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To the Secretary,  
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

The East Gippsland Landcare Network has been running a program to rehabilitate the Red Gum Plains since 1998. The Red Gum Plains has a number of highly endangered vegetation communities and protecting and rehabilitating them has been a focus of Landcare members and Farm Tree groups since the 1980's. This long running project has provided a fencing incentive for landholders to fence off remnants and riparian zones and plant seedlings to restore these areas. This has great benefits for the community by reducing erosion, and nutrient runoff into the Gippsland Lakes. It also increases the biodiversity and links important isolated patches of the Gippsland Plains. The project is well known in East Gippsland with over 600 sites in total with many participants doing multiple sites on their property.

A problem has arisen in our area to do with applications for the current funding round of Caring for Our Country Open Grants. In the application our Network project officer needs to have signed approvals with details of fencing and seedlings required from all persons wishing to participate in the project. This raises various issues in the management of such efficient landscape scale projects.

Currently the project 'devolves' funds to landholders through an expression of interested process. In that time an extension officer visits each site to assess the site priority and to collect information such as fencing lengths and seedling species and numbers. This process is resource intensive including employment, travel and other associated costs.

This project is landscape scale with multiple private property participants thus has a heavy time factor from all parties and a resultant cost burden without any guarantees of funding. Not for profit - non government organisations do not have the resources to spend 6 months finding sites and providing extension to landholders without guarantee of funding. And community confidence would suffer if they could not be confident in planning major rehabilitation projects on their property and participation would be reduced.

Landscape scale projects are just not possible under the new CFOC funding guidelines. The short term thinking of only providing year to year funding provides huge security issues and planning problems for rehabilitation programs. The Federal Government needs to understand that long term ongoing landscape programs are more effective, provide greater participation opportunities for landholders and will provide more benefits to the community than smaller scale short term projects on limited sites.

Our recommendation's to the Federal government's new funding body CFOC is:

- 1) Allow devolved grants for landscape scale programs that have multiple private landholders.
- 2) Provide long term secured funding to allow for projects to be strategically planned, implemented, evaluated and reported.

If the Federal Government cannot meet these criteria, then community groups will find it too difficult to be able to participate in natural resources management. This would be a great loss as volunteers contribute an invaluable amount of time towards improving their communities, but in turn they rely on good government policy to support their efforts and recognise their needs.

Kind Regards,

Leah Newey  
Project Officer