

14. How mining offsets can make a contribution towards meeting National Recovery Plan objectives

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Abstract

The Malleefowl Management Fund is a \$700,000 financial offset which funds activities to address actions identified in the National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl. The offset is one of the approval commitments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for the Iluka Murray Basin Stage 2 Mineral Sands Mine Sites in Ouyen, Victoria. Now in its fourth year, the fund has helped to support a range of activities which have contributed towards meeting the recovery plan objectives. This talk gives an overview of how the offset came to be, the projects funded to date, and details of how to apply to the fund.

Presentation

Iluka Resources Ltd is a mineral sands mining company. The Murray Basin Stage 2 (MBS2) project consists of the Kulwin and WRP mine sites, located in close proximity to Ouyen, Victoria. As part of the EES approval process the Biodiversity and Habitat Assessment for the project determined that the WRP site would impact upon Malleefowl habitat.

As a result, the Federal government set approval conditions under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act 1999* to provide \$700,000 for the implementation of measures to address actions identified in the National Recovery Plan for Malleefowl. The priority actions were to be identified by representatives from the Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group, the National Malleefowl Recovery Team, the Department of Environment, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries and Iluka Resources. As a result the Malleefowl Management Committee was convened with representatives from these five organisations plus Parks Victoria, and today consists of the following people:

Iluka Resources Ltd	MBS2 Rehabilitation Superintendent
Victorian Malleefowl Recovery Group	President of VMRG
National Malleefowl Recovery Team	Chairperson of NMRT
Department of Environment	Terrestrial Species Conservation Section
Department of Environment and Primary Industries	Biodiversity Officer - Threatened Species
Parks Victoria	District Program Manager - Mallee District

The Fund is now into its fourth year. A number of projects have been supported - the major projects are outlined in the table below. Many of the projects funded have complimented one another or met more than one objective. As an example the National Malleefowl Monitoring Database has played a crucial role in providing data to the Adaptive Management Team, whilst the National Malleefowl Recovery Program Coordinator has made a huge contribution towards facilitating communication between groups as well as meeting criteria 9.4.

Table 1: Major projects (listed by National Recovery Plan objective) funded by the Malleefowl Management Fund.

Objective 5: Reduce isolation of fragmented populations		
5.1	Landscape Linkages Project	
Objective 9: Monitor Malleefowl and develop an adaptive management framework		
9.1	Adaptive management of arid and semi-arid ecosystems	3 year funding
9.1	National Malleefowl Monitoring Database	Four phases
9.1	Fox Scat Analysis	Two phases
9.1	Camera Trap Monitoring Program	Two phases
9.1	Malleefowl Data Analysis	
9.4	National Malleefowl Recovery Plan Coordinator	4 year funding
Objective 16: Facilitate communication between groups		
16.1	2011 Renmark National Malleefowl Forum	
16.1	2014 Dubbo National Malleefowl Forum	
16.1	Around the Mounds Newsletter	5 year funding
9.4	National Malleefowl Recovery Plan Coordinator	
Objective 17: Raise public awareness through education and publicity		
17.1	Interpretive Malleefowl Signage	Two phases
17.1	VMRG Information Brochures	
Objective 4: Reduce predation		
16.1	Adaptive management of arid and semi-arid ecosystems	

The offset fund has been well managed, and this is due to a number of reasons:

- The development of a Memorandum of Understanding by Iluka and the VMRG – the VMRG worked closely with Iluka to produce a sound Memorandum of Understanding which outlined how the fund was going to be managed.
- A shared vision between the VMRG and Iluka on how the offset should be managed – both organisations wanted the best value for money from the fund and as a result the VMRG administer the funds on Iluka's behalf and no admin costs are incurred.
- Charter and funding guidelines were agreed upon by the whole committee – including the decision not to fund landscape restoration projects which could use up large sums of money and therefore ensured that the fund stretched further.
- Good representation on the grants decision panel – a range of people with knowledge of good project management and Malleefowl conservation experience sit on the committee.
- Good continuity of committee members and Iluka staff – which has enabled the committee and Iluka to communicate well.

Other EPBC Act Malleefowl offsets - before commencing researching for the talk I had anticipated that there were more mining offsets of this nature. However it became apparent that there are very few mining offsets that are linked to meeting recovery plan objectives. The Department of Environment were able to provide details on some other mining companies whose EPBC Act commitments include actions for Malleefowl, these included Mount Gibson Iron, who have a Malleefowl Management Plan and have undertaken extensive aerial searches for mounds, and the Great Victorian Desert Biodiversity Trust Fund, which has recently been formed to manage the financial offset for the Tropicana project, and will facilitate priority research and on-ground conservation management which meets recovery plan objectives for Malleefowl, the Sandhill Dunnart and Marsupial Mole.

As demonstrated by the Malleefowl Management Fund, mining offsets can provide real benefits to meeting recovery plan objectives and it will be exciting to see what benefits present and future mining offsets can bring to support recovery plan objectives.

Three years funding remain of the Malleefowl Management Fund with approximately \$230,000 available. For all funding enquiries, or copies of the guidelines and an application form please contact Stephanie Mitchell on 0408051635.