

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION AND THE NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

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CSIRO and The Ian Potter Foundation

Report to the Land and Water Resources R&D Corporation and Environment Australia
National Program on Rehabilitation, Management and Conservation of Remnant Vegetation

A Discussion Paper

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PREFACE

This discussion paper reports the outcomes of an initiative undertaken by CSIRO and The Ian Potter Foundation that has assessed the role of the non-government sector in conserving Australia's bushland and natural resources.

This discussion paper forms the final component of 3 year study that has evaluated opportunities for the use of incentive based instruments in the conservation of remnant vegetation. The study is funded through the National Program on Rehabilitation, Management and Conservation of Remnant Vegetation which is funded by Land and Water Resources R&D Corporation and Environment Australia.

Our objective has been to identify those actions that need to be taken to achieve a significant increase in the scope and scale of investment in landscape conservation made by the non-government sector and private individuals in Australia.

Leaders with an interest in landscape conservation from the philanthropic, business, conservation and government sectors were brought together in November 1999 to identify the opportunities and impediments to greater non-government sector involvement. A draft discussion paper was prepared following this meeting and following comment has formed the basis for the development of this final discussion paper.

The paper identifies a range of policy options for both the government and non-government sectors. To the maximum extent possible actions have been identified that can be taken without the need for change in government policy or legislative frameworks. However, in those situations where policy change is required, specific actions for government have also been identified.

This paper is a starting point. It is hoped that the discussion paper can be a catalyst for increased dialogue and that it will facilitate the development of more effective partnerships for landscape conservation and natural resource management between landholders, local communities, philanthropists, businesses and governments.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper seeks to identify the actions required to meet the following vision for non-government sector involvement in landscape conservation.

To foster community-business-government partnerships that create strong and vibrant markets for private investment and philanthropic donation for the conservation of Australia's landscapes.

The objective is to facilitate a significant expansion in the size and scope of non-government activity in conserving Australia's natural resources. A goal has been set for the non-government sector to facilitate numerous large-scale landscape conservation programs in each Australian State and establish an additional 2500 private conservation reserves nationally by 2020. This will require a wider range of organisations and individuals to become involved, including the community, philanthropic, business, research and conservation sectors.

There is of course already a wide and growing range of such activities in Australia. However, too often conservation activities are undertaken on a project by project basis with little coordination of activities between both government and non-government players. To address this shortcoming this document puts forward a bold agenda for landscape scale partnerships to be developed that facilitate larger and more strategic approaches to achieving conservation outcomes with local communities. This ultimately requires the integration of conservation objectives needs, production systems and social factors.

A range of policy options is identified for consideration by both non-government and government decision makers. Each of these options seeks to address one of the following gaps and/or challenges in facilitating more productive community-business-government partnerships.

Identifying Markets for Landscape Conservation: The role of the non-government sector in achieving the conservation of natural resources at a landscape scale is poorly defined. Opportunities for developing markets for philanthropic giving, private reserves, environment services such as carbon sequestration, and environmental certification of agricultural commodities are identified. However, these markets either do not exist, are inactive or are only just starting to emerge in Australia. In order to secure increased non-government involvement there is a need to raise general community awareness and preparedness to invest in and make donations for landscape conservation. To do this it is proposed that a working group be established to develop and secure support for the creation of new environmental markets.

Institutional Arrangements: There is a need to establish the legislative, policy and organisational frameworks that can secure large scale enduring conservation programs. To achieve this it is proposed that a charter for community-government-business partnerships be developed that establishes the principles for the creation of conservation partnerships. Other proposals relate to putting in place systems for accounting for off-reserve conservation and the need to review land tenure arrangements.

Information Exchange and Capacity Building: A significant challenge is to improve expertise and information bases that non-government organisations can draw upon in developing conservation programs. Although numerous informal networks exist the information base is fragmented and there is limited investment in building the capacity of new organisations. Options for developing information sharing networks through the Internet and capacity building programs such as leadership and organisation support programs are identified.

Securing Funding: If the goals put forward in this document are to be met new resources will be required. If clear pathways for investment and donation are identified there is scope for significant growth. The ability to develop well targeted fund raising strategies will be central to the achievement of increased funding levels.

There is a potential role for an organisation such as Philanthropy Australia to provide training and networks to organisations involved in on-ground conservation that are yet to tap into the philanthropic market. For government the critical task is to continue to strengthen tax incentives for giving to environmental programs so that they at least align with tax incentives for cultural heritage.

Accessing the Full Range of Conservation Tools: Non-government organisations cannot easily access the full range of policy tools and incentives that are available for promoting the conservation of natural areas. Many States in Australia have yet to establish Conservation Trusts with the ability to negotiate conservation covenants at arms length from government. Likewise the potential to use innovative schemes such as revolving funds and auction systems is limited. Options for facilitating broader use of innovative conservation tools are put forward.

These challenges are significant. Only with a combination of actions between the government and non-government sectors will the potential for community based landscape conservation be realised.

Consultations undertaken in the preparation of this paper have revealed a strong consensus amongst government, community and business leaders on the need for non-government involvement. Indeed the government discussion paper: *Managing Natural Resources in Rural Australia for a Sustainable Future* acknowledges the increased importance of the non-government sector and identifies the need to remove any policy or structural hindrances to the development and participation of the non-governments sector in natural resource management activities.

Further, there is a high level of consensus on the issues that need to be addressed. However, there is less clarity on the issue of who should move first to address the policy issues and impediments to establishing partnerships for landscape conservation. The problem would appear to be one of initiation: collective action is required to establish investment pathways prior to individual organisations being able to become actively engaged.

For these reasons an over-arching policy option identified here is to put in place a forum for improving dialogue between community, business, philanthropic, conservation and government leaders on market creation and the strategic engagement of the non-government sector. The Commonwealth government in partnership with key community and business leaders is in a unique position to establish such a forum.

Policy Option 1 – A community-business-government forum

A community-business-government forum for landscape conservation be established to develop dialogue and partnerships between leaders in the community, philanthropic, business and government sectors. The forum would be linked to the government's Community Business Partnership initiative. Priority tasks for the forum would be to:

- Develop proposals for facilitating new markets for landscape conservation (Policy Option 2).
- Develop a charter for government-business-community conservation partnerships that articulates the principles against which conservation partnerships may be put in place in an administratively efficient manner (Policy Option 3).
- Develop an efficient mechanism for information sharing and building the capacity of the non-government sector to develop and deliver conservation programs (Policy Options 7 and 8).
- Further develop and refine proposals for the introduction of tax incentives for private investment in landscape conservation (Policy Options 10).
- Facilitate the establishment of independent Conservation Trusts with the capacity to enter into conservation covenants in all States and Territories (Policy Option 11).

