

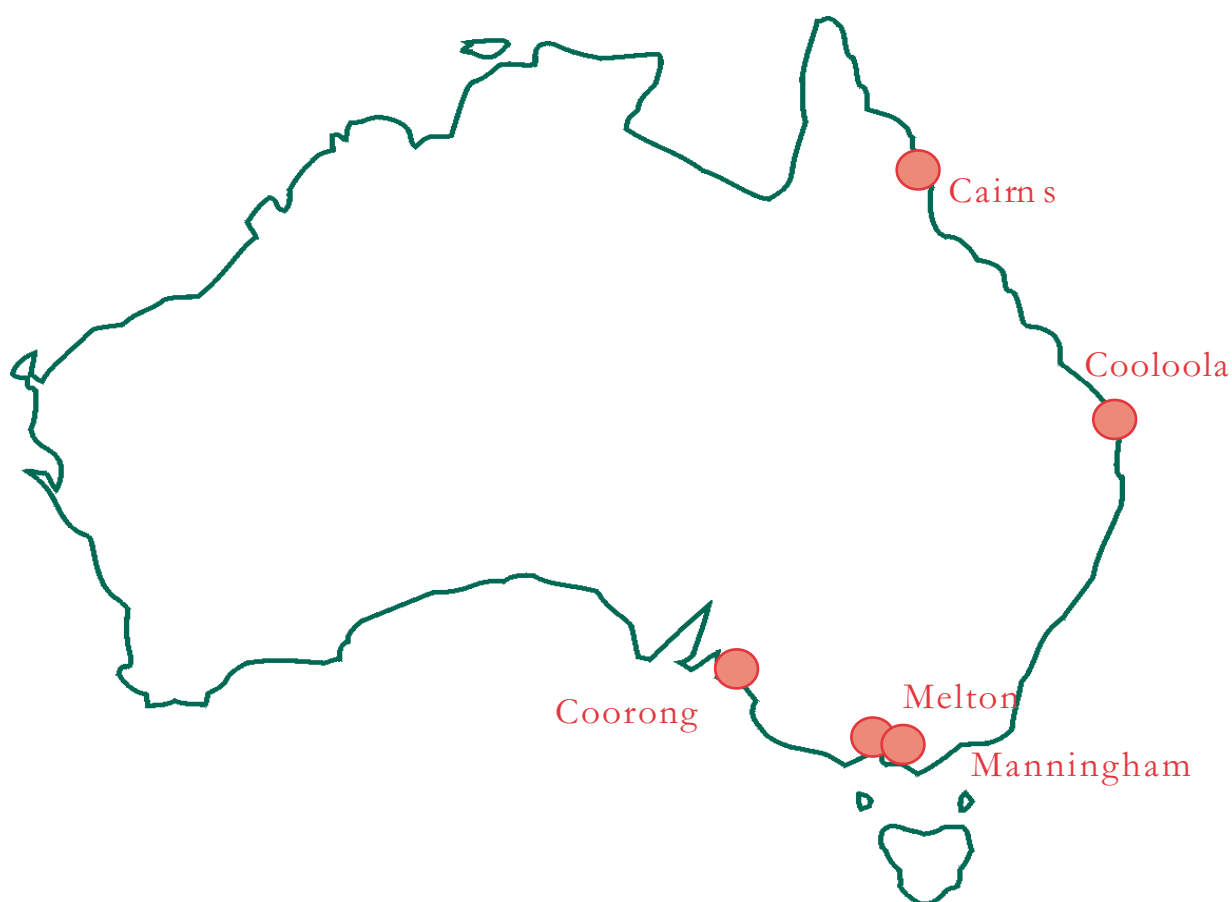
## PART C CASE STUDIES

This part profiles some of the increasing numbers of councils using incentive schemes to encourage landholders to conserve biodiversity. Five of these councils are:

1. Cairns City Council, Queensland.
2. Cooloola Shire Council, Queensland.
3. Coorong District Council, South Australia.
4. Melton Shire Council, Victoria.
5. City of Manningham Council, Victoria.

Together they illustrate different ways councils are implementing tailored incentive packages that include financial incentives (e.g. rate rebates and grants) supported by motivational and other incentives (e.g. awards, training, technical advice and materials). All are at early stages of implementation and highlight various successful characteristics.

At the time of publication, and to the best of the author's and publisher's knowledge, the information contained in the five case studies was correct. Information was provided and checked by the relevant councils as of January 2000.



# Case Study I

## Cairns City Council, Queensland

### Land Management Agreements

Cairns City Council's local government area is a long narrow coastal strip between the Coral Sea and Great Dividing Range, covering an area of more than 1,750 square kilometres. It extends from Ellis Beach in the north to Russell River in the south and includes a mix of tourist development, urban and rural areas. The internationally recognised Wet Tropics World Heritage Area skirts the area's western boundary.

