



Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot Round 2 Guidelines

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Contents

1	Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot Round 2 processes	6
2	About the grant program	8
2.1	About the C+B Pilot Round 2 opportunity	9
3	Grant amount and grant period	10
3.1	Grants available	10
3.1.1	How is the biodiversity payment calculated?	10
3.2	Project period	11
4	Eligibility criteria	11
4.1	Who is eligible to apply for a grant?	12
5	What the grant money can be used for	13
5.1	Eligible grant activities	13
5.2	Eligible locations	13
5.3	What the grant money cannot be used for	14
6	The assessment criteria	14
7	How to apply	15
7.1	What to consider when submitting your costs and making a bid offer	17
7.2	Requirement to act with utmost good faith	17
7.3	Timing of grant opportunity processes	18
7.4	Questions during the application process	19
8	The grant selection process	19
8.1	Assessment of project applications	19
8.2	Who will assess applications?	19
8.3	Who will approve grants?	19
9	Notification of application outcomes	19
9.1	Feedback on your application	20
10	Successful grant applications	20
10.1	The grant agreements	20
10.2	How we pay for professional advice	20
10.3	How we pay the biodiversity payment	20
10.4	Grants Payments and GST	21
11	Announcement of grants	21
12	How we monitor your grant activity	21
12.1	Keeping us informed	21
12.2	Reporting	22
12.3	Monitoring	22
12.4	Pilot agreement variations	23
12.5	Data sharing	23
12.6	Audit or compliance visits	23

12.7	Record keeping.....	23
12.8	Evaluation	23
12.9	Acknowledgement.....	23
13	Probity.....	24
13.1	Enquiries and feedback	24
13.2	Conflicts of interest	24
13.3	Privacy	25
13.4	Confidential Information.....	25
13.5	Freedom of information.....	26
14	Glossary.....	26

1 Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot Round 2 processes

Carbon + Biodiversity (C+B) Pilot Round 2 participants

If you participate in this C+B Pilot you are offering to deliver long-term biodiversity improvement in the form of a diverse native planting in conjunction with an [Emissions Reduction Fund \(ERF\) environmental plantings project](#). The Australian Government will pay you a biodiversity payment for the biodiversity improvement and you will retain the carbon credits generated by the project.



Submit up to 3 applications

Finalise your project plan(s), review the checklist and if you meet all eligibility criteria, submit your application(s) through the [National Stewardship Trading Platform](#) by 3 March 2022 17:00 AEDT.



DAWE will assess your project(s) and determine what payment we will offer

We assess applications against the eligibility criteria and exclude (and notify) ineligible applications. We will calculate a biodiversity benefit score for your project(s) and a biodiversity payment offer(s). The offers are based on the estimated cost of your project and the revenues the project could generate from carbon credits. Alternatively, you can submit your own bid price. Projects in each region are then ranked (highest to lowest) based on their benefit-cost score.



Successful projects are approved to receive biodiversity payment offers

A project assessment panel will advise the decision maker on which projects are the best value for money, based on the benefit-cost score. The decision maker approves the amount we will offer to successful applicants.



We make offers to successful applicants and notify unsuccessful applicants

We make biodiversity payment offers to successful applicants, providing them with two agreements: a participation agreement and C+B project agreement.

Applicants who are unsuccessful in receiving a biodiversity payment offer will be notified.



You sign a participation agreement for your successful project(s), seek professional advice and receive payment

You should sign the participation agreement within 4 weeks of receiving it. Signing the participation agreement makes you eligible for an immediate payment of up to \$10,000 to support you seeking professional advice. Pilot participants are encouraged to seek professional advice from legal, financial, carbon and/or agronomical service providers as appropriate to their circumstances.

Signing the participation agreement and receiving the financial support for professional advice, *does not* commit you to undertaking the planting project. The participation agreement requires you to provide certain information to the department to help us learn from the pilot.



You unconditionally register your project(s) with the ERF

You can only receive a biodiversity payment and sign your C+B Project agreement once your project has been granted unconditional ERF registration from the Clean Energy Regulator (CER). You can commence your registration by going to the [CER website](#). As the registration process can take up to 90 days, this process should be commenced as soon as possible.

*** Project activities, including site preparation (pre-planting weeding and soil preparation), must not have started prior to registration, this will disqualify it from being eligible to be registered under the ERF. ***



You inform us that the project is registered with the ERF and sign the Project Agreement.

When you provide us with evidence that your project is unconditionally registered with the ERF and sign the project agreement you commit to implementing your C+B project and accept the biodiversity payment offer. We will then pay you up to 80% of the biodiversity payment. The remainder of the biodiversity payment will be paid after you complete your plantings.

The project agreement(s) must be signed within 6 months of you being notified of the biodiversity payment offer. The project agreement commits you to maintaining your C+B project for 25 years.

Note: If successful applicants choose not to sign the project agreement and wish to find alternative funding from a private buyer, the department can provide additional guidance on how to list a C+B project on the National Stewardship Trading Platform.



Planting and ongoing obligations

You must establish your plantings in accordance with the requirements of both the ERF (for carbon) and this C+B Pilot (for biodiversity improvement). Both programs have rules governing the establishment and management of environmental plantings and ongoing reporting/monitoring requirements.

You will have 9 months to undertake the planting from the date you signed the project agreement. We can grant an extension due to circumstances beyond your control that stop you meeting that deadline (e.g. drought, the planting season being inappropriate or seedlings being unavailable within that timeframe).



Your project generates Australian carbon credit units (ACCUs) and these are issued to you by the Clean Energy Regulator.

The ACCUs are issued to you at the end of reporting periods over the life of your project, as your trees grow and store carbon. Once issued, you are able to sell your ACCUs to generate income or retain them for your own use, such as for the carbon neutrality of your farm.

You may choose to sell your ACCUs to a private buyer on the National Stewardship Trading Platform. Guidance will be provided on how to list your ACCUs on the platform.

1.1 Introduction

This document explains the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot (C+B Pilot) Round 2. The C+B Pilot is a component of the Australian Government's Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package (the Package). The Package is demonstrating market-based approaches for farmers to improve biodiversity on agricultural land and reward farmers for their stewardship. The C+B Pilot Round 2 is continuing these trials in 6 new regions.