INTRODUCTION

We are balancing two resources: land and people. The maintenance of the land (the natural resources) is dependent on the knowledge, desire and disposable income of the people (the human resources). While the desire may be present, there are deficiencies in both education and capital it may be more advantageous to nurture the community that controls the land.

Richard Weatherly, Watershed 2000

This paper is aimed at understanding the role of the non-government sector in landscape conservation – that is it seeks to identify the mechanisms through which the natural resources of our regions, and the people who live in those regions, can be sustained by the non-government sector.

The paper identifies the challenges involved in developing active partnerships for landscape conservation across a range of non-government organisations, businesses and governments.¹

Defining Landscape Conservation

Decline in Australia's rural and remote regions has become endemic. This is reflected in the status of our landscapes, which are subject to a wide range of economic, social, environment pressures. Rural populations, services and infrastructure are in decline in many regions outside regional centers. Further, environmental and natural resource management problems are becoming increasingly urgent.

It is to the environmental issues facing rural and regional Australia that this paper is focussed. However, it seeks to do so in a way that recognises the fundamental role of people, particularly land managers, in managing these issues.

For example, loss of biodiversity is perhaps Australia's most urgent environmental problem (see 1996 Commonwealth State of the Environment Report). However, addressing the loss of biodiversity will require a fundamental shift in approaches to conservation policy.

- It is broadly recognised that many of our most vulnerable ecosystems (groups of native plants and animals and the physical environment in which they live) are found on land that is managed by private landholders, for example the temperate woodlands and grasslands of the sheep-wheat belt of south eastern Australia. Increasingly it is recognised that traditional approaches to public conservation through National Parks will not, if used in isolation, work to adequately conserve our biological diversity. Rather an approach that fosters conservation stewardship by individual landholders is required to complement publicly owned conservation reserves.
- The protection of biodiversity requires policies and programs to be planned at a landscape scale that takes into account the interactions between different land systems and the ecological processes that underpin them. Natural systems must be effectively integrated with human production systems. Hence, a landscape approach to conservation demands a much broader set of strategies.
- Biodiversity conservation requires effective engagement of regional and local communities and must be underpinned by strategies that maintain the economic viability and social vitality of regional communities.

¹The term “non-government sector” includes the full suite of individuals and organisations involved in conservation activities outside of formal government programs. The term “community-business-government” partnerships is shorthand for the need to establish closer working arrangements between all people and organisations with an interest in conservation.

For these reasons the term landscape conservation is used in this report to describe a human focused approach to achieving environmental outcomes – an approach that recognises the central role of land managers in achieving conservation outcomes.

Some of the attributes that landscape conservation may embody are set out below.

- Conservation should be marketed in the context of investing in “on-ground” actions/outcomes.
- On-ground action should be seen as politically neutral, a product that has its own value and identity separate from environmental advocacy to governments.
- Effective conservation requires engagement between the broader community and local communities and land managers through communal action and partnerships.
- Conservation requires improved connections between urban and regional Australia.
- Conservation outcomes can only be achieved at a landscape scale where production, conservation and social issues are effectively integrated.
- Conservation must be action oriented: it must sell solutions and success, as well as problems. There is a need to get good news stories out: “the problem is real but if we work together it can be solved”.
- There is a need to establish a clear link between actions that can be taken today (investment opportunities) and the environmental benefits they will deliver.

The Need for Non-Government Sector Involvement

There are a number of important characteristics of the non-government sector that highlight the importance of their involvement in developing new approaches to landscape conservation.

- The perceived independence of the non-government sector means that it can engage many private landholders that will not deal with government. The experience of Trust for Nature in Victoria would suggest this is indeed the case. Likewise the employment of local landholders as extension officers is proving a highly successful innovation in many conservation programs.
- Non-government organisations are often less constrained than government agencies and, hence, are better able to gauge community needs and to develop entrepreneurial solutions. Global experience suggests they are often the source of innovation.
- Free of bureaucratic processes non-government organisations are often able to deliver on-ground outcomes more efficiently than government organisations. This is particularly true at local and regional scales where individual knowledge and networks are often critical.

Nevertheless governments have played and will continue to play a critical role in planning for and achieving conservation outcomes. Governments are required to establish the legislative, policy and program structures that correct the failure of markets to adequately recognise conservation as a public good.

One of the critical elements of developing innovative approaches to landscape conservation is to be able to combine a range of information and expertise including research, local knowledge, program development and management, and landholder extension and communication. It is unlikely that a single organisation would have all of these skills or the capacity to reach all landholders. Hence, active partnerships and collaboration are required between all the players including government, philanthropists, businesses and the community sector.

Scope for Community-Business-Government Partnerships in Australia

The challenge is to identify the mechanisms through which active partnerships for conservation can be formed both within the non-government sector and also with governments.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the current range of non-government activity in landscape conservation. There is cause for optimism in the rapidly expanding range of activity which is perhaps best evidenced by the growth in the number of non-government organisations actively promoting the protection of bushland outside of the formal reserve system. Organisations such as the Trust for Nature (Vic), the Australian Landscape Trust, The Australian Bush Heritage Fund, National Trust (WA) and the World Wide Fund for Nature have significantly expanded their role in recent years. Further, the New South Wales, Queensland and South Australian governments are actively considering the establishment of independent Conservation Trusts. At a local scale there is a huge range of local and regionally based groups undertaking conservation works both within and outside the Landcare movement.

