# Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot Round 2 Webinar

Transcript

Tuesday 15 February 2022

[Webinar begins]

David Pembroke: Well, hello, everyone, and welcome to today's webinar about round 2 of the Carbon and Diversity Pilot, which is a component of the federal government's $66.1 million Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package. My name is David Pembroke, and on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, I'd like to warmly welcome all of you today. Thank you for your attendance.

David Pembroke: The Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package is designed to help create market mechanisms that will attract private investment to reward farmers who deliver biodiversity services along with carbon planting on their properties. Round 2 builds on the success of round 1 and has been extended to six new natural resource management regions, which are the Fitzroy Basin in Queensland, Riverina in New South Wales, Goulburn Broken in Victoria, Southern in Tasmania, Northern and Yorke in South Australia, and South Coast in Western Australia.

David Pembroke: Joining me in the studio today to help present today's webinar is Ryan Wilson, the Director of the Agriculture Stewardship section of the department. Ryan, welcome to the program today.

Ryan Wilson: Thanks, David.

David Pembroke: Joining Ryan on our panel today will be Dr. Dean Ansell, an ecological expert at the Australian National University who is leading the design of the Agriculture Stewardship pilots and the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme. We'll also be joined by Elyse Riethmuller, the CEO of the Fitzroy Basin Association, who are a delivery partner for round 2. And last but not least will be Alex Cummins, who is a senior policy officer at the Clean Energy Regulator.

David Pembroke: Now, many of you already know that the applications for round 2 opened on the 16th of December last year, and you will also be aware that they do close on the 3rd of March. So please keep that in mind. You only have a couple of weeks left to get those applications in. But if you do have any inquiries about the package that are not answered during today's webinar, you can send an email to agstewardship@awe.gov.au. That's agstewardship@awe.gov.au. Or you can call the Agriculture Stewardship hotline on 1-800-329-055. That's 1-800-329-055.

David Pembroke: So, to get us underway today, I'd like to introduce once again Ryan Wilson, the Director of the Agriculture Stewardship Program, for his particular presentation. Over to you, Ryan.

Ryan Wilson: Great. Thanks for that, and thanks everyone for coming along. Hopefully you find it an informative session. As David mentioned, the government's aim really with this whole stewardship package is about testing and trialling market mechanisms that we can develop for farmers to essentially be rewarded for the stewardship of their land, and also to do it in a way that is a market mechanism we can attract some private sector investment into the sector to help them do that. Obviously, the aim there really is about creating additional income sources for farmers. Probably important thing to mention, it's very much a collaborative effort between the government, the Australian National University, and the NRM organisations in the pilot regions. And so, we'll hear later from one of those regions.

Ryan Wilson: The package overall, it's got a number of components to it. So obviously today we're talking about the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot, which is about new plantings, so planting of new vegetation on farms for carbon and biodiversity. The Enhancing Remnant Vegetation Pilot is about farmers who have native vegetation on their farm and undertaking a long-term agreement about how to manage that vegetation and payment arrangements for that. The National Stewardship Trading Platform, that's really about helping farmers plan their projects and create, giving some tools for farmers to plan these sorts of projects and also helping to connect buyers and sellers. Because obviously there is some interest in buying this sort of projects. The Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme, which is about farmers who are doing good work already, about getting recognition for that work in a way that they can use, essentially a stamp, that they can use in their marketing arrangements. And then the Australian Agriculture Sustainability Framework, so that's work we're doing with NFF, which is really about providing an overarching framework for sustainable agriculture in Australia and helping industry sectors to do planning and assurance and benchmarking.

Ryan Wilson: So that's the package overall. For the pilot itself, so the way this pilot works is ANU's developed these biodiversity planting protocols. That's really about when doing a carbon plantation... a planting, sorry... when doing a carbon planting, you do that planting according to these biodiversity protocols. And that creates not only a carbon benefit which farmers can get as a carbon credit that they can sell in future as those carbon credits accrue, but also there's a biodiversity benefit because you've done it in accordance with this protocol. So farmers who do a new Emissions Reduction Fund project, they own those carbon credits at the end of it in addition to biodiversity payments upfront to help cover those initial costs of establishing the planting.

Ryan Wilson: We use a cost benefit analysis to assess proposals. We are looking at the expected biodiversity benefit that arises relative to the cost of those projects. So that's an important thing to remember because it is a competitive process, and we are prioritising those that create the most biodiversity relative to the project cost itself. As David mentioned earlier, this is the second round and trialling it in six new NRM regions.

Ryan Wilson: Just a very quick overview of what happened last time. In the first round last year, we made about $4 million worth of offers to farmers. So it's up to them whether or not to accept those offers, and that involved 65 projects in six regions. We've since then signed a number of contracts and a bunch of farmers are going through the process of then registering their Emissions Reduction Fund project through the Clean Energy Regulator. And so for round 2, I think we've already gone through that detail a bit there, but a key difference with round 2 is that there'll be an initial payment upfront for successful applicants to help cover the costs of the professional advice. Obviously, it's a pretty significant commitment to sign up to particularly the carbon element of this project, and this payment upfront will help people think through that carefully with the appropriate professional support.

Ryan Wilson: I mentioned the Stewardship Trading Platform. The aim of the platform is really about, one, helping farmers plan projects and providing tools for that, but also connecting buyers and sellers. At the moment we're using it for round one participants in the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot to help them find buyers for their carbon credits. There is interest from corporate Australia. So we've been consulting with the Business Council of Australia, and there's definitely interest in buying these sorts of projects from the private sector. Particularly the carbon credits obviously, but also with the biodiversity benefit that comes along with that. So, yeah, just wanted to mention that.

Ryan Wilson: That's live now, so you can go and have a look at how that works. We'll be continuing to improve the platform over the next little while, but it's currently live and taking applications for this current round of Carbon + Biodiversity. I think I'll leave it there, so any questions, and I'll hand back to you, David.