#### Program Objective

To protect land with high conservation value. This includes:

- areas of regionally outstanding or high biodiversity;
- vegetation considered to be a rare or threatened community type or poorly represented in the region;
- land which acts as a corridor or link between existing protected areas;
- areas which are habitat for rare or threatened fauna species;
- landforms which have a significant scenic quality.

#### Program Background

The far north Queensland region is exhibiting strong growth. Clearance of rainforest and other vegetation for urban expansion and agriculture has increased pressure on the globally significant flora and fauna within the Cairns City Council's area.

Council launched the Land Management Agreement Project in March 1998 to provide incentives to landholders to protect high conservation value vegetation.

#### Program Description

The Land Management Agreement project allows landowners to voluntarily enter into a legal contract with council to protect land that has been identified as possessing high conservation values.

Landowners may receive benefits, such as:

- a rates refund of up to 50 per cent based on the proportion of land included in the agreement (maximum \$600);
- a cash grant for works undertaken to complement or enhance the protected area;
- technical advice;
- community recognition.

Technical advice and materials are provided with the assistance of the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Environment Protection Agency and Department of Natural Resources.

Participating landowners also receive a sign to display on their property showing they are part of the project, and a medallion is presented during a public ceremony. A register of landowners and their properties is maintained to ensure that statutory dates are met.

Land Management Agreement rate incentives can be provided in conjunction with a Wet Tropics Management Authority Cooperative Management Agreement or the Department of Environment and Heritage Voluntary Conservation Agreements. This adds to the versatility of the project, in that land managers who may prefer to negotiate or see added benefits in pursuing an agreement with one of the other agencies are free to do so, while retaining the option to receive a rate refund.

The project is promoted both through articles, workshops, and television coverage, and through letters sent to landholders in priority areas.

In the first year \$10-15,000 was allocated for the rate refund/cash grant packages, assuming an

average of \$1-2,000 per landholder to cover materials, ranging from trees for revegetation to bulldozer driver fees to assist in correcting serious erosion problems.

The project was developed and initially implemented by a council officer, a position jointly funded by council, the Environment Protection Agency and the Wet Tropics Management Authority. The project has now moved into an operational phase, and is managed by council's Development Assessment Section. Additional funding is provided from the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust Bushcare component.

### **Planning Context**

The Far North Queensland 2010 Regional Environment Strategy provides the regional planning framework for the Cairns project. Taking a regional approach ensures that the project complements similar land management agreement programs run by the Wet Tropics Management Authority, Department of Environment and Heritage and adjoining shire planning scheme provisions that also provide for land protection.

At the local level, key areas for off-reserve conservation have been identified by using detailed vegetation mapping from Greening Australia. This mapping will be an invaluable tool for identifying Cairns city's ecological resources as part of council's new planning scheme proposed for gazettal in 2001. This will be consistent with the *State Integrated Planning Act 1997*.

### **Monitoring/Evaluation of Participants**

In the first six months of operation, three Land Management Agreements were finalised protecting of 165 hectares. From December 1998, a further four agreements were finalised, with over 300 hectares now included. To stimulate further interest, an information brochure will be mailed to all ratepayers owning land with significant regional biodiversity.

To ensure compliance with the Land Management Agreement, key clauses can be added or removed to suit the individual needs of the landowner, while ensuring protection for the environment.

Key clauses that secure the land include:

- Sale of land - gives council first option to purchase the land at the price nominated by the landowner.
- Covenant - in the event that legislation is passed in Queensland to register covenants against the land title, the owner agrees to do all things necessary to achieve registration of the conditions against the title.
- Caveat - does not permit the registration of an instrument affecting the conservation area until the caveat is withdrawn by council.
- Vegetation protection order - owner agrees to allow the making of an order on the land without objecting to or hindering the process.
- Deed of novation - the owner will not sell the land except subject to the condition that the purchaser will enter into the agreement with council.

### **Issues and Difficulties**

In developing and implementing the project, significant staff time is taken in assuring and reassuring landowners that council does not want to take their land from them or impinge on their existing landuse rights, particularly during negotiations. Though it is not a serious problem, the lack of a 'full-time' officer has limited the time available for this critical task.

The only other minor issue is that there is a constant need to circulate information throughout the community to stimulate interest and maintain a steady flow of participants. This is an essential component of the program, and without this the Land Management Agreement project would have limited success.

### **Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of the Land Management Agreement project is to provide landholders with a tailored incentive package which promotes and assures the protection of valuable natural resources in the Cairns City Council local government area. Fostering a cooperative approach between council and freehold landowners is essential to increase the protected area network outside the government estate.

The project recognises the value of remnant vegetation that landowners have voluntarily retained, whether that has been because the land is generally unproductive, or because they simply like their patch of rainforest that provides food for the local cassowary.

