

Corporate Plan Reference:	<i>Our environment is protect, enhanced and valued by the community</i>
Endorsed by Council:	20 September 2018
Guideline Owner and Department:	Director Environment and Sustainable Development

GUIDELINE BACKGROUND

The Environment Levy Policy provides the head of power for the acquisition of environmentally significant land and the Voluntary Conservation Agreement (VCA) program. In addition, the Land for Wildlife (LfW) program supports landholders with conservation efforts on private land. An Environment Levy Working Group (ELWG) makes recommendations to Council on the best mechanisms to protect environmentally significant land under these programs.

The purpose of the Conservation Land Guideline is to provide a clear methodology for identifying land parcels of interest for either voluntary acquisition, the VCA program or the LfW program.

POLICY GUIDELINE

Core Protected Areas and Biodiversity Corridors

Consistent with the Environment Levy Policy, the Conservation Land Guideline is based upon the principle of consolidating and connecting Core Protected Areas (CPAs). CPAs are large areas of remnant vegetation which consist collectively of public land already under conservation protection such as National Park, Conservation Park, Nature Refuge or Bushland Reserve. The larger the protected area, the more chance of survival for certain vegetation types and faunal species. Fragmentation of habitat places faunal species at risk of genetic isolation, predation by pest species and impacts from climate change.

Noosa's four largest CPAs are shown in Map 1 and are Cooloola-Noosa, Tewantin-Pomona (including Ringtail and Yurol State Forest), West Cooroy and Woondum. Map 1 also shows mapped Biodiversity Corridors that help connect CPAs via creek lines and vegetation networks. The VCA and LfW properties play an important role in consolidating biodiversity corridors.

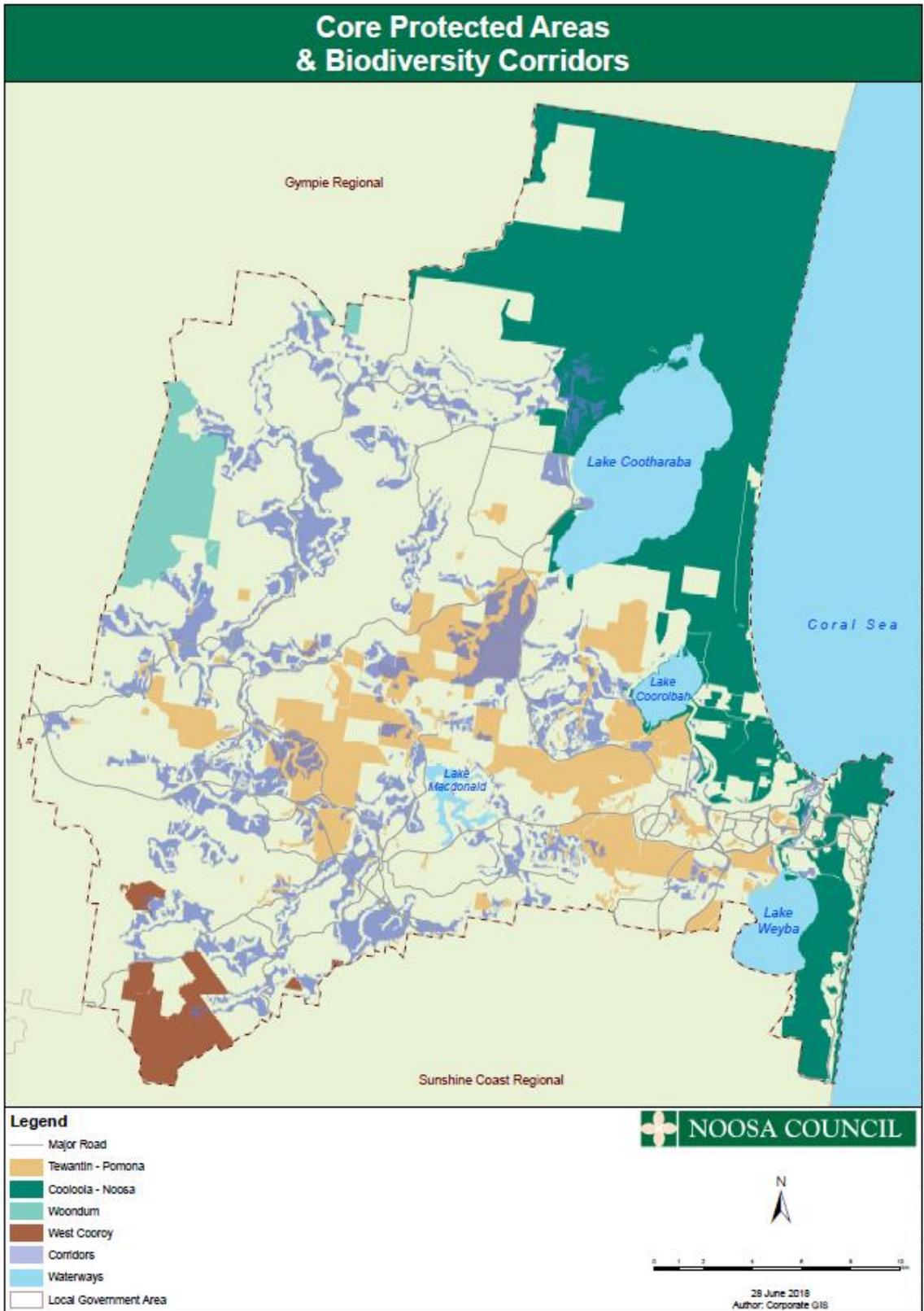
Mapping methodology to identify land parcels of interest

