



Framework for assessing
and recommending
upgraded catchment action
plans

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List of acronyms

CAP	Catchment Action Plan
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NRM	Natural resource management
NSW	New South Wales

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1 Introduction

Catchment Action Plans (CAPs) are strategic regional plans for improving the health, productivity and resilience of our landscapes. They identify what the community and government value about these landscapes, and explain what needs to be done to ensure long-term, sustainable management of a region's natural resources.

Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and their partners have been implementing approved CAPs for over five years. The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has audited their implementation and found effective progress¹. CMAs are preparing to upgrade their CAPs by March 2013, in line with the *NSW 2021* state plan target and priorities for increasing the devolution of decision making, funding and control in catchment management. Upgraded CAPs will incorporate lessons from implementation, evolving policy settings and community values, new knowledge including systems thinking and emerging issues such as climate change.

The NRC recommends CAPs to the Minister for Regional Infrastructure and Services (the Deputy Premier) and the Minister for Primary Industries (the Ministers), who are then responsible for approving them. In previous years the responsible Minister has sought Cabinet endorsement of the CAPs. The NRC's recommendation is based on its assessment of whether a CAP complies with the *NSW Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management* (the Standard) and whether it promotes achievement of the state-wide targets for natural resource management (the targets)².

The purpose of this document is to explain how the NRC will assess upgraded CAPs. The NRC sets expectations so that CMAs can upgrade their CAPs in a regionally-appropriate way, confident in the framework that will be used for assessment. It outlines common expectations of quality and encourages regional innovation and diversity in how CMAs meet or exceed those quality expectations.

This document is aimed primarily at CMAs, as they are responsible for collaboratively preparing CAPs. It also aims to inform other organisations who partner with CMAs in developing and implementing CAPs, including state and Australian government agencies.

This document may be updated to provide additional clarity where necessary, and to capture our improved understanding of the CAP upgrade process and outcomes over time. This is Version 1.2 of the framework and previous versions of this document should be removed from circulation.

The following sections explain the assessment criteria and process in more detail:

- Section 2 describes the context for upgrading CAPs and how the assessment criteria were developed
- Section 3 explains the assessment criteria in detail and provides some non-prescriptive guidance on what the NRC will be looking for to assess performance against the criteria
- Section 4 outlines the process the NRC will use to assess and recommend CAPs.

¹ Natural Resources Commission (2010), *Progress towards healthy resilience landscapes: Implementing the Standard, targets and catchment action plans*, December.

² This function is specified in Section 13 of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* and Sections 22 and 23 of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

2 Context for CAP upgrades

The business of natural resource management in NSW has evolved since the first CAPs were developed. It is now an appropriate time to upgrade CAPs, which are expected to continually improve over time, in line with an adaptive management approach.

In its *2010 Progress Report*³ the NRC described a vision for CAPs where they become the mechanism for aligning and helping to deliver a range of state policies, non-statutory and statutory plans, and natural resource management-related Australian and NSW Government programs at the regional scale. Notably, there is now a greater commitment across governments to work towards a collaborative, whole-of-government and community approach to regional natural resource management.

In addition, systems thinking has emerged as a promising new approach to natural resource management. This approach frames landscapes as dynamic systems with interacting social and ecological parts. In these linked social-ecological systems people depend on the resources and services provided by ecosystems and in turn ecosystems dynamics are influenced to varying degrees by human activities. Management of these systems seeks to ensure the continued provision of ecosystem services (for example the provision of food and fibre) in the face of an uncertain future. Resilience is a property of systems and measures the extent to which the system can withstand shocks and retain its structure and function. Resilient landscapes are central to the state-wide aspirational goals in NSW⁴.

Central West and Namoi CMAs, and NSW government agencies took part in a pilot process for upgrading CAPs which has tested this approach. This pilot has shown us the kinds of improvements that can be made now, as well as the aspects of CAPs which we aspire to achieve but will require further collaborative learning across CMAs, agencies and the community.

The NRC's assessment of CAPs is part of a wider program of auditing and reporting, through which the NRC focuses on:

- promoting excellence and driving continual improvement in how CMAs and others conduct integrated natural resource management planning and implement effective resource stewardship programs
- informing Government and other stakeholders about what is working in natural resource management, what needs fixing and how the regional model is progressing towards its stated policies and targets.

The following sections explain:

- the institutional context and drivers for upgrading CAPs
- how the assessment criteria were developed.

³ Natural Resources Commission (2010), *Progress towards healthy resilience landscapes: Implementing the Standard, targets and catchment action plans*, December.

⁴ State-wide aspirational goal: *Resilient ecologically sustainable landscapes functioning effectively at all scales and supporting the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of communities*. A report providing full details of the aspirational goal and state-wide targets can be found at www.nrc.nsw.gov.au (originally published in September 2005).

2.1 Drivers for upgrading CAPs

A significant trend in natural resource management is the shift at many levels in the way we think about and manage our natural resources. Theory and practice is moving away from conservation-based thinking of restoring landscapes to pre-European conditions, and there is a growing understanding that landscapes are made up of human communities and biophysical processes that interact and shape each other and are constantly changing.

Upgraded CAPs provide an opportunity to plan for managing change in our landscapes and adapting to uncertain futures, including mechanisms for addressing potential impacts of climate change. Governments and communities should use the CAP upgrade process as a forum for discussing risks and identifying management strategies relating to climate change and variability and other major shocks and drivers that may affect their landscapes.

A systems approach has emerged as a new frame for helping communities understand how their landscapes work and where and how they can best intervene to keep their landscape systems operating effectively⁵.

What is resilience?

Resilience is a measure of a system's capacity to cope with shocks and undergo change while retaining essentially the same structure and function. Applying systems thinking to natural resource management allows us to look at our landscapes as dynamic systems with interacting social and ecological components.

Analysing system dynamics allows for the identification of the critical slow variables that keep social-ecological systems stable. This stability enables them to withstand shocks and continue to provide ecosystem goods and services. Exceeding thresholds on these critical variables can change the structure and function of systems, potentially driving them into undesirable states. Management can be designed to maintain a functioning system either by avoiding reaching thresholds or transforming to a desirable (or least undesirable) alternative stable state. Managing for system resilience involves promoting diversity and flexibility in those systems, and building the capacity to adapt and change.

Taking a systems approach influences the types of targets CAPs might contain, the partners that might be involved to pursue the best results, and the type of knowledge that CMAs should draw on to analyse, understand and communicate how the landscape functions.

In addition, the regional model has matured considerably and the external policy environment has shifted since the first CAPs were developed in 2004-05. Importantly, in NSW there has been a clear move towards greater collaboration between agencies and CMAs, and commitment to a whole-of-government approach. Upgraded CAPs should incorporate best available information, reflect the growing capabilities of CMAs, the maturing of the regional delivery model, the changing priorities of investors and communities, and changes in the operating environment of CMAs.

⁵ Useful references for systems approaches include: Walker, B, and Salt, D (2006), *Resilience thinking – Sustaining ecosystems and people in a changing world*, Island Press, Washington DC; Bennett, E (2003), *Scenario development and resilience: local and global examples of resilience of social-ecological systems*, IHDP (International Human Dimensions of Global Change); Walker, B, Abel, N, Anderies, J, Ryan, P (2009), 'Resilience, adaptability and transformability in the Goulburn-Broken Catchment, Australia', *Ecology and Society*, Vol 14, No 1, Synthesis; Chapin, FS, Folke, C, Kofinas, GP (2009), *Principles of Ecosystem Stewardship*, Springer, New York.

