

Report from the 12th NRM Regional Bodies Chairs' Forum

**20th & 21st March 2014 at the Hotel Grand Chancellor, Launceston,
Tasmania**

The 12th annual NRM Chairs' Forum was held in Launceston, Tasmania, on 20 and 21 March 2014. Chairs or deputy Chairs from 47 of Australia's 56 regional NRM bodies attended the Forum along with the Chair of Victoria's Catchment Management Council and the Chair of New South Wales' Local Land Services Board of Chairs. Guests included David Walker, President of the National Landcare Network, Sean Sullivan, First Assistant Secretary, Department of Environment and Jenny Barbour, Assistant Secretary Department of Agriculture. Chief Executive Officers/Regional Managers of regional NRM bodies also attended for part of the first day of the Forum.

Pam Green, Chair of the National NRM Regions' Working Group convened the Forum, with the official welcome provided by Richard Ireland, Chair of NRM North, the host region for the 2014 Forum.

Pam welcomed two new regional NRM bodies to the Forum: the Peel Harvey Catchment in Western Australia represented by Andy Gulliver and OceanWatch Australia represented Brad Warren, its Executive Chair. Both organisations have been designated as regional NRM bodies by the Minister for Environment, the Hon Greg Hunt MP. Pam also extended a welcome to new Chairs of New South Wales' 11 Local Land Services Boards that came into operation on 1 January 2014.

Pam noted the apologies of Ministers Hunt and Joyce who were unable to attend because the Australian Parliament was sitting.

The theme adopted for the 2014 Forum was: *Regional NRM organisations and the efficient delivery of the Australian Landcare Program.*

Session 1: New directions for Regional NRM – the Australian Landcare Program

Sean Sullivan, Department of Environment and Jenny Barbour, Department of Agriculture briefed the Forum on the Coalition government's NRM initiatives. Their presentation covered the new National Landcare Program, the Green Army and the 20 Million Trees Program. Sean and Jenny stressed that the government is looking to a partnership approach between regional NRM bodies and Landcare that recognises the contribution both regional NRM bodies and the National Landcare Network can make to the new National Landcare Program.

The Forum acknowledged the Australian Government's on-going dialogue with regional NRM bodies on the design of the Landcare Program and supported the efforts of its National Working Group in presenting the regional NRM bodies' views.

Session 2: Working with Landcare - Briefing on progress with the Landcare Statement of Common Purpose

Pam Green introduced David Walker, President of the National Landcare Network (NLN). David provided Chairs with a history of Landcare development in Australia and Minister Hunt's recent decision to provide the NLN with a grant of \$1 million per year for the next three years.

One requirement of the grant was that the NLN develop a discussion paper on how Landcare and the regional NRM bodies can work together in advising the Australian Government on priorities for local Landcare investment.

David reaffirmed the importance of the Statement of Common Purpose in terms of recognising the contributions of regional NRM and the NLN to supporting local community group action. He reported strong support from NLN members for the statement.

Pam Green briefed members on the progress with discussions between the National NRM Regions' Working Group, the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia Limited on how the three organisations can promote the benefits of a landcare approach and resolve any differences between the organisations.

In response to questions from the Forum the following points were noted:

- It is important that we take a long term perspective – regional NRM plans set out a 20 to 30 year vision and while the landcare approach is critical to achieving that vision we need to recognise the importance of continually reinvesting in landcare and other community groups to ensure replenishment of community-based groups;
- Governments and regional NRM bodies must continue to work on demonstrating respect for local knowledge and skills of landcarers and other community group members if we are to achieve ownership of the challenges and solutions – the approach can be summarised as “hearts/heads/minds”;
- Not all community groups working on natural resource management issues are called landcare groups: in some regions they are industry or conservation based groups. It is important that regional NRM bodies' community engagement approaches recognise this diversity;
- Forum members are encouraged to look at replicating the Statement at the State/Territory levels and progress is being in some jurisdictions in this regard.

The National NRM Regions' Working Group to continue with its program of building strong links across the Landcare sector and was asked to work closely with the National Landcare Network and Landcare Australia Limited in identifying and resolving emerging issues. The National Working Group should develop terms of reference to guide this work.

Session 3: Localism Workshop

This workshop session was facilitated by Sue Middleton (WA Regional NRM Leaders Group), Penny Scott and Carole Sweatman (both from Terrain NRM) and aimed to Identify actions to implement localism, consider the Localism Position Paper and present the outcomes from the Knowledge Conference's Community Engagement and Capacity Building workshop.

The feedback on the Localism Position Paper included:

- There was support for the concepts embodied in the Localism Position Paper and the contribution such a paper could make to the discussion around localism. The Forum would like to think that the concepts are being implemented now by regional NRM bodies. But they recognise that there is a great diversity of communities and landscapes and therefore a need

for a flexible document that can be used as a 'checklist' which reflects intent and for regional bodies to determine how it can be progressed in their region.

