



Natural Resources Commission

Final report

Local strategic plan implementation audit

November 2019

Murray Local Land Services

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

DPI	Department of Primary Industries
FARMS	Financial and Rural Management System
IRIS	Integrated Resource Information System
IT	Information Technology
LHMS	Livestock Health Management System
LMBD	Land Management Data Base
LLS	Local Land Services
MERI	Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement

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Document No. D19/3760

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Executive summary

Murray Local Land Services (LLS) region covers an area over 4.2 million hectares in southern NSW and includes the major regional centres of Albury, Barham, Corowa, Moama, Deniliquin, and Tocumwal. Drought is currently depressing the productivity of many landholders (see **Attachment 1**).

The *Local Land Services Act 2013* requires local boards to prepare a local strategic plan and to have it approved by the Minister. The purpose of a local strategic plan is to 'set the vision, priorities and strategy in respect of the delivery of local land services in the region, with a focus on appropriate economic, social and environmental outcomes' (see **Attachment 2**). The Murray LLS local strategic plan (Murray plan) was approved by the Minister in 2016.

The Murray plan sets out the strategic direction for the five years between 2016 and 2021.¹ It outlines how Murray LLS intends to deliver efficient and effective services and outcomes associated with the core functions of LLS; agricultural production, natural resource management, biosecurity and emergency management. It contains 29 regional objectives that define the outcomes that Murray LLS is working towards. To support these outcomes, the Murray plan includes 41 regional priorities and 86 regional actions. These are underpinned by 33 early indicators (two to five years) and 26 longer term indicators (greater than five years).

Murray LLS views the challenges outlined in the Murray plan as current and therefore the Murray plan itself remains relevant to the region's activities. Staff levels have been reduced since 2016, which has impacted on the types of activities that are being delivered in some programs.

The objective of this audit was to assess Murray LLS' implementation of the Murray plan and the extent to which stated outcomes have been achieved within set time frames and reported (see **Attachments 3 and 4**). The audit report was informed by a combination of interviews with Murray LLS staff (see **Attachment 5**) and review of relevant documentation.

The Natural Resources Commission's (the Commission's) audit approach was to look at the broad intent of the Murray plan, focussing on its stated outcomes. The assessment of whether the actions and projects aligned with this intent was the basis for making the judgement regarding the extent of implementation of the Murray plan.

Findings

Overall, the Commission found that, through delivery of its programs, Murray LLS will contribute to achieving the outcomes stated in the Murray plan within the set timeframes. Progress is being reported and the supporting systems and processes are adequate to support the implementation of the Murray plan. The Commission therefore has determined that Murray LLS is likely to implement its Murray plan by 2021.

A key achievement of Murray LLS is that, despite limited investor interest, it has shown a unique commitment to long-term biodiversity monitoring at a landscape scale since 2007. In addition, Murray LLS has also undertaken biodiversity benchmarking for its travelling stock reserves, and produced and shared with LLS a rapid assessment and monitoring method to enable land managers with limited time and skills to readily evaluate the condition of travelling stock reserves. These efforts to produce a landscape scale assessment of biodiversity over time

¹ *Local Land Services Act 2013*, Section 45(1).
Document No: D19/3760
Status: Final

are to be commended and are invaluable for informing strategic decision making and in providing a benchmark from which to measure progress.

Another significant contribution unique to Murray LLS is its support of the rice growing industry in their aims for International Sustainable Accreditation.

Given board effectiveness is dependent upon receiving the right information at the right time from credible sources, strategic oversight and performance would be improved through a shift to outcomes-focused reporting.

The Commission found the following constraints:

- The current information technology (IT) systems are beyond the control of regional LLS as they are controlled by LLS at the state level. Whilst they were deemed adequate to support strategic plan implementation by LLS staff, in their current state, they pose some risks to data integrity, storage and ease of retrieval. The Commission noted that a platform with increased functionality is being rolled out by LLS across the organisation, which is anticipated to address the current risks.
- Funding for natural resource management has been considerably reduced under Catchment Action NSW and the National Landcare Program Phase Two since Murray plan commencement. The region is required to undertake time consuming applications for short-term grants, which must align to investor priorities, limiting the region's ability to embark on strategic landscape scale improvements.

Areas going well

The Commission determined the following areas of Murray plan implementation are going well:

- F1 Murray LLS demonstrated progress in implementing the Murray plan, including progress towards intent for all outcomes and regional priorities within the Murray plan.**
- F3 Operational plans align to the Murray plan.**
- F4 Murray LLS governance processes support Murray plan implementation.**
- F7 Murray LLS reports on progress to the local board of its activities through qualitative updates and annual business plan traffic light reports.**

Key findings to be addressed

The Commission identified the following areas for improvement:

- F2 Measures of success are not explicitly mapped to Murray plan outcomes and data has not been comprehensively collected or collated to measure progress towards outcomes.**
- F5 The planning framework does not provide strong linkages between operational activities, outputs and Murray plan outcomes.**
- F6 Continuous improvement processes could be further strengthened and formalised.**
- F8 There is no explicit reporting on progress at the outcome level of the Murray plan.**

Recommendations

To increase the likelihood that Murray LLS is able to implement its plan by 2021, the Commission recommends that Murray LLS:

R1 Monitor progress towards achieving Murray plan outcomes by:

- rationalising outcomes to provide a key set of outcomes to monitor progress against
- establishing a key set of metrics for each outcome
- establishing a baseline or benchmark for each outcome
- collating existing data for key metrics
- continue to collect data in key areas
- collecting data if any gaps are identified.

R2 Strengthen links between operational activities and Murray plan outcomes by:

- continuing to refine program logics as part of the ongoing theme plan review process to include stronger links between operational activities, outputs and Murray plan outcomes through documented assumptions and key metrics
- amending the annual business plan to include explicit links to Murray plan outcomes.

R3 Include information regarding cumulative achievement of outcomes in its board reports.

1 Achievement of local strategic plan outcomes

The Commission determined that there is progress towards all Murray plan outcomes and regional priorities contained within the Murray plan. However, the extent of this progress is not transparent.

