

PROJECT PHOENIX



A STRATEGY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN SEED SECTOR

SUMMARY

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Australian Government



Across all of our Project Phoenix activities and actions we pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work. We honour the resilience and continuing connection to country, culture and community of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

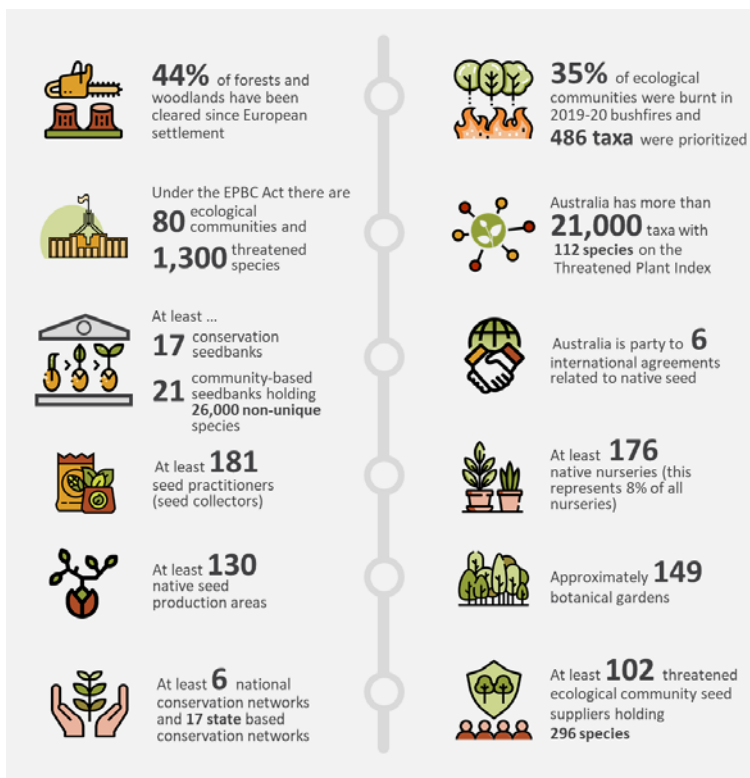
Why we need a strategy

Australia has great biodiversity with over 21,000 different species of native plants. Some of these are commonly sourced and are available, while others including threatened species are protected by legislation. Native seed has many uses which are often inter-related and continually evolving. It is used to conserve and restore our landscapes and create opportunities for communities (such as Traditional Owners and conservation/Landcare) and businesses (such as seed collectors, restoration practitioners, native foods, gardens and novel products). A snapshot of the native seed sector is presented in **Figure 1**.

In 2019–20, Australia suffered unprecedented bushfires. Over 35 per cent of Australia’s ecological communities were impacted. After the ‘Black Summer’ bushfires, it was clear that we needed to build a sustainable supply of native seed to be prepared for disasters such as fire, flood, drought and climate change.

This ten-year native seed and landscape restoration Strategy is a coordinated approach to growing the sector. It sets objectives to remove barriers and achieve outcomes that will benefit the whole sector and enable Australia to better manage restoration and rehabilitation of landscapes and support biodiversity.

FIGURE 1. A SNAPSHOT OF THE NATIVE SEED SECTOR



Source: Project Phoenix

The outcomes will benefit everyone

This Strategy has been designed around two challenges for Australia, to better use native seeds:

Seedbanks need to make the full diversity of Australian native plant species and their genetics available for future generations and active use.

As the world changes, Australia needs to ensure we retain our native plant species and prevent them from becoming lost forever. This means maintaining species in the wild and ensuring that soil seedbanks and seed stores provide insurance for our species. This will require improvement, growth and maintenance of existing seedbanks and seed production networks to ensure genetically diverse and viable seeds are available for future generations.

The Australian native seeds sector needs to attract the resources to sustain its skills and capacity to respond when required.

The need for native seed is always changing and is not always predictable. As such, we need to be able to scale seed sources, stores and uses as needed. This needs a flexible market, infrastructure, organisations and skills.

The native seed sector is complex, diverse and ever-changing. While these differences can create resilience, it makes it difficult to achieve common goals or overcome common challenges.

The Strategy relies on the whole sector to overcome these challenges. This will deliver benefits for all participants, by creating a sector that (refer **Figure 2**):

- is visible and connected
- has successful enterprises and thriving communities
- is supported by programs and initiatives and
- provides a sustainable supply of native seed.

FIGURE 2. BENEFITS



Source: Greening Australia

Six strategic objectives

The Strategy sets six strategic objectives (refer **Figure ES1**) to deliver on the challenges and achieve the benefits outlined above.

FIGURE 3: STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



Source: ACIL Allen

The strategic objectives will support everyone by overcoming common challenges such as:

- not enough information (including market-based information)
- competing views
- difficult regulation and
- uneven and unpredictable demand and supply.

The objectives are summarised below along with 12 activities, which show how we will achieve the objectives.

Strategic Objective 1: Quality

High quality collection and storage are common among sector participants and quality needs to be better recognised and valued. However, in contrast, poor quality seed collection and storing practices are common among some sector participants, which damages the reputation of the sector as a whole.

We need to agree on and use a national set of standards for collecting, cleaning and storing seed. This will ensure that users of seed get value for money and their time, and suppliers of seed get guidance to improve practice, are able to provide assurance to the market and are recognised for high quality outputs.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To agree on, promote and actively adopt one ‘living’ set of national best practice standards (or Code of Practice) and functional data systems for (possibly voluntary) use across the sector.

