

EcoTender Demonstration 2007/08

Frequently asked questions

Information Sheet No. 2

Is there a minimum site size to be eligible for EcoTender Demonstration 2007/08 project?

No, there is no minimum size for a site to be eligible for EcoTender Demonstration project as the project is aimed at improving ecosystem outcomes at a range of scales.

I've got more than one patch of bush or revegetation site on my property, how is this dealt with?

Landholders with a number of sites on their property will be able to submit either a combined bid that covers two or more different areas or separate bids for each site. The choice is up to the landholder.

Landholders will not be able to bid more than once on a site for the same management commitments. That is, landholders will not be able to submit both a multiple-site bid and a single-site bid that covers the same site and management commitments.

Successful separate bids will require a number of management plans to be included under a single management agreement.

Does the EcoTender Demonstration project only deal with native bush or is revegetation of new areas of bush also okay?

The EcoTender Demonstration project covers both improved management of existing patches of native vegetation and creation of new areas through revegetation. Protection of paddock trees to encourage natural regeneration and management of native grasslands and wetlands are also eligible.

In general, typical management actions will include:

- fencing to address grazing impacts by domestic stock;
- weed and pest animal control above current responsibilities;
- retaining standing/fallen timber; and,

- supplementary planting of existing patches of vegetation.

Revegetation activities will need to be carried out in accordance the minimum-required target mix and density of species according to an agreed site preparation, planting and maintenance schedule.

How will I know what management actions to undertake?

The EcoTender Field Officer will undertake a site assessment and discuss the land management options available to each landholder and how these options would be scored in the assessment of a bid. It is important that the landholder share and discuss ideas, aspirations and management goals for the site with the Field Officer. The resulting management commitments and relative actions finalised in the Management Agreement are those which are agreeable to both the landholder and EcoTender Field Officer, but for which the landholder is ultimately responsible.

For landholders with more than one site, a separate draft management plan is prepared for each site and landholders can choose to combine or separate their sites as part of the bidding process.

As in all resource management plans, it is critical that landholders do not over-commit to works. Recognising this issue, EcoTender Demonstration project has prescribed a five-year duration for Management Agreements. Therefore the agreed management actions can be spread over the 5 year time frame to allow for changing conditions and natural occurrences such as flooding, fire or droughts. Permanent on-title agreements are also available for landholders to choose.

How will the agreements be monitored?

Landholders will be required to submit an annual report to the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA) that details the actions undertaken during the preceding 12 months and describes progress towards targets.

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The agreed annual payments are dependent upon receipt of these reports and satisfactory progress against the scheduled management actions and commitments for the period.

Revegetation agreements will include performance payments subject to satisfactory progress towards agreed establishment targets.

The Corangamite CMA will monitor a number of agreements each year and each site will be visited at least once during the five-year agreement to assess progress on the management activities and discuss any management concerns the landholder may have.

Any breach of an agreement may result in the cessation of annual payments.

What is in the agreement?

The agreement is a simple, plain-English document of three to five pages. It will contain a date of commencement and termination; obligations of the landholder and the Chief Executive Officer of the Corangamite CMA and interpretation clauses. The agreement will also contain a number of schedules such as the agreed management plan (agreed type and timing of management actions) and a site plan. It will also outline the schedule of payments to the landholder and the landholder reporting requirements.

How long are the agreements for?

Landholders can choose to enter either a five-year management agreement **or** a five-year management agreement plus permanent protection option.

In line with other fencing incentive programs, successful bidders who sign management agreements that include fencing will be required to *maintain that fencing in stock-proof condition for a period of ten years* from the date of commencement of the agreement.

Are the agreements 'common law' or some other type of agreement?

The management agreements will be contracts under common law. Parties to these agreements will be the Chief Executive Officer of Corangamite CMA and the landholder(s) of the site.

The permanent protection option will relate to on-going land use and will be registered on the property title and binds all future owners. They may either be registered under Section 69 of the *Conservation, Forests and Land Act 1987* and signed by the Secretary of the Department of

Sustainability and Environment (DSE) or a conservation covenant registered with the Trust for Nature under the *Victorian Conservation Trust Act 1972*.

What happens at the end of the fixed-term agreement period?

Landholders' management obligations under the management agreements cease at the end of the agreement period and they will be able to manage the vegetation according to their own wishes in accordance with other responsibilities applying at that time.