1.1 Areas going well

F1 Murray LLS demonstrated progress in implementing the Murray plan, including progress towards intent for all outcomes and regional priorities within the Murray plan

The Commission recognises that there has been a large amount of effort since the inception of LLS in 2015 to combine three former organisations with different functions and cultures into a successfully functioning Murray LLS. This achievement is to be commended and was positively acknowledged by all interviewees and reflected in relatively positive People Matters Survey Results showing an overall improvement since 2016.²

The Murray plan contains 28 applicable outcomes.³ Of these outcomes:

- Fifteen (54 percent) were achieved
- Six (21 percent) were achieved and ongoing
- Seven (25 percent) were partially achieved and ongoing

The Murray plan contains 41 regional priorities.⁴ Of these regional priorities:

- Twenty-seven (67 percent) were achieved
- One (3 percent) was achieved and ongoing
- Eleven (27 percent) were partially achieved and ongoing
- One (3 percent) was not commenced

Attachment 6 provides more detail on the status of outcomes. The one regional priority that Murray LLS self-assessed as not commenced was “establish baseline indicators across all goals.” Whilst there are no formal baselines established for Murray plan outcomes that are used to report progress against, Murray LLS has:

- been undertaking landscape scale biodiversity monitoring since 2007 in partnership with the Australian National University. This work is commendable given funding available for this type of monitoring work is scarce and no longer available as part of the core LLS funding streams of Catchment Action NSW and National Landcare Program Phase Two. Murray LLS has prioritised this ongoing monitoring, recognising its value to decision

² 2018 People Matters Survey results showed that 77 percent of people agreed that they would recommend Murray LLS as a great place to work in comparison to 68 percent agreement in LLS. People Matters Survey results in 2016 showed 61 percent of people agreed that they would recommend Murray LLS as a great place to work in comparison to 55 percent agreement in LLS.

³ One regional objective that is considered by Murray LLS to no longer be relevant is RO2.4 to ‘increase livestock productivity due to improved livestock biosecurity management practices.’ Murray LLS considers that a range of factors beyond biosecurity influence livestock productivity and is focusing its biosecurity efforts appropriately maintaining a long-term industry viability, rather than at individual farm productivity.

⁴ The regional priority that is considered by Murray LLS to no longer be relevant is P2.4 to ‘develop and implement a regional plant biosecurity business plan.’ Murray LLS has appropriately supported the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) in three plant biosecurity responses. However, DPI is responsible for producing the biosecurity business plan.

making and in providing a benchmark from which to measure progress. This research has enabled measurement of the impact of the collective investment in biodiversity outcomes in the Murray region.

- invested in developing landscape-scale benchmarks to be able to track changes to the condition of travelling stock reserves. Of note was the five-year investment between 2012 and 2017. This project invested in active management and subsequent monitoring to confirm improved vegetation condition across 70 travelling stock reserves. This project trialed, tested and produced a rapid assessment and monitoring method that could be used by land managers with a basic botanical and scientific skillset and limited time. This methodology was subsequently shared with other LLS regions. Over the same time period, Murray LLS invested in woodland bird benchmarking and monitoring across its travelling stock reserves as a measure of ecosystem diversity, and as a surrogate for environmental health and sustainable land use.
- produced the rapid assessment and monitoring method to support ongoing condition assessments by land managers with basic skills and limited time.
- collected data in areas beyond natural resource management to support baseline development.

Other achievements in the Murray LLS region are outlined below:

- Murray LLS has delivered numerous projects to support threatened species and communities, including small-bodied native fish, squirrel gliders, southern pygmy perch, endangered frogs and endangered orchids.
- Murray LLS has also worked to improve the condition and resilience of important ecosystems including the Central Murray Forests Ramsar site and the Upper Murray Billabong-Yanco and Edward Wakool areas. These projects included Aboriginal cultural heritage and involved Aboriginal communities.
- Interviewees reported Murray LLS has applied a flexible and innovative approach to implementing the Murray plan, seizing opportunities to work with industry on emerging opportunities. An example of this is Murray LLS' role in working with the Rice Growers Association on achieving a United Nations accreditation for sustainable rice growing.
- Murray LLS is working with the Tri-state Alliance to deliver employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians.
- Weed management has been carried out in partnership with the Murray Regional Weed Committee and has included management activities on a range of weeds including blackberry, African boxthorn and horehound.
- Murray LLS has successfully maintained positive relationships and partnerships with community groups including local Landcare groups and local Aboriginal land councils. They operate with a 'hub and spoke' strategy, supporting larger groups, who in turn support a number of smaller groups.
- Agricultural advice has focused on drought support for landholders. Its main industries include beef, sheep, dairy, irrigated systems and dryland pasture systems. Focus areas include improved water efficiency, climate variability adaptation and soils. Activities have included workshops which have focused on animal nutrition in dry times and ground cover. Murray LLS has developed a series of options to support the rollout of initiatives to increase adoption of climate adaptation practices in coming years, such as dryland farming and a number of potential options for retired irrigation lands.
- Pest animal management has focused on baiting activities for wild dogs, pigs and foxes. Trials have been done in partnership with Riverina LLS on the thermal imaging of pig

densities. Murray LLS partnerships have resulted in reduced stock attacks from wild dogs through installation of electric fencing. Pest management has also focused on protecting native species in areas where grazing areas have been converted to cropping activities.

Murray LLS is able to demonstrate the implementation of the Murray plan and measurement of associated state-wide LLS or investor-specified outputs.

Murray LLS has worked in partnership with to implement projects and initiatives. These partners include Australian Government, NSW Environmental Trust, Australian National University and local Landcare and Producer Groups.

1.2 Key findings to be addressed

F2 Measures of success are not explicitly mapped to Murray plan outcomes and data has not been comprehensively collected or collated to measure progress towards outcomes

Murray LLS staff indicated that the Murray plan contains some elements that are either not measurable or do not reflect the current functions and priorities of the organisation. For example, the Murray plan outcome “increase livestock productivity due to improved livestock biosecurity management practices” does not reflect broader factors impacting livestock productivity such as nutrition, genetics, weather and the timing of husbandry events. Nor does it reflect Murray LLS’ role in biosecurity to maintain market access for the industry.

A number of Murray plan outcomes were considered to be not measurable by some Murray LLS staff. For example, ‘the majority of primary production enterprises are operating profitably and sustainably’ was considered unmeasurable given low availability of financial data, and the fact that Murray LLS’ focus is on the long-term viability of production industries, rather than on individual landholder profits.

