

16th National NRM Chairs Forum | Report

DoubleTree by Hilton, The Esplanade, Darwin - 21 and 22 May 2018

The 16th National NRM Regions Chairs' Forum was held in Darwin on the 21 & 22 May 2018 and was hosted by Territory Natural Resource Management. Forty-four of Australia's 56 regional NRM organisations attended.

The Forum aimed to: guide progress with developing a national framework for NRM to serve Australia for the next 20 years; create opportunities for networking between Chairs; hear from national partners and; be briefed on Northern Territory NRM work.

The program also provided briefings for delegates on global drivers and how they affect NRM, along with briefings from the science sector on how they can contribute to NRM regional organisations. Developments in our national partnerships were also featured, including the signing of a Heads of Agreement with Geoscience Australia and the signing of an addendum to our MOU with the National Landcare Network.

Welcome to Country

Bilawara Lee, a Larrakia Elder and Board member of Territory NRM provided the Welcome to Country.

Bilawara provided an inspirational "welcome to country" address. The Larrakia people are the traditional owners of the land and waters of the greater Darwin region, including Darwin Peninsula, the Cox Peninsula, most of Gunn Point, rural Darwin, Darwin harbor and adjacent Islands and land west of the Howard River. There are approximately 2,000 Larrakia people living in the Darwin region.

Bilawara described her people's strong cultural, economic and spiritual relationship with the land and sea, and although boundaries extend up to 50 km inland Larrakia people are often referred to as the Saltwater People. The relationship with country is deep and spiritual, there is no aboriginal word for ownership. The natural environment is created by mother earth and owning land is like saying you own your mother – land is for air, food, culture spirit and identity.

Forum Opening

Clare Martin, Chair of Territory NRM, welcomed Chairs to the Territory. She noted the apologies of NRM Regions Australia Chair, Parry Agius. Claire provided an overview of the unique NRM challenges facing the Territory driven by its vast area, different climate zones, small population base and a high proportion of indigenous land ownership. NRM issues of particular importance include feral animal and weed management.

Session 1: Territory NRM Showcase

Karen May, CEO of Territory NRM introduced the Territory NRM Showcase.

Territory Conservation Agreements - Alan Roe, Program Manager, Territory NRM

The Territory Conservation Agreements (TCAs) is a flagship initiative of TNRM. The program began in 2011 to promote off-reserve conservation of habitats for threatened species and under-represented Territory bioregions. It has evolved into a mechanism that encompasses relatively large sites with ecological values. While the focus is fostering conservation on pastoral lands and mainstreaming conservation into the management of working properties, there are related initiatives e.g. crocodile management.

TCAs are voluntary agreements between Territory NRM and landholders to develop and implement conservation plans. They are supported by contracts committing the landholder to implement management actions for 10 years. The TCAs are not registered on property title or binding upon future owners. The selection process begins with a call for EOIs. These are assessed against a range of criteria including the ecological value of the site, the proposed work plan and the monitoring regime.

By the end of 2017, 43 TCAs have been established covering 55,146 hectares (12% of all NT pastoral leaseholds participate in the program). Empowerment of landholders has been critical. If the conservation works do not incur costs to landholders then the works remain in place – TNRM are not aware of any lapses, despite some properties changing ownership.

Indigenous NRM Traineeship Overview – various presenters

TNRM recognises the vital role of indigenous organisations and ranger groups have in managing country. In partnership with those groups TNRM (in 2014) established a traineeship program that allows trainees to graduate with nationally recognised qualifications that complements their knowledge, skills and confidence. Delegates were briefed by current trainees on the value of the program.

Moth Mob – productive partnerships, student investigations and community arts integration. Kate Harden

The project focussed on the Atlas Moth, a threatened species in the Northern Territory - where its conservation status is listed as vulnerable. The project involved students from the Berry Springs Primary School (the Moth Mob) and encouraged them to ask questions about the moth. An innovative “Chilli Question Matrix” was developed to encourage students to be creative/imaginative in their questions about the moth. The project also encompassed many other innovations – recording food plant observations, holding an Atlas Moth Masquerade Disco, developing a community arts display to inform the wider community; developing a children’s story book to tell the Atlas Moth story, a song (I’ll Fly Away). The Moth Mob received the 2017 Territory Junior Landcare Award in 2017.

