



NRM Regions Australia Submission on the Biodiversity Assessment Instrument

October 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Biodiversity Assessment Instrument (BAI) for the Nature Repair Market.

NRM Regions Australia is the national peak body of Australia's 54 regional NRM (natural resource management) organisations. Our members work with land managers, diverse groups and industries across Australia to manage our land, water, coast, plants and animals for the benefit of people, environment and industries.

Regional NRM organisations have been leading and delivering projects that benefit biodiversity for over 20 years. Our members plan, partner, and deliver programs that support healthy and productive land, viable communities and sustainable industries. They work from the paddock to the regional scale to address issues that require a landscape perspective. This includes through informing and supporting on-ground conservation and environmental restoration programs, delivery of programs to build community capacity in NRM, and engagement with governments and other stakeholders on issues requiring a broader perspective, such as management of biosecurity risks. All regional NRM organisations have a regional NRM plan that describes the NRM priorities for that region.

The place-based information developed through regional NRM planning can help support the development of projects that consider local environmental, economic and social contexts, whilst delivering effective environmental outcomes, avoiding perverse outcomes, and reducing risk. With the BAI prescribing requirements for methods, which in turn set conditions for projects, in our view the BAI should require all methods to consider alignment with regional NRM plans wherever possible.

We wish to draw your attention to the tight timeframes for the consultation on the method, and Nature Repair Market consultation in general. The consultation on this method comes immediately after the consultation on the Nature Repair Market Rules, and simultaneously with the consultation on the Biodiversity Assessment Instrument (BAI) and the Ecological Knowledge Systems (EKS) report. Given the importance of the method, the BAI and the EKS to the operation of the Nature Repair Market, there would be value in providing further opportunity for consultation ahead of finalisation of these key pieces of work.

Please find our responses to the consultation questions below.

1. Is the biodiversity assessment instrument an appropriate means of achieving consistency in how methods describe biodiversity ?

- Our understanding of the proposed Biodiversity Assessment Instrument is for it to prescribe requirements for what methods must contain for assessing biodiversity and its change, with an aim of enabling potential buyers of certificates to compare aspects of projects under different methods.
- We agree that having an instrument that enables comparison of projects under different methods in a consistent way is valuable.
- NRM Regions Australia particularly supports the inclusion within the BAI of requiring methods to set provisions for projects to assess and describe broader landscape and seascape benefits (section 2.7). We note that wherever specified by methods, the information supporting these claims needs to be backed up by evidence. Where included, any reference to broader landscape benefits should be informed by and aligned with regional NRM plans.
- We support the requirements for all methods to assess the ecological condition of the project site, and the change arising from the project activities compared to a relevant reference site, considering ecosystem structure, function and composition. This will provide an important evidence base for assessing outcomes of nature repair project activities.

2. Does the biodiversity assessment instrument assist in ensuring that methods comply with the biodiversity integrity standards?

- NRM Regions Australia has no specific comment

3. Do you have any feedback on the scope of this biodiversity assessment instrument?

- Our understanding is that the BAI is intended to cover all methods under the Nature Repair Act (Part 2 - scope of this biodiversity assessment instrument, p22)
- In particular, NRM Regions Australia welcomes:
 - the inclusion of the BAI requirements for methods to contain conditions requiring project proponents to consider climate risk - both in identifying eligible project areas that may be subject to particular climate change impacts and thus will affect biodiversity outcomes, and how proponents plan to reduce risks of climate change impacts.
 - the inclusion of the BAI requirements for methods to contain conditions relating to consideration of certainty and confidence in project outcomes.

4. Do you have any feedback on the First Nations knowledge, values and data section of the biodiversity assessment instrument?

- NRM Regions Australia supports the consideration of First Nations knowledge, values and data within the biodiversity assessment instrument. NRM Regions Australia acknowledges the crucial role of First Nations in the Nature Repair Market, and the invaluable knowledge and contribution that First Nations bring to nature repair.
- It is appropriate that the BAI requires methods to contain conditions requiring project proponents to provide evidence of consent from appropriate First Nations representatives for the use of any First Nations knowledge or information, that

culturally appropriate approaches are being used, and how project design and implementation are informed by First Nations knowledge and values.

5. Do you have any feedback on the measuring and assessing change in biodiversity aspects of the biodiversity assessment instrument, including: establishing how to measure change in project biodiversity; monitoring, measuring and assessing biodiversity outcomes at the project area; and assessing and describing broader biodiversity benefits.

- We support the requirements for all methods to assess the ecological condition of the project site, and the change arising from the project activities compared to a relevant reference site, considering ecosystem structure, function and composition. This will provide an important evidence base for assessing outcomes of nature repair project activities.
- NRM Regions Australia supports in particular the inclusion of the BAI requirements for methods to contain conditions requiring project proponents to consider climate risk - both in identifying eligible project areas that may be subject to particular climate change impacts and thus will affect biodiversity outcomes, and how proponents plan to reduce risks of climate change impacts.
- The BAI should require methods to require projects to be informed by regional NRM plans wherever possible. This will help ensure that proposed projects align with landscape planning processes and other landscape investments

6. Do you have any feedback on the consistency and transparency aspects of the biodiversity assessment instrument, including: defining key terms and concepts; considering climate change; certainty and confidence; data suitability and sharing requirements

- Our understanding is that the BAI will define and interpret key terms within an appendix (section 2.1). As proposed it is not immediately clear if the key terms in the definitions provided in Appendix A is the full list, or just a subset example of what will be provided within the BAI. In its current form, the definitions appear extremely limited, with some key terms not included; for example, project area, project period, certainty, confidence, commitment to protection, culturally significant entities etc. If the intent of the BAI is to promote consistency across methods, a more comprehensive list of definitions would greatly assist in the development and interpretation of methods.
- As described above in this submission, NRM Regions Australia supports the consideration of climate risk, certainty and confidence.

7. Is the proposed Replanting Native Forest and Woodland Ecosystems method consistent with the biodiversity assessment instrument?

- No specific comments.

8. Do you have any other comments on the biodiversity assessment instrument?

- The place-based information developed through regional NRM planning could support the development of projects that consider local environmental, economic and social contexts, whilst delivering effective environmental outcomes, avoiding perverse outcomes, and reducing risk

- With the Biodiversity Assessment Instrument prescribing requirements for methods, which in turn set conditions for projects, the BAI should require all methods to be aligned with regional NRM plans, wherever possible
- Specifically, the proposed BAI requires methods to contain provisions to consider climate change, biodiversity characteristics (e.g. threats, capability of the area to support threatened species), and broader landscape and seascape outcomes- regional NRM plans and relevant supporting information held by regional NRM organisations can help inform these.
- We note the reference within the explanatory memorandum (para 429) to the Nature Repair Act, whereby the BAI may specify the need to “*consider existing documents relating to biodiversity at a local or landscape level, such as regional natural resource management plans*”

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission. We would be happy to discuss these points further. Please direct enquiries to NRM Regions Australia CEO Dr Kate Andrews at kate@nrmregionsaustralia.com.au or 0403 604 823.