



Working with Nature

Restoring landscapes
and supporting regional
economic recovery



Photo credit: Tobias Rowles

Working with Nature

Restoring landscapes and supporting regional economic recovery

March 2021

This report is based on a proposal for a conservation and land management employment program, developed in response to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and supported by more than 100 conservation, farming and land management organisations, including:

National

Australian Association of Bush Regenerators
Australian Conservation Foundation
Australian Land Conservation Alliance
Australian Marine Conservation Society
Australian Wildlife Conservancy
Bush Heritage Australia
Conservation Volunteers Australia
Country Needs People
Field and Game Australia
Greening Australia
Invasive Species Council
Landcare Australia
National Farmers Federation
National Landcare Network
NRM Regions Australia
South Endeavour Trust
The Nature Conservancy – Australia
The Pew Charitable Trusts
Vertebrate Pest Managers Association of Australia
WWF – Australia

Queensland

AgForce
Burnett Mary Regional Group
Cairns and Far North Environment Centre
Cape York NRM
Desert Channels Queensland
Fitzroy Basin Association
Healthy Land and Water
Northern Gulf Resource Management Group

NQ Dry Tropics
NRM Regions Queensland
Queensland Conservation Council
Queensland Trust for Nature
Queensland Water & Land Carers
Rainforest Rescue
Reef Catchments
Southern Gulf NRM
Southern Queensland Landscapes

New South Wales

Landcare NSW
Nature Conservation Council
NSW Farmers Association

South Australia

Conservation Council of SA
Landcare Association of SA
Nature Conservation Society SA
Nature Foundation SA
Primary Producers SA
SA Nature Alliance
Trees for Life

Western Australia

Conservation Council of WA
Environs Kimberly
Perth NRM
Rangelands NRM
South Coast NRM
South West Catchments Council
Wheatbelt NRM
WA Landcare Network

Victoria

Environment Victoria
Landcare Victoria Inc.
Victorian Farmers Federation
Victorian National Parks Association

Tasmania

Cradle Coast Authority
Landcare Tasmania
North East Bioregional Network
NRM North
South Coast NRM
Tasmanian Land Conservancy

Northern Territory

Arid Lands Environment Centre
Environment Centre NT
Landcare NT
NT Cattlemen's Association
Territory NRM

Australian Capital Territory

ACT NRM
Conservation Council ACT
Landcare ACT

For more information, visit www.workingwithnature.org.au

Foreword

Over the past century, federal and state governments in Australia and overseas have looked to create jobs in times of need by implementing programs in the conservation and land management sector.

From the US Civilian Conservation Corps of the Great Depression to the present day, these programs have demonstrated an ability to deliver employment and skills development outcomes for participants while leaving lasting benefits for the broader community and the natural environment.

In Australia, the work completed by participants in these programs has left an enduring natural legacy, improving the health of our soils and rivers, restoring our forests and building tracks and trails in our national parks. These programs have helped our natural landscapes recover, and benefitted industries such as agriculture and tourism, while keeping Australians actively engaged in work during times of economic crisis.

Unprecedented stimulus measures in response to COVID-19 have assisted Australia's economy and placed the nation on a path to economic recovery. However,

there are still hundreds of thousands of people out of work and past experience teaches us that the benefits of economic recovery can be unevenly distributed. Young and unskilled workers are particularly susceptible to the risk of long-term unemployment, while regional areas with less diverse economies may be vulnerable to long term impacts from a short term crisis.

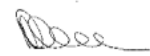
Motivated by our concern for vulnerable workers and regional communities, and an enduring commitment to improving the health and productivity of Australia's natural landscapes, more than 100 conservation, farming and land management organisations have come together to support a proposal for a national conservation and land management employment program.

This ambitious and inspiring program of work would reduce the impact of key environmental threats, deliver large scale

improvements in the condition of key environmental assets, enhance landscape resilience and support long-term agricultural productivity.

By employing and training vulnerable workers to restore and revitalise landscapes, we can create a natural legacy for all Australians to be proud of.

In rebuilding the nation's economy, let's not forget the land that it was built on.



Jim Adams
Chief Executive Officer
National Landcare Network



Kate Andrews
Executive Officer
NRM Regions Australia

Conservation and land management work helped keep thousands of Australians in work during the Great Depression

Picture: Shutterstock.



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Executive summary

More than 100 conservation, farming and land management organisations have come together to support Working with Nature, a proposal for thousands of workers to be employed to deliver practical conservation and land management work across the country. This initiative presents an opportunity to deliver targeted economic recovery support to regional communities while leaving lasting benefits for the environment, tourism, farm businesses and local communities.

This investment would deliver timely, targeted and temporary support for unemployed workers and can be scaled as needed to meet the needs of regional communities, in the context of broader federal and state economic recovery priorities.

Consistent with the Australian Government's planned transition away from economy-wide support measures, this program presents an opportunity to assist those most impacted by the residual economic impacts of COVID-19, including young people and unskilled workers in hard-hit regional communities.

The types of practical activities that would be undertaken include weed management, soil erosion control, tree planting, bushfire recovery, restoration of bushland, rivers and creeks, feral animal control, fence construction and restoration of coastal and marine habitats.

Investment in these activities will leave a positive long-term legacy, including:

- improvements in natural capital that boost farm health and productivity
- improved recovery of landscapes and wildlife impacted by bushfires
- restoration of important tourism and land management infrastructure
- fishing and recreation opportunities associated with healthy rivers and coasts

The program would provide a pathway from welfare to work for thousands of people, including unskilled workers and young people at risk of long-term unemployment, at a substantially lower cost than large-scale infrastructure programs.

- skill development and income diversification for landholders and regional communities
- improved human wellbeing through employment security and access to nature.

The program would provide a pathway from welfare to work for thousands of people, including unskilled workers and young people at risk of long-term unemployment, at a substantially lower cost than large-scale infrastructure programs. For workers, this program would provide an income, the dignity of work, new skills, mental health benefits and the opportunity to contribute to the resilience

and long-term productivity of our land, rivers, oceans and farming landscapes.

This proposal has been refined through extensive consultation with stakeholders, experts and policy makers, including economic analysis by Ernst & Young which found that a \$500 million investment in this program will deliver nearly 7,000 full-time jobs and \$1.2 billion in long-term economic benefits.¹

Investment in practical conservation and land management work would be widely valued by a nation reeling from the impacts of drought, bushfires and COVID-19. Recent polling found that 83 per cent of Australians support investment in practical conservation work, ranking it second out of twelve potential economic recovery measures.

This report outlines the diverse economic, social and environmental benefits associated with government investment in conservation and land management work, illustrated with case studies, and outlines opportunities for further investment in hard-hit regional communities.

1. Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020. URL: www.alca.org.au/delivering-economic-stimulus-through-the-conservation-and-land-management-sector.

