



Natural
Resources
Commission

Recommendations for potential future NSW Environmental Trust investment in roadside vegetation



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Enquiries

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List of acronyms

LLS	Local Land Services
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NSW	New South Wales
RMS	Roads and Maritime Services
RVIP	Roadside Vegetation Implementation Project

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1 Introduction

The NSW Environmental Trust (the Trust) provided approximately \$2.35 million of funding for the Roadside Vegetation Implementation Project (RVIP), which was completed in two stages between 2011 and 2014. The Trust requested the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to undertake an independent evaluation of the RVIP in order to understand the appropriateness, cost effectiveness and results achieved from the first two stages of funding (Stages 1 and 2). The Trust also asked the NRC to provide recommendations on the design and optimal delivery model for a potential third stage (Stage 3) of the program, informed by the review of Stages 1 and 2.

The NRC has completed its evaluation of Stages 1 and 2 and has provided the Trust with a report with its findings and recommendations. This report presents the NRC's recommendations on the design and delivery for a potential third stage of the RVIP. It focuses on strategic design and selection of delivery models; however, in developing details of the third stage of the program, the Trust should consider the full range of the NRC's recommendations from the evaluations of Stages 1 and 2 (including on administrative and reporting improvements). A full copy of these findings and recommendations are included in Attachment A.

2 Summary of evaluation lessons

The NRC identified several key lessons from the evaluation of Stage 1 and 2 that should be considered in developing Stage 3.

Program design:

- Review the evidence supporting investment in roadside reserves, and linear corridors more generally to determine if roadsides provide a sound investment opportunity relative to other options for achieving objectives.
- Develop an evidence-based program design supported by clear objectives and a strategic assessment of priority areas for investment.
- Select projects aligned with the objectives, timeframe, scale and budget of the overall program. A longer timeframe than provided in Stages 1 and 2 is needed for restoration and rehabilitation projects.
- Integrate active capture and sharing of knowledge, tools and good practice into the program design, with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Develop a monitoring program focused on evaluating desired outcomes.

Project delivery

- Implement regionally planned and coordinated projects, to take advantage of economies of scale and provide support for lower capacity councils in NSW.
- Implement steps to increase the likelihood that projects will provide long-term outcomes including requiring demonstration of planning and budget commitment to monitoring and maintenance, evaluating proposals in regards to how projects will be integrated into broader council activities, and investing in tools that support integration of environmental asset data into broader council activities.
- Allow flexibility to create customised and innovative projects based on local or regional needs in a way that supports adaptive management and facilitates sharing between councils.

Governance and administration

- Determine whether to devolve the program management based on an assessment of the expected value and the capacity of the administrator to facilitate expected outcomes. To avoid excessive administrative costs, devolve to the lowest capable level and limit the layers of devolution.
- Implement measures to improve coordination of projects with neighbouring landholders, other NSW council activities and other Trust programs and relevant plans.
- Ensure that project assessment criteria fully reflect the program objectives, that the technical review of proposals includes an appropriate mix of skills and that proposals provide sufficient information to meaningfully assess them against the selected criteria.

3 Proposed funding needs and objectives

Some of the limitations of Stages 1 and 2 stem from the short time frames allowed for both program development and project delivery. In developing Stage 3, the Trust has the opportunity to reconsider the funding need and objectives to ensure they are strategic, realistic, evidence-based, and informed by the experiences in Stages 1 and 2.

A key finding from the evaluation of Stages 1 and 2 is that the Trust's decision to fund roadside vegetation appears to have been based on limited information and assessment as to whether roadside reserves are a sound investment for the Trust relative to alternatives. The NRC recommends that the Trust thoroughly evaluate available information regarding investment in corridors and the value of roadside reserves in improving connectivity. Linear corridors other than roadside reserves¹ may provide better investment opportunities for connectivity.² An evaluation of strategic priorities should consider both public and private land that may serve corridor or connectivity objectives.

The NRC has undertaken some preliminary investigations into this issue. Corridors are intended to allow movement of target animals, reducing genetic isolation and improving their viability. Vegetation links can also help provide habitat and shelter, reduce wind and water erosion, and have aesthetic appeal.³ However, corridors can also act as conduits for invasive species and diseases.