CAPs play a key role as integrated regional strategies that bring together and align the priorities and investment of the many parties with an interest in natural resource management. Governments fund a range of policy instruments to address sustainability issues including: regulation of land use, vegetation and water; environmental education; structural adjustment; regional development; and stewardship programs run by organisations like CMAs, Landcare and other community groups. CAPs provide a non-regulatory, collaborative planning process that can harness and align these varied approaches to ensure coordinated action towards common goals for resilient landscapes and communities. This vision for the role of CAPs, as illustrated in figure 1.1, sets the context for the NRC assessments.

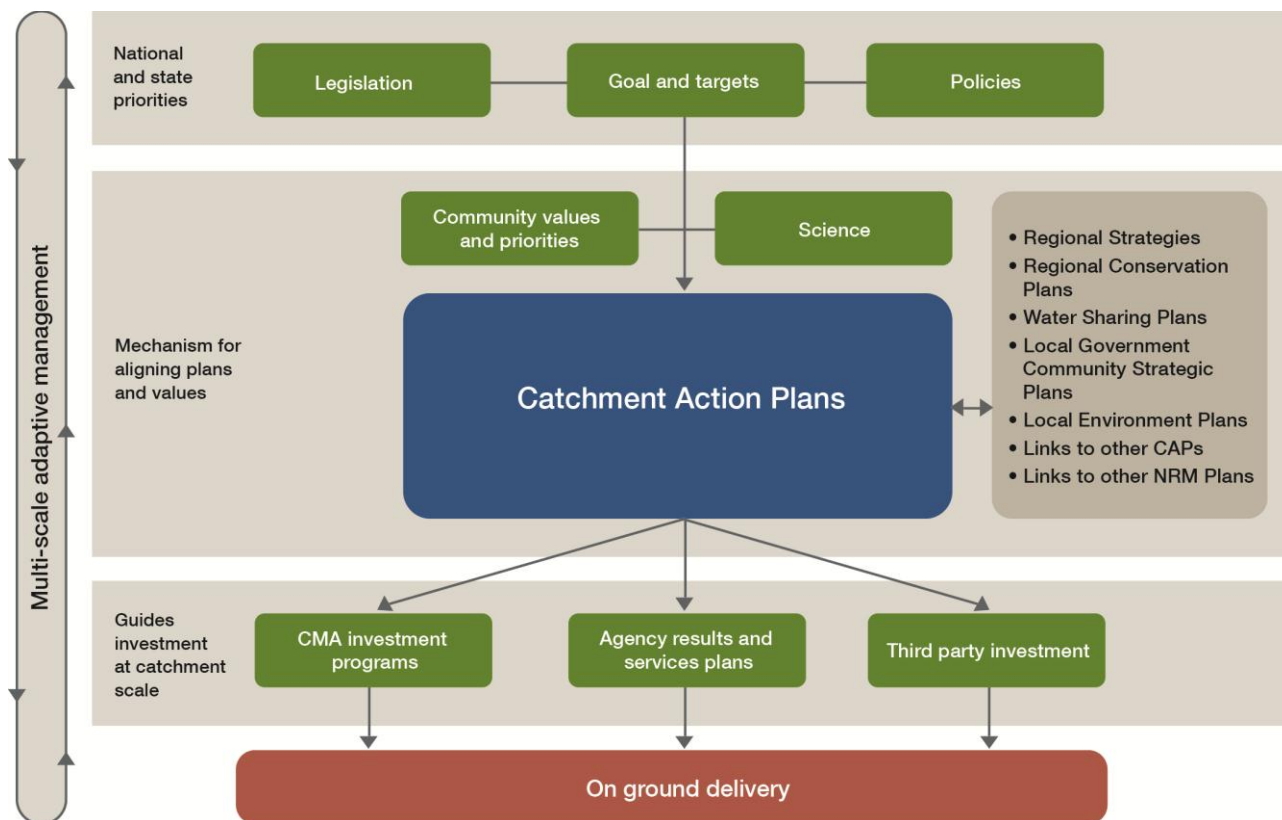


Figure 1.1: CAPs as integrated strategies for managing natural resources in a catchment region

This model recognises the critical role of local government in influencing landscape health, particularly along the NSW coast. There is great potential for CMAs and local governments to work towards aligning the objectives of community strategic plans and CAPs⁶. Similarly, groups like Landcare, Coastcare, Indigenous groups, other non-government organisations and industry are essential parts of the regional capacity to manage our landscapes. It is essential that all such parties are engaged in developing the regional plan and see themselves as contributing to its agreed objectives and strategies.

There have also been some significant changes in program and policy settings at state and national levels. CAPs need to be in a position to inform, adapt to and assist the effective implementation of these large-scale initiatives that will rely on regional and local knowledge of landscapes to be effective.

⁶ Local government community strategic plans are relatively new instruments that guide both local governments' statutory planning instruments, such as the local environment plan, and its program of investment in environmental management. Many CMAs and local governments have already made good progress in aligning their NRM priorities, and many already have developed memoranda of understanding to facilitate joint work under their CAPs and local environment plans respectively.

For example, the NSW Government's *Strategic Regional Land Use Plans* and the Australian Government's *Carbon Farming Initiative*, *Murray-Darling Basin Plan* and *National Wildlife Corridors Plan* should all draw on the best available knowledge and landscape analysis developed at the regional scale. This will require spatial expression of CAP priorities. Some spatial analysis will be in CAPs, but some issues will require much finer scale, issue-specific analysis that should be completed on an as-needs basis in collaboration with the CMA, and within the overarching framework of the CAP.

Upgraded CAPs also have a role to play in facilitating progress across government on the five priorities identified in the *2010 Progress Report* to pursue a more cohesive, collaborative and effective approach to natural resource management across all of government. Upgraded CAPs will provide a regional framework for:

- **whole of government and community regional planning** – by providing a basis for collaborative action between the CMA and its agency, community and industry partners
- **more relevant science to support decisions at all scales** – by collecting and synthesising best available information, and using this information to analyse and describe the linked social-ecological systems operating in a catchment
- **whole of government adaptive management** – by demonstrating effective adaptive management and the benefits of institutional continuity at the regional scale
- **matching funding to landscape need** – by providing a reliable and credible basis for aligning diverse sources of local, state and national government funding programs
- **designing sound policy to complement stewardship** – by providing a solid evidence base, knowledge of community values and spatial representation of priorities CAPs can inform major state and national policy developments and strategic land use planning.

2.2 Roles and responsibilities for whole-of-government and community CAP planning

Whole-of-government and community CAPs require the commitment of stakeholders during the planning process, and agreement from partners to implement components of the final plan. CMAs are responsible for leading the development, documentation and review of the CAP. This should be a collaborative process, with other partners supporting the CAP's development and implementation in accordance with the roles and responsibilities outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Roles and responsibilities for whole-of-government and community CAP planning

