



## Crossing the border for biodiversity



The Border Ranges region of New South Wales and south-eastern Queensland is a biodiversity 'hotspot'. Its abundant animal and plant species and richly varied landscapes have drawn humans to the region since Aboriginals first arrived on this continent.

But throw in a couple of centuries of land use, including clearing lowland rainforest and draining swampland, plus recent pressures from tourism and life-style blocks, and the region's biodiversity is nudging the critical list.

A visionary cross regional approach in the area is now helping protect threatened species in two states.

The Border Ranges Cross Regional Biodiversity Project is one of the first large-scale projects to deal with threatened species issues across an entire bioregion.

In 2004, the Regional Competitive Component of the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust provided \$2.2 million to the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (NCRMA). This funding was for a three year program to develop and implement a rainforest recovery plan including programs to protect threatened species, high conservation value ecosystems, riverbank ecosystems and to build community capacity.

### Needing help

There are currently some 97 rainforest plant species, 31 fauna species and one ecological community that are recognised as threatened in the region. The Coxen's Fig Parrot, Richmond Birdwing Butterfly and the Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby are among the threatened species.

Statistics on the impacts of land clearing and urban development further tell the story of why concerted action was urgently needed to protect biodiversity in the Northern Rivers region.

The Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority covers an area of some five million hectares, about three million of which still contains native vegetation. Out of this, approximately 1.3 million hectares are protected within national parks or other reserves. Much of the national park and reserve land is however in the very steep escarpment country – land that was simply not wanted for agriculture.

In contrast, native vegetation on favorable soils is very depleted and is in small scattered fragments. In the coastal floodplain country of the north-eastern Border Ranges Region, only 13 percent, or 7,650 hectares, of the area remains under natural vegetation and only 1,152 hectares, is in national parks.

The region needed concerted action to help protect what remained.







## Runs on the board

Community engagement has been an important part of the project and the Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority has established a Steering Group with wide representation to direct the project. Property management planning workshops have been held in a number of areas to help landholders complete management plans which incorporate biodiversity management and threatened species protection.

The Rainforest Recovery Program is well underway and an implementation strategy for the Border Ranges threatened species recovery plan has been completed. About half of the proposed species protection projects have been completed and have included:

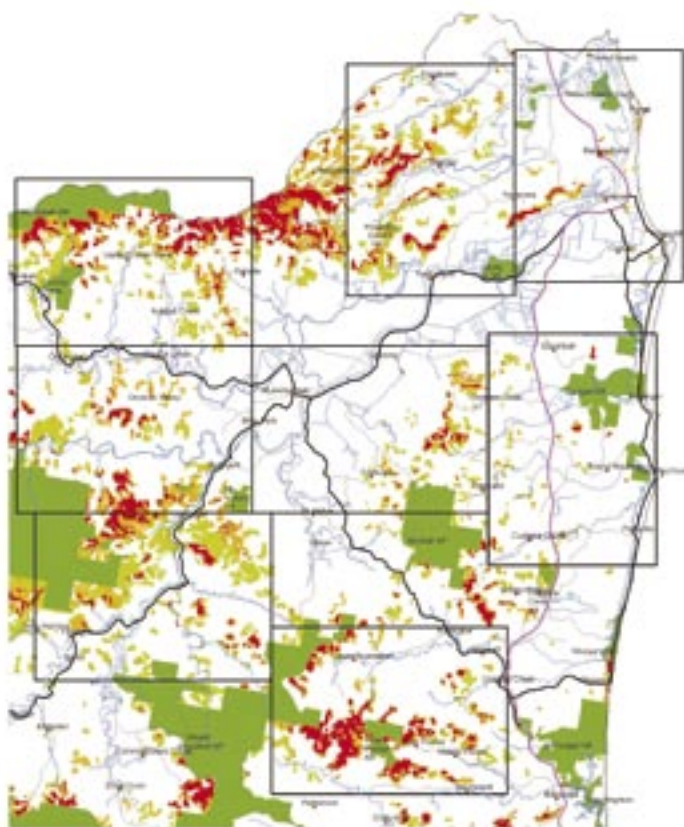
- restoration and rehabilitation of threatened flora on private lands;
- investigation of the Aboriginal cultural significance of selected threatened vegetation species and involvement of the Aboriginal community in the recovery of these species;
- publication of threatened species protection guidelines;
- contribution to the Eastern Bristlebird captive breeding program;
- management recommendations and implementation of works to protect the threatened plants, Coastal Fontainea and the Red Fruited Ebony.
- propagation and distribution of 2,500 fig trees for habitat for Coxen's Fig Parrot in the Tweed Shire area.
- population monitoring and habitat surveys for the Eastern Bristlebird and Fleay's Barred frog.