David Pembroke: Great. Thank you very much, Ryan. We do have questions, and the first was, "Is this webinar being recorded for playing again later?". And the answer is yes, it is. So it will be up on the department's website, so feel free to access this particular piece of content at the appropriate time to capture all of the information today. But we do have another question, Ryan, and it's from Lynn Vaye, and it's quite a simple question, and it is, "Where can I find an application form?"

Ryan Wilson: The information's on the department's website, so awe.gov.au/agriculturestewardship. I think the link will be available in the material from the webinar. Also, there's information available on GrantConnect. So if you look up GrantConnect online and look up the program, all the details will be there.

David Pembroke: Okay. Another question about these conversations and discussions with the Business Council of Australia. Can you give us a little bit more detail about what it is precisely you're talking about as it relates to carbon planting and biodiversity and what the farming community can think about or know about those conversations?

Ryan Wilson: Yeah. I mean, I think the context is very important. There's quite a significant increase in demand to buy carbon credits from businesses. They've all got their 2050 goals for net zero. So there's a growing interest from business to do that. The way this particular pilot works, and we're doing this as a stepping stone to a market approach, so this is the piloting phase, but the way it works is there's an upfront investment to do the plantings. There's payment from the biodiversity payment, but also there's a future revenue that comes from carbon associated with that. And so, by developing this trading platform, we're helping farmers to find buyers who are interested in buying that carbon and potentially making a commercial agreement about the future purchase of those carbon credits. So it really helps farmers get that certainty that that's one of the ways they can sell the carbon credits in the future.

David Pembroke: Okay. So there could be, in the future perhaps, the potential for a farmer to have an agreement with a company to basically sell all of their carbon?

Ryan Wilson: In the very near future. We're looking in the coming weeks to upload the first lot of buy and sell listings on the trading platform. So in the near future, there'll be some there. From pilots like this, this will be a tool that's available to farmers to look for corporate buyers who are keen to make an agreement with them about the sale of their carbon credits.

David Pembroke: Okay. So to the next question, "Are there any minimum project size limitations, for example, minimum property size or a CCU potential?"

Ryan Wilson: Yeah, so the size range that we are working for in this pilot is between five and 200 hectares for the projects.

David Pembroke: Okay. Next question, this one from Zoe Ryan, "Can the plantings be done over two seasons to spread the risk of planting failure?".

Ryan Wilson: That's probably one we haven't had to answer before. We'd have to take that one on notice. We're certainly aware it is a complex task to do these sorts of plantings. There's a number of issues you need to think about, seasonal conditions and seedling availability, things like that. So, in terms of the specific process, we'll have to double check that, but certainly we're aware of that complexity. Definitely we'll talk to the department about it, or also talk to your local NRM. They can help you work those things out.

David Pembroke: All right. But an answer to the question will be posted up onto the website as best as you can answer the question at this time.

Ryan Wilson: This is a trial, we're doing pilots. The idea is to learn, so feedback like that is very useful just to try and make it as workable as possible for farmers.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question is from Paul Donaldson, and thank you very much for the questions that are coming in, and please keep them coming throughout today's presentation. Paul asks, "Funding is available to obtain advice on the commitment. Is there a panel or list of recommended consultants available to farmers to provide that advice?".

Ryan Wilson: We don't have a panel available for that. That's probably something... There'd need to be a conversation with potentially the NRM organisations. Yeah, but we don't. Yeah, we don't unfortunately have a panel. I know that is something that in other schemes they do have a specific panel, but we're not requiring you to go to any particular providers.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question is from Murray Kerr... or actually, no, sorry, from Graham Oaks, and Graham asks, "How many projects were submitted with 65 successful?". That chance of success, what was the success rate last time.

Ryan Wilson: Yeah, so in round one, there were 83 applications that we had come in through the portal, and we made 65 offers.

David Pembroke: Okay. So that's pretty good.

Ryan Wilson: Yeah. Yep.

David Pembroke: That a pretty strong success rate.

Ryan Wilson: Yep.

David Pembroke: Excellent. Okay, to our next question, Murray Kerr asks, "What's the role of the local NRM in this process?".

Ryan Wilson: Yeah, well, Elyse from Fitzroy Basin will talk more about that a bit later, but essentially it's really that collaborative approach. We've got ANU working on getting the technical protocols right. The department is making sure the scheme operates overall. But the NRMs are really providing that local advice. So obviously, they can help with things like what sort of native species are the right ones for this particular patch of land, that kind of thing, help working out where's the best place to source seedlings from, that sort of thing.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question, "Are there any particular methodologies that have to be followed?"

Ryan Wilson: Yes, certainly there is. This is all set out on the website. The guidelines are the main document to have a look at, and there's a nice flow chart that sets out how that all works. But there's requirements in the guidelines, although with our guidelines they are a bit general, but probably the most important thing is the planting protocol. There's a protocol about the sort of things you need to look at in doing the planting and it has a range of factors in there. So that's sort of the key thing when thinking about the actual design of the planting itself, the sort of species and the densities and that sort of thing.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question is from Nathan Moore, and Nathan asks, "Considering the complexity of participating in carbon projects, will there be another pilot round to allow farmers more time to consider participation?".

Ryan Wilson: The government hasn't made any decisions about future rounds. I guess that's something that will we'll think about. And really, it's a decision for the minister after we see how this goes. Obviously, part of what we're doing is we're trying to learn how to do this because there's a real economic opportunity here for farmers. So we're learning how to do it, but separately the government introduced into parliament a piece of legislation to create essentially a functioning voluntary market for this sort of work. The idea is to actually transition over time into a market where there's commercial transactions going on. I think partly we need to learn from this, but also partly we're transitioning to that market, like a functioning market. I guess that'll be something that the minister will decide as we wrap up this round and look at the results.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question, "Is it only corporates who can buy credits on the market or can individuals buy them?".