Natural resource managers	Roles and responsibilities
CMAAs	<p>CMAAs are the key bodies for delivering natural resource management in NSW at the regional scale. CMAAs lead CAP development, documentation and review processes and coordinate CAP implementation to promote achievement of the state-wide targets. They directly deliver NSW and Australian Government funding programs for natural resource management, largely focussed on encouraging landscape stewardship and behaviour change, and building the capacity of communities. They also leverage additional funds to complement government investment, and have a role in providing advice to agencies on state-wide policy development.</p>
<p>NSW Government agencies (Department of Primary Industries, Office of Environment and Heritage, Department of Planning and Infrastructure, Office of Water, Aboriginal Affairs NSW)</p>	<p>NSW Government agencies develop state-level natural resource management policies, and are also responsible for natural resource management on large areas of public land. The role of agencies in natural resource management is coordinated through the Natural Resource and Environment CEO Cluster Group (the Cluster), and the NRM Senior Officers Group. Agencies are major partners in CAP development and implementation, with the Cluster agreeing that upgraded CAPs should include targets that are based on what can be delivered by both CMAAs and agencies in each region. All relevant agencies are responsible for providing input to the CAP development process to ensure agency priorities are reflected and the best available knowledge held within agencies is considered. Agencies also provide science support for decision-making. Agency CEOs need to confirm their support of the strategic intent of the CAP and agreement to roles and responsibilities.</p>
<p>NSW Government whole-of-government coordinator</p>	<p>The NRM Senior Officers Group has appointed a whole-of-government coordinator to facilitate more efficient and effective collaboration between CMAAs and agencies during CAP development.</p> <p>The whole-of-government coordinator will work with CMAAs and agencies to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ which agency stakeholders should be involved at different stages of CAP development ▪ ways collaboration can be streamlined, particularly by consulting at different scales for different issues ▪ an appropriate timetable for CMA and agency collaboration that does not place undue strain on CMA or agency resources ▪ facilitate negotiated outcomes for input to the CAP development.
<p>Local government</p>	<p>Local government has extensive roles and responsibilities in land use planning, and public land management, regulation, education, compliance and advocacy. CMAAs and local governments collaborate in developing and reviewing CAPs, local environment plans, community strategic plans and increasingly with spatial analysis and reporting.</p>

Natural resource managers	Roles and responsibilities
<p>Australian Government agencies (Including Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency, National Water Commission, Murray Darling Basin Authority)</p>	<p>The Australian Government is a major funding partner of CMAs through the Caring for our Country program, providing a share of base level funding and specific investment funding. The Australian Government outlines its funding priorities and invests directly in regional natural resource management through CMAs and other groups. Major national policy and program initiatives, for example, the <i>Murray Darling Basin Plan</i>, the <i>Carbon Farming Initiative</i> and the <i>National Wildlife Corridors Plan</i>, can also draw on the values represented in the final CAPs, and the regional scale knowledge underpinning the CAP.</p>
<p>Community groups and non-government organisations</p>	<p>Landcare, Coastcare, Aboriginal groups, land councils and traditional owners, and non-government organisations such as Greening Australia have long histories of local-scale natural resource management. These groups participate in CAP planning processes to contribute knowledge about local priorities and values, and help design programs that enable collaborative effort towards common objectives. They may also be active in helping deliver CMA-funded projects on the ground, and may source their own funding to deliver projects that are aligned with the shared targets in CAPs.</p>
<p>Scientific community</p>	<p>Universities and organisations, such as CSIRO, RDCs and CRCs, provide scientific support to CMAs in CAP planning and to inform adaptive management as CAPs are implemented.</p>
<p>Industry and land managers</p>	<p>Industry and individual land managers are key partners of CMAs in delivering CAPs through on ground projects. They contribute understanding of local and property-scale issues and values to the CAP planning process. They also contribute significant matching funds and in-kind investment, while industry is also increasingly funding initiatives on the ground which ideally should align with the shared targets in CAPs.</p>

2.3 How the assessment criteria were developed

Under the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*, the NRC's advice to the Ministers regarding CAP approval will be based on whether a CAP complies with the Standard and promotes the state-wide targets for natural resource management. The NRC has developed a set of assessment criteria to determine a CAP's compliance with the Standard and state-wide targets, in the context of the main drivers for CAP upgrades.

The assessment criteria were trialled and refined through a pilot process involving CMAs and agencies:

- the NRC worked with CMAs, NSW and Australian Government agencies, and local government to develop a draft set of assessment criteria (released in July 2010 – *Working draft: Criteria and Attributes for Upgrading Catchment Action Plans*)⁷
- Central West and Namoi CMAs, working with government agencies, local government and community partners, developed pilot upgraded CAPs based on the working draft criteria
- the NRC conducted a trial assessment of the pilot upgraded CAPs to test the feasibility of the assessment criteria, as well as the appropriateness of the benchmarks being set

⁷ The Natural Resources Advisory Council also provided comment on this working draft set of criteria during the pilot process.

- the NRC refined the assessment criteria based on feedback, lessons from the pilot assessment process, and the up-to-date priorities for CAPs identified in the *2010 Progress Report*.

To develop the criteria and define expectations for the assessment, the NRC first examined the external context (institutional, spatial and temporal) and the level of development of the natural resource management system and its institutions. It then identified elements that we expect to see in a high quality strategic natural resource management planning process and final plan. This understanding of the external environment and the task being undertaken was then used to contextualise what the Standard requires in upgrading CAPs, and determine assessment criteria. This is the same process that was used for developing the lines of inquiry used for auditing CAP implementation.

The regional model is grounded in adaptive management, meaning CMAs and stakeholders should be looking to continually improve how natural resources are being managed in NSW⁸. In this context, the NRC has designed assessment criteria that aim to encourage excellence in natural resource management by setting expectations that, in some cases, are achievable right now and others that may be stretch goals at this stage of development. Some of these expectations may only be achievable after multiple CAP upgrade processes, or following significant institutional change that is outside of the CMAs' control. However, they represent what in practice is required of CAPs if they are to play their potential role of whole-of-government and community strategic plans for aligning the actions of all parties around a common goal of achieving healthy, productive and resilient landscapes.

⁸ A report providing full details of the Standard and state-wide targets can be found at www.nrc.nsw.gov.au (originally published in September 2005).

3 Assessment criteria, attributes and guidance for meeting the Standard

The aim of the assessment is to determine whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan that meets the Standard and promotes the state-wide targets. This section outlines the criteria the NRC will use to assess upgraded CAPs to determine whether they are quality, strategic natural resource management plans.

As described in the previous sections, the NRC will assess the quality of CAPs in the context of whole-of-government and whole-of-community strategic plans, consistent with those described in the *2010 Progress Report*. This will require CAPs to demonstrate:

- whole-of-government and community involvement
- prioritisation of strategies based on analysis of landscape function
- spatial expression of priorities.

Therefore, the NRC will assess CAPs against three criteria relating to both the quality of the planning process undertaken, and the quality of the final plan. The NRC will determine whether each CAP:

1. was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process
2. uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes
3. is a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community, and industry partners.

For each criterion the NRC has identified three attributes, reflecting what the NRC expects to see as demonstration of performance against each criterion. Our assessment process will look for evidence of these attributes to make judgements on whether the criteria are being met. These attributes were tested with the Standard to define expectations of quality. The attributes were also calibrated against the pilot upgraded CAPs prepared by Central West and Namoi CMAs.

To provide extra guidance and clarity about the NRC's expectations, this document also contains prompts about the kinds of things we will expect to see during the assessment to determine performance against the criteria in a way that meets the required outcomes of the Standard. We have provided this guidance in the form of typical questions that the NRC will ask during the assessment.

This guidance is not designed to be exhaustive or to limit the approaches chosen by CMAs. The NRC expects to see innovative and regionally-appropriate approaches to CAP development. The guidance is designed to illustrate the intent of the criteria in more detail, and provide a starting point for CMAs to build from.

The complete set of criteria and attributes are summarised in **Figure 3.1**. Sections 3.1 - 3.3 explain each criterion and the NRC's performance expectations in more detail.

