

**Summary of Trust Administration’s response to recommendations made by the Natural Resources Commission - Evaluation of Roadside Vegetation
Implementation Project Stages 1 and 2**

	Natural Resources Commission Recommendations	Trust Administration Response
<p>1. Revise the program design</p>	<p>The NRC recommends that the NSW Environmental Trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) review the evidence supporting investment in roadside reserves and linear corridors more generally to ensure investments are strategically appropriate for achieving objectives, relative to other options b) develop a program logic based on clear objectives and a strategic assessment of priority areas for investment, prior to committing funds c) establish clear program objectives that are achievable, measureable and aligned with the available funds, timeframe and scale of the projects d) seek opportunities to work with neighbouring landholders to expand efforts beyond the width of roadside reserves, including evaluating where projects may enhance works done through other Environmental Trust programs, and ways to improve alignment with other relevant plans e) develop a monitoring program focused on evaluating desired outcomes and linking output measures to those outcomes. 	<p><u>1(a) Accepted</u> – While the it is acknowledged that any new program design should include a strategic and evidence-based assessment and prioritisation process, it should be noted the intention of RVIP 1 & 2 was predominantly to deliver outcomes against existing Roadside Vegetation Management Plans; drive roadside management culture and momentum; and fund projects that would have some longevity, rather than a statewide strategic approach to corridors. Notwithstanding this, the initial program was designed some time ago and it is now considered an opportune time to look at strategic investment opportunities. The Trust will therefore look to the most recent knowledge to determine whether this area is still a priority where Trust intervention would be appropriate, or if other priority areas have emerged in recent times.</p> <p><u>1(b) Accepted</u> – The Trust has established Major Projects Governance, which requires a business plan (including program logic and clear objectives) to be developed, considered and endorsed by both a Subcommittee and the Trust prior to any funds being committed. Alternative governance models may include a contestable or negotiated grant, which will also require either and EOI/Application or Business Plan to be assessed by a Technical Committee or Subcommittee and endorsement by the Trust prior to any funds being committed.</p> <p><u>1(c) Accepted</u> – Trust Administration acknowledges the need for clear program objectives to be established through the governance model for any future program, and that grant model, scale and timeframe will be better aligned with the objectives.</p> <p><u>1(d) Accepted</u> – Trust Administration acknowledges that synergies with other programs exist, and through further investigation Trust</p>

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		<p>Administration will look for opportunities to maximise these synergies, avoid duplication and, where possible, develop complimentary programs. This may include expanding from roadside reserves to other linear corridors such as Travelling Stock Routes and Crown Lands. These opportunities will be explored and will inform future program design.</p> <p><u>1(e) Accepted</u> – All Trust grants have some level of monitoring, evaluation and reporting, and the Trust has a dedicated officer to assist with development in this area. For any future program there should be improved communication to the grant recipient(s) on the importance of monitoring and evaluation, and linking outputs to outcomes, so that grantees have an understanding of this important element of their grant, and the capacity to undertake it.</p> <p>Additionally, all new Major Projects are now required to have an independent evaluation conducted at the end of the project, and project budgets are required to set aside an amount of funds for this purpose.</p>
<p>2. Strengthen project delivery</p>	<p>The NRC recommends that the NSW Environmental Trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) maintain flexibility for customised and innovative projects based on local or regional needs in a way that supports adaptive management and facilitates knowledge sharing between councils b) implement regionally planned and coordinated projects to take advantage of economies of scale and provide support for lower capacity councils c) establish methods to improve the likelihood that projects will provide long-term outcomes, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. requiring demonstration of planning and budget commitment to monitoring and maintenance to ensure that the requirement for ongoing maintenance is being met ii. evaluating proposals in regards to how projects will be 	<p>The recommendation to strengthen project delivery is accepted; however there are multiple drivers for roadside management within NSW, the NSW Environmental Trust being only one stakeholder. Furthermore, outside of its statutory requirements Trust funding should not be an on-going allocation into one area for a continuous period. Key stakeholders, such as Councils and the Roadside Environment Committee, have responsibilities within roadside management, and the Roadside Environment Committee is the appropriate body to communicate, facilitate, support and implement programs, and could take a more proactive role in strengthening project delivery. Any Trust designed and implemented program needs to be predicated on a willingness and ability of all responsible parties to undertake their legal responsibilities subsequent to the Trust program.</p>

