



REVIEW OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR REGIONAL DELIVERY OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES



Report prepared by the Ministerial Reference Group
for Future NRM Programme Delivery

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**Natural
Heritage
Trust**
*Helping Communities
Helping Australia*

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action
Salinity & Water
AUSTRALIA

Preface

In September 2005 the Natural Heritage Ministerial Board commissioned the Ministerial Reference Group (an independent group) to look at the regional delivery of Australian Government natural resource management (NRM) programmes. (This report forms the basis of the advice provided to the Board.)

To complete the task the Reference Group travelled the length and breadth of Australia meeting with individuals, groups and representatives from state and national organisations. The aim was to identify stakeholders, determine how they felt about the current arrangements and programmes and how these could be improved.

What the Reference Group saw and heard on the ground demonstrated that NRM is an issue widely supported by community, governments, industry and non-government organisations. The Group found there is an overwhelming sense of commitment from those involved in NRM, and a strong desire to continue to build on a model that has the capacity to focus regionally but deliver nationally.

Kim Keogh

Chairman, Ministerial Reference Group for Future NRM Programme Delivery

Acknowledgements

The Reference Group acknowledges the efforts of many individuals, groups and organisations in providing advice and assistance.

The group is indebted to the people, volunteer groups and professional organisations who found time to meet with them, or provided a written submission. A list of those who contributed to the consultations is provided at [Appendix C](#).

In the preparation of this report the Ministerial Reference Group would like to thank the Secretariat within the Australian Government NRM Team.

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List of abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ALC	Australian Landcare Council
CDEP	Community Development Employment Programme
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CSO	Community Service Orders
Envirofund	Australian Government Envirofund
JSC	Joint Steering Committee
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAP	The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NHT	The Natural Heritage Trust
NHT1	The first phase of the Natural Heritage Trust
NHT2	The Extension to the Natural Heritage Trust
NHTAC	Natural Heritage Trust Advisory Committee
NLP	National Landcare Programme
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
QLD	Queensland
QMDC	Queensland Murray Darling Committee
Reference Group	The Ministerial Reference Group for Future NRM Programme Delivery
SA	South Australia
SEQ	South East Queensland
TAFE	College of Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
(The) TRUST	Natural Heritage Trust
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Executive summary

A. Introduction

In 2000, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to endorse a national action plan to address the natural resource issues of salinity and water quality - to be underpinned by an Intergovernmental Agreement and bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and each state/territory government. COAG agreed that the action plan would build upon the achievements of the Natural Heritage Trust, along with other state-based NRM initiatives, to enable and motivate regional communities to use coordinated and targeted action to address the issues of salinity and water quality through landscape scale change.

Since then, the Australian Government has made the largest financial commitment to NRM in Australia's history through programmes that include the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP), the Extension to the Natural Heritage Trust (the Trust), and the National Landcare Program, amounting to \$2.7 billion. These programmes are playing an important role in protecting and enhancing Australia's unique biodiversity, the future productive capacity of our agricultural industries and the viability of rural and regional communities.

The programmes invest in activities at a range of scales, in the main using regional plans and strategies as their core, as also agreed by COAG in 2000. While the majority of funding is being directed through regional investment, significant funds are also being invested towards national priorities, as well as at a community level to help local groups and individuals engage and address their more immediate needs.

Funding for the NAP and the Trust programmes is due to conclude in June 2008.

To inform the early consideration of future NRM programmes, the Natural Heritage Ministerial Board commissioned a Ministerial Reference Group for Future NRM Programme Delivery to provide independent advice on:

- the strengths and weaknesses of current NRM programmes' regional delivery arrangements;
- improving the effective delivery of NRM programmes regionally, including possible actions to streamline processes;
- and enhancing regional community engagement in NRM including through involvement of local government, landcare groups, volunteers and other stakeholders.

The Reference Group consisted of Mr Kim Keogh (Chair), Mr Bob Frazer and Mr Doug Chant. The three members were chosen for their links to the community and experience across a range of environmental and sustainable agriculture issues.

The Reference Group undertook consultations between October 2005 and February 2006 with key stakeholders associated with the regional delivery of the NRM programmes. The Reference Group travelled across Australia holding discussions with regional NRM bodies, state and territory governments, sub-catchment groups, industry groups, community groups, local government, Indigenous community members, landcare groups, and other stakeholders. In total the Reference Group met with representatives from over 200 groups and organisations, and

received over 150 written submissions (see Appendix C). As the terms of reference asked the Reference Group to focus on the regional delivery of NRM, the consultations and report deal mostly with issues pertaining to the NAP and the Trust.

B. Preamble

There was overwhelming support for the regional delivery of NRM across Australia. Stakeholders emphasised the need for governments, including the Australian Government, to maintain their commitment to natural resource management. They also emphasised the need for an early announcement of the Australian Government's intention with regards to NRM programmes to ensure a smooth transition between the current programmes and any future arrangements. An early announcement would also help to maintain the momentum and goodwill that has been built amongst NRM stakeholders as a result of the regional delivery of NAP and the Trust, particularly within the past 18 months.

A diverse range of interests was represented in the consultations and, as expected, different stakeholders emphasised different priorities. However, there was consistent support for regional delivery as the best means for achieving integrated natural resource outcomes at a landscape scale.

The Reference Group concluded that there should be some refinement, but any change should be based on the principle of 'evolution rather than revolution.'

C. Key Findings

- The regional plans have been developed, the institutional arrangements are in place, and the implementation of strategic investments has commenced.
- Key land managers, i.e. primary industry and local government, are yet to be fully engaged.
- The partnership between the Australian Government and state and territory governments has been instrumental in leading regional delivery of NRM.
- NRM is an issue of national importance and worthy of a continued and sustained commitment from the Australian Government.
- The Australian Government must persist with regional NRM arrangements or be prepared to risk losing community backing and on-ground support.
- The community is pressing for an early announcement of the Government's intentions for NRM programmes post-June 2008.

Community Engagement

Volunteers across Australia contribute significant time, energy and knowledge to NRM projects. As an indication of the value of that contribution, the Australian Landcare Council estimates it to be worth more than three times that provided through formal investor funding.

The Reference Group believes that the regional NRM model has been successful in leveraging volunteer effort and providing good value for money in accessing volunteer labour, and could increase this leverage.

The Reference Group was impressed by the dedication of on-ground staff, including facilitators and coordinators, and recognised the high value that the community places on their work. Restricted career opportunities and low employment security threaten the tenure of many of these staff. The trust and knowledge that they share with those delivering projects on-ground, particularly in Indigenous communities, is at risk due to these factors. The Reference Group supports these staff being valued in their own right. They should be seen as an important investment for engaging and assisting the community to deliver on-ground outcomes.

Other sectors of the community have also been engaged in regional NRM delivery with differing degrees of success. In some areas, volunteers, Indigenous and coastal marine communities, local government and industry have a lot more to offer to NRM delivery than is currently being accessed. Regional boards need to reflect the interests of, and engage, these community groups.

Local government, for example, contributes significantly to NRM across Australia and has strong ties to the community in rural regions, and strong planning powers in coastal and urban regions. While local government is well engaged with regions in many places, the regional delivery of NRM could be enhanced through a more active promotion of partnerships with local government.

Similarly, promoting industry involvement, whether it is primary industry, tourism or mining, has the potential to expand the reaches of NRM, due to the level of trust between members and their industry structures. Alongside this, greater industry involvement has the potential to contribute to direct investment in NRM programmes through integration with existing programmes and through the building of partnerships. Industry also has much to offer on research and development for NRM, as well as in programme reporting.

Programme Delivery

Consultations highlighted that the cost and workload associated with programme administration and reporting continues to be seen as a burden on regions and those delivering projects. The 'red tape' issue is one that seems to affect stakeholders at all levels of regional NRM delivery and while most recognise that an element of accountability ('red tape') will always exist in delivering outcomes funded from the public purse, most agree that significant efficiencies could be made within the current arrangements. Some of the mechanisms for creating greater efficiencies that were raised include:

- the provision of block funding to regions to purchase outcomes without the need for investors to micro-manage projects;
- utilising industry partners to engage stakeholders and deliver a wider range and more integrated suite of projects; and
- developing stronger underlying trust between project partners by recognising the different but equally important role that investors, planners and those working on-ground play in delivering programme outcomes.

Regions indicated to the Reference Group that they would appreciate more direct guidance from governments to help them understand what standards are expected. The areas where they are particularly keen to have greater direction are in governance arrangements, target setting and project reporting, determining priorities for investment, and engagement and communication with regional stakeholders. On several occasions it was raised that such guidelines or a set of criteria could serve as a vehicle for defining possible block funding arrangements in future funding rounds. A number of regions would like the flexibility that block funding can provide, e.g. helping them deliver outcomes rather than projects. However, there is general acceptance of the need to demonstrate transparency and accountability within all stages of their project/investment cycle to governments, other investors and stakeholders.

The Reference Group heard of many new ways in which future programme funding could be directed. Some of the more interesting and commonly cited examples that the Reference Group heard included:

- funding for large/iconic projects,
- stewardship payments, and
- funding to support the extra administrative and logistical challenges of large and remote regions.

There was strong support from the community for the Australian Government Envirofund and the National Landcare Programme because of their capacity to reach audiences outside of what might be considered traditional regional stakeholders, and also because of their ability to engage particular sectors of industry and the community, in an efficient and effective way.

Communication and Capacity Building

Time and again the Reference Group heard of the important, long-term role for the Australian Government to promote and provide national leadership on NRM. While many stakeholders prefer to focus on activities within their local area or catchment boundary, they want to know that someone is leading the way at the national level, bringing all of their efforts into a coordinated programme that is delivering something meaningful on the large scale.

It became clear to the Reference Group that the Australian Government's investment in NRM is still not receiving due recognition. Many on-ground groups told of how participants proudly promoted the Trust and the NAP through merchandise and brochures. This recognition is not being communicated through other mechanisms, such as local media reporting and formal reporting on projects. Project signage is an effective way of recognising investor involvement and the obligation to acknowledge the Australian Government should be reinforced.

The shift to regional delivery of NRM programmes has placed an enormous burden on regional bodies and their stakeholders. Worthwhile progress has been made towards establishing regional arrangements and in achieving on-ground change. Stakeholders told the Reference Group that they strongly believed that the Australian Government has a responsibility to promote NRM nationally and in doing so support the communications activities that regions and local groups undertake.

The divide between rural and urban communities is as strong for NRM as it is for any other issue. In particular the Reference Group heard of the need for awareness raising within urban communities to help them understand how good land and water management is relevant to them, and the benefits they receive when good management practices are encouraged in rural and regional communities. The Reference Group spoke with regions that contain large urban populations and heard of the different challenges they face to reach their stakeholders, but also of the opportunities these more densely populated regions provide, especially in being able to engage corporate investment and large armies of volunteer labour.

Information and Knowledge

NRM stakeholders acknowledge that practical information of a high standard along with good quality target setting are necessary to deliver successful NRM outcomes. These stakeholders emphasized to the Reference Group that continued investment is required for researching and delivering high quality information at all levels of programme delivery, from understanding and monitoring resource condition to project planning through to on-ground delivery. There is a need for a more effective mechanism to improve information sharing and the timely brokering of scientific data and state of the art knowledge, including via cross-regional collaboration.

Stakeholders agreed that relevant information needs to be delivered at a local scale in order to be used. There was also agreement on the need for national direction in this area to help guide researchers and on-ground users to work together effectively and identify common outcomes.

Summary of Recommendations

The Reference Group believe that the regional delivery of NRM programmes is progressing well, and represents a very important and worthwhile investment for the Australian Government. Any changes to the programmes should be minimal and focussed on improving the existing arrangements, that is, an ‘evolution rather than a revolution’ approach.

A. Australian Government Support for NRM (Section 4.4)

1. That the Australian Government make an expeditious announcement of its intentions for the future of the Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality post 2008.
2. That the Australian Government make a long-term in-principle commitment to the community to continue investment in natural resource management.

B. Community Engagement (Section 4.5)

Industry/NLP

3. That strategies be developed in partnership with primary industry to achieve higher levels of engagement.
4. That a funding stream be introduced direct from the Australian Government, leveraging cash contributions from industry and in-kind support from the primary industry sector to improve the uptake of sustainable agricultural practices to deliver desirable regional, cross-regional and cross-jurisdictional outcomes.
5. That the National Landcare Program should be retained as a separate funding stream based on its value for promoting sustainable agriculture and engaging the farming community, and its focus on profitability and innovation linking to sustainability.

Volunteers/Envirofund

6. That, when all 56 regional NRM plans have been accredited, Ministers table the plans in Parliament and acknowledge the important role of volunteers in developing the plans and their commitment to delivering on the outcomes stated in them.
7. That the Australian Government Envirofund be maintained as a very important element of future NRM programmes.

Indigenous Engagement

8. That investigation continues into the potential of the regional NRM model to align Australian Government programs to achieve multiple outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Natural Resource Management Officers/Facilitators and Coordinators

9. That the funding of facilitators and coordinators be considered as a legitimate investment reflecting the fundamental role these positions have in the delivery of 'on-ground' outcomes.

Maximising community engagement in regions

10. That governments ensure, in establishing membership of regional bodies, that they have processes in place that maximise community engagement and ownership.

Local Government

11. That regional bodies be encouraged to work more closely with local government in the delivery of NRM programs.

12. That, in the interests of improved engagement, local government be represented on Joint Steering Committees with observer status leading to better the integration of local government and regional plans.

C. Improving Delivery (Section 4.6)

Governance/Quality assurance/ Block Funding

13. That quality assurance measures be introduced for monitoring and improving governance arrangements and operational performance of all regional bodies.
14. That where a regional body has demonstrated a capacity to manage its business effectively and accountably to an agreed standard, then block funding be devolved to that body to allow greater flexibility in their operations.

Streamlining/Red tape reduction

15. That, to address community concerns, action be taken to streamline the approvals-to-payment processes for NRM funding.

Coastal and marine

16. That a greater focus be given to coastal issues and marine issues, and better integration arrangements developed between coastal, marine and riparian issues.
17. That better linkages be developed between the regional planning and statutory local government planning frameworks.

Cost shifting

18. That agreements between state / territory governments and the Australian Government for future NRM programmes should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of governments to assist in reducing the potential for cost-shifting and to ensure that investment in programmes is maximised.

Boundaries

19. That consideration be given to regional boundary adjustment taking into account region size, remoteness, population base and the effectiveness of current engagement.

Remote regions

20. That allocation of resources to regions needs to take into account any extra costs associated in delivering programmes to extensive areas with remote populations.

Large scale projects

21. That resourcing of large-scale one-off / “greenfields” salinity projects be supported.

Stewardship

22. That a process be developed where stewardship payments may be made available to those landholders who can demonstrate a public good outcome, through improved resource management systems.

D. Communication and Capacity Building (Section 4.7)

Communication of achievements

23. That regional bodies are actively encouraged to promote achievements via local and other media to build greater community awareness and support for the process and to provide greater recognition for the Australian Government’s contribution.

Formalise cross regional interaction

24. That an annual forum of regional body Chief Executive Officers be held. The forum would facilitate discussion on key issues of concern including the effectiveness of arrangements between regions and states and information sharing.

Urban and rural issues

25. That more effort is required to promote and communicate the benefits accruing to urban communities from sustainable agricultural production.

E. Information and Knowledge/ Monitoring and Evaluation (Section 4.8)

Research and development unit

26. That a national brokering unit be established to integrate and deliver research and development data and outcomes across the 56 NRM regions.

Baseline data

27. That governments recognize the importance of baseline data in measuring programme success and that investment in its collection is maintained at an appropriate level.

Websites

28. That the existing NRM website (www.nrm.gov.au) be enhanced to improve its interactivity with the community.

Conclusions

There is strong community support for the continuation of the regional delivery of natural resource management across Australia.

The past five years has seen a giant shift in the way Australia is approaching natural resource management with much greater emphasis being placed on regional priorities.

Significant human capital, time and financial resources have gone into building the necessary links between communities, industry and government for the successful regional delivery of natural resource programmes.

Some key sectors, such as the primary industry sector and local government, are yet to be wholly engaged. The challenge is to identify where gaps in engagement exist and to expand on those models where effective engagement already occurs. Stronger support is needed for innovation and for communicating programme success.

Security of funding is an essential ingredient to the long-term success of natural resource management and the Australian Government has a very significant and central role in ensuring this support continues.

A commitment from the Australian Government to continue funding the regional delivery of natural resource management programmes and an early announcement of such intentions would be very well received.

1. Introduction

Since 2000 the Australian Government has provided \$2.7 billion for programmes including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (the NAP), the Extension to the Natural Heritage Trust (the Trust) and the National Landcare Program. This represents the largest financial commitment to NRM in Australia's history. These programmes play a vital role in protecting and enhancing Australia's unique biodiversity, the viability of rural and regional communities and the future of our agricultural industries.

The Natural Heritage Ministerial Board ('the Board') oversees the Australian Government's engagement in the NAP and the Trust. The Board consists of Senator the Hon Ian Campbell, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, and the Hon Peter McGauran MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

The Trust and the NAP are due to conclude in 2008. The Board commissioned a Ministerial Reference Group for Future NRM Programme Delivery to inform the early consideration of future NRM programmes. The aim was to provide advice on:

- The strengths and weaknesses of current NRM programme regional delivery arrangements;
- Improving the effective delivery of regional NRM programmes, including possible actions to streamline processes; and
- Enhancing regional community engagement in NRM - including through involvement of local government, Landcare groups, volunteers and other stakeholders.

The full terms of reference are at [Appendix A](#).

The Reference Group was chaired by Mr Kim Keogh, a prominent Western Australian pastoralist. Mr Keogh was joined by Mr Bob Frazer, Executive Officer of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Board, and Mr Doug Chant, President of the United Dairyfarmers of Victoria. The three members were chosen for their links to the community and experience across a range of environmental and sustainable agriculture issues.

In developing its advice the Reference Group undertook targeted consultations with key stakeholders associated with the regional delivery of the NRM programmes across Australia between October 2005 and February 2006 ([Appendix B](#)). The Reference Group held discussions with regional NRM bodies, sub-catchment groups, industry groups, local government, community groups, Indigenous community members, landcare groups, State and Territory Governments, and other interested representatives. A full list of all the groups and individuals consulted is at [Appendix C](#).

This review process will be complemented by a series of evaluations of the Trust and the NAP. The evaluations will consider:

- Biodiversity outcomes of regional investment;
- Significant invasive species (weeds) outcomes of regional investment;
- Current governance arrangements to support regional investment;
- Salinity outcomes of regional investment;
- Sustainable agriculture outcomes of regional investment;
- The impact of the National NRM Facilitator Network;

- The effectiveness of Bilateral Agreements between the Australian Government and State/Territory Governments for the regional component of the Natural Heritage Trust Extension;
- Evaluation of the Australian Government Envirofund;
- Evaluation of the National Investment Stream of the Natural Heritage Trust; and
- Evaluation of coastal and marine outcomes of regional investment.

2. Philosophy and principles underpinning regional arrangements

The design and operation of the Australian Government's current NRM programmes reflect a set of inter-connected principles covering the strategic objectives of these programmes. The operational performance can be best understood in the context of these principles and, in turn, of the policy approach underlying them.

The programmes reflect an evolutionary approach that has recognised the need to respond to changes in the operational environment for NRM, and to draw from the lessons learned from previous measures. This approach has also sought to preserve the gains achieved under earlier measures and to minimise the transitional disturbance associated with programme redesign and implementation.

Since 2001 this evolutionary approach has developed a major shift in the framework of NRM programme delivery in Australia, particularly with the introduction of the redesigned Trust in 2002. This shift has emphasised joint regional delivery arrangements for the NAP and the Trust. These joint arrangements operate both within the Commonwealth, with the joint administration of the National Action Plan and the Trust by the Agriculture and Environment portfolios and between the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions.

The transition to integrated programme delivery responded to changes in the nature of the NRM issues faced by Australia. Issues include the emergence of salinity and water quality issues as particularly urgent challenges; changes in the state of scientific and technical knowledge about NRM matters and how to deal with them more effectively (e.g. through market-based instruments); and to changes in the nature of the Australian community's demand for NRM services, and expectations about how these services should be delivered.

The Australian Government's response to these changes has been developed in terms of principles that reflect the nature of NRM issues and the stakeholder and broader community interests engaged in them. These principles entail the recognition that:

- NRM engages multiple stakeholder interests and a broad and frequently complex spectrum of issues. For example, the economic and environmental elements of NRM are closely interrelated - and have significant national importance - and effective measures therefore involve the achievement of both environmental and economic objectives. Accordingly, reconciling these diverse interests in a way that produces desirable NRM outcomes requires a strategic approach to NRM planning and investment;
- Many NRM issues require a sustained, long-term commitment to address environmental degradation and repair, and to develop a more sustainable approach to the use of Australia's natural resources¹;
- The strategic objectives of NRM programmes can be most efficiently achieved by promoting landscape-scale changes at local, regional and national levels. In particular, the common bio-physical characteristics of Australian regions endows the regional level of NRM programme delivery with a high potential for achieving good landscape-scale outcomes; and

¹ Addressing certain NRM issues, such as drought, can be time-urgent and require immediate action.

- That strategic landscape-scale change is most effectively achieved where communities have a sense of ownership over planning and investment decisions, and are therefore prepared to make the investments in time, resources and better practices to achieve good outcomes. The importance of the community ownership principle, especially at the regional level, reinforces the biophysical importance of the region as a basic unit for NRM programme delivery.

3. The regional arrangements in practice

Integrated Delivery of Natural Resource Management and Funding under the Regional Component of the Trust and the NAP

One of the key principles underlying the NAP and the second phase of the Trust was a vision of strategic integrated investment in outcomes based on a regional delivery model. Agreement was reached between the Australian and State and Territory governments to integrate the delivery of the Trust and the NAP, providing benefits in streamlined planning and implementation based on regional needs.

The Australian Government established an innovative joint team approach to deliver outcomes using resources in the departments of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (administering the NAP), and the Environment and Heritage (administering the Trust) to support the strategic integrated investment approach.

The key elements of the regional delivery model include:

- 56 NRM regions were established across Australia for determining and managing priorities. The boundaries for each region have been agreed between the Australian and State and Territory governments;
- Identification of organised “catchment” or “regional bodies” representing the local community. They are charged with managing Trust and NAP funding in the region, and held accountable for expenditure of public monies. Existing structures in jurisdictions have been used to form these regional bodies where possible and appropriate;
- Both the NAP and the regional component of the Trust are driven by single regional NRM Plans, developed by local communities and supported by government and the best available science to improve resource management on a regional scale. The Plans consider all environmental, social and economic impacts of NRM decisions on a regional basis. At the time of this report Regional NRM Plans had been accredited for all except two of the regions;
- The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council endorsed a National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets as the basis for target setting in regional plans;
- Each regional plan is accredited by the Australian and State and Territory governments, with all except two accredited as of January 2006;
- A single three-year Regional Investment Strategy forms the basis for investment for both programmes to ensure the programmes are delivered in an integrated manner at this level; and
- Investment Strategies are approved by the Australian and State and Territory governments.

Table 1. The range of accreditation dates for Regional Plans by jurisdiction

State	Accreditation dates
New South Wales	July 2003 – March 2004
Victoria	April 2003 – December 2004
Queensland	July 2004 – May 2005
South Australia	April 2003 – June 2004
Western Australia	December 2004 – April 2005
Tasmania	March 2005 – April 2005
Australian Capital Territory	May 2004
Northern Territory	May 2005

(Source: Australian Government NRM website www.nrm.gov.au)

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of funding for the regional component of the Trust and NAP across jurisdictions for the remaining three years of both programmes.

