

Conservation Management Networks: The Gippsland Plains Story

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Introduction

Agricultural landscapes in temperate Australia have endured major losses and degradation of their native vegetation, leading to severe decline in extent of many vegetation communities, flora and fauna (NLWRA 2002). Due to this severe habitat loss, vegetation became fragmented with remnant patches occurring predominantly on private land. Traditional methods of protecting biodiversity, such as reserving extensive areas of public land for conservation, were not applicable in this situation. In response, the late 1990s saw the development of Conservation Management Networks (CMN), providing new models for landscape-scale conservation.

A CMN is a biophysical network of remnant vegetation sites across a variety of tenures and a social network of managers, owners and interested people (Thiele and Prober 2000). A CMN brings together the social and biophysical networks in order to improve land management and biodiversity outcomes. The focus of a CMN is usually on a vegetation community or species that is threatened or under-represented in the reserve system and is usually located in fragmented landscapes. A CMN provides a conservation network model that complements the National Reserve System. Trust for Nature (TfN) played a major role in facilitating the establishment of the first CMN in Victoria and the second in Australia: the Gippsland Plains Conservation Management Network (GPCMN).

The GPCMN is located in south-eastern Victoria in an agricultural landscape (Figure 11.1). The landscape covers ~700 000 ha with less than 10% native vegetation remaining. The main focus of the GPCMN is the nationally threatened Gippsland Red Gum Grassy Woodlands and the associated plains vegetation communities. Within the