Farmers can build farm resilience by planting and maintaining environmental plantings that protect their soils, farm dams and waterways. The C+B Pilot trials a market-based mechanism for farmers to improve on-farm biodiversity while delivering carbon abatement by establishing environmental plantings for biodiversity outcomes.

The aim is to create a credible market mechanism that improves biodiversity and climate outcomes and creates new income opportunities for farmers. The Australian Government has commenced consultation on legislation to support the development of a National Biodiversity Stewardship market. The C+B Pilot will inform the proposed legislation and key elements of scheme design required to create a successful voluntary market.

This document sets out:

- the eligibility and assessment criteria
- how to apply to participate
- how applications are considered, and how biodiversity payment offers are made
- how farmers that have applied are notified and receive payments
- how participating farmers' projects will be monitored and evaluated
- responsibilities and expectations.

We have worked in partnership with the Australian National University (ANU) to develop the C+B Pilot and we are collaborating with Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations in each region to support delivery.

2 About the grant program

The C+B Pilot has 5 core elements.

- 1) **Carbon Plantings:** Participating farmers will be required to undertake a new mixed-species environmental plantings project registered under the Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF). These projects involve establishing and maintaining vegetation such as trees or shrubs on land that has been clear of forest for more than 5 years. Participating farmers will also need to ensure they satisfy relevant ERF scheme obligations and [environmental plantings method requirements](#), including in relation to measurement, reporting and auditing.
- 2) **Planting Protocols:** Participating farmers will need to comply with the C+B planting protocols and reporting requirements. The planting protocols set out rules about the location, dimensions, configuration and composition of plantings to ensure projects generate biodiversity benefits. Participating farmers need to comply with both the ERF rules and the planting protocol requirements.
- 3) **Funding:** Participating farmers in the C+B Pilot application process have the opportunity to receive income for biodiversity improvement from the government through a Biodiversity Payment. Participating farmers will also receive a payment to support them in seeking professional advice about their project.
- 4) **Carbon Credits:** Environmental plantings projects earn one Australian carbon credit unit (ACCU) for each tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂-e) stored in the project trees as

they grow. Projects will be credited ACCUs for 25 years from the project start date. Participants are credited ACCUs when they report to the Clean Energy Regulator (CER), this can occur as often as every 6 months, but must occur at least every 5 years. Typically for environmental planting projects, abatement peaks at year 6. Participants can sell (creating income), keep or cancel any ACCUs they receive for the projects.

- 5) **Minimum 25-year project life:** Plantings established under the C+B Pilot will need to be protected and maintained for at least 25 years to ensure biodiversity outcomes. At the time of ERF project registration, you will be required to nominate either a 25-year or 100-year permanence period. During this period, you must maintain your project as per the environmental plantings method to protect the carbon stored in your project.

The objectives of the C+B Pilot are to:

- trial a market-based system whereby farmers can be paid to provide biodiversity improvement by a government payment, alongside payments for carbon by willing buyers and/or government.
- provide the information, knowledge and experience necessary to establish markets for on-farm biodiversity stewardship, including commercial arrangements between business purchasers and farmer applicants.

The intended outcomes of the C+B Pilot are:

- increase the adoption of biodiversity practices by enabling farmers to be rewarded for their stewardship by those willing to pay
- improve biodiversity and increase carbon stored in environmental plantings
- provide information and confidence to the market.

2.1 About the C+B Pilot Round 2 opportunity

The purpose of C+B Pilot Round 2 is to extend opportunities made available to farmers under Round 1 to more farmers. Round 2 will further test market arrangements, biodiversity planting protocols and the biodiversity scoring system to demonstrate credible mechanisms to support a voluntary biodiversity market.

C+B Round 2 will run in 6 new Natural Resource Management (NRM) regions within the intensive agriculture zone. The following NRM regions are eligible for Round 2:

- Fitzroy Basin in Queensland.
- Riverina in New South Wales.
- Goulburn Broken in Victoria.
- Southern in Tasmania.
- Northern and Yorke in South Australia.
- South Coast in Western Australia.

Round 1 of the C+B Pilot was open for applications between April and June 2021 in 6 NRM regions.¹

¹ Eligible NRMs for Round 1 were Burnett Mary in Qld, Central West in NSW, North Central in Vic, NRM North in Tasmania, South West in WA, and Eyre Peninsula in SA.

The C+B Pilot Round 2 will introduce a new payment to applicants who receive an offer to help with professional advice costs of their C+B project.

3 Grant amount and grant period

The Australian Government has up to \$18.8 million available for the C+B Pilot during 2021-22 and 2022-23. There is no maximum amount under the C+B Pilot Round 2 but grants cannot exceed the amount of available funds.

3.1 Grants available

There are two grants available under C+B Round 2.

Successful farmers will be offered:

- **Professional advice payment:** This small grant associated with the participation agreement will be provided to all successful participants to offset the costs of seeking professional advice as appropriate to their circumstances (e.g. legal, financial, carbon and/or agronomical service). This helps them consider the offer to proceed with their C+B project. All applicants that are made an offer will be able to receive an amount up to \$10,000. Participants will be required to provide information about the professional advice they have sought to receive the payment and to help us learn about how the pilot worked.
- **Biodiversity payment:** The biodiversity payment offer is made by the Australian Government to participating farmers for their delivery of long-term biodiversity improvements through a C+B project. The process for calculating the biodiversity payment offer is outlined in [section 3.1.1](#).

3.1.1 How is the biodiversity payment calculated?

Applicants will submit cost estimates for their project and, if successful in the selection process, will receive a biodiversity payment offer.

The biodiversity payment offer will be calculated using a financial model that estimates:

- the projected carbon revenues projects could earn from credited carbon abatement and sale of ACCUs,
- the cost of establishing and maintaining the plantings (a pricing guide will be published to help applicants estimate their costs),
- the cost of reporting associated with the project.

The model will consider the revenue and cost estimates to calculate a biodiversity payment offer, with the aim of providing efficient participants with an appropriate rate of return on their investment.

Applicants also have the option to make their project more competitive by submitting their own bid price for the biodiversity payment they are willing to accept ([Section 6](#)). If the applicant's bid offer is lower than the calculated biodiversity payment offer, the bid offer will be used for the purposes of the assessment. If the applicant's bid offer is higher than the calculated biodiversity payment offer, the latter will be used.

Applicants should be mindful of the competitive nature of the C+B Pilot when designing their project and submitting an application.