Table 2. Investment profile for Regional Delivery under the Trust and NAP from 2005-06 to 2007-08

Jurisdiction	Funding Source	2005-06 Estimate	2006-07 Estimate	2007-08 Estimate
NSW	NHT	\$29,610,000	\$30,210,000	\$32,459,000
	NAP	\$45,878,000	\$37,881,000	\$20,692,000
	Total	\$75,488,000	\$68,091,000	\$53,151,000
VIC	NHT	\$23,040,000	\$23,230,000	\$24,138,000
	NAP	\$27,852,000	\$22,499,000	\$9,668,000
	Total	\$50,892,000	\$45,729,000	\$33,806,000
QLD	NHT	\$28,162,000	\$28,600,000	\$25,816,000
	NAP	\$16,728,000	\$10,498,000	\$11,662,000
	Total	\$44,890,000	\$39,098,000	\$37,478,000
SA	NHT	\$15,700,000	\$15,730,000	\$13,994,000
	NAP	\$13,457,000	\$13,366,000	\$10,843,000
	Total	\$29,157,000	\$29,096,000	\$24,837,000
WA	NHT	\$22,840,000	\$22,880,000	\$20,346,000
	NAP	\$53,923,000	\$41,753,000	\$35,936,000
	Total	\$76,763,000	\$64,633,000	\$56,282,000
TAS	NHT	\$3,885,000	\$7,150,000	\$6,352,000
	NAP	\$1,800,000	\$1,797,000	\$1,642,000
	Total	\$5,685,000	\$8,947,000	\$7,994,000
ACT	NHT	\$1,225,000	\$1,230,000	\$1,275,000
	NAP	\$500,000	\$503,000	\$802,000
	Total	\$1,725,000	\$1,733,000	\$2,077,000
NT	NHT	\$6,632,000	\$7,150,000	\$6,860,000
	NAP	\$500,000	\$500,000	\$500,000
	Total	\$7,132,000	\$7,650,000	\$7,360,000
	Overall Total (all jurisdictions)	\$291,732,000	\$264,977,000	\$222,985,000

(Source: Australian Government NRM Team. Note budgets are indicative and subject to change).

Governance Structures

The key elements of the governance structures supporting the integrated delivery of NRM under the regional component of the Trust and NAP include the Bilateral Agreements, Partnership Agreements and Joint Steering Committee arrangements.

Agreements

The regional delivery model is underpinned by NAP and Trust Bilateral Agreements between Australian and State and Territory Governments. NAP agreements are in place for all States and Territories with the exception of the ACT - the ACT was not identified as a priority region for NAP funding. The agreements include requirements for institutional and policy reforms consistent with the National Action Plan agreed to in 2000 by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The agreements were signed off between June 2001 and September 2003.

The Trust agreements were negotiated between the Commonwealth of Australia (the Australian Government) and each of the States and Territories to implement the Framework for the Extension of the Natural Heritage Trust. They were based on the NAP agreements and include requirements for institutional and policy reforms consistent with national priorities identified for the Trust. The agreements were signed off between December 2002 and June 2004 and are now in place for all States and Territories.

The agreements in each jurisdiction define the relationship between the Australian and State/Territory Governments for the delivery of regional funding. They contain information relating to:

- Management arrangements including roles and responsibilities of both parties;
- The role and functions of the Joint Steering Committees (see also below);
- Development of the Regional Plan and accreditation process;
- Regional Investment Strategies and approval processes;
- Partnership agreements between the States/Territories and regional bodies;
- Capacity building;
- Funding arrangements;
- Monitoring and evaluation; and
- Reporting and acquittal requirements.

The negotiation of the Trust agreements with the States/Territories has been an evolutionary process over a number of years. While each contains the key governance elements noted above, each State/Territory has negotiated agreements with variations in accordance with State NRM policy requirements and NRM delivery arrangements.

Partnership Agreements between State/Territory Governments and Individual Regional Bodies

The Australian Government generally does not have a formal contract with regional bodies under the regional delivery model.² The State/Territory governments sign a Partnership Agreement with each regional body in their jurisdiction. Key elements include:

² The exception being South Australia where a tripartite agreement is in place between the Australian Government, the State and the regional body.

- The development of an accredited Regional Plan;
- Definition of the roles and responsibilities of the parties;
- Cost-sharing arrangements;
- Agreed outcomes to be achieved;
- Arrangements for monitoring, evaluation and review;
- Communication and promotional approaches; and
- Accountability requirements including annual review, financial and programme reporting.

Joint Steering Committees (JSCs) are the main vehicle for bilateral decision-making and development of recommendations to Australian and State/Territory Ministers in relation to regional delivery.

JSCs in each jurisdiction include Australian and State/Territory Government officials as Co-Chairs, and Australian and State/Territory Government members. Some JSCs include State/Territory NRM agency representatives as observers. Recently, in a number of jurisdictions, community representatives have been invited to attend JSC meetings as observers. In Western Australia community representatives have been a part of their state JSC since its inception.

The key functions of a JSC include:

- Alignment of both the Trust and NAP programmes in terms of timing, decision steps and processes;
- Assisting regional bodies in the development of Regional Plans and associated Investment Strategies;
- Recommending accreditation of regional plans to Ministers and ensuring appropriate processes are in place to support this;
- Recommending to Ministers approval of the three-year Regional Investment Strategies;
- Authorising payments quarterly in advance to the regional body in accordance with approved investments by the Ministerial Board and State Ministers that are conditional on performance against a schedule of agreed milestones;
- Reviewing and approving quarterly financial and six-monthly programme performance reports; and
- Developing, where necessary, strategies to address departures from the approved programme allocations.

JSCs generally meet face-to-face quarterly, with secretariat services provided by the relevant State/Territory Government.

4. Themes of issues arising from consultations

4.1 Consultations

The Reference Group met with over 200 groups between October 2005 and February 2006, and also received in excess of 150 written submissions. A broad range of stakeholders were directly consulted including:

- Representatives from regional NRM bodies, sub-catchment and local on-ground delivery groups;
- Industry organisations operating at the regional, state and national levels;
- Local government including staff, councilors and representatives from state local government organisations;
- Indigenous community members;
- Staff and senior officials from State and Territory Governments;
- Representatives from a number of state and national advisory committees;
- Representatives from state and national non-government conservation organisations;
- Representatives involved in the science, policy and delivery elements of research and development organisations; and
- Individuals and other members of the general community.

Meetings included in-depth discussions with individuals and organisations, site visits, presentations, sector-based meetings and open community forms.

Exposure to a wide range of interests through a number of formats allowed the Reference Group to hear an extensive range of issues, opinions and concerns regarding Australian Government NRM programmes - the NAP and the Trust in particular - and to see firsthand some of their impacts and the delivery processes. Additional issues are noted at [Appendix F](#).

4.2 Key Findings

- Regional plans have been developed, the institutional arrangements are in place, and the implementation of strategic investments has commenced.
- Key land managers, i.e. primary industry and local government are yet to be fully engaged.
- The partnership between the Australian and State and Territory Governments has been instrumental in leading regional delivery of NRM.
- NRM is an issue of national importance and worthy of a continued and sustained commitment from the Australian Government.
- The Australian Government must persist with regional NRM arrangements or be prepared to risk the loss of community backing and on-ground support.
- The community is pressing for an early announcement of the Government's intentions for NRM programmes post-June 2008.

4.3 Overview of feedback on regional NRM arrangements

There was widespread support for the regional NRM delivery model from members of all sectors of the community, industry and government. They articulated some clear strengths within the Trust and the NAP.

The regional delivery approach has resulted in a much greater level of professionalism and strategic thinking in the way natural resources are being managed than under previous programmes and projects. It has also led to more robust mechanisms being used for selecting investments and an increased understanding of natural resources by both those directly involved and the general community.

The design of the current NRM programmes allows for projects to protect and preserve natural resource assets, as well as to repair and restore those that have been degraded.

The network of Facilitators and project officers employed by governments and regional organisations continue to build the capacity of local communities and organisations. It also provides a key connection between the community and the mechanics of the regional delivery model.

The current programme structure allows for regions to be flexible in how they engage stakeholders, how they prioritise and invest in projects, and how they deal with natural resource and demographic issues specific to their regions. This flexibility is important and should be maintained in any future programmes.

Those involved in consultation meetings recognised the programmes had a number of experimental aspects and there are many things that have been learned along the way which need to be considered in further planning.

There is concern that governments may not fully recognise that NRM is a major issue - equivalent to health and education - and will require a long-term commitment of at least 10-20 years to see real improvements on-ground and in community attitudes.

There are some problem areas with the way investment is delivered, including delays in receiving approved funding, lack of flexibility in spending funds despite seasonal and other impacts that may delay projects, and inconsistency in investment allocations. Under current conditions project proponents often have to seek funding on an annual basis despite governments having agreed at the higher level to invest on a three-year cycle.

Many feel there is an imbalance between funding and the amount of reporting required. Most agree that high quality project monitoring and evaluation is important to ensure that work leads to outcomes, to demonstrate the extent of these outcomes and to improve NRM by documenting experience. The issue is that in many instances reports require excessive detail so as to meet the requirements of multiple investors, and often the life of a project does not match the timeframes set out in reporting frameworks.

There are still a large number of NRM programmes being delivered outside the regional model, for example the National Landcare Programme and Community Water Grants. This leads to frustration in communities trying to work out where to seek funding, as well frustration for regional bodies trying to deliver strategic outcomes against a range of competing mechanisms.

There is an inequity in the funding received by regions depending on whether they receive both Trust and NAP support. Regions understand different programmes have their own specific objectives, but these do not always align with regional priorities and can undermine the ability of regions to invest across a range of issues.

There is a constant tension between the need to direct funds to high-priority resource issues and to direct resources to activities that will promote community engagement, both of which are objectives under the current programmes.

Not all natural resource issues can be adequately addressed through regional delivery and some require more extensive co-operation between regions than currently exists - for example threatened species. There are also some issues which may have high national priority but are not being delivered at a regional level due to reasons such as a lack of expertise or low priority within a regional context.

Insufficient baseline data and underpinning science for regional target-setting has led to inconsistency in the way projects are designed and monitored. This has been compounded by inadequate time and resources being allocated to the monitoring and evaluation of projects, and poor access to existing data and technical expertise.

Project investors are not always recognised for their contributions. This is true for governments that invest significant amounts of money into planning, implementation, research, monitoring and project administration. It is also true for the thousands of landholders and volunteers who invest significant amounts of time and effort into delivering projects on the ground.

The programme strengths are its capacity for strategic planning, priority setting and good value investments, its potential for information sharing, and restoration of significant Indigenous sites.

The regional model has helped stakeholders communicate more and work cooperatively to set common objectives. Partnerships have developed between NGOs, Landcare groups, Indigenous groups, state agencies and research organisations in developing projects, although consolidation of relationships through project implementation is yet to be realized.

The programme weaknesses are poor understanding and trust between stakeholders, including local government and regional bodies, lack of funding to support initiatives, focus on agricultural lands rather than population centres, and sole focus on environmental outcomes rather than the triple bottom line (economic, social and environmental outcomes). Local groups often feel disempowered under current arrangements.

Poor communication of desired objectives, standards and targets by government and between governments, including local government were also cited as weaknesses. Improvements in this area would ensure better alignment with State of the Environment and Management Plans.

Participants in the consultations strongly encouraged the continuation of the regional model as a vehicle for future programme delivery. There were many suggestions as to how to improve the existing model. The following are some of the more common examples cited:

- Ensure there is an early announcement on future programmes and be aware of the need for continuity of on-ground rollout or a seamless transition to a new programme. It was commonly agreed that June 2006 would be a suitable time for announcing the Government's plan for future programmes;
- Ensure future project funding is delivered through a single channel i.e. through the regional bodies, even if there are several sources of funding;
- Ensure there is a clear delineation of the role of the regional bodies in future programme delivery, including their role in prioritising projects and investments, their obligations as a governing body, their obligations to engage with and communicate to, the community and their obligations to formulate partnerships with industry and other sectors;
- Ensure governments understand concepts of 'rural sociology' and the ways in which communities respond to commitment and change, and are willing to accommodate the practical delivery of these as the programmes evolve;
- Greater recognition of the production and industry elements within the programme objective of 'sustainable agriculture' would help raise awareness and engagement levels by the primary producer and other industry sectors;
- There are many opportunities for regions to share information and lessons learnt during all stages of planning, investment, implementation and evaluation phases under the regional delivery model. It would benefit regions enormously if some more formalised structures to support cross-regional exchange were built into future programmes;
- Further investment needs to be made into establishing baseline data for many natural resource issues and their associated management activities;
- Many regions consider greater efficiencies could be made by having a baseline of funding for each region. This would be used to support basic administrative expenses - with an additional bidding process to access funding for high-priority projects - rather than the current system which requires each project to have its own administrative element built in;
- The incorporation of Envirofund into the regional investment and reporting process would allow regions to engage more widely and also to report on Envirofund successes as part of their regional summaries; and
- More strategic guidance on weed control needs to be considered in future programmes, including the social, economic and environmental aspects of weed management.

The Roads to Recovery project was cited on several occasions as an Australian Government initiative displaying a number of qualities that could be applied to regional NRM delivery (see Case Study 1).

Case Study 1: Roads to Recovery

From January 2001 to June 2005, the Australian Government distributed \$1.2 billion for local road improvements to Australian Councils under the Roads to Recovery Programme.

The programme was implemented because much of the local road infrastructure was about to reach the end of its useful life and its replacement was beyond the financial capacity of councils.

The programme was reviewed in 2003 with the finding that, although good use had been made of the funds and Australia's local roads had improved, there was much left to do. In January 2004 the Government announced it would extend the programme for a further four years to 30 June 2009. The programme has now been included within AusLink.

Over the four financial years from 1 July 2005 the government will contribute a further \$1.35 billion to over 700 local councils. This is additional to its untied Financial Assistance Grants to councils for roads and other purposes.

Feedback from councils is that the programme:

- Allows local decision-making and priority-setting;
- Has simple reporting and administrative arrangements; and
- Directs money to councils without state government involvement.

An evaluation of the programme showed councils are using the money wisely to generate returns worth \$1.80 for every dollar spent.

Councils are allocated funding according to a formula based on population and road length. In large parts of Australia (mainly remote areas) there are no councils and State Governments provide these services to communities. These are known as 'unincorporated areas'. Special programme provisions apply to these areas and to the Indian Ocean Territories.

Money provided under the AusLink programme is not intended to replace council spending on roads or State and Territory Government assistance to councils for local road construction or maintenance.

Local councils, not the Australian Government, nominate projects to be funded. Councils have so far used the money to repair and upgrade more than 15,000 road sites.

This programme operates uniformly across Australia. Each council is guaranteed a share of the total available funding. Money is paid directly from the Australian Government to each council under simple administrative procedures whereby spending decisions are made locally and reported back. Much of the administration is via the Internet.

In particular, the Roads to Recovery project was seen to have the ability to engage local government (See Section 4.5.6) and to provide direct funding for projects that would not otherwise be eligible for government assistance. In many cases these have been large and/or iconic projects that are highly visible and meaningful to the wider community (see Section 4.6.7) meaning an advantage of this approach for the Australian Government is the ability to receive

clear recognition for project contributions (see Section 4.7.1). An advantage for local councils (and indirectly for the community) is that a direct process reduces the administrative burden in designing projects, making them faster and cheaper to deliver (see Section 4.6.2).

The specific issues raised in each jurisdiction are outlined in [Appendix D](#).

4.4 Government commitment to NRM

Recommendation 1

That the Australian Government make an expeditious announcement of its intentions for the future of the Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality post 2008.

Recommendation 2

That the Australian Government make a long-term in-principle commitment to the community to continue investment in natural resource management.

Early announcement of NRM programmes post-2008

Stakeholders agreed almost unanimously that an early announcement of the Australian Government's plan for future NRM programmes is warranted to ensure that on-ground support for NRM can continue or otherwise provide stakeholders with sufficient time to adjust to the changes. This call was supported in a large number of submissions, including the Australian Landcare Council, Western Australia Farmers Federation and Southern New England Landcare Coordinating Committee. A major downfall in the transition from the first phase of the Trust to the current arrangements was the insufficient and slow release of programme information.

Stakeholders believe governments should recognise the contribution that on-ground practitioners make towards NRM activities. They also believe that people have committed to a long-term investment by participating in NRM activities and this should be respected in the way the Australian Government communicates its future plans.

“Keep the regional model, please no more change...work to evolve the system we have and finance it well.” Southern New England Landcare Coordinating Committee

“There needs to be a seamless transition to the next round of funding via the existing model, otherwise there is likely to be irreparable damage to community confidence and support for projects only recently begun.” NRM Council, Western Australia

“We hope that changes to federally funded programmes do not undermine the landholders and our ability to deliver improved environmental, social and economic outcomes to all Australians.” Hindmarsh Landcare Network

A decision not to continue programme funding altogether would have a detrimental effect on the NRM community, in terms of their level of commitment to government funded processes as well as their engagement in activities. The consequences of delaying an announcement would have a similar, if milder, effect.

Some regions will soon commence preparations for their next three-year investment proposals, which would see them run into the 2008/09 financial year. At this time they have no certainty as to whether funding will be available for the full period, which would force them to re-consider how they prepare their Investment Strategies and in turn how they may choose to engage their community and investment partners. For example, do they reduce their strategies to only cover a two-year period, do they take the risk and assume funding will continue, or do they continue with options to pull back on projects at the last minute if necessary?

Any of these scenarios creates risks for delivering strategic NRM at the regional level, in particular that such conditions would undermine the trust regional groups have built with their stakeholders. It also goes against the principles underpinning the programmes, that three-year rolling investments will provide project security over a reasonable timeframe for achieving significant change.

The Reference Group learnt that during the early stages of the Trust transition to the regional model, it was important to retain the efforts and enthusiasm of participants to ensure skills, knowledge and human capital did not disappear. The decade of Landcare and seven-year commitment to the NAP signified a (relatively) long-term commitment by the Australian Government to resources. However, this has not yet translated to stability for community organisations across the board.

For example, many organisations still cannot offer staff anything longer than a 12-month contract at a time. It is a major issue for organisations and for on-ground projects when the person with the knowledge, expertise and commitment may no longer be around at the end of the project. This may be because funding has ceased or they have been offered a position with a more secure tenure in another organisation, or another field altogether.

This issue goes beyond individual projects. It has the potential to erode the trust of communities being supported by staff and it has the potential long-term consequence of a decline in the NRM knowledge and skill base to provide the support needed for good on-ground outcomes. Even basic operational functions such as leasing arrangements can be jeopardised by the lack of security of funding.

In most cases we are talking about staff who are highly committed to NRM and to the objectives of the organisations for which they work. Community feedback suggested more emphasis needs to be given to building capacity and agency support, rather than less. In that regard there needs to be a move to a more corporate-oriented and professional model of support for local level 'volunteer' community involvement.

Long-term commitment

There is a strong community view that NRM is an issue of national importance and worthy of sustained commitment equal to the levels provided for issues like health, education and defence (South West Catchments Council, NRM Council). Government influence in giving NRM prominence within the community is important in raising awareness and support for the programmes.

“In the longer term the Commonwealth and states should allocate secure funding to protect and manage the natural capital of Australia in a similar way to Commonwealth/State arrangements for joint responsibilities like health, education and transport. This approach is vital for the environment and to provide secure employment for staff so as to retain and build on expertise and intellectual capital.” *NRM Council, Western Australia*

Successful NRM relies on substantial investments and widespread community support. The community has backed the regional delivery model despite its slow start. The community would be reluctant to walk away after having put so much time and effort into establishing functional regions and developing plans to manage NRM for the next 10-20 years. They emphasised they would not survive another major programme overhaul and the valuable start made in addressing NRM through the current programmes would be lost. It would not be desirable for the Australian Government to withdraw from the process before the programmes have had a chance to prove themselves.

“But the Australian and State Governments, with NHT1 and now NAP and NHT2, have spearheaded such an important initiative, and have built up such a head of steam in communities around the country, it would be a shame for that not to be followed up with ongoing funding of an equivalent level.” *South West Catchments Council*

“Sustainable NRM is a holistic long term process and requires the security of long term funding and the flexibility to deliver on a range of issues and actions.” *Queensland Water and Land Carers*

Short-term programmes run a risk of creating false economies and encouraging excessive scrutiny of projects with a high demand for quick results. Nevertheless, there is evidence that the programmes are making a difference on the ground even though they have only been operating for a comparatively short period. This evidence comes from research, project monitoring and through anecdotal examples of community participation. The leadership of the Australian Government has played a vital role in achieving this success and is well recognised by on-ground participants and other stakeholders.

“We have had huge amounts of private investment in the region in the form of landholders’ land and time. This has only been possible due to the support of government in providing funding for other aspects of the projects.” *Hindmarsh Landcare Network*

Examples where the Trust and the NAP are making a difference include:

- The Drainage Diversion Scheme of the Upper South East (South Australia). Refer to Case Study 2.
- Protecting Dugong and Turtle species in Northern Australia (Northern Territory). Refer to Case Study 13.
- The Collie Catchment Recovery Project (Western Australia). Refer to Case Study 14.
- The Shepparton Irrigation Region Surface and Sub-Surface Drainage Programme (Victoria). Refer to Case Study 22.
- The Conservation of Freshwater Ecosystem Values Project (Tasmania)
- Protecting biodiversity in the Southern Catchment (New South Wales)
- The Community Assessment Monitoring Program for Fire Impacted River Ecology Project (Australian Capital Territory)
- Repair of unacceptable degradation in the Condamine region (Queensland).

The community values the national leadership the Australian Government gives to NRM delivery and emphasises the need for consistent national approaches. This is particularly relevant in areas such as setting research priorities, monitoring landscape change and supporting local activity through small grant funding.

There is a community expectation that government commitment to regional delivery will continue beyond the life of current programmes. A continued commitment would provide government with an opportunity to derive the recognition and benefits of earlier investments. The community has expectations that the arrangements will deliver on the values and principles underlying investment in current NRM programmes, and the Reference Group encourages the Government to continue with this commitment.

Consideration needs to be given to the provision of funding for periods longer than three years, at least in principle. The short timeframes are an issue within current programmes because they do not recognise the nature of issues and time required to address them. For example, when the NAP was established it was done so to begin the process of addressing Australia's salinity problem. The seven-year commitment was an indication the Government was treating this issue seriously, recognising a timeframe of decades would be needed for reversing the situation given the nature of the issues involved and external impacts such as drought.

Similarly issues such as biodiversity are often addressed through short-term activities, but the full extent of results takes much longer to realise (see Case Study 3). However, short timeframes run the risk of encouraging overly optimistic project reporting and poor integration of previous learnings into projects within the lifetime of a programme. Funding certainly accelerates the timing with which NRM objectives can be delivered, however it is not the only factor for enabling their success.

Case Study 2: Drainage Diversion Scheme in the Upper South East of South Australia

The Upper South East Dryland Salinity and Flood Management Programme was developed in the early 1990s to address community concerns about dryland salinity, waterlogging and the fragmentation and degradation of ecosystems. Dryland salinity alone has a significant impact on large-scale sheep and beef cattle properties and cereal crop production in the Upper South East, with annual loss estimated at \$36 million.