The Commission recognises that Murray LLS may have slightly shifted its focus from the Murray plan outcomes in some cases but is still operating within the stated priority areas.

Project output data is collected but it is not collated comprehensively to establish the contribution of these projects towards achieving Murray plan outcomes.

Project outputs are recorded in programs such as the Integrated Resource Management System (IRIS), MyHQ financial management system, Land Management Data Base (LMDB) or Livestock Health Management System (LHMS). The Commission noted that the understanding of the rules around what data should be recorded against which LLS standard output and in which system was strong in Murray LLS. This provides a high level of confidence around the data held in these systems.

The Murray plan contains 33 early indicators to provide an early (two to five years) measure of regional success against outcomes. Of these, 20 indicators (60 percent) have been reported on at least once, either internally to the board or externally via an LLS annual or five-yearly report, indicating positive progress towards outcomes. This reporting of indicators occurs where Murray plan indicators align with LLS state-wide standard outputs or investor output requirements.

Murray plan indicators are mapped to the four LLS state goals. It is necessary to apply some assumptions in order to map these indicators to Murray plan outcomes. Approximately 25

Murray plan indicators (76 percent) can be mapped in this way to Murray plan outcomes and data is available for 60 percent of these indicators at varying points in time. However:

- this relationship is not made explicitly clear in the Murray plan or within other planning documentation
- output-based performance data is collected but not cumulated and used to track performance towards achieving Murray plan outcomes
- baselines for each indicator are not formally set up even though some good benchmark information exists.

As a result, Murray LLS is not systematically using its output-based performance data or held baseline data to assess the extent to which it is achieving all of the Murray plan outcomes.

The measurement of outcomes resulting from activities is inherently difficult and is a challenge in most organisations. It is often more straight forward to focus on output data relating to what is being delivered on the ground to satisfy stakeholders and investors. Measurement of outcomes is often resource intensive, which is a challenge in the face of reduced funding and staffing levels.

The Commission noted that Murray LLS is aware of the importance of consistent year-on-year projects and on-ground actions, which can deliver the same standard outputs and therefore be aggregated. Achieving this consistency can be difficult given annual funding cycles and changing investor priorities.

Measuring Murray plan outcomes stemming from Murray LLS activities would:

- provide a shared understanding of progress and what still needs to be achieved
- provide a basis for effective oversight, strategic decision making and reporting on performance
- inform future investment and adaptive management decisions
- support the demonstration of value to investors, customers, partners and other stakeholders.

If additional effort is not directed towards data collection that can support the measurement of Murray plan's outcomes, it will be difficult to evaluate the level of achievement of outcomes by 2021.

There are a large number of stated outcomes in the Murray plan.⁵ It is timely to assess opportunities where the Murray plan could be refocused to better focus its activities and associated monitoring efforts on achieving targeted outcomes that align with the organisation's current priority areas.

⁵ There are 29 regional objectives (outcomes) in the Murray plan, which are aligned to four State LLS goals.

To increase the likelihood that the region delivers the outcomes within timeframes per the Murray plan and improves its strategic performance, the Commission recommends that Murray LLS:

R1 Monitor progress towards achieving Murray plan outcomes by:

- rationalising outcomes to provide a key set of outcomes to monitor progress against
- establishing a key set of metrics for each outcome
- establishing a baseline or benchmark for each outcome
- collating existing data for key metrics
- continue to collect data in key areas
- collecting data if any gaps are identified.

2 Systems and processes supporting implementation

The Commission has determined that Murray LLS has sound planning and governance arrangements and adequate IT systems to support implementation of the Murray plan. However, there remain improvements which would increase Murray LLS' effectiveness of implementation.

2.1 Areas going well

F3 Operational plans align to the Murray plan

All operational planning documentation links back to the Murray plan, including explicit references to relevant Murray plan outcomes, regional priorities and actions. In addition, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) information and program logics are common throughout Murray LLS planning documentation.

The key plans in the Murray LLS region include:

- **Seven five-year theme plans:** These inform the delivery direction over five years for each functional area and provide more detail of what is to be achieved and how.⁶ The seven theme plans, endorsed in 2016 by the board, are currently being renewed, commencing with environment and agriculture. The theme plan reviews are being undertaken in close consultation with the board.⁷

Whilst the current theme plans are of varying levels of detail, they generally include a MERI framework, a program logic and targets. In addition, they list applicable Murray plan regional priorities, actions and outcomes. However, how these fit into the program logic is not always apparent.

- **Annual business plans:** These identify projects to be delivered for each year. The annual business plan is approved by the local board on the basis that all programs within the business plan contribute to the Murray plan outcomes.
- **Program or project plans:** These provide detailed project descriptions, including supporting governance structures, milestones, budgets, outputs and outcomes. These follow a template to encourage consistency.

The individual project plans follow a project plan template that guides project managers to identify links between the project outputs and outcomes via a project logic, and to identify the relevant Murray plan outcomes.

- **Personal development plans:** These identify responsibilities and focus areas for staff that link to the Murray plan. These may include regional objectives, delivery of programs, projects or activities depending on the staff member's level of accountability.

Murray LLS has been disciplined in maintaining this line of sight to its Murray plan in its planning processes. This is important as it serves to:

- help prioritise activities in the face of reduced funding, so that the focus for delivery remains on Murray plan outcomes and priorities

⁶ Theme plans are in place for the following seven theme areas: Biosecurity and emergency, environment, agriculture, travelling stock routes and reserves, communities in our landscape, governance, culture and communications, business and corporate services.

⁷ Murray LLS originally intended for there to be an Aboriginal services theme plan. This has been delayed as a result of staffing issues, and the development of the Reconciliation Action Plan and Aboriginal Engagement Strategy may end up taking the place of this theme plan. This is currently being assessed.

- provide confidence to the local board that the annual suite of activities will contribute towards the achievement of the Murray plan outcomes.

F4 Murray LLS governance processes support Murray plan implementation

The Murray LLS board comprises a Chair and three board members that are appointed alongside three board members that are elected by LLS rate payers. This structure combines a high capacity for strategic planning with insights into the priorities of the local community. The local board helps to shape the strategic direction of the organisation, support the development of strong external relationships (including with investors) and plays an important role in communicating the priorities and concerns of customers to the local board.

