

Guide to completing a Project MERI Plan (Caring for our Country and Biodiversity Fund)

This document intends to assist you in the completion of your Project MERI Plan. The following sections under blue headings in this document provide advice for completing the corresponding sections in the Project MERI Plan template. We recommend that you have your Funding Agreement, application details and any other existing documents relating to your planned program of works at hand, so that you can easily refer to this relevant information.

Capitalised terms not otherwise defined in this document are as defined in the relevant Caring for our Country or Biodiversity Fund, Agreement.

Once completed and accepted by the department, you will need to review and update your Project MERI plan on an annual basis (at a minimum). The Project MERI Plan is a living document that should be used to help manage the project and should be updated as new challenges and/or opportunities over the life of the Project emerge. The department may require the MERI plans to be resubmitted for review and approval.

If you require any further assistance in the development of your Project MERI Plan, contact your regional departmental representative, or departmental contract contact officer. Contact details can be found at <http://www.nrm.gov.au/contact/officers.html> or you can email MERI@environment.gov.au.

The Department is committed to continuous improvement of our processes and documents; if you think this guide can be improved please email your suggestions to MERI@environment.gov.au.

Project Information and Budget

1.1 PROJECT INFORMATION

Project Details

Add your project information. This should be the same as detailed in the Funding Agreement.

Project Reference

The Department will provide the Project Reference ID for the project.

Biodiversity Fund Only - The Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI)

Please state whether the Department requires your Project to be recorded on the Register of Offsets Projects under the CFI administered by the Department of Innovation Industry Climate Change Science Research and Tertiary Education, and if not, whether you intend to have your project recorded in any event.

To have your project recorded on the Register of Offsets Projects a number of requirements must be fulfilled. If the Department requires your project to be recorded, it must be recorded on the Register of Offsets Projects within 12 months of the Commencement Date of your project.

For information on how to record your project on the Register of Offsets Projects, please visit:

- www.climatechange.gov.au/cfi
 - www.cleanenergyregulator.gov.au
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Project Detail

2.1

This section of your Project MERI Plan should detail the specific activities, outputs and outcomes that the project intends to deliver. These should be consistent with those detailed through the application process; however, you may be required to provide more information through the MERI template. This section is about explaining what the project is aiming to achieve and how it will do this.

Project Location – No detail needed here. The department will request that you provide your project location information via the online mapping and reporting tool.

Project Outcomes – Project Outcomes are the desired (or actual) results, or impacts of having undertaken the project. Project Outcomes are usually the medium to longer-term outcomes of delivering the project. A project should have at least one clear and well-defined outcome and should be expressed succinctly and clearly – the criteria of: ‘Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic and Time bound’ (SMART) should be reflected in the Project Outcome statement as much as possible. Project Outcomes should also align with broader Program (Caring for our Country or Biodiversity Fund) Outcomes / Objectives. Project Outcomes are generally the medium to longer-term outcomes of having delivered the project, and need to be monitored and evaluated during the life of the project Funding Agreement. Example Project Outcomes:

- *Enhanced Ecological Character of the [name of] Ramsar site by 2018.*
- *Increased awareness within the community regarding the impact of the [name of] weed on the yellow box woodland Ecological Community by 2015.*
- *Engagement of the Indigenous community in the planning and restoration of 20 kms of high value riparian vegetation by 2015.*

Project Description – Provide a succinct statement about the Project, as if you were describing it to a friend or community member who is unfamiliar with the project.

Project Outputs, Assumptions and Monitoring

(Primary) Investment Theme: Select the investment theme/priority that your project most directly aligns with. You may have done this as part your application. The investment theme chosen will be the investment theme/priority that this project will be linked with for basic reporting purposes.

Project Outputs: Project Outputs are the key (NRM related) actions delivered by the project. Project Outputs are largely within the direct influence of the project team and achieve the Project Outcomes. It is critical that Project Outputs are expressed as SMART statements, to the greatest extent possible. Reporting on delivery of Project Outputs will be required at every reporting period. In addition, by monitoring the impact (or results) of the Project Output, progress towards the Project Outcome may become apparent. Example Project Outputs:

- *Clear 800 ha of 6 invasive flora species by 2015*
- *Undertake twice annual (six in total) community awareness ‘on country’ field trips.*
- *Replant 500 ha with mixed native species by 2016*
- *Construct a ‘soft’ urban drainage and wetland system by 2018*

Delivery Mechanisms, assumptions and rationale: Please include details of the key method(s) or approaches that you will use to deliver the Project Output (i.e. the delivery mechanisms) and describe the reason why the method and approach has been chosen (i.e. the rationale). Please also include the assumptions that are associated with the Project Output and its planned success. By documenting the

assumptions, the project team can ensure a shared understanding about them is established (i.e. that the project is proceeding based on shared assumptions). Identification of assumptions may also help identify risk, and risk management strategies for the project. Identifying assumptions will also highlight factors that are within reasonable control of the project and those that are not – this may help inform the development of the Risk Plan. Example assumptions and rationale:

