Australian Local
Government Association

IN CONJUNCTION WITH

Biological Diversity
Advisory Council

# NATIONAL Local Government BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

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SUPPORTED BY

Environment Australia



# Foreword

The National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy was endorsed by unanimous vote at the National General Assembly of Local Government in November 1998. The document represents an agreed Local Government position at the national level on the management of our biodiversity.

The strategy recognises that:

- Conservation and sustainable use of our natural resources will only be achieved through local area planning and management, along with community education and participation.
- There is a willingness of Local Government across Australia to play a lead role in dealing with our most pressing and complex conservation issue—the loss of biodiversity.
- A clear and co-operative partnership arrangement is required between the three spheres of government.

The strategy recognises the three way partnership will vary from State to State, with Local Government powers varying widely. Individual arrangements will be required to suit the particular relationships between State and Local Governments.

It is therefore proposed that State Local Government Associations begin negotiations with the relevant State Governments and agencies to assess the human and financial resources required for Local and State Governments to cooperatively manage our biodiversity.

The Commonwealth also has a vital role to play in terms of national coordination.

We would like to acknowledge the effort that has been involved in developing the strategy. The network of Environmental Resource Officers (ERO) in each Local Government Association has played a key role, along with members of the Biological Diversity Advisory Council, and staff of the BDAC secretariat within Environment Australia. The strength of Local Government support for this strategy has been in large part a result of the enthusiastic participation of a wide cross section of people, and their attention to detail.

However the real work of gaining endorsement and genuine support from State and Territory Governments, and the Commonwealth still lies ahead. We hope this Strategy provides a useful framework for addressing the critical issues that face us in the conservation of our biodiversity.

**Cr John Campbell**
PRESIDENT

**Roger Kitching**
CHAIR

# Executive Summary

**Biodiversity put simply is the variety of all forms of life. Its conservation is a complex task, and will involve building regional partnerships. The National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy has been developed to assist Local Government be a key partner in biodiversity conservation.**

The success of this strategy will require the development of biodiversity policies, and commitment by individual Councils. It will also require adequate resources and other support from the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments as well as commitment by individual Councils.

The strategy addresses five key issues and identifies relevant actions for each of the key issue. These actions will require varying degrees of support from all spheres of Government, and regional organisations.

## AWARENESS, TRAINING AND EDUCATION

**Objective:** To develop a national awareness, training and education program. This could be targeted to community, industry and Government, with the aim of supporting local programs.

**Suggested actions include:**

- Establish a biodiversity support network for Local Government.
- Promote success stories and establish an award system.
- Provide particular support to rural Councils to develop and implement local planning regulations to assist biodiversity conservation.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT RESOURCING

**Objective:** To ensure adequate resourcing for all interested Councils or regional organisations, to play a greater role in biodiversity conservation. This includes addressing the specific requirements of indigenous communities.

**Suggested actions include:**

- Conduct an audit of existing programs to ensure cost effective delivery.
- Support environmental officers in Councils or regional groups to develop and implement Local Government biodiversity conservation strategies.
- Rate rebate schemes for biodiversity conservation.

## REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

**Objective:** To encourage regional partnerships and planning, preferably along existing regional boundaries. This requires coordination, information and support to Local Government, regional bodies, and State agencies. It is essential to acknowledge the key role of catchment organisations in some States, and for Councils to work cooperatively with these groups.

**Suggested actions include:**

- Direct resources to regional planning and implementation and where appropriate provide statutory support for regional authorities to play a coordinating role.

- Integrate with existing processes and programs eg catchment planning, Natural Heritage Trust etc.
- Support regionally administered incentive schemes eg the Greening Australia fencing incentives program.

## LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORKS

**Objective:** To encourage State Governments to review, and possibly amend legislation relating to Local Governments' role in managing biodiversity (eg, Planning, Local Government and Environment Acts).

**Suggested actions include:**

- Develop all catchment/regional plans in cooperation with Local Government, and incorporate into Council planning schemes.
- Allow Local Governments to raise special purpose levies, if they wish to play a greater role in biodiversity conservation, as done in Brisbane City and other Councils.
- Encourage consistency between States with State Acts that relate to biodiversity.

## INFORMATION AND MONITORING

**Objective:** To establish a nationally coordinated information and monitoring system which is integrated with existing data bases, to provide Councils with the basic information on biodiversity in their area.

**Suggested actions include:**

- Ensure Local Government has access to existing State and national data systems, preferably on geographic information systems (GIS).
- Establish data standards and protocols, and ensure data is delivered at a relevant scale.
- Provide training, tools and technology transfers to local managers.

This Strategy has been developed in consultation with State Local Government Associations and the ALGA by the Local Government representative on the Biological Diversity Advisory Council (BDAC). BDAC has sectoral representation and is a technical advisory group established to advise the Commonwealth Minister and the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council on the conservation of Australia's biodiversity and the implementation of the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity*.

# Introduction

## DELIVERING THE NATIONAL BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION AGENDA AT A LOCAL LEVEL

Biodiversity conservation is on the political agenda. Right now, Local Government has the opportunity to provide local leadership and become strategically involved in national biodiversity conservation.

Biodiversity, put simply, is the variety of all forms of life. Its conservation is a complex task and will involve building regional partnerships. *The National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy* ("the Strategy") is a partnership between the community, Local Government and State and Commonwealth Agencies

This Strategy recognises that many Councils are already actively involved in biodiversity conservation, using a variety of mechanisms including integrated environmental management programs and Local Agenda 21 Plans.

Success of the Strategy will require the development of biodiversity policies and commitment by individual Councils. Central to the Strategy is the concept of biodiversity management progressively becoming a core function of Local Government subject to adequate funding and resources.

The structure of the Strategy builds on these key national issues as shown in Figure 1.

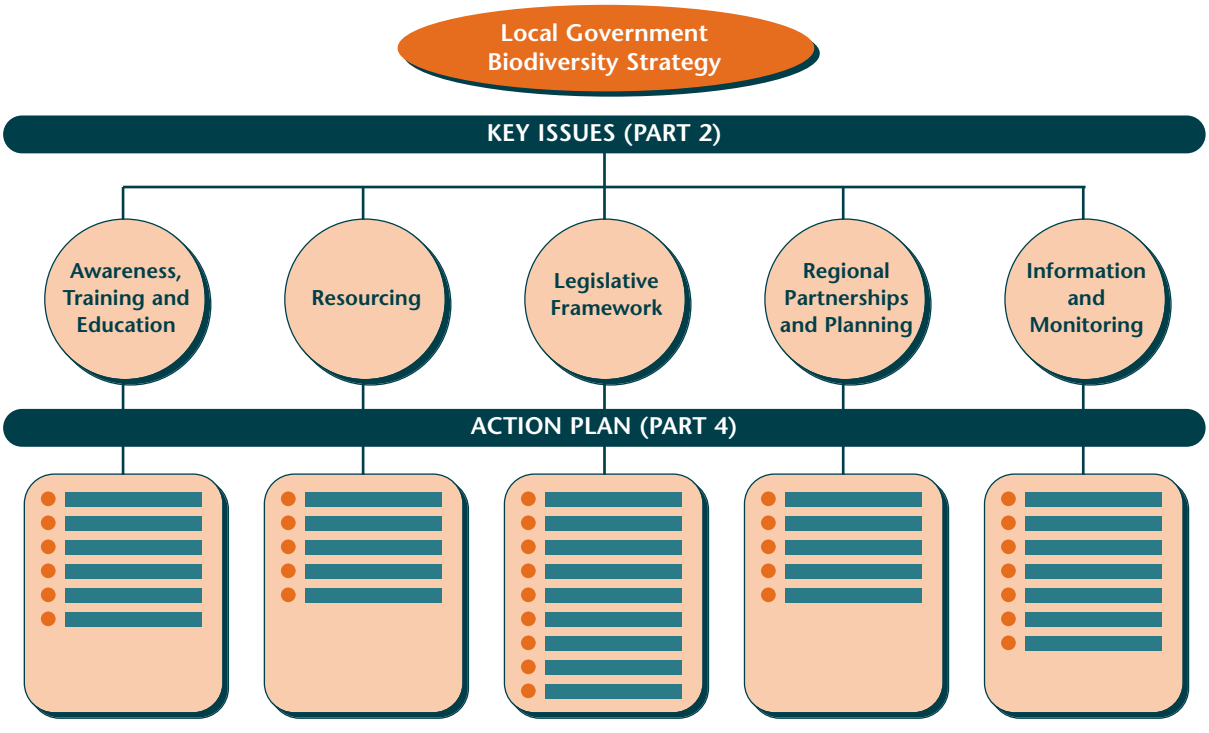


FIGURE 1: **Structure of this Strategy**

## WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

And why Local Government? Because natural resource management is best done at a local level, to suit local conditions, in consultation with local people.

