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# OPERATION BOUNCEBACK – ECOLOGICAL RECOVERY IN THE FLINDERS RANGES

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## INTRODUCTION

Operation Bounceback is a major ecological restoration project focusing on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity values on a regional scale in the northern Flinders Ranges of South Australia. The project is a partnership between National Parks & Wildlife SA and the Natural Heritage Trust.

Bounceback has been established as a demonstration of environmental management in a semi-arid rangeland environment through the implementation of the following core elements:

- addressing major threats to ecological integrity in the region
- monitoring progress to allow ongoing refinement of activities
- maintaining gains through the development of long-term management programs
- working with landholders in the region

### On-ground activities for biodiversity enhancement

Bounceback is implementing a number of activities focused on the removal of threats, the protection of species and the recovery of habitats and vegetation communities. The major active threats to biodiversity in the region have been identified as excessive grazing pressure, predation and pest plant infestation. Bounceback's threat abatement program includes the following on-ground activities:

- feral goat control on a regional basis
- rabbit control capitalising on RHD
- euro (*Macropus robustus*) control in targeted areas
- broadscale fox control with 1080 dried meat baits
- feral cat control at targeted locations
- priority weed control works

### Assessment of progress

An extensive monitoring and evaluation program has been established to assess the progress of the project in achieving its ecological recovery goals. Monitoring systems are in place for both the assessment of the threats, and the responses of the ecological system.

A target has been set for each threat to provide information on the effectiveness of the management action. For example, feral goat densities of less than 1/km<sup>2</sup> in core areas have been set, with specific targets also established for foxes, euros and rabbits in different management areas. Such monitoring has been crucial in allowing the refinement of management activities in terms of resource allocation, timing and methodologies employed.

More important, however, is the assessment of the environmental responses as a result of the management actions. A monitoring program is in place to assess the biodiversity status of a system or the response of the system to on-ground works. Our monitoring includes:

- yellow-footed rock-wallaby populations
- small vertebrate populations
- long lived perennial vegetation
- a formal Land Condition Index assessment
- targeted indicator species (e.g short-tailed grasswren, emu, bushbirds)
- aquatic macroinvertebrates
- threatened species status

## **SUMMARY**

Bounceback's on-ground management program has been developed within an ecological framework including well-defined conservation goals that are regularly reviewed to evaluate the effectiveness of management actions. The monitoring activities that are being implemented provide detailed information on the biodiversity status and trend of ecosystem components in the project area. Although obtaining a meaningful response from an indicator can be difficult within a typical project lifespan, an ongoing process of review and refinement for both monitoring techniques and management actions will ensure Bounceback's conservation goals are achieved in the long-term.