

SECTION 3

How to apply



3.1 Submitting a proposal for investment

Caring for our Country funding is available for successful projects that will contribute to the achievement of targets listed in the Priorities for investment section in this 2010–11 business plan.

To apply for funding under Caring for our Country visit the website at www.nrm.gov.au which will provide information for proposals on all investments outlined in this business plan. The application form will be available online from January 2010. When applying, it is important that you clearly identify the measurable quantity of target that you will deliver, and the time-frame for this. These requirements apply across all the different funding mechanisms that operate under the business plan.

Caring for our Country offers a range of different funding opportunities to suit the various targets and outcomes we are seeking. All proponents (except those applying as a delivery agent for the Environmental Stewardship Program) must register via the Caring for our Country website and then select from the list of funding opportunities.

- » **Open call** — For the majority of proposals an open call online application form will need to be completed. Further details and the online application form are available from the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au. Applications close on **15 April 2010**.
- **Co-investment opportunities** — Open call proposals are also specifically invited for projects with corporate and/or philanthropic matching cash co-investment. Refer to Section 1.4 for details.

Closing dates

All proposals must be **submitted by 15 April 2010** except for the following:

| | |
|---|--|
| Reef Rescue Research and Development Program | 15 February 2010 |
| Environmental Stewardship Program | see AusTender www.tenders.gov.au |
| Regional base-level expressions of interest | 31 March 2010 |
| Community Action Grants — open in July 2010 | closing date to be advised |

Closing dates are as at 5:00pm Australian Eastern Daylight (saving) Time (AEDT), or Australian Eastern Standard Time (AEST) as appropriate.

We recommend that proponents register and apply online where possible. If you are unable to access the internet, you can contact the Australian Government on 1800 552 008 to ask for a hard copy form. You should not request a hard copy form if you can apply online.

- » **Reef Rescue Research and Development Program** — Expressions of interest are invited from organisations interested in undertaking water quality research that aligns with the Reef Rescue Research and Development Plan. The relevant expression of interest form is available at the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au. All applications must be submitted to the email address reef@nrm.gov.au by **15 February 2010**.
- » **Environmental Stewardship Program** — To apply to be considered as the delivery agent for the Environmental Stewardship Program you must complete and submit the expression of interest documents available from AusTender at www.tenders.gov.au.
- » **Sustainable practices** — Open call proposals and expressions of interest are invited for the Sustainable practices activities identified in Section 2.4. Applications close on **15 April 2010**.
 - If the total value of your proposal is greater than \$300 000 you need to apply via the Sustainable practices expression of interest form available from the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au.
 - If the total value of your proposal is less than \$300 000 you must complete and submit the open call application form on the Caring for our Country website.
- » **Regional base-level allocations** — Regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations can submit an online expression of interest for their available base-level allocation. Regional NRM organisations will then be contacted by an Australian Government officer to negotiate the detail of their proposal (see below for further detail). To apply you must submit the regional base-level expression of interest form available from the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au. Note that for the Cape York NRM region base-level applications, proponents should contact Dr Geoff Dyne on (02) 6272 4561 or geoff.dyne@nrm.gov.au in the first instance to discuss options. All regional expressions of interest close **31 March 2010**.
- » **National Reserve System** — To apply for more complex National Reserve System (NRS) proposals you first need to email nrs@environment.gov.au to arrange to discuss your proposal and be supplied with the relevant application form. For less complex NRS proposals you must complete and submit the open call application form. Applications for NRS close on **15 April 2010**. Refer to Section 2.1 for details, in particular to see the definition of complex and less complex NRS proposals.
- » **Community Action Grants** — It is anticipated that the 2010 round of Community Action Grants will open in **July 2010**. Further information about Community Action Grants, including the guidelines will be available on the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au at that time.



PHOTO: Fusion Films

Open call applications

This is the main avenue for Caring for our Country funding.

Caring for our Country invites you to submit proposals that will either deliver against multiple targets in an integrated way, or proposals that deliver against a single target. An integrated proposal is only valuable where linking multiple targets makes sense and will deliver better outcomes than a single focussed project.