While, the net benefit of corridors is difficult to quantify, it is generally agreed that works to improve corridors provide benefits if they are properly designed and there are clear objectives for the functionality or habitat being targeted for improvement. Although roadsides are roughly

¹ The width of the road reserve is established through either historical survey or survey at the time the road is established per the NSW *Roads Act 1993*.

² A comprehensive evaluation of other corridors is beyond the scope of this evaluation. However, travelling stock reserves (TSRs) and Crown land roads (e.g. 'paper laneways') have both been identified as potential areas for investment. The Trust previously funded a project to conserve paper laneways identified as having significant environmental value. While those involved in the project indicate that it achieved conservation benefits, the project was plagued by administrative and legal issues. Completion of the project required transfer of the land from the Crown to the adjacent private landholders, who agreed to conservation agreements. This process was costly and after several years has yet to be completed. Many paper laneways are also cleared roads serving farmland and may not provide significant benefits as corridors. Unless the legal and administrative barriers are addressed through a change in the land transfer process, paper laneways may not be a sound area for Trust investment.

³ Bennett, A. F. 1998. Linkages in the landscape: the role of corridors and connectivity in wildlife conservation. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN.; Gilbert-Norton, L., Wilson, R. Stevens J.R., Beard, K.H. 2010. A meta-analytic review of corridor effectiveness. *Conservation biology: the journal of the Society for Conservation Biology*, 24(3), pp.660–8. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20184653> [Accessed July 14, 2014]; Lindenmayer, D.B. & Nix, H. a., 1993. *Ecological Principles for the Design of Wildlife Corridors*. *Conservation Biology*, 7(3), pp.627–631. Available at: <http://doi.wiley.com/10.1046/j.1523-1739.1993.07030627.x>.

estimated to cover three percent of NSW⁴, they are not designed as biodiversity corridors. At best they fill this function accidentally and their utility as corridors will be context specific. Roadside reserves are often quite narrow resulting in large edge effects. Much of the vegetation and roadside habitat is already highly disturbed, and distances between remnant patches may be very large.⁵ Therefore, any interventions would ideally be strategically planned with a clear consideration of the role of the roadside in the landscape, and a focus on managing threats and improving specific landscape functions.

Given the Trust's stated desire to invest in roadsides specifically, and having observed practice and needs on ground, the NRC has identified three possible priorities for future funding. These are: knowledge of assets and risks; integrated management of assets and risks; and strategic works to improve landscape function and condition. These priorities are interrelated and do not need to be funded exclusively. Rather, they form a continuum with different councils and regions currently at different stages along this continuum. Without sufficient knowledge of roadside assets and a degree of council capacity to manage these, on-ground projects are unlikely to succeed in delivering long-term improvements in asset function or condition.

Figure 1 outlines how these priorities are interrelated and the capacity needed to implement them.

