Gold Coast and Northern NSW Coast

Economic context

This extensive region, stretching from the Gold Coast to the Hunter Valley, provides one of the most diverse range of natural and cultural tourism opportunities in Australia, catering to domestic and international tourists and contributing more $9 billion each year to the national economy. The recent economic impacts of COVID-19 (**Table 1**) came on top of already significant impacts from the long term drought and the worst fire season on record.

Conservation values

This region is home to two World Heritage Areas (Gondwana Rainforests, Greater Blue Mountains), three Ramsar Wetlands (Hunter Wetlands, Myall Lakes, Moreton Bay) and over 700 conservation reserves, including a number of marine reserves. The region's diverse geography supports a highly diverse fauna and flora, a high degree of endemism and many threatened and migratory species.

Conservation and land management outcomes

Investment in conservation and land management stimulus during the economic recovery period would deliver tangible outcomes across four strategic priority areas:

1. **Scaling up bushfire recovery and resilience efforts**
   Natural habitats in the region were severely impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires, including >50% of the Gondwana Rainforests WHA. Scaling up existing restoration, invasive species control and fire management efforts in the region will increase prospects for long-term recovery and resilience.

2. **Tackling noxious weeds and feral animals**
   Weeds and vertebrate pests have been impacted by drought and bushfires, presenting a time limited window of opportunity for strategic management interventions (e.g. shifting the bitou containment line further south, implementing new cat control methodologies).

3. **Supporting improved management of protected areas**
   With over 700 conservation reserves in the region, and many private protected areas, a surge in effort will help to tackle long-term management challenges and enhance visitor infrastructure.

4. **Restoring rivers, catchments and coastal habitats**
   Building on existing community programs, economic recovery investment will help to restore dune ecosystems, regenerate coastal bushland, fence and restore streams, enhance in-stream habitats and improve on-farm management to reduce nutrient and sediment runoff.

Proposed investment and associated employment

Federal investment of $100 million, matched by $100 million in Queensland and NSW Government funding will deliver **1,200 full-time equivalent positions** over four years. Recent analysis by Ernst & Young indicates that the long-term total economic impact of this investment will exceed $450 million.[1]

Regional delivery capacity

Government investment in this region has supported the establishment of long-term conservation strategies and development of substantial organisational capacity. There are extensive state and local government programs in the region, together with mature community networks (e.g. Landcare) and well-established NRM regional bodies. There is substantial scope to scale up these programs, working with trusted delivery partners (*see list below*).

Proposed delivery approach

It is recommended that this funding be delivered through a combination of (a) regional conservation and land management partnerships (one per NRM region); (b) direct funding to state conservation agencies; and (c) a competitive funding round in early 2021.

Table 1: Predicted employment impacts [2]

Statistical regions (SA4)	Workforce	Predicted employment loss (%)	Predicted total unemployment (%)
Gold Coast	266,921	11%	17%
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	52,018	9%	16%
Mid North Coast	74,185	8%	16%
Hunter Valley exc Newcastle	110,932	9%	16%
Richmond – Tweed	96,406	9%	15%
600,462		**9%**	**16%**

Potential delivery partners

Australian Government (Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment, National Landcare Program, National Indigenous Australians Agency, Indigenous Land and Sea Management), **Queensland Government** (Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service), **NSW Government** (National Parks and Wildlife Service, NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, NSW Environmental Trust, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, **NRM Regions / Local Land Services** (SEQ Catchments (Healthy Land and Water), North Coast Local Land Services, Hunter Local Land Services, **Conservation and farming organisations** (Landcare NSW, Queensland Water and Land Carers, Australian Association of Bush Regenerators, Greening Australia, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Bush Heritage Australia, Queensland Trust for Nature, NSW Farmers Association, AgForce Queensland, Great Eastern Ranges Initiative, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Rainforest Rescue, The Nature Conservancy, Invasive Species Council), **Indigenous Land Management Organisations, Local Government, Tourism Operators.**

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[1] Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020. Calculation based on combined federal and state investment of $200 million and a return on investment ratio >2.25:1.

