

## Report from the 14<sup>th</sup> NRM Regional Bodies Chairs' Forum

### 9 & 10 June 2016 at the Novotel Pacific Bay Resort, Coffs Harbour, NSW

The 14<sup>th</sup> annual NRM Chairs' Forum was held in Coffs Harbour, NSW, on 9 and 10 June 2016. Chairs or deputy Chairs from 46 of Australia's 56 regional NRM bodies attended the Forum along with the Chair of New South Wales Local Land Services Board of Chairs. In addition to key note speakers, guests included Terry Hubbard (Chair, National Landcare Network), Jim Adams (Executive Officer, National Landcare Network), Steve Costello (Department of Environment) and Adrienne Hallam (Department of Agriculture and Water Resources).

The Forum was hosted by North Coast Local Land Services on behalf of the NSW Local Land Services Board of Chairs.

The theme adopted for the 2016 Forum was *The National Landcare Programme – beyond 2016*. The Forum was held at the midpoint of the 2016 Federal elections and followed directly after the 6<sup>th</sup> National NRM Knowledge Conference held at the same venue over the previous 3 days.

**Max Kitchell**, Chair of NRM Regions Australia opened the Forum and explained that today's morning session and the first part of Friday morning would be a joint session with CEOs/Regional and General Managers. Max introduced **Mark Bulley**, acting Chair of North Coast LLS, who provided the official welcome to Chairs.

**Mark Flanders**, an elder of the local Gumbaynggir people, provided the Welcome to Country.

**Tim de Mestre**, Chair of the NSW LLS Board of Chairs, provided an overview of the regional NRM arrangements in NSW which comprises 11 regional Local Land Services Boards (responsible for the day-to-day operations of Local Land Services and setting the strategic direction to achieve local and State priorities) and a state-wide board of Chairs that is responsible for the delivery of statewide priorities and the governance of service delivery across the state. One of the strengths of the NSW approach is a focus on collaboration rather than competition between regions, the Board of Chairs achieves this by facilitating sharing of knowledge and encouraging greater communication.

#### Session 1: National Landcare Programme

**Steve Costello**, Department of Environment, led the briefing. Steve noted that because of the Federal elections the government was in caretaker mode and so decisions about the National Landcare Programme future and potential reviews would need to be made by the incoming government. Although if a review is required the Department could move quickly to implement this and could potentially involve documenting the achievements of the programmes 2 years of implementation (set in the context of longer term achievements achieved through predecessor programs), surveys and consultations with stakeholders.

Steve's briefing also covered the good progress being made by the programme with updating MERIT, the development of Performance Expectations and initiatives such as NRM Planning for Climate Change.

**Adrienne Hallam**, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, reinforced the points made by Steve, emphasising the need to demonstrate value for money, particularly in terms of a measurable improvement in the resource base and farm gate returns. Projects funded through NLP need to demonstrate best

practice extension and that they are based on good science. Adrienne also reported on the outcome from the recent Sustainable Agriculture Small Grants round with 103 projects (totalling \$3.8 million) being successful.

Discussion covered: NRM funding in the forward estimates (noting that the Natural Heritage Trust is in the forward estimates and continues beyond 2018); the communications efforts made by regional NRM organisations over the past 12 months; accessing the MERIT system to gather information on national outputs from NLP; and the importance of regional NRM organisations having the opportunity to contribute to the design of the next stage of the NLP.

## **Session 2: Progress with NRM Regions Australia Projects**

### *1. Strategic Partnerships – Engaging with the National Landcare Network -Jim Adams (NLN)*

Jim Adams, Executive Officer, National Landcare Network (NLN), outlined the strong engagement at the national level between NRM Regions Australia and NLN represented by collective work on the community participation project and regular involvement by NLN in NRM Regions Australia's monthly teleconference meetings. The engagement efforts culminated in a productive meeting between the NLN Executive and NRM Regions Australia the previous afternoon. Jim also outlined the changes to the NLN governance structure.

