

# In Focus



## Welcome from the Ministers

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Our nation has experienced one of the most severe droughts of the past century, and the impact on the livelihoods of so many people has been devastating. While some areas have had recent relief, recovery will be slow.

The Australian Government is lending practical support to drought-affected farm families with its additional drought assistance measures, which are estimated to be worth around \$254 million over two years. This aid comes on top of the 2005–06 Budget Estimates commitment of more than \$2.2 billion through Exceptional Circumstances assistance, the Farm Management Deposits scheme, FarmBis and related Natural Heritage Trust expenditure.

The latest round of assistance includes:

- more generous Exceptional Circumstances Interest Rate Subsidies with a revised assets test (\$195.3M);
- a more generous income test for Exceptional Circumstances Relief Payments (\$49.32M);

- additional counselling and support services (\$8.98M); and
- an extension of the streamlined re-assessment process for those Exceptional Circumstance declared areas nearing the end of their second year of assistance, and a review by the National Rural Advisory Council of areas not recommended for an Exceptional Circumstance extension over the last year.

These schemes will provide additional support for our landholders experiencing a third or fourth year of drought.

In addition, \$10 million from the Envirofund has been made available in a special drought round, allowing those affected by the drought to apply for grants of up to \$50,000 for environmental and biosecurity projects.

These new additional assistance measures follow widespread consultation, and address the most pressing priorities identified by farmers and their communities. We will continue to work closely with landholders to develop the skills to tackle future challenges, and protect such a vital part of our national identity and our national economy.

### Senator the Hon Ian Campbell

Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage

### The Hon Peter M'Gauran MP

Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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# Funding Update

## Envirofund 2005 Drought Recovery Grants

Drought-affected communities can apply for funding for environmental works under a special \$10 million Drought Recovery Round of the Australian Government Envirofund.

Grants of up to \$50,000 are available for projects located in Exceptional Circumstance declared areas. The funding aims to help landholders and communities:

- protect the land, water, vegetation and biodiversity resource base from the effects of drought
- prepare for the recovery from the drought
- prevent environmental damage when the drought ends.

Projects should be aimed at protecting and rehabilitating the local environment affected by the drought, such as fencing to protect riverbanks and waterways, earth works to control erosion and weeding to improve native vegetation or pasture condition.

The Drought Recovery Round is just one of a series of activities targeted at drought-affected communities announced by the Prime Minister in June.

**At a Glance**  
**ENVIROFUND 2005 DROUGHT RECOVERY GRANTS**

**Applications close:** 25 August 2005

**Further information:** [www.nht.gov.au/envirofund](http://www.nht.gov.au/envirofund)

**Funding available:** Up to \$50,000. Funding will be available from November 2005 onwards

## Community Water Grants

Australia faces a great challenge to better manage our scarce water resources now and into the future. The Australian Government's Community Water Grants provides \$200 million over five years to help communities make a real difference to the way water is used.

This funding will provide grants of up to \$50,000 to eligible community organisations, and in some cases the grants can be combined to provide larger grants to community based non-government organisations.

It will help community groups undertake on-ground projects that focus on water savings efficiency, water reuse, recycling and surface and groundwater health.

A wide range of groups can apply, including:

- local governments
- schools
- Indigenous organisations
- community groups such as
  - environmental groups
  - rural organisations
  - sporting associations and social clubs
  - community-care sector such as hospitals, nursing homes and childcare centres
  - regional natural resource management bodies.

**At a Glance**  
**COMMUNITY WATER GRANTS**

**Applications close:** 4 October 2005

**Further information:** [www.communitywatergrants.gov.au](http://www.communitywatergrants.gov.au)

**Funding available:** Up to \$50,000. Projects are allowed 15 months for completion.

**PHOTO CREDITS**

Front page Dune revegetation: Martin Heller; Mulching: Ryan Rix Photography; Examining re-growth: AM Photography.  
Inside pages Big Island: Andrew Tatnell, River: John Baker  
Back page Black Cockatoos: Arthur Mostead

# Regional Project



## Improving monitoring efficiencies and communicating with stakeholders

Australia has some of the widest varieties of introduced pests in the world.

It's a rather dubious honour, and one that impacts on the viability of many farms, has an enormous impact on the Australian economy, and inflicts large environmental costs. It's a complex problem that needs a co-ordinated approach. Kate Thorn talks about the success of the West Coast Integrated Pest Management Program on South Australia's Eyre Peninsula, one of the largest programs of its type in Australia.