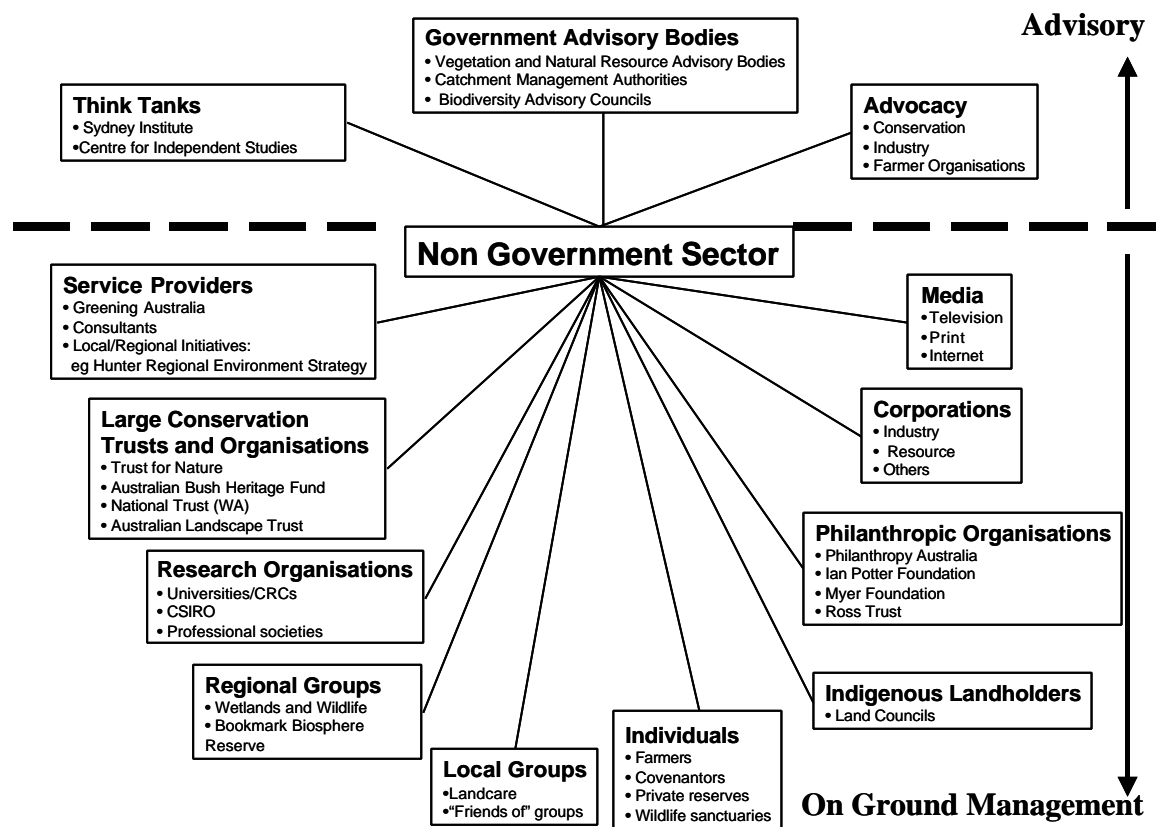


Figure 1: The range of non-government players in Australia

Closer to government, organisations such as Greening Australia are actively involved in delivering government programs at arms length. Linkages between the community and government through advisory bodies and advocacy groups are also strong.

Whilst the level and growth of activity is encouraging, the challenge is to identify the mechanisms through which more effective partnerships can be developed between the different categories of organisation represented in Figure 1. Too often current conservation initiatives are constrained by only involving a narrow range of organisations. For example, although there are notable exceptions, local Landcare and catchment groups are often tied to

government funding programs and have only limited awareness or connection to business, philanthropic or research organisations with an interest in landscape conservation and natural resource management. If synergies between organisations can be found, particularly ones that provide connectivity between urban and regional Australia, it is believed that markets, funding and participation of the non-government sector in conservation activities can be significantly expanded.

In summary, the following characteristics of successful partnerships for landscape conservation can be identified:

- the collaboration of several non-government organisations, businesses and government working in partnership to achieve conservation outcomes at a landscape/regional scale;
- an appropriate balance struck between *engagement of local communities* and their aspirations for land management and *leadership in natural resource management* through provision of information, identification of conservation priorities, funding and organisational support;
- clear linkages established between environmental, natural resource, social and economic development programs within a region;
- acceptance that different organisations have different strengths and weaknesses and hence different niches within which they can effectively contribute in partnership;
- active promotion of successes and collaboration that secures ongoing community and political support including funding from both the public and private sector.

DEFINING A VISION AND GOAL FOR NON-GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The need to increase non-government sector involvement in landscape conservation has prompted the development of a Vision and Goal statement for the development of non-government conservation initiatives in Australia.

Vision

To foster community-business-government partnerships that create strong and vibrant markets for private investment and philanthropic donation for the conservation of Australia's landscapes – the natural environment and the regional communities who are required to sustain them.

Goal

Through private and non-government sector investment the following will be achieved by 2020:

- *numerous large-scale regional programs that demonstrate sustainable natural resource management at a landscape scale will be in place in each State and Territory; and*
- *an additional 2500 private bushland reserves will have been created and be sustainably managed.*

These vision and goal statements need to be understood in the following context.

- Private investment is needed to complement *but not replace* existing public expenditure for landscape conservation. Because of the size and urgency of the task of conserving Australia's natural resources a significant increase in investment is required to effectively achieve our landscape objectives. Successful engagement of private markets is one component of this task.
- Given an appropriate policy framework, there is ample scope for individuals, philanthropists, businesses, and governments to work in partnership with land managers to achieve sustainable management of our natural resources and environment.
- The inclusion in the goal of several large scale regional programs in each State, is aimed at addressing land management issues at an appropriate landscape scale. Such programs would be characterised by partnerships between a wide range of organisations and landholders with a joint vision for integrating conservation and production objectives.
- The goal of 2500 private reserves by 2020 can be achieved if approximately 20 private conservation reserves are established in each State each year and a further 5 reserves established in each year in the Territories.² It is acknowledged that the goal of establishing private conservation reserves represents only one component of a broader strategy for non-government involvement in landscape conservation, but is put forward as a good indicator of activity in this area.
- Private reserves are not an end in themselves, rather ongoing best practice management of bushland areas by both the government and non-government sector is the goal.

² A key issue will be to develop agreed criteria for the establishment of private reserves. It is suggested that formal recognition as a "private conservation reserve" should be dependent on voluntary entry into a conservation covenant that is noted on land title and is legally binding in perpetuity. However, it is noted that a wider range of more flexible instruments will be required including non-binding agreements and a range of cost-sharing and catalytic grants.

IDENTIFYING MARKETS FOR LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION

The disjunct between urban and regional Australia is growing. Terms such as “nature conservation” and “biodiversity” are strongly associated with the creation of national parks but not with environmental stewardship by land managers.

A more mature debate is required that addresses the role of conservation in sustaining production systems and maintaining social cohesion in regional Australia. A foundation for such an approach has been laid through the Landcare movement that has done much to achieve heightened awareness of environmental issues.

However, business leaders involved in the preparation of this discussion paper noted that the term “landscape conservation” is poorly defined. If greater non-government sector involvement is to be secured, then these terms need to be more effectively defined, labelled and marketed, particularly to urban Australians.

Potential markets that may assist in connecting urban and regional Australia in funding landscape conservation are outlined below.

