



Australian Government

maintaining australia's biodiversity hotspots



PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

Biodiversity hotspots are areas rich in native plant and animal species, especially endemic species (that is, species found nowhere else), and under threat from human related activities, such as land clearing, development pressure, salinity, weeds and feral animals. Taking action now to protect natural habitat that is in good condition will be more cost-effective, and have a greater chance of success, than trying to restore it once it has been removed or degraded and plants and animals have become endangered.

The biodiversity hotspots programme is taking a proactive approach to managing threats in areas that are still relatively intact and maintaining their biodiversity values. Managing the threats effectively will require a whole of landscape approach across all tenures, to promote active, ongoing conservation management.

The priorities for identifying locations for investment under the programme are:

- > natural ecosystems with largely intact and native species and communities well represented;
- > the area has high diversity of endemic species;
- > current, planned or potential management activities place the natural values at risk, and it is likely this risk will increase in the future in the absence of active conservation management; and
- > the area has the potential to provide value-for-money in contributing to conservation of biodiversity.

The programme supports two activities: stewardship payments for on-ground biodiversity improvements and voluntary acquisitions. These guidelines provide help in understanding the process and criteria for seeking funding support under each activity.

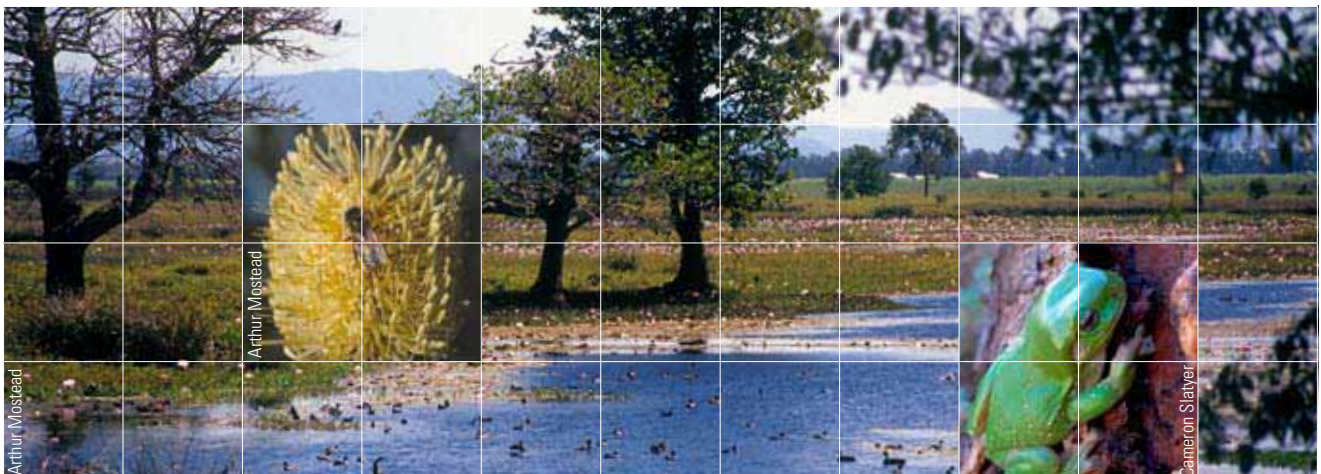
Stewardship payments for biodiversity improvements

Stewardship payments are financial incentives to land-holders to carry out actions to protect existing natural habitats with high conservation value.

Payments will only be available for actions ('environmental services') that are above and beyond a land-holder's existing regulatory responsibilities or management obligations, such as industry codes of practice. These actions may include such things as: control of animals, weed control in remnant native vegetation, protection of wetlands, exclusion of stock, reduced stocking rates, and/or fire management.

Payments will be made to land-holders through local competitive tender processes run by delivery agents contracted by the Australian Government. Land-holders can access support to help them participate in the process and to identify biodiversity values and appropriate management actions.

Applications will be assessed based on value for money. Therefore, land-holders who are willing to contribute to the costs of conservation actions are likely to be most competitive in the tender process.