Natural resource management is a logical extension of land-use planning and development control which, in most parts of Australia, and is a core function of Local Government.

## FRAMEWORK FOR REFORM

Supporting the notion of Commonwealth/State funded delivery, the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity* is specific in committing resources to Local Government to carry out their allocated actions.

Among other things the National Strategy also recommends that:

- Local Governments be encouraged to cooperate with each other to develop management plans at a regional level;
- biodiversity be recognised as an important function of Local Government;
- training and access to information on biodiversity to Local Government be increased; and
- by the year 2000, there be programs designed to encourage Local Government to play a major role in nature conservation.

The *National Local Government Biodiversity Strategy* is a response from the Local Government sector to the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity*. It spells out the mechanics of how to achieve Local Government objectives in a way that is acceptable to Local Government and will deliver quality outcomes in an efficient way with maximum community support.

This document argues that Local Government, either as regional groupings or as individuals, is the most appropriate level of government to deliver the best outcomes at the lowest cost with the highest level of community involvement and support. Local communities expect their Councils to represent their views in what is essentially a landuse planning exercise, a core function of Local Government.

### Where to Now?

The mechanics of achieving these biodiversity objectives requires each Local Government or region to have the resources to:

- employ technical/professional staff;
- audit biodiversity;
- develop sustainable biodiversity or natural resource management plans;
- introduce biodiversity conservation into planning schemes;
- implement the plans with a program of education, incentives and statutory control;
- monitor the outcomes and effectiveness of those plans;
- report back to the Commonwealth through SOE reporting; and
- establish administrative structures for ongoing biodiversity management.

In the absence of any other environmental programs the cost of implementing the Local Government Biodiversity Strategy is in the order of $50 million per year. This figure is based on around 700 Councils needing some $75,000 per year each. However,

numerous Natural Heritage Trust funded Landcare and catchment management structures already exist and, with some restructuring, could include the role of biodiversity conservation. As well there is a wide variety of State and Local Government programs focused on natural resource management and related programs.

As a first step toward assessing the extent and effectiveness of these Commonwealth, State and locally resourced efforts, it is imperative that we identify the resources Local Government is putting into biodiversity conservation. This will allow us to identify where the gaps exist.

The implementation of the Strategy will begin, therefore, with an audit of Local Government activities so that a budget for the Strategy can be developed. This audit will be of incalculable value in helping assess the cost and effectiveness of existing programs and the gaps therein.

If Local Government is to maintain or enhance its role and relevance in the community then it must be prepared to deliver outcomes on mainstream issues when it is the most appropriate level of government to do so. Biodiversity conservation is one of the issues which Local Government could effectively address and in so doing ensure lasting credibility and support.

The Strategy has been developed in consultation with State Local Government Associations and the ALGA by the Local Government representative on the Biological Diversity Advisory Council (BDAC). BDAC has sectoral representation and is a technical advisory group established to advise the Commonwealth Minister and the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council on the conservation of Australia's biodiversity and the implementation of the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity*.

PART 1 Background

# Part 1 Background

## 1.1 Why this strategy?

Biological diversity (or biodiversity) is the variety of all life forms—the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain, and the ecosystems of which they form a part (a detailed description is at Appendix 1). Australia's first National State of the Environment Report (1996) found that the loss of Australia's biodiversity is the single most important environmental issue facing this nation. The sustainable management of biodiversity is critical for the future of agriculture, fishing, clean air and water, lifestyle and recreation and, ultimately, life on the planet. The values of biodiversity are described in Appendix 2.

Many Councils are already playing a leading role in biodiversity conservation, using a variety of mechanisms. These are outlined in Appendix 3 and include:

- Grants and incentives such as rate rebates.
- Raising environmental levies.
- Strategic planning and development control.
- Management of public lands such as reserves and roadsides.
- Providing direct assistance to community groups eg. administrative support, meeting rooms, machinery.

Biodiversity conservation is being carried out by many Councils as part of an integrated approach to environmental management. This can be done through an environmental management system (EMS), a catchment strategy, or an Agenda 21 plan. An Agenda 21 plan applies the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD), and involves planning for economic, social and environmental sustainability into the 21st century. Biodiversity conservation would be one component of such a plan.

This strategy is not intended to be binding on Councils. Rather, it identifies major impediments to those Councils that may be willing to play a greater role. Success of the strategy will depend on some resources and other support from Commonwealth and State Governments, as well as commitment by individual Councils. Addressing the key issues in this strategy will encourage more Councils to include biodiversity as a mainstream issue.

This strategy recognises that the role of Councils in biodiversity conservation will vary from State to State, depending on State legislation and the differing regional and catchment arrangements. The strategy serves to highlight key issues that are common nationally, and suggests broad national directions. It recognises that individual Councils and State/Territory Local Government Associations will need to work in partnership with regional organisations and State and Territory Governments.

This Local Government Biodiversity Strategy builds on the *National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biological Diversity* (NSCABD) and is based on the following assumptions:

### Local Government

- While Local Government recognises that it has an **expanding role in many areas** including the conservation of biological diversity, it is unable to continually accept new responsibilities and deliver effectively without adequate resourcing.
- Local Government's share of Commonwealth taxation **revenue has fallen** from 0.92 per cent to 0.59 per cent over the last 15 years while its responsibilities have

increased. Responsibilities ranging from the provision of fundamental infrastructure, to include planning and development approvals, environmental management, social services, economic planning and more.

- Most rural and smaller Councils lack the **resources and the expertise** to plan and deliver comprehensive Local Government conservation strategies. Although many urban and coastal Councils are better resourced, many of these Councils also lack qualified staff in ecology and natural resource management.
- There are **benefits of regional cooperation** between Councils, recognising both the regional nature of the issues and in delivering economies of scale.
- **Recognition** by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments of the **role of Local Government** in the conservation of biological diversity.
- Given adequate resources, Local Government is the most appropriate of the three spheres of Government for **on-ground delivery** of Federal and State policies on biodiversity conservation.
- In return for Commonwealth and State support (eg. funding, legislative framework, public education/information, extension support) it is legitimate to expect from Local Government an increasing level and uniformity of **commitment and accountability** in exchange.
- A **commitment to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment** and to the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development that it contains by all levels of Government.
- If Local Government does not **drive the agenda** in relation to biodiversity conservation, it is likely to have the agenda driven for it, or imposed on it, by other spheres of Government.

## The National Strategy for the conservation of Australia's Biodiversity

Biodiversity is an important issue for local communities; it also has national and international significance. This is reflected by the NSCABD, which was signed by the Commonwealth and all State and Territory Governments in 1996 (see Appendix 4).

A range of actions to achieve biodiversity conservation is outlined in the NSCABD, many of which relate directly or indirectly to Local Government. The National Strategy recognises that Local Government can play a role in the following areas:

- Local planning and environmental management.
- Standards of land management.
- Conservation of native vegetation, including off reserve conservation.
- Rehabilitation of degraded areas.
- Urban conservation.
- Eradication of weeds.
- Pollution control.
- Implementation of national policies at a local level.