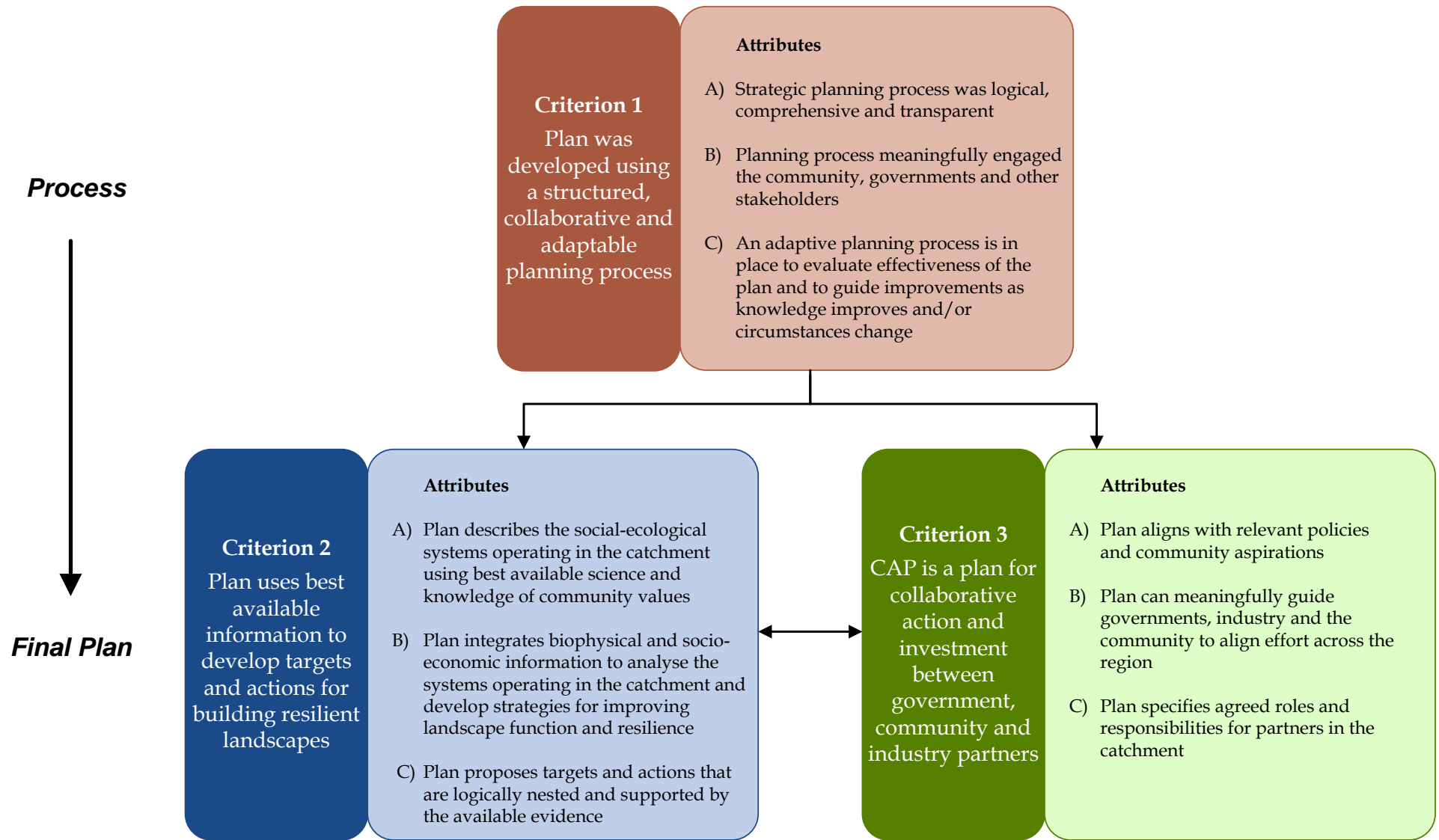


Figure 3.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

3.1 Criterion 1: CAP was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process

Criteria	Attributes
1. CAP was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process	<p>A. Strategic planning process was logical, comprehensive and transparent</p> <p>B. Planning process meaningfully engaged the community, governments and other stakeholders</p> <p>C. An adaptive planning process is in place to evaluate effectiveness of the CAP and guide improvements as knowledge improves and/or circumstances change</p>

The quality of a strategic plan depends on the quality of the knowledge and planning processes that underpin it. Much of the worth in any planning process is in building improved strategic planning capacity within an organisation and among its partners – not solely in the final documentation of that thinking. The quality of a CAP is also demonstrated in its ability to be evaluated and further adapted, and the degree to which partners and stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in the process.

A structured, transparent and adaptable planning process should generate a quality plan, as well as a number of other benefits for the CMA and its partners:

- the CAP should be grounded in good governance and business systems
- the planning process should build natural resource management and strategic capacity among staff and stakeholders
- the planning process should build trust in the CMA and encourage broader ownership of the CAP
- a culture of ongoing review and adaptive governance will ensure ongoing relevance of the CMA systems, the CAP and its natural resource management objectives, and give the CMA flexibility to respond to changing circumstances and knowledge.

For each of the criterion the NRC has considered the required outcomes of the Standard to identify characteristics we would expect to see in the CAP development process, and the final CAP, which would demonstrate effective performance against the criteria and compliance with the Standard.

For example, to meet this first criterion in a way that complies with the Standard, the NRC would expect the CAP development process to demonstrate:

- sufficient governance arrangements, project planning and project management to develop a whole-of-government and community CAP
- an adaptive approach using experience in implementing the current CAPs and using results of previous reviews and audits
- understanding of CMA business and other institutional responsibilities at all scales
- knowledge of stakeholders and their capacity and needs
- broad community engagement and effective collaboration for plan development

- plans for future adaptation of the CAP in response to changing circumstances, new information, and monitoring and evaluation results
- effective information management.

The NRC has used its pilot assessments of two CAPs to calibrate these expectations and develop three attributes around which the NRC will gather evidence in order to make a judgement about performance against the criterion:

A) Planning process was logical, comprehensive and transparent

The NRC will expect to see a systematic, planned and documented approach to upgrading CAPs. CAPs are strategic plans for natural resource management, so the process should draw on well-established strategic planning principles. For example, the planning scope should be informed by a clear understanding of the CMA and stakeholder objectives for the CAP upgrade, and a clear understanding of the CMA business and the roles, responsibilities and capacity of others in the catchment.

Typical strategic planning processes will identify and consider a range of possible strategic objectives. For CAPs, this could mean considering different desired futures for the catchment communities and landscapes. The CAP planning process should also evaluate alternative approaches for meeting the strategic objectives, and refine the objectives through this process. In practice, the degree of consideration given to alternatives depends upon the risk and investment level particular to the catchment, and the time and resources available to the CMA.

The planning process should be well documented and communicated within the CMA. Information about the planning process should also be made available to relevant external stakeholders, including details about the stakeholder engagement process and updates on key planning milestones or decisions.

The NRC will also expect to see that the process engaged and built the capacity of CMA staff at all levels, including the CMA Board, so that all parts of the organisation feel ownership of the plan and are committed to implement it.

B) Planning process meaningfully engaged the community, governments and other stakeholders

CAPs are plans for collaborative action and investment. Therefore, the planning process must meaningfully engage those stakeholders with an interest in plan implementation, or whose activities have an influence on landscape health and the likelihood of the CAP being effectively implemented. This will include: local, state and Australian Governments; Landcare, Coastcare and other community and non-government organisations; Indigenous and non-Indigenous land managers; industry; and the scientific community.

There are three main components to this attribute – was there a plan for who to engage and how and why to engage them? Was the plan executed effectively? Do the partners have the capacity to collaborate in implementation? The NRC will consider the views of stakeholders when determining whether the engagement has been meaningful. However, engagement is a two-way process and the NRC will also consider how effectively agencies and other stakeholders participated and contributed to the processes facilitated by the CMA.