Finniss-Reynolds Catchment Group Project – Land Managers collaborating at the landscape scale to manage invasive species. Susanne Casanova, Territory NRM

The project area covers 5,500 square kilometres within the Western Top End region (about 100 km south west of Darwin). Land use includes Indigenous land, pastoral properties, national parks, crown land, weekender blocks, and rural residential blocks. The Finniss-Reynolds Catchment Group (winner of the 2015 NT Landcare Award for the best community group) has established a catchment weed management plan and focus their efforts on reducing the infestation of *Mimosa pigra* and feral pigs to protect the three sites of Conservation Significance within the catchment. The group’s efforts (covering information, incentives, training) are supported by a Technical Advisory Group and coordinated by a project officer.

The catchment group has been able to use its work to leverage other projects, for example NTG Aboriginal Ranger Grants and collaboration with external researchers on projects such as pig collaring. The group has been able to demonstrate significant outcomes, for example its Werat case study shows 815 ha reduction in mimosa impact.

Session 2: The National Landcare Program

Delegates discussed the NLP2 tender outcomes and implications for their jurisdictions. Most regional NRM organisation were invited to proceed to the second round. Detailed negotiations will now take place on the costs and outputs of the proposals. A small number of regions (and their jurisdictional governments) are however in discussion with Australian Government officials regarding their original proposals.

Chairs discussed the drivers behind the tendering approach and recognised the challenges before commonwealths NLP agencies (Department of Environment and Energy and the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources) in justifying to central agencies why the NLP grants are not competitively tendered. In reporting back on progress with NLP2, delegates, recognising the need for confidentiality as the process is on-going, reported on challenges with the process:

- All jurisdictions noted the substantial costs in preparing the tenders.
- The process challenges the partnership model that is important to regional NRM – regional NRM organisations are constrained in their communications with the Australian Government (a major partner) during the tendering process due to probity considerations, some delegates commented on the process resulting in more formal relationships with other partners;
- Positive outcomes from the process included the Australian Government being required to specify the outputs/outcomes they require and for the regional NRM organisations to justify why they are well placed to cost/effectively deliver these outcomes;
- One concern raised during the tendering process was the proposal for payment in arrears for the successful tenders. For many regional NRM organisations this presents a significant cashflow challenge. The concern has been raised with Australian Government officials and discussions are on-going.

Session 3: NRM in the 21st Century: Global drivers, risks & opportunities – What does it mean for NRM?

Global drivers, risks & opportunities – the next 20 years? Emily Gerrard (Environmental policy and law specialist, Comhar Group)

Emily provided the keynote address for this session. She covered Climate change and the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, and related developments and drivers that impact on the work of regional NRM organisations.

The Paris Agreement (Conference of the Parties - COP 21), agreed to work towards 'limiting the increase in global average temperature to 'well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels'. The aim is to reach peak greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and then rapid reductions to achieve net zero emissions in the second half of this century. Each country is required to identify their National Determined Contributions (NDC) on how they will meet these commitments. The Rule Book requires details to operationalise the agreement and this will be considered by COP 24 (to be held later this year).

Emily noted other international drivers that impact on the work of regional NRM organisations. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals established by the UN in 2015. These (17) goals require action by all nations (unlike the 2000 Millennium Development Goals that focussed on developing countries). Three of the goals relate to outcomes that NRMs are directly involved with: Life on Land; Life Below Water; Climate Actions. Regional NRM has a strong interest in several other goals – Clean Water & Sanitation; Sustainable Cities and Communities Partnerships for the Goals and; Decent Work and Economic Growth.

She also drew attention to the work of Australia's indigenous peoples in responding to the climate change challenge, noting their responsibility for managing over 30% of Australia's land mass. Emily concluded by commenting on the role of regulation, markets and the government's National Energy Guarantee (NEG) in achieving climate change goals (many jurisdictions argue that NEG should also address emissions from power generation and this may provide impetus for land sector carbon opportunities).

Panel Discussion - What is happening in response?

A panel of experts was invited to respond to the challenges presented by Emily. Key points from their presentations included:

'Natural Capital' - Stephanie Russo, Manager, Natural Capital, National Australia Bank

Stephanie outlined the National Australia Bank approach to natural capital. The bank recognises the significant challenges to economic prosperity from the degradation of natural capital and the opportunities for investing in building our natural capital. NAB has a Natural Value program that seeks to promote natural value across agribusiness bankers, support the NAB's Natural Capital Declaration and develop opportunities to integrate

natural capital considerations into credit risk decisions. The strategy is built on understanding the linkages and dependencies of natural capital upon customers, operations and supply chains. It is founded upon integrating this understanding into NAB products, services and building capability within NAB networks.