The NSCABD is specific in committing resources to Local Government to carry out their allocated actions. It recommends that Local Governments be encouraged to cooperate with each other to develop management plans on a regional basis, with assistance from State and Territory Governments.

The NSCABD recommends that biodiversity conservation be recognised as an important objective of Local Government, and that training and access to information on biological diversity for Local Government officials be increased.

One area of critical importance to Local Government is the goal within the strategy that by the year 2000 there will be programs *"designed to encourage Local Government to play a major role in nature conservation."* This strategy is a Local Government response to this goal, and highlights those areas requiring attention.

## 1.2 Process for developing this strategy

The process for developing this strategy is outlined in Appendix 5, including a list of contributors and workshop participants. The process is mapped in Figure 2.

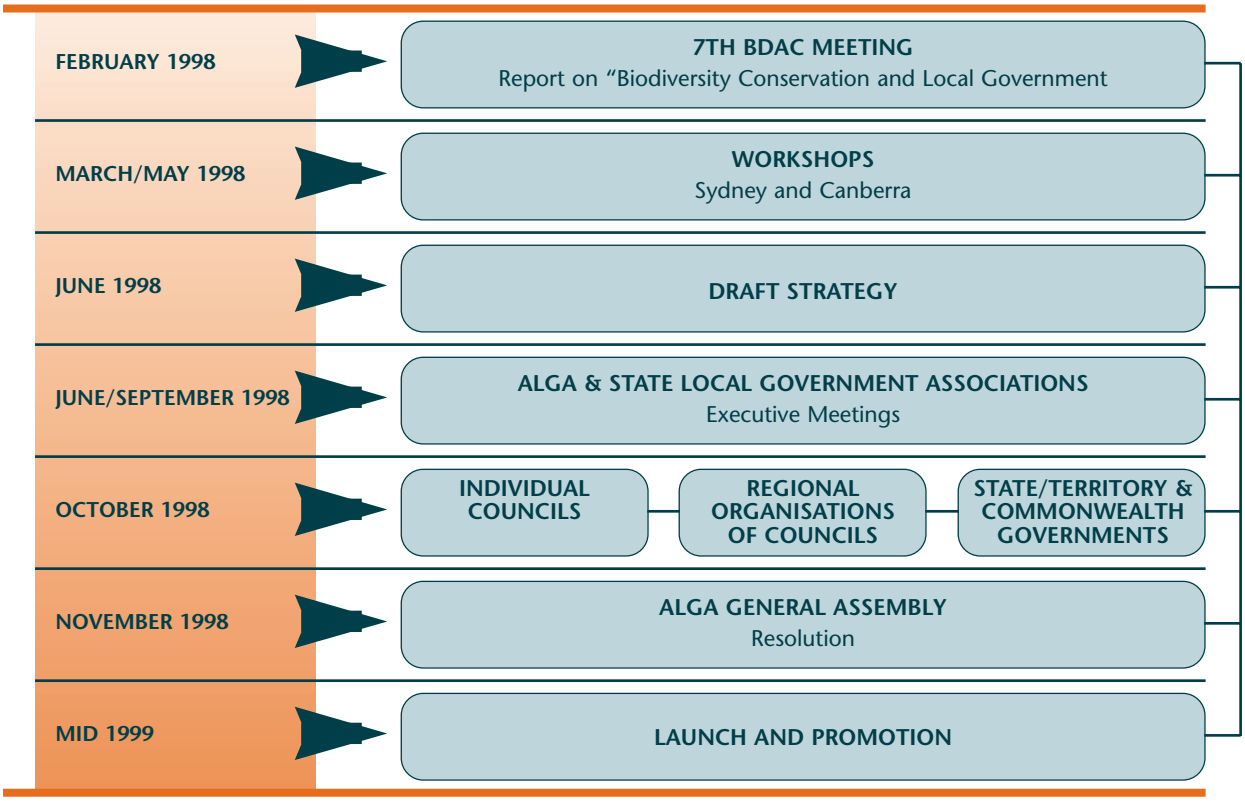


FIGURE 2: **Process for developing the Local Government biodiversity strategy**

The first stage of implementing the strategy is under way following endorsement by the National General Assembly of Local Government in November 1998. The success of the strategy will require Commonwealth support, and, for agreements between individual State/Territory Local Government Associations and State and Territory Governments, to address issues within the specific State contexts. Ultimately, success of the strategy will require commitment from individual Councils and the development of policies for biodiversity conservation, if this has not already been done.

## 1.3 Who should read this report?

This strategy is of critical importance to:

- Local Government.
- Regional organisations.
- State and Commonwealth Governments.
- Any individuals or groups with an interest in local biodiversity conservation.

PART 2
Key Issues

# Part 2 Key Issues

## 2.1 Awareness, Training and Education

There is reluctance in many Councils to take on additional responsibilities such as biodiversity conservation. This is compounded in many rural areas by a general resistance from the farming and grazing industries to conservation regulations on freehold and leasehold land. In addition, there is a poor understanding of biodiversity in many Councils. Work is needed to raise the level of awareness.

The most effective way to increase understanding within Councils is to demonstrate success stories from other Councils. Interactive forums and study tours are effective means to achieve this. Training, information and support networks are critical.

The adoption of biodiversity conservation by Councils, will require:

- Professional and technical skills.
- Education.
- Access to information.

These are discussed below.

### 2.1.1 PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

There is an urgent need for professionals within Australia to assist in documenting and managing biodiversity. The range of skills required for defining, monitoring, planning for and managing biodiversity at the local level, may not currently be readily available within a Local Government Area.

However, there is expertise to draw upon within the wider community. There are networks of professional and technical people in many areas, which can support those people trying to assess and manage biodiversity. These include people within State and Commonwealth agencies, consultants, academics and members of community groups.

A successful approach for integrating these professional and technical skills is to have an environmental officer within the Local Government team. This person can then link with the planning and operational people at the local level. This would involve working with decision-makers such as Councillors and managers, on-ground staff, professional and technical experts, and the wider community. Employment of staff is discussed under human resources in Section 2.2 on resourcing.

### 2.1.2 EDUCATION

#### Local Government

Education programs must be targeted to their audience, and developed in response to their specific needs. A range of training programs may be required to suit, for example, elected representatives, technical staff and outdoor staff. There are existing Local Government training networks in most States, which can play an important role in delivering specific training programs.

Education programs will also require tools and products, such as information kits, which can support Local Government biodiversity conservation programs. These programs should be carried out in partnership with other spheres of Government, regional organisations, industry, developers and private landholders.

Marketing biodiversity conservation to the broader community and to target groups could be carried out by providing concise information sheets, guides, booklets, pamphlets, media releases and radio/TV clips. These information sources could place an emphasis on:

- The values of biodiversity and the local significance.
- Principles that it 'pays' to conserve biodiversity.
- The resources and support that are available.
- Community involvement and pride in biodiversity conservation.
- Saving biodiversity, then allowing development, rather than the other way round.

### 2.1.3 ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Access to information is critical. The National Strategy (NSCABD) emphasises the need for Local Government access to information on biological diversity. This issue is discussed further in Section 2.5.

## 2.2 Resourcing

Councils are well placed to play an active role in biodiversity conservation, and are already doing so in many areas. Many Councils would be prepared to do more, however, lack of resources is a major deterrent. Even when funding is available on a short term basis through programs such as the Natural Heritage Trust, there is no ongoing commitment or guarantee of funding. This deters many Local Governments from embracing greater responsibility for fear of creating a financially unsustainable precedent.

It is important to note, however, that resourcing alone will not solve all the problems if other fundamental issues are not addressed.

Councils have limited taxing powers. Councils therefore require additional financial and human resources from central Governments, which have a variety of revenue raising options and expertise. In per person terms, grants to Local Government from the Commonwealth have fallen by one fifth of their value over the last 15 years. Local Government faces falling revenue and growing responsibilities in many areas. In some States, Councils are subject to rate capping which prevent them from raising additional revenue.

