



CARING
FOR
OUR
COUNTRY

SA 2011-12

Environmental Stewardship

Multiple Ecological
Communities Project

Information Booklet

PEPPERMINT BOX
GRASSY WOODLAND

IRON-GRASS NATURAL
TEMPERATE GRASSLAND



Foreword

Caring for our Country — the Environmental Stewardship Program was established in 2007-08 to assist private land managers to maintain and improve the condition and extent of threatened ecological communities and other matters of national environmental significance listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* on private land.

The Environmental Stewardship Program uses market-based instruments to purchase environmental services from land managers. To date the preferred instrument has been the reverse auction whereby land managers bid competitively to win contracts to improve targeted environmental assets on their land.

Five reverse auction rounds were conducted between 2008-09 and 2009-10 targeting the critically endangered white box, yellow box and Blakely's red gum grassy woodland and derived native grasslands ecological community (known as box gum grassy woodland) across eight NRM regions in New South Wales and Queensland. This ecological community was targeted initially because of its extensive geographic range and hence the potential large market of land managers to undertake actions on private land to improve the condition of these remnants.

From the time of its establishment the Australian Government envisaged that the Environmental Stewardship Program would support more than one ecological community. In 2010-11, the Program began targeting multiple ecological communities. In South Australia these are peppermint box grassy woodland and iron-grass natural temperate grassland.

Prior to European settlement these ecological communities were extensively distributed within their geographic range but due to clearing and agricultural practices the remnants of these communities are highly fragmented and only a small proportion remains in good condition. It is therefore important that the remaining vegetation stands of these communities are actively managed to maintain and enhance their condition and extent as well as contribute to the ongoing conservation of the species that rely on them for food and shelter.

The Multiple Ecological Communities (MEC) Project provides eligible land managers, who successfully bid, with the opportunity to receive Australian Government funding for up to fifteen years to actively manage and conserve one or more target communities on their land. Participation in the Project is entirely voluntary.

This booklet has been prepared to assist land managers who are considering participating in the Multiple Ecological Communities Project in 2011-2012 to better understand the criteria for participation, what constitutes the target communities, the range of management actions that can be undertaken to maintain or improve their condition, the processes involved from the time of nominating for the Project up until a funding agreement is signed, and monitoring arrangements.

Thank you for your interest in the Multiple Ecological Communities Project. We trust that you find this booklet useful and after considering the information herein, you will be motivated to participate in the Project, like the 270 land managers who have already signed up to protect ecological communities through previous auction rounds and in doing so, have established an environmental enterprise to complement their traditional farming enterprise.

Charlie Zammit

Assistant Secretary
Biodiversity Conservation Branch

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01

Environmental Stewardship Program Multiple Ecological Communities Project

What is the Environmental Stewardship Program?

The Environmental Stewardship Program is part of the Australian Government's Caring for our Country initiative.

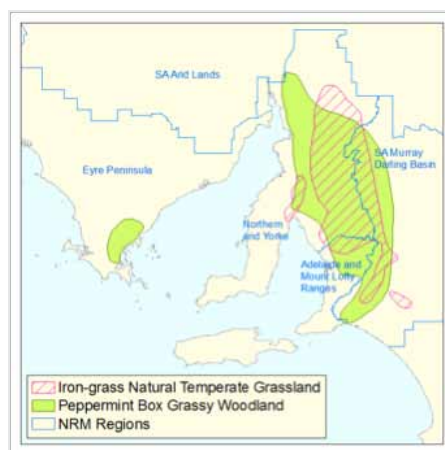
The objective of the Environmental Stewardship Program is:

to maintain and improve the condition and extent of targeted high public value environmental assets on private land.

Depending on the assets that are targeted, the Environmental Stewardship Program aims to achieve a range of outcomes including:

- improved habitat across the landscape
- increased viability, integrity and buffers to high quality remnants for species, ecological communities, Ramsar wetlands and World Heritage Areas
- improvements to the long-term protection of nationally endangered species and ecological communities
- improvement in the condition and function of ecological communities
- enduring changes in land manager attitudes and behaviour towards environmental protection and sustainable land management practices.

Environmental Stewardship Program funding is allocated through a reverse auction process where land managers bid competitively with other participating land managers for funding for management activities on their site.



In 2007-08 the Environmental Stewardship Program began by targeting a single ecological community in New South Wales and Queensland through the Box Gum Grassy Woodland Project. In 2010-11 the Program expanded to target multiple ecological communities in New South Wales and South Australia through the Multiple Ecological Communities (MEC) Project.

In 2011-12 the MEC Project is again targeting the following two ecological communities in South Australia:

- peppermint box grassy woodland of South Australia (known as peppermint box grassy woodland)
- iron-grass natural temperate grassland of South Australia (known as iron-grass grassland)

occurring on private land in the Northern and Yorke, Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges and South Australian Murray Darling Basin NRM Board regions of South Australia.

The following map shows the possible extent of the target ecological communities.

Participation is voluntary and land managers can withdraw from the Project at any stage up until a funding agreement is executed.

Land managers are invited to submit bids to undertake specific management activities that look after and improve the quality and extent of contracted areas of the target ecological communities on their land.

Through the MEC Project, land managers are also encouraged to establish and manage buffers and conserve paddock trees that provide connectivity between existing remnants of the target ecological communities, where these are important to reduce the threat of isolation and improve habitat across the landscape.

The MEC Project is supported by a purpose built tool designed to provide a conservation value score for one or more ecological communities. The more management actions that the land manager agrees to undertake (including agreeing to a covenant and/or management of buffers and areas connecting remnants), the higher the conservation value score of their site.

