

Conservation Covenant News

Newsletter of the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Nature Conservation Covenant Program



December 2004

Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of Conservation Covenant News, the Department of Conservation and Land Management's Nature Conservation Covenant Program newsletter.

In this issue we discuss funding for conservation projects and incentives available to conservation covenantors, and introduce the staff of the Program.

We hope you have a lovely holiday season and wish you all the best for the new year!

Anthea Jones, Acting Covenant Coordinator

(N.B. for the first half of next year I shall be moving across to act as coordinator for the Land for Wildlife Program, and Emma Bramwell will take over the reins as A/Covenant Coordinator.)

Current Status

The Nature Conservation Covenant Program has entered into conservation covenants with 45 landowners to protect 3,575 hectares of remnant vegetation throughout the southwest of the State.

We are currently negotiating with 37 landowners to protect a further 5,856 hectares, ranging in location from Walpole to Broome. We look forward to bringing many of these covenants to fruition in the new year.

Assistance for Conservation Projects

The State Government has launched a new scheme that provides economic incentives for landholders to manage privately owned areas of remnant vegetation for nature conservation. The \$1 million Bushland Benefits scheme is a 'tender system' through which landowners can bid for funds to manage their native bushland. The object of the tender system is to promote management practices that are targeted to biodiversity benefits, but which may not suit the specific guidelines of other funding programs. To develop a tender, landowners will require a management plan (or covenant guidelines) for their bushland or wetland area.

The Department of Conservation and Land Management will call for applications for Bushland

Benefits early next year, but landowners can register their interest with the Bushland Benefits Coordinator on 9334 0570 to ensure that they receive an information package when it is developed.

Also, the Australian Government has launched Round 6 of Envirofund, a program helping communities to undertake local projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use. This program offers up to \$50,000 in assistance for suitable projects. Round 6 of Envirofund closes on 18 February 2005.

If your land is already protected under conservation covenant with the Department, then this provides long-term security for any project undertaken to enhance the biodiversity values of your land and a management plan would have already been developed. Both the Bushland Benefits and Envirofund programs would consider such land under conservation covenant favourably.

We would be pleased to assist in the development of suitable projects and provide letters of support for projects enhancing conservation covenant sites. If you have a project that you would like to undertake on your covenant site, please contact the Covenant Coordinator on 9334 0477 for advice.

Taxation Incentives

Owners of land under conservation covenant with Department of Conservation and Land Management's Nature Conservation Covenant Program or the National Trust of Australia's (WA) Covenant Program are eligible for three types of taxation concessions:

- an income tax deduction for any decrease in land value as a result of entering into a conservation covenant;
- Capital Gains Tax (CGT) provisions apply as if it were a sale or gift of the land; and
- State land tax exemption.

To determine how these taxation concessions apply to you, we recommend that you consult your taxation agent, as the benefits will vary depending on your personal circumstances.

For further information on income and capital gains tax concessions contact the Australian Taxation Office. For further information on land tax exemption contact the Office of State Revenue.

If you would like the Nature Conservation Covenant Program to advise the Office of State Revenue of your conservation covenant on your behalf, please contact the Program Coordinator and we will be happy to do this for you.

Rate Relief

In some cases, when a covenant is placed over the land, the value of the property may be reduced. This occurs where a covenant restricts an activity that would otherwise be allowed, and where this particular activity affects property values, for example a covenant that restricts subdivision that would otherwise be allowed. Cases where a covenant results in little change to the value include those over agricultural land that has already had a reduced valuation because it is considered unsuitable for agriculture. The Valuer General's Office considers valuations on a case-by-case basis.

Additional to the potential taxation benefits of having your property re-valued at a reduced amount, re-valuation may also result in a reduction in local government rates. In order to receive any benefit from this, you will need to have your property re-valued by the Valuer General's Office. Again, if you are interested in pursuing this, we would be pleased to advise them of your conservation covenant on your behalf. Please note, however, that there is no guarantee that re-valuation will result in a reduction in the land value, and in some situations there may even be an increase in the land value.

Land for Wildlife

Many of our covenantors would already be familiar with *Land for Wildlife*. In fact, the Nature Conservation Covenant Program and *Land for Wildlife* share a number of staff, so you may have already spoken about *Land for Wildlife* with the Officer that visited your site for the Covenant Program.

Land for Wildlife is a voluntary scheme that aims to encourage and assist private landholders to provide habitats for wildlife on their property. Beyond your covenant site, they offer advice and assistance - whether you manage a farm, a bush block, a Shire reserve or a roadside. *Land for Wildlife* can offer you contact with like-minded landholders, and a chance to share in their ideas and experiences through publications, field days and other activities.

If you are interested in joining the scheme, please contact the *Land for Wildlife* Coordinator on 9334 0530.

A Good Outcome for Biodiversity Conservation and Property Owners

In 2004 Keith and Paula Taylor were the first to take up the opportunity to subdivide their bushland property under the Busselton Biodiversity Incentive Strategy. A condition of subdivision under this Strategy is that the owner of the land must enter into a conservation covenant to protect the remnant vegetation on their property. The Taylors chose to enter into a Nature Conservation Covenant with the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

When the Taylors purchased the property approximately 5 years ago, they had a vision of retaining an area of diverse bushland, containing Threatened Ecological Communities, Priority listed flora, and habitat for the Threatened Western Ringtail Possum.

The Taylors subdivided their 52 hectares of bushland into one small property of about 4 hectares, containing bushland and a cleared area suitable for a building envelope, while keeping the majority of bushland intact on a large 48 hectare property.

The large property was purchased by the Department to be vested in the Conservation Commission as a Nature Reserve. The small property with bushland protected in perpetuity under a conservation covenant was sold to a private conservation minded purchaser. A good outcome was achieved for all.

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