



Assessment of
the Murray upgraded
Catchment Action Plan

June 2013

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

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

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Executive summary

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Murray Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities. The CAP encompasses part of the former Lower Murray Darling catchment management region after their amalgamation.

The Murray region includes diverse landscapes, from alpine slopes in the east to native grasslands, rangelands and riverine floodplains in the west. Much of the region's economy depends on access to and the productivity of its land and water resources.

Key findings

The upgraded Murray CAP is an innovative, high-quality strategic plan based on fully integrated analysis of social, economic and environmental factors. The CAP was developed by devolving decision-making to a committee of community members, in close collaboration with a broad range of local and regional stakeholders. Successful implementation of the CAP is very likely to **deliver improvements** in the region's long-term health and community well-being.

As a plan to **guide investment and on-ground activity**, the CAP:

- clearly **articulates an integrated vision** for the region, encompassing people, environment and production
- has **strong community support and ownership** due to the devolution of decision making to the community and the effective consultation with farmers, local businesses, landholders, Aboriginal groups and other interested community groups
- clearly **prioritises strategies to direct investment** across the region, and deliver better outcomes for the region and higher returns for investors
- details targets and actions, **transparently developed from community input**, that can guide on-ground activity to deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes
- includes strategies informed by the practical application of the 'five capitals' approach and the **strong integration** of social, economic and environmental elements in the analysis
- includes ten **local landscapes** valued by farmers, local businesses, landholders and community groups, and details the key local natural resource management (NRM) priorities
- is **accessible, and has increased the capacity** of stakeholders to make decisions and take action in their local landscape and areas
- clearly explains how it will be **adapted** to address change and stay relevant
- includes **objectives aligned** with local, state and Australian governments, and community and industry-based organisations, to increase the **efficiency** of NRM efforts in the region.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Murray CAP with the following condition to:

- **review and adapt** the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, in accordance with the Minister's decision.

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1 Introduction

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Murray Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities. The CAP encompasses part of the former Lower Murray Darling (LMD) catchment management region following amalgamation.

The Murray catchment spans more than 77,000 square kilometres of south-western New South Wales (NSW), along the border with Victoria. The diverse catchment includes alpine slopes in the east, and native grasslands, rangelands and riverine floodplains to the west. The catchment's population of 114,000 people is concentrated along the Murray, Edward-Kolety and Darling River systems.

1.1 Background

CAPs are strategic regional plans for improving the health, productivity and resilience of landscapes and communities. CAPs identify what the community, industry, and government value about these landscapes, and explain what needs to be done to ensure long-term, sustainable management of a region's natural resources. Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have primary responsibility for effectively implementing the CAPs in collaboration with their partners.

Under the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* (NSW), the NRC is required to assess CAPs and recommends them to the Minister for approval.

1.2 Focus of assessment

The focus of the NRC's assessment is to determine whether a CAP is a quality strategic plan that promotes the state-wide targets for natural resource management (NRM) and complies with the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*¹ (the Standard).

The *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans*² details the assessment criteria, attributes and process used. The NRC examined three key criteria in its assessment:

- 1 Was the plan developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process?
- 2 Does the plan use best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes?
- 3 Is the CAP a plan for collaborative action and investment between Government, community and industry partners?

The NRC collected evidence through extensive analysis of available documentation, technical reviews, stakeholder surveys and interviews and assessment of the CMA's engagement with government, industry and community partners (see Attachment 2 for details).

¹ The NSW Government adopted the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*, which identifies seven components that are used to reach high-quality natural resource decisions. CMAs must comply with the Standard¹, using it as a quality assurance standard for all planning and implementation decisions.

² NRC, *Framework for assessing and recommending upgraded catchment action plans v2*, June 2012

2 Summary of assessment findings

2.1 Planning

The Murray CAP has benefited from an innovative, high-quality strategic planning process. This comprehensive CAP development process and the effective integration of part of the LMD CMA provides a high level of confidence in the CMA's ability to successfully implement the region's CAP and achieve positive social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Strategic planning and capacity

The CMA demonstrated thorough research and evaluation of new concepts, including systems analysis - incorporating social, economic and environmental factors - to develop a CAP that can coordinate regional NRM investment. The CMA analysed the external operating environment and community attitudes to determine the most suitable CAP development method. It analysed planning approaches and trialled new processes throughout the CAP development, demonstrating a willingness to consider options and aim for continual improvement.

