



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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1. Is my property eligible?

A site is **eligible** if it meets the following guidelines:

- Whole or partially located within the project area
- Sited on private land only
- On land not subject to prolonged inundation (i.e. not a permanent water body or river)
- Meets site selection criteria for remnant vegetation or indigenous revegetation
- Free from current government funding through another program (that is, one that is not under a funded contract for work on the site currently).

Ineligible sites include:

- Site directly bordering land that requires joint party fencing to be erected to protect the site from neighbouring stock (ineligible due to existing obligations under Fencing Act, native vegetation clearing controls and stock control issues)
- All crown land, including unused roads, licensed river frontage, unlicensed, leased or vested crown land
- Rivers, streams and waters including dams and permanent water bodies to the top of the bank or high water mark (note adjacent terrestrial areas may be eligible).
- Sites with existing funding contracts in place that are still in place when Expressions of Interest are called for.

If the site has a current Bush tender, EcoTender, Coastal Tender, Landcare grant or other government funded program contract or agreement over the site during the implementation period, then it is not eligible.

- Sites that have been used as an environmental offset under Australian or State Government law (e.g. offsets for native vegetation clearing, EPBC Act restoration work for threatened species, carbon offsets etc.) or as part of a planning decision (either on or off the same property) are not eligible.

2. Who can enter into a contract?

The landowner must have a legal responsibility for the tender site in order to be eligible. Land managers / lessees must have written approval from the landowner for involvement in the Northern Eco-Connection project. The landowner must co-sign the Contract and agree to the management actions outlined in the Management Plan over the life of the contract for funds to be allocated for that site if successful.

3. What if I've got more than one eligible site?

Landholders will be able to submit separate bids for each site or a combined bid for two or more sites. A separate Management Plan will be required for each bid.

4. What does permanent protection mean?

Permanent protection relates to on-going land use and is registered on the Title through a covenant or similar instrument and has its own agreement. This project will use Trust for Nature covenants to permanently protect private land where it is chosen to do so. See the below link for more information on Trust for Nature covenants:

<http://www.trustfornature.org.au/conservation-planning/conservation-covenants/>

5. Can I nominate for permanent protection of my property?

Only the landowner of a site (that is the proprietor who is named on the land title whether that is an individual, organisation, fund, trustee or business) can nominate a site for permanent protection through a covenant or agreement registered on title.

6. Why would I want to place my site under permanent protection?

Many landholders are aware of the value of the native vegetation on their property – not only for their own benefit, but for the benefit of future generations and the broader community. By placing permanent protection on a site, landowners can ensure current actions are continued by future landholders for the ongoing conservation of a site.

Landholders wanting to register a new agreement for permanent protection on a site will be recognised in the bid evaluation process. By choosing this option the site's score will be increased.

Landowners who have already permanently protected their sites voluntarily and have not been paid for this through a previous program will be entitled to the bonus score.



7. My property already has a covenant, can I still participate?

Yes, however, some covenants may have involved compensation which might impact on the amount of value you can offer. Contact Northern Eco-Connections staff to discuss your existing covenant.

Previously covenanted sites may be eligible but it will depend on the purpose of why the site was funded. A site with a covenant completed as a previous action of a finished tender process (such as Bush Tender, Grassland Tender etc.) or as a voluntary unfunded action may be eligible to be included. However, eligible sites will not score gains for covenanting if they were funded for this in a previous tender program.

8. Will my application be confidential?

Landholders need to be assured that the information they provide remains confidential. Unless a landholder expressly signs a waiver provided by the CMA to share this information with other programs, all information provided by landholders is to remain confidential within the Northern Eco-Connections project and Victorian Environmental Partnerships Program.

9. Who will know the contents of my management agreement if I'm successful?

Cost, payment and site score details will remain confidential between the land manager, Northern Eco-Connections and Victorian Environmental Partnerships Program staff. For public accounting purposes, information on the geographic location of sites under agreement and the associated Management Plan may be made available through VEPP. The project may also make available general statistics in compliance with the Information Privacy Act, 2000.

10. How do I organise a site visit?

Landholders are required to register their interest in being involved in the project by submitting an Expression of Interest (EOI). A Northern Eco-Connections field staff member will contact land managers who register an EOI to arrange a site visit. The EOI can be made on line, by post, by phone or in person.

11. Who will know the amount of my bid?

Bids are kept in strict confidentiality between Northern Eco-Connections and VEPP project staff and the land manager.

12. What is the habitat hectare method?

The 'habitat hectares' approach has been developed in response to a growing need for more objective and explicit methods of assessing the quality of remnant native vegetation – for use in monitoring vegetation decline and recovery as well as prioritising conservation actions across the landscape.

