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ENTERPRISE BASED CONSERVATION PROVIDES VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO 'LOCK UP AND LEAVE'

The Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) believes its Enterprise Based Conservation program provides a workable compromise to the war of words between the NSW Farmers' Association and the Humane Society International about environmental management.

Yesterday, the Humane Society International called for one-fifth of Australia's landmass to be locked up under National Heritage.

The NSW Farmers' Association responded by labelling that an impractical goal and calling for a fundamental rethink about the current approach to environmental management.

According to the Western CMA's General Manager, Daryl Green, the Enterprise Based Conservation program provides a win-win solution for both landholders and the environment.

"Since the program's launch in 2007, six landholders within the NSW Western Division have been paid to manage a total of 48,000 hectares (480km²), which is larger than Kinchega National Park, for conservation for fifteen years," Mr Green said.

The Enterprise Based Conservation funding is designed to cover costs of actively managing the conservation area and to provide income similar to forgone agricultural production to maintain the viability of the farm business.

The recipients have been encouraged to invest payments into a long-term investment security to provide an on-going income stream.

"The program recognises conservation is a legitimate commercial land-use," Mr Green said.

"Conservation produces clean air, healthy soils and water and a diversity of plants and animals, all of which benefit the public.

"It's also a drought-proof income source that ensures people can continue to be part of their local community. Locking up areas can mean the death of services and local communities in remote areas," Mr Green said.

Three properties are located within the Western Catchment: Will and Denise Turnbull of 'Greenvale' near Bourke, Tas and Penne Clarke of 'Kayrunnera', near White Cliffs, and Mick and Michaela Fisher of 'Kilberoo' near Yantabulla.

The other three properties are from the Lower Murray-Darling Catchment: Andy and Fiona McLeod of 'Coombah' near Wentworth, Laurence and Helen Barnes of 'Lethero' south of Pooncarie, and Gary and Tracey Neyland of 'Mandelman' east of Pooncarie.



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The areas being managed for conservation include a wide variety of land types including wetlands, Indigenous cultural heritage sites, endangered vegetation communities and habitat for endangered animal species including Mallee Fowl and Western Pygmy Possums.

"We completely agree that the 'lock up and leave' strategy doesn't work," Mr Green said.

"Rather than leaving the areas alone, the landholders with the Enterprise Based Conservation program are required to install fencing, de-stock, de-commission watering points and control feral animals and undertake other management activities to ensure specific conservation goals are met," he said.

Mick Fisher of 'Kilberoo', north-east of Wanaaring is managing 14,185 hectares of his property through the scheme.

"It's early days yet, but we can already see the benefits and we're very happy with the way things are unfolding," Mr Fisher said.

"There's no question of just leaving the land idle. We have our hands full. It's a big job.

"We have seen a marked increase in groundcover because we had good rain last year. As a result there's been an influx of feral goats and we wouldn't have been able to retain the groundcover if we hadn't been managing the area.

"We had a groundcover survey done in December that found additional native plant species. There's no way we would have had that result in an area under commercial grazing," Mr Fisher said.

The Australian Tax Office is supporting the program by allowing the lump sum payment to be tax assessable over the fifteen year period, which has obvious benefits for the landholders involved.

The original fund of \$1 million from the NSW and Australian Governments has been supplemented by an additional \$1 million from the Western CMA and \$334,000 from the Lower Murray-Darling CMA.

Both CMAs are working towards meeting management targets for conservation land use. The CMAs monitor the progress of the properties involved in their Catchment through Property Vegetation Plan Agreements.

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- Map_EBC: The six properties taking part in the Enterprise Based Conservation program.
- The Fisher Family of Kilberoo Station: Back: Mick, Joe and Michaela Fisher; Front: Jeremiah, Millicent and Mikey Fisher.



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- Fisher_Floodplain: The floodplain on Kilberoo provides breeding habitat for a number of bird species including the freckled duck and blue-billed duck, both of which are threatened species.
- Fisher_GGoosefoot: Joe and Mick Fisher inspect golden goosefoot, which grows in floodplain depressions and is flourishing in the absence of stock.