Many Councils are, for example, barely able to maintain extensive rural road networks on very small rate bases, and are already concerned at the small percentage of petrol tax spent on roads. There is reluctance in many Councils to spend scarce resources on a subject they know little about—conservation planning and management.

If Local Government is to undertake biodiversity conservation planning and management, it requires professional skills which do not exist in many Councils. The most effective way to introduce conservation planning to small, rural and remote shires is to properly fund and resource them, and to provide assistance towards developing conservation planning and management as a core function. There are around 700 Councils in Australia that will require varying degrees of assistance to enable them to undertake effective conservation planning and management.

Effective delivery is discussed below under the following:

- Cost effective delivery.
- Human resources.
- Funding mechanisms.

### 2.2.1 COST EFFECTIVE DELIVERY

#### Regional economies of scale

Ideally, Local Governments should group together into regions for the purpose of natural resource management (refer to section 2.4). These regions should preferably be consistent with existing boundaries, such as Regional Organisations of Councils (ROC), but should also consider catchments or bioregions). It is important to note, however, that in some areas regional coordination can be difficult to achieve and requires considerable resources. In the absence of effective regional structures, individual Councils could be supported to develop their own biodiversity conservation strategies. Nevertheless considerable economies of scale can be achieved by sharing the following at a regional level:

- Environment officers.
- Community education and consultation.
- Biodiversity auditing and mapping.
- Developing statutory instruments.
- Monitoring and environmental reporting.

#### Avoiding duplication

Considerable resources are already devoted to natural resource planning and management by all three spheres of Government. It makes no sense to duplicate or overlap with programs already underway. In some regions the estimated cost of duplication of effort could be as high as several million dollars.

In order to avoid the waste and duplication of resources, it is important to develop an accurate picture of existing programs at a national, State and local level, to determine the number and effectiveness of these programs. This will identify gaps that need to be filled and opportunities for closer integration of existing programs. A full audit of these processes should be undertaken at the regional level with a view to streamlining existing processes. Savings made should be diverted into on-ground works (an example where this has been done is the SA Urban Forest Program). A national overview is also required.

Strengthening and clarifying the role of Local Government in biodiversity conservation could make significant savings. For example, Councils could provide administrative and statutory support to Landcare and other community groups without the need to establish new structures.

### 2.2.2 HUMAN RESOURCES

Expertise and human resources are critical if Local Government is to be active in biodiversity conservation. Community groups are also calling out for assistance with their local activities. Many groups are on the verge of collapse because of the time consuming processes and the heavy workload, which tends to fall on the same small number of individuals. Provided that Councils are committed and have an underlying policy or strategy in place, employment of environmental officers can be extremely effective. This can occur either within individual Councils or collectively on a regional basis.

The duty Statement of an Environmental Officer would be to:

- Introduce technical skills and data into Councils or regional organisations.
- Organise and manage vegetation/biodiversity audits.
- Design and implement education/information programs.

- Draft habitat conservation regulations.
- Consult with local communities.
- Review planning schemes to introduce biodiversity conservation into landuse management.
- Design and implement monitoring programs. These programs could integrate with any existing State or Local Government *State of Environment reporting* that may exist.
- Establish administrative structures for ongoing biodiversity management.

The figures in Table 1 provide an indication of the potential costs of employing environmental officers within Councils. Experience with other environmental programs has shown that commitment to a 3-year program yields greater benefits than a year to year approach.

**TABLE 1 Indicative cost of a Local Government Environmental Officer**

| Item | Cost for one year ($) | Cost over 3 years ($) |
|---|---|---|
| Wages (Environmental Officer) | 50,000 | 150,000 |
| Travel, information technology support and oncosts | 12,500 | 37,500 |
| Biodiversity audit | 30,000 | 30,000 |
| Education/information program | 5,000 | 15,000 |
| **TOTAL** | **97,000** | **232,500** |

The national cost of employing such staff within Councils could range anywhere from $35m to $160m. For example, there are around 700 Councils in Australia and if each created a job as set out above, the total cost could be up to $160m over three years. If such a position was created in, for example 150 regions, the cost would be around $35m.

Until an audit of existing programs is carried out and until the ability to deliver biodiversity planning and management is assessed, it is difficult to determine a precise budget. It is important to note that some Councils already have specialist officers and staff who are employed under existing programs, who may also be able to carry out some of the tasks.

Savings to the total budget could arise from:

- The Natural Heritage Trust (NHT), which is providing specialist people in regions to work on Bushcare and other program support, and regional facilitation.
- Existing vegetation clearing controls in some States.
- Major economies of scale which could be achieved if Councils grouped into regions.
- The many Councils that have high levels of urban development and have relatively small areas of biodiversity remaining, although impacts on other areas should always be considered eg. pollution.
- The many Councils that already have effective nature conservation programs. These Councils should not be penalised for being ahead.

Any allocation of Commonwealth funding to Councils should be based on a consideration of disability factors, such as isolation and access to State Government support.

### 2.2.3 FUNDING MECHANISMS

#### Grants to Local Government

Councils have financial systems in place for the administration of funds, and thus could administer grants for biodiversity conservation. This would ensure accountability and full involvement of the locally elected body.

In many rural areas catchment committees, land care and conservation groups should continue to be a motivational force and source of expertise supporting the program.

The capacity of Councils and other organisations will vary from region to region, and this needs to be taken into account in program development. It is important not to have a *one size fits all* approach to regional delivery.

Grants to Councils and regional organisations should be based on the recipient complying with agreed performance standards and achieving clear outcomes. These should be linked to the type of monitoring process outlined in section 2.5.

Recurrent costs will arise from the continued employment of people with the necessary expertise. This will include wages, office accommodation, travel, and costs of inspecting and processing applications to damage or destroy habitat or modify the natural environment. Further recurrent costs will arise from ongoing monitoring and reporting. To address this issue in the long term, Local Government will require ongoing secure revenue sharing arrangements with State and Commonwealth Governments, and clear cost sharing frameworks. Local Government ultimately seeks a fixed share of taxation revenue, in relation to its increasing range of functions not just biodiversity conservation.

#### Local Government Incentives

A range of mechanisms can be used to promote voluntary action on private land. Incentives can be a catalyst for action, but they should not be expected to work alone (sometimes being more symbolic than providing a huge financial benefit). Incentives should be integrated as part of a broader strategy involving the various spheres of Government and regional groups. This should include consistent messages being sent by different Governments. For example, certain State actions such as land taxes can work against biodiversity conservation.

Recent CSIRO work (Binning, Cripps & Young 1998) identifies a range of financial incentives that are being offered by some Local Governments. These are described in Appendix 3, including examples of Councils that offer such schemes. Councils may choose to offer some or all of the following incentives:

- Grants.
- Rate rebates.
- Environmental levies.
- Management agreements.
- Covenants.
- Revolving funds.
- Development benefits.

## 2.3 Legislative Framework

### 2.3.1 STATE LEGISLATION

Under the Constitution, powers over the natural environment and land use rest with the States, although the Commonwealth does have influence through some of its powers, particularly through funding. The States are able to devolve a variety of conservation responsibilities to Local Government. While specific roles and responsibilities differ between States and Territories, Local Governments have a range of regulatory and planning powers that influence the way biodiversity is managed at the local level (outlined in Appendix 3). The different legislative frameworks within each State have been summarised by Binning, Cripps & Young (CSIRO 1998).

There is considerable variation between States, and there is generally room for improvement in terms of recognising and clarifying the roles of Local and State Governments. Statutory issues need to be resolved with the States if the biodiversity agenda is to be driven locally. An ongoing concern for Local Government across a whole range of issues is the continuing devolution of responsibility through legislation without an increase in resources, and the exclusion of Local Government as a partner in the policy development process.

