

17th National NRM Chairs Forum Report

NRM Futures – the Next Steps

Hovell Tree Inn, Albury, - 21 and 22 November 2019

The 17th National NRM Regions Chairs' Forum was held in Albury on the 21 & 22 November 2019. It was preceded the 7th National NRM Knowledge Conference held in Wodonga from 18 to 20 November 2019, working closely with North East Catchment Management Authority and Murray Local Land Services. 39 of Australia's 54 regional NRM organisations attended (see delegate list).

The 2019 Forum aimed to:

- Review progress from the Darwin Forum, in developing a national NRM Framework that provides the context for natural resource management, the role of regional NRM organisations and role of our national body, NRM Regions Australia;
- Consider how we configure our national arrangements to best support our member organisations;
- Be briefed on progress with NRM Regions Australia's major projects and work;
- Discuss the model for NRM Regions Australia to become a legal entity (National Working Group of Chairs);
- Review the outcomes of the 2019 National NRM Knowledge Conference's *Call to Action*;
- Establish priorities for NRM Regions Australia annual work program.

Welcome to Country

A formal Welcome to Country was made at the start of the week, by Allan Murray, a Yorta Yorta and Dhudhuroa people elder, at the opening of the Knowledge Conference. Emma Jackson, Chair of NRM Regions Australia and Chair of Cape York NRM, acknowledged the traditional owners of the lands on which the Forum was held and paid respect to the elders past and present.

Forum Opening

Emma Jackson introduced Leanne Mulcahy (North East CMA) and David Wolfenden (Murray Local Land Services) as joint hosts – both welcomed Chairs to the Forum.

Session 1: The latest in climate change and what it means for NRM

Professor Mark Howden, Director Climate Change Institute, ANU, joined the Forum by video link. Mark provided an overview of the latest IPCC report and the progress with meeting the Paris Agreement target of staying below the 1.5 degree increase by 2050. He reiterated the human cause of climate change and the potential impacts of temperature rising by 1.5 and 2 degrees. His emphasis was on early action by all nations to reduce emissions and illustrated the substantial challenges if we delayed action and still intended to achieve the Paris Agreement targets by 2050.

Session 2: State and Territory Reports

Chairs shared information about NRM initiatives in their jurisdictions since the last Forum. Key points raised included:

- **South Australia:** The Government has recently released a Blue Carbon Strategy for South Australia to help mitigate climate change by protecting seagrass meadows, saltmarshes and mangroves; the Government is also reviewing its NRM legislation through its *Towards Landscape SA* project. This reform program aims to enhance natural resources management across South Australia.

- **New South Wales:** Following the State Government elections in March 2019, a new Minister was appointed to oversee Local Land Services (LLS) and increased funding provided for the NSW Landcare Initiative (jointly run by Local Land Services and Landcare NSW), now \$22.5 million over the 2019 to 2022 period; drought and fire management dominate LLS activities in most parts of the State with staff assisting with stock management and fodder distribution in partnership with NSW Ag; climate change initiatives have also received increased attention with 35 new adaptation projects supported.
- **Western Australia:** NLP2 funding issues have now been resolved, but reduced funding means there is less activity in coastal regions, less community engagement and reduced scale of operations for NRM regions; the limited resources has highlighted challenges with working with WA landcare; and drought dominates NRM activities in WA.
- **Tasmania:** Thanked NRM Regions Australia for the very productive Knowledge Conference; acknowledged that much is happening at a State and city level in addressing climate change; drew attention to Tasmania's Climate Action 21 Report Card 2019; and noted the growing drought concerns facing farmers in the north central and north east of the state.
- **Victoria:** The Vic Catchments initiative (involving Chairs and CEOs of the Catchment Management Authorities and Government officials) continues to grow in stature and represents a strong collegiate approach in Victoria's NRM sector; the Victorian Government's *Our Catchment our Communities* \$40 million initiative is due for review in 2020; new relationships are being formed with Victorian Water Authorities who are required to offset their carbon emissions with CMAs being able to provide sequestration opportunities; the Victorian Government is continuing to support Drought employment initiatives where CMAs (and others) provide off-farm NRM type employment opportunities.
- **Territories:** the ACT is currently appointing its new NRM Council and the NT Chair sent her apologies due to a clash with the NT's annual NRM Conference and awards.

