

Cassowary Credit Scheme Guide



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AUSTRALIA

CASSOWARY CREDIT SCHEME GUIDE

Version 1.1

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Version and review

This is version 1.1 of the *Cassowary Credit Scheme Guide*. This document may be reviewed and updated from time to time for relevance and effectiveness in meeting the Scheme's objectives.

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1. Purpose of this Guide

The *Cassowary Credit Scheme Guide* (the Guide) sets out the background, rationale, intent and underlying principles of the Cassowary Credit Scheme (the Scheme).

This Guide should be read in conjunction with all relevant Scheme documents, including:

- *Cassowary Credit Scheme Standard*
- *Cassowary Credit Scheme Definitions*
- Approved Methodologies, including associated tools or documents
- Methodology technical or explanatory statements and associated tools
- *Methodology Approval Procedures*
- *Cassowary Credit Scheme Reversal Procedure*
- *Cassowary Credit Scheme Approved Operator Certification Procedure*
- *Compliance Procedure*
- *Cassowary Credit Scheme Fee Schedule*
- *Stakeholder Grievance Procedure*
- *Dispute Resolution Procedure*
- *Conflict of Interest Code*
- A series of forms and templates

2. Background and rationale

2.1 Globally significant rainforest biodiversity in decline

The Wet Tropics of far northeastern Australia is one of the world's most biologically diverse regions and is recognised as a global biodiversity hotspot. It is the only place in the world with two interconnected World Heritage Areas – the Wet Tropics forests and the Great Barrier Reef (Figure 1).

The Wet Tropics rainforests are diverse and ancient. They support a large number of plants and animals that occur nowhere else on Earth (i.e., endemic species, genera and families), including representatives of ancient evolutionary lineages. These forests are also central to the cultural heritage of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples who have maintained an unbroken connection with the land and waters of the region for tens of thousands of years.

Unfortunately, the Wet Tropics rainforests have been fragmented by clearing for agriculture, residential development and infrastructure. Further degradation has occurred through the introduction of non-native plants, animals, diseases and pathogens, as well as impacts from surrounding land uses and activities. With climate change now compounding these factors, there is ongoing and mounting pressure on rainforest biodiversity.

Even though substantial areas of Wet Tropics forests are formally protected, rainforest biodiversity has already declined and will continue to decline unless rapid large-scale action is taken to restore, reconnect and protect forests and enable adaptation to ongoing climate change.

Action to protect and repair Wet Tropics rainforests benefits terrestrial biodiversity and can also have substantial benefits for freshwater and marine ecosystems, including the World Heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef. The region's nine major river systems flow into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. Restoration of rainforest vegetation along these waterways stabilises streambanks and reduces

sediment and nutrient loads, improving instream water quality and providing downstream benefits for estuarine and marine ecosystems.