Ryan Wilson: Individuals can buy them. So yeah, that's others. On the training platform, you can go on and register your interest to buy. Anyone can do that.

David Pembroke: Okay. Alex Diamond asks, "Do you have any tips for a successful application?"

Ryan Wilson: I think the main tip is to read the guidelines carefully. There's a lot of information in them, but in the guidelines there's some fairly explicit and detailed descriptions of what makes a project good quality and competitive. There's a bunch of things in there like looking at your project cost. And we're using a cost benefit analysis assessment, so obviously the amount of benefit you get relative to the cost is important. So cost efficient projects will be more competitive for example. That's all detailed in the guidelines, but I think, yeah, remembering that it's a cost benefit analysis, and having more benefit relative to the dollars actually proposed for the project. I think that makes it more competitive.

David Pembroke: And we will be hearing very soon from Dr. Dean Ansell who will give you a little bit more insight around that. But just one question just before we move on to Dr. Ansell, a final question. And please, do keep the questions coming because we will try to get through them as much as we can today. But a final question for you, Ryan, before we move to Dr. Ansell. It's from Eugene Maloney, and Eugene asks, "Can you retain the credits for your own farm?".

Ryan Wilson: Yes. The way this program works, those credits will be owned by the farmer, and it will be really for them to decide what to do with it.

David Pembroke: Great. All right, Ryan, well, stay tuned. Ryan is going to stick around and stay with me here at the desk for the balance of the program today, so he'll be able to continue to answer questions and to provide you the information. And again, on behalf of the department, thank you so much for your attendance today. It's very important that you do attend, so you get the right information to make these applications successful. And indeed understanding that that closing date is March the 3rd. So make sure that you've got that written down somewhere because I'm pretty sure that after March the 3rd, you're no chance if you don't get your application in.

David Pembroke: Okay, so Dr. Dean Ansell is an ecological expert at the Australian National University, and he's leading the design of Agriculture Stewardship Pilots and the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme. Today, Dean will run us through what farmers need to consider before starting an application, how to apply through the National Stewardship Trading Platform, and how you can make your application competitive. He will also explain how applications are assessed, including the description of the pricing model and the cost benefits scoring that Ryan just alluded to. Dr. Ansell, thank you very much for joining us today, and I will open the floor to your presentation.

Dr Dean Ansell: Thanks very much. I will jump straight in because there's a fair bit to get through, and hopefully I can address some of the questions that may not have been answered in time in that last session. The first thing we want to consider though is whether the C + B Pilot fits for your particular circumstance, obviously, and for your planning. As we've heard, it's a fantastic opportunity to, I guess, diversify farm income and generate biodiversity and other environmental benefits on the farm. But, of course, you need to factor in the fact that it's a minimum 25-year commitment for you, as well as the economics of the program. There are a lot of good tools and information available on the department's website and links to other sources. As we heard from Ryan, there is a payment available for seeking that financial advice for successful applicants.

Dr Dean Ansell: The next consideration, of course, is whether you are eligible as an entity and whether your property is eligible. The pilot guidelines that was referred to, that is essentially the rule book and the reference for the program. So I'd encourage you to read that very closely. It details eligibility requirements around entities, around the location of your project, and the composition of your project. There was a question there before regarding, "Can you split across properties?". Yes, you can, and that details all that information, the minimum/maximum size, the land ownership, and also land use. So before you go too far, just review those guidelines closely and get in touch with the department if you still have any questions. There should be some case studies available that show the application of the project across some different contexts as well so you can see how that works.

Dr Dean Ansell: Having done that, the next step then is to register on the National Stewardship Trading Platform, which is the portal, the site where you will prepare and submit your application. Again, that's at agestewart.com.au. Next I would read the planting protocols that apply to your particular region. They are largely similar across the regions, but there are some specific exceptions or differences between them. And then there's also the price guide that applies across all of the regions. The protocols really sets out the expectations for the establishment, the management, the ongoing maintenance of your planting, both under the ERF as well as under the pilot. You should start to consider the location of the plantings and the type of planting. There are two types you may have seen. There's simple mixed native species planting, and there's a local vegetation community planting. The latter receives a higher benefit score in our evaluation of your project, and that's because it's more aimed at trying to emulate the vegetation community that was found in that area prior to clearing.

Dr Dean Ansell: You also want to be thinking about your management activities and the costs. How will you establish the planting if the tubestock order is exceeding and costs associated, as well as ongoing pest and weed management? And then secondly, the permanence period as well. So you'll be selecting from 25-year or 100-year permanence period. And that decision has implications for both your benefit scoring as well, with 100-year permanence period projects receiving a higher benefits for all else being equal, as well as impacting on your sequestration estimates. Lastly, I would suggest that you watch the 'How To Apply' video for a much more thorough explanation of what we're about to go through in the next few slides and read the application guide. All of that's available on the department's website.

Dr Dean Ansell: So we arrive at agestewart.com.au, and the first step there is we click on the 'Project Planning' tab. Make sure that you have signed in, hence registering in the previous step. And then we go down and we select the 'Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot' button. And that takes us through to the landing page for the pilot. You'll find here a quick overview of some key aspects of the program around the calculation of carbon credits, how the biodiversity payments are calculated and structured, how we select projects, and a quick recap on eligibility. And then when you're ready, you click on 'Plan A Project', and that takes us through to the main mapping page in the platform.

Dr Dean Ansell: The first thing to do here is you'll notice there are some data layers listed on the right view screen. We want to toggle on, or turn on that topmost layer because it's showing the areas of land that are likely ineligible based on their forest cover history. So that helps you optimise your project boundaries so that you're making the maximum area eligible. On the left-hand side, we also just need to quickly select the program. For this example, we're selecting a Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot. And then once done, we are ready to find our property planting areas. You can do that by using the search by address bar at the top. Or in the bottom right corner there is the plus and minus which will let you zoom in and out of the map, or just simply by scrolling with your mouse till you find your region and your property.