3.2 Project period

C+B Pilot projects will need to be protected and maintained for a minimum of 25 years. This is consistent with the minimum permanence period for ERF environmental plantings projects. As C+B projects are registered under the ERF, the ERF permanence requirements also apply.

Participating farmers must only commence the project after they have unconditionally registered it under the ERF and signed the C+B project agreement with the government.

In the event that all or part of the plantings are deliberately or recklessly damaged, or if the ERF registration is revoked for part or all of the planting area, participants will need to repay or forfeit all or part of the funding.

Under this pilot arrangement, *risks to the biodiversity* (e.g. plant death) from natural disturbance (such as fire or drought) will be shared between participants and the government. Participants *should* replace plantings to ensure the biodiversity is maintained for the 25-year C+B permanence period (although replacement is not strictly a requirement).

Under the ERF participants have obligations to proactively protect and maintain plantings against risk from natural disturbances like fire and drought for the duration of the project's nominated 'permanence period'. Participants submit a permanence plan to the CER at registration and in years 8 and 24, to explain the steps they have or will undertake to manage risk to plantings.

Projects must be maintained as per the requirements outlined in the [environmental plantings method](#). The permanence period is the period over which participants are required to protect and maintain the credited carbon stocks. Participants must choose between a 25-year or 100-year permanence period. Participants' choice of permanence period will impact the [crediting discount](#)² applied to their project (there is a larger discount applied for projects with a permanence period of 25-years than those with 100-year permanence period). The period starts when the first ACCUs are issued to the project.

In the event that carbon stored in an ERF project is lost due to unavoidable natural disturbance or deliberate conduct the CER may require a participant to relinquish a certain number of ACCUs or replant. The obligation to relinquish ACCUs or replant is at the discretion of the CER and influenced by actions taken by the participant to mitigate risks to the project as outlined in their permanence plans.

If no ACCUs have been issued at the time of a mortality (a situation which is more likely to arise in the first few years of the project), permanence requirements are not activated; at this stage the participant could elect to receive fewer credits, replant, or cease the project.

See [Permanence obligations](#) for further information on ERF project permanence requirements.

4 Eligibility criteria

Eligibility criteria apply to both the applicant and to the proposed project. Applicants must provide the information required to assess their eligibility and the eligibility of their proposed project.

² Under the ERF, participants must choose between a 25-year or 100-year permanence period. If participants opt for a 100-year permanence period, a 5% risk of reversal buffer is applied when calculating their ACCU entitlements. If participants opt for a 25-year permanence period, both the 5% risk of reversal buffer and a 20% permanence period discount are applied. Applicants should note that the 20% permanence period discount is not considered when calculating biodiversity payment offers under the C+B Pilot. This is to ensure the C+B Pilot does not provide higher payment offers to projects with shorter permanence periods.

If they, or their proposed project, do not meet all the eligibility criteria, their application will not undergo assessment.

Should an applicant mistakenly lodge the application with incorrect particulars (e.g. incorrect company name or structure in which you hold an interest), we can make changes upon receipt of their written advice, at our discretion.

Without limiting any other provision of these guidelines, we may, in our absolute discretion, allow or not allow a related entity to take over an application in substitution for the original applicant, provided that the substituted entity also meets the relevant eligibility criteria.

4.1 Who is eligible to apply for a grant?

To be eligible applicants must:

- have an Australian Business Number (ABN), and
- be a permanent resident of Australia, and
- have an account with an Australian financial institution, and
- be the owner, leaseholder or exclusive native title holder of the land in one of the six eligible Carbon + Biodiversity Round 2 NRM Pilot regions (see [section 5.2](#)) and be one of the following entity types:
 - a company incorporated in Australia
 - a company incorporated by guarantee
 - an incorporated trustee on behalf of a trust
 - an incorporated association
 - a partnership
 - a registered charity or not-for-profit organisation
 - an individual
 - an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Corporation registered under the [Corporations \(Aboriginal and /or Torres Strait Islander\) Act 2006](#)
 - persons
 - a sole trader

Eligible applicants must also satisfy the following requirements:

- Your *property* must be at least partly in one of the eligible C+B Pilot regions (see [section 5.2](#) below).
- Your property must be predominantly used for agricultural purposes. A property is predominantly used for agricultural purposes if, under the applicable state or territory planning laws, the majority of the land is zoned for agricultural land uses and, at the time of application, the land is used to operate a commercial agricultural enterprise.
- You must have the legal right to control how the project area is used (e.g. you must hold freehold or leasehold title, or exclusive possession native title, to the land on which your project will be located). If you are a lessee, the term of your lease must run at least for the duration of the C+B agreement, otherwise you must apply jointly with the holder of the freehold title.
- You must be willing and able to undertake a [new ERF environmental plantings method project](#).

- You must meet the participant obligations under the ERF as outlined on the CER's website (<http://www.cleanenergyregulator.gov.au/ERF/Want-to-participate-in-the-Emissions-Reduction-Fund/Planning-a-project/participant-obligations>).
- You must provide a commitment to act with the utmost good faith in your engagements with the program.
- You cannot submit more than three complete applications in total. If you submit more than three applications, only the first three will be considered and the remainder will be rendered ineligible.

Eligible projects must satisfy the following requirements

- All projects must be located entirely within a pilot region.
- Projects can comprise one or more planting areas. The planting areas associated with a project can be located on different properties and different land titles but must be located within the same C+B Pilot region.
- Projects must cover an area between 5 and 200 hectares.
- The project must satisfy the eligible offset project registration requirements under the ERF, including the requirements under the [ERF environmental planting method](#) and must not already be registered.
- Project activities must not have commenced.
- The environmental plantings must be carried out in accordance with the [C+B planting protocols](#) for the relevant region. The protocols specify the location, dimensions, configuration and composition of plantings and are designed to ensure projects generate the maximum possible biodiversity benefits. The protocols contain rules about the proximity of plantings to houses and other infrastructure. These rules are designed to reduce the bushfire risk associated with plantings.
- Projects must not receive financial or other support for the establishment of the plantings under another federal, state/territory or local government environment program, other than the ERF.

For more information, see the requirements for the [ERF environmental planting method](#), guide to the reforestation by environmental or mallee planting ERF method. You can test your eligibility for the ERF using the Clean Energy Regulator's [Interactive Emissions Reduction Fund Questionnaire](#).