### 2.3.2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT POWERS

Local Government in most States has specific land use controls. It has discretionary powers in rural areas, where Councils can exercise planning, landuse and environmental controls by the following means if they choose:

#### Local Laws

Local Government can administer local laws within a State legislative framework applying to issues such as vegetation, habitat, clearing, earthworks or pollution. For example, tree preservation orders are common in urban areas throughout Australia. However, vegetation clearance or vegetation management local laws are rare in rural areas, where much of Australia's biodiversity exists.

Local laws are one of the most powerful tools available to Local Government to manage vegetation and biodiversity. To be really effective, they need to be combined with planning schemes so that land use zones and local laws are consistent and integrated.

#### Planning Schemes

Planning schemes can be used in a variety of ways. Areas of conservation significance can be identified, mapped and zoned for conservation or sustainable use. Within these zones, clearing, earthworks or habitat destruction may be defined as development that requires consent or permits.

There is potential to link the management of individual properties with Council planning schemes. Landowners who have developed a whole-of-farm plan, which is consistent with the objectives of the planning scheme and local laws, could be exempted from the consent or permit processes. Sustainable uses, such as timber or other forest product extraction, could similarly be addressed through the property planning process.

#### Policies

Detailed policies outlining acceptable and unacceptable practices relating to habitat, biodiversity, vegetation, earthworks and other forms of development can be developed by most Local Governments. This gives support and substance to local laws and planning schemes, and guides decision makers.

## 2.4 Regional Partnerships and Planning

There are a number of trends affecting the role of Local Government in biodiversity conservation. Councils are becoming larger through amalgamations and their powers have significantly broadened over the last 10–20 years. Councils are moving away from a focus on provision of infrastructure to dealing with a wide range of issues including land use planning and environmental management.

Natural resource management is also increasingly being undertaken at a regional level. State Governments, and to a degree the Commonwealth, have developed organisations to plan and advise, at the regional or catchment level. Regional conservation strategies are also being initiated by some groups of Councils in partnership with State agencies and community interests. There are great differences in the arrangements between regions, and between States. Examples include the Regional Vegetation Committees in NSW, Land Conservation District Committees (LCDCs) in Western Australia, and Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) in Victoria. These bodies are increasingly being given regulatory functions which have traditionally been functions of Local Government. In a number of areas this is causing Local Government to feel marginalised.

Conserving biodiversity is a complex task that involves understanding the linkages between a wide range of activities, organisations and interests. Any proposed management regime will need to reconcile various interests such as farming, forestry, nature conservation and urban development. The role of various organisations in planning and implementation must be defined.

In any given region there is a wide range of groups with an interest in biodiversity conservation. These include:

- Local Government.
- Catchment groups.
- Landcare and community groups.
- Greening Australia.
- Industry, including farming, mining and forestry interests.
- Voluntary Regional Organisations of Councils and other regional organisations.
- State and Commonwealth Government.

Because of the complex nature of biodiversity conservation, Councils should not undertake this task alone. The actions of an individual landholder or Council will only make a long term contribution if they are integrated with the work of other organisations and Governments. Biodiversity management is fundamentally about building regional partnerships.

## 2.5 Information and monitoring

We live in a complex and constantly changing world where the scale of human activities is the major cause of change. Biodiversity is increasingly affected by these changes with widespread impacts on ecosystems, loss of species, additions of exotic species, and loss of genetic resources.

If we are to minimise the impact of our activities, we need some understanding of our environment and its various components. We also need to understand our impacts, and develop ways of reducing these. This requires information resources and a monitoring system that can provide an input to management. In this regard, the outcomes of

research and development work should be used to ensure that on-ground works have a scientific basis.

### 2.5.1 DATA ISSUES

There is a lack of appropriate data on biodiversity at the Local Government level for defining and managing biodiversity. Present knowledge of biodiversity is poor. For example, we know little of the less conspicuous elements such as soil flora and fauna, yet these are essential for the maintenance of healthy, self-renewing soils.

Low levels of biodiversity knowledge are due to a lack of baseline studies, poor linkages between databases and an unwillingness of many custodians to share data. Although Councils need information such as maps and natural resource management data, it is often costly to obtain even in some cases where it has been gathered at public expense and held by Government agencies.

Many State agencies and a growing number of Councils now have access to sophisticated Geographic Information Systems (GIS) databases, which could link critical information rapidly through to Councils and the community. The data on our biodiversity resources needs to be collected at a number of levels. In order to integrate data, rationalisation is required at all levels, to highlight gaps in information and to help determine priorities for gathering information.

### 2.5.2 MONITORING SYSTEMS

An adaptive environmental management cycle is required. This involves planning, taking action, evaluating the results of those actions, adapting management practices, and reporting on the process. Further information can be obtained from a number of recent publications (ALGA 1999, Thorman 1997 and Binning, Cripps & Young 1998).

The **strategic planning phase** of the management cycle involves community members, policy makers and planners. It requires identifying the important environmental and biodiversity values, and the key issues in the local area. It should also outline a shared vision for the future.

Part of this process is also to define management objectives and targets, and to establish the necessary tools and resources needed for management. This requires gathering and processing information to learn more about the biodiversity of the area. The basic information required is an accurate map of the ecosystems that make up the area and the major components of these ecosystems, usually based on vegetation associations and soil types.

The **management and action phase** of the environmental management cycle requires developing and implementing an action plan. The plan should define:

- Actions that are necessary.
- Who will carry out them out?
- How much will it cost?

**Monitoring and evaluation** is critical to the success of the management cycle to evaluate each step and their outcomes. The evaluation step completes the cycle and is used to improve and adapt planning and management. Successful evaluation is based on a monitoring program that will examine selected indicators. This involves establishing baseline data, and then assessing changes over time.

**Indicators** are measures that best represent the key elements of complex ecosystems. They are used to describe environmental factors at a given time, show trends, or track

progress in relation to a given management objective. In choosing indicators, it is useful to assess them against the SMART criteria. That is, a useful indicator should be Simple, Measurable, Accessible, Relevant, and Timely (ALGA, 1999).

Indicators chosen to monitor biodiversity will depend on the management objectives. The range of indicators that could be used will vary between Council areas. The selection of indicators should build on existing work on biodiversity indicators developed as part of the national State of the Environment reporting process (Saunders, Margules & Hill, 1998).

There may be a need to use key or focal species as indicators. These are the species within each ecosystem that are regarded as important for various reasons, and provide some idea of status and likely changes in that status. Focal species may differ from place to place, but some of the principles behind their selection would be consistent across the country. Some of these species, particularly those regarded as rare or vulnerable, may be identified as an important part of the monitoring process. However, species that are common now may not be common in future, and should also be included in monitoring.

Regular **reporting** on the state of biodiversity is an important part of the environmental management cycle. By using appropriate environmental indicators, such reports demonstrate improvements or otherwise in the local environment.

This reporting keeps the community informed about changes to biodiversity and about the effectiveness of biodiversity management. Reporting should draw on *State of the Environment reporting* that is being carried out at the State level, and by Councils in NSW.

PART 3
Vision and desired outcomes

# Part 3 Vision and desired outcomes

## 3.1 Vision

The following vision has been proposed:

> *By the year 2000, sufficient resources will have been provided to ensure most Councils in Australia will have committed to, and developed, a policy for the conservation of biodiversity. In addition, by 2003 most Councils will have begun implementing an integrated program to conserve their local biodiversity. Councils could work either together in a region or individually, in partnership with the community and State and Commonwealth Governments.*

This vision recognises that many Councils have already commenced and are doing good work. It also recognises that biodiversity conservation must be integrated with Councils' broader environmental agenda.

In order to achieve this vision, the key issues outlined in **Part 2** must be addressed. Desired outcomes for these issues are listed below:

## 3.2 Desired outcomes

### 3.2.1 AWARENESS, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Raise awareness within Local Government and the community. This requires the development and implementation of a national awareness, training and education program for biodiversity conservation. The first step will be to identify existing activities and to assess the need for awareness, training and education programs nationally. This will target not only Local Government, but the community, industry, regional organisations and State agencies.

