes, functions, attributes and values of the ecosystems.

**Ecological character description**— Ecological character descriptions are prepared using the *National framework and guidance for describing the ecological character of Australia’s Ramsar Wetlands* and are endorsed by the Australian Government. An ecological character description is a description of a wetland at a given point in time, which can be used to assess change in the ecological character of these sites. It provides information about the environmental features and services of the site.

**Ecological communities**—Interacting organisms living together in a specific habitat.

**Ecosystem**—A biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. Ecosystems are identified at various scales.

**Ecosystem services**—The benefits people obtain from ecosystems.

**Endangered**— A native species or ecological community considered under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* as facing a very high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future.

**Endemic species**—Unique species not naturally found elsewhere.

**Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999**—The Australian Government’s central piece of environmental legislation. It provides a legal framework to protect and manage nationally and internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places. The Act focuses Australian Government interests on the protection of matters of national environmental significance, with the states and territories having responsibility for matters of state and local significance.

**High Ecological Value Aquatic Ecosystems (HEVAE)**—Include rivers, wetlands, floodplains, lakes, inland saline ecosystems, groundwater dependent ecosystems and estuaries. HEVAEs do not include the

marine environment. HEVAEs are identified based on criteria relating to international recognition, diversity, distinctiveness, vital habitat, evolutionary history, naturalness and representativeness.

**High quality native vegetation**—Vegetation made up primarily of the native species and structural components that would be expected in a mature and long-undisturbed stand of the vegetation type concerned.

**Indigenous estate**—Land held by Indigenous interests through a variety of forms of tenure/title.

**Indigenous partnership**—Where one or more project partners are Indigenous and they actively participate in decision making and delivery of Caring for our Country targets and outcomes.

**Landscape scale**—A scale of planning, implementation or reporting which typically incorporates areas larger than individual sites, properties or habitats, and often includes a mix of different vegetation types and landforms, ranging across several sub-catchments or environmental domains.

**Marine environments**—Includes the oceans, seas, bays, islands, reefs, seabeds and other marine habitats stretching from three to 200 nautical miles from the coast.

**Matters of national environmental significance**—Nationally or internationally important flora, fauna, ecological communities and heritage places as defined under *the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

**Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI)**—An approach that is iterative and integrative and aims to result in learning and adaptive management.

**National priority areas**—The six areas which Caring for our Country is focused upon to achieve its strategic goal. These six areas are: National Reserve System; biodiversity and natural icons; coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats; sustainable farm practices; natural resource management in northern and remote Australia; and community, skills, knowledge and engagement.

**National Reserve System**—Australia's nation-wide network of protected areas, conserving examples of Australia's unique landscapes, plants and animals for future generations. The aim of the National Reserve System is to protect a comprehensive range of examples of ecosystems and other important environmental values within each of Australia's 85 bioregions.

**Nationally threatened species and ecological communities**—Threatened species or threatened ecological communities are those threatened with extinction or destruction. The term 'threatened' encompasses, from most to least likely to become extinct: critically endangered; endangered; and vulnerable. They are listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

**Natural resource management**—The sustainable management of Australia's natural resources (our land, water, marine and biological systems) to ensure our ongoing social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

**Outlier infestation**—An isolated infestation of the species, separate from the core infestation.

**Partnership**—A cooperation of different groups with complementary skills and interests who will work together to more effectively deliver projects.

**Program logic**—The rationale behind a program. What are understood to be the cause-and-effect relationships between program activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes and longer-term desired outcomes. Usually represented as a diagram or matrix, program logic shows a series of expected consequences, not just a sequence of events. It thus facilitates planning, execution and evaluation of an intervention (adapted from Dart and Davies 2003 and OECD 2002).

**Ramsar**—The intergovernmental treaty which provides the framework for national action and international cooperation for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

**Refugia**—Isolated places where more widespread species previously survived. This isolation may be due

to climatic change, geography, or human activities such as changed land use. Refugia act as places where species can contract to or disperse from as environmental conditions change. Some examples of refugia include islands, caves, wetlands, gorges, mountains and remnant vegetation patches.

**Regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations**—The identified regional organisations in the 56 NRM regions across Australia, also known as regional NRM organisations, NRM groups or in some cases, Catchment Management Authorities. These are the organisations that undertake to plan, coordinate and support natural resource management at the regional level and are listed on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

**Representative**—Under the National Reserve System, ‘representative’ is comprehensiveness considered at a finer scale (Interim Bio-geographic Regionalisation of Australia subregion), and infers that the variability within ecosystems is sampled within the reserve system.

**Resilience**—The capacity of an ecosystem to tolerate disturbance without collapsing into a qualitatively different state that is controlled by a different set of processes. A resilient ecosystem can withstand shocks and rebuild itself when necessary. Resilience in social systems has the added capacity of humans to anticipate and plan for the future.

**Traditional ecological knowledge**—Refers to a cumulative body of knowledge, know-how, practices and representations maintained and developed by Indigenous peoples with extended histories of interaction with the natural environment. These sophisticated sets of understandings, interpretations and meanings are part and parcel of a cultural complex that encompasses language, naming and classification systems, resource use practices, ritual, spirituality and worldview.

**Value for money**—Demonstrates that the proposed methodology is the most cost-effective option and that all costs in a project proposal are justified and reasonable.

**Water for the Future**—The Australian Government’s \$12.9 billion national plan for water. Under Water for the Future, the Government has allocated \$3.1 billion to purchase water in the Murray–Darling Basin over 10 years.

**Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP)**—Provides an ecosystem-based approach to integrated water cycle management supported by science. WQIPs are designed to address the key priority threats to water quality and environmental flows and deliver significant reductions in the discharge of pollutants to an agreed aquatic ecosystem.

**Weeds of National Significance**—Weeds of National Significance are 20 weed species agreed by the Australian and all state and territory governments. They are the priority species for sustained nationally coordinated action under the Australian Weeds Strategy.

**World Heritage areas**—World Heritage areas are each listed for one or more specific outstanding universal values and represent the best examples of natural and cultural places in the world. These areas transcend national identities and include outstanding examples of major stages of the earth’s ecological, biological or geological processes, or contain important and significant natural habitats for biodiversity conservation, or are associated with unique, living cultural traditions.

## 5.2 Acronyms

**HEVAE**—high ecological value aquatic ecosystems

**IPA**—Indigenous Protected Areas

**MERI**—monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement

**NRM**—natural resource management

**NRS**—National Reserve System

**WQIP**—Water Quality Improvement Plan

## 5.3 Appendix

Supporting maps available on the Caring for our Country website at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au)

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