Eligibility to Participate

You are eligible to apply for funding where you:

- > can provide the environmental services sought in a region where a call to apply is made;
- > are willing to sign a management agreement and to protect the conservation values identified in the agreement over the long term; and
- > can demonstrate a proven track record in managing for biodiversity conservation, for example through the quality and extent of natural areas on the property, involvement in past successful projects or in property management planning.

Information about the management agreements and obligations of land-holders will be provided to eligible participants interested in applying for funding.

Stewardships - Investment Criteria

The following investment criteria will be used in assessing the tender applications in each round of funding.

The property and its biodiversity values:

- > The property or site of interest will contribute to the protection of biodiversity over the longer term if managed for conservation.
- > The existing remnant vegetation patch or patches are of sufficient size and suitable shape, and close to and/or connected to other sites of the same type.
- > The remnant vegetation patch or patches contains species of high conservation value, such as, endangered species and communities, or populations of endemic species that are threatened elsewhere.

The management actions:

- > The proposed management actions will remove or reduce the current and emerging threats to biodiversity.
- > The proposed management action is good practice and is likely to be successful.
 - > The applicant has the capacity to carry out the proposed actions.
 - > The applicant has access to long-term support through local, regional and state institutions.
 - > The investment will leverage additional funding and support.
- > The investment will remove or reduce threats to biodiversity overall and in the longer term.
 - > It is not sound to invest funds to remove or reduce a threat if it is just transferred onto nearby land, replaced by another threat, or returns if action is not ongoing.
- > The proposed management actions are above and beyond the land-holder's existing responsibilities and obligations.
 - > Stewardship payments cannot be used to support activities required under existing regulations or land-holder obligations.

The funding request:

- > The investment is cost-effective.
 - > Prevention is better than cure and it costs less. Protecting existing natural habitat is more cost-effective than trying to restore it once it has been destroyed or degraded and species have been lost.
- > The investment builds on existing investment and management regimes.
 - > Investment should take into account and build on, rather than replace, existing activities, for example those funded through government grants, rate rebates etc.

A fact sheet will be available before the tender process begins. The fact sheet will outline the values, key threats, existing obligations, best management approaches for biodiversity conservation and activities that will be supported under the programme.

Acquisitions

The focus for investment will be large (generally in excess of 1000 hectares) properties with outstanding biodiversity values located in areas where there is high level of species endemism and original ecosystems and species composition have not been markedly altered, the natural habitat and native species are under threat, and reservation is the most appropriate way to remove or reduce these threats.

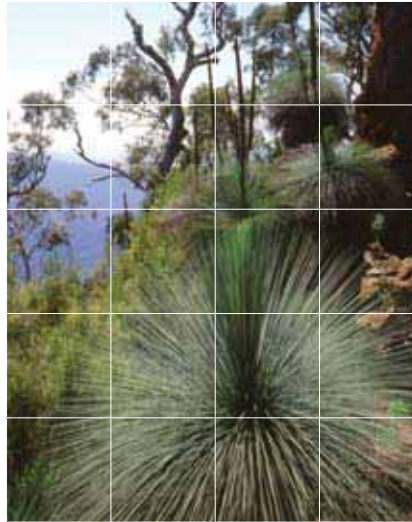
All acquisitions will be voluntary.

In general, the programme will provide up to 66 percent of the purchase price for land acquisitions. However, applicants who are able to leverage greater philanthropic input from the private sector and therefore apply for less than 66 percent of the purchase price will be considered favourably.

Eligibility to participate

- > The organisation purchasing the property to manage as a conservation reserve: property acquisitions will be negotiated by registered charitable organisations where they:
 - > can demonstrate the financial and organisational capacity, prior property acquisition experience, and sufficient resources to undertake the task;
 - > have a proven track record in practical, on-ground conservation management, including, for example wildlife management, weed and feral animal control, and fire management;
 - > are willing to manage the properties for conservation in perpetuity;

- > are willing to secure biodiversity outcomes through conservation agreements, linked to title in perpetuity;
 - > can demonstrate how they will encourage philanthropic contributions from the private sector, and engage the local community in supporting the on-going management of the land for conservation; and
 - > have established mechanisms for handing management over to an appropriate alternative conservation manager if the organisation dissolves or ceases to exist.
- > Property owners interested in selling their property as a conservation reserve need to demonstrate that they have authority to sell the property and are doing so voluntarily.