If you are applying through the open call you will be asked to nominate up to a maximum of three targets. These are the targets against which your proposal will be assessed. You should therefore carefully select those targets for which your proposal can achieve the greatest measurable difference. There may be circumstances where a proposal could feasibly address more than three targets. Successful proponents will have the opportunity to broadly describe contributions to other targets in the application form and at the contracting stage.

All proposals need to demonstrate ability to achieve against the nominated target(s). An integrated proposal which seeks to address multiple targets will need to identify and explain the linkages between the various selected targets and how the proposal delivers against each of them.

Additional details about your project deliverables will be asked of successful applicants and will be used in our contract with you, unless changes or conditions are required.

Proposal expectations

Caring for our Country proposals are expected to:

- » clearly and logically explain how and why the project activities will deliver improvements against Caring for our Country targets, for example, have a program logic
- » outline a strong governance structure for delivery of the project — including any partners, sub-contractors and interest groups engaged in the delivery
- » involve effective partnerships where this adds value and more effectively delivers the outcomes sought; for example with relevant industry, community, including environmental, Landcare and Coastcare groups, Indigenous groups, government and non-government organisations, research and development corporations and providers and on-ground facilitators
- » consider the risks involved in the project delivery and how these can be managed and/or mitigated
- » consider a communication strategy to disseminate information to the broader community where this is relevant
- » provide detail of any project manager or facilitator costs (if required), why they are essential and how such services will demonstrably lead to improved on-ground outcomes for the project
- » consider relevant past and current projects
- » explore and address any opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the delivery of the targets
- » consider if and how community groups such as environmental, Landcare and Coastcare groups could be actively engaged in project planning and/or delivery.

In preparing your proposal you must carefully consider the information provided in Section 2. Additional information is available on the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au.

Expressions of interest for regional NRM organisations' base-level allocations

In 2010–11 regional NRM organisations can submit a single online expression of interest for multiple-year proposals up to the maximum level of their available base-level allocation. Regional NRM organisations will then be contacted by an Australian Government regional liaison officer or facilitator to negotiate the detail and balance of investments to deliver Caring for our Country targets and outcomes. The Australian Government reserves the right to redirect investment at this negotiation stage.

In this business plan a number of the targets for investment are available specifically for regional NRM organisations. For example, regional NRM organisations can submit an expression of interest for their base-level allocation against a broader range of Ramsar wetlands, critical aquatic ecosystems and coastal hotspot sites than is available to other proponents through the open call.

This is to ensure that the Australian Government's investment in regional base-level allocations is cost-effective and applied against sites of national interest. Details of these opportunities are clearly identified in Section 2.3 for Ramsar wetlands, critical aquatic ecosystems and coastal hotspots.

Expressions of interest for base-level allocations should demonstrate a clear commitment to delivering the Australian Government's outcomes, including coordinating projects at the regional and local levels to address the targets outlined in this business plan.

We expect that base-level allocation expressions of interest will incorporate community skills, knowledge and engagement activities. Indigenous communities should be involved in the delivery of regional programs to address the Caring for our Country targets. However, proposals which solely relate to community skills, knowledge and engagement activities will not be funded.

Non-statutory regional NRM organisations may also apply to use a portion of their base-level allocation to improve their governance arrangements. This is restricted to specific investments that will directly improve a non-statutory regional NRM organisation's core governance such as improving decision-making, fiscal accountability, organisational effectiveness, strategic planning, internal and external communications, or monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI).

A regional NRM organisation which already has some approvals in place over multiple years will need to take this into account if submitting an expression of interest in 2010–11. The focus is on those regions with funds not yet approved. Regional NRM organisations can submit proposals for investment for multiple years in accordance with the timeframe for each target.

Table 12: Example of budget for a regional NRM organisation multi-year proposal

Region X has an annual base level allocation of \$2 million and was successful in securing approval for multi year projects in 2009–10.

| | Approved | Not yet approved (available for investment) |
|---------|-------------|---|
| 2009–10 | \$2 000 000 | 0 |
| 2010–11 | \$1 500 000 | \$ 500 000 |
| 2011–12 | \$1 000 000 | \$1 000 000 |
| 2012–13 | \$ 500 000 | \$1 500 000 |
| Total | \$5 000 000 | \$3 000 000 |

Region X can submit a multi-year expression of interest of up to \$3 million through the 2010–11 business plan if the timeframe for the individual targets are consistent with this scenario.

