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Looking after Our Country... Our Way

Protecting Country Against Invasive Species

Guide for Indigenous Ranger Groups when completing an Expression of Interest and Proposal

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1. Introduction

The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) invites Indigenous Ranger Groups in northern Australia to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for funds available under the Australian Government funded *Protecting Country Against Invasive Species* program¹.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry established a partnership with NAILSMA in late 2023 to coordinate delivery of this program.

\$1.98 million (GST exclusive) is allocated for projects to support capacity development and resource Indigenous rangers to manage the impacts of priority pests and weeds in northern Australia. Funding will be split evenly across WA, NT, QLD.

Projects need to start during the 2024 field season and activities must be completed by 14 November 2025.

Management of feral cats, pigs and gamba grass (Qld only) are highlighted as priorities however there is opportunity to manage other pests threatening biodiversity and cultural values. There is a strong focus on supporting formal and informal training and developing robust operational work health safety (WHS) policies and procedures.

There will be a staged application process, consisting of an EOI (Stage 1), followed by a detailed Proposal (Stage 2).

Indigenous Ranger Groups are encouraged to collaborate with other groups in your region. NAILSMA is seeking to support regional partnerships to maximise impact. One group in a regional partnership will need to agree to be the Lead Organisation for the Proposal.

Proposals will be prioritised (within states/territories) based on merit against the Assessment criteria (below), ranked and successful proposals identified up to the level of funds available. Dependent on proposals received and outcomes of the merit process, we expect to provide resourcing for approximately six regional partnerships (two in each state/territory).

NAILSMA will manage approved proposals through a head contract with the Lead Organisation. The contract will include agreed activities, an approved budget, the work health safety and ethical requirements for managing risk, timeframes for delivery and monitoring and reporting.

Interested Indigenous Ranger Groups are encouraged to contact Regional Coordinators to discuss project ideas. Contact details below:

NT- Alex Ernst, alex.ernst@nailsma.org.au

QLD - Harry Tamwoy, harry.tamwoy@nailsma.org.au

WA – this position is currently vacant

For enquiries about projects in WA contact Senior Project Coordinator, Angie Reid, angie.reid@nailsma.org.au

EOIs will need to be submitted by the due date (26 April 2024) to be considered for Stage 2. Below is an overview of the process.

¹ This program is a component of the Supporting Communities Manage Pest Animals and Weeds Program.