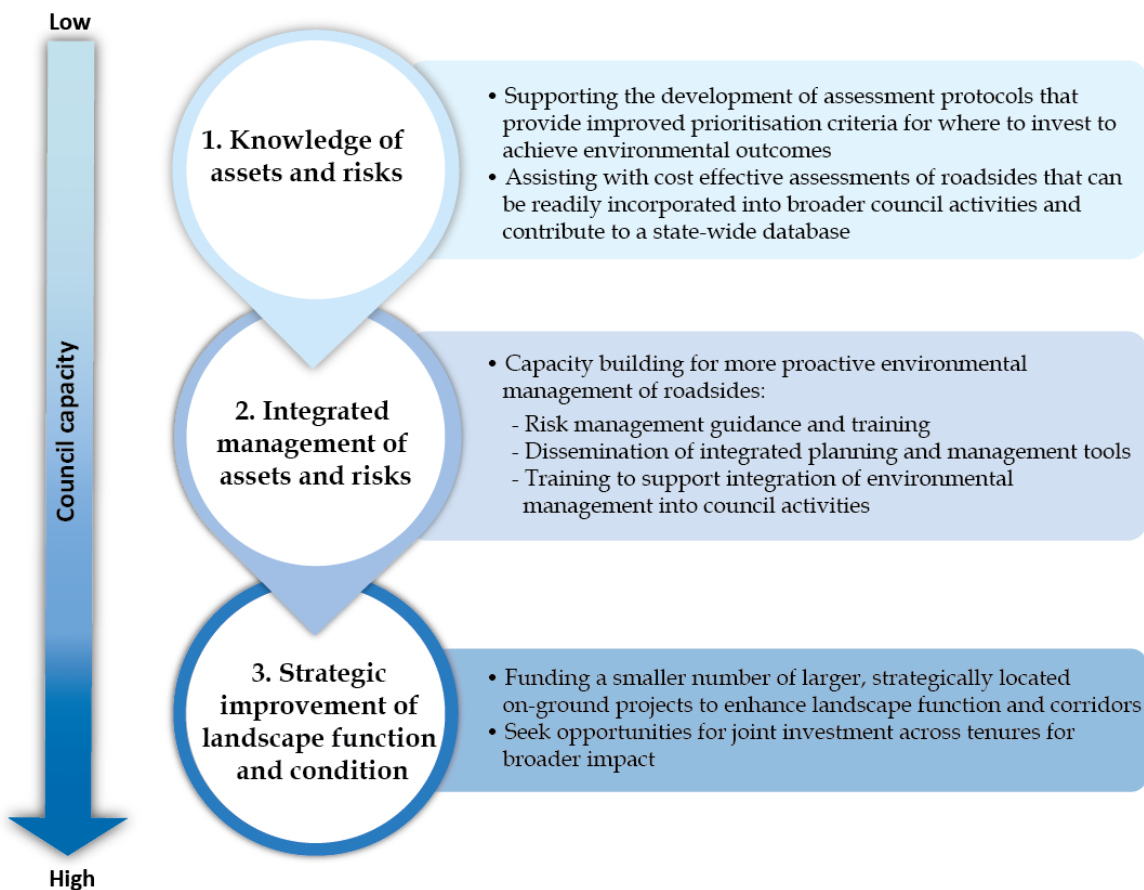


Figure 1: Needs for roadside vegetation management and associated capacity requirements

⁴ Estimate provided by the Roadside Environment Committee.

⁵ Doerr, Veronica AJ, Tom Barrett, and Erik D. Doerr. "Connectivity, dispersal behaviour and conservation under climate change: a response to Hodgson et al." *Journal of Applied Ecology* 48.1 (2011): 143-147.

⁶ Hess, GR, Fischer, RA, 2001, Communicating clearly about conservation corridors, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, vol. 55, pp. 195-208.

Current council capacity varies considerably, with some councils ready and able to implement priority on-ground works, and others needing information and capacity building before they can reasonably be expected to succeed in carrying out works that will achieve long-term on-ground outcomes. The Trust could consider using some of the available funds for each of the priority areas, or potentially implementing a staged approach by funding improvements in information and capacity building followed by on-ground works when capacity is sufficient.

The Trust could also consider allocating a portion of the funds for innovation grants, to be used to fund pilot studies and/or develop technologies that have the potential to be applied and create positive impacts across the state. For example, the NRC observed instances where investment in researching and piloting new methods for the control of environmental weeds in sensitive locations would have been beneficial.

Improved knowledge of assets and risks



Improved information and access to tools that allow for the effective collection of information are needed to inform selection of strategic priorities for connectivity and to allow councils to better understand and manage their environmental assets.

Assessment guidance

There are a variety of guidance materials available regarding assessment of environmental values in roadside reserves. However, there is no standard good practice model that is implemented uniformly across NSW. There is an opportunity to improve standards for collecting roadside vegetation information and using that information for prioritising investment in environmental values and assets of roadside reserves.

Many councils involved in the RVIP indicated that they have limited information regarding the environmental assets within their roadside reserves. While the Trust funded the Roadside Vegetation Management Plans in 2005, limitations of these plans were identified in the NRC's evaluation of Stages 1 and 2. Many of the plans are outdated, cover only portions of council roads, and are based on limited assessment criteria, which typically focus predominantly vegetation quality. Further, many are not digitised or integrated into council activities.

