



Caring for our Country

The Commonwealth Government recognises that urgent action is needed to better protect Australia's unique natural environment and improve the sustainable management of our natural resources.

As part of this it has committed over \$2 billion in funding over the first five years for a new ongoing program, Caring for our Country. It will commence from 1 July 2008.

Caring for our Country has one clear goal: 'An environment that is healthy, better protected, well managed, resilient and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate'. These services include protected biodiversity and natural icons, clean water and air, healthy soils, and sustainable food and fibre industries. Funding may, for example: help purchase new properties for the National Reserve System; manage weeds and feral animals; improve soil management on farms; or help protect World Heritage values.

Caring for our Country focuses on six national priorities:

- national reserve system
- biodiversity and natural icons – including weed and feral animal control, threatened species
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices – including Landcare
- natural resource management in remote and northern Australia
- community skills, knowledge and engagement

It will also implement the Government's 2007 election commitments to:

- rescue the Great Barrier Reef (\$200 million)
- repair our fragile coastal ecosystems (\$100 million)
- save the endangered Tasmanian Devil (\$10 million)
- improve water quality in the Gippsland Lakes (\$5.25 million)
- fight the Cane Toad menace (\$2 million)
- employ additional Indigenous Rangers (\$90 million)
- expand the Indigenous Protected Area network (\$50 million)
- assist Indigenous Australians enter the carbon trading market (\$10 million)

A streamlined approach

Caring for our Country, for the first time, will bring together delivery of four Commonwealth programs under a single banner.

These are the Natural Heritage Trust, the National Landcare Program, the Environmental Stewardship Program and the Working on Country Indigenous land and environmental program.

Caring for our Country will take a business approach to investment. It will have clear outcomes and priorities, reduced bureaucratic complexity and improved accountability.

A stronger focus on outcomes

The Prime Minister will be asked to approve specific outcomes for Caring for our Country within each of the six national priority areas for investment.

The Government will release an annual business plan describing its investment priorities and short-term targets (between one and three years duration).

In another first, Caring for our Country will provide an increased opportunity for non-government organisations, regional bodies, local, state, territory and Australian government agencies to access a greater proportion of the program's funds to help achieve our national priorities.

Relevant organisations and partnerships will be invited to make proposals to undertake activities. The Government will select the best options.

Caring for our Country will include a range of small grants targeting specific national priorities, which will replace the current Envirofund. These include grants for Community Coastcare, and Reef Water Quality and Landcare.

Throughout the life of the program there is likely to be additional small grants funding available.

Program facilitators

Caring for our Country will operate a more streamlined, integrated network of facilitators. Roles will be more clearly defined than under the Natural Heritage Trust and National Landcare Program. Facilitators will continue to be based in each state and territory.

Building on our strengths

In designing Caring for our Country, the Government has built on the strengths of previous natural resource management programs. The Government recognises that there is a highly talented, committed and engaged group of people throughout the Australian community who have already been working for many years to achieve results on the ground. By integrating four programs into one, the Government is demonstrating its commitment to simpler, less bureaucratic arrangements.

Through Caring for our Country the Government looks forward to working with all these people to help secure Australia's future.

Further information

Ring the information hotline on 1800 552 008 or visit www.nrm.gov.au