Board governance and operations contain several examples of good practice. Good governance processes in the region include regular board meetings and using the state-authorised agenda and meeting minutes format. Functional area managers and the General Manager provide regular qualitative reports to the board on the progress of various activities and programs, and theme plans, which highlight any issues.

There are two sub-committees, focussing on communications and new business:

- The Communications Sub-committee will lead a customer survey to understand customer needs regarding communication methods and content, as well as LLS service offerings.
- The new Business Sub-committee investigates opportunities to supplement current variable funding streams.

A Community Advisory Group and an Aboriginal Community Advisory Group are in place to provide advice to the Murray LLS board. The region has operated these groups under various models and has been adaptively managing this process to find a model that works well. Currently, the two groups have a joint meeting, which interviewees report is working well. The function of the groups has improved through a better understanding of roles and responsibilities, more regular meetings and stronger feedback loops between the board and the two groups.

These groups provide a direct avenue for community voices to be heard on various issues, at the board and LLS senior management levels.

The project plan template includes a section on project governance, prompting project managers to include a section on how the project will be governed. Murray LLS often use steering committees for employing a range of decision making and collaboration models as relevant to each project according to its significance, funding arrangements and stakeholder interest. The steering committee arrangements serve to involve the community in decision making, identify opportunities for improvement and ensure appropriate decisions are made. These committees often involve Murray LLS board members.

The Squirrel Glider Local Area Management Plan (2012-2018) is a good example of this planned co-design governance approach. The steering committee has been active throughout the project and is now in a position to take over this successful project, which is currently being transitioned to a steering committee purely made up of stakeholders external to LLS.

2.2 Key findings to be addressed

F5 The planning framework does not provide strong linkages between operational activities, outputs and Murray plan outcomes

The suite of planning documentation (see **Section 2.1** above) includes a list of relevant Murray plan outcomes, regional priorities and actions and, in some cases, indicators.

Project plans generally contain project logics and MERI plans to meet investor requirements. However, the linkage between indicators within the project and program plans, the five-year theme plans, and the Murray plan outcomes and indicators is not always clear. This is likely due to the fact that a common suite of metrics carried through all planning documentation has not yet been developed for each outcome to allow for meaningful quantitative aggregation of progress towards Murray plan outcomes.

Planning process should drive data collection, reporting and outcomes for all activities. They should provide a clear line of sight between operational activities and Murray plan outcomes. The theme plan reviews that are currently underway provide the opportunity to address some of these weaknesses that are already recognised by Murray LLS. They are intended to inform the development of the next iteration of the Murray plan post 2021 and will include:

- a needs assessment
- a definition of Murray LLS' role and targeted stakeholders
- a review of Murray plan outcomes
- refinement of the MERI framework, including a review of indicators
- available baseline information
- targets
- refinement of the theme plan program logic.

In reviewing the program logics, Murray LLS should include an assessment of:

- what outcomes can be measured
- linkages between activities, outputs and their expected outcomes
 - Clear thinking and detail about the assumptions on which the program logic is based will support monitoring activities that test the validity of those assumptions and explain the cause and effect relationships that link activities and outputs with desired outcomes.
- what metrics will be tracked
 - For some outcomes it is recognised that adopting a surrogate metric for part of the outcome will be more feasible to measure than developing metrics for the full outcome.
- the expected level of contribution of each activity to achieving individual outcomes
- the feasibility of activities and timeframes
- the data collection frequency and spatial scale required to show activities are delivered as expected and to inform future improvements
- baselines – where they can be established – and meaningful targets.

This would make it easier to determine the cumulative contribution of programs and projects to Murray plan outcomes.

There is a need, wherever possible, for baseline data from which the impact of investments and progress towards Murray plan outcomes can be measured.

In the first instance, Murray LLS should use data it already has before prioritising additional key baselines that would provide benefit though would require additional data gathering.

Whilst existing baseline data may not be perfect due to a range of reasons, the value of a baseline as a starting point from which progress can be measured should not be underestimated. Baselines may be improved over time and reset if need be. Any changes to baselines will need to balance the incremental increase in resources and effort required to gather better data against the incremental improvement in quality of information.

The annual business plans have evolved since 2016/17, which included very explicit links to the Murray plan, to the 2018-19 annual business plan, which aligns to the LLS state-wide template. This new format does not include explicit links to the Murray plan. Murray LLS is managing this risk by providing additional detailed information to its local board, which identifies explicit linkages back to the Murray plan. This maintains the focus of the Murray LLS business plan with the Murray plan. For simplicity, Murray LLS could consider adjusting the LLS state business plan template to allow explicit linkages back to the Murray plan to maintain this line of sight more transparently.

To increase the likelihood that the region delivers the outcomes within timeframes per the Murray plan and improves its strategic performance, the Commission recommends that Murray LLS:

R2 Strengthen links between operational activities and Murray plan outcomes by:

- **continuing to refine program logics as part of the ongoing theme plan review process to include stronger links between operational activities, outputs and Murray plan outcomes through documented assumptions and key metrics**
- **amending the annual business plan to include explicit links to Murray plan outcomes.**

F6 Continuous improvement processes could be further strengthened and formalised

A number of activities demonstrate a culture of continual improvement at Murray LLS, including:

- theme plan reviews, which are currently underway
- post workshop evaluations
- the development of the rapid assessment and monitoring methodology for travelling stock reserves
- the initiation of the sub-committees for new business and communications
- the restructure of Community Advisory Groups and Aboriginal Community Advisory Groups
- evaluations of some programs, including the Community Capacity and Small Grants Program
- emergency response after action review
- the regional stakeholder survey.

Whilst a culture of continuous improvement is evident in Murray LLS, currently this is done in an *ad hoc* manner and processes for evaluation and continuous improvement incorporating lessons learned is not formalised across all areas of the business. Budget was cited by interviewees as a potential reason for why these processes have not been formalised across all areas of the organisation. An area where particular value could be achieved is following up landholders to determine practice change from particular support received from Murray LLS.

Continuous improvement processes could be further strengthened and formalised to deliver a more consistent approach to documenting, sharing and incorporating lessons learned.

2.3 Constraints

Murray LLS uses the standard suite of IT systems provided by LLS at the state level including government agency systems where LLS has shared responsibilities. These systems have supported Murray plan implementation to date though there are a number of difficulties.

