

Voluntary, Incentives-based, and Other conservation measures

Incentives-based conservation measures to protect habitat can be classified into two general categories. These include voluntary habitat conservation measures, and incentives schemes. Voluntary habitat conservation measures include a range of mechanisms by which landholders and community groups can voluntarily protect and manage habitat. Incentives schemes can be used to assist and encourage this voluntary habitat conservation.

Further information on these measures where they are included in the Draft CKPoM can be viewed in Section 4.6 of Part 2: CKPoM Resource Document.

Voluntary Habitat Conservation Measures

Voluntary Conservation Agreements (VCA). (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

Currently available under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (NPW Act). VCAs are negotiated between a landholder and the Minister administering the NPW Act and aim to conserve areas of specific value as natural or cultural heritage. While they are voluntary on the part of the landholder, once entered into they are legally enforceable and run with the title of land. Land to which a VCA applies is exempt from all Council rates (s.555 (1b1) *Local Government Act 1993*).

Voluntary Conservation Zones (VCZ). (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

This enables landholders to voluntarily rezone land with the aim of protecting koala habitat. VCZ would be incorporated within an environmental planning instrument and therefore act to manage development to provide koala habitat with long term protection.

Property Agreements.

Currently available under the *Native Vegetation Conservation Act 1997* (NVC Act). They are negotiated between the Director-General of Land and Water Conservation and a landholder. They are more flexible than Voluntary Conservation Agreements, although they may include terms that are binding to either party and may run with the title of the land. Given their flexibility, Property Agreements could be used as a means to encourage a wide range of landholders to manage koala habitat on their properties. Landholders that enter into Property Agreements are eligible for financial assistance through the Native Vegetation Management Fund (\$15 million will be available over three years).

Management Agreements. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

These are agreements between a landholder and a third party (such as a council) regarding the management of koala habitat on the landholder's property. They can be either binding or non-binding to the landholder. Binding agreements have legal status and may be used to prevent inappropriate land use and to prescribe appropriate management actions. Non-binding agreements may be used to formalise landholder participation in on-ground management. Due to limitations on the extent to which NSW Councils can enter into binding agreements to protect native vegetation, non-binding agreements may be the more appropriate form of management agreement for Councils to use to manage koala habitat.

Wildlife Refuges. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

Currently available under the NPW Act, a Wildlife Refuge can be declared over a property, by joint agreement between the property owner and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, where the property has substantial areas of natural habitat and where the owner is prepared to make a positive contribution to wildlife conservation. Wildlife Refuge status over a property does not affect the title of the land or the owner's rights and can be repealed at any time by notice from either party.

Incentives Schemes

Management Grants. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

Generally involve the provision of funds to individuals or community groups to undertake conservation works (eg. on-ground works like fencing of remnants or tree planting). Alternately, they can be used as a simple means of providing financial incentives, in lieu of potentially more complicated schemes like rate rebates.

Rate Rebates. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

Rate rebate schemes can provide a financial incentive by reducing the amount of rates payable on land that is set aside for habitat conservation. Four means by which rate rebates could possibly be achieved include:

1. Differential rating based on different land use zones or rating categories;
2. Remission or exemption from rates;
3. Refunding or discount of a proportion of the rate payable on land; and
4. Alteration of land values through the valuation system.

Development Incentives. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

This scheme would involve a landholder being allowed specific development or subdivision benefits on one part of their property in return for dedicating another part of their property to conservation. Development incentives should only be applied on a case-by-case basis, as there are a number of planning issues that will need to be considered before this could be identified as a viable option for a given area of land.

Transferable Development Rights (TDR). (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

TDR describes a planning tool that can be used to compensate landholders for the loss or restriction of the right to develop their land. A TDR scheme provides a means by which a landholder that is prevented (usually by regulation) from developing their land because of the occurrence of a resource which requires protection, is granted development rights that can be transferred (sold) to someone else to be used elsewhere

Other related schemes

Land for Wildlife. (Currently in Draft CKPoM)

Free, voluntary, non-binding scheme which provides participants with property signage, regular newsletters and management notes, access to extension staff and the opportunity to participate in field days. A Land for Wildlife scheme has the potential to inform landholders about nature conservation and to encourage participation in other incentives-based schemes.

Environmental Levy.

Councils can apply to the Minister of Local Government to raise an environmental levy to help finance the implementation of incentives-based conservation measures and other nature conservation initiatives.

Revolving funds.

Councils could choose to acquire sites of high conservation value. Instead of retaining such sites, Councils could place a covenant on the land to protect its natural resources and then re-sell the land on the open market, potentially to an owner committed to nature conservation.