Agriculture and the environment

Partnering in NRM

> **Collaboration with NRM organisations is so much more than a partnership. It's a group effort to grow strong and healthy ecosystems, communities and economies. NRM organisations are keen to work with all industries, to strengthen the regions, and create sustainable and liveable places.**
>
> Emma Jackson, Chair NRM Regions Australia

Collaboration is key to managing Australia's valuable natural resources — our land, water, soil, animals, plants and people.

Farmers, industry bodies and regional NRM groups across the country are working together to find practical land management solutions.

There are 54 regionally-based NRM groups. All work with diverse partners to manage and sustain a wide range of ecosystems, and are a mixture of statutory agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs).

These regional NRM groups have established productive partnerships with the agricultural industry through peak industry councils, producer groups, Research and Development Corporations, agribusiness, processors and individual landholders.

POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Focusing on best practice management of natural resources in agriculture, these partnerships build capacity and resilience, strengthen networks and support sustainability at the paddock, regional and national scale.

It's an impact that adds up over time and across the country.

These partnerships recognise that in addition to the great value of helping individuals improve the environment and productivity on their land, better NRM performance by an industry overall delivers multiple benefits. It supports the implementation of industry sustainability frameworks and can maintain or increase access to markets sensitive to sustainability issues.

At a broader scale, better NRM practices meet government priorities and fulfil Australia's commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SUCCESS FACTORS

NRM Regions Australia is leading a project with the National Farmers Federation and the Council of Rural Research and Development Corporations, to increase the number and impact of partnerships between NRM groups and agricultural industries. We have profiled 20 of these to understand what makes them tick. Ranging from fertiliser management to pastoral property planning to protecting the Great Barrier Reef, these successful partnerships demonstrated similar traits:

- Mutual benefits for the environment and productivity
- Drivers linked to market access
- Shared understanding and a common purpose
- Active involvement of all partners in designing the project
- A flexible approach to managing the project
- A history of working together
- High levels of trust

Knowing this we can continue to do more and better.

Turn the page to discover what we have already achieved through partnerships to improve water quality, broaden biodiversity and build better businesses to sustain our natural resources into the future. Find the full suite of case studies at **nrmregionsaustralia.com.au**

Australian Government | National Landcare Program

e: info@nrmregionsaustralia.com.au
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NRM REGIONS AUSTRALIA

Partners in water quality

> We spend so much time here — the children have grown up playing in the river, fishing, swimming, picnics. It is also the water that drives our business.
>
> Rosie Davenport, dairy farmer

Success in keeping Cows Out Of Creeks

It's a simple but effective slogan, and one that's ramped up the momentum across Tasmania to protect waterways by keeping cows out of creeks, with the ultimate goal that every farmer is happy to swim, fish and drink the water downstream of their farm.

Grants of $5000 are available to help dairy and beef producers fence off creeks, build stock crossings and install troughs, pipes, pumps and water tanks in paddocks and encourage revegetation along rivers and drains.

Since 2013, 330km of waterways have been fenced off by dairy and beef producers at a cost of $4.8 million for materials and labour, funded by the state government, NRM Regions and DairyTas as project leader.

Cows out of Creeks has become a recognised brand within the award-winning DairyTas Clean Rivers program that highlights fertiliser and effluent management practices that preserve water quality. In 2019 the State Liberal Council endorsed a motion for 'Cows out of creeks by 2030'.

There are currently 50 Cows out of Creeks sites on the Expressions of Interest register and funding has been approved for another 20 farms by December 2021.

Partners: DairyTas, Tasmanian Government, Tas Water, NRM North, Cradle Coast NRM, NRM South and Greenhams.

Funded by: Tasmanian Government, DairyTas, NRM Regions.

LEARN MORE

- **www.dairyaustralia.com.au/dairytas/resources-repository/2020/07/09/clean-rivers-and-tasmanian-dairy-farms#.YFs28S0RpBx**

> We have unprecedented grower engagement and buyers lined up to invest in Reef Credits, paid for preventing nutrients and sediment from entering the Great Barrier Reef catchment.
>
> Fiona George, Terrain NRM

Farmers earn credits for cleaner water

The farmer-centric Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project trials new approaches to reduce runoff into the Great Barrier Reef. This includes the creation of Reef Credits, which generate a tradeable unit or 'credit' for preventing nutrients and sediment from entering the Great Barrier Reef catchment. Global financier HSBC was the first to buy Reef Credits.