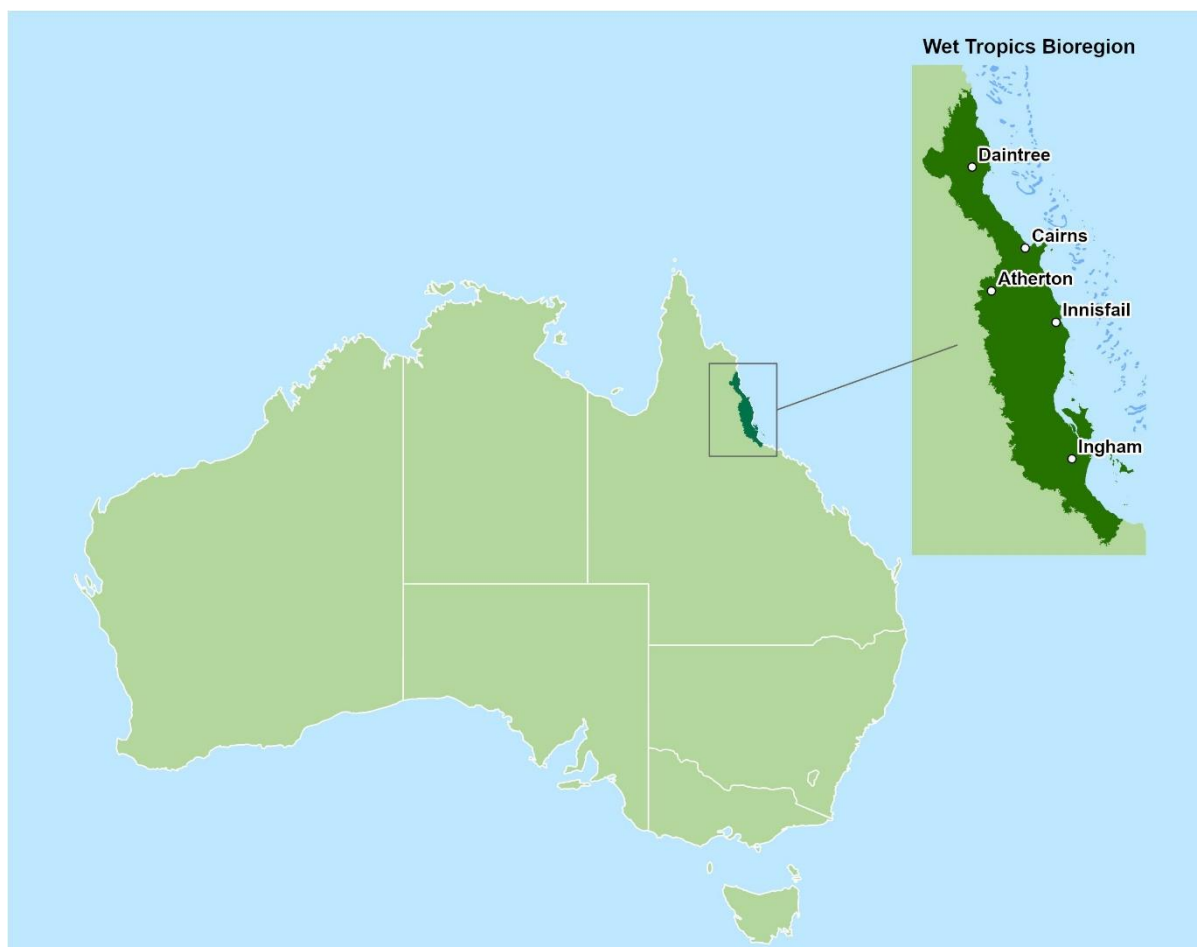


Figure 1. Map of Australia showing location of the Wet Tropics Bioregion. Inset: Wet Tropics Bioregion is delineated in dark green and the names of main towns are shown.

2.2 Wet Tropics communities need support to protect and restore the region's rainforest

Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples of the Wet Tropics have the right and expressed aspiration to lead, manage and participate in initiatives to improve the health of their traditional Country. Having been stewards of the Wet Tropics region over many millennia, Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples have developed a deep, applied understanding of their Country.

Regional communities of the Wet Tropics, including Rainforest Aboriginal people, hold significant ecological knowledge and expertise in the management and conservation of the region's natural environments. In the past 50 years, the broader communities of the Wet Tropics have engaged in a range of efforts to protect and restore Wet Tropics rainforest, including developing regional-specific approaches to replanting, regenerating and managing rainforests to deliver benefits for rainforest biodiversity. These approaches draw on decades of adaptive practice and western scientific understanding from some of the best-studied tropical ecosystems on the planet.

A network of Aboriginal organisations and other land management enterprises, government agencies, private conservation organisations and community-based groups collectively form a

dedicated and skilled conservation and restoration industry in the Wet Tropics region. Despite enormous effort, relatively small areas of degraded rainforest country have been restored and substantially increased investment is needed to realise the potential of the Wet Tropics regional community to protect and restore the Wet Tropics rainforests.

In addition to delivering benefits for rainforest biodiversity and human wellbeing, a healthy rainforest conservation and restoration industry in the Wet Tropics supports realistic pathways for regional communities to adapt to climate change. Much of the region is heavily dependent on agriculture and tourism, two industries that are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Investment in enterprises involved in the conservation and restoration of Wet Tropics rainforests provides opportunities for farm businesses to diversify income streams and creates alternative employment opportunities in these rural and regional communities.

3. Intent of the Cassowary Credit Scheme

The intent of the Cassowary Credit Scheme (the Scheme) is to provide a high-integrity regional biodiversity market that delivers large-scale benefits for rainforest biodiversity and regional communities. It enables proponents to generate and sell credits by delivering validated and verified outcomes that improve the condition, extent or protection of rainforest biodiversity in the Wet Tropics.

A Cassowary Credit represents a quantified and verified benefit that has been delivered through a purposeful action to restore or protect rainforest biodiversity and support regional communities in the Wet Tropics.

Societal expectations and regulatory frameworks are increasingly driving investment in biodiversity, particularly since the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at the 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP 15).

Market-based approaches are being used around the world to achieve a range of environmental outcomes, including the sequestration of carbon and improvement of water quality. In these markets, biodiversity is often regarded as a 'co-benefit'. The Scheme provides an opportunity to mobilise and increase the flow of funding to deliver benefits for biodiversity and to have positive outcomes for regional communities in the Wet Tropics.