Successful land managers receive an annual payment for between 10 and 15 years providing they undertake agreed management actions, and complete and return annual reports.

02

Identifying the target ecological communities

An ecological community is a group of species (plants, animals and microorganisms) that naturally occur in the same place. Interactions between the species are also an important part of an ecological community. Soil, slope, aspect, water and climate also contribute to where an ecological community occurs and which species are found in it.

Peppermint box grassy woodland

Location of peppermint box grassy woodland

The peppermint box grassy woodland ecological community, as listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, is only found in South Australia. It is a low, open to dense woodland that typically occurs on gentle to moderate slopes, hilltops and adjacent plains. The soil types range from sandy-loam to clay-loam. The annual rainfall is between 310mm and 610mm per year. It occurs from the southern Flinders Ranges to Lake Alexandrina and in parts of the Eyre Peninsula.

Vegetation structure and plant species of peppermint box grassy woodland

In peppermint box grassy woodland, peppermint box (*Eucalyptus odorata*) is the dominant overstorey tree and makes up at least 50% of the total canopy cover. Other tree species that may be present include grey box (*Eucalyptus microcarpa*), South Australian blue gum (*Eucalyptus leucoxylon*), sugar gum (*Eucalyptus cladocalyx*), Mallee box (*Eucalyptus porosa*), drooping sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*), white cypress-pine (*Callitris glaucophylla*) and southern cypress pine (*Callitris gracilis*).

The understorey consists mainly of grasses and herbs, and varies from being fairly dense and diverse in open sites to sparse in more densely wooded sites. The shrub layer is often sparse, but may have a cover of up to 30%.

The most common grasses, herbs and shrubs include wallaby grasses (*Austrodanthonia* spp.), spear grasses (*Austrostipa* spp.), iron-grasses (*Lomandra* spp.), black-anther flax lily (*Dianella revoluta*), wood-sorrel (*Oxalis perennans*), chocolate lily (*Arthropodium strictum*), sweet bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) and golden wattle (*Acacia pycnantha*).

Peppermint box is a spreading tree with rough bark on the trunk and usually on the branches. The bark is thick, fibrous and grey-brown except on the smallest branches where it is smooth. The adult leaves are dull, blue-green when new, but become glossy and green with age. The fruit are cup-shaped to slightly barrel shaped. The flowers are white.



- 1 Peppermint box
Photo: Brooker & Kleinig
© Australian National Botanic Gardens
- 2 Peppermint box grassy woodland
Photo: Anthelia Bond
- 3 Peppermint box fruit
Photo: Jean Turner
- 4 Peppermint box flowers
Photo: Jean Turner



Iron-grass natural temperate grassland

Location of iron grass natural temperate grassland

The iron-grass natural temperate grassland ecological community, as listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, is only found in South Australia. It occurs from the southern Flinders Ranges to the Tailem Bend area.

Remaining patches of the iron-grass natural temperate grassland ecological community generally occur on the slopes of low hills, at altitudes above 380 metres. The soil types range from loam to clay loam, and surface pebbles are common. Rocky outcrops may also be present. The annual rainfall is between 280mm and 600mm per year.

Vegetation structure and plant species iron-grass natural temperate grassland

Iron-grass natural temperate grassland has very few or no trees and tall shrubs. The total cover of trees and tall shrubs must be less than 10%. Iron-grasses are hard-leaved lilies that form grass-like clumps or tussocks. Hard iron-grass (*Lomandra multiflora dura*) and scented iron-grass (*L. effusa*) are the two species most commonly found in Iron-grass Natural Temperate Grasslands. Hard iron-grass has grey-green, flat, rigid leaves. Scented iron-grass has flat or twisted leaves with two, small, sharp horns at the tip. The flowers are usually yellow (hard iron-grass) or white and scented (scented iron-grass) and are clustered on branched stems.

Iron-grasses (*Lomandra* spp.), specifically hard (or many-flowered) matrush (*L. multiflora dura*) and scented matrush (*L. effusa*), are a prominent and characteristic feature of the ecological community. Other perennial tussock grasses are present in the ground layer and native herbs and wildflowers grow in the spaces between tussocks. Chocolate lilies (*Arthropodium* spp.), bulbine lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*), yellow buttons (*Chrysocephalum apiculatum*), scaly buttons (*Leptorhynchus squamatus*), New Holland daisies (*Vittadinia* spp.) and pussytails (*Ptilotus spathulatus*) are just some of the wildflowers common in this ecological community.



5 Iron-grass natural temperate grassland
Photo: Jean Turner

6 Iron-grass natural temperate grassland
Photo: Andrew Allonson

7 *Lomandra effusa*
Photo: Jean Turner

8 Bulbine lily
Photo: Graham Hodge

9 Yellow buttons
Photo: Jean Turner



03

How can I get involved in the MEC project?