Philanthropic markets

Philanthropic markets relate to the willingness of individuals to make donations for environmental works. They are a particular priority for facilitating greater urban engagement in landscape conservation. Philanthropy can be generated at any scale, ranging from small donations from concerned citizens to major contributions from wealthy individuals and corporations.

Despite common perception there is an active philanthropic market in Australia. However, despite notable exceptions, only a relatively small share of philanthropy has been directed towards environmental works. This is changing with a number of leaders in the philanthropic sector noting increased awareness of environmental issues in the preparation of this report.

Markets for private reserves

Individuals may wish to invest directly in ownership of private conservation reserves. This opportunity is particularly relevant to achieving conservation outcomes on the urban fringes of Australia’s major populations centres – the eastern and south western coastal zones where many of our most vulnerable ecosystems are located. In these cases there is opportunity to redirect the investment from individuals who wish to buy a lifestyle block, away from primary production and towards conservation. However, as will be discussed, there remain significant tax impediments to achieving these outcomes, as conservation is not considered a business and therefore conservation blocks cannot access business related tax deductions.

Markets for environmental services

Landscapes underpin production of most of the goods and services that humans value. They directly provide the resources that feed, clothe and shelter us. Markets exist for these goods. However, landscapes also provide services for which land managers receive no financial return, although their benefits cannot be doubted. Notable examples include carbon sequestration, maintenance of water quality, control of ground water recharge that causes salinity and the protection of biodiversity.

It may be possible to create direct markets for goods of this kind, for example the Sydney Futures Exchange is currently developing a market for trading in carbon and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment in Victoria is developing auction systems for provision of conservation services.

Markets for sustainably produced commodities

Much attention has been given in recent years to the potential for environmental certification to provide a market niche in commodity markets that continue to experience declines in real terms of trade. A notable example is the drive for Australia to be perceived as the Green Food Basket of Asia.

Accreditation could take place under generic management system approaches such as ISO 14 000 or specific industry based standards such as those established for forestry by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Environmental certification is having its greatest influence in Europe, particularly in response to genetically modified foods, which has assisted in driving the market share of organically grown foods to over 10% in Britain.

Markets for offsetting environmental degradation

Markets can also be used to provide greater flexibility in the delivery of government regulation. In these cases polluting activities are given flexibility in how they achieve prescribed environmental standards. For example, tradeable permits give organisations the option of directly reducing pollution or purchasing excess rights from other users who are able to reduce pollution at a lower cost.

Each of these potential markets for landscape conservation is important. However, it must be recognised that many of the markets either do not exist, are inactive, or are just emerging.

For this reason a critical challenge is to raise general awareness of environmental services provided through landscape conservation and thereby increase the overall size of these markets. Further, policy makers need to be engaged in dialogue over how to facilitate the creation of markets of this kind.

Box 2 – Example of innovative environmental markets

EcologyFund.com is an innovative Web site, www.EcologyFund.com, which gives the public the opportunity to “click” to preserve wilderness at no cost to them. Visitors can save 276 square feet of land each day by clicking on projects in Patagonia, US Wilderness Areas, and the Amazon Basin Rainforest. In the eight weeks since the site was launched, conservation of over 700 acres of land had been secured. EcologyFund.com currently works with the World Land Trust and the Wilderness Land Trust. These trusts purchase threatened lands with sponsorship funds received from site advertisers.

A number of suggestions as to how conservation outcomes may be more broadly marketed were identified in discussion with community leaders in the preparation of this paper. These include the following.

- A non-government and philanthropy expo where conservation information, actions and strategies are put forward to potential investors.
- A communication program using a combination of high profile and grass roots people to make issues relevant to all Australians.
- Use of flagship species to promote conservation, including less well recognised species which do not fall in the category of charismatic mega-fauna. A suggestion was to create cartoon/animated characters.

Individual organisations already do a great deal to promote themselves and their role in landscape conservation. However it is recognised that there is a need to communicate at a broader scale – to develop a communication strategy that raises community awareness and preparedness without being affiliated to any particular organisation. Such a communication task requires considerable commitment, resources and expertise.

Policy Option 2

In order to secure the growth of markets for landscape conservation there is a need to develop and create new and innovative ways to market environmental services.

Non-government sector actions

A working group be established to:

- develop proposals for creating new markets for landscape conservation; and
- secure funding for a high profile national campaign raising awareness of conservation issues and the urgency of developing community partnerships.

This group would develop a portfolio for investment by governments and the non-government sector.

Government actions

Governments have a key responsibility to research and facilitate the development of new markets for landscape conservation. A particular challenge is to remove impediments to market creation by the non-government sector.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMMUNITY-BUSINESS-GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

There are currently only a limited range of mechanisms for establishing partnerships for landscape conservation between different organisations.

Of particular significance is the relationship between the non-government sector and government - often seen as adversarial where interest groups compete for the attention of governments in securing funding and/or advocating policy change. Alternatively governments often perceive the non-government sector as a service provider, simply a more efficient way of delivering existing government programs. What is required is a relationship where governments and the non-government sector work collaboratively for the achievement of landscape conservation objectives.

Four key challenges relating to putting in place institutional structures that facilitate more active partnerships for landscape conservation are discussed in this section.

- Arrangements for establishing formal partnerships between the government and non-government sector.
- Capacity to develop durable self-sustaining programs.
- Achieving formal recognition of non-government efforts for private conservation.
- Rationalising land tenure arrangements

Arrangements for establishing formal partnerships

It is recognised that relationships between government and business will, through necessity, take a variety of forms ranging from the provision of services to the development of more active bi-partisan partnerships.

However, when developing larger scale programs for landscape conservation it is often difficult to access and work with bureaucratic structures and to have decisions made by government. Current structures for partnership between government and local communities, such as through the Natural Heritage Trust's "One-Stop-Shop", are often not appealing to businesses or philanthropic investors. In these cases they would rather have a direct relationship with government.

If the non-government sector is to actively work with governments there is a need to establish relationships where power and decision making are evenly shared. This is not a superficial issue given the differences in the decision making processes of governments and private organisations and businesses. A good example of the type of difficulties that can be encountered was in the development of a partnership for the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve between the South Australian Government and the Australian Landscape Trust. In this case changes in legislation were ultimately negotiated to overcome difficulties in land management.

As a starting point, it is suggested that when both the private sector and government financially contribute to a conservation initiative the following principles should underpin that arrangement.