5 What the grant money can be used for

5.1 Eligible grant activities

Eligible grant activities associated with the professional advice grant are seeking professional advice on your C+B Pilot project proposal. This includes, but is not limited to legal, financial, carbon or agronomical advice (contact the department if you are unsure).

Eligible grant activities associated with the biodiversity payment are broadly defined as activities which are reasonably required to establish, protect and enhance the biodiverse environmental plantings within your project area, as set out in these guidelines.

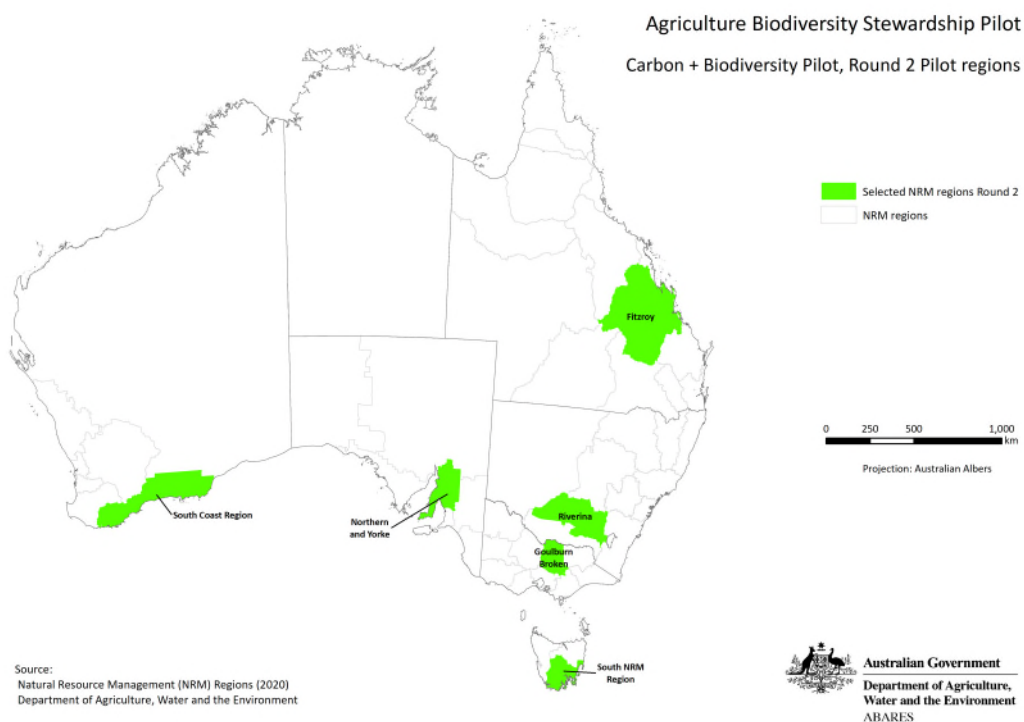
5.2 Eligible locations

To be eligible to participate in the C+B Pilot Round 2, your project must be in one of 6 eligible NRM/LLS regions. If you are unsure about the precise location of the boundary, please confirm it with your local NRM/LLS organisation.

- Fitzroy Basin in Queensland.
- Riverina in New South Wales.
- Goulburn Broken in Victoria.
- Southern in Tasmania.
- Northern and Yorke in South Australia.
- South Coast in Western Australia.

The 6 eligible NRM regions were chosen to test the pilot across a range of farming systems, vegetation types and jurisdictions to generate the necessary data to effectively trial the pilot's policy objectives. Consideration was given to how the datasets and processes developed in Round 1 could be further tested when selecting eligible Round 2 NRM regions. Round 1 NRM regions are not eligible to participate in Round 2.

Figure 1 Map of eligible C+B Round 2 regions



5.3 What the grant money cannot be used for

The grant money cannot be used to fund activities that breach any land management, environmental or other law or regulation applicable to that parcel of land. The money cannot be used for activities that are already funded on an ongoing basis by a third party or activities that commenced prior to the grant agreement being finalised, such as capital costs.

6 The assessment criteria

All eligible applications will be given a benefit-cost score, where the modelled biodiversity benefit is divided by the biodiversity payment (cost). Applications are then ranked from highest to lowest benefit-cost score. Successful applicants will be those with the most competitive benefit-cost scores. The assessment panel will also consider the objective of properly trialling the pilot across a diversity of regions and settings ([section 8](#)).

The biodiversity benefit score is a modelled score of the projected regional biodiversity improvements that are likely to result from the project activities proposed by the applicant.

- The biodiversity benefit score assigned to a project will reflect the predicted benefit of the proposed project activities to vegetation condition for biodiversity across the site and adjacent land, as well as the value of that condition change to biodiversity conservation across the region.
- The score will be calculated based on several factors, including the size and shape of the proposed planting areas, the location of the areas, their association with threatened species and ecosystems, their contributions to connectivity and corridors and their proximity to watercourses.

The cost component will be based on the modelled biodiversity payment (calculated as described in [section 3.1.1](#)) **or** the bid offer supplied by the applicant, whichever is more competitive.

Applicants should be mindful of the competitive nature of the C+B Pilot when designing their project and submitting an application. There are 3 key ways to improve the competitiveness of a project:

- nominate a lower, competitive bid offer
- providing in-kind contributions to the project. This can be done by submitting lower cost estimates for nominated project activities in your application
- design projects that will maximise biodiversity benefit (e.g. consider the planting type (species to be used), size and shape of the proposed planting areas, the location of the areas, their association with threatened species and ecosystems, their contributions to connectivity and corridors and their proximity to watercourses)

A competitive, transparent and fair process will be used to assess and select projects to ensure the C+B Pilot delivers biodiversity improvements that are value for money and achieve biodiversity outcomes. The decision maker reserves the right to distribute grants across regions that may not be strictly in accordance with ranking.

7 How to apply

Before applying, you must read and understand this program document and the checklist on our website.

We strongly recommend that during the process you seek independent professional advice about your participation in this Pilot, potentially including financial, legal, agronomy and carbon project specialists.