### 3.2.2 RESOURCING

Secure adequate resources for all interested Councils or regional organisations, including indigenous communities, in order to develop in-house expertise to prepare and implement Local Government biodiversity strategies.

### 3.2.3 LEGISLATION

Recognise the role of Local Government in biodiversity conservation in State and Commonwealth Government legislation. If necessary, legislative support should be given to those Councils that are willing to have a greater involvement in biodiversity conservation.

For this to occur, the scope and strength of national and State laws, and Council planning instruments and policies, will need review. State Governments should review their own legislative frameworks to ensure there is enabling legislation within Local Government, planning, development and environment Acts.

### 3.2.4 REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND PLANNING

Develop regional partnerships and plans to conserve biodiversity. This will require coordination, information exchange and support between Local Government, State Government and regional bodies.

The most effective model for biodiversity conservation in the long term is through a regional partnership. In the absence of existing regional structures, strong financial incentives could be provided to plan and manage biodiversity on a regional basis. For example, seed funding (in the order of $30,000) could empower and directly fund successful regional structures to develop regional biodiversity strategies. This process could draw on expertise and data from State agencies, and encourage Local Government to use statutory planning and local law making powers to implement conservation measures.

### 3.2.5 INFORMATION AND MONITORING

Establish a nationally coordinated information and monitoring framework, which addresses information requirements for Local Government management of biodiversity. This should promote integration of existing databases, and be delivered at a scale relevant to Local Governments. This would include integrating existing reporting and planning processes such as State of the Environment reporting and catchment planning.

An adaptive management framework should be established to cater for improved data, changing priorities and targets, and to ensure effective management. This requires a well-informed environmental management cycle. It involves planning, taking action, evaluating the results of those actions, adapting management, and reporting on the process.

PART 4 Action plan

# Part 4 Action plan

Implementation of the strategy will require a staged approach.

## Stage 1 Council adoption (1999–2000)

- Individual Councils to develop and commit to policies on biodiversity conservation in their Council area.
- Seek State/Territory and Commonwealth Government support.
- State/Territory Local Government Associations and State/Territory Governments establish agreements.
- Legislative review at Commonwealth level to support biodiversity conservation.

## Stage 2 Transition period (2000–2003)

This would require resourcing in the following areas. It would involve:

- Education, awareness and training program.
- Employment of resource officers.
- Developing performance measures.
- Developing regional strategies.

## Stage 3 Ongoing implementation (2004 and beyond)

Ongoing implementation at the regional level would focus on putting in place local and regional biodiversity conservation strategies.

This would include applying the full range of options available to Councils, such as:

- Community education programs.
- Land for wildlife schemes and other extension services.
- Covenants.
- Incentives such as a rate rebates.
- Environmental levies.
- Grants to community groups and landholders.
- Planning instruments, policies, local laws.
- Offset development rights.
- Managing impacts of Councils own activities.
- Acquisition in critical areas.

Ongoing implementation would also involve ongoing monitoring and a review of policy and implementation.

To ensure ongoing implementation, long term cost sharing and revenue sharing arrangements must be established. Mechanisms could include local levies, or ensuring Local Government receives a long term share of Commonwealth and State sources of taxation revenue. Any Federal assistance grants for biodiversity conservation should take into consideration of any disability factors.

**The following tables detail specific actions that are required, and who is responsible for initiating them. The costs are indicative only.**

## ISSUE 1 Awareness, training and education

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY: Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Development of a comprehensive Local Government education campaign. This would assist Councillors to understand the meaning of biodiversity and its sustainable use, and could build on the BDAC (1997) Biodiversity: A Politicians Guide. | 1999–2000 | $750,000 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 2. Play an active role in the media and in public education. Market biodiversity conservation to the broader community and target audiences. This could include distribution to local and regional media, particularly newspapers and radio. | 2000–2003 | $500,000 | ● | ■ | ● | ● | | | |
| 3. Promote and celebrate biodiversity success stories. Develop case studies and best practice models for Local Government and biodiversity conservation. This could include awards schemes for Local Government and associated community partners to recognise achievement in local biodiversity conservation. | 2000–2005 | $80,000 | | ■ | ● | ● | | | |
| 4. In partnership with ALGA, develop a national biodiversity conservation support network for Local Government (possibly coordinated by a specific organisation and accountable to a steering committee). This could involve developing, promoting and disseminating support materials such as guidelines and toolkits for target audiences working within Local Government. Forums and exchange tours should also be encouraged so that Councils con learn from each other. | 1999–2003 | $200,000 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 5. Conduct a biodiversity audit of relevant Local Government training programs, highlighting good examples and gaps on a State by State basis. | 1999 | $15,000 | | ● | ■ | ● | | | |
| 6. Develop appropriate bidiversity educative materials to improve understanding of regulation and legislation. This would target the broader community and developers to explain relevant regulation/legislation in reader friendly terms. | 1999–2000 | $40,000 | | ■ | ● | | ● | | ● |
| 7. Develop standards and ethics for environmental consultants. Criteria could be developed to help Local Government and developers in their assessment of consultants that provide expertise and advice on bidiversity conservation. This could be done in consultation with relevant professional groups. This could be promoted to target audiences within Local Government, regions and States. | 2000–2001 | $30,000 | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | ● |
| 8. Address the urban bias in planning systems. Seek greater involvement from non-urban areas in the development and review of national State and regional planning legislation and regulation. Provide professional support to rural Councils to help develop and implement their local planning regulations affecting biodiversity conservation. | 2000–2003 | $60,000 | ● | ■ | ● | ● | ● | | |

■ **indicates lead role** ● **indicates support role**

## ISSUE 2 Resourcing

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
| 1. Conduct an audit to assess number, cost, focus and effectiveness of programs impacting on biodiversity conservation, by Local government. | 1999 | $50,000 | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | |
| 2. Identify opportunities for existing programs to support or supplement this strategy and implement any of the proposed actions. | 1999 | $20,000 | ■ | ■ | ● | ● | | | |
| 3. Identify resources to provide funding assistance for environmental officers in Councils to prepare and implement Local Government biodiversity strategies. | 2000–2003 | Up to $160m over 3 years | ■ | ■ | ● | | | | |
| 4. Cost sharing arrangements entered into for biodiversity conservation, with Councils able to provide in-kind support as part contribution. | 1999–2003 | $30m | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | |
| 5. Identify ways to supplement rate rebate schemes of Councils that wish to participate over a three-year period, to allow time for Councils to adjust their rating systems to maintain overall rate base. | 1998–2003 | Up to $5m over 3 years | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 6. State legislative barriers to raising levies should be removed. | 1999–2001 | $100,000 | | ■ | ● | | | | |
| 7. Identify ways to provide seed money for funding regional environmental plans, and to fund regional incentives programs. A good example is Greening Australia's fencing assistance scheme which can link to regional plans. | 1999 2002 | $1.5m | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| 8. Address the disincentive to biodiversity conservation due to State land taxes. | 1999–2000 | $50,000 | | ■ | | | | | |