The CMA Board's strategic capacity has grown through a deeper understanding of the region's landscapes and communities, and the staff members' capacity has increased as a result of the inclusive CAP development approach. The Board demonstrated clear strengths in strategic planning capability through its leadership of and involvement in developing the CAP. As part of a cultural change, the CMA used the opportunity presented by the CAP upgrade to embed new thinking and stakeholder knowledge across the whole organisation, and throughout the catchment.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

The Murray CMA Board took an innovative approach to strategic NRM planning, devolving CAP development decision making to a community and industry Board sub-committee. The community committee included skilled community and industry leaders with a variety of views and NRM experience, including representatives from the irrigation industry, agribusiness, local government, dryland and irrigation farming, and Landcare. Employing new methods to genuinely engage the community was critical to the success of the CAP development, particularly as the community had become disenfranchised by other government planning processes.

By establishing the community committee, the CMA facilitated genuine community participation in the CAP upgrade, accessing committee members' extensive local networks, robust stakeholder analysis and tailored engagement methods where required. The collaborative CAP process involved 30 community workshops and public forums (including five with the Aboriginal community), an Aboriginal technical reference group, and consultation with other technical experts, industry representatives and government agencies. A technical reviewer praised the CAP, noting in particular that it conveys a sense of community input translated into learning and action. Because of this, community members are more likely to be motivated to achieve the shared objectives.

Following amalgamation with part of the LMD CMA, an integration committee was established including community members from the LMD region (also the Murray community committee), to incorporate local values. Despite the short time-frames the integration committee effectively consulted with stakeholders in this region and included their priorities in the CAP.

The CAP reflects a strong understanding of stakeholder objectives and capacities, and positions the CMA well to successfully implement its collaborative CAP. This approach demonstrates the CMA's commitment to a whole-of-government and whole-of-community CAP, and has also empowered the local community and increased its ability to engage in NRM planning, decision-making and actions.

Adaptability

The CMA's strong governance and the use of an adaptive process in developing the CAP, including integrating part of the LMD CMA, provides a high-level of confidence in the CMA's ability to implement its CAP adaptation strategy. The comprehensive adaptation strategy is designed to facilitate continual improvement and future evaluation of the CAP as knowledge improves and circumstances change. The CAP upgrade has been effectively informed by the CMA's outward-looking approach, with the CMA's internal and external operating environments considered on a number of scales.

2.2 Targets

The Murray CAP presents a people-centred vision for the region, supported by the community and local industry to deliver long-term landscape health and community well-being. The CMA's innovative approach to CAP development - successfully devolving decision-making to a Board sub-committee - was highly effective in incorporating community and industry knowledge and values.

Best-available information

The CAP has incorporated best-available information to address the big issues for the region, namely an ageing population, productive farming systems, balanced resource use, pest control and adapting to climate variability. This approach was based on extensive community and industry consultation, resulting in a CAP that incorporates local values and knowledge. The CMA accessed scientific and technical information through agency contacts, technical experts and staff expertise.

Analysis of social, economic and environmental information

A key strength of the upgraded CAP is the comprehensive and transparent systems analysis that has considered social, economic and environmental factors. An independent technical reviewer commended the CAP, in particular the approach to incorporating socio-economic analysis, commenting that the CAP's practical and specific suggestions for addressing community access and capacity building represent a best-practice approach.

The 'ground up' approach means that the CAP effectively incorporates local issues. The community committee, in close consultation with the community, developed ten overlapping social-ecological systems, including two developed with community members in the former LMD CMA region. The systems analysis included identification of the drivers and controlling variables for the local landscapes. The community committee then transparently developed the CAP targets based on this systems analysis, with the CAP hierarchy showing clear logic links between the targets and the desired outcomes. The CAP clearly communicates the priorities for each landscape and the region.

The CMA's systems analysis was strengthened by the practical application of the 'five capitals' approach, which included the assessment of capacity in the region and informed the prioritisation of CAP strategies. This was confirmed by an independent technical review, which

confirmed the strength of the CAP's community focus, specifying that 'the CAP represents a big swing away from assets, towards issues and values held by local people. This is understandable and potentially a powerful approach to planning especially as there was an analytical process to evaluate issues and set targets and priorities'. CAP analysis shows that the CMA considered of the state and inter-state scales, and that the overlapping local landscape boundaries recognise sub-regional interactions.

