

## Stories of NRM

# Carbon + Biodiversity –a role for regional NRM organisations



“Farmers are a diverse lot. You get them in all shapes and sizes and they are motivated by many different things ... What you need is a bit of a bistro, a smorgasbord of offerings in this space from pure carbon, to pure biodiversity, with multiple offerings in between.”

**Professor Andrew Macintosh,  
ANU, 2021**

In 2021 the Federal Government launched a pilot, the Carbon + Biodiversity program, to incentivise participation in carbon farming projects with additional biodiversity benefits.

The program was designed in collaboration with researchers from the Australian National University (ANU), and involved the Australian Government partnering with six regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations to support delivery of the project in the following regions: Burnett-Mary in Queensland, Central West in New South Wales, North Central in Victoria, NRM North in Tasmania, Eyre Peninsula in South Australia and South West in Western Australia.

Under the pilot, landholders who agreed to participate in a revegetation project using the Environmental Plantings Method under the Emissions Reduction Fund were eligible for both Australian Carbon Credit Unit payments, and an extra payment for meeting additional criteria for improved biodiversity outcomes. By adding an up-front payment to help support project establishment, it was anticipated that the extra money might both ‘get farmers over the line’ to establish a planting that would provide an additional source of farm income, and also lead to additional environmental benefits.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

For the six regional NRM organisations involved, managing the delivery of the pilot included:

- promoting the grant opportunity through their local farmer networks;
- undertaking site assessments to optimise the environmental and other co-benefits arising from the projects;
- supporting landholders through the application process.

Where landholders were ineligible to participate in the Carbon + Biodiversity pilot, regional NRM organisation staff were able to provide advice on other programs that might be more appropriate to meet their needs.

In Round 1 of the Carbon + Biodiversity pilot, there were 65 project offers with an average project size of around 38 ha, for a total of around 2,500 hectares of plantings across the six regions. While not all landholders are expected to progress to contract finalisation, the first round of the pilot demonstrated the significant potential of the project concept.

The pilot has since been extended to another six regions: Fitzroy Basin in Queensland; Riverina in New South Wales; Goulburn Broken in Victoria; Southern in Tasmania; Northern and Yorke in South Australia and South Coast in Western Australia. In response to an identified need for additional professional support, landholders that were made offers in Round 2 of the pilot have also been offered access

to \$10,000 to contribute to technical and legal advice on participating in a project under the pilot and Emissions Reduction Fund.

In summary, partnering with regional NRM organisation on national carbon farming projects can:

- Provide access to local networks to identify and engage with ‘carbon farming ready’ landholders to increase participation in the ERF.
- Draw on regional NRM plans to identify areas where projects will promote co-benefits, including for biodiversity, water quality and employment.
- Provide farmers with access to trusted, independent, local experts that can support them to engage with new environmental markets.
- Provide avenues for further investment in natural resources management on farms – where carbon farming is not an option, NRM professionals can direct farmers to other appropriate opportunities.

### HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

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