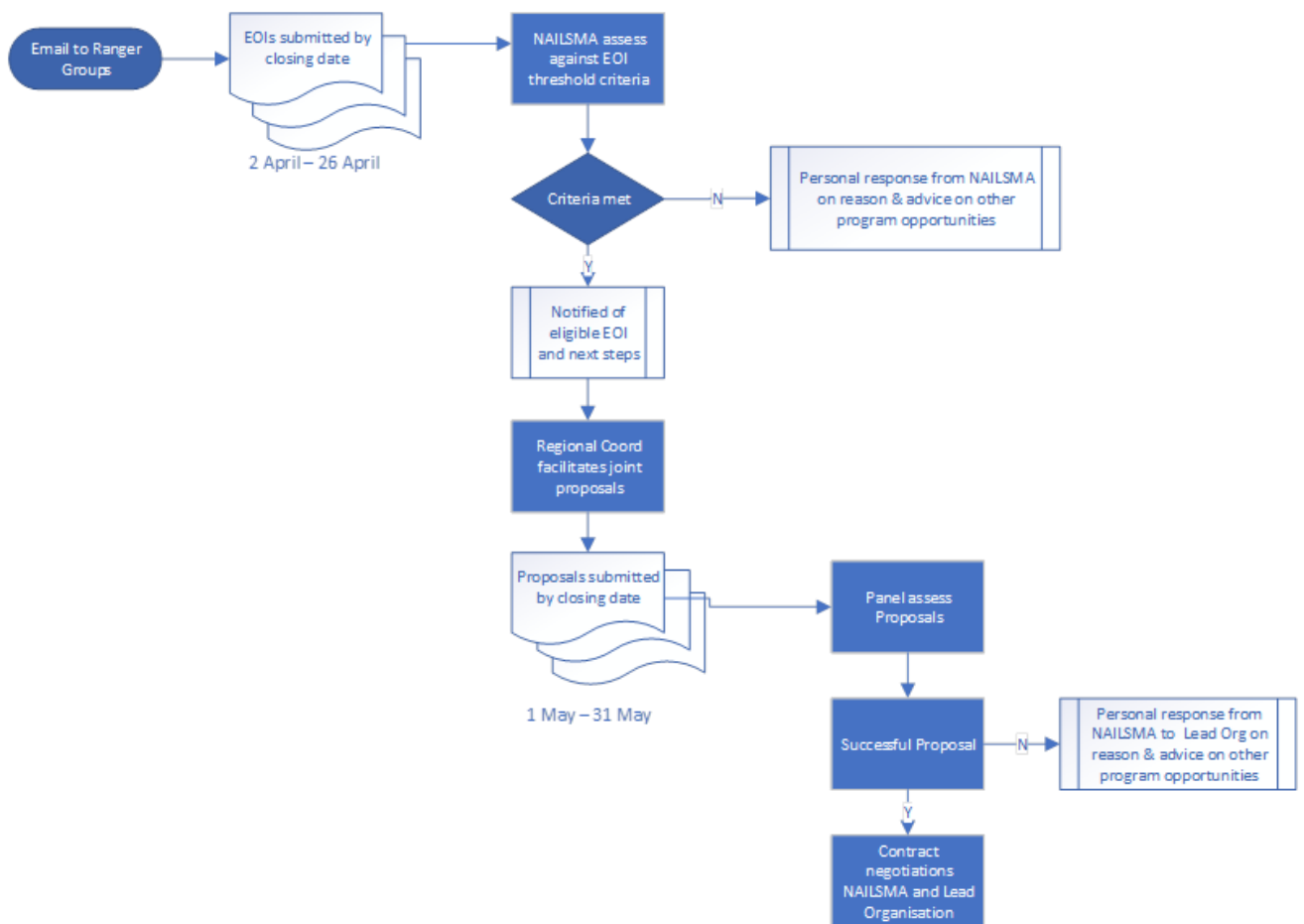


Figure 1 Application process and timeline

2. Program outcomes sought

The intended outcomes of the *Protecting Country Against Invasive Species* program (and projects funded) are to support Indigenous Ranger Groups in northern Australia to:

- protect biodiversity and cultural values from pests and weeds, providing employment and skills development.
- access training and development opportunities that improve rangers' effectiveness in managing pests and weeds, reducing the impact of pests and weeds on Country.
- participate in knowledge transfer opportunities, extending intergenerational knowledge transfer and Indigenous rangers' effectiveness.
- strengthen governance and risk management to effectively mitigate risks, in particular Work Health and Safety (WHS) risks, in undertaking pest and weed control activities and comply with applicable jurisdictional laws and policies regarding WHS and pest and weed management.

3. Submitting an Expression on Interest (Stage 1)

EOIs should be prepared using the [EOI template](#) and emailed to angie.reid@nailsma.org.au by 26 April 2024. NAILSMA will accept Microsoft word or PDF format.

The EOI process will allow NAILSMA to determine (for each region) interested groups, priority pest animal and weed management requirements including management activity resourcing requirements, activities that support the development of capacity and experience, formal training requirements and equipment needs.

NAILSMA will assess EOIs received as outlined below against threshold criteria.

Regional Project Coordinators based in the Kimberley, Darwin and Cairns will follow up with Indigenous Ranger Groups (Lead organisations) that submitted an eligible EOI, facilitating a conversation at the regional level on shared priorities, consideration of joint Proposals and assistance in working through the Proposal Form.

Indigenous Ranger Groups will ultimately determine who they wish to partner with for the Proposal stage.

NAILSMA will also contact those Lead Organisations that submitted an EOI but did not meet the threshold requirements to explain the reason. Information on how the group can seek other opportunities to benefit from the program, for example through planned capacity building activities, will be provided.

