

Nature Repair Market Bill 2023

Senate Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee 30 June 2023

BCT Opening Statement

I am pleased to be here today to represent the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) and share some insights the BCT has gained in our six years working to achieve high-integrity private land conservation outcomes, in partnership with landholders.

The BCT was established as a statutory trust by the NSW Government in 2017, overseen by an independent Board. The BCT's purpose is to partner with landholders to enhance and conserve biodiversity on private land in areas of strategic biodiversity value. The BCT's investment is guided by the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy, ensuring we direct our investment at the highest conservation priorities.

The BCT delivers best-practice, high integrity private land conservation outcomes. These conservation outcomes are legally secured through statutory conservation agreements that sit on land title, in most-cases in-perpetuity. Uniquely, the BCT also supports conservation management through in-perpetuity funding to many of our agreement-holders, via a growing endowment fund.

The BCT's programs are founded on a scientific assessment metric, with the core component of the metric in the final stages of accreditation by Accounting for Nature. Agreements are underpinned by management plans developed with the landholder and monitored through our ecological monitoring program to demonstrate that biodiversity outcomes are being realised. Our programs are complemented by regionally based landholder support providing training, networking and agreement monitoring.

The BCT's programs have been highly successful in securing strategic private land conservation outcomes and over-subscribed by landholders.

The BCT supports the development of a legislated, national nature repair market to unlock private investment. It presents an excellent opportunity to bolster Government funding with private sector finance.

The BCT's focus is ensuring that the nature repair market enables and accelerates NSW private land conservation programs, rather than having unintended perverse impacts. The BCT is seeking to pursue co-investment opportunities with the private sector and has developed market-ready opportunities to do this.

Harmonisation between the nature repair market and BCT programs will help ensure that the highest integrity conservation outcomes, those secured under a legal in-perpetuity conservation agreement, are incentivised through the market. It will also help landholders to navigate the complexity of multiple programs available at the state and Commonwealth level.

The BCT has market-ready opportunities which could achieve early, robust biodiversity outcomes for the nature repair market, including:

- expanding the pool of landholders who enter in-perpetuity unfunded conservation agreements with the BCT, enabling them to access private finance to fund conservation outcomes;
- providing an alternative funding source for landholders who cannot participate in the BCT's funded conservation agreements as our programs are over-subscribed beyond our budget; and

- using BCT conservation agreements to certify biodiversity co-benefits of carbon projects.

The BCT supports the amendments that have been made to the Nature Repair Market Bill, including the commitment by the Commonwealth to publish market information. We'd encourage the Committee and the Commonwealth to consider strengthening this through the development of an investment strategy to guide the nature repair market. The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Investment Strategy has been an important tool to ensure investment is targeted to the highest conservation priorities.

In addition to the amendments made to the Bill, the BCT recommends that the Committee and the Commonwealth establish a method under the Nature Repair Market that accredits NSW conservation agreements and other in-perpetuity covenants established through existing state-based schemes, to ensure these landholders can participate in the market.

The BCT also recommends that the Commonwealth work with the BCT to ensure the Biodiversity Assessment Instrument aligns with the BCT's best practice assessment metric and ecological monitoring module.

The BCT has appreciated the opportunities to engage with the team at DCCEEW, led by Anthony Bennie and Ryan Wilson, on the development of the nature repair market and we look forward to continuing to work closely with them.