Dr Dean Ansell: Next step, you can submit... sorry, name your project, and I recommend you do this because you might end up preparing a number of applications either for this program or other programs. And so naming it will just help you quickly find it. I'll just call this "My Carbon Project", and then you're ready to start drawing your planting areas. We do that just by clicking on...

Dr Dean Ansell: Excuse me for a second. We do that just by clicking on the Fountain Pen icon in the top left corner of the map, which brings up the tools to start drawing the boundary around your planting area. You can very easily change those boundaries just by dragging these white markers. You can click the green tick when you're ready. You can delete that project area and start again. But when you click the green tick, you'll see that the total area, the estimated eligible area, and the estimated sequestration tonnes of CO2 is provided both through individual project areas and your project as a whole on the left hand side. We can easily add more planting areas just by, again, clicking the Fountain Pen icon and drawing another area. When you click the green tick again, you'll see that the project area information is updated on the left and your total project area has also updated here.

Dr Dean Ansell: Now, at this point, or at any point, you can save your application. I recommend that anyway, but it also means you can come back and have a think about it, get some advice if you like, come back and continue. You can also click 'Download' to download your map in KML format, and that will let you open that in something like Google Earth, which is available freely, again, to seek advice or to just be able to zoom in and do some more thinking around where you want to plant those areas. Again, when you're ready to proceed, we click 'Apply Now'. And that takes us to one of first main pages for the application. This is where we're just basically going to provide some personal information, name, contact details, property address, postal address, ABN, and that sort of information. We'll also here select the permanence period, the 25 or 100 years, and select ticks and boxes that just confirms eligibility.

Dr Dean Ansell: On the right, the map will show the location, those planting areas, throughout the application. At any stage, you can go back to 'Map' up in the top left corner and revise, draw additional areas. When you filled out that page, go to the main application page, and this is where you'll provide details of the current condition of the site, the planting type. Again, that's the simple mix planting or the local vegetation community planting, as well as details about proposed management activities and establishment method and the costs. We do that for each individual planting area. As you can see, this is circled planting area one, so that we know that we're working on that one. You will repeat that information for each planting area.

Dr Dean Ansell: Here's an example of providing information for planting area one on our site preparation. So will we undertake weed treatments? If so, are we using spot spray, using boom spray, or other? What's the area treated? How many treatments? And what's the total estimated cost? Likewise, for ongoing management, in this case pest control, how many hours of pest control are we proposing to undertake each year in the first three years? And what's the cost per hour? And then, likewise for the remaining contract period. So the questions are going to be around site preparation, soil preparation, the planting method. Is the tubestock order exceeding? Plant protection. Are we going to fence? Are we going to provide tree guards? There are recurrent management activities, be it weed, pest, or watering, as well as any freight, distance, and costs.

Dr Dean Ansell: That information is then feeding into the price model, which we'll see in a second. But on this final page is where we review the application and submit or optionally save and come back later, go back to the map and revise further. But it's providing here... and you'll see I've put some extremely low estimates in just to illustrate, but this is going to sum the establishment costs that you've provided in the previous step. We also have the option here of downloading a CSV file, which is basically like an Excel file or a basic spreadsheet, which will provide the details of estimated tonnes of CO2 sequestered over the 25 years split by project area and total. We can use that again if we wanted to seek some further advice.

Dr Dean Ansell: And importantly, at this point, we have the option of submitting a bid. It is completely optional, but the bidding step represents the opportunity for you to identify the payment amount that you'd be willing to accept to undertake the project. The way that this works is the price model generates a biodiversity payment offer which is taking into account all of your management costs and your expected revenue from the sale of carbon credits, and generates a payment offer that is meant to provide an efficient applicant with a reasonable rate of return. Alternatively, if you submit a bid price and it's lower than that payment offer, then it's the bid price that's used in evaluating your project. Again, it's totally optional. There is further information on how that process works.

Dr Dean Ansell: But when you're ready, a couple of final questions regarding the use of data, et cetera, and you're ready to submit. Now for the final slide. What happens from there? How do we select projects? As Ryan indicated, the projects are selected primarily using a benefit cost ratio system. We calculate the expected biodiversity benefit from your project and divide that by the cost, which is the biodiversity payment offer. The biodiversity benefit score reflects the likely change in regional biodiversity condition from your project. And the biodiversity payment offer, as I said, is generated from the price model that considers, on the one hand, the projected revenue from the sale of your credits, on the other, the cost of establishing and maintaining and reporting your project. If the bid is lower, then the bid is used in place of that payment offer.

Dr Dean Ansell: Finally, some questions in the chat, "how to increase your competitiveness?" We can do that by influencing the biodiversity benefit side of the equation and/or the price side of the equation. On the benefit side, you can select local vegetation community plantings over simple mixed plantings. You'll see the requirements for those in the management protocols. You can opt for a larger planting or smaller. You can situate your plantings closer to water courses and ribbon vegetation and associated with areas of threatened species habitat, threatened ecosystems. On the cost side, you can provide in-kind contribution to your project through labour or either subsidising the cost yourself. Remember to review the price guide in costing your application. And you can opt to submit a bid. Given time, I'll leave it there and hopefully I can pass back to you, David. Thank you.

David Pembroke: Thank you very much, Dr. Dean Ansell there from the ANU. Dean, there are some questions coming in for you. I don't know if we'll get through all of them today given the allocated time, but we will get through some of them. The first of them comes from Murray Kerr, and Murray asked, "Will someone give us some sort of indication today about the ongoing costs associated with committing to a program such as testing carbon?". What's involved in terms of ongoing costs?

Dr Dean Ansell: That's a fair question, and it's a difficult one to give a specific answer on because the cost varies so significantly depending on details of the project. What I could suggest there is that you take a look through the pricing guide. That will give you an indication of per hectare values that you can then use to match to your planned project. Again, also, I would check out the case studies for some worked examples. That would be a good reflection of a typical project.