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	<p>integrated into broader council activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> iii. considering investing in tools that support integration of environmental asset data and management of roadsides into other council activities to facilitate practice change d) continue to encourage on-ground partnerships for delivery of works and capacity building. 	<p><u>2(a) Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented and supports flexibility, innovation, adaptive management and knowledge sharing. Mechanisms to support flexibility include the ability to vary grants as outlined in the conditions of a grant agreement. Knowledge sharing is planned for through the business plan, which includes a communication and engagement component.</p> <p><u>2(b) Accepted</u> - Trust Administration would support regionally planned and coordinated projects, as well as supporting councils with lower capacities. Further investigation into strategic priorities may identify the best way to address regional planning and coordination between projects and may result in future programs targeting strategic regions, councils or priorities.</p> <p><u>2(c) Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented through the project design of any future program.</p> <p><u>2(d) Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented through the project design of any future program and supports partnerships for project delivery and capacity building.</p>
<p>3. Update governance and administrative arrangements</p>	<p>The NRC recommends that the NSW Environmental Trust:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) determine whether to devolve administration of the program based on an assessment of the expected added value and risks b) establish clear roles and responsibilities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the program administrator (if grant is devolved) and include requirements and budget allocation for tasks or outcomes in the program contract ii. active capture and sharing of knowledge, tools and good practice, and implement measures to assess effectiveness of knowledge sharing 	<p><u>3(a) Partially Accepted</u> – it is acknowledged that there are advantages and disadvantages of devolved grants programs, which also require financial resources for administration. However a particular organisation may be best placed to run a grants program due to its technical expertise and customer base.</p> <p>Implementing this recommendation would require further work in order to determine which grant model will best suit the needs of the target stakeholders and what is cost-effective. Before any decision will be made, further investigation into the strategic priorities and</p>

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	<p>c) ensure that project assessment criteria fully reflect the program objectives, that the review process incorporates sufficient practical technical review and that proposals provide sufficient information for meaningful assessment</p> <p>d) revise reporting requirements to allow for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. evaluation of the program outcomes and assessment of whether what was proposed was delivered ii. efficient collection of useful information for completing program evaluation and informing future works iii. consistent financial information to assess cost-effectiveness, value for money and in-kind contributions <p>e) devolve administration to the lowest capable level to reduce administrative costs (if devolving the grant administration).</p>	<p>investment areas will be undertaken, and this will inform the design of any future program, including whether or not it is devolved and who is best placed to deliver it.</p> <p><u>3(b)i Accepted</u> – if a future program is devolved, prior to any funds being committed the grantee would be required to develop and submit a Business Plan, which would clearly outline roles, responsibilities, reporting requirements, budget and objectives for the program.</p> <p><u>3(b)ii Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented in future grants programs. As previously discussed, business plans include a component on establishing monitoring and evaluation questions and performance indicators and targets prior to any program commencement and reporting will align with the business plan. Additionally, a set amount of the grant funding will be retained to allow an independent evaluation to be conducted at the end of a program.</p> <p><u>3(c) Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented through program design and tailoring of Guidelines and EOI/Application Forms and associated assessment criteria. Trust Administration supports the view that technical review members have appropriate technical experience in the subject area, and that proposals contain sufficient information to allow a fair and justifiable assessment.</p> <p><u>3(d)i, ii and iii Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation can be implemented in future grants programs.</p> <p><u>3(e) Partially Accepted</u> - Trust Administration considers that this recommendation could be implemented in future grants programs, however further investigation will need to occur to determine strategic priorities in the first instance to determine program design and grant model. Trust Administration support the minimisation of administrative costs associated with devolved grants programs and</p>

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		will ensure any devolved grant programs fit within best practice guidelines for grant program administration costs, noting the Trust is currently operating its administration at approximately 2-2.5 percent, but more technically complex, or new, programs may be higher.