Where regional NRM organisations have part or all of their base-level allocation for 2010–11 already approved, they can submit an expression of interest for future years. An example of the possible budget for a regional NRM organisation multi-year proposal is shown in Table 12.

In preparing expressions of interest, regional NRM organisations should use the principles of MERI to identify the monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements of the activities proposed. Regional NRM organisations will be required to revise their existing Caring for our Country MERI plans to take into account new targets and activities funded under the 2010–11 business plan. A MERI plan is not required to be submitted with an expression of interest. Further information on MERI plans can be found in Section 4.1.

In preparing an expression of interest for their base-level allocation, regional NRM organisations are encouraged to contact the Australian Government Land and Coasts team, regional liaison officers and Caring for our Country facilitators.

How you can access assistance

Answers to frequently asked questions are available on the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au.

In addition, the Australian Government Land and Coasts team is available to provide information on factual matters such as the assessment process and eligibility, clarification of terms, Caring for our Country targets, priorities or relevant information sources. It is important to be aware that contact with and assistance from the Australian Government Land and Coasts team, including the Caring for our Country facilitators, does not guarantee that any project will be funded. All project proposals will be subject to a rigorous assessment, evaluation and approval process.

If you have any questions regarding the application process for Caring for our Country, please contact us using one of the following:

Australian Government Land and Coasts
GPO Box 787
Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: **1800 552 008**

Email: **business.planning@nrm.gov.au**

Web: **www.nrm.gov.au**



PHOTO: Nicole Middleton

3.2 Eligibility requirements

Caring for our Country is available to legal entities for work that will contribute to achieving one or more of the Caring for our Country targets.

Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for Caring for our Country investment you must meet all of the following:

- » be a legal entity
- » clearly identify in your proposal which Caring for our Country target(s) you seek to address
- » have or be able to obtain, before agreed commencement, all necessary planning, regulatory or other approvals
- » have no overdue reports or acquittals from previous Australian Government funding
- » have the agreement of the lead partner organisation and key partner organisations to submit the proposal (e.g. CEO of company, president of the community group, chief executive of government department).

Individual targets may have additional specific eligibility requirements. The relevant target information in Section 2 details any additional specific criteria.

Exclusions and ineligible activities

Caring for our Country will not invest in activities that are outside the scope of the initiative. Under Caring for our Country, investment is not available for the following:

- » activities that will not deliver against one or more Caring for our Country targets
- » activities that have a significant negative impact on any matter of national environmental significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*

- » the introduction of plants, animals or other biological agents known to be, or that could become, environmental or agricultural weeds or pests
- » activities that are not considered good value for money or integral to achieving project outcomes
- » activities that are the core responsibility/business of state/territory/local governments and land managers/farmers/fishers
- » activities that are the legislative and regulatory responsibility of others, such as managing or controlling certain weeds or compliance activities
- » activities that are inconsistent with key national, state, territory, regional natural resource management strategies or plans
- » retrospective activities — activities that have been undertaken prior to the signing of Caring for our Country contracts, with the exception of land purchased in the past two years that is proposed for inclusion in the National Reserve System
- » direct subsidisation of commercial activities, business start-up or where the primary purpose is commercial gain
- » activities that are more appropriately funded by other initiatives or programs such as the Australian Government's Water for the Future and Australia's Farming Future
- » water use efficiency, water savings, water quantity activities, development and implementation of water sharing plans such as those that are eligible under the Australian Government's Water for the Future Program
- » major water infrastructure such as large salt interception or engineering works
- » large capital works that do not directly achieve the Caring for our Country targets, such as the construction of buildings and car parks
- » public amenity projects where the primary purpose is for recreation, safety, or tourism including toilet blocks and amenity plantings
- » administration or legal costs other than those directly related to the delivery of the project
- » activities outside of Australia.