David Pembroke: Alright. So the next question to you, Dr. Ansell, is, "Does the project also allow for the site to be a stewardship site eligible for selling BCT offset credits?".

Dr Dean Ansell: Typically, there are some specific criteria around excluding any management activities that you are already funded to under another program. So that's pretty clear in the program guidelines. Again, I would suggest that you review that section and contact the department regarding your particular circumstance. But also in relation to offset, generally that's going to be either a site that's established, remnant vegetation, or potentially revegetation. And both of those would be largely ineligible for planting under this program.

David Pembroke: Alright. The next question from Craig Turner, "Having read the guidelines, it appears there must be some under story. Does this program preclude agroforestry utilising local appropriate species?".

Dr Dean Ansell: There are requirements and conditions around the use harvesting of woody plants from planting areas, and they are spelled out in the planting protocols. There are requirements both throughout ERF and around the pilot. Again, I would check for your particular circumstance, and if there is still a question on that to get in touch with the department.

David Pembroke: Okay. To the next question, and this time from Laurel McGinty, and Laurel asks, "As part of the application process, some applicants are finding that some of their planting area is identified as 'likely ineligible' in the indicative mapping. As this is only indicative, if farmers do not concur with this finding, is there a process by which they can follow up on this further?".

Dr Dean Ansell: Might throw to the regulator to address that question if someone's online.

David Pembroke: Okay, just at the moment we don't have that answer, but what we will do is get an answer in the future for that one. And as we said, we're going to be updating a lot of the Q&A on the website, so we will be sure to find an answer for that. So, Laurel McGinty, if you would like to check back to the website in a few days' time, I'm sure there will be a answer for that particular question. Again, just coming to a couple of final questions for you, Dr. Ansell, and just saying that there will also be the opportunity for these questions to be answered to go up onto the website. But the question to you is, "Do we need to know... ". Alex Diamond asks, I should say, "Do we need to know what species we are going to plant before applying for the grant?".

Dr Dean Ansell: That's a good question, and the answer is no in the sense that you don't need to identify the species in your application. We do provide tools that allow you to determine the species that would have been present as part of the community on that site. And I would encourage you to do so beforehand because that may impact on the costings for your plantings. So in short, you don't need to provide the details, but I recommend that you do that research beforehand, and there are tools available on the site.

David Pembroke: Thank you very much. The next question from Warrick Ragg, and Warrick asks, "Can I please clarify whether the estimates of carbon... ". Excuse me. "...whether the estimates of carbon per hectare is annual or over the life of the project, presumably 25 years?".

Dr Dean Ansell: That's correct. It's over the 25 years, but the CSB file that I pointed to as part of the application will allow you to see that accumulated sequestration over that life. So you can see that broken up over the project period.

David Pembroke: Alright, well, Dr. Ansell, thank you so much for your contribution today. There are further questions that have been made into the Q&A box, and the department will be working with the panellists to be able to get appropriate answers for you ahead of that closing date of March the 3rd for the application. So, the questions will be answered in plenty of time to be incorporated into your application. But Dr. Dean Ansell from the ANU, thank you so much for your contribution to today's webinar.

David Pembroke: Our next guest is Elyse Riethmuller, who is the CEO of the Fitzroy Basin Association in Queensland, which is one of the six eligible Agriculture Stewardship Pilot regions. The National Resource Management organisations are important partners in providing advice to farmers about planting and management protocols that are relevant to local audiences. Elyse, welcome to the program.

Elyse Riethmuller: Thanks, David. You've just about done my presentation for me. Look, I just wanted to spend a couple of minutes, I only have one slide deliberately, but I'll spend a couple of minutes just introducing the Natural Resource Management organisations.

Elyse Riethmuller: I am here in Central Queensland, but there are a range of organisations, we're a network of 54 across all of Australia. We're part of that collaboration with the department and ANU on helping people look at whether this kind of program is something for them. So, whilst there are different governing structures of those NRMs, we all have a common goal. We work very closely with our industry, government, research, and our local communities, and it's all about productive, profitable, and long-term sustainability for our landscapes and environmental natural assets.

Elyse Riethmuller: Here in the Fitzroy, that kind of work can be anything from supporting our local community volunteers in monitoring turtle hatchlings along our coastal through to very large-scale multimillion-dollar stream bank stabilisation projects. But in the relevance of this program, a lot of our work and a lot of the work of most of NRMs across Australia is all about working with our land managers. And it's about a collaborative learning process of what is land management practises that can be productive and sustainable into the future.

Elyse Riethmuller: That brings me to the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot and what we can bring to people that are interested in participating. A lot of that is around understanding the types of vegetation and what's involved. In the Fitzroy, we've had a number of projects looking at how do you get trees established in this landscape, and what's involved? So we can work with individuals on designing their projects so they can actually understand what their project might look like in the short term through to the 25, or if they want to go to the 100-year cycle what that might look like. We also have been doing a lot of work with local suppliers so that you can source those tubestock and native seeds so you can actually achieve that local providence or local species planting in your landscape. Some of the work can be actually, if we're invited, going out to your place and actually exploring where you'd like to do a project like this and what it might look like with you.

Elyse Riethmuller: We're doing that work for free because the department have partnered with us and are providing that support. That's probably the main ones, David, without going into detail. And I thought it might be good to answer a few questions. I have seen a few skipping through, or otherwise there might be more for Dean if he needs more time.

David Pembroke: Look, yeah, there are some questions for you, Elyse. Just in terms of those contacts, and thank you for putting them up there, but how do you find out which region that you're in? Where are the boundaries, and how do people know what's in and what's out in terms of their Natural Resource Management region?