Application timelines

Round 2 Applications open 16 December 2021

Round 2 Applications close 3 March 2022

Table 1 How to apply for the C+B Pilot Round 2

To apply you must:
1. Read C+B Pilot material, confirm your eligibility and plan your project. If you have any concerns at this point, please contact your NRM organisation or the department to discuss before commencing your application (contact details at Section 7.3)

To apply you must:

2. The ERF environmental plantings method has requirements that should be taken into account. An overview of the requirements under the ERF environmental planting method is available [here](#).
3. Complete the C+B application through the National Stewardship Trading Platform accessed at agsteward.com.au
4. In the C+B application you will be asked to:
 - » Map your proposed C+B project area to indicate the size and location of the plantings using the planning tool.
 - » Provide your personal details including your postal address and the address of the property on which the project will be located as well as the lot number.
 - » Provide details for your proposed planting including (where applicable)
 - Your choice of mixed native or local native as outlined in the planting protocols
 - The number of mature native trees that will be retained within the planting area
 - The current vegetation cover in the planting area
 - Site preparation (weed control) method (spot spray, boom spray or other)
 - Soil preparation method (manual digging, deep ripping or discing)
 - Planting method (manual tubestock planting, mechanical tubestock planting, or direct seeding)
 - Tree protection method (fencing, guards or no protection)
 - Annual management regime (watering, grazing, weeding and pest control).
 - » Submit cost estimates for your project including
 - Site preparation (weed control)
 - Soil preparation
 - Tubestock or seed, and total planting costs
 - Tree guards and fencing
 - Recurrent management (confined to weeding, pest control and watering)
 - Freight costs for materials
 - (optional) Submit bid price for biodiversity payment. Submitting a bid price may increase your chances of being successful in the application process.
 - Signify your commitment to act with the utmost good faith in all engagements with the program.
 - Confirm you are the owner, lease holder or exclusive possession native title owner of the property and that it is predominantly used for agricultural purposes. If the property is held by a Trust or multiple owners, list the names of all owners or Trust.

Applicants should ensure the project area is mapped as accurately as possible because information on the location and characteristics of your project area will be used to generate their payment offer or test the competitiveness of their bid price.

To apply you must:

To assist with project planning, the mapping tool will provide an indicative estimate of the anticipated carbon sequestration in the planting areas (tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂-e)). This estimate is not a projection of the ACCUs the project is likely to receive – it is an indicative estimate of the carbon sequestration in an environmental planting project on the site under average climate conditions.

7.1 What to consider when submitting your costs and making a bid offer

To help estimate these costs, a price guide is available that provides an indicative price for each component of your project.

The cost estimates must not include the cost of management actions that are already required to be carried out by or under a law of the Commonwealth or a state or territory, or are already funded under another Australian Government, state, territory or local government environment program.

The online application will also allow you to submit a bid price for the biodiversity payment you would be willing to accept to undertake the project. Applicants do not have to submit a bid price, but this could increase your chances of being successful.

7.2 Requirement to act with utmost good faith

The requirement to act with the utmost good faith in all engagements with the program is intended to ensure participants embrace and support the objectives of the C+B Pilot. The C+B Pilot is trying to improve public good environmental outcomes, while providing new market opportunities for the agricultural sector. These objectives can only be realised if participants engage with the program in a collaborative manner.

You are responsible for ensuring that your application addresses the eligibility criteria and is complete and accurate. Applications that contain false, misleading or incomplete information may be excluded from consideration. Giving false or misleading information is also an offence under the *Criminal Code Act 1995 (Cth)*.

You must notify us if there are any key changes to your organisation or its business activities, particularly if they affect your ability to meet your obligations under the project, carry on business or pay debts due. The legal agreement will contain provisions that apply if you sell the land on which the project is established.

Check your application carefully before submitting it. If you find an error in your application after submitting it, you should contact us immediately at agstewardship@awe.gov.au or 1800 329 055.

You cannot change your application after the closing date and time.

If we find an error or information that is missing, we may ask for clarification or additional information from you that will not change the nature of your application. However, we can refuse to accept any additional information from you that would change your submission after the application closing time.

You should keep a copy of your application. This can be downloaded from the National Stewardship Trading Platform application portal.

We will acknowledge that we have received your application within 2 to 3 working days.

7.3 Timing of grant opportunity processes

You must submit your application/s between the published opening and closing dates

Late applications will not be assessed except in exceptional circumstances

Please note that if an election is called the department will enter a caretaker period. This could impact timing. The timing below is indicative.

Table 1: Indicative timing

Activity	Timeframe
Applications open	11 weeks
Assessment of applications and notify successful applicants	4 weeks
Successful applicants notified and sign participation agreement.	Second quarter 2022 (or April-June 2022) Participation agreement should be signed within 4 weeks of receiving notice of a successful application.
Seek professional advice	Second quarter 2022 (or April-June 2022) Advice must be sought before signing C+B project agreement.
ERF registration	Registration must be complete to sign the C+B Project agreement and receive the biodiversity payment. Registration can take up to 90 days.
Sign C+B project agreement and receive Biodiversity Payment offer by signing	Within 6 months of receiving notice of a successful application. To sign and receive the first payment evidence of unconditional ERF registration must be provided. Note: An extension to the 6-month period may be granted to participants who are unable to register under the ERF within the 6 month period if reasonable efforts have been made to progress registration.
Undertake plantings	Within 9 months of signing the C+B project agreement, unless an extension is provided due to drought or other factors that are beyond the control of the applicant.
End date of project agreement	25 years after the C+B project agreement is signed.
ERF Permanence end date	25 or 100 years from ERF project start date.

7.4 Questions during the application process

If you have any questions during the application period, your first point of contact is your NRM/LLS organisation.

You can also contact the department by email at: agstewardship@awe.gov.au or via phone at 1800 329 055.

Updated frequently asked questions and their answers will be published on GrantConnect.

Applications will be subject to an initial screening to determine whether the project and applicant meet the eligibility requirements. Applications that are eligible will be assessed and ranked in accordance with the process detailed in this section

8 The grant selection process

8.1 Assessment of project applications

Section 6 determines the assessment criteria and how value for money should be determined.

When the assessment panel meets, they will consider your application on its merits, based on:

- how well it meets the criteria;
- how it compares to other applications as judged by analysis of its cost effectiveness; and
- whether it provides value with relevant money, as judged by cost effectiveness analysis and proper testing of the protocols across all eligible regions to ensure robust testing of the pilot design and methodology in a range of farming systems and vegetation types.

8.2 Who will assess applications?

The Minister for Agriculture will establish an assessment panel, chaired by a senior officer of the department. The panel will include the chair, 2 departmental employees, and 2 specialist advisors from the ANU.