4. Submitting a Proposal (Stage 2)

Proposals should be prepared using the [Proposal template](#) and emailed to angie.reid@nailsma.org.au by 31 May 2024. NAILSMA will accept Microsoft word or PDF format.

Proposals will be assessed against the Assessment criteria (below) by a panel.

5. Eligibility criteria

Indigenous Ranger Groups eligible to apply are those who are currently part of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Biosecurity Indigenous Rangers Program.

Other organisations with a delivery role in the Proposal can be included.

6. Eligible expenditure

Expenditure must be a direct cost of the project. You can request funding for:

- Equipment (build, purchase or hire equipment or assets)
- Salaries (on-costs for Indigenous Rangers directly employed to complete activities)
- Contract expenditure (cost of any agreed activities that you contract to others)
- Training that supports achievement of the project outcomes
- Operational costs, including domestic travel, communications and administration.

7. Project criteria

It is considered that a Proposal that achieves one or more of the Project criteria will help to contribute to the Program outcomes sought.

The Project criteria are:

- **Addresses key threats** (including but not limited to feral pigs, feral cats and gamba grass²) impacting on threatened native plants and animals. Protecting threatened native plants and animals included in the **Threatened Species Action Plan** will receive a higher weighting.
- **Regional collaboration** between Indigenous Ranger organisations. To maximise impact, we will prioritise projects that demonstrate collaboration with other Indigenous ranger groups in the region, share knowledge and resources, and identify opportunities for group training and capacity development.
- **Strong governance and risk management**, developing methods, policies and procedures that can support the safe delivery of management activities. We will be prioritising projects that have established and tested policies and procedures that support safe operations for common land management activities and include internal processes and evidence of compliance with the WHS standards (e.g. tools that compel rangers to follow acceptable WHS standards and record compliance for helicopter use, firearms use, herbicide use). We aim to use the projects to share successful and trusted approaches and develop accepted policies and procedures (that meet jurisdictional expectations for WHS risk management) that can be shared with Indigenous ranger groups across northern Australia. **Funding cannot be provided to organisations that do not have appropriate WHS policies and procedures in place.** Resourcing can be sought to support the development of appropriate WHS policies and procedures and training.
- **Skills development**, projects that identify training and skills development activities that will elevate their regions capacity to independently manage pest and weeds will be prioritised. We are seeking to identify gaps in skills and experience applying diverse management methods. This can include completing training in critical WHS gaps such as chemical use, helicopter use and firearms use.
- **Leverage research partnerships**, align management activities with research activities that are occurring in region. This funding provides an opportunity to explore research priorities that will help your organisations understand the impact of different management approaches and define practical and robust monitoring methods that provide useful feedback for management decisions.

8. Assessment of EOIs

This section outlines the threshold criteria that will be followed by NAILSMA when assessing EOIs. All threshold criteria must be met.

1. The EOI template is complete
2. The Lead Organisation meets the Eligibility Criteria

² Control of Gamba Grass in NT will not be prioritised, given DCCEEW investment of \$9.8m. Control of Gamba Grass in QLD will be considered.

3. The Proposal meets at least one Project Criteria
4. The Proposal lists the native plants, animals and/or ecological communities to be protected
5. The Proposal lists the key invasive species impacting on biodiversity and/or culture
6. The Proposal activities can be completed by 14 November 2025
7. The Proposal indicates readiness to commence delivery
8. The Budget includes Eligible Expenditure only

9. Assessment criteria - Proposal

This section outlines the assessment process that will be followed when assessing Proposals. All Assessment Criteria are of equal importance and weight.

1. **Proper use and management of public resources and value for money**, including:

a. **Effective use:** The extent to which the Proposal meets one or more of the Project Criteria and therefore helps to contribute to the Program outcomes sought.

Note: A Proposal will generally be assessed more favourably against this criterion if it meets more than one Project Criteria. In assessing this criterion, the Panel will consider the methods proposed to achieve the stated outcomes, and whether measurement, reporting and evaluation methods suggested are sufficient to enable NAILSMA to measure the stated outcomes.

b. **Efficient use:** The extent to which the Proposal will achieve value for the money and the resources used, including whether the proposed budget is reasonable to achieve the stated outcomes.

