

# 2010 NATIONAL NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT REGIONAL CHAIRS' FORUM REPORT

## OVERVIEW

The eighth NRM Regional Chairs Forum was held in Darwin from the 22 to 23 April 2010. Forty nine of Australia's 56 regional NRM body Chairs attended along with two Chairs of State NRM Councils and seven other delegates.

The culmination of the Forum was the presentation of its report to the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council on the afternoon of 23 April 2010. A copy of this report can be found at Appendix 1.

The following report summarises the discussion and actions arising from the Chair's Forum. The Forum was divided into several sessions with each session covering a specific issue.

Appendix 2 provides details of the Forum delegates.

### **Session 1 – Resilient Regions: Applying Resilient Thinking to NRM**

Paul Ryan (Interface NRM) and Jim MacDonald (Namoi Catchment Management Authority) provided the Forum's keynote address, *Applying Resilience Thinking*. Starting with a general definition of resilience as "the capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganise without significant change to the structure, function feedbacks and outputs of the system" they explored how this approach can be utilised in NRM planning to help identify the thresholds at which further change impacts on the system's ability to recover. Paul illustrated his talk with examples of ecosystems that had moved past these "tipping" points.

### **Session 2 – NRM Governance System in Australia**

#### ***Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper***

Sarah Ryan (ACT) introduced the key points from the draft *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation paper* prepared for the National NRM Regions' Working Group.

The Forum welcomed the initiative and confirmed the importance of the paper in helping to improve Australia's NRM governance system by addressing issues such as:

- Understanding the roles of organisations at all scales in the Australian NRM Governance System;
- Lack of enduring NRM infrastructure at the regional level;
- Balancing regional, State and National NRM priorities;

The Forum recognised that the current arrangements are the product of independent changes and decisions over time and that as a consequence the agreed roles of the different players in the system, particularly regional NRM bodies, are unclear.

Chairs noted that the paper can also make a useful contribution to:

- greater alignment and sharing of NRM roles on a State basis, sharing across States
- understanding the role of Local government in delivery- subsidiarity is important
- communication to help others understand the NRM challenges

- understanding the importance of relationships and partnerships to successful NRM
- the upcoming review of CFoC

### **The Implications Paper**

The National NRM Regions' Working Group also prepared a draft "Implications Paper" to help identify the potential changes that might flow from adopting the principles outlined in the *Australian NRM Governance System Discussion Paper*.

### **Actions for the next 12 months**

The Forum agreed to the following actions:

- Review the wording of the principles included in the discussion paper to ensure they are more easily understood (i.e. a "plain English" version);
- Chairs to provide Sarah Ryan with the specific comments, corrections, edits etc on the paper;
- The National NRM Regions' Working Group to publish the paper;
- The National NRM Regions' Working Group to take the paper to State groups, the National NRM round table and others and to develop a communication and consultation program that covers jurisdiction Ministers;
- The National NRM Regions' Working Group to redraft the Australian NRM Governance System implications paper and further consult with Chairs.

### **Session 3 – Progress with Resource Condition Monitoring**

Judy Henderson (NSW) reported on the discussion at the preceding NRM Knowledge Conference around Resource Condition Monitoring and the strong desire from delegates to "do-something".

Currently the most developed concept is the Wentworth Groups' proposal, *Accounting for Nature*, but Chairs were unsure of the extent of political support for this approach. The Wentworth Group is proposing a series of regional trials.

Chairs expressed a willingness to participate in the trials and committed to continuing to advocate for:

- a national resource condition monitoring system and
- pursuing the development of a set of a National Environmental Accounts.

### **Actions for the next 12 months**

The National NRM Regions Working Group to form a sub - working group to work oversee progress with resource condition monitoring. The Working Group should support a pilot of the Wentworth proposal and seek to engage Australian and State/Territory governments in the trial.

### **Session 4 – Australian Government briefing and other reports**

Mark Flanigan and Ian Thompson briefed the Chairs on the AG perspective on regional NRM – they were asked to be constructively critical and provide suggestions for how regional NRM can improve. They commented that regional NRM bodies are making a difference and implement good activities – but they are only as strong as the weakest links – there is a need for internal support and mentoring to capture the best and share.