An independent probity advisor will support the selection advisory panel, and other experts may be invited by the chair in a non-voting capacity.

The selection advisory panel will recommend which projects should be successful to the decision maker.

Where external experts or advisors are part of the assessment process and are not a Commonwealth Official, they will be expected to perform their duties in accordance with the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines ([CGRGs](#)).

8.3 Who will approve grants?

After considering the advice from the assessment panel, the Minister for Agriculture will decide which projects receive offers and the terms of the offers. The Minister may choose to accept or reject the panel's recommendations, based on their judgement of what is in the public interest. The Minister will seek advice or otherwise be informed about the risks of deviating from advice from the assessment panel.

9 Notification of application outcomes

We will advise you of the outcome of your application in writing. If you are successful, we will advise you of any specific conditions attached to the agreements.

9.1 Feedback on your application

If you are unsuccessful, you may ask for feedback by contacting the department. There is no appeal mechanism for decisions to approve or not approve a grant.

10 Successful grant applications

10.1 The grant agreements

Successful applicants will be notified and sent a biodiversity payment offer, along with two agreements: a participation agreement and C+B project agreement.

Signing of the participation agreement will entitle participants to a payment for seeking professional advice up to the value of \$10,000 and oblige participants to share certain information with the department about their decisions making process and details of the professional advice sought (this helps us learn about the pilot as a step towards establishing a market). Participants have 4 weeks to sign their participation agreement.

The C+B project agreement will require the contracted party to establish a C+B project within 9 months of signing the agreement, unless an extension is provided due to drought or other factors that are beyond the control of the applicant such as unavailability of seedlings in that time. The C+B Project agreement is a 25-year agreement (lifetime of the C+B project). Participants have 6 months to sign their C+B project agreement, during which they seek professional advice and register with the ERF. ERF registration process can take up to 90 days. An extension may be granted to participants who are unable to register under the ERF within the 6-month period if reasonable efforts have been made to progress registration. An extension is at the discretion of the department.

Upon receiving the offer, applicants will be given the opportunity to propose good faith variations to the details of the project – for example, minor modifications to the size of the project area. Any proposed modifications will be accepted or rejected at the department's discretion, to ensure that it does not compromise the integrity and fairness of the selection process. Where variations are made to the project, the payment offer may also change.

If successful applicants do not accept the biodiversity payment offer and wish to find alternative funding from a private buyer, the department can provide additional guidance on how to list a C+B project on the National Stewardship Trading Platform.

10.2 How we pay for professional advice

This is a one-off payment to all successful applicants to cover some of the costs of seeking professional advice (legal, financial, carbon and/or agronomical service). Advice must be sought before accepting biodiversity payment offer and signing C+B project agreement. Payments will be made up to \$10,000. Participants will need to provide information about the type of advice they sought to receive the payment.

10.3 How we pay the biodiversity payment

The biodiversity payment under the C+B Project agreement will be made in 2 instalments. The payment schedule will be as follows and recognises that most costs associated with environmental plantings are incurred when establishing the project. All payments will be contingent on satisfying prescribed project milestones.

Table 4 Biodiversity payment schedule

Payment number	Amount	Project milestone
Payment 1	Up to 80% of Biodiversity Payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • registration of the project under the ERF (with an unconditional project declaration from the CER)
Payment 2	Remaining amount of the Biodiversity Payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing evidence that the plantings have been established in accordance with the project's contracted specifications and the C+B planting protocol; and • providing itemised data to us about the cost of establishing the plantings in accordance with the terms of the legal agreement.

10.4 Grants Payments and GST

Payments will be GST inclusive. If you are registered for the [Goods and Services Tax \(GST\)](#), where applicable, we will add GST to your grant payment and issue you with a [Recipient Created Tax Invoice](#).

Grants are assessable income for taxation purposes, unless exempted by a taxation law. We recommend you seek independent professional advice on your taxation obligations or seek assistance from the [Australian Taxation Office](#).³ This advice could be paid for with your professional advice payment. We do not provide advice on your particular taxation circumstances.

11 Announcement of grants

If successful, your grant will be listed on the GrantConnect website 21 calendar days after the date of effect as required by Section 5.3 of the [CGRGs](#).

12 How we monitor your grant activity

12.1 Keeping us informed

You should let us know if anything is likely to affect your project.

You must also inform us of any changes to your:

- name
- addresses
- nominated contact details
- bank account details.

If you become aware of a breach of terms and conditions under the legal agreement, you must contact us immediately.

³ <https://www.ato.gov.au/>

12.2 Reporting

The C+B Pilot aims to provide information, knowledge and experience on how to support and monetise on-farm biodiversity stewardship. To do this, information needs to be gathered and analysed from participants on the environmental and financial performance of their projects.

Consistent with this, successful applicants will be required to submit annual C+B Pilot reports on the financial and environmental performance of projects over their first 3 years. Over the remainder of the 25-year contract period, reports will be required to be submitted when participants' report under the ERF.

The C+B Pilot reporting requirements will be streamlined to reduce transaction costs for participants. The first 3 reports will be required to contain:

- evidence that plantings have been established in accordance with the project's contracted specifications and the C+B Pilot planting protocols (for example, prescribed tree and understory species have been planted in the appropriate places, proportions and configurations), and that contracted recurrent management actions have been undertaken
- information on the mortality rate of the plantings and the steps taken to address any significant mortality events
- itemised financial data on the project, including the costs of establishing the plantings and undertaking the contracted recurrent management actions, the sale price of ACCUs, the cost of audits, and the cost or time taken to complete reporting requirements

Prior to receiving the second payment of the C+B project agreement participants must provide a report with itemised data about the costs of establishing the planting.

The Australian Government may request further information or material on any significant development concerning the project, including significant delays or difficulties encountered or to clarify or otherwise support the information provided by the participant in a report.

12.3 Monitoring

Environmental planting projects initiated under the C+B Pilot will be required to:

- establish long-term monitoring plans and allow designated parties to access the sites for monitoring purposes
- allow designated parties to access the broader project areas for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

Monitoring visits will occur in accordance with a rotational scheme-wide monitoring schedule that ensures a proportion of projects are inspected each year and all projects are visited once every 3 years (or some other frequency we determine). If there is evidence of non-compliance with C+B Pilot requirements, projects may also be subject to additional spot visits.

