



Australian Government

National
Landcare
Programme



National Landcare Programme Monitoring and Reporting Plan

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1. Introduction

The **Australian Government** is committed to demonstrating and accounting for intermediate and long term outcomes and improvements from its natural resource management (NRM) investments. Monitoring and reporting on progress and improvement is an essential element of effective programme management.

The purpose of this plan is to outline the **monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI)** approach and responsibilities of National Landcare Programme **funding recipients** and the Australian Government to ensure:

- funding recipients can track and report on project progress and achievements;
- the Australian Government can track and report on programme achievements, including impacts on the environment, natural resource base and community;

- information collected along the way is used effectively, including by funding recipients and the Australian Government, to inform ongoing and future design and delivery of projects and programmes; and
- accountability for public expenditure.

This plan is based on the [*Australian Government Natural Resource Management Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework*](#) and should be read in conjunction with the programme guidelines that relate to the relevant funding component under the National Landcare Programme.

2. National Landcare Programme Strategic Objectives and Outcomes

The National Landcare Programme (NLP) is the Australian Government's flagship NRM initiative. The NLP enables communities and organisations, through their own planning and prioritisation processes, to identify activities that are important at the local or regional level, while also contributing to national priorities and outcomes.

This Monitoring and Reporting Plan covers the suite of components that make up the National Landcare Programme, which will involve local delivery through a national stream and a regional stream.

- The national stream includes: the 20 Million Trees Programme; 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15; local programmes (Coastal River Recovery Initiatives, Whales and Dolphins; Keep Australia Beautiful and Clean Up Australia; Cumberland Conservation Corridor; Kimberley Cane Toad Clean Up; Dandenong Ranges Programme); and some legacy initiatives.
- The regional stream will be regional delivery through 56 regional NRM organisations across the country and will have a strong focus on community participation, including the local landcare community, in setting priorities and delivering projects.

The NLP will deliver against four **Strategic Objectives**, each supported by **Strategic Outcomes**, which are set out in Table 1. A [*Programme Logic*](#) has been developed, including 2014–18 intermediate outcomes. Key Performance Indicators for the [*regional stream*](#), the [*20 Million Trees Programme*](#) and the [*25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15*](#) have also been developed and will be used by the Australian Government to demonstrate progress towards the NLP Strategic Objectives and Outcomes.

Investments under the NLP ensure that the Australian Government is able to meet its national and international obligations, including under the Convention on Biological Diversity, Kyoto Protocol, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030 and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. For this reason, funding recipients must demonstrate how their projects contribute to Australia's national and international obligations described in column 3 of Table 1 (most of these purposes reflect a number of Australia's key international environmental obligations). Further information on national and international obligations is available at www.nrm.gov.au

Table 1: National Strategic Objectives and Outcomes for the NLP

Strategic Objectives	Strategic Outcomes	Contribution to national and international obligations
Strategic Objective 1: Communities are managing landscapes to sustain long-term economic and social benefits from their environment.	Maintain and improve ecosystem services through sustainable management of local and regional landscapes.	Protection and restoration of ecosystem function, resilience and biodiversity; appropriate management of invasive species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or native species.
Strategic Objective 2: Farmers and fishers are increasing their long term returns through better management of the natural resource base.	Increase in the number of farmers and fishers adopting practices that improve the quality of the natural resource base, and the area of land over which those practices are applied.	Sustainable management of agriculture and aquaculture to conserve and protect biological diversity and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase carbon stored in soil.
Strategic Objective 3: Communities are involved in caring for their environment.	Increase engagement and participation of the community, including landcare, farmers and Indigenous people, in sustainable natural resource management.	Build community awareness of biodiversity values, skills, participation and knowledge, including Indigenous knowledge and participation, to promote conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.
Strategic Objective 4: Communities are protecting species and natural assets.	Increase restoration and rehabilitation of the natural environment, including protecting and conserving nationally and internationally significant species, ecosystems, ecological communities, places and values.	Reduce the loss of natural habitats, degradation and fragmentation; protecting or conserving Matters of National Environmental Significance including management of World Heritage Areas, Ramsar wetlands, natural values of national heritage etc; reduce the number of nationally threatened species and improve their conservation status.

3. MERI principles

When designing and implementing projects, funding recipients should ensure MERI elements are:

- fit for purpose—tailored to the design, purpose and objectives of NLP;
- credible—based on scientifically and administratively defensible methods and approaches;
- transparent—clearly demonstrates how public money has been spent, the resulting **project outputs** and **project outcomes**; and
- cost effective—the cost of MERI activities is within allowable limits, commensurate with the scale and scope of the project, and where possible draws on and links with existing processes and information.

Evaluating the success of a project or programme provides an opportunity to draw conclusions about what has been achieved, what is yet to be done, what worked well and what didn't. It allows improvements to be made to programme and project design and delivery and, if necessary, to reorient investment at key decision points.