'Indigenous land sector development' - Ricky Archer, Northern Australia Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)

Ricky covered the role of NAILSMA (an Indigenous led not-for-profit company operating across north Australia). It has adopted a "culture-based" economy approach that aims to build resilience in northern communities by enabling Indigenous people to engage in the market economy and at the same time value and strengthen their own cultural values, beliefs and practices. It is focused on improving outcomes in existing industries and growing new emerging economies. Ricky outlined the role played by the Northern Australia Indigenous Experts Forum in promoting economic development and the opportunities for greater integration of natural resource management with economic development.

'Reef Credits' – Keith Noble, Chair, Terrain NRM, Qld

Keith outlined the Reef Credit Initiative. This is an innovative, market-based approach to drive improvement in water quality in the Great Barrier Reef catchments. Farmers and other land managers can earn income through activities that improve water quality and reduce the environmental impact on the Reef. The initiative is a partnership between Terrain NRM and other Reef catchment NRM organisations and the private sector (GreenCollar) and was launched in August 2017 by Queensland's Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection, the Hon. Dr Stephen Miles.

Credits are issued to projects based on expertly designed methodologies that calculate or model the reduction of sediment and/or nutrients and pesticides flowing onto the Great Barrier Reef due to land management change activities such as revegetation, riverbank stabilisation, reduction of nitrogen runoff and general system repair. Reef Credits can then be sold to government, industry and other organisations with an interest in saving the Great Barrier Reef. Keith noted that the approach delivers on the ecosystems services concept and helps develop the role of regional NRM organisations as "honest brokers".

'Beef Industry Sustainability Framework' - Pip Band, Program Manager, Industry Sustainability Framework, MLA

Pip outlined the Australian Beef Sustainability Framework and the need for a conversation on how industry can work effectively with regional NRM organisations. The Framework defines sustainable beef production and addresses priorities of major domestic and global stakeholders. The development of the Framework involved consultation with 25 industry groups and 36 external stakeholders at face to face meetings.

The result was an agreed definition of sustainability; (...the production of beef in a manner that is socially, environmentally and economically responsible. They do this through the care of natural resources, people and the community, the health and welfare of animals, and the drive for continuous improvement); and the identification of four themes (welfare, economic, environment and community) leading to 23 priority areas for action and 52 indicators to measure progress. Of these priority areas, six have been given priority, and two of these relate directly to regional NRM; the balance of tree and grass cover and managing climate risk. These comprise the frameworks Environmental Stewardship effort and MLA is keen to work with NRM regions to establish appropriate baseline data and actions to address the stewardship goals.

Panel Workshop - What is happening in response?

Chairs circulated between individual speakers to question and discuss in more detail the speaker's work and implications for NRM regions. Detailed notes were recorded from this session and will be considered by NRM Regions Australia in framing its 2018/19 work program. Key matters raised by Chairs included:

- Selling what NRM regions do and our potential to link R&D organisations and communities

- Progressing an MOU with MLA
- Acknowledge the diversity of NRM regional organisations across Australia – but how do we become trusted advisors to government? Is there a role in being the regional honest broker (providing verification/certification of local actions, off-sets etc)
- Potential for scaling up the Reef Credits concept to become a national program
- Honest broker role in relation to indigenous communities R&D and new development initiatives, and supporting the development of a national indigenous research program
- Looking to overseas at experiences with other funding investment models (e.g. the UK)

Our guest speakers reported on a very positive session and welcomed both the opportunity to engage with the Chairs and to respond to their insightful questions.

The Carbon Industry and NRM

The national picture - Brad Kerin, General Manager and Company Secretary the Carbon Market Institute (CMI)

Brad briefed delegates on the role of the CMI in assisting businesses to seize opportunities in the evolving carbon markets. The CMI is independent and non-partisan. It is the peak industry body for climate change and business. Its focus areas include opportunities in land and agriculture, natural resources, industry, finance, and professional services. It also plays a critical role in influencing government policy and program design by facilitating connections between business, policy makers and thought leaders.

The Paris Agreement (2015) represents the latest international commitment to reduce carbon emissions. Australia is a party to that Agreement. The use of market-based approaches such as emissions trading and carbon pricing is a core part of the global policy architecture for business to effectively achieve mitigation challenges. Over 90 countries have indicated they will use market mechanisms to meet their NDC.

Brad outlined the types of emerging carbon markets. For example: sectoral markets illustrated by Civil Aviation Organisations and their desire to achieve carbon neutral growth; countries putting a price on carbon (pricing instruments cover 8GtCO₂ at a value of US\$52 billion); and the growing demand for offsets from sub-national jurisdictions (where they put a price on carbon and look to purchase credit credits).