- If the audience for paper is the community then a shortened and less bureaucratic version is required. This could be achieved by reducing number of principles in the paper and simplifying the language. The principles should be adaptive and lend themselves to modification over time as we learn from implementation.
- Regional NRM bodies need to determine their reporting and accountability requirements relating to the position paper and to recognise the importance of measuring progress.

Detailed notes were collected from the table groups and the National NRM Regions' Working Group was asked to use this feedback in revising the document.

Knowledge Conference Community Engagement Workshop

The National NRM Knowledge Conference, held over the previous three days, also gave priority to the concepts of community engagement and capacity building which are closely related to the Localism approach. Carole Sweatman reported on the outcome of the Community Engagement Workshop which focussed on how regional NRM bodies can strengthen their community engagement and capacity building efforts. The key findings from the workshop were:

- The importance of establishing a **National Collective Understanding** covering: agreement on the purpose of Community Engagement /Capacity Building (Is it a social outcome in itself or is it an enabler of NRM? How do we define the "end game"?); the need to track outcomes not outputs relating to Community Engagement and understand the return on investment but this requires us to draw the relationship between CE/CB and biophysical outcomes
- **A National Framework** can provide consistency in approach: this could provide some level of consistency for the planning and monitoring of outcomes; but such a framework must be flexible and adaptable to local circumstances and need
- **Understanding Regional Capacity** required to plan for and measure Community Engagement and Capacity Building including: skills; clarity of purpose; attribution (proving our investments/activities have made a contribution to longer-term outcomes which are influenced by a wide range of factors).
- **Tools for monitoring, evaluation and critical reflection** -we need to simple but effective tools for collecting monitoring data on community outcomes (smart tools). We need a suite of tools which enable data collection which is repeatable, reportable, rigorous and is able to be aggregated to enable reporting at different scales.

The Forum welcomed the report and noted the complex challenges presented with community engagement and capacity building having close links with other projects such as the Regional NRM Planning Project and the Regional Environmental Accounts. But being able to articulate the why and how of our community engagement/capacity building efforts and the success we are having will present a strong case to governments for continuing to invest in regional NRM.

The National NRM Regions' Working Group to consider how to progress the Localism Position Paper and the Community Engagement and Capacity Building workshop outcomes as part of its 2014/15 Work Program.

Session 4: The evolution of regional NRM bodies - where are we heading?

Pam Green chaired this session and invited one representative from each jurisdiction to report on NRM trends within their jurisdiction. Key trends reported included:

- **Tasmania:** 3 regions were recognised 10 years ago by the States' Natural Resources Management Act. The Act is due for review. Challenges include rolling out of regional environmental accounts and examining opportunities for promoting "clean and green" agriculture production.
- **Victoria:** 10 Catchment Management Authorities (along with the State-wide Catchment Management Council) are established in 1987 under the Catchment and Land Protection Act. The CMAs also have responsibilities delegated by the Water Act (river health and floodplain management). Emerging issues include: implementing recently endorsed Regional Catchment Strategies, review of the State's floodplain management strategies, sustainable agriculture and working with the Victorian Landcare Council.
- **New South Wales:** 11 Local Land Services Boards came into operation on 1 January 2014, along with the Local Land Services Board of Chairs. These are established by the Local Land Services Act 2013. Regional Boards comprise 4 members appointed by the Government and 3 members elected by the community and play a key role in biosecurity, provision of advice to farmers and emergency response. Challenges include: establishing the new organisations, enhancing regional governance and accountability and measuring value.
- **Queensland:** 13 regional NRM organisations cover all of Queensland. They have been in existence for more than 10 years and are community based organisations with Board members elected by members. The Queensland Government provides \$11 million to support the work of the NRM regions. Emerging challenges include working with industry to reduce impacts of agriculture on the reef and regional NRM and biosecurity.
- **Northern Territory:** Territory NRM is a non-government organisation established in 2005. It covers a substantial area that is divided into 4 sub-regions. Because it has a small staff they are keen to learn from other regions across Australia and share ideas. Indigenous engagement and capacity building is a core focus. A major challenge is improving the NRM evidence base to both improve knowledge management and reporting of outcomes.
- **South Australia:** 8 Natural Resource Management regions, regional NRM Boards and the State NRM Council are established by the South Australian Natural Resources Management Act 2004. Boards have the capacity to raise a levy to implement their NRM plans. In 2012 the NRM Boards were integrated with the regional services of the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. Current issues facing the Boards include the outcome of the recent State elections (which will give clarity about the direction of the governments NRM policies), working with local government to demonstrate the benefits of the levies; engaging urban and indigenous communities', environment flow negotiations and management of marine parks.
- **Western Australia:** 7 regional NRM bodies cover Western Australia – the Peel Harvey Catchment Council was recently appointed by Minister Hunt as a regional NRM body. They are also non-government organisations with Boards elected by members. The Western Australian Government provides some funding through its State NRM Program grants. State

funding programs are to be reviewed in in 2014. Other challenges include working with local government, and strengthening indigenous land management efforts.