### *2. Community Participation Review – Carole Sweatman (CEO, Terrain NRM) and Dan Healy (First Person Consulting)*

Carole Sweatman outlined the background to this project (it was an initiative of the 2014 National NRM Chairs Forum) and the importance of being able to report on outcomes from our community participation efforts and not just the number and type of participation activities. With funding support from the Australian Government we have been able to progress the project through engaging First Person Consulting who have prepared an overview of regional NRM organisation participation evaluation efforts and organised a workshop with representatives from 29 regions to help identify the outcomes we are seeking from participation activities. The workshop identified almost 50 outcomes and these are being grouped/refined. The final stage of the project will include identifying measures that can be recorded in MERIT.

Chairs acknowledged the importance of having a consistent approach across all NRM regions to reporting on community participation outcomes and that to achieve this standard metrics will need to be recorded in MERIT.

### *3. Performance Expectations and OPE- Steve Costello (Department of Environment) and Andrew Drysdale (Queensland Regional Groups Collective)*

**Steve Costello** reported on the current review of the Performance Expectations Framework and thanked regional NRM organisations for their prompt feedback in relation to the revised draft of the Framework released in early May 2016. Steve emphasised that one of the aims for the Framework was to reduce the frequency of reporting requirements for those regions that meet and exceed the standards. Steve noted that work is on-going with the NSW Natural Resources Commission to align the Framework with the NRC's reviews of Local Land Services.

**Andrew Drysdale** reminded Chairs of the background to NRM regions Organisational Performance Excellence project. OPE is intended to facilitate continuous improvement of regional NRM organisations governance through an initial assessment followed up by reviews. The assessments and reviews are scored allowing individual regions to compare their performance with other regions and to track changes in their

performance over time. A key characteristic of our approach is that the reviews are confidential to the regional NRM organisation Board. The concern for the future of the OPE approach is that regions are less likely to undertake a review if they are required to report on the Performance Expectation framework (because of time and resource constraints), and this is starting to show with a decline in numbers of regions wanting to undertake follow-up OPE reviews.

Chairs expressed their on-going support for the OPE approach and noted the efforts of the OPE Working Group to align the OPE process with the Performance Expectation framework.

#### *4. Regional Environmental Accounts - What does it mean for your region? -Peter Cosier (Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists)*

**Peter Cosier** reported on significant progress with regional environmental accounts since the 2015 Chair's Forum held in Brisbane. Peter and Max Kitchell have undertaken a round of State/Territory briefings of lead NRM Ministers about the accounts trial and the proposed approach based on using regional NRM organisations to coordinate the account development within their regions. Discussions have also occurred with Minister Hunt and a range of senior officials including the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It is hoped that Peter and Max will have the opportunity to present the Regional Environment Accounts to a meeting of the Environment Ministers Council after the election.

If successful, resources will be available to regional NRM organisations to develop the regional accounts and that within 5 years a full set of national accounts will be produced.

Chairs, noting the very positive feedback on this topic at the NRM Knowledge Conference earlier that week, reaffirmed their commitment to the project.

#### *5. Agricultural Accreditation Systems – the role for regional NRM organisations*

**Dr Joshua Bishop**, National Manager – Markets, Sustainability and Business Partnerships, WWF outlined the background to WWF's approach to accreditation and the growth in companies willing to work with the WWF to gain recognition for their sustainable production practices. The approach relies on producers being able to demonstrate improved practices against agreed objectives. Josh described the very comprehensive assessment processes used.

**John Gavin**, Remarkable NRM, briefed Chairs on the project he undertook for NRM Regions Australia on the roles for regional NRM organisations in accreditation systems. He noted the possible purposes for our involvement (including engendering third party or community support for agricultural practices (social licence to operate) and increased market access or financial return to farmers) as well as benefits to regional NRM organisations relating to funding program development and delivery and adding to the value proposition for regional NRM).

Options for our consideration include developing a scheme within the NRM sector, supporting/endorsing schemes already in operation through auditing or certification etc.

Chairs discussion on the presentations covered the challenges with accreditation of organisations' sustainable production systems independent of other aspects of the organisation's operations.