To consolidate and connect CPAs, land parcels of interest are identified based on the following mapping methodology:

- Land located immediately next to or within CPAs;
- Land equal to or greater than 30ha in size ;
- Land parcels with a high biodiversity score (as identified in the Biodiversity Assessment Report mapping).

The ELWG has recommended that land parcels in or adjacent to the Cooloola-Noosa CPA be considered as the highest priority because of the potential threat of development in the lower Noosa River catchment. A suitable land parcel is land that:

- Is located immediately next to the Noosa River or lakes;
- Is located on Noosa North Shore that connects National Park or Bushland Reserve;
- May have a lower biodiversity score because the main criteria for these land parcels is 'threat level' and lower biodiversity score parcels are still considered a high priority for acquisition in this area;
- Are larger parcels of land i.e. zoned Open Space Conservation, Rural Settlement or Rural.



Map 1 Noosa's Core Protected Areas and Biodiversity Corridors

Conservation mechanisms

Apart from environmental legislation, Council has four key mechanisms to protect environmentally significant land:

1) Land acquisition program-Buy and hold

A landholder may approach Council with an offer to sell their land. The ELWG makes an assessment of whether the land meets the criteria under the mapping methodology. If so, an assessment is undertaken for:

- Verification of biodiversity values and condition
- Investigation of encumbrances including weed infestation, future road corridors or impacts from climate change such as sea level rise
- Assessment of funding opportunities for revegetation if the property is partly cleared. Examples include grants, environmental offsets or carbon offset programs
- Suitability for potential Nature Refuge dedication under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*
- Value for money: A potential purchase must also be 'value for money' based on a current land valuation

The ELWG has recommended that land parcels in or adjacent to the Cooloola-Noosa CPA be considered as the highest priority because of the potential threat of development (including clearing for views) in the lower Noosa River catchment. Land parcels in this area are considered for 'buy and hold' under public protection and not recommended for on-selling. After purchase the land may be managed by Council as a bushland reserve or 'gifted' to National Parks to add to the protected area estate.

Land parcels that do not meet the mapping methodology may also be considered on a case by case basis. For example, a smaller land parcel may have unique characteristic that warrant conservation such as the last remaining population of a threatened species.