The NSW Roadside Environment Committee has recently updated its guidelines for performing roadside assessments. While the new guidelines contain improvements, they still largely focus on prioritising roadside reserves based on the quality of roadside vegetation.⁷ These guidelines could be further developed to consider additional criteria in the prioritisation process. For example, Wingecarribee Shire Council has developed an assessment protocol that focuses on a broader range of criteria such as endangered species and communities and connections to priority biodiversity corridors for prioritising works. This protocol could be adapted and shared with other

⁷ Threatened species, endangered ecological communities, presence of wildlife corridors, introduced and native species and other road management activities (e.g. safety, bushfire risk management) are included in the assessment but are not factored into the priority rating. There is no assessment of the importance of roadsides for connectivity other than identifying the presence of neighbouring bushland greater than 10 hectares.

councils as appropriate, or used to further develop the Roadside Environment Committee guidelines.

Cost-effective assessments

Easy to implement, cost-effective assessment methods that provide readily useable GIS layers are needed. Many councils in NSW have limited resources for performing assessments of environmental aspects of roadside reserves. Further, in order to be effective in the long-term, assessments need to result in data that can be readily integrated into regular council activities.

Rapid assessment methods have been developed and trialled within NSW and other regions of Australia. These methods typically involve live or video assessment via slow moving vehicle. More detailed evaluations of specific areas can be performed where necessary, for instance, to delineate an endangered ecological community. Attachment B provides information on some rapid assessment methodologies identified by the NRC during the evaluation of Stages 1 and 2 of the RVIP.

A significant limitation of roadside reserve projects is the safety and liability concerns associated with having non-council staff working on the roadsides. Conducting roadside assessments is an area where councils have successfully partnered with other organisations as assessments can often be performed from a vehicle, reducing safety concerns. Community organisations and other government organisations can also provide expertise in evaluating video footage of roadsides. For example:

- In NSW councils have successfully partnered with Catchment Management Authorities (now Local Land Services), Landcare and with private contractors for this type of work.
- In Tasmania, Greening Australia has provided assessment services, as well as follow up training, program implementation and monitoring assistance through their Enviromark Program.⁸
- In Western Australia, the Roadside Conservation Value Mapping Program is undertaken by the Roadside Conservation Committee, which is a partnership with local volunteers, Landcare, Community groups and local government. The Committee works with selected shires each year to undertake a survey of their roadside vegetation.⁹

Local and regional data are often not available to those outside the area. Any future investment in roadside assessments should require that consistent data be collected by program participants and made available to inform strategic analysis at a regional and state scale.

Suggested funding priorities

Environmental Trust should consider investment in:

- Easy to use assessment protocols that provide improved prioritisation criteria for investment in projects to achieve environmental outcomes.
- Assisting councils to complete cost-effective assessments of roadsides that can be readily incorporated into broader council activities and contribute to a state-wide database.

⁸ See links for more information:

http://ga.yourasp.com.au/veg-futures/pages/images/Colloquim%20A2_Corbett.pdf

http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/12037/EnviromarkUserGuide.pdf

⁹ See link for more information: <http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/off-reserve-conservation/roadside-conservation/132-roadside-conservation-value-mapping-program>.

Integrated management of assets and risks



The evaluation of Stages 1 and 2 demonstrated that councils range considerably in their capacity to manage roadside reserves for environmental values. To achieve long-term changes in practice environmental management should be integrated into broader council activities such as planning, asset management and roadside maintenance. The NRC has identified opportunities for investment that would assist councils with risk management and building capacity across council staff.

Risk management guidance

Councils manage roadsides for a range of outcomes, including noxious weed control, bushfire management and safety. These obligations may at times conflict with each other. The key driver for many councils to manage biodiversity on roadsides is sound management of environmental compliance risks. Councils have indicated that there is a lack of clear guidance regarding what is required to meet due diligence requirements. There have been several recent cases in which councils have been heavily fined for failure to comply with the requirements for protection of threatened species when carrying out management activities in roadside reserves. Councils' interest in compliance risk management could be leveraged to encourage improved understanding and management of roadside environmental assets as part of day-to-day council business.

