

**9<sup>th</sup> NATIONAL NRM CHAIRS' FORUM**  
**CANBERRA, 16 TO 18 MARCH 2011**  
**DRAFT REPORT TO MINISTERS**

**Overview**

The ninth Natural Resource Management (NRM) Regional Chairs' Forum was held in Canberra from the 16 to 18 March 2011. Its theme was **Enhancing the governance capacity of regional NRM bodies**.

Seventy five delegates attended the Forum comprising 48 of Australia's 56 regional NRM body Chairs. This year the Forum included seven members of the Natural Resources Policy and Programs Committee and the Chairs of the Australian Landcare Council and the National Landcare Network, the CEO of Landcare Australia Limited and the National Landcare Facilitator.

Chairs acknowledged the continuing support of Australian governments for the Forum and look to their on-going support for future Forums.

The 2011 Forum proceedings changed significantly from previous years in that the Chairs did not report directly to the Ministerial Council on the Forum outcomes. The planning for the Forum proceeded on the basis that the Natural Resources Ministerial Council would be meeting in New Zealand and that it would be impractical for the Forum to be held at the same location. In February 2011 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to changes in its Ministerial Council arrangements resulting in new standing Ministerial Councils. The NRM Regional Chairs' regard regular dialogue with Australian governments' Ministers as essential.

**The Forum agreed to seek guidance from Australian Government Ministers who Chair the new Ministerial Councils on the appropriate arrangements for the Forum to provide advice back to Australian governments.**

**NRM Regional Body Governance**

Chairs accept that on-going support for regional NRM depends upon our ability to demonstrate good governance. The Forum was briefed by Michael Traill AM (Social Ventures Australia) on best practice Board governance and by Norbert Vogel on regional NRM Body Performance Excellence Reviews.

The Performance Excellence Reviews are an initiative of the regional NRM CEOs and are intended to drive self improvement by regional organisations. The review uses globally recognised business excellence principles and criteria which are customised for the NRM sector and assesses NRM performance in: leadership; corporate strategy and planning; client and community focus; information and knowledge; people focus; process management; and business results.

**Chairs agreed that the National Work Group should assess the different Performance Review approaches used within jurisdictions and share information about those approaches. The Forum adopted a target of 85% of regional NRM bodies having conducted appropriate Performance Excellence Review by 2013.**

**Australia's NRM Governance System**

In 2010 Chairs advised the Ministerial Council of the Forum's endorsement of the discussion paper *Australia's NRM Governance System – Foundations and principles for meeting future challenges*. The paper was subsequently published and distributed to Ministers, regional NRM bodies and others.

The Forum heard that feedback has been very positive. The Forum's National Working Group has been developing a companion "implications" paper that puts forward ideas for actions to address the principles.

**The Forum noted progress with the implications paper and agreed that the paper should identify areas for development rather than nominate specific mechanisms and that the paper should contribute to the development of the Landcare Action Plan being progressed by the Australian Landcare Council.**

### **Strengthening relationships between national, regional and community landcare**

Chairs were pleased that Kim Chance (Chair of the Australian Landcare Council), David Walker (Chair of the National Landcare Network), Heather Campbell (Chief Executive, Landcare Australia Limited) and Brett de Hayr (National Landcare Facilitator) were able to participate in the Forum and to contribute to a panel discussion on opportunities for strengthening the relationship between regional NRM and landcare.

**Chairs recognised that there can be confusion between the roles of regional NRM and landcare and welcomed the proposal that a Statement of Common Purpose be developed jointly between the Forum's National Working Group, the Australian Landcare Network, the National Landcare Network, Landcare Australia Limited and the National Landcare Facilitator.**

The Statement should start from the premise that landcare in its broadest sense requires the contribution of a wide range of organisations – local volunteer groups, local government, regional NRM bodies, State/territory governments, the Australian Government and the private sector. The Statement should draw on case-studies to illustrate the successful interaction of local landcare groups and other volunteer groups and regional NRM bodies.

### **Regional Development**

The Forum welcomed the focus on regional development by all governments and the critical role of the Regional Development Australia regional committees. Chairs recognised that regional NRM plans provide a context for sustainable regional development initiatives and regional NRM bodies can play a role in delivering initiatives relating to water and utilising natural resources.

**The Forum agreed that individual regional NRM organisations should work to establish strong relationships with regional development committees and asked the National Working Group to brief the Regional Development Australia on the NRM regional plans.**

### **Carbon Farming Initiative**

The NRM Regional Bodies' Carbon Working Group (established following the 2010 Forum to support regional NRM engagement in the development of carbon policies and programs) reported to the Forum on opportunities for regional NRM organisations to contribute to the carbon farming initiative. Regional NRM Plans can assist with identifying potential perverse landscape outcomes from wide scale revegetation as well as identifying opportunities consistent with those plans objectives.

The Forum was also briefed by Australian Government officials on progress with the Carbon Farming Initiative and the establishment of a voluntary carbon market.

**The Forum agreed to continue to explore opportunities presented by the Carbon Farming Initiative for landholders to receive payments for ecosystem services associated with reducing agricultural emissions and increasing carbon sequestration and to ensure these efforts are consistent with the objectives of regional NRM plans.**

## **Regional Environmental Accounts**

Chairs committed in 2010 to testing the Wentworth Group's *Accounting for Nature* concept. The National Working Group reported on progress with regional trials. Pilot regions have been identified in each State/Territory and support committees (Technical Standards and Scientific Standards and Accreditation) have been established by the Wentworth Group. Results from the regional trials are expected later in 2011.

**Chairs confirmed their support for a robust reporting system and agreed that the trials must continue.**

## **Raising community awareness of regional NRM**

Chairs are concerned that the outcome from governments' investment in regional NRM is not well understood by the general community. Over 2010/11 the National Working Group commenced work on a national regional NRM awareness project. The Forum received and endorsed a progress report on this project.

**The Forum agreed to pilot the National Awareness Project through the coordinated efforts of regional NRM organisations on World Environment Day 5 June 2011.**

The Forum also received a progress report from the regional NRM CEOs on *Wild Things*, a national program to attract private sector investment in regional NRM. Regional NRM organisations will identify projects designed to protect endangered fauna and these will be coordinated through a national campaign.

## **Caring for our Country Review**

Chairs welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the review of Caring for our Country and directed its **National Working Group to prepare a submission based on the Chairs' Australian NRM Governance System principles**. They also encouraged regional NRM bodies to provide individual submissions to the review.

## **National NRM Knowledge Conference and the National Landcare Conference**

The Forum has previously coordinated a biennial National NRM Knowledge Conference with the last one being held in Darwin in 2010. Chairs recognised the benefits of working with the ALC and Landcare Australia Inc. to synchronise the holding of the National NRM Knowledge Conference and the National Landcare Conference and for each being held on alternate years.

**The Forum asked that the National Working Group work with the ALC, National Landcare Network, National Landcare Facilitator and Landcare Australia Limited to develop a proposal for the coordination of the National Landcare and National NRM Knowledge conferences.**