

Australian Conservation Land Trusts Alliance

Submission to the Commonwealth Government Review of the Caring for our Country (CfoC) Program

Background:

The Australian Conservation Land Trusts Alliance (CLTA) is a newly formed national alliance of not for profit, non government organisations that work at the state scale in the area of nature conservation on private land and can loosely be defined as land trusts. They deliver a range of nature conservation initiatives and projects including conservation covenanting, revolving funds and purchase and management of conservation reserves. The membership comprises:

- Nature Foundation SA
- Nature Trust of Western Australia
- New South Wales Nature Conservation Trust
- Queensland Trust For Nature
- Tasmanian Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy – Australia Program
- Trust for Nature Victoria

The Alliance was formalised in 2009 and has been supported through a grant from the 2009-10 round of CfoC funding to create a secretariat.

The Alliance's mission is to provide leadership in the development of, engagement in and advocacy of policies in relation to private land nature conservation so as to ensure that conservation covenants and associated conservation agreements can make the greatest possible contribution to the achievement of national and state conservation goals

The National Reserve System Private Partners Network, which shares a level of common membership with CLTA, has developed a submission which the CLTA also supports and is attached.

Various CLTA members have been recipients of CfoC program funding in addition to the funds provided for the establishment of the CLTA secretariat.

The CLTA members have developed this short submission to reflect directly their experiences with the CfoC program and to propose improvements based on this experience. In addition, the CLTA has been formed to provide a collective voice on private land covenanting and its associated issues and this submission is an opportunity for us to raise relevant policy questions in relation to the CfoC program.

Proposed Inclusions and Improvements for future CfoC programs:

Our comments in relation to practical aspects of the program design and its priorities are:

- The need for a stronger provision of direct funding for private biodiversity protection projects to act as a stronger catalyst for private landholders to place greater value on the preservation of biodiversity on private properties and also to function as an opportunity for landholders undertaking biodiversity maintenance to meet some component of the associated costs.
- An expansion of the funds available to skill covenanting organisations with the capability to undertake widespread and comprehensive stewardship support for private landholders who have entered into conservation covenants.
- Consider making a funding priority the development of systems to identify the volume and economic value of biodiversity management activities.
- Fund a Federal program (like EcoTender) to enable covenant holders to access services that can supply the tools necessary to fully participate in biodiversity maintenance markets and carbon sequestration markets.
- Enable private landholders to easily participate in certification and auditing of their vegetation managements practices so that entry to current and future development of markets with new income streams attached to vegetation management will be easier.
- Give a focus to research into carbon sequestering for native vegetation and biodiversity management. Offering funding to produce research outcomes that demonstrate carbon sequestration values will assist to increase the potential markets that could deliver an income stream to holders of private land covenants.
- Change the NRM funding approach to more heavily reward NRM Boards that have drawn up cooperative programs with private land conservation and covenanting organisations and private landholders where there will be a higher extended value of the Government's funds.
- Streamline the CfoC reporting, especially in development of project documentation, the level of detail attached to project expenditure breakdown (with associated invoicing for costs) and the provision of project results. These processes should be robust but leaner so as not to detract from the application of effort to the conservation outcomes of projects rather than the reporting.
- Increase the speed of responses by CfoC to basic and practical project implementation questions about how/whether funds can be used and the timing when project implementation actions alter, as they often do in adaptive conservation projects.

CLTA also proposes the CfoC program may consider the following policy questions to reshape the program's key principles:

- **Regionalisation.** Private landholders acting in concert within regions to create and maintain habitat links and provide natural habitats for endemic species play an important role where the governments capacity to add land to the National Reserve System is limited (particularly

where the locations fall outside the current priorities). A greater emphasis on regional cooperative projects that involve regional NRM Boards, private land conservation and covenanting organisations and Local/State Government, together with private covenant holders, has the capacity to produce better whole-of-region outcomes than highly localized projects.

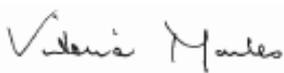
- **Value of Perpetual Covenanting.** Priority placed on a nationally recognised and consistent system for the economic and ecosystem value generated by private land covenants would provide a stronger basis for selecting private landholder projects using known information on the potential for high quality conservation outcomes.
- **Multi-year Project Funding.** CLTA has a strong desire for CfoC to add the capacity for multi-year programs in addition to single year projects. In land covenanting works, the longer funding timeframe would support more successful and long-lasting capacity development, as well as build certainty in the NGO and community sector that delivers projects. The extended timeframe would reduce the burden of yearly administrative cycles, and also spread the high transaction times and costs of the single year funding cycles which are often impractical and unworkable for both the funds recipient and for the department.
- **Sector-wide Initiatives.** The Conservation Land Trust Alliance was formed to support and develop the practice of private land conservation. As a sector-wide initiative, the Alliance found it difficult to present a CfoC funding application to meet the CfoC program criteria due to the wide-ranging nature of its activities across sector. Sector-wide practice initiatives provide the fabric for smaller eNGOs and the community to have effective participation in protections for private land biodiversity, meaning that CfoC provisions to support sector-wide initiatives would help to generate broad buy-in and good value for the CfoC program.

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NATIONAL TRUST



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