2) Land acquisition-Buy and on-sell (Revolving fund)

Similar to the land acquisition 'buy and hold' program above, land parcels identified through the mapping methodology are suitable for a buy and on-sell proposition (also termed a revolving fund). Only the Cooloola Noosa CPA land parcels are not suitable for resale through a revolving fund because they are identified as a priority for conservation and are recommended for the highest level of protection through public ownership.

Under the Environment Levy Policy, land (or part thereof), may be on-sold with conservation protection if there are no adverse impacts to the environmental values of the land. The main mechanisms to do this are:

- On-sell entire land parcel: The land parcel is purchased, dedicated as a Nature Refuge and on-sold
- Boundary realignment: Two adjoining land parcels can undergo a boundary realignment, one parcel is dedicated as a Nature Refuge and the balance parcel on-sold
- Subdivision: A land parcel can be subdivided for park purposes, one parcel is dedicated as a Nature Refuge and the balance parcel on-sold

A Revolving Fund Guideline has been developed to implement a revolving fund.

3) Voluntary Conservation Agreements

Private land conservation can play an important role in re-connecting corridors between CPA's. Council may enter into an agreement with a private landholder to place conservation protection over their land (or part thereof). A covenant or Nature Refuge is placed on title to protect land in perpetuity. Council may provide funds towards the costs of establishing the covenant or Nature Refuge and may also provide ongoing funding support to deliver an Environment Management Plan.

Land parcels identified through the mapping methodology are suitable for the VCA program. In addition land parcels that occur in mapped biodiversity corridors may also be suitable for the VCA program.

A Private Landholder Conservation Partnerships Guideline has been developed to implement the VCA program.

4) Land for Wildlife

The LfW Program offers an alternative for landholders whose properties do not qualify for the VCA Program or for landholders that do not want a statutory covenant on their land. The LFW Program provides a support network for landholders interested in conserving their land and adds to Noosa’s social capital of people involved in private land conservation. Based on popularity and area of land cover the LFW program is Noosa’s leading private land conservation initiative.

Land for Wildlife offers a lower level of conservation protection than public ownership or private Nature Refuge, however, like many other rural properties that are vegetated, LfW properties are protected (or partly protected) under the under the Noosa Plan Biodiversity and Riparian Overlays.

Applications for LfW are considered on a case by case basis and suitable land includes:

- Land parcels identified in the mapping methodology
- Land in biodiversity corridors
- Land outside biodiversity corridors that meets LfW criteria identified in supporting guidelines.

A Private Landholder Conservation Partnerships Guideline has been developed to implement the LfW program.

Conservation tenure and levels of protection

In terms of safeguarding biodiversity, public ownership is considered more secure than private ownership. It is not possible to determine the absolute risk to biodiversity of each conservation land mechanism as it is subject to the intent of the landholder (regardless of statutory protection provisions). Figure 1 below shows the various conservation protection tenures, levels of protection and the scale of investment required.