Central to Australia's approach is the Emissions Reduction Fund and its Safeguard Mechanisms (due to come into effect post 2020). Reporting from the 155 responsible emitters (those entities that emit over 100,000 tonnes of CO₂e annually) commenced in late 2017. These entities can either purchase or retire Australian Carbon Credit Units (ACCUs) to meet their commitments. A secondary market for trading in emissions reduction could emerge.

The Australian Government's National Energy Guarantee (NEG) also has potential implications for the carbon market – because of the commitment to increase generation efficiency which will drive down emissions. Brad concluded his presentation by outlining the Carbon Farming Roadmap developed by the CMI, which has the potential to deliver 360 to 480 MtCO₂e abatements, over \$12 billion in revenue and over 10,500 jobs (plus environmental co-benefits).

[Update from NRM Regions Australia 's National Carbon Working Group](#)

John Gavin, executive support to NRM Regions Australia's Carbon Working Group briefed delegates on the activities of the Working Group over 2017/18. NRM regions are being seen by government and industry as an important partner in land sector carbon abatement projects. The Working Group has held workshops to brief government officers, contributed to various public consultations relating to the EMF, Climate Authority work and the development of new soil carbon methodologies. They also worked closely with the Carbon Market Institute in developing a Code of Practice for Carbon Project Developers which is about to be launched.

Delegates noted that this work is on-going and will be progressed during 2018/19. New initiatives are also proposed: develop a position paper on what happens after/beyond the ERF, with secondary market development and recognition of co-benefits; and expanding the working group communications with NRM Regions on the activities regarding the ERF and broader GHG emissions reductions.

The next generation and NRM – Emma Jackson, Chair, Cape York NRM

Emma challenged delegates to consider what would happen if we failed to pass on our knowledge in a way that the next generation understands – many of our NRM gains could be potentially lost. Emma outlined the many social media tools available that help communicate with the younger generation. She introduced her blog site “the Cape Crusader” and illustrated the extensive links to other platforms and the importance of having substantial visual material on the blog. Local newspapers are also important in getting the message out and this requires building strong relationships with local editors etc. Delegates acknowledged the importance of social media and shared information on campaigns being run in their regions/jurisdictions.

Session 4: NRM in the 21st Century - Science, data & information

Centre for Invasive Species Solutions (CISS) - partnering with NRM - Andreas Glanznig, CEO, Centre for Invasive Species Solutions

Andreas stressed the importance of innovation through national collaboration and how this builds on the work of the CISS predecessor, the Invasive Animals CRC. CISS members cover all jurisdiction governments, the CSIRO and MAL. Its partners include universities and industry bodies. Policy drivers for CISS include the 22 National EIC RD&E Priorities, 2016-2020 and the “invasion curve” which prioritises cost effective prevention, eradication and containment interventions.

Andreas provided examples of CISS work under five program areas: Incursions, Integrated Landscape Management, Biocontrol, Management Systems and Tools and Community Engagement & Education. These examples included the release of rabbit biocontrol agent RHDV1 K5; the development a Community-led regional planning and management platforms such as “wild Dog Scan” and other tools such as remote digital sensing systems to track wild dogs. Andreas concluded his presentation by outlining how NRM Regions Australia might contribute to the design, trialling and adoption CISS projects.

Remote sensing and data disruptor – Digital Earth Australia and what next? Dr Stuart Minchin, Chief of Environmental and Geoscience Division, Geoscience Australia.

Stuart briefed Chairs on the capabilities of Geoscience Australia. Following the rapid deployment of satellites Geoscience Australia has been investing in Digital Earth Australia (DEA), a world-class digital infrastructure that uses satellite data to detect detailed physical changes across Australia. It identifies soil and coastal erosion, crop growth, water quality and changes to cities and regions.

Stuart used the work on vegetation cover mapping to illustrate the usefulness of the time series data sets to showing landscape scale changes (he provided a live example of vegetation cover change for Pittong, west of Ballarat in Victoria).

The presentation was followed by signing of a Heads of Agreement between Geoscience Australia and NRM Regions Australia – Dr Stuart Minchin and Clare Martin (on behalf of NRM Regions Australia). The Heads of Agreement sets out a framework for collaboration between Geoscience Australia and NRM Regions Australia.

Environmental Economic Accounting: A Common National Approach Strategy and Action Plan

Kate Andrews presented the briefing on behalf of Sarah Jane Hindmarsh (Department of Environment and Energy) who was a late apology due to a flight cancellation.

In April 2018 Commonwealth, State and Territory environment ministers released a Strategy for a common national approach to environmental-economic accounting. The Strategy sets out a five-year action plan to

achieve nationally consistent implementation of the United Nations System of Environmental-Economic Accounts as well as a set of coherent, comprehensive and integrated national accounts.

