

Attachment 1



CARING  
FOR  
**OUR**  
COUNTRY

THE REVIEW OF  
CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY:  
AUSTRALIA'S NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT  
INVESTMENT INITIATIVE

DISCUSSION PAPER

FEBRUARY 2011

## **Background to discussion paper**

This discussion paper is designed to help inform a review of the government's major natural resource management initiative, Caring for our Country.

Under Caring for our Country, the government is investing \$2 billion over five years. The long term objective of the initiative is to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

As of 30 November 2010, over \$1.7 billion has been committed to support new projects involving farmers, Indigenous groups, regional natural resource management organisations, Landcare and other volunteer environmental groups across Australia. Significant achievements so far include Reef Rescue, which is improving the quality of water runoff into the reef, the establishment of a national network of regional Landcare facilitators, progress in combating the impacts of cane toads and camels, and the expansion of the Indigenous Protected Area network, including the employment of hundreds of new Indigenous rangers.

The initiative is heading towards the final two years of its current funding cycle and the Australian Government is reviewing its efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness. We are seeking your views about Caring for our Country; whether it has met its objective and what issues we may need to consider in developing future options for natural resource management programs.

This discussion paper highlights some common topics raised by stakeholders to date, or that we have identified from our experience with the initiative. It is not intended to include a definitive or finalised list of issues or themes. It is a starting point to help you get involved and provide us with your input.

The discussion paper will not be your only opportunity to comment on Caring for our Country. Other opportunities include key stakeholder meetings and an open invitation to provide feedback through the review email address [thereview@nrm.gov.au](mailto:thereview@nrm.gov.au) or the Caring for our Country Review information line at 1800 003 562 (toll-free).

## What is Caring for our Country?

---

Caring for our Country is an ongoing Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve an environment that is healthy, better protected, well-managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate. The initiative began on 1 July 2008.

In its first five years, Caring for our Country focused on six national priority areas:

- Australia's National Reserve System
- biodiversity and natural icons
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats
- sustainable farm practices
- community skills, knowledge and engagement, and
- natural resource management in northern and remote Australia

For each national priority area, the Australian Government describes a long-term (20-year) projection of results it expects to achieve and shorter term (five-year) outcomes. These are set out in the Australian Government's strategic outcomes statement *Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008-2013*.

In addition, short-term targets are set annually to ensure that the initiative is on track to achieve measurable and strategic five-year outcomes. The targets are outlined annually in the Caring for our Country *business plans*. The business plans also outline the range of investment mechanisms used that include small and large competitive grants, negotiated regional funds and targeted investments such as for the National Reserve System.

## Purpose of review

---

In reviewing the Caring for our Country initiative, the Australian Government will:

- assess progress towards meeting the Caring for our Country five-year outcomes
- assess the efficiency and effectiveness of Caring for our Country in delivering its outcomes and targets
- assess the appropriateness of Caring for our Country as an Australian Government natural resource management initiative, and
- examine future policy options for effective and efficient Australian Government natural resource management delivery.

Evaluation is an important part of the delivery of government programs and policies. It provides support for decision making on, for example, the appropriateness of design, implementation and achievement of intended results. Caring for our Country was designed with a **Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI)** framework to monitor the progress of Caring for our Country against targets, outcomes and long term projections. The review will be informed by relevant parts of the *Caring for our Country MERI Strategy*. Information on the MERI framework and strategy is available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

## Scope of review

---

Through the review, the Australian Government will collect and analyse information from a range of stakeholders and other sources. The information and analysis will inform government about potential program improvement options for natural resource management program delivery in the future.

In reviewing the Caring for our Country initiative the Australian Government will consider the program elements that underpin its delivery, including but not limited to: the business plan approach, setting national priority areas for investment, setting and use of outcomes and targets, integration of programs, regional delivery arrangements, engagement with stakeholders, monitoring and evaluation and administrative processes.

Included in the scope of the review would be the role of local government and natural resource management regions in natural resource management planning and governance, stewardship of environmental assets, building the natural resource management capacity of private land managers, future directions in program design and the role of Indigenous Australians in natural resource management.

