

Principles for delivery of conservation and land management stimulus

Introduction

In response to the profound economic impacts of COVID-19, more than 70 conservation, land management and farming organisations have come together to support a proposal for thousands of impacted workers to be employed to deliver practical conservation and land management activities across the country.

This proposed conservation and land management program would provide important opportunities for safe, meaningful and socially beneficial work during the period of economic crisis, while leaving enduring benefits for the environment, local communities, tourism and farm businesses.

In order to assist governments in refining this proposal, we recommend that the following principles guide investment. 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.**

In the context of this proposal the ‘conservation and land management sector’ is taken to describe a diverse range of organisations and individuals involved in conserving, restoring and managing land and natural resources, including NRM bodies, non-profit organisations, community groups, local councils, state and federal government agencies, industry associations, small businesses, farmers, traditional owners and other landholders.

The principles included in this discussion paper are built upon the direct experience of stakeholders involved in the delivery of conservation and land management programs 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.

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 and projects 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.

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
 - 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](#).
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.

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.