Training and guidance in these areas has been shown to be successful in reducing environmental impacts on roadsides. For instance, councils participating in Stage 1 and 2 of the RVIP indicated that training road crews in environmental risks has facilitated the quick adoption of simple measures such as ensuring that mowing is strictly limited to areas already cleared, and that designated turn around points are used.

Building council capacity

Long-term outcomes for roadside vegetation management projects depend upon ongoing council capacity to proactively manage the environmental aspects of their roadside reserves. Councils who have advanced their roadside management programs recognise the need to include environmental assets in their integrated planning and asset management. However, this is not common practice for managing roadside reserves across the State or even within most regions.¹⁰ Tools are needed to allow easy integration of environmental assets with other council activities. Training and capacity building for a range of council staff are also needed.

¹⁰ Interviews from the Stage 1 and 2 evaluation with council representatives, the Roadside Environment Committee, the Roads and Maritime Services and a technical experts all indicate that many councils lack the capacity to assess environmental assets and to integrate environmental management with other council activities.

Several tools have been developed that allow councils to use environmental assessment data to better inform their environmental compliance risk management and road management activities. These tools include a simple program for completing a Review of Environmental Factors linked to the environmental assessment data, field guides for road crews, and GPS systems that alert crews to sensitive areas. Attachment C provides some examples of tools available for integrating environmental management with other council activities that were identified in the Stage 1 and 2 evaluation.

Suggested funding priorities

Environmental Trust should consider investment in:

- A program that builds council capacity and commitment to proactively manage high biodiversity value roadside reserves by leveraging councils' need to manage environmental compliance risk. This could include for instance:
 - risk management guidance and training
 - dissemination of integrated planning and management tools
 - training to support the integration of biodiversity management with council asset management.

Strategic investment to improve landscape function and condition



The evaluation of Stages 1 and 2 of the RVIP highlighted the need for better understanding of the role of roadsides within the landscape and more strategic consideration of where and how roadsides might provide functional value such as connectivity. Funding numerous, disjointed, small projects is an inefficient and ineffective means of impacting on broader corridor function.

Given available funds, the Trust should target a small number of larger projects with the aim of achieving environmental benefits at a broader scale. Project selection should consider where work can be done in conjunction with efforts on neighbouring lands and through other programs to maximise outcomes and provide efficiencies. On-ground works should be based on a clear program logic linking the actions to the high level objectives.

There is a range of existing mapping available for prioritising vegetation investment that could help the Trust determine where it should focus its efforts.

For example, at the:

- national scale, there is mapping that supports the *Great Eastern Ranges Initiative* which includes priority areas in NSW
- state scale, there is mapping under the *NSW Native Vegetation Management Benefits Analyses* which provides state-scale context for investment in native vegetation management

- regional scale, there is mapping in the upgraded Catchment Action Plans that targets areas for vegetation investment and the Office of Environment and Heritage is trialling BIOmap in some regions of the state
- local scale, there is some mapping that supports *Local Environmental Plans*, that identifies important areas of vegetation for protection and roadside vegetation management plans.

Many of the available maps are based on assessment of all land types (i.e. public and private). Therefore they could be used if the Trust wished to identify projects that could contribute to larger corridors through joint works across tenures. For example, the *Native Vegetation Management Benefits Analysis* includes maps for where to invest for the objectives of “manage, improve, and revegetate” as well as a consolidated benefits map, and a map of where to focus efforts to improve connectivity. Project selection might consider land including conservation areas, Catchment Authority land, Crown Land, Traveling Stock Reserves, rail corridors and private land.

Determination of where to invest in specific on-ground projects will require a more detailed analysis at a regional and local level. Once the Trust has strategically identified the regions where investment may have the most benefit, they could seek applications from regional groups identifying where and how they would propose to carry out works. Where priority areas consist of multiple types of land, applicants should be encouraged to propose joint projects and/or identify how the proposed project can leverage works funded through other programs on adjacent land.

