

Bush Bank Private Land Stream Walking Together Framework

Introduction

This framework provides the foundation to build partnerships between Cassinia Environmental (Cassinia) and Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal businesses in the delivery of the BushBank Private Land Stream.

The BushBank Program

The BushBank program will revegetate land to store carbon and create habitat, contributing to the targets set out in *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* and help Victoria reach its emissions reduction goal of net-zero by 2045.

The BushBank Program includes separate grant streams including:

- First People's stream which aims to improve the capacity of Traditional Owners to participate in healing Country, carbon markets and to practice self-determination.
- Public land and program support stream to restore degraded public land and respond to issues that impact the BushBank Program
- Private land stream to revegetate and restore at least 20,000 hectares of native habitat across private land in Victoria.

BushBank Private Land Stream

The Victorian Government has contracted Cassinia to deliver the \$30.9 million private land stream of the BushBank program (the Program). These funds seek to:

- leverage private investment including from carbon markets to deliver 20,000 hectares or more of restored and protected habitat on private land, and
- create jobs and support a growth in restoration industries including seed and nursery suppliers.

This will be achieved by partnering with private landowners to restore and protect their land and through land purchase, restoration and on-selling with conditions for permanent protection. Cassinia partners with many organisations including Traditional Owner Corporations (TOC) and Aboriginal businesses, carbon market companies, and community groups to deliver the Program.

More information about the delivery of BushBank is available at: <https://cassinia.com/bushbank/>

A note about terminology:

Traditional Owners is used as it identifies Aboriginal people with a rights based relationship with a particular area of land, and culturally defined obligations to care for this area of Country. This includes Traditional Owner people and groups whether these rights have been formally recognised by the state or not.

Traditional Owner Corporation is used to refer to the representative body of Traditional Owners who have received formal recognition. These corporations have the authority to speak for Country, culture and collective interests of their community.

Why walk together?

Cassinia acknowledges the Traditional Owners have never ceded sovereignty of their Country, and Traditional Owners' cultural rights and responsibility to care for Country.

Cassinia has built relationships with Traditional Owners and are seeking to expand this and move towards practical partnerships embedded in our business practice. Cassinia seeks to partner with Traditional Owners in the delivery of BushBank and commit to identifying opportunities for meaningful, respectful and increased participation in components of the program that align with each group's healing Country objectives.

As part of the delivery, Cassinia is committed to specific targets for procurement from Aboriginal businesses and prioritising sites that provide 'environmental, cultural or social co-benefits'. This includes targets set out in program contracts to purchase a minimum of 10% of seed and seedling from Aboriginal businesses and supporting Traditional Owners to acquire at least 500 ha of land made possible by the Program. Cassinia seeks to create opportunities for Traditional Owner-led biocultural projects that deliver biodiversity and carbon sequestration benefits, including restoration on freehold land owned by Traditional Owners.

For Traditional Owners, participation in BushBank presents opportunities to implement their strategies to extend their Healing Country programs across all tenure types, particularly private land, and in some cases reconnect with areas of their Country they have not been able to access since dispossession. Due to the scale and lengthy time frame of the program it has the potential to provide a reliable springboard to grow their revegetation businesses. The revolving fund component of the program has the potential to enable partnerships to support strategic acquisition of priority properties. Participating in the program is also an opportunity to build relationships with the local community and individual landowners with benefits for broader reconciliation and developing understanding of Traditional Owners connection with their Country.

Cassinia's commitments for Walking Together

Cassinia makes the following commitments to enable the best outcomes for Traditional Owners within the tight time and budgetary constraints and ambitious targets of the program. These are intended to allow for multiple entry points for Traditional Owners to participate in the Program in line with their priorities and growing capacity.

We will incorporate Traditional Owner advice on program implementation

Biannual meetings with TOC representatives will provide updates on Program implementation including the status of projects on each groups Country, and gaining advice on aspects of Program implementation which may affect Traditional Owner interests. These meetings will enable accountability for Cassinia implementing commitments in this Framework through:

- reporting on progress against each commitment,
- reporting on any constraints encountered and alternative approaches considered, and
- recording any advice or actions recommended during these meetings and reporting on progress of these actions during subsequent meetings.

Participation is optional and meetings will be designed to be efficient given the resource constraints of TOCs and Cassinia. Meetings will be a mix of online and on-Country incorporating site visits and/or training opportunities.

We will encourage Traditional Owners to inform selection of project sites

Through engaging with each TOC via regular meetings and reviewing Country Plans and other relevant documents to more fully understand TOCs Healing Country objectives, priority landscapes can be targeted for inclusion as projects in the Program. Cassinia commits to one scheduled meeting per year with each Traditional Owner Corporation, which can be complimented with additional meetings regarding specific projects as required. Traditional

Owners are encouraged to engage with Cassinia with properties which they own, their partners own or properties for sale to test if they meet the criteria for inclusion as a BushBank site.

We will notify TOCs of projects taking place on their Country

Cassinia will notify TOCs of projects taking place on their Country via the revolving fund or partnership with a private landowner. This will enable Traditional Owners to identify their preferred level of participation in the project. This will be done in a timely manner understanding that Traditional Owner groups will need adequate time, of at least 4 weeks, to process information, consult internally and provide an initial response. Cassinia will consult with DEECA, Federation of Victorian Tradition Owner Corporations or the First Peoples Assembly of Victoria to identify appropriate strategies for engaging with Traditional Owners in areas where there is no formally recognised Traditional Owner group to negotiate participation in the program.