Elyse Riethmuller: If you're on that edge of the boundaries, you'll probably know roughly where you are. But if you don't, by all means ring the closest NRM organisation and talk to them. One of the best things we can do is actually keep connecting with landholders. So, you can go through a whole mapping exercise or just pick up the phone or send a quick email.

David Pembroke: Okay. Then just in terms of that contact information, we did have the screen up there before, they're the appropriate contacts for those particular areas?

Elyse Riethmuller: Yes, they are. Definitely. We've been working with the team at ANU and the department for the last couple of months now in getting across the program and making sure that we each in each of those NRMs have got people that are upskilled that can support land managers through this work.

David Pembroke: Okay. Well, we have a question now from Laurel McGinnity, and Laurel asks, "Can farmers undertake planting in conjunction with a Natural Resource Management south or other not-for-profit organisation?".

Elyse Riethmuller: Look, I don't know whether that's an easy one to answer and there might be some restrictions from the departmental perspective, but certainly from a partnership with your local NRM group, explore that as part of the project.

David Pembroke: Ryan, I might just throw to you on that for clarification from the department.

Ryan Wilson:

Sure. I mean the application for the program is through the department, so ultimately a farmer is applying to be part of the program through the department. We are partnering with NRMs to make sure that's locally well-designed to provide a source of advice that people they can pick up the phone to. They're not obliged to use that advice, but certainly that's part of how we've set up the program to work with those organisations. But the actual official application is really with the department.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question for you, Elyse, is, "Will my local NRM help me identify other opportunities if I'm not eligible for Carbon + Biodiversity?".

Elyse Riethmuller: Absolutely. There are lots of different programs and opportunities and all of NRMs across Australia work day to day with our land managers. So, we don't always know what everyone is interested in doing, and that really helps us to then feed that information into the next programs and the next design. But yeah, most of NRMs have got multiple different programs going where there's always opportunities to work together for that sustainable outcome.

David Pembroke: What is your advice, though, in terms of working with NRMs? What's the best way to stay involved? Are there communities that people can get involved in? Are there particular email subscription lists? Are there events that they can attend? What's the best way that farmers who've got interest in this can build that collaborative partnership with the NRM in their local area?

Elyse Riethmuller: Look, David, we're all time poor, aren't we? And that's why I mentioned even email and those kind of things because often, if you're anything like me, the last time you think about something is at 10 o'clock at night and no one is going to be in the office to answer that call. But we do follow up on those emails. All of NRMs have a range of field days, workshops, email, newsletter updates, and everyone is really keen, even in COVID times, to be out talking with people, obviously in a COVID-safe way.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question for you, Elyse, is, "Will the NRMs be able to help me with the application itself and navigating the online portal?".

Elyse Riethmuller: Absolutely. If that's one of the best things we can do to help, then yes, definitely we can do that.

David Pembroke: I know you can't speak on behalf of everybody because you only are in charge of the Fitzroy Basin there in Queensland, but what's your preferred method for people to be able to reach out to you for assistance to be able to make the application and get through the online portal?

Elyse Riethmuller: Thankfully, one of the benefits of COVID is we've all become a lot more used to this technology, and even in our rural areas where internet can be difficult at times, you can still share a screen. So if we can't get together face to face, which is always the better option because you can understand, then you can look at the property, you can explore some of the areas that might have the additional benefits that Dean was talking about in his process and his presentation. So it might be adjacent to some remnant vegetation or along a waterway. But if you can't get out and about, then we can do sharing screens, working things through. The beauty of the platform is you can save that application and go back and review it.

David Pembroke: Okay. The next question for you, Elyse, is, "What species should I plant and where can I get seed supply for my local region? What species should I plant? And where can I get seed supply for my local region?".

Elyse Riethmuller: I'm going to give the political answer of that depends. And it really does. So that's one of the beauties that your local NRM can provide is an understanding of what your vegetation types may have been and what you're going to get the best biodiversity outcome for. And then from there, we've all got our networks of people that either collect seed or grow out seed or can supply seed. I think there was another question earlier on in the process about planting contractors. The NRMs will also have a good network of people that can undertake that work so that we won't do the quoting for you or for them, but we will certainly be able to put you in touch with people that you can connect and seek a quote on that planting.

David Pembroke: Just as a matter of interest, in your particular area, are there adequate supplies of seeds?

Elyse Riethmuller: We have, either fortuitously or I had a very good eightball to actually work this out, but we have been growing our network of volunteers that have been collecting seeds and propagating our native species. We've also got some partnership projects on establishing local nurseries of native plants so that we have that capacity to supply when the demand meets.

David Pembroke: And do you know if other NRMs that have been nominated this time round for round 2, do you know if they're in the same situation as you?

Elyse Riethmuller: No. Look, I don't know, but Ryan may have better understanding.

David Pembroke: Okay. No, Ryan's shaking his head. But again, that's the conversations that are being encouraged for the applicants, is really to reach out to your local NRM and have those conversations and have those conversations early. Because again, further reminder, March the 3rd is the closing date, March the 3rd this year. So you want to be really getting on the phone now. Any final words of wisdom from you, Elyse, or encouragement to potential applicants? We have well over 100 people on the line today listening for advice.

Elyse Riethmuller: I know you are reiterating March the 3rd, but it is only the application stage and you don't have to have all of the detail worked out. We're working in this collaboration beyond March the 3rd, so we're not just in the application stage, and we're here for the long haul. FBAs been around for 23 years now, and a lot of the other NRMs have been around for a long time. Reach out because even if you don't participate in this pilot, there are other opportunities.

David Pembroke: Elyse Riethmuller from the Fitzroy Basin Association, thank you so much for your contribution to today's program. Much appreciated. And on behalf of the department, thank you for giving up your time today.

David Pembroke: To our fourth and final presenter today, and that's Alex Cummins from the Clean Energy Regulator. Alex will take you through the requirements for successful participants under the Emissions Reduction fund and explain how to register under the Emissions Reduction Fund and what help is available to you along the way. Alex, welcome to today's webinar.