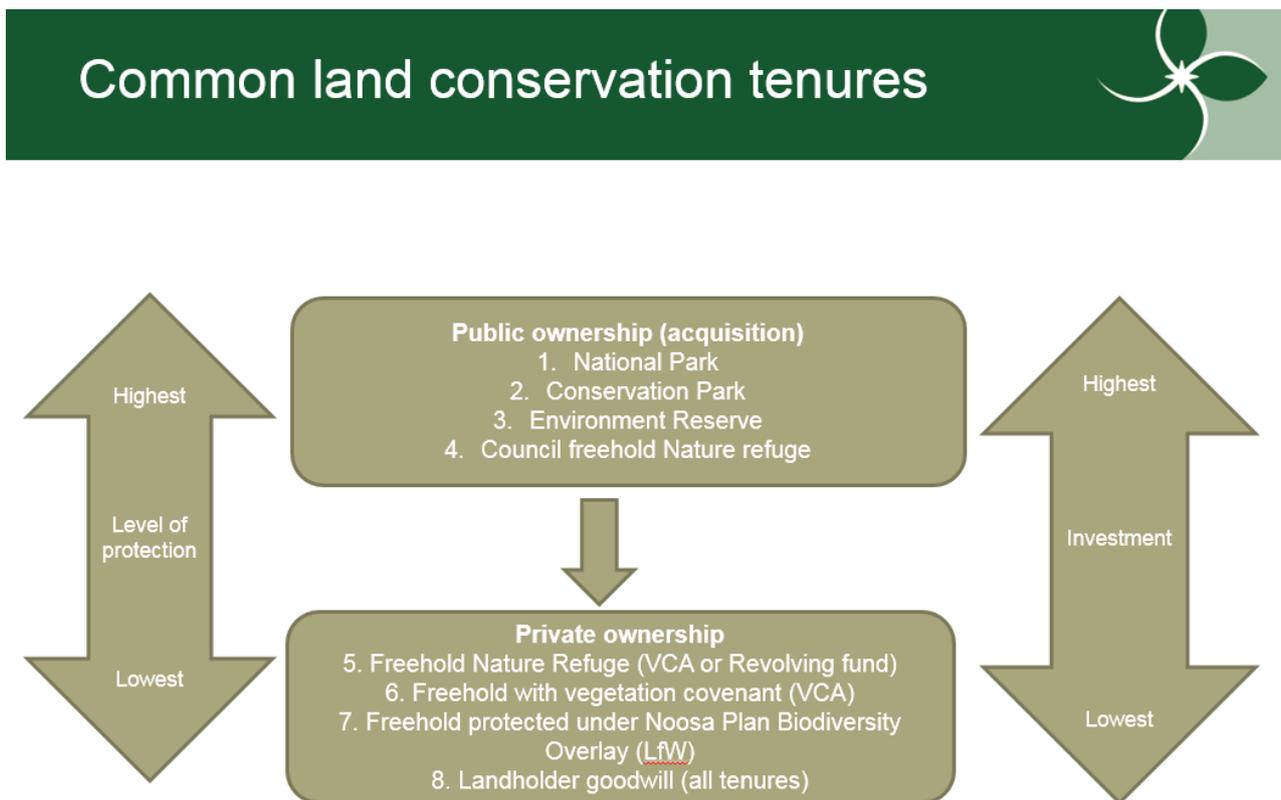


Figure 1. Common land conservation measures and level of protection

Decision support tool

Landholders may choose to voluntarily sell to Council for conservation purposes or elect to be part of a private landholder conservation partnerships program. Figure 2 is a decision support tool for helping to determine the preferred conservation mechanism for landholders interested in protecting their land through one of the conservation mechanisms.