The NRC's audits have shown that community engagement is a key strength of the regional model and will be expecting strong performance in this area. The NRC recognises that other stakeholder relationships, for example with agencies, are still evolving. However, given the strong commitment of the NRM Senior Officers Group to whole-of-government CAPs, the NRC will

expect to see effective agency-CMA collaboration. The CMAs' engagement plans should promote agency engagement at multiple scales, including at CEO level early on in the CAP development process.

C) An adaptive planning process is in place to evaluate effectiveness of the CAP and guide improvements as knowledge improves and/or circumstances change

An adaptive approach is necessary in natural resource management which is characterised by uncertainty, complexity and lack of information. A CAP should therefore identify how its implementation will be monitored, how progress will be evaluated, and the CAP adapted. The NSW Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Strategy, Evaluation framework for CMA natural resource management and the Australian Government's NRM Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Framework provide some guidance on this important aspect of CAP development.

This attribute covers both how the experiences in implementing the existing CAP have been used to inform the planning process, and how the CMA is planning to adaptively manage in the future in response to new information, changing circumstances, emerging risks, and monitoring and evaluation results. The CMA should also consider potential triggers for plan adaptation, such as significant policy changes, and how to involve all relevant stakeholders in future revision of the CAP. For example, the Central West upgraded CAP identifies a process for adaptation of the plan as knowledge of their landscape improves.

The CAPs should demonstrate leadership in natural resource management strategic planning and show how others can contribute and collaborate.

Table 3.1 below lists these attributes. It also lists typical questions the NRC will ask during the assessment to determine compliance with the Standard.

Table 3.1: Attributes the NRC will be looking for and questions the NRC may ask to determine whether the CAP was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process

Criteria	Attributes	Typical questions the NRC will ask when reviewing CAPs to assess compliance with the Standard
1. CAP was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process	1A. Strategic planning process was logical, comprehensive and transparent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was the CAP upgrade planned, managed and documented as a systematic project? For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – did the process have clear, logical and repeatable stages? – was it supported by available evidence and rigorous analysis? ▪ Was there a process for determining a range of desired outcomes for the catchment, and analysing alternative strategies for achieving those outcomes? ▪ How were the CMA Board, management and staff engaged in the planning process and did that engagement build natural resource management and strategic capability within the CMA?
	1B. Planning process meaningfully engaged the community, governments and other stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a plan for engaging major partners and stakeholders (government, community and industry) in the planning process (i.e. who to involve, when and why, and how to manage expectations)? ▪ Were major partners and stakeholders effectively engaged throughout the planning process? ▪ Did the process build natural resource management and strategic capability of the major partners and stakeholders?
	1C. An adaptive planning process is in place to evaluate effectiveness of the CAP and guide improvements as knowledge improves and/or circumstances change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How was the planning process informed by an evaluation of the previous CAP and its implementation? ▪ Does this plan outline a process for future adaptation of the CAP in response to new knowledge, changing circumstances and monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan information? ▪ Does this process outline roles and responsibilities, review/check points, and how the impacts of CAP revisions on stakeholders will be managed?

3.2 Criterion 2: CAP uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes

Criteria	Attributes
2. CAP uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes	<p>A. CAP describes the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment using best available science and knowledge of community values</p> <p>B. CAP integrates biophysical and socio-economic information to analyse the systems operating in the catchment and develop strategies for improving landscape function and resilience</p> <p>C. CAP proposes targets and actions that are logically nested and supported by the available evidence</p>

This criterion focuses on how evidence and analysis have been used to determine the strategies, targets and actions identified in the CAP.

This criterion and its attributes also refer to the resilience of social-ecological systems. Resilience is a measure of a landscape's capacity to cope with shocks and undergo change while retaining essentially the same structure and function. Managing for resilience involves promoting diversity and flexibility in those systems, and building capacity to adapt and change.

In the pilot CAP upgrades, Central West and Namoi CMA's trialled systems thinking as an approach to landscape analysis and target setting. Both CMAs demonstrated that the concepts can be tailored to suit the needs of an individual CMA, and appropriately integrated with other decision-making tools.

However, the NRC recognises that there are other more established approaches to landscape analysis and regional planning that may be appropriate for the needs of particular CAPs and their communities. The approach adopted needs to demonstrate compliance with the Standard, and effectively frame the required collaborative, strategic planning challenges, using best available knowledge at the right scales to inform strategy development.

The NRC encouraged the use of systems thinking in the pilot CAP upgrades, as the concepts are grounded in principles that align with the Standard:

- it requires the support of a strong evidence base
- it emphasises the importance of temporal, biophysical, social and institutional scale, and the interactions between them
- it adopts a risk-based approach, managing known risks to system function and emphasising preparedness for uncertainty.

The resilience of social-ecological systems aligns with the aspirational goal for natural resource management in NSW⁹ which brings together the state-wide targets, and reflects the long held ideals of natural resource management where the interconnectedness of ecosystems, economies and society is recognised. Building resilience in landscapes will also be an important and practical approach to help communities and landscapes adapt to the effects of climate change.

⁹ State-wide aspirational goal: *Resilient ecologically sustainable landscapes functioning effectively at all scales and supporting the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of communities*. A report providing full details of the aspirational goal and state-wide targets can be found at www.nrc.nsw.gov.au (originally published in September 2005)

The Central West and Namoi CMAs showed that systems thinking:

- helps develop a holistic picture of how the landscape functions and test assumptions
- helps manage complexity by focussing on the few most important things
- was a useful concept to engage the community in strategic planning
- embraces change and builds capacity to manage for natural variability and extreme events.

However, the NRC recognises that there may be knowledge and expertise limitations in the early stages of applying a new approach and that applying any new approach will reveal differences between the emerging and traditional ways of working. In these instances, partners at the regional and state scales should work together with a view to identifying points of commonality, and apply an adaptive approach to resolve points of difference over time.

Some examples of what the NRC would expect to see in the planning process and the final CAP to demonstrate compliance with the Standard include:

- a structured and transparent process for identifying and collecting knowledge, and identifying gaps
- effective integration of biophysical, social and economic information to understand landscape function at a range of scales (spatial, temporal and institutional)
- a structured approach to risk when analysing alternative strategies
- an understanding of the monitoring and evaluation required to fill knowledge gaps, evaluate effectiveness and adaptively manage
- appropriate information management and knowledge management systems.

The NRC has used its pilot assessments of two CAPs to calibrate these expectations and develop three attributes around which the NRC will gather evidence in order to make a judgement about performance against the criterion:

A) CAP describes the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment using best available science and knowledge of community values

An up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge base should provide the basis for developing strategies and setting targets. This attribute examines how knowledge has been collected and managed, and what plans are in place to fill identified knowledge gaps over time. The Central West and Namoi CAPs identify gaps in knowledge and appropriate strategies to address them.

This attribute also addresses the use of this knowledge to provide a description of the region's landscape in terms of linked social-ecological systems. This will provide a starting point for the more detailed analysis referred to in the following attribute. Even if a CMA chooses not to fully adopt a systems approach, they should be aiming to include this description of the landscape in the CAP, demonstrating an understanding of:

- how social and ecological elements of the landscape fit together
- the important values and big issues in the catchment
- disturbances, trends and how the landscape is changing
- the history of the landscape and its possible futures
- how the different parts of the landscape are governed and who is involved in management.

It is important that the CAP is underpinned by the best available knowledge and that the CAP demonstrates how this knowledge was applied. However, as it is a strategic document, the CAP needn't contain all the detailed technical information upon which it is based.

B) CAP integrates biophysical and social information to analyse the systems operating in the catchment and develop strategies for improving landscape function and resilience

This attribute focuses on how information has been used to analyse what is happening in the catchment, and determine what the CMA and its partners can do to improve landscape function and resilience. In meeting this attribute, CAP planners should use spatial information tools, in addition to other tools, to assist in analysing and integrating biophysical and social information to identify and describe their region's systems and determine priorities.