Alex Cummins: Thanks, David. All right, so as previously noted, Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot participants are required to register with the Emissions Reduction Fund under the environmental plantings method. The ERF is a voluntary scheme administered by the Australian Government Clean Energy Regulator, that supports investment in carbon abatement projects across all sectors of the Australian economy. In addition to carbon abatement, many ERF projects... sorry... provide important environmental, economic, social, and cultural co-benefits, such as in this case biodiversity. The environmental plantings methods sets out the detailed rules for running a mixed species environmental plantings project and calculating the carbon abatement. The purpose is to establish new and permanent forest cover.

Alex Cummins: Recently, the Clean Energy Regulator has made it easier for farmers and landholders to directly participate in the ERF. Our new environmental plantings pilot has been designed and developed to be a streamlined pathway for eligible participants, including those participating in the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot. The pilot removes the cost of project audits, simplifies project registration and crediting processes, and introduces an easier way to sell Australian carbon credit units, also known as ACCUs, to the Australian government.

Alex Cummins: There are three core components of the pilot. The first is the streamlined processing component. What this means is that we've introduced a new simplified registration form. We've also introduced new simplified reporting and crediting processes, and we've introduced comprehensive guidance and ongoing support. A second component is the alternative assurance component. This means that pilot projects will be eligible for reduced order obligations under new alternative assurance arrangements. The third component then is the introduction of a fixed price purchasing desk. This is where participants can sell ACCUs to the Australian government at a fixed price offered by the Clean Energy Regulator. This is the optional alternative to the ERF auction process and has been designed to reduce price uncertainty as well as the associated administrative barriers.

Alex Cummins: The following are just some core ERF scheme requirements to be aware of before beginning your ERF project registration application. Now, please note, we do have more information on each of these in the guidance that I'll provide at the end. Firstly, the project proponent is the person or entity responsible for carrying out an ERF project, is issued ACCUs generated by the project, and has a legal relationship with the Clean Energy Regulator. A project can have multiple project proponents with one appointed as the nominee authorised to act on behalf of the project. Each project proponent must undergo a fit and proper person assessment. Please note, this does include completing an Australian Federal Police National Police Check.

Alex Cummins: For legal right and eligible interest holder consent, now it's important to note that you must have the legal right to carry out project activities on the land nominated as the project area, as well as to receive ACCUs from these activities. In the instance that you do not have the exclusive legal right or another person or entity has an eligible interest in the land, then you will need to obtain the relevant consents. You will also need to obtain all relevant planning or environmental approvals to carry out your project activity. It's important to note that ERF project registration does not replace or include relevant local, state, or federal approvals.

Alex Cummins: It's also important to note that all carbon abatement generated and credited must be new and additional, that is, it is otherwise unlikely to occur in the absence of the ERF scheme. For example, this means that there are certain activities, such as site preparation and planting, that are not permitted to commence until after the project has been registered. At the time of project registration, you'll be required to nominate a 25-year or 100-year permanence period. This period begins when your project is first issued ACCUs. In addition, you'll be required to submit a permanence plan with your project registration application that outlines the steps that you will take to ensure that the carbon is stored in your project area.

Alex Cummins: So what we have on the screen here is just a diagram, basically what this all kind of looks like in practice. So this is what we consider to be a life cycle of an environmental plantings pilot project. Step one is just to review the eligibility criteria and prepare for registration. Step two is to apply to register your project by the client portal. Step three is to establish the planting areas. Step four, then, is to report on those planting areas. Now, instead of the farmer or a landholder incurring the cost of scheduled audits, under alternative assurance arrangements, the Clean Energy Regulator will use geospatial tools to confirm that the planting activity has happened, verify that abatement is being achieved, and monitor for any disturbances. The Clean Energy Regulator will also assist with project mapping and modelling annually to make it easier to report on carbon abatement and to earn ACCUs.

Alex Cummins: So step five, when you report on your project, you can earn one ACCU for each tonne of CO2 equivalent stored by the project. You then have two options. You can either hold on to those ACCUs and continue to maintain, monitor, and report on the project, or you can sell the ACCUs. You can sell your ACCUs to the Australian government either via participating in an ERF auction or for a fixed price offered by the Clean Energy Regulator using the fixed price purchasing desk. Alternatively, of course, you may also choose to sell your ACCUs to private buyers in the secondary market. The final step then is that you're required to maintain forest cover and preserve the carbon stored in the project for the duration of the nominated permanence period.

Alex Cummins: So how to register a pilot project. The first step is to create a client portal account in order to access the online registration form. The next step is to select the Environmental Plantings Pilot Registration form, which is shown here. Before you enter your project details, you'll be asked to confirm that you meet the eligibility criteria and wish to opt into alternative assurance arrangements. As you can complete the form, you'll be required to provide information about each project participant. This client enrollment information must be completed for each project proponent. The next section will be to enter details about the project. And you'll ask a series of questions that will be assessed against the requirements of the environmental plantings method. Once the form is completed, you'll be prompted to sign a declaration and submit the application for assessment. And it's important to note that you may want to allow it to 90 days.

Alex Cummins: There are several documents that are likely to be required at the time of project registration. The first is your need to have 100 points of ID for your client enrollment information, and this is the case for each and every project proponent. Please note as well that these documents must be scanned, certified true copies of the original. You'll also need your Police Check form. You will need evidence of legal rights. For example, that might be a copy of the land title. You will need a single geospatial map file of the project area boundary. You will need a copy of your permanence plan. And please note, we do have a template available to download online to help with this step. And then, of course, if applicable, you'll need to provide any relevant consents and approvals if required.

Alex Cummins: So, offering comprehensive guidance and ongoing support is a key aspect of this streamlined pathway. The Land and Forest assessment team and the Clean Energy Regulator will be available to assist you throughout the registration application process and will be responsible for providing ongoing support with the reporting and crediting processes as well. For those participating in the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot, we are also working closely with a dedicated support, Officer Allison, who's on secondment from the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, in order to assist participants through the registration process.

