



Media Release

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Valuing Nature. Burnett Mary Region moves Australia to front of race to unlock billions in investment.

Natural resource manager, The Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) together with partners, has announced registration of Australia's largest regional-scale environmental account.

An environmental account is a stocktake of a region's natural assets, such as:

- Vegetation cover
- Soil condition (including CO2 stores)
- Plants and animals (including aquatic fauna)

BMRG's CEO, Sheila Charlesworth said the account is the first step towards unlocking billions in conservation investment.

"As climate change forces the world economy to decarbonise, investors are looking to direct billions of dollars into protecting the ecosystems that sustain us," Ms Charlesworth said.

"To facilitate that investment in natural assets, we must first place a value on them, but we can't value assets until we know what they are, where they are and, how much there is. Our environmental account answers these questions. We now have a 5.6 million hectare stocktake of the Burnett Mary region's natural assets," said Ms Charlesworth.

eDNA metabarcoding, portable water sensor smart-stations, satellite remote sensing and Bayesian modelling was used to collect data. These high-tech methods were complemented by consultations with traditional owners, land managers and scientists.

BMRG Ecologist, Matt Taylor said the account revealed a wealth of natural capital in the region and a few pleasant surprises.

"The Mary River Turtle (*Elusor macrurus*) was detected by our eDNA metabarcoding survey at eight locations, which is great news, given the Mary River has been impacted by the worst flooding on record," Mr Taylor said.

BMRG received funding from Andrew and Nicola Forrest's Minderoo Foundation, to develop accredited environmental accounting methodologies with the support of a scientifically based framework from Accounting for Nature®.

Accounting for Nature's Director and former federal Treasury Secretary, Dr Ken Henry says the environmental account methodologies will be made publicly available.



“Farmers, traditional owners, governments and researchers will now have access to a consistent methodology for measurement and reporting of native vegetation, fauna and freshwater, linked with biomass and soil carbon as well as fire and flood risk mapping for environmental accounting across the country,” said Dr Henry.

The next phase of the project is to present the environmental account to financial markets looking to invest in Natural Capital. This work is being supported by the NAB Foundation and the Pollination Group.

“We know companies like Unilever have announced a €1 billion climate and nature fund, Apple is directing capital to nature-based investments and L’Oréal is investing millions into the preservation of biodiversity and circular use of resources,” said Martijn Wilder, founder of environmental markets advisory firm, Pollination Group.

“With this environmental account verging completion, Australia moves to the front of the pack, in the race to unlock billions of dollars in untapped Natural Capital investment.” said Mr Wilder.

The account will be combined with fire and flood risk data to better understand the impact on environmental assets in the Burnett Mary region.

Adrian Turner who leads Minderoo’s [Fire and Flood Resilience](#) initiative which funded the environmental account, believes it is a game changer.

“By measuring things like the impact of cool burning by traditional owners to reduce fuel loads or clearing waterways to prevent flooding in a standards-based way, we will enable multi-party investment in landscape-based resilience.”

BMRG’s Sheila Charlesworth summarised environmental accounting as the foundation stone to a completely new way of investing.

“I think it was one of Bill Clinton’s advisers who once quipped ‘It’s the economy, stupid.’ If he was around today, he might say ‘The natural environment is the economy, stupid.’ For without it, we are nothing.” Ms Charlesworth said.

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About the Burnett Mary Regional Group: www.bmrg.org.au

About Accounting for Nature: www.accountingfornature.org

About Minderoo Foundation: <https://www.minderoo.org/about/>

Further Briefing

A webinar featuring presentations and conversations with leaders from BMRG, Accounting for Nature, Minderoo Foundation and associated partners will take place in the near future. To register your interest please email: naturalcapital@bmrg.org.au

Definition of an Environmental Account:

Environmental Accounts measure and track the condition of environmental asset classes - soil, native vegetation, native fauna, water, within three realms - land, ocean, freshwater. Environmental accounts provide a source of truth for sustainability claims made with respect to landscape or marine conservation and restoration. These accounts can underpin government and philanthropic grants, issuance and tracking of green bonds and other financial instruments, monitoring the efficacy of sustainable land management activities, consumer labelling on food and fibre products, undertaking due diligence on impact investments, and credibly linking environmental co-benefits to carbon offset units under different internationally recognised standards.