- *Contractual* - the arrangement should clearly establish the resources contributed by all parties and unambiguously define roles and responsibilities particularly in relation to long term management and funding responsibilities;
- *Clearly define outcomes* - partnerships should have measurable goals and objectives – both in terms of on ground outcomes and in relation to community capacity building;

- *Cost effectiveness and efficiency* - to attract clients, proposals for non-government investment in conservation activities should deliver in a cost effective and efficient manner;
- *Transparency* - transparency is required in both directions. This would give non-government organisations a clear understanding of the circumstances under which governments are willing to contribute to regional programs and likewise would ensure funds provided to the non-government sector are appropriately administered;
- *Attribution* - outcomes of collaborative projects should allow for due acknowledgement;
- *Monitoring* - arrangements for evaluating the effectiveness of programs should be developed.

Impediments to achieving compliance with these principles do need to be addressed, however. For example, where corporations make donations to environmental programs and receive recognition, their contribution may not be tax deductible as a gift as it is considered that they receive a material benefit in the form of corporate sponsorship.

Another impediment relates to transparency in eligibility for government funding. As noted criteria for community grants are generally transparent as evidenced by the “One-Stop-Shop” for Natural Heritage Trust grants. However, processes for securing larger scale partnerships are less well defined.

The development of a charter for community-business-government partnerships for landscape conservation would do much to address these impediments and give full effect to these principles.

Policy Option 3

Action for both governments and the non-government sector

To facilitate larger scale partnerships for landscape conservation a charter for government – business – community partnerships be developed which articulates the principles against which large scale conservation partnerships may be put in place in an administratively efficient manner.

Self Sustaining Programs

The capacity of non-government organisations and the private sector to provide ongoing (recurrent) funding for environmental projects is limited. For this reason it is important that mechanisms be established for making environmental initiatives self-funding in the medium to long term.

The concept of providing catalytic support (both in terms of financial and organisational capacity) to get new conservation initiatives and/or environmental markets established is attractive. Ideally support would be removed once a self sustaining system has been created. Once again the Bookmark Biosphere Reserve program provides an example of where innovative new industries, such as cut flowers from semi-arid Australia, are being researched, developed and marketed with a view to developing a more secure revenue stream in the future. Likewise the Commonwealth government’s Natural Heritage Trust is aimed at providing catalytic support for new environment projects.

However, it was also recognised that in some situations, ongoing financial support may be required to sustain conservation outcomes. The need for ongoing support will be most strong where those land-uses that are compatible with conservation outcomes are no longer economically viable or where significant environmental externalities exist. An example would be the situation where there are pressures to convert a native grass/shrub-land to cropping. In

these cases there may be an urgent need to take action to protect the area from more intensive land-uses.

These situations present a particular problem for both government and non-government organisations. Should programs be initiated that will place a long-term financial burden on organizations? Programs of this kind may be perceived as the purview of governments, however, funding from this sector can be equally uncertain, particularly when considered over a number of political cycles.

One approach is to require a capital base large enough to secure the ongoing viability of a new project prior to commencement. This is the attitude taken by the National Trust in the United Kingdom that will not accept a property in the absence of a capital fund that is sufficient to secure its ongoing management. The cost of this approach is that action will only be taken in a secure environment, and this rarely exists.

To address this situation it was suggested that a pilot/trust fund could be established that aims at maintaining income of landholders on ecologically significant areas that are protected via conservation covenant. This fund would need to be managed at arms length from government to provide long-term security. Alternatively acquisition by government or non-government organisations such as the Australian Bush Heritage fund may be more effective in some situations, providing the ongoing management needs of the site can be met.

Policy Option 4

To maximise returns on investment, both government and non-government programs should be targeted at initiatives that have the potential to become self-sustaining after a period of initial investment.

In those situations where ongoing payments are required, a capital fund sufficient to sustain ongoing payments should be secured.

Government and non-government sector action

Consideration be given to establishing a stewardship fund to provide ongoing funding, in the form of income support, for the management of land of outstanding conservation value that would otherwise be lost to alternative land-uses.

Recognition of Non-government Activities

There are currently no mechanisms for accounting for and quantifying the contribution of the non-government sector to achieving landscape conservation objectives. Lack of institutional recognition means that the contribution of private initiatives cannot be readily quantified. This is important for two reasons. First, it means that the role of private conservation is often neglected in the development of government policy at national, State, regional and local scales. Second, the poor public profile of private conservation impedes its future growth.

The concept of a Conservation Management Network has been developed to address this concern (see figure 2). The objective is to develop management strategies that maximise the contribution that each tenure of land can make to the achievement of conservation outcomes. No tenure is considered “superior” to another. Rather management strategies that maximise opportunities for integrating conservation objectives with other land-uses are actively pursued on all land tenures. For example, in the case of rural lands, conservation actions would need to be integrated with agricultural practices and the protection of corridors of native vegetation. The framework is inclusive and acknowledges that in many regions conservation objectives will not be met exclusively through formal reserves and thus requires greater integration between on- and off-reserve conservation.³

³ It is noted that such a framework is not new and is consistent with the approach used in the United Nations Environment Program’s Biosphere Reserve model initiated in 1972.

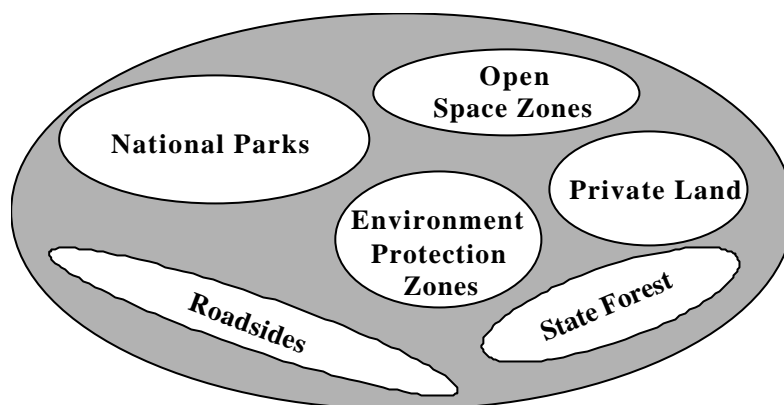


Figure 2: The concept of a conservation management network

The concept of a Conservation Management Network could be put in place by developing a database that records:

- the *distribution* of native vegetation by ecological communities within the region;
- the *significance* of specific sites in meeting the region's conservation objectives including, where available, an assessment of site quality; and
- the *security* of management for conservation on the site. For example the land-uses permitted and any commitments entered by the landholder to conservation management.

If such a database was maintained it would be possible to objectively evaluate the status of ecological communities and review management strategies. The database would also provide a baseline against which changes and losses in the distribution of ecological communities could be measured through time.