#### *6. Climate Change – what are the lessons from making our regional NRM Plans climate ready?*

**Mike Berwick** (Chair of the Queensland Regional Groups Collective and convenor of NRM Regions Australia's Carbon Working Group) introduced **James Schultz** (CEO of Greencollar and Board member of the Carbon Market Institute). James provided an overview of the operation of the Emissions Reduction Fund and the work of his company. Following discussions with NRM Regions Australia earlier in 2016 James and

the Carbon Market Institute are working with NRM Regions Australia on a code of practice for commercial aggregators that encourage dialogue with regional NRM organisations regarding the landscape impact of ERF vegetation projects.

Chairs received the report and noted the importance of a regional perspective that takes account of the unique needs of different ecosystems around Australia, for example in some areas large scale plantings may diminish the ecosystem values.

### *7. NRM Regions and Indigenous Land and Sea Management*

The session provided a snapshot of regional NRM organisations indigenous land and sea management projects. **Mitch Jeffrey** (Department of Environment) provided a national overview based on National Landcare Programme projects, 2242 indigenous people are employed to deliver projects and 143 projects use indigenous local knowledge. **Neil McCarthy** (North East CMA) outlined the indigenous engagement guidelines developed by Victoria's indigenous facilitator network and CMAs. **Parry Aguis** (Presiding Member of the Alinytjara Wilurara NRM Board) described the comprehensive approach adopted by his Board to both engagement and partnering with other organisations to encourage the development of enterprises and job opportunities.

### *6th National NRM Knowledge Conference*

The Conference was held at the same venue on the days preceding the Chairs Forum and many Chairs attended. The general feedback was a good conference, but there was concern that the key note speakers were predominantly male and that future conferences should pay particular attention to ensuring a more balanced program.

## **Session 3: National Landcare Programme – what have we learnt from 20 years of Australian Government investment**

**Robert Hill**, the former Minister for Environment who led the establishment of the Australian Government's Natural Heritage Trust, briefed the Chairs on challenges and opportunities from his time as Minister for the Environment. Robert described the background to the Trust and the Government's desire to support practical, on-ground actions to address environmental issues. The Trust and the Environment and Biodiversity Conservation Protection (EPBC) Act were two key initiatives of his time as Minister. In relation to the EPBC Act, the Environment Minister was given powers to decide on projects that may affect environmental assets rather than just being consulted by the Minister responsible for the development proposal.

## **Session 4: NRM Chairs forward planning: the National NRM work program and budget**

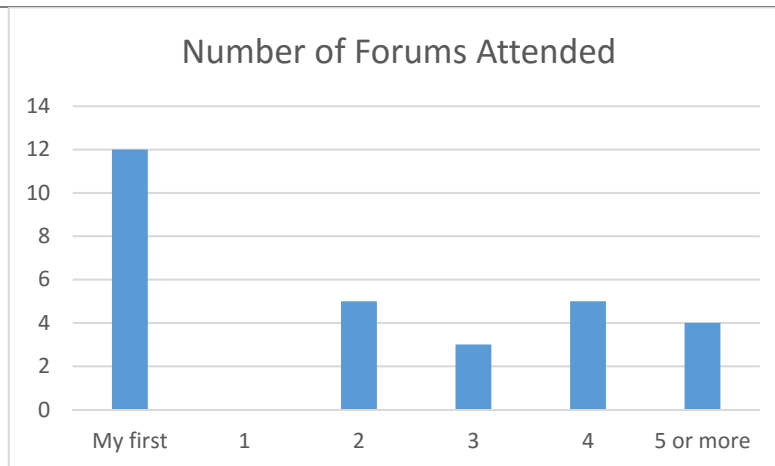
### *Is NRM Regions Australia meeting your needs?*

Chairs completed an on-line survey prior to the Forum and at the Forum they were asked to complete a hard copy of the survey to take account of the project briefings provided at the Forum. The results are set out in the table below.