### **Tell us about the West Coast Integrated Pest Management Program.**

With funding from the Natural Heritage Trust, we implemented a fox baiting program in 2000 to support the reintroduction of brush-tailed bettongs and greater bilbies to the Venus Bay Conservation Park. Initially, fox baits were offered to landholders in the immediate vicinity of the Park to create a buffer zone. But it quickly grew to become a community response on a landscape scale, and today there are over 400 landholders involved in the program, covering an area of around 1.5 million hectares.

### **That's an amazing take-up in a relatively short period. Why do you think it has been so readily adopted?**

I think there were two main factors in establishing such strong involvement. First, we encouraged people to operate

the program with their neighbours. We formed groups and a group leader network. This network gives feedback and advises us on the direction of the program. There is a strong sense of ownership, and farmers are now driving the take-up of the project.

Second, people were quick to realise that the program would be more successful if we worked at the landscape scale. It means that as a community we can work with the fox biology, so we bait in autumn and spring which also complements farmers' schedules on the land and vastly reduces reinvasion. With only a few people baiting you're not controlling breeding. In keeping with an integrated approach, participation in rabbit control has also picked up in the last couple of years.

### **How do you know the program is having an impact?**

From the outset we had developed a practical, cost-effective monitoring and evaluation process that enabled us to track the impact of the program, and importantly obtain early warning signs for any changes needed.

### **What were some of the warning signs?**

Staff from our partner agencies were initially undertaking spotlight surveys every two months. But at certain times of the year – for example, when the crops were up – foxes are less visible. We knew we had to change our monitoring, but we didn't have the resources internally to develop a model we knew with certainty would be statistically representative. So we talked to our regional ecologist, who helped us identify two academics from the University of Nabraska in the US and the University of Adelaide. We now have a sophisticated model that supports our monitoring and evaluation, and provides us with improved processes for identifying population trends.



Integrated Pest Management program coordinator Kate Thorn discusses the Autumn fox baiting program with local farmer Paul Heath.



Greater bilbies are being reintroduced into the Venus Bay Conservation Park.

### **What improvements were suggested?**

One of the main changes we made was to only survey in the non-cropping season, when fox detectability is at its highest. So we are looking at reducing our surveys from six to just four per year, which means reduced pressure on our resources, and a reduction in costs.

### **What sort of support do you provide for the farmers and stakeholders involved in the program?**

We've learnt that open communication is a key to success. It's a two way street – landholders are very involved in providing data on bait uptake records, informing us of the results of spotlight surveys and sightings. In return our monitoring and evaluation process allows us to report findings straight back to the community.

We also organise for each group to get together twice a year for training on safety and legal issues, to provide peer networking, and to allow groups to share their experiences. And we've developed a website ([www.westcoastipm.eyreonline.com](http://www.westcoastipm.eyreonline.com)) that has a range of information they can access, including the results of the latest spotlight surveys.

### **Sounds like you've made extraordinary progress. Where to from here?**

In terms of the baiting program, we're close to moving into maintenance stage. At the moment the bettongs and greater bilbies are still within a fenced area. Our ultimate goal is to release some

bettongs outside the fence, and to do this we need to become more strategic in our approach to biodiversity. We need to work with other agencies to improve our mapping systems, identify the best habitat areas, and understand the control measures and buffer zones we'll need. With our community unity and landholder support, it's a goal that is easily achievable.

## **PROJECT LEARNINGS**

Kate Thorn's three pearls of wisdom for project success:

1. Work with and build upon existing motivations of the community.
2. Seek advice and partnerships to improve local knowledge and monitoring and evaluation methods.
3. Plan, monitor and evaluate according to the needs of the project and the community – reporting to funding bodies will logically follow.

# NRM Tools and Information

## Regional Programs Summary Report 2003–04

The Regional Programs Summary Report 2003–04 details the achievements of regional investment through the \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust and the \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP).

The report highlights the success of the partnership approach taken by the three tiers of government, industry and communities to improve the health of Australia's land, water, vegetation and biological resources. It shows that governments have invested around \$352 million in the NAP since its inception in 2000/01, and committed more than \$2.2 billion to the Trust since its establishment since 1997.

In addition, the report highlights:

- over 9,000 hectares of agricultural land has been improved through activities such as planting perennial pastures, which combats dryland salinity and acid soils. More sustainable irrigation systems have also been established on over 5,500 hectares of land
- regions have developed 163 sub-catchment plans, over 2,000 property management plans and 35 species recovery plans for endangered and threatened flora and fauna
- over 46,000 hectares of native vegetation has been rehabilitated, around 6,200 hectares of land protected for endangered or threatened flora and fauna, and almost 4.5 million hectares managed for pest plants and animals.