The pilot process trialled resilience as a new analytical approach. However, this does not preclude the use of alternative planning methods to develop strategies and targets.

If CMAs choose to analyse the resilience of their social-ecological systems, typical analytical steps will include:

- analysing social-ecological systems and sub-systems, dynamics, their drivers and controlling variables, feedbacks and thresholds, and their linkages with systems above and below the regional scale (this analysis is often depicted in state and transition models)
- identifying and prioritising controlling variables, feedbacks and thresholds critical for maintaining the system in a healthy, productive state
- assessing the proximity of the critical controlling variables to the thresholds
- estimating the consequences for landscape and community values if key thresholds are crossed
- identifying and prioritising actions and targets likely to either manage the landscape to stay within critical thresholds or transform.

This analysis is referred to in the literature as 'specified resilience', that is, the resilience of specific parts of the social-ecological system to specific shocks or disturbances. A resilience analysis should also cover 'general resilience' which is about the system's capacity to cope with shocks and disturbances that are not anticipated. When developing strategies for improving landscape function, planners will also have to consider whether it's possible to adapt to foreseeable changes in the landscape, or whether transformation is necessary.

Both Central West and Namoi CMAs used resilience analyses to set targets that aim to avoid systems crossing thresholds to undesirable states. However, both CMAs found it more difficult to identify controlling variables and thresholds for the social components of landscape systems than for the biophysical. This is due to a combination of data limitations and capacity. This analysis is quite complex and will improve over time. Both CAPs include plans to develop knowledge and capacity in this area.

C) CAP proposes targets and actions that are logically nested and supported by the available evidence

CAPs have typically contained catchment targets that are long-term and aspirational, and management targets that are shorter-term and often framed as an aggregation of outputs or actions. Upgraded CAPs should use a logical hierarchy for nesting targets that suits the particular business and investment planning needs of the CMA and its partners.

A CAP should be positioned at a strategic level over a five to ten year timeframe, rather than at an operational level. CAPs should describe results that are expected from implementation, timeframes for achieving the results, and priorities for investment that can inform planning¹⁰. A CAP's targets and priorities should be designed to encourage and accommodate investment by a broad range of potential partners. Shorter-term plans directing operational and investment decision-making can be nested under the CAP.

The NRC expects CAPs to include targets that are:

- based on the evidence and analyses described above
- logically nested in a hierarchy
- supported by justified assumptions and program logic
- beyond the scope of the CMA alone to achieve so that they can encompass the actions and responsibilities of partners.

The final targets should provide a frame for negotiating shorter-term, time bound and achievable (SMART) targets in investment programs, or in other negotiated investments with the NSW or Australian Governments. Targets included in investment programs must demonstrate their logical links with the CAP targets through robust program logic, and allow investors to hold partners accountable for implementation.

The CAP is a strategic document that CMAs and partners should be held accountable to at a strategic level. Individual CMAs and partners should then have flexibility to prioritise investments and actions to suit shorter-term investment plans, based on the available resources and in line with the broad responsibilities and targets agreed in the CAP.

Table 3.2 below lists these attributes. It also lists typical questions the NRC will ask during the assessment to determine compliance with the Standard.

¹⁰ Under Section 20(1)(a)(b) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

Table 3.2: Attributes the NRC will be looking for and questions the NRC may ask to determine whether the CAP uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes

Criteria	Attributes	Typical questions the NRC will ask when reviewing CAPs to assess compliance with the Standard
2. CAP uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes	2A. CAP describes the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment using best available science and knowledge of community values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the plan provide a description of the catchment in terms of the linked social-ecological systems? ▪ Was there a structured and comprehensive process for identifying and reviewing best available knowledge on the catchment and its community? ▪ Have knowledge gaps been identified, and is there a strategy to fill those gaps?
	2B. CAP integrates biophysical and socio-economic information to analyse the systems operating in the catchment and develop strategies for improving landscape function and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did the planning process analyse the social-ecological systems and how they function? ▪ Did the planning process consider alternative strategies for improving landscape function and resilience, based on the analysis above? ▪ Did the planning process assess adaptive capacities of the community and stakeholders?
	2C. CAP proposes targets and actions that are logically nested and supported by the available evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the plan contain targets to improve landscape function that are supported by justified assumptions and causal linkages, and will contribute to the achievement of state-wide targets? ▪ Are the proposed targets based on the analysis of social-ecological systems and alternative strategies, as described in 2B? ▪ Does the plan contain strategies to enhance the ability of communities to deal with change (adaptive capacity)?

3.3 Criterion 3: CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community and industry partners

Criteria	Attributes
3. CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community and industry partners	<p>A. Plan aligns with relevant legislation, policies and community aspirations</p> <p>B. Plan can meaningfully guide governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region</p> <p>C. Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment</p>

Achieving improvements in NSW landscapes requires the involvement, commitment and effort of multiple parties in natural resource management. These include government agencies, landholders, community groups, Indigenous groups, non-government organisations, Landcare groups, local government and industry. A CAP should be a plan for collaborative action and investment by these parties in a catchment region. It should be the basis for partnerships where groups work together to build resilient ecologically sustainable landscapes. A CAP like this is both 'whole-of-government' and 'whole-of-community'.

This means that a CAP should aim to align with relevant legislation, policies and community values, provide a forum for agreeing common goals and define priorities for all to work towards. Through two-way information exchange, the CAP should both inform and be informed by relevant government policies. The CAP process should identify areas of commonality and difference and propose ways of achieving better alignment.

There are opportunities for upgraded CAPs to bring about greater alignment between government policies, including natural resource management, water and land use plans, to represent a more integrated approach to natural resource management in each region.

Different types of plans often intersect both spatially and in their effect. Alignment may involve mapping the aims and objectives of the various plans to identify areas of commonality and difference.

One important tool in engaging partners is spatial identification of priorities. Spatial representation of priorities helps to align different plans and can provide guidance for investment and on-ground action. It can also inform decision-making for various policy areas, such as land use management and development and water resources sharing and management.

Ensuring that the CAP will support collaborative action and investment will generate a number of benefits for the CMA and its partners:

- a collaborative approach should increase the effectiveness of both the CMA and its partners, and minimise costs in working towards common objectives
- agreed, common goals should ensure that regulatory decisions, land use planning and other government policies will be reinforced by the incentive programs delivered by CMAs, while also ensuring that regulatory decisions do not undermine the voluntary work of the community

- agreed and documented roles and responsibilities will streamline effort and extend the effectiveness of all partners, building greater confidence in the CAP
- spatial information tools will help with determining and communicating priorities and facilitating alignment towards common goals, and give the CMA a solid basis for influencing policy and programs developed at state and national scales.

Some examples of what the NRC would expect to see in the CAP planning process and the final CAP to demonstrate compliance with the Standard include:

- best available knowledge of partners and stakeholders at all scales, including their particular responsibilities, capacities and information needs
- knowledge of local, state and Australian government scale natural resource policies and plans and their relevance at the regional scale
- understanding of community values and aspirations and how they vary across the catchment
- effective analysis and articulation of spatial scale
- collaboration with partners above the catchment scale as well as with partners within the catchment and across neighbouring catchments
- an effective, collaborative process for negotiating roles and responsibilities
- consideration of risks to landscape function, and CMA effectiveness, of policy, regulatory and planning regimes not aligning with the goals identified in the CAP.