Since 2003 Australian and State Governments and other stakeholders have allocated \$49.27 million³ to the programme. Activities have included drainage to lower groundwater levels and control waterlogging, revegetation and wetland management.

The drainage diversion scheme is a major component and totals \$19.15 million, of which the Australian Government has contributed \$9 million through the NAP.

In the last three years 255 kilometres of drains have been completed, together with the assessment and upgrade of existing drains. Other work has included native revegetation across 6,560 hectares, wetland protection covering 2,650 hectares, establishment of salt-tolerant pasture across 80 percent of affected area and perennial pasture such as lucerne across 30 percent of high-risk agricultural land.

Landholders have reported that, following the drain construction, pastures once too saline for cropping have become viable again and stock rates have improved. Adaptive management programmes have commenced, and through their implementation the programme will:

- Further reduce the area effected by salinity and waterlogging;
- Protect and enhance remnant native vegetation;
- Establish strategic wildlife corridors;
- Establish re-vegetated buffer zones; and
- Re-instate watercourse and wetland habitats.

Components of the Upper South East Flood Mitigation Programme

Component	Stakeholder investment (\$ million)
Tilley Swamp risk management, land acquisition and management	1.84
Drainage Diversion Scheme – drain consturction	19.15
Investigations to Determine Threshold Criteria for the Management of the Southern Lagoon of the Coorong	1.23
Watercourse Restoration Project - Upper South East	2.84
Biodiversity Conservation and Enhancement Project	17.15
Review and Establishment of Regional Targets for Revegetation and Vegetation Enhancement	0.10
Reclaiming the Productive Potential of the Upper South East	0.39
Integrated Environmental Management and Monitoring Strategy	2.99
Implementation of Upper South East Communication Strategy	0.36
Upper South East Programme Support	1.47
Total for Upper South East Flood Mitigation Programme	

Case Study 3: Arid Recovery Reserve, Roxby Downs

Since European settlement more than 60 percent of native mammals in the Arid Lands region of South Australia have become extinct. Bilbies and bettongs are Indigenous to the region and both are listed by the Australian Government as endangered.

The Arid Recovery project has been allocated over \$200,000 since 2002. Funded activities include pest animal management, the development of an off-reserve model for biodiversity protection, development of predator-control techniques and promotion of conservation issues.

Over 40 bilbies were re-introduced into a 6,000 hectare fenced reserve between 2000 and 2005, and 29 bettongs re-introduced between 1999 and 2000. The reserve provides important habitat for the animals, protection from introduced predators and rabbits and is an important facility for university research.

Today the reserve is home to more than 300 bilbies, 300-350 bettongs and supports an abundance of hopping mice. The reserve is being expanded to 8,600 hectares as a result its success. Major project sponsors include the Trust and the local mining industry. The project is a key element in the region's strategy for achieving sustainable NRM.

4.5 Community Engagement

4.5.1 Intersection with Industry

Recommendation 3

That strategies be developed in partnership with the primary industry to achieve higher levels of engagement.

One of the Reference Group's key findings was that the primary industry sector is yet to be fully engaged. The Pastoralists and Graziers Association in Western Australia, for example, commented it would be difficult to engage the top 20 percent of members because programme administrative costs are too high to make involvement a good business decision. Moreover, several industry organisations commented that the NLP is more user-friendly for their constituents in terms of being able to access funding readily and in a timely manner.

The issue of the NAP and the Trust being seen as 'environmental' programmes with little or no focus on productivity has made it difficult for many organisations to sell the benefits of involvement to members. Industries that have become most involved with regional NRM have done so with a strong infrastructure to support them, including regionally-based staff, facilitator networks and industry-based extension services. Some industries, such as dairy, are beginning to explore the potential for comprehensive involvement throughout their supply chains.

The ability to engage different industries depends on many factors, and variability in levels of engagement is not specific to NRM or regional bodies. For example, local governments face a similar problem in trying to engage stakeholders in NRM activities within their jurisdiction.

Linkages between regional bodies and industry groups are variable. Some regions, such as the Condamine region in southern Queensland, have built strong industry partnerships. However others are taking a less industry-focused approach or are relying heavily on internal resources to deal with industry-based issues.

As with other stakeholder audiences there was strong support for a continued regional approach, provided some refinements and greater efficiencies were built into a future model. Industry groups mentioned that one of the major selling points of current programmes is the ability to be able to focus on whole-of-catchment targets, not just on the individual properties where landholders are prepared to change their practices. This was seen to have greater efficiencies and lead to better overall outcomes. The challenge is still to find a way to successfully link what occurs at the farm scale with objectives set at a regional scale, and for that matter, a national scale.

Greater industry involvement through regional partnerships would help eliminate project duplication across regions and the associated administrative costs of running such projects. This would maximise funding spent on delivering on-ground outcomes. Stronger partnerships may also help address two of the issues facing regions, that is, their ability to be flexible in project timing, delivering when they are most needed, and being able to change investment priorities to match changing demands.

In most instances primary producers have a long history of working with industry organisations and look to them for a reliable source of information and assistance when they are planning to make changes to their on-property operations. Industry organisations have built confidence and trust among members and consequently have an advantage when engaging constituents in areas like more sustainable farming practices. Industry organisations are able to provide a single point of contact for obtaining such information and avoid the confusion that sometimes exists amongst landholders as to what programme funding is available to assist them. In that regard industry organisations have assisted landholders to prepare grant applications and have seen this as a way to keep members involved.

A particularly significant issue influencing the effectiveness of the current model is access to information. This is not to say that insufficient information exists - rather it is more to do with limits to delivery mechanisms available for receiving and distributing information and the expertise to assist landholders with applying lessons to their own properties. Many consider there has been a decline in the level of extension services offered to landholders, and there is variability in the capacity of regional bodies to communicate sufficiently well to fill this gap.

There is an opportunity for industry organisations to pick up this role as they have the expertise to access available research, understand the needs of landholders and develop partnerships with regional bodies to ensure shared objectives are met. A combined effort in addressing this issue

may also allow for more stable employment opportunities for extension staff, which is a major issue (especially in rural areas).

Case Study 4: Best Practice Dairy Effluent Management in Tasmania

Over the next five years Tasmanian's Cradle Coast and Northern NRM regions hope to achieve significant reductions in the amount of nutrients and other pollutants entering aquatic environments. Development and implementation of guidelines to address pollutants and turbidity has been identified as a priority task in regional plans.

Since 2003 the Australian Government has provided \$812,330 of Trust funds to address nutrient and water quality issues in these regions. An additional \$161,000 has been allocated for 2006-2007.

The major activity is an upgrade of effluent management systems on dairy farms. This will reduce faecal coliform contamination and nutrient loads in waterways and estuaries.

Stage 1 has completed farm plans and works to upgrade management on 45 farms. This equates to improved management standards and disposal of 158 megalitres of effluent. Stage 2 will continue work on 50 farms in both regions.

One of the difficulties faced by many state industry organisations is being able to effectively engage with several regions across a large area. Some have employed staff to take on this role. This approach seems to have worked well although it is an expensive option. Others have opted to focus on a select number of regions, which makes the task manageable, but at the loss of some key engagement opportunities.

There are opportunities through entire industry supply chains for developing partnerships with industry organisations. However, in some cases these opportunities cannot be easily addressed at a regional level due to their scale (e.g. issues that cross regional boundaries) and in some cases regional bodies have not yet matured to this level of interaction.

There are some examples of this larger scale type of interaction, such as the Memorandum of Understanding to manage effluent waste recently signed by members of the dairy industry and the Victorian Government. Under such a model partners would be responsible for monitoring and reporting on NRM activities as well their own research, extension and investment contributions. While still in its infancy, this model has potential for achieving a long-term transition from primarily government-funded NRM to a partnership between government, regions and industry.

On the whole industry organisations provide an existing, knowledgeable and trusted conduit to their sectors and the current NRM model would benefit, at all levels (national, regional and local) from their assistance.

Case Study 5: Condamine Alliance Business Model for Industry Involvement

The Condamine Alliance was established under the NAP and officially registered in 2002. Board membership includes representatives from the Condamine Catchment Management Association, the Eastern Downs Regional Planning Advisory Committee, Toowoomba and Region Environment Council, the Condamine-Balonne Water Committee and the wider community.

Directors include two local government nominees, two Landcare nominees, two Catchment Management Association nominees, one Condamine-Balonne water committee nominee, one Indigenous nominee and one industry nominee, along with an independent Chair.

The Board's approach was to form a small organisation of specialists to manage a portfolio of investment through partnerships with key community stakeholders. Partnership development was underpinned by a number of key principles and approaches.

The key principles:

- NRM Plan priorities form the basis of all investments;
- The business should drive operations;
- Innovation building on past success;
- Emphasis on skill-building within industry rather than within the regional body; and
- Measure outcomes rather than activities.

The key approaches include:

- Define the context of industry liaison in the catchment and define key contacts in industry;
- Establish current working practices and use existing networks;
- Establish a business partnership model that reduces competition between industries;
- Link activities to priority outcomes and NRM Plan targets, and run pilot programmes;
- Establish a single point of contact for partners;
- Allow flexibility in delivery models according to partners, skills and abilities; and
- Allocate sufficient resources to achieve the desired outcomes.

Workshops were held to bring together industries and environmental groups to address issues such as differences/conflicts in the development of Best Management Practices (BMP) in each industry, delivery mechanisms and barriers to adoption.

Results

The Alliance has focused on developing its capacity to engage the community and to deliver an effective and efficient model for NRM investment. This approach has gained ground since moving from planning to investment.

Streamlining of administrative processes has been a significant achievement and has allowed partners greater ownership of investment outcomes.

The Condamine Alliance has adopted a project management system that all staff and partners use to fully understand the delivery model that has evolved through partner feedback. The system is supported by an external independent audit process that assesses around 20 per cent of all completed projects. The audit process allows the Condamine Alliance to apply continuous improvement principles to subsequent planning and projects.

Recommendation 4

That a funding stream be introduced direct from the Australian Government, leveraging cash contributions from industry and in-kind support from the primary industry sector to improve the uptake of sustainable agricultural practices to deliver desirable regional, cross-regional and cross-jurisdictional outcomes.

Recommendation 5

That the National Landcare Programme should be retained as a separate funding stream based on its value for promoting sustainable agriculture and engaging the farming community, and its focus on profitability and innovation linking to sustainability.

A funding stream delivered through industry groups to support uptake of sustainable practices within the agricultural and other primary industries would improve efficient delivery across regions. The Reference Group saw firsthand the opportunities for engaging individual landholders through industry when they visited Carnavon Gorge, and read of similar success stories in submissions on work being done through the Farm Management System project in Queensland. Another example can be seen in the Grain and Graze programme (refer to Case Study 21). Such approaches could leverage greater engagement in the regions, and over time, potentially leverage additional funding.

Refer also to Sections 4.5.1 on Interaction with Industry and Section 4.6.8 on Stewardship.

Industry stakeholders considered one barrier to more effective engagement to be the over-emphasis of environmental gains in the concept of sustainability, and the lack of productive gains that can also be associated with this term. Industry organisations believe they would have a much easier task selling NRM to farmers under a sustainable production rather than a conservation banner.

The seafood industry is the most diverse and widespread primary industry in Australia and operates in a commons without boundaries. Many industry stakeholders say it has been difficult to clarify their role within a regional context despite a willingness to become engaged in regional NRM. For a number of reasons there has tended to be more focus (and funding) on terrestrial than marine resources under the regional NRM model, and this is a concern to the fishing and seafood industries. Further discussion on coastal and marine issues can be found in Section 4.6.3.

It has been suggested that better support from government agencies could help encourage improved integration of marine and terrestrial approaches. It has also been suggested that clearer communication and an explanation of the relationship between the role of the regional body and the NRM Plan would help stakeholders better understand the funding process and how they may get involved.

“The majority of seafood industry members or groups that are involved in regional NRM have pursued involvement rather than being invited to be involved... a number have tried to get involved and struggled and some have given up out of frustration.” *Seafood Services Australia*

A separate, industry-supported funding stream with a production focus directed at supporting on-farm change would accelerate the achievement of NRM targets through practice change. It would also encourage sustainable increases in production through the application of new technology. Such a stream could be designed to cover other primary industries - such as fishing - where appropriate.

Supporting industry volunteer links/NLP

Some industries, for example viticulture, and ‘care’ groups have little contact with regional bodies and there needs to be an alternative avenue for these industries/groups to become more involved in NRM. The NLP and Envirofund are good examples of where funding is engaging specific sectors of the community and strong support for these two streams to remain in place was evident.

The NLP has the added advantage of a strong focus on encouraging innovation and industry engagement in sustainable agriculture. It is also a known quantity for landholders and, like the Envirofund, has worked to retain the interest and engagement of stakeholders during the period in which the regional structures have been put in place. Not all farmers wish to participate in the regional process, preferring to retain a focus on what they know best – agriculture. The NLP provides another avenue to engage this community, and is often a stepping-stone to greater engagement in NRM.

Landcare membership is drawn largely from the farming community and surveys show members are twice as likely to have adopted innovative practices to address NRM issues. The NLP is thus central to farmer participation and to the incorporation of conservation in productive farm systems.

Surveys indicate that as many as 75 percent of broadacre and dairy farmers and land managers are exposed to Landcare activities, or benefit from the knowledge acquired through participation. In the 2003 survey 91 percent of participants said Landcare involvement had influenced their farming decisions. This demonstrates that focusing on landcare and industry groups is an effective mechanism to achieve regional NRM outcomes (source: *Report of the Review of the National Landcare Program*).

4.5.2 Intersection with the Community

Volunteers

Recommendation 6

That, when all 56 regional NRM plans have been accredited, Ministers table the plans in Parliament and acknowledge the important role of volunteers in developing the plans and their commitment to delivering on the outcomes stated in them.

The Government must recognise it would be impossible to address the level of environmental and sustainable resource-use issues facing Australia without community ownership and investment.

This includes supporting volunteers through programmes such as the Envirofund and the Community Support element of the National Landcare Programme.

“We would like to applaud the Government for targeting regional communities as priorities for funding as we believe there is a significant contribution these communities can make in achieving NRM targets...” *Western Rock Lobster Council Inc*

Governments are concerned about leveraging dollars from other governments, industry and corporate bodies, but do not always recognise how much volunteer effort their funding is leveraging. The Reference Group consultation process revealed volunteers provide more than just their time in delivering NRM. In calculating their contribution it is important to also recognise the value of their local knowledge, individual skills and in-kind or monetary contributions to projects. The degree to which Australian Government funding leverages volunteer in-kind contributions varies between place and project, but has been estimated to be as high as 4:1 and even 6:1 in some instances (ALC).

“...the ALC places particular emphasise on the critical role that volunteerism has played, and will continue to play, in leveraging government investment in programs such as NHT and NAP. Council believes that this fact should be kept clearly in mind when considering the way in which government supports NRM and sustainable agriculture into the future.” *Australian Landcare Council*

The Reference Group found that the level and nature of interaction between on-ground groups and regional bodies was very much dependent on leadership and the degree to which the concepts and principles of community and stakeholder engagement (communication, transparency, collaboration, inclusiveness, equity, and integrity) were being applied.

The consultations also indicated that the impact of the move to regional delivery arrangements had been greater on smaller on-ground groups, often due to their lack of resources and capacity to maintain a good level of engagement and participation beyond the planning and investment strategy development phases.

“Smaller groups are the ones that have been most dramatically impacted upon by the move to regional arrangements.” *Queensland Water and Land Carers*

Volunteers and local NRM groups of all sizes and types have participated in regional planning during the past three years while others have waited patiently for activities to commence. To maintain enthusiasm it is important regional bodies continue to value and engage these people until they begin to see the benefits of planning as it becomes translated into activity on the ground. They also want evidence that projects they are involved with contribute to a greater objective and national vision. There is an important role for the Australian Government to play in ensuring volunteers understand there is a national vision for NRM and they can see where they fit into the big picture.

The tabling of all 56 Regional Plans in the Australian Parliament is one step, along with the suggestions made in latter chapters dealing with Communication and Capacity Building, in demonstrating a national vision for NRM. However, it is important that, when tabling these documents, the very significant volunteer effort is acknowledged.

Recommendation 7

That the Australian Government Envirofund be maintained as a very important element of future NRM programmes.

Australian communities recognise the importance of the Envirofund in managing the transition from the first phase of the Trust to the current phase. The Envirofund is also seen as a mechanism to engage those people that do not necessarily want to be directly involved in regional planning and activities.

“ It (Envirofund) has engaged a lot of people who have never done Landcare or been involved in a catchment group.” *CLC from the Shires of Dowerin and Goomalling, Western Australia*

“ Envirofund provides useful funds for targeted producer implemented projects.”
Queensland Farmers Federation

Conversely, some stakeholders can see there would be advantages in linking Envirofund and other small grants programmes to the regional funding processes. This is seen by some as a way of making Envirofund activities more strategic. In some less populated areas small grants are seen as discouraging community engagement in the more strategic activities of the region. However the majority strongly supports keeping these programmes separate, their main areas of concern being the lack of clear communication about accessing the programmes and the level of administration and reporting required to receive relatively small amounts of funding. The Australian Government was complimented on its recent efforts to simplify the Envirofund application form.

“...the Australian Government is encouraged to develop and implement biodiversity conservation programmes such as Envirofund – to be delivered in concert with the larger NRM programmes.” *Worldwide Fund for Nature*⁴

Autonomy for local groups is important, even under the regional model. There is a need to be aware that a narrow focus on regional bodies may be detrimental to local community groups and volunteers which often underpin the success of regional arrangements and are essential to the health of the NRM model.

An important issue is how to most effectively link the enthusiasm and knowledge of these local groups with the priority-setting and planning processes that occur at a regional scale. One successful model in creating this link has been through the establishment and support of sub-

⁴ These were amongst many quotes received from written submissions in support of the continuation of the Australian Government Envirofund.

catchment groups. These groups are close enough to the ground to understand the needs of smaller groups but are typically more strategically placed and better able to provide coordination and administrative support for larger-scale project deliver. A particularly successful model has been the Woody Yaloak Catchment Group formed in the Corangamite region of Victoria.

Case Study 6: The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group

The Woody Yaloak Catchment Group is located in the Corangamite region of southwestern Victoria. The Group was established more than ten years ago after winning an Alcoa grant and combining the seven regional sub-groups. It now has around 170 members.

The Group has taken on a coordinating role at the sub-catchment level providing services promoting viable businesses, strong communities, a healthy natural environment and protection of native animals and plants. The Group now runs a programme worth half a million dollars per year, of which about forty percent comes through Australian Government NRM programme funding. The Group has one part-time coordinator other activities are organised with volunteer.

The Group does not see itself at odds or in competition with the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CMA), but rather sees great advantage in working with the CMA for mutual benefit. While the Group recognises itself as part of the catchment it operates quite independently of the CMA for most purposes. Unlike some other Landcare Group conglomerates, Woody Yaloak has actively sought funding through a wide range of internal and external means. In its first year of operation it received a significant grant from Alcoa, allowing it to become established and to leverage funding from other sources. It now relies on funding from 10-12 sponsors – including corporations - each year.

One innovation implemented by the Group is a voluntary levy system whereby all member landholders pay an annual fee entitling them to Group services. This system has multiple benefits, one of them being that landholders can access funding of approximately five dollars to each one dollar they contribute to have work done on their land. The system creates a very strong sense of ownership such that members recognise the whole-of-catchment benefits from the work being done, and will contribute to the levy system irrespective of whether they intend doing work on their own property during that year or not.

There also needs to be a minimum level of funding and programme security in order for local-level community structures to survive and develop. There are processes the community needs to undertake to receive funding through the regional model before projects can commence. This also relates to ongoing project maintenance, for example the reporting requirements or to receive ongoing funding. Envirofund was seen to provide a more straightforward way of accessing funds to undertake local activities.

There was strong evidence these programmes are a valuable mechanism for the Australian Government to gain recognition of support for local level activities. It was clear Envirofund has been instrumental in keeping some sections of the volunteer community engaged. For many volunteers the objective of their efforts is to deliver NRM on the ground or to focus on specific priorities that may or may not be recognised within the regional plan. It is important to recognise

the contribution these people make to NRM and not to allow the regional model to detract from their value. Too rapid change or too great a shift towards regional priority setting and delivery would run the risk of losing these people permanently.

Examples of Envirofund projects that have successfully engaged the community include:

- Kuku Thaypan Traditional Knowledge Recovery project (Balkanu, Cape York) *Indigenous* Refer to Case Study 8.
- The Humps and Mulka's Cave Environmental and Cultural Management Plan (Kondinin Shire, WA) *Indigenous/Landcare/Local Government/Tourism*
- Project Bandicoot (Adelaide Hills, SA) *Threatened species*
- Penguin monitoring and Rehabilitation program (Ulverstone, Tasmania) *Coastal & Marine*
- Iluka Peninsula Coastal Vegetation Restoration project (North coast, NSW) *Coastal & Marine*
- Trailed mechanical tree planter (Condobolin, NSW) *Landcare*
- Community Capacity Building and Revegetation project (Bundeburg, Qld) *Landcare*

For further information visit <http://www.nht.gov.au/envirofund/index.html> or call 1800 303 863.

4.5.3 Indigenous Engagement

Recommendation 8

That investigation continues into the potential of the regional NRM model to align Australian Government programmes to achieve multiple outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The consultations showed a general support amongst Indigenous communities for the regional model. Indigenous people own and manage around 14 percent of the land across Australia (including freehold, leasehold and reserve, *GeoScience Australia*), which makes them a significant NRM stakeholder. However given the health, education and well-being concerns for most Indigenous communities, NRM is often a second-order concern. Indigenous communities, particularly those in regional areas, have strong identification with caring for the land. This provides a largely untapped opportunity to use NRM investment to improve the overall well-being of Indigenous communities, while deriving environmental benefits.

One example of good NRM integration with broader community issues can be found in South Australia's Alinytjara Wilurara region, where NRM funding benefits not only the land but also health, skill development, self-esteem and employment outcomes within the regional Indigenous community. Land and Sea Ranger programmes are achieving good NRM as well as social outcomes for Aboriginal communities in northern Australia. Currently Community Development Employment Programme (CDEP) provides the funding to employ rangers, but the delivery of Indigenous objectives could be more holistic under an NRM programme. The successful engagement of Indigenous communities through ranger programmes has built up a growing expectation for NRM. The continuation of this engagement will require increased resourcing and priority as a project.

Indigenous Coordination Centres

In July 2004 the Australian Government significantly revised Indigenous Affairs administration arrangements and established 30 Indigenous Coordination Centers (ICC). ICCs are the new on-ground mechanism for supporting coordination, planning and service delivery to Indigenous communities. ICCs are managed by the Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination in the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Each centre includes staff from key program delivery agencies, and in some cases staff from state agencies, who are charged with brokering innovative and flexible responses to needs identified by Indigenous communities.

The principles underpinning the development of the new government responses are: shared responsibility; partnership development; whole-of-government; regional focus; flexibility; and real outcomes. The key mechanism for brokering whole-of-government outcomes is through Shared Responsibility Agreements (at the community level) and Regional Partnership Agreements (higher level strategic) which are based on concepts of mutual obligation for both community and government. Further information is available at <http://www.indigenous.gov.au/icc/>.