The Scheme is characterised by a suite of features that make it appealing for investors and proponents, including:

- a tradeable credit that represents benefits that have been delivered for Wet Tropics rainforest biodiversity and regional communities, including Rainforest Aboriginal people;
- a basis in rigour and evidence, using science, credible knowledge and regional expertise to define, quantify and verify the benefits delivered by projects;
- a transparent and secure Registry system for tracking unique credits;
- clear rules and procedures to allow development of a portfolio of Cassowary Credit Scheme Methodologies and projects;
- independent and accountable governance to ensure that the benefits delivered are verifiable, additional and enduring;

- an economically efficient pathway to the delivery of landscape level change.

To deliver benefits at scale, the Scheme is focused on a region of approximately two million hectares¹, enables participation by a broad range of proponents and provides scope for a range of activities that improve the extent, condition and protection of rainforest biodiversity, without displacing established agricultural industries².

Furthermore, the Scheme is focused on delivering positive outcomes for rainforest biodiversity broadly, rather than for a single species or ecosystem³.

The Cassowary Credit Scheme benefits Wet Tropics rainforest biodiversity by:

- facilitating large scale, long term, diversified investment in biodiverse rainforest restoration and protection of rainforest;
- using robust, evidence-based approaches to restore and protect rainforest;
- providing an independent, transparent and accountable framework to achieve improvements in the condition, extent or protection of rainforest biodiversity;
- delivering consistent measurement and monitoring tools to track progress of rainforest restoration.

4. Principles underpinning the Cassowary Credit Scheme

A set of principles provide the underlying foundation for the design and implementation of the Cassowary Credit Scheme:

Safeguard environmental, cultural and social values

Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects will not cause adverse environmental impacts and must seek to maximise benefits to regional communities, including for Rainforest Aboriginal people.

Use evidence-based approaches

Credible and scientific evidence and rigorous and independent processes will be used to approve, deliver and verify Project outcomes.

Deliver benefits at scale and in time

Widespread participation in the Scheme will be facilitated, enabling access by a diversity of participants and allowing for a range of approaches to be used, especially those that deliver benefits rapidly.

¹ For example, analyses by Terrain NRM identified approximately 200,000 ha of remnant or high value regrowth rainforest on private land that could be subject to actions that improve their value for biodiversity or increase their level of protection.

² Additional analyses show that across this region, over 50,000 hectares of land is currently unvegetated and unlikely to be used for productive agriculture (either classified as 'very poor' agricultural land or over 20% slope or bordering a waterway). Such areas could readily be subject to rainforest restoration activities without competing with or undermining other productive land uses.

³ While the southern cassowary (*Casuarus casuarius*) is the flagship species for the Scheme, the Scheme is not focused on delivering specific benefits for this species. Rather, the Scheme is predicated on the thinking that restoring, improving and protecting habitat that is suitable for rainforest biodiversity in general will potentially benefit cassowaries. Cassowaries are an iconic species in the Wet Tropics and play critical ecological roles in seed dispersal and forest regeneration. The Scheme does not propose to measure outcomes for cassowaries per se.

Produce additional and measurable outcomes

Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects will yield new and quantifiable outcomes, that are measured using sound scientific approaches and which would not have happened without the project activities.

Deliver verifiable and enduring benefits

The benefits generated through Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects will be confirmed through independent processes and should endure beyond project timeframes.

Guarantee unique and traceable credits

Each Cassowary Credit will be unique and able to be tracked through a secure, independently-managed Registry.

Ensure transparency

Relevant information, outcomes and reviews from the Cassowary Credit Scheme will be made publicly available for scrutiny to maintain accountability and ensure transparency.

Apply accuracy and conservatism

Accurate or conservative assumptions, values and procedures will be used to ensure that benefits claimed are not over estimated.

5. How the Cassowary Credit Scheme works

5.1 Administration and governance

Eco-Markets Australia, an independent not-for-profit company, established in Queensland under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) as a company limited by guarantee, administers the Cassowary Credit Scheme. The company is governed by a skills-based Board of Directors (Figure 2), with the day-to-day administration of the Scheme delegated to a staff member who is the Cassowary Credit Scheme Secretariat (the Secretariat). A Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) containing specialists provides independent expertise related to technical aspects of the Scheme.