The monitoring visits will serve 2 purposes.

- Check compliance with the program requirements without the need for third-party auditors. Participants will not be responsible for the cost of the visits.
- Improve scientific understanding of how environmental plantings affect biodiversity and the carbon accumulation rates in different types of environmental plantings.

Participants will receive an indicative schedule of monitoring visits and will be given at least 20 days notice before site visits.

Audits of the ERF eligible component of projects will be conducted in accordance with [CER auditing rules](#).

12.4 Pilot agreement variations

As noted in [section 10](#), upon receiving the offer, applicants can apply to us to vary their project. Contracted parties can also apply to us to vary their project.

Applications for project variations will be accepted or rejected at the department's discretion. In making decisions on applications for variations, we will consider the nature and extent of the variation, the implications of any changes for the integrity of the application and selection process, and the obligation for program participants to act in good faith. Participant must not vary the project or the planting Area without the Australian Government's prior written consent.

Once a project is registered under the ERF, any variation in the boundaries of a project or planting area that requires a corresponding variation of the project registered under the ERF will only be considered after the variation has been accepted by the CER. Further information on project variations under the ERF can be found on the CER's [making changes to your project webpage](#).

In addition to variations in the specifics of projects, under the agreement, participants must notify us of any material changes in your organisation or its business activities that are relevant to the project. This includes any changes to name, postal address, email, phone numbers and bank account details. Participants must also notify us of any material non-compliance with the terms and conditions of your C+B Pilot agreement or ERF requirements.

12.5 Data sharing

If you are successful and exercise the option to initiate a project, you will be required to share (on a confidential basis) data on the financial and environmental performance of your project, including expenses and revenues associated with project activities and potential sale of ACCUs. This is important because it is a C+B Pilot and information is needed to build and improve the system.

12.6 Audit or compliance visits

If there is evidence of non-compliance with C+B Pilot requirements, we may ask you to provide an independently audited statement about project activities and/or the information contained in C+B Pilot reports.

12.7 Record keeping

We may also inspect the records you are required to keep under the C+B Project agreement.

12.8 Evaluation

We will evaluate the C+B Pilot Round 2 to measure how well the outcomes and objectives have been achieved. We may use information from your application and reports for this purpose. We may also interview you, or ask you for more information to help us understand how the grant impacted you and to evaluate how effective the program was in achieving its outcomes.

We may contact you up to one year after you finish your grant for more information to assist with this evaluation.

12.9 Acknowledgement

If you make a public statement about your participation in the Pilot, we require you to acknowledge your participation as follows:

'This project participated in the Australian Government Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot Round 2' (or another form of text agreed by us).

13 Probity

The Australian Government will make sure that the grant opportunity process is fair, according to the published guidelines, incorporates appropriate safeguards against fraud, unlawful activities and other inappropriate conduct and is consistent with the CGRGs.

These guidelines may be changed from time-to-time by the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. When this happens, the revised guidelines will be published on GrantConnect.

13.1 Enquiries and feedback

If you are dissatisfied with the way your application assessment was handled, you may provide your complaint to us. All complaints must be provided in writing.

Any questions about the decisions for this C+B Pilot program should be sent to agstewardship@awe.gov.au or 1800 329 055.

Any questions on the ERF can be sent to the Clean Energy Regulator at enquiries@cleanenergyregulator.gov.au or 1300 553 542.

If you do not agree with the way we have handled your complaint, you may complain to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint unless the matter has first been raised directly with us.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman can be contacted on:

Phone (Toll free): 1300 362 072

Email: ombudsman@ombudsman.gov.au

Website: www.ombudsman.gov.au

13.2 Conflicts of interest

Any conflicts of interest could affect the performance of the C+B Pilot program. There may be a conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, if our staff, the ANU's staff, any member of a committee or advisor and/or you or any of your personnel:

- has a professional, commercial or personal relationship with a party who is able to influence the application selection process, such as an Australian Government officer (or member of an external panel)
- has a relationship with or interest in, an organisation which is likely to interfere with or restrict the applicants from carrying out the proposed activities fairly and independently, or
- has a relationship with, or interest in, an organisation that will receive personal gain because the organisation receives a payment under the program.

You will be asked to declare as part of your application, any perceived or existing conflicts of interests, or that to the best of your knowledge there is no conflict of interest.

If you later identify an actual, potential, or perceived conflict of interest, you must inform us in writing immediately.

Conflicts of interest for Australian Government staff will be handled as set out in the Australian [Public Service Code of Conduct \(Section 13\(7\)\)](#) of the [Public Service Act 1999](#). Committee members and other officials including the decision maker must also declare any conflicts of interest.

13.3 Privacy

We treat your personal information according to the [Privacy Act 1988](#) and the [Australian Privacy Principles](#). This includes letting you know:

- what personal information we collect
- why we collect your personal information
- who we give your personal information to

Personal information means information or an opinion about an identified individual, or an individual who is reasonably identifiable.

Sensitive information is a subset of personal information and includes any information or opinion about an individual's racial or ethnic origin, political opinion or association, religious beliefs or affiliations, philosophical beliefs, sexual preferences or practices, trade or professional associations.

Your personal information can only be disclosed to someone else for the primary purpose for which it was collected, unless an exemption applies.

The Australian Government may also use and disclose information about grant applicants and grant recipients under this grant opportunity in any other Australian Government business or function. This includes disclosing grant information on GrantConnect as required for reporting purposes and giving information to the Australian Taxation Office for compliance purposes.

We may share the information you give us with other Commonwealth entities for purposes including government administration, research or service delivery, according to Australian laws.

For further information see our [privacy policy](#).

13.4 Confidential Information

Other than information available in the public domain, you agree not to disclose to any person, other than us, any confidential information relating to the application and/or agreement, without our prior written approval. The obligation will not be breached where you are required by law, Parliament or a stock exchange to disclose the relevant information or where the relevant information is publicly available (other than through breach of a confidentiality or non-disclosure obligation).

We may at any time, require you to arrange for you or your employees, agents or subcontractors, to give a written undertaking relating to nondisclosure of our confidential information in a form we consider acceptable.

We will keep any information in connection with the agreement confidential to the extent that it meets all of these conditions:

- 1) you clearly identify the information as confidential and explain why we should treat it as confidential
- 2) the information is commercially sensitive and
- 3) revealing the information would cause unreasonable harm to you or someone else.