Overall, there needs to be better recognition of the cultural differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities of Australia. This includes greater attempts to understand the impact of culture on daily life and clearer communication and understanding of NRM issues and how they affect Indigenous communities. While all rural communities desire a high level of stability and long-term commitment to NRM programmes, this is particularly important for Indigenous programmes. In Indigenous communities it takes much longer to build trust and to learn how to communicate effectively, and any loss of continuity would be detrimental.

“The preferred timetables and methodology for Aboriginal consultation just did not fit the timetables or consultation models dictated by governments.” AJ Braid, Western Australia

“The differences in the focus of NRM programme frameworks and the aspirations of Indigenous people with numerous concerns and issues for Country means that many Indigenous priorities are not funding priorities for NRM.” Australian Rainforest Council

For Indigenous communities there are additional issues to consider, including how well funding application timeframes meet their needs, the lack of funding to support participation in NRM activities and decision-making forums, and the complex language and cultural barrier that different groups contend with. Indigenous communities would like to have more consistent representation on the regional boards. The current arrangements are patchy in the way they address Indigenous issues and in the extent to which communities are represented. This may be through direct involvement or through an Indigenous advisory committee who report to the regional board.

Case Study 7 :Indigenous Youth Participation in Natural Resource Management as part of Community Diversionary Strategies for Youth at Risk

At present there is a lack of organisations and activities for those Indigenous Youth who are on Community Service Orders (CSO) from a Magistrate Court where they can adhere to their CSO in a constructive way. In most cases there is little if any participation in vocational training or education as a component to the Orders. The current system does little by way of assisting individuals to establish a work ethic or to see cultural awareness and maintenance, vocational training or education as relevant to their future.

“Enhancing Indigenous Engagement in Natural Resource Management” is planning through the establishment of two Pilot Projects in Western Australia’s Geraldton and the Kimberley region to have the Aboriginal Land & Sea Ranger programs accredited to supervise Juvenile offenders in completing CSOs. The project, which is based on the Greencorps model, could consist of 10 to 12 persons at any one time. This may include those from the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and those subject to CSOs.

The participants would partake in the TAFE Certificate 1 & 2 Conservation and Land Management course. This includes training units such as: OH&S; first aid; revegetation; using essential equipment and chemicals; restoration works; NRM assessments on certain lands; working effectively in the industry; numeracy and literacy; fire management; traditional ecological knowledge; Elder mentoring; and managing biodiversity threats.

The project offers a cooperative approach to supporting Indigenous communities, the regional NRM bodies and relevant agencies involved in management of Indigenous Youth Diversionary programs by providing a positive approach to participation in on-ground NRM work activities. The project supports other agency objectives in providing training opportunities for Indigenous juvenile offenders completing CSOs.

The strategy is framed to be consistent with Australian Government policy, with the aim of developing a practical working arrangement to bring about whole-of-government approaches in Indigenous service delivery. The approach is based on several principles:

- Indigenous communities (many in remote areas) need to have support and resources to deal with their issues, address their priorities and problems and plan for their future i.e. to self-determine actions to achieve community objectives;
- Developing appropriate programmes which deliver services to Indigenous communities;
- Relevant mainstream programmes (Australian Government, State /Territory and private agencies) supporting Indigenous communities delivering programme outcomes; and
- A partnership approach is able to engage other agencies and stakeholders to make a difference.

Case Study 8: Traditional Knowledge Recording Project in Cape York

The Traditional Knowledge Recording Project was kick-started in 2000 with an initial injection of \$170,000 from NHT1. The project was initiated by two Kuku Thaypan Elders who wanted their knowledge, beliefs and practices recorded and preserved for present and future use by their families and youth. The project uses digital technology to document and preserve information in a technical database and has the additional benefits of providing a training medium to engage younger generations in the recording of Elder knowledge.

The project has evolved to include several communities, each of which has its own data recorders, database and Elders who advise the project development. New communities enter the project through Elder mentoring activities whose communities are already undertaking Traditional Ecological Knowledge recording work. This means community engagement is expanding and communities who join the project know there is a support network in place where people are mentoring, educating and sharing experiences with others.

There are a range of outcomes from this project which are beneficial far beyond the recording and preservation of Traditional Ecological Knowledge including:

- *Community benefits:* development of appropriate community governance structures to interface project works based on modern technologies; intergenerational knowledge transfer in communities; identification of future leadership potential through Elder-governed mentoring and leadership programs; and realisation of a range of employment outcomes based on learning, understanding and preservation of a range of natural and cultural resource management tools; and
- *NRM benefits:* communities focused on land and sea issues, with unique perspectives; skilled in traditional and western technologies; stable governance structures; in areas where other resources just do not exist; and motivated to contribute to local, regional and national NRM objectives.

Researching, recording, documenting and using traditional knowledge systems in managing natural and cultural resources has significant biodiversity conservation outcomes. The recording process incorporates aspects of language, country and cultural information including fire, water and land management. This information has already been translated into a series of management actions based on traditional knowledge for Low Lake in the Lakefield National Park.

The project utilises a natural resource management platform in the realisation of a broad range community aspirations in line with the new Australian Government service delivery mechanisms for Indigenous communities. In line with these new arrangements development of a Shared Responsibility Agreement or Regional Partnership Agreement to support the project is now under consideration, an approach that has the potential to demonstrate to government the range of positive outcomes, which can be achieved by these types of community driven NRM projects.

4.5.4 Importance of Facilitators and Natural Resource Management Officers

Recommendation 9

That the funding of Facilitators and Coordinators be considered as a legitimate investment reflecting the fundamental role these positions have in the delivery of ‘on-ground’ outcomes.

In state and territory consultations the importance of Facilitators and Project Coordinators was recognised in helping the community link into the regional delivery model and access resources to deliver projects on-ground.

“The Natural Resource Management Officer network... is a critical service to the broader community and is critical to successful delivery of regional NRM. Do away with the archaic view that these positions are ‘administration’ only and not to be specifically funded.” *AJ Braid, Western Australia*

The role of Facilitators is acknowledged at all NRM levels, from government agencies to state industry bodies to local group volunteers. The delivery of extension and project coordination has changed under the regional model but it is well-recognised as having an important role in ensuring well-managed and well-resourced projects. There is concern that technical expertise and extension skills are being lost, especially those from state agencies, but there are opportunities for recreating this skill base, for example through industry linkages. Extension skills are one of the key ingredients for linking catchment-wide priorities to individual property owner actions. Facilitators and Coordinators also play a role in providing credibility to regional bodies.

“Facilitators and Coordinators provide a vital link between government and community. The current Facilitator and Coordinator Networks work well and needs continuing support.” *Local Government Association of New South Wales/Shires Association of New South Wales*

Facilitators and NRM Officers are employed at a variety of levels within the regional delivery model and it would be wrong to assume that all fill the same function or same level of importance to particular stakeholders at any one time. It is clear however the networks these people operate within and influence are very important for successfully linking communities operating on-ground with regional, government and industry partners.

“(Having) Natural Resource Management Officers out in the community, either as a full time or part time equivalent, is significantly increasing the profile of NRM in the region.” *Mingenew-Irwin Group*

A key issue for these positions is security and the length of time they are funded for. In many cases positions are funded for a 12-month period and often tied to project funding. In some cases project officers are employed on a casual basis and the longest contracts are of three years duration.

It is very difficult to entice staff to remain in positions when they have such short tenure and uncertainty of contract renewal, which means regions have difficulty retaining corporate and project knowledge. Some of the flow-on effects are projects not being completed, poorly-informed project reporting and disengagement of community groups.

The question of whether Facilitators and NRM Officers should be classified as ‘on-ground works’ is an important one. The regional variability in the level of resourcing - often at the expense of other on-ground activities - can create friction. In other regions these positions are highly valued and strategically utilised without concern they are unnecessary or a waste of money.

Grassroots stakeholders commented they were reliant on Facilitators and Coordinators to provide a range of project support, despite the perceived opportunity cost between funding on-ground activities and their employment. This support ranges from getting projects off the ground to helping them with successful project management in dealing with the associated paperwork. As indicated above, the positions provided a vital link between landowners and regions and were often sources of information about NRM practice and processes.

Local level Facilitators and Coordinators need to have employment security that is not project-dependent, allowing them to engage with the wider community and not be tied to single projects. This will maintain their role as project catalysts and supporters. Given their vital NRM role in it is important that the positions be considered a legitimate investment, essential to achieving on-ground outcomes. Legitimising their role will also address the issue of tenure and staff retention, having the added benefit of helping regions, community and industry maintain the corporate knowledge and skills needed to deliver NRM effectively.

4.5.5 Maximising community engagement in regions

Recommendation 10

That governments ensure, in establishing membership of regional bodies, that they have processes in place that maximise community engagement and ownership.

A lack of community ownership can come at a great loss for a region, particularly where there are few or dispersed resources to undertake NRM activities (for example in rural regions). Community ownership is a key source of project design and implementation, information, local knowledge and cash and in-kind support, which in turn leads to effectively meeting catchment targets. Estimates of volunteer contributions to projects show they may have increased by way of dollars to in-kind from just over 2:1 under the first phase of the Trust to closer to 4:1 under the current programmes.

However, there was feedback to suggest community ownership in some areas had fallen away, in large part due to the way regional bodies are operating and engaging - or not engaging - the community. In some cases the communication between local community groups and regional bodies has changed in the move from planning to implementation (as these groups take on the

role of contracted service providers). This has strained the relationship between the two and highlights the need for ongoing communication.

The structure of regional boards/CMA's varies between jurisdictions. They can be appointed under statutory arrangements, elected by the community or be a mixture of both. The allocation of members on the regional bodies has been determined in two fundamentally different ways, either on the basis of skill or the basis of representation.

Table 4. Type of appointment of NRM regional bodies by jurisdiction

State/Territory	Status	Basis of appointment
Australian Capital Territory	Non-statutory	ACT Government appointment
New South Wales	Statutory	NSW <i>Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003</i>
Northern Territory	In transition	Likely to be body corporate under NT Corporations Legislation
Queensland	Non-statutory	Companies limited by guarantee or incorporated bodies under <i>Queensland Associations Incorporations Act 1981</i>
South Australia	Statutory	<i>SA Natural Resources Management Act 2004</i>
Tasmania	Non-statutory	<i>Natural Resource Management Act 2002</i>
Victoria	Statutory	<i>Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i>
Western Australia	Non-statutory	<i>WA Associations Incorporation Act 1987</i>

The discussion on regional body structure highlighted that each model has some obvious strengths and weaknesses. For example, Catchment Management Authorities with a statutory basis tend to demonstrate high levels of skill in particular areas, good levels of governance and well-established systems for dealing with day-to-day issues. These same structures, however, can be viewed as being a fourth tier of government, a vehicle for cost-shifting by state agencies and as supporting a less-than-democratic, top-down approach.

Likewise an elected regional body must still have a sufficient and broad skill base to be able to fulfill its functions properly, but often the member election process cannot adequately address this need. The strength of an elected body is that it can be more readily accepted by the community as being able to represent their views and needs.

Feedback received through the consultation process clearly demonstrated how important it is for regional bodies to have community ownership, irrespective of whether they have been specifically appointed on the basis of representation or otherwise. Community representation should not be seen to be at odds with bodies that have been appointed on a skills basis because engaging the community is a key skill the regional bodies must demonstrate. The perception by the community that a skills-based body cannot represent them is due in a greater part to the failure of the organisation to communicate their objectives, activities and timeframes for programme implementation.

There are examples to demonstrate how community ownership can exist under a statutory model and there is no reason why the two should be mutually exclusive. Greater understanding needs to occur of the processes that successfully allow community ownership to co-exist with statutory

bodies. It also needs to be communicated effectively so successful models can be more widely adopted, perhaps even made a mandatory criteria for regional bodies to embrace.

A way of supporting greater community ownership in future regional arrangements would be to negotiate specific changes under Bilateral Agreements. There could be adjustments to support stronger selection processes for Board members and engagement processes within regions in a similar way to how institutional reform was addressed in the first agreement round. One of the key questions is at what point responsibilities should be devolved to regions and/or be retained by governments.

4.5.6 Intersection with Local Government

Recommendation 11

That regional bodies be encouraged to work more closely with local government in delivery of NRM programmes.

Local government was involved at the highest policy level in the formation of current NRM programmes but this has not been consistently translated to involvement at the local level. Some regions are working well with local councils and shires, but equally there are many local governments which have no inclination to become involved with delivery through the regional bodies and NRM programmes.

“Local government is a major player in the sustainable management of our natural resources (as investor, planner, regulator, manager and administrator) and has the most immediate connection to the community. Local government is therefore uniquely placed to play a significant role in the delivery of NRM outcomes.”
Local Government Association of New South Wales/Shires Association of New South Wales

“Feedback from Councils indicates support for an option that builds on current arrangements but results in a more integrated approach at the regional level including stronger links to other planning processes.” *Local Government Association of Queensland*

One of the key reasons given for this inconsistent involvement has been poor articulation of the role local governments should play in the programmes themselves, and how the programmes should integrate with traditional planning and NRM activities. The regional NRM structural arrangements are not well-aligned with existing local government structures, which compounds the problems of integration on issues such as planning, project reporting and NRM priorities.

Under the current programmes the core NRM issues dealt with by local councils, such as waste management and stormwater control, are often not recognised as regional priorities (given most regions perceive these as an issue for local government rather than the region). It is unlikely local governments would be expecting this to change. However without some form of connection to current activities many will not be able to recognise and value existing NRM activities. They may

also continue to view activities as a form of community service when in fact they may be fulfilling both functions. Inconsistencies between boundaries and the ratio of local shires per region have also been problematic.

Local governments have an extensive range of skills and resources to offer NRM programmes, particularly at the local delivery level. Local government is well-recognised by the community and is commonly seen as a first port of call for advice on local issues. As elected representatives they also have the confidence of the community in the main. Local governments have a long history in building the capacity of local communities and in being able to deliver services that are tailored to local needs. These have been recognised as key elements for successful translation of national NRM programmes to the on-property activity vital for successful outcomes.

Local governments also have a great deal of experience and structural resources for delivering planning objectives. If local government activities remain outside of the NRM planning, implementation and reporting spheres, a lot of information, skills and resources will be lost. Reporting of regional NRM activities will also be missing significant chunks of activity and expenditure.

“Local government’s on-going commitment to natural resource management and its significant expenditure on it outside of the regional NRM framework is not being appropriately acknowledged.” Local Government Association of South Australia

However, it needs to be acknowledged not all local councils play the same role. Indeed there are significant differences between the roles of rural and urban councils while councils with coastal boundaries have additional responsibilities to those inland. In planning future NRM programmes it would be beneficial to take some of these differences into account, to maximise where the strengths of particular councils lie, and to articulate these in allocating roles and responsibilities. It has been proposed that local government work in partnership with regions to provide greater direction on issues such as local planning and coastal and marine issues to benefit the regional model (see Section 4.6.3 Coastal and Marine Issues).

Options to create better linkages with local government could include tripartite agreements, engagement of local government by regional bodies through activities (for example hosting of staff) and by providing better access/eligibility of local government to access various forms of NRM funding.

Having a local government councilor on a regional NRM body, and particularly as the Chair, has proved to be an advantage for regional community engagement and to deliver projects under high-quality governance arrangements. Cases such as the Southern Rivers regions of New South Wales (See Case Study 9) are amongst many good examples that exist across Australia.

Case Study 9: Southern Rivers community engagement process

In preparing their Catchment Action Plan the Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (CMA) conducted 34 scheduled meetings and approximately 25 informal meetings to engage directly with some 400 community representatives from the community. The meetings were held over a period of six weeks across the entire region, from Jindabyne to Kangaroo Valley and from Wollongong to Eden.

Some paid advertising was used to promote the meetings, for example through newspaper releases, radio, newsletters and posters. However, to keep costs minimal most of the community was informed through letters of invitation and by CMA Community Support Officers.

The consultations were used to engage the community and to increase understanding of the Southern Rivers CMA and its functions. An evaluation showed the meetings were reaching new audiences amongst 13 percent of attendees, and of those all felt their level of understanding increased at least moderately.

The meetings were organised by CMA staff and consisted of a presentation followed by a workshop on the targets and six themes of the draft Catchment Action Plan. The workshops allowed the community to share ideas and from this build new partnerships. A criticism of the process was the limited time available to participate.

To finish the workshops the community was asked to allocate stickers indicating their priority for themes discussed. This process provided the CMA with a good overview of the community's NRM priorities as well as an insight into the priorities on a sub-catchment basis.

NB In New South Wales the transition to the CMA structure described here followed extensive community consultation in the preparation of the Southern and South-East Catchment Management Board Blueprints.

Promoting effective engagement between regional bodies and local government through a more systematic approach is being trialled through a pilot project in Queensland (see Case Study 10).

Case Study 10: Queensland Local Government NRM Engagement Pilot

The Local Government Association of Queensland has used a Strategic Reserve investment for a pilot project to increase the awareness of and involvement in NRM by local governments. The project has helped the Association visit all councils (including Indigenous councils), make presentations during council meetings, hold an annual environment conference and develop resources to assist councils to expand their NRM involvement. As a result the priority councils place on NRM has been increasing throughout the state.

This project has demonstrated how a relatively small investment in local government has achieved significant outcomes. Councils are analysing their own NRM spending, ensuring their objectives are firmly outlined in corporate and strategic plans and fully funding targeted activities.

It is important local government be included at all levels of regional delivery including representation on regional boards. Experience across regions has shown local government representation is most effective when it is skill-based rather than solely representational. One way of seeking effective representation is to utilise local government collective structures, for example the Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) in Western Australia. These structures provide a channel into several local councils/shires and more efficient feedback mechanism into regional boards, particularly in circumstances where regions cover a large number of shire boundaries.

Recommendation 12

That, in the interests of improved engagement, local government be represented on Joint Steering Committees with observer status leading to better the integration of local government and regional plans.

The question was raised as to whether local government representation on the Joint Steering Committees would be a useful move for better delivery on programme outcomes. There was wide agreement that local government involvement at all levels would be an advantage and would help address the issues of local government involvement in regional delivery.

“Guaranteed full local government membership on the NRM Joint Steering Committee needs to be supported and pursued as a matter of priority to give NRM greater legitimacy in purpose and direction and to optimize local government engagement.” Local Government Association of South Australia

Local government representatives strongly encouraged a tripartite approach to the future delivery of regional NRM, even if the higher level of programme policy and direction remained under a bilateral arrangement. Meeting representatives were keen to emphasise that local government is another tier of government and not just another stakeholder.

Case Study 11: QMDC Local Government Weed Management Incentives Program

Local governments in the Border Rivers and Maranoa Balonne catchments are partnering with the Queensland Murray Darling Committee (QMDC) to identify priority weed species and hotspots in their shires and develop on-ground projects to address these issues. The areas are identified on a catchment scale, building on previously-funded activities or momentum, including all land tenures, private/public and state managed land. They are also being directed by the Local Government Area Pest Management Plan (LGAPMPs).

To date \$200,000 of QMDC (Australian Government funding) has been committed to address seven priority weed species by involving over 250 landholders. The total value of these projects with local government and landholder contributions is around \$1.2 million.

QMDC was responsible for developing funding guidelines that were reviewed by local governments before they were finalised. These guidelines ensure a sub-catchment approach to weed management, which means that best-practice weed control moves away from the parameters local governments work under in their existing operational framework (guidelines attached). Local governments are obliged to give priority to public land under their management, whereas these guidelines allow them to target the real priority areas and across land tenures to ensure a catchment-scale approach.

The role of QMDC:

- Coordination of technical support, mapping and monitoring;
- Best practice information exchange and project promotion;
- Development of regional components of the projects and outlining landholder obligations;
- Coordination of labour to ensure resources are available in a timely manner; and
- Coordination of steering committee who assess the projects – and ensure that the organisations they are representing are involved e.g. Main Roads, Forestry Leases.

The role of local government:

- Project administration and project coordination;
- Enforcement to ensure work is carried out where relevant & applicable;
- Mapping and monitoring in partnership with QMDC; and
- Equipment maintenance and on-site inspections.

The intended outcomes

- Coordinated weed control addressing priority species in the LGAPMPs;
- Focus on high-priority areas and species at a catchment scale;
- Increased knowledge of best practice technologies; and
- Reduction and containment of priority pests.

Benefits of the collaboration between QMDC and local government

- Councils can focus on priority areas on all land within their shire;
- Coordination of stakeholders through the steering committee/assessment panel as well as regional QMDC staff;
- Coordination of labour and resources across a larger region to ensure economic efficiencies; and
- Collation of mapping/monitoring data that can be shared between shires and agencies.

4.6 Improving Delivery

4.6.1 Governance/Quality Assurance/Block Funding

Recommendation 13

That quality assurance measures be introduced for monitoring and improving governance arrangements and operational performance of all regional bodies.

Recommendation 14

That where a regional body has demonstrated a capacity to manage its business effectively and accountably to an agreed standard, then block funding be devolved to that body to allow greater flexibility in their operations.

Regional bodies face a range of governance and reporting challenges. This is evident both in building capacity and in dedicating the often significant resources required to address the accountability and reporting requirements placed on them by the Australian and State/Territory Governments, at the expense of more direct investment in NRM.

The community and regions would prefer that expenditure on administration and reporting be minimised and NRM investment be maximised. However, this cannot happen unless governments are assured regional bodies have the capacity to deliver investment wisely. There is a need to support regions to build their governance capacity.

Feedback suggests the Australian Government could play a stronger role in supporting regional bodies to deal with corporate governance issues such as financial management, legal issues and governance structures. This role could be exercised through the provision of a person on the ground to work with regions across a state.

There needs to be some basic criteria for regional bodies to ensure they meet minimum standards in the way of capacity, expertise and support for meeting accountability and operational requirements. The regional governance framework needs to ensure regions have an effective strategy for engaging stakeholders, maintaining relationships and communicating across the whole region. It is important for them to employ staff with communication and facilitation skills as well as those with financial and technical expertise.

The development and implementation of a quality assurance framework would improve monitoring and governance arrangements. One such example is the Natural Resources Commission initiative in New South Wales (see Case Study 23).

Block Funding

‘Block funding’ has potential to reduce red tape, speed up approvals and streamline reporting requirements while delivering regional priorities and outcomes. There are multiple interpretations of what block funding may constitute under regional arrangements. The most commonly-held view is one of providing large components of funding to purchase multi-activity outcomes at a

catchment or sub-catchment level. The focus of the investor is on the *outcome* and the agreed milestones marking progress in delivering the outcome.

Block funding would differ from current arrangements in that it would not require the NRM regional body to *specify in detail* what projects would be funded. It would also allow the region to have flexibility in funding different projects over the course of the funding period according to their approved regional plan and investment strategy. This would have the added advantage of allowing them to meet unforeseen/unplanned opportunities for investment partnerships.

“Regions should also be in a position to define the actual outcomes they want to achieve against their specific NRM targets. In this way regions can define the ‘what’ and providers can describe ‘how’ they will deliver the outcomes.”
Greening Australia

One of the most consistent criticisms of NRM programme delivery has been the duplicative and onerous nature of government-required reporting. To date, the level of reporting has been justified by investors on the basis of ensuring an appropriate balance of governance and accountability arrangements. This has occurred where programme arrangements and stakeholder relationships were still in the planning rather than implementation phase.

In general, regions have moved from planning to implementation. Considerable confidence in the regional model has grown and the regional bodies have matured in their capacity and governance arrangements.

