

CONSERVATION – ALIGNING THE STARS IN THE WESTERN DIVISION OF NSW

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Whilst there has been a growing call for increased conservation of our natural resources, there have been inadequate market signals to encourage voluntary participation by landholders.

A number of instruments are now being aligned in the Western Division of NSW which individually or collectively are changing this, primarily by providing landholders with an economic return for maintaining conservation areas.

A Western Lands Lease rental annual rebate is available for leased land recognised as being maintained for managed rehabilitation. This rebate is 40 cents per hectare for agreements exceeding ten years, or 30 cents per hectare if up to ten years.

Voluntary property vegetation plans, with opportunities for one-off grants from a conservation fund, are a vital plank in the new statewide native vegetation legislation.

Enterprise Based Conservation (EBC) promotes conservation as an alternative to grazing as a legitimate commercial land use, proposing an annual equitable return to the landholder (see paper this Conference).

The WEST 2000 Plus Program has piloted the EBC project, involving over 65,000 hectares on ten properties with annual payments for five years. Outcomes of this pilot program include marketing the concept, gaining an appreciation of the willingness of landholders to be involved, identifying mutually acceptable prices, and determining eligibility criteria, conservation management contracts, mechanism for allocating funds and administrative frameworks.

The Environmental Services Scheme is a statewide pilot project with similar outcomes to the WEST 2000 Plus Program, but it only offers a one-off grant rather than annual payments.

The Southern Mallee Land Use Agreements allow trade-offs of conservation areas for increased areas of clearing and dryland cultivation. Nearly 100,000 hectares of conservation is now permanently secured through perpetual lease agreements.

Privately managed conservation areas, providing an economic return for landholders is now being seen as a viable option for landholders, and as an alternative to state managed national parks in the Western Division.

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