

In Focus



Minister's welcome

ISSUE 5, 2006

Local governments are a key stakeholder in natural resource management and this edition of *In Focus* highlights their importance in NRM's regional landscape and the delivery of the Natural Heritage Trust and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

This tier of government is a vital partner in regional planning, identifying conservation priorities and integrating biodiversity conservation into planning and management processes and operations.

See Page 6 to learn about the National Awards for Local Government, which recognise councils' environmental achievements. Last year's winner – Newcastle City Council – will be showcased at the upcoming Local Government Managers Australia Conference (May 21–24) in Perth, where sustainable principles will be shared.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2002–03 the Australian Government contributed \$40 million to local government for environmental protection and natural resource management activities.

For Queensland and Tasmanian councils, water protection activities and waste water management were the main natural resource management activity undertaken.

Councils are crucial to the future of the Murray-Darling Basin, which covers about one million square kilometres. The Murray-Darling Basin comprises a quarter of the number of Australian local government areas, has 9 per cent of the Australian population and crosses four State boundaries. These councils have a shared responsibility with the Australian and State governments to help conserve the Basin's annual run-off of 24,300 gigalitres.

Councils in this area also have a shared obligation to help protect the Basin's agricultural output, which is worth about a third of Australian output. It is heartening to see that, relative to the rest of Australia, local councils in the Basin spend more per capita on environmental protection.

See our NRM profile on Page 3 to read about how our local government facilitators are helping to engage local governments in regional NRM planning. They are part of the greater NRM network, building relationships and delivering NRM priorities for the region.

Senator the Hon Ian Campbell

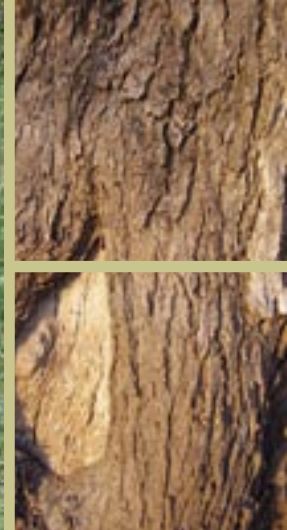
Australian Minister for the Environment and Heritage

The Hon Peter McGauran MP

Australian Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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Funding Update

Water Smart

There is a new call for proposals under the Australian Government's Water Smart Australia programme. The new funding round also includes a specific call for irrigation proposals. Water Smart Australia is a large scale project programme that supports on-ground water resource projects that will make a significant contribution to the sustainable and efficient management of Australia's water resources in rural, regional and urban areas. Applications close 16th June 2006. Guidelines are available at: www.nwc.gov.au/water_fund/water_smart_aust.cfm

Community Water Grants

A massive 1,750 community groups will share in \$61 million in funding to undertake water saving projects across Australia, under the Australian Government's Community Water Grants programme, part of the \$2 billion Australian Government Water Fund. Thousands of Australians are set to save about 18 billion litres of water a year – the equivalent of 18,000 Olympic swimming pools. Round two Community Water Grants will be announced mid-year. Visit www.communitywatergrants.gov.au/index.html

Boost for South East Queensland

Communities in Queensland's south east region will benefit from more than \$8.4 million in funding to address water and soil quality, weed and pest control, coastal and wetland conservation and wildlife protection. Stretching from Noosa through Brisbane and Toowoomba to the Gold Coast, the region will receive more than \$3.3 million from the Natural Heritage Trust and \$5 million under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

Visit: www.deh.gov.au/minister/env/2006/mr16mar06.html

Threatened Species Network Grants

Round 9 of the Threatened Species Network Community Grants, funded by the Natural Heritage Trust, is now open. Funds of up to \$50,000 are provided for activities such as: habitat restoration, weeding and feral animal control, monitoring and surveying species populations, fencing and fire management. Guidelines and application form can be obtained from www.wwf.org.au or by phoning 1800 032 551. Closing date for applications is 5pm Friday, 2nd June, 2006. For more information visit www.wwf.org.au/ourwork/species/tsngrants

Envirofund

Community groups and individuals in northern Queensland and the Northern Territory town of Katherine can apply for Australian Government Envirofund grants until 19th May, after the April deadline was extended. The destruction caused by Cyclone Larry last month and the recent Katherine floods this month means some people will need extra time to submit applications for local environmental projects. Since it was launched in 2002 the Australian Government has approved nearly 6,000 community-based projects and provided more than \$90 million in funding. For information about the next round visit www.nht.gov.au/envirofund

PHOTO CREDITS

Front page Dune revegetation: Martin Heller, Mulching: Ryan Rix Photography, Examining re-growth: AM Photography.
Inside pages Volunteers: Georgia Curry; Local Government Facilitators by LGAQ:
Back page Propagating native trees: Georgia Curry

Profile

There are more than 700 NRM facilitators networking across the continent forging new partnerships for natural resource management. Each facilitator is a link to new stakeholders such as Local Government Facilitator for Queensland Malcolm Petrie, who travels the length and breadth of Queensland to engage 125 Local Governments, 15 Aboriginal Shire Councils and 17 Island Community Councils.