The ‘living’ standard needs to be flexible to adapt as the sector grows and new research emerges. This will take time to be developed and adopted, and its use should initially be voluntary.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

1. Adopt an existing framework for standards that is nationally agreed but voluntary.
2. Find an owner for the standards so they can be maintained, adapted and developed over time using existing systems and processes.
3. Promote the benefits of using standards to larger seed suppliers, purchasers and users.

Strategic Objective 2: Market coordination

Despite the many uses for native seed, there is uncertainty around what, where and when different types of seeds will be needed, where these can be sourced from, in what quantity and quality, and at what price. This makes it difficult for businesses to invest in physical assets, research and development (R&D), quality processes, systems or staff.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To enable the native seed sector to make coordinated market decisions by better sharing market-based information and connecting organisations and networks.

The sector needs information on priority areas and policies to secure funding, as well as the demand for native seed to make decisions on seed production areas, seedbanks and storage requirements and on investing in staff skills and capabilities.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

4. Develop a schedule of regionally-based fora (through the NRMs or Landcare) to facilitate information sharing and networking accompanied by a widely circulated regular digest of trends and opportunities.
5. Develop a policy and planning digest integrated with spatial mapping and other existing databases and tools.
6. Design a regionally networked exchange portal with a brokerage function to support sharing of demand and supply-side information.

Strategic Objective 3: Information sharing

The sector also has challenges in creating and using new and existing information such as best practice techniques and approaches. This limits the growth of the sector and decision-making by businesses, institutions and policy makers. Better coordination and access to information is essential for growing the sector, reducing duplication of effort and maximising opportunities.

Existing information on regional vegetation and guides on their distribution should be made more available for all regional natural resource management (NRM) regions. New research and development could focus on biodiscovery (new uses for native seeds); seed biology, genetics and germination; unknown taxa and flora; and building the scale and capacity of the sector.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To support the native seed sector through access to new and existing knowledge that is readily available, accessible and applied to support practices.

The sector can use a range of existing funding sources to create and use information.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

7. Develop a single connected network of information databases on areas relevant to native seeds from the regional to the national level (integrate this with information developed in Strategic Objective 2).
8. Make use of existing structures and funding co-design R&D priorities with a focus on public good to improve R&D support/outcomes.

Strategic Objective 4: New industries

New industries will boost the value of the sector. The two main areas for developing industries are:

- **Small, specialist areas:** industries with a low number of seed species and higher value, for example, native foods/bushfoods, ornamentals, biodiscovery and medicines etc.
- **Big-scale products:** industries with a large scale of land and species, for example, carbon or biodiversity offsets.

New industries are more likely to grow and invest in innovation if there is a supportive, thriving community. This also lowers the risks of innovation. New industries should use a range of existing support programs to grow.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To foster the growth of new and emerging industries to increase economic activity.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

9. Ensure those who want to develop new industries have access to funding and supports that exist to do so.
10. Coordinate and collaborate better through fora (Strategic Objective 2) and information (Strategic Objective 3).

Strategic Objective 5: Smarter regulation

The regulatory system governing the sector is complex. It is controlled by federal, state and territory governments. Regulation is needed to protect the environment, heritage and biodiversity conservation. However, differences in regulation across Australia mean that licensing systems are varied and application processes are difficult, take too long, and are expensive.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To better protect threatened species, biodiversity and land tenure while improving access (supply) through smarter regulation.

State and territory legislation and regulation needs to be reviewed and amended to better protect native plant species, control land access/property rights, protect traditional knowledge/IP, support the development of the sector and make it easier to do business.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

11. Improve permits/licensing through review of state/territory legislation across all jurisdictions.

Strategic Objective 6: Sector leadership

While many groups could lead the sector, each is focused on a specific area of the sector and no one group can provide overall leadership. This long-standing issue prevents the sector from implementing the Strategy and developing itself.

Leadership, and possibly a 'peak body', could:

- implement the Strategy
- represent the sector in policy processes
- promote the use of seeds and better practices
- set quality standards and provide accreditation and
- facilitate networks, share information and offer training.

The goal for this strategic objective is:

To develop a single voice for coordinated action in the sector to ensure strategic leadership and foster future growth and development of the sector.

For leadership to occur, there will need to be:

- an alignment of interests between the businesses, associations and others to establish a clear identity and agenda
- a value proposition for the services to be unique to, or best delivered at a sector level
- financial viability among those that are willing and able to provide the resources needed to lead or support the 'peak body'.

The actions for this strategic objective are:

12. Establish transitional leadership in the form of partnership arrangement with state/territory representatives focused on Strategy implementation. A peak body should be fostered and be supported to promote standards.

Next steps

The Strategy has been developed in collaboration with the sector during the first half of 2021. This included consulting widely through interviews and 14 online workshops as well as drawing on the insights from Project Phoenix, background sources and the Project Phoenix External Steering Committee. More information on the Strategy, Project Phoenix and Reports can be found on the Project Phoenix webpage www.greeningaustralia.org.au/phoenix.

The Strategy is open for public submissions from 5 July – 7 August 2021. In August, the Strategy will be finalised between the Project Phoenix External Steering Committee and Commonwealth, before being launched in September 2021.

We acknowledge that native seed is important to Traditional Owners. The Strategy will need to be delivered with Traditional Owners, to build a culturally appropriate and inclusive sector. While efforts were made to include Traditional Owners in the Strategy's development, more work is needed to ensure the Strategy meets the needs of Traditional Owners.

Now is the time to have your say

Your views are very important to finalising the Strategy. You will help sharpen the objectives and target the actions to make a real difference. We encourage you to have your say through the link from our webpage at www.greeningaustralia.org.au/phoenix or by email submissions at phoenix@greeningaustralia.org.au