Such a database would allow for the relative contribution of different organisations and sectors to be quantified for the first time and, hence, provide greater recognition and profile for the role of the non-government sector.

The coordination of information of this kind is primarily a responsibility of governments. However, in the absence of adoption by governments, it is directly in the interests of non-government organisations to demonstrate the environmental and cost effectiveness of conservation programs.

Policy Option 5

In order to highlight the importance of non-government sector in landscape conservation, a database should be put in place to ensure that the contributions of the non-government sector to meeting conservation objectives are recorded and quantified.

Actions for the non-government sector

Develop a national and/or regional database/s for recording projects undertaken by the non-government sector and their contribution to conserving different ecological communities.

Actions for government

Integrate database to ensure that all government investment in landscape conservation, be it on or off reserve, is recorded on a consistent basis.

The development of a database in itself is of course not sufficient to ensure improved recognition of the non-government sector. It is, however, a necessary starting point.

Rationalising Land Tenure Arrangements

Many of the problems associated with on-ground landscape conservation stem from the different regulatory arrangements that are applied to different land-use tenures. Different legislative and approval processes exist for different land tenures making the achievement of landscape scale conservation initiatives problematic.

For example arrangements for entering stewardship arrangements with landholders will vary depending on whether the land is freehold, leasehold or managed by a government agency. In each case different government agencies and legislative frameworks must be complied with.

Opportunities for developing conservation partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land owners are also an important area for further investigation.

A thorough review of land management and tenure arrangements is well overdue – although inevitably politically contentious. Such a review could be undertaken under a similar model to that developed for the water reform through the Council of Australian Government (COAG). Such a process would allow a long term agenda for rationalisation of land tenure and management arrangements to be undertaken.

It is noted that this conclusion is consistent with the “Bathurst declaration on administration for sustainable development”. The declaration was the outcome of a workshop held jointly by the United Nations and the International Federation of Surveyors in Bathurst in October 1999.

Policy Option 6

Review of legislative and regulatory frameworks for the administration of land tenure is required to facilitate improved delivery of conservation and natural resource management programs.

Actions for government

Through the Council of Australian Governments, put in place a strategic long term reform process for simplifying arrangements for land tenure management in Australia.

INFORMATION EXCHANGE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

In the information age, credible, accessible information is critical to developing successful conservation programs. Information in itself is of course not sufficient, with expertise and experience in a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds required to build the capacity of organisations to develop, manage and deliver on ground conservation programs.

The need for expertise and training in establishing conservation programs is quite broad ranging, including, *inter alia*, the following expertise and capacities:

- **Ecological knowledge** including capacity to identify conservation priorities, the practical management needs of different ecological communities, and the ability to establish and maintain adequate monitoring.
- **Landholder and community extension** including knowledge of local communities and strategies for engaging and working in partnership with communities and private landholders.
- **Program design** including analysis of the relative strengths and weaknesses of different programs and policy tools currently used in Australia and overseas.
- **Program management** including strategic and project planning, management of staff and coordination of activities both within and outside the organisation.
- **Business and financial management** including fund raising, accountable financial management, and legal management including negotiation of management agreements and contracts with landholders.

Information Exchange

Although numerous informal networks exist, there is currently no formal mechanism for sharing information on non-government initiatives for landscape conservation. The closest mechanism we are aware of is the Conservation on Private Land Network (CONPLAN) that brings together organisations involved in entering management agreements and conservation covenants across Australia. This is but one mechanism.

There is broad consensus amongst government and non-government leaders that existing information sharing facilities and networks are inadequate. In the preparation of this paper frustration has been expressed by a number of business and corporate representatives that information on environmental priorities was not readily available. At the moment large corporations are often funding projects on the basis of “what walks in the door”. A strategic focus for investment in landscape conservation has not been developed within the business community.

If businesses are to fund new projects they need to know:

- that it addresses an environmental issue of significance; and
- that the contribution they can make, within a defined budget, will make a substantive and tangible difference.

A related issue is how local or regional groups can access information on activities and networks that are currently operating within their region and best practices in conservation management. An overview of activities at a State-wide or national scale is currently difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

Attributes that a successful information sharing network would have include:

- the network and the information it contains should be readily identifiable and accessible;
- the host of the network and the information disseminated must be highly credible;
- a balance must be struck between local and informal sources of information and governmental sources;
- the network would identify wherever possible clear environmental priorities and needs, particularly at regional scales;
- successes would be communicated by documenting best practice examples of conservation and environmental management; and
- the network be resource and cost efficient.

In summary, an information sharing forum is required that meets the attributes listed above. Such a network could be comprised of a combination of:

- an internet based resource/information directory that summarises key environmental information with particular focus on identifying priority areas and actions for landscape conservation in different regions.
- there may be potential to extend such an internet based directory into a “Virtual” clearing house for environmental projects where proponents and potential funders could meet.
- continuation of informal networks for information sharing, including the potential to hold meetings between conservation, business, philanthropic and government leaders on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Policy Option 7

Non-government Sector Actions

A working group be established to investigate existing environmental information networks and to develop and refine proposals for an internet based service and seek funding for its creation and ongoing maintenance.

Agree to convene an informal meeting of landholder, conservation, business, philanthropic and government leaders on an annual or bi-annual basis.

Government Actions

To provide a catalyst for non-government sector involvement, draw together existing land, water and environmental information at a regional scale and identify priority conservation actions and investment within each region.

Building the Capacity of the Non-Government Sector

Capacity equates to the ability of organisations and individuals to achieve their conservation goals.

There is a depth of experience in the development and management of conservation programs in Australia. Leading examples such as the Australian Bush Heritage Fund, Trust for Nature, the Australian Landscape Trust and Greening Australia can contribute many valuable lessons on how to develop and establish partnerships for landscape conservation at a broad regional scale. At a grass roots level, the Landcare and Bushcare programs have put in place extensive networks of facilitators to build the capacity of local groups and facilitate improved access

and uptake of government programs. An interesting question is the relationship between these networks and accessing the non-government sector and funding sources.

A key issue is the need to carefully balance strategies for capacity building by providing professional leadership for the “top-down” and facilitating and working with local communities from the “bottom-up”. In other words how can existing experiences be built upon, sustained and then most effectively translated to other regions and organisations within Australia? Key opportunities for capacity building include the following.

- Establishment of a number of non-government organisations committed to building the capacity of regional and local groups to put in place effective landscape conservation and natural resource management programs.
- Greater use of leadership programs such as the Hugh Williamson Foundation Leadership Program and the Rural Leadership Program for promoting sustainable natural resource management.
- Providing operational training to organisations. One approach would be to put together a network of volunteers or people with expertise in different areas that other non-government groups can access. Such a network would include environmental, administrative, technical and business management skills. Another approach would be to facilitate exchanges between organisations to facilitate organisational learning.