With regards to the relationship between regional bodies and Landcare, the AG has provided clear support for Landcare. Mark and Ian acknowledged there has been some competition between regional bodies and Landcare groups or networks and this has not always been constructive.

They also acknowledged regional bodies' desire for the Australian Government to commit to long term funding of NRM. But this will be an on-going issue with Governments constrained by financial and political cycles. This reinforces the importance of diversity of funding for regional NRM.

Monitoring was also recognised as an area where more needs to happen. They noted that the ANAO did not discuss how the short-comings in earlier NRM programs should be fixed – they just highlighted it as a problem.

The upcoming mid-term review of *Caring for Our Country* provides an opportunity to explore the funding issues further.

### **Actions for the next 12 months**

The National NRM Regions Working Group to support regional NRM Body input to the mid-term review by overseeing the preparation of a national Regional NRM Bodies submission to the review.

### **Session 6 – Landscape Carbon**

Mike Berwick (Queensland) introduced Allan Dale (Terrain NRM) and Penny Van Oosterzee (Degrees Celsius) who provided a briefing on the work of Degrees Celsius in establishing a model for aggregation and abatement at the regional scale. As well as developing the regional model, Degrees Celsius has supported the National NRM Regions Working Group with advice around carbon policy and the Emissions Trading Scheme.

Allan and Penny provided a comprehensive briefing and responded to questions from the Chairs. They presented a series of design principles for Chairs consideration. The principles are to guide the Working Group's contribution to the development and implementation of a national scheme for greenhouse gas pollution reduction.

Chairs expressed general support for the principles and agreed on the need to discuss them with their own Boards and with other Chairs within their jurisdictions (it will be important to see how the principles align with State based climate change efforts).

The request by Terrain for financial support was noted, with Chairs discussing the dual role played by Degree Celsius in terms of program development and policy advocacy. At a national level the advocacy function may be more appropriately handled by the National NRM Regions Working Group

### **Actions for the next 12 months**

The National NRM Regions' Working Group to coordinate the feedback for regional body Chairs on the proposed principles and next steps proposed in the presentation:

#### Principles

- a) Any pollution reduction scheme needs an appropriate emissions reduction target and an appropriate mix of integrated policy tools, including well designed market mechanisms, targeted incentives, etc.
- b) The architecture of any scheme needs to be designed to maximize investment in climate change mitigation and landscape scale adaptation, including the protection of existing stores.
- c) Delivery of cost efficient bio-sequestration will require a well designed emissions trading scheme. The price of carbon will also need to be set high enough to maintain a broad-based offset scheme.
- d) Implementation of any scheme to reduce offset or mitigate greenhouse gas emissions' must minimise perverse outcomes and maximise environmental, social and agricultural production co-benefits.

- e) Offsetting schemes must deliver against verifiable standards with integrity. Systems developed, however, also need to enable effective aggregation of farm-scale bio-sequestration activities.
- f) Accredited regional NRM plans (subject to appropriate amendments and updated in the context of emerging carbon accounting mechanisms and national standards) should be used to guide the minimization of perverse outcomes and the maximisation of co-benefits at the landscape level. Our current systems of fragmented land use regulation would also require refinement.
- g) A complementary fund for strategic biodiversity outcomes not secured through offsets is needed.
- h) The regional level is an appropriate scale to plan and deliver bio-sequestration and other landscape adaptation projects, both via market offsets or complementary programs. A wide variety of organisations with appropriate capacity and governance structures could participate in implementation via delivery mechanisms that well are integrated and monitored at that regional scale.
- i) An appropriate natural resource accounting framework or a set of national environmental accounts will be required to measure progress towards improved resilience in the Australian landscape.