Session 3: NRM Regions Australia major projects 2018/19 and opportunities

Kate Andrews introduced this session, drawing attention to the significant 2018/19 engagement opportunities with the Australian Government around various NRM related programs. The report included the following projects:

Biosecurity

NRM Regions Australia secured two small national biosecurity contracts: To hold a national NRM and environmental biosecurity workshop and generate a report with suggested next steps; and to undertake a 'gap analysis' of NRM regional bodies involvement in plant health biosecurity and suggest opportunities. Both contracts were successfully undertaken (in a very short timeframe) with the help of some excellent consultants from the NRM and biosecurity sector. The reports have identified useful opportunities for NRM regional bodies and the Australian Government to work together on Biosecurity.

Agricultural Biodiversity Stewardship program

NRM Regions Australia has been engaging with the Department of Agriculture and the NFF in providing suggestions for program design and case-studies of stewardship programs run by regional organisations around the country. The four-year, \$34 million Agriculture Stewardship Package comprises: developing a national Agriculture Biodiversity Policy that aims to find alignment between the public and farm sector on what is biodiversity best practice; establishing an Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Pilot Program where grants will be available to incentivise the adoption of improved biodiversity practices on farms.

NRM Organisational Performance Excellence (OPE) Update

Chris Norman (CEO GBCMA) briefed Chairs' on the OPE project and of current work of the CEOs OPE working group. The review process uses an international convention for scoring NRM regional

organisational performance to allow valid benchmarking within and outside the NRM sector. The primary aim is for NRM Regional organisations to assess their own performance against a range of organisational performance criteria and use this information to drive continuous performance. There has been a strong interest in resuming the OPE work to demonstrate regional NRM Organisations governance development (and showing this to our investors). Since the project commenced in 2004, 67 reviews have been undertaken across all states. There has been a progressive increase in average total score since that time.

We have recently funded an update of the guide: *The Performance Excellence Guide for Regional Natural Resource Management Organisations* has recently been updated and NRM regions are being invited to undertake reviews. Please contact Chris Norman if your organisation would like to participate.

Industry and NRM Partnerships project with NFF and CRRDC

Fiona Johnson, consultant, briefed Chairs on the partnership project. The project originated from the MOU signed between NFF and NRM Regions Australia. Along with the Council of Rural RDCs we have collectively developed a proposal to progress NRM – Industry partnerships on the national level. This proposal secured \$460,000 funding from the Department of Agriculture. Work will focus on identifying successful partnerships between NRM and agricultural industries; identifying needs and opportunities; scoping and designing methods to fill needs; trial and support collaborations; share learnings.

Session 4: National Environmental Economic Accounts

Anthony Bennie, Director, Environmental-Economic Accounts, Department of the Environment and Energy, briefed the Forum on the background to a progress with National Environmental-Economic Accounts. In November 2017 Environment Ministers agreed that their governments would collaborate to work towards a common national approach to environmental-economic accounting. In April 2018 they released a strategy to deliver environmental-economic accounts for Australia. The focus to date has been on establishing the interjurisdictional steering committee to oversee the work and scoping work with key national agencies (ABS, ABARE, Geoscience Australia, CSIRO etc).

Session 5: Carbon Farming, the Climate Solutions Fund and Emissions Reduction Fund and NRM Regions Carbon Working Group

Sam Wagstaff (Department of the Environment and Energy) joined the Forum by video link and reported to the Chairs on progress with Emissions Reduction Fund. At the end of October 2019, there were 789 registered ERF projects that been issued a total of 69,247,398 Australian Carbon Credit Units. Of the 789 projects the majority related to NRM type activities (vegetation 445, agriculture 64 and savanna burning 76). The challenge for the fund is to increase the supply of ACCUs, particular as the next tranche of funding (\$2 billion) comes on-stream.