The degree of success that the project can expect in the future is related to the attitude of land managers and their willingness to explore new concepts in land protection and management. As projects such as Land Management Agreements

steadily increase in popularity in provincial council areas, benefits to landowners and the environment will become apparent in the improved health of the ecosystem both on-farm and at a regional level.

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Photo - courtesy of Cairns Council

## Case Study 2

### Cooloolo Shire, Queensland

## Environmentally Significant Areas Strategy

Cooloolo Shire is a recently amalgamated area centred on the town of Gympie, and covers an area of 297,300 hectares. Most of the shire is located within the Mary River catchment. It is made up of a mix of high quality agricultural land, large tracts of state forest, extensive rural residential development and urban centres. The east of the shire lies within the Great Sandy Region, which adjoins the World Heritage listed Fraser Island and other features of international conservation significance.

### Program Objective

To identify, manage and protect valued habitats and stands of remnant vegetation significant to the shire's ecological sustainability, areas representing the intrinsic character of a locality and/or landscape elements of outstanding significance.

### Program Background

A 1993 environmental audit, that included an assessment of the status of remnant vegetation in the shire, found that the "current biotic linkages from east to west across Cooloolo Shire are extensively fractured and tenuou, making all remnant native vegetation on private lands within Cooloolo Shire significant from this perspective alone".

The Environmentally Significant Areas Strategy complements the Cooloolo Conservation Strategy, which was adopted in early 1995.

### Program Description

The strategy includes:

- A map that identifies environmentally significant areas. Categories include national parks, forests and woodlands, riparian corridors, significant areas of remnant vegetation, and frontal dune and foreshore vegetation.
- Procedures to consider development applications on land which includes, is adjacent to, or may have environmental consequences for, designated Environmentally Significant Areas and/or areas of remnant vegetation identified in the Cooloolo State of the Environment Report. These may require the applicant to prepare an Environmental Assessment Report and/or Environmental Management Plan that sets out proposed measures that will mitigate against these impacts prior to Council considering the application.
- Incentives to offset any perceived costs of retaining areas for conservation, that include:
  - waiving application fees to include an area in an Environment Protection Zone;
  - favourable consideration of permissible uses such as eco-tourism and cultural facilities;
  - developing bonuses and modifying certain provisions for applicants who demonstrate a willingness to incorporate conservation areas and the principles of ecologically sustainable development within their project allow increased entitlements on less sensitive areas while restricting development within, or adjacent to, environmentally significant areas.
- Additional incentives and support to encourage landholders to conserve areas of environmental significance in private ownership, including:
  - providing concessions and rate relief for the retention of identified wildlife corridors and critical habitats, stands of remnant vegetation and other significant environmental features;

- encouraging eco-tourism facilities near environmentally significant areas to promote a broader understanding and appreciation of the shire's environmental attributes;
- support for public awareness campaigns through council and community networks.

The two major rate rebate schemes are the Nature Conservation Area Rebate and the Farm Forestry Rebate.

The criteria to attract a Nature Conservation Area Rebate are:

- The subject site needs to meet the selection criteria identified for Nature Conservation Areas.
- A conservation agreement will be entered into over the property or that part of the property subject to the rates reduction application.
- Rate discounts will be provided until such time as the provisions of the conservation agreement are dishonoured or at least a three-year trial period has expired.
- Any repayment of a discount that results from failing to honour an agreement is to be negotiated through the preparation of the conservation agreement.
- Rates discounts will apply as follows:
  - Less than 5 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$300 per annum.
  - 5-10 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$500 per annum.
  - 10-20 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$750 per annum.
  - 20 hectares and above: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$1,000 per annum.

The criteria to attract a Farm Forestry Rate Rebate are :

- The application will meet the selection criteria identified for the Farm Forestry Program, including a requirement to demonstrate that the site is established for production.

- The applicant will enter into an agreement with council to follow recognised codes of practice and to follow a farm management plan certified by a relevant government or accredited private organisation as meeting principles of sustainable production, and will agree to maintain the plot for farm forestry purposes.
- Rate discounts will be provided until such time as the provisions of the agreement are dishonoured or at least a three-year trial period.
- Any repayment of a discount as a result of failing to honour an agreement is to be negotiated through the preparation of the agreement.
- Rates discounts will apply as follows:
  - Less than 5 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$200 per annum.
  - 5-10 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$400 per annum.
  - 10-20 hectares: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$600 per annum.
  - 20 hectares and above: 50 per cent of the general rate or maximum \$800 per annum.

The rebate schemes were originally funded jointly by the Queensland Department of Natural Resources (Integrated Catchment Management Program), and the council.

### **Planning Context**

The Wide Bay 2020 Growth Strategy provides a planning framework for the region.

At the local level, the strategy helps council implement the aims of the Cooloola Conservation Strategy.