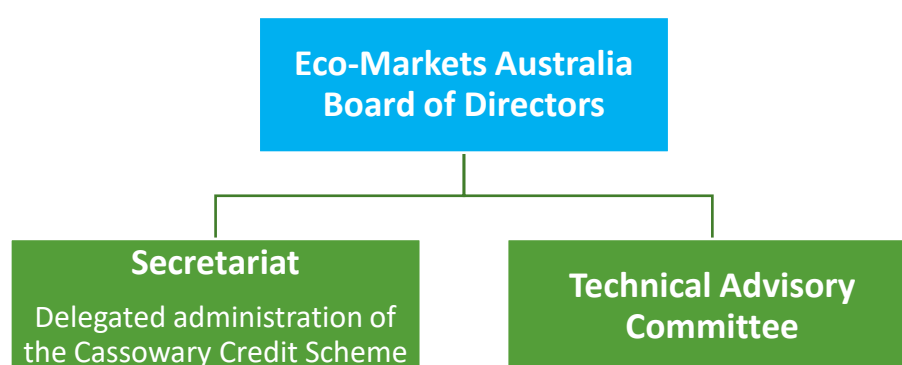


Figure 2. Structure of Eco-Markets Australia

The Board of Directors provides strategic, risk, compliance and financial oversight to Eco-Markets Australia. The Board provides oversight to the development and ongoing maintenance of the *Cassowary Credit Scheme Standard* (the Standard) and provides supervision of the Secretariat.

The Secretariat, overseen by the Board, administers the Cassowary Credit Scheme, in accordance with the Standard and supporting documents. The Secretariat's role and responsibilities include:

- managing or overseeing all Scheme processes and procedures;
- issuing, approving and/or updating all Scheme documentation;
- issuing guidance and interpretations related to the Scheme;
- making decisions regarding the administration or operation of the Scheme, to ensure the integrity and intent of the Scheme are upheld. This may include input from the Technical Advisory Committee and Board.

The TAC is composed of specialists whose skills complement those of the Board and Secretariat. The TAC advises on technical aspects of the Standard and Methodologies and provides independent expertise on the Methodology approval and modification process, selection of peer reviewers, compliance matters and related issues.

5.2 Components of the Cassowary Credit Scheme

The Scheme provides a practical, rigorous and scientifically valid framework for crediting outcomes that deliver on the objectives of the Scheme. Key components include:

<i>Cassowary Credit Scheme Guide</i>	Rationale, intent and underlying principles of the Scheme.
<i>Cassowary Credit Scheme Standard</i>	Rules and requirements for developing Projects and Methodologies, the Registration, Monitoring, Validation, Verification and Crediting processes and the governance arrangements.
Cassowary Credit Scheme Registry	Ledger that tracks Cassowary Credit transactions and ownership.
Approved Methodologies	Approved ways of undertaking Projects.
Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects	Activities that conform to an approved Methodology.
Cassowary Credit Scheme Governance	Independent oversight of the Standard, Registry, Methodologies and Projects.
Cassowary Credit Scheme forms and templates	Approved administrative forms for Project Application, Monitoring, Reporting, Verifying and claiming issuance of Cassowary Credits.

5.3 Overview of the process to implement a Cassowary Credit Scheme Project

The following section outlines the process that Proponents follow to generate, register and sell Cassowary Credits from a Project. This process is summarised in Figure 3.