3.3 Assessment process

The contributions which proposals can make to the Caring for our Country targets set out in this business plan form a very important part of the assessment of these proposals.

The following investment principles will be considered when the Australian Government is undertaking the assessment of proposals for Caring for our Country investment:

- » proposals must demonstrate ability to make clear and measurable achievements against the 2010–11 Caring for our Country target(s) the proponent has chosen to address. In assessing this we will take into account:
 - demonstrated capacity of the proponents and/or partnership to deliver results and manage contractual obligations
 - demonstrated technical feasibility
 - relevance of proposed activities to the chosen target(s)
 - engagement with relevant stakeholders and partners
 - the most effective delivery mechanism(s)
 - the scale and degree of intervention proposed
 - the likely degree of adoption where relevant
 - potential to raise community awareness and enhance skills, including for Indigenous groups where appropriate
 - that the proposal is based on the best available science at the time and builds on the collective knowledge of what works best
 - the maintenance of benefits into the future (where appropriate).



PHOTO: Paul Candlin

- » alignment to national strategies where appropriate, such as the National Biodiversity Strategy or Australian Weeds Strategy
- » the risk of activities not being able to proceed as planned and the risk mitigation plan in place
- » the public or broader community benefit derived from the project:
 - proponents seeking to work on private land should be prepared to contribute to the cost of their project. Cost sharing arrangements need to take into account the levels of public and private benefits to be obtained.
- » value for money:
 - proposals that achieve the greatest benefit against Caring for our Country target(s), for every dollar invested, will receive a higher priority.
- » additional selection criteria may apply for proposals which address specific targets. The relevant target information in Section 2 details any additional specific criteria.

Weightings may apply to some selection criteria. The Australian Government reserves the right to undertake external assessments or feasibility studies and use the information provided in applicant's proposals for this purpose.

Proponents may be asked to nominate two referees who can attest to an organisation's capacity to undertake the work set out in a proposal. Referees must not have any financial or contractual interest in the proposal.

The assessment process allows for consideration of a wide range of projects and includes the necessary expertise and technical specialists required for components such as the National Reserve System, Environmental Stewardship Program, Indigenous projects, and Sustainable practices.

You must carefully consider the information in Section 2 before preparing your investment proposal. If you are applying for a co-investment opportunity you need to consider the information provided in Section 1.4.



3.4 Conditions of grant

Reporting of successful grants

Proponents should be aware that if they are successful, Commonwealth policy may require the Australian Government to publish information about the applicant, including, but not limited to:

- » name of the person or entity receiving the grant
- » amount of funding received
- » term of the grant
- » title and summary of the project
- » type of project and funding location.

Applicants should be aware that the Australian Government may publish the above information online in order to comply with Commonwealth policy and to meet mandatory reporting requirements.

By submitting an application for funding under this grant program, the applicant consents to publication of the above information by the Australian Government if they are awarded funding.

All information in the application will be handled in accordance with the *Privacy Act 1988*.

If you are successful, you will be responsible for managing your project within agreed timelines, monitoring and reporting and acquitting your expenditure (see Section 4).

Planning approvals

The Australian Government expects that proponents will obtain all necessary planning approvals for their project, including the permission of the land owner or land manager for any project on private or public land, prior to beginning their project.

Insurance

Successful proponents will not be able to receive funding unless they have public liability insurance for the period of the grant.

Project financial reporting and acquittal

If you are successful, one of your most important obligations as a recipient of public monies is to report on progress and acquit the funds you have received. The timing for project reporting (including financial reporting) is specified in funding deeds between proponents and the government. Other monitoring, reporting and communications obligations are set out in Section 4.

Acknowledgement

Successful proponents are required to acknowledge the grant provided by the Australian Government's Caring for our Country program in accordance with the Recognition of Caring for our Country Guidelines. These guidelines can be found on the Caring for our Country website at www.nrm.gov.au.

Taxation and GST

Grants are subject to normal taxation treatment and no special arrangements will apply. Proponents should seek independent advice on the taxation implications of receiving a grant.

All applications for funding will be GST exclusive. Payment of GST on the grant will be dependant on the organisation's GST status.