### **Monitoring/Evaluation of Participants**

Table A on the following page summarises the state of affairs, as at December 1999, in terms of applications processed so far.

**Table A: Rate Rebate Scheme Progress to Date (as at December 1999)**

	# of FF Appl'ns Processed	#of NC Appl'ns Processed	Total Area of FF Covered Covered - (ha)	Total Area of NC Covered (ha)	Monies Distributed So Far - FF(\$)	Monies Distributed So Far - NC(\$)
1996-97	7	8	46	89	3,878	4,562
1997-98	3	3	11	65	754	1,525
1998-99	5	6	16	141	1,343	3,551
Total	15	17	73	295	5,975	9,638

NC = Nature Conservation Area Program  
 FF = Farm Forestry Program

Note: The number of applications processed differs from the number of applications received. Some applications did not qualify, or applicants have not yet returned their agreements for endorsement. The above figures represent the totals derived from applications approved and endorsed by council, and rebates paid.

From available funds in the Nature Conservation Area Program, \$9,638 has been distributed to the entitled recipients, allowing conservation of 295 hectares of private land.

From available funds in the Farm Forestry Program, \$5,975 has been distributed to the entitled recipients, allowing conservation of 73 hectares of private land.

To monitor whether the terms of the agreement are being adhered to, landholders are required to respond to questionnaires that enable council to assess management performance. The terms of the agreement also allow council to undertake random checks if required.

### Issues and Difficulties

The two major challenges faced by council are the lack of resources and time able to be dedicated to the initiative, and the ongoing need to persuade landholders that protection of native vegetation has economic as well as ecological benefits.

### Conclusion

The Environmentally Significant Areas Strategy provides a framework to implement several

complementary incentives. In addition to rate rebates, the strategy includes bonuses to encourage development of less sensitive areas as an offset for conserving biologically important areas.

While at an early stage, the incentive scheme shows great promise. By providing a financial incentive to protect native vegetation, the scheme has already swayed the decision of some participating landholders to conserve rather than clear significant areas of their properties.

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# Case Study 3

## Coorong District, South Australia

### Local Action Plan

Coorong Council is located at the southern end of the Murray River. The council is an amalgamation of the former Peake, Meningie and Coonalpyn Downs councils, and covers an area of 885,000 hectares, with a population of 6,100. The region contains areas of world significance, such as the Ramsar-listed Coorong wetlands. It also includes over 150,000 hectares of native vegetation, much of which is in national parks.

#### Program Objectives

The seven-year objectives of the Local Action Plan are to:

- establish perennial vegetation that will result in a reduction of the recharge rate by 11 per cent in five years and 20 per cent in seven years.
- employ management techniques to maintain and enhance biodiversity and conserve native species in 17,000 hectares of native vegetation and wetland in five years, and 29,000 hectares in seven years;
- reclaim or rehabilitate 2,230 hectares of degraded land in five years and 3,730 hectares in seven years;
- investigate groundwater issues, develop options for management and begin implementation of recommended actions within five years;
- investigate and develop options for the control of lakeshore erosion around Lakes Albert and Alexandrina, and begin to implement within five years;
- promote sustainable agricultural production by:
  - balancing land use and land capability.
  - fencing to land classification and capability.
  - investigating and implementing options that will overcome the problems associated with non-wetting sand within five years.
  - stabilising bare and eroding land.

#### Program Background

The region has significant land degradation problems, and only 18 per cent of the area's

original native vegetation remains. About 57,000 hectares are affected by dryland salinity, with a further 70,000 hectares at risk. Steps need to be taken to maintain and improve the health of existing remnant vegetation, and to establish native vegetation strategically to assist biodiversity conservation.

In 1995, the decision was made to develop the Local Action Plan. After two years of plan development, a draft plan was released in July 1997. A final plan will be released in March 2000.

At the 2000 National Landcare Awards, the Local Action Plan won the BP sponsored Landcare Catchment Award.

#### Program Description

The Coorong District Local Action Plan offers incentives for revegetation projects and projects that protect existing native vegetation and wetlands. A bonus is included for projects that have some biodiversity benefit. This is assessed by using scientifically based criteria to determine the status of the remnant vegetation.

The incentive provided for fencing remnant vegetation is determined by the health, size, location and intactness of the vegetation and if it protects rare or threatened species. All new plantings of native vegetation are assessed to enable their long-term biodiversity value to be determined by taking into consideration locality of planting, size, shape and species used.

To attract funding, projects must:

- control dryland recharge and the spread of dryland salinity;
- involve the broadacre establishment of perennial plants;
- have adequate site preparation;
- protect native vegetation or wetlands;
- reclaim salt-affected or eroded lands.

Funding is geared toward projects that have the greatest impact on reducing recharge to the groundwater. A bonus payment may be made if rare or threatened species can be identified and planted. The rate of incentive payment is determined by the private versus public value of the project.