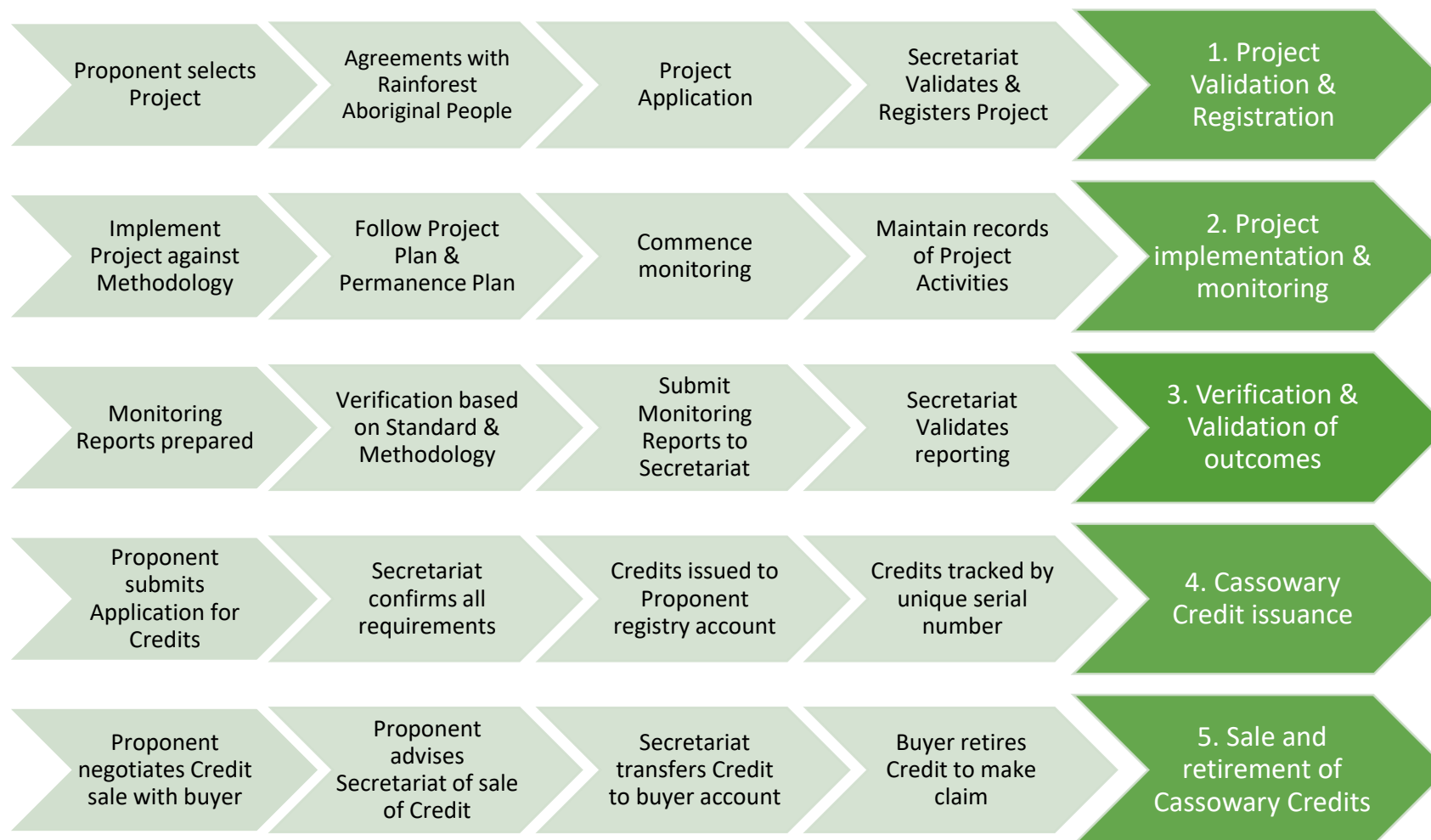


Figure 3. Summary of the process to implement a Cassowary Credit Scheme Project

Step 1. Project Validation and Registration

Once a Proponent identifies a Project Area and selects an appropriate Methodology, discussions with relevant Rainforest Aboriginal people and any eligible interest holders commence. The Proponent prepares their application, which includes any requirements in the Methodology, such as preparation of a Project Plan or Permanence Plan. Once agreements from all stakeholders are in place, any associated Project Plan or Permanence Plan is finalised and the Proponent is satisfied they meet all other necessary rules and criteria of the Standard, they apply to Register a Project with the Secretariat. The Secretariat will Validate the Project against the Standard and the appropriate Methodology to ensure the Proponent complies with all relevant rules and criteria. If the Project is compliant the Secretariat will notify the Proponent and Register the Project on the Registry. If the Project is not compliant the Secretariat will notify the Proponent that the Project has failed to meet Validation standards. Proponents may revise their Project Application and reapply if they feel they are able to subsequently satisfy all necessary rules and criteria of the Standard and Methodology.

Step 2. Project implementation and monitoring

Once the Project is Registered, Proponents implement the Project in accordance with the applicable Methodology. The Proponent ensures all requirements in their Project Plan and Permanence Plan, Validated by the Secretariat as part of their Project application, are also met. The Proponent follows requirements to Monitor the Project and maintains records of Project Activities or Monitoring, as required in the applicable Methodology to meet Reporting requirements.

Step 3. Verification and Validation of outcomes

The Proponent prepares Monitoring Reports to demonstrate the change over time resulting from Project Activities. Proponents ensure any Verification requirements are met, according to the Standard and applicable Methodology. Once finalised, the Proponent submits Monitoring Reports to the Secretariat. The Secretariat assesses Monitoring Reports to ensure all requirements of the Standard and applied Methodology are met, including independent assessment of Project outcomes by Approved Operators or Approved Verifiers. If all requirements are met, the Secretariat Validates the Monitoring Report.

Step 4. Cassowary Credit issuance

Once the Proponent meets all requirements to quantify and Verify Project outcomes and the Secretariat Validates their Monitoring Report, an Application for Cassowary Credits can be made. The Proponent must set up a Registry account, to which Cassowary Credits will be issued. The Secretariat assesses the Application for Cassowary Credits and, if satisfied all requirements are met, Validates the application and issues Cassowary Credits to the Proponent's Registry account. Upon issuance, Cassowary Credits become visible to the public and are tracked with a unique serial number.