Actions for the Working Group:

- NWG development of an agreed position and the negotiation of required outcomes across all political parties;
- Continued consensus building between the National Working Group, the Conservation Sector, NFF, ALGA, AIG and other critical sectors;
- Ongoing negotiation with the commonwealth re the development of appropriate methodologies and systems for regional aggregation, and development of key regulations relating to offset provisions in the CPRS;
- Ongoing capacity development at the Regional Body level.

**Session 7: Maintaining Volunteerism**

Pam Green (NSW) reported on the outcomes from the March 2010 Landcare Forum held in Adelaide. She referred delegates to Minister Burke's speech where he emphasised the importance of the conservation and productivity balance (promoted by the ACF and NFF in the early days of landcare) and that he sees landcare as an outcome rather than a program. It's an outcome achieved through voluntary contribution and if groups and others are not formally "badged" as landcare their works should still be regarded as landcare outcomes.

Other messages from the Landcare Forum included:

- The nature of volunteerism is changing and we need to design programs that cater for the different ways in which volunteers want to contribute (usually with on-ground works rather than meetings);
- Food security and climate change are emerging issues were a landcare perspective will be important;
- Engaging young people – raising awareness is the key – young people will respond in their own timeframe;
- The Australian Landcare Council now back in action with a new Chair, Kim Chance, from WA;

- Regional bodies are recognised for their support , but need greater flexibility in CfC funding to support landcare.

### **Actions for the next 12 months**

Chairs agreed to continue to work to improve relationships with Landcare and volunteer groups.

### **Session 8 – NRM Chairs’ Forum - actions for the National NRM Regions Working Group**

Peter Box introduced the last session and used the National NRM Regions Working Group Report to the Forum as the basis for discussion. The Forum endorsed the future directions outlined in that report and action on other issues considered over the past two days.

In summary, the National NRM Region’s Working Group is asked to:

- Progress the *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper* through discussion of the concepts with stakeholders and governments and national peak body of stakeholders.
  - Revise the *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper* implications paper to take into account matters raised by the Forum.
  - Publish the *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper* within the next two months and distribute copies to Ministers, agencies and NGOs.
  - Develop a consultation strategy around the *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper* that covers actions by Chairs within their State/Territory jurisdictions as well as the National NRM Regions Working Group.
  - Build resilience into the NRM governance paper.
- Ensure that work on resource condition monitoring and national environmental accounts is progressed. Chairs expressed strong support for the need for a national resource condition monitoring and reporting framework with many regions offering to be part of a trial of the Wentworth Groups’ *Accounting for Nature* proposal and agreed that the National Working Group should establish a sub-group to work on this issue.
- Support the important role of regional NRM bodies in managing Landscape Carbon – regional NRM bodies can help minimise perverse outcomes (unintended negative impacts on landscapes) and to maximise co-benefits and contribute to bio-sequestration, amelioration and adaptation.
  - Establish principles to guide the National Working Group’s Landscape Carbon efforts based on feedback from regional bodies to the draft principles considered at the Forum.
- Increase engagement with the Natural Resources Policy and Programs Committee of the National NRM Standing Committee. The Working Group is to seek an opportunity to meet with the Committee to discuss the *Australian NRM Governance System Foundation Paper*.
- Provide on-going support for the NRM roundtable.
- Progress planning for the 2011 National NRM Chairs’ Forum. After noting that the April 2011 Ministerial Council will be held in Auckland, the Chairs’ noted Canberra as the preferred option for the 2011 National Chairs Forum.
- Support an additional request for a \$500 contribution from each regional NRM body towards the Working Group’s projects over 2010/11.
- Drawing on the expertise of the National CEOs Working Group, contribute to the mid-term review of *Caring for our Country*

- Consider opportunities for “branding” of regional NRM to facilitate greater understanding of the role of regional NRM bodies
- Keep volunteering on the agenda for NRM - to maintain commitment to volunteering.
- MDB regional bodies - working together – consider sponsoring the development of a network of regional body Chairs and CEOs connected to the Murray Darling Basin Water Plan to share information about the water plan and its implications for regional NRM.
- Keep a watching brief on the Australian Governments’ population review and its implications for NRM.
- Pursue opportunities, such as that provided by the Prime Minister’s Country Task Force (Chaired by Joel Fitzgibbon), to present on the essential contribution of regional NRM to Australia’s social, economic and environmental outcomes.