The proposed rollout of 'myLAND' at the LLS state level is anticipated to bring some improvement because it encompasses a web based customer (self-service) portal, other features such as greater accessibility for officers working in the field, and an asset management module.⁸ It will provide a number of functions on one platform, allowing data to be stored in one place, reducing duplication. Areas highlighted by Murray LLS staff during the interview process where myLAND is anticipated to improve efficiency and effectiveness include:

- improved capability to record geographic impact of baiting activities
- improved ability to input data across all functional areas including the ability to input data in the field
- improved ability to extract data in different report formats across the business by a broader range of people
- improved access to customer data for customer service officers
- improved access to online services for customers.

⁸ 'myLAND' is intended to replace and consolidate the existing set of outdated systems with a SaaS (Software as a Service) solution to provide a platform that enables a range of customer- focused business improvements. It will perform the following functions: business reporting, customer relationship and travelling stock reserve management. It will replace the Financial and Rural Management System (FARMS), IRIS and LMDB.

3 Reporting on local strategic plan implementation

The regular reports to the board are useful in providing an indication of the extent of activities contributing to Murray plan implementation. However, they do not provide an indicator of the extent of progress to date or how much remains to be achieved. Where feasible, cumulative reporting would improve the transparency and understanding of progress and organisational achievements.

3.1 Areas going well

F7 Murray LLS reports on progress to the local board of its activities through qualitative updates and annual business plan traffic light reports

Reports to the board at every local board meeting provide the board with a picture of the level of activity within each project or theme area. The traffic light report on business plan achievement status communicates whether programs are on track, fully implemented or are experiencing minor or major delays. Board papers provided to the Commission include a qualitative update from staff on particular focus areas within the organisation and various programs.

These board reports maintain the currency of board awareness of key issues and LLS activities in the Murray region. The outputs are not presented in the context of their contribution to outcomes but are accepted internally as an indicator of progress in implementing the Murray plan. This is largely due to the strong link between the Murray plan and the planning process, in particular the board approval of the business plan. Interviews with board members provided positive feedback on the information they receive from Murray LLS staff in the board papers.

External reports include quarterly reports on activities against the NSW Animal Biosecurity & Welfare Business Plan, to which DPI and all LLS regions contribute. Other external reporting includes the State LLS Annual Report, and reports to the Australian Government (for example, National Landcare Program Phase Two) and NSW government (for example, Catchment Action NSW). Reports to funding bodies provide data on the extent to which programs and projects are complete and identify performance against milestones and spend.

High-level outputs are published in Murray LLS annual reports and posted on the Murray LLS website. They provide information on activities such as baiting programs, managing biosecurity risks, travelling stock reserve management and sustainable agriculture incentives. There are many reports via mixed media that publicise LLS activities. These external reports provide data showing progress towards Murray plan outcomes.

3.2 Key findings to be addressed

F8 There is no explicit reporting on progress at the outcome level of the Murray plan

Reports to the local board can be related back to the Murray plan through annual business plans and program plans. However, much of the information that is needed to drive strategic performance, enable strategic oversight and demonstrate the impact of the Murray plan's implementation is not presented. The reports do not provide an indicator of progress towards the completion of regional priorities or progress towards outcomes. As a result, there is no clear and consistent organisational understanding of progress achieved to date.

It is the board's responsibility to oversee and monitor the implementation of Murray plan, so knowing the level of progress at the outcome level is critical to performing their role

effectively.⁹ A formal cumulative review increase focus on the Murray plan, driving greater accountability to stakeholders and performance improvement towards organisational goals.

Murray LLS already holds much of the data it needs to report on progress. Murray LLS has already done a significant qualitative progress review in putting together its self-assessment for this audit.

To increase the likelihood that the region delivers outcomes within timeframes per the Murray plan and improves its strategic performance, the Commission recommends that Murray LLS:

R3 Include information regarding the cumulative achievement of outcomes in its board reports.

⁹ The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Section 29(1) states that one of the functions of a local board is to 'monitor the performance of Local Land Services in the region, including by reference to the local strategic plan'.

Attachment 1 - Overview of the Murray LLS region

The Murray region covers 42,000 square kilometres and has a population of 107,000 people. Important population centres include the Murray, Edward-Kooley and Billabong - Yanco river systems in towns such as Barham, Corowa, Moama, Deniliquin, Tocumwal and Albury (which is the region's major city). The region supports a large Aboriginal population and many important cultural locations (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1: The Murray region

The landscape is varied and includes steep alpine slopes in the east, as well as vast native grasslands, rangelands and riverine floodplains to the west. Nationally significant areas include Kosciuszko National Park, the Murray River, and Central Murray Red Gum forests, which are recognised as important wetlands under the Ramsar Convention. This landscape is home to a number of threatened and iconic species.

Murray LLS is responsible for the management of approximately 55,000 hectares of travelling stock reserves.

Approximately 75 percent of land in the region is privately owned and approximately one-third of the population is directly involved in agriculture. Agriculture in the region includes cropping, grazing (beef and sheep) and dairying. Rainfall is supplemented by an extensive water supply infrastructure, including Australia's largest irrigation network and the Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric Scheme.

Murray LLS delivers its local strategic plan via eight themes, under which a series of projects and programs sit. These themes are:

- Aboriginal Services.
- Agriculture.
- Biosecurity and Emergency Management.
- Business and Corporate Services.
- Communities in Our Landscape.
- Environment.
- Governance, Culture and Communications.
- Travelling Stock Routes and Reserves.

The region is currently undertaking a mid-term theme plan review.

The main challenges in the region include:

- Supporting regional communities in the face of changing demographics.
- Working to increase the recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage, spirituality and connection to country, as well as providing economic and employment opportunities.
- Maintaining healthy, diverse and connected natural environments.
- Maintaining productive farming systems.
- Changes in rainfall and temperature patterns.

Murray LLS provide advice to primary producers, biosecurity and emergency management services, manage natural resources, broker relationships and share knowledge. Murray LLS' functional areas are organised under three main areas (**Figure 2**). Governance and oversight is provided by a board and the senior management team.



Figure 2: Murray LLS functional areas and business units

Each functional area within Murray LLS has a five-year theme plan. The Annual Business Plan specifies the direction and focus for project and program delivery. Detailed project plans are developed and approved for each program listed in the business plan.