Step 5. Sale and retirement of Cassowary Credits

The sale or transfer of Cassowary Credits is a direct transaction between the Proponent and buyer. Buyers of Cassowary Credits must set up a Registry account. The Secretariat receives a report of a sale from the Proponent after a transaction is made and approves transfer of Cassowary Credits from one Registry account to another. The Secretariat is not involved with any financial transaction between buyers and Proponents. Once a Cassowary Credit is purchased, a buyer must retire the Cassowary Credit with the Secretariat to claim the relevant benefit to rainforest biodiversity.

5.4 Participation in the Cassowary Credit Scheme

Participation in the Cassowary Credit Scheme is voluntary and based on satisfying the requirements of the Standard and selected Methodology/ies. Participation is open to anyone who can meet these requirements. Details of the various types of participant in the Scheme are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Participants in the Cassowary Credit Scheme

TYPE OF PARTICIPANT	ROLE
PROPONENT	Proponents are individuals or entities that conduct a Cassowary Credit Scheme Project and generate Cassowary Credits.
LANDHOLDER	Landholders own the land where Projects are conducted. They may be a Proponent or they may negotiate with another Proponent to conduct the Project.
BUYER	Buyers include any public or private entity that purchases Cassowary Credits.
APPROVED OPERATORS	Approved Operators have been certified by the Secretariat to deliver goods or services to Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects. Their roles are specified in Methodologies and may include technical support or advice to Proponents, independent monitoring of Project outcomes, independent preparation of Project Plans, Permanence Plans, Monitoring Reports or Applications for Cassowary Credits, providing trees for replanting projects, conducting on-ground Project Activities, etc.
METHODOLOGY DEVELOPER	Methodology developers are bodies that write and develop Methodologies that are subject to the Scheme's Methodology Approval Process.
APPROVED VERIFIER	Approved Verifiers are independent third parties or agencies who confirm the details of Cassowary Credit Scheme Projects and generation of Cassowary Credits.
GOVERNANCE BODY AND SECRETARIAT	The Cassowary Credit Scheme is governed by Eco-Markets Australia, with the day-to-day administration of the Scheme delegated to the Secretariat. The Secretariat manages Verification, Registration, Validation and Crediting processes.

6. Core integrity features of the Cassowary Credit Scheme

There are characteristics of the Wet Tropics Bioregion that will support the development and ongoing management of a high integrity biodiversity credit market, including:

- strong governance frameworks for protection and conservation;
- stable political and economic systems;
- high community engagement, collaboration and support.

The design of the Scheme also includes specific requirements that will ensure the highest integrity levels are met, providing confidence for all participants in the Scheme. This is particularly critical during the early stages of market development (as well as beyond) and will contribute to building trust in the outcomes being delivered through the Scheme, and more broadly through other developing biodiversity credit markets.

6.1 Permanence

Permanence requirements in the Scheme aim to provide long term security of Project outcomes. All Projects conducted under the Cassowary Credit Scheme will deliver benefits to rainforest biodiversity and make a valuable contribution to biodiversity in the Wet Tropics region. Even without formal protection of Project outcomes, the biodiversity benefit from some Projects will persist well beyond Project timeframes. For example, a Project that results in increased landscape connectivity may facilitate improved movement of genetic resources, contributing to increased genetic diversity. This improvement is not lost at the end of a Project, regardless of what happens at the original Project location. Unlike environmental planting projects in a carbon scheme, where a loss of vegetation at the end of a project results in a loss of carbon stored during the project, biodiversity benefits from Cassowary Credit Projects may persist well beyond the timeframe of Projects.

There is also a considerable commitment to forest restoration in the Wet Tropics region and relatively low rates of vegetation clearing⁴, meaning the risk of Project outcomes being lost as a result of clearing is relatively low.

Nevertheless, persistence of rainforest biodiversity at Project Areas and more formal long term security of Project outcomes is the desired outcome within the Scheme. For Methodologies requiring permanent protection of Project outcomes, legally enforceable instruments that are binding on current and future landholders are used, to provide the highest level of protection.

For Projects conducted under restoration Methodologies, long term security of Project outcomes is promoted, encouraged or incentivised within the Methodology. It is also possible the vegetation from Projects using restoration Methodologies will have developed sufficiently at the end of the Project to achieve a level of protection under mechanisms external to the Scheme, such as the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*.

6.2 Risk of Reversal

The Risk of Reversal process applied in the Scheme is intended to account for Significant Reversals that result in a decline in Credited Project outcomes. These declines could be a result of either avoidable (e.g., inappropriate or insufficient management) or unavoidable (e.g., Severe Natural Events) circumstances.

The Risk of Reversal approach:

1. provides security of Credited Project outcomes and avoids over-crediting across the Scheme; and
2. protects Proponents from bearing the entire Risk of Reversal, particularly in circumstances where an unavoidable Significant Reversal occurs, as this would be an unacceptable burden on Proponents and a significant barrier to participation.

