

THEME: SCALING UP RESTORATION

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The ideal aim of ecological repair is to make a difference at large enough scales to not only repair specific damage but also to substantially expand the area available to nature conservation - whether that occurs in dedicated reserves or wherever possible throughout production and urban landscapes. (Standards Reference Group SERA 2017).

Increasing scale of restoration projects is of utmost importance for a range of reasons including that (a) many faunal species and populations rely on extensive habitats for sufficient seasonal food supply; and, (b) some environmental problems (such as climate change) now occur at a large scale and cannot be addressed with small scale outcomes.

Achieving sustainable outcomes at scale involves a range of elements including:

- **Conservation planning** (See: [Conservation Measures Partnership 2013 cmp-openstandards.org](#))
- **Community, landholder and donor social engagement** as scaling up into developed landscapes invariably depends on a range of values to people (See: [Principle 6](#) and case study: [Regent Honeyeater Project](#) engagement summary). Also see IUCN document [Ecological Restoration for Protected Areas](#)
- **Research partnerships** (See [Principle 6](#) and large scale restoration research [Examples](#))
- **Vision and Long term commitment** (See [Gondwana Link](#) and [Habitat 141](#))

Other cases can be viewed on the National Standards '[Corridors](#)' examples page.

How can projects increase their influence at larger scales?

Top down and bottom up efforts. The scale of projects can be increased through 'top down' or 'bottom up' approaches – or a combination of both. In a 'top down' process governments can regulate the conservation management of large areas (e.g. large national parks or marine reserves). In a 'bottom up' process, larger scale outcomes can be achieved by the cumulative effect of many small-scale projects with similar aspirations (e.g. Landcare). One of the most effective approaches however is where Natural Resource Management (NRM) groups or not-for profit organisations (NGOs) support landholders in strategically important locations where landscape scale or regional scale linkages can be prioritized. This is particularly the focus of a range of corridor projects (Box 1).

Planning principles to achieve results at scale. The quality of outcomes at sites, landscapes and regions can be predicted to improve if the planning phase of a project or programs includes assessment of the configuration of sites within the broader landscape or region. 'Greatest ecological and economic efficiency arises from improving and coalescing larger and better condition patches and progressively doing this at increasingly larger scales' (Standards Reference Group SERA 2017, p 37). While this means that the location of a site in the landscape and its degree of degradation should inform its priority for treatment (see [Open Standards for the](#)

[Practice of Conservation](#)), it must be noted that areas of higher degradation, if strategically located, may still be judged high priorities for conservation and restoration.

Reducing quality to increase quantity. Another way the scale of efforts can be increased is to target particular problems and opportunities rather than undertaking comprehensive restoration treatments in all locations. In contrast to mining companies that are often required to concentrate high levels of expenditure in a concentrated period, government agencies and NGOs often have smaller budgets that are nonetheless available over time. This allows the latter group to focus on progressively addressing particular problems that occur at a larger scales (e.g. certain invasive plant and animal threats) to allow gradual native plant or animal recovery at those scales, leaving other less pressing problems to a future date. In yet other cases, complete removal of even some threats at scale is not possible and reduction of these threats may be the highest and best outcome attainable. Such programs can still be considered ecological restoration activities as long as the limitations are stated and the goal is at least substantial recovery for native biota and ecosystem functions. Where a project does not aim for substantial recovery or include local native species it does not fit the definition of ecological restoration and would be more appropriately labeled 'rehabilitation'. Nonetheless, rehabilitation can still play an important role in environmental repair at larger scales.

Box 1. Large scale linkage projects – See <http://seraustralasia.com/standards/egcorridors.html>

A number of large-scale linkage projects have been initiated in Australia. These commence with a focus on securing the conservation status of the component lands and progress to actively restoring habitats in cleared areas to improve connectivity.

Features that can increase connectivity include continuous wildlife corridors, 'stepping stones' and buffer zones around existing habitat areas.

Lessons and Limitations

- Large-scale linkage programs combine conservation and restoration and require very long-term commitment, ongoing funding and engagement with communities and other stakeholders.
- All the constraints that apply to individual projects apply to large scale projects, multiplied by the scale and social and ecological complexity of the project.
- Minimum habitat area requirements of individual species need to be considered for optimal reinstatement of linkages in fragmented landscapes.

See also:

'Section IV – Restoration and the 'big picture' environmental challenge in McDonald T, Gann GD, Jonson J, and Dixon KW (2016) *International standards for the practice of ecological restoration – including principles and key concepts*. First Edition. Society for Ecological Restoration, Washington, D.C. Available: <https://ser.site-ym.com/page/SERStandards>

Reference:

Standards Reference Group SERA (2017) *National Standards for the Practice of Ecological Restoration in Australia*. Second Edition. Society for Ecological Restoration Australasia. Available <http://seraustralasia.com/standards/contents.html>