

# Caring for our Country Business Plan 2009-10

## Ministers' foreword and aim of the business plan

These pages have been extracted from the full document which is available at: [www.nrm.gov.au/publications/books/business-plan.html](http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/books/business-plan.html)

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# Ministers' Foreword

Australia's harsh landscapes of endless red deserts, rugged coastlines, natural areas and remote farming properties belie the unique vulnerability of our country.

Australians recognise our responsibility to future generations to protect our remarkable biodiversity and wide variety of stunning landscapes which make up this amazing country we are fortunate enough to call our home.

To support the tireless work of volunteers, farmers, Indigenous communities and natural resource management professionals who are committed to protecting Australia's natural icons and ensuring a sustainable future for our food and fibre production, the Australian Government has provided over \$2 billion over the first five years under Caring for our Country.

We have identified the outcomes we need to achieve through Caring for our Country, we are targeting our investment and we will report regularly on what has been achieved and on what changes we have to make to ensure we reach the goals we've set.

There are huge challenges ahead of us. In particular, climate change presents threats to our natural environment and to our productive agricultural lands alike. Now, more than ever before, we must work together to manage our natural assets effectively, because now, any mistakes we make will be amplified by climate change. Rapid and far-reaching changes in our environment like species loss, the expansion of pests and weeds, and dramatically altered rainfall patterns must be answered with integrated landscape scale solutions.

We want projects which recognise the many interactions affecting our natural assets, which use the best science to find a solution and achieve multiple benefits – like improved water quality, protected natural habitats and improved productivity in our farmlands. In regions where ecosystems are intact, we want to keep the best of what we've got and manage it well.

As managers of 70 per cent of Australia's land, farmers are essential to delivering enduring and broad scale management of the environment. Protecting our natural environment and ensuring we have productive agricultural lands are complementary, not competing interests. Working together, regional natural resource management organisations, non-government and Indigenous organisations, farmer and community groups, governments and businesses will deliver action to secure both our farming resource base and our unique environment into the future.

The past efforts of our communities have led to improvements in the care and management of our land. With better targeting to focus these efforts, and accountability for the results at all levels, Caring for our Country will make an even greater difference.

This is a call to action. Protecting our natural environment ensures we establish the natural resilience in our ecosystems and in our farmlands to withstand the pressures the natural landscapes of Australia will face over the coming years. We invite you to join us in Caring for our Country to secure Australia's environmental and farming future.



The Hon Peter Garrett AM MP  
Minister for the Environment,  
Heritage and the Arts



The Hon Tony Burke MP  
Minister for Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

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# Caring for our Country

Caring for our Country is an Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed and resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

Essential ecosystem services include protected biodiversity, clean air and water and healthy soils which support sustainable food and fibre industries.

Australia's environment is under increasing pressure from a range of threats including the loss of biodiversity, threats to critical aquatic systems and water quality, and decline in our productive land base.

This has led to ongoing loss of species combined with fragmentation of native habitats and a reduced productive capacity.

Conserving, protecting and restoring this unique and valuable environment is an aim of the Australian Government to ensure that our environment continues to provide the diversity of ecological services that all Australians rely on for the future.

Caring for our Country aims to achieve this strategic goal by focusing on six national priority areas: National Reserve System; biodiversity and natural icons; coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats; sustainable farm practices; natural resource management in northern and remote Australia; and community skills, knowledge and engagement.

Caring for our Country provides \$2.25 billion in funding over the first five years.

To ensure that these funds are invested in a strategic manner across the highest priorities, the government has approved a series of specific Caring for our Country outcomes.

The outcomes help us to clearly focus investment on achieving national priorities and avoid spreading the funds so thinly that the improvements cannot be measured or reported.

Details of the Caring for our Country outcomes are available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

Short-term Caring for our Country targets for years two to five (2009–10 to 2012–13) have been developed to help achieve these outcomes.

The targets play a crucial role in guiding the investment by identifying the steps that need to be taken to achieve the Caring for our Country outcomes.

Figure 1 shows how the projects and the Caring for our Country targets and outcomes contribute to the Caring for our Country goal.

Caring for our Country commenced on 1 July 2008. It integrates delivery of the Australian Government's previous natural resource management programs, including the Natural Heritage Trust, the National Landcare Program, the Environmental Stewardship Program and the Working on Country Indigenous land and sea ranger program.



John Houldsworth

It also incorporates the delivery of a range of other natural resource management funding elements including Community Coastcare, World Heritage, regional investments and relevant 2007 election commitments.