### **National NRM Chairs Forum Report to the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council, held in Darwin on 23 April 2010**

On behalf of regional NRM body Chairs, I thank the Council for this opportunity to meet with you. We know your agenda is tight so I will move straight into the business.

#### Conference

This last week the National NRM Regions Working Group hosted the **3<sup>rd</sup> National NRM Conference** in Darwin and the **8<sup>th</sup> National NRM Chairs Forum**. We **thank** Australian Governments for their support of both events and we look forward to future support for these very important Forums.

The Conference, which attracted over 220 delegates from around Australia, reinforced the importance of **relationships and sharing information** across the NRM sector. Although these conferences have their origins in NRM regional bodies sharing information, we see the need to broaden their appeal to State and National government agencies, research bodies and the non government sector – we made progress in this area in Darwin, with excellent NGO keynotes, but a longer lead time will help achieve this in future years.

Issues raised by the Conference include: the importance of a landscape approach rather than ecological apartheid; problems with stop-start funding; the need diversifying funding; working to engage communities in different ways around the country - relationships are essential; and the need for mechanisms for sharing Knowledge.

#### Australia's NRM Governance System

The Chairs Forum in Hobart 2010 asked its National Working Group to develop a discussion paper on NRM Governance. Our concern was to understand how the system could work best and what it should look like in 10 years time. This means clarifying roles and responsibilities within the system and understanding the relationships and what is required of them.

- We have done extensive work writing a **discussion paper** about the NRM Governance system and understanding it as a complex social-ecological system. We will be **publishing** this and providing copies to Ministerial Council and its agencies within the next 2 months.
- **Principles** have been drawn from this – there was general agreement to these principles, and discussion about their **implications**.
- We will be establishing a **dialogue** with NGOs and governments over the next 12 months to further developing implications from these principles
- We would like to **brief** you next year on the outcomes of this work

### Resource Condition Monitoring

We have raised this issue in Hobart, Melbourne and at earlier meetings. Why is it so important? We identified the following reasons: accountability, priority setting, improving effectiveness of investment and intervention, being answerable to ANAO, to funders and to communities and to understand trends and identify emerging issues

**The conference and the Chairs' Forum felt strongly about this topic.** We made the **distinction between** the collection data through resource condition monitoring and the aggregation and presentation of this through a set of national environmental accounts. We heard from a range of scientists and others about these topics including Prof Gene Likens and Prof Ted Lefroy.

We agreed that -

- **We are committed to a national resource condition monitoring system**
- **We will pursue the development of a set of a National Environmental Accounts**

There is an emphatic **willingness to participate in trials** based upon principles that have been established by the Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists. We are clear that this is just a start and it will change and develop as we trial it. We all believed we needed to start somewhere.

### Landscape Carbon

Our aim is to minimise perverse outcomes (unintended negative impacts on landscapes) and to maximise co-benefits.

Regional Bodies through existing work already contribute to biosequestration, amelioration and adaptation.

Some Regional Bodies across Australia are also working on how we can build upon this. We believe the regional scale has important role to play.

We have:

- **Endorsed principles to guide the Chairs' National Working Group in contributing to policy development**
- **We will continue to progress this through the National NRM roundtable, engaging with diverse NGOs**

### Landcare and volunteerism

We received a report from the March 2010 Landcare Forum and discussed practical ways that regional bodies can, and are, supporting landcare.

- **Chairs agreed to continue to work to improve relationships with Landcare and volunteer groups.**

There was an understanding that volunteerism extended beyond landcare and that there was growing diversity.



### Wrap-up

The last couple of years have seen a maturing of the Regional NRM Bodies and the collegiate of the Regional NRM Bodies Chairs through the National NRM Regions Working Group with a growing capacity to work together, and to contribute to NRM as a whole. We are looking to improve the bigger picture not just our own interests. There is an increased sophistication in understanding NRM as a system.