The objective of the projects should be clearly defined when seeking applications. For instance, if the objective is to enhance a particular corridor between two conservation areas to allow movement of animal species between those areas, the project should provide for a corridor of sufficient width and habitat type facilitate movement of the target species. Questions the regional groups should consider in proposing and designing projects for enhancing corridors and connectivity include:

- What is the critical habitat at either end of the corridor, or within the corridor that you are seeking to conserve or enhance? What is the condition of that habitat and what threats is it under?
- What are the focal species for the conservation action and what are their dispersal and/or habitat requirements?
- What is the distance between ‘patches’ if you are seeking to provide connectivity?
- Is the scale of the proposed intervention aligned with the patchiness of the landscape and the dispersal ability of the target species?
- Are there key habitat features necessary to achieve desired outcomes, and does the corridor have those features, or potential to provide those features?
- What is the ratio of edge to area for the corridor? How can the edge effects be reduced (e.g. could the project work across land tenures to widen the corridor?)

Suggested funding priorities

Environmental Trust should consider investment in:

- Strategically located on-ground projects to enhance landscape function and corridors with more targeted design criteria and a clear program logic.
- Joint investment across tenures for greater impact.

4 Potential delivery models

Once the objectives for future funding are determined, the design of a future program can be outlined by considering¹¹:

- Scale – what is the right scale (spatial, temporal, and institutional) for the desired impact?
- Basis of decision-making – grant administration literature identifies three key types of decision-making models, which may be used in combination:
 - Rational assessment of competitive bids against set criteria – selection criteria should be aligned with objectives to ensure projects are likely to meet the desired outcomes.
 - Strategic budgeting where specific partners and programs are targeted based on strategic planning.
 - Performance-based where additional funds are provided to those who have performed well in the past.
- Delivery model – what will be the most appropriate and effective delivery model and who has the capacity to deliver the program under that model?
- Long-term outcomes – how can the projects be sustained when grant funding is completed?
- Risk management – what are the risks in investing in the selected program or projects?
- Monitoring and evaluation – what are the monitoring and evaluation needs and how can the monitoring demonstrate whether outcomes were achieved?

4.1 Improving knowledge and capacity for integrated management

The NRC has considered the questions above to provide advice for potential design and delivery options for the three proposed investment areas.

Improved knowledge and integrated management of risks and assets can be delivered by similar models. An assessment of the above considerations for these potential investment areas is outlined below.

Scale

A capacity building program is likely to take two to three years to implement, with the first year requiring building and trialling tools and training materials, and broader roll out occurring in subsequent years. The total time frame will depend on the available budget and size of the region being targeted for implementation.

Carrying out rapid assessments could be completed in a few months for an individual council, but may take longer to implement across a region or multiple regions, depending on the size of the region.

Programs to build capacity or improve knowledge should be designed for regional or state-wide deployment to allow for consistency, efficiency, and sharing of information. Trialling a program in two to three regions would allow for refinement of training tools that could ultimately be implemented state-wide. As these should add value to councils, the program should generate interest beyond the trial regions.

¹¹ Kelly, J. 2008, *Strategic review of administration of Australian Government grant programs*, Department of Finance and Deregulations.

Programs should aim to create change at the local council level, but be designed to have impacts at the regional and state scale.

Basis of decision-making

A rational assessment of expressions of interest, followed by the requirement for a more detailed application, with final work plans to be negotiated prior to contracting, was shown to be efficient and effective for regional projects in Stages 1 and 2. This encourages applications by reducing the up-front time and resources required to request funds. The governance guidelines for major projects recently completed by the Trust provides for this process.

The proposal evaluation process followed in Stages 1 and 2 of the RVIP was a sound methodology. Assessment criteria should be carefully developed to ensure they address the key issues for evaluating whether proposed projects will substantially contribute to the achievement of objectives. Selection of panel members should provide a breadth of practical technical knowledge, backgrounds and experience relevant to the projects being evaluated.

Sustaining works long-term

In order to support long-term outcomes, the program design should be developed in partnership with delivery partners and the local councils in the region. Strengthening of partnerships between the councils in the region and with the regional and/or state level partners will increase the likelihood of ongoing support.

Successful integration of training and tools into regular council business will help to ensure long-term practice change. For instance, one council in Stage 1 of RVIP now includes training requirements in job specifications. The added value for councils in sound risk management will drive ongoing implementation.

