

Land Management for Nature – initiatives in the Northern Territory

As a private landholder, leaseholder or land manager in the Northern Territory there are a number of ways that you can commit to protecting important native plants, animals and landscapes on your property, for future generations to enjoy. In fact, many landowners are already involved in local landcare groups and are making excellent progress in the management of natural values on their properties.

Why do we need off-reserve conservation incentives in the NT?

Many Northern Territory properties include areas that are exceptionally important for threatened and significant species and ecosystems. The future of these important places depends on good conservation management of the land, outside the government reserve system (hence the term “off-reserve”). Land managers should be encouraged and rewarded for protecting these places into the future.

The Department of Natural Resources, Environment, The Arts and Sport (NRETAS) is working in partnership with stakeholders to develop a conservation agreement program that will offer conservation management support, and incentives to land managers interested in entering into partnership agreements for the management of these special areas. Some of these stakeholders include the Northern Territory Cattlemen’s Association, Landcare, Greening Australia and the NT Natural Resource Management Board.

Graziers and other landholders face a variety of barriers to the adoption of conservation practices. There are opportunity costs and/or management costs associated with on-farm conservation, and financial and other incentives may help to improve the appeal of conservation management. Of course, many landholders already maintain and manage the

biodiversity values on their lands, and incentives may also help acknowledge or accelerate the implementation of on-farm conservation practices.

Conservation Incentives

A suite of different incentive instruments are currently being used to encourage the off-reserve conservation of biodiversity in Australia. These include financial incentives, education and extension, government regulation and industry-based voluntary initiatives, and often a mix of incentives is available. Conservation covenants and conservation management agreements are examples of incentives which can be included in the incentive mix or ‘toolbox’.

Conservation covenants (CCs) are statutory covenants placed over land titles that may or may not be permanent. They are voluntary agreements that are entered into between a landholder and government, covering all or part of a land parcel. They are flexible and the landholder negotiates the terms of the agreement.

A conservation management agreement (CMA) is a contract or binding agreement between a landholder and government regarding the use and management of their land. CMAs are voluntary agreements that specify conservation actions and/or outcomes. A CMA is not placed against the land title and thus does not bind future owners of the property if it is to change hands.

Many of the CC and CMA schemes are supported by additional incentives to make them more attractive, including rate reductions, capital gains tax concessions or off-sets, extension services and technical advice.

Conservation incentives for the Northern Territory

CC and CMA schemes are highly developed in other states but are relatively new to the Northern Territory. A recent survey of pastoralists in the Territory found there is considerable interest in CCs and/or CMAs. Greening Australia (NT) is trialling some conservation incentives programs in the MacDonnell Ranges and in the Katherine region.

A new project: *'The NT Off-Reserve Sustainable Country Initiative'* will commence early next year and will develop trial conservation agreements with interested landowners who manage areas of high conservation value. This is an excellent opportunity to explore the opportunities of conservation partnerships agreements. Landowners will be paid an incentive for getting involved that will go towards any costs on their time.

For further information about this project and off-reserve conservation initiatives in the Northern Territory, contact Jon Green on 08 89994598 or email jon.green@nt.gov.au

The below list contains useful web links to information about conservation incentive programs:

A survey of NT Pastoralists regarding their interest in, and motivations for conservation activities. Also summarises examples of CC and CMA schemes currently operating in Australia:

<http://www.nrmbnt.org.au/files/Survey%20of%20NT%20Pastoralist%20MBI%20Interest.pdf>

Desert Uplands Landscape Linkages program (QLD):

<http://www.desertuplands.org.au/projects/landscape-linkages-across-the-southern-desert-uplands/>

Heritage Agreement Program (SA):

http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/biodiversity/heritage_education.html

Environmental Stewardship payments for landowners (national):

<http://www.nrm.gov.au/stewardship/index.html>

Market-based Instruments

<http://marketbasedinstruments.gov.au/>

Conservation agreements:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/publications/gifts-keep-giving/pubs/gifts-keep-giving.pdf>

Tax concessions from the Australian Government:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/incentives/covenants-tax.html>

Funding support from the National Reserve System Project:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/nrs/getting-involved/private.html>

Recently announced successful land management and conservation projects from Caring for Country

<http://www.nrm.gov.au/projects/open-grants.html>