Working with Nature

A plan for restoring landscapes and supporting regional economic recovery

**\$500
million**

investment in
conservation and land
management work



6,690

full time equivalent
workers

**\$1.2
billion**

long-term economic
benefits



Timely delivery through
existing mechanisms and
trusted partners



Targeted support for
young, unskilled workers
and hard-hit regions



Temporary investment
during the economic
recovery period



Supporting sustainable
farming and restoring
natural capital



Building transferable
skills and knowledge



Providing meaningful
work and income for
local businesses



Restoring native
vegetation and managing
invasive weeds



Conserving habitat
and tackling
threats to wildlife



Restoring rivers
and coasts for fish and
local communities

Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic threw Australia's historically stable economy into disarray, with the economic impacts of the health crisis – and an unexpectedly strong recovery – presenting complex, high stakes challenges for policy makers and the broader community.

Robust economic stimulus measures by federal and state governments have helped to stabilise the economy, getting people back to work and reinvigorating a flatlining national economy.

There are many lessons to be learned from the large-scale, rapidly implemented economic interventions rolled out in 2020.

It's now possible to examine government-led economic stimulus initiatives and examine the factors that have made them successful. This makes it easier to build on these successes and use them as building blocks for the next phase of Australia's economic recovery and growth.

For some sectors of the community, recovery will be a slower, longer-term process. Youth unemployment remains high in many regional communities, with hundreds of thousands of young people currently out of work.

Experts warn of the risks of entrenched patterns of unemployment following an economic crisis, and the need for targeted responses to the needs of vulnerable populations, especially young people and unskilled workers.

Over the past century, governments in Australia and overseas have used practical conservation and land management

There are many lessons to be learned from the large-scale, rapidly implemented economic interventions rolled out in 2020.





Greening Australia Board Director Gordon Davis chats to landholder Lenny Parisi about restoration works on his property.
Credit Annette Ruzicka.

programs to create meaningful work for those most in need.

From the US Civilian Conservation Corps of the Great Depression to the present day, these programs have demonstrated an ability to deliver employment and skill development outcomes for participants while leaving lasting benefits for the broader community.

In response to COVID-19, states and territories across Australia have announced practical employment programs, including Working for Victoria, Western Australia's Green Jobs Plan and Queensland's Reef Assist initiative.

Together with federal and state investments in national park infrastructure, these programs are providing much needed work and putting boots on the ground to deliver practical conservation and land management outcomes.

The early success of these programs, and lessons learnt from previous similar programs, provides a strong foundation for further investment as Australia moves into the next phase of its economic recovery from COVID-19.

In this report, we outline the diverse economic, social and environmental benefits associated with investment in practical conservation and land management work, illustrated with case studies of programs currently under way.

By examining programs now in the field, we can chart a course towards more ambitious investment in the months and years ahead.

Large-scale investment in conservation and land management will provide enduring benefits for the environment and local communities, helping to ensure that we leave the best possible natural legacy for future generations of Australians.

Responding to a national economic crisis

In response to the profound economic impacts of COVID-19, more than 100 conservation, land management and farming organisations came together in 2020 to support a proposal for thousands of impacted workers to be employed to deliver practical conservation and land management activities.

This initiative is supported by more than 100 conservation, farming and land management organisations, including the National Landcare Network, Landcare Australia, National Farmers Federation, NRM Regions Australia, Australian Land Conservation Alliance and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Together, these organisations developed a bold proposal for an economic stimulus program that would deliver practical conservation and land management outcomes while employing thousands of the workers in hard-hit regions.

This proposal called for federal and state investment in the creation of safe,

meaningful and socially beneficial work during a period of economic crisis -- while leaving enduring benefits for the environment, local communities, tourism and farm businesses.

The work they proposed would help to restore some of Australia's most damaged landscapes, through bushfire recovery, weed management, tree planting, restoration of bushland, rivers and creeks, feral animal control, fence construction and restoration of coastal and marine habitats.

Collectively, these activities constituted an ambitious and inspiring program of work, which would reduce the impact of key environmental threats, deliver

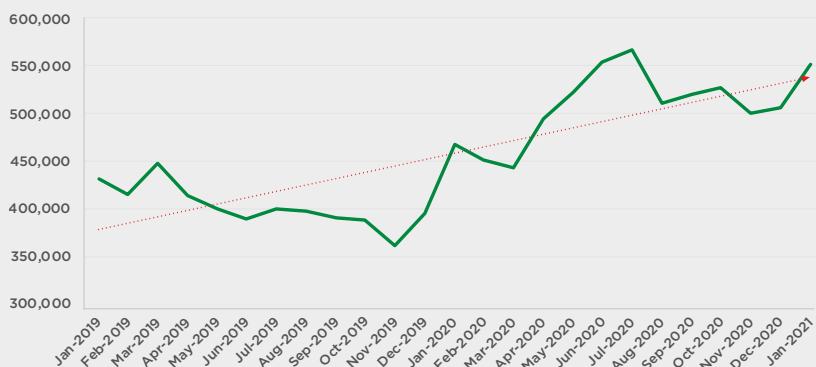
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The road to recovery will be a long one, which will require each sector of society to contribute in its own way. We stand ready to help in any way we can.

”

– Conservation, farming and land management organisations' letter to Prime Minister Morrison, 2 April 2020.

**Australian Unemployed Young People (15 - 34 years)
Jan 2019 - Jan 2021**



Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Detailed, January 2021: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/jan-2021>

Over 100,000 more young people were unemployed in January 2021 compared to March 2020. Young and unskilled workers have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID economic crisis and are particularly susceptible to the risk of long-term unemployment, even as the broader economy recovers. Conservation and land management jobs can get young people back into the workforce by providing them with meaningful work which builds their skills and knowledge, keeps them in their communities and improves mental health and wellbeing.

large-scale improvements in the condition of key environmental assets, enhance landscape resilience and support long-term agricultural productivity.

The organisations recommended that the program be delivered cooperatively by federal, state and territory governments, working in close collaboration with the conservation, land management and farming sector.

Governments' robust response to the health and economic crisis has helped to mitigate the worst impacts of COVID-19 and lay a foundation for strong economic recovery, as evidenced by recent improvements in employment statistics.

Consistent with Government's planned transition away from economy-wide

support measures, including JobKeeper, we believe investment in practical conservation and land management work presents a tool for delivering targeted and timely support for those most impacted by the residual economic effects of COVID-19, including young people in hard-hit regional communities.

This investment would deliver on multiple policy priorities across the environment, agriculture, employment and regional development portfolios, including training and skills development. Work in the conservation and land management sector provides an opportunity to develop practical, transferable skills through a combination of field-based learning and vocational training programs.

“

The labour intensive nature of the work, combined with low capital costs, results in a high proportion of investment flowing to the employees and contractors delivering the work and, in turn, to their families and businesses in their local community.

”

- Jim Adams, CEO, National Landcare Network



Practical conservation and land management activities

Investment in a national conservation and land management employment program would support practical, local action to protect and restore important environmental assets, including:

- river and wetland restoration, including fencing, revegetation and erosion control;
- a surge in weed control efforts, focused on containment and preventing cross-tenure spread;
- national park infrastructure, track maintenance and park management (fire, weeds, feral animals);
- bushfire recovery and resilience activities, including infrastructure repairs and habitat restoration;
- invasive animal control, including deer and pigs which impact on farming and threatened species;
- tree planting and habitat restoration in metropolitan, suburban, peri-urban and rural areas;
- funding for private land conservation, putting money in the hands of farmers and land holders;
- coastal habitat restoration and monitoring, in partnership with fishing industry and local communities;
- plastics and marine debris clean up, including research to inform future policy decisions; and
- funding for Indigenous rangers to support employment outcomes in vulnerable communities.

