

**Regional Vegetation Management Committees SW Queensland.**

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Native Vegetation Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
LB2, Collins St East  
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Please find attached excerpts from the draft regional vegetation management plans for South Western Queensland.

Three vegetation management plans have been developed in this region, covering the New England Tablelands Bioregion, The Southern Brigalow Region and the Mulga Lands Bioregion.

The vegetation management committees that sought direct community advice based on a discussion paper and focus groups using a participative consultation process. Over 1200 individuals provided comment on aspects of the discussion papers.

The following excerpts cover issues related to financial assistance required to deliver reform in vegetation management regulation.

This information is provided to the Productivity Commission on behalf of the New England, Southern Brigalow and Mulga Lands Regional Vegetation Management Committees by the Regional Coordinator.

Yours faithfully

Peter Voller  
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## **Incentives and financial adjustment**

It is clear from the community advice that incentives and financial adjustment packages are fundamental to the achievement of desirable vegetation management outcomes.

It is proposed that the RVMP include a series of priorities and mechanisms for investment should funds become available. The plan may also propose a range of non financial options such as reconfiguration of vegetation on properties and establishing mechanisms for trade in environmental services.

There is at present no definable investment stream for any of the proposed incentive or financial assistance schemes in this Plan. It is hoped that if such funding were to become available, these priorities would be addressed.

Some mechanisms outlined below may encourage landholders to engage in activities that complement the general levels of land stewardship already undertaken.

## **Mechanisms**

Preferred mechanisms for incentives and financial assistance include:

- Long-term annuity payments or tax benefits linked to binding property and catchment scale agreements. The annuity could include a fee for service for management of retained areas for community benefit. Such fees could contribute to costs of ongoing weed and pest control. (Note that changes to tax laws would require action by the Commonwealth Government.)
- Trading in environmental services provided by vegetation at property and landscape scales. It is recommended that a statute and policy mechanism be developed and implemented to:
  - quantify the environmental service values of vegetation, including provision of clean water, prevention of land degradation, pollination of crops, waste absorption, biodiversity conservation
  - provide the mechanism for private agreements between landholders and purchasers of the ecosystem services to be lawfully made,
  - provide the mechanisms for the payment of environmental services to landholders,
  - allow sharing of management and use rights (profit a prende<sup>1</sup>) arrangements should they be appropriate.
- Revolving land fund systems for property purchase and resale with nature conservation covenants attached. Such land funds could be operated through a government or non-government philanthropic organisation.
- Grant funds to enable local authorities to participate in rate rebate schemes.

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<sup>1</sup> The right to take soil, minerals, or produce (such as wood, turf or fish) from another's land (the servient tenement) or to graze animals on it.

- Grant funds to encourage on ground activity that promotes enterprise viability within the context of vegetation management controls. Activity may include reconfiguration of infrastructure, weed and pest control programs, participation in training programs that encourage sustainable enterprises, provision of planning support including access to scientific research.
- Establishment of farm forestry plantations and revegetation schemes preferentially favouring salinity recharge areas with preference given to the lease/management model being implemented by QDPI Forestry Hardwood Plantations. Areas revegetated should be available for assessment in subcatchment scale vegetation management planning.
- Expansion of the eligibility criteria of various labour assistance programs for activities that result in better vegetation management outcomes on properties.
- Continuation and expansion and improvement of community action programs including Landcare and Bushcare to provide community based extension and facilitation of good practice landscape management. Need for performance based approaches to community funded action programs.

It is suggested that incentives should be preferentially weighted towards landholders managing or retaining areas for public benefit outcomes such as

- protection of areas with high nature conservation value; including vegetation associated with high priority conservation areas as identified in this RVMP, eg artesian springs, wetland buffers, remnant vegetation in bioregional corridors and riparian areas.
- protection of areas vulnerable to land degradation;
- areas of high priority for water quality and salinity risk avoidance.
- enhancement of remnant endangered and of concern regional ecosystems; and
- management of remnant regional ecosystems where weeds or pest animals represent a significant threat to the values of the ecosystem.

Preferential weighting may include lower proportional contributions to costs of on ground works projects by landholders, access to a wider range of incentives and stewardship payments for environmental services, preferential access to some incentives.

Landholders who enter into long term management agreements (such as voluntary conservation agreements with local government, covenants or property scale declarations) should also be encouraged by preferential access to incentives.

## **Priority actions**

It is proposed that in the RVMP actions are linked to the goal statement as generally endorsed through the community consultation process. Suggested actions have been attributed to each outcome of the goal statement as follows-

**The bioregion is capable of viable and sustained economic production and use; and that flexibility in property scale management is allowed.**

*Actions:*

- Assisted property vegetation management planning activities such as vegetation planning workshops are promoted which foster subcatchment scale outcomes
- Enterprise diversification programs developed and implemented to promote the most sustainable use of the region's natural resources, eg farm forestry.
- Incentive schemes and financial assistance packages linked to accreditation schemes such as Environmental Management Systems (EMS) that promote and encourage ecologically sustainable management practices
- Catchment and subcatchment plans developed in partnership with landholders for all areas in the bioregion identifying priority areas and programs for natural resource management
- Extension and training opportunities developed and implemented for whole of property planning
- Incentive schemes should allow landholders to manage their properties as a business enterprise as well as managing areas for public benefit outcomes.