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After the Forum  
(30 responses)

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**1. How familiar are you with the work of NRM Regions Australia?**

- 0 Do not know about the work
  - 12 Know a little about the work
  - 13 Very familiar with the work
  - 2 Would like to know more
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**2. How can we improve communications with Chairs? (respondents can indicate more than one method)?**

- 7 Communications are adequate
  - 15 More regular Communiqués sent by email
  - 9 Make greater use of NRM Regions Australia website
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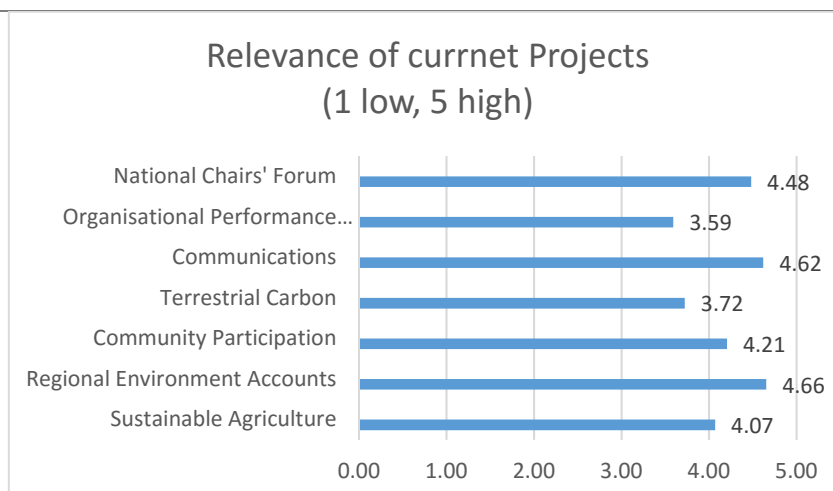
Other suggestions included:

- I recognise the need to be more structured in providing timely and targeted communications to Chairs/GMs and Regions
  - Comms currently are pretty good
  - I am the deputy chair and suggest email because that would be easier for our Chair to share amongst other board members
  - More focus on what NRM is about and not be hijacked by difficult issues, e.g. branding
  - Only a few more, not 20 times
  - Need more time for the discussion of the business of NRM Regions Australia and issues of the day - should be a priority for Chairs meeting
  - For those that have been involved for a while. Need a short induction pack for new Chairs and 1 page briefing note on key pillars/themes that we can use when advocating, campaigning or representing NRM Regions Australia in our regions.
  - Facebook and Twitter?
  - A way to link Chairs who have similar issues
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After the Forum  
(30 responses)

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### Other project suggestions

- Marketing and branding through customers and staff
- It would be good if all states had a similar set-up regarding funding, statutory obligations. The loss of species is a national issue - we must bite the bullet and address the issue of cats (politically difficult but necessary)
- Biodiversity, Indigenous NRM
- When following the conference the Forum could be held on one day
- Capacity of NRM organisations to devise mitigation projects on behalf of the Commonwealth across Australia -threatened species and ecosystem services
- In relation to OPE not sure, getting mixed messages that OPE review take up is low. Promoting indigenous engagement within NRM is important -more indigenous members on Boards, more presentations more membership
- The NRMs need to the all-inclusive ethos mentioned in the opening speech and include the aquatic environment in the process
- Closer relationship with the Department of Agriculture
- Must lift profile of regions and promote on-ground achievements. Must demonstrate engagement with youth as most Chairs are older and could give the wrong impression. Should encourage younger keynote speakers to inspire everyone with cultural and gender diversity. Maximise the culture of elders in nurturing the future in the sense that we are "elders". Link environmental health/protection to production. Try to spread the interest across the whole of Australia, not just the Reef. Include different marine environments, can we capitalise on recent weather events to push our relevance?
- Branding, Communication, Messaging, as per the Brisbane Chairs Forum
- Intergenerational NRM awareness. Raising political agriculture awareness. How can we get the population to share the vision. Don't separate Chairs from CEOs
- Climate Change adaptation (not just carbon farming) will remain a central focus)
- Partnerships with Landcare. Appreciate this is already developing but I think it is crucial for a coherent message to government. Key is for landcare to be advocating NRM regional bodies and appreciating the value of them
- Outstanding session for me from the Knowledge Conference was prof Daryl Low Choy and his alignment of plans and the logic associated with this. Water in various aspects, environmental quality, reuse, managing for predicted weather patterns, surface, groundwater and storm.
- More emphasis on the word environment as against (my words here - writing hard to read) climate

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After the Forum  
(30 responses)

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change and hence our focus on environment. Focus on the introduction of the environmental message to the Federal Government rather than as I believe a token representation as reflected by the budget contribution. More focus on the marine environment and less on the Great Barrier Reef.