This work will deliver a range of long-term environmental, social and economic benefits, including:

- improvements in ecosystems and natural capital that boost farm health and productivity;
- recovery of landscapes and wildlife post-bushfire restoring tourism potential and improving productive, environmental and aesthetic value;
- restoration of important tourism and land management infrastructure like fencing, roads and fire trails;
- income diversification by upskilling regional communities in environmental land management focused on improved soil health and productivity, and supporting access to carbon and other environmental markets;
- regeneration of healthy coastal systems that provide fishing and recreation opportunities; and
- improved human health and wellbeing through employment security and access to nature.

“
This program could deliver meaningful gains in agricultural productivity, by reducing costs, improving the condition of soil, water and native vegetation and enhancing resilience to natural disasters.

”
- Kate Andrews, CEO,
NRM Regions Australia

Caring for Country in North Queensland

Funded by the Queensland Government's \$10 million Reef Assist program, the 'Healing Country' project is creating jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in North Queensland while supporting efforts to protect the Great Barrier Reef and nearby coastal ecosystems.



Three Big Rivers Executive Director Thomas Holden with NQ Dry Tropics CEO Dr Scott Crawford

Townsville-based natural resource management organisation NQ Dry Tropics has joined forces with Indigenous employment group Three Big Rivers to deliver the initiative, funded through the Queensland Government's Reef Assist program.

Under the project, five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of an environmental team are gaining practical on-ground skills working on NQ Dry Tropics projects across the region, while undertaking an accredited environmental training program.

NQ Dry Tropics CEO Dr Scott Crawford said the partnership was boosting on-ground activities to improve land condition, protect plants and animals, and improve the quality of water flowing into local creeks and the reef.

"The Healing Country project is offering participants a chance to work on country and gain practical experience on activities that benefit reef water quality," Dr Crawford said.

"Tasks will include learning techniques to fix eroded gullies to reduce sediment runoff, protecting sensitive creekbank areas with revegetation and weed control, and tackling marine debris.

"The project is also about brokering mutually beneficial relationships between landholders and Traditional Owners.

"We hope the skills and qualifications participants acquire will set them up for

“
I know a lot of young people who feel excited when they see us out on country. They ask what we're doing and who we work for, and whether there's any more work available.
”
– Sam Savage, Healing Country program participant

future careers in natural resource or rural management.

"The partnership with Three Big Rivers fits with our belief that meaningful Traditional Owner engagement leads to better, more sustainable natural resource management outcomes," he said.

Three Big Rivers Executive Director, Thomas Holden said the way the project had been developed would help ensure sustainable Indigenous employment opportunities across the region:

"Co-designing this project with NQ Dry Tropics, with support through the Reef Assist Program, will support capability and capacity building that will provide lasting benefits," Mr Holden said.

Since the start of the year, the environmental team has been busy protecting areas of threatened beach scrub north of Townsville.

Crew members Sam Savage and Rheardan Cobbo (Bindal), Gary Kyle (Bwngcolman / Juru), Waylan Sam (Bwngcolman) and Supervisor Darryl Chong (Waanyi) have been collecting marine debris from three beach scrub sites at Crystal Creek, Mystic Sands and Quindalup.

The debris, including rubbish left behind by campers, impacts local wildlife and plant species. The team will also be controlling invasive weeds at various locations.

Sam Savage said he was happy to be involved with the project: "Three Big Rivers and NQ Dry Tropics have given us the opportunity to reconnect with country. I know a lot of young people who feel excited when they see us out on country. They ask what we're doing and who we

work for, and whether there's any more work available because they want to be out on country as well."

"I would love to get a job helping the environment, so this work is a good step for me to take. Once I gain more knowledge, I will share it with others so they can get a better idea of how they can help," said Rheardan Cobbo.

Supervisor Darryl Chong said: "I've got a great team here. We started off not knowing what to expect, but we've done a couple of sites now and are getting the hang of what we need to do. There's still a lot of training to come for us. This experience could provide a pathway for crew members to become future rangers".

Training opportunities for the group will include a Certificate III in Rural Operations, tickets to operate light machinery, and learning how to construct stick dams to control gully erosion.



Gary Kyle protecting native plants and animals by collecting harmful marine debris.

Environmental team (left to right) Rheardan Cobbo, Gary Kyle, Waylon Sam, Sam Savage, Darryl Chong.





Independent analysis of economic and social benefits

Expert analysis by Ernst & Young found that a \$500 million investment in a conservation and land management employment program would deliver more than \$1.2 billion in long-term economic benefits.

Ernst & Young (EY) was enlisted to perform an economic impact assessment of a broad-based program of conservation and land management activities to support Australia's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

This assessment identified a range of economic, social and environmental benefits associated with the proposed program, and found that the program reflected the following characteristics of an effective economic stimulus measure:

- ✓ **Targeted** The program involves real jobs on real projects. It's not a make-work program. Rather the initiatives have the potential to make our environment and agricultural land better and leave a legacy. Moreover, the program is targeted at alleviating some of the key social and economic concerns of regions affected by COVID-19, as well as the bushfires.
- ✓ **Temporary** The program has a finite start and end date (depending on the scale of the program) and does not bake in structural commitments to the Budget.
- ✓ **Timely** The program can be implemented quickly, and has been structured around the capacity of the conservation and land management sector to deliver work on-the-ground. Program requirements are largely based around unskilled workers and it can help engage unemployed and underemployed workers across Australia, including in regions at risk of entrenched disadvantage.

- ✓ **Proportionate** The program can be scaled up or down. Stimulus decisions, by nature, are made rapidly and in a climate of uncertainty. The proposed program enables policymakers to adjust their investment under each of the program options if necessary.²

The EY analysis found that this investment could “deliver meaningful gains in agricultural productivity, including by reducing costs and lifting the capacity of the land, improving water quality and natural disaster resilience, and preserving the country's natural heritage”.

The report presents a taxonomy of environment, social and economic benefits of the program, including improved agricultural productivity. The authors reviewed the findings of previous cost-benefit analyses and found that:

- Invasive weed control was found to deliver an average benefit to cost ratio of 33, principally through improvements in farm production and reduced long-term weed control costs.

- Invasive animal control delivers positive benefit to cost ratios between 2.8 and 25. These benefits accrue principally to producers through reduced pressure on pasture and water resources.
- Habitat restoration enhances farm productivity by improving water quality, reducing soil erosion and salinity, enhancing pollination, providing shelter for stock and enhancing drought resilience.

The analysis found that government investment of \$4 billion in a national conservation and land management program could raise economic output by about \$5.7 billion, reduce welfare costs by \$620 million and generate 53,000 jobs over the next four years.

The program is scalable, with scope to target investment on a regional basis. EY found that a regionally targeted investment of \$500 million would create 6,690 jobs and \$1.2 billion in economic impacts over the next 20 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Employment and economic benefits associated with three investment scenarios

Scenario	Investment	Duration	Direct employment (FTE)	Indirect employment (FTE)	Long-term economic benefits
Scenario 1	\$4 billion	4 years	40,000	13,428	\$9.3 billion
Scenario 1	\$2 billion	3 years	20,000	6,701	\$4.7 billion
Scenario 1	\$500 million	2 years	5,000	1,690	\$1.2 billion

2. Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020. URL: www.alca.org.au/delivering-economic-stimulus-through-the-conservation-and-land-management-sector.

Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector

Economic Impact Assessment (Ernst & Young, June 2020)³

Extract from EY economic assessment:

Conservation, land management and farming organisations have collaborated to develop a program that will support thousands of unemployed workers and provide a meaningful contribution to the sector.

The broad-based program involves a range of activities that could be undertaken in both regional and metropolitan areas. The scope of these activities ranges from restoring natural habitats, to controlling invasive animals and weeds, to building and repairing infrastructure.

Underpinning each of these activities is a commitment to employ low-skilled workers, or workers who have little experience in practical conservation and land management delivery. In fact, preliminary estimations suggest about 67% of the roles in the program will require workers to have no previous experience.

Most activities are labour intensive and involve working outside with minimal previous experience. Therefore, it is possible to conduct this work in a COVID-19 safe environment, while maintaining social distancing.

As most roles in the program will require minimal previous experience, this increases the available pool of workers who can participate. This is a key attraction of the program, as it means

that workers who have been displaced from their previous jobs in heavily affected sectors (such as tourism) can substitute into conservation and land management roles.

Moreover, by allowing workers to move into roles in the conservation and land management sector, it will help to reduce the number of people relying on Job Seeker and Youth Allowance.

The long-term social and economic benefits of moving people off welfare and into work are profound – those who are unemployed for long periods of time find it increasingly more difficult to find and hold employment. People are more likely to experience longer, and more frequent, spells on welfare the longer they are out of the job market. This is a particularly potent issue for young people and highlights the importance of encouraging people off welfare and into work.

Not only will these activities allow people to get into work, and engage in meaningful tasks, it will also allow them to accumulate new knowledge. While many of the proposed activities require a low baseline skill level, there is potential for participants to upskill and retrain in conservation and land management roles.

Participants are likely to gain important technical skills such as surveying, fencing and occupational health and safety training. There is also an opportunity to

build practical and highly transferable skills in areas such as teamwork, communication, leadership and program management. In addition, engagement in the program is likely to build self-esteem, community capacity and job-readiness.

This may increase one's future employment options. The ability to transfer workers from other industries is an attractive program feature, especially for rural areas. Without this option, some communities may suffer displacement of workers to areas with higher demand. This phenomenon, which is often referred to as 'brain drain', has the potential to leave vulnerable and remote communities at risk.

Activities can be concentrated in areas with large numbers of unemployment, targeting communities who have a larger supply of available workers.

The low entry requirements may be particularly effective in engaging with people who are currently out of work and ensuring they stay in the local area. The conservation and land management sector has a relatively high proportion of female employees across its broad spectrum of activities.

There have been increasing concerns about the effects of COVID-19 on women, with females disproportionately affected by the economic crisis. Based on the sector's strong female engagement, the program has the potential to support improved opportunities for women.

Another critical feature of the program is the fact that the proposed activities build on existing models. Thus, established and functioning programs can be expanded to adapt to the needs of the region. Notably, there are no costs involved in designing brand new activities. This is beneficial from a risk management perspective and would assist in the timely delivery of the program. Moreover, there is also a high level of shared knowledge among program coordinators, about the success and failure of previous programs that can be leveraged.



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The long-term social and economic benefits of moving people off welfare and into work are profound.

”

- Ernst & Young, June 2020

3. Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020.
URL: www.alca.org.au/delivering-economic-stimulus-through-the-conservation-and-land-management-sector.



Coastal habitat restoration is practical work that enhances our beaches, stabilises coastal dune systems and provides habitat for native wildlife.
Picture: Trees for Life.

Benefits for the tourism sector

✓ **Maintaining, restoring and enhancing natural tourism assets:**

Public investment in conservation and land management work presents opportunities to restore and enhance natural tourism assets (e.g. restoring visitor infrastructure and natural habitats destroyed by bushfire; tracks and trails in national parks; monitoring and restoring coastal and marine habitats).

✓ **Income diversification for tourism businesses:**

There may be opportunities for tourism businesses to diversify their income during the economic recovery period. For example, marine tourism operators would be well placed to provide boats, dive equipment and skilled workers for marine research and habitat restoration activities on the Great Barrier Reef.

✓ **Retaining experienced tourism workers in regional areas:**

In regional centres hard-hit by the downturn in tourism, this investment would provide people with the dignity of work, support them to remain actively involved in their community and provide a pathway back into long-term work as tourism and other key economic sectors recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

✓ **Leaving a lasting environmental legacy and promoting our natural icons:**

By scaling up existing successful conservation programs during the economic recovery period, we can leave a lasting legacy for nature, enhance the resilience of rural landscapes, promote our iconic natural assets and highlight the tourism industry's long-term commitment to environmental sustainability.

In regional centres hard-hit by the downturn in tourism, this investment would provide people with the dignity of work, support them to remain actively involved in their community



Tackling a destructive weed in the Northern Territory

In July 2020, the NT Government announced plans to establish a 'Gamba Army' to control highly invasive gamba grass as part of its economic recovery plan.

The Gamba Army has now been established, creating 45 jobs and providing targeted support in Litchfield and Charles Darwin National Parks and the Greater Darwin region.

Rowena Eastwick, from the Gamba Army, said that the gamba army had got off to a good start over its first wet season.

"The army is quite a diverse range of people. A lot of them are students and it's great to see them improving their capacity on ground around grass identification," she said.

"We also have tour guides in the Gamba Army. Obviously, the tourism industry has been hit really hard by COVID, so tour guides are looking for work.

"We bring tourists here to look at our natural environment, so the team are really enjoying this opportunity to get rid of this weed and bring the landscape back to native, beautiful habitat."

The Gamba Army has had to choose areas to focus on as priorities, given the wide distribution of gamba grass across the Top End. Areas of high conservation value and high public use have been top priorities.

"The question this year is where can we get bang for buck. You can't just spray a spot, then walk away. We need to consider what the follow up plan is for each year," Rowena said.

"I have been talking to the rangers at Litchfield National Park and we are trying to get a team down there to do that as a priority."

Rowena said one of the first priority areas was around the Casuarina Coastal Reserve.

"The team's done a great job and there's really large patches of gamba grass gone around areas we've started with there," she said.

"The native grasses - the spear grasses - will start overtaking the gamba soon in those areas. We'll do some follow up work and keep monitoring them to make sure we stay on top of it."





Working for Victoria participants in the field.
Credit: Vic Catchments.

Public support for investment in conservation stimulus

There is strong public support for government investment in conservation and land management as an economic recovery measure, with more than four in five Australians supporting investment in practical environmental programs to employ people in hard-hit regional areas.

In 2020, public polling was commissioned by the National Landcare Network to assess the popularity of economic stimulus focused in their sector with the general public. The research, conducted by Dynata polling, was conducted on 20-21 July across a sample of 1009 respondents Australia-wide.

The results showed clear endorsement of the program concept, with more than four in five Australians (83%) saying the Morrison Government should fund practical environmental initiatives like tree planting, weed removal and river restoration to keep people in regional communities employed while Australia recovers from the economic impacts of COVID-19.

