



CUMBERLAND PLAIN CONSERVATION PLAN BIODIVERSITY STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

A guide for Western Sydney landowners interested in establishing a biodiversity stewardship agreement with support from the NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust.

A solution for our growing challenge

The NSW Biodiversity Conservation Trust (BCT) is a NSW government body with a mission to protect the natural environment by supporting private land conservation around NSW.

Western Sydney is growing rapidly with the population estimated to double in less than 40 years. To meet the challenge of protecting the unique native flora and fauna of the area as our population grows, a plan was developed to secure and conserve public and private land and encourage biodiversity to thrive. That plan is the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan **(the Plan)** and it is now one of the largest strategic conservation plans in Australia. The Plan balances the need for urban growth with the need to support biodiversity across Western Sydney. The Plan will deliver commitments to improve ecological resilience and function, and offset biodiversity impacts from housing and infrastructure development.

As part of the plan, the BCT is working with landowners to form biodiversity stewardship agreements (BSAs) so landholders are provided with ongoing payments to better manage their property for conservation.

This important work will help conserve our native plants and animals in Western Sydney and support a more biodiverse region.



Area of Western Sydney covered by the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of this land and pay respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Landowners can enter a biodiversity stewardship agreement to permanently protect and manage an agreed patch of land for conservation in return for financial and other benefits.

Why consider a biodiversity stewardship agreement (BSA)?

The biodiversity of the Cumberland Plain region is unique and to conserve it we need to retain bushland on private land. In entering a BSA, you will:

- Get support and guidance from the BCT on how best to manage your land for conservation.
- Receive annual payments for land management activities such as stockproof fencing, erosion control and the control of weeds and feral animals.
- Potentially make a profit from the sale of biodiversity credits.
- Contribute to the protection of natural bushland and preserve Western Sydney's unique biodiversity for future generations.
- Build resilience against climate change, maintain the quality of the water we drink and the air we breathe as well as improve mental and physical health.
- Secure benefits for other parts of your property by supporting native pollinators, reducing soil erosion and improving soil fertility.

Working together to preserve our future.

If you decide to enter a BSA, it's important to note that the land is still yours. You can make money from the sale of the biodiversity credits created by the BSA, and will receive annual payments to manage the site, but the land can no longer be developed, as it will be secured for conservation purposes.

This guide explains how you can gain financial benefits as well as outlines your obligations as a landowner subject to a BSA.



What are biodiversity stewardship agreements (BSAs)?

The name might be new, but the idea behind BSAs has evolved over many years. Previously called biobanking agreements, today there are already more than 70 similar agreements in place throughout Western Sydney.

A BSA is a legal arrangement between you, the landowner, and the NSW Government, to create a biodiversity stewardship site and generate biodiversity credits under the Biodiversity Offsets Scheme. The agreement identifies the land that will be managed for conservation and is permanently registered on the title of the land.

A BSA identifies the number and type of biodiversity credits created at the biodiversity stewardship site, the management actions you agree to undertake at the site to improve its biodiversity values, as well as your annual monitoring and reporting obligations. It also sets out the amount of money required to fund the management of the site over time and how this will be paid to you, the landholder, as annual land management payments.

“Selling biodiversity credits has given us the freedom to look after the land in the way we’ve always hoped to.”

Bill and Elizabeth Inglis own and live at Craig End, a dairy farm in South-Western Sydney. In 2017, they signed their biodiversity stewardship agreement and haven’t looked back. The sale of biodiversity credits generated from the agreement meant they didn’t need to sell the land once they retired from farm work. Craig End was granted to Bill’s Great-great-great Grandfather in 1832 so a land sale would have broken a five-generation connection with the property.

Bill grew up on Craig End, and has fond memories of the bush on the property and over time has become more interested in conserving these areas alongside the maintenance of the farm.

“When I learnt about stewardship agreements offered by the BCT, I realised there was a way I could control lantana and other weeds while still letting the edges of the bush grow back without slashing,” Bill said.

Bill and Elizabeth are now in the process of expanding their stewardship site to generate more credits, and as a result their children want to continue their legacy.



CPCP Case Study:
Craig End Dairy Farm

How biodiversity credits work

When you enter into a BSA, biodiversity credits are generated. Credits represent the expected improvement in biodiversity values that will result through the protection and management of your land under the agreement.

The number and type of credits created by a BSA are identified by an accredited ecological consultant (known as an accredited assessor) and depend on the type and condition of the native vegetation, the presence of threatened species and how your land will be managed to improve biodiversity. After your application is accepted and signed, the credits will be issued to you and added to a public register.

Biodiversity credits can be bought and sold like a commodity. If you are located within Western Sydney, the BCT may offer to purchase your credits under the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan Biodiversity Stewardship Program. You may also have opportunities to sell credits directly to developers or others looking to invest in conservation outcomes.



Funding your BSA

When you sell your biodiversity credits, an agreed amount of money from the sale is placed in trust by the BCT on your behalf. The deposited funds and earnings from the trust flow back to you over time as annual payments to manage the biodiversity stewardship site. Once the agreed amount has been deposited in the management fund, any remaining funds from the credit sales can be retained by you as a return on your investment.

Who can sign up for a BSA?

Land is eligible for a BSA provided it is not already managed as a biodiversity offset and the past, current or future use of the site will not stop biodiversity conservation being achieved.