Capacity building strategies of this kind point to the potential rewards from making catalytic investments in the capacity of both existing and new organisations. By providing up-front support to new organisations, they can “find their feet” and progressively become self-sustaining.

Policy Option 8

In order to increase the size and capacity of the non-government sector, existing organisations have a responsibility to actively build internal capacity and disseminate information and foster the growth of new organisations.

Non-government actions

- Large non-government organisations should devote a proportion of their program budget to leadership training and capacity building strategies both within the organisation and also for smaller regionally and locally based groups and organisations.
- Existing leadership programs could be more actively extended to people involved in landscape conservation and community facilitation.
- Establish a network of individuals and organisations that are willing to contribute expertise in establishing and managing new conservation programs established by the non-government sector. Assistance could be sought through existing networks or advertised on an annual basis.
- Encourage exchange of staff between non-government organisations to promote information exchange and learning.

Government Actions

- Provide increased organisational support to non-government organisations through existing grant programs such as the Natural Heritage Trust.
- Facilitate greater information sharing by encouraging secondments between non-government organisations and government agencies at all levels.
- Support research on new and innovative approaches to landscape conservation and natural resource management.

SECURING GREATER PRIVATE FUNDING

Few would argue that greater funding for landscape conservation and natural resource management is required in Australia. The challenge is to sustain existing funding sources and to further broaden the funding base in a way which complements existing government funding.

Discussion of funding strategies is divided between those actions that the non-government sector can take to promote greater private giving and the actions governments can take through the taxation system to further enhance and catalyse private investment and donation for landscape conservation.

It is noted that the creation of markets for environmental services, as discussed earlier, represents another important opportunity to increase the overall funding base.

Expanding the Philanthropic Market

In developing this paper, a number of people consulted expressed a strong view that markets for funding non-government sector activities have not been fully explored within Australia. This is perhaps best evidenced by the growth of key “on-ground” conservation organisations in recent years (for example Trust for Nature and the Australian Bush Heritage Fund).

Key issues that need to be taken into account in developing funding strategies include.

- Opportunities need to be put forward in a way that makes individuals see that they can make a significant and lasting contribution. Examples of marketing phrases could include the opportunity to make a “perpetual difference” or “a mark forever”.
- To be successful, a funding strategy must be able to clearly identify the outcomes that are going to be achieved - both in tangible and intangible terms.
- There is considerable evidence from the USA that it is individuals rather than corporations that drive giving for philanthropic purposes. Corporations are more likely to provide sponsorship of events. As a result, approaches to key individuals rather than to corporations will be a critical element of any funding strategy.
- There is a need to develop “funding opportunities” at a variety of scales so that individuals can give to a specific action with a well defined outcome, irrespective of the size of their gift.
- One interesting idea is the concept of a “Cyber-Pledge”. This is where an organisation commits to contributing a dollar for every “hit” on an Internet site or for every dollar contributed to an organisation.
 - An example of a pledge of this kind is where Microsoft co-founder Paul G Allen pledged to donate \$5 million to the Nature Conservancy of Washington in January 1997 in the form of a Challenge Grant. Under this scheme Allen donated \$1 for every \$2 donated to the Conservancy until the \$5 million limit was reached. Allen’s intention was to spur additional private donations to a total of \$15 million.

Policy Option 9

There is an urgent need to build the fund raising capacity of the non-government sector.

Non Government Actions

That an independent organisation, such as Philanthropy Australia, develop and put in place a training program for fund raising by non-government organisations – with particular emphasis on improving linkages between the philanthropic, business and conservation sectors.

The Role of Taxation Incentives

Taxation is recognised as a fundamental driver of philanthropy; a primary mechanism through which community – business partnerships can be facilitated. There are only minimal tax incentives that encourage private conservation activities in Australia. These incentives are considerably less than those made available in the United Kingdom and the United States.

Several options for using the tax system to encourage greater private sector activity for nature conservation have been identified in the document: *Philanthropy – Sustaining the Land*, prepared for this project. The document compares the availability of different financial tools in the US and Australia and makes the following recommendations.

To encourage greater private contributions, allow all donations of property to conservation trusts to be tax deductible over five years and exempt from capital gains tax. The definition of property for the purposes of this recommendation could be extended to:

- all land, physical and financial assets;
- conservation covenants;
- bargain sales of land – that is the gap between sale price to the conservation trust and the full market value of the land;
- donations of land with an occupation right retained by the existing owner; and
- donations of assets for which a limited lifetime annuity is paid.

To facilitate the creation of private conservation reserves, provide the following tax incentives for land covered by a conservation covenant:

- access to tax deductions, or the 34% Landcare rebate, for costs associated with managing land;
- exemption from State land taxes;
- exemption from local government rates similar to NSW and SA practice⁴
- exemption for conservation trusts from stamp duties, taxes and charges on the purchase and sale of land in the operation of a revolving fund; and
- allow private conservation reserves to be negatively geared and give their owners primary producer status.

A further refinement identified since completion of that report relates to ensuring that corporations, Trusts and other organisations are able to make tax deductible donations to environmental organisations⁵;

The potential for taxation changes in this area to catalyse a significant expansion in private sector investment and donation for landscape conservation has been recognised by the government which has recently amended tax laws to allow:

- an income tax deduction that can be apportioned over 5 years for non-testamentary donations of property (including land) with a value of more than \$5000 regardless of when property was purchased or acquired by the donor;
- a capital gains tax exemption for testamentary gifts of property donated to organisations, bodies or funds eligible to receive tax deductible donations; and

⁴ Note that smaller rural Councils may require compensation to implement this measure as they have less capacity to redistribute the overall rate burden.

⁵ As noted earlier, there is considerable uncertainty over the capacity of these organisations to make tax deductible donations as there is a concern that corporations may receive a material benefit from being associated with environmental programs. This is clearly an impediment to corporate donations.

- allowing for the establishment of private funds that are able to receive tax deductible donations.

These reforms represent a significant first step in putting in place tax incentives in this area. In passing these laws the government has also noted that it is willing to consider further taxation initiatives to encourage philanthropic involvement in environmental works.

The Community Business Partnership, a committee that reports to the Prime Minister, is now in the process of considering the other recommendations outlined in this section and will report before the end of 2000. To ensure that taxation arrangements between charitable sectors are equivalent, it will be important to ensure that future changes are integrated with other taxation measures for philanthropy being considered through the Community Business Partnerships initiative.

