



The need for biodiversity conservation activities within Australia's development assistance program has been well recognised over many years.

The *Environment Assistance Program*, under the Labor Government in the early 1990s was probably the first to tackle environment and biodiversity issues in the aid program. The Howard Government established the *Regional Natural Heritage Program* (RNHP) that ran for 4 years. A DEWHA paper on '*Australia and the World Heritage Committee*', in a table of Government expenditure under the *Asia- Pacific Focal Point for World Heritage (2000- 2007)* stated that of the nearly \$6m spent during that period, over \$5m came from the RNHP over a three year period. This clearly shows the critical role of the RNHP regionally, and the loss of essential funding to the region that the lapsing of this program represented.

The Rudd Government's International Forest Carbon Initiative (ICFI) (Previously launched by the Howard Government as the *Global Initiative on Forests and Climate*) should make a substantial contribution to biodiversity conservation in some specific areas in Indonesia and PNG. However the IFCI will not address the pressing biodiversity conservation needs in most of Australia's development assistance partner countries or in many parts of PNG and Indonesia.

Several donor countries have specific biodiversity programs as part of their development assistance effort. For example the US Fish and Wildlife Service has a program of biodiversity grants for all regions of the world. The UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs *Darwin Initiative* "assists countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) through the funding of collaborative projects which draw on UK biodiversity expertise."

Australia, as a developed country with significant biodiversity conservation expertise and achievements, should, for reason of geography, be able to match or exceed the laudable UK and US biodiversity conservation aid programs.

AusAID's 'Working draft on an environment and climate strategy for Australian Development Assistance' specifically identifies the need for the aid program to address biodiversity conservation in a number of areas. However the 'Working Draft' does not suggest a means for achieving this.

### ***Proposal for the Joseph Banks Initiative***

It is proposed that as part of the AusAID Environment and Climate Change Strategy a new five year strategy for the *Joseph Banks Initiative* (JBI) be established under Australia's Development Assistance Program.

The program could be a **joint initiative of AusAID and the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts** with both agencies contributing equal

amounts to the Program. Funding could be sourced from existing Forward Estimates, for example, in part from the Government's allocation from the aid program to support climate change adaptation in the South Pacific and from relevant parts of the environment program. For example, in October 2008 Minister Garrett announced an allocation of \$2.5 million to UNESCO to support World Heritage initiatives internationally, with a focus on the Asia-Pacific. The DEWHA Heritage allocation could provide one source of funding.

The RNHP allocated \$10 m over four years. Given the nature and extent of the threats to the Asia Pacific region's biodiversity, doubling the allocation to \$20m over four years for a new JBI would be reasonable. It could be desirable to 'stage' expenditure, commencing from a low base, in order to gain experience with the new program

Monies could be directed to NGOs in the Asia- Pacific region, based on a public allocation process. Priority could be given to protected area and buffer zone management, reserve development and dedication, actions to maintain populations of endangered species including recovery actions, public awareness, illegal wildlife trade, projects relating to biodiversity conservation hotspot areas etc. The program should cover both terrestrial and marine environments.

The program could be managed by a steering committee comprised of AusAID and DEWHA as joint chairs, other agencies, scientific experts and relevant NGO representatives. One of the roles of the Committee could be to make recommendations on grant allocations.

The proposed program would have considerable potential in leveraging additional monies of an amount at least equal to the Australian Government contribution. (This was the experience of the Australian Government's Regional National Heritage Program with approximately \$13 million leveraged from NGOs).

A prime rationale of the proposed JBI would be to get funding quickly into the Asia Pacific region to assist in maintaining natural ecosystems and biodiversity essential to sustaining livelihoods in the face of face of mounting pressures from land clearing, climate change and other key threats.

Making the JBI an NGO grant program is considered the most efficient way to get on the ground programs under way as quickly as possible. NGOs have a good track record in stretching small sums of money to good effect.

## **Conclusion**

At a time of huge pressures on the regions' unique biodiversity from land clearing and climate change, the establishment of a new regional biodiversity conservation program would fill a significant gap in Australia's development assistance program and in our national environment program.

## References

1. Walsh, Brian. *Vanishing Act: How Climate Change is Causing a New Wave of Extinction*. Time magazine. 13 April 2009.



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