## Guiding principles

---

The [Commonwealth Grant Guidelines](#) outline key principles for grant administration including: robust planning and design, delivering outcomes, proportionate and appropriate grant administration, collaboration and partnership, governance and accountability structures, probity and transparency measures, and achieving value with public money. The review of Caring for our Country will look at program design and management practices with regard to the key principles.

## How to make a submission

---

1. Read the discussion paper – you may also find it useful to read [Caring for our Country Outcomes](#) and the [2010-11 Caring for our Country Business Plan](#) before preparing your submission. These are available on the [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) website.
2. Make a submission – submissions close 5pm AEST **20 May 2011**.

Submissions can be made as follows:

### **email**

[thereview@nrm.gov.au](mailto:thereview@nrm.gov.au)

### **regular mail**

Caring for our Country Review Team  
Australian Government Land and Coasts Division  
GPO Box 858  
Canberra ACT 2601

### **Publication of submissions**

Submissions may be published on the website in full and submissions, or extracts from submissions, may also be reproduced in public documents unless marked confidential.

For submissions from individual community members, the publication of contact details will be limited to organisation (or organisation type), name, suburb and state unless marked confidential, in which case no details will be published.

Confidential information should be provided in a separate document with 'Confidential' clearly marked on every page and a title such as 'Confidential annexure to submission by [your name] on [date]'.

## Discussion

---

### **Discussion point 1: National priorities in Caring for our Country**

The objective of Caring for our Country has been to help achieve an environment that is healthier, better protected, well-managed, resilient and can provide essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

The Caring for our Country initiative invested public funds to secure outcomes in six national priorities areas on the basis that this is an appropriate, relevant and effective focus for Australian Government funding.

Under previous Australian Government natural resource management programs, the government invested heavily in regional natural resource management investment strategies aligned with accredited regional plans. Previous reviews raised concerns that this investment model did not clearly define Commonwealth, state and regional roles, that there was duplication of effort or lack of investment in critical areas, that outcomes were not measurable or strategic (in that there was a lack of focus on long term landscape scale change) and there were limited opportunities for non-government organisations to participate in the program. Caring for our Country attempted to address these concerns by placing measurable strategic outcomes at a national scale in the context of long term 20 year projections and to improve community participation in natural resource management.

Recently, issues have been raised about the balance of Caring for our Country investments across national, regional and local priorities and the adverse impact this has had on the community's capacity to work on relevant and appropriate projects at a local or regional level.

#### **Possible themes for discussion**

What is an effective and appropriate focus for the Australian Government to achieve an environment that is healthier, better protected, well-managed, resilient and can provide essential ecosystem services in a changing climate?

How could the Australian Government's role in regional natural resource management planning be improved while retaining measurable strategic outcomes at a national scale?

## **Discussion point 2: Setting annual priorities and ways of investing**

Caring for our Country encompassed a wide range of investment timeframes (ranging from one year to five year investments), investment approaches (open call, co-investment, direct investment, expressions of interest, community action grants, regional base-level funding and large-scale projects), and funding streams (Working on Country, Environmental Stewardship, Landcare etc).

Five-year outcomes for the initiative were published in *Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008-2013* while investment priorities were identified and published in an annual business plan, taking into account community, scientific and expert advice.

The intent was to provide a longer term context for the initiative along with range of opportunities to suit the needs of different organisations, to provide an integrated program with all components focused on common outcomes and targets, to encourage effective collaborations, to streamline business and to focus annually on a set of priorities that could build to achieve the five-year outcomes.

An additional aim of Caring for our Country was to encourage partnerships that bring together groups of people with complementary skills to plan and deliver projects together.

### **Possible themes for discussion**

What mix of investment timeframes and approaches would be most beneficial?

In what ways could the Australian Government improve the way it prioritises investments, encourages partnerships and identifies national priorities?

How could the packaging of Australian Government natural resource management activities be improved to provide administrative efficiencies for all partners or enhance outcomes?