Funding practical environmental work came in as the second most popular (75% support) out of 12 options for keeping people in regional communities employed, second only to increasing funding for training and apprenticeships (78%).

The polling also showed that three quarters (76%) of Australians were concerned about the health of the country's forests, rivers and wildlife, with a similar number (74%) agreeing that economic stimulus funding should be used to help communities and the environment recover from the bushfires and drought.

Media across the country picked up the polling, with more than 80 metropolitan and regional publications running stories highlighting the positive response to the program proposal.

83%

of Australians think the Federal Government should fund practical environmental initiatives like tree planting, weed removal and river restoration to keep people employed

76%

of Australians are concerned about the health of the country's forests, rivers and wildlife following the drought and bushfires

74%

of Australians agree that economic stimulus funding should be used to help communities and the environment recover from recent bushfires and drought

Supporting regional employment in Victoria

The Victorian Government moved quickly to respond to the unfolding COVID-19 crisis, announcing its \$500 million *Working for Victoria* program in March 2020.

The program, developed to stimulate a struggling economy, incorporated spending for new and existing projects in the national resource management and agriculture sector among other initiatives.

Early reports indicate good results for the program around the state, with uptake particularly strong in areas which have been hardest hit by COVID-19 job losses.

To date, 570 new roles have been created by Catchment Management Authorities, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment representing a total investment of \$29 million.

The jobs will improve land and catchment health through the removal of rubbish, increased revegetation, pest management control and maintenance to keep waterways clean, safe and healthy.

Work completed also includes improvements to parks and reserves, such as track maintenance.

Local councils have created several hundred additional environment-related positions through Working for Victoria (for example, the City of Melbourne created 64 positions for urban tree planting).

The statewide program involves lots of government partners and local councils in delivering practical land management work. They operate using a coordinated approach to recruitment, which has helped to fill available roles rapidly, but local organisations retain autonomy in where they work.



“

We're creating jobs that will allow hundreds of people to keep working while supporting projects that benefit the entire community.*

”

- Victorian Minister for Jobs, Innovation and Trade Martin Pakula

Working for Victoria participants in action.
Picture: Vic Catchments

Opportunities for investment in hard-hit regional areas

To assess the opportunities to support employment and environmental outcomes in hard-hit regions, the Working with Nature team identified ten candidate priority regions, based on the following criteria:

1. Economic impact:

Identify regions with relatively high employment loss due to COVID-19.

2. Conservation values:

Prioritise regions with high conservation values / key conservation threats.

3. Regional delivery capacity:

Scale investment in line with regional program delivery capacity.

The team worked with regional and state partners to develop ten regional stimulus concepts – one for each priority region. These concept proposals identify potential delivery partners, proposed activities, expected conservation and land management outcomes and anticipated employment and economic benefits.

Note: For consistency with Ernst & Young analysis, worker numbers are based on annual full-time employment – for example, 350 workers employed full-time for two years is recorded as 700 FTE.

Summary of regional conservation and land management stimulus proposals developed by regional delivery partners.

Outback: Vulnerable remote communities

- Tackling highly invasive, transformative weeds
- Working with pastoralists and Traditional Owners
- Revegetation, seed collection and erosion control

252 full-time workers

South-west Western Australia

- Improving drought resilience and land condition
- Establishing seed banks and restoring wildlife habitat
- Restoring coastal habitats, bushland and waterways

450 full-time workers

Greater Adelaide Mount Lofty Ranges

- Working with landholders and primary producers
- Revegetation, weed control and habitat restoration
- Building natural capital for primary production

300 full-time workers





An aerial photograph of the Great Barrier Reef. The water transitions from a deep blue in the upper portion to a vibrant turquoise and light green in the lower portion, indicating the shallow reef flat. Two boats are visible in the middle ground, one on the left and one on the right, both appearing to be engaged in reef research or maintenance. The reef's intricate patterns and textures are clearly visible through the water's clarity.

“

These initiatives will ... create lasting legacies in regional centres, small towns and on the Great Barrier Reef, which will be a big boost to local communities.*

”

- Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack

* Ley, S. (2020, July 12). Historic investment in iconic National Parks [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://minister.awe.gov.au/ley/media-releases/historic-investment-iconic-national-parks>

Building on success

Over the past year, governments in Australia and overseas have rolled out large-scale economic stimulus packages, including a number of conservation and land management employment programs. These early initiatives provide a foundation for a more ambitious national program in Australia.

Australian Government

In October 2020, the Australian Government announced a \$61.7 million investment in the environment, through the \$1 billion COVID-19 Relief and Recovery Fund. This package aims to create employment, boost local tourism and preserve the environment through investment in three strands of work:

- \$33.5 million for conservation work and infrastructure upgrades across 23 national heritage and World Heritage sites;
- \$22 million for coastal communities to restore shellfish reefs, improving the health of marine ecosystems, enhancing local fish stocks and creating tourism dive sites; and

- \$8.2 million to engage tourism operators in Great Barrier Reef monitoring and conservation work and upgrade Townville's Reef HQ aquarium.

In July 2020, the Australian Government announced \$233 million for tourism infrastructure in federally managed national parks: Uluru, Kata-Tjuta, Kakadu, Booderee and Christmas Island. This investment is expected to create employment for hundreds of construction workers and provide long-term benefits for local tourism businesses.



Iconic tourism destinations like Uluru have been given a boost by the Federal Government.

Photo credit: Parks Australia.

“
New and improved infrastructure means more tourism, more jobs and better outcomes for Australians living in regional and remote areas, which is vital as we move through the economic challenges of COVID.
”

- Minister for the Environment
Sussan Ley

“

It is important that Western Australia's economic recovery works hand in hand with the continued protection of Western Australia's magnificent environment - which is one of our most precious assets.*

”

– WA Environment Minister,
Stephen Dawson

Western Australia

On 27 July, the WA Government announced a \$60 million Green Jobs Plan, as part of the state's \$5.5 billion Economic Recovery Plan. This three year investment is forecast to create 1,000 conservation jobs across the state and includes a \$15 million Vegetation Rehabilitation Fund, \$25 Healthy Estuaries Program, and \$3.3 million for Indigenous land management in the Pilbara.

On 8 August, the WA Government announced a \$150 million tourism industry recovery package, including infrastructure improvements for the state's "most iconic natural attractions", including Karijini National Park, Ningaloo, Monkey Mia, the Pinnacles, Rottnest Island and Murujuga National Park.

* Dawson, S. & McGowan, M. (2020, July 27). McGowan Government unveils Green Jobs Plan to support recovery [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.mediastatements.wa.gov.au/Pages/McGowan/2020/07/McGowan-Government-unveils-Green-Jobs-Plan-to-support-recovery.aspx>



Coral garden in the world heritage-listed Ningaloo Marine Park.
Credit: Paul and Kelly Wags

Queensland

On 15 July, the Queensland Government announced its \$10 million Reef Assist package. The program aims to create up to 200 nature-based jobs for unemployed Queenslanders in the Wet Tropics, Burdekin and Mackay-Whitsunday catchment areas. Mackay, Townsville and Cairns were identified as priority areas that have been badly impacted by a loss of visitors as a result of COVID-19.