**Biodiversity in the bioregion is maintained and enhanced**

*Actions:*

- Endangered regional ecosystem extent increased to greater than 10% of pre clearing extent through voluntary protection and management of regrowth within 10 years of RVMP approval.
- Of concern regional ecosystem extent increased to greater than 30% of pre clearing extent through voluntary protection and management of regrowth within 10 years of RVMP approval
- Voluntary nature conservation agreements, including use of statutory covenants, accessible to landholders across the bioregion for protection of areas of high nature conservation values.
- Continuous corridor of riparian vegetation on major rivers restored through statutory and voluntary activities.
- Conservation of core retention areas as defined by EPA Biodiversity Planning Assessment process.
- Management guidelines developed and implemented for areas of significant biodiversity value including riparian areas, wetlands, lakes and springs, high nature conservation regional ecosystems and important wildlife habitat areas
- Recovery plans for all Endangered, Vulnerable or Rare (EVR) flora and fauna species in the region are developed

## **Land degradation in the bioregion caused by changes on woody vegetation cover is addressed**

### *Actions:*

- Development and implementation of sustainable grazing management programs that include management of total grazing pressure.
- Whole of property planning programs promoted and available to all landholders
- Development of cost effective methods for control of invasive plants, including strategic use of fire and grazing pressure.
- Development and implementation of vegetation management programs in priority salinity risk areas including incentives for revegetation of critical recharge areas.
- Rehabilitation activities in existing salinity discharge areas and scalded areas
- Development and implementation of management programs, including thinning of invasive species in erosion prone areas.
- State lands are managed to control exotic weeds, feral animals and as a model for appropriate land management

## **Cultural values related to existing native vegetation are protected**

### *Actions:*

- Increased access to cross cultural awareness training for Departmental vegetation management assessment staff.
- Inclusion of cultural awareness into property planning workshops provided for vegetation management.
- Broad regionally based study to identify important cultural heritage sites in partnership with Traditional Owners
- Development and implementation of guidelines for the management of important cultural heritage values
- Increased number of cultural sites identified and protected from accidental clearing

## **Ecological processes can continue to function effectively**

### *Actions:*

- Water quality in rivers and streams is enhanced through rehabilitation of riparian vegetation, especially regeneration of native ground cover through treatment of exotic weeds and removal of thickening woody vegetation where appropriate
- Management of appropriate vegetation in critical parts of the landscape to encourage deep nutrient cycling and maintenance of humus layers.
- Regeneration of ecosystems where tree decline and dieback threaten habitat viability.

- Development and promotion of cost effective methods for management of threats to ecological processes such as salinity, weed invasion, pest plagues.

**Responsibility for protection and management of woody vegetation cover is shared across the Australian community. This must recognise landholder ‘duty of care’ and incentives for ‘public good’ management activities.**

*Actions:*

- Incentive mechanisms should address real costs incurred or loss of production and opportunity such as management, monitoring, retirement of land, loss of market value and any other costs.
- Funds should be made available for targeted investment for landholders adversely affected by the retention of vegetation principally for public good.
- Encourage landholders who have low vegetation retention rates (eg less than 20%) to restore and retain vegetation through voluntary participation

## **Research and extension priorities**

The following recommendations identify a number of gaps in current research and extension that will be important for the implementation, monitoring and review of the RVMP.

### **Research priorities**

Promote research and investigation in the following areas:

- The effectiveness and application of thinning activities in remnant ecosystems and the relationship with maintenance of ecological and landscape functions (particularly hydrological impacts) for economic, land degradation and biodiversity outcomes.
- Implications for fauna and flora conservation from development practices recommended by this plan.
- Study into viable remnant and corridor size for this bioregion.
- Definition of economic impact of public good vegetation retention and development of mechanisms for placing a dollar value on ecosystem services.
- Modeling implementation of RVMP code requirements and good practice activities to determine real costs for public good conservation and natural resource management.
- Social research into incentives and other support mechanisms for landholders at property and catchment scales for public good conservation and natural resource management. Establish regional pilot projects to determine workability of existing and potential strategies such as salinity credits and bush tender schemes, property and sub catchment declarations or covenants etc.
- Develop appropriate scale data sets to provide concise and clear management information to landholders and stakeholders undertaking property management planning.

- Investigating the impact of invasive vegetation where it has an effect on Great Artesian Basin recharge.
- Immediate development and ground truthing of spatial information at a property relevant scale for
  - Regional ecosystems as 1:50 000 scale in over cleared parts of the bioregion
  - Hydrology
  - Salinity risk
  - Groundwater flow systems
  - Recharge areas
  - Bioregional corridors
  - Culturally significant sites

### **Extension priorities**

- Developing participative approaches to adoption of good practice vegetation management as part of overall property and sub catchment management.
- Participative approaches need to be inclusive of neighbouring landholders, technical information providers as well as interested stakeholders
- Development of processes that allow local communities to 'ground truth' data and planning information used in vegetation management planning assessments
- Encouraging use of incentives and alternative management strategies including the voluntary measures set out in this plan
- Facilitating access to recent science and knowledge in regard to vegetation management
- Raising awareness of regulatory obligations under the RVMP framework.
- Provision of mechanisms that allow easy and ready access for all community stakeholders to relevant information when available

Information should be presented in such a way that it can be understood and interpreted by landholders undertaking property planning activities in independent self directed situations