4. Implementing project MERI—funding recipients

Funding recipients can allocate up to ten per cent of their total project budget to MERI activities, in accordance with the relevant programme guidelines. Specific project MERI requirements (e.g. reporting frequency and format) may vary slightly depending on the NLP funding component and will be detailed in the relevant programme guidelines and funding agreement, however, NLP funding recipients will generally be required to:

- develop a new, or update an existing, project MERI plan including a 12 to 18 month activity schedule which will be reported against every 6 months (not applicable to 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15). ;
- undertake monitoring and evaluation activities to collect information as evidence of project progress and achievements; and
- provide, to the Australian Government, progress reports and supporting evidence throughout the life of the project, and a final report upon completion of the project.

4.1 Project MERI plans

Not applicable to 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15

NLP funding recipients will be required to develop a project MERI plan at the commencement of their project. The project MERI plan is a living document that should be updated at least annually through consultation between the funding recipient and the Australian Government.

The purpose of the project MERI plan is to:

- clearly set out the intended outcomes and outputs of NLP funded project/s and the project activities intended to achieve them; and
- monitor progress and achievements through six monthly reporting against the project MERI plan which supports accountability and adaptive management.

The [MERIT Activity Form Selection Guide](#) provides information, examples and mandatory requirements for developing and reviewing a project MERI plan activities.

4.2 Online project reporting

To streamline and simplify the management and reporting of data and information, funding recipients will be expected to report via the Department of the Environment's online reporting tool (MERIT). Importantly, the tool will allow environmental and natural resource management data, information and project achievements to be made publicly available. For further information on the tool click the link below.



Funding recipients are responsible for collecting and reporting **project level** data that demonstrates the performance of the project in terms of progress and achievement of **project outcomes**. The type of information that is collected will vary depending on the type and size of the project as well as the particular outcomes that are being monitored or evaluated.

Funding recipients will be required to report to the Australian Government on the progress of their project, and provide a final report on project completion using the Department's online reporting tool.

Reporting will include:

- information about the project activities, that were set in the project MERI plan process, undertaken during the reporting period. These activities will contribute to meeting **project outputs**;
- progress towards **project outcomes**, including using standard measures provided in online reporting templates;
- identifying lessons learnt through delivery of the project and describing resulting necessary changes to the project design and / or delivery;
- any other relevant information including maps, photos, case studies, raw data etc;
- information to assist in any mid-term and end-of-programme evaluations that may be undertaken.

Reporting of financial information will be required but will occur outside the online reporting tool using financial templates available at www.nrm.gov.au.

4.3 Data and information

The data and information generated through NLP investment contributes to the national environmental information base, allowing the Australian Government to meet reporting requirements including the objectives of the *Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act 1997*, *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–30*, national State of the Environment reporting and international obligations as set out in Table 1.

The Australian Government is particularly interested in collecting the following important project data and information through project reporting:

- spatial information to create a better understanding of the scope and linkages between funded projects. This will enable better spatial analysis of how projects have an impact at a range of scales;
- methods used, issues encountered and outcomes achieved to help develop a better understanding of the NRM methods that represent best value for money;
- information about how the project is or will contribute to the conservation and protection of Matters of National Environmental Significance, nationally recognised threatened species, threatened ecological communities and migratory species;
- how the project is or will contribute to regional and landscape scale issues such as threats to biodiversity, connectivity, and the condition of natural resources that support ecosystem services, such as food and fibre production; and
- information about the economic, social and community impacts of the programme, including how it contributes to Closing the Gap objectives, and the broader sustainability agenda of the Australian Government.

4.4 Programme logic

Not applicable to 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15

A programme logic is a diagram or matrix that shows a series of consequences expected to arise as a result of a project and its activities. It is not just a sequence of events but rather it expresses how change is expected to occur as a result of the project.

NLP funding recipients are encouraged to develop a programme logic for each specific NLP programme or project. This will assist in ensuring logical and realistic programme and project design, including relationships between activities, outputs, intermediate outcomes and longer term desired **programme outcomes**. The [Developing and Using Programme Logic in Natural Resource Management—user guide](#) explains a step-by-step process for developing programme logic for NRM projects.

5. Implementing programme MERI—Australian Government

The Australian Government will be responsible for **programme level** MERI for the NLP including:

- developing processes, systems and templates and providing guidance to support funding recipients in undertaking their MERI responsibilities;
- collating, analysing and reporting on consolidated project data;
- storing and making publicly available, relevant project and programme information;
- supporting programme level monitoring, research and evaluation activities that align with programme outcomes; and
- providing timely updates on programme progress and achievements.