The NRC has used its pilot assessments of two CAPs to calibrate these expectations and develop three attributes around which the NRC will gather evidence in order to make a judgement about performance against the criterion:

A) Plan aligns with relevant policies and community aspirations

This attribute focuses on the role of CAPs at the catchment scale in aligning values that are expressed at a range of other scales. It is about aligning local, state and national priorities with community values, as well as in some cases aligning disparate pieces of state legislation and policy and bringing them together at the regional scale.

In assessing against this attribute the NRC recognises that complete alignment of all stakeholder needs will not be possible. The CMA and agencies will need to determine the most important policy areas to pursue, the degree of alignment that is feasible now, identify the areas of commonality and difference, and design strategies to improve alignment over time. For example, priorities for alignment may include:

- strategic level plans and policies addressing issues of regional, state and national significance (for example, land-use, biodiversity, water sharing, climate change)
- plans and policies providing more specific guidance on local or regional scale issues that are particularly important in a given region.

In addition to aligning state and regional scale natural resource management, land use and water policies and strategies, CMAs should be looking at the key strategic plans and policies in place at all levels. For example, under legislation¹¹ CAPs are required to consider relevant environmental

¹¹ Section 20 (2)(a) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*
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planning instruments under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, including local environment plans.

The Threatened Species Conservation (TSC) Act 1995 provides for the biodiversity certification of the native vegetation reform package. CAPs are part of the package. To retain certification draft CAPs need to contribute to the achievement of the objects of the TSC Act. These objects involve conserving biological diversity and promoting the recovery of threatened species, populations and ecological communities.

Any legislative requirements of CAPs must be met prior to their submission to the Ministers for approval, eg. Biodiversity certification and land use planning requirements.

At the national scale, CMAs should look to align with Australian Government strategies and policies that provide high-level guidance on national values and priorities, and may offer significant opportunities for funding and regional development; current examples are the Australian Government's Clean Energy Future program and the draft National Wildlife Corridors Plan.

For an example of alignment in practice, a National Water Commission project in the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA region has demonstrated a useful methodology for aligning water allocation and natural resource management planning, and identified some good methods for negotiating alignment¹².

To assist the prioritisation of plans and policies for alignment, the NRM Senior Officers Group has developed a list of plans and policies that may help inform CAP development. CMAs and agencies should refer to the NRM Senior Officers Group's *Register of policies, plans and strategies relevant to upgrading CAPs* as a starting point to inform their own prioritisation and alignment processes.

In some cases, restructuring and improvement of policies and plans is needed at the state-wide scale before CAPs can reasonably be expected to bring them together at the regional scale. The NRC expects that the knowledge and priorities being developed in upgraded CAPs will support the review and improvement of relevant policies and plans.

B) Plan can meaningfully guide other governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region

Stakeholders will be seeking varying levels of information and guidance from the CAP depending on their own needs and resources. To accommodate diverse stakeholder needs, CAPs should be designed so that anyone wanting to participate in natural resource management in the catchment can use it to inform or guide their own activities. This means CAPs should be easily understandable, and the underpinning knowledge and analysis should be accessible and easy to use. CMAs need to consider what level of information should be published in the CAP itself, and what is better to include in supporting documentation or link to as a reference.

Spatial tools will be important for communicating and building stakeholder buy-in. Practically, this means that CAPs should contain maps of areas of high environmental value, sensitivity and areas of high priority for targeting management effort. The scope and scale of the spatial

¹² The National Water Commission funded a project involving CMAs, the NSW Office of Water, the former Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water and the NRC to collaboratively develop a methodology for aligning water allocation planning and catchment planning. This methodology was piloted in the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA region and is now being implemented across NSW. The Central West CMA has demonstrated that the methodology can also be applied for the draft Biodiversity Strategy, and potentially other policies. Hamstead, M. (2010) *Alignment of water planning and catchment planning*, Waterlines report, National Water Commission, Canberra.

representation of CAPs will vary according to the needs of the CAP partners and spatial data availability. Spatial data will be important to better align CAP targets with local government's natural resource management priorities and local environment plans (and associated plans), and vice versa.

However, the NRC recognises that the spatial needs of all potential partners cannot be comprehensively covered in an upgraded CAP. For example, the pilot upgraded CAPs demonstrated that it is impractical for CAPs to present information at the property scale needed to directly inform local government land use planning. However, the spatial products presented in the CAP should provide context for the CMA to work with partners collaboratively to produce spatial analyses at finer scales to meet various partners' requirements on an as-needs basis.

Spatial analysis is critical to the methodology for aligning natural resource management and water allocation planning demonstrated in the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA region¹³. It will also be particularly important to allow CMAs to influence the implementation of the Carbon Farming Initiative and the National Wildlife Corridors Plan.

C) Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment

CMAs have the lead responsibility for preparing CAPs. However, both the development of a CAP and its implementation should be collaborative. To get wide buy-in to CAPs requires both a partnership approach in the development of the plan, and endorsement of the final plan. The final result should be that the CAP is 'owned' by all relevant organisations or sectors, and it should include targets and strategies that are beyond the scope of the CMA alone to implement. Ideally, the final CAP should document agreed roles and responsibilities at a strategic level for major partners and stakeholders to ensure effective implementation.

The planning process should consider the opportunities for 'win wins' from coordinated action, but also the potential risks where alignment or partnerships cannot be successfully negotiated.

Prior to submitting the plan for assessment, the CMA should seek confirmation from the relevant agencies of CEO level support for the strategic intent of the plan, and in principle support for the roles and responsibilities outlined in the plan.

Table 3.3 below lists these attributes against the criterion. It also lists typical questions the NRC will ask during the assessment to determine compliance with the Standard.

¹³ Hamstead, M (2010), op. cit.

Table 3.3: Attributes the NRC will be looking for and questions NRC may ask to determine whether the CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community and industry partners

Criteria	Attributes	Typical questions the NRC will ask when reviewing CAPs to assess compliance with the Standard
3. CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community and industry partners	3A. Plan aligns with relevant policies and community aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does the plan document and justify the degree of CAP alignment with relevant natural resource management, water and land use policies and community aspirations? ▪ Does the plan identify strategies to improve alignment between relevant policies, community aspirations and/or priorities determined in the CAP?
	3B. Plan can meaningfully guide governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is the plan concise and easy to understand and interpret, and meaningful to stakeholders? ▪ Are the targets, actions and supporting analysis spatially represented, easily understood and presented in a way that matches the identified needs of stakeholders? ▪ Does the plan provide guidance on how key stakeholders can best use the available information to guide their own natural resource management efforts?
	3C. Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Was there a planned and effective process for agreeing roles and responsibilities in CAP implementation with stakeholders? ▪ Did the planning process consider alternatives for how stakeholders can be involved in CAP implementation? Did this include consideration of synergies? ▪ Does the plan outline potential or agreed roles and responsibilities of major partners and stakeholders in plan implementation?

4 How the NRC will conduct assessments and make recommendations

The NRC recommended approval of the first round of CAPs after reviewing the plans themselves, and the business systems that were inputs to the plans. Consistent with the increasing capabilities of natural resource management organisations, and the growth in natural resource management knowledge and information, the NRC assessment of upgraded CAPs will use a greater degree of technical assessment focussing on the quality of the final plan, and the analysis used to prepare it. However, we are still interested in assessing the quality of the process that produced the plan and the commitment to a whole-of-government approach.

This section provides a general overview of the process and methods that will be used to assess upgraded CAPs. The main steps in the process, including the roles of different stakeholders in CAP development and approval, are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

NRC staff will engage with CMAs during the development of the plans and will provide informal advice to CMAs regarding their planning processes in the early stages of CAP development. Each CMA will receive written feedback from the NRC on any material risks at the end of this monitoring stage at 1 August 2012. After this, the NRC will then prepare for its assessment and is available for clarification of its feedback as needed.

