

3.3 BIODIVERSITY OFFSETS PACKAGE

The Program provides for a \$530 million biodiversity offsets package to protect high conservation value areas both *within and outside* the Growth Centres. 25% of this money will be used to secure conservation areas within the Growth Centres and 75% will be used to secure high quality vegetation remnants with similar ecological values outside the Growth Centres.

In addition to the \$530 million, some of the conservation areas within the North West Growth Centre are being purchased using other NSW Government revenue and by the local council.

3.3.1 Conservation areas within the Growth Centres

The conservation areas to be purchased within the Growth Centres are shown in Figure 5 and Figure 8 and are zoned as:

- Environmental conservation;
- Public recreation – regional; and
- Public recreation – local.

These areas cover a minimum of 1,000 ha and represent the highest quality vegetation within the Growth Centres.

There are a range of processes to acquire the land (detailed in Section 4) and all areas are protected from vegetation clearing through development controls and will be managed in the long term for conservation.

In addition to these areas there are lands within the Growth Centres that are currently in public ownership or have been identified for acquisition. These areas include areas such as Rossmore Grange, Kemps Creek Nature Reserve, and the Western Sydney Parklands. These areas are in public ownership and are managed by NSW Government or local councils to meet conservation and recreation objectives.

3.3.2 Conservation areas outside of the Growth Centres

The Program provides for the establishment of additional conservation areas throughout the Cumberland Plain, the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment and the Sydney Basin (see Figure 9). The Program will provide 75% of the overall Conservation Fund (\$397.5 million in 2005/06 dollars) over 30+ years for the securing of offset lands of high conservation and similar ecological values within these areas. This will be delivered through the Growth Centres Offset Program.

As a first preference, the funds will be invested within the priority areas on the Cumberland Plain identified in the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Action Plan (2008). The priority areas within the Cumberland Plain were identified by DECCW as lands that could most effectively be managed for threatened biodiversity (Figure 10). They represent the best remaining opportunities in the region to maximise long term biodiversity benefits for the lowest possible cost, including the least likelihood of restricting land supply. DECCW considers the remnant vegetation within these lands to be the highest priority for future recovery efforts for the threatened biodiversity of the Cumberland Plain.

Criteria for guiding the spending of annual funding within this area include a consideration of reserve design principles, conservation values and cost effectiveness. Preference will be given to protecting the largest remnants of intact vegetation with the greatest potential for long-term retention of biodiversity values.

If no suitable, cost effective lands are available in the areas of first preference, then priority areas within the broader Hawkesbury Nepean catchment will be considered as a second preference. These areas were identified as part of the development of the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Action Plan and comprise a network of regional corridors and priority fauna habitats in the catchment (Figure 11).

Finally, as third and fourth preferences, funding can be spent to conserve grassy woodlands within the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment and then the Sydney Basin respectively. Grassy woodlands are a broad group of vegetation types, including Cumberland Plain Shale Woodlands and Shale Gravel Transition Forest, that are under-represented in the State's reserve system (Figure 12).

In summary, funding will be allocated within a cascading series of preferential areas as follows:

- priority areas within the Cumberland Plain, as identified in the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Action Plan; then
- priority areas within the Hawkesbury Nepean catchment, as identified in the Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Action Plan; then
- grassy woodlands within the Hawkesbury Nepean catchment; and then
- grassy woodlands within the Sydney Basin.