- Must continue to sell what we do
  - Priorities: continued funding commitment from government and regional environmental accounts at a farm level.
  - Marketing/promotion (trusted) of NRMRA/Landcare - see earlier comments, need one consistent voice. E.g. LAL, mining sectors, tourism, defence recruitment. Proactive strategic engagement (I do not feel we have a sense of urgency or call to arms) with Canberra. We targeted outcomes focussed relationship building, for example Minerals Council, Arts Council, Medical Association and AFGC. We need and Environmental literacy uplift. For example: lift the nation's understanding to ensure/optimize engagement to design our future NRM; example Keating lifting the nation's economic literacy. So Program: strategic themes (on-going); projects say 2-years finite life; flagship programmes (longitudinal)
  - Immediate priorities for communicating with new government and preparing message for all regions to communicate to local MPs
  - Clean Green Indicators at a catchment and sub-catchment scale to promote change if needed; able to use Agriculture to promote clean and green to their customers. Other priorities: soils maintenance and improvement; and national accounts.
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#### *NRM Regions Australia Terms of Reference and changes to the Chair appointment*

Mike Berwick presented the changes to NRM Regions Australia terms of reference. Currently the Chair of NRM Regions Australia must be a Chair of an NRM regional organisation. While continuing to support this principle, NRM Regions Australia has agreed that it should have the option to relax this rule for a period of 6 months following the Chair ceasing to be a Chair of a regional NRM organisation. This allows NRM Regions Australia the capacity to avoid Chair change overs in challenging periods, such as post Federal election 2016. Chairs noted this report.

#### *NRM Regions Australia Budget Update*

NRM Regions Australia's Executive Officer, Danny O'Neill, presented the 2015/16 budget and work plan. The work plan describes a range of activities (large and small) in terms of projects.

Chairs proposed that the work plan be reformatted to so that on-going activities relating to sustainable agriculture, biodiversity planning, climate change and indigenous land and sea management be reflected as themes rather than projects and that there be a limited number of priority projects.

The Executive Officer reported on the implications arising from changes in the Australian Government's decision to support only one conference from the NLP budget in future years. Profits from NRM Regions Knowledge Conference have supported the NRM Regions Australia budget for the past 4 years. In future years we will work with the National Landcare Networks and Landcare Australia Limited in hosting the National Landcare Conference and this will have a direct impact on funds to support the national work program.

#### *2016/17 NRM Regions Australia Work Plan Priorities*

Discussion centred on the review of the National Landcare Programme and the need to sustain a major effort to engage with Ministers/officials and communicate regional NRM organisations achievements. We

need to demonstrate to the incoming government the value that we add to their policy agendas. Chairs recognised that this may require additional contributions from regions.

Chairs also considered how they can help with progressing the national agenda and agreed to the concept of “Chair Champions” for a number of themes and projects:

- Mariyon Slany (Perth NRM) offered to champion the communications effort;
- Neville Goodwin (Port Phillip and Westernport CMA) offered to champion the indigenous land and sea management effort;
- John Brisbin (Southern Gulfs NRM) and Tanzi Smith (Burnett Mary Regional NRM Group) offered to champion the development of the of a national NRM Knowledge portal based on the NRM Regions Australia web-site.

Chairs, in noting the number of Chairs/deputy Chairs attending their first Forum, commented on the professional development opportunity the Forum provides for Board members. There was general agreement that NRM Regions Australia should consider expanding Forum participation to include younger Board members and also investigate mentoring opportunities.

*Official closing comments Max Kitchell Handover for the 2017 Forum to be hosted by the Victorian Chairs*  
Max Kitchell closed the Forum and announced that the Victorian CMA Chairs will host the 2017 Forum.