- *Project is proceeding on the assumption that the proposed weed eradication (multi-year treatment) method is appropriate and effective for the targeted weed species. There is evidence (ref) to support this assumption and so the project team is comfortable with this assumption.*
- *Project is proceeding based on assumption that reduction of pest species will be sufficient to enable better reproduction outcomes for protected species. There is evidence (ref) that suggest that target pest species needs to be reduced to a density of X per hectare, and so the project will aim to achieve this threshold reduction. The method used is also consistent with the relevant threat abatement plan*
- *Project is proceeding on the basis that the community has an interest in engaging in NRM activities, and that the project will attract the volunteers needed. This is an unknown assumption and so risk management strategies will be identified.*

Monitoring Impact

This column is about explaining how you will monitor the impact of the Project Outputs. Monitoring the impact of the Project Output (i.e. how the Project Output has lead to change in environmental, or institutional capacity, for example) should contribute evidence to evaluating how the project is progressing towards the Project Outcome. Monitoring approaches may involve simple photo-point monitoring, transect monitoring, surveys and questionnaires. Because project impact or condition change can take years or even decades to become apparent, proponents should think about indicators of change that can be monitored within the project lifespan, as well as monitoring that you have the capacity to continue undertaking after the end of the project. Where the project is part of a longer-term program and longer term monitoring associated with the program exists, this should be noted. Where the project intends to continue monitoring beyond the timeframe of the Funding Agreement should also be noted.

Biodiversity Fund only – Ecological Condition Monitoring Requirement

The Biodiversity Fund requires all projects using this Project MERI Plan to undertake some form of vegetation condition monitoring. This data will be combined with other information to assist the Biodiversity Fund to report on its targeted priorities. You are able to monitor the project using one of the approved methodologies on the Biodiversity Fund website including the Biodiversity Fund Ecological monitoring guide, which has been developed by the department. If you have any issues or questions with regard to the ecological condition monitoring requirement, please contact the department. Methodology details can be found on the Biodiversity Fund Website

Example monitoring statements include:

- *Ecological monitoring will be undertaken as per the Biodiversity Fund Ecological Monitoring guide. Transects and plots will be established in the project area to determine changes in species composition/diversity.*
- *Frequent monitoring and mapping of control sites for regrowth of weeds, regeneration of natives will enable the early detection and control of weed regrowth and the improvement of control techniques through the assessment of on-ground response to control measures.*
- *The project is part of a broader regional NRM program. This NRM program has a long term monitoring strategy to monitor condition change and map connectivity in the region. Monitoring of this project site will be included picked up in the long term monitoring Program.*

Activity schedule

Project Output (to be delivered a reporting period)

Include the quantity of the Total Project Output (as detailed in the Total Project Output column above) to be delivered in the annual period. For example, the project may be deliver 100 hectares of revegetation. In the first year, the project may plan to deliver the first 50 hectares only, with the remaining delivered in second year.

Key Activities

Each project is broken down into stages representing the six-monthly reporting periods. In this section you should list all the key activities you expect to undertake in the relevant stage. A key activity is one that is important for the project to deliver to successfully achieve the Project Output. If a key activity was not delivered, it may compromise the success and / or quality of the project. For example, a project activity may be to:

- *Establish weed map of project site*
- *Develop training material in preparation of workshop*
- *Undertake weed removal on project site*
- *Establish baseline pest density*
- *Develop Annual Steering Committee meeting*
- *Develop a project pamphlet for community*

Annual Budget

Include the annual (cash) budget excluding GST. Include detail of any non-Australian Government cash contributions that are associated with the corresponding activities and Project Outputs for that year.

Evaluation and Improvement

Evaluations provide an opportunity for the overall project's progress to be considered, including focused consideration of specific aspects of the project. This section of the MERI plan is designed to ensure that the Project Team:

- has given thought to the type of evaluation questions that should be asked of the project
- has appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure the evaluations are considered and addressed in a timely manner; and
- will act on information coming from evaluations, and communicate the information to the project team and other relevant stakeholders.