The eligibility criteria for project applications on private land are:

- An Individual Works Proposal is needed for all projects.
- An agreement (which includes a maintenance period) must be signed by landholders and when appropriate, on behalf of any other body with an interest in the land.
- A single project payment will be made on completion of works except where the public share of the costs exceeds \$2,000, in which case a split payment will be applied.
- In the case of split payments where recommended practices are used, part payment (75-85 per cent) will be made on completion of works and the balance (15-25 per cent) for a specified result (e.g. when desired plant numbers are achieved).
- In the case of split payments where recommended practices are not used, part payment (15-25 per cent) will be made on completion of works and the balance (75-85 per cent) for a specified result (e.g. when desired plant numbers are achieved).
- Funds will only be paid direct to landholders, not to people performing the works who are not signatories to the agreement.

The eligibility criteria for project applications on public land are:

- Groups will be required to submit their project proposal on a Natural Heritage Trust application form.
- An initial payment of up to 40 per cent of the project share will be forwarded to groups to cover initial set up costs.
- Up to 85 per cent of the project payment may be forwarded as an initial payment in certain circumstances.
- All payments after the initial payment will be made on completion of agreed milestones.
- Where the public share of total project costs

per group exceeds \$2,000, a delayed final payment structure will automatically be applied. The final 15 per cent of the project share will only be paid when a specified result is achieved.

- For projects on public land, agreements must be signed by two members of the group and on behalf of any relevant authority with an interest in the land
- Funds will only be paid direct to groups, not to individual group members or to people performing the works who are not signatories to the agreement.

The Local Action Plan is funded by cash and in-kind support from Coorong District Council, supplemented by funding through the Commonwealth's Natural Heritage Trust.

The Local Action Plan Committee is a council committee, which oversees decisions on project funding. It comprises the council CEO, along with eleven community members and one State agency representatives. A joint council/local action plan management committee oversees the two paid project officers. A second project officer has been employed, with funding provided from the Natural Heritage Trust. The role of this technical position is to provide advice and extension to landholders.

In 1997–98, the scale of the incentives program was enhanced by Natural Heritage Trust funds of \$260,000, which aimed to plant 4,315 hectares of perennial vegetation and install 80 kilometres of fencing. The actual amount of vegetation planted was 5,959 hectares and 115 kilometres of fencing. In 1998–99, Natural Heritage Trust funds were secured to fund \$410,000 worth of incentives to achieve 12,482 hectares of perennial vegetation and 175 kilometres of fencing. A similar program is planned for 1999–00.

## **Planning Context**

The Coorong and Districts District Plan complement the Local Action Plan. The district plan was developed by the Coorong and Districts Soil Conservation Board in 1995, and describes the natural resources of the district, the land management problems present and recommended land management practices for different land capability classes. All seven Soil Conservation Board members are on the Local Action Plan Committee.

Other planning documents linked to the Local Action Plan include:

- Ramsar wetland plan for the Coorong and Lower Lakes;
- River Murray Water Catchment Management Board Plan;
- relevant legislation, such as the *Local Government Act*, *Soil Conservation and Landcare Act* and the *Planning and Development Act*.

### **Monitoring/Evaluation of Participants**

All projects need to be completed by the participant as agreed in the contract. At completion, work is inspected at the site and an inspection report completed, detailing any variations to the agreement. For some incentives, a part payment of 25 per cent is made after the area agreed is planted, with the remainder forwarded once the result is more evident. Spot checks are made if necessary; one week's notice is given before all checks.

The agreement also includes a maintenance period of 5-40 years depending on the rate of incentive payment.

### **Issues and Difficulties**

The Local Action Plan is one of the first in South Australia. The program benefited from pilot funds to test the implementation process, though considerable demands were placed on the volunteer committee and the agency support staff. The development of the process faced many challenges as it broke new ground in many areas. An example was the cost-benefit analysis and the many attempts to develop a rigorous method to underpin the cost-share framework. The framework assisted in developing the incentive rebate levels. In hindsight, a major lesson was that as the project was innovative, a long leadtime was needed to ensure that a strong foundation for the Local Action Plan was built.

### **Conclusion**

The Coorong District Local Action Plan has been a successful pilot project. Its partnership approach is being implemented elsewhere in the State and Australia. The partnership between Coorong Council, community/landholder groups and State Government has resulted in the high level of acceptance of the Local Action Plan.

The Local Action Plan gives individual farmers a means to access incentive funds for relevant works that were not available through past landcare-type grants. So far the target area of perennial vegetation planting has exceeded expectations, and the community input is more than five times the Natural Heritage Trust funding input.

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For further details on the Coorong District Local Action Plan refer to the website at [www.nht.sa.gov.au/coorong.html](http://www.nht.sa.gov.au/coorong.html).

