



Office of
Environment
& Heritage

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Mr Peter Dixon
Director Grants
NSW Environmental Trust
PO Box 644
PARRAMATTA NSW 2124

Dear ~~Mr Dixon~~ *Peter*

Thank you for your letter about the Natural Resources Commission's review of the Linking Landscapes through Local Action project funded by the NSW Environmental Trust. I appreciate the opportunity to formally respond to the findings.

As you are aware, the primary objective of the Linking Landscapes project was to protect and manage conservation values by establishing biobank sites on public land in the Sydney Basin bioregion. As part of the project, the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) also developed the Biodiversity Investment Opportunities Map and tools to identify and display priority biodiversity investment areas. OEH and the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust are investigating options to use the map to prioritise biodiversity investment through other programs.

OEH supports the key findings of the review that the project was effective in achieving its primary objective. The BioBanking agreements led to improvements in site condition that would not have otherwise occurred. It increased the protection of conservation values at all sites and greatly reduced the risk of future rezoning or development. The agreements also improved the councils' capacity to manage public land for conservation outcomes.

More than a third of the vegetation communities in the seven council-owned BioBanking sites established between 2012 and 2015 were listed as either endangered or critically endangered under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. The sites provide valuable habitat for more than 45 threatened animal and plant species and contribute to important corridors that connect with other native vegetation areas.

For example, the Fencott Drive Wetland Reserve in the Lake Macquarie local government area is part of the larger Jewells Wetlands that is recognised on state and national registers as being of important conservation value. They are part of a vital habitat corridor that extends along the Central Coast. Ku-ring-gai Council's Sheldon Forest, Rofe Park and Comenarra Creek Reserve biobank site is also part of an unbroken four kilometre stretch of bushland that connects with Lane Cove National Park.

The project has generated interest from owners and managers of public land in using the Biodiversity Banking and Offsets Scheme as a mechanism to fund long-term land management. Establishing a biobank site can give councils and other public land managers a known and enduring funding source that can support the strategic and sustained action needed to combat the decline and degradation of our native bushland.

I note that the commission found a large variation in cost-effectiveness across the sites. Funding for each site varied widely both in total and on a per hectare basis due to differences in the initial condition of the sites.

OEH deliberately selected sites in different initial conditions to achieve greater conservation gains. During the selection process we recognised that there were two competing criteria, sites with low-level threats and sites with high-level threats.

Sites with low-level threats are more cost effective to manage allowing larger areas of land to be managed and protected. However, there is also low opportunity for conservation improvements as they are in good condition. Sites with high-level threats are expensive to manage and this limits the area being managed and protected. However, these sites also have the opportunity for high conservation benefits by improving the condition of threatened ecological communities.

I note that the commission identified that the project has positive impacts at the site scale but was unlikely to have a material impact at the landscape scale. OEH agrees with the recommendation that effectively linking landscapes in the Sydney Basin bioregion requires improved coordination between councils supported by additional funding and investment in bushland management.

I also note that the commission identified issues with the availability of conservation commitment data to support the spatial viewer tool. We recognise that there are challenges associated with rolling out the viewer during implementation of the biodiversity reforms and with sustainability of the tool. OEH has implemented initiatives such as the Delivery Office, Data Strategy development and a new approach to information and communications technology project planning to help ensure that these issues are avoided in the future.

I have attached OEH's response to the commission's evaluation. If you have any further questions please contact Liza Schaeper, Senior Team Leader, Ecosystems and Threatened Species on 9995 6753 or at liza.schaeper@environment.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Kate Wilson
Executive Director
Communities and Greater Sydney

13.11.18

OEH RESPONSE TO NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION'S EVALUATION OF THE LINKING LANDSCAPES THROUGH LOCAL ACTION PROGRAM

	Recommendations	OEH response to the recommendation
<p>1. IMPROVE SITE SELECTION CRITERIA TO INCREASE RETURN ON INVESTMENT</p>	<p>Selecting sites for future investment should explicitly consider future threats to site values, the likelihood of those threats, the magnitude of impact on biodiversity values and the ability of those threats and impacts to be feasibly managed.</p> <p>Investors should avoid small, isolated sites, particularly in highly urbanised areas, for landscape-scale outcomes.</p> <p>Investors should seek to weight criteria in favour of connectivity, ecological function and resilience attributes over scarcity values such as listed endangered ecological communities.</p>	<p>Accepted</p> <p>Accepted</p> <p>Accepted</p>
<p>2. IMPROVE ASSURANCE FOR PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES</p>	<p>In addition to compliance audits at biobank sites, performance reviews should be undertaken to ensure management outcomes are being achieved through the agreed management activities.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>

	Recommendations	OEH response to the recommendation
<p>3. IMPROVE COORDINATION BETWEEN LAND MANAGERS AT A LANDSCAPE SCALE</p>	<p>Landscape-scale priority mapping should inform site selection and maximise return on investment. These will be useful tools to help councils and other land managers coordinate planning and implementation.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
<p>4. SEEK ALTERNATIVE AND ADDITIONAL FUNDING</p>	<p>There is scope to encourage more active support of councils to adopt alternative funding mechanisms in addition to traditional funding sources.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
<p>5. IMPROVE TOOLS FOR IDENTIFYING CONSERVATION INVESTMENT PRIORITIES</p>	<p>Tools that identify future investment priorities and existing commitments for conservation should be created with an end-user in mind and be integrated into existing business processes to ensure effective project and risk management and their long term utility.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>

	Recommendations	OEH response to the recommendation
<p style="text-align: center;">6. FLEXIBLE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS</p>	<p>While generic management prescriptions are important for accountability, land managers should also have flexibility to adopt appropriate action to suit circumstances at hand.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
	<p>Land managers should be cautious in diminishing marginal returns of some management actions that may have minimal benefit to biodiversity values.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>
	<p>Management effort should be prioritised across sites once key threats are under control.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>