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MINISTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, HERITAGE AND THE ARTS

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
ABC COUNTRY HOUR, NSW**

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SUBJECTS: Caring for our Country

MICHAEL CONDON: The Environment Minister, Peter Garrett, says it's not surprising that many inland programs missed out, as the priority for Caring for Our Country funding was the coast. Of the \$400 million handed down to environment groups and catchment management authorities, coastal projects have received the bulk of the money.

Peter Garrett explains the rationale for this decision to Serena Locke.

PETER GARRETT: Well, New South Wales did very well out of Caring for Our Country generally, Serena. They've got a significant commitment to 3000 landholders for adopting healthy soil management practices. Most of those are through CMAs; another 1500 farmers will be benefiting from biodiversity practice, most of those, again, with CMAs; and we've got about 500 community organisations running across coastal rehabilitation.

So I think that there have been some significant commitments to New South Wales. New South Wales did very well in the program. There'll always be some who want to see additional resources. We'd love to have a bigger set of funds to be able to provide for people.

But I'm absolutely confident that the process of rigorous application and contestability that happened with the business plans has meant that we've actually got the best outcome for Caring for Our Country this year than we've ever had in the past.

REPORTER: And I have spoken to several of the catchment management authorities - Lachlan, for example, Murrumbidgee for another - talking about the two inlands.

Now, they say they are very pleased with the baseline funding that they have received, but they had as a separate thing competitive tendering for projects that they'd linked up with Landcare, with Greening Australia, with other environmental groups, and particularly with Aboriginal groups.

Now, on the Murrumbidgee, for example, 60 people employed in a scheme to rehabilitate the river along the 'Bidgee will no longer be employed under the funding arrangement that has been made for Caring for Our Country.

PETER GARRETT:

Well, Serena, it's important to remember that Landcare's still to be announced. It's also important to remember that we have made some significant commitments, say, for example, \$1.5 million for the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre.

Now, that's a specific response to the fact that we need to get on top of ferals right across landscapes, but particularly in order to strengthen rabbit control under the new RHD virus.

We've got a number of different commitments that I can see through there: Department of Primary Industries in Victoria, Birds Australia, operating right across landscapes and across state jurisdictions.

REPORTER:

And in fact, Birds Australia asked for \$11 million and got \$1.5 million. So significantly less. They're not sure how they can use that money, given they were going to offer some sort of stewardship payments for farmers. That can't go ahead now.

PETER GARRETT:

Oh well, look, I would have to say to Birds Australia that \$1.5 million under this program is an entirely appropriate grant of funding. An \$11 million ask was very ambitious and I admire the ambition.

But the fact of the matter is that we are providing for specific focus delivery of programs right around Australia in all of the states. And we're doing it in a way in which the panels that evaluate these programs, in other words, the panels that evaluate the bids that are put in by CMAs and others, are looking very carefully at the set of criteria, the national priorities that we've identified, and they're assessing those bids against bids that others make.

Now, that is exactly the right way for us to conduct this program. It means that the commitment that we made last week to over \$400 million under Caring for Our Country in this next tranche of programs is specifically focused and targeted, it meets the national priorities that we've set.

And by the way, it will mean more than 12,000 farmers will have opportunities to improve the health of their soils, 3000 landholders who've got remnant woodland and native grassland

on their properties engaging in better efforts to secure those landscapes.

There's significant delivery to landowners, for farmers and to communities, but it's done in the context of the competitive bidding and the competitive funding, and I think that's exactly the healthiest way for us to ensure that we get the best result for the taxpayers' dollars that we're spending.

MICHAEL CONDON: Environment Minister, Peter Garrett.

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