### **Discussion point 3: Community engagement and Landcare support**

Community capacity, engagement and participation are important elements of natural resource management. Maintenance and growth of sound community engagement, skills and knowledge in natural resource and project management underpin the successful delivery of much of Caring for our Country.

Some groups have raised concerns that the combination of changed investment in community-based regional planning and the current requirement for community skills, knowledge and engagement investment to be tied to a biophysical target may be having unintended consequences on the role that Landcare and community groups play in caring for our environment and resources.

Caring for our Country has focused strongly on on-ground delivery. Some stakeholders have suggested that not all projects and delivery agents have access to or the capacity to use best available natural resource management or project design knowledge.

#### **Possible themes for discussion**

In your experience, what is the current state of community capacity to deliver natural resource management?

What are the best vehicles to deliver knowledge and capacity to program delivery agents?

What should be the respective roles of regional, state and Commonwealth government, industry and non-government organisations in building and maintaining community capacity for natural resource management?



## **Discussion point 4: Engaging Indigenous Australians**

Indigenous participation in Caring for our Country is a priority. Indigenous people have considerable and unique knowledge, skills and responsibilities, which contribute significantly to Australia's natural resource management outcomes. Caring for our Country aims to develop enduring community-government partnerships with existing Indigenous groups to enhance their active engagement in natural and cultural resource management.

Caring for our Country includes a number of Indigenous-specific programs including the Indigenous Land and Sea Country Partnerships Program, funding for the Indigenous Land Management Facilitator Network and funding to expand Indigenous Protected Areas. Caring for our Country also sets targets to record traditional ecological knowledge at the cultural landscape scale to support biodiversity, coastal and other conservation outcomes, and urges regional natural resource management organisations to invest significantly in engaging Indigenous communities.

In addition, Caring for our Country has made a significant contribution to the Working on Country program by employing and training hundreds of Indigenous rangers to manage the natural and cultural values of their traditional estates.

Opportunities also exist through competitive grants (open call and Community Action Grants, for example) for Indigenous groups to seek funding for natural resource management. Information on opportunities is available at [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au).

### **Possible themes for discussion**

What are the challenges for Indigenous groups under the current Caring for our Country model?

In what ways could the Australian Government improve Indigenous Australian's participation in natural resource management?

Are the targets that are Indigenous-specific appropriate and do they effectively engage Indigenous Australians in natural resource management?

## **Discussion point 5: Working effectively with state and territory governments, engaging with local government**

Under previous programs, Australian Government investment in natural resource management was matched by state and territory governments. Joint investment was an integral part of the funding model.

Caring for our Country does not require matching investment from state or territory governments. State and territory governments have their own priorities for investment in natural resource management and state and territory plans guide their own processes. Under Caring for our Country, where state and territory targets overlap or align with Caring for our Country targets, the aim is to reduce duplication or conflicting effort. Federal-state partnerships under Caring for our Country are inherent in the Government's support for regional natural resource management organisations and in the management of state-based areas of national significance such as World Heritage, Ramsar or the National Reserve System.

The move away from requiring joint or matching investment at the regional level may have contributed to some states and territories reducing their funding for natural resource management or their contributions to regional bodies.

In the case of local government, the perception is that there is little or no engagement between Caring for our Country and local government, even though local government has functions and responsibilities that directly support local communities and deliver sustainable approaches to land use and natural resource management and planning.

### **Possible theme for discussion**

How can the Australian Government engage better with other levels of government on natural resource management outcomes?

How can overlaps or duplication of effort be avoided?

## **Discussion point 6: Regional base-level funding**

One third of all Caring for our Country funding is provided to regional organisations in 56 natural resource management regions across Australia through base-level funding arrangements. Considerable effort has been made to strengthen the capacity of regional bodies to contribute to achieving sound on-ground outcomes.

The government advised regional bodies of their five-year base-level funding allocations in 2008-09 to provide a level of certainty and to assist organisations in their project planning and implementation.

The regional natural resource management organisations are invited to submit multi-year proposals to access their base-level allocation. In 2010-11, for example, regional natural resource management organisations submitted expressions of interest for their available base-level allocation, identifying how their proposed activities addressed targets in the 2010-11 Caring for our Country business plan. The business plan called for significant investment in engaging Indigenous communities and local groups such as Landcare and Coastcare, whilst delivering on the Caring for our Country targets.

