

Monday, 23 November 2009

Government delay sparks community frustration

Community frustration across the South Coast is on the rise due to the Australian Government's delay in announcing the *Caring for our Country* funding plan for next year.

At a South Coast NRM Committee meeting last week, the committee expressed serious concern that the community was being put under enormous pressure to develop applications for funding in an extremely competitive environment, with little time.

Comprising community, local and state government representatives and Indigenous leaders, the committee provides advice to the South Coast NRM Board of Management on planning and implementation of NRM activities.

South Coast NRM chief executive Rob Edkins said it was disappointing that the Australian Government had made a commitment to release *the Caring for Our Country* plan in September this year, but was still making the community wait.

Caring for our Country is an Australian Government initiative that seeks to achieve a healthy environment by focusing on six priority areas; biodiversity and natural icons; coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats; sustainable farm practices; natural resource management in northern and remote Australia; and community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The initiative, which commenced on 1 July 2008, provides \$2.25 billion in funding over the first five years.

"It is difficult to expect our community to make time to write funding applications given they are either harvesting or making hay at this time of the year. There is also the added complication of Christmas and holidays to consider," Mr Edkins said.

South Coast NRM has developed a consultative framework to include community ideas in the development of the next South Coast *Caring for our Country* Business Plan.

"We were very successful last year and we're hoping to do well again this year but the lateness of the release of the Government's plan may mean we have to compromise our planning to ensure we meet the expected February submission deadline," he explained.

For more information on *Caring for our Country*, visit www.nrm.gov.au

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South Coast Natural Resource Management is the leading regional non-government group for natural resource management on the South Coast of Western Australia. As an independent non-profit organisation, we work with the community to improve the environment by preserving and protecting unique plants and animals, managing land and waterways, and sharing knowledge and skills in natural resource management.