Policy Option 10

Taxation incentives have the capacity to act as a significant incentive to environmental philanthropy.

Government Actions

Further progress consideration of the tax policy changes proposed in the document: *Philanthropy – Sustaining the Land* in close consultation with the Community Business Partnerships initiative.

ACCESSING THE FULL RANGE OF CONSERVATION TOOLS

Because conservation policy and legislative structures have not been developed with active involvement of the private sector in mind, a number of impediments exist to non-government organisations accessing the full range of conservation tools. This in turn is limiting the capacity of non-government organisations to undertake programs for on-ground landscape conservation and natural resource management. An example is the ability to establish Trusts or charitable organisations which are able to both receive tax deductible donations and enter into binding conservation agreements and covenants with landholders.

There is a need to promote more open access to the following conservation planning tools and institutions.

- **Capacity to establish independent conservation trusts and organisations:** arrangements are required which allow for the efficient establishment of organisations committed to developing programs and funding on-ground conservation works at national, State, regional and local scales.
- **Access to covenanting powers:** all States and Territories in Australia should have in place arrangements for approved Conservation Trusts to enter conservation covenants that: have a statutory basis, are registered or noted on land title, and are binding in perpetuity.
- **Institutions for the creation of environmental markets:** non-government organisations are limited in their capacity to promote and secure land use change through markets for environmental services such as carbon sequestration. An example of an impediment is that markets for environmental services require a mechanism that allows separation of ownership of environmental services from land, as is the case in forestry where ownership of trees/timber and land can be separated. Further separations could be permitted to allow for the establishment of separate markets for environmental services.⁶

A particular priority is to give appropriately qualified organisations the capacity to enter conservation covenants that secure their investment in on-ground works. Broadly accepted covenanting mechanisms are also integral to achieving a significant expansion in the number of private conservation reserves in Australia.

Considerable progress has been made in broadening the use of covenanting in Australia in recent years. All States now have active covenanting programs, most of which are managed by State government agencies. Progress in achieving non-government access is also being made. Western Australia through the National Trust has recently established a program at arms length to government modelled on Victoria's Trust for Nature. Queensland and New South Wales are also in the process of considering the establishment of similar Trusts at arms length to government. The current state of play in each jurisdiction is summarised in Table 1.

⁶ It is noted that a conservation covenant, tied to a once off payment equivalent to the value of the environmental service provided, may be one mechanism for achieving this outcome. New South Wales is the first Australian State to pass legislation that allows for the separation of carbon rights from land.

Table 1: Current Status in the negotiation of conservation covenants

State	State government capacity to enter Covenants	Non-government sector capacity to enter covenants
Commonwealth/National	Environment Australia <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> (Part 14 s304 – 311)	No
Queensland	Environment Protection Agency <i>Nature Conservation Act</i> (s51) ⁷	Proposal to establish a Conservation Trust
New South Wales	National Parks and Wildlife Service <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act</i> (s69B-C) Dept of Land and Water Conservation <i>Native Vegetation Conservation Act</i> (s41-44)	Proposal currently being developed
Victoria	Dept of Natural Resources and Environment <i>Conservation, Forests and Lands Act</i> (s69 - s72)	Trust for Nature <i>Victorian Conservation Trust Act</i> (s3A)
Tasmania	Department of Environment and Land Management <i>National Parks and Wildlife Act</i> (s37A - s37H)	No
South Australia	Dept of Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs <i>Native Vegetation Act 1991</i> (s23)	No
Western Australia	Dept of Conservation and Land Management <i>Soil and Land Conservation Act</i> (s30B)	National Trust of Australia (WA) <i>National Trust of Australia (WA) Act 1964</i>
Northern Territory	May be possible through leasehold conditions	
Australian Capital Territory	May be possible through leasehold conditions	

⁷ The Queensland parliament recently passed the *Natural Resources and Other Legislation Amendment Act 1999* which authorises the registration of statutory conservation covenants on title. Significantly, it also allows statutory bodies and local governments to enter into and administer nature conservation covenants.

Considerable care needs to be taken in considering the mechanisms through which the non-government sector should be able to access covenanting powers. A careful balance must be struck between two competing objectives.

- On the one hand it is desirable that a broad range of organisations be able to access covenanting powers. This is for two reasons: first, to heighten the profile of conservation covenants and broaden the base from which they are marketed to landholders; and second, to increase the overall level of resources devoted to covenanting in Australia.
- On the other hand non-government organisations must have the resources, management skills, knowledge and reputation that will enable them to sustain, manage and, where required, enforce conservation covenants. This requires organisations that have a stable resource base which is secure in the longer term.

One possible mechanism for achieving a balance between active non-government sector involvement and the need for secure, stable and credible organisations to be the delivery agents is put forward in the document *Philanthropy – sustaining the land*. It proposes that legislation in each State or Territory be developed to establish clear criteria through which organisations could be accredited to access a range of tools including the ability to enter conservation covenants.

Two potential models for such legislation can be envisaged.

- The first model would involve establishing an over-arching conservation trust with an independent board in each State. This trust would then be given an exclusive statutory power to enter conservation covenants with landholders. The Victorian Trust for Nature is a model of such an approach.
- The second model would involve establishing legislation that would facilitate the accreditation of organisations to enter conservation covenants. The process of accreditation would be based on strict criteria relating to factors such as the organisation being not-for-profit and having a demonstrated capacity to fulfil its land management responsibilities by administering, monitoring and enforcing covenants in the longer term.

The key challenge with the first model is to facilitate the establishment of partnerships between the trust and other organisations with an interest in covenanting. For example, in larger States it may be possible for the trust to enter partnerships with other organisations, or even local governments, for assistance in the delivery of the trust's covenanting proposals on a regional basis.

The key challenge with the second model is to ensure that only credible organisations, which enjoy broad respect in the community, are given the capacity to enter covenants. The absence of broad credibility would undermine covenanting as a conservation tool with landholders and may even bring the legal status of conservation covenants into question.⁸

⁸ Covenants that are not maintained, reviewed and enforced by the covenanting organisation may lapse after a period of time.

In summary there is a need to broaden the range of organisations involved and the tools used to deliver conservation programs in the future.

Policy Option 11

Action for governments

State and Commonwealth governments be encouraged to facilitate greater non-government sector involvement in landscape conservation by enacting legislation that enhances the capacity of non-government sector to establish conservation trusts/organisations that:

- are able to develop active partnerships with landholders and their communities for on-ground works for landscape conservation;
- can access tax deductible status for donations; and
- can enter conservation covenants with landholders.

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