This investment model is intended to provide an important link between national natural resource management priorities and local action.

### **Possible theme for discussion**

How could the regional natural resource management delivery model be improved?

### **Other themes for discussion**

Finally, there may be other issues or themes you may wish to raise and let us know about as we review Caring for our Country. We welcome your suggestions.

## City of Joondalup Submission- Caring for our Country Review 2011

### ***Discussion Point 1: National Priorities***

National priorities set out within the *Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008-2013* are difficult to localise. Priorities need to be more general to provide guidance on natural resource management without being too prescriptive. Currently national priorities are too specific and not always consistent with local priorities.

There also seems to be a regional focus in terms of priorities with natural resource management within urban areas not being considered as highly as rural or regional areas. The protection and conservation of remnant areas of vegetation is an important issue within cities and should be recognised as a critical component of biodiversity conservation.

Climate change impacts and the effects on biodiversity should be a priority within the Caring for our Country Program. The impacts of climate change are a significant threat to biodiversity within the South West of Western Australia and funding for programs in this area is vital to ensuring the long term protection of biodiversity values.

Natural Resource Management Planning is also critical to the protection and enhancement of natural areas and support for strategic projects that aim to plan for the future management of natural areas should be provided through Caring for our Country. Currently there seems to be a greater level of support for on ground projects rather than strategic projects such as research and monitoring projects and the development of management plans.

The national priorities should be reviewed in consultation with all stakeholders to ensure that state, regional, and local priorities are considered in the development of national priorities.

### ***Discussion Point 3: Community engagement***

Caring for our Country should provide support for education initiatives, not just on ground works. Currently community engagement must be a component of an on ground project to be eligible for funding. The delivery of community engagement projects is vital to raising the awareness of natural resource management within the community and it is not always applicable to link these initiatives with on ground works.

### ***Discussion Point 5: Working effectively with state governments and engaging with local government.***

Local government is responsible for planning and implementation of natural resource management and also works closely with the community in the conservation of local natural areas. In order to effectively plan and undertake projects and initiatives relating to natural resource management, local government requires support and guidance from other levels of government. Consistency in federal, state and local biodiversity strategies and policies is also important in ensuring national priorities are reflected at the local level.

Local government should be given the opportunity to provide input into the establishment of national priorities to ensure that there is consistency and alignment with objectives of Local Biodiversity Action Plans and Local Biodiversity Strategies which have been developed to guide natural resource management at the local level.

Programs such as the Perth Biodiversity Project have been critical in providing a framework for local governments to effectively plan and manage the protection of natural areas and support should be provided to ensure the longevity of programs such as these.

The City of Joondalup participates in the Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) Program, an international program that aims to assist local governments in the sustainable management of urban biodiversity. Since joining the Program in 2006 the City of Joondalup has developed a Biodiversity Action Plan, to provide a strategic direction for biodiversity management within the City. The City has also established a number of community related biodiversity initiatives as part of the LAB Program which have assisted to increase public participation and community awareness of biodiversity and natural areas within the City.

The promotion of Programs such as the LAB Program and financial support for local governments to participate in this and similar programs would enhance the capacity of local governments to deliver biodiversity planning and management within urban environments.

The way forward is for the Caring for Country Program to provide funding for a network for local governments to progress Local Action Biodiversity Strategies and Plans (LBSAPs) which are aligned to the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plan (NBSAPs) objectives. Such an arrangement would provide a mechanism for local government to assist in the delivery of national priorities and would allow for greater alignment and coordination between national and local biodiversity objectives and assist the Federal Government to meet obligations under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity.

The City is also of the view that Programs such as the Perth Biodiversity Project which was developed to assist Local Governments in WA to take a strategic approach to retention, protection and management of natural areas should be eligible for funding through Caring for Country Program. The City subscribes to the Program and it is extremely effective in assisting with the protection and management of local biodiversity through land use planning.