



Natural Resources Commission

Final report

Local strategic plan implementation audit

November 2019

South East Local Land Services

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

FARMS	Financial and Rural Management System
IT	Information Technology
IRIS	Integrated Resource Information System
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LLS	Local Land Services
LMDB	Land Management Database
MERI	Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement

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The Commission reserves the right to update this draft audit report upon completion of auditing the remaining LLS regions.

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Executive summary

Background

The South East Local Land Services (LLS) region covers a topographically diverse area of approximately 5.6 million hectares in south-eastern NSW. It extends from the warm temperate coastal lowlands from Stanwell Park in the north, southwards to the Victorian border, across the highlands and into the tablelands to the west as far as Yass, and to the Snowy Mountains and the Murray River in the south. The coastal areas of the region that extend from Wollongong south to Kiama and Nowra are highly populated. The largest inland regional centres are Queanbeyan and Goulburn. An extended drought has brought challenges to the region and there are signs of a turnaround in seasonal conditions (see **Attachment 1**).

The *Local Land Services Act 2013* requires local boards to prepare a local strategic plan. 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 South East LLS local strategic plan (South East plan) was approved by the Minister in 2016.

The South East plan sets out the strategic direction for the five years between 2016 and 2021. It outlines how South East 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. The plan contains 19 outcome statements to achieve the four goals (which are referred to as outcomes for the purpose of this audit). To support these outcomes the South East plan includes:

- forty-one actions and 38 regional performance measures that are aligned to 12 strategies
- seven key performance indicators (KPIs) aligned to the outcomes and four goals.

South East LLS has experienced significant change since the development of the South East plan. There have been major reductions in funding, a new organisational structure and changes in senior management. A formal organisational change process completed in early 2017 resulted in a 'flatter' management structure, with South East LLS operations based on six local area teams, rather than functional areas, across the whole region.

This structure is unique among LLS regions and the transformation led to an upheaval for staff and disruption to programs. The redesign to focus delivery on local areas was considered necessary by the organisation due to the size and diversity of geography and land use in the region. The reduction in funding and associated staff numbers was the key reason for changing how South East LLS operated.

The board and senior management have overseen substantial cultural change and are beginning to see more effective cross-functional delivery at the operational level.

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

The Natural Resources Commission's (Commission) audit approach was to look at the broad intent of the South East 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 South East plan.

Findings

Overall, the Commission found that the project activities being delivered are contributing to achieving some South East plan outcomes. The board and senior management have overseen significant cultural change and are beginning to see more effective cross-functional delivery at the operational level. After forthcoming business planning process and efforts improved strategic alignment of programs are completed, there is expected to be a shift in priorities and the South East plan may be formally amended.

South East LLS has collected some data against the regional performance measures under each strategy. This was collated by the Commission as part of this audit. There has been very little collection or collation of evidence to assess progress against the KPIs linked to South East plan outcomes. This has limited the Commission's ability to assess progress towards South East plan outcomes.

The South East plan is not driving planning processes or the prioritisation of activities. However, South East LLS is delivering activities that fall within the scope of the South East plan, meaning activities can be aligned to the South East plan. This alignment is not deliberate beyond aligning with the four State LLS goals and twelve strategies that define the state-wide LLS organisation. The impact of project activities is not being assessed in relation to South East plan implementation. Project information is gathered in relation to investor or State LLS requirements.

The Commission found that South East LLS is likely to implement activities that contribute to its existing South East plan by 2021, although more work is needed to demonstrate achievement of outcomes.

South East LLS intends to revisit its regional priorities in the near future. As part of this, it may be appropriate to consider formally amending the South East plan. A simpler, more targeted plan could better drive strategic decision-making and improve the delivery of services to meet regional needs.

Regular reviews of progress by the board and management would improve strategic and operational oversight of intended outcomes.

Areas going well

The Commission found the following areas of South East plan implementation are going well:

- F1 South East LLS demonstrated progress in completing project activities that contribute to each of the strategies in the South East plan and some progress towards meeting outcomes.**
- F3 Governance processes support the effective implementation of projects.**

Key findings to be addressed

The Commission identified the following areas for improvement:

- F2 Adequate data are not being collected or collated to measure the extent of progress towards South East plan outcomes.**

F4 The South East plan is not driving planning processes or activities.

F5 There is no explicit reporting on the extent to which projects are contributing to South East plan outcomes.

Recommendations:

To increase the ability of South East LLS to demonstrate achievement of outcomes and to implement the South East plan by 2021, the Commission recommends that South East LLS:

- R1 Improve the collection and collation of data on South East plan regional performance measures and begin collecting and collating data for South East plan KPIs to enable an assessment of achievement towards outcomes.**
- R2 Planning documents should be updated to include South East plan outcomes. The new South East Business Plan 2019-21 should set out a program logic and a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework that specifies metrics, data collection and key baselines to support the assessment of cumulative progress towards South East plan regional performance measures and outcomes.**
- R3 Include quantitative information on cumulative achievement of South East plan outcomes in its board reports.**

1 Achievement of local strategic plan outcomes

The Commission found that South East LLS has demonstrated progress in completing project activities that could contribute to each of the strategies in the South East plan, and some progress in meeting outcomes.