Development of training and tools is predominantly a one-off cost that will continue to add value and reduce compliance risks for councils once developed.

Risks

Key risks to this type of program include potential difficulties generating practice change and impacts of the local government reforms. Management of environmental values may conflict with other council responsibilities and create resistance to change. This risk may be mitigated through improved training regarding the risks of poor environmental management for councils, and engaging with the most relevant partners to help create 'buy-in' for the need to change. Further, creation of useful tools that provide value for councils in their day-to-day activities will help to drive implementation and commitment to change. Potential local government reforms, such as council amalgamations, should be considered when designing the program.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Trust should incorporate a clear monitoring and evaluation plan into the program design before funds are provided. Monitoring should focus on collection of the most important data for determining whether outcomes have been met and for informing future decision-making. Definitions should be consistently used across projects to allow for meaningful aggregated data, and baseline data should be collected to allow for assessment of the impacts of the program.

For knowledge building and improved management, monitoring and evaluation should include collection of evidence that training programs have been successful and that practice change has occurred.

4.2 Improving landscape function through strategic on-ground works

The NRC recommends the following for design of a program related to strategic investment in on-ground works for improved landscape function.

Scale

The duration of on-ground restoration and rehabilitation projects should be a minimum of three years to ensure that works can be properly planned, to allow for potential delays due to weather and seasonality, and to allow for evaluation of whether outcomes have been achieved.

The physical scale of the projects will vary depending on the objectives and identification of strategic priorities. The scale will also depend on the amount of available funding. To make an impact on regional or state scale corridors and create efficiencies, a small number of large on-ground projects should be selected.

Delivery of effective projects will require coordination and support at the local, regional and potentially state scale. Coordination and planning at the regional scale is recommended.

Basis for decision-making

The scope of the strategic on-ground works should be clearly defined by the Trust. As such, the Trust could prepare tender documents outlining its requirements and desired outcomes and make a targeted request for expressions of interest, based on the scope in the tender documents.

Consistent with Stages 1 and 2 a rational assessment of expressions of interest, followed by the requirement for a more detailed application, with final work plans to be negotiated prior to contracting is recommended for selecting delivery partners.

Review of expressions of interest should be consistent with the recommendations for technical review in Section 4.1.

Sustaining works long-term

On-ground works will require monitoring and incorporation into routine maintenance activities in order to be successful in the long-term. Maintenance requirements should be included in the contract with clear roles and responsibilities and a requirement to demonstrate budget commitment. Where possible the maintenance should be incorporated into ongoing local council or regional maintenance activities to improve efficiency. For instance where environmental weed control is required, long-term management of the target weeds should be incorporated into council or weed authority planning and activities. Building of strong partnerships in the design and delivery of projects will help to facilitate this integration into ongoing operations.

Site selection should consider the resilience and potential risks to the site, to increase chances that improvements can be maintained in the long-term.

Risks

While there is information available that can be used to better prioritise investment, the data has limitations, and corridor functionality is complex. As such, there remains a risk that investments may not have the anticipated impacts. This risk can be mitigated by ensuring decisions are made based on best available information and adaptive management is employed to adjust to new information.

Monitoring and evaluation

Investment in corridors should be based on a clear understanding of the functionality and/or habitats that are being targeted for restoration. Monitoring and evaluation should focus on assessing whether the outcomes related to function and condition have been met, rather than on outputs. For instance, if the objective is to eliminate an environmental weed threat, monitoring should target the success of weed eradication efforts, rather than reporting on weed spraying activities undertaken.

5 Delivery options and partners

The NRC recommends that the Trust delivers investment at a regional scale to gain economies of scale and support strategic investment in the landscape. This could be done through one state level body at the regional scale (e.g. Local Land Services), or different regional bodies for different regions.

As local councils have responsibility for roadside reserves within their area, project delivery will necessarily involve close partnerships with local councils. A strong relationship with and understanding of local council operations and needs should be a key consideration in selecting delivery partners.

Evaluation of whether to devolve any responsibilities should consider the anticipated added benefits and risks of devolution. In deciding whether to devolve grant management responsibilities, the Trust should consider the transaction costs of devolving the grant to a state level body that would then devolve to regional groups and then, most likely, through to councils.