The program will provide environmentally beneficial work while also leaving enduring benefits for regional communities, businesses and landscapes. Projects funded through the program are likely to include practical, on-ground land management work such as streambank rehabilitation, tree planting, pest and weed control.

Reef Assist was announced together with a \$10 million extension of the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program to fund traineeships in construction, conservation and land management. On 16 June, the Queensland Government announced \$8.9 million for infrastructure in national parks, building on an existing \$45 million national park infrastructure program.

“
Reef Assist will provide unemployed and underemployed Queenslanders with temporary nature-based employment, delivering up to 200 jobs in hard-hit regions.*

”
– Queensland Premier
Annastacia Palaszczuk

* Palaszczuk, A. (2020, July 15). More jobs for Queenslanders as we unite and recover from the global pandemic [Media release]. Retrieved from <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/90199>



“

Victoria's Catchment Management Authorities do an amazing job managing and keeping our waterways healthy and these roles will help deliver even more important local projects across the state.*

”

– Victorian Minister for Water
Lisa Neville

Victoria

The \$500 million Working for Victoria program, announced in March, has created thousands of new roles for unemployed people affected by the economic impacts of COVID-19. To date, 570 new roles have been created by state environmental agencies, while local councils have created several hundred additional environment-related positions through Working for Victoria.

In a separate announcement, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning will deliver \$129 million in direct support to local communities. The Victorian Government estimates that this investment will create 3,700 direct jobs, while supporting thousands more across the state's supply chains.



Working for Victoria has created jobs for hundreds of Victorians, many of them in regional and rural areas.

Credit: Vic Catchments.

* Andrews, D. (2020, August 13). Hundreds of Jobs Working for Victoria [Media release]. Retrieved from <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/creating-hundreds-jobs-working-victoria>

New South Wales

In January 2021, the NSW Government announced a \$400 million investment in the state's national parks. The funds include \$257 million to be invested in new facilities, including more than 750 kilometres of new and upgraded walking tracks, upgrades to 33 campgrounds and 61 new and improved picnic areas.

In 2020, the NSW Government allocated \$18 million to Local Land Services to deliver practical conservation and land management work. This funding was provided explicitly as regional economic stimulus, to create work in regional areas over the next 12 months.

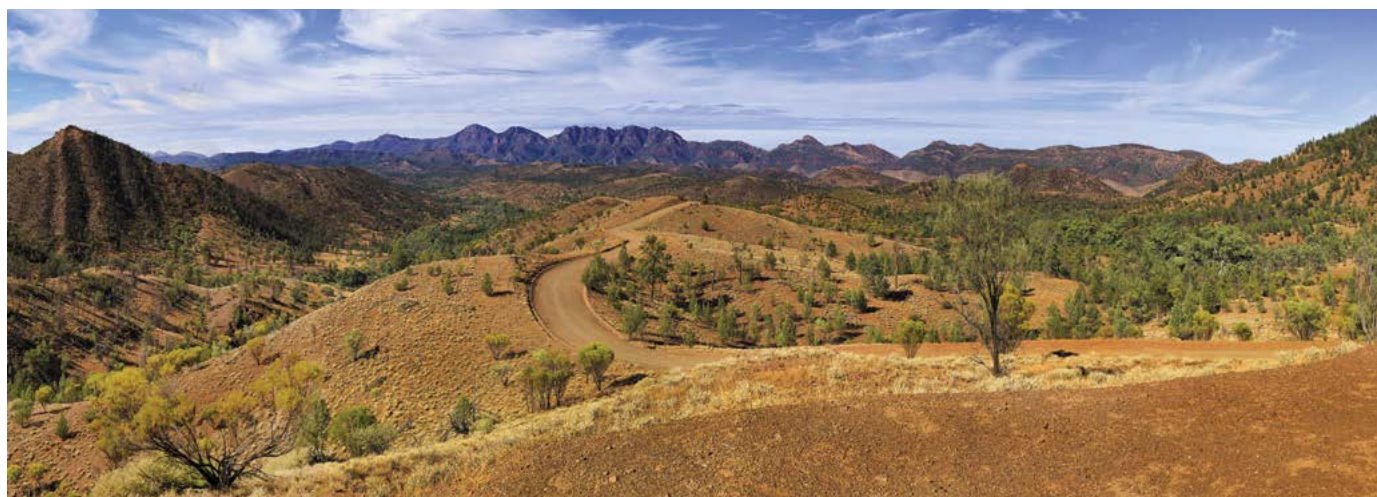
“

Not only are our national parks good for the environment and our health and wellbeing, they are good for the health of the economy.*

”

- NSW Premier, Gladys Berejiklian

* Berejiklian, G. (2020, January 17). Biggest infrastructure investment in history of NSW national parks [Media release]. Retrieved from <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/biggest-infrastructure-investment-history-of-nsw-national-parks>



South Australia

In 2020, the South Australian Government announced new funding for national parks, taking total investment by the Marshall Government to more than \$130 million. This investment will enhance visitor infrastructure in parks across Australia including at the Flinders Ranges, Yorke Peninsula, Eyre Peninsula, Fleurieu Peninsula, Barossa Valley and Adelaide Hills.

SA Environment Minister David Speirs said “The Marshall Liberal Government’s record investment will help us achieve our aim of doubling the state’s nature and heritage tourism expenditure to \$3.4 billion over the next decade, creating 4,000 new jobs”.

“

This once-in-a-generation investment will not only support regional communities and create local jobs, but also protect our precious environment for future generations.**

”

- SA Premier Steven Marshall

** Marshall, S. and Speirs, D. (2020, November 7). Record investment in South Australia’s parks [Media Release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.premier.sa.gov.au/news/media-releases/news/record-investment-in-south-australias-parks>



Our Gamba Army will provide targeted support in areas of significance and provide up to 45 local jobs for Territorians to assist with stimulating the economy.*



- NT Environment Minister Eva Lawler

Northern Territory

In July 2020, the NT Government announced the establishment of a 'Gamba Army' to control highly invasive gamba grass, creating around 45 jobs and providing targeted support in the

prioritised areas of Litchfield National Park, Charles Darwin National Park and the Greater Darwin region. The Gamba Army has now started work eradicating this dangerous weed from key tourism areas.

Australian Capital Territory

In May 2020, the ACT Government announced 26 new bushfire recovery positions in the Parks and Conservation

Service, as part of the territory's \$20 million Jobs for Canberra package.



Investments in 'nature-based solutions' create jobs that typically have low training and education requirements, are fast to establish and require relatively little produced capital for each worker.



- 2020 Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity, produced for Boris Johnson's Conservative UK Government

UK analysis of job opportunities from nature conservation and restoration

In February 2020, the Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity produced for Boris Johnson's Conservative UK Government identified natural capital investments in afforestation, expanding parkland, enhancing rural ecosystems as a high priority for post-COVID recovery.

They cited numerous advantages of investment in these sort of jobs, including

that they: have low training and education requirements; are fast to establish; require relatively little produced capital for each worker; have large economic multipliers, with evidence that 70% spent in local economies is invested or spent locally; can be implemented quickly, and, meet social distancing norms.