Hundreds of ideas from 40 organisations and 300 people were integrated into the Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project, but in the end much of its success came down to 'walking' with the region's cane and banana growers and the broader community.

Project partners split the Tully and Johnstone catchments south of Cairns into specific areas and asked farmers to 'walk the landscape' on maps, to show them where water moved and flooded.

A much faster turnaround in water quality data to show how farming practices impacted the end of the catchments resulted in unprecedented engagement of 450 landholders, with 37 demonstration sites set up and 1850 workshop participants.

"For the first time we're translating the science into something relevant and meaningful and farmers are amazingly engaged," says Fiona George from Terrain NRM.

Partners: Terrain NRM, Innisfail Canegrowers, Tully Canegrowers, Australian Banana Growers' Council, Queensland Government.

Funded by: Queensland Government's Reef Water Quality Program

LEARN MORE

- **https://terrain.org.au/major-integrated-project/**

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Australian Government | National Landcare Program | Wet Tropics Major Integrated Project | Queensland Government

NRM REGIONS AUSTRALIA

> We really focus on distilling everything down to fundamentals — what does an Alliance do that's better than doing it alone? And we work collaboratively across all states because we can achieve more that way.
>
> Fiona Johnson, Alliance Executive Officer

New connections forged by regional alliance

An alliance bringing together communities in three states along the length of the Murray River has proven there is power in collaboration, making headway in building an indigenous economy through a partnership with WA's Noongar Land Enterprises, and restoring a range of habitats for native fish.

The Tri-State Murray NRM Regional Alliance covers 21 million hectares of land, is home to more than 30 Aboriginal groups and 500 threatened species, and contributes $7.2 billion in agricultural output.

It has created the East-West Alliance, a co-operative Fairtrade model to link Aboriginal groups in the east (Murray Corridor) and the west (Noongar Land Enterprises) with NRM agencies and private sector partners.

Corporate partners include Jasper Coffee, mentoring to Aboriginal landholders on co-ops; global skin care company Aesop, working with the CSIRO to test indigenous plants; and legal company Allens Lawyers, providing contracts for indigenous honey production.

The Alliance Fish Connections strategy is putting snags into rivers and streams so fish have a place to rest and spawn, improving water quality, removing weirs and installing fish ladders, so that native fish species can feed, breed and raise their young.

Partners: South Australia Murraylands and Riverland Landscape Board, Vic North Central CMA, Vic Goulburn Broken CMA, Vic Mallee CMA, Vic North East CMA, NSW Murray Local Land Services & NSW Western Local Land Services.

Funded by: Each partner, with funding for specific projects from the Australian and State Governments, the National Landcare Program, and the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

LEARN MORE

www.necma.vic.gov.au/Projects/Current-projects/tristate-murray

Australian Government | National Landcare Program

> Markets are beginning to exert pressure on producers to show how their food is produced…with minimal damage to the environment. This case study gives us the opportunity to put some values on how we interact with nature.
>
> Tom Mitchell, WA farmer

Measuring on-farm Natural Capital

In a market garden 90km north of Perth, farmer Tom Mitchell is looking very closely at his cover crop and citrus orchard and trying to calculate its impact on aspects of the natural environment, from soil health to the native bees that pollinate his pumpkins and a pair of Whistling Kites nesting on a nearby hill.

He's a 'guinea pig', one of five WA producers taking part in the first stage of Perth NRM's Measuring On-farm Natural Capital project, working out how to assess the value of elements like soil, carbon and biodiversity that form the basis of sustainable food production.

Like financial accounting, natural capital accounts have an agreed set of standards and can be tracked over time to demonstrate the value of nature to investors, buyers and consumers of agricultural products.

The project is developing a structure to account for natural capital across a range of farming types such as irrigated horticulture, low rainfall broadacre agriculture, high rainfall vineyards and pasture.