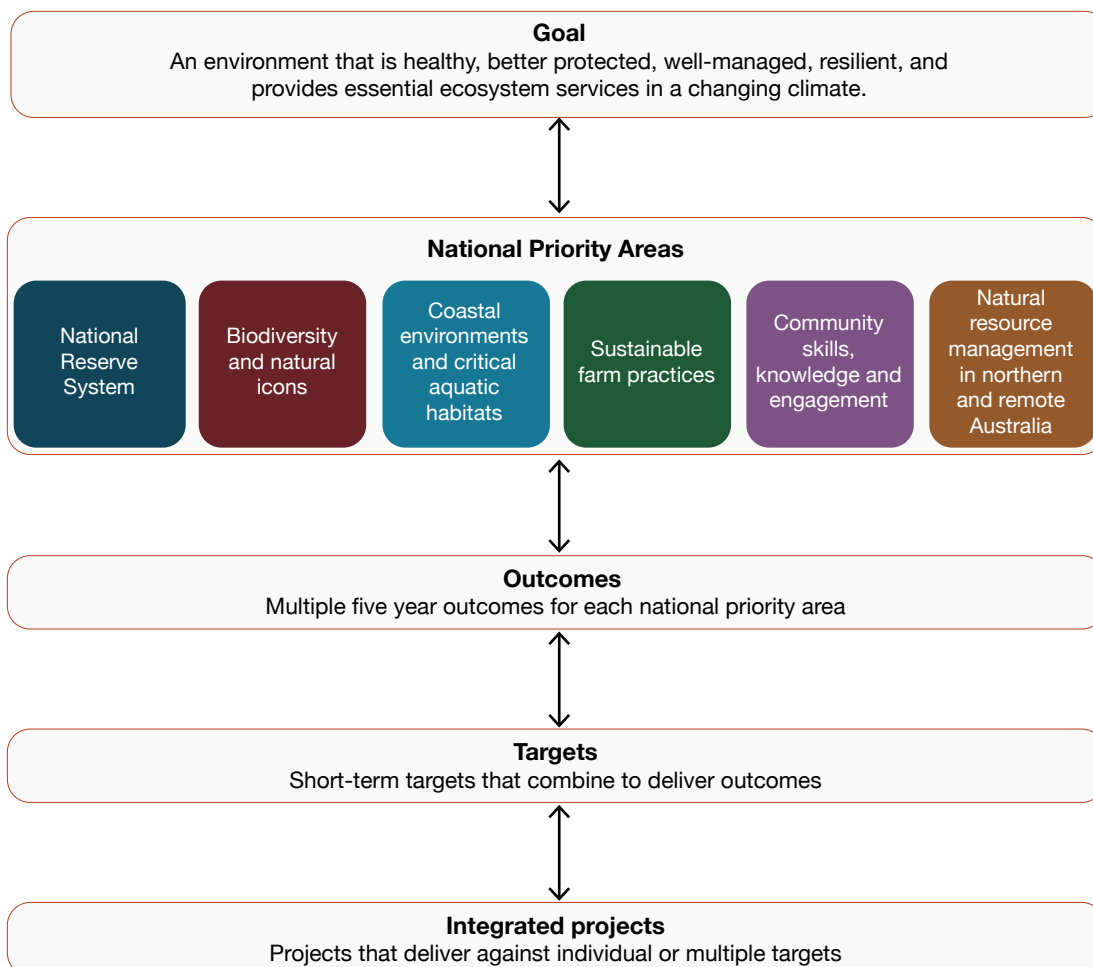
To ensure a smooth transition to this new initiative, Caring for our Country is being progressively introduced during 2008–09.

The regional natural resource management organisations have been guaranteed a base level of funding and a number of critical national projects have been funded to maintain effort.

This business plan identifies the investment focus for 2009–10, the second year of the initiative.

A Caring for our Country business plan will be released each year to seek investment proposals for the delivery of identified targets. These will in turn lead to the achievement of the Caring for our Country outcomes that address the national priority areas.

**Figure 1:** Caring for our Country framework



# Aim of the 2009–10 Business Plan

The aim of the business plan is to seek proposals that will provide the Australian Government with the opportunity to invest in a suite of projects. These projects will be those that best deliver the effective, efficient and timely results that will enable the achievement of the Caring for our Country outcomes.

The Caring for our Country outcomes identify the results that the Australian Government is aiming to achieve in the first five years, while the targets provide greater detail about the actions and, in some cases, the places where the changes are being sought (see *Caring for our Country outcomes 2008–2013* at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au)).

The Australian Government invites interested parties to submit investment proposals for projects that will contribute to the achievement of Caring for our Country targets.



