



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

The Hon Peter Garrett MP

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and
the Arts

The Hon Tony Burke MP

Minister for Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

14 March 2008

CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY - BETTER LAND MANAGEMENT, LESS RED TAPE

The Federal Government will invest \$2.25 billion over five years on a new program to restore the health of Australia's environment and build on improved land management practices.

The *Caring for our Country* program will deliver funding to local communities through a simple, 'one-stop shop' covering the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Landcare, Environmental Stewardship and Working on Country programs.

The \$2.25 billion package represents a new, coordinated approach to environmental management in Australia built on transparent and consistent national targets.

It recognises that the previous system was not working efficiently, with funding scattered across the country to individual projects, often working in isolation from each other.

Caring for our Country will be backed by an annual business plan to ensure the investment is targeted to deliver the best results for the environment.

It will also cut excessive administration costs and instead allow more funding to be provided directly to farmers and other land managers.

The program will complement the \$130 million *Australia's Farming Future* initiative, which will ensure the primary industry sector has a vibrant and sustainable future in a changing climate.

The Government will provide an annual report card on progress under *Caring for our Country*.

The program will focus on the key goals of a healthier environment, which is better-protected, well-managed and more resilient against the challenges of climate change.

It will invest in projects which match six national priorities:

- Australia's national reserve system;
- Biodiversity and natural icons (including weeds, feral animals and threatened species);
- Coasts and aquatic habitats;
- Sustainable farm practices and Landcare;
- Natural resource management in remote and northern Australia; and
- Community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The new program will deliver on key Rudd Government election commitments including:

- The \$200 million Great Barrier Reef rescue plan;
- A strengthened Landcare;
- The \$50 million expansion of Indigenous Protected Areas;
- The employment of an additional 300 Indigenous Rangers;
- \$10 million to save the Tasmanian Devil;
- An extra \$2 million to fight the cane toad menace;
- \$100 million to protect and repair fragile coastal ecosystems; and
- \$5.25 million to improve water quality in the Gippsland Lakes.

Under a streamlined system, the World Heritage programs and others related to it will be overseen by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts Peter Garrett and Landcare will be overseen by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Tony Burke.

The regional natural resource bodies will remain central in delivering *Caring for our Country*, with a guaranteed share of program funds.

In fact, *Caring for our Country* will offer many regional bodies significant new opportunities.

Regional bodies will receive guaranteed funding of at least 60 per cent of historical average funding to secure their operations.

They can then access additional funds for projects which will help to deliver on key national priorities, or for extra assistance in adapting to the program.

The Government will be flexible and look at how each bid would help to achieve the best environmental outcomes.

Caring for our Country recognises that a modern and prosperous Australia is inextricably linked to the health and sustainability of our ecosystems.

Our waterways, atmosphere and soils all rely on functioning ecosystems.

Successful farmers know that to be profitable and to pass a productive business on to the next generation, farming practices need to be environmentally sustainable.

Farmers across Australia are already leading the fight against climate change, adopting cutting-edge technology to increase sustainability while also boosting production.

Caring for our Country will help to arm them with the skills and knowledge to make the agricultural sector even more resilient and productive.

Business, communities and farmers around the country have cried out for clear national leadership in land management and environmental protection in the face of climate change.

That is what *Caring for our Country* is all about.

For more information see www.nrm.gov.au – or ring the hotline on 1800 552 008.