The issue of block funding was raised in meetings in several states and territories and ideas were expressed on ways to best deliver it. For example, in New South Wales it was raised by the Natural Resources Commission and Department of Natural Resources as a means of addressing some of the key problem areas of the current arrangements such as onerous administration costs and unrealistic timeframes. In Victoria it was raised by the Chairs of the Boards of the Catchment Management Authorities as a way to better target investment and leverage private sector funding (see Case Study 12).

“We must move towards block funding, with large place-based multi-outcome projects ideal as the first step.” *Chair, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA*

One of the concerns for government in delivering block funding is the need to be certain the outcomes being purchased will be delivered, and the governance and accountability arrangements are in place.

Block funding could be allocated in a staged approach, with an increasing proportion of regional budgets being moved to this over time. Alternatively, this concept could be trialled in two or three states under the current NRM programmes with the aim of introducing it as a standard for any new NRM programmes.

A clear and agreed definition of what the term means and what parameters define how funding may be used is essential in setting up arrangements for block funding. Performance standards and indicators to guide investors and those receiving funds must be clearly stated to show who is

eligible and to ensure funding is used appropriately once a system is established. A critical determinant for eligibility would be the capacity of a region to demonstrate well established benchmarks, approved accountability/governance arrangements and an approved three-year investment strategy. There needs to be measures in place to ensure investment sources are properly recognised, including the Australian Government funding.

Block Funding (from submission by Dr Mick Lumb, Chair, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA)
The adoption of block funding could be based on an accreditation approach of specific criteria and demonstrated sound governance. The criteria could include:

- Strong governance and record of sound performance;
- Identification of place-based risks to asset values;
- Achievable, cost effective response;
- Likelihood of significant supportive funding;
- Documented support from key implementing agencies, local government, communities and organizations;
- Specified deliverables;
- Mechanisms to measure achievement of outcomes; and
- Auditable business systems.

Block funding could also provide a means for better engaging corporate sector partners. For example under the GroWest project, Port Phillip expects to be able to leverage \$2 million from a \$500,000 block funding package (see Case Study 12).

4.6.2 Streamlining/Red tape reduction

Recommendation 15

That, to address community concerns, action be taken to streamline the approvals-to-payment processes for NRM funding.

The process of applying for funding is time consuming, excessively detailed and can take resources away from existing project delivery. This process needs to be simplified and proponents given forward warning as to when application rounds commence.

“The timeframes for delivering investment strategies i.e. 12 month projects are inadequate and often impossible to meet due to seasonal lead time, 18-24 months is more realistic.” *Southern New England Landcare Coordinating Committee*

“Whilst some administration costs are factored into NHT funding, groups are unable to pay staff to undertake vital tasks such as bookkeeping, staff supervision, contract management, training, OH&S and banking.” *National Parks Association of New South Wales*

Case Study 12: GroWest Project, Port Phillip and Westernport CMA

GroWest is an umbrella programme established by landholders and other stakeholders to deal holistically with a range of issues including the loss of natural and agricultural assets, weed infestation, loss of biodiversity, erosion, water quality, soil degradation and salinity.

The programme is:

- Assisting landholders to combat weeds and other land management issues;
- Providing an opportunity to attract and coordinate funding for land improvement, and
- Addressing the community pressure to find a solution for many of the problems described.

The programme provides economic benefits as well as environmental and social benefits.

Economic benefits include:

- Increased land value;
- Employment;
- Access to funding and expertise to enable activities; and
- Reclamation of land and increased productivity.

Environmental benefits include:

- Increased stability of land;
- Increased habitat for native plants and animals;
- Increased linkages between areas of native vegetation; and
- Improved condition of waterways.

Social/community benefits include:

- Community recognition and understanding of local natural resource issues;
- Sense of pride in working to resolve local land management issues;
- Increased cooperation between sectors of the community; and
- Increased attractiveness of the landscape.

The programme aims to use funding of \$500,000 per year to leverage contributions of around \$2 million per year over a three-year period. This will be achieved by attracting funds directly for specific activities and by building links between the programme, landholders and other initiatives to attract funds into the area for complementary work.

Future programmes should focus on simplifying the funding process and reducing red tape. There was strong support for streamlining programmes into a single or limited number including a small grants element. It was suggested that reducing programme numbers would simplify regional delivery, create greater equity of access and better program recognition as well as save on administrative costs. The NAP and the Trust are integrated for on-ground delivery purposes anyway.

“With the regional strategies and investment plans in place there needs to be greater delegation to the regional organisations of decision making and project allocation to streamline implementation.” *DairyTas*

A strategic approach needs to be taken to ensure lessons learned from previous programmes are made accessible to all stakeholders. Greater consideration also needs to be given to policy instruments to supplement government funding so NRM is not reliant on it over the long term.

“Longer funding cycles at the local level are required to facilitate improved planning required to implement works and programs and to leverage partnership investment in NRM.” *Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association*

Reporting requirements are also overly onerous and templates often do not allow an accurate picture of projects to be portrayed. Groups applying for project funding said they would appreciate better communication of the application process and more realistic timeframes for receiving feedback.

The comment was made that delays in programme delivery have occurred as a result of attempting to create a perfect product the first time around. Unless exceptional circumstances exist In future programme rules should not be open to debate during the life of the programme.

4.6.3 Coastal and Marine Issues

Recommendation 16

That a greater focus be given to coastal issues and marine issues, and better integration arrangements developed between coastal, marine and riparian issues.

There is a concern that coastal regions are spending less on coastal and marine activities because there is no specific programme allocation or guidelines for coastal and marine priorities as there were in earlier programmes.

“Currently the NHT does not adequately cater for marine projects which may explain the lack of marine projects supported.” *National Parks Association of New South Wales*

“There is a growing concern from Coastcare volunteers that regional catchment management bodies will have a greater focus on rural environmental issues to the detriment of coastal and marine issues.” *Landcare Australia Limited*

It was suggested more guidance be given to regional bodies in developing the coastal and marine sections of their NRM Plans, and more importantly, greater guidance for setting coastal and marine priorities for investment. A common criticism was that marine and coastal issues are often identified within the Plans but never make it high enough up the investment priority list to get funded. This may be a conscious decision by regions, or more likely is due to a lack of relevant expertise to assess projects adequately.

Many coastal and marine representatives felt there was not enough information and expertise in relation to marine matters to properly inform individual regions. More targeted spending is needed to develop a marine knowledge base as well as to communicate existing information and new findings to regions in a manner that will allow marine management to be better integrated with other NRM activities.

“Catchment Management Authorities are progressively recognizing the values and issues associated with the marine and coastal environments, but there are few dedicated staff in Catchment Management Authorities with coastal and marine responsibilities and expertise.” *Victorian Coastal Council*

Case Study 13: Turtle and Dugong monitoring around Sir Edward Pellew Island

Of the world's seven marine turtle species, six inhabit the Northern Territory and five are known to nest there. The Sir Edward Pellew Islands are nationally and internationally recognised as significant habitats for turtles and dugongs. Serious threats to their survival - primarily from pollution and changes to important habitats, especially coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangrove forests and nesting beaches - need to be addressed.

Improved stewardship programmes have been identified as a high priority in the Territory's NRM plan. The Turtle and Dugong Monitoring Project has received \$112,500 from the Australian Government through the second phase of the Trust. It was delivered by the Lianthawirriyarrna Sea Rangers from Borroloola with assistance from WWF-Australia and the Northern Territory Government's Parks and Wildlife Service.

Since 2003 the project has recorded the natural and cultural values of the Sir Edward Pellew Islands, including a study of the nesting habits of both green and flatback turtles. Satellite tracking is increasing knowledge of migratory patterns and nesting frequency of the turtles.

Stewardship programmes are being established with the Sea Rangers and include technical training as well as informal skills, as well as linkages with Traditional Owners to manage natural resources. Dugong habitat restoration will commence in 2006.

Coastal and marine representatives recognised many of the regional bodies have evolved through predominantly land based NRM processes. Nevertheless, in future they would like to see better coastal and marine representation on regional bodies, along with a greater emphasis on the catchment to coast continuum.

“Historically, there has tended to be a focus on primary industry and terrestrial resources, to the extent that the marine and coastal aspects of our natural resources are not as well funded.” *Western Rock Lobster Council Inc*

The coastal and marine community is diverse, including fishers, environmentalists, marine planners and urban dwellers. In a simple way this demonstrates the challenge regional bodies face in engaging a representative sweep of the coastal and marine community.

To compound this problem coastal and marine NRM is full of questions surrounding the appropriate geographic scales in which to make planning decisions and the amount of information and research available to support such decisions. There are questions surrounding where the coast begins and how to best make the catchment to coast continuum meaningful to a wide range of stakeholders.

Coastal and marine management is subject to a number of institutional arrangements and planning processes and at present these are not well integrated. This makes it difficult for an additional layer of regional planning to integrate further with them. It must also be recognised that some arrangements and planning processes sit well outside the scope of NRM programmes.

Recommendation 17

That better linkages be developed between the regional planning and statutory local government planning frameworks.

See also *Section 4.5.6 - Intersection with Local Government*.

Local councils in regions with coastal boundaries have stated they are concerned about their reduced access to funding because these regions in general do not receive NAP support. In the past it has been critical for local government to work in partnership with on-ground groups such as Coastcare to be able to effectively coordinate and deliver coastal and marine projects on public land. As coastal areas tend to coincide with urban populations, the approach to engaging the community has some inherent differences to those rural and inland regions. The opportunity to be able to identify and provide the necessary support for these differences could be more appropriately addressed at a local council level than through a whole-of-catchment mechanism.

“Coastal councils are discouraged by the lack of recognition of the NRM issues facing the coastline in the regional plans and the resulting lack of funding opportunities for coastal projects.” *Australian Local Government Association*

The need to assist identification of coastal and marine issues and to coordinate activity has been recognised in some jurisdictions, for example by the Victorian Coastal Councils. While these arrangements are helpful in targeting issues there are still many hurdles to overcome in aligning the work they do with the work of the regional bodies.

There is much to be learnt from existing long-standing models of cooperative interaction, such as existing local government arrangements to help in this process. An overarching framework under

which issues could be dealt with effectively and consistently is the local government planning and statutory arrangements existing in each jurisdiction. Local government planning and statutory arrangements have implications for managing and delivering NRM that extend beyond coastal and marine issues.

4.6.4 Cost Shifting and Government Involvement

Recommendation 18

That agreements with state / territory governments and the Australian Government for future NRM programmes should more clearly define roles and responsibilities of governments to assist in reducing the potential for cost shifting and to ensure that investment in programmes is maximised.

For the purposes of this report cost shifting has been defined as ‘The process of using resources derived from an external source to substitute for the resources an organisation would otherwise expend on a particular activity’.

Constitutional responsibility for land and water management rests with State and Territory Governments. However many NRM issues are national in scale and the market has often failed to deliver funding to where it is needed. Numerous issues require a sustained, long-term commitment to address environmental degradation and repair, and to develop a more sustainable approach to the use of our natural resources. In addition NRM issues do not respect state boundaries – they represent national-scale problems that require national action and coordination.

The Australian Government uses funding to influence State Governments and stakeholder investment through persuasion as it does not have the constitutional basis to directly address many NRM issues. The Reference Group heard a major strength of the regional model is that it leverages considerable cash and in-kind investment in this way from Australian Government investment.

It is a general principle that Australian Government investment in NRM should be over and above that invested by State and Territory governments. This is in order to either achieve outcomes in new or additional areas of activity or to speed up existing State government-funded activity in priority areas. Australian Government Ministers have expressed considerable concern that approved funding does not always meet this principle. As Australian Government investment in this area increases, State Government investment - in some areas - has been reduced or transferred from important NRM priorities to other state priorities.

Cost-shifting takes various forms. The Reference Group heard a number of examples where it is occurring or where the additional Australian Government funding has been diverted away from achieving maximum value on the ground due to State/Territory tendering or procurement practices.

The most commonly cited example is in the transfer of extension services from state agencies to regional bodies (partly funded by the Australian Government) and industry.

Because landholders continue to value and seek these services, and they remain important for the long-term sustainability of primary production industries, regional bodies have in many instances established Facilitator and Coordinator positions to assist in that regard. Unfortunately these staff are often not equipped with the technical skills or knowledge to be able to adequately deal with the issues. This means that although they are providing additional resources on the ground, in many instances they are not replacing the traditional extension role funded by State Governments. They may also not have access to essential information and data housed within State and Territory Government agencies.

Another example raised with the Reference Group is water quality monitoring, traditionally a responsibility of state and territory governments. The Reference Group heard that the responsibility for water quality monitoring is increasingly being transferred to the regional NRM bodies, without additional state funds to undertake this essential activity.

One specific example that was provided involved a (non-regional) statutory authority that had been directly funded by the Australian Government to conduct a resource-condition monitoring project. That organisation sub-contracted the work to another authority, which in turn sub-contracted the work to a state government agency. The state agency did not have sufficient staff to conduct both the contracted work and also meet its resource condition monitoring obligations. The state agency subsequently advised the relevant regional body that it did not have the resources to conduct this essential monitoring work, and sought to have the regional body fund another provider to carry out the monitoring.

Indirect cost shifting

The issue of cost-shifting was not present across the board. The Reference Group heard of instances where state agencies were providing a high level of support to project delivery, particularly in support for data collection expertise, research and information management. That said a common complaint from non-government service providers was they were often ‘pipped at the post’ by government agencies when vying for projects. This was because they could not offer an equivalent level of service or staff expertise and knowledge to those of the agencies.

In some cases state agencies are in the best position to undertake service provision to regional bodies. However the Reference Group heard of examples where sub-catchment groups and non-government organisations felt they had been ‘cut out’ of the tendering process, increasing their disenfranchisement and reducing the opportunity to increase competition between government and private service providers.

State agency tenders are also often more competitive than private consultants as all base costs are covered rather than having to be attributed to a particular project. This diverts officers away from existing core state government activities, as detailed in the example above.

State officials are present on most regional bodies. These are usually very senior officials who are influential on the basis of their knowledge. State/territory government officials can therefore unduly influence planning and investment development processes and pressure CMAs to undertake state-priority projects they want done, shifting the cost partly onto the Australian

Government for core state activities. Concerns were raised during the consultations regarding the allocation of Strategic Reserve funding to state agencies to conduct projects, without tender processes, and with little or no consultation with regional bodies.

State Governments can also dilute Australian Government investment by giving regional bodies additional roles to those agreed through bilateral agreements. For example, concern was raised that under the new New South Wales statutory arrangements, CMAs are being directed to play a regulatory role in managing the delivery of the new native vegetation legislation. This has caused concern amongst CMAs as this 'stick' function creates a degree of conflict in their otherwise 'carrot' role of engaging community participation in NRM. There is also a feeling from both the CMAs and the community that the role of regulator of state legislation should be a direct responsibility of the government agency responsible for NRM.

Greater clarity of roles and responsibilities is needed between tiers of government and regions along with greater trust and information sharing to address this problem. Some state industry groups feel on-ground results should be the indicator of success (or otherwise) for regional bodies than the amount of funding they receive or administer.

Following the discussion of block funding earlier, it is worth commenting there is a risk of increased cost-shifting with further devolution of decision-making and a solid base upon which devolution is to occur must be spelt out. In some respects, if investors are purchasing outcomes through cost-effective means and regional bodies are able to deliver then the issue becomes a less important one.

4.6.5 Boundaries

Recommendation 19

That consideration be given to regional boundary adjustment taking into account region size, remoteness, population base and the effectiveness of current engagement.

There are considerable differences in the size and resource base of NRM regions across Australia. In many instances there is a clear logic defining regional boundaries encapsulating the natural resource issues and community values that exist within a region. In other regions this is not so strongly defined and a much greater diversity exists. There are other regions - such as Desert Channels and Rangelands - which cover large areas, contain dramatically different landscapes and different community aspirations.

The Rangelands covers more than 90 percent of Western Australia and 75 percent of its coastline. The region contains the four sub-regions of the Kimberley (425,000sq km), Pilbara (500,000 sq km), Gascoyne-Murchison (480,000 sq km) and Goldfields-Nullabor (930,000 sq km). The regional NRM Plan was developed on this sub-regional basis as each has its own distinctive set of issues to face. Given the Rangelands' scale it would be worth considering whether issues might be more effectively addressed if it were divided differently. For example, the more tropical Kimberley region could be separated from the remainder of the region.

Over the years Australia has been divided in many ways that affect the way natural resources are managed - for example bioregions, coastal versus rural populations and local government shires. Another way of looking at regions is to divide them into sub-regions or sub-catchments. Even in smaller regions this has shown to be a useful tool for involving the community in NRM (see Case Study 6).

A particularly important factor in uniting regions is the strength of shared values for NRM within them and the resources available to deal with issues. Community ownership is the key to long-term change. It needs to be understood, however, that there is a fine balance between dividing the country into enough regions to be able to effectively reach and engage local communities, and in cutting up the country into too many. This runs the risk of overburdening administrative costs and governance arrangements.

4.6.6 Remote Regions

Recommendation 20

That allocation of resources to regions needs to take into account any extra costs associated in delivering programmes to extensive areas with remote populations.

There is considerable variability in the size and populations of regions. For some large, low-population areas it may be worth establishing sub-regions to be able to plan and implement projects effectively (NRMF). Prevention may often be the most appropriate goal and ‘no change’ to resource condition should be seen as a success, particularly in large-scale regions.

“Normal operations for a regional NRM group in a large, remote region call for very long travel times and distances, unusually high operational costs, and expensive back-up, communications and emergency equipment...Basic staff recruitment and relocation expenses are significantly greater than in coastal regions of higher population, and this is exacerbated by a high staff turnover that often accompanies remote locations.” *Chair, Lake Eyre Basin Ministerial Forum Community Advisory Committee*

Large regions and more remote areas have additional requirements for funding - for example to engage the community, access and transport of resources.

4.6.7 Large Scale Projects

Recommendation 21

That resourcing of large-scale one-off / “greenfields” salinity projects be supported.

There is still significant potential to fund large-scale, iconic projects like Western Australia’s Collie River Salinity Recovery Project and South Australia’s Upper South East Dryland Salinity Programme. Consideration should be given to such projects where they are in an advanced stage

and where they could be used as a pilot for others. State Governments in particular need to have governance or regulatory arrangements in place that allow these projects to proceed and to be maintained.

Examples might include Western Australia's Yarra Yarra project, which is trialing deep drainage as a solution for salinity, or the Collie Catchment Recovery project (See Case Study 14 below).

Case Study 14: Collie Catchment Recovery Project

The Collie River Catchment in the South West of Western Australia covers an area of 3,000 ha and includes Wellington Reservoir, one of the largest dams in the South West. Wellington Dam is primarily used for irrigation and has progressively become too salty to use in peak summer months with salinity levels exceeding Australian Irrigation Guidelines⁵. (The reported level for 2001 was 1100 milligrams per litre in 2001 or 300mg/L above the standard). This has resulted in yield reductions as crops are no longer able to extract sufficient water from salty soils.

Since 1961 over \$20 million of project funding from a number of sources, including the Trust and the NLP, has contributed to re-forestation and research. This has halted the increase in irrigation salt levels and helped identify the source – the Collie River East contributes about 54 percent of the salt load into Wellington Dam.

Some \$15 million of Australian Government NAP funds has been provided to implement a Collie River East diversion scheme to divert salty flows in peak periods, combined with further re-vegetation, habitat recovery, better farm management systems and changes to land use.

Options to address salinity issues have been already been proven, with early results showing that about 3,000 tonnes of salt was removed from the system over a four-month period. This equates to a measured reduction of approximately 35 mg/L.

Over the next ten years Wellington Dam salinity should be down by 45 percent (500mg/L). The recovery project will directly contribute to reducing salinity to acceptable levels that fall within irrigation guidelines over the next five years (650 mg/L by 2010 and to 550mg/L by 2030).

4.6.8 Stewardship

Recommendation 22

That a process be developed where stewardship payments may be made available to those landholders who can demonstrate a public good outcome, through improved resource management systems.

The Reference Group acknowledges work is being undertaken to progress the matter of stewardship payments through the NHT Advisory Committee and also through a small working group including representatives from DEH, DAFF and the NFF. This work will provide greater detail on a more defined purpose and the mechanics of possible future arrangements. The feedback on stewardship arrangements provided outlines community perspectives heard during the consultations in each jurisdiction (see [Appendix E](#)).

Both industry representatives and landholders recognise land stewardship as being able to provide one of the most visible outcomes of the Trust and the NAP programmes, not only in terms of the biophysical results but also in programme recognition. One of the big challenges with this approach is determining how to value such services in an equitable yet incentive-driven way, and how to properly assess the public versus private benefits of any activities undertaken. It is also important that the reasons for deteriorating resource condition are identified and addressed appropriately before entering into incentive arrangements. This reflects a holistic approach to land management and does not simply reward or punish existing practices.

One of the outcomes landholders are seeking when entering into arrangements (such as ecosystem services payments or property covenants) is long-term security for what may include significant changes to their property or practices. Ecosystem services payments need to be fairly designed, backed by an ongoing government commitment and assessable for their relevance over the long term to be successful. There is also believed to be very little recognition for the time, effort and resources landholders and other volunteers contribute to NRM under current arrangements.

“Funding is required to support all those working to deliver sustainable NRM outcomes over and above that required for private benefit.” *Queensland Land and Water Carers*

It was suggested that incentive payments or other recognition mechanisms where landholder contributions are above what could be reasonably expected should be considered to avoid the risk of negative impacts such as burnout or inability to complete projects.

“There needs to be clear distinction between the environmental outcomes many landholders provide in the day to day activities of managing their land and those that are above and beyond duty of care.” *National Farmers Federation*

“A new paradigm of sustainable farming in which environmental services contribute significant cash flow to farm income is needed to kick the Landcare concept up to the next level.” *New South Wales Farmers Association*

An important aspect in determining a process for delivering stewardship payments is the need to define what stewardship means, what it includes and excludes and what it is aiming to deliver.

Key defining criteria should include that stewardship:

- Require a contribution over and above duty of care;
- Be targeted to areas where land is of particular ecological value;

- Deliver a public good that is broader than the environmental benefits, for example may flow on to regional sustainability;
- Identify why a particular piece of land or resource is in its current state, and whether we address it by better management (productive use) or stewardship i.e. is it a management or an environmental issue; and
- Recognise land may be managed for multiple purposes and assistance may be required where the required management style is not able to fund itself, for example in delivering environmental outcomes.

“Additionally, in proposing a major new initiative to establish a stewardship funding program for private landholders, we feel that an important gap in the current suite of national support programs and initiatives would be filled – involving direct and sustained support for those landholders prepared to take additional management action to conserve biodiversity and maintain ecosystem services on their properties.” *Humane Society International*

Market-based instruments (MBIs) may be best utilised to build on regulatory frameworks rather than to replace them. MBIs may not be the most advantageous choice in all situations and care should be given when considering them as a preferred mechanism.

4.6.9 Programme Flexibility

Need for flexible programmes

The regional planning process provides flexibility to address the whole range of NRM issues, especially through the Regional NRM Plans and Investment Strategies. However there needs to be flexibility with funding delivery, levels of funding, how programmes are structured for delivery and interpretation of guidelines. NRM Plans set regional priorities for the next 10 years but many stakeholder groups are only just beginning to recognise their role. This means opportunities for engagement outside the initial consultation process need to be supported.

The 56 regions are diverse in size, priority issues, demographic makeup and maturity in regional delivery. It needs to be recognised that different approaches are needed to work in different regions, for example metropolitan Sydney as compared to western Queensland’s Desert Channels.