We are keen to contribute to the development of NRM policy and any program reviews that are undertaken. We believe that our work over the last 12 months on issues such as NRM governance adds values to our contributions.

## National NRM Chairs' Forum, Darwin 22 and 23 April 2010

## Delegates

Sarah	Ryan	ACT NRM Council
Yvonne	Sneddon	Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges Natural Resource Management Board
Marilyn	Ah Chee	Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Management Board
Bob	Crouch	Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Management Authority
Kevin	Mann	Burdekin Dry Tropics Group Inc
Evelyn	Meier	Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management Inc
Tom	Gavel	Central West Catchment Management Authority
John	Herbert	Condamine Catchment NRM Corporation Ltd
Peter	Greig	Corangamite Catchment Management Authority
Rick	Rockliff	Cradle Coast NRM Committee
Brian	Foster	Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board
Mark	Wootton	Glenelg - Hopkins Catchment Management Authority
Peter	Ryan	Goulburn - Broken Catchment Management Authority
John	Klem	Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority
Wej	Paradise	Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority
Jackie	Kelly	Kangaroo Island Natural Resource Management Board
Robert	Gledhill	Lachlan Catchment Management Authority
Mark	King	Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Authority
Joan	Burns	Mallee Catchment Management Authority
Alex	Anthony	Murray Catchment Management Authority
Lee	O'Brien	Murrumbidgee Catchment Management Authority
Jim	McDonald	Namoi Catchment Management Authority
Kate	Andrews	Natural Resource Management Board (NT) Inc.
Sharon	Starick	Natural Resources Management Council
Geoff	Williams	North Central Catchment Management Authority
Richard	Ireland	North NRM Committee
Merv	Lewis	Northern and Yorke Natural Resource Management Board
John	Bethel	Northern Gulf Resource Management Group
Judy	Henderson	Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
Christine	Mucha	NRM South Committee
Bruce	Hamilton	Perth Region NRM Inc
Peter	Akers	Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority
Peter	Blundell	Queensland Murray Darling Committee Inc
Bill	Mitchell	Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group Inc.
Royce	Bishop	Reef Catchments
Chris	Reed	SA Arid Lands Natural Resource Management Board
Bill	Paterson	SA Murray Darling Basin Natural Resource Management Board
Rhonda	Williams	South Coast NRM Inc.
James	Osborne	South East Natural Resources Management Board

Gordon	French	South East Queensland Catchments
Jim	Dale	South East Queensland Catchments, Deputy Chair
Jan	Star	South West Catchments Council Inc
Alison	Bohannan	Southern Gulf Catchments Inc
Pam	Green	Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
Philip	Sansom	Sydney Metro Catchment Management Authority
Mike	Berwick	Terrain
Mick	Murphy	VCMC
Liz	Clay	West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
Rory	Treeweke	Western Catchment Management Authority
Glenice	Batchelor	Wheatbelt NRM Council Inc.
Merryn	Eagle	Wimmera Catchment Management Authority

#### **Executive Officers**

Danny	O'Neill	Vciproarian CMA Chairs' Forum and National NRM Regions Working Group
Rob	Edkins	NRM Regional Leaders Group (WA)
Kerryn	Richardson	NSW Chairs' Council
Kate	Clarke	SA Executive Officer
Kathleen	Broderick	TAS Executive Officer

#### **Guests**

Paul	Ryan	Interface NRM – keynote speaker
Peter	Box	Group Strategies - facilitator

#### **Apologies**

Kim	Chant	Australian Landcare Council
John	McDowall	Cape York
Peter	Douglas	Desert Channels Queensland
Peter	Veenker	East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
Ted	Scott	Fitzroy Basin Association Inc
Phyllis	Miller	Natural Resources Advisory Council
Yvonne	Marsden	Northern Agricultural Catchments Council Inc
Paul	Carrick	North East Catchment Management Authority
Mark	O'Brien	South West NRM Group Ltd
John Toshie	Kris	Torres Strait Regional Authority
Andrew	Drysdale	Queensland Regional Groups Collective
John	Feint	ACT NRM Council Executive Officer