As required with current incentive schemes, landholders who receive funding to erect fences will be required to maintain these fences for a period of 10 years from the commencement date on the agreement.

I am leasing the property, can I sign an agreement?

Lessees will be eligible to sign a management agreement as long as they have the written authority of the owner of the site and that the proposed management actions are not already the responsibility of the lessee under the existing lease arrangement.

The EcoTender Field Officer may request a copy of the lease.

What if I sell the property or transfer the lease before the end of the agreement?

The fixed-term agreements are between the Corangamite CMA and the landholder and are not registered on title. Sale of the site or transfer of the lease would terminate the agreement.

The Corangamite CMA may offer the new landholder the opportunity to sign a new agreement for completion of the actions specified in the original agreement.

Permanent protection agreements will be registered on title and transferred with the title.

How will I be paid?

Landholders will receive an initial upfront payment upon signing the final management agreement. Following this, annual payments will proceed subject to satisfactory completion of agreed actions.

Revegetation agreements will include performance payments subject to satisfactory progress towards agreed establishment targets.

Payments will be by cheque or Electronic Funds Transfer and the annual payments will be subject

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to landholders submitting a report verifying the actions undertaken in the preceding 12 months.

What if I change my mind?

Landholders can withdraw from the process at any time without obligation, up to signing the final management agreement.

Landholders wishing to withdraw from the agreement after this time should contact the Corangamite CMA to discuss their options.

Can I change the proposed management actions once I have signed the agreement?

Agreements can be varied with the written consent of both parties. In general, only actions that lead to an equal or improved outcome will be considered and re-negotiation of payment will not be possible.

I am currently doing my own conservation work on my property. Will this be eligible? What about the work I have done with Landcare?

Landholders who are already managing or revegetating the native vegetation on their property can benefit from participation in EcoTender Demonstration project as there is an opportunity for their past and current efforts to be recognised. EcoTender assesses the current quality and extent of native vegetation on the site and then assesses the management commitments and actions required to maintain or enhance this. Significant previous management effort is likely to have increased the current quality and extent of native vegetation on the property.

Management actions specified in the Management Agreement are only for work over and above any pre-existing management agreements, but may include the conservation work already being undertaken by the landholder through their own initiative.

I've got a conservation covenant, do I get rewarded for this?

Yes, EcoTender is aimed at paying for landholder management actions that avoid the decline and/or improve the quality of native vegetation on private land. An existing voluntary conservation covenant provides permanent protection of native vegetation that secures the environmental outcomes achieved through the landholder management commitments.

The effect of the existing conservation covenant is the same as a permanent protection commitment option chosen through the EcoTender process.

Can I find out more about the environmental value of my property?

The EcoTender Field Officer will provide landholders with information about the relative environmental value of their property in the broader landscape from a range of perspectives including terrestrial biodiversity, river and estuarine health. Further to this, the EcoTender Field Officer will help landholders identify actions that improve the environmental value of their land.

My property includes Crown Land frontage. Am I still eligible?

Much of the land immediately adjacent to rivers and waterways in Victoria is owned by the 'Crown' or State of Victoria. Adjacent landholders may have a Crown Land licence which legalises their occupation of the land and enables them to carry out specific activities on that land. The licence also typically requires the licensee to be responsible for certain management actions such as control of pest animals and weeds.

Landholders and occupiers of Crown Land who hold a current Crown Land licence that extends at least to the end of the five-year EcoTender management agreement period are eligible to participate in EcoTender Demonstration project.

What about funds from other sources?

Successful bidders who sign an EcoTender management agreement may not be eligible to receive further funding through any other publicly funded assistance program for the site management actions identified in the management agreement for the period of the agreement.

Offsets for permitted clearing of native vegetation and registered native vegetation credits are not eligible to receive funding through EcoTender. Landholders already under an existing BushTender, PlainsTender, CarbonTender or similar contract will not be eligible to receive funding for a site for the same management actions covered by the existing agreement.

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Are bids from groups or multiple-landholders accepted?

Yes, as long as there is a legal entity that represents the group and is able to sign the final management agreement. This entity will also be responsible for annual reporting and disbursing payments to individuals within the group.

Landholders must choose to bid either singularly or as part of a group. Single bids will not be accepted for the same site that is included in a group bid.

Further information

For further information on the demonstration project or to register an Expression of Interest to participate, please contact the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or visit the DSE website www.dse.vic.gov.au or Corangamite CMA website www.ccma.vic.gov.au and search under "EcoTender".

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