## 2016 National NRM Regions Chairs' Forum Delegate List

### Organisation

National Landcare Network	Jim	Adams
Natural Resources Alinytjara Wilurara	Parry	Aguis
LLS Board of Chairs	Alexandra	Anthony
Riverina Local Land Services	Sam	Archer
Terrain	Mike	Berwick
WWF	Josh	Bishop
OceanWatch	Geoff	Blackburn
North West Local Land Services	Conrad	Bolton
Northern Gulf Resource Management Group	John	Brisbin
WA Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Kathleen	Broderick
Murray Local Land Services	Richard	Bull
North Coast Local Land Services	Mark	Bulley
Goulburn - Broken Catchment Management Authority	Murray	Chapman
North Central Catchment Management Authority	David	Clark
Wentworth Group of Concerned Scientists	Peter	Cosier
North East Catchment Management Authority	Lyn	Coulson
Department of Environment	Katrina	Cuskelly
South Coast NRM Inc.	Carolyn	Daniel
LLS Board of Chairs	Tim	de Mestre
Wimmera Catchment Management Authority	Karen	Douglas
Queensland's Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Andrew	Drysdale
Torres Strait Regional Authority	Joseph	Elu
NSW Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Tim	Ferraro
Glenelg - Hopkins Catchment Management Authority	Antony	Ford
Reef Catchments	Craig	Fraser
South West Catchments Council Inc	David	Gardner
Central West Local Land Services	Tom	Gavel
RemarkableNRM	John	Gavin
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Ian	Gibson
Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority	Neville	Goodwin

## Organisation

Department of Environment	Sarah	Gowland
Department of Agriculture and Water	Adrienne	Hallam
First Person Consulting	Dan	Healy
	Robert	Hill
Hunter Local Land Services	Susan	Hooke
National Landcare Network	Terry	Hubbard
Tasmania's Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Richard	Ingram
Department of Environment	Mitch	Jeffrey
Department of Environment	Kylie	Jonasson
NRM South Committee	Max	Kitchell
Corangamite Catchment Management Authority	Alice	Knight
Natural Resources Eyre Peninsula	Diana	Laube
Fitzroy Basin Association Inc	Ian	MacGibbon
Territory Natural Resource Management	Clare	Martin
Victoria's Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Neil	McCarthy
Condamine Alliance	Malcolm	McKay
Natural Resources SA Murray Darling Basin	Deana	Mildren
South East Local Land Services	David	Mitchell
Southern Gulf Catchments Inc	Megan	Muchenberg
South West NRM Group Ltd	Mark	O'Brien
NRM Regions Australia Executive Officer	Danny	O'Neill
SA Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Stuart	Paul
Mallee Catchment Management Authority	Sharyon	Peart
Cradle Coast NRM Committee	Rick	Rockliff
Western Local Land Services	Marie	Russell
Green Collar	James	Schutz
Department of Environment	Nathan	Sibley
Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges	Rachael	Siddall
Perth Region NRM Inc	Mariyon	Slany
Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management Inc	Tanzi	Smith
South East Queensland Catchments	Robert	Smith
Natural Resources Northern and Yorke	Eric	Sommerville
NQ Dry Tropics Group Inc	Mark	Stoneman
Queensland Murray Darling Committee Inc	Noel	Strohfeld

## Organisation

Wheatbelt NRM Council Inc.	Jim	Sullivan
Terrain	Carole	Sweatman
East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Peter	Veenker
North NRM Committee	James	Walch
Rangelands NRM Coordinating Group Inc.	Christopher	Williams
Northern Agricultural Catchments Council Inc	Jill	Wilson
ACT's Executive Officer to NRM Regions Australia	Tim	Wong

## Apologies

Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management Inc	Tony	Ricciardi
Cape York NRM	Emma	Jackson
Desert Channels Group	Dominic	Burden
Reef Catchments	Royce	Bishop
Southern Gulf Catchments Inc	John	Taylor
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority	Angus	Hume
Victorian Catchment Management Council	Angus	Hume
South Coast NRM Inc.	Bill	Hollingsworth
Department of Environment	Kylie	Jonasson
Peel Harvey Catchment Council	Andy	Gulliver
Natural Resources Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges	Chris	Daniels
Natural Resources Kangaroo Island	Richard	Trethway
Natural Resources SA Arid Lands	Janet	Brook
Natural Resources SA Murray Darling Basin	Sharon	Starick
Natural Resources South East	Frank	Brennan
ACT NRM Council	Paul	Davies
Central Tablelands Local Land Services	Ian	Armstrong
Northern Tablelands Local Land Services	Hans	Hietbrink
Western Local Land Services	Tom	Hynes
Department of Agriculture and Water	Ian	Thompson