⁴ <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/mapping/statewide-monitoring/slats/slats-reports/2021-22-slats-report/bioregion-breakdown>

The Standard and approved Methodologies provide guidance on how the Risk of Reversal is to be managed in Projects. The Risk of Reversal Procedure provides the specific process the Secretariat will follow if a Significant Reversal occurs; it should be referred to for detailed information.

6.3 Verification

The Verification process applied in the Scheme aims to balance risk to Scheme integrity with the burden on Proponents (cost, time, Project complexity, administration). This provides a fit for purpose approach for Projects that does not present unacceptable barriers to participation and can act to increase Scheme participation, while maintaining the highest level of Scheme integrity.

Verification requirements are designed to be proportionate to the level of risk associated with a Project (see Verification section in the Standard). The aim of Verification is to provide a level of assurance of outcomes from Projects, in situations where this cannot be sufficiently met through other means (such as independent Project Monitoring, Reporting and Validation; remote geospatial monitoring).

All Projects are required to use Approved Operators for independent Monitoring and Reporting, with third-party, independent Validation conducted by the Secretariat.

Third party Verification is not required by all Projects, but Projects must meet strict criteria to be eligible to avoid or reduce third party Verification requirements. If Projects require Verification, it must be conducted by Approved Verifiers, who have the necessary skills and experience to conduct the Verification services.

6.4 Additionality

Additionality requirements in the Scheme are designed to ensure the delivery of benefits to rainforest biodiversity that are above and beyond what would occur in the absence of the Project. Any benefit to rainforest biodiversity that is quantified and converted to Cassowary Credits as part of a Project must be specifically attributable to the Project. Projects are not considered Additional if there is a regulatory, policy, contractual or legal requirement for them to occur.

Other projects or schemes can be delivered at the same site as a Cassowary Credit Scheme Project, as long as the Cassowary Credits claimed are only for Additional outcomes delivered by the Project.

6.5 Benefits for regional communities

Design of the Cassowary Credit Scheme was heavily informed by regional expertise, values and experience, accounting for the characteristics of regional communities and likely Project participants.

The Scheme has been designed to support and maximise the participation of a range of stakeholders and provide social, economic and cultural benefits for regional communities and Rainforest Aboriginal people, including:

- direct financial return via service delivery (e.g., native trees, restoration activities, technical services);
- diversifying landholder income from initiatives that benefit biodiversity;
- supporting the retention and fostering development of regional skills and capacity;

- bolstering the regional economy through improved regional employment, job creation and business opportunities;
- regional reputational benefits;
- improved regional resilience.

The Scheme delivers these benefits through the requirement to:

- use Approved Operators from the Wet Tropics region (see additional requirement to preferentially use Rainforest Aboriginal Approved Operators in 6.6.1).
- obtain free, prior and informed consent from landholders, where the landholder is not the Proponent.
- negotiate agreements with landholders for fair and equitable benefit sharing arrangements, where the landholder is not the Proponent.

6.5.1 Approved Operators

In order to provide a high level of confidence and rigour in the Scheme, and to address the intent of the Scheme to deliver benefits to regional communities, Proponents are required to use local businesses and service providers that have been accredited as Approved Operators to plan and implement their projects. Local service providers are certified through the Scheme as Approved Operators and are suitably skilled or experienced in the delivery of the goods and services required for Projects. Proponents are required to use Approved Operators from the Wet Tropics region in preference to service providers from other areas, in order to:

- support and build the regional rainforest conservation and restoration industry;
- provide skills development and employment opportunities within the region;
- ensure regional communities are engaged and invested in the Scheme;
- retain financial benefits from the Scheme within the region;
- ensure regionally-specific conditions and approaches are considered in Project design and delivery; and
- avoid the social implications of ‘fly in – fly out’ labour arrangements.

Decades of tropical forest restoration practice and science in the region, and thousands of years of active Aboriginal management of the region’s ecosystems, mean that many individuals and organisations in the Wet Tropics possess the specialised technical skills, knowledge and expertise necessary to plan and implement biodiversity initiatives in the region. These skills are critical for the successful delivery of *bona fide* outcomes from Projects.

Approved Operators are required to demonstrate they have the necessary skills and experience to deliver high quality goods or services to the Scheme that contribute to high quality Project outcomes, and that they are based within the Wet Tropics region.

In order to support the delivery of benefits to Rainforest Aboriginal People, Approved Operators that identify as Rainforest Aboriginal People, or that employ Rainforest Aboriginal People, are given preference in the Scheme.