Local Government Facilitator for Queensland Malcolm Petrie.

Describe your role within the NRM network.

I work with the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) helping to implement the \$1.4 million Local Government, Aboriginal and Island Councils NRM Capacity Building Project.

Local Governments need to take a proactive approach to the \$3 billion Natural Heritage Trust and \$1.4 billion National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality through developing NRM frameworks and institutional responsibilities. However, many local governments do not have the capacity to be involved effectively in NRM planning.

What are the major issues you face as a local government facilitator?

The primary issues are building the capacity of local governments to respond proactively to the NRM agenda. Building capacity also involves facilitating a change in attitudes within local governments about the importance of sustainable NRM.

In 2002 the LGAQ conducted a needs analysis survey to identify the level of awareness of NRM issues within Councils, which showed that local government required a high level of capacity building support if it was to respond effectively to regional NRM policy. As a result, a capacity building program was developed to help get local governments involved in sustainable land-use and natural resource planning and management.

In 2004 the LGAQ was commissioned by the Australian and State Governments to start a capacity building program for all Queensland councils. What does this program offer?

The project is in the process of developing and delivering a range of products and services including guidelines for 'Integrating Natural Resource Management into Local Government Planning Schemes and Corporate, Strategic and Operational Plans'.

There is also an introductory Best Practice NRM Operational Manual scoping Erosion and Sediment Control, Roadside Management, Rivers and Wetland monitoring, Biodiversity Protection and Councils' NRM under Australian and State government legislation.

A State Local Government NRM Reference Group has been established to help the LGAQ identify key national and state strategic NRM issues; and the LGAQ convenes an annual Queensland Local Government Environment and NRM Conference as a forum for Council staff to get updates on the latest programs and initiatives from national and state experts including case studies from Councils across Queensland.

Other aims of the project are to partner with the Environmental Protection Agency to support State of the Environment Reporting for Local Government across Queensland; develop economic evaluation software and user guides to help Councils identify the true costs of natural resource management; and develop a Marketing and Communication Plan including an NRM Website on LG Online promoting regional NRM initiatives.

A number of the programs, products and services are now being utilised nationally to assist Councils in other state and territories to integrate regional approaches to land-use and natural resource planning and management.

What are the highlights so far?

The genuine commitment of Councils to participate in the capacity building project. For example, we recently delivered 15 workshops on integrating NRM into Local Government Corporate, Strategic and Operational Plans with 50 councils participating and we plan to offer additional workshops next year.

We also recently convened an Aboriginal Shire Council NRM forum where 10 of the 15 Shires across Queensland attended – delegates considered the forum to be highly



Western Australian Local Government Facilitator Nathan Malin, Malcolm Petrie and LGAQ NRM officer Gillian Sinclair on an Island Community Council trip in February 2006. The team visited Saibai, Boigu, Badu and Warraber Island Councils.

successful. The project continues to set the benchmark as one of the most successful projects funded under the NAP and NHT State Investment Projects.

The LGAQ is also about to develop a guideline to help Aboriginal community governments integrate land and sea management into their corporate plans.

What is your ultimate objective?

Firstly, that local government is recognised as a significant player in NRM by other stakeholder groups such as regional NRM bodies and other spheres of government. Secondly, to have all Councils understand and support the regional arrangements for delivering NRM outcomes.

How do you get local governments involved?

To successfully engage Councils you require an intimate knowledge of how local government operates. This includes their planning processes such as council's corporate plan, which sets out a strategic direction for the community, and planning schemes that regulate new land use developments. Within councils you need to appreciate the varying levels of decision-making such as the role of elected members, the chief executive officer and senior management. Finally, understanding councils existing NRM priorities and consider how these priorities can be integrated into the regional NRM planning processes. This is more likely to succeed because councils might be reluctant to undertake new responsibilities unless they align with their existing NRM priorities.

Any words of wisdom for your fellow facilitators?

I believe success comes with time and trust. If you can develop trust with your stakeholders you will have the foundation to effectively engage and represent them. Finally, remember to market your successes no matter how small because it is the only way people will appreciate the importance of your contribution as a facilitator.



Gillian and Malcolm out the front of Saibai Island Community Council, which is part of the Torres Strait group of Islands.