Note: In assessing this criterion, the Panel will consider the costs for activities contained in the Proposal in comparison with costs for comparable activities and the appropriateness and efficiency of the proposed activities contained in the Proposal.

c. **Economical:** The extent to which the Proposal minimises costs for the achievement of stated outcomes.

Note: In assessing this criterion, the Panel will consider whether the level of resources requested is commensurate with the stated outcomes and the level of resources to be provided by other partners.

d. **Ethical:** The extent to which the lead personnel and group members and its Proposal, including its approach to achieving the stated outcomes raises any ethical or probity issues (including conflict of interests) that cannot be reasonably managed.

Note: In preparing your response to this criterion, you should identify any potential probity or ethical issues, including in relation to conflicts of interest, and describe the actions you consider are required to manage the identified issues. In assessing this criterion, the Panel

will consider whether a decision to proceed with the proposal would be defensible (including upholding the Probity principles).

2. Viability of the Proposal:

The viability of the Proposal will be determined by the Panel after assessing whether it can realistically achieve sustained benefits over time. This includes considering the extent to which there are any known or reasonably foreseeable barriers or external factors that would prevent the Proposal from achieving its stated outcomes by the projected end date.

Note: *In assessing viability, the Panel will consider matters such as any dependencies for the proposal to proceed, the extent to which the Partners would address the stated problem in the Proposal and the benefits that will continue to be realised following completion of the Proposal.*

3. Risk profile of the Lead Organisation or the Proposal:

The risk profile of the Proposal will be determined by the panel having regard to risks which have not been considered in criterions 1 or 2 and will examine risks associated with the Proposal as a whole and the risks of partnering with the lead group and partners, including any identified subcontractors and their involvement.

Note: *the entity that is the Lead Organisation will have the legal relationship with NAILSMA through the resultant contract (if any) and will ultimately be responsible to NAILSMA for its group members and subcontractors involved in delivery of the Proposal.*

In preparing your response to this criterion, you should outline any risks in the Proposal as well as intended mitigation strategies for those risks. This includes considering the range of risks associated with performance of obligations in relation to the Proposal, including the ability to do so safely and in accordance with Work Health and Safety (WHS) obligations. You should attach your Indigenous Ranger Group(s) WHS Management Plans and other relevant documents in place to mitigate risks and comply with applicable state/territory rules for pest and weed control activities.

10. Program roles and responsibilities

The Australian Government Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon Murray Watt, approved the grant of \$3.947m (GST exclusive) to NAILSMA to coordinate delivery of the *Protecting Country Against Invasive Species* program.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) subsequently entered into a grant agreement with NAILSMA to deliver the program in December 2023. The program includes a number of components, in addition to projects, such as training and capacity building. See further details here: [Protecting Country Against Invasive Species | NAILSMA](#)

NAILSMA will assess EOIs against the threshold criteria, advise Lead Organisations of outcomes and via Regional Coordinators will facilitate discussions on joint Proposals.

NAILSMA will establish the Panel to assess Proposals against the assessment criteria, comprised of NAILSMA personnel, independent advisors and a DAFF representative. To avoid any perceived conflict of interest, Regional Coordinators will not be panel members.

The Panel will assess Proposals against the assessment criteria and compare it to other eligible applications before recommending which Proposals to fund.

The NAILSMA CEO will approve the list of successful Proposals and provide to DAFF for announcement of recipients to receive Commonwealth funding under the program.

If a Proposal is successful, NAILSMA will advise the Indigenous Ranger Group identified as the Lead Organisation and seek to enter into a contract to deliver the Proposal.

If a Proposal is unsuccessful, NAILSMA will advise the Lead Organisation in writing and the NAILSMA Senior Project Coordinator will be available to provide feedback.

11. Probity

Probity principles require the conduct of open, fair, accountable and consistent processes. The probity principles applied through this process aim to assure all parties of the integrity of the decision-making process. The probity principles include:

- honesty and impartiality.
- identification and management of conflicts of interest
- appropriate security and confidentiality arrangements
- consistency, fairness and due diligence
- transparency
- maintaining an appropriate audit trail, and
- compliance with legal and policy frameworks.