6.5.2 Safeguards for landholders

To avoid potential perverse outcomes for regional communities from the Scheme, there are safeguards to protect the rights of landholders. These safeguards are particularly relevant in situations where the landholder is not the Proponent. In these instances, the Proponent must:

- negotiate fair and equitable agreements for benefit sharing with the landholder;
- obtain free, prior and informed consent from the landholder.

These requirements provide a level of protection to landholders and aim to prevent situations where a third-party Proponent disproportionately benefits from the Project, at the expense of the regional community.

6.6 Specific considerations for Rainforest Aboriginal people

Rainforest Aboriginal people are obviously part of Wet Tropics regional communities, but specific consideration is given to Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples in the Scheme, due to their long cultural connection to the region and a more recent history of displacement and alienation from many decision making processes. The Scheme includes specific requirements to support Rainforest Aboriginal People's aspirations to further develop land management enterprises and play more meaningful roles in decision-making and management on their traditional Country.

Rainforest Aboriginal people can participate in the Cassowary Credit Scheme in various ways, including as Proponents or Approved Operators. In addition, Projects can include specific cultural outcomes. For all Projects, Proponents are required to consider and mitigate potential impacts of Projects on Rainforest Aboriginal People's cultural values. Proponents are also required to:

- preferentially use Approved Operators who are Rainforest Aboriginal persons.
- obtain free, prior and informed consent when the Project Area includes areas that are owned or managed by Rainforest Aboriginal people.
- obtain free, prior and informed consent from Rainforest Aboriginal people if Activities in a Project Area might affect Rainforest Aboriginal people's values beyond the Project Area.
- offer Rainforest Aboriginal people the opportunity to be involved on their terms in any Project undertaken on land they own or manage.
- obtain free, prior and informed consent and negotiate appropriate payment for the use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge.

6.6.1 Rainforest Aboriginal people as Approved Operators

There is a specific requirement in the Scheme for Proponents to preferentially use Approved Operators who identify as, or employ people who identify as, Rainforest Aboriginal persons, to boost employment opportunities and deliver social and financial benefits to Rainforest Aboriginal people.

6.6.2 Additional requirements for Projects on land where Rainforest Aboriginal people have a recognised interest

For all Projects where the Proponent is not the landholder, free, prior and informed consent is required from the landholder, including where land is owned by a Rainforest Aboriginal person or organisation. In situations where the land is not owned by a Rainforest Aboriginal person, but they have a recognised interest in the land, the Proponent must obtain free, prior and informed consent from the appropriate Rainforest Aboriginal people.

In addition to this consent, the Proponent must provide the option for Rainforest Aboriginal people to be actively involved in the Project in a way that they choose. This may include as a partner, Proponent, stakeholder, decision maker or shareholder.

This includes land that is owned or managed by Rainforest Aboriginal People, including where there is a Native Title Declaration, Indigenous Land Use Agreement, Indigenous Protected Area or another form of joint management agreement.

6.6.3 Recommendation to engage with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples on all Projects

In addition to these requirements, proponents are also strongly encouraged to engage with Rainforest Aboriginal people for all projects – including situations where it is not a specific requirement of the Scheme. Genuine engagement with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples during early stages of Project planning, and exploration of options for ongoing interactions, can result in lasting benefits. Benefits of engaging with Rainforest Aboriginal people go both ways and include:

- validation and recognition of cultural values;
- improved cultural outcomes from Projects;
- potential to receive a premium price for Credits, if there are Verified benefits provided to Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples;
- cross-cultural benefits from establishing and building relationships between Rainforest Aboriginal people and private landholders;
- reconnection of Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples to Traditional lands and waters;
- contributing to positive health and well-being outcomes for Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples.

6.6.4 Guidance for engaging with Rainforest Aboriginal Peoples through the Cassowary Credit Scheme

It is important to recognise that cultural protocols and Aboriginal communities can be complex and varied. Like any relationship, time and respect is needed to develop trust. An intent for genuine, equitable and meaningful engagement for a shared purpose are good foundations. Identifying the right people or person with authority to speak on behalf of Country is important. Guidance on contacting and engaging with Rainforest Aboriginal people can be provided by the [North Queensland Land Council](#), or regional organisations such as [Terrain NRM](#) or the [Wet Tropics Management Authority](#). Contact details for Rainforest Aboriginal groups can also be found at the [Office of the Registrar for Indigenous Corporations](#).

There are useful resources that help inform ways of working together. Proponents should refer to these when planning Projects:

- [Principles for engagement in projects concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, AIATSIS](#)
- [Principles for effective consultation and engagement \(adapted from Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues\)](#)
- [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, United Nations](#)
- [Indigenous Engagement Protocols for Threatened Species Researchers, Threatened Species Recovery Hub: National Environmental Science Programme](#)
- [Our Knowledge Our Way guidelines, CSIRO](#)