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Ecosystem services from tropical savannas: economic opportunities through payments for environmental services

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Abstract

Economic activity in the tropical savannas of northern Australia, like rangeland regions across the globe, has traditionally been based on primary production – predominantly cattle grazing and mining. More recently, northern Australia has experienced an increase in the extent of the conservation estate and in tourism and associated service industries. These trends demonstrate an increasing recognition of the multifunctional character of the tropical savannas and business opportunities additional to the traditional primary production systems. The increasing recognition of the multifunctionality of landscapes and increasing demand for ecosystem services provides potential opportunities for economic returns for businesses and communities in the tropical savannas through the delivery of environmental services to sustain the region’s natural capital. This paper pursues two objectives. Firstly, it sets out to provide conceptual clarity around the notions of ecosystem services, environmental services and payments for environmental services (PES). Secondly, we sketch some of the opportunities associated with PES, with particular reference to the Gulf of Carpentaria in northern Australia.

Keywords: ecosystem services, environmental services, multifunctionality, natural capital, tropical savannas.

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