Interviewees indicated that it has been an organisational priority to restructure and change culture before focussing specifically on delivering South East plan outcomes. This has impacted on the delivery of the South East plan.

Wild dog management has been a long-standing and challenging issue. There has been an increased effort to monitor the impact of dog control measures through the implementation of local plans. Examples of these efforts include mapping attack outbreaks, baiting and other control activities. Feedback from private land managers provides information on stock losses and sightings in each wild dog management area. Despite these community efforts, South East LLS resources are still focussed on direct control. The additional resources directed towards wild dog management has restricted South East LLS' ability to deliver fully across all areas of the South East plan.

1.1 Areas going well

F1 South East LLS demonstrated progress in completing project activities that contribute to each of the strategies in its South East plan and some progress towards meeting outcomes

The plan contains 19 outcome statements to achieve the four goals and these are the 'outcomes' that South East LLS is working towards. Seven high-level KPIs are used to measure progress towards South East plan outcomes. To support these outcomes, the South East plan includes 41 actions and 38 regional performance measures aligned to the 12 strategies.

In summary, of the regional performance measures:

- Twelve had been progressed (32 percent).
- Twenty-two had been partially progressed (58 percent).
- Four had not been progressed (10 percent).

There has been no self-assessment and little data provided that could be used to assess progress towards the delivery of South East plan actions or achievement of South East plan outcomes. In addition, the Commission found that there was very little baseline data available and no system to measure progress towards targets for the South East plan KPIs. However, South East LLS was able to provide some quantitative data and other evidence to demonstrate the level of progress against the regional performance measures aligned to the strategies (detailed in **Attachment 6**). This was the basis for the Commission's assessment of progress.

Three of the four regional performance measures not progressed related to the preparation of plans and strategies that were no longer considered relevant or required.¹ The three measures were:

- 'By June 2017, develop and implement the Regional Information Services Strategy.'
- 'Develop and implement a Regional Collaboration Plan by March 2017.'

¹ This relates to regional performance measures 1.3, 2.3, 4.2 and 11.3.

- 'By March 2017, develop and implement the South East Adaptive Management Plan.'

The Agriculture Services Team indicated that the performance measure relating to the benchmarking project for priority industries was still relevant and would be progressed in the future.

Key achievements include:

- A long-standing initiative has been the Feral Fighters Program. This program targets pest animals by developing local plans and undertaking coordinated group baiting and control programs. It is conducted in partnership with the community, Landcare, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Department of Primary Industry. Good participation in the Feral Fighters Program regionally is evidenced by follow-up surveys of participants over several years. This program contributes to the South East plan outcomes related to sharing responsibility for biosecurity threats and increasing of customer and stakeholder engagement and collaboration.²
- South East LLS has provided a comprehensive regional drought response catered to local needs. This response has included:
 - the formation of a multidisciplinary drought coordination group that meets quarterly to advise the board
 - the development and implementation of the Drought Response Strategy 2018-21 that contains strategic objectives and also has an operational focus³
 - agricultural advice to livestock farmers delivered through livestock feeding workshops, other drought information sessions in collaboration with Rural Financial Counselling Services, and regional mental health programs.
- South East LLS has undertaken a follow-up survey data relating to landholder practice change as a result of South East LLS services.⁴ This initiative has provided data for several regional performance measures in the South East plan.⁵ Results included:
 - increased leadership capacity of Landcare based members
 - increased landscape-scale pest and weed management
 - increased land manager knowledge and skills
 - increased land manager adoption of improved practices to protect biodiversity and restore soil health and water quality.
- Overall customer satisfaction with LLS services increased between 2015 and 2018, evidenced by the results of the State LLS Customer Focus Survey.⁶

² These include Strategy 5 to 'ensure local people participate in decision making' and the associated region performance measure of 'the number of people engaged in the development of local plans'.

³ The drought coordination group includes one local manager, two senior agricultural advisors, one senior biosecurity officer, one district vet, one delivery support person and one customer administration officer from each local area.

⁴ South East LLS (2019) *Learning and engaging through evaluation – a participatory internal evaluation of investment in natural resource management and sustainable agriculture outcomes 2014-2018*.

⁵ These include Strategy 1 to 'provide data, information and knowledge that supports and enables land managers and customers to improve decision making (corresponding regional performance measure of 'increase customer access and satisfaction with information services'), Strategy 2 to 'provide products and advisory services that support and enable customers to implement improved practices (corresponding regional performance measure to 'annually evaluate the adoption of improved practices by 10 percent of customers who have undertaken training or advisory services activities')'.

⁶ Instinct and Reason (2018) *LLS State-wide Customer Focus Survey*. Prepared for State LLS.

1.2 Key finding to be addressed

F2 Adequate data are not being collected or collated to measure the extent of progress towards South East plan outcomes

South East LLS is implementing various activities that contribute to the 12 generic South East plan strategies. South East LLS has collected some data against the regional performance measures under each strategy and the Commission collated this evidence as part of this audit. However, limited evidence has been collected for the South East plan KPIs that are linked to outcomes. This limited the Commission's ability quantifiably assess progress towards South East outcomes. In addition, the Commission found differences in opinion between board directors and between staff on the extent to which they considered actions or outcomes had been achieved.