The approach is a key component of Victoria's native vegetation management policy framework, and its practical application is being further evaluated in a number of programs including Victoria's 'Bush Tender' and now Victorian Environmental Partnership Program (VEPP).

13. How will I know what management actions to undertake?

All eligible sites will receive an obligation free site assessment which will inform the development of a site specific Management Plan. The Management Plan will outline the required actions, their timing and duration that are suggested to improve the condition of your site. Land managers will be able to discuss their own ideas for management during the site assessment process. There will be minimum standards required for some activities such as fencing, ground preparation and revegetation.

14. What if I want to alter my Management Plan?

If there are any changes you wish to make to your Management Plan, you will need to contact your field staff officer within 7 days of your Management Plan being sent to discuss the changes.

Upon receiving the revised Management Plan you will have 10 calendar days to submit your bid. Please be advised that further requests for changes to your Management Plan will not be granted.

15. When do I have to submit my bid?

Bids must be returned within 21 calendar days following the Management Plan being sent to you. The bid can be posted to Northern Eco-Connections tender box, PO Box 18, Huntly, VIC, 3551.

The NCCMA office is open 8.30 – 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding public holidays. Late, facsimiled or emailed submissions will not be accepted.

16. How will I find out if my bid is successful?

Both successful and unsuccessful bidders will be notified in writing of the outcome of their bid application once the tender evaluation process is complete in late June 2014.

If unsuccessful it does not mean that your property does not have conservation values worth protecting, but that the bid did not represent adequate 'value for money' in this tender process.

Unsuccessful bidders will be made aware of any other programs which may be able to help with the management of their site.

17. How long are Management Agreements for?

Land managers will enter into a Management Agreement for a minimum of 5 years. The option of permanently protecting the site is also available and this is taken into account during the bid evaluation process.

18. How will the Management Agreements be monitored?

Land managers will be required to submit an annual report to Northern Eco-Connections staff that details the actions that have been undertaken in the previous 12 months and the progress toward agreed targets from the Management Agreement.

Depending on the level of demand and staff resources available, annual site visits will be conducted at each of the sites to assess progress and provide technical support.

19. Will I be audited?

At minimum, a random sample of projects will be audited each year to assess that you have completed actions that have been agreed to in the management agreement. If subject to an audit be assured that adequate notice will be given, and that best efforts will be made to ensure that the audit occurs at a mutually agreeable time.

20. What will my reporting requirements be?

You will be required to submit an annual report on the activities of the previous 12 months and the progress toward achieving the targets outlined in your Management Plan. Reporting requirements will be simple, but should be considered when putting together your bid.

21. How will I be paid?

All payments will be by cheque or Electronic Funds Transfer. Land managers will need to submit an annual report complying with the Management Agreement and may be subject to a site assessment to verify the actions undertaken in the preceding 12 month. Payment amounts and dates are listed in the table below.

Payment	Amount (exc GST)
Initial payment on commencement of contract OR Milestone payments based on material and contractor costs	40% of successful bid price
End of year 1 after annual report received and management actions completed to specified standards	30% of successful bid price
End of year 2 after annual report received and management actions completed to specified standards	5% of successful bid price
End of year 3 after annual report received and management actions completed to specified standards	5% of successful bid price
End of year 4 after annual report received and management actions completed to specified standards	5% of successful bid price
End of year 5 after annual report received and management actions completed to specified standards	15% of successful bid price

22. Can I change the proposed management actions once I have signed my Management Agreement?

Management Agreements can be varied with the written consent of both parties. In general, only actions that lead to an equal or improved conservation outcome will be considered and re-negotiation of payment will not be possible.

23. What happens at the end of the fixed-term agreement period?

Land managers' management obligations under the fixed-term agreements cease at the end of the 5 year Management Agreement period and they will be able to manage the site according to their own wishes in accordance with other responsibilities applying at that time. As required with other incentive schemes, land managers who receive funding to erect fences will be required to maintain these fences for a minimum period of 10 years from the date on the Management Agreement.

24. What if I sell the property or transfer the lease before the end of the Management Agreement?

The fixed-term 5 year agreements are between the relevant CMA in the landholders region (North Central, Goulburn Broken or North East CMAs) and the landholder. They are not registered on Title. Sale of the site or transfer of the lease would terminate the agreement. The Northern Eco-Connections project coordinator must be notified of any changes. The new landholder may have the opportunity to sign a new agreement for completion of the actions specified in the original Management Plan. Covenants for permanent protection will be registered on Title and will not be affected by the sale.