We will not be in breach of any confidentiality agreement if the information is disclosed to:

- the selection assessment panel and other Australian Government employees and contractors to help us manage the C+B Pilot program effectively
- employees and contractors of our department so we can research, assess, monitor and analyse our programs and activities

- employees and contractors of other Australian Government agencies for any purposes, including government administration, research or service delivery
- other Australian Government, state, territory or local government agencies in program reports and consultations
- the Auditor-General, Ombudsman or Privacy Commissioner
- the responsible minister or parliamentary secretary
- a House or a Committee of the Australian Parliament.
- the CER to support the administration of the ERF component
- your NRM organisation to assist with your consideration of you Biodiversity Payment offer or ERF Registration

The contract may also include any specific requirements about special categories of information collected, created or held under the agreement.

13.5 Freedom of information

All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about this grant opportunity, are subject to the [Freedom of Information Act 1982](#) (FOI Act).

The purpose of the FOI Act is to give members of the public rights of access to information held by the Australian Government and its entities. Under the FOI Act, members of the public can seek access to documents held by the Australian Government. This right of access is limited only by the exceptions and exemptions necessary to protect essential public interests and private and business affairs of persons in respect of whom the information relates.

14 Glossary

Term	Definition
accountable authority	see subsection 12(2) of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013
administering entity	when an entity that is not responsible for the policy, is responsible for the administration of part or all of the grant administration processes
assessment criteria	are the specified principles or standards, against which applications will be judged. These criteria are also used to assess the merits of proposals and, in the case of a competitive grant opportunity, to determine application rankings.
Australian Carbon Credit Unit	Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCU) are credits that represent one tonne of verified carbon emissions or equivalent abatement achieved by eligible offsets projects. ACCUs are created and issued by the Clean Energy Regulator in accordance with Section 147 of the <i>Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Act 2011</i> .
biodiversity payment offers	the amount you will be offered to undertake your project, if successful through the assessment process.

Term	Definition
biodiversity score	a score of the projected regional biodiversity improvements that are likely to result from the project proposed by an applicant.
Carbon estimation areas (CEAs)	Eligible planting areas are stratified as carbon estimation areas (CEAs) for the purpose of calculating carbon abatement generated by the project as per the environmental plantings method requirements.
Clean Energy Regulator	The Clean Energy Regulator is the Australian Government body responsible for administering legislation that will reduce carbon emissions and increase the use of clean energy.
commencement date	the expected start date for the grant activity
Commonwealth entity	a Department of State, or a Parliamentary Department, or a listed entity or a body corporate established by a law of the Commonwealth. See subsections 10(1) and (2) of the PGPA Act
Commonwealth Grants Rules and Guidelines (CGRGs)	establish the overarching Commonwealth grants policy framework and articulate the expectations for all non-corporate Commonwealth entities in relation to grants administration. Under this overarching framework, non-corporate Commonwealth entities undertake grants administration based on the mandatory requirements and key principles of grants administration.
completion date	the expected date that the grant activity must be completed and the grant spent by
co-sponsoring entity	when two or more entities are responsible for the policy and the appropriation for outcomes associated with it
date of effect	can be the date on which a grant agreement is signed or a specified starting date. Where there is no grant agreement, entities must publish information on individual grants as soon as practicable.
decision maker	the person who makes a decision to award a grant
Emissions Reduction Fund	The Emissions Reduction Fund (ERF) is a voluntary scheme that supports investment in carbon abatement projects across all sectors of the Australian economy. It is helping Australia to meet its emissions reduction targets, as well as providing business and employment opportunities. In addition to carbon abatement, many ERF projects provide important environmental, economic, social, and cultural co-benefits. The ERF is administered by Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator.

Term	Definition
eligibility criteria	refer to the mandatory criteria which must be met to qualify for a grant. Assessment criteria may apply in addition to eligibility criteria.
grant	for the purposes of the CGRGs, a 'grant' is an arrangement for the provision of financial assistance by the Commonwealth or on behalf of the Commonwealth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. under which relevant money⁴ or other Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) money⁵ is to be paid to a grantee other than the Commonwealth; and b. which is intended to help address one or more of the Australian Government's policy outcomes while assisting the grantee achieve its objectives.
grant activity/activities	refers to the project/tasks/services that the grantee is required to undertake
grant agreement	sets out the relationship between the parties to the agreement, and specifies the details of the grant
GrantConnect	is the Australian Government's whole-of-government grants information system, which centralises the publication and reporting of Commonwealth grants in accordance with the CGRGs
grant opportunity	refers to the specific grant round or process where a Commonwealth grant is made available to potential grantees. Grant opportunities may be open or targeted, and will reflect the relevant grant selection process.
grant program	a 'program' carries its natural meaning and is intended to cover a potentially wide range of related activities aimed at achieving government policy outcomes. A grant program is a group of one or more grant opportunities under a single Portfolio Budget Statement Program.
grantee	the individual/organisation which has been selected to receive a grant
National Stewardship Trading Platform	online platform that helps buyers and sellers of biodiversity and carbon projects to find each other.

⁴ Relevant money is defined in the PGPA Act. See section 8, Dictionary.

⁵ Other CRF money is defined in the PGPA Act. See section 105, Rules in relation to other CRF money.

Term	Definition
PBS Program	described within the entity's Portfolio Budget Statement , PBS programs each link to a single outcome and provide transparency for funding decisions. These high-level PBS programs often comprise a number of lower level, more publicly recognised programs, some of which will be Grant Programs. A PBS Program may have more than one Grant Program associated with it, and each of these may have one or more grant opportunities.
project (or C+B project)	a project that aims to establish biodiverse carbon project in a project area under the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot.
project area	areas in which grant activities are carried out. areas of the Carbon + Biodiversity project in which project management activities are carried out, where biodiverse planting protocols are applied.
selection criteria	comprise eligibility criteria and assessment criteria.
value with money	<p>value with money in this document refers to 'value with relevant money' which is a judgement based on the grant proposal representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of public resources and determined from a variety of considerations.</p> <p>When administering a grant opportunity, an official should consider the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each proposal including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the quality of the project proposal and activities; • fitness for purpose of the proposal in contributing to government objectives; • that the absence of a grant is likely to prevent the grantee and government's outcomes being achieved; and • the potential grantee's relevant experience and performance history.