- **OceanWatch:** is not for profit organisation established in 1989 and was appointed by Minister Hunt as a regional NRM body in March 2014. It works the Australian seafood industry in addressing sustainability issues. OceanWatch would like to build on its existing relationships with regional NRM bodies to address coastal and estuarine issues.

Actions arising from the discussion included:

The National NRM Regions' Working Group to consider:

- How to promote the importance of evidence based approaches to natural resource management and how this helps address development issues – regional NRM bodies are seen by the community as “honest brokers” in relation to scientific information.
- The diversity of indigenous communities across Australia and how this needs to be considered when pursuing indigenous land and sea management programs;
- The roles regional bodies can play in assisting farmers dealing with drought – i.e. planning, building resilience and drought recovery

Session 5: Regional Environmental Accounts – where to from here?

Max Kitchell, Chair, Regional Environmental Accounts Steering Committee briefed Chairs on progress with the Regional Environmental Accounts since the 2013 Chairs' Forum. A workshop was held in Canberra in June 2013 that marked the end of the data collection phase of the pilot program and demonstrated the proof of concept of accounts. In the latter half of 2013 offers were made to the Government and Opposition to brief them on progress. Greg Hunt, the then shadow Environment Minister was briefed on several occasions and since becoming Minister in September 2013 has received further briefings. He remains very supportive, but noting the budget situation has asked his department to work with us in exploring options for implementing the Accounts. Max encouraged Forum members to brief their State Ministers and on the project.

Carla Sbrocchi from the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists introduced the *Accounting for Nature Quick Guide* to the Forum.

The Forum reaffirmed its commitment to developing a national process for outcome reporting and supported the National NRM Regions' Working Group's continuing efforts in implementing regional environmental accounts.

Session 6: Report from the 5th National NRM Knowledge Conference

Max Kitchell and Richard Ireland reported on the very successful National NRM Knowledge Conference held over the previous three days in Launceston. More than 300 delegates attended the Conference with provided 5 field trips, 10 workshops and a plenary day with three key note speakers and a debate. The Workshops in particular focused on aspects of the regional NRM business with several producing detailed reports for consideration by the National NRM Regions' Working Group.

Session 7: Evaluation of the National NRM Regions' Working Group

Pam Green and Danny O'Neill, the National NRM Regions' Working Group Executive Officer, introduced the report on Working Group activities since July 2012. The report was prepared in response to the agreement at the 2012 Forum to increase regional subscriptions for a two year period and for the Working Group to report to this Forum on progress.

The Forum received the report on its National Working Group's activities since July 2012.

Session 8: Working Group Reports

a. NRM Planning in Australia – report from the NRM Planning Working Group presented by James McKee, CEO NRM North

James presented the report to the Forum and explained that it was initiated in response to the Australian Government's Carbon Farming Initiative and the need for regional NRM plans to assist with addressing potential perverse outcomes. Over 2012 the NRM Planning Working Group worked closely with the Australian Government in designing the NRM Planning for Climate Change program and through that process identified the need for a guide to regional NRM planning. The report contains a number of recommendations and the Forum agreed that the National NRM CEOs Forum should address these over time.

The Forum received the report and noted that it will now be available as a reference document on the National NRM Regions' web-site and will be updated from time to time.

b. Sustainable Agriculture – report from the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group presented by Sharon Starick, Chair, SA Murray Darling NRM

Sharon reported on a very successful Sustainable Agriculture Workshop held as part of the Knowledge Conference. There was strong interest in how regional NRM bodies might contribute to the Australian Government's proposed Agriculture White Paper. She also presented the position paper developed by the Sustainable Agriculture Working Group to the Chairs and invited their feedback on its contents. The position paper will be used as the basis for a submission to the White Paper process.

The Forum welcomed progress with the Sustainable Agriculture Position Paper and suggested the paper should also cover:

- Peri-urban issues;
- The need for land to be managed;
- Reinforce the importance of sustainable production and not just increased production;
- The cost and benefits of increasing agriculture in established agricultural areas relative to opening up new areas;
- Feedback from the National Farmers Federation on the matters raised in the paper

c. Indigenous Land Management – report from the Indigenous Land Management Working Group presented by Kate Andrews, Chair NT NRM

The Working Group, established in August 2013, has been: developing its membership to ensure greater national coverage; developing a database of ILM case studies; and organising the Knowledge Conference workshop.