NRM Tools and Information

Stock take

Australia has a new national snapshot of its native vegetation. The National Vegetation Information System (NVIS) is a comprehensive database containing detailed, accurate information on Australia's native vegetation. It brings together information from State and Territory governments and other sources. Visit www.deh.gov.au/erin/nvis

Ghost nets

You can find out about the rubbish that's being washed up in the Gulf of Carpentaria in Queensland on the new Ghost Net web site. Ghost nets are lost or discarded fish nets that drift through the ocean wreaking environmental havoc. They kill turtles, dugongs, dolphins, whales, fish and other sea life. The Ghost Net project aims to remove ghost nets from the Gulf's coastline to stop them re-entering the ocean, collect information about these nets to help stop fishing nets becoming ghost nets and help Indigenous rangers to continue work on ghost nets beyond the life of the project. Visit www.ghostnets.com.au

Conferences & workshops

The NRM web site now contains a page for listing information about upcoming conferences and workshops that may be relevant to us and our partners. If you know of other conferences or workshops that should be added to the list please email gerry.maynes@deh.gov.au Visit www.nrm.gov.au/community/workshops.html

Wealth of knowledge

Knowledge for Regional NRM is a national initiative funded through the Natural Heritage Trust and managed by Land and Water Australia. Read about the latest developments to help build stronger connections between researchers and information providers and those undertaking NRM planning, decision making, implementation and evaluation activities so each can inform the other.

Visit www.lwa.gov.au/resource.asp?section=282

Health and safety

Community groups involved in monitoring waterways can now get detailed guidance on health and safety issues. The Health and Safety Guidelines for Community-based Waterway Monitoring is for use in waterway monitoring involving community volunteers. The guidelines will help groups identify health and safety risks and take measures to address these. Visit www.wqonline.info/



Weeding out information

The Introductory Weed Management Manual is an introductory guide for those with little experience with weed management, particularly the control of environmental weeds. Printed copies are available at www.weeds.crc.org.au/documents/manual.pdf For a printed copy contact 02 6274 2082 or email nikki.ward@deh.gov.au

The weather man

The Bureau of Meteorology has a great new pamphlet Weather for Pesticide Spraying, which gives science behind the best weather for spraying crops to minimise spray drift. The practical guide tells landowners the best conditions in which to spray, such as wind conditions, temperature and humidity, rainfall and topographical influences. Visit www.bom.gov.au/lam/ppage.shtml

Hands on for Habitat

The free Exploring Australia's Threatened Species Resource Kit is now available at www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/habitat-teachers-guide/index.html

Cane Toad report

Developing a cane toad biological control: Final research report for the period July 2004 –30 June 2005 can be viewed at www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/cane-toad-2005/index.html

Collision risk

Wind farm collision risk for birds: Cumulative risks for threatened and migratory species www.deh.gov.au/epbc/publications/wind-farm-bird-risk.html

Local Government toolbox

To help Local Governments incorporate biodiversity conservation into their core operations, there is a web-based collection of tools, resources, examples, templates and links. Visit www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/toolbox/index.html

What's new

A Senate inquiry into the impact of salinity on Australia's economy has found the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust should be extended another 10 years.

The first two of the 23 recommendations were: "The Australian Government and the state/territory governments extend the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality for a further 10 years, with matched funding at least commensurate (on a per year average basis) with the first stage NAP funding. It is recommended that negotiations over the future of the NAP be expedited to provide certainty to regional bodies and other stakeholders. It is recommended that any further consideration of the prioritisation of NAP funds include consultation with the states/territories and the wider community."

"The Australian Government extend the Natural Heritage Trust for a further 10 years with funding at least commensurate (on a per year average basis) with existing funding levels." To view *Living with Salinity* – a report on progress visit: www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/ecita_ctte/salinity/report/c01.htm

The National Awards for Local Government, sponsored by the Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, are now open for applications. For more information contact 1800 065 113. Applications close 13th June 2006.

The World Challenge is seeking nominations for projects that make a real difference to local communities. World Challenge 2006 aims to find individuals or groups from around the world who have shown enterprise and innovation at a grass roots level. The winner will receive a US\$20,000 grant to benefit their project. A further prize of US\$10,000 will be given to each of the two runners up. Entries close 5pm 4th June 2006. Visit: www.theworldchallenge.co.uk/

The new NRM group for south-east Queensland, SEQ Catchments, has been announced along with the group's \$8.4 million regional investment strategy. SEQ Catchments was formed through the amalgamation of the region's two previous NRM groups, NRM SEQ and Western Catchments. The group is involved in more than 200 projects across the region.

The COAST TO COAST 2006 conference will be held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre from 22 to 25 May 2006. Australia's biennial national coastal conference will focus debate across the full range of coastal and marine issues being considered at national, state, regional and local levels. The Conference attracts more than 400 delegates including Australian, State and Local Governments, NRM Regional bodies, research and education organisations, coastal and marine industries, planners and engineers, NGOs and community groups. Visit: www.iceaustralia.com/coasttocoast2006/index.html

This edition of *In Focus* is the last hard-copy version to be printed. The next edition – Issue 6 – will be distributed via email in July and available online at www.nrm.gov.au/publications/in-focus/index.html

We welcome your contributions to *In Focus* – so please keep us informed of your projects, your events, and of the people in your region who are making a difference. simply drop us an email at nrm@deh.gov.au

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How do I find out more?

For further information on natural resource management visit www.nrm.gov.au or freecall 1800 552 008.



Contact Details:



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