Delivery of projects plans contribute to delivery of the Murray plan outcomes. Projects and programs also need to align with the requirements of other plans including the:

- Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Strategic Plan.
- Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Business Plan.
- Emergency Management Operational Plan.
- Murray Strategic Pest Animal Management Plan.
- Murray Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan.
- Governance, Culture and Communications Theme Plan.
- Travelling Stock Routes and Reserve Theme Plan.
- Agriculture Theme Plan.
- Environment Theme Plan.
- Biosecurity and Emergency Theme Plan.
- Business & Corporate Services Theme Plan.
- Catchment Action NSW – Business Plan.
- National Landcare Program, Regional Partnerships Program.
- Reconciliation Action Plan.

Board members and staff describe the Murray LLS as being, foremost, a customer focused business. Customer satisfaction and confidence in the organisation is a priority, together with a resilient natural environment, and biosecure and sustainable agricultural industries. Priority areas for Murray LLS include:

- maintaining strong relationships and partnering with local Aboriginal land councils and Aboriginal communities
- supporting and maintaining relationships with local community group networks
- agriculture advisory services, including climate change adaptation, irrigator water efficiency, soils and drought support
- adapting to market demands, including in the area of sustainable rice growing credentials
- Aboriginal engagement, including facilitating improved employment opportunities through the Tri-state Alliance partnership
- natural resource management, including supporting a number of threatened species, and improving important conservation areas, including Ramsar wetlands
- travelling stock reserves, including preparation of a local operational plan when the state-wide management plan is completed
- pest animal and invasive plant planning and control to reduce crop and livestock losses and protect native fauna.

Attachment 2 – Murray plan outcomes

During initial discussions with the region it was agreed that the ‘regional outcomes (RO)’ listed in the strategic plan were appropriate outcomes to review progress against for the purpose of this audit. These relate to the four common LLS goals. No timeframes are provided specifically for regional objectives, although indicators of success are provided for two to five years and for greater than five years. The Commission therefore assumes that timeframes against all ROs is 2021 (the completion of the Murray plan).

Goal 1 Resilient, self-reliant and prepared local communities	Timeline
RO 1.1 Increase in Local Land Services engagement and support for customers and stakeholders including information exchange, capacity support, devolved planning and decision-making and devolved project delivery. (S 1,4,5 & 10)	2021
RO 1.2 Increase in employment outcomes for Aboriginal Australians working on country (S7)	2021
RO 1.3 Increase in community leaders, active within their communities and engaging with Local Land Services (S5)	2021
RO 1.4 Increase in engaged and empowered Aboriginal people actively working on Country (S7)	2021
RO 1.5 Increase in community prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from natural disasters and emergency events (S3)	2021
RO 1.6 Increase in enduring partnerships with relevant community organisations (S4)	2021
Goal 2: Biosecure, profitable, productive and sustainable primary industries	Timeline
RO 2.1 The majority of primary production enterprises are operating profitably and sustainably (S2 & S6)	2021
RO 2.2 Increase in ground cover and improved soil condition in priority areas (S2)	2021
RO 2.3 Reduce impact of priority invasive animal and plant species on primary production (S7)	2021
RO 2.4 Increase in livestock productivity due to improved livestock biosecurity management practices (S3)	2021
RO 2.5 Increase in the number of land managers utilising science based, best practice production systems (S1,2,4)	2021
RO 2.6 Increase capability of land managers to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and natural disasters) (S3)	2021
RO 2.7 Increase uptake of practices that support the adaption to the impact of climate variability and long-term climate change (S2,4)	2021
Goal 3: Healthy, diverse and connected natural environments	Timeline
RO 3.1 Increase in the knowledge, skills and capacity of land managers to improve the extent, condition and connectivity of native ecosystems (S1, 2,4,6)	2021
RO 3.2 Increase in land managers, community groups and key stakeholders actively engaged in local decision-making and partnerships to achieve sustainable natural resource management (S4, 5,7)	2021

RO 3.3 Increase in priority landscapes, aquatic ecosystems and habitat corridors being managed, including TSR's (S4, 9)	2021
RO 3.4 Reduction in key threats to biodiversity in priority areas (S1,2,4)	2021
RO 3.5 Increase in communities' connection to their environment and action to improve local environments (S1, 2,7,11)	2021
RO 3.6 State, regional and local priorities in NRM are addressed (S4,6,9)	2021
RO 3.7 Increase in research directly addressing regional issues and contributing to adaptive management (S2,6)	2021
Goal 4: Board members and staff who are collaborative, innovative and commercially focused	Timeline
RO 4.1 An embedded values-based service culture responsive to client, customer and community needs and based on core values (S 10,11)	2021
RO 4.2 Increase in staff and customer satisfaction and wellbeing (S10,11,12)	2021
RO 4.3 Increase in governance standards including a commitment to review, adaptation and accountability (S12)	2021
RO 4.4 Clear evidence-based decision-making frameworks (S6,12)	2021
RO 4.5 Improved business systems improved to support delivery and reporting (S12)	2021
RO 4.6 Skilled, experienced and motivated staff (S10)	2021
RO 4.7 Increase in internal and external relationships and collaboration that add value for stakeholders and customers (S4,11)	2021
RO 4.8 Increase in external funds sourced to the region (S7,12)	2021
RO 4.9 Increase in customer, stakeholder and staff feedback being sought and addressed (S10,11)	2021

Attachment 3 – Audit overview

The Commission's role in auditing local strategic plans

Section 46(1) of the *Local Land Services Act 2013* requires the board of each LLS region to prepare a local strategic plan and to have it approved by the Minister. These local plans were approved by the Minister mid-2016.

Section 45(1) of the *Local Land Services Act 2013* specifies that the purpose of a local strategic plan is to 'set the vision, priorities and strategy in respect of the delivery of local land services in each region, with a focus on appropriate economic, social and environmental outcomes'.

Section 47(1) of the *Local Land Services Act 2013* specifies that a local strategic plan for a region must include:

- outcomes that are expected to be achieved by the implementation of the plan in relation to the region and the timeframes for achieving those outcomes
- requirements for reporting on whether those outcomes and timeframes have been achieved.