The Workshop was very successful and attracted a wonderful range of participants – from ecological fire management with Traditional Owners to Indigenous marine ranger work to Indigenous engagement in Landcare in Victoria and protection of peat bogs in the high country. Key issues arising from the Workshop included:

- Recognising the fundamental importance is value and respect – as Joseph Elu explained it in the workshop not just respect for others but respect for self;
- Cultural & Natural RM – recognition of the value of cultural resource management and its integral role in NRM
- Indigenous participation in NRM governance and decision making and planning
- Access to country for cultural works and to connect to country
- Empowerment through capacity building, employment and economic development
- Cultural competency and training (embedded in NRM)
- Protection of cultural sites
- Valuing and respecting ownership of **Indigenous knowledge** and protocols
- Partnerships – Indigenous participation a foundation not just an add on

The Workshop recommends that the work program for the National Regional NRM Indigenous Land and Sea Management Working Group address:

- **Champions** - We would like champions for this conversation from the Chairs
- **Alliances and networks** - There are already some State based networks for ILSM – these were considered a good option. We would like to build broader alliances with other organisations eg the NFF to share good examples of access to land for cultural purposes (either formally – ILUAs – or informally).
- **Principles** - We would like to draft a set of principles for NRM respecting Indigenous culture, knowledge and Indigenous participation in NRM.
- **Share stories, tools, processes and people** - Share the good examples from across NRM to learn from each other - concrete examples of governance arrangements or Indigenous Ecological Knowledge programs or getting children out on country. Encourage Indigenous mentorships, exchanges etc.
 - Build upon the ILSM database
 - National electronic newsletter of the work being done - and a more recent suggestion from a CEO for an email group
- **Improve our organisations** - We would like to encourage improving the cultural capacity of NRM organisations (not just awareness but capacity) - embedding these processes
- **Opportunities** - Encourage capacity building, tailored training packages, economic development

The Forum welcomed the report and noted the Indigenous Land and Sea Management Working Group will progress the recommendations from the Knowledge Conference Indigenous Land and Sea Management Workshop.

d. Carbon – report from Mike Berwick on the National NRM Regions’ Working Group response to the Australian Government’s Emissions Reduction Fund

Mike Berwick briefed Chairs on the work of the National NRM Regions’ Terrestrial Carbon Working Group over the past few years and the important role it played in establishing the Carbon Farming Initiative. The Working Group recently developed a submission to the Government’s Emissions Reduction Fund Green Paper where we emphasised the importance of co-benefits (carbon and landscape) and the need for greater effort in developing methodologies for landscape carbon sequestration.

Mike stressed the importance of building links with other organisations to enhance our technical capacity to contribute to the development of methodologies.

The Forum received the report and expressed support for the approach but also asked the Working Group to consider “blue carbon” opportunities.

Session 9: NRM Chairs forward planning: The National NRM 2014/15 work program and budget

Pam Green and Danny O’Neill presented the Working Group’s work program outline and budget proposal for 2014/15. Chairs raised a number of issues that could be built into the work program:

- The importance of developing links with agricultural industry research and development organisations covering how we can work more closely with them to identify and address research and extension needs;
- The need for a greater effort regarding extension and how this could be funded (noting that extension is a broad concept that has evolved over the past few decades and involves a range of different skills and approaches);
- Chairs from regions with large population centres expressed an interest in developing an informal network to share understanding on challenges and approaches

The Forum also noted the media release from the National Farmers Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation recognising 25 years of Landcare and calling for a recommitment to action.

Chairs asked the National NRM Regions’ Working Group to issue a media release supporting the NFF/ACF call for continued action on landcare.

In discussing the proposed Working Group budget, Chair’s noted the decision of the Australian Government not to contribute directly to the operation of the Working Group. They recognised that the Australian Government may wish to contribute to the some of the Working Group’s projects and the Working Group was asked to pursue these possible funding avenues.

The Forum endorsed the outline of the national work program and a subscription of \$2,000 per region for 2014/15 and agreed that the National NRM Region's Working Group should refine the work program to address matters raised by this Forum.

Chairs concluded this session by discussing the potential implications from the Australian Government's Commission of Audit and the forthcoming Federal budget for Landcare Program funding.

The Forum agreed that members should continue to seek opportunities to brief local members of parliament on the work we do and the benefits to agriculture and broader Australian community. The National NRM Region's Working Group was asked provide Chairs with a briefing note to support Chairs in their meetings with MPs.

Forum Close

Pam Green formally closed the Forum by announcing that the 2015 Forum will be hosted by Queensland and the 2016 Forum and Knowledge Conference by New South Wales.