



Conservation Partnerships In the Daintree region

July 2006

Background

In 2005 the Australian Government provided the Australian Rainforest Foundation (ARF) with \$5 million to undertake a range of conservation initiatives in the Daintree aimed at reducing the impact of development following the controversial subdivision of approximately 1100 lots of rainforest in the 1980's.

Conservation Partnerships and Stewardship Payments

This \$5 million Commonwealth funding is not just about land buyback, but very much about engaging and supporting landowners and the local community who wish to remain in the Daintree and look after the land. To do this ARF and the landowner or a community group may enter into a partnership to undertake agreed works that improve the environment. Applications can then be made to ARF for Stewardship Payments to assist with these works.

Covenants to protect the land forever

A conservation covenant is a voluntary agreement between a landholder and an authorised body (in our case the Queensland Government) to help protect and manage the environment on the property.

The covenant is registered on the land title and it is usually permanent. This means that the area covered by the conservation covenant is protected, regardless of who owns the land in the future.

Conservation agreements and covenants can be registered either using the Nature Conservation Act and having the area declared a Nature Refuge or a covenant under the Land Title Act.

Over all or part of the land

The covenant will define what and how the land - either all or part of it - can be protected and what can be used or developed by the owner. Each owner will have different needs and as the conservation agreements are voluntarily entered into each is negotiated with the individual landowner.

Financial benefits

In some cases tax concessions may be available to landowners entering into a conservation covenant. These include an income tax deduction for a decrease in land value (over \$5,000) as a result of entering into a conservation covenant (conditions apply).

Special treatment of capital gains tax is also available under certain conditions for landowners that sell part of their land. In the case of this region, local government also provides a rate discount. The Queensland Government has a range of initiatives for landowners who have their land declared Nature Refuge.

Stewardship payments

Financial payments will be made directly by ARF to individual landowners or community groups who apply for and satisfy the funding criteria as assessed by the ARF Stewardship Payment Panel. Applications can be made at any time and are subject to available funding. Decisions will be made and applicants notified quickly.

Questions you may have about Stewardship Payments

1. Do I have to have a conservation covenant on my land to apply for Stewardship Payments and how much will it cost me to take out the covenant?

As Stewardship Payments are intended as an investment for the future, ARF will only fund projects on an individual's land that is protected, on either part or all of the land, into perpetuity through a conservation covenant. ARF will pay all fees associated with establishing the conservation covenant.

2. What sort of projects is ARF looking to support through Stewardship Payments?

Pest and weed control, feral pig trapping, revegetation, fencing, water course improvement, erosion control – are just some of the initiatives ARF will look at supporting. However, consideration will be given to all projects that demonstrate good conservation.

3. What sort of money is ARF talking about?

Initially \$500,000 is available for Stewardship Payments to the end of December 2006. Further funding is allocated for 2007.

4. Who decides which projects get the payments?

The decision to fund a project or not will be made by the 'ARF Stewardship Payment Panel'. This panel will be made up of ARF Board Members and two external professionals, a scientist and a probity lawyer.

5. How can community groups apply for Stewardship Payments when they don't own land?

ARF wants to encourage good conservation across the community for the benefit of everyone and will support recommendations for Stewardship Payments that lead to good community conservation that are put forward through a community committee.

6. Is there an evaluation carried out once the payment has been made?

An evaluation process will be put in place in accordance with the agreed management plan for the Stewardship works.

7. Is the payment only available once or will it be on-going?

There is scope for one-off payments as well as recurrent funding.

8. What is a nature refuge?

A category of protected area under the Nature Conservation Act 1992, a nature refuge can cover part or all of a property protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat emphasising the conservation of biodiversity as an important part of property management. Go to www.epa.qld.gov.au for more information.

9. If I covenant, will it affect the resale value of my property?

Having a conservation covenant attached to its title does not in itself seem to make the property difficult to sell. Some real estate agents selling properties in areas such as the Daintree have marketed the covenant as an asset rather than a liability. The covenant may reduce the number of potential buyers but not necessarily the sale price.

10. Where can I get more information about covenants and tax concessions?

The Australian Government, through Environment Australia and the Australian Taxation Office has information on these tax arrangements for conservation covenants.

Go to: www.deh.gov.au or www.ato.gov.au

11. Where to from here?

For projects that benefit the whole community a Conservation Partnerships Committee needs to be formed to begin communications with ARF. For individual projects on private land, landowners should contact ARF.