## Case Study 4

### Melton Shire, Victoria

## Environmental Enhancement Policy Program

The Shire of Melton covers an area of 450 square kilometres on the western fringes of Melbourne. Although there are urban development and subdivision pressures, most of the shire is made up of rural properties. The remnant native vegetation ranges from rare and threatened grasslands to open greybox woodlands. Major threats to biodiversity include weed invasion, particularly serrated tussock, prairie ground cherry, boxthorn, artichoke thistle and patersons curse.

### Program Objectives

The aim of the non-urban zones Environmental Enhancement Policy is to provide landowners with a monetary incentive in the form of a rebate to undertake specified works that will improve the environment on their properties, principally by addressing problems of land degradation. The three main principles are based upon:

- control of weeds;
- control of pest animals;
- control of soil erosion.

### Program Background

Under its corporate plan, Melton Shire Council has taken a leadership position and holistic approach to landcare and the associated principles by adopting a three pronged approach to ensure landcare goals are met: first, through the non-urban zones Environmental Enhancement Policy, second, through mapping priority weeds within the shire, and third, by acting as a coordination point for three landcare groups and a number of community groups.

One of the biggest problems affecting rural properties and productivity is the impact of serrated tussock grass. This has now become a major priority area for using incentives and the Environmental Enhancement Program's rate rebate scheme to reward good land management. This rebate was established under Section 169 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. The partnership in Melton is a strong one made up of landholders,

three landcare groups, community groups, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and council. The landcare groups (Truganina, Toolern Vale and Rockbank) have had a coordinator that reported to the Western Plains Landcare Executive, made up of council representatives and the groups.

In September 1998, the scheme won a Keep Australia Beautiful Vision of Australia award and again in 1999 it won Keep Australia Beautiful's City Pride Award for Landcare.

### Program Description

The rebate targets all properties in non-urban zones, although the rebate may be granted to properties in urban zones where the land fits the definition of farmland under the *Valuation of Land Act 1960*. Depending on the size of the property, the rate rebate will vary from as little as \$108 up to \$50,000. The impact of the environmental enhancement policy is wide ranging in that it covers over 1,100 properties within the shire, incorporating every property over 2 hectares.

The activities that the policy promotes are concurrent with landcare aims, and application of the new benchmarks of the revised 1999–2000 policy. The benchmark of *complete prevention of seed set by serrated tussock plants on the property and a minimum of 20 per cent reduction of the level of serrated tussock infestation on the property* has made the rebate system even more stringent.

The management principles are based on the following criteria:

- weeds – containing spread, reduction, eradication and prevention of re-infestation;
- pest animals – reduced numbers, destruction of burrows and prevention of re-invasion;
- soil erosion – prevention of expansion of existing erosion, rehabilitation of eroded sites and maintenance of vulnerable sites.

Works being promoted include reduction of grazing pressure, fencing and revegetation or pasture improvement, construction of soil erosion control structures, and drainage diversions.

Apart from financial incentives as a rate rebate from council, the following are provided:

- free mulch for community and landcare groups for tree-planting exercises and in many cases the supply of trees and tree-guards;
- rebate available from the operators of the landcare mechanical spot sprayer;
- hiring of other landcare equipment at discount rates to landcare members;
- copies of properties from council's weed mapping system at no charge to landholders.

Council also provides rent-free accommodation and administration for a landcare coordinator who provides advice, training, discount equipment hire and encouragement for the landcare members and the community, and promotes linkages to other networks. The landcare coordinator operates as a secondary watchdog over the policy, whilst also offering support to landholders, thus demonstrating effective means of achieving landcare aims.

Complementary works coordinated by council include "weed-busting" on a weekly basis to eradicate weeds on roadsides and in reserves, with other agencies and public utilities such as VIC Roads and Western Water now forming collaborative efforts.

As a result of the council's prioritization of rural issues, another group has been formed, the Alternative Farmers Network, which aims to investigate new farming methods that may prove sustainable and profitable for farmers in the area. Council provides free office accommodation and administrative support for this network.

## **Planning Context**

The State Government's urban growth policy provides the regional planning framework for the Melton project where the Melton Rural Zone serves as a buffer area. Environmental and conservation values in this zone and other non-urban zones require protection to ensure that the integrity of a "green wedge" is maintained.

The environmental enhancement scheme is also cited as an example of best practice in the Werribee Catchment Action Plan, endorsed by the Werribee Catchment Implementation Committee under the Port Phillip Regional Catchment and Land Protection Board.

At the local level, key areas and community priorities for off-reserve conservation have been identified in council's Local Conservation Strategy and the environmental significance overlay in the Melton Planning Scheme. This is consistent with the Victorian planning provisions and the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*.