■ indicates lead role ● indicates support role

## ISSUE 3 Legislative arrangements

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY: Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** State Governments review their own legislative frameworks to encourage biodiversity conservation. This should assess the potential for more enabling legislation within Local Government planning, development and environment Acts. This requires a flexible approach according to the needs of each region and each State's legislative framework. | 1999–2000 | $100,000 | | ■ | ● | | | | |
| **2.** Review Local Government Acts to encourage consistency between States in the conservation of biodiversity. | 1999–2000 | $50,000 | ● | ■ | ● | | | | |
| **3.** State Governments to ensure that all catchment and biodiversity land-use planning is integrated and consolidated at a local level. This should be achieved through appropriate land-use and zoning arrangements administered by Local Government. Where other regional organisations are responsible for the development of plans, these should be developed in cooperation with Local Government and be integrated into Local Government planning schemes. | 1999–2005 | $50,000 | | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **4.** Assist Councils to consider cumulative impact when assessing individual proposals, to assess the combined impact of developments in biodiversity over time. | 2000 onwards | $50,000 | | ■ | ■ | ● | | | ● |
| **5.** Local Government be given the legislative capacity to raise funds for biodiversity management through special rates and levies at a local or regional level in all States. | 1999–2002 | — | | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| **6.** Local Councils be encouraged to coordinate the financial administration and distribution of grant funding for natural resource management at the local level. This should ensure Local Government is aware of, and able to contribute to, all activities being funded in the region. This should not however allow Local Government to override the decisions of local groups that have successfully applied for funding. | 1999–2005 | — | ● | ● | ■ | ● | | | |
| **7.** In its review of environmental legislation the Commonwealth consider recognising the role of Local Government in biodiversity conservation. | 1998–1999 | — | ■ | ● | | | | | |
| **8.** Federal and State Governments consider providing legislative foundation to genuinely implement the principles of the Inter Governmental Agreement on the Environment (IGAE) (see Appendix B) | 1999–2001 | $80,000 | ■ | ■ | | | | | |

■ **indicates lead role** ● **indicates support role**

## ISSUE 3 Legislative arrangements (continued)

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
| **9.** Identify ways to modify the taxation system to encourage ecologically desirable activities. | 1999–2001 | $500,000 | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| **10.** Assessors and Judges in State Land and Environment Courts should be comprehensively trained in the areas relevant to conservation of biodiversity and ecological systems, to provide support to Council planning powers. | 2000–2002 | $100,000 | | ■ | | | | | |
| **11.** State organisations that administer conservation agreements and covenants should enter arrangements with local Councils. Local Government should be able to register agreements on the title of the land. | 1999–2002 | $80,000 | | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| **12.** For those States with mandatory provisions for vegetation protection there should be a continuation, strengthening and clarifying of the position. For those States with no statutory provisions for vegetation management, a staged approach may be required. This could involve vegetation protection and management becoming more a core function of Local Government. | 1999–2005 | $150,000 | | ■ | ● | ● | | | |
| **13.** This Strategy to be reviewed in three years by which time the non-regulatory States should review their policy direction. | 2001 | — | | ■ | | | | | |

■ indicates lead role ● indicates support role

## ISSUE 4 Regional partnerships and planning

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY: Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1.** Resources directed towards regional conservation strategies, provided implementation structures are in place and performance standards established. Ensure regional planning feeds into local laws. | **1999–2001** | **$30,000 per Council seed money $20m nationally** | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **2.** Empower regions to take staged approach to developing regional strategies. These could be recognised within a State legislative framework. | **1999 onwards** | — | | ● | ● | ■ | | | |
| **3.** Local Councils be encouraged through ROCs[1] and similar organisations to take the lead role in developing and implementing biodiversity conservation strategies at a regional level. | **1999 onwards** | — | ● | ● | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **4.** Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all spheres of Government, and other players in biodiversity conservation. This includes the issue of Local Governments' and ROCs' relationships with State Government appointed regional structures, which in some cases is leading to Councils feeling marginalised. | **1999–2003** | — | ● | ● | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **5.** Integrate with other existing local processes, for example Local Councils State of Environment reports (SoE), environmental management systems (EMS), Agenda 21 plans or catchment management strategies. | **1999–2001** | — | | ● | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **6.** Identify opportunities for integrating with national programs. For example, the regional approach is consistent with Commonwealth's agenda to encourage regional environment strategies as basis for NHT funded projects. | **1999–2001** | — | ■ | ● | ■ | ■ | | | |
| **7.** Encourage regionally based incentives schemes such as the Greening Australia Fencing Incentive Scheme, or the Victorian Land Protection Incentive Scheme. These schemes require landholders to fill out a 2 page application form, and involve on-ground advice. | **1999–2000** | **$10m** | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | ■ | | |

■ **indicates lead role** ● **indicates support role**

1 Regional Organisation of Councils

## ISSUE 5 Information and monitoring

| ACTION | TIMING | COST EST. | RESPONSIBILITY | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Federal | State | Local | Regional | Community | Individual | Industry |
| 1. Ensure that Local Government has access to biodiversity related data systems, such as GIS, as part of an integrated management system. | 2000–2005 | $50m | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | |
| 2. Coordinate, between Commonwealth, State and Local Governments, the integration of existing data systems into a common framework. This will reduce data duplication. The national land and water resources audit will play a role in this context. | 1999–2003 | — | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 3. Assign responsibility for data management. In establishing a monitoring system, agree on who, how, and what in terms of data collection and data storage. | 2000 | — | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | |
| 4. Present such information in a useable and accessible way, ideally on GIS at a relevant scale for use at the local level. To ensure access to information, establish a data directory. | 2000–2003 | — | ■ | ■ | ■ | ● | | | |
| 5. Establish data standards and protocols. | 2000 | — | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | |
| 6. Ensure costs of data are not prohibitive. Data which is for the public good should be accessible to all users at reasonable or no cost. This is particularly the case where information was gathered at public expense. | Ongoing | — | ■ | ■ | | | | | |
| 7. Provide tools, training and technology transfer. Basic training for local managers is needed to deal with the complexity of available data, and to ensure that information translates to action on the ground. | 2000–2003 | $5m | ■ | ■ | ● | | | | |
| 8. Continue to conduct Local Government State of Environment reports where they are required (NSW), and assess their use in other States. These reports give information on environmental assets in the Local Government area, and by using appropriate indicators, clearly monitor environmental change. | 1998 onwards | — | | ■ | ■ | | | | |

■ indicates lead role ● indicates support role

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# Appendix 1

## What is biodiversity?

### Biological diversity is the variety of all life forms

Biodiversity is the different plants, animals and micro-organisms, the genes they contain, and the ecosystems of which they form a part. Biodiversity is not static, but constantly changing; it is increased by genetic change and evolutionary processes and reduced by processes such as habitat degradation, population decline and extinction. It covers the terrestrial, marine and other aquatic environments.

Biodiversity is considered at three levels:

- **Species diversity**, which is the variety of species on earth (plants, animals, bacteria etc).
- **Genetic diversity**, which is the variety of genetic information within and between populations of species. It is the basis of continuing evolution, and the adaptability and survival of species.
- **Ecosystem diversity**, which is the variety of habitats, biotic communities and ecological processes.

Biodiversity therefore covers the vast variety of life, from strands of DNA that make up a gene, to organisms the size of blue whales or the largest trees. No forms of life from the micro to the macro scale occur in isolation; there is a myriad of connections between the uncountable life forms. For example, we now know that the disappearance of a minute insect can affect the survival of a whole tree species.

Australia's plants and animals are unique. They have evolved over millions of years in isolation from the other continents. A high percentage of Australian species occur nowhere else. For example, about 82 % of our mammal species, about 85 % of our flowering plants, and about 93 % of our frogs are found only in Australia. Australia is also very rich in some groups of species, for example the Acacias, comprising perhaps 1070 species, subspecies and varieties. Some of Australia's species contain populations with markedly different genetic makeup.

Human activity has been changing Australian ecosystems for at least 50 000 years, but the pace and extent of change have increased since European settlement, about 200 years ago. Australia's temperate zones and coastal ecosystems have been extensively altered. Many wetlands have been degraded, and most other parts of the country have been modified to some extent by various factors, including introduced plants and animals. The result has been dramatic declines in the distribution and abundance of many species.

# Appendix 2

## The value of biodiversity

It is difficult to quantify the benefits of biodiversity conservation because without biodiversity we would not exist. Appropriate management of biodiversity is not limited to nature conservation but is also about the sustainable use of resources. An environment rich in biological diversity offers the broadest array of options for sustainable economic activity, and for adaptation to changing environments. A healthy, strong economy can only operate in the long term if there is a healthy, sustainable environment.