Any complaints or concerns about the probity of this program should be directed to NAILSMA Chief Operating Officer in the first instance at erica.mccreedy@nailsma.org.au.

12. Timeframes

NAILSMA is committed to progressing the assessment process in a timely manner, to enable successful Proposals to proceed and commence control activities by mid-dry season 2024.

If requested to provide additional information in relation to an EOI or Proposal, please do so promptly and in the manner requested. Delays in providing the information requested may adversely impact on the assessment of your Proposal.

Expected timing:

Activity	Timeframe
Opportunity to submit EOI closes	26 April 2024
Assessment of EOIs	1 May 2024
Opportunity to submit Proposal closes	31 May 2024
Assessment, approval and announcement of successful Proposals	June/July 2024

Negotiations and executed contracts	July/August 2024
Projects commence	August 2024
Project completion date	14 November 2025
End date of the contract commitment	12 December 2025

13. Announcement

NAILSMA will publish on its website a summary of the successful Proposals. This may include:

- name of organisation (Lead Organisation, Indigenous Ranger Group partners and other entities involved in delivery)
- title of the project
- public description (as per your Proposal, or amended as agreed with Lead Organisation)
- amount of Commonwealth funding awarded and contributions from other parties (where applicable)
- list of threatened native plants and animals to be protected.

All eligible Indigenous Ranger Groups will be notified of successful Proposals.

14. Successful Proposals

The Proposal Lead Organisation must enter into a legally binding contract with NAILSMA.

No funding will be committed for any Proposals until a contract has been agreed between NAILSMA and the Lead Organisation. No legally binding obligations will arise on a party until a contract is executed by both parties.

NAILSMA is required under the Agreement with DAFF, to make available to the Commonwealth any contracts associated with delivery of the Program, upon request.

Specific legislation, policies and industry standards

In undertaking the Proposal, the Lead Organisation, group members and other delivery entities must comply with all relevant laws, regulations and standards.

NAILSMA recognises that Indigenous land and sea management organisations already apply rigorous WHS and other protocols for their staff which are part of their ranger funding contracts. NAILSMA will explore existing safe work instructions and protocols with the Lead Organisation and partners and identify refinements (where relevant), to strengthen governance and risk management. This includes specific WHS plans for each control activity (e.g., baiting), which at a minimum identifies risks associated with the activity, assesses those risks, and includes details on how those risks are to be managed. Training needs, such as permits needed for personnel to undertake activities, will also be identified.

As part of project initiation, NAILSMA will work with the Lead Organisation to make available to project personnel the training and equipment necessary to perform the project activities.

Lead Organisations entering into a contract with NAILSMA, will be responsible for personnel and any sub-contractors meeting the WHS requirements, animal ethical requirements and other requirements specified in the contract, including completion of applicable training.

Payment

The contract with NAILSMA will state the amount to be paid and any contribution provided by you or a third party. Depending on available funding this may be less than the requested Commonwealth amount in your Proposal.

If you incur extra costs in delivery of your Proposal, you must meet those costs.

NAILSMA will make payments according to an agreed schedule set out in the contract. Payments will be subject to satisfactory progress on the project (as per the agreed contract).

Grant Payments and GST

If you are registered for the Goods and Services Tax (GST), where applicable we will add GST to your grant payment and provide you with a recipient created tax invoice. You are required to notify us if your GST registration status changes during the project period.

Grants are assessable income for taxation purposes, unless exempted by a taxation law. We recommend you seek independent professional advice on your taxation obligations or seek assistance from the [Australian Taxation Office](#). We do not provide advice on tax.

Reporting

You will be required to submit reports in line with the contract. We will provide you with a template to guide the amount of detail required. We will remind you of your reporting obligations before a report is due. We will expect you to report on:

- progress against agreed project milestones and outcomes
- project expenditure

We will monitor the progress of your project by assessing reports you submit and may conduct site visits to confirm details of your reports if necessary. Occasionally we may need seek further information.