"The metrics vary depending on what you're doing and how you farm, so we have to tailor the accounting process to individuals rather than being broad brush," says Tom.

Stage Two of the project will spread the circle wider, establishing a cost-effective Natural Capital Accounting framework with 30 farmers and industry stakeholders to collect data on soil conditions, biodiversity status, farming practices, nutrient exports and metrics from food produced. This will be analysed to measure the farm's stock of Natural Capital.

Partners: Perth NRM, Commonland, Western Australian Government, Producers and Agribusiness.

**Funded by: Stage 1: Commonland, farmers and Perth NRM;
Stage 2: WA State Government, Commonland, farmers and Perth NRM.**

LEARN MORE

www.perthnrm.com/project/measuring-on-farm-natural-capital

Australian Government | National Landcare Program | Perth NRM

Partners in
biodiversity

NRM REGIONS AUSTRALIA

> In the past when we've thought about wildlife conservation on farms we might fence off bits that are out of production, whereas 'Bitterns in the Rice' is explicitly using parts of the farm where the production is. The potential here is enormous.
>
> Matt Herring, wildlife ecologist

Rice growers commit to boost the 'bunyip bird'

There are only 2500 Australasian Bitterns left in the world, in Australia, New Zealand and New Caledonia, and it's estimated that around 40% of these are attracted to rice crops in the Murray, Coleambally and Murrumbidgee Irrigation Areas of NSW to breed.

Two key projects encouraging the growing of 'Bittern-friendly rice' have resulted in four times the number of birds being found in the project crops, compared to controls.

Enthusiastic rice growers are paid incentives to provide early permanent water and a minimum of 20 hectares of rice on their farms to provide food and shelter for the birds. In 2021 there are 11 growers taking part, covering nearly 1000 hectares of rice.

State government departments and agencies are also working together to support the birds by improving wetlands along the Murrumbidgee River, with an additional 250ha being established.

The project has attracted global interest, with thousands of people following the journey of Robbie the Australasian Bittern, who made a round trip of 1270km from the Riverina to coastal wetlands at Nelson in southwest Victoria.

Partners: Riverina Local Land Services & Ricegrowers' Association of Australia.

Funded by: Australian Government National Landcare Program with support from Riverina LLS.

LEARN MORE

- **www.lls.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/1249328/Landholder-guide-Growing-Bittern-Friendly-Rice.pdf**

> Together with wine grape growers and the local communities we're creating a greater balance between the environment and the practice of viticulture.
>
> James Hall, Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board

Group effort brings wildlife to wineries

Prominent winemakers in McLaren Vale and the Adelaide Hills have found themselves with a tree planter rather than glass in hand, after embracing the Wildlife for Wine project to encourage biodiversity around the vineyard.

Staff of Petaluma, Shaw+Smith and Shingleback Wines have teamed up with community groups, Wine Australia and the University of Adelaide to plant seedlings that form an insectary to encourage beneficial insects in the vineyard; reclaim wetlands; and build and install microbat roosting boxes, to enable studies of the tiny bats that also play a vital role in reducing pests.

The University of Adelaide is supporting a PhD student to monitor microbat guano (faeces) to determine which insect groups that up to nine species of regional bats feed on in the vineyards. A local consultant has also been engaged to monitor insect pests and 'good bugs' at key planting and restoration sites.

Partnerships have been forged with local biodiversity action groups such as Biodiversity McLaren Vale and Hills Biodiversity. Hills and Fleurieu Landscape Board staff provide the technical guidance, including species lists and planting designs, and draw up a Biodiversity Action Plan for each site.

Partners: Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board, wine grape growers.

Funded by: Hills & Fleurieu Landscape Board.

LEARN MORE

- **www.landscape.sa.gov.au/hf/land/landholder-services/wildlife-for-wine**

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NSW Government | Local Land Services

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ABOUT NRM REGIONS AUSTRALIA

NRM Regions Australia represents the 54 regional NRM organisations working with landholders and industry to manage natural resources across the country. We build networks, share and grow information, foster innovation, and help influence strategic directions for policies and programs. We liaise with the Australian Government to ensure that natural resource management is recognised, funded and coordinated effectively.

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