Most project outputs are recorded in LLS systems such as the Integrated Resource Information System (IRIS), Financial and Rural Management System (FARMS) and the Land Management Database (LMDB) but these records have not been collated against the KPIs that measure South East plan outcomes.

Some of the South East plan measurements are quantifiable but, while some data is being collected, it has not yet been collated to provide an assessment of contribution to South East plan outcomes.

To increase its ability to measure the contribution of actions to achieving South East plan outcomes, the Commission recommends that South East LLS:

R1 Improve the collection and collation of data on South East plan regional performance measures and begin collecting and collating data for South East plan KPIs to enable an assessment of achievement towards outcomes.

2 Systems and processes supporting implementation

The Commission found that South East LLS has governance and information technology (IT) systems that adequately support its operations. However, planning processes can be improved to align programs to the South East plan to ensure its implementation.

2.1 Areas going well

F3 Governance processes support effective implementation of projects

The South East LLS board comprises a chair and three elected and three appointed members. There is Aboriginal representation on the board for the first time.

South East LLS' organisational structure is unique and comprises six local areas led by six local area managers.

There are fortnightly meetings between the leadership team and, 12 months ago, 'FIT' meetings⁷ were introduced, which enable team leaders from each functional area to share experiences, resolve issues and discuss opportunities to collaborate.

Board operations include both performance and risk sub-committees that monitor issues impacting the business including seasonal, political and financial concerns.

The board revised the number of community advisory groups from six (one for each local area), which posed resourcing challenges, to one, which provides regular feedback on relevant matters.

The Aboriginal Community Advisory Group has been recently established, in addition to the general Community Advisory Group. The Aboriginal Community Advisory Group aims to develop appropriate and innovative ways for South East LLS to work with local Aboriginal communities. On-ground activities have included cross-tenure cultural burns and an agreement with Bega Local Aboriginal Land Council for Koori work crews to support biodiversity projects in the far South Coast local area.⁸

In addition to the community advisory groups, community engagement has been facilitated through a new initiative with 'Stakeholder breakfasts' held prior to board meetings, commencing August 2015. These provide an opportunity for community members to directly speak to and receive feedback from the board on issues of concern. Five community and two external state agency members attended the February 2019 breakfast in Bega. This initiative contributes to two actions under Strategy 5 and one regional performance measure.⁹

⁷ Functional Internal Teams.

⁸ These initiatives contribute towards Actions 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 under Strategy 7 to 'deliver services that support Aboriginal people to care for Country and share traditional land management knowledge' and the regional performance measure that 'by 2020, a minimum of 15 Aboriginal people have been employed to deliver natural resource management activities'.

⁹ Strategy 5 is to 'ensure local peoples participate in decision making'. Action 5.1 is to 'promote opportunities for involvement in LLS decision making' and Action 5.5 is to 'provide opportunities for broad participation via face to face and online technologies'. The regional performance measure is for an 'increase in participation in annual local customer forums'.

2.2 Key findings to be addressed

F4 The South East plan is not driving planning processes or activities

Current planning processes include preparation of:

- an annual business plan
- detailed annual service delivery plans for individual projects and programs.

Annual service delivery plans for projects and larger programs have been consistently developed and include details on outputs and outcomes, delivery method and monitoring and evaluation for investor funded projects to meet investor requirements. However, there are very few to no clear links to the South East plan. Planning documentation does not include a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) framework or program logics to link activities to South East plan outcomes.

The South East plan is not driving the projects and programs being delivered. The projects and programs are being driven by investor preferences, State LLS and the community, rather than the South East plan. Activities can be aligned to the general aspects of the South East plan, given its generic nature. However, there is no deliberate strategic planning to prioritise activities and projects for the purpose of implementing the South East plan.

The board and senior management recognise this and have begun developing the South East LLS Business Plan 2019-21. This is intended to be a new planning mechanism that links the South East plan outcomes, strategies, regional performance measures and actions to annual service delivery plans. This should help establish and implement monitoring to better understand the extent to which the South East plan is being implemented. It should also provide information on what still needs to be achieved, to inform decision-making.

From August 2019, South East LLS intends to develop program-level plans across the functional areas that will set out MERI frameworks and program logics for each area. These plans are intended to link more strongly to other key plans, including the South East plan.

The development of a high-level MERI framework that specifies metrics and data collection methods would support the assessment of cumulative progress towards South East plan outcomes. This should also form part of the business planning process. It would be beneficial if this process resulted in some rationalisation of the 38 regional performance measures identified in the South East plan.

The MERI framework should be supported by a clear program logic, which sets out:

- the relationship between program-level activities and outputs with South East plan outcomes
- clearly defined metrics linked to regional performance measures
- underlying assumptions made to establish the links between activities, outputs, outcomes and regional performance measures.

Baseline data is needed wherever possible to measure progress towards South East plan outcomes. South East LLS has already collected some baseline data and follow-up survey data related to landholder practice change and asset condition for natural resource management,

sustainable agriculture, and Aboriginal community support.¹⁰ South East LLS should focus on using data it already has before prioritising additional key baselines that would provide benefit but require additional data collection. While existing baseline data may have limitations, the value of having baseline data from which to measure progress should not be underestimated. Baselines may be improved over time and reset if needed. Any changes to baselines will need to balance the increase in resources required to gather better data against improvements in the quality of information.