If the Trust chooses to fully devolve the grant administration function, clear roles and responsibilities for the administrator should be defined. Devolution will add greater value if the administrator has a clear program management role in regards to quality assurance and actively capturing and disseminating information.

Full devolution of grant administration could be done at a state scale through:

- **Local Land Services (LLS)** - Supporting integrated land management and building partnerships are core objectives for LLS, which also has management responsibilities for travelling stock reserves. LLS (formerly CMAs) successfully delivered one of the regional projects from Stage 2, and participated in another, and has a strong understanding of environmental management of roadside reserves. However, LLS capacity and relationships with local councils may vary by region and as a new organisation LLS has many competing priorities.

- **Local Government NSW** - Local Government NSW was the project administrator for Stages 1 and 2 of the RVIP, and consequently is familiar with the program and has built relationships with local councils and partners such as the Roadside Environment Committee. However, LGNSW has limited in-house technical and practical expertise in environmental management of roadside reserves, and limited capacity to provide cash or in-kind contributions.

An alternative to devolving management of the grant is for the Trust to invest directly through regional organisations that have demonstrated capacity for the type of project identified. In this scenario, the Trust would need to commit the resources required for active knowledge capture and sharing across regions. This could either be done by the Trust or contracted to a third party.

The selection of delivery partners may well vary by region depending on the strength of relationships with local councils and the capacity of the organisation in the region targeted. Key partners that could be involved in delivery at a regional scale include:

- **Roads and Maritime Services (RMS)** - The RMS is currently undertaking a program to train 78 councils involved in managing RMS roads on proper environmental risk management and environmental impact assessment. This program is being delivered by the RMS regionally and has been piloted in one region. There would be efficiencies in delivering the RMS training in conjunction with other training such as use of rapid assessment tools and methods to integrate environmental management with other council activities. This would require some expansion of the current program in scope and to bring in councils not within RMS's current program.
- **Community/environmental organisations** - Community and environmental organisations such as Landcare, Greening Australia, and the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators could be effective partners for knowledge building and assessment, and strategic on-ground works (subject to safety and liability limitations). The most appropriate delivery partners would vary by region and project objective.

Such organisations have a history of delivering similar programs, such as the Greening Australia Enviromark program in Tasmania, and work on risk assessment completed by the Australian Association of Bush Regenerators for the Roadside Environment Committee. Landcare was involved in some of the Stage 1 and 2 projects, providing assessment expertise and training.
- **Regional Organisations of Councils** or organisations similar to the Central West Salinity and Water Quality Alliance that have demonstrated capacity for this work could provide coordination and planning for all of the areas identified for potential investment. Assessment of each group's capacity would be required on a regional basis to determine which groups would be most suited to deliver selected projects, relative to alternative delivery partners.
- **Regional LLS organisations** - Regional LLS organisation could be chosen as direct delivery partners as was done in Stage 2 of the RVIP, rather than devolving the full grant to the state-wide LLS.

The NRC has identified organisations that might be considered as partners for specific projects to provide expertise, assistance with training and assistance with on-ground works. These include:

- **Institute of Public Works Engineers Australasia** - This is the peak body for public works engineers, primarily in local government. They have a history of preparing assessment and guidance materials, and encouraging adoption of good practice. They have a state-wide reach and provide an avenue of communication with staff outside of the environmental arena. They could provide assistance with training and capacity building programs, and tools for integrating environmental management into broader council activities.

- **Roadside Environment Committee** – This is a state-wide body funded by RMS that provides advice regarding management of all linear corridors. As such, they have broad representation. They have provided technical advice and assistance to Local Government NSW throughout Stages 1 and 2 of the RVIP. They could provide further assistance in regards to training and guidance materials. However, the committee has limited capacity to undertake projects or to receive and manage funds. They would likely contract out works to another body, and the extent of their relationships with local councils is unclear.
- **Regional Weed Authorities / County Councils** – These organisations could provide cost-effective weed management for strategic on-ground works, as well as ongoing maintenance. These groups are only present in some areas of the state and vary in their capacity to manage additional works.