The Commission has a role under section 54(4) of the *Local Land Services Act 2013* to undertake an audit of local strategic plans.¹⁰ Section 54(2) requires each local strategic plan to be audited within three years of its approval by the Minister to ascertain whether its provisions are being given effect. This requirement has been triggered, given the local strategic plans commenced mid-2016.¹¹

Audit approach and methodology

The Commission interprets the audit objective under section 54(2) of the *Local Land Services Act 2013* as being to assess each LLS region's implementation of its local strategic plan. Specifically, to assess the extent to which stated outcomes have been achieved within set time frames and reported (see **Attachment 4** for scope of works).

The audit has been carried out consistent with the audit scope endorsed by LLS. The audit focused on the reporting of the achievement of outcomes against timeframes as stated in the strategic plan.

The Commission assessed audit findings against the audit evaluation framework which includes a maturity scale used to assess observed LLS performance with respect to each audit focus area.

Evidence

The Commission's audit was informed by a range of evidence, including:

- **Interviews:** with key staff and board members in each LLS region
- **Document review:** the Commission obtained relevant information from each LLS region, documentation received from LLS State Operations and relevant staff.

The Commission would like to thank all the staff in Northern Tablelands LLS, who contributed to this review.

¹⁰ The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Section 54(4) states that 'an audit under this section is to be carried out by the Natural Resources Commission or an independent person, body or panel appointed by the Minister'.

¹¹ The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Section 45(2) states that 'a local strategic plan has effect for the period of 5 years (or such other period as is prescribed by the regulations) after it is approved by the Minister'.

Attachment 4 – Scope of works

Scope of Works

LLS Strategic Plan Implementation Audit

Background

The Natural Resources Commission (Commission) will undertake the audits of each LLS local strategic plan to ascertain whether its provisions have been given effect¹² as the independent auditor¹³ in accordance with the Local Land Services Act 2013 (the Act).

The local strategic plans were approved by the Minister in 2016. The plans were written to address legislative requirements and the LLS Performance Standard (Standard). The Commission reviewed the plans prior to approval and conducted a detailed assessment of how the plans complied with legislation and aligned with the Standard.

This audit will focus on the implementation of the local strategic plans.

Audit Objective and Scope

To satisfy legislative requirements, specifically to assess LLS' implementation of local strategic plans and the extent to which stated outcomes have been achieved within set time frames and reported.

The audit scope will include a review of:

- implementation of strategic plans in each of the 11 LLS regions.
- within each LLS region, systems and processes supporting implementation and progress monitoring of strategic plan implementation.

The audit scope will not include a review of:

- the quality and objectives of the plans as this was covered in the Commission's Strategic Plan Review in March 2016.
- the LLS State Strategic Plan.

Overall Approach

Information to support the audit analysis will be sought from all LLS regions and state wide LLS via document review, interviews and site visits.

Five key audit questions will be addressed. They are listed below.

¹² The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Section 54(2) states that 'the Minister is to ensure that each local strategic plan is audited, within 3 years of its approval, to ascertain whether its provisions are being given effect'.

¹³ The *Local Land Services Act 2013* Section 54(4) states that 'an audit under this section is to be carried out by an independent person, body or panel appointed by the Minister'.

Key Question	Criteria
To what extent does each LLS region have systems and processes in place to support the implementation of local strategic plans?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Systems fully developed and fully functional 2. Systems partially developed/ Systems partially functional 3. Systems not developed, ad hoc approach
To what extent have stated outcomes ¹⁴ been achieved within set timeframes for each local strategic plan?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. All stated outcomes achieved per set timeframes 2. Stated outcomes partially achieved 3. Stated outcomes not achieved
To what extent has achievement of stated outcomes been reported and how does this align with reporting requirements as set out in each local strategic plan?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Progress reporting fully available, integrated and transparent 2. Progress reporting partially available, partially integrated 3. Progress reporting not available
What has worked well and what are the potential areas of improvement in LLS' local strategic plan implementation?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Areas for improvement identified are all low risk 2. Areas for improvement identified include moderate risk items 3. Areas for improvement include high risk items
What are the gaps/ constraints impacting performance?	<p>1 N/A</p>

One final report will be provided to the Minister mid-2019.

¹⁴ Each region has identified outcomes in their strategic plans in different ways. For example, local plans may refer to regional success, strategic objective, strategic intent. The Commission will work with each region to verify its interpretation of outcomes as they appear in each local strategic plan.

Attachment 5 – Interviewees

Area	Role	Name	Date
Board	Chair	David Wolfenden	29 May 2019
	Board Member	Michelle Humphries	30 May 2019
	Board Member	Colin Bull	27 May 2019
LLS staff	General Manager	Gary Rodda	29 May 2019
	Manager – Land Services	Trish Bowen	29 May 2019
	Manager – Biosecurity and Emergency Services	Geoff Corboy	20 May 2019
	Manager – Corporate Services	Colin McMahan	29 May 2019
	Team Leader – Agricultural	Tom McIntosh	30 May 2019
	Team Leader – Environment	Leigh Blackmore	30 May 2019
	Team Leader – TSR	Peter O’Shannessy	29 May 2019
	MERI Officer	Elisa Tack	30 May 2019

Attachment 6 – Regional objectives and regional priority status

The results of the self-assessment undertaken by Murray LLS in the first quarter of 2019 in preparation for this audit are outlined below. Various documentation was provided as evidence in support of this assessment.

Regional objective status	
Rating	Regional objective partially achieved and ongoing
	<p>RO2.1 The majority of primary production enterprises are operating profitably and sustainably (S2 &S6)</p> <p>RO2.7 Increase the uptake of practices that support the ability to adapt to the impact of climate variability and long-term climate change (S2,4)</p> <p>RO4.3 Increase in governance standards including a commitment to review, adaptation and accountability (S12)</p> <p>RO4.4 Clear evidence-based decision-making frameworks (S6, 12)</p> <p>RO4.5 Business systems improved to support delivery and reporting (S12)</p> <p>RO4.7 Increase in internal and external relationships and collaboration that add value for stakeholders and customers (S4,11)</p> <p>RO4.8 Increase in external funds sourced to the region (S7,12)</p>
Rating	Regional objective achieved and ongoing
	<p>RO1.5 Increase in community prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from natural disasters and emergency events (S3)</p> <p>RO2.2 Increase ground cover and improved soil condition in priority areas (S2)</p> <p>RO2.3 Reduce impact of priority invasive animal and plant species on primary production (S7)</p> <p>RO2.6 Increase capability of land managers to respond to emergencies (emergency animal disease and natural disaster) (S3)</p> <p>RO3.1 Increase in the knowledge, skills and capacity of land managers to improve the extent, condition and connectivity of native ecosystems (S1, 2,4,6)</p>
Rating	Regional objective achieved
	<p>RO1.1 Increase LLS engagement and support for customers and stakeholders including information exchange, capacity support, devolved planning and decision-making and devolved project delivery. (S 1,4,5 & 10)</p> <p>RO1.2 Increase employment outcomes for Aboriginal Australians working on country (S7)</p> <p>RO1.3 Increase community leaders, active within their communities and engaging with LLS (S5)</p> <p>RO1.4 Increase engaged and empowered Aboriginal people actively working on Country (S7)</p> <p>RO1.6 Increase enduring partnerships with relevant community organisations (S4)</p>