We benefit enormously from biodiversity, including both direct economic and non financial benefits. Although the products and services derived from biodiversity are often grossly undervalued, biodiversity is increasingly being included in environmental accounting and cost-benefit analysis. There are calls for cost-benefit analysis to genuinely address biodiversity loss as a 'cost' to the community, and for biodiversity conservation to be recognised as a "benefit". Any economic analysis of biodiversity should also account for the cost of repairing degraded biodiversity.

Direct benefits derived from biodiversity include:

- High economic returns through **tourism** and **increased land values**, due to scenic and amenity values.
- Clean **air and water** (including pollutant breakdown and absorption).
- The productivity of recreational and commercial **fisheries**.
- **Forestry and wildflower industries** which rely on the harvest of biological resources.
- **Agricultural productivity** which depends on access to wild gene stocks, to develop new or improved food crops.
- **Sustainable agriculture** through reduced land degradation and provision of habitat for local species. For example, maintaining areas of native vegetation can reduce erosion and salinity and may assist in minimising pest damage such as insect attack. (CSIRO has estimated that land degradation through the breakdown of ecological processes costs the Australian economy more than $1billion annually).
- **Soil** production and fertility, nutrient storage and cycling.
- Maintenance of **hydrological cycles** (groundwater recharge, watershed protection and buffering against extreme events) and climate regulation.
- Genetic resources **for medicines and industrial products** and other technologies.
- **Recreation** areas for the local community.
- **Cultural identity** and natural heritage of local regions. This includes indigenous communities who have a rich cultural diversity, closely linked to their environment.

Finally the conservation of biological diversity also has an ethical basis. We share the Earth with many other life forms that warrant our respect, whether or not they are of benefit to us. Earth belongs to the future as well as the present; no single species or generation can claim it as its own.

# Appendix 3

## Why should Local Government manage biodiversity conservation?

Local Government already plays a major role in biodiversity conservation. The extent of this role varies from Council to Council. Some examples include the Campaspe Shire in Victoria (winner of Local Government category—national landcare awards), and at a regional scale, the North Queensland Joint Board which works with 11 Councils on vegetation planning, protection and revegetation.

Local Government is the best placed sphere of Government to deliver biodiversity conservation, with its existing infrastructure and links with the community. For example, Local Government plays a role in:

- **Strategic planning**, and coordination of regional plans.
- **Regulation** over privately owned lands.
- **Land management** of crown and Council owned lands.
- **Impact management** of its own activities when building infrastructure.
- **Environmental protection** and management (eg. waste management).
- **Administration** of public funds.
- Management of **grants and incentives** programs (more detail below).
- **Revenue collection** through raising levies at the local level.
- **Community involvement** and education.
- Providing **direct assistance** to community organisations such as office space and machinery.
- **Recreation** and cultural development.
- **Co-ordinating**/resourcing/assisting/implementing catchment management and land care strategies developed by non-Government organisations.
- **Monitoring** and reviewing outcomes of biodiversity plans.
- **Tourism** such as the promotion of bushfoods.

### Local Government incentives

There are a variety of incentive mechanisms Local Government can use, such as:

- **Grants:** Local Government can provide or administer grants to individuals or community groups to undertake conservation works. For instance, a farmer may apply for fencing assistance to protect a high value remnant (eg. the Murray Fencing Assistance scheme in NSW). This can be linked to cost-sharing mechanisms (eg. Coorong Council).
- **Rate rebates:** A rebate on rates may be provided to landholders who have agreed to manage an area for nature conservation (eg. Logan City Council, Cooloola Shire Council).
- **Environmental levies:** These are used to raise funds for environmental programs. Funds from a levy may be used to fund land purchases, administration of management agreements, or grants to individuals or groups (eg. Brisbane City Council for purchase of remnant bushland).

- **Management agreements:** A contract or binding agreement for a landholder to manage native vegetation on their land. Agreements may involve a range of commitments from landholders. They can be registered on the title through a covenant. Agreements may also be non-binding, such as the Land for Wildlife scheme in Victoria. Financial incentives can be used to encourage landholders to enter management agreements.
- **Covenants:** A legal instrument that binds landholders either for a fixed period or in perpetuity. A covenant can be used in conjunction with some of the other mechanisms such as management agreements and revolving funds.
- **Revolving funds:** This can be used to purchase land on the open market, then place a covenant on the land and resell it. This may bind future owners to the conditions of the covenant. Local Governments with sufficient funds could use this mechanism to change the status and hence development potential of key sites.
- **Development benefits:** Where a property owner is allowed specific development or subdivision benefits in return for setting aside a part of the property for conservation or rehabilitation. For example, a rural landholder may be allowed to develop tourist accommodation or a resort facility which would occupy only a small part of the property with the balance reserved for conservation, rehabilitation or catchment protection purposes.

# Appendix 4

## The National Context

The international and national significance of biodiversity conservation has been recognised. Australia's first **State of the Environment report** identifies loss of biodiversity as Australia's most important conservation issue. The importance of the issue is recognised in the **National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia's Biodiversity** (NSCABD). This has the endorsement of all States, and has specific implications for Local Government.

Local Government has the opportunity to set the agenda to protect the interests of local communities, rather than having the agenda thrust upon it by central Governments.

### National and international initiatives

In addition to the NSCABD there are other key intergovernmental and international agreements and Government programs which add weight and inevitability to the role of Local Government in nature conservation.

- The **International Convention on Biological Diversity** to which Australia is signatory and which led to the drafting and signing of NSCABD in 1996.
- The Federal Government's **Natural Heritage Trust** (NHT) is being delivered through arrangements set out in bilateral Partnership Agreements with State and Territory Governments. One of the NHT programs is *Bushcare: the National Vegetation Initiative*, whose primary objective is to reverse the long-term decline in the extent and quality of Australia's native vegetation cover. This is to be achieved by conserving remnant native vegetation and biodiversity, and by restoring vegetation (revegetation).
- The **Kyoto agreement** in which Australia has committed itself to meet Greenhouse emission targets largely through the retention of remnant native vegetation and the planting of further vegetation. This will have biodiversity benefits in addition to carbon sequestration.
- A current **review of Commonwealth Environment Legislation**. This proposes to devolve powers and responsibilities to the States and Local Government.
- The **Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment** (IGAE) signed in 1992 by Local, State and Commonwealth Governments.

# Appendix 5

## Process for developing this strategy

The development of this document began with discussion by the Biological Diversity Advisory Council (BDAC), and a presentation from BDAC's Local Government representative, Cr Mike Berwick, Mayor of Douglas Shire, Queensland, about the role of Local Government in biodiversity conservation.

Representatives of Local Governments, Local Government organisations, Environment Australia, CSIRO and environmental consultants to Local Government attended an initial workshop in March 1998 in Sydney. The outcome of the March workshop was a list of issues under a number of key headings, which formed the basis of a working draft.

Contributions were made by people attending the workshop, and these were compiled by Local Government's representative on BDAC, Mayor Berwick. A working Draft was then presented to a May workshop in Canberra, which had a wider Local Government input with at least one Councillor or Local Government Association representative from every State (participants in the workshops are listed below). Comments from that workshop have been incorporated into this report which has been edited by Rob Thorman.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) Executive provided input to the draft following a briefing in June 1998. This final draft was presented to the National General Assembly of Local Government in November 1998, where it was accepted unanimously.

# List of contributors and participants

## List of Contributors:

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## Working group—all of above plus:

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| David Lamont | Roadside Conservation Committee—WA |
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## Other Workshop Participants:

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| Cr Gerry Wood | Litchfield Shire—NT |
| Mayor Roger Stubbs | Western Australian Municipal Association |
| Cr Peter Watts | Municipal Association of VIC |
| Cr Val Bonython | Local Government Association of SA |
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