

COVER SHEET FOR SUBMISSIONS 20 MILLION TREES – REQUEST FOR INFORMATION (RFI)

This completed form must be included with your submission.

CONTACT DETAILS	
<p>Please provide at least one contact address; a telephone number is optional. If you are making a submission for a group or organisation, please provide contact information for one member of your organisation.</p> <p>NOTE: <i>The Department needs to collect some personal information in case we need to contact you should further information or clarification be required on your submission. Personal information may be disclosed to the Minister for the Environment or the Secretary of the Department or to employees of Australian Government agencies assisting the Department for the purposes outlined above.</i></p>	
Organisation	SEQ Catchments Limited
Title	Mr
First name	Simon
Surname/Family name	Warner
Postal address	PO Box 13204 George St Q 4003
Email address	swarner@seqcatchments.com.au
Telephone number	07 3211 4404
HOW TO SUBMIT COMMENTS	
<p>Please return your completed cover sheet and submission by email (preferred option) or post to the address below.</p> <p>Email: 20milliontrees@environment.gov.au</p> <p>Post: 20 Million Trees Section Biodiversity Conservation Division Department of the Environment GPO Box 787 CANBERRA ACT 2601</p>	

For further information, please email 20milliontrees@environment.gov.au.

SEQ CATCHMENTS RESPONSE TO THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S REQUEST FOR INFORMATION – 20 MILLION TREES PROGRAM

Introduction:

SEQ Catchments thanks the Australian Government for the opportunity to provide comment on the implementation of the 20 Million Trees Programme (the programme). We note the programme scope is to establish 20 million trees in urban, peri-urban and regional locations to re-establish green corridors and urban forests. We also note the objectives include working cooperatively with community, supporting local environmental outcomes and contributing to Australia reducing its greenhouse gas emissions.

This submission addresses the areas raised in the Request for Information (RFI) in the order they are raised. Importantly, SEQ Catchments along with the 13 other regional natural resource management (NRM) groups in Queensland have recently completed first drafts of revised NRM Plans covering the state identifying opportunities for carbon abatement. Also, the regional NRM groups have extensive community, industry, indigenous, academic and government networks to ensure they can assist the Australian Government meet its programme goals.

Supply issues:

Regional NRM groups have over 10 years expertise in providing on-ground environmental outcomes across Queensland and have a strong and flexible network of suppliers of seed stock. Given the seasonal nature of tree planting and revegetation projects, this understanding of provenance, supply and stock resilience issues associated with such projects is critical. A number of regional NRM groups have been actively involved with and instrumental in establishing the necessary value chain approach and scheduling for many thousands of hectares of tree plantings. For example, SEQ Catchment's experience with planting stock survival rates averages between 95-100% survival rates depending on planting conditions and maintenance routines built into its project planning.

Queensland is fortunate to have a number of high quality community run nurseries run by local Landcare and catchment management groups across the State. Regional NRM groups routinely work with these groups as well as Greening Australia and professional nurseries to ensure the supply chain is managed for regulatory purposes such as environmental offset plantings as well as small, medium and large scale restoration projects on behalf of all levels of government. These nurseries hold the necessary skills to collect and manage local provenance for such projects.

Availability of suitable land:

While most areas of Queensland have an extensive local government and State government reserves system, many areas require a strategic approach to land availability. Regional NRM groups were contracted by the Queensland Government to provide the GIS and mapping products necessary to support its newly proclaimed *Environmental Offsets Act 2014* and associated framework. In particular, the work was aimed at identifying strategic investment corridors which are off the shelf products to focus environmental offset investment. This work has resulted in a network of strategic restoration corridors across Queensland and could be used to focus investment from the 20 Million Trees Programme.

In addition, the NRM Plans commissioned by the Australian Government due to be completed before the end of this calendar year establish the areas and targets needed to underpin investment in areas for high biodiversity and carbon outcomes. Together with the strategic corridor work, Queensland is now blessed with the knowledge and science developed by regional NRM groups to ensure suitable land is identified for

targeted investment for the programme. The work already completed for the NRM Plans could be supplemented by an analysis of tenure impacts and opportunities to refine options and tenure mixes for potential projects.

The last five years of implementation of offset projects resulting from development impacts in Queensland has provided regional NRM groups in Queensland to understand the issues and challenges associated with finding sites for rehabilitation, restoration and/or planting. Tree crop and carbon credit planting projects and other project examples have also in many cases, hardened some landowners to becoming involved in tree planting projects on private lands. Regional NRM groups are in a position to know and understand how landholder see government policy which may affect their property interests and can work with them to ensure their interests are taken into account.

As a result, there have been a number of innovations by the Queensland Government to encourage and make land available for environmental projects. The State Government is actively looking at their land assets for opportunities for offset and other environmental use outcomes.

Application of industry standards:

In Queensland, there are a number of examples where simply planting trees and walking away has not resulted in any environmental outcomes. A number of older Landcare revegetation projects and Greenfleet projects provide case studies of the need for ongoing maintenance and management of revegetation and tree planting programmes. To plant and hope for good weather in Queensland does not work.