Figure 9: Schematic of the offset focus areas

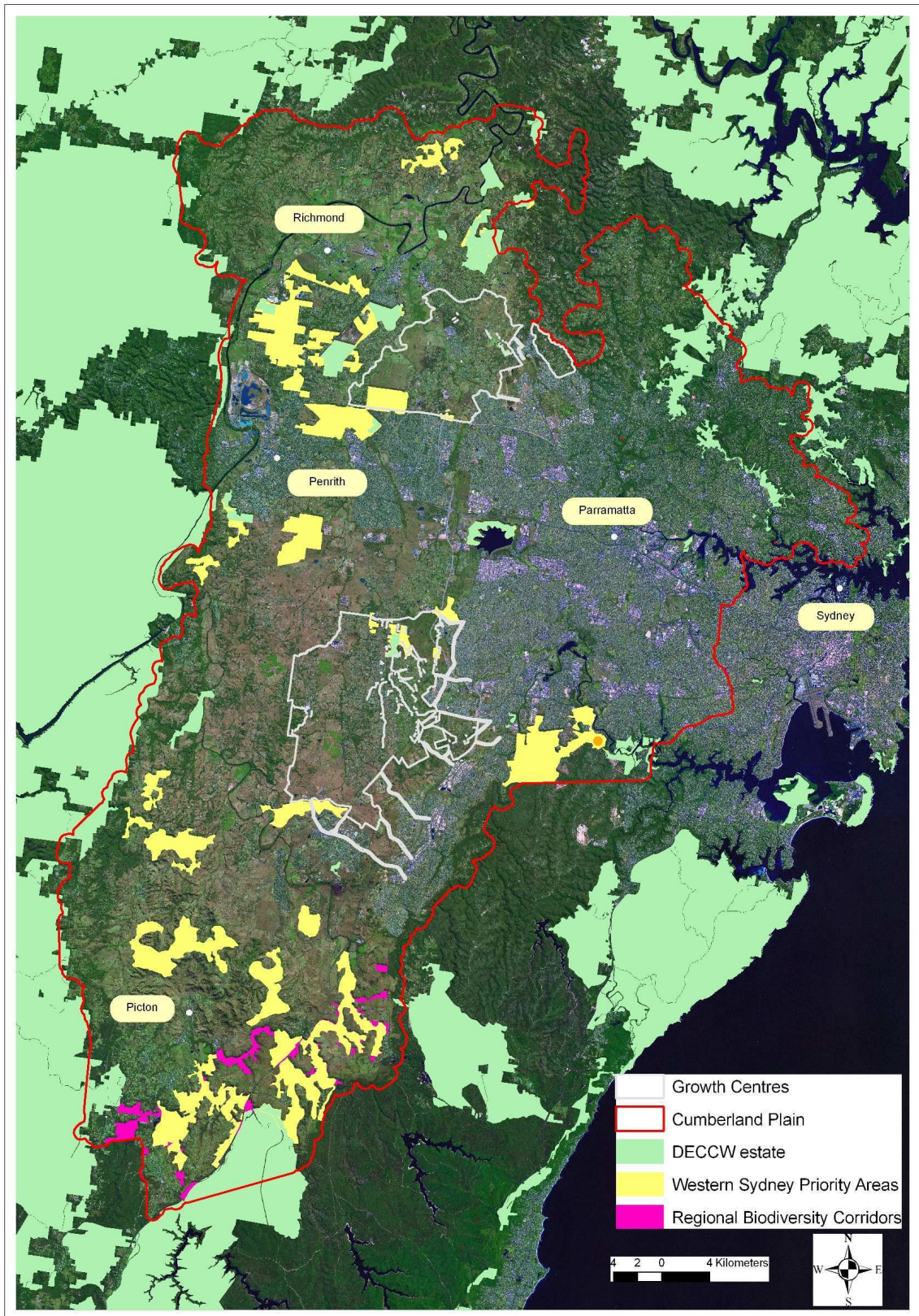


Figure 10: Priority areas within the Cumberland Plain

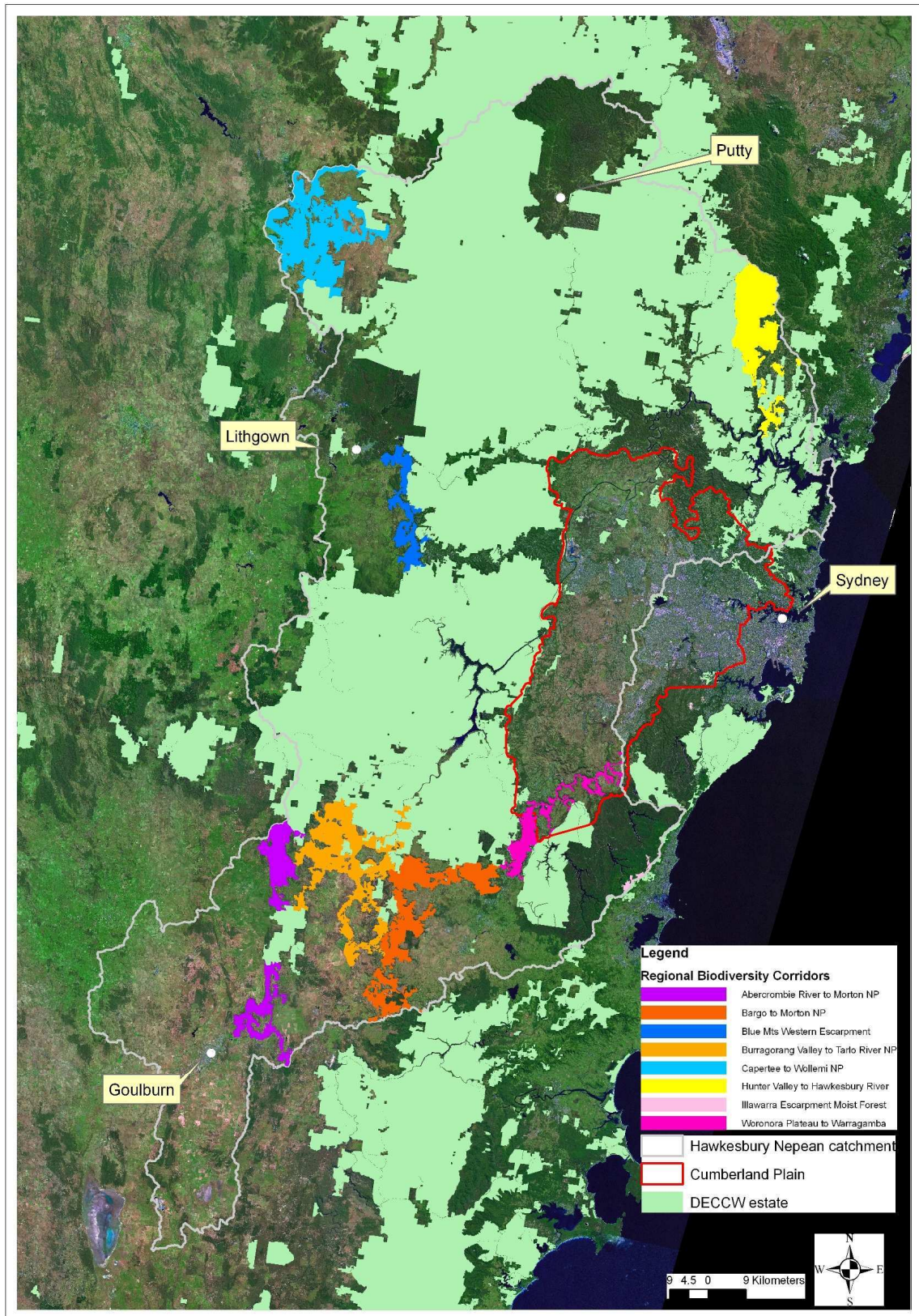