The NRC will commence formal assessment of parts of the CAP prior to final CAP submission, with written notification to CMAs requesting planning and supporting documents. This assessment will focus on criteria 1 and 2 and will inform the NRC's final assessment.

The NRC will assess the CAP against the criteria and attributes outlined in this framework. This will involve collecting evidence and consulting with CMAs, agencies and other stakeholders. Methods for collecting evidence are described in Section 4.1.

The NRC determines what represents an acceptable level of performance against the criteria at a point in time, considering factors and risks specific to the CAP and the region it covers as well as the maturity and development of the regional model as a whole, including comparative performance of other CMAs.

In developing its recommendations, the NRC will consider the strengths and benefits, limitations and risks associated with the CAP, and the nature of any barriers to meeting the criteria. The NRC will also consider: how the CAP should be supported and used by other stakeholders; what actions may be needed to ensure effective implementation; any changes that may be necessary in the short and longer-term; and what systemic changes may be needed to support and improve the CAP over time.

Following consultation with CMAs and agencies the NRC will then produce a final recommendation report to the Ministers for whole-of-government approval that will:

- recommend whether the Ministers should approve the CAP, and what conditions (if any) should apply
- recommend suggested next steps for CMAs and Government to ensure effective implementation and future improvement of the CAP.

The NRC's recommendations report, and any reports detailing supporting evidence, will be made public.

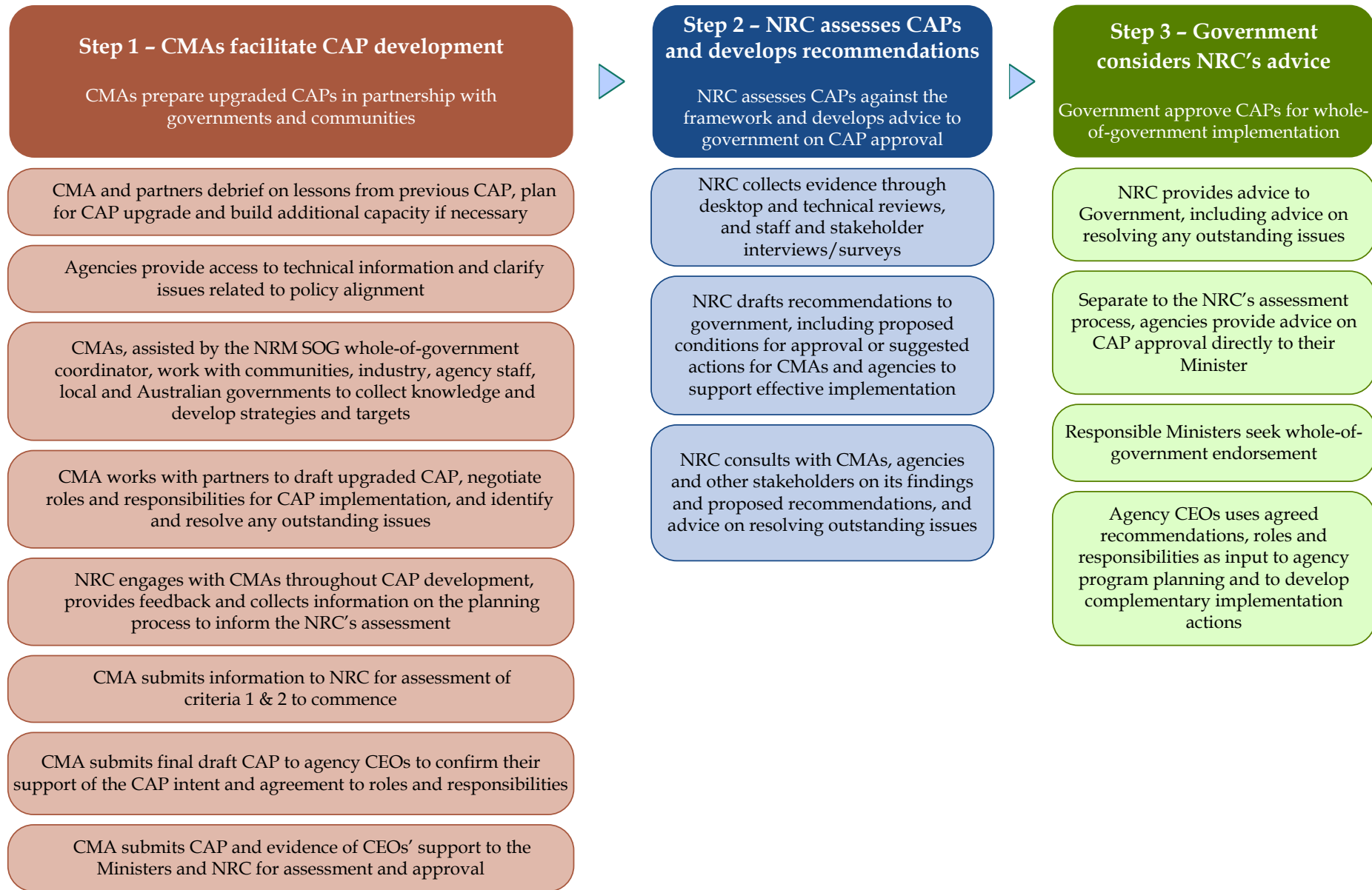


Figure 4.1: Major steps in the NRC's process for assessing and recommending CAPs

4.1 Methods for collecting evidence

The NRC has identified various methods that it may use to collect evidence against the criteria (Table 4.1). The NRC assessment methods will ensure that it collects best available information in the most effective means.

The NRC expects that the CAP is an accessible document, well-structured and targeted at its key audience, which should include government, industry and community natural resource management partners and investors. The NRC does not expect CMAs to include extensive background information and documentary evidence in the CAP itself to demonstrate that the criteria and attributes have been/are being met. Such information should instead be included in supporting documentation and made available to the NRC

The mix of methods and activities used in a particular assessment will be determined through NRC's project planning and will be communicated to the CMA prior to the assessment.

Table 4.1: Methods that may be used to collect evidence

Assessment method	Description
Pre-assessment engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NRC staff will engage with CMAs during the planning process, and will provide informal advice on the planning process and any project risks ▪ Review of relevant planning documents, such as: engagement and project plans; delivery schedules; knowledge management plans; governance structures; risk management strategies; resource plans; and board papers ▪ Identification of characteristics of the region that influence CAP development, such as major issues and institutional structures
Desktop analysis of plan and planning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of the plan and supporting documentation ▪ Review of documentary evidence of the planning process and outputs. This could include documents that guided the evaluation and planning process, for example, a project plan, and/or documents generated in the planning process, for example, a record of a workshop ▪ NRC will request relevant information
Agency consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek agency advice on whether key issues are addressed from the agency's perspective ▪ Particularly relevant for assessing effectiveness of engagement, ability of the CAP to guide and inform other decisions and plans, and the extent of stakeholder support and agreement to roles and responsibilities
CMA interviews board management and staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of verbal evidence of the planning process and outcomes ▪ NRC may request further relevant information
Stakeholder interviews/questionnaires and surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seek key stakeholder advice on whether relevant criteria and attributes are met from their perspective ▪ Particularly relevant for assessing meaningful engagement, ability to guide and inform other decisions and plans, and extent of support ▪ NRC may seek advice from CMA on identifying key stakeholders
Technical reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review of the identification and use of best available knowledge in the planning process and how it informed the plan ▪ Seek technical advice from experts in reviewing key aspects of the plan including systems analysis techniques and outcomes, causal linkages between systems analysis and targets and logic in the nesting of targets.

