

Mole Creek

Conservation of forests on private land remains a priority for the Australian and Tasmanian governments.

The forests of the Mole Creek area are no exception.

Much of the private land near the Mole Creek Karst National Park contains many of the environmental values that led to the park's creation in December 1996. The park is a haven of limestone caves, beautiful scenery and plentiful wildlife. The protection of the forests and cave systems of the park will be enhanced by complementary conservation of the private land in the nearby region.

The Australian Government's commitment to provide \$3.6 million to protect up to 2,400 hectares of private forest in the Mole Creek area will be implemented as part of a new program – the Forest Conservation Fund.

This fund will be established and fully funded by the Australian Government and managed jointly with Tasmania. The program will focus on adding old-growth forest to the reserve system, as well as other under-reserved forest values, to meet a private land conservation target of 43,200 hectares plus up to 2,400 hectares in the Mole Creek region.

The Australian Government is providing \$3.6 million for a special call for the voluntary covenanting or purchase at market value of properties in Mole Creek under the new program. No landowner will be forced to sell or covenant his or her land.

The governments will consult with stakeholders, including landholders, conservation groups and Timber Communities Australia, on the special Mole Creek element within the next few weeks. The timetable for the Mole Creek call for applications is likely to be scheduled for early in the 2005-2006 financial year. The program will seek bids from landowners in the Mole Creek region through a 'tender' or 'auction' process. This means that landowners will be able to nominate the value that they place on managing their land for conservation. The Australian Government will pay for the best value-for-money proposals within the \$3.6 million cap.

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