The newly proclaimed Queensland Government Environmental Offsets Framework contains a number of mechanisms and safeguards to ensure matters of environmental significance in general, and habitat in particular, are managed to achieve a viable status. These mechanisms could be used to frame the delivery of the programme ensuring that the 20 million trees planted will provide an enduring carbon storage and a credible legacy of this direct action initiative.

South East Queensland has developed an Ecological Restoration Guideline (see <http://www.seqcatchments.com.au/seq-ecological-restoration-framework>), as have a number of other respected entities such as the Ecological Restoration Society. Where regional specific guidelines exist, these should form the basis for the programme; otherwise, the more general guidelines developed by the Society should be used. Where riparian environments are to be revegetated, then there are a number of high quality guidelines available.

Capacity for industry to deliver tree planting Australia-wide:

The Queensland regional NRM groups are increasingly working together to deliver outcomes. A recent tendering process resulted in five of the six coastal based regional NRM groups submitting a single tender with the sixth keen to join; however was unable to do so at the time. The chief executive officers of the Queensland regional NRM groups met recently and agreed on the need collaborate to take advantage of the wide community, local government, industry and academic networks and expertise offered through the network. Because the regional NRM groups are not for profit mainly community owned businesses, programme delivery costs can be optimised.

The regional NRM group network comprises well in excess of 50 scientific and technical staff covering all the necessary disciplines and localities required for successful implementation of the programme in Queensland. The nature of the groups also ensures potential programme funding is leveraged through

volunteer effort, local government and State Government programmes as well as the networks of contractors and volunteer groups to draw upon as needed in each region.

In any particular region, the NRM Plans will give expert and community negotiated priorities and outcomes upon which to base the delivery of the programme. No other single entity exists in Queensland with the reach and expert resourcing to ensure the programme is delivered.

Optimising environmental and carbon abatement outcomes:

The regional NRM groups are close to completing the NRM plans for each and every region in Queensland. As part of the contract with the Australian Government for delivery of the NRM plans, each region has identified and optimised opportunities for delivery of environmental and carbon abatement. Importantly, each region has worked through an extensive community engagement process to ensure the plans recognise and represent community and industry aspirations and needs. Most regional NRM groups are developing an investment program to ensure the plans are implemented.

The groups also hold accurate knowledge and experience in pre-existing regional ecosystems such that the outcomes of carbon storage and biodiversity can be optimised. Experience also offers the advantage of knowing when is best to plant and with what maintenance regime to minimise costs while reducing the risks of poor establishment.

An example of the development processes for the regional NRM plans can be found here:

<http://www.naturalassetsseqyoursay.com.au/have-your-say-on-our-regions-future1>

Identifying and managing other significant issues that may influence delivery:

The Australian government already has well established programme and project relationships with the regional NRM groups. Now that the regional NRM groups are collaborating more closely and sharing knowledge and resources, this relationship can be improved even further. The regional NRM groups are able to mobilise their extensive community networks to gauge and encourage positive community attitudes toward the programme outcomes. There are many “care, watches and friends of” groups which can form an effective implementation basis from which the programme rollout can be framed.

Experience in Queensland indicates a need to plan planting work for the periods September to early December and late February through to mid-April as a general rule. To plant outside these periods increases the risk of project failure due to lack of rain or severe frosts depending on the time of year. This requirement necessitates the need to plan providence collection and stock resilience treatments to coincide with Spring and Autumn.

As pointed out, the Queensland Offset Framework has provisions which encourage monitoring and maintenance of tree planting and restoration activities out to a stage that minimises the risk of project failure as well as managing threats such as weed invasion and fire. Some of these provisions could form a part of the programme implementation requirements.

Cost-effective delivery considerations:

As pointed out above, regional NRM groups are not for profit groups which can leverage any programme resources with resources from other partners, strategic offset delivery funding, and in kind work, greatly increasing the value for money and strategic outcomes of the programme.

Regional NRM groups also work closely with local governments and other partners including Greening Australia and Landcare groups. The strategic investment corridors which have already been identified and mapped and regional NRM plans developed based on robust scientific methods means regional groups are ideally situated to know where to locate projects to deliver programme outcomes in Queensland.

From our experience, trees can be planted for as little as \$10 per tree on flat easy terrain; however, this amount accounts for minimal site preparation and limited to no maintenance. Several projects which have been planted for this level of investment have failed within their first year. Given the objectives of the programme include biodiversity outcomes and carbon outcomes, we strongly urge the Australian government account for proper site preparation and ongoing maintenance runs out to viable habitat status. To do this means the full cost per tree would equate to \$20 per tree on average terrain and up to \$30 per tree for remote and difficult terrain placing the potential total program costs between \$200 and \$600 million up until 2020. These costs are based on standard commercial rates for current offset and revegetation planting practices. As a result, the importance of leveraging other funding sources and programs may well be critical to the program.

Conclusion:

Regional NRM groups have over 10 years' experience in delivering on-ground outcomes for governments at all levels, community and industry. Our networks and landscape understanding of our landscapes and habitats ensures the regional NRM groups are well positioned to assist the Australian government with its 20 Million Trees Program.