RO2.5 Increase number of land managers utilising science based, best practice production systems (S1,2,4)

RO3.2 Increase in land managers, community groups and key stakeholders actively engaged in local decision-making and partnerships to achieve sustainable natural resource management (S4, 5,7)

RO3.3 Increase in priority landscapes, aquatic ecosystems and habitat corridors being managed, including TSR's (S4, 9)

RO3.4 Reduction in key threats to biodiversity in priority areas (S1,2,4)

RO3.5 Increase in communities' connection to their environment and action to improve local environments (S1, 2,7,11)

RO3.6 State, regional and local priorities in NRM are addressed (S4,6,9)

RO3.7 Increase in research directly addressing regional issues

RO4.1 An embedded values-based service culture responsive to client, customer and community needs and based on core values (S 10,11)

RO4.2 Increase in staff and customer satisfaction and wellbeing (S10,11,12)

RO4.6 Skilled, experienced and motivated staff (S10)

Rating	Regional objective no longer relevant
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RO2.4 Increase livestock productivity due to improved livestock biosecurity management practices (S3)

Regional priority status

Rating	Regional priority partially achieved and ongoing
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P1.1 Develop theme plans for communities, Aboriginal communities and emergency services

P1.4 Develop a framework for decision-making associated with investment with groups for project delivery or group capacity support

P2.8 Support land manager adaptations to climate variability through application and extension of locally-specific modelling scenarios, local monitoring and ground truthing.

P2.9 Support activities that promote land managed within capability across the rangeland, irrigated and high rainfall cropping, grazing and mixed farming systems of the region

P3.8 Complete TSR valuation and asset review

P4.1 Develop Theme Plans for each area of the Murray Local Land Services business

P4.2 Implement a plan to drive integration and develop a values-based regional culture

P4.3 Develop process to ensure organisational standards and legislative requirements are met

P4.5 Establish systems for data capture appropriate to all levels of internal and external utilisation, monitoring, review and reporting

P4.6 Understand and address risk across the business and in co-delivery and devolution of funds to stakeholders and customers

P4.11 Contribute to, adapt and improve as a result of audits, reviews and lessons learned processes.

Rating	Regional priority achieved and ongoing
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P4.4 Address next level planning and create a clear alignment between all levels of the planning framework

RO 4.9 Increase in customer, stakeholder and staff feedback being sought and addressed.

Rating	Regional priority achieved
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P1.2 Develop and implement a plan for monitoring, mapping and supporting the capacity and aspirations of customers and stakeholders such as landcare and producer groups

P1.3 Support increased sharing of knowledge and skills internally and externally

P1.5 Increase MATG and LCAG functionality as clear pathways to influence decision-making

P1.6 Improved communications and engagement processes with customers and stakeholders

P1.7 Increased collaboration and devolution of decision-making and delivery

P1.8 Support education and awareness activities for the broader community

P1.9 Develop and conduct a stakeholder satisfaction survey

P2.1 Develop theme plans for biosecurity and agricultural advisory services

P2.2 Deliver a regional animal extension and compliance biosecurity program that addresses legislative requirements particularly those associated with footrot, NLIS and saleyard compliance

P2.3 Deliver a regional pest extension and compliance biosecurity program that addresses legislative requirements particularly those addressing wild dogs, rabbits, feral pigs and locusts

P2.5 Deliver a program to decrease the effect of emergency biosecurity events (plants and animals) and natural disasters (e.g. animal welfare in flood and fire) on regional primary production.

P2.6 Develop and deliver discretionary group pests and animal health biosecurity programs including those addressing fox control, ovine Brucellosis and ovine Johnes disease

P2.7 Support a coordinated approach to weeds and implement key recommendations from the NSW Weeds Review including forming a Regional Weed Advisory Committee

P2.10 Deliver effective and relevant agriculture advisory services that support key regional industries including rice, cropping, sheep and beef and that address water use efficiency and adaptation to changed water regimes

P3.1 Develop theme plans for environment and land management

P3.2 Deliver and adapt social-ecological systems projects in the Upper Murray, Billabong-Yanco and Edward-Wakool areas

P3.3 Deliver projects that improve landscape scale native vegetation connectivity and wetland enhancement in priority areas

P3.4 Deliver projects to support threatened species and communities' including small bodied native fish, squirrel gliders, endangered orchids, bush stone curlews and endangered ecological communities.

P3.5 Deliver programs to reduce the impacts of key threats to the conservation estate including the Central Murray Forests

P3.6 Continue to support and review long-term monitoring programs and research that build our adaptive management and decision-making capacity.

P3.7 Further integrate program delivery with biosecurity services to achieve coordinated approaches to NRM, biosecurity, pest plant and animal control

P3.9 Develop a clear and adaptable TSR management plan that incorporates economic, environmental, social and cultural values

P 3.10 Further develop prioritisation frameworks and decision-support tools to guide investment and delivery mechanisms (in areas of greatest weakness).

P4.7 Prioritise workplace health and safety

P4.8 Explore opportunities to increase resources into the region

P4.9 Develop the leadership, management, communication and engagement skills of our people

P4.10 Continue to pursue integration across all aspects of our business

Rating	Regional priority not commenced
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P4.13 Establish baseline indicators across all goals

Rating	Regional priority no longer relevant
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P2.4 Develop and implement a regional plant biosecurity business plan