1. If, after attending an information session and/or having read this booklet, you consider that you meet the requirements to participate, have one or more of the target ecological communities on your property and you are prepared to undertake the management actions required to maintain or improve its condition then contact the delivery agent using the details in this booklet by the date advised.
2. A field officer employed by the delivery agent will contact you to arrange a site assessment or to discuss your site in more detail.
3. If a field officer visits your property they will assess your site and tell you whether the site is eligible and what condition the ecological community is in. The field officer will also discuss a range of management actions for the site. Some actions are mandatory and form the Standard Management Package; other actions are optional and, if agreed to, will increase the value of your site. The field officer will also discuss optional actions for land adjacent to these ecological communities to buffer them from external threats and to reduce the impacts of isolation on the ecological communities. You will also be asked if you want to place an in-perpetuity covenant (Heritage Agreement) on your site.
4. After the site visit and if your site is eligible for the MEC Project, the delivery agent will send you a record of site visit and a management booklet that shows the agreed area, the management actions you are willing to undertake and ways you can undertake the agreed management actions.
5. A pre-filled bid application form with your personal details and agreed management schedule will be developed and posted to you for you to insert your bid price when all site assessments have been completed. A copy of the draft funding agreement will be sent to you at that same time.
6. You must post your completed bid application form to the Tender Box address provided prior to the nominated date that will be advised by the delivery agent. Bids will be assessed by an evaluation panel and recommendations made to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The Minister makes the final decision as to which bids are successful.
7. The Australian Government will contract successful bidders to actively manage their target ecological community to maintain or improve its condition and to manage any buffers and/or connectivity areas that were agreed to. Contracted land managers will be required to undertake simple annual monitoring of their site and to provide an annual report on their activities.

04

Eligibility criteria

The delivery agent will fully explain the eligibility criteria to all interested participants. The Environmental Stewardship Program Guidelines for the Multiple Ecological Communities Project Round 2 are also available at www.nrm.gov.au/stewardship/mecp/mecp-sa.html and should be read in conjunction with this booklet. The Guidelines describe the objectives of the Project and eligibility criteria in detail.

Applicant requirements

To be eligible applicants must be the unconditional owner or lessee of private land at the time a site assessment is requested. If you are a lessee you will be asked to provide supporting documentation that shows you have a lease over the site for the length of the project (10 to 15 years) and a letter of authorisation signed by the owner and giving permission to undertake all management actions on the land that are required by the funding agreement.

Some people are not eligible to apply. These include:

- Delivery agent employees who are directly engaged in the delivery of the project (delivery agent includes those organisations directly contracted by the Commonwealth, or those subcontracted by an organisation directly contracted by the Commonwealth). Employees include permanent, non-ongoing employees, and temporary contractors.

- Commonwealth employees with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, or the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities who are directly engaged in the delivery of the project. Employees include permanent, non-ongoing employees, and temporary contractors.
- Spouses, cohabitants, co-owners, tenants, or business partners of any of the above.

Applicants may make only one bid per property. Bids covering more than one property will not be accepted.

Applicants must be Australian residents, registered in Australia for tax purposes, and have an Australian bank account.

Bid proposals above \$3.5 million will not be accepted.

Property requirements

Properties must be in one of the targeted South Australian NRM Board regions:

- Northern and Yorke
- Adelaide and Mt Lofty Ranges
- South Australian Murray Darling Basin.

Eligible properties must be privately owned through freehold or leasehold arrangements. As long as part of the property is within the boundary of the eligible NRM region the whole property will be eligible.



10 *Pterostylis despectans*
Photo: Jean Turner





How do I participate?

Ecological community requirements

Eligible sites will contain at least 2 hectares of peppermint box (*Eucalyptus odorata*) grassy woodland and/or 0.5 hectares of iron-grass (*Lomandra spp.*) natural temperate grassland.

If any part of the site is covered by an existing in-perpetuity conservation covenant (Heritage Agreement) then the site is still eligible. Funding will not be available for capital works or management activities that are already funded under the existing Heritage Agreement.

With the exception of those sites covered by a Heritage Agreement, sites to be contracted under the MEC Project must not be covered by an existing binding agreement (e.g. contract or legal agreement), or be receiving funding for activities similar to, or in conflict with, activities required under the Environmental Stewardship Program funding agreement.

Business entity requirements

The Australian Government can only enter into an agreement with one or more recognised legal entities. These include an individual or a company, an individual or company acting as a trustee, or individuals who have formed a partnership. At least one of the applicants must either own the site or have a lease on the property for the period of the proposed agreement.

If you have established a number of legal entities to manage your affairs, you should seek advice from your legal adviser or accountant as to which of those entities meets the requirements under the Project Guidelines before completing your bid application form. Once a bid application is evaluated no changes can be made to the legal entity who applied.

If you believe you have peppermint box or iron-grass on your property, and you would like to participate, then contact the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board – the Program's South Australian delivery agent.

Phone 1800 194 304
Email enquiries@samdbnrm.sa.gov.au
Post SA MDB NRM Board
PO Box 2343
Murray Bridge SA 5253

After you have registered your interest in the Project the delivery agent will appoint a field officer to conduct your site assessment. The field officer will contact you to discuss the project, determine your eligibility and make a time for the site assessment when you can be available to show them the site and discuss management actions.

You need to nominate the areas of the ecological community that you want to include in the Project from the outset. The field officer who visits your property will only assess areas of the communities that you nominate.

If a large number of requests for site assessments are received, they will be prioritised on a first in, first served basis – so register your interest quickly if you want to participate. Site assessments will be conducted in spring and early summer 2011. Contact the delivery agent for further details.

06

Site assessment

What happens during the site assessment?

When the field officer visits your property they will discuss and assess the areas you have nominated. They will also answer any questions you have during the site visit.

The field officer will need to confirm that your nominated areas are the target ecological community and meet the eligibility criteria. If the area is not eligible the field officer will not proceed with the site assessment and will advise you of their decision.

If the site is eligible the field officer will assess the condition of the site and the major threats inside and outside the nominated areas.

Information collected from your discussion and the site assessment will be entered into a tool known as the Conservation Value Measure. The tool will generate management recommendations for each site.

The field officer will discuss ecological condition of your site and the management recommendations with you. There are a group of standard management actions that you will have to undertake if your bid is successful and additional management actions that you can choose to undertake.