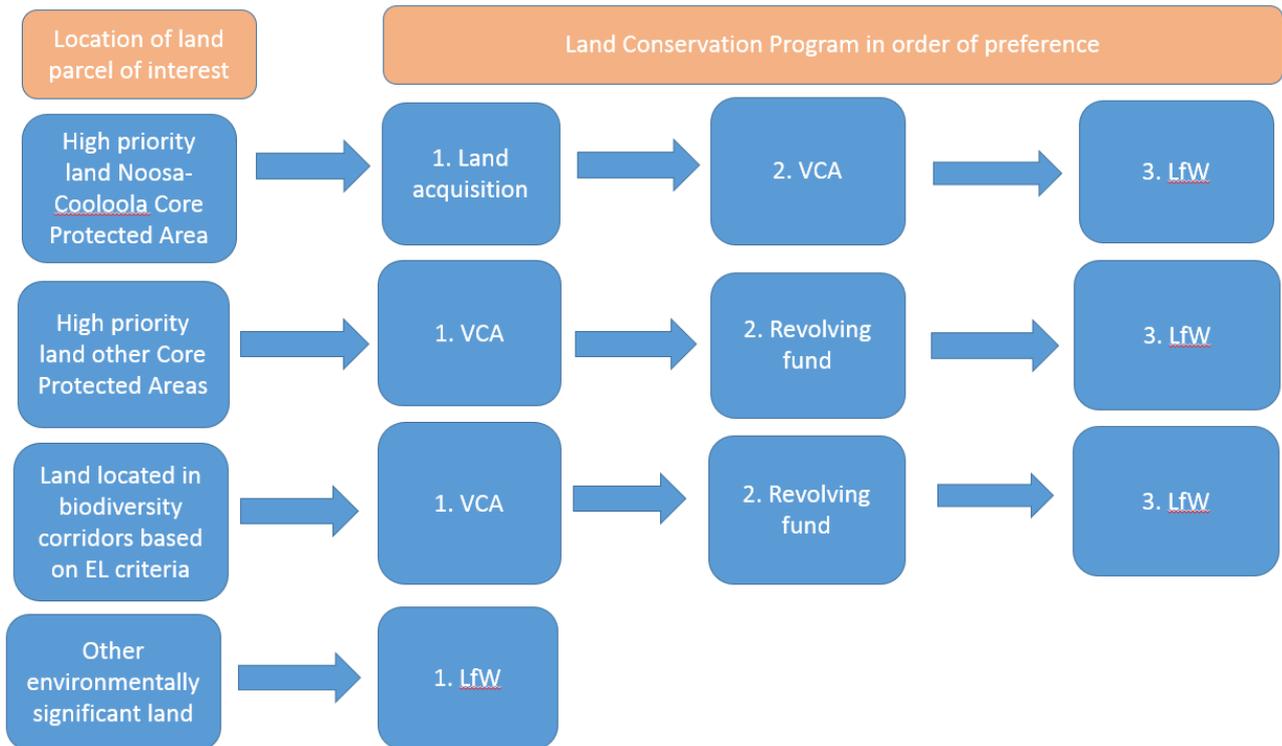


Figure 2. Decision support tool

With reference to Figure 2 and subject to the mapping methodology and associated guidelines:

- Land acquisition for public ownership is preferred for land parcels located next to or within the Cooloola-Noosa Core Protected Area
- All parcels identified through the mapping methodology are suitable for VCA and LfW
- Land parcels occurring in mapped biodiversity corridors are also suitable for LfW and VCA
- VCA is preferred over a revolving fund because with VCAs the private landholder manages the purchase and selling of land, rather than Council buying and selling land.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Environment Levy Working Group makes recommendations to Council on implementing the Conservation Land Guideline. Roles and responsibilities are shown in Table 1 below.

CLP Program	Lead generation	Responsibility	Contact
EL Acquisition	Landholders approach Council Council advertise an EOI Landholders place property on open market	ELWG to assess proposed acquisitions	Principal Environment Officer/Senior Environment Officer (Planning)
EL Revolving fund	Landholders approach Council Council advertise an EOI Landholders place property on open market	ELWG to assess proposed acquisitions and the feasibility of on-selling is undertaken with Financial Services	Principal Environment Officer/ Senior Environment Officer (Planning)
VCA program	Landholders approach Council Council advertise an EOI	ELWG review VCA program on an annual basis and assess new applicants	Community Partnerships Officer
LfW program	Landholders approach Council	ELWG review LfW program on an annual basis and assess new applicants	Community Partnerships Officer

Table 1. Roles and responsibilities for implementing the Conservation Land Guideline

RELEVANT LEGISLATION, POLICY AND GUIDELINES

Noosa Council Biodiversity Assessment Report 2016

Noosa Shire Waterways Assessment report 2017

Noosa Council Environment Levy Policy 2018

Noosa Council Revolving Fund Guideline 2018

Noosa Council Private Landholder Conservation Partnerships Guideline 2018

The Noosa Plan

Qld Land Act 1994

Qld Nature Conservation Act 1992

Qld Vegetation Management Act 1999

Version control:

Version	Reason/ Trigger	Change (Y/N)	Endorsed/ Reviewed by	Date
1.0	Create new		Council	20/09/2018