The CMA consistently demonstrated thorough analysis and application of theory and practice throughout all stages of developing the CAP. The CMA researched, trialled and analysed different methods, and provided a rationale for the methods chosen. Detailed recording of this work demonstrates the CMA's strong information and knowledge management capability. A technical reviewer noted that overall, the 'integrated package of adaptive governance, adaptive management and social-ecological systems [underpinning the CAP] is a cutting-edge example' of an emerging approach to NRM.

Logical hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The CAP presents a clear vision, goal and target hierarchy that can direct investment across the region and is supported by community and industry. The CAP targets and actions are evidence-based and are supported by the CMA's analysis. The targets address the priorities for investment and will guide implementation of the CAP. The CAP effectively presents the priorities identified at the local level so that community input to the CAP is visible, while also presenting catchment-scale visions and goals.

Accountability

CAP strategies will effectively guide on-ground activities to deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes now, while also being flexible enough to deal with future uncertainty. The CAP clearly identifies knowledge gaps and the CMA has an adaptive management strategy designed to address these gaps and deal with ongoing changing circumstances and knowledge. Specific actions will be set during the implementation stage which was a key learning from the CMA's review of the first CAP. Reference points for measuring progress towards CAP targets need to be determined to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

2.3 Action and investment

The Murray CMA has developed strong relationships with key stakeholders and has developed a CAP that aligns with community and industry values, and government priorities. Implementation of the CAP is expected to facilitate collaborative action and investment between community, industry and government to achieve multiple outcomes.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The Murray CAP is designed to increase the efficiency of NRM efforts in the region, so that outcomes can be maximised despite limited resources. To do this, the CMA has worked to align the CAP with the high-level objectives of regional NRM organisations including government and non-government partners. Aligning objectives and facilitating collaboration in this way will increase the likelihood that actions taken contribute to the goals of multiple organisations in the region.

The CMA's thorough analysis of the Murray CAPs alignment with government policies and plans included analysis of the complex institutional operating environment. The CAP has been endorsed by the relevant state government agencies including the Department of Planning and

Infrastructure, the Department of Primary Industries, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, confirming that 'it is not inconsistent with the NRM policies, plans and strategies' that these agencies are responsible for. The CAP is aligned with NSW 2021 goals³ and the state-wide targets for NRM, and is consistent with *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW).

The CMA also identified the plans and policies relevant to operational scale planning and has explained how the CAP will align with these plans and policies during the implementation phase. The CAP is aligned with community and industry aspirations, including in the former LMD region, prioritised at the local and catchment-scale to ensure community and industry support. The CMA incorporated analysis of local government community strategic plans which along with stakeholder engagement, effectively captured community views for inclusion in the CAP.

To maximise outcomes, CAP goals identify high-level opportunities for collaboration between a range of organisations, including those not traditionally involved in NRM. The CAP includes strategies that aim to improve collaborative delivery, including with cross-border organisations. The CMA has effectively engaged bordering Victorian organisations which is important for collaborating on cross border projects, particularly those involving the Murray River.

Roles and responsibilities

The CAP outlines a clear plan for whole-of-government and whole-of-community collaborative NRM in the Murray region. Partners understand the role of the CAP and the subsequent implementation planning process - where specific program and project details will be negotiated - and have agreed to be involved in this process.

Implementation

The CMAs strong relationships with partners, and its comprehensive governance structures, provide a high level of confidence in the likelihood that it will successfully implement the CAP. The CAP implementation strategy is clearly defined and can guide the actions of the CMA's delivery partners. The CAP includes strategies that aim to improve collaborative delivery, informed by an analysis of capacity constraints in the region, and will help the CMA achieve efficiencies and returns on investment.

The CAP clearly outlines how it will guide subsequent planning processes so delivery partners can identify actions they could take to improve community and landscape health. All partners understand the relationship between the CAP, the three-year business plans, and the annual implementation plans that will set out specific program and project details. The CMA analysed existing project prioritisation approaches and developed a customised approach suitable for guiding implementation of this systems-based CAP. This prioritisation approach allows for adaptation and the effective incorporation of community and industry priorities to support CAP implementation.

³ www.2021.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/NSW2021_Plan%20Goals_0.pdf

3 Recommendation

3.1 Approval

In accordance with section 13 (b) of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* (NSW), the NRC recommends that the Ministers approve the upgraded Murray Catchment Action Plan with one condition.

3.2 Conditions of approval

The NRC recommends approval of the Murray upgraded CAP with the following condition to:

- review and adapt the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, in accordance with the Minister's decision.

The CMA should report to the NRC on how it has met these conditions of approval in its Strategic Progress Letters. Commencing September 2013, the CMA should provide the NRC with a Strategic Progress Letter annually, or as conditions are met.