For more information about the 2003–04 Regional Programs Report visit  
[www.nrm.gov.au/publications/regional-report/03-04](http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/regional-report/03-04)

## Greenhouse resources

Need to track landscape and vegetation change and monitor greenhouse gas emissions on your property? Two new tools from the Australian Greenhouse Office will make it easy for you.

The *Data Viewer* DVD contains a 30-year visual record of landscape and vegetation change in Australia. You



can zoom into any area of the Australian continent and compare satellite images between years. You can then drill right down to a regional or property scale to assess changes such as tree cover. The DVD also contains regional climatic data.

The *National Carbon Accounting Toolbox* CD allows you to estimate greenhouse gas emissions and carbon stock changes from the way land is used and managed. The Toolbox helps you effectively monitor emissions, identify less emissions-intensive land management practices, and assess carbon reduction outcomes associated with varying forest management options.

To request a free copy of these products, e-mail [ncas@greenhouse.gov.au](mailto:ncas@greenhouse.gov.au) with your contact details. For further information visit [www.greenhouse.gov.au/ncas](http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/ncas)

## Promote your achievements

A new range of information materials aims to raise awareness of the considerable on-ground works occurring in regions across Australia, and to help communities and individuals become involved in natural resource management.

- “Environmental Work in Progress” signs have been sent to all regional bodies to acknowledge projects being undertaken locally. If you are working on a project and would like to erect a sign, contact your regional body (visit [www.nrm.gov.au/about-regions](http://www.nrm.gov.au/about-regions) for local details)
- To further promote achievements within regions, writers around Australia have been commissioned to prepare project stories and to secure placement in local media. If you would like to share the outcomes of a successful project, email [nrm@deh.gov.au](mailto:nrm@deh.gov.au) and we can put you in touch with a writer for your region.
- A new series of brochures simplify various aspects of the Australian Government's NRM program. They cover topics such as the facilitator network, funding opportunities, monitoring and evaluation, and how to check if your project complies with the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act*. They are available online at [www.deh.gov.au/publications](http://www.deh.gov.au/publications). If you would like to receive hard copies, email [ciu@deh.gov.au](mailto:ciu@deh.gov.au)

# Understanding Environmental Laws

Before embarking on a project, don't forget to check that it meets the requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The Act is an important piece of legislation that delivers significant benefits for all Australians, future generations and the international community by protecting our environment and conserving our native plants and animals.

Under the Commonwealth's environment protection legislation, there are seven Matters of National Environmental Significance (Matters of NES) protected by the Act:

- World Heritage properties
- National Heritage places
- Wetlands of international importance
- Migratory species
- Nationally threatened species and ecological communities
- The Commonwealth marine area
- Nuclear matters.

While not a Matter of NES, Commonwealth land is protected in the same way. Any activity may require EPBC Act approval if it is likely to have a significant impact on these Matters of NES.

So what are the key EPBC Act components you should consider when you're planning and implementing your project? Here's a quick checklist.

- Know where Matters of NES exist in and around your region. Use the EPBC Act mapping tool to generate a list ([www.deh.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc](http://www.deh.gov.au/erin/ert/epbc))
- Consider whether your project is covered by the EPBC Act. Ensure project proponents are aware of their obligations, particularly concerning referral

of actions that may have a significant impact. You should also obtain information and guidelines on Matters of NES in your region that may be adversely impacted by projects.

- Consider whether an EPBC Act risk assessment for your region would achieve more than a case-by-case approach.
- Visit the EPBC Act website ([www.deh.gov.au/epbc](http://www.deh.gov.au/epbc)) and review any referrals and new nominations for listing species or ecological communities made from your region.
- Identify which of the listed species and ecological communities, Ramsar-listed wetlands and any World or National Heritage places are under greatest threat from human activity and ensure they are addressed in your project plan.
- Regional bodies should assess whether your team, management or other stakeholders need to know more about the EPBC Act. For information on training and outreach programs contact Paul Garrett, T: 02 6274 1925 or E: [paul.garrett@deh.gov.au](mailto:paul.garrett@deh.gov.au)

For further information:  
Visit [www.deh.gov.au/epbc](http://www.deh.gov.au/epbc)  
Email [ciu@deh.gov.au](mailto:ciu@deh.gov.au)  
Free-call 1800 803 772

Contact Details:

We welcome your contributions to *In Focus* – so please keep us informed of your projects, your events, and of the people in your region who are making a difference. simply drop us an email at [nrm@deh.gov.au](mailto:nrm@deh.gov.au)

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