



## **Victorian Volcanic Plains Ecosystem Stewardship Project (PlainsTender) Information for Landholders regarding Round One**

### Does PlainsTender only deal with native bush or is revegetation of new areas of bush also okay?

PlainsTender is mainly focused on native vegetation. However, if revegetation with indigenous vegetation will add to that remnant in some way, for example joining two remnants together, or creating corridors etc, then these will be considered. Management actions should aim to improve the quality and extent of native vegetation on a property.

### How will bids be assessed?

Bids will be assessed according to criteria that compare the relative conservation value of each site and the amount of service being offered by each landholder against the cost of each bid. Conservation value will be assessed in accordance with objective state priorities, including the type and current quality of native vegetation present; plant and animal species present; and the position of the site in the landscape. Landholder services are based on proposed landholder management actions.

### What are landholder services?

Landholder services are the habitat management or revegetation services that a landholder agrees to provide for the duration of the management agreement to improve the quality of native vegetation on their property. These services are based on management actions over and above those required by current arrangements and legislation. Typical services may include protection of existing native vegetation assets (eg. Use of appropriate grazing regimes) and/or active management of key habitat components (eg. weed control).

### Who will know how much I bid?

Bids remain confidential between PlainsTender and the landholder.

### Who will know the contents of my management agreement if I am successful?

Cost, payment and service score details will remain confidential between the landholder and PlainsTender. For public accountability purposes, information on the geographic location of sites under agreement and the associated management plan will be available through PlainsTender. The Project may also make available general statistics, in compliance with the *Information Privacy Act, 2000*.

### How will the fairness of the bid assessment process be guaranteed?

Each site will be assessed through an objective, qualitative process. PlainsTender will appoint independent probity auditors to review and report on the bid assessment process. This report will be made publicly available on the PlainsTender website and through a published report that will be sent to all landholders who participated in the incentive scheme. Individual landholder bids will not be disclosed as part of this report.

### How will I find out if I am successful?

Both successful and unsuccessful bidders will be notified by letter when the bid assessment process is completed.

### What happens if I am not successful?

If a bid is unsuccessful, it will be because it does not represent adequate "value for money" in comparison to other landholder bids. Unsuccessful bidders will be advised in retrospect how their bid compared with the general level at which bids were successful. These landholders will be able to bid again in the second round of incentives and will also be made aware of other extension programs and financial support schemes that may be able to assist them with management of their site.

### How long are the agreements for?

Landholders will enter into a four year management agreement. Beyond this fixed-term, a further option of a 10 year or a permanent protection commitment is also available, which will increase the service score.



Are the agreements 'common law' or some other type of agreement?

The fixed-term management agreements will be contracts under common law. Parties to these agreements will be PlainsTender and the landholder(s) of the site. The permanent protection option will relate to on-going landuse and will be registered on the title through a covenant.

What is in the agreement?

The agreement is a simple, plain-English document of three to five pages. It will contain a date of commencement and termination; obligations of the landholder and PlainsTender and interpretation clauses. The agreement will also contain a number of schedules such as the agreed management plan (agreed type and timing of management actions) and a site plan.

I've got more than one patch of bush on my property, how is this dealt with?

Landholders will be able to submit either one bid that covers a number of different areas on their property or separate bids for each area. The choice is up to the landholder. Successful separate bids will each require a management plan to be included under the management agreement.

I am leasing the property, can I sign an agreement?

Lessees will be eligible to sign a management agreement as long as they have the written authority of the owner of the site and that the proposed management actions are not already the responsibility of the lessee under the existing lease arrangement. PlainsTender Officers may request a copy of the lease.

I've got a conservation covenant, do I get rewarded for this?

PlainsTender is aimed at paying for landholder services that avoid the decline of existing assets and/or improve the quality or extent of bush on private land. An existing covenant provides permanent protection which is considered as a landholder service for the purposes of the project.

How will I be paid?

For all agreements landholders will receive annual payments subject to satisfactory completion of agreed actions. Payments will be by cheque and the annual payments will be subject to landholders submitting a report verifying the actions undertaken in the preceding 12 months. Where a landholder has opted to include a 10 year or permanent protection commitment an additional lump-sum payment will subsequently be made.