5.1 Departmental Programme monitoring

The NLP will be underpinned by a range of data provided by recipients and also monitoring undertaken by the Department:

- *Project data* — includes project outputs provided by funding recipients through progress reports. With the exception of 25th Anniversary Landcare Grants 2014–15, progress reports containing project data will be the basis for triggering progress payments. This project data contributes to meeting the accountability needs of the programme, and may be audited to ensure that funding is being used as required by the funding agreement. Where appropriate, project data will be aggregated and displayed on dashboards in MERIT.
- Project information also includes **project outcome** data. Each project should include **project outputs** against which the progress and effectiveness of the project are measured. For a given project, there may be a range of targets. Only NLP related outcomes must be reported for the purpose of programme monitoring, however recipients are encouraged to include information about other relevant outcomes and findings in their reports. In addition to quantitative outcome information, project reports and case studies are important sources of information, particularly for communicating the lessons learned through project implementation.
- *Targeted monitoring*—The Australian Government may decide to undertake and will be responsible for any targeted monitoring activities that may be undertaken to complement project level information

provided by funding recipients. These targeted monitoring activities will be designed to provide further evidence of changes to the natural resource base, and to better understand how the programme is progressing towards its Strategic Objectives, including the impact that the overall investment is having on specific natural resource and biodiversity assets. Targeted monitoring activities may focus on particular assets, geographic areas (including project sites), and / or Strategic Outcomes. Findings from targeted monitoring activities will inform programme evaluation and future programme design.

5.2 Evaluation and reporting

The Australian Government aims to evaluate and report on progress of the NLP on a regular basis, including through:

- an *annual snapshot* of how the programme is delivering on its Strategic Objectives and Outcomes. This will synthesise the data from MERIT (e.g. dashboards) and describe progress to date through graphical representations, statistics and case studies;
- *annual reports* on programme administration, including the relevant departmental Annual Reports tabled in Parliament, Portfolio Budget Statements and portfolio Senate Estimates hearings;
- a *mid-term programme evaluation* of programme design, implementation and progress to date, with a focus on the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery model. This evaluation will inform any adjustments that might be required to the future delivery of programme; and
- an *end-of-programme review and evaluation*, focussing on whether the programme's Strategic Objectives, Outcomes and intermediate outcomes have been met. A report will be prepared to describe the achievements and impact made during the full programme cycle.

The mid-term and end-of-programme evaluations will be based on a set of programme level key evaluation questions (KEQs—see Table 2) and evidence of programme performance to demonstrate achievements.

Funding recipients should develop specific project-level KEQs related to their particular project outcomes and document these in their project MERI plans. The programme level KEQs in Table 2 provide guidance for funding recipients in determining their own set of project specific KEQs.

Table 2—Programme level key evaluation questions (KEQs) for the NLP

Appropriateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is the programme aligned with the needs of the intended beneficiaries? To what extent is the programme compliant with recognised best practice processes in the field—e.g. the type, level and context of investment and associated activities?
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In what ways and to what extent has the programme contributed to changing asset condition, management practices, and / or effectiveness of delivery? What, if any, unanticipated positive or negative changes or other outcomes have resulted? To what extent were the changes directly or indirectly produced by the programme interventions?
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent have the planned outcomes and outputs been achieved? Are current delivery approaches and funding mechanisms the best way to maximise impact or are there other strategies that might be more effective? To what extent is the programme attaining, or expected to attain, its objectives and outcomes efficiently and in a way that is sustainable?
Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent has the programme attained the highest value out of available resources? How could resources be used more productively and efficiently? What could be done differently to improve implementation, and thereby maximise impact, at an acceptable and sustainable cost?
Legacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will the programme's impacts continue over time and after the programme ceases? How should the legacy be managed and by whom?

6. Terminology

Achievement	For the purpose of this Monitoring and Reporting Plan 'achievement' is a general term referring to the realisation of particular activities and outcomes.
Evaluation	A systematic process of information collation and analysis to assess the impact, appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency or legacy of a project or programme.
Monitoring	The (preferably regular) collection of data / information, usually to assist timely decision making, and demonstrate changes over time.
Objective	A desired result of an activity, project or programme
Project Outcomes	The results of project activities. These may be immediate, intermediate or longer term outcomes. A project should have at least one clear and well-defined outcome which must be expressed succinctly and clearly using the criteria of: 'Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic and Time bound' (SMART).
Project Outputs	The key actions delivered by the project that contribute to achievement of the Project Outcomes, e.g. 800 ha of weed treatment. Reporting on Project Outputs will be required at every reporting period.
Programme level	Refers to the MERI responsibilities and activities of the Australian Government at the whole-of-National-Landcare-Programme-level.
Programme or Strategic Objectives	The 2014–18 Strategic Objectives of the National Landcare Programme.
Strategic Outcomes	The 2014–18 Strategic Outcomes of the National Landcare Programme.
Project level	Refers to the MERI responsibilities and activities of the funding recipient
Funding recipient	Person or organisation that receives funding through the National Landcare Programme.
Australian Government	The Australian Government as represented by the Department of the Environment and/or the Department of Agriculture.