* Lawler, E. (2020, December 8). Boots on the Ground, Jobs for Territorians: Gamba Army Works Begin [Media release]. Retrieved from <https://newsroom.nt.gov.au/mediaRelease/34030>

New Zealand's \$1.1 billion Environmental Jobs Package



Lake Wanaka, Otago,
Picture Hannah Wright, Unsplash

On 14 May, Prime Minister Ardern's Government announced a \$1.1 billion environmental jobs package. The package is expected to create 11,000 new jobs in regional NZ, including displaced tourism workers. The program was rolled out quickly, creating new jobs within weeks in hard-hit tourism areas.

In his budget speech, Finance Minister Grant Robinson highlighted this initiative as one of six priority initiatives in response to COVID-19 economic impacts.

"Our rebuild from COVID-19 provides an opportunity to address some of the long-standing sustainability and environmental challenges facing New Zealand. Our

\$1 billion Environmental Jobs package announced today will create thousands of jobs that will at the same time support habitat protection, pest control and biodiversity on our public lands," he said.

The NZ package represents a compelling illustration of the multiple benefits of a conservation and land management

employment package: timely and targeted employment in hard-hit regional areas; important benefits for the environment, farmers and local communities; broad stakeholder support; and, a practical and easily understood way to provide work where and when it is needed most.

United States: Investing in iconic national parks and wild lands



Yosemite National Park will benefit from improvements to maintenance and infrastructure.

Credit: Francesco Ferrarini, Shutterstock.

Civilian Climate Corps

In January 2021, President Biden announced an executive order on climate change and the environment that provides for “the establishment of a Civilian Climate Corps Initiative to put a new generation of Americans to work conserving and restoring public lands and waters, increasing reforestation, increasing carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protecting biodiversity, improving access to recreation, and addressing the changing

climate.” This initiative is reminiscent of President Roosevelt’s Civilian Conservation Corps, which employed millions of unemployed young men during the Great Depression.

Great American Outdoors Act

In 2020, the US Congress passed the Great American Outdoors Act, a landmark law that aims to deliver around US\$900 million for land and water conservation and a further US\$1.9 billion a year over five

years on maintenance and improvements on federal land including national parks, wildlife refuges and range lands. This legislation was passed with bipartisan support and signed into law by former US President Donald Trump. Supporters of the legislation estimate that this historic investment will create more than 100,000 jobs through programs administered by the National Park Service, the Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Bureau of Indian Education.

Learning from experience

Conservation and land management organisations consulted during the preparation of this program proposal emphasised the importance of learning lessons from the delivery of the Australian Government's Green Army program. In particular, stakeholders emphasised the need to:

- Ensure that program activities are clearly and effectively aligned with **long-term conservation and land management strategies** and priorities, including regional natural resource management plans.
- Provide **funding for training, equipment, materials and operational costs** – this will increase program effectiveness, increase uptake by delivery partners and provide flow on benefits for local businesses.
- Clearly articulate strategic conservation and land management outcomes and prioritise activities and locations where benefits can be **maintained over time**.

Experience has demonstrated that programs of this kind deliver not only much needed employment and income for participants, but also provide opportunities for skill development, social connection, mental health benefits, building individual confidence and self-esteem and a sense of contribution to the community.





Delivery of employment programs by land management organisations in Victoria

In Victoria, land management organisations have played a valuable role in the delivery of employment programs following natural disasters and economic shocks.

From 2015-17, the Mallee, Wimmera, North Central and Glenelg Hopkins Catchment Management Authorities delivered the **Drought Employment Program**, as part of the state's broader response to the economic and social impacts of the drought. Over 18 months, the program provided drought affected farmers, farm workers and individuals the opportunity to earn off-farm income to support their families, contribute towards local environment outcomes and build skills for the future. Key stakeholders were generous in their praise for the work teams and participants felt they made a valuable contribution to their local communities:

“
Everyone in town notices that things are getting done and it gives you a lot of pride in the work when you get some acknowledgement from the community – it makes it all worthwhile.”

In 2013, SPC Ardmona announced a dramatic reduction in fruit purchasing contracts worth more than \$100 million to the local economy, sending shock waves through the Goulburn region. In response, Goulburn Broken CMA established the **Fruit Industry Employment Program**, working in partnership with local councils and Parks Victoria to provide much needed employment for affected fruit growers. FIEP participants contributed almost 40,000 hours of environmental works, including 1500 hectares of weed control and 67 kilometres of fencing, while receiving significant income, skills training, and informal social network support.⁵



4. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (2017) *Final Evaluation Report: Drought Employment Program 2015-17*, Government of Victoria. URL: www.water.vic.gov.au/dry/drought-employment-program.

5. Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (2015) *Fruit Industry Employment Program 2013-14: A Fruitful Job Program Partnership*, URL: www.gbcma.vic.gov.au/downloads/Outcome_Stories_Case_Studies/A_Fruitful_Job.pdf.

Principles for effective program delivery

In this section, we outline principles for the effective delivery of conservation and land management employment programs, based on upon the direct experience of stakeholders and lessons learnt from past government programs that contain similar elements to the proposed stimulus program. We have sought to incorporate effective elements that are likely to achieve desired outcomes, while avoiding the known pitfalls.

If these principles are followed, then activities funded under the program should be able to:

- maximise the number of people employed and the short term stimulatory economic impact;
- achieve desired conservation and land management outcomes;
- ensure work is safe, meaningful and productive; and
- deliver enduring environmental, social and economic benefits that lead to a better future.



Photo credit: Greening Australia

High level principles for delivery of a jobs-rich conservation and land management stimulus program:

The following principles are intended to capture the main high-level recommendations to government for program delivery and project selection:

- 1 Target areas of demonstrated economic need where there is an available workforce.
- 2 Address long-term strategic priorities for conservation and land management.
- 3 Build on success – scale up existing programs through trusted delivery partners and approaches.
- 4 Investment in economic recovery should not be at the expense of long-term programs.
- 5 Funding should cover both wages and project implementation costs.
- 6 Ensure gains are secured for the long-term and leverage existing funding streams.
- 7 Involve conservation, farming and land management stakeholders in co-design and delivery.
- 8 Projects must be able to be delivered safely in the context of COVID-19.
- 9 Use best practice risk management and monitoring, reporting and evaluation frameworks.
- 10 Have a separate and dedicated funding stream for Indigenous land and sea management.



Sam Savage from Three Big Rivers points to a patch of the invasive weed lantana.

Principle 1

Target areas of demonstrated economic need where there is an available workforce

1. Forecasting the precise economic impacts of COVID-19 in different regions is difficult, however regions which are particularly vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19 include areas with:
 - High reliance on tourism;
 - High underlying unemployment;
 - Less complex regional economies;
 - Ongoing impacts from recent natural disasters, including bushfires, drought and flooding.
2. Sectors of the workforce that are both vulnerable to the economic impacts of COVID-19 and will be able to safely transition across to practical roles in conservation and land management in their region include:
 - Unemployed young people, including those who have temporarily lost apprenticeship positions;
 - Workers in highly impacted sectors such as tourism, retail, hospitality and the arts;
 - Workers with existing experience in practical conservation and land management who are not currently employed in the sector.
3. In order to maximise the economic stimulatory impact and long-term social and economic benefits, emphasis should be placed upon local procurement of labour and materials.