The new cluster arrangements in the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment provide more opportunities to collaborate and share data and resources, especially around access to data on outcomes for which LLS has a shared responsibility.

The South East LLS Business Plan 2019-21 is intended to enable limited resources to be targeted to core business and regional priorities. If new priorities emerge that are materially different to current South East plan outcomes during the planning process, it may be an appropriate time for South East LLS to consider seeking an amendment to the current South East plan to formalise any change in strategic focus. This would also redistribute activities and associated monitoring and reporting to achieve more targeted outcomes.

In lieu of a formal amendment of the South East plan, the Commission is auditing whether or not South East LLS will implement its South East plan by 2021.

The Commission recommends that South East LLS:

R2 Planning documents should be updated to include South East plan outcomes. The new South East Business Plan 2019-21 should set out a program logic and a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement framework that specifies metrics, data collection and key baselines to support the assessment of cumulative progress towards South East plan regional performance measures and outcomes.

2.3 Constraints

IT systems support the implementation of the South East plan. While the systems currently in use (for example LMDB, FARMS and IRIS) capture metrics for on-ground activities, they present a number of difficulties in terms of data storage and ease of retrieval. The inability to efficiently share mapping at the property level across functional areas was raised as a specific limitation by interviewees.

The proposed roll out of 'myLAND' at the LLS state level may bring some improvements. Although its benefits are not yet demonstrated, it includes a web-based customer self-service portal, greater accessibility for officers working in the field and at home, and an asset management module.¹¹

¹⁰ South East LLS (2019) *Learning and engaging through evaluation – a participatory internal evaluation of investment in natural resource management and sustainable agriculture outcomes 2014-2018*.

¹¹ myLAND is intended to replace and consolidate the existing systems with a SaaS ('Software as a Service') solution to provide a platform that enables a range of customer-focused business improvements.

3 Reporting on local strategic plan implementation

Regular reports to the board are structured around risks, opportunities and achievements at the local area level and do not include links to the South East plan.

3.1 Key findings to be addressed

F5 There is no explicit reporting on the extent to which projects are contributing to South East plan outcomes

The board receives updates from local area managers on the delivery of projects, including information on deliverables, schedules and budget. The reports also include information regarding risks, opportunities for funding and new collaborations and achievements at the local area level.

However, reporting does not outline the extent to which projects contribute to South East plan actions, strategies and outcomes.

Progress in implementing the South East plan is not tracked by the board or LLS staff and there is no systematic focus on monitoring progress.

The Commission found no clear and consistent organisational understanding of progress to date. It is the board's responsibility to oversee and monitor the implementation of the South East plan and knowing the extent of progress towards outcomes is critical to performing this role.¹²

Management should report to the Board on progress towards South East plan outcomes. Cumulative reporting on priority measures would improve the board's understanding of progress and organisational achievements. It would also help the board make informed decisions on the implementation of the South East plan.

The Commission recommends that South East LLS:

R3 Include quantitative information on cumulative achievement of South East plan outcomes in its board reports.

¹² The *Local Land Services Act 2013*, Section 29(1) states that one of the functions of a local board is to 'to monitor the performance of Local Land Services in the region, including by reference to the local strategic plan'.

Attachment 1 – Overview of the South East LLS region

The South East LLS region covers a topographically diverse area of approximately 5.6 million hectares in south-eastern NSW. It extends from the warm temperate coastal lowlands from Stanwell Park in the north, southwards to the Victorian border, across the highlands and into the tablelands to the west as far as Yass, and to the Snowy Mountains and the Murray River in the south. The coastal areas of the region that extend from Wollongong south to Kiama and Nowra are highly populated. The largest inland regional centres are Queanbeyan and Goulburn (Figure 1).



Figure 1: South East LLS region

The main challenges and threats facing the region include:

- agricultural viability being impacted by factors such as farm and industry profitability, market access, emerging industries, resource security, climate variability, and the capacity and knowledge of land managers
- declining soil health and erosion impacting on priority industries and aquatic assets
- maintaining estuaries, coasts and marine areas in good condition
- potential emergency and biosecurity hazards impacting broadacre livestock and threatening market access

- threats to productivity and profitability from drought and longer-term climate change, and associated variable or unreliable feed and water availability
- invasive species (pest animals and weeds) and other threats to natural values
- riverine and wetland condition threatened by bed-and-back disturbance, point-source pollution and changes to flows.

South East LLS provides advice to primary producers, biosecurity and emergency management services, manages natural resources, brokers relationships and shares knowledge.

Operationally, South East LLS has six local areas based on geographic location, which each have a manager and local team (**Figure 2**). Governance and oversight is provided by a local board and leadership team.