## **Monitoring/Evaluation of Participants**

A cost-benefit analysis, Environmental Enhancement Policy Economic Analysis, was completed in December 1998. The scheme has resulted in increased agricultural productivity and community pride, and an increased awareness of weeds and weed problems. The analysis showed that:

- a 30 acre property with serrated tussock and other weeds sells for \$90-100K;
- a 30 acre property without serrated tussock and other weeds sells for \$155-175K.

A number of weaknesses and problems were also identified which subsequently led to changes and improvements to the Melton scheme, including a focus on new benchmarks for serrated tussock (refer to Program Description section) and monitoring of compliance.

At present 95 per cent of all landowners comply with the environmental enhancement policy and the landowners strongly support the principles of the scheme. To qualify for a rebate, Form A is completed by the landowner annually, detailing (with photos) the land degradation problem(s) to be addressed and the nature of proposed works to be undertaken, for assessment by council.

Melton Council, in partnership with the National Landcare Program and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, has been involved in a two-year project to map its noxious weeds, to ascertain the success of the Environmental Enhancement Policy and estimate the movement of weeds.

Although the mapping system has not yet provided a full analysis of the policy's performance over time, council estimates the infestation of serrated tussock alone has reduced by as much as 40 per cent, and a significant improvement is clear just by looking at the land.

To ensure compliance with the conditions of the rebate, Form B is sent to the landowner for completion (i.e. description of works substantiated with photographs). There is then a follow-up inspection and only those who fail to meet the criteria have their rebate withdrawn.

### **Issues and Difficulties**

In developing and implementing the project, significant staff time and resources have been used. Though it is not a serious problem, the lack of a full-time officer limited the time available for this critical task.

More recently, Melton Shire, in partnership with Moorabool Council, has secured a \$200,000 grant from the Natural Heritage Trust to employ the Werribee Catchment Community Coordinator. Also, a grant of \$53,540 from the Regional Assistance Program, Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business was obtained to jointly undertake the Outer Western Agribusiness Audit with Wyndham Council. Both of these funded initiatives have been critical in improving and sustaining the local incentive scheme and implementing the Environmental Enhancement Policy.

The other main issue was the monitoring of compliance and cooperation. This is an essential component of the program, and without cooperation of landowners the rate rebate scheme would have limited success.

One major limitation of the Melton rate rebate scheme is that it cannot be applied to non-ratable lands, such as government and public utility lands. Other complementary instruments are therefore needed.

The partnership and two-way information flow between Council, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, landcare and the community has helped to keep track of weed hotspots and keep council informed of those

landholders that will require further prosecution or have failed, or are likely to fail, the rate rebate performance criteria. The high up-take rate of the Environmental Enhancement Policy by landowners has meant the development of a community ethic to 'dob' in a landowner with weeds on their property. As a result council is held to be more accountable for the operation of the program and for weeds in the shire.

### **Conclusion**

The extent and degree of further success the Melton project can expect may be related to the ability and enthusiasm of land managers to extend innovation in land protection and management beyond weed control to other conservation initiatives with benefits for biodiversity conservation.

However, as projects such as Melton's Environmental Enhancement Rate Rebate scheme steadily increase in popularity in other local government areas, benefits to landowners and the environment will lead to improved health of ecosystems, encompassing individual properties, catchments and regions.

Under the Environmental Enhancement Policy, communication has developed between council, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment and landcare groups allowing more strategic and tactical targeting of specific areas. Through these mechanisms the landcare ethic is promoted and new farming practices can be investigated and built upon to provide synergy between sustainable production and the conservation of local and regional biodiversity.

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# Case Study 5

## City of Manningham, Victoria

### Local Environmental Assistance Fund

The City of Manningham is located in the ‘middle ring’ suburbs 12 kilometres to the east of Melbourne’s central business district. Manningham mainly comprises residential neighbourhoods with the Mullum Mullum Creek dividing the municipality. There are rural-residential and non-urban environments in the east, areas of State significance containing rare and threatened species, and areas of regional significance or local botanical zoological interest. The vegetation consists predominantly of box stringybark woodland on the slopes and hilltops and manna gum riparian forests along the valleys and creek lines.

#### Program Objectives

As part of *learning to love remnants*, Manningham’s Local Environmental Assistance Fund (the program) aims to:

- provide assistance/incentive to landowners to maintain and improve the environmental quality of their land for the benefit of present and future generations;
- improve the ability of the community to sustainably manage their environments and natural resources, in order to protect and preserve indigenous flora and fauna;
- encourage and promote integrated catchment management throughout the community;
- address and identify high priority environmental issues within the municipality.

#### Program Background

The target area for the program forms part of Melbourne’s ‘Green Wedge’, which was created by the Hamer Government in the late 1970s. This area was set aside to ensure the permanent retention of “wedges” of countryside between urban corridors to preserve landscapes, agricultural areas and native flora and fauna habitats close to urban areas within the metropolitan zone.