25. Can I access additional public funds from other sources?

For the period of the agreement, successful bidders who sign Northern Eco-Connections Management Agreements will not be eligible to receive further funding for the tendered sites through any other publicly funded assistance program for the management actions identified in the management agreement.

26. What if I change my mind?

Land managers can withdraw from the process without obligation any time up to signing the final Management Agreement and receiving the first payment. Once a Management Agreement has been entered into, land managers wishing to withdraw from the agreement should contact the Northern Eco-Connections project coordinator to discuss their options.

27. How do I get in contact with the Northern Eco-Connections project coordinator?

Contact details for the Northern Eco-Connections project coordinator and other staff can be found by visiting www.northernecoconnections.vic.gov.au



28. Can I submit a bid to manage a site under this project if I already receive assistance to manage a site?

If you are currently receiving funding support from any source for conserving or protecting remnant vegetation on your nominated site then you cannot bid through this project for the same area of land. If you have a covenant on a site that requires you to undertake certain management activities for which you receive no remuneration, you are able to participate in the project, provided other eligibility criteria are met.

29. What if I am unsure whether I want to be involved in the Northern Eco-connections project?

Involvement in the Northern Eco-Connections project is entirely voluntary. If you choose to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) you are not obliged to continue with the project. There are no penalties for deciding not to go ahead. At any time prior to signing a Management Agreement you can decide not to continue.

30. Are there any rules relating to applications on leasehold land?

Lessees are entitled to participate in the project provided the following conditions are met:

- the conditions of the lease do not prevent any of the proposed activities
- you have been given the authority by the landowner to enter into a contract with Northern Eco-Connections. In this instance the landowner will need to co-sign the agreement with the land manager.

31. When should I start consulting financial advisers about my bid?

If you think that you are likely to proceed with a bid you should start seeking advice early. This could help you with costing the management activities you want to carry out for inclusion in your bid price. Fencing contractors and suppliers of herbicides may be able to assist with costing some of the physical activities you might undertake. For further assistance in assessing these costs you may wish to talk to your accountant/financial adviser.

You should also check with your financial adviser or the Australian Tax Office (ATO) regarding the possible taxation implications of your proposed bid and may wish to contact Centrelink about any impacts on your Centrelink entitlements if applicable.

32. What happens if a natural event affects the site I am contracted to manage?

We recognise that from time to time significant natural events, such as floods, droughts, bushfires and storms severely impact on natural resources. For this project, these impacts are seen as beyond the land manager's control.

If you are unable to fulfil your obligations as set out in the management plan due to natural events you should contact project staff to discuss your options.



33. What happens if I cannot meet my obligations in the Management Agreement in the agreed time frame?

If you cannot meet your obligations within agreed timeframes, you need to let us know as soon as possible. The Northern Eco-Connections project coordinator will then consider the circumstances and discuss an appropriate way forward. This may include revising management actions, an extension of timelines or termination of the contract.

34. Is the income received through the project subject to income tax?

Yes. Payments received under the project are subject to income tax. Please seek advice from your financial adviser on how this will affect you.

35. Will Northern Eco-Connections staff at various times require access to my property?

Northern Eco-Connections project staff and service providers employed by the government will need access to your property from time to time for the length of your Management Agreement. Before entering your property, staff will:

- contact you and arrange a suitable time
- not enter your land without you or your representative present unless you give permission for them to do so
- respect and comply with your reasonable safety and security procedures

It is anticipated that there will be periodic monitoring for a sample of sites, but all access visits to your property will always occur with your permission.

36. If endangered species or noxious weeds are found on my property will that affect how I am allowed to farm my property?

Noxious weeds are your responsibility under existing State and Federal laws. The cost of managing other non-noxious weeds which may compromise the value of your site can be included in your bid as can the management of weeds listed as Weeds of National Significance.

Any discussions about management options will be only for the area nominated by the land manager, and may affect how this area is farmed. No inspection will be made of other areas of the property.

37. How was the project area chosen?

The Northern Eco-Connections project area has been defined by:

- identifying high value sites through analysis of modelled information from the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI);

- a desire to enhance resilience and connectivity across the landscape; and
- by identifying an area commensurate with funding to enable delivery via a market based instrument/competitive tender.

The Northern Eco-Connections Conservation Tender will increase resilience and connectivity by focussing on two key corridor zones (1) The Central Victorian Box-Ironbark corridor and (2) The Murray River Corridor, which are both regional priorities across the three CMAs for a number of reasons.

The model used (a NaturePrint product which uses vegetation and fauna data) grades all of Victoria for its habitat importance and the areas selected to be included within the boundary represent those of the highest value, which also assists in the protection of threatened species.