Trust regions and Trust/NAP regions

The NAP is a focused programme using limited funding to target salinity and water quality issues. The inequity of funding allocated to regions with or without access to NAP funding was raised in several regions across Australia. The main issue for regions who do not receive NAP funds was their reduced capacity to deliver NRM because of financial constraints, and the need to be strict when prioritising activities. The main issue for regions who do receive funding was that such a large proportion of their spending had to be against salinity and water quality issues when regional priorities may be broader than this.

Case Study 15: Volcanic Plains Tender, Western Victoria

The Victorian Volcanic Plains is a bioregion covering 2.3 million hectares between Melbourne and Portland. The area is a national biodiversity hotspot but native vegetation remains on a very small proportion of the land, mostly on private land. The region is also highly productive for agriculture.

Of the original 2.4 million ha of Plains ecosystems approximately 110,000 ha (4.6) of remnants are known to remain. 'Grassy' vegetation classes account for 28,000 ha of these, of which 500 ha is in reserves. The size of these remaining areas of native grassland, wetlands and grassy woodland is also getting smaller and more fragmented. This affects the distribution of plants and animals and will eventually lead to the extinction of many species because they have little habitat in which to survive in.

The three-year Victorian Volcanic Plains Tender Project (PlainsTender) has been allocated \$3.9 million in Trust funding from the Australian Government. The project promotes a continuing net gain in the extent, quality and security of remnant ecosystems and associated biodiversity within the bioregion.

The project represents a new way of engaging landholders to actively manage their land for biodiversity purposes by providing financial support to assist them. Under the tender system landholders set their own price for providing the management services and to bid against landholders across the Volcanic Plains bioregion. If successful, landholders receive periodic payments to implement the management actions they have identified.

The process for tendering includes:

- Expression of interest;
- Site assessment;
- Development of a management plan;
- Submission of a bid;
- Bid assessment;
- Signing of a management agreement; and
- Reporting and payment.

Results

The project benefits landholders by providing flexibility in how they chose to manage their land as well by providing financial support. The process benefits catchment health by improving the extent and quality of native vegetation across the Volcanic Plains. The process also ensures that best value for money is achieved through site assessment and a secret ballot approach.

Targeted research, monitoring and evaluation are assessing the effectiveness of the implemented management actions. To date it is clear some of the treatments being examined in the experimental grazing trials are resulting in different impacts on the grassland. For example, the 'no grazing' treatment (stock omitted for three years to date) has declined in species number and increased in litter cover.

Investment strategies will be most successful if they seek multiple sources of funding and maximise their ability to deliver on a wide range of NRM matters. It should also be understood there will always be different buckets of funding available in different regions. Some of these differences will be due to the range of issues present, some to the range of investors willing to provide funds and some to the capacity of the regional bodies and their stakeholders to access and utilise funds effectively.

4.7 Communication and Capacity Building

4.7.1 Communication of achievements

Recommendation 23

That regional bodies are actively encouraged to promote achievements via local and other media to build greater community awareness and support for the process and to provide greater recognition for the Australian Government's contribution.

One of the key factors in the community's ongoing support of NRM is the ability to see their money, invested on their behalf by the Australian Government, is being used wisely. This requires governments, regional bodies and project proponents to communicate the success and learnings of NRM activities. This also raises community awareness about the need to care for the environment and how people can contribute.

“There needs to be better marketing to the Australia community of what NRM is, what it is trying to achieve, how important it is to Australian society and how people can get involved.” NRM Council, Western Australia

It was evident that communication of achievements and actions was not always effective from the difference between what regions reported they were doing and the knowledge of their actions from grassroots stakeholders. Many on-ground groups told of how participants proudly promoted the Trust and the NAP through merchandise and brochures. This recognition is not being communicated through other mechanisms, such as local media reporting and formal reporting on projects, leading to the conclusion that communication at a regional level could be improved.

“We applaud the Australian Government for its continued support for maintaining these extremely important (facilitator and coordinator) positions. This network of committed and dedicated people across Australia has been one of the most recognised and appreciated initiatives of the Australian Government.” ACT Catchment and Landcare Association

The Australian Government is still not receiving due recognition for its investment and this was evident from site visits, despite being a requirement of funding agreements. An example was seen at South Australia's Linden Gardens native parkland site, where signage for a re-vegetation project identified a host of supporters and investors in the project without a single visible sign of the Australian Government or the Natural Heritage Trust (despite the Australian Government being a significant investor). The channels to include Government Ministers in delivering good

news stories are either not present or poor. This further reduces the opportunity of Government to communicate the effectiveness of the regional model and to raise community and stakeholder awareness.

There are a lot of high quality projects being undertaken that the community and governments should be commended for, and this is increasing as the programmes mature. An important issue is how the NRM community and governments can more effectively tell their stories and show successes in the public arena.

“Collectively, several major national NRM funding programs maintained by the Australian Government contribute significantly to beneficial landscape change across Australia.” *Australian Landcare Council*

Some mechanisms are available for doing this formally - for example the *Natural Heritage* journal and regional case studies – while others are chance opportunities (see Case Study 16). Either way there is considerable room for improvement. Addressing this issue will have to be a shared responsibility between community, regions and government.

Case Study 16: NRM meets the Commonwealth Games

The mascot for the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games is so rare that a conservation plan has been launched to rescue it from extinction.

There are fewer than 1000 surviving southeastern red-tailed black cockatoos of the southern Australian woodlands. On the arrival of the Queen’s baton relay at Casterton in Victoria’s Western District, the heartland of the cockatoo, the Australian Government announced a \$1.3 million rescue package for the species.

The important work being undertaken through the project will safeguard one of Australia’s unique species, now recognised around the world thanks to Karak, the symbol of the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games.

The recovery project aims to encourage landholder participation in a new competitive tender system that funds worthwhile environmental projects on private land, based on proposals from the landholders themselves.

4.7.2 Formalise cross regional interaction

Recommendation 24

That an annual forum of regional body Chief Executive Officers be held. The forum would facilitate discussion on key issues of concern including the effectiveness of arrangements between regions and states and information sharing.

One of the strengths of the regional model is the ability to pilot and learn from a wide range of NRM action across Australia. It was evident from consultations that the diversity and range of the

56 regions means there is a good chance someone has learnt from an approach that another region is about to implement, or has a solution to something that has another region stumped. Alternatively the knowledge gap one region has may apply to many or all in similar circumstances. There may be efficiencies to be gained by addressing this at a cross-regional or national level. While there is currently an annual meeting of Regional Chairs, as well as a bi-annual National Facilitators conference, the key lynch pin in the strategic and operational management of NRM – the Chief Executive Officer - is isolated from all but those in their own states. A regular exchange would enhance information sharing across all regions and allow them to share their learnings and problems, leading to better delivery across the board.

Case Study 17: The North Australia Fire Management Project

The North Australia Fire Management project has been funded by the Trust for two years. It was developed to service the fire management information needs of the Cape York, Northern Gulf, Southern Gulf and the NT regions, the Kimberley sub-region, and other major sectoral stakeholders. Coordinated under the Tropical Savannas Management Cooperative Research Centre, the project has focused on three core issues:

- *Rangeland management* - to address the role of fire for managing woody thickening, focusing especially on northern QLD;
- *Indigenous engagement* - to provide a forum for Indigenous communities to engage with government and other sectors, and enhance economic opportunities for Indigenous cultural and natural resource management (C&NRM); and
- *Fire knowledge forum*— to address the provision of daily fire location ('hotspots') and mapping information, and general fire information at www.firenorth.org.au.

The highlights of the project include enhanced Indigenous engagement in NRM, development of Indigenous livelihood opportunities, support from a range of organisations and sectors, and significant steps being taken by NRM project partners to develop business opportunities for cultural and natural resource management. Developing examples include:

- *Kimberley Fire Control Teams (FCTs)* have been established in remote communities to service on-ground fire management on pastoral stations and around communities. The teams provide culturally and economically employment opportunities for Indigenous people. They are also serving to enhance communication across sectors, and to break down some pre-existing tensions between pastoral, Indigenous and conservation interests relating to the inappropriate use and misunderstanding of fire in the region.
- A Fire Control Team model is in the process of being developed in the Southern Gulf Catchments region, with the support of Queensland agencies. Adoption of these approaches across the north is a direct result of the cross-regional reach of the north Australian fire management project.
- *Timber Creek community rangers, NT* engages in a variety of C&NRM activities, including fire and weed management, fencing, cultural site management.
- *West Arnhem Land Fire Management*: this regional project is now supported by a major commercial sponsor and is based on a greenhouse gas offset agreement between landowners and the NT Government.
- *Fire information*—the fire location and mapping website has been well received. Land managers across the north now access the website on a daily basis during the fire season.
- *Cross-jurisdictional support*—the collective involvement of partners across the north has helped raise the profile of, and need for, more effective fire management.

4.7.3 Urban and Rural Issues

Recommendation 25

That more effort is required to promote and communicate the benefits accruing to urban communities from sustainable agricultural production.

More effort is required to bridge the rural-urban divide and increase the two-way recognition of the issues in the peri-urban and rural areas (e.g. through common issues such as river and weed management for urban water quality).

“Improving environmental outcomes on farm benefits farmers as well as providing environmental, social and economic benefits to the wider Australian community through decreased chemical usage and runoff, increased environmental outcomes such as habitat and carbon usage, and increased trade options for farm produce.”
Hindmarsh Landcare Network

There are not many degrees of separation from those directly involved in projects before people have no awareness of NRM, let alone the NAP and the Trust It is vital to build greater awareness amongst urban and peri-urban audiences as to what NRM means and to understand the true costs of food and resource use.

The urban population is, however, not entirely devoid of understanding of NRM and there is a huge army of people who regularly volunteer in activities. This army represents a resource that could be utilised by rural communities and so there is a need for rural communities to better understand and utilise this resource. The sense of ownership and making a contribution is as important to urban as it is to rural volunteers.

Perceptions of NRM: urban and regional audiences

- The concept of sustainability in agriculture is one that connects the environment with what people do in their everyday life making regional issues meaningful to urban communities;
- The couching of agriculture as an NRM issue is acceptable to urban communities as long as the emphasis remains on the importance of NRM rather than agriculture;
- The concept of working together (urban and regional communities, along with government) is important to all audiences;
- There are sensitivities when examples are used that appear to lay blame on farmers, even if this is done inadvertently;
- Both city and regional audiences report a similar level of interest in the environment;
- A higher proportion of regional audiences report as individuals that they are doing everything that they can to help the environment, but consistently across both metropolitan and rural audiences it is felt farmers and agricultural industries are not doing all they can; and
- Younger audiences tend to be more comfortable talking about the environment in cultural (consumerism) and global/economic terms.

Taken from Open Mind Market Research, 2005

There is a strong need for capacity building amongst urban populations in getting them to understand what NRM means, the issues faced by rural communities, and to link the environmental services they receive to good NRM practices including clean air and water, food and fibre and the economic benefits of a healthy primary trade industry. Farm production contributes \$32 billion each year to Australia's Gross Domestic Product (ABARE) and farmers manage 60 percent of the land and are recognised as the biggest investors in NRM in the country.

Regional bodies are challenged by communicating with the “urban sprawl” and getting NRM on the urban agenda. There are lessons to be learned from regions that have been dealing with large urban populations for a long time. Port Phillip and Westernport, for example, has a population of 3 million people who are largely urban dwellers. The region has used tenders, offsets and ecosystem services purchasing to engage the community. One of the key objectives for urban audiences is to educate and help them recognise the environmental and economic values they gain from the good NRM practices of those managing rural land.

Case Study 18: A Peri-Urban Approach for NRM in South East Queensland

The South East Queensland (SEQ) region is experiencing rapid land use changes, with increasing urbanisation causing some real challenges for land and water management. The management approach being adopted by SEQ will see a suite of actions being applied to targeted landscapes for optimum returns.

The headwaters of the Pine Rivers, once under dairy production and native forest management, is currently transforming into peri-urban with property sizes ranging from one to ten acres. The area is within a water catchment and supports high biodiversity values in the adjacent D'Aguiar Range National Park.

In partnership with the local catchment group, industry and council, the project components are addressing poor water quality and land hazards including erosion, weeds and landslip. A four-acre farm forestry demonstration site has been established and landholders are being skilled in property planning to better manage on-farm resources. Landholders within the targeted area have access to incentives that aim to support weed management, off-stream watering points and riparian management. To date, added investment has been received from SEQ Water and landholders have matched funding received, in some cases in the ratio of 3:1.

A citizen science project will document the attitudes and motivations of residents in the peri-urban zones of SEQ and will develop a comprehensive and practical suite of tools for overcoming barriers to improved land management in the local community. A draft map has been produced that identifies peri-urban areas and research areas of Moggill Creek, Tallebudgera Creek and North Maroochy River catchments chosen to drill down to driving forces within these areas.

While much NRM work is being delivered in rural and regional Australia, a significant amount is also occurring in urban areas. The Sydney Metropolitan CMA estimates up to 5000 volunteers contribute to on-ground NRM projects each weekend in Sydney and surrounding areas alone. There is an array of NRM issues facing urban and peri-urban areas but coastal management (see Section 4.6.3) and biodiversity protection are some of the most important (see Case Study 18).

Case Study 19: Swan Biodiversity Project

Urbanisation in the Perth region has resulted in degradation of native vegetation and increasing threats to native plants and animals. A high priority for the Swan region is commitment to biodiversity conservation issues relating to the management of Council-controlled land and development issues.

Under the Trust extension the Australian Government has provided more than \$1 million in funding (building upon an earlier Trust-funded) project for the Perth Biodiversity Project. This project provides scientific and technical support to promote the long-term protection and rehabilitation of priority biodiversity areas. This will increase local governments' capacity and level of commitment to apply conservation principles in land use planning and management.

The project is likely to be completed in 2008, with an additional \$942,846 to be allocated for ongoing activities.

Since this project commenced in 2003 best practice management guidelines for natural resources have been developed and implemented, three Biodiversity Strategies have been produced and there has been an increase in the capacity of volunteers.

The project has contributed to:

- Management of Local Governments reserves to reduce the threat to native species;
- Improved weed management at Armadale bushland reserves;
- Dieback treatment in Armadale;
- Sand dune rehabilitation at Floreat Beach; and
- Rehabilitation of Hinds Reserve Bayswater.

4.8 Information and Knowledge/Monitoring and Evaluation

4.8.1 Research and Development Unit

Recommendation 26

That a national brokering unit be established to integrate and deliver research and development data and outcomes across the 56 NRM regions.

A key issue for the overall success of the NAP and the Trust is how to most effectively use and incorporate research and development into programme activities. Good science is necessary at the activity planning stage in identifying high value assets, problems these assets are facing and for determining appropriate measures to address and measure the impact of such measures.

“The challenge in the regionally distributed model of NRM is to establish effective processes for dispersed research and development organisations to interact with regional groups spread across the whole country.” CSIRO Land and Water

One of the main problems faced by regions is not the lack of information *per se*, but a lack of relevant and accessible information. Regions are primarily dealing with on-ground practitioners who need to be able to translate an understanding of the ecosystems around them into an appropriate level of action. Often those undertaking research and development activities have a fundamentally different objective from those who are the delivery agents.

“They [community groups] want to know that their on-ground works are the right actions in the right places, for maximum effectiveness, so that funding for on-ground works is directed with the best possible scientific knowledge.” *South Australia Centre for NRM*

Traditionally, extension services are provided as a mechanism to bridge the gap between researcher and practitioner, but under the current regional arrangements these services have been lost and replaced with Facilitators and Coordinators. The latter play an equally important but fundamentally different type of role from that of an extension officer. It is interesting to note that in some areas agribusiness consultants are providing the extension role, but their services are most often used by that minority of farmers who are the most innovative and likely to adopt new and sustainability focused practices anyway.

There is an opportunity for establishing a much greater access to information relevant at the practitioner level through cross-regional interaction and coordination. For example, when Queensland’s Southern Gulf region was preparing its NRM Plan they spoke quite extensively with staff from Victoria’s North East region to find out their experiences in community engagement and plan development. The Southern Gulf predicts that taking the information and learnings of another region saved six months of time and frustration in developing an NRM plan.

A major challenge for research and development organisations is to be able to disperse information effectively across 56 regions. Organisations believe there is no single solution for this problem and the outcome will depend on maturation of a number of approaches. This is an issue not only for information dispersal, but also for technical expertise currently being picked up through private service providers or not at all. This is particularly a problem where there has been a loss of technical and extension expertise from state agencies.

While the focus of NRM delivery is now heavily on the regions there are some areas where a national lead needs to be taken. Coordinated research and development is one of these areas for several reasons. Firstly it would be a high-risk proposition to expect all regions to have the necessary experience or technical know-how to guide all aspects of project design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation or strategic prioritisation.

Some regions will have expertise in certain areas and this expertise can be shared and built on across regions. However, it is likely some information and expertise will be required beyond what is immediately available within the regions. In addition, the structures to enable information sharing across the whole country could only be properly coordinated at a national level. Of course, the upside is that any national framework or system requires data from the regions to

create a picture of what really exists. One of the great challenges of the regional model is how to capture data so it is meaningful from the local to the national scale.

At present the roles and responsibilities of each level of government, regions and indeed industry and research organisations is not clear in terms of who should be coordinating research and development activity. It is also unclear who should determine research priorities, the best delivery mechanisms and how data should be collected and utilised for maximum impact.

There are good examples - such as the Centre for NRM in South Australia - where statewide coordination of research and development is occurring and linking with the needs of on-ground practitioners. However it would be a big step to go from this to a national arrangement and would need to be implemented gradually to allow for the different needs and levels of sophistication in each state or territory.

Science underpinning NRM approaches

Another major challenge has been the underpinning premise that there are strong and definite causal links between on-ground actions and resource targets.

Discussions with national research and development organisations indicated that more emphasis needs to be placed on assessing the assumptions in the cause and effect model most of the NRM projects are based on. In the discussions it was suggested we need a better understanding of how changes in practice bring about desired outcomes. This includes the environmental, social and economic influences on adoption of new practices, and therefore which changes in practice will lead to the most significant levels of change in the landscape given a limited amount of investment. This is especially relevant where catchments have been identified as high-risk areas for a particular natural resource issue, but the response by landholders to adoption of new practices is not sufficiently high to achieve desired results or meet management action targets.

“Biodiversity conservation priorities developed through the regional delivery process have in many cases been based on limited scientific knowledge/input and have frequently been largely determined by stakeholder influence and bias.”
Worldwide Fund for Nature

It was also suggested that future programme arrangements should give thought to exploring theme-based approaches to research and development activities, such as industry based or relevant to a particular natural resource issue such as an invasive species covering several regions. There may also be an opportunity to make changes to institutional arrangements to better support some of the needs identified above. This is particularly relevant to closing the gap between pure research outcomes and applied research needs.

At the moment there is still a paucity of real and consistent data being generated from projects. The risk if this situation continues is it will make it difficult to show the full impact the programmes are having on the landscape, thereby under-selling their true value. One way of addressing this problem would be to place greater recognition on NRM Plans as the major vehicle for planning and investment in natural resources, so all stakeholder activities, not just those of the regional bodies, would be recognised and reported on.

Improving the situation

There are high overhead costs of working with 56 regions and significant time delays in promoting best practice to a wide audience. An industry-driven approach may be one way of addressing these dilemmas. There are models already in existence, such as those in Queensland, where direct interaction between landholders and research and development organisations is occurring successfully. The question is how to get successful models adopted more broadly and across a wider range of audiences. A number of options are available, including training for agronomists and other service providers and developing partnerships with farmer assistance groups.

A combination of a national knowledge brokering system operating in conjunction with state research and development activities could be tailored to specific jurisdictional requirements to address this problem. An organisation like Land and Water Australia is in a good position to provide a 'one stop shop' service and national direction in knowledge brokering, but only if additional, specific funding was supplied. Land and Water Australia has worked with regional NRM groups and could continue to expand on work with individual regions on different issues.

Case Study 20: The South Australian Centre for Natural Resource Management

The Centre for Natural Resource Management with its Investment Advisory Board was established on 11 February 2003. It aims to develop and maintain partnerships with NRM Regional Groups, scientists, researchers, business, industry, governments and agencies so that integrated NRM across South Australia is based on world-class research and development. A primary role of the Centre is to create more sustainable environments by developing new technologies and industries that benefit the environment and are economically sustainable.

The Centre brings together all stakeholders with interest in NRM research and development, including the Australian and State Governments, private and public research and development providers, NRM Regional Groups, academic and technical experts, business and industry. To date the Centre has received funding totalling \$11.7 million.

A joint venture between the State Government and the University of Adelaide, the Centre is located on the Waite Campus at Urrbrae, Adelaide, together with many research groups from the University of Adelaide, South Australia Research and Development Institute and CSIRO. Co-location enhances the Centre's brokering, information exchange, negotiation, and leveraging activities leading to new partnerships and strategic alliances.

In the past two and a half years the Centre has come a long way but still needs further refinement to ensure its success. This is particularly important in being able to target research to assist with the science underpinning the smaller on-ground projects that regions are funding. One of the major successes of the Centre has been its ability to coordinate activities right across the state and to service all of South Australia's regions without duplicating existing activities.

The Grain and Graze project is a good example for demonstrating how government, industry and landholders can work in partnership throughout the life of a project to develop practical

information and tools to support sustainable farm management. The project is unique in that it was initiated to gain landholder support as well as ongoing landholder interaction, rather than the more common model where they are consulted during the design phase then virtually ignored until the research and development component is complete.

Case Study 21: Grain and Graze

Grain & Graze is a research programme with a difference involving catchment managers, land managers and farmers. Their involvement starts at the research design stage to improve the financial and environmental performance of Australia's mixed livestock and cropping farmers.

The aim of the programme is to provide mixed farming enterprises in southern Australia with new "whole-farm" knowledge, tools and capability to adopt management changes to increase production of crops, pastures and animals while maintaining/enhancing biodiversity and the catchment resources which sustain them.

The programme aims to raise awareness among 15,000 farmers and directly influence 6,800 producers to change their farming practices to deliver:

- A 10 percent increase in mixed farm productivity driven by a 5 percent increase in grain yields and a 10 cent increase in livestock production;
- Improved, or at least stable, condition for the natural resources on mixed farms in line with regional or catchment targets; and
- Confident and knowledgeable mixed farmers making decisions and using management tools which sustain production and promote biodiversity.

A Collaborative Approach

Historically farming and land management research has focused on the component parts, such as crop management for improved yields, animal husbandry for healthier animals, and the protection of remnant vegetation for wildlife habitat. However, farming is much more than the management of the pieces: the interactions between the livestock, cropping and environmental systems must also be managed, and this must happen in the context of broader regional and catchment plans and strategies. Grain & Graze is about informing farmers about practical ways to improve the performance of the whole farm system to increase profitability and productivity while also protecting the natural and environmental resources under their stewardship.

Grain & Graze partners are working with regional, catchment and farming groups to share the huge amount of information and knowledge already available about the best ways to manage farming systems within a catchment context. They are also investing in new research into the financial and environmental impact of management practices on farms, farmers and catchments. The substantial participation of farmers with researchers and catchment planners to design and implement on-farm trial and demonstration sites is an important feature of Grain & Graze.

The Program has been developed around three core strategies, the Regional Research and Innovation, Information Management and Analysis, and Communication and Capacity Building. Grain & Graze is scheduled to run until June 2008.

4.8.2 Baseline Data

Recommendation 27

That governments recognise the importance of baseline data in measuring programme success and that investment in its collection is maintained at an appropriate level.