[2] Centre for Conservation Geography (2020) *Preliminary analysis of the spatial distribution of COVID-19 related employment loss.*

Outback: Remote tourism dependent communities

Economic context

Many remote communities have been acutely impacted by COVID-19 restrictions. Their isolation, small size, simple economic structure and high rates of underlying unemployment make remote communities particularly vulnerable during periods of economic downturn. Tourism dependent remote communities like Broome and Shark Bay are likely to experience particularly severe employment loss.[1]

Conservation values

Remote tourism communities are commonly located near iconic natural areas, including World Heritage sites like the Ningaloo Coast, Shark Bay, Purnululu, Kakadu and Uluru. Remote landscapes are typically characterised by relatively intact natural habitats, with native species threatened principally by destructive wildfire, feral animals and invasive weeds.

Conservation and land management outcomes

Investment in conservation and land management stimulus during the economic recovery period would deliver tangible outcomes across five strategic priority areas:

1. **Supporting Indigenous land and sea management**
    Indigenous Ranger programs represent a well-established and highly successful vehicle for delivering meaningful employment opportunities and environmental outcomes in remote communities.

2. **Tackling destructive weeds and feral animals**
    Strategic investment in the containment and control of transformative weeds (e.g. gamba grass, buffel grass, prickly acacia) and feral animals will reduce long-term environmental and production impacts.

3. **Delivering strategic threatened species recovery actions**
    Outback Australia is home to world-leading species conservation programs. Investment in strategic species recovery actions (e.g. extending predator exclosures) will deliver important benefits for native wildlife.

4. **Restoring coastal habitats, rivers and wetlands**
    Practical restoration activities will provide positive ecological outcomes and meaningful employment for impacted workers in tourism dependent communities (e.g. vine thicket restoration near Broome).

5. **Supporting voluntary conservation action on pastoral stations**
    Working in partnership with pastoralists to deliver practical conservation actions (e.g. building stock fences to protect sensitive areas) will benefit local contractors and support large scale conservation outcomes.

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[1] Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020.

Regional delivery capacity

Traditional owners, public land managers, natural resource management bodies and pastoralists in Outback Australia manage very large areas with limited resources. The challenges of working at scale have fostered strategic and efficient approaches to land management which deliver a high return on investment.

Proposed investment and associated employment

Federal investment of $150 million, matched by $50 million in state and territory funding, would create **1,200 full-time equivalent positions** over four years. Recent analysis by Ernst & Young indicates that this investment would create >$450 million in long-term economic benefits for local communities and regional economies.[2]

Proposed delivery approach

It is recommended that this federal investment be delivered through three complementary funding pathways: (a) regional conservation and land management partnerships (one per NRM region); (b) direct funding to state and territory conservation agencies; and, (c) a competitive funding round in early 2021.

Table 1: Predicted employment impacts

Statistical regions [3]	Workforce	Predicted employment loss (%)	Predicted total unemployment (%)
NT Outback	30,737	7%	18%
SA Outback	34,619	8%	15%
WA Outback	98,669	9%	15%
Queensland Outback	33,817	7%	14%
Far West and Orana	46,707	7%	14%
Darwin	71,296	8%	12%
	315,845	**8%**	**15%**

Selected Local Government Areas [4]	Predicted employment loss (%)
Shark Bay	17%
Coober Pedy	15%
Flinders Ranges	14%
Diamantina	13%
Exmouth	12%
Burke	11%
Broome	11%

Potential delivery partners

Australian Government (Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (National Landcare Program), National Indigenous Australians Agency); **State and Territory Governments** (Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales); **NRM Rangelands Alliance** (Rangelands NRM (WA), Territory NRM (NT), Alinytjara Wilurara (SA), Arid Lands (SA), Western LLS (NSW), Desert Channels (QLD), Southern Gulf (QLD), Northern Gulf (QLD)); **Conservation and farming organisations** (Bush Heritage Australia, Australian Wildlife Conservancy, National Landcare Network, Nature Foundation SA, Livestock SA, Environs Kimberley, NT Cattlemens Association, AgForce Queensland), **Indigenous Land Management Organisations** (Indigenous Desert Alliance, Kimberley Land Council, Yamatiji-Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation, Central Land Council, Northern Land Council), **Local Government**, **Tourism operators**.

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[2] Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020.
[3] Centre for Conservation Geography (2020) *Preliminary analysis of the spatial distribution of COVID-19 related employment loss in Australia.*
[4] Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020.