If you choose to undertake recommended additional management actions outside the perimeter of the threatened ecological community the field officer will need to confirm the boundaries of these secondary management units with you.

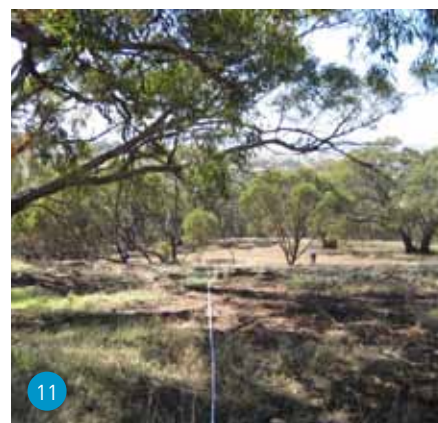
The field officer will also discuss whether you wish to enter into a Heritage Agreement over all or part of the nominated areas if your bid is successful. A Heritage Agreement provides a means of achieving conservation gains in perpetuity. Applications that nominate at least 30% of the area for a Heritage Agreement receive an additional score for the conservation gains expected from the site.

What happens after the site assessment?

The field officer will map your site before providing you with a record of the site visit, and a management booklet.

The field officer can discuss any issues you might have or alter the management schedule as necessary before your bid application is submitted, however, only one site assessment will be undertaken.

When site assessments have been completed a pre-filled bid application form with your personal details, maps and agreed management schedule will be developed and posted to you for you to insert your bid price. A copy of the draft funding agreement will be sent to you at the same time, for your information.



11 A 50 metre X 20 metre plot will be established to assess the condition of the site. *Photo: Emma Burns*

12 Plains wanderer
Photo: Jean Turner

07

Managing target ecological communities for conservation outcomes

The Australian Government expects land managers who are successful bidders under the Project to actively manage their contracted sites to maintain or improve the ecological condition for the duration of the funding agreement. This may include managing any agreed areas adjoining the identified target threatened ecological community to better protect the ecological community through reducing threats and increasing connectivity over the period of the agreement.

Active management means undertaking all works required under the agreement with the Australian Government, monitoring the site, observing changes in the condition of the ecological community arising from management and, in agreement with the Australian Government, modifying management where necessary and feasible.

This kind of management may require new knowledge and skills as the site is now managed primarily for the protection and enhancement of conservation values.

The Australian Government will pay successful land managers for up to 15 years for the cost of this active management. This payment may include capital and labour costs, and lost income from managing the site for biodiversity outcomes, so long as the active management is demonstrably beyond the land manager's normal regulatory responsibilities.

Successful land managers will be required to prepare a three year management strategy and submit it with their first annual report. The management strategy will outline how and when contracted management actions will be implemented, and will need to be revised and updated every three years.

All land managers who sign an agreement with the Australian Government will agree to undertake a Standard Management Package of activities to conserve their ecological community/ies.

Standard management package

The following management actions are required on all sites:

1. monitor and manage grazing pressure from domestic livestock
2. no new additional permanent infrastructure
3. monitor and manage aggressive exotic plants
4. monitor and manage feral animals
5. no cultivation
6. no fertilisation or inappropriate use of agrochemicals
7. no removal or disturbance of native vegetation, living or dead
8. no removal or disturbance of bush rocks
9. no inappropriate planting
10. no intentional burning outside of a management plan
11. all other actions associated with compliance with State and local government regulations.



- 13 Periodically excluding grazing has the advantage of allowing native plants to flower and set seed and allows tree regeneration to occur. *Photo: Jean Turner*
- 14 Salvation Jane
Photo: Graham Hodge

1. Monitor and manage grazing pressure from domestic livestock

Why?

To allow natural regeneration of native vegetation due to reduced grazing pressure.

Periodically excluding grazing allows native plants to flower and set seed, allows tree regeneration to occur more readily, reduces nutrient inputs from grazing stock, and minimises physical soil disturbances and compaction of soil.

Implementation

Depending on the condition of the site, land managers can choose one of the following options for each management unit:

- no grazing (mandatory for best condition ecological communities)
- conservation grazing option 1
- conservation grazing option 2.

General conservation grazing requirements

Conservation grazing may only be undertaken where livestock grazing is currently practiced.

A shift to conservation grazing must not result in an intensification of existing livestock grazing on the management unit.

The minimum sward height requirement is that 50% or more of the native vegetation in the ground layer in each paddock in the management unit must be maintained at a height of 5 cm or more.

If the management unit is affected by fire livestock cannot be reintroduced to the management unit until minimum sward height requirements are met.

Conservation grazing – Option 1

Conservation grazing option 1 involves short graze periods, followed by longer rest periods. During grazing plant height must remain above 5 cm. Grazing and rest time should be managed to ensure recovery of all palatable plants.

From 1 December to 28 February domestic livestock must be excluded from the management unit.

From 1 March to 31 August domestic livestock can graze within existing paddocks in the management unit for a maximum of 7 days provided minimum sward height requirements are maintained. After the graze period domestic livestock are not permitted to graze the paddock again for a minimum of 42 days – regardless of sward height.

From 1 September to 30 November domestic livestock can graze within existing paddocks in the management unit for a maximum of 3 days provided minimum sward height requirements are maintained. After the graze period domestic livestock are not permitted to graze the paddock again for a minimum of 28 days – regardless of sward height.



15 Grazing pressure can be a threat to ecological communities
Photo: Jean Turner



Conservation grazing – Option 2

Conservation grazing option 2 involves a long rest period followed by a long graze period. During grazing plant height must remain above 5 cm. Grazing and rest time should be managed to ensure recovery of all palatable plants.