What if I change my mind?

Landholders can withdraw from the process at any time without obligation, up to signing the final management agreement. Landholders wishing to withdraw from the agreement after this time should contact the Project to discuss options.

How will the agreements be monitored?

Landholders will be required to submit an annual report to PlainsTender that details the actions undertaken during the preceding 12 months and describes progress towards targets. PlainsTender will seek to revisit each site annually (depending on the number of sites). These visits will include a follow-up assessment and technical support. Any breach of an agreement may result in the cessation of annual payments.

Can I change the proposed management actions once I have signed the agreement?

Agreements can be varied with the written consent of both parties. In general, only actions that lead to an equal or improved outcome will be considered and re-negotiation of payment will not be possible.



What happens at the end of the fixed-term agreement period?

Landholders' management obligations under the fixed-term agreements cease at the end of the agreement period and they will be able to manage the vegetation according to their own wishes in accordance with other responsibilities applying at that time. As required with current incentive schemes, landholders who receive funding to erect fences will be required to maintain these fences for a period of 10 years from the date on the agreement.

What if I sell the property or transfer the lease before the end of the agreement?

The fixed-term agreements are between PlainsTender and the landholder and are not registered on title. Sale of the site or transfer of the lease would terminate the agreement. PlainsTender should be notified of any changes. PlainsTender may offer the new landholder the opportunity to sign a new agreement for completion of the actions specified in the original agreement. Covenants for permanent protection will be registered on title.

What about public funds from other sources?

Successful bidders who sign PlainsTender management agreements will not be eligible to receive further funding through any other publicly funded assistance program for those management actions identified in the management agreement for the period of the agreement.

How do I register an expression of interest?

Landholders should contact PlainsTender, after 27 September 2004, with Anne Buchan on (03) 5232 9117 to register an expression of interest in the scheme. The Project Officer will request some contact details upon registration and you will receive a letter confirming your registration. Be quick because over subscription in the scheme may result in later registrations missing out.

How do I organise a site visit?

A PlainsTender field officer will contact landholders who register an expression of interest to arrange a site visit during Spring/early Summer. It may be some time before you are contacted depending upon the demand for site assessments. It is recommended that once your registration has been confirmed, that stock be removed until the site assessment to enable your site to be assessed to its best potential.

How will I know what management actions to undertake?

PlainsTender field officers will provide face-to-face advice to landholders to help them identify current threats to native vegetation on their site. They will also identify the potential management actions, and their timing and duration, that address these threats. Landholders will be able to discuss their own ideas for management during this process. In some circumstances (eg. fencing, revegetation), landholders will have to meet required management specifications.

How will I know how much to bid?

The amount bid will be entirely up to the individual. The PlainsTender field officer will not know what will comprise a successful bid and will therefore not be able to advise on this. Landholders should bid the amount of money they wish to receive to undertake the proposed management actions and to fulfil any longer-term protection commitments. To assist with bid preparation, the project will advise landholders of the current conservation values on their site and will provide the landholder's service scores. Landholders will need to consider how their own view of an acceptable level of payment places them with respect to other bidders.

How do I put in a bid?

In the weeks following the site assessment, landholders will receive a draft PlainsTender management plan by registered mail. This plan is based on actions previously discussed between the landholder and the PlainsTender field officer. Landholders can then submit their bid using the supplied postage-paid envelope. In so doing, landholders acknowledge that the management plan is final.



When do I have to submit my bid?

Landholders will have a period of 14 days to submit a bid following receipt of the PlainsTender-agreed management plan. Bids received after this period will not be eligible for assessment.

What if I want to alter the management actions in the draft management plan?

Landholders have an opportunity to amend the draft management plan. To do this the landholder should contact PlainsTender on (03) 5232 9117 to discuss management options as soon as possible after they receive the draft plan and before the 14-day submission period expires. Any proposed change to the management actions will require a reassessment of the landholder's service score. This will be forwarded to landholders along with a redrafted PlainsTender management plan. The landholder's bid can then be submitted within a new 14 day period.

It should be noted that only PlainsTender plans will be eligible for inclusion in landholder bids and that redrafting of management plans may involve delays depending on officer availability.