Figure 11: Second preference offset areas

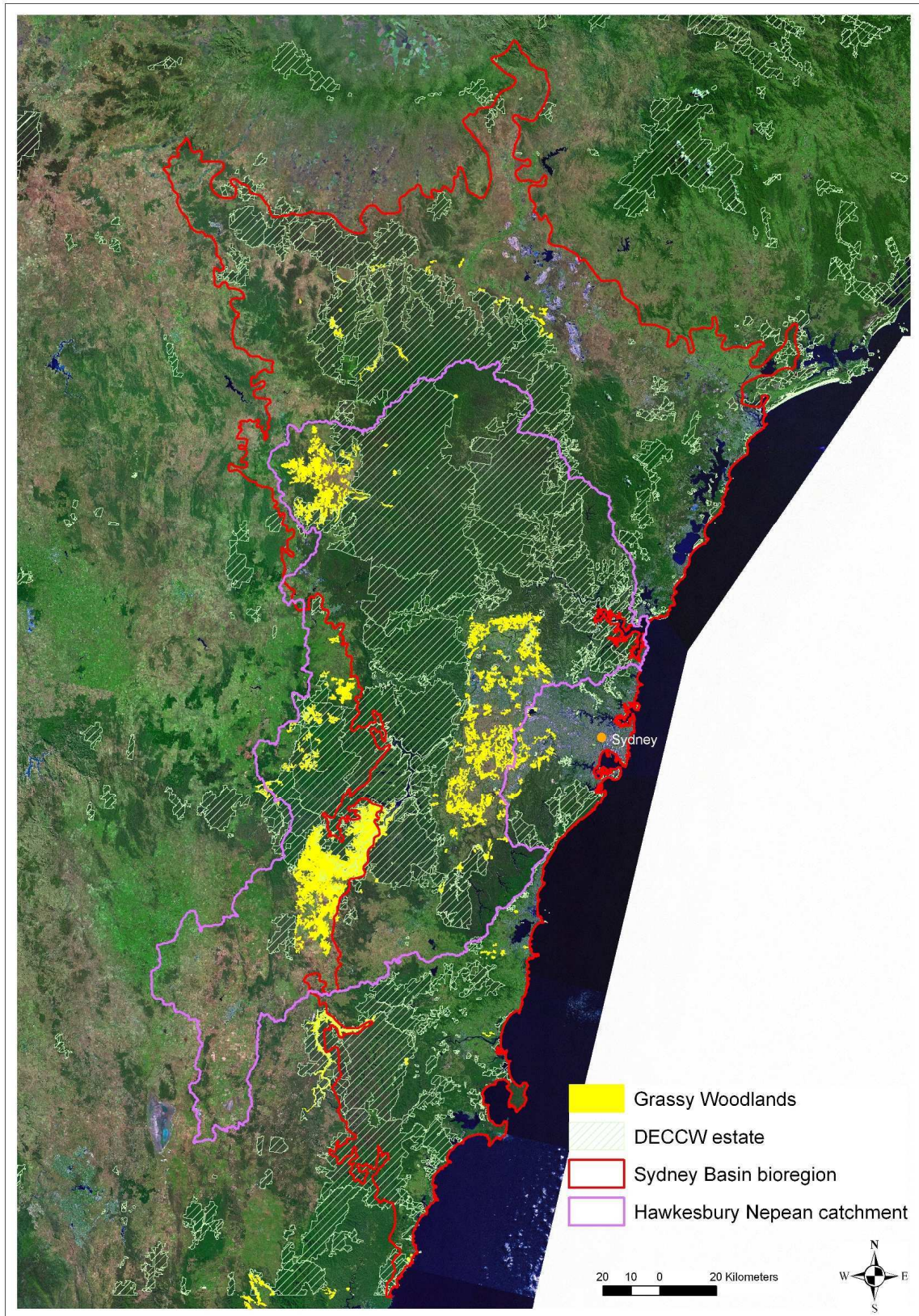


Figure 12: Grassy woodlands within and near to the Sydney Basin bioregion