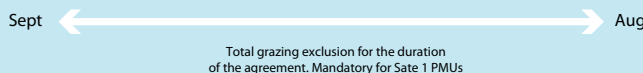
From 01 September to 28 February domestic livestock must be excluded from the management unit.

During the September to February grazing exclusion period domestic livestock can be grazed for no more than 7 days in the management unit to control exotic plants, provided minimum sward height requirements are met.

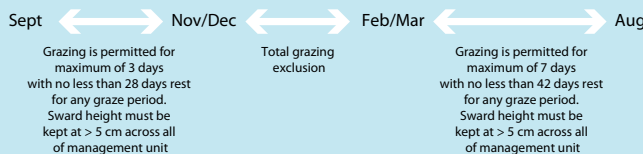
From 01 March to 31 August domestic livestock can graze within existing paddocks in the management unit provided minimum sward height requirements are met.

MEC 2 GRAZING OPTIONS

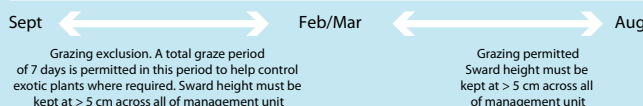
No grazing



Conservation grazing option 1



Conservation grazing option 2



2. No new additional permanent infrastructure

Why?

To increase protection of the ecological community through minimal disturbance.

No new permanent fences, watering points or other permanent infrastructure can be established in a management unit. Maintenance or replacement of existing infrastructure is permitted.

Implementation

New permanent fences are only permitted around the perimeter of a management unit. Any new fence cannot use electric fencing as a bottom strand or barbed wire as a top strand, and should be appropriate for the livestock grazing or exclusion proposed.

Temporary fencing can be erected within a management unit to restrict access to part of the management unit. If this is necessary a temporary water point may be used. Both the temporary water point and the temporary fencing must be removed at the end of the graze period.

3. Monitor and manage aggressive exotic plants

Why?

To reduce competition with native plant species and improve the likelihood of native seed germination.

Implementation

Aggressive exotic plants include soursob, bridal creeper, phalaris and similar species that seed prolifically and become dominant in patches.

Control of aggressive exotic plants may require localised application of herbicides (spot spraying, weed wiping, drill and fill), hand pulling or chipping of target weed species, mowing or slashing, or possibly localised conservation burning (under an approved fire management plan). The most appropriate options will depend on the exotic plants present, the condition of the management unit, accessibility of the management unit and the overall need to minimise adverse impacts on native species.

Each management unit must be inspected several times a year to assess the presence of aggressive exotic plants with active management undertaken to manage any problems.

4. Monitor and manage feral animals

Why?

To improve regeneration of native plant species, improve biodiversity and reduce predation of, and competition with, native animals.

Implementation

Land managers are required to control feral animals (e.g. rabbits, hares, goats, deer, pigs, foxes, feral cats) to prevent the expansion of their numbers and to work towards eliminating them from the site. Control measures will differ between species and may include both preventative (e.g. fencing) and destructive measures as appropriate.

Destructive control measures should minimise unintended adverse impacts on non-target species and be undertaken humanely and in accordance with South Australian legislation. Warren ripping to control rabbits within an ecological community should be undertaken as a last resort and every effort should be made to minimise soil disturbance away from the warren site.

Where feral grazing species (e.g. rabbits) and predators (e.g. feral cats or foxes) are present, an integrated approach should be taken that targets both groups.

Each management unit must be inspected several times a year to assess the presence of feral animals with active management undertaken to manage any problems.



16 Wild oats pose a threat to adjoining woodland Photo: Graham Hodge

5. No cultivation

Why?

To improve soil health and biodiversity with no mechanical disturbance, and to reduce competition from exotic plants and increase the abundance and diversity of native plants.

Implementation

Within the site you may not cultivate, including direct drilling or any action resulting in significant soil disturbance.

6. No fertilisation or inappropriate use of agrochemicals

Why?

To stabilize soil chemistry, deplete added nutrients and chemical and increase the survival and germination of native plants.

Implementation

You may not use or store synthetic or organic fertiliser within the site. Take care when using fertiliser on land adjacent to the site to prevent nutrient run-off or drift onto the site.

Agrochemicals can only be used for the control of exotic plants and as part of an agreed management plan.

7. No removal or disturbance of native vegetation (living or dead)

Why?

To increase native vegetation abundance and diversity from enlarged seed banks, provide a more diverse structure to protect seedlings, increase habitat for native wildlife, and reduce erosion.

Implementation

Both living and dead standing trees must be retained. Standing dead timber often contains hollows which provide nesting sites for birds, mammals and reptiles.

Fallen trees or branches should be left where they fall unless they block access to the site, damage fencing associated with the site or pose a threat to life, in which case they can be moved within the site but in a way that minimises soil disturbance.

8. No removal or disturbance of bush rocks

Why?

To retain soil moisture, reduce erosion and provide habitat for native animals.

Implementation

Do not disturb or remove any bush rock in the site.

9. No inappropriate planting

Why?

To maintain the integrity of the ecological community.

Implementation

Planting of any vegetation that is not native to the ecological community and appropriate to the region is not permitted.

10. No intentional burning outside of a fire management plan

Why?

To improve regeneration of native plants by natural or well-considered fire regimes.

Implementation

Fire may be an option recommended as part of the additional management actions depending on the condition of your management unit. However, ad hoc use of fire in the absence of a properly considered and approved management plan is not permitted. Talk to your NRM Board about obtaining expert advice.

If a fire occurs from a lightning strike or from a bushfire the land manager must advise the Environmental Stewardship Program Director or delegate.