John Gavin, CEO Cape York NRM and Chairs of NRM Regions Carbon Working Group, followed up Sam's presentation with an outline of our efforts in contributing to the program design based on the importance of NRM plans. Our concerns include: a mechanism to help participating landholders where there is a problem; processes to pre-empt such problems; and a framework that enables greater participation and equity while minimising perverse outcomes.

Action: Kate Andrews to circulate copies of the presentations made to the Forum to Chairs

Session 6: Natural disasters and drought – impact of the current drought and building preparedness and resilience

Following a briefing from Kate Andrews on the current consultation relating to the draft Drought Resilience Funding Plan, Emma Jackson sought feedback from Chairs regarding matters NRM Regions Australia should raise in its submission to the consultation. Working in table groups Chairs identified key actions that we

could support (including actions that are not necessarily undertaken by regional NRM organisations) to enhance drought resilience:

- Facilitate sharing of experience
- Use GIS tools to assist with early de-stocking
- Act as an Information Hub
- Provide 1:1 emotional support
- A stronger feral animals and weed management effort prior to drought to minimise feral animal impact during drought (for example camels and deer)
- Promote early destocking to protect asset (land/grasses)
- Work with the community to provide support
- Share and promote information around successful initiatives such as Victoria's Drought Employment program
- Promote the development of Decision Support tools, for example tools that might project water availability
- Build on the work of Jacki Schirmer (University of Canberra) and her report for NRM Regions Australia
- We should be contributing to driving the R&D agenda
- Partnerships are a key strength of NRM Regions, and we should be working with rural industry groups (Grains, Dairy etc) in developing collaborative approaches

Action: NRM Regions Australia to circulate the table notes from this session to Chairs to assist with the development of individual regional and state collective submissions.

Session 7: Establishing a national legal entity for NRM Regions Australia

Chairs received a briefing from Emma Jackson and Chris Norman on the background to the proposal to establish NRM Regions Australia as a legal entity able to enter into contracts with governments to deliver agreed outcomes. They noted the evolution of NRM Regions Australia from a national body that was primarily focussed on organising annual Chairs' Forums to a group that is gaining national credibility and that actively contributes to national NRM policy and program development.

Chairs again worked in table groups and were asked to identify opportunities for a national NRM organisation. A summary of points raised in that discussion include:

- Ability to "legally connect" with other organisations and government agencies and to source philanthropic funds (e.g. Pew) with the aim securing increased funding/investment/R&D for NRM clients
- Capacity to deliver credible and consistent NRM advice to Australian Government policy and program development such as carbon markets and contribute regional expertise for national priorities, e.g. reef, rangelands etc
- Participate in national level R&D to inform policy
- Develop mature and effective partnerships with partners and collaborators
- Promote innovative concepts such as natural capital and social capital
- Improve cross border collaboration in general and provide support (hosting opportunities) for landscape scale groups of regional NRM organisations (e.g. Rangelands could be an affiliate member), and other emerging cross jurisdictional initiatives
- Facilitate sharing of staff and skills, e.g. secondments across jurisdictions to fill short and long term vacancies when projects start or change (great for staff and great for delivering on project milestones)

- Convene and run specialised events and conferences to support sharing of information to improve productivity of regions
- Strengthening our ability to work with Government and Opposition parties in developing NRM policies
- Supporting members to engage with their jurisdictional governments through sharing initiatives from across Australia
- Capacity to promote NRM as a brand nationwide

Session 8: Legal Entity discussion (continued)

The first session on Friday morning reviewed the previous afternoon discussions on establishing a legal entity. The following motion was put to the Forum:

That NRM Regions Australia become a legal entity as a company limited by guarantee and that a draft constitution for NRM Regions Australia be developed

Moved: David Wolfenden

Seconded: Angus Hume

The motion was carried unanimously.

The table group discussions identified detailed points to be considered by in developing the constitution and levy structure. Chairs were keen to progress the matter quickly and suggested NRM Regions Australia set 1 July 2020 as the date for the new entity to become operational.