The collection of baseline data has varied between jurisdictions over time. Some regions have a considerable amount and quality of data on the extent and quality of issues whilst others have comparatively little. In Victoria, for example - where the CMAs have been in place for a decade - an Ecological Vegetation Class (EVC) mapping project was undertaken in 2002/03. The project collected data on the distribution of various vegetation classes, the extent of change in these classes from 1750 to the present and assessed the level of threat to different vegetation classes across the state.

The project was undertaken in response to new native vegetation legislation being introduced and to provide the community with baseline data to assist them with planning and management activities. Since then it has developed to address its level of user-friendliness and is being modified to allow local government and other agencies to use it in formulating policy and guide statutory planning frameworks. In contrast, other states that have spent a significant amount of their efforts over the past few years establishing their regional groups and consulting with their community to develop a regional NRM Plan have been investing in developing their regional priorities, therefore spending less in gathering baseline data.

There is a very real need to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of NRM investments. This cannot be done without the ongoing collection of baseline data. Evidence is available to show that targeted, broad-scale investment is more cost-effective than the ad-hoc investment of previous programmes. However, many regions reported they had patchy access to baseline data, were not always able to access state-held data or were still building their data stock from which to both measure future success and - in some cases - identify what would be the most appropriate intervention in NRM issues.

*“Government needs to provide adequate baseline information to assist groups in both identifying the issues as well as testing targets, outcomes and investment.”
AgForce*

It is difficult to demonstrate evidence of what has been achieved if we don't have the 'before' data to measure what has changed. There is a need for post-project monitoring of what has been achieved, and if not, why outcomes have not been met. There is a need to address monitoring and evaluation expertise around Australia.

“There is a need to look in more depth at monitoring and evaluation and ensure that all stakeholders understand the purpose and method at both levels of monitoring and evaluation.” Greening Australia, Northern Territory

Case Study 22: The Goulburn Broken Catchment and Shepparton Irrigation Region

In conjunction with significant community and state investment, the National Action Plan and Phase 1 and 2 of the Trust are important investment sources for the Goulburn Broken catchment.

The investment has allowed the regional community to make significant advances in

- Installing farm reuse systems;
- Improving irrigation practices;
- Installing groundwater pumps; and
- Surface water management systems.

These investments have allowed the community to harness the benefits of resource condition outcomes relating to:

- Improved water quality (nutrients and salinity);
- Improved water table levels; and
- Improved river health.

Long-term catchment monitoring has indicated that the total phosphorus loads from all irrigation drains in the Goulburn-Broken catchment decreased from over 160,000 kg (160 tonnes) per year in 1993/94 to around 70,000 kg (70 tonnes) per year in 2004/05. This is an improvement of more than 40 percent in phosphorus loads over 11 years. This exceeds the region's long-term target of 84,500 kg (84.5 tonnes) per year by 2016.

A reduction in phosphorus levels will be achieved at the regional level through:

- Irrigation drains by 50 percent (84.5 tonnes);
- Dryland and diffuse sources by 20 percent (22 tonnes);
- Wastewater management facilities by 80 percent;
- Urban stormwater (9.84 tonnes); and
- Intensive agricultural industries and local water quality issues (3.5 tonnes).

The Shepparton Irrigation Region is the centre of an intensive agricultural production zone, producing some 25 per cent of Victoria's exports, and is a major economic driver in the state.

In 1995 monitoring indicated that for approximately 50 per cent (286,000 hectares) of the area surveyed, the watertable was less than two metres below the surface and posed real risks to agricultural production and environmental assets.

Approximately \$22 million in NAP funding has gone into surface and sub-surface drainage, water efficiency and sustainable agriculture and river health programmes. The surface and sub-surface drainage programme is halfway through a 30-year programme to protect agricultural production from rising groundwater and salinity. The programme involves both a network of strategically located drainage lines and groundwater pumps.

As a result of these and other irrigation activities the affected area has fallen to around 25 per cent since 2001.

Regional targets are important for setting goals, improving existing work and determining future project directions. They provide a link between the individual and the whole-of-catchment approach but must be actively reviewed. The Reference Group received feedback that there needs to be better recognition of social targets in current monitoring arrangements and targets.

Measuring short-term progress on long-term resource condition change is difficult and governments need to continue investment to ensure groups can show what is being achieved for the longer term. There is a need to balance investment in on-ground work with the ability to measure what is being achieved, thereby allowing governments to clarify where investment is making a difference. This links to the capacity of regions and governments to communicate the investment outcomes, and the ability to learn from both the successes and mistakes of the past. There is also a need for greater data integration in project planning and a need to raise stakeholder awareness as to what data is available and to show why it is important to use such information.

“More work and interoperability and data sharing between governments and agencies is required for effective decision making, reporting and monitoring and evaluation activities.” *Australian Local Government Association*

Case Study 23: The Natural Resource Commission

The Natural Resource Commission was established by the New South Wales Government in 2003 under the *Natural Resources Commission Act* to provide independent advice on a range of natural resource issues.

It consists of the Commissioner, four assistant commissioners and an executive officer.

One of the Commission's successful outcomes has been the establishment of a statewide standards and targets framework. From this framework the Commission is responsible for auditing the implementation of catchment plans by each of the CMAs with respect to their effectiveness in achieving standards and targets set out under the statewide framework.

4.8.3 Websites

Recommendation 28

That the existing NRM website (www.nrm.gov.au) be enhanced to improve its interactivity with the community.

The Internet is a key source of information for the community and regional bodies. However, there is a mass of information and it is difficult for people to find, be sure of and make use of this information (see the discussion in 4.8.1 for more background). In addition regions indicated better use of the existing NRM website could be made in terms of a creating a way to enhance cross-regional communication and shared experiences. To do this it was felt the inclusion of a

“chat room” style facility and further linkages to a range of relevant NRM data would be beneficial. (see also the discussion in Sections 4.81 and 4.7.2 for further background.)

The community also indicated it was sometimes difficult for them to access the Internet and consideration needs to be equally given to maintaining other sources of information.

5. Conclusions

There is strong community support for the continuation of the regional delivery of natural resource management across Australia.

The past five years has seen a giant shift in the way Australia is approaching natural resource management with much greater emphasis being placed on regional priorities.

Significant human capital, time and financial resources have gone into building the necessary links between communities, industry and government for the successful regional delivery of natural resource programmes.

Some key sectors, such as the primary industry sector and local government, are yet to be wholly engaged. The challenge is to identify where gaps in engagement exist and to expand on those models where effective engagement already occurs. Stronger support is needed for innovation and for communicating programme success.

Security of funding is an essential ingredient to the long-term success of natural resource management and the Australian Government has a very significant and central role in ensuring this support continues.

A commitment from the Australian Government to continue funding the regional delivery of NRM programmes and an early announcement of such intentions would be very well received.

Appendix A

MINISTERIAL REFERENCE GROUP ON NRM PROGRAMME DELIVERY TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Natural Heritage Ministerial Board requested the establishment of a Ministerial Reference Group ('the Reference Group') to provide advice that will assist the Australian Government in refining the regional delivery of its major natural resource management (NRM) programmes, which currently include the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

The Australian Government, in collaboration with the states and territories, has implemented a regional model to deliver a significant proportion of its NRM programme investments. This model has sought to empower regional communities to prioritise issues and design innovative and integrated strategies, which governments invest in to achieve regional, state and national NRM priorities. Regional NRM bodies are operational in 56 regions around Australia. As of 30 June 2005, regional NRM plans have been accredited, and investment strategies approved, in 52 regions.

The Reference Group will provide advice on:

- the strengths and weaknesses of current NRM programmes' regional delivery arrangements;
- improving the effective delivery of NRM programmes regionally, including possible actions to streamline processes; and
- enhancing regional community engagement in NRM including through involvement of local government, landcare groups, volunteers and other stakeholders.

In developing this advice, the Reference Group will undertake targeted consultations with key stakeholders associated with the regional delivery of the NRM programmes.

SCHEDULE OF CONSULTATION MEETINGS

Table 5. Schedule of consultation meetings

Date	State	Venue
2005		
26-27 October	Tasmania	Launceston
27 October	Tasmania	Launceston
28 October	Tasmania	Hobart
7 November	Queensland	Ingelara
7-8 November	Queensland	Longreach
8-9 November	Queensland	Cairns
14 November	Western Australia	Perth
15 November	Western Australia	Northam
16 November	Western Australia	Geraldton
17 November	Western Australia	Bunbury
30 November	National	Canberra
1-2 December	South Australia	Adelaide
5 December	New South Wales	Dubbo
6 December	New South Wales	Sydney
7 December	Australian Capital Territory	Canberra
8 December	Victoria	Melbourne
9 December	Victoria	Ballarat
12-13 December	Northern Territory	Darwin
14-15 December	Queensland	Brisbane
2006		
12 January	National	Canberra
7-8 February	National	Canberra

ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Organisation

Tasmania

- DairyTas
- NRM of Northern Tasmania
- Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association
- Tamar NRM
- Tamar NRM
- Dorset NRM/NRM North
- East Tamar Landcare Group
- Upper Brumby Landcare Group
- Tasmanian Landcare Association
- Private Forests Tasmania
- Tasmanian NRM Council
- Tasmanian NRM Advisory Group
- PFT Board
- Hobart Water
- Greening Australia
- Tasmanian Conservation Trust
- Tasmanian Landcare Association
- Sustainable Living Centre
- Rural Development Services
- University of Tasmania
- Agricultural Resource Management
- Local Government Association of Tasmania
- Southern Tasmanian Councils

Queensland

- Lake Eyre Basin Community Advisory Committee
- Desert Channels Queensland Board
- Fitzroy Basin Association and Stakeholders
- Indigenous Community Members
- Central Highlands Regional Resources Use Planning Co-operative (CHRRUP)
- Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)
- Queensland Government
- Banana Growers Queensland
- Central Region, Environment
- Community Partnerships, NR&M
- DPI&F
- Far North Queensland NRM Ltd
- FNQ Area Consultative Committee
- FNQ ROC, Local Government
- Landowners, Organic Producers FNQ, Russell Mulgrave CMA
- Northern Australia Environmental Alliance
- QLD Dept of Natural Resources and Mines
- Southern Gulf Catchment
- Northern Gulf Resource Management Group
- Burdekin Dry Tropics Board
- Cape York Community Engagement Group
- James Cook University

Brisbane

Seafood Services Australia (SSA)

CANEGROWERS

Condamine Alliance

Australian Landcare Council

Growcom Submission

Queensland Farmer's Federation

Queensland Water and Land Carers Inc.

Queensland Dairyfarmers' Organisation (QDO)

Healthy Waterways: Moreton Bay Waterways & Catchments Partnership

NRM SEQ Inc

Cotton Australia

Regional Group Selective

Burnett Mary

Australian Marine Conservation Society

Greening Australia

Sunfish Queensland

Recfish Australia

Queensland Conservation Council

WWF

Western Australia

WWF

Mingenew-Irwin Group (Letter)

South West Catchments Council

Western Rock Lobster Council Inc.

Doc Reynolds – Indigenous member of the NRM State Council

WAFF

NRM State Council

South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team inc. (SCRIPT)

WA PGA

CRC for Plant-Based Management of Dryland Salinity

WA Catchment Alliance (previously called the WA Drainage Alliance)

Friends of Lancelin Coast (Inc)

North East Wheatbelt Regional Organisation Council (NEWROC)

Northern Agricultural Catchments Council

Greenough Shire

Avon Catchment Council

Ballardong NRM Working Group

Chapman Valley Shire

Geraldton Professional Fisherman's Association

Greening Australia

Harvey Water NRM Group

Northern Agricultural Catchments Council

Rangelands NRM Group

Sepentine-Jarrahdale Community Group

Swan Catchment Council

WA Fishing Industry Council

WA LGA

Landcare Groups

Leschenault Catchment Council

South Australia

Local Government of South Australia

Centre for NRM in South Australia (Notes)

South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board

Government of South Australia

Advisory Board of Agriculture

Alan Mayfield Consulting

Alexandrina Council

Apple and Pear Growers Association of SA

Central Local Government Region

City of Port Adelaide Enfield

CNRM TWG

Conservation Council of South Australia

DC Ceduna

Dr Rob Lewis

Indigenous Reps

LGA

Marine and Coastal Community Network

Meat and Livestock Association

Nature Conservation Society of SA

Nature Foundation of SA

NRM Council

SA Landcare Committee

SA No-Till Farming Association (SANTFA)

SAFF

University Representatives

New South Wales

Environmental Research & Information Consortium Pty Ltd

Local Government Association of NSW

Floodplain Management Authorities

NSW Department of Primary Industries

Dairy Industry Development Company

Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority

Southern New England Landcare Coordinating Committee (SNELCC Inc)

Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee (LPLMC)

Landcare Australia

Aboriginal Reference Group

Bathurst Regional Council

BIA Environmental

Central West CMA

Central West Conservation Farming Association

Cotton Australia

Cudgegong Catchment Committee

Department of Conservation and the Environment

Department of Natural Resources

Dubbo City Council

Dunedoo & District Landcare Group Inc.

Fishing Trawlers Association

Government Liaison and Marina Association

Greening Australia

Hawkesbury Nepean CMA

Holbrook Landcare Group

Inland Rivers Network

LAL

Lower Murray-Darling CMA

Macquarie 2000

Macquarie Marshes Management Committee

Macquarie River Flood and Fibre

Mid-Macquarie Landcare

Murrumbidgee Landcare Association

Murray CMA

Murray Irrigation

Namoi CMA Board

Namoi Water Association

Natural Resources Commission

Nyngan Five Ways Landcare

Ocean Watch

Parkes and District Landcare

State Landcare Committee

Surfriders Foundation Australia

Watershed Landcare

Western Catchment Management Authority

Murray Darling Association Inc

ACT & Canberra

National Farmers Federation

Land and Water Australia

Greening Australia

ACT NRM Advisory Committee

Murrumbateman Landcare group

ACT Catchment and Landcare Association

CSIRO Land and Water

Threatened Species Scientific Committee

Australian Local Government Association

Australian Landcare Council

ACT Government

Bureau of Rural science

Department of Arts, Environment and Heritage

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation

Grains Research and Development Corporation

Murrumbidgee Landcare Group

National Land and Water Resources Audit

National Water Commission

Rural Industry Research and Development Corp.

Rural Lessees Association of the ACT

South East Landcare Association

Upper Lachlan Catchment Coordinating Committee

Humane Society International

NSW Farmers Association

Victoria

Wimmera Catchment Management Authority

Dept of Sustainability and Environment, Dept of Primary Industries

Conservation Volunteers Australia

Victorian Coastal Council

Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority

Victorian Farmers Federation
Corangamite CMA
Leigh Catchment Group
Australian Conservation Foundation
Australian Dairy Farmers Ltd
Australian Vegetable and Potato Growers Federation
Bird Observers Club of Australia
Birds Australia
Bush Heritage Trust
Central Coastal Board
Central Goldfields & Hepburn Shires
Dairy Australia
Environment Victoria
Gippsland Coastal Board
Glenelg Hopkins
Greening Australia
Lexton Landcare Group
Local Government
MCCN National Reference Group
Merri Creek Management Committee
Mildura Rural City Council
Municipal Association of Victoria
Murrumbidgee Council
Museum Victoria
National Landcare Facilitator Office
Native Fish Australia
North-Central CMA
Northern Victoria Fruitgrowers Association
Seafood Industry Victoria
Trust for Nature
Victorian Dairy Products Association
Victoria Recreational Fishing
Victorian CMA
Victorian Fisheries Co-management Council
Victorian National Parks Association
Victorian Association of Forest Industries
Wangaratta City Council
Western Coastal Board
Woody Yaloak Catchment Group

Northern Territory

Australian Government Coastcare Facilitator NT
Greening Australia NT
Australian Landcare Council
Central Land Council
Derby Shire Council
Department of Environment
Kimberly Land Council
NRM Board, NT
Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
Northern Land Council
NT Bushfires Council
NT Cattleman's Association
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts

Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines

NT Horticulture Association

NT LGA

Ord Catchment Reference Group

Ord Land and Water

Whyndam East Kimberley Shire

Tropical Savannas Cooperative Research Centre

Victoria District Conservation Association

STATE SUMMARIES

TASMANIA

There is concern the transitional problems of NHT1 to NHT 2 will be repeated in the next round of programmes. Continuity is essential for programme rollout, staffing, integration and predictability for the community. A signal from governments by June 2006 would be welcomed.

Support for the Envirofund was generally strong but not universal. Suggestions were made to ensure delivery was linked to regional processes.

There is a need for longer-term funding for NRM programmes (10-20 years) to show the community the Government is as committed to NRM as it is to health. 'Annualisation' of funding is exhausting the community.

There is a perception too much reporting is required, in part due to the different requirements of the Australian and State Governments.

Local government should be better included to utilise their potential to engage local communities.

There is quite a lot of confusion over the links between NRM programmes and the non-forest vegetation debate. Both issues are caught up in people's minds as being regulation-related, which frightens some off NRM involvement.

The State's commitment to NRM was questioned and there a perception that as Australian Government involvement/investment increases the State role/investment decreases.

The regional model was strongly supported and seen as providing a more professional approach to addressing NRM issues than previous approaches. The higher level of centralisation has raised concerns about additional layers between governments and on-ground action. The capacity for good governance and communication with stakeholders remains a concern in some regions.

A greater degree of clarity and interaction is required around peri-urban and urban issues, including more effective communication of rural/regional issues to city populations.

The Facilitator Network and other capacity building initiatives are imperative for future programmes. Too much focus on on-ground work can be to the detriment of the ongoing skills-building needed for continual improvement.

A greater focus on production and industry aspects of NRM, along with better application of research and development efforts, is needed to increase industry/farmer involvement.

Some concern was shown towards the lack of coastal/marine priorities in regional plans particularly given the importance of fishing/aquaculture to state economy.

QUEENSLAND

The regional model is widely supported and seen to be providing a more coordinated and strategic approach than previous models. This has improved community understanding of NRM.

Major activity is underway after an intense planning period. Regions are seeking a government commitment that time will be given to implement the plans before any changes are made.

Continuity for NRM programmes is crucial for staff security, maintaining involvement of land managers/volunteers and predictability for the community.

The community sees more to gain from preserving rather than repairing our natural resources.

Facilitators and Coordinators are important for engaging land managers and community, ensuring successful on-ground delivery and assisting with small grant applications.

Programme structures need to be flexible to adapt to regional differences and to recognise that one size does not fit all.

Sharing information between regions is important and regions would appreciate more effective structures to increase the effectiveness of this activity.

Queensland stakeholders are happy with the community-based model and have concerns over moving towards a statutory model

Gathering baseline data has been difficult in some regions due to lack of time and resources allocated to this activity, and in some instances climatic conditions.

There is concern over governance and reporting arrangements and regions would prefer six monthly reporting over the current quarterly reporting.

Regions receiving NHT funding only feel they are under-resourced to achieve the priorities for their areas, in comparison to regions that receive NAP funds also.

The NLP and Envirofund have helped to maintain momentum in the transition between NHT1 and NHT2 and for those with low priority projects. There is some concern about the lack of integration of these investment streams with the regional process and assisting with applications draws resources away from regional implementation.

Indigenous representation can be difficult due to a lack of people advising on (not representing) issues faced by Indigenous groups. In some regions, Traditional Owners are seeking greater involvement in planning and decision-making.

Landholders are after long-term security in government NRM policy, for example in committing to covenants on their property or providing ecosystem services.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The regional model is widely supported from across many sectors. Sub-catchment groups operate effectively under the regional bodies leading to a sense of community empowerment. The Rangelands region suggested being split into four sub-catchment regions, using local government infrastructure to deliver the programmes, to address its size and resource issues.

Western Australia is happy with the community-based model for regional bodies and most were happy for State Government officials to be on the boards to provide technical expertise.

Many stakeholders expressed strong support for the Facilitators and Coordinators and believed them to be critical for engaging land managers and the community.

The fishing industry felt left out of the regional planning process and fisheries boundaries do not align with catchment boundaries making industry engagement more difficult.

A more holistic approach to NRM would increase Indigenous engagement and could be used as a way of engaging on other issues such as health. The Envirofund has engaged Indigenous groups.

Some groups are concerned regional bodies have moved away from drainage as an option to reclaim saline lands. Regional bodies feel they are lacking policy direction from the State on this issue and each case must be considered on its merits.

Volunteer workload is very high and causing 'burnout'. Red tape, for example contract management and reporting requirements prevents some applicants from becoming involved.

There is a perception amongst the agricultural sector that NRM programmes are focused on biodiversity at the expense of sustainable agricultural production.

There is a tension between investing in on-ground works and investing in capacity building. Regions felt that funding stability would promote security for staff, who sometimes turn away from NRM jobs due to the short-term nature of the contracts.

NRM language can alienate people, particularly those without a scientific/technical background, sometimes leading to intended recipients not providing comment on documents.

Integrating the range of NRM programmes would simplify delivery and potentially ease the confusion in the community.

While being nervous about being relied on for on-going investment for regional NRM delivery in the future, local government is keen to use its infrastructure to deliver programmes. There is tension between targeting high priority projects and maintaining widespread community engagement.

The Kimberley sub-catchment has been hampered by the size of the Rangelands region, the limited resources available, and the distinctive nature of issues in the sub-region.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

The regional model is widely supported in South Australia albeit with the following criticisms:

- o Reporting and administration processes consume a considerable amount of funding that could be better spent employing more on-ground staff;
- o The regional model has yet to deliver on the benefits promised during its formation;
- o There are still many programs being delivered outside the regional model;
- o Indigenous people outside the model find it difficult to get involved; and
- o The time difference between applying for and receiving funds is too long and there are often delays.

The regional model has empowered Indigenous people to become involved in decision-making processes, giving them a means to deal with issues such as feral animals. Indigenous communities have asked for more flexibility and awareness of cultural differences. Indigenous community projects can be interrupted by cultural and social issues.

Community awareness and knowledge of long-term government funding arrangements is essential. An early announcement of next phase would allow for better NRM planning.

Programme structures need to be flexible to adapt to the differences between regions and to recognise that one size does not fit all. Regions with large areas but low populations have high administration and communication costs.

Regions without access to NAP funding feel severely disadvantaged and board members from these regions want a NAP/NHT amalgamation.

A cross-regional approach to addressing wide spread NRM issues is a priority for both regional boards and conservation organisations.

Local governments want better participation and representation in NRM and need greater clarity of their role. Local government and regional boards recognise the need to develop a stronger partnership between regional bodies and local government

The perception of regional boards is the need to understand that ‘big discoveries’ are not as important to regions as ‘small science’, which underpins projects.

There is a belief agencies discourage funding for marine and coastal projects, which is reflected in the NRM Act, which states their responsibilities end at the water mark.

There is a lack of knowledge and awareness by community of where funding comes from, eg State and Australian Government funding. Further branding means were recommended to ensure adequate recognition of the investors was given.

Facilitators are essential for communities and there is a major concern funding will not be continued. Stakeholders also expressed concern over the loss of ability to fund part-time project officers, which was important to the management and coordination of community projects.

NEW SOUTH WALES

There were concerns raised about the perception that CMAs are seen by many as a fourth tier of government and mistrust that the State has just shifted its control of NRM onto the CMAs.

Local government expressed concerns about lack of representation on regional bodies and the Shires Association would like the next NRM Bilateral Agreement to be a 'trilateral'.