Obtain approval from the Native Vegetation Council before undertaking any burning on your property.

11. All other actions associated with legal obligations

Some conservation outcomes will be achieved through Commonwealth, State and local government legislation that require land managers to undertake a minimum level of action. State or local government requirements of land managers to control or manage certain declared weeds are an example.

Land managers are expected to meet their legal responsibilities using their own resources. State or local government officials or your local NRM Board will be able to provide further information.

Land managers who are required to manage exotic plants listed as Weeds of National Significance (WONS), can attribute the whole cost to the MEC Project. For a list of weeds of Weeds of National Significance go to www.weeds.gov.au/weeds/lists/wons.html

Additional management actions

Additional management actions will enhance the ecological outcome over the life of an agreement based on the existing condition of your site, the current threats and the implementation of the standard management actions.

The field officer will discuss the additional actions recommended for your site. It will be your choice to determine which actions you will adopt. The more recommended actions you undertake the more likely you are to improve the condition of your site. However, each action comes with a cost that you will need to consider when you prepare your bid.

a) Monitor and manage non-aggressive exotic plants

Why?

To reduce competition and improve the likelihood of native seed germination.

Implementation

You are required to inspect the area several times per year to effectively monitor the areas being managed.

Some control of non-aggressive exotic plants can be achieved through conservation grazing with domestic livestock. Other control methods include localised use of herbicides (spot spraying, weed wiping, drill and fill), hand pulling or chipping of target exotic plant species, mowing and slashing or possibly localised conservation burning (under an appropriate and approved management plan with permission from relevant agencies).

Fodder should not be stored within, or introduced to any site.

B) Monitor and manage grazing pressure from native species

Why?

To improve the regeneration of native plants.

Implementation

You are required to inspect the area several times per year to effectively monitor the areas being managed.

Actions that reduce grazing by native species (i.e. kangaroos) and total grazing pressure include exclusion or culling.

Tree guards can be used to protect saplings and seedlings. Culling requires a license issued by the appropriate government authority. Trapping and relocation is an option but only under licence. Removal of watering points from the site is also an option, but success would need to be monitored.



17 Rocky outcrops can be home to reptiles.
Photo: Jean Turner



C) Plant native perennial species

Why?

To improve the regeneration of native plants and increase the complexity of the native habitat.

Implementation

Any planting needs to be done according to a planting plan agreed with the relevant State level authority and sent to the Australian Government.

The planting plan will need to include:

- using plant community appropriate species from the local region (where possible)
- using natural plant spacing
- providing sufficient post planting care
- planting in a way that results in minimal disturbance.

D) Add coarse woody debris

Why?

To retain soil moisture, prevent erosion and increase the complexity of the native habitat.

Implementation

Where coarse woody debris is sparse or absent, adding untreated fence posts, sleepers or other rural timber is recommended. Disturbance of the site should be kept to a minimum.



E) Monitor and manage dominant native plant species

Why?

To reduce competition and increase the abundance and diversity of native plants while increasing the complexity of native habitat.

Implementation

You are required to inspect the area several times per year to effectively monitor the areas being managed.

Conservation grazing can help with managing dominant native species. Other methods of control include slashing or mowing, hand or mechanical removal, or the use of herbicide. Small-scale burns are permitted when part of a fire management plan that has been agreed with relevant State-level authorities and sent to the Australian Government.



18 Three strand plain wire fence affixed to the top of a stock-proof fence to exclude kangaroos
Photo: Graham Hodge

19 Woody debris provides shelter for animals and prevents erosion
Photo: Jean Turner

08

Management actions adjoining the ecological community

Depending on the threats affecting the ecological community, the field officer may suggest additional management actions in areas adjoining the ecological community. This may include managing an area 20 metres or 100 metres wide along the boundary of the ecological community, or managing an area including paddock trees to connect your ecological community to more wooded vegetation. If you agree to include managing external areas in your bid there are a set of common management requirements for these areas.

If there are no external threats to the ecological community or you do not own the adjoining land, the field officer will not suggest external management actions.

Common management actions

These common management actions are required to reduce a range of threats which operate at a landscape scale.

1. No cultivation
2. No fertilisation
3. No removal or disturbance of native vegetation, living or dead
4. No removal or disturbance of bush rock

These requirements do not prevent necessary fence or track maintenance.

Additional management actions

Additional management actions involve management beyond the common requirements and these are similar to those adopted in the ecological community.

A) Monitor and manage aggressive exotic plants

This action is conducted in a strip 100 meters wide along the perimeter of the ecological community. It will help prevent the spread of exotic aggressive plants into the ecological community.

Management options available include localised application of herbicides (spot spraying, weed wiping, drill and fill), hand pulling or chipping of target weed species, mowing or slashing, or possibly localised conservation burning (under an appropriate management plan). The most appropriate options will depend on the exotic plants present, their densities, accessibility of the site and the overall need to minimise adverse impacts on perennial native species. Domestic livestock grazing is also permitted.

B) Reduce wind-borne agrochemicals

This action is conducted in a strip 100 meters wide along the perimeter of the ecological community. It will help contain chemical contamination, stabilise soil chemistry, improve the survival and germination of native plants and improve the viability of the ecological community.

Management options available include the common management requirements and, where trees are present, the same grazing management as is agreed to in the adjoining management unit.

C) Reduce water-borne movement of agrochemicals

This action is conducted in a strip 20 meters wide along the perimeter of the ecological community. It will help contain chemical contamination, stabilise soil chemistry, improve the survival and germination of native plants and improve the viability of the ecological community.