South Coast, Snowy Mountains and East Gippsland

Economic context

The south-east corner of Australia includes the coastal communities of the Shoalhaven down to the Victorian east coast, and the alpine regions and farming districts of the Snowy Mountains and Tumut area. The region is economically dependent on its natural resources, with significant agriculture, forestry, fishing and nature based-tourism industries. The impacts of COVID-19 restrictions on the tourism dependent region have come straight after the devastating 'black summer' bushfires, which caused a combined $1.19 billion in economic damage to the region. The compounding impact of these twin disasters has seen many small businesses close, significant unemployment and the region is likely to experience lasting economic impacts (**Table 1**).

Conservation values

The region includes over fifty national parks and nature refuges, including Kosciuszko National Park; significant areas of state forest; the headwaters of the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Snowy Rivers, three internationally important Ramsar listed wetland systems; four marine national parks; pristine coastal rivers and estuaries and exceptionally diverse fauna and flora (including nationally listed threatened and migratory species).

Conservation and land management outcomes

Investment in conservation and land management stimulus during the economic recovery period would deliver tangible outcomes across four strategic priority areas:

1. **Restoring the headwaters of the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers**
   Scaling up and accelerating efforts to improve soil conservation and habitat quality in the alpine headwaters of these vital river systems through restoring riparian vegetation, working with landholders to fence off riparian areas and support sustainable agriculture and addressing impacts from feral animals and weeds. This will have significant long-term impacts for NSW and Victorian irrigation districts, fish stocks and downstream ecosystems such as river red gum forests.

2. **Bushfire recovery and resilience**
   This region was the most severely impacted area in the country by the 2019-20 bushfires. Scaling up existing restoration, invasive species control and fire management efforts in the region will increase prospects for long-term recovery and resilience.

3. **Coastal dune and estuary management**
   Protecting beaches, dunes and estuaries through revegetation, erosion control and weed removal to improve coastal amenity and enhance biodiversity and fish stocks.

4. **Supporting improved management of protected areas and crown land**
   Deliver a surge in management effort across national parks and state forests to tackle long-term conservation threats like weeds and feral animals and enact threatened species recovery plans and build infrastructure such as tracks and facilities.

Proposed investment and associated employment

Federal investment of $50 million matched by $50 million in NSW and Victorian Government funding would deliver **600 full-time equivalent positions** over four years. Recent analysis by Ernst & Young indicates that this investment would create $220 million in long-term economic benefits for the regional and state economy.[1]

Regional delivery capacity

Federal and state investment in has supported the establishment of long-term conservation strategies and development of substantial organisational capacity. There is substantial scope to scale up existing successful programs, working with trusted delivery partners (*see list below*).

Proposed delivery approach

It is recommended that the investment be delivered through a combination of (a) regional conservation and land management partnerships (one per NRM region); (b) direct funding to state agencies, including funding for work on national parks and other public lands; and (c) a competitive funding round in early 2021.

Table 1: Predicted employment impacts [2]

Statistical regions	Total employed (Fed 2020)	Predicted employment loss (%)	Predicted total unemployment (%)
Snowy Mountains	9,463	12%	15%
South Coast	26,205	10%	15%
Shoalhaven	36,258	9%	15%
Gippsland - East	17,046	8%	14%
Wodonga - Alpine	32,302	8%	12%
Tumut - Tumbarumba	6,001	6%	12%
127,275	**9%**	**14%**

Potential delivery partners

Australian Government (Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment (National Landcare Program, National Bushfire Recovery Agency, National Indigenous Australians Agency)); **NSW Government** (Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust, NSW Environmental Trust, National Parks and Wildlife Service)); **Victorian Government** (Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (Parks Victoria)); **NSW Local Land Services** (South East, Murray, Riverina); **Victorian Catchment Management Authorities** (East Gippsland, North East); **Conservation and farming organisations** (Landcare NSW, Greening Australia, NSW Farmers, Conservation Volunteers Australia, Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Invasive Species Council), **Indigenous Land Management Organisations**; **Local Government; Tourism operators**.

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[1] Ernst & Young (2020) *Delivering economic stimulus through the conservation and land management sector*, June 2020.
[2] Centre for Conservation Geography (2020) *Preliminary analysis of the spatial distribution of COVID-19 related employment loss in Australia.*