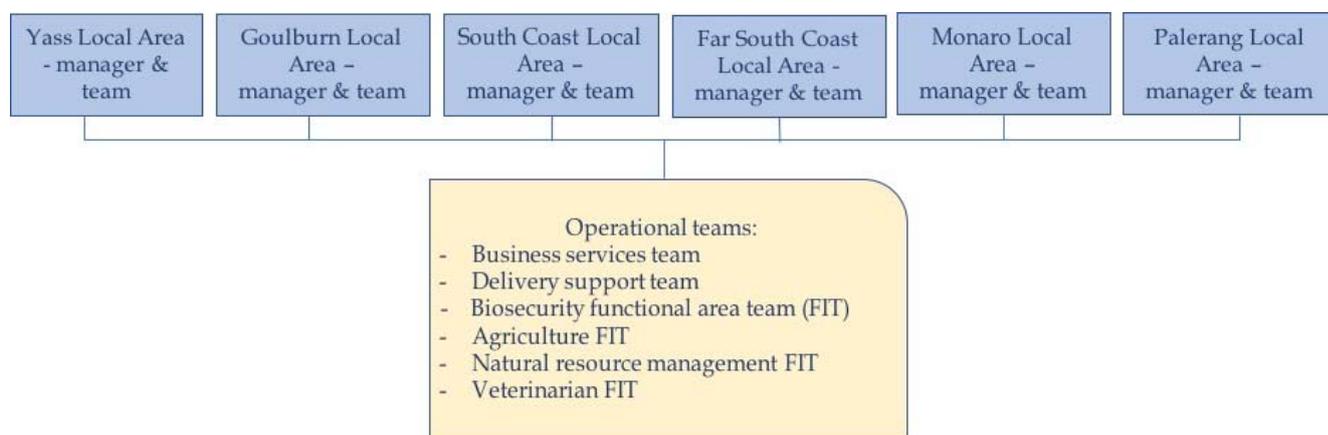


Figure 2: South East LLS region local area management structure

Annual business plans identify the program delivery focus and the region's contribution to agreed state-wide priorities for each year. Under these, annual service delivery plans are developed and approved for each project and program. South East LLS priorities for 2018/19 were established to deliver on outcomes outlined in key strategies and management plans for each of the main programs, including the:

- South East Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plan
- South East Regional Strategic Weed Management Plan
- NSW Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Business Plan
- South East Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Strategic Plan
- South East Communications Strategy and Implementation plan
- South East Catchment Action Plan
- South East Climate Adaptation Plan
- Wild Dog Management Plans (district level)
- Wild Deer Management Plans (district level)
- Conserving Biodiversity on Travelling Stock Reserves Business Plan

South East LLS is developing a new business plan for 2019-2021 that will include its delivery priorities for the next two years. Delivery priorities have been strongly influenced by the extended drought in the region and will continue to be a focus for some time. Additional priorities include:

- the assessment of travelling stock reserve conservation values and on-ground works to protect threats to high-value flora and fauna
- increasing Aboriginal capacity to share their cultural heritage with others and their connections to traditional land management and cultural practices
- deer management (an emerging pest animal species in the Southern Highlands and Goulburn areas)
- rehabilitation of riparian habitat in the far South Coast (Bega Valley, Deua River and Tilba Lakes)
- the rural landscape program in collaboration with landholders in the Shoalhaven, Wingecarribee and Wollondilly sub-catchments and WaterNSW
- building landholder capacity to control feral pigs and wild dogs.

Attachment 2 – South East plan outcomes

Outcomes for the South East LLS region, as stated in the South East plan, are outlined below.

#	Outcome statements to achieve plan goals	Key Performance Indicators	
1	Resilient, self-reliant and prepared local communities.		
1.1	Engaged and connected people.		
1.2	Increased customer confidence and leadership in land and biosecurity management.		
1.3	Aboriginal people supported to actively care for Country.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of members belonging to care or primary industry groups increases by 10% from 2015 to 2020. 	
1.4	Increased preparedness and responsive to natural disasters and emergency events.		
1.5	Increased levels of customer and stakeholder engagement and collaboration.		
2	Biosecure, profitable, productive and sustainable primary industries.		
2.1	Regional agricultural values protected.		
2.2	Shared responsibility for biosecurity threats and natural resources that support primary production.		
2.3	Early detection to prevent establishment of new weeds, invasive animals, plant pests and diseases or animal pest and disease incursions that threaten market access.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No loss of market access due to new pest or disease incursions. 	
2.4	Improved resilience to natural disasters and seasonal variability.		
3	Healthy, diverse, and connected natural environments.		
3.1	Healthy productive soils, used within their capabilities.		
3.2	Clean water.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of people undertaking action to improve their local environments, against a 2015 baseline. The area of land under active management has increased, against a 2015 baseline. 	
3.3	Healthy aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems.		
3.4	A biodiverse landscape.		
3.5	Priority landscape corridors under active management.		
3.6	Landscape amenity and aesthetics maintained.		
4	Board members and staff who are collaborative, innovative and commercially focused.		
4.1	The South East Board, Executive and staff demonstrate value, integrity, accountability,		