Management options available include the common management requirements.

D) Reduce disturbance to tree roots

This action is conducted in a strip 20 meters wide along the perimeter of the ecological community. It will help improve the survival and germination of native trees, improve the viability of the ecological community and improve habitat for native species.

Management options available include the common management requirements.

E) Reduce isolation

This action may be recommended for the peppermint box grassy woodland ecological community to improve the survival and germination of native plants, improve the viability of the ecological community and improve habitat for native species across the landscape.

Management options available include:

The common management requirements PLUS fence at least 30% of the paddock trees at a distance of 10 metres from the crown drip-line.

OR

The common management requirements PLUS monitor and manage grazing pressure from domestic livestock as per the adjoining management unit.

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Developing a bid

After assessing your site and discussing its condition, the threats present and the management actions you are prepared to undertake, the field officer will provide you with a record of the site visit including a map of your site and a management booklet.

At this time you should begin considering the cost of these management activities and the changes required to your agricultural business.

The Australian Government is prepared to consider realistic payment for these management activities, including lost income, where such payments provide relative value for money.

When site assessments are completed the delivery agent will send a pre-filled bid application form with your personal details and the agreed management schedule for you to insert your bid price. A copy of the draft funding agreement will be sent to you at that same time for your information.

Determining the applicant

The entity making the bid application **MUST** include the legal entity that owns or leases the land. Check that the bid form has been pre-filled with your correct details. The entity that appears as the applicant on the bid form will be the only entity contracted, if your bid is successful.

If there are any errors in the pre-filled bid application then advise the delivery agent of required amendments.

Pricing a bid

Please note: it will be entirely up to you to determine the price you ask to undertake the agreed management actions.

You are advised to consult your financial advisers and service providers when costing your bid. It is important that you account for the full costs of implementing the agreed management activities and consider that prices may change over the duration of the agreement.

The field officers, the delivery agent or the Australian Government will not provide you with advice on the actual costing of your bid.

There is no standard price. Each bidding round establishes its own market and successful bids will cover a range of prices.

You should think about:

- labour costs, including your own
- material costs. For example fencing materials, herbicides, pest and weed control, re-vegetation and replanting, costs associated with equipment required to undertake on-ground management activities
- the costs of seeking specialist advice relating to: contractors, exotic plant and feral animal management advisers, personal financial advisers, solicitors, accountants or agricultural product suppliers over the life of the agreement



20 Woodland bird
Photo: Jean Turner



- costs associated with stock exclusion, such as alternate water sources or establishing alternative stock shelter, for example a strip of trees or man-made structure
- loss of income arising from restrictions on the use of the site for production or other income generating purposes, e.g. reduced carrying capacity or cost of firewood, etc
- consider financial issues that may arise over the timeframe of the agreement e.g. inflation
- any costs associated with establishing a covenant on the site if one is proposed
- time and costs associated with the monitoring and reporting requirements and the labour and equipment that might be required
- cost of public liability insurance required under the agreement.

After costing your bid, you may consider the extent to which you are prepared to absorb a proportion of the costs for the private benefits you will receive. These may include:

- improved biodiversity, soil health, and water quality on the property
- improved habitat for wildlife – native birds, animals and flowers
- improved stock and land management
- increased aesthetic values of the property
- personal enjoyment and satisfaction from having made a positive impact on the local natural environment
- helping to better link private land conservation efforts across the catchment to help address important conservation issues.

The Australian Government expects to make an annual payment. If you propose a fifteen year agreement then your bid should request 15 annual instalments reasonably evenly distributed across the life of the agreement.

For contracts of 10 years duration no more than 35 per cent of the total funding sought should be requested in the first three years. For contracts of 15 years no more than 25 per cent of the total funding sought should be requested in the first three years. Applications which include upfront payments in the first three years greater than 35 per cent or 25 per cent respectively are ineligible and will not be evaluated.

Submitting a bid

Bid applications must reach the Tender Box before the close of the application period to be eligible for evaluation. The bid application must meet all the Project eligibility criteria, and if required, must be accompanied by supporting documentation, for example:

- a copy of a tenancy agreement or lease
- a letter of authorisation signed by the land owner
- an application for a Heritage Agreement
- proof of an existing Heritage Agreement.

The delivery agent will advise you on what supporting documentation is required.

Once the bid form has been submitted there will be no further opportunities to renegotiate the agreed management actions or the price before the bids are evaluated.

Applicants may withdraw at any time before an agreement is signed.

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Bid evaluation

The bidding process is a competitive tender, so your bid will be compared to the bids of other land managers participating in the Project.

Bids will only be accepted into the final evaluation if they are posted before the nominated closing date.

The Multiple Ecological Communities Project Evaluation Panel will evaluate all eligible applications and make a recommendation to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. An independent probity adviser is present during the evaluation.

All bids are ranked according to their conservation value from highest to lowest in a value-for-money continuum. The ranked bids are used to generate a marginal cost curve, where best value-for-money bids are on the lowest part of the curve on the left, and lower value-for-money bids are on the higher part of the curve on the right.

When making recommendations to the Minister the Panel may also consider other parameters such as the price per hectare sought per year, the unimproved land value, the available Project budget, the spread of bids across target ecological communities, the level of previous funding (if any) received by applicants under the Environmental Stewardship Program, or if the applicant has any outstanding reporting requirements under another Australian Government grant.

The Minister will receive the Panel's list of recommended bids and make the final decision on which bids are funded.