All stakeholders are aware that NRM problems require long-term solutions. There is a need for government commitment to ongoing NRM as for health, defence and education.

Continuity is a particularly important issue in NSW where significant changes have happened in departmental and regional body staffing recently.

Multiple funding programmes were seen by many as adding to the administrative burden of CMAs and funding proponents. One suggestion was having a schedule out for a number of years of when programme applications open and closed to help all concerned and avoid late night rushes to complete forms.

Facilitators and Coordinators are important in engaging land managers and community members, ensuring on-ground activities are delivered and ensuring Envirofund, NLP and other applications link into the Regional NRM Plan.

The level of engagement of local government authorities, as for Landcare groups, was seen as very mixed. A Memorandum of Understanding between the NSW Local Government and State Government is being re-negotiated to help connect local government and CMAs.

The Natural Resources Commission has driven the establishment of state-wide standards and targets and a quality assurance governance framework for NRM. It is also helping CMAs implement the standards and targets in a consistent manner across the State.

Regions receiving only NHT funding feel they are under-resourced to achieve their priorities in comparison to regions that receive NAP and NHT funds, particularly in the coastal regions.

In some areas Indigenous engagement was seen as very effective, for example where there is an Indigenous reference group that has a MoU with the CMA and direct access to the Board.

Peri-urban and urban issues are becoming increasingly important, including communicating more effectively to cities on rural/regional issues.

Many and varied views were put forward in relation to stewardship payments. Most considered payments to farmers as appropriate if they could clearly deliver public good outcomes on private land.

Weeds were consistently raised as a problem all levels of government were not adequately addressing.

VICTORIA

Stewardship should be seen as enhancing or rehabilitating land managed by farmers, not taking land out of production and payments should be based on an assessment of the cost of an environmental service on a particular property.

There are variable levels of involvement between Landcare groups and regional bodies. This variability makes it hard to tell whether elected or appointed boards work better.

‘Sustainable resource use’ is often problematic as many interpret it from a conservation perspective ignoring the profitability aspect, which is what drives change on private land.

Local government is running massive environment programmes but there is a disconnect with the flagship NRM programmes. There is enormous capacity and ability to deliver NRM programmes within local government, but the problem is one of integration and structural issues. There is some conflict between the regional and local planning regimes.

Working with local government to deliver programmes would increase recognition for Australian Government funding, as experienced with the Roads to Recovery Programme.

We need to take the first step towards block funding, especially for big projects on key issues in sub-regions. This would allow synergies to develop within the region on a ‘place’ rather than themes basis, allow greater leveraging and ensure more community involvement.

It would be good to secure funding from rate-payers by educating the urban population to acknowledge that clean air and water are due to investment beyond the urban fringe.

Engaging with CMAs can be very difficult, as they sometimes don’t see the community knowledge and information being as valuable as scientific research. There are also concerns over the lack of transparency in determining where funding goes and there is a perception that this often happens without consulting the broader community on its values.

Reduced extension services have become a real problem over the last few years. Industry bodies see an ongoing role for governments in NRM and while they are happy to take the lead and contribute, they want to see a high level of public good coming out of investments. There is a lack of information from regions available to individual farmers. Often practices are trialled but the outcomes do not get shared.

It has been difficult to measure change and show what single site impacts have on whole-of-catchment targets; increases in productivity have been one area where measures can be made.

Where sub-catchments have high rural urban centres there is often a good resource base available but a lack of understanding or experience as to what to do. One of the real impacts under these circumstances is that of attitudinal change but it is very difficult to measure.

NORTHERN TERRITORY

There is widespread support for the regional model.

A number of landscape issues such as fire management demand inter-jurisdictional solutions, and people would like to see more a cross regional/jurisdictional approach for such issues.

There are tensions between particular aspects of current arrangements such as between competitive tendering and collaborative partnerships.

The Australian Government Facilitators have a particularly critical role in bringing diverse groups (e.g., scientists and the wider community) together.

There is a mismatch between demand for particular NRM projects and the administrative capacity to handle this demand. The scale of projects in the NT is too large for many groups to deal with effectively.

There is potential for local government to have a positive role in future NRM arrangements but dedicated staff and resources would be needed to support this.

There needs to be improvement in current NRM arrangements including simplified application, reporting and other processes, and a devolution of financial and other responsibilities to regions.

There is a need to recognise the importance of staffing and funding NRM in the long-term. Security of funding is important in the Northern Territory to retain staff and skills in more remote areas, as well as to reassure the community its efforts are not in vain.

Current monitoring and evaluation arrangements are not well geared for determining high-level resource condition changes.

There is concern to ensure existing plans are implemented and there is better coordination between Northern Territory, Australian Government and community priorities.

There may be a disjunct between financial year reporting requirements and the climatic and seasonal nature of NRM activities, which reflects badly on projects.

There is a tension created where the Australian Government has the financial resources and the territory government has the responsibility for implementing NRM.

Local government has inherent advantages for helping deliver better NRM including its natural engagement with local issues, and its natural ability to deploy skilled labour on the ground. Local government would like to have representation on the Regional Board.

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

The ACT suggested it could be used as a trial region for looking at urban issues because of its manageable size with a well-educated population and only two tiers of government.

The territory is already showing good examples of integrated management - for example 50 per cent of land is co-managed between the government and Indigenous populations, and a whole-of-government reporting system has been established following the 2003 bushfires.

Under current legislation the territory is required to respond to key issues raised as part of the State of the Environment Reporting process, which is also linked to NRM reporting. This model provides an opportunity to close the loop on the continuous improvement cycle and demonstrate how project learnings can be used to enhance programme delivery.

Stakeholders stressed the importance of acknowledging the role of Facilitators, especially within a region that has a high urban/peri-urban population.

SUMMARY ON STEWARDSHIP ARRANGEMENTS

There were varied views on stewardship payments. Most considered stewardship payments to farmers were appropriate where they were delivering public good outcomes on private land, providing the public-good being delivered was clear. An example in NSW was that of CMA involvement in the West 2000 and West 2000 Plus programs providing \$1.24m to develop and deliver 'enterprise based conservation' outcomes.

Some felt that stewardship should be seen as enhancing or rehabilitating land that is managed by farmers, not taking it out of production. They believed that land stewardship payments should be based on an assessment of the cost of an environmental service on a particular property.

This raises the question of how to best value unproductive land if we are looking to 'buy-out' farmers for environmental outcomes. A number considered that such approaches should only be considered where alternative productive uses for the land had first been exhausted. A suggestion was made that payment of funds under stewardship programs could be made via CMAs, but delivered through Landcare networks.

A considered proportion of NRM funding is channeled into incentives to encourage farmers to engage in NRM and undertake action on their properties. Given factors such as drought, variable commodity prices and general fatigue affecting the agricultural sector in some states, there was a general view that the level of incentive payments should be examined to ensure there is a real drive for on-farm action. Volunteerism is still alive but should not be taken for granted.

There was strong support to pursue programs such as the Victorian Bush Tender program, ie a best value for money approach, rather than addressing incentives to farmers through a 'lowest common denominator' flat rate grants approach. It is thought that the former leads to more strategic outcomes as to which parcels of land are 'locked up' or managed in a particular manner.

Incentives were seen as preferable to regulation especially where the public benefit delivered is over and above the private benefit. There is a risk in pursuing only one approach and the feedback was that governments would get better results from using a range of complementary approaches and instruments.

There is a perception from some quarters that NLP, NAP and the Trust don't deliver genuine outcomes on the ground. However state farmer organisations confirmed that land stewardship outcomes are more visible and popular with farmers than many other NRM outcomes.

Landholders are after long-term security in government NRM policy and funding. For example if they commit to a covenant or ecosystem service provision, they want reassurance that the government is not going to put requirements or limitations on the landholders in the future.

There is good support for increasing stewardship arrangements in future NRM models. Industry believes that self-management is the key to on-ground success, and in general terms, the community feels that it is better to invest in preserving rather than repairing our natural resources.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES RAISED

The following sections include information and perspectives that were raised through the consultations, in particular by one sector or a small segment of the community. The issues described are general in nature and are not a word for word description of individual comments.

National Agribusiness Organisations

- Environmental outcomes require long timeframes and will only be achieved through long-term funding commitment from governments.
- There is widely varying capacity between regions to deliver the programmes, highlighting the important oversighting role that the Australian Government has and needs to continue with.
- Farmers are pivotal in delivering NRM outcomes successfully. To engage this population the focus needs to be on sustainable agriculture as well as resource protection.
- There is very little in the regions at present that brings together the many facets of NRM to the individual landholder or directs on-farm activities.
- There is concern that landholders have not been properly represented in the setting of regional NRM priorities or the decision-making processes that have flowed from this.
- Supporting farmers to plan and invest in the long term to enhance their risk management capabilities will be important for NRM in the long-term. This can only be achieved through solid research and development to support the Australian market, and good communication and awareness raising amongst farmer and non-farmer populations.
- The question of what constitutes duty of care and what is a public good outcome needs serious consideration so that meaningful and effective environmental stewardship can be promoted.
- Many landholders are concerned that restrictive legislation is working against broader NRM objectives making it increasingly difficult for regions to engage landholders in NRM programmes.
- Frameworks could be enhanced to ensure monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking are informing future targets and programmes to maximise environmental outcomes.
- Although regional NRM may prove to be effective in delivering regionally specific outcomes, the seafood industry does not currently have the capacity to effectively participate in all the regions and national/industry wide programmes may be more effective for this sector.

State Agribusiness Organisations

- Landholders, and the financial stake they have to their land, have become lost in the NRM process and yet it is private landholders that will have the most impact on future natural resource use. The apparent lack of primary producer representation on some regional boards is of concern, and failing that there seems to be a lack of process to actively involve industry sectors.
- There is a perception amongst some farmer groups that the programmes focus on biodiversity at the expense of sustainable farming outcomes.
- For a particular resource within a particular region, there are usually many groups and organisations capable of delivering the outcomes sought by governments with regards to

NRM. A shift to a more market driven process for funding allocation would be of benefit, as it would ensure a more efficient use of resource overall.

- Industry is well placed to engage farmers in NRM through existing networks, the capacity to communicate back to farmers about project applications and delivery, and through links to research and development. In many instances, industries have already identified their NRM priorities and can engage farmers through a dual approach of production and conservation gains.
- An additional program component dedicated to providing core support to industry NRM initiatives that would complement and accelerate delivery of regional targets would be welcomed.
- The NLP has potential to improve farm sustainability and is very effective in leveraging volunteer support. Landcare volunteers are often motivated by different goals to regional bodies and must be allowed to manage themselves to some degree rather than being forced to implement NRM Plan priorities.
- Likewise Envirofund has been well picked up by the primary producer sector where it has been used successfully to communicate across industries.
- There is a need for adequate data and integrated information systems as a basis for making informed decisions. There is a role for primary producers in the collection of natural resource data but information sharing arrangements need to be clearly defined and communicated for this to occur successfully.
- There has tended to be a focus on primary industry and terrestrial resources, to the extent that marine and coastal aspects of our natural resources are not as well funded, which is a particular concern to the fishing industry. Better communication and agency support is needed to help engage marine industries.
- A more targeted and coordinated approach to weed management would be welcomed.

Regional NRM Bodies

- Greater consideration needs to be given to policy instruments that can supplement government funding for NRM to reduce reliance on program funding. There is a need for greater involvement from the private sector as investors which government could support through the establishment of competitive markets and mechanisms to reward exceptional stewardship.
- Urban and peri-urban issues have been by-passed to date in favour of funding to rural and coastal parts of catchments. There are opportunities to make NRM relevant to urban populations and to educate them about the benefits they derive from good catchment health.
- The aspects of future programs that require further investment include risk analysis, priority setting, delivery mechanisms, evaluation based on clear benchmarks, approved accounting systems, and measuring expenditure against achievement. Transaction costs could be reduced through better-designed reporting processes and accountability through exception and auditing could be considered.
- Regions need to be supported to develop appropriate partnerships with research and development organisations to maximise learning and to ensure that we are not living off past investment in natural systems.
- Good monitoring and evaluation is important for showing which NRM issues will respond quickly and which will respond slowly.

- The regional model could be strengthened by governments working to legitimise regional bodies, provide resources to support good governance, and encourage regional development across government sectors.
- Streamlining programs into one program (with a small grants program included) would simplify delivery at the regional level, create greater equity of access and better program recognition.
- Access to small amounts of funding leads to addressing small-scale issues rather than landscape scale changes. It also does not recognise the administrative burdens of larger regions.
- The balance between on-ground works and supporting activities (eg research or capacity building) needs to be determined by regions in line with the stage they are at within the continuous improvement loop.
- Reporting has been limited to ‘how busy’ regions have been rather than their achievements against benchmarks for natural assets. A future model could establish a small number of research and monitoring sites in each region to collect long-term data sets.

Non-government Conservation Organisations

- There is no apparent strategy for engaging national NGOs in the regional model. National NGOs find that they are still able to engage with local groups but struggle to engage with regions.
- Regional delivery has been very successful in many ways but has led to trade-offs and inconsistency on delivering national issues such as biodiversity planning. National driver programs are needed to ensure the Australian Government is meeting its national and international obligations.
- Support for the establishment of protected areas via the National Reserve System is a fundamental part of protecting biodiversity. This should be better built into Trust projects.
- Regional investment plans need to be better informed by science and there needs to be adequate funding for research and capacity building to match.
- Short timeframes are an issue with the current programs because they do not recognise the nature of the issues or time required to address them. They also encourage overly optimistic project reporting and poor integration of previous learnings.
- The regional governance framework needs to ensure that regions have an effective strategy for engaging stakeholders, maintaining relationships and communicating across their whole region. It is important for regions to employ staff with communication and facilitation skills as well as those with financial and technical expertise.
- Contracts appear to be developed against inputs/outputs rather than outcomes and often the requirements of service delivery are so specific that they leave no room for innovation and adaptation to regional differences. By defining outcomes, regions could define the ‘what’ and providers could use their skills to define the ‘how’ in delivering outcomes thereby getting the best value from partnerships.
- While the decade of Landcare and NAP programmes signified a long-term commitment from the Australian Government, this has not translated to stability for community organisations. For example, in many organisations staff are still contracted to positions for twelve months or less at a time.
- Many communities are motivated to undertake local projects, but they do not proceed because there are insufficient resources to take on the logistical and technical roles.

- A way to foster cooperation, reduce competition, promote partnerships and bridge the often-significant gap between community groups and regions is to set up sub-catchment groups.
- A misunderstanding of values and processes has led to active disengagement by conservation groups in some regions who feel they can be more successful by remaining outside a relationship with the region.
- There is a perception that NRM is unbalanced in favour of industry, local government and development (ie non-biodiversity conservation) priorities. The perceived bias towards terrestrial projects means few marine projects being supported.

Local Government

- In 2002/03 alone, councils spent \$1.9 billion on NRM activities.
- Local governments are experienced in governance and project management and are answerable to their communities.
- The role of local government in NRM has never been clearly defined which has resulted in ad hoc engagement between regions. Improved communication of desired objectives, standards and targets by government and between governments, including local government, would ensure better alignment with other environmental management planning.
- The regional NRM plans have been drawn up with two specific government programmes in mind and do not cover the whole range of NRM activities, such as regional recycling activities, stormwater management, or sewerage treatment, nor tie into the local government planning and approvals process.
- Inadvertently, the NAP has created great inequality between coastal and inland regions. A recent survey of coastal councils found that only 43 percent of coastal councils believed their regional plan adequately addressed coastal issues indicating that an excellent opportunity to promote partnerships with local government has been missed.
- Local government needs opportunities to develop its knowledge of regional catchment objectives, approach to programme development, skill requirements, data capture and management, target setting and policy formation, as well as a clearer understanding of their long term role in NRM.
- Regional targets are important for setting goals, improving on existing work and determining future project directions. They provide a link between the individual and the whole of catchment but must be actively reviewed. There needs to be better recognition of social targets in the current arrangements.
- Representation by local government on JSCs would provide benefits of advice on governance, land use planning, local government roles and responsibilities and how they might participate in activities.

State and Territory Governments

- A dual approach to NRM delivery is required that allows regional priorities to be met but can also pick up issues that are more effectively managed on a cross regional or statewide basis.
- The challenges and dichotomies facing regions have not been adequately recognised, for example delivering large versus small projects, focusing on emerging versus existing problems, fostering partnerships versus working with existing funds.
- The differences between states in programme rollout have shown that the most effective delivery occurs where roles are clearly defined and where operating rules and priorities are not subject to substantial change.

- Most regions are aware of the broad Australian Government objectives in the programmes but they receive mixed messages about the freedom with which they can prioritise issues or are likely to get funding for. Communication to remote regions has been less effective than in other areas.
- The allocation of funds should be based on a region's proven ability to deliver projects (and scientific assessment of assets) rather than on their claims to be able to achieve or to spend funds quickly.
- It needs to be communicated that the sum of regional targets will not equal state or national targets, partly because some matters will slip through the cracks and partly because some regions have not utilised state data resources well.
- Delays in programme delivery have occurred as a result of attempting to create a perfect product the first time around (eg changes to milestones). In future, programme rules should not be open to debate during the life of the programme.
- There needs to be a distinction made between project level monitoring and evaluation (the role of regions) and the need for rigorous, long term investment in resource condition change (cross regional issue).
- There does not seem to be a substantial change in the engagement of individuals as yet. As a trade-off for regions being able to be more strategic, individuals and industry seem to have less 'buy in'.
- The role of facilitators funded by the Australian Government has been invaluable for project management, network management and continuity of information and advice from the Australian Government.

Facilitators and Coordinators

- Local facilitators need to be untied to single projects and be made available to use their broader skills to engage the wider community.
- Land and sea ranger programs are achieving good NRM outcomes as well as social outcomes for Aboriginal communities in northern Australia. The current channels (CDEP) could be better utilised to provide a more wholistic approach under an NRM program.

Sub-Catchment Groups

- Strengths of the regional model are the sense of ownership by local people, the ability of the regional body to build an identity and get out and promote NRM in the region, and the support the region provides to funding NRM on-ground officers. The regional model works well when regional bodies partner effectively with industry and community groups.
- Weaknesses have been the time between engagement and project delivery, the turnover of staff when given insufficient direction, and lack of transparency in the EOI process.
- Key aspects of the programmes to enhance are maintaining staff stability and maintaining a balance of engagement activities and on-ground delivery.
- Improvements could be made in the areas of streamlining administrative processes, communications, and developing partnerships with established groups. Groups would appreciate better communication of the application process and more realistic timeframes for receiving feedback.
- The process by which regions commission project partners needs to be transparent, providing opportunities for all relevant organisations to participate and encouraging new ideas and innovation into the process.

- There can be a perception that community groups are only useful for project delivery, but they also need to be considered within decision making, research and policy processes.
- The regional model needs a period of consolidation to allow the institutional arrangements in place to settle and to allow functional arrangements to establish and focus on the wider aspects of engaging the community in on-ground works.
- There are concerns that targets are seen as an end rather than a means. There needs to be some serious attention given to targets once the ‘easy’ goals are approaching completion and there needs to be consideration of how and where we can better manage land. Consideration needs to be given to adjustment processes where significant land use change is required.
- The regional model has been successful in bringing agencies, their staff and others together more effectively than in previous models. We should be heading towards greater national consistency in institutional and statutory arrangements, such as planning, M&E, business management, as a long-term goal.
- Weed management is an issue that needs to be encouraged more consistently within regional plans.
- Community groups recognise the Australian Government initiative to fund facilitators and coordinators and support their continuing role but more emphasis needs to be placed on education and capacity building
- The process is one of changing peoples’ hearts and minds. The community, appropriately supported, can find tools, but it is important not to overlook the ethical aspects of NRM.

Advisory Groups and Committees

- Formal mechanisms should be instituted to assist adjoining regions to collaborate effectively, especially across jurisdictional borders, bioregions and drainage basins.
- Funding for rangelands, arid region and other remote NRM groups should be increased to reflect the greater operational costs of working in remote areas, and the disproportionately large geographical areas covered by such groups.
- The range of NRM funding programmes should be collapsed into one programme to focus more attention on the efficiency of delivery and achieving outcomes.
- Local government should be recognised for its contribution to NRM. Further involvement should be encouraged, but tempered by the capacity of local government to be involved on a basis of sustainability.
- More emphasis should be given to capacity building to deal with the leadership demands and governance requirements of regional delivery. Many regions have been established through the willingness of dedicated amateurs and the necessary skills may be lacking. There needs to be a move from a ‘volunteer model’ and mindset to a more corporate-oriented model of community involvement.
- There is still a commonly held view that environmental outcomes and productive agriculture are mutually exclusive.
- An economic component of sustainability needs to be pursued to promote a regional development framework where new industries that support environmental outcomes are developed.
- An ongoing issue for regions is that communities view regions as government, and government views regions as communities.

- The community is nervous about what is going to happen after June 2008 given the difficulties that occurred during the previous transition. An implementation plan should be developed to guide the transition to a new program.

Research and Development Organisations

- There is an ongoing need for greater training and provision of tools if we are to have information rich and well connected technical advisors within regions.
- The regional model is beginning to fill the gap between state and local scales for dealing with landscape processes but consistency of data collection still remains problematic.
- The transaction costs for individual regions to engage with research and development is high and would benefit from a more coordinated approach.
- Regional processes have been successful in achieving small, incremental changes in behaviour, however large radical change may still be difficult.
- Programmes need to acknowledge that productive landscapes have a role in NRM ie we don't need to lock land up and throw away the key and there is evidence that incentive based approaches are more successful than regulatory ones.
- Consideration could be given to the separation of responsibilities between Australian and state/territory governments in funding and implementing NRM programmes.
- Short-term programmes create a false economy and encourage excessive scrutiny of projects with high demand for quick results.
- High staff turnover runs the risk of a loss of learning and little genuine progress.

Indigenous Groups

- Aboriginal people have a very close relationship with their ancestral land and sea country, which is embedded in customary laws. At birth, Aboriginal people inherit ownership, rights of access, and responsibilities to 'Care for Country'.
- We need to move past tokenism and think more holistically about the ways in which they can be involved. A good model may be to have Indigenous Advisory Groups to all NRM regions.
- Traditional Owner knowledge, interests, aspirations and activities are not reflected in most planning instruments, nor are the social and economic impacts on Traditional Owners taken into consideration.
- The development of cultural landscape strategies is an important mechanism that is needed for the effective participation of Indigenous communities in the management and development of cultural landscapes as well as the development of sustainable approaches to managing them.
- The framework for the Trust, particularly at the regional level, is very much steeped within a western scientific NRM framework and any real recognition of Indigenous values and perspectives in the accreditation of NRM Plans and investment strategies is minimal.
- The demand to meet government timeframes and deadlines in the development of the NRM plans and projects remains a challenge for Aboriginal liaison staff and their communities.

Coastal and Marine Interests

- There are continuing pressures on the coast, such as catchment impacts, development pressures, climate change and marine pests.

- Marine and coastal issues often cross over a number of regional boundaries and asset classes which can make it difficult to get them ranked as a high priority.
- Multi-regional and statewide funding has been especially important for marine and coastal projects and should be retained in future arrangements.
- Where regions do recognise the values of their coastal and marine resources there is often a lack of dedicated staff to address the issue. This is a function that could be improved by partnering with local council.
- Facilitators and coordinators are particularly important for engaging and supporting the activities of coastal and marine groups and stakeholders.
- A proportion of the total NRM funding pool dedicated to delivering on coastal and marine outcomes would be a worthwhile investment.