Principle 2

Address long-term strategic priorities for conservation and land management

1. To be considered a conservation and land management activity for the purpose of this stimulus proposal, activities should contribute to: meeting the goals of Australia's Strategy for Nature 2019-2030; and/or, building Australia's natural capital and the long-term sustainability of food and fibre production through helping improve land and water condition and resilience.
2. In order to maximise the long-term environmental and productive benefits, short-term stimulus activities should be aligned with existing plans and strategies at a local, regional, state and national level. These include:
 - State and territory conservation strategies
 - Bushfire recovery and resilience strategies
 - Regional Natural Resource Management Plans
 - Local, regional and state Landcare plans
3. Programs which demonstrate collaborative cross-sectoral engagement and cross-tenure delivery should be favoured over activities delivered in isolation. Programs that utilise the strengths of different delivery sectors are more likely to have enduring outcomes, improve long-term collaboration, and provide more opportunities for a range of participant skills and interests.

- Farming, fisheries and forestry sector sustainability strategies
- Threatened species recovery plans and threat abatement plans
- National Landcare Program priorities
- Australian Weeds Strategy 2017-2027
- Australian Pest Animal Strategy 2017-27
- Australian Government Drought Response, Resilience and Preparedness Plan
- Strategy for Australia's National Reserve System 2009-2030
- National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy.

Rheardon Cobbo and the Three Big Rivers Team working on areas of threatened beach scrub.



Principle 3

Build on success – scale up existing programs through trusted delivery partners

1. The use of pre-existing methods of delivery will allow the program to harness well developed networks and organisational expertise, while reducing risk, cost and delays.
2. The program should use existing mechanisms to allocate funding to government and non-government delivery partners, including state agencies and National Landcare Program funding arrangements.
3. Funding should be allocated to:
(a) ongoing activities which can be safely and effectively scaled up;
(b) planned activities which can be brought forward; or
(c) shovel-ready new initiatives which can be quickly implemented.
4. For non-government partners, allocate funding to organisations with a demonstrated capacity to deliver conservation and land management projects safely and effectively.

Principle 4

Investment in economic recovery should not undermine long-term programs

1. This proposal is for immediate stimulus in response to the current crisis. It is not intended to replace existing environmental funding programs and will not remove the need for longer-term measures to support the environment to recover after the bushfires, save threatened species and increase natural capital on our farms and in our landscapes.

Principle 5

Funding should cover both wages and project implementation costs

1. Experience from past employment programs in the sector, including the Federal Green Army, has shown that if funding is allocated to wages but project costs are underfunded then the conservation and land management outcomes may fail to be met and the productivity of the workforce can be compromised.
2. In order to address this, it is recommended that at least 25% of funding covers project implementation costs including training, equipment, materials, transport and other operational costs.
3. Wages should be paid at award rates, with the majority of jobs in low or semi-skilled positions to encourage participation. Provision should also be made for higher paid positions in project management and planning, team leadership and positions which require specialised technical knowledge.
4. As a stimulus program, projects should be tailored to a short-term surge in effort with most roles (~90%) finishing within 12-24 months. Some roles should continue for longer than 24 months to secure the gains of the initial surge in effort and ensure there is tapered return of people to the workforce.
5. Periods of employment less than six months are not recommended as they may compromise the adequacy of the program in terms of both economic stimulus and conservation and land management outcomes. Employment contracts of at least six months will ordinarily be needed to ensure adequate training and delivery.
6. For Indigenous communities, employment should be offered for a longer period as outlined in Principle 9.

Principle 6

Ensure gains are secured for the long-term and leverage existing funding streams

1. In order to maintain and consolidate the gains of a short-term surge in effort and maximise the value for money for taxpayers, government agencies and delivery partners should be required to demonstrate how they intend to secure conservation and land management gains for the longer term.
2. This can be done by: (a) selecting activities with relatively durable outputs (e.g. fencing), (b) selecting locations with ongoing capacity to maintain conservation and land management outcomes (e.g. national parks, council reserves); or (c) using conservation covenants, maintenance agreements and similar tools to ensure ongoing maintenance commitments are in place by relevant land managers to maintain outcomes over time.
3. In order to maximise the resources available and the impact of funding, projects should also seek to leverage additional project funding. This could be through: (a) building on complementary funding streams, such as for bushfire and drought recovery; (b) scaling up existing government programs; (c) bringing forward planned spending or (d) securing additional investment from the non-government sector.

Principle 7

Involve conservation, farming and land management stakeholders in co-design and delivery

1. This project offers governments a unique opportunity to build on the cross sectoral engagement and collaboration between conservation and agriculture sectors by involving them in the co-design and delivery of the program.
2. Leveraging the expertise and goodwill across the conservation and land management sector, including in state agencies, local government, non-profit organisations and the private sector, will reduce program risks and improve program outcomes.
3. Collaboration and cooperation between federal, state and territory and local governments will reduce duplication, maximise the funds available and fairly distribute the benefits and costs.
4. Ensuring flexibility in program design and broad eligibility criteria will allow the program to meet local needs and build upon local networks and partners.

Principle 8

Projects must be able to be delivered safely in the context of COVID-19

1. Conservation and land management jobs can be delivered safely, including in the context of COVID-19 social distancing requirements.
2. Delivery partners must be able to demonstrate that they can meet

all required work health and safety expectations and regulations, including hand washing, supply of personal protective equipment, compliance with social distancing and procedures for managing an outbreak of COVID-19 if it occurs. Projects should be able to be delivered in the context of state border and other closures as a result of COVID-19.

3. Delivery partners should be prepared to change a project to meet any updates to COVID-19 requirements as they occur. This may require adjustments to a project's expected outcomes and/or funding.

Principle 9

Use best practice economic assessment, risk management, monitoring and evaluation

1. Delivery partners should assess financial, organisational and environmental risks associated with a project before funding is provided.
2. Work should be appropriate to the level of skill of participants and caution should be applied to the use of unskilled labor in environmentally sensitive areas.
3. Delivery partners must be able to demonstrate to government that they have met the expected employment, conservation and land management outcomes using standard monitoring, reporting and evaluation frameworks.
4. Proponents should be able to demonstrate an acceptable return on investment or cost benefit ratio, and not create unacceptable economic and budgetary liabilities.

Principle 10

Have a separate and dedicated funding stream for Indigenous land and sea management

1. Based on experience from existing programs, such as the federal Indigenous Protected Areas program and Working on Country ranger program, funding for Indigenous land and sea management should be provided on a longer-term basis than other stimulus funding. This is because Indigenous communities and organisations usually require stable and flexible funding over the longer term to be successful.
2. Temporary funding can create complexity which may be difficult to navigate for Indigenous groups given the additional barriers they typically face to equitable participation. Chronic long-term unemployment requires a more stable investment and there should also be allowances for cultural decision-making processes.
3. Funding for Indigenous land and sea management should be aligned with well-developed existing programs and reporting requirements should not be overly burdensome. A dedicated funding stream should not preclude Indigenous participation in other funding streams under this proposal.



Working with Nature

Restoring landscapes and supporting
regional economic recovery

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