Some land may have easements or be subject to mining or other interests and this may affect what part of your property the BSA can be established on. The BCT can help you work through these issues to identify an appropriate stewardship site footprint on your property.

You can choose a number of parcels of land within the same property to allocate towards a BSA. They don't need to be next to each other, but they do need to have the same landowner.

There is no minimum size for a BSA, but there are likely to be financial and other benefits to larger sites. If you're unsure, or need more advice, the BCT can help you determine the feasibility of a stewardship agreement on your property.

How do I sign up for a BSA?

Under the Cumberland Plain Conservation Plan Biodiversity Stewardship Program, any Western Sydney landholder that expresses interest in a BSA will receive a site visit and initial assessment of the feasibility of a stewardship agreement on their property. Landholders may also be offered the opportunity to have the BCT develop a BSA business case for their property. Alternatively, you can opt to pursue a feasibility assessment and/or business case independently by engaging an accredited assessor who will typically charge you for their time. The feasibility assessment and business case help you to make an informed decision about whether a BSA is a viable financial option before signing up for a BSA application.

Explore

Expression of Interest

Get in touch with the BCT to find out more about BSAs. We can explain the steps involved and help you understand whether a BSA is right for you and your property.

Feasibility Assessment

This step includes a basic assessment of your property by the BCT using existing information. They then estimate how many and what types of biodiversity credits you might generate with your land.

Business Case

The BCT can prepare a detailed estimate of the overall viability for your land for a BSA and outline the potential financial benefits. We may offer to purchase your credits on behalf of the NSW Government, and offer financial assistance to cover some of the costs of the BSA assessment and application process.

Apply

Site Assessment

An accredited assessor will assess the biodiversity values of your site and calculate the number and type of biodiversity credits to be generated. The results of the assessment will be compiled in a Biodiversity Stewardship Site Assessment Report.

Develop management plan and calculate management costs

The accredited assessor will work with you to develop a management plan for the site and identify the costs to implement the plan. The management costs are used to calculate the required initial deposit into the Biodiversity Conservation Fund.

Submit Application and Supporting Documents

The Biodiversity Stewardship Site Assessment Report, management plan and supporting documentation (e.g. certificate of land title) are submitted to the Credit Supply Taskforce within the NSW Department of Planning and Environment together with a complete BSA application form.



Establish

BSA application review

A staff member will work with you to prepare your agreement. This will include a review of your proposal and details in your application. Once complete, we will provide a copy of a draft agreement for you to review. This will include the proposed management plan for your site.

Accept, Sign and Register

Once everyone signs the final stewardship agreement, the details are then officially added to the title of your land and your credits are issued to you. The credits will be added to the public credit supply register and can then be traded.



Manage

Management Actions

Once the BSA commences you are responsible for completing actions to manage your land. The BCT will provide ongoing technical advice and support.

Annual Management Payments

Annual land management payments are made to you according to the agreed schedule in your BSA to cover the costs of land management and reporting.

Annual Management Report

Each year, you will complete a report to show how you have met your obligations under the agreement. The BCT will also provide support and advice to help with this process.

The decision to establish a BSA involves financial and other risks. The BCT can help you understand some of these risks and when you should seek specialist legal and/or financial advice.

If you're a Western Sydney landholder thinking about a BSA for your land, we encourage you express your interest by sending us an email using the address below.

The BCT can then help you to make a more informed decision, and there's no obligation to go any further with a BSA application. We may offer to purchase your credits on behalf of the NSW Government, as well as cover some of the costs or provide financial assistance for an application.

It all starts with the EXPLORE phase

On your journey towards a BSA, you can choose to start with an expression of interest, a feasibility assessment, or you can skip this phase entirely and go direct to making an application. We recommend starting with an expression of interest as the BCT may be able to provide some financial assistance and technical support to Western Sydney landowners who take this step.

Get to know your local bushland, flora and fauna

Cumberland Plain Woodland is a critically endangered ecological community. It is a woodland characterised by tall eucalypt trees like the forest red gum, grey box and grey ironbark. A lower-layer of trees including species like the black, Parramatta and hickory wattles, and native cherry is sometimes present. Shrubs including native blackthorn, gorse bitter pea, native indigo and a diverse range of native grass and herbs adorn the ground below.

Some of the endangered wildlife to be found in Western Sydney includes the swift parrot, regent honeyeater and the Cumberland Plain land snail, while the endangered flora includes the spiked riceflower and the nodding geebung.



Meet the swift parrot

Similar to a lorikeet, this endangered small parrot is bright green with red around its bill, throat and forehead. The red on its throat is edged with yellow and a dark red thin tail. Swift parrots often feed and fly with similar lorikeets but can also be recognised by their metallic “kik-kik-kik” call.

Meet the Southern myotis

This vulnerable micro-bat has a wingspan of just under 30 centimeters. It used to be called the large-footed myotis because of its large feet which it uses to pluck insects and fish from the surface of streams and pools.



Meet the nodding geebung

An endangered shrub that grows to 2.5 metres high, it usually flowers from November to March. The flower is a yellow pendant drooping on a stalk around 10 millimetres long. Its abundant fruit is favoured by currawongs, wallabies, kangaroos and possums, which helps to disperse seeds around.



Meet the Cumberland land snail

This endangered snail may look superficially like the garden snail, but its shell is very thin and fragile and is always just the one uniform colour. It's generally active at night when it dines on fungus.



To express your interest in this program, email info@BCT.nsw.gov.au or call 1300 992 688.

bct.nsw.gov.au

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