The MERI Strategy and the MERI templates provide some guidance on the types of evaluation questions that project teams should consider. However there is flexibility in how the project will be evaluated, and the types of questions it thinks would be useful to address throughout and on completion of the project. Details of the evaluation questions and how they will be answered should be provided in the table. Example evaluation questions might include:

- *Is the Project delivering the project outputs as planned? (effectiveness)*
- *Have applied methods been effective? Are there aspects that would be done differently? (effectiveness)*

- *How has the project impacted on the community, and helped build Indigenous capacity for NRM? (impact)*
- *Is the project being delivered on Budget? What aspects of the project would be done differently next time to cut costs while still delivering achievements? (efficiency)*
- *To what extent did the project deliver against the needs of key stakeholders? Were the size, scale and approach taken appropriate?*

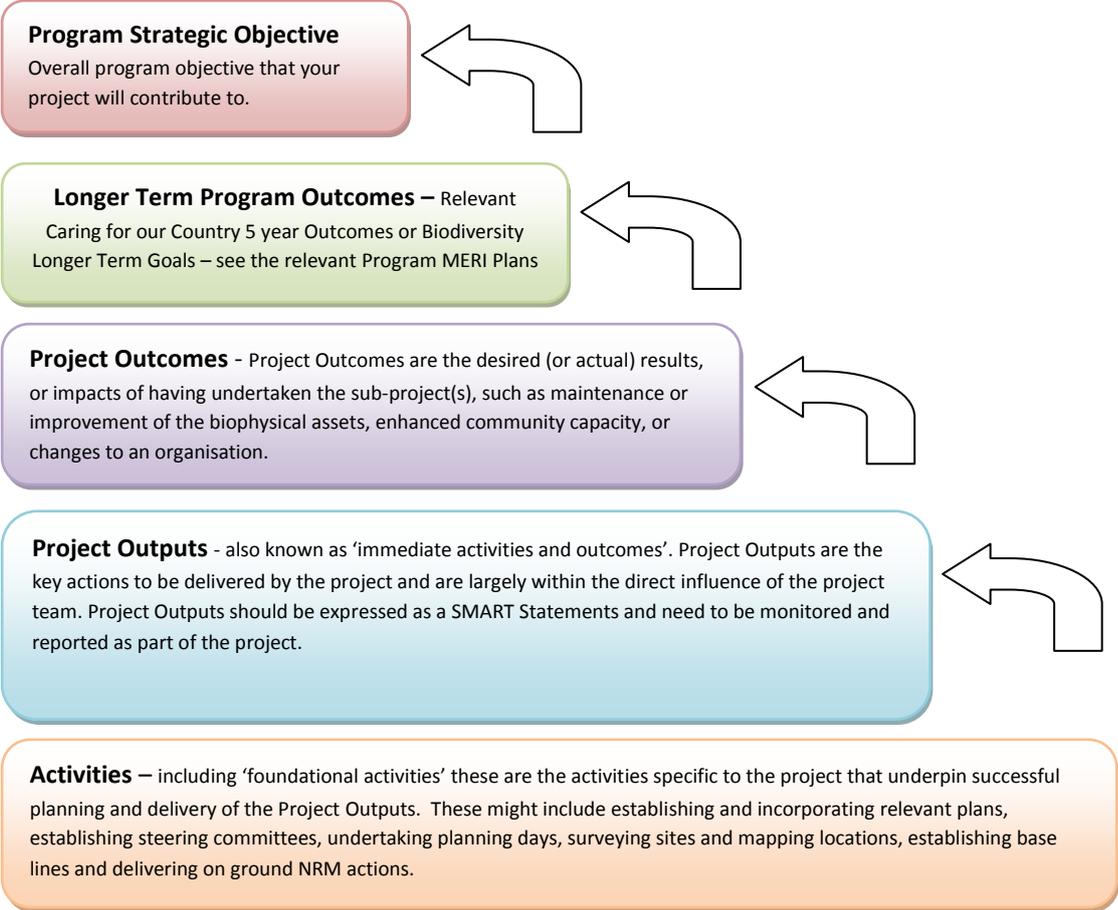
Example activities to ensure the project evaluation questions are answered might include:

- *Participatory review of community impact undertaken in second year.*
- *Expert review of ecological impact, drawing on monitoring data.*
- *Self-assessment of methods used and lessons learned, written up in annual report.*
- *Steering committee updates of progress, with recommendations taken for project modification on quarterly basis.*

Evaluation approaches and activities identified should be reflected in the Activity Schedule.

Attachment - Program Logic

Developing a project logic can be a useful way to depict the detail of a project and the relationships or linkages between project activities, outputs and outcomes. A program logic can also be a useful communications tool for the project – neatly and visually presenting the important aspects of a project on a single page. To assist in developing a Program Logic you may wish to refer to the Developing and Using Program Logic in Natural Resource Management – user guide, available on the MERI page of the NRM website. The diagram below depicts the basis structure and levels of a program logic diagram.



Attachment – Budget

Biodiversity Fund and Sustainable Environment Stream Only

Include the planned budget expenditure against each Investment Theme area. This information will be used to report on the use of public money.

Attachment - Risk

As part of the application process you were required to develop a risk plan for the project. Update and attach the risk plan to the MERI plan.