Progress reports

Progress reports must:

- include details of your progress towards completion of agreed project activities, an explanation for any activities not able to be completed within the planned timeframe and how they will be achieved going forward, and consideration of project risks and mitigations put in place.
- identify the total eligible expenditure incurred to date.
- be submitted by the report due date.

We request that any delays are raised with us as soon as you become aware of them.

End of project report

When you complete the project, you must submit an end of project report.

End of project reports must:

- describe achievements against project activities and performance indicators.
- Evaluate how the project contributed to the overall program outcomes sought.
- identify the total expenditure incurred and list of assets created or acquired.

- include a declaration that the Commonwealth funding was spent in accordance with the contract and to report on any underspends.
- be submitted by the report due date.

Contract variations

We recognise that unexpected events may affect project progress. In these circumstances, you can request a variation to your contract, including:

- changing project activities
- changing project milestones
- extending the timeframe for completing the project but within the maximum time period allowed (by 15 November 2025)

The program does not allow for an increase of Commonwealth project funds.

If you want to propose changes to the contract, you must put them in writing. NAILSMA will consider in consultation with DAFF where applicable.

You should not assume that a variation request will be successful. We will consider your request based on factors such as:

- how it affects the project outcome
- expectations set in this guide in terms of Project and Assessment Criteria.

Evaluation

NAILSMA will evaluate the project to measure how well the outcomes have been achieved, for reporting to DAFF. NAILSMA may use information from your proposal and project reports for this purpose. NAILSMA may also interview you or ask you for more information to help us understand how the project impacted you and to evaluate how effective the program was in achieving its outcomes.

Acknowledgement

If you make a public statement about a project funded under the program, including in a brochure or publication, you must acknowledge the Commonwealth funds by using the following:

'This project received funding from the Australian Government Protecting Country Against Invasive Species program, coordinated by NAILSMA.'

You must include the Australian Government logo and NAILSMA logo in all promotional materials, publications and websites.

If you promote your project on social media, where character limits allow please use the following handles and hashtags:

- Facebook: @DAFFgov, @North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd
- X: @DAFFgov
- Instagram: @daffgov, @nailsma_
- LinkedIn: @Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, @North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd, @BertieHennecke

15. Rights and responsibilities

NAILSMA reserves the following rights:

- Accept a late EOI/Proposal after the closing date, accept an amended EOI/Proposal after lodgement or seek additional information on an EOI/Proposal.
- To amend or vary this process, in consultation with DAFF.
- To not advance a contract for any reason, in consultation in consultation with DAFF.
- Suspend consideration of a Proposal at any time and for any reason, in consultation in consultation with DAFF.
- Retain a record of the information obtained through the EOI/Proposal and subsequent requests for information in relation to the Program, noting this material will be held in-confidence to NAILSMA and DAFF and only used for the purposes of the Program, subject to obligations NAILSMA and DAFF have under law/policy to disclose.
- Proposals will be treated as confidential before and after the award of a contract. Where NAILSMA has agreed a contract, the terms of the contract, including parts drawn from the Proposal, are not confidential unless the relevant entity has determined and identified in the contract that information is to be kept confidential.
- We treat the information you give us as sensitive and therefore confidential if it meets all the following conditions: you clearly identify the information as confidential and explain why, the information is commercially sensitive, disclosing the information would cause unreasonable harm to you or someone else, you provide the information on the understanding that it will stay confidential.
- The need to maintain confidentiality of information needs to be balanced against the public accountability and transparency requirements of the Australian Government. NAILSMA will liaise with DAFF regarding requests for confidentiality and contact Lead Organisation to discuss where needed.
- We may disclose confidential information to the assessment panel and DAFF and NAILSMA employees and contractors, to help manage the program effectively. DAFF may also disclose the confidential information to the Auditor-General, Ombudsman or Privacy Commission, to the responsible Minister or to a House or Committee of the Australian Parliament.
- Where confidential information is required to be disclosed, reasonable notice in writing will be given to the party from whom the information originated.
- All documents in the possession of the Australian Government, including those about the program, are subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth) (FOI Act).
- NAILSMA, DAFF or the Minister, may announce the names of successful Proposals.

NAILSMA will publish on its website if there are changes to this Guide and/or Forms.