



Biodiversity
Conservation
Trust

Biodiversity Conservation Trust

Investment in private land conservation

| September 2019

Introduction

The BCT's investment in private land conservation is guided by the priorities, principles and targets set out in the 2018 Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy (BCIS).

Priority investment areas

The BCIS ranks NSW landscapes into priority investment areas and provides guidance that the higher ranked landscapes are to be a priority for government investment in private land conservation.

There are 571 NSW landscapes (Mitchell 2002) that have been derived based on characteristics such as rainfall, temperature, topography, geology, soil and vegetation. Landscapes are used by the NSW Government to represent regional ecosystems for the purpose of measuring progress towards a comprehensive, adequate and representative (CAR) protected area system.

The BCIS ranks NSW landscapes into priority areas for investment having regard to four criteria: (1) high environmental values; (2) areas that improve ecological connectivity and resilience to climate change; (3) areas that contribute towards achieving a CAR protected area system; and (4) areas where high environmental value assets are under greatest pressure.

The BCT focusses government investment in private land conservation through the BCIS priority investment areas (PIAs) in the following ways:

- fixed price offers target investment to those that have the highest concentration of BCIS high priority NSW landscapes (PIAs 1, 2 and 3);
- conservation tenders are primarily offered within high priority NSW landscapes (PIAs 1, 2 and 3) and are used for priority conservation assets listed within the BCIS;
- the BCT's revolving fund targets most of its activity on securing sites within priority NSW landscapes (PIAs 1, 2 and 3).

Principles

BCIS Principle 1: Investment in private land conservation should seek to maximise conservation benefits

Our programs seek to maximise conservation benefits by focusing on priority conservation assets listed within Principle 1 of the BCIS that are under significant pressure or threat.

BCIS priority conservation assets are: 'least protected ecosystems' (threatened ecological communities, threatened species, over-cleared vegetation types, Saving our Species sites, wetlands, littoral rainforests, koala habitat, old-growth forests, rainforest, and high conservation value

grassland); under-protected NSW landscapes; core areas; biodiversity corridors, including travelling stock reserves; and climate refugia.

BCIS Principle 2: Investment in private land conservation should seek to promote long-term outcomes – both for landholders and the environment

Our programs seek long-term outcomes for participants and the environment by concentrating government investment on in-perpetuity agreements that are supported by annual conservation management payments.

In cases where the Conservation Management Program offers term agreements, such as via conservation tenders, the assessment of sites gives greater weight to longer-term agreements relative to shorter-term agreements, and greatest weight to in-perpetuity agreements.

In cases where the Conservation Management Program invests in lower priority landscapes, bioregions that have met comprehensiveness targets or subregions that have met representativeness targets, the BCT only offers in-perpetuity conservation agreements.

BCIS Principle 3: Investment in private land conservation should complement other government and non-government programs

Our programs are developed to complement other conservation programs. Examples include: fixed price offers, which focus investment in those subregions that have not met the National Reserve System targets; and conservation tenders, which are offered to secure NSW Koala Strategy and Saving our Species priorities.

Our programs strive for strategic coordination of Conservation Management Program and Biodiversity Offsets Program activities to maximise available conservation investment and achieve enhanced conservation outcomes.

BCIS Principle 4: Investment in private land conservation should support sustainable farming enterprises, promote regional economic benefits and avoid land use conflicts

Our programs enable landholders to manage parts of their properties for conservation outcomes and to receive support for managing conservation areas via annual conservation management payments.

Our programs offer flexible conservation actions so landholders can often integrate conservation with continued agricultural production or other land uses without impeding achievement of biodiversity outcomes.

The protection and restoration of native vegetation can increase productivity by sheltering livestock, pasture and crops from extreme weather, provide alternative fodder and reduce soil erosion as well as weed and disease transfer between properties. Retaining native vegetation can also increase the abundance of beneficial organisms such as crop pollinators and predators to control agricultural pests.

Our programs provide a diversified farm income, assisting to mitigate the financial impacts of fluctuating markets, or drought and other climate change impacts, and opening new business opportunities such as marketing sustainable agricultural products or eco-tourism.

BCIS Principle 5: Investment in private land conservation should be cost effective, transparent, efficient and make the best use of available mechanisms to deliver investment

We offer a diversity of mechanisms for landholder participation in private land conservation and our programs apply assessment methodologies to prioritise investment into those sites that represent the best value for money.

We are continually reviewing and improving our programs and assessment methodologies to ensure that our private land conservation investments are cost effective, transparent and efficient.

Targets

Target 1: By 2023, private land conservation agreements will protect examples of 30 NSW landscapes that are either not represented within, or are inadequately protected in, the protected area system in 2017.

The BCT met target 1 in February 2019, four years early. As at 30 June 2019, the BCT has protected 64 NSW landscapes that are inadequately protected (unrepresented or under-represented) and of these landscapes, two had not previously been sampled within the protected area system.

In meeting this target, the BCT contributes towards the National Reserve System. All Australian governments have agreed to minimum standards that protected areas must meet to be included in the National Reserve System.

Target 2: By 2023, diversified income streams will improve the financial sustainability of participating landholders relative to similar local businesses.

Our programs diversify farm income, assisting to mitigate the financial impacts of fluctuating markets, or drought and other climate change impacts, and open up new business opportunities such as marketing sustainable agricultural products or eco-tourism.

In 2018-19, the BCT invested \$73.8 million in rural and regional areas across NSW, providing a diversified income stream to 74 landholders via the Conservation Management Program. This represents new and diversified income streams that can be spent on property improvements, in local businesses and communities. Around 70 per cent of properties with funded conservation agreements have a primary purpose of agricultural production.

A comprehensive measure of diversified income and financial sustainability is being developed.