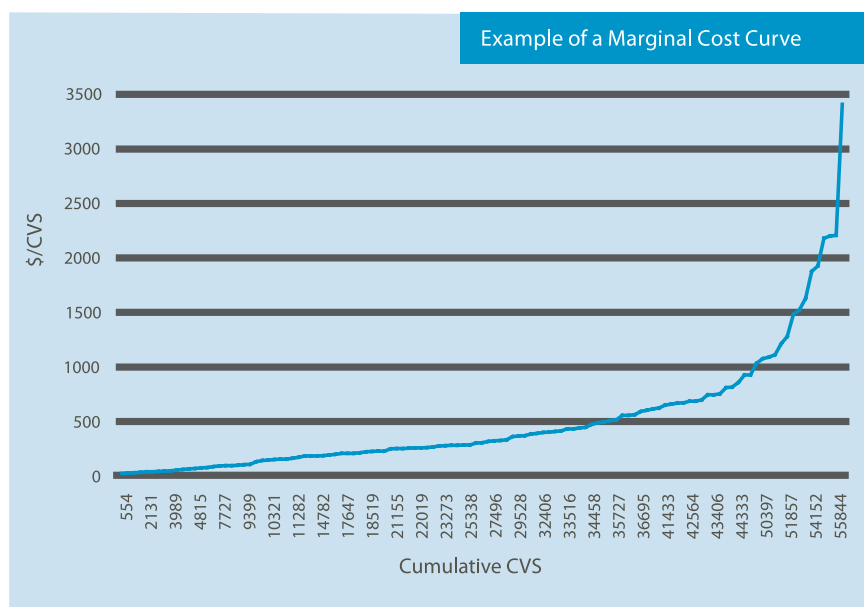
Successful bids

If successful, you will be offered a funding agreement with the Australian Government. The agreement will require you to carry out the agreed management actions and submit annual reports in order to receive yearly payments for the life of the contract.

First payment will be made after the agreement is signed by the Department (the last party to sign) and can be expected by 30 June 2012.

Unsuccessful bids

The bid round is a competitive tender process – so not all bids will be successful. If a bid is unsuccessful it is likely that the conservation value of the site as it relates to the bid price was not as competitive as others were in the bid round. It does not mean that a site does not have conservation value or that the recommended management would not improve the condition of the target ecological community.



11

Land manager monitoring and evaluation

If you are funded under the MEC Project you will be required to provide an annual report consisting of a financial report, a management actions report, a monitoring questionnaire and fixed point photographs.

A field officer will visit your site to help establish the monitoring sites, go over the reporting process and explain the monitoring kit that will be provided.

You may also be asked to participate in more formal monitoring or survey activities conducted in association with the Environmental Stewardship Program. A condition of your funding agreement is to grant site access if selected as one of the study properties. There are no cost implications for you.

You will be contacted well in advance and arrangements will be made to ensure any visits happen at a convenient time for you. All information gathered during these surveys and assessments will be made available to you.



21 Photo monitoring of changes to an iron-grass site
Photo: Jean Turner

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Covenanting your site

You are encouraged to consider entering into a perpetual conservation covenant or Heritage Agreement to protect your site. Please note: only land owners can enter into a conservation covenant.

Heritage Agreements are voluntary agreements negotiated between a land owner and the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to protect and manage land of high conservation value for conservation outcomes. Heritage Agreements are recorded on the title of the land and restrict particular actions or types of land use that would degrade the conservation value of the land. A Heritage Agreement remains in effect if the land is sold.

The Australian Government would like to ensure that the conservation benefits arising from its investment through the South Australian MEC Project are secure and encourages you to consider a Heritage Agreement over all or some of your site. If you take up a Heritage Agreement or have an existing Heritage Agreement on at least 30% of the threatened ecological community on your site you will receive significant additional weighting on the conservation value score for your site.

If your bid is unsuccessful, you will not be required to proceed with taking up a Heritage Agreement.

Is my site eligible for a Heritage Agreement?

During the site assessment the field officer will talk to you about Heritage Agreements and will assess the condition of the ecological community you nominate. All areas considered for a Heritage Agreement must be larger than one hectare. The final decision to grant a Heritage Agreement for a site rests with the South Australian Department of Environment and Natural Resources (through the South Australian Minister).

DENR has agreed that target ecological communities in very good condition will be eligible for a Heritage Agreement without an additional site assessment from a DENR officer where livestock grazing is excluded.

DENR will need to undertake an assessment of sites in a lesser condition before they will be considered eligible for a Heritage Agreement. DENR may have additional requirements for site management above or additional to the requirements of the MEC Project, particularly where grazing is a management action.

If a land manager is successful in receiving funding from the MEC Project, the management schedule agreed as part of Project will be attached to the Heritage Agreement and will remain in place for the duration of the MEC Project funding agreement.

Taxation of payments

All Multiple Ecological Communities Project payments are subject to income tax.

We advise you to seek independent financial advice before submitting a bid under the Project.

For more information regarding the tax treatment of these payments consult your accountant, phone the ATO on 13 2866 or visit the website at: www.ato.gov.au

Some conservation covenant programs are approved under the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1997*. This means that if you enter into a perpetual conservation covenant (Heritage Agreement) and do not receive any money, property or other material benefit, you may be allowed a special income tax deduction.

If land owners enter into a conservation covenant, there are capital gains tax implications, whether or not they receive any money, property or other material benefit on entering the covenant.

Further information about this concession can be found on the ATO website on conservation covenant concessions: www.ato.gov.au/content/19507.htm or by phoning the ATO on 13 28 66.

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CARING FOR OUR COUNTRY

Delivery agent Contact Details:

If you believe you have peppermint box or iron-grass on your property, and you would like to participate, then contact the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board – the Program's South Australian delivery agent.

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