We will support Traditional Owners to visit sites and inform restoration design

For every site, Cassinia will undertake due diligence to check for known or potential areas of cultural significance utilising online maps. We will invite Traditional Owners to visit sites by agreement with the landholder and where there is interest from Traditional Owner groups.

Site visits will enable Traditional Owners to access Country and suggest cultural values that can be built into the restoration design, including protection of cultural heritage and inclusion of priority species. Input could also involve Traditional Owners reviewing Native Vegetation Restoration Plans that have been prepared by Cassinia.

Contributing to site design can enable indigenous land management practices to be built into the Restoration Plan, Conservation Covenants and carbon agreements. For projects where a partner organisation is leading project delivery, Cassinia will encourage these partners to invite Traditional Owners on site visits and support contributions to site design. For some projects as is deemed appropriate by both parties, Traditional Owners can lead the project site design process whilst ensuring site plans meet the requirements set out in Cassinia's contract with DEECA.

The involvement of Traditional Owners in site visits and design can vary based on the interest and capacity of Traditional Owners, whether the project is based on land purchase or partnership with landholders and resourcing available. Where a project is based on private land, Traditional Owner participation will be based on agreement by the landholder. Traditional Owners will be adequately remunerated for this work.

We will procure seed and seedlings from Traditional Owner Corporations and Aboriginal businesses

Cassinia will be procuring seed and seedlings for projects which they are leading project delivery, in most cases properties purchased via the Revolving Fund or by Cassinia itself. In these instances, we can prioritise the use of Traditional Owner Corporations and Aboriginal businesses. For projects based on partnerships with private landholders or other land managers, these partners will determine project procurement. In these cases, Cassinia will encourage procurement from Traditional Owner and First People's businesses.

Most TOCs have seedling or seed supply capacity to some degree or are in process of building this capacity. Orders with ample notice will enable Traditional Owner nurseries to plan and prioritise their seed and seedling production, supporting the growth of the operations and employment outcomes. Through regular contact with groups, we will keep track as Traditional Owner supply capacities come online during the lifetime of the project.

We will engage Traditional Owner works crews to provide on-ground land management services where feasible

Cassinia will engage Traditional Owner works crews for on-ground revegetation works where feasible and of interest to TO groups. We will also encourage partners and landowners to procure Traditional Owner land management services for BushBank projects.

We are aware that most TOCs are building their capacity to provide revegetation and environmental monitoring services, and work on this Program can support capacity building and employment outcomes. Some groups are at capacity in this regard with works and landscapes they are already committed to working on. Advanced notice will allow groups to plan to make their works teams available for projects.

We will support Traditional Owners access land acquisition opportunities made possible by this program

The Program involves the purchase of some properties, where revegetation works will be undertaken, a conservation covenant used to protect the area revegetated and then resold with the covenant and other mechanisms in place. These properties will generally be held for several years for revegetation works to be undertaken. There is potential for this process to enable divestment of properties, using the time properties are held to establish partnerships with co-funders which would enable purchasing these properties on behalf of Traditional Owners.

Cassinia will partner with Traditional Owners to identify priority properties for purchase and support the development of additional partnerships to enable this process as required.

One potential partner is the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC). ILSC supports the purchase of properties but require, and support, the development of feasibility studies regarding the ongoing use and management of such properties. For such projects Traditional Owners should be involved with designing management plans for these projects to enable Indigenous Land Management practices to be incorporated. Traditional Owner groups are encouraged to engage with Cassinia to discuss properties that they are interested in acquiring to see if they are suitable to be purchased via the Revolving Fund.

We will support the use of alternatives to Conservation Covenants for some projects where possible and appropriate

There is scope within the Program to use alternative mechanisms to Conservation Covenants to ensure the areas of Country restored via the program are cared for and healthy Country is maintained in perpetuity. Such protections are a requirement of the program based on contractual agreement with DEECA and are a requirement under many natural capital accounting markets. Cassinia will support the use of alternatives if it accords with contractual arrangements and is cost and time efficient. The use of alternatives to Conservation Covenants will be supported for all projects on properties owned by or intended to be acquired Traditional Owners, if that is the preference of relevant Traditional Owner group.

We will support groups seeking additional co-funding to enable Traditional Owner outcomes outside the scope of the Program

This could include funds for:

- The purchase of properties acquired via the revolving fund for Traditional Owners, including feasibility assessments for ongoing management.
- Pilot projects where Traditional Owners have a greater level of involvement in site design and implementation, and could potentially include a broader set of healing Country measures beyond that are beyond the scope of the program, such as invasive species management, waterway management, and restoration of non-woody vegetation types.
- Conducting collective training programs bringing together Traditional Owner groups, such as in seed collection, processing and storage.
- Purchase of equipment that could be co-owned shared between groups, such as mechanical planting equipment.

We will learn together as we go

Given that the program will include multiple projects, different approaches to Traditional Owner participation can be incorporated and tested in earlier projects, with lessons learnt informing future projects and review of this framework as required.