

Assessing Commonwealth Work Plan Actions against NVF Desired Outcomes Commonwealth Jurisdiction (AFFA response)

Part C: Assessment of impact of Measures under the ANZECC Commonwealth Workplan on the specific outcomes listed in the ANZECC National framework (3.3.2-3.3.5)

The specific outcomes listed under the ANZECC framework to be assessed are: Soil & water resources, Hydrology, Land Productivity, and Sustainable Land Use.

Generally, measures at 4.1 to 4.5 in the short term will directly address the protection and management of the native vegetation estate as they are specifically focussed on these issues.

Over the longer term, the protection and sustainable management of native vegetation can be expected to promote the specified outcomes for Soil & Water resources, Hydrology, Land Productivity, and Sustainable Land Use. The degree to which this occurs and the extent to which it can be attributed to specific outcomes will always be difficult to assess due to the complex interrelationship of biophysical factors on both a temporal and spatial scale. As an example, the nature of the underlying hydrology in a catchment affects both the lead time and location at which the outcomes of vegetation management practices are observed.

In most instances a range of vegetation and non-vegetation approaches will be required to achieve the desired outcomes. These integrated outcomes are being provided by a range of programs under the Natural Heritage Trust, support for research and development activities, the recently announced National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, as well as the activities of regional communities and government agencies.

4.2 Planning and assessment

4.2.1 Vegetation Inventory, data collection and mapping – Currently medium impact

Broad-based vegetation information is essential in allocation of resources for protection and management. To be of maximum impact however, vegetation information must be combined with other related datasets such as topography and hydrology and decision support systems tailored to the users needs. A present limitation is the availability of data at an appropriate scale and the complexity of integrated decision making. Vegetation information alone will only be of limited value, therefore rate medium priority.

4.2.2 Biodiversity status assessment – Low impact in the short term, potentially higher in the long-term

Following on from 4.2.1, specific biodiversity information is part of a broad spectrum of information requirements. Biodiversity status assessment less important than 4.2.1 and is therefore given a low rating.

4.2.3 Regional vegetation management planning – Medium

Vegetation establishment, retention and management is critical to all of the above. Plans are required to guide decision making at all levels. In most regions the impact in any given region is limited by the availability of resources for mapping at a finer scale (ie 1:50,000 or 1:25,000) and access to expertise to assist regional decision making. Therefore rated this measure as medium.

4.3 Formal reserve system - low

The current reserve system contributes significantly to Soil & Water Resources, Hydrology, Land Productivity, and Sustainable Land Use. However, the location and size of reserves in critical catchments will vary and their contribution vary accordingly. In a number of critical catchments affected by salinity the level of reservation is low and they are themselves under threat from salinity, water logging etc.

The scope for large additional reservation is limited in most catchments with vegetation remnants often small and highly dispersed. Reservation is often impractical and/or of only limited impact on catchments and landscapes and may not therefore be critical to promoting soil and water outcomes for example.

Given the above we would rate this a low priority and note that off reserve activities are of potentially far greater significance.

4.4 Communication and capacity building

4.4.1 Community education – Low impact

General awareness raising targeted at the broader community is of only limited benefit when compared with targeted campaigns involving landholders as they are the major decision makers on private land activity. This is reflected in the thrust of existing natural resource management programs. Therefore rated low.

4.4.2 Research & Development and education/extension– Medium

R&D when coordinated with extension activities for landholders is strategically a good investment from the Commonwealth's perspective. The impact of this measure will be most significant where:

- the environmental services of native vegetation are quantified through R&D,
- are recognised within the agricultural sector, and
- are linked to incentives for vegetation management and retention.

4.4.3 Vegetation management infrastructure – Medium

This activity is strongly interrelated with 4.4.2 and rated the same. Private and public sector activities have a significant and complimentary role to play in providing support to landholders engaged in vegetation management.

4.5 Incentives

4.5.1 Grant Programs/incentives – Medium

May be of high impact for individual landholder decision making, however, its broader impact is limited by the nature and extent to which resources are available. It is also affected by socio-economic factors. Where sufficient resources are available it can result in a major expansion in land set asides and plantings. It is most effective when complimented by good priority setting at the national and regional level.

4.5.2 Property rights and market-based Measures – Low with a significantly higher potential in the longer term

Still in early stages of development and some way from being a major driver, therefore rated low at this time. Maybe important in promoting large scale expansion of native species in commercial farm forests and plantations. Developments which could result in this measure having a more significant impact are developments in relation to Greenhouse (Carbon credits) and salinity management.

4.5.3 Revolving funds

As per 4.5.1.

4.5.4 Differential rating and Taxation measures – Low with potential for higher impact

Can be significant at the individual property level, but aggregate impact has been relatively low (other than in relation to the forestry sector).

4.5.5 Offsets and Performance/Assurance Bonds - Low

May be significant at the local level, but of limited impact over a large scale and therefore rated low.

4.6 Regulatory Mechanisms

4.6.1 Threatened species - Low

While impacts of threatened species legislation will vary with species the measure is not designed to expand the native vegetation estate the scale of impact may well be limited overall.

4.6.2 Land Clearing Regulation – Medium

In those States where high rates of clearing are evident there is potential to have significant impact, particularly in circumstances where clearing is (or without regulation would be) concentrated in particular catchments. The Qld. Government has recently introduced new and comprehensive legislation, the final impacts of which may not be known for several years.

4.6.3 Industry/Land use Codes of practice – Low with potential for significantly higher impact in the longer term

Still in early stages of development and some way from being a major driver, therefore rated low.

4.7 Monitoring and evaluation

7.7.1 Low

Of low direct impact as the availability of data remains an issue, yet it remains an essential input into good planning.

7.7 Low - impact on Soil/Water resources and Hydrology

Medium – impact for Land Productivity and Sustainable Land Use.