	transparency and credibility to customers, stakeholders and investors.	
4.2	The South East Board, Executive and staff are responsible and accountable for the delivery of the South East Local Strategic Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Successful delivery of the South East Local Strategic Plan. ▪ Organisational activities and local services meet customer, stakeholder and investor requirements. ▪ Performance Standard requirements for Local Land Services met.
4.3	Organisational efficiency demonstrated by prioritisation of financial, systems and human resources.	
4.4	There is collective organisational responsibility for risk management.	
#	State Strategies & Regional Performance Measures	
1	Provide data, information and knowledge that supports and enables land managers and customers to improve decision making.	
1.1	Increase in customer access to and satisfaction with information services.	
1.2	By June 2016, establish a baseline of customer knowledge relating to local land services activities.	
1.3	By June 2017, develop and implement the Regional Information Services strategy.	
2	Provide products and advisory services that support and enable customers to implement improved practices.	
2.1	95% customer satisfaction for all advisory services activities.	
2.2	By June 2017, strategic natural resource assets that support priority industries are identified and mapped.	
2.3	By June 2016, benchmark economic capacity of priority industries in the South East region and their contribution.	
2.4	Annually, evaluate the adoption of improved practices by 10% of customers who have undertaken training or advisory services activities.	
3	Provide products and services that support and enable customers, land managers and the community to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from biosecurity and natural disaster events.	
3.1	By December 2016, implement the Local Land Services.	
3.2	Emergency Management Business Plan to minimise market impacts.	
3.3	By December 2016, implement the South East Climate Adaptation Plan.	
3.4	By December 2016, develop and implement the South East Local Land Services Seasonal Variability Strategy.	
4	Collaborate with investors, stakeholders and external organisations to deliver improved products and services to customers.	
4.1	Develop and implement a Regional Collaboration Plan by March 2017.	
4.2	Develop MoUs with key stakeholders to deliver services and activities to customer by June 2017.	

4.3 By June 2016, establish a baseline of stakeholder capacity.

4.4 Recurring stakeholder survey demonstrating 95% satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.

4.5 Stakeholders report increased efficiency and value arising from collaboration.

5 Ensure local people participate in decision making.

5.1 Regional investment priorities informed by Community Advisory Groups and other fora.

5.2 By June 2017, all local plans are complete.

5.3 Number of people engaged in the development of the Local Plans.

5.4 Increase in participation in annual local customer forums.

5.5 Increased ratepayer enrolment to vote in Board elections.

6 Connect research and development with advisory services to address priority data, information and knowledge gaps and barriers to improved practice.

6.1 By June 2017, collaborate with stakeholders to develop and implement a knowledge and research strategy for South East Local Land Services.

6.2 Improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.

7 Deliver services that support Aboriginal people to care for Country and share traditional land management.

7.1 By June 2016, an Aboriginal engagement framework for South East Local Land Services has been developed.

7.2 Improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.

7.3 By 2020, a minimum of 15 Aboriginal people have been employed to deliver NRM activities.

8 Deliver consent and compliance services that educate and protect communities, landscapes and industries.

Meet the legislative requirements of the four Local Land Services Biosecurity Business Plans:

- 8.1
- Invasive species
 - Plant biosecurity
 - Animal biosecurity and welfare
 - Emergency management.
-

8.2 Increased customer satisfaction with consent and compliance services offered by South East Local Land Services.

9 Manage Crown Land vested in Local Land Services for environmental, social and economic outcomes.

9.1 Develop a Travelling Stock Reserve Management Plan by December 2016.

9.2 Improve or maintain the condition of all Travelling Stock Reserves in the South East region.

9.3 Increased customer and stakeholder satisfaction: Crown land/TSR care and control services.

10 Develop engaged and accountable people with a strong customer focus

10.1 All staff have approved annual Performance Development Plans.

10.2 95% of priority actions from approved Communications Plan implemented.

10.3 Positive trend in staff engagement in Employee Matters staff survey results.

11 Foster a values-based culture which emphasises collaboration, innovation and continual improvement.

11.1 Nil customer complaints regarding staff behaviours linked to organisational values.

11.2 Increase alternative investment streams.

11.3 By March 2017, develop and implement the South East Adaptive Management Plan.

11.4 Positive trend in Employee Matters staff survey results.

12 Ensure a safe and sustainable organisation.

12 No lost time through injury.

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.¹³ 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-2016.¹⁴

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.

¹³ 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’.

¹⁴ 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’.

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

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 effect¹⁵ as the independent auditor¹⁶ 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.

¹⁵ 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.'

¹⁶ 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 ¹⁷ 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?	N/A

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

¹⁷ 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

Functional Area	Role	Name	Date
Board	Chair	Allison Harker	26 June 2019
	Elected Board member	Stuart Burge	27 June 2019
	Elected Board member	Mac Wilson	26 June 2019
	General Manager	Anthony Marshall	26 June 2019
Local Areas	A/Local area manager, South Coast	Jason Carson	26 June 2019
	Local area manager, Goulburn	Aaron Smith	27 June 2019
	Senior NRM advisor, Far South Coast	Graham Scott	26 June 2019
	Senior Agricultural Advisor, Goulburn	Matt Liechke	27 June 2019
Delivery & strategy	Delivery Support Manager	Ken Garner	27 June 2019
	Stakeholder & Investment Co-ordinator	Rebecca Bradley	26 June 2019

Attachment 6 – South East LLS regional performance

The Commission’s assessment of South East LLS’ progress against the regional performance measures in the South East plan is provided in the following table.

