

**Friday, 22 June, 2001**

## **Dollars for Farm Bush Protection Trial — Minister**

The Bracks Government announced today that, under a new trial starting soon, farmers could be paid to help protect the one million hectares of native vegetation on private land.

The announcement of the three-year trial applying to landholders in the North East and North Central of Victoria was made by the Minister for Environment and Conservation, Sherryl Garbutt, and the Minister for Agriculture, Keith Hamilton.

"The BushTender Trial encourages participating landholders to provide services which improve the quality and extent of native vegetation on their land, in return for payment," Ms Garbutt said.

Ms Garbutt said it was important to look at ways to protect Victoria's native vegetation as research was highlighting the critical role native vegetation played in the health of catchments.

"There are over a million hectares of native vegetation on private land in Victoria and its protection is vital for salinity control, water quality, land protection and flora and fauna habitat," Ms Garbutt said.

Mr Hamilton said the benefits to farmers and sustainable primary production could be enormous if the trial was successful.

"This trial will assist farmers to do the right thing on their own property - whether that's locking up the back paddock or protecting remnant vegetation - and, in turn, this would impact on the sustainability of their production," Mr Hamilton said.

The trial will commence shortly in the north central region between Bendigo and Ballarat and in the north east between Wangaratta and Wodonga.

BushTender offers landholders the opportunity to receive payment for entering into an agreement to provide management services, which improve the quality or extent of native vegetation on their land. The agreements in the trial would run for three years.

"BushTender has a unique approach, enabling landholders to establish their own price for the management services they are prepared to offer to improve their native vegetation," Ms Garbutt said.

The price would form the basis for a bid, which would be compared with the bids from all other landholders participating in the trial. Successful bids would be those which offer the best value for money to the community.

"Successful landholders would receive periodic payments for their services under a management agreement signed with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE)," Ms Garbutt said.

Mr Hamilton said that all bids would be assessed objectively on the basis of the current conservation value of the site, the amount of service offered, and the cost involved.

"BushTender is not an open cheque book, but a practical way to identify the most effective management services offered by landholders which provide the best value for the available taxpayers' money," Mr Hamilton said.

"Only actions by the landholder that are over and above those required by current responsibilities under existing arrangements and legislation will be eligible for payment."

Ms Garbutt stressed that the trial would be subject to a systematic evaluation focussed on:

- the acceptability to landholders of management agreement with payments;
- the application of objective methods for bid assessment;
- the potential for the approach to achieve the Government's native vegetation objectives; and,
- the use of a tender process as a means of identifying best value for money when investing taxpayers' money

"The BushTender trial fulfils a commitment made by the Bracks Government in its native vegetation policy and I'd encourage landholders in the trial areas to participate," Ms Garbutt said.

A series of public information sessions will be held in the trial areas over the next month to ensure landholders have the best possible opportunity to understand the BushTender process, and how they can participate.

**For further inquiries about the BushTender Trial or information seminars call the NRE Customer Service Centre on 136 186**

For general information about NRE please contact:

NRE Customer Service Centre

Phone: 136 186

E-mail: [customer.service@nre.vic.gov.au](mailto:customer.service@nre.vic.gov.au)

Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victoria, Australia

© The State of Victoria, Department of Natural Resources and Environment, 2001