

Caring for our Country Program Design Team
Australian Government Land and Coasts
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Wednesday 15 August, 2012

Re: Comments on the Caring for our Country Consultation Discussion Paper “Regional Delivery”

To the Caring for our Country Program Design Team,

The Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) was formed in 2011 to establish a formal network of organisations working towards implementation of the National Reserve System (NRS) through private land conservation. A key driver behind ALCA’s formation was recognition of the fact that private land conservation efforts in Australia appear fragmented across states and lack synergy. ALCA believes that more work needs to be done to develop a consistency of approach to promote, explain and execute conservation programs on private lands. Acting as a national voice for private land conservation, ALCA currently represents the NSW Nature Conservation Trust, The Nature Conservancy (Australia), the Queensland Trust for Nature, the Nature Foundation SA, the Tasmanian Land Conservancy, the Trust for Nature Victoria and the National Trust of Australia (WA), together representing private landholders already responsible for protecting up to 200,000 hectares across Australia.

ALCA would like to congratulate the Australian Government on securing funding and support for the next phase of the Caring for our Country program. The Alliance ardently supports the ongoing inclusion of the National Reserve System within Caring for our Country as a crucial part of the program, particularly acknowledging its strengths as a national approach to conservation and its role in building and sustaining partnerships across states and at multiple levels ranging from local to regional and national. Recognising the important areas within the program that require improvement, ALCA wishes to thank the Program Design Team for the opportunity to comment on the next phase of Caring for our Country.

ALCA stresses the need for the next phase of the Caring for our Country program to further support the private land conservation sector and its important contribution to the permanent protection and conservation of nationally significant species, ecosystems and biodiversity. In particular, the Alliance wishes to voice the following:

1. Permanent protection is an integral part of the mix of approaches that Caring for our Country should support;
2. Post-protection management services are essential for securing conservation agreements in the longer term;
3. Revolving funds are an important and effective mechanism for permanent protection of private land and should be supported by Caring for our Country.
4. There is a need for increased transparency of Caring for our Country delivery activities, monitoring and evaluation;
5. Caring for our Country should provide for undertaking negotiated agreements with state-wide service delivery bodies; and
6. A devolved funding process would make Caring for our Country more accessible to landowners with permanently protected land who are participating in private land conservation activities.

Each of these key points relevant to the Regional Delivery discussion paper is discussed in Attachment A. A summary table is provided to link these discussion points to the questions listed in the Caring for our Country discussion paper (Attachment B).

ALCA would like to extend an offer to assist government officials in the design of the Caring for our Country program to help ensure that private land conservation activities make their greatest possible contribution to Caring for our Country objectives.

Should you require further clarification on this submission, please contact Stephen van der Mark or Mat Hardy (contact details on the attached cover sheet).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S van der Mark", is written over a horizontal line.

Stephen van der Mark
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Land Conservation Alliance

Attachment A – Submission discussion points

5 Caring for our Country should provide for undertaking negotiated agreements with state-wide service delivery bodies.

5.1 The contribution of state-wide service delivery bodies

Private land conservation organisations, which through their delivery of conservation activities can be considered as state-wide service delivery bodies, are directly involved in the permanent protection and management of biodiversity on private land across Australia. Given that over 70 percent of Australia is under private ownership, including some of Australia's most important ecological areas, supporting state-wide service delivery bodies who have long-term relationships with landowners is essential for Caring for our Country to deliver national conservation outcomes.

As state-wide service delivery bodies, private land conservation organisations are also key partners in the development and delivery of effective national, regional or local conservation programs, particularly for developing conservation lands that extend across catchments and state borders.

ALCA and its member organisations are well placed to assist in the delivery of the Caring for our Country program and ensure its longer-term success, having extensive voluntary and philanthropic networks, long term stability, as well as extensive local private land conservation experience to support private landowners participating in the biodiversity conservation activities. In some cases they are better placed than state NRM agencies to facilitate this work, particularly on private land.

Importantly for private lands, which are a significant part of national conservation efforts, conservation covenants can only be registered by a very limited set of organisations who have acts of parliament allowing this to happen. As such, it is important for SEWPAC to work with these bodies to develop effective, well-supported, long-term programs so they in turn can support the on-ground investment on private lands, rather than making these bodies compete against either each other or against the private landholders and other organisations doing the on-ground work.

5.2 Program design and negotiated agreements

As such, state-wide service delivery bodies should have access to direct, negotiated agreements with Caring for our Country rather than solely through the competitive open-call process. Through supporting negotiated agreements, Caring for our Country can work with state-wide service delivery bodies to develop projects on private land that increase the capacity to produce better whole-of-region outcomes than highly localised projects. Moreover, through these negotiated agreements, ALCA members can play an important role in strengthening partnership links between the private land conservation sector state governments, the Commonwealth environment department and other departments, ensuring strategic alignment in investment and activities, as well as strengthening partnerships between private landholders, conservation NGOs, corporations and regional bodies.

Attachment B – Related discussion paper questions

Table 1. Summary table showing relationship between discussion points and Caring for our Country discussion paper questions

Theme	Discussion question	Related discussion point
		Negotiated agreements
Governance	What governance standards should be expected of regional NRM organisations?	
	How can we ensure consistency and continual improvement in the performance of regional NRM organisations?	
	How can regional NRM organisations best support their local NRM community?	
Regional planning	How can regional planning best be integrated into Caring for our Country to fully realise these benefits?	✓
Caring for our Country priorities	What role can regional NRM organisations play in addressing each of the new Caring for our Country strategic objectives?	✓
	What role can regional NRM organisations play in ensuring state, regional and local priorities are represented within the framework of our national strategic objectives?	✓
Delivery mechanisms	Should regional organisations be eligible for other competitive funding? If so, should there be any restrictions or requirements?	✓