Acquisitions - Principles for Investment

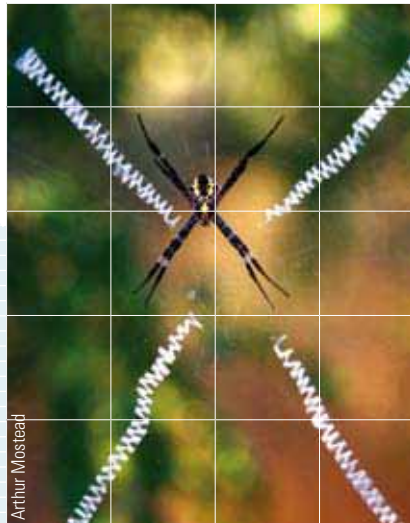
Applications will be assessed against the following investment criteria:

- > The property will contribute to the priorities of the programme by meeting one or more of the following:
 - > containing outstanding examples of ecosystems, in particular those not already well represented in existing reserves;
 - > having high diversity of endemic species;
 - > containing threatened species, communities or ecosystems (listed under Commonwealth or state legislation);
 - > providing a refuge for local species during adverse seasons, and a source from which they spread during favourable seasons;
 - > supporting significant habitat for migratory species; and
 - > meeting the international criteria and management standards of a protected area managed mainly for conservation of the existing species and ecosystems (IUCN Protected area management categories I-IV).



> Acquisition will protect the outstanding biodiversity values of the property, including:

- > the property is of sufficient size, suitable shape, location in the landscape, and proximity to other protected areas for it to maintain species function and diversity over the long term;
- > the condition of the property is such that extensive revegetation and substantial weed or feral animal controls are not required to return it a condition where species and ecosystems are self-maintaining over the long-term; and



Arthur Mostead

- > the property contains ecosystems not represented, or under-represented, in the existing reserve system or it contains examples of ecosystems that have been greatly reduced since European settlement.

- > the property is held in freehold tenure or leasehold tenure that can be converted to permanent reservation. Other leasehold land may be considered but the funding available will be reduced to reflect the shorter agreement period.

> Acquisition will secure the biodiversity values of the property in perpetuity, for example:

- > each ecosystem type represented is of sufficient size (area or population) and condition (relatively intact) to maintain itself over the longer term;
- > the long-term risk from salinity or other regional impacts is minimal;
- > the population size of threatened or endemic species is sufficient for them to maintain themselves in the long term, either in isolation or in conjunction with adjacent reserve populations; and

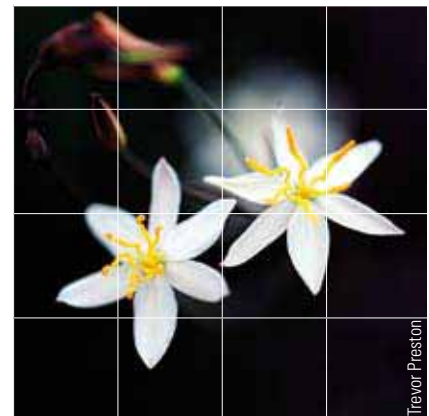
> The investment is cost-effective and represents value for money:

- > prevention is generally better than cure therefore sites of high quality are preferred to those already markedly altered by human-related activities;

> the proposed acquisition takes account of and builds on, rather than replaces or duplicates, existing investment and activities. Priority will be given to proposals that:

- Link to other areas managed for conservation.
- Increase reservation in bioregions where the proportion already reserved is low.
- Leverage private sector contributions and engage the local community.
- Form part of broader strategic regional activities to protect local species and ecosystems.

> the biodiversity values of the site are significantly threatened or will be in the foreseeable future and the proposed conservation management removes or significantly reduces the threats. Examples of threats may include current grazing or fire regimes, plans to clear vegetation, or insufficient weed or feral animal control. Regional rising salinity levels would not be considered a threat that could be reduced by reservation.



Trevor Preston



M Fagg

Andrew Tatnell

Further information about the *Maintaining Australia's Biodiversity Hotspots Programme*, including delivery agents in your region, can be found at:
www.environment.gov.au/hotspots