Six new threatened species protection projects have begun including:

- implementation of management recommendations to protect the habitat of Fleay's Barred Frog;
- implementation of management recommendations to protect the habitat of the Eastern Bristlebird;
- on-ground works to protect the Red Fruited Ebony
- restoration and rehabilitation of sites containing a number of threatened plant species including Hairy Quandong, Floyds Walnut, Green-leaved Rose Walnut, Rusty Rose Walnut and Davidson's Plum

Five ecosystems have been selected for the aspect of the project focusing on protecting vegetation of high conservation value. They include wetlands, rainforest, heath, mapped old growth eucalypt and estuarine ecosystems. By early 2006, work undertaken under this part of the project included:

- on-ground works such as fencing, drainage alterations and weed management to protect 80 hectares of wetlands in the Upper Clarence and also encouraging amended land and stock management practices in the region;



- on-ground works and amended land management practices to protect a minimum of 75 hectares of rainforest in the Tweed Catchment;
- development of a project to protect a minimum of 75 hectares of heath; and
- development of a project to protect a minimum of 75 hectares of mapped old growth eucalypt forest by property covenant.

Key areas for this work were selected using a stepped prioritisation process developed by the Department of Environment and Conservation based on information from the GIS Biodiversity Forecasting Tool, added to other data and expert knowledge. This process has also been used in work to protect high conservation value headwaters in project areas including selection of priority sites and precincts and works to protection of 25 kilometres of headwaters in the Tweed, Brunswick, Richmond and Clarence catchments.

## Lessons learnt

- Biodiversity hotspots need to be a focus for coordinated protection action.
- It is important to have accurate baseline information on the region including the extent, depletion, rarity and condition of vegetation and the general state of biodiversity including the condition of flora and fauna species, before initiating action. The Biodiversity Forecasting Tool has been pivotal in analysing this data to select key sites.
- Cross regional initiatives can work to protect areas under threat through a proactive process that builds local community capacity.



Biodiversity encompasses the variety of all living things. Conserving biological diversity gives us the best chance of adapting to our rapidly changing world.

This leaflet is one of a series showing how farmers, Indigenous communities, local government and community groups have either initiated special biodiversity projects, or have successfully incorporated biodiversity protection into their work and daily lives.

We hope these success stories provide useful information and inspiration to others in similar situations.

For more information: [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au); or freecall 1800 552 008

Australian Government Biodiversity Facilitator [annie.keys@csiro.au](mailto:annie.keys@csiro.au)

© Commonwealth of Australia June 2006 Printed on Monza Satin Recycled.

### Photo Credits

Front: Eastern Bristlebird; Tun Pin ONG.  
 Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby; Andrew Tatnell.  
 Fleay's Barred Frog; David Newell.  
 Barretts Creek Landholder Group; NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation.  
 P2: Fig; Rik Christian.  
 Mt Warning Border Ranges National Park;  
 Red Eyed Tree-frog; both Hank Bower.  
 P3: Southern Angled-headed Dragon; Hank Bower.  
 Priority rainforest conservation areas; NSW Dept of Environment and Conservation.  
 Back: Bird's Nest Fern; Hank Bower.  
 Murray's Skink; Hank Bower.

Banner: Bark; Joseph Lafferty. Lichen; Peter Ranyard. Hand; Andrew Tatnell.