3.3 Additional suggested actions for the CMA

There are no suggested actions for this CAP.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

The Murray CAP upgrade has positioned the CMA well to transition to the new Local Land Services structure as:

- The CMA Board and staff have demonstrated excellent strategic planning capability and understanding that would inform future strategic planning.
- The CAP vision, strategies and priorities would provide clear direction to a new Board.
- Community and stakeholder views are already captured and reflected well in the CAP. Consequently, extensive community consultation would not be required in order to reflect the Local Land Services boundaries.
- The sub-regionalisation of the Murray CMA is logical and detailed. The identification of priorities for each local landscape allows for information to be extracted as required to fit with the Local Land Services boundaries.
- The scientific, industry, and community knowledge that supporting the CAP is a valuable resource for new regional organisations.

Attachment 1 - Detailed assessment findings

Criterion 1 - Plan was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process

Attribute 1A: Strategic planning process was logical, comprehensive and transparent

The CMA has implemented a sophisticated and transparent CAP planning process. The CAP upgrade has addressed the key strategic NRM issues for the region and provided the platform for a distinct shift away from the first CAP's biophysical focus, to a community-oriented approach to NRM. The CMA has demonstrated strong governance and project management throughout the CAP upgrade, including ensuring the organisation was suitably structured and skilled to undertake the project. The Board's devolution of decision-making to a community-based committee demonstrated its commitment to the whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach. This has empowered the local community and increased its knowledge of NRM planning. The Board's strategic capability has grown through a deeper understanding of the region's landscapes and communities, and the capacity of the CMA's staff has increased as a result of the inclusive CAP development approach. The detailed CAP development framework and recording of the processes involved will ensure that corporate knowledge is retained.

Strengths:

- The CMA identified that the key risk for the CAP development was a community disenfranchised from government processes (specifically in relation to the Basin Plan). As such, the CMA's CAP approach focussed on community and industry involvement, to ensure genuine shared ownership of the CAP.
- The strategic capability of the CMA staff, management and Board has increased as a result of the CAP upgrade, together with a deeper understanding of the region's communities and landscapes.
- Devolving responsibility to the community committee empowered and engaged the community, demonstrating an effective governance framework for genuine devolved decision-making.
- The CAP development process has incorporated CMA and stakeholder objectives and is based on a clear understanding of partners' functions and capacities.

Attribute 1B: Planning process meaningfully engaged the community, Governments and other stakeholders

The devolution of CAP development to a skills-based community committee is an innovative approach aimed at countering 'consultation fatigue' in the community brought about by numerous major government programs (such as the Basin Plan). This approach was successful in gaining community support for the CAP. The effective establishment of the community committee with the strong networks of its members, and robust stakeholder analysis and tailored engagement led to genuine community participation in the CAP upgrade. The community committee members themselves currently work for or have experience in key industries and sectors in the region. This comprehensive approach has helped the CMA forge strong relationships with existing and new stakeholders. While the CMA recognises that its strong focus on community engagement reduced the time available for agency engagement, it has relied on existing strong and close working relationships with

Strengths:

- Devolution of decision-making for the CAP upgrade to the community committee brought community and industry directly into the process and has significantly contributed to community support for the CAP, which provides a strong foundation for effective implementation.
- The collaborative approach helped to restore community confidence in the CMA in a region suffering 'consultation fatigue', where relationships with other government bodies have become strained.
- The CMA effectively used the networks of the community committee members' to engage stakeholders that were previously isolated from the CMA.

agencies, and has received positive feedback on the draft CAP.

- CAP engagement was representative of industry, landholders, the Aboriginal community, Landcare and other interested community groups. It was informed by robust stakeholder analysis, and engagement activities were tailored to stakeholder needs where possible.

Attribute 1C: An adaptive planning process is in place to evaluate effectiveness of the plan and to guide improvements as knowledge improves and/or circumstances change

The CAP incorporates a comprehensive adaptive process to facilitate continual improvement during the CAP implementation and for the future evaluation of the CAP, as knowledge improves and circumstances change. Using an adaptive process throughout the CAP pre-planning and development phase, the CMA reviewed its first CAP, its operating environment and its CAP development approach. The CMA's staff and Board members consistently described the adaptive approach it has implemented to develop the CAP, and how the adaptive management strategy will accommodate change in the future. The CMA has outlined triggers for reviewing and implementing the CAP. The strong governance and strategic capacity of the CMA (discussed in Attribute 1A), and the detailed records of its processes, provide confidence in its ability to implement the CAP's adaptive management strategy. The CAP upgrade has been effectively informed by the CMA's outward-looking approach, considering different scales and levels, as well as the CMA's internal and external operating environments.