Session 9: Knowledge Conference Call to Action

Chris Norman and Emma Jackson presented the draft *Call to Action* developed over the course of the 7th National NRM Knowledge Conference. Following discussion Chairs proposed the following points be considered in finalising the Call to Action:

- Who is the audience – what is it for?
- Is it a crisis or a challenge facing us?
- Needs to be outward looking (these statements feel inward looking).
- A vision and/or big audacious statement/goal is needed upfront (e.g. NFF \$100 billion production goal, carbon neutral by 2050.... etc) is required
- What is our role/value proposition? (e.g. community engagement is the key to our national coverage).

Session 10: Establishing priorities for the 2019/20 work program

In addition to the major projects already covered at the Forum, the establishment of the legal entity and the on-going partnership efforts at the National level (e.g. Landcare), Chairs noted the following emerging issues that NRM Regions Australia could contribute to:

- The development of the National Soils Strategy
- Review of the EPBC Act
- Draft a framework paper for documenting risks and true costs of decline in resource base
- Develop and enhance a National Partnership Strategy for engagement with indigenous communities in regard to NRM – use the “Regional Action Plan” process
- Explore role for NRM Regions to assist Australian Government deliver natural disaster/emergency recovery and restoration activities (offering shared national expertise)
- Explore feasibility for NRM Regions Australia to become an aggregator for Carbon Abatement Programs through accreditation and capacity building

- Explore potential roles for NRM Regions Australia to contribute to, or partner in' infrastructure projects relevant to NRM

Forum Close

Emma Jackson thanked all presenters and Chairs for their contribution to the Forum and reported that NRM Regions Australia will advise Chairs of the venue for the 2020 Forum.

Chairs thanked Emma Jackson for her contribution to a very successful 2019 Forum and preceding Knowledge Conference.

Forum Delegates

Allison	Hatker	South East Local Land Services
Richard	Bull	Local Land Services
Susan	Madden	Central West Local Land Services
Ian	Rogan	Central Tablelands Local Land Services
Barney	Hyams	Riverina Local Land Services
Lindy	Hyam	Hunter Local Land Services
Julie	Miller Markoff	North Central CMA
Bob	Smith	North Coast Local Land Services
Hans	Hietbrink	Northern Tablelands Local Land Services
David	Wolfenden	Murray Local Land Services
Conrad	Bolton	North West Local Land Services
Margie	Milgate	Healthy Land and Water
Julie	Boyd	Reef Catchments
Les	Tyrell	NQ Dry Tropics
Megan	Munchenberg	Southern Gulf NRM
Keith	Noble	Terrain NRM
Andrew	Drysdale	Desert Channels Queensland
Emma	Jackson	Cape York NRM
Sean	Conaghan	Fitzroy Basin Association
Mark	Whitfield	Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board
Kristy	Richards	Alinytjara Wilurara NRM Board
Andrew	Heinrich	Kangaroo Island NRM Board
Peter	Voller	Cradle Coast NRM
Pamela	Allan	NRM North
Andrew	Scanlon	NRM South
Angus	Hume	Victorian Catchment Management Council
Alice	Knight	Corangamite CMA
Leanne	Mulcahy	North East CMA
Shayron	Peart	Mallee CMA
Peter	Jennings	West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
Antony	Ford	Glenelg Hopkins CMA
Peter	Hilbig	Wimmera CMA
Les	McLean	Port Phillip & Westernport CMA
Julie	Miller Markoff	North Central CMA
Helen	Reynolds	Goulburn Broken CMA
Bruce	Hegge	Perth NRM
Robert	Keogh	Northern Agricultural Catchments Council
Carolyn	Daniel	South Coast Natural Resource Management
Debra	Rule	Wheatbelt NRM Inc
Officers and Guest		
Kate	Andrews	NRM Regions Australia
Danny	O'Neill	NRM Regions Australia
Chris	Norman	Goulburn Broken CMA

John	Gavin	Cape York NRM
Tony	Baker	Vic Catchments
Fiona	Johnson	Consultant
Anthony	Bennie	Department of the Environment and Energy
Tatia	Currie	Alinytjara Wilurara NRM Board
Ian	Heiner	NRM Regions Queensland
Gary	Rodda	Local Land Services