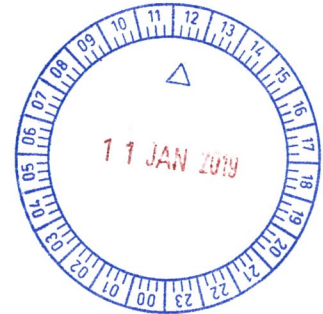




Environmental Trust

Our Ref: DOC18/500866
Your Ref: D18/1342



Mr Bryce Wilde
Executive Director
Natural Resources Commission
GPO Box 5341
SYDNEY NSW 2001

Dear Mr Wilde

Thank you for the evaluation of Office of Environment and Heritage's (OEH) Linking Landscapes through Local Action project, funded by the Environmental Trust (Trust).

The Trust has noted the outcomes of the evaluation and has accepted the Natural Resource Commission's (NRC) recommendations. A copy of the Trust's and OEH's administrative responses are enclosed for publication with the report.

I acknowledge the NRC is required under the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* to make its reports publically available. The Trust supports the NRC placing the evaluation report and responses on its website.

I thank the NRC for its thoroughness and flexibility in the evaluation and look forward to our continued collaboration.

Yours sincerely

Anthony Lean
Trust Secretary

21.12.2018

Enclosure

TRUST RESPONSE TO NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION EVALUATION OF THE LINKING LANDSCAPES THROUGH LOCAL ACTION PROGRAM

Key Findings	Recommendations	Trust response to the recommendation
<p>1. IMPROVE SITE SELECTION CRITERIA TO INCREASE RETURN ON INVESTMENT</p> <p>The return on investment is sensitive to the initial condition of the site; its exposure to ongoing threats due to size, location, usage, and perimeter-to-area ratio; and the feasibility of managing those threats to biodiversity value.</p> <p>Landscape scale outcomes can be enhanced with less emphasis on scarcity values and greater emphasis placed on a site's connectivity, ecological value, and resilience.</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: The Environmental Trust (Trust) agrees that for any future projects of this kind, site selection criteria be amended to improve biodiversity outcomes and return on investment. It is noted that the initial site selections in this project were made prior to the BIO Map and geospatial viewer tools becoming available, both of which are intended to guide these types of site selection.</p>

	Key Findings	Recommendations	Trust response to the recommendation
<p>2. IMPROVE ASSURANCE FOR PERFORMANCE AND OUTCOMES</p>	<p>Regular performance reviews of BioBanking agreements carried out in addition to compliance audits would help verify that management outcomes are being achieved and the sites continue to deliver a positive return on investment.</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: The compliance audits only occur at seven-year intervals. While OEH found that all land managers were satisfactorily upholding their contract obligations under the BioBanking agreements, more frequent performance reviews would provide additional assurance that public funds have been used effectively. This will be considered in the design of any future programs of this nature by the Trust.</p>
<p>3. IMPROVE COORDINATION BETWEEN LAND</p>	<p>While the grant program establishing seven BioBanking agreements was considered effective at site scale, it is unlikely to have had a material impact at the landscape scale. To more effectively “link” landscapes across the Sydney Basin bioregion, the NRC recommends: improving coordination between councils; providing additional funding for bushland management; and the trialling of alternative funding mechanisms</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: This will be incorporated into the design of any future programs of this nature by the Trust.</p>

Key Findings	Recommendations	Trust response to the recommendation
<p>4. SEEK ALTERNATIVE</p> <p>BioBanking has been found to be effective in improving the capacity and capability of public land managers in achieving biodiversity outcomes. Therefore, councils should be encouraged to adopt alternative funding sources including participating in the sale of biodiversity credits on the open market and other innovation options such as crowdfunding or micro-levies.</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: The Trust will share these learning with other agencies operating in this space.</p>
<p>5. IMPROVE TOOLS FOR IDENTIFYING CONSERVATION INVESTMENT PRIORITIES</p> <p>Tools to identify existing commitments for conservation alongside future investment priorities would usefully inform site selection and coordinate planning and implementation of management for conservation.</p> <p>However, the \$555,154 invested in developing the Biodiversity Investment Spatial Viewer (BISV) did not deliver any of the core benefits scoped in the original business plan. The NRC note this was due to: difficulties obtaining accurate data in the correct format; quick technological change and competition from other platforms (such as SEED); issues with compliance with government accessibility standards; and concerns about the longevity of any resulting platform due to future funding uncertainties.</p>	<p>To allow for a landscape-scale approach to prioritisation, tools that identify future investment priorities and existing commitments for conservation should be used to inform site selection and coordinate planning and implementation of management for conservation. Such tools should be created with an end-user in mind and be integrated into existing business processes to ensure their long-term utility and effective project and risk management. Specifically, in creating these tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • end-users should be identified and their needs factored into the design of the tool to ensure its usefulness and relevance • development of the mapping and IT tools should be guided by a clear purpose and a set of activities that will ensure that end users are aware of, able to access and able to use such tools • appropriate technical expertise is required in the scoping phase of IT/technology 	<p>Accepted: In future programs of this nature, the Trust will work with the proponent to identify maintenance resources up-front, and ensure that there is an adequate risk analysis undertaken with regards to technology and the assumptions surrounding the use and utility of data.</p>

Key Findings	Recommendations	Trust response to the recommendation
<p>The \$405,000 invested in developing a BIO Map tool for the Illawarra delivered better results than the BISV and has already been used to identify priority investment areas for the NSW National Parks Association's BushMates program. However, the NRC notes that judging the value for money of this tool is difficult because the extent of its ongoing contribution to other programs is unclear, and there is no clear plan for supporting and testing its use.</p> <p>Attention should be given to flexible and site-specific management actions but be encouraged to prioritise actions that maximise biodiversity values.</p>	<p>projects to accurately identify constraints, feasibility issues and identify and manage potential risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> agencies commit to, and invest in compiling fit-for-purpose data that shows the location of conservation agreements owners of the tools should be clearly identified to ensure ongoing maintenance and use of the final product. <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>Land managers should be cautious in diminishing marginal returns of some management actions that may have minimal benefit to biodiversity values.</p> <p>Management effort should be prioritised across sites once key threats are under control.</p>	<p>Accepted: While the Trust recognises the need for site specific flexibility and adaptation, a balance needs to be struck between pursuing appropriate on-ground initiatives but which deviate from specified work plans and maintaining best-practice governance and accountability practices. More frequent performance reviews as recommended above (see recommendation 2) would likely assist in striking this balance between flexibility and accountability.</p>
<p>6. FLEXIBLE MANAGEMENT OPTIONS</p>		