

LEGAL PROTECTION

THE south-west of Western Australia is a world hotspot of biodiversity; a unique jewel in Australia's rich natural heritage. As we know, much of this natural heritage that is so vital in maintaining our unique biodiversity is situated on private property. This gives private landholders a tremendous opportunity to contribute to our future and make room for nature. *Land for Wildlifers* are, of course, already doing just that.

Increasingly now, those who have spent years working to preserve the bush they treasure, are thinking towards the future and seeking ways to ensure the protection and management of their land beyond their time. With Nature Conservation Covenants it is possible to do just that by creating your own private reserve. Such covenants are being offered in WA through programs run by CALM and the National Trust (WA).

But what exactly is a covenant? Sounds a little Biblical doesn't it? A Nature Conservation Covenant is a mutual pledge by both the landowner and the covenanting body to support the management of the nominated bushland by entering into a partnership agreement with common conservation goals in mind. They are voluntary agreements that are legally binding between the landowner and the covenanting body once registered on the title of the land, and bind any future landowners, thereby ensuring protection of the bushland in the future. Covenants set out what actions can't be undertaken on the land, in order to protect the bushland and its conservation values.

To provide this service, CALM has a team of local representatives skilled in nature conservation and covenants who offer a personalised service. Each covenant is individually designed to include a set of common conservation goals that suit the unique nature of each

CALM COVENANTS - CREATE YOUR OWN PRIVATE RESERVE

by Wendy Payne

parcel of bushland and cater to the owner's wishes and needs. Covenants are available at no cost to the owner, where they are not required for commercial reasons.

Placing a conservation covenant on private bushland provides benefits not only to the bushland but also to the landowner. Importantly, both ownership and control of the bushland remains with the landowner. The bushland is assessed for its conservation values and management needs. Owners are presented with an individual property assessment, a photographic record of their bushland, and assistance is given to create management guidelines that provide a focus for conservation efforts. If the landowner then chooses to proceed with placing a covenant over their bushland, they are guaranteed a long term-interest in the land and advice on a wide range of issues to assist them in their conservation efforts through CALM's Covenant Stewardship Program. Advice may be sought on management issues at any time by landowners, who also receive annual contact by telephone and a triennial visit to the land to discuss options for management issues that may change over time.

Whilst day-to-day management of the bushland remains the prerogative of the landowner, assistance in that management may be offered on a case by case basis. For example, funding may be given for initial management that is essential for the conservation of the

bushland, or to help contend with "out of the ordinary" threats to the conservation values that may arise from time to time. Funding is assessed on the conservation benefits that will result from the proposed works. Further assistance may be offered in helping to draft applications for funding through other sources. Where outside influences such as development proposals threaten the conservation of the bushland, CALM can also act as an advocate on behalf of the owner and assist with negotiations to achieve the best possible outcome.

The increasing use of conservation covenants in WA marks a shift in conservation thinking within our State. Conservation has moved from being seen to be the sole responsibility of government through formal conservation reserves, to an acknowledgment of the ability and desire of private landowners to make a valuable contribution to conservation on their lands. Together, a network of protected conservation lands can be created including private and government lands, to achieve an integrated approach to the protection of our natural heritage across the landscape.

Although CALM's Nature Conservation Covenant Program only began in 2000, it is now gathering momentum with covenants in place over 12 properties totalling 180 hectares of land and another 18 properties in negotiation totalling roughly 5,000 hectares. CALM looks forward in the future to making the most of its wealth of management resources and years of research into our natural environment to help the community in its own conservation efforts.

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