These accounts will deliver information that improves the community's understanding of the value and condition of the environment and its contribution to our economy and quality of life. They will assist NRMs in more clearly demonstrating the value of their work because they connect environmental extent and condition to social and economic information. This will provide a clearer picture of the impact and value of natural resource management for Australia's wellbeing.

Next steps will involve consultation on the action plan, developing a work program for account development and establishing the governance arrangements which will help deliver the strategy. NRM Regions Australia will be consulted on the action plan and will be invited to be part of a Stakeholder Reference Group to inform how accounts are developed and used. The Australian Government wants feedback from NRMs on the action plan, the role we could play, our information needs and support required to build and use accounts.

Session 5: NRM in the 21st Century - Our growing partnerships

The future of Landcare - Peter Bridgewater, Chair, National Landcare Network.

Peter's presentation covered the changing perspectives of Landcare over its 30-year history (initially seen as a program about restorative work - repairing the paddock, the bush, our coasts and waterways and regarded by Green NGOs as "farm stuff"). While the focus remains in the outback, there has been a strong growth of Landcare in peri-urban environments. Peter drew attention to the new challenges facing the world covered by the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Four of these are directly relevant to Landcare/NRM common purpose - Clean Water, Climate Action, Life Below Water and Life on Land (but there are four other goals that also relate to our common purpose as well as Goal 17 stressing the importance of partnerships).

Peter proposed that Landcare, whether the NLN, LAL, or NRM organisations, have the important task of working together to persuade the Australian community, and, through them, the Australian Government(s) of the need to **repair and care for the country** that supports us all.

Peter described the structure of NLN and progress with the NLN/LAL merger which has involved two workshops of the joint Boards (March and April 2018) to identify and resolve key differences. The next stage in the process is the development of a detailed implementation plan, but due to other on-going commitments of both organisations, this will not be completed by the end of June. Peter concluded his presentation with the joint signing (with Clare Martin as the NRM Regions Australia representative) of an addendum to the NRM/NLN Statement of Common purpose.

Victoria's Landcare MOU

Angus Hume briefed delegates on the recent MOU between Vic Catchments and Landcare Victoria Inc designed to strengthen natural resource management in Victoria. The agreement heralds a new and consolidated partnership arrangement to promote and bind ongoing natural resource management and sustainable agriculture. Catchment Management Authorities across the state have enjoyed a positive relationship with Landcare over the past 20 years and this agreement will strengthen that into the future.

Session 6: NRM in the 21st Century - Our National NRM system for the next 20 years

Kate Andrews introduced this workshop session. She noted there is no comprehensive and coherent Natural Resource Management framework or system at the national level. This is a barrier to: achieving long-term meaningful NRM outcomes; improving how we do NRM and the impact of investment; and justifying investment in NRM (as shown each time we transition to a new program). It is also a barrier to developing all components of the system required to achieve Australia's NRM goals.

Justifying NRM investment to central agencies is difficult. We need further evidence, in many forms, to show why NRM is important – whether economic modelling of contribution to agricultural productivity or illustrations of contribution to regional community resilience.

Kate presented a “framework” for building a National NRM system (key steps are: Identification of Problems and Opportunities; map of the NRM system; our “asks” and evidence to support our efforts). Delegates, working in table groups, reviewed and provided feedback on the “Framework”. Kate explained that the framework was itself not to be used to communicate publicly but was our internal logic for proceeding with our push for a national policy and improved NRM system.

Workshop outcomes. Detailed recommendations were made on the Framework and this information was recorded for consideration by NRM Regions Australia. Key points included:

- Strong support for the approach and its effort to provide an overarching framework;
- The importance of communication, marketing and branding – NRM is not well understood;
- Building into the framework additional science partnership opportunities outlined earlier in the Forum;
- Recognition that progressing the framework, developing our “asks” etc may require greater resourcing from NRM regions.

Session 7: Future Priorities and establishing the 2018/19 work plan

Kate Andrews introduced the NRM Regions Australia report with delegates noting the significant achievements over the past 12 months and the proposed changes to NRM Regions Australia’s terms of reference that will enable the appointment of an independent deputy Chair.

Danny O’Neill, the Forum’s recorder, outlined the key points arising from the Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning workshop sessions. These will be presented to NRM Regions Australia for consideration with respect to the 2018/19 work program.

Forum Close

Clare Martin 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 2019 Forum.

Chairs expressed their appreciation to Clare and the Territory NRM team for their contribution to a very successful 2018 Forum.