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## Disclaimer

This guide was prepared to assist councils in Australia to develop and implement local programs using financial incentives and other associated mechanisms to conserve biodiversity, in particular native vegetation, on private lands under their jurisdiction. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided in this document is current at the time of publication. This document does not purport or seek to provide a complete and comprehensive guide to all opportunities and legal obligations applicable to local government and other parties. Independent professional advice on all matters presented in this guide should be obtained prior to using any financial incentives instrument or other associated mechanisms or making any decision based on information summarised in this document.

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# CONTENTS

## CONTENTS

Summary.....	v
Acknowledgments.....	vi
<b>PART A      INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Why should councils be involved in conserving biodiversity?.....	2
Benefits of biodiversity and sustainable land management.....	3
How can councils help?.....	4
What incentives and related mechanisms are we talking about?.....	5
<b>PART B      HOW TO IMPLEMENT A FINANCIAL                  INCENTIVES SCHEME</b>	<b>7</b>
Stage 1 Development	
<i>Step One</i> Getting started.....	9
<i>Step Two</i> Assess the financial implications and funding opportunities.....	13
<i>Step Three</i> Set up your framework for implementation.....	17
Stage 2 Implementation	
<i>Step Four</i> Promote and market to landholders.....	26
<i>Step Five</i> Implement your scheme with landholders.....	26
Stage 3 Monitoring and Evaluation	
<i>Step Six</i> Evaluate your scheme.....	28
<i>Step Seven</i> Assess cost-benefit.....	29
<b>PART C      CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>31</b>
Cairns City Council, <i>Queensland</i> – land management agreements.....	32
Cooloola Shire Council, <i>Queensland</i> – environmentally significant areas strategy.....	35
Coorong District Council, <i>South Australia</i> – local action plan.....	38
Melton Shire Council, <i>Victoria</i> – environmental enhancement policy program.....	41
City of Manningham, <i>Victoria</i> – local environmental assistance fund.....	44
References and further reading.....	47
Key terms used.....	49

## APPENDICES

1	Potential funding opportunities .....	50
2	Local incentive schemes and environmental levies .....	52
3	Link-up: useful contacts and support networks .....	54
4	Some examples of incentives scheme assessment and application forms .....	55
5	Example of non-binding management agreement (contract) .....	65

## TABLES

1	Native vegetation that benefits farm production and biodiversity conservation .	3
2	Context of local government in biodiversity conservation on private land .....	4
3	Options for use of financial incentives .....	20
4	Options for use of property right mechanisms .....	21
5	Options for application of revenue raising mechanisms .....	22
6	Options for use of planning incentive mechanisms .....	23
7	Options for use of non-financial motivational incentives .....	24

## FIGURES

1	Steps for implementing a financial incentives scheme .....	8
2	Key ways to deliver incentives under council's overall strategy .....	9

# SUMMARY

Across Australia, people working the land are taking the next steps toward sustainable land management. This is in response to widespread acknowledgement that poor native vegetation management is affecting the economic well being of whole communities through decline in farm productivity, and is causing biodiversity loss, ecosystem decay and loss of habitat.

Local government is in a powerful position to establish incentive schemes that encourage private landholders to become partners in conserving biodiversity, particularly remnant vegetation, as part of sustainable land management and farm production. Incentives are part of an integrated approach that includes planning, regulation, education, and encouragement of community participation in a partnership between private landholders and governments.

Broadly speaking, the offer and take-up of financial assistance is an acknowledgement that the community, through local government, is willing to help with the cost of conserving biodiversity on private lands.

This guide (revised edition) is designed to help local government to work with local communities and landholders to develop, implement and monitor the success of financial incentive schemes. It provides a step-by-step approach for councils and their staff to develop and implement local financial incentive programs, and to encourage people who are interested in making a real difference to conserve biodiversity on their land.

The guide is the culmination of a two-year project by Environs Australia and was prepared in two stages. During the first stage, in 1998-99, Environs Australia worked with the three pilot councils of Surf Coast Shire, Shire of Cardinia and City of Greater Bendigo to develop and trial a draft guide.

In applying the draft guide, all three pilot councils have recently been successful in receiving funding for their local incentive programs in the most recent round of the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare

grants for 2000. In the second stage, the draft guide was reviewed, evaluated, revised and edited with its scope extended to include more national relevance.

Incentives may include: financial incentive mechanisms (rate rebates, grants or annual payments); non-financial motivational incentives (local awards, community recognition, training and technical support, materials); and development incentives (tradable or transferable development rights). Supporting mechanisms can include: property right mechanisms (management agreements and revolving funds); and revenue raising mechanisms (environmental levies and developer contributions)

Where councils can provide a 'package' of different incentives, the uptake by landholders is likely to increase. For each State, the type of package offered may depend upon the legislative arrangements that are in place. Where the legislation allows, rate rebates and grants are the recommended preferred option for application of financial incentives by local government.

This combination of incentives can also be linked to property management plans and management agreements under local planning schemes, including voluntary conservation agreements such as covenants that ensure land is managed appropriately in the long term.

There are already many examples of highly innovative and successful local incentive programs being run by councils in Australia, and five of these are presented as case studies.

The potential for success increases where a council works in partnership with the community in policy, financial, resource and administrative terms and with other organisations, such as catchment and regional authorities, State agencies, Greening Australia and other non-government organisations.

More detail on the legislative and legal aspects, options, opportunities and constraints for local government to use financial incentives and other related mechanisms are provided in the suite of recent publications from CSIRO Wildlife and Ecology prepared by Binning, Cripps and Young (refer to references and contact details, Appendix 3).



There is a strong need to amend State legislation to remove impediments so that local government can more readily and effectively apply a full range of instruments and mechanisms such as financial incentives to protect native vegetation on private land. All spheres of government are encouraged to work together in partnership to build a national coalition of support for cost-sharing arrangements across all States to conserve biodiversity.

The application of financial incentives and other related mechanisms are still at an early stage throughout most of Australia. Contributions and feedback on this work are welcomed from any councils or other government agencies by contacting Enviro Australia.

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