In 1995, an independent planning panel considered the future of the ‘Green Wedge’ in Manningham.

The panel recommended that council commission an investigation of a range of financial and environmental incentives to assist landowners in the Green Wedge and encourage long-term land management strategies for the area. In response to the panel’s recommendations council established the program.

#### Program Description

Financial assistance is available for landowners in the non-urban zones of the municipality to maintain and improve the environmental quality of the land. Council allocated \$40,000 towards the 1999/2000 program. Further financial assistance for landowners is available from Melbourne Water.

Three categories of assistance are available:

- **Category One** A property management planning course assists landowners in developing land management plans for their property. The course is structured to accommodate the range of land uses found in the non-urban zones of the municipality, with an emphasis on balancing competing land uses with natural conservation management. The cost to attend the course is \$50 per landowner.
- **Category Two** Land protection works provide grants up to \$800, on a matching dollar-for-dollar basis, for actions to improve the environmental quality of the land. Such actions would include pest plant and animal control, indigenous revegetation works and erosion control.
- **Category Three** Melbourne Water’s Rural Stream Frontage Program provides funding for landowners whose properties have stream frontage. Financial assistance is available for landowners who actively seek to improve the environmental quality of the stream bank. Assistance will be given for works within 20 metres of a stream. Such actions would include pest plant control, fencing, indigenous re-vegetation works and erosion control.

Priority for funding allocations is given to the following:

- projects in Category Two that form part of an implementation program for an existing conservation/land management plan;
- projects involving sites of significance identified in the Environmental Studies East of Mullum Mullum Creek or the Wonga Park Sites of Zoological and Botanical Significance;
- projects that involve a group of landowners rather than individual landowners;
- properties that have conservation covenants or belong to Land for Wildlife.

The program is managed by a council officer. Apart from Melbourne Water's Stream Frontage Program, the program is funded solely by council.

## **Planning Context**

Manningham is committed to protecting and enhancing the character, landscape quality and other natural environmental values of the non-urban area in an equitable and sustainable manner.

Manningham's Municipal Strategic Statement outlines strategies to ensure that the non-urban areas continue to be protected from pressure for further subdivision or more intensive urban development. The municipal strategic statement and planning scheme include controls and policies that will ensure that land use, development and land management practices protect and enhance soil, water and air quality, native flora and fauna and the character of the non-urban area.

The non-urban areas of the municipality are included in the Environmental Rural Zone in the new Manningham Planning Scheme.

Under the new format planning scheme, local policies have been prepared to provide more specific policy direction.

Local policies relevant to the non-urban areas cover:

- indigenous flora and fauna;
- design and development;
- roadside environments.

*GreenPrint for a Sustainable City* (council's conservation strategy) outlines actions and goals in relation to integrated environmental management. Monitoring of environmental issues is a major component of council's GreenPrint.

## **Monitoring/Evaluation of Participants**

Individual site inspections are conducted to assess the results of all works undertaken by landowners. Also, to evaluate the effectiveness of the program the following performance indicators have been identified:

- percentage of land covered with indigenous vegetation across the municipality;
- total hectares of remnant native vegetation cover;
- conservation status of local indigenous flora and fauna;
- coverage (hectares) of introduced flora species within the municipality;
- number of indigenous fauna species within the municipality.

Council is also developing a geographic information system, which will be incorporated into databases such as the statewide Department of Natural Resources and Environment flora database.

## **Issues and Difficulties**

As with most local incentive programs, limited resources are available. Council has allocated \$40,000 annually towards the program, although in 1999 over \$65,000 worth of requests were received.

Before the program is advertised each year, Council's budget needs to be endorsed. This has meant that residents are not notified until December that their application has been successful. The timing of the program restricts participants from implementing a number of management activities, including weed control and tree planting.

The program only targets specific areas within the non-urban parts of the municipality. There are a number of sites in the urban area that are also significant, for example those that have stream frontage.

## **Conclusion**

The Local Environmental Assistance Fund program is the ‘carrot’ that encourages landholders to manage their land in a sustainable manner and opens the lines of communication between landholders and council.

It provides a ‘foot in the door’ for council and other land management authorities for accessing traditionally uncommitted groups. The spin-offs include substantial improvements in the understanding and knowledge of landholders, and there is new interest by private landholders in environmental issues on public land and in joining ‘Friends Of’ groups to help manage these areas.

Nine local environment groups have been formed comprising over 150 landholders. Initially the groups focussed on rabbit control, but are now looking at tackling other land management issues as coordinated groups.

Council also conducts monthly environment seminars on local fauna and flora, Aboriginal cultural heritage, and fire prevention, which have generated enormous enthusiasm amongst land management groups and participants in the program.

## **Contact**

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Photo - courtesy of Manningham Council