Nick Rains

In order to select the best arrangements for delivering an integrated package of activities for a particular geographic region or natural asset, decisions will be based on:

- » demonstrated clear and measurable achievements against at least one of the Caring for our Country targets in this business plan
- » public benefit—proposals that achieve the greatest public benefits for every dollar invested will receive a higher priority
- » value for money
- » the project is based on the best available science at the time and builds on the collective knowledge of what works best

The risks associated with delivery will also be taken into account. Examples of risk could include natural hazards, uncertainty with estimating costs and benefits of the proposal, or the adequacy of the knowledge base underpinning the cause of the problem to be addressed and the effect of the intervention to be applied.

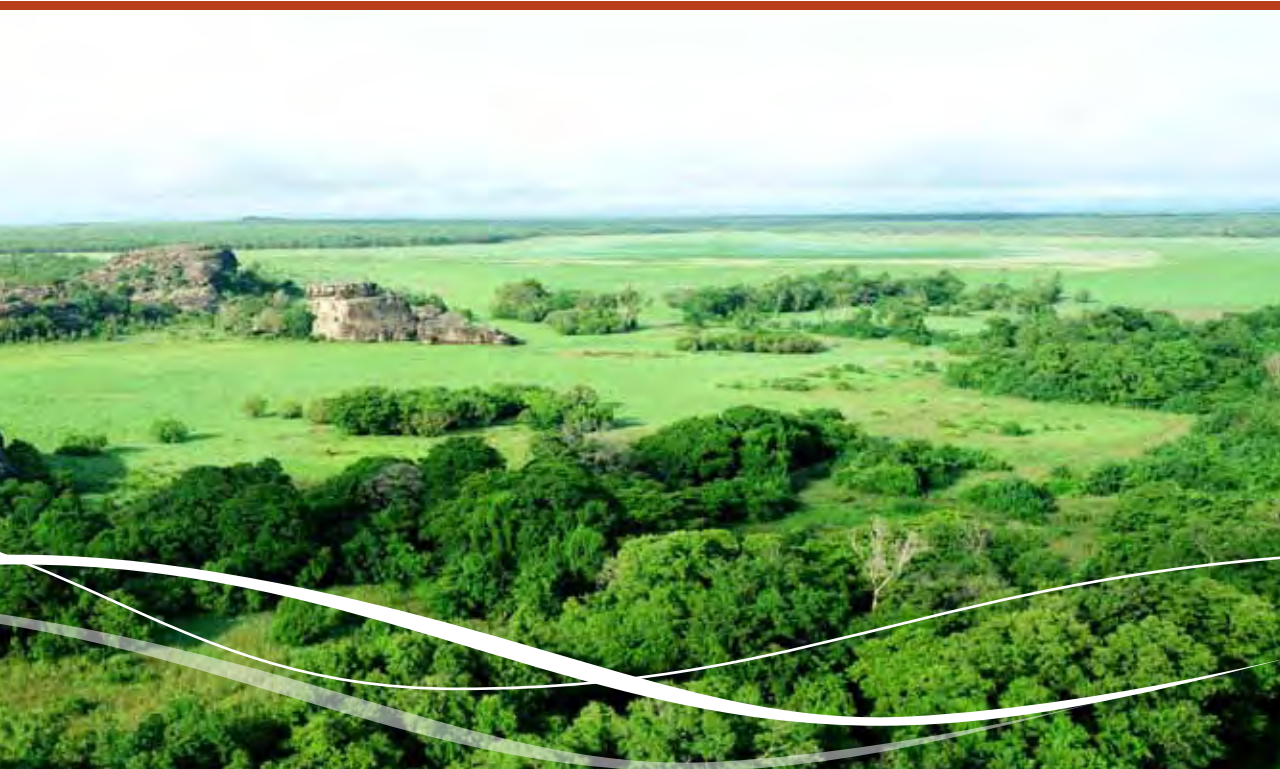
Lack of knowledge, though, should not be a cause for no action. Rather, prudent actions associated with mitigated risk and adaptive management might be appropriate where risks are high.

Large and medium-scale projects are a priority for the delivery of Caring for our Country, where they protect key assets and address multiple targets.

It is expected that large and medium-scale projects will be best delivered through partnerships.

Smaller scale proposals such as those from landcare, coastcare, Indigenous groups or other community or productivity groups will be considered under Caring for our Country.

These proposals must address the targets identified in the section *Priorities for Investment* (further guidance is available in the section *Guiding Information*).



Ian Oswald-Jacobs