Strengths:

- The CMA thoroughly considered a broad range of internal and external factors affecting NRM, including changes in NRM practice and factors relating to the CMA's operating environment, such as the consultation processes undertaken for other major government programs and political priorities.
- The CMA designed the CAP's comprehensive adaptation strategy to ensure that knowledge and evidence are continuously updated and used to facilitate the adaptation and transformation of the Murray CAP delivery as required.
- The CMA has demonstrated its ability to learn and adapt throughout the CAP development process, incorporating lessons learnt in implementing the first CAP. This provides confidence in the CMA's capacity to continuously improve and adapt the upgraded CAP.

Criterion 2 - Plan uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes

Attribute 2A: Plan describes the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment using best available science and knowledge of community values

The CAP's innovative approach to devolved decision-making appropriately combines community and industry values with scientific information to describe the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment. The community committee developed ten social-ecological systems (local landscapes) using the 'sense of place' logic based on the members' own knowledge, and tested these systems with the community to confirm their validity. The CAP identifies and addresses the key issues for the region, at the local and catchment scales. The local community and industry priorities specified at the local landscape scale will facilitate on-ground action and contribute to the catchment-scale priorities. The local landscape descriptions and priorities in the CAP enable the community to identify with the CAP, and promote a shared understanding of the issues for the region. The CMA analysed the social-ecological systems based on community and

Strengths:

- The CAP effectively describes logical social-ecological systems operating in the catchment, which the CMA developed in a transparent, community-based process.
- The CAP comprehensively incorporates best-available science, and community and industry knowledge and values.
- The CAP addresses the big issues in the region - such as an ageing population, productive farming systems, balanced resource use, pest control and adapting to climate variability - and has identified strategies to address these.

industry values and knowledge, and the incorporation of scientific and technical data. The CAP clearly identifies knowledge gaps and the CMA has an adaptive management approach designed to address these gaps and deal with ongoing changing circumstances and knowledge.

- The CAP identifies knowledge gaps and there is a plan to address them during the implementation phase.

Attribute 2B: Plan integrates biophysical and socio-economic information to analyse the systems operating in the catchment and develop strategies for improving landscape function and resilience

The Murray CAP analysis was based on a thorough exploration of community and industry values, and an integrated systems analysis of the local landscapes, which incorporated biophysical and social-economic information. The resulting strategies address the big issues in the catchment and are aimed at addressing the system drivers for improving landscape function and resilience. The CMA's practical application of the 'five capitals' approach was an effective way to assess the capacity of the catchment, and has logically informed the CAP strategies developed. The CMA thoroughly researched theory and practice in the area of systems analysis (which the CMA also undertook during the social-ecological systems development), trialling and evaluating analysis methods to select the most suitable approach. The CAP transparently presents the consultation undertaken with community and industry members, and incorporates the values identified. The CMA developed the CAP using a bottom-up approach, incorporating community information sourced at the local landscape level into systems modelling to identify catchment-wide issues and priorities. The CAP's strategies are logically based on the CMA's analysis and address the local and catchment-wide priorities for landscape and community health.

Strengths:

- The CMA has transparently and effectively incorporated social, economic and environmental information into the conceptual models of the different systems operating in the catchment.
- The integrated systems analysis has led to CAP strategies that are transparently derived and are grounded in community and industry values, and will deliver long-term landscape health and community well-being outcomes.
- The CMA demonstrated sophisticated research and evaluation of theory and practice during the CAP development, trialling new processes for fully integrated NRM analysis. A key strength was the practical application of the 'five capitals' approach.
- The CAP strategies have a strong focus on building community and industry capacity to achieve social, economic and environmental outcomes for the region, and to support future devolution of decision-making.

Attribute 2C: Plan proposes targets and actions that are logically nested and supported by the available evidence

The CAP presents a clear vision, goal and target hierarchy that can direct investment across the region. The targets are focussed on outcomes and flow logically from the analysis. The CAP provides clear links between the community and industry values and the CAP strategies. The CAP considers different scales, presenting eight catchment-wide priorities that will contribute to achieving the CAP goals and local priorities at the local landscape scale. The CAP has an attainable implementation process that outlines the relationship between the CAP and subsequent implementation planning. Detailed prioritisation and