Alex Cummins: For more information on the Environmental Plantings Pilot, visit the Environmental Plantings Pilot webpage on the Clean Energy website. This webpage includes a fact sheet, a comprehensive information pack that covers both information about the ERF scheme as well as details of the pilot. And there is also a step-by-step how-to guide for registration applications and templates to assist with your application. Alternatively, of course too, if you have any specific questions about your circumstances or about your project area, you can also contact the Land and Forest assessment team via the contact details provided here. Thank you.

David Pembroke: Alex Cummins from the Clean Energy Regulator. Thank you very much. And there are questions for you, Alex. The first of those comes from Murray Kerr, and Murray asks, "In regards to asking permission for any interested parties, does this mean if you have obtained financing using your property as security that the bank has to provide permission for you to engage in the project?".

Alex Cummins: Yes, so quite possibly. In the case that there is a mortgage on the land where the project area has been nominated, then a bank or a financial institution may qualify as an eligible interest holder, in which case you would need to obtain eligible interest holder consent.

David Pembroke: Excellent. Okay. Now the next question is, "What are the consequences to landholder/project owner if a bushfire was to go through the area registered under the project?".

Alex Cummins: In the case of a disturbance, especially a natural disturbance like a bushfire occurs, what you would be required to do is to notify the Clean Energy Regulator of the disturbance and also of what impact that it's had on the carbon estimation area. And it would depend on the severity of that impact as well. Under the environmental planting method, it may be as simple as infield planting those areas, or it also might be based around whether or not the project has been credited and what parts of those areas and carbon stores have been credited, that sort of thing. But the Clean energy Regulator does take into account the threat of natural disturbance, and that is why there is a 5% risk of reversal buffer that is applied to the ACCUs that are issued for any project area as well.

David Pembroke: Okay. Thank you very much for that answer. The next question to you, Alex, is, "When could I expect to be issued ACCUs for my project?".

Alex Cummins: With this type of project, the ACCUs can be issued any time within the crediting period. The crediting period is a 25-year timeframe. So over that 25 years, you can apply to be credited for the carbon stored in your project. What we are going to encourage though, is that you partake in regular reporting and crediting processes to make it easier to be issued ACCUs, and this is something that the Clean Energy Regulator will be helping with. And then I'll also just note, too, that with this type of method, this is what we consider to be a front-loaded method, so you would expect to see most of the carbon abatement occurring in the first half of that crediting period.

David Pembroke: Okay. So, to the next question for you, Alex, "Will successful Carbon + Biodiversity applicants also be eligible to participate in the Clean Energy Regulator's Environmental Plantings Pilot?"

Alex Cummins: Yes. Yes. The Clean Energy Regulator's pilot has been designed and developed to align with the Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot. And we would encourage Carbon + Biodiversity Pilot participants to apply by this streamlined pathway to make it easier to access the benefits of the ERF.

David Pembroke: All right. Well, Alex, thank you so much for your time today and for your presentation and your answers to the questions from the many people who have been registered and listening to today's webinar. So thank you on behalf of the department to the Clean Energy Regulator for your participation today.

David Pembroke: So Ryan, if I might just jump back to you. And just a reminder to people who have asked questions, the answers will be updated on the Q&A on the website, so we will get to those answers. We are running a little bit short of time, but the department will be getting those answers to you in the coming days and weeks ahead of the March 3rd application. But Ryan, just as a bit of a summary to you, the high points from today's presentations that we've had.

Ryan Wilson: Yeah. I think probably what I would focus on really because we're really trying to help people understand the scheme and to apply is to, I guess, reassure them that that probably seems like quite a lot that we've just gone through, it does have some complexities, but just to remember that you do this in a sequence. The first thing is really about reviewing those key documents, going onto the portal, the agsteward portal. You can map out your project, costing your project, lodge that for an application. Like Elyse said, you don't have to have every rhyme and verse. You need to do a certain amount of thinking about it, but you don't have to spend endless weeks and months with every detail. Put in the application for those projects that are competitive, we make an offer, and there's an offer of that $10,000 payment to help people with some advice to go that next step and do that full proper legal looking at things or any other financial advice or whatever that they might need.

Ryan Wilson: If people decide to do that, they can then commence that process of registering with the Emissions Reduction Fund as Alex just went through that whole process there. So there is a bit of a sequence there. You can then be looking at trying to get a buyer through the trading platform and working out some of the details of implementation like when can you actually get an order for seedlings in and things like that. Just to reassure people, there is a bit of a sequence there. We're all available through that process to help get you in touch with the right people through whether it's NRMs or ourselves or the Clean Energy Regulator. I guess, yeah, that was probably my key thing to emphasise with everyone. This doesn't have to be done all in a couple of weeks, there is a bit of a sequence you can go through using all these tools that we've mapped out.

David Pembroke: Alright. Well, Ryan, thank you so much. And a very big thank you once again to you the audience for coming along today. On behalf of the department, can I thank you once again for giving up your time and your attention and your participation? Best of luck with those applications. To our panellists today, Ryan Wilson, Dr. Dean Ansell, Elyse Riethmuller, and Alex Cummins from the Clean Energy Regulator, a big thanks to you.

David Pembroke: Again, note that for more information you can go to the department's website at www.awe.gov.au, and any inquiries can be directed towards agstewardship@awe.gov.au. So if you do have a specific question you'd like to ask, agstewardship@awe.gov.au, or the hotline, 1-800-329-055. That's 1-800-329-055. A big thanks to all of you, both the presenters and to the audience for your participation today in the Carbon + Biodiversity Round 2 webinar. Best of luck with those applications. My name's David Pembroke. Thanks very much for joining me.

[Webinar ends]