#	State Strategies & Regional Performance Measures	Progress level: progressed, partially progressed or not progressed Assessment of documented evidence
1	Provide data, information and knowledge that supports and enables land managers and customers to improve decision making.	
1.1	Increase in customer access to and satisfaction with information services.	Progressed: evidenced by - participation in LLS held activities and evaluation form responses, positive Rate-It survey responses, South East (SE) LLS Local Annual Reports (2015-2017), NLP2 and CANSW investor reports, region wide evaluation of NRM projects, increased feedback through social media platforms; but not collated to quantify the measure. An increase in customer satisfaction with LLS services occurred between 2015 and 2018 (evidenced by the results of the state LLS Customer Focus Survey).
1.2	By June 2016, establish a baseline of customer knowledge relating to local land services activities.	Partially progressed: a 2012 landholder survey covered approx. 50% of the region investigated landholder knowledge of LLS services and attitudes towards NRM.
1.3	By June 2017, develop and implement the Regional Information Services strategy.	Not progressed: noting that a SE LLS Communications strategy and implementation plan 2017-19 has been developed.
2	Provide products and advisory services that support and enable customers to implement improved practices.	
2.1	95% customer satisfaction for all advisory services activities.	Partially progressed: demonstrated by positive feedback in evaluation forms from individual events and very positive responses via Rate-It survey, but not collated to quantify measure. An increase in customer satisfaction with LLS services occurred between 2015 and 2018 (evidenced by the results of the state LLS Customer Focus Survey).
2.2	By June 2017, strategic natural resource assets that support priority industries are identified and mapped.	Partially progressed: SE Catchment Action Plan mapped priority natural resource assets (completed in 2016). Referred to when preparing service delivery plans or scoping funding applications.
2.3	By June 2016, benchmark economic capacity of priority industries in the South East region and their contribution.	Not progressed: noting that Ag Advisory team reported that this remains a priority.
2.4	Annually, evaluate the adoption of improved practices by 10% of customers who have undertaken training or advisory services activities.	Partially progressed: evidenced by NLP investment reporting, demonstrated by results of interviews with landholders and inspecting on-ground works covering projects 2014-2018, reported in SE LLS internal evaluation of investment in NRM and sustainable agriculture outcomes with accompanying project case studies, but not collated to quantify measure.

3 Provide products and services that support and enable customers, land managers and the community to prevent, prepare, respond and recover from biosecurity and natural disaster events.		
3.1	By December 2016, implement the Local Land Services Emergency Management Business Plan to minimise market impacts.	Progressed: through the SE LLS Concept of Operations emergency response framework and procedures, Saleyard Action Plan for a National Livestock Standstill in cooperation with DPI , police and shire councils (2015), LLS representation on Local Emergency Management Committee, training in Emergency Animal Disease response.
3.2	By December 2016, implement the South East Climate Adaptation Plan.	Progressed: South East LSS Climate Adaptation Plan 2016 has been prepared
3.3	By December 2016, develop and implement the South East Local Land Services Seasonal Variability Strategy.	Progressed: through implementation of SE LLS Drought Management Strategy and Ag advisory team seasonal updates
4 Collaborate with investors, stakeholders and external organisations to deliver improved products and services to customers.		
4.1	Develop and implement a Regional Collaboration Plan by March 2017.	Not progressed.
4.2	Develop MoUs with key stakeholders to deliver services and activities to customer by June 2017.	Progressed: this occurs on a program or project basis e.g. service level agreements with Water NSW, NPWS, reported in LLS annual service delivery plans, partnering with community groups in CILF projects
4.3	By June 2016, establish a baseline of stakeholder capacity.	Progressed: South East 2015 LLS Stakeholder Benchmarking report completed, identifying their capacity and willingness to collaborate and level of satisfaction with the collaboration.
4.4	Recurring stakeholder survey demonstrating 95% satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.	Partially progressed: feedback on satisfaction levels working with SE LLS was gained during 6-monthly reporting intervals from community groups participating in CILF projects (2014-17), Community of Practice network and group capacity building activities e.g. annual Muster for Landcare South East.
4.5	Stakeholders report increased efficiency and value arising from collaboration.	Partially progressed: increased satisfaction levels were reported from above sources but not collated to quantify the measure.
5 Ensure local people participate in decision making.		
5.1	Regional investment priorities informed by Community Advisory Groups and other fora.	Progressed: evidenced by CAG activities, LLS seeking community input during Landcare Muster and Community of Practice activities, board meetings hosting breakfasts in different locations inviting community and agency stakeholders to communicate local interests
5.2	By June 2017, all local plans are complete.	Partially progressed: SE LLS local area plans are not being prepared for all areas. Far South Coast plans for 2016-17 and 2017-18 and Goulburn plan for 2018-19 provided.
5.3	Number of people engaged in the development of the Local Plans.	Partially progressed: for example, Wild Deer Management plan developed in consultation with local community, Wild dog-Fox Management Plans developed with community based groups, but no data collected or collated to quantify measure.

5.4	Increase in participation in annual local customer forums.	Partially progressed: evidenced by above but not collated to quantify the measure.
5.5	Increased ratepayer enrolment to vote in Board elections.	Partially progressed: SE LLS has made an effort to engage with community and encourage enrolment to vote (media releases, flyers and posters) but no evidence provided that there had been an increase in ratepayer enrolment.
6	Connect research and development with advisory services to address priority data, information and knowledge gaps and barriers to improved practice.	
6.1	By June 2017, collaborate with stakeholders to develop and implement a knowledge and research strategy for South East Local Land Services.	Partially progressed. Report commissioned in 2015, Towards a more effective knowledge system for the SE LLS to help operationalise this strategy. No reporting provided on progress in implementing its recommendations.
6.2	Improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.	Partially progressed: evidenced by increase in results from State-wide Customer Focus Survey but no data collated specific to customer or stakeholder satisfaction related to this strategy.
7	Deliver services that support Aboriginal people to care for Country and share traditional land management.	
7.1	By June 2016, an Aboriginal engagement framework for South East Local Land Services has been developed.	Partially progressed: Draft Aboriginal Participation Plan is being developed, terms of reference developed for the formation of an Aboriginal Community Advisory group have been developed. Aboriginal Cultural Heritage training for all staff in 2018.
7.2	Improved customer and stakeholder satisfaction with South East Local Land Services.	Partially progressed: evidenced by increase in results from State-wide Customer Focus Survey but no data collated specific to customer or stakeholder satisfaction related to this strategy.
7.3	By 2020, a minimum of 15 Aboriginal people have been employed to deliver NRM activities.	Partially progressed: Aboriginal people have been employed in Biodiversity Fund, CILF projects and in Far South Coast on the Marine Estates project (evidenced in annual service delivery plans and NLP and CANSW funding reports), but not collated to quantify the measure.
8	Deliver consent and compliance services that educate and protect communities, landscapes and industries.	
8.1	Meet the legislative requirements of the four Local Land Services Biosecurity Business Plans: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invasive species ▪ Plant biosecurity ▪ Animal biosecurity and welfare ▪ Emergency management. 	Progressed: evidenced by various plans (Regional Pest Animal Plan, Regional Weed Management Plan, Concept of Operations, Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Plan with quarterly reporting against KPIs to DPI). Examples include good attendance at biosecurity workshops (276 participants attending in 2017 with 90% reporting an increased understanding of their responsibilities under the Act), preparing farm biosecurity plans, adopting suitable practices. 45 participants at serrated tussock field days in 2018.
8.2	Increased customer satisfaction with consent and compliance services offered by South East Local Land Services.	Partially progressed: evidenced by increase in results from State-wide Customer Focus Survey but no data collated specific to customer satisfaction with consent and compliance services
9	Manage Crown Land vested in Local Land Services for environmental, social and economic outcomes.	
9.1	Develop a Travelling Stock Reserve Management Plan by December 2016.	Partially progressed: through involvement in State level operations development of TSR plan

9.2	Improve or maintain the condition of all Travelling Stock Reserves in the South East region.	Partially progressed: Assets assessments completed of all TSRs, Greening Australia and CANSW funded projects target significant native vegetation assets within TSRs and improvements have been reported on.
9.3	Increased customer and stakeholder satisfaction: Crown land/TSR care and control services.	Partially progressed: evidenced by increase in results from State-wide Customer Service Survey and vast majority of Rate-It responses are very positive, but no data collated specific to TSR care and control services.
10 Develop engaged and accountable people with a strong customer focus		
10.1	All staff have approved annual Performance Development Plans.	Progressed: this is a focus for SE LLS, using an online system to document PDPs, managed by the Department of Industry.
10.2	95% of priority actions from approved Communications Plan implemented.	Partially progressed: Communications strategy and implementation plan 2017-19 completed, an internal communications and engagement review early 2019 resulted in a SE LLS Communication Map, Functional Internal Team meetings introduced 12 months ago to improve cross functional communication, but data not collated to quantify the measure.
10.3	Positive trend in staff engagement in Employee Matters staff survey results.	Progressed: Results from 2018 People Matter survey indicate positive trend (increased 8% in overall employee engagement from 2017). Results communicated between board, management and staff.
11 Foster a values-based culture which emphasises collaboration, innovation and continual improvement.		
11.1	Nil customer complaints regarding staff behaviours linked to organisational values.	Partially progressed: evidenced by increase in results from State-wide Customer Focus Survey and vast majority of Rate-It responses are very positive, but no data collated specific to complaints regarding staff behaviours.
11.2	Increase alternative investment streams.	Progressed: evidenced by contacts with external partners including ACT government for erosion projects, vertebrate pest control on NPWS estate, NSW Water, Australian Government.
11.3	By March 2017, develop and implement the South East Adaptive Management Plan.	Not progressed: Work on this including a draft Service Improvement Framework ceased following organisational restructure.
11.4	Positive trend in Employee Matters staff survey results.	Progressed: Results from 2018 People Matter survey indicate positive trend (increased 8% in overall employee engagement from 2017). Results communicated between board, management and staff.
12 Ensure a safe and sustainable organisation.		
12	No lost time through injury.	Partially progressed: evidenced by Workplace Health & Safety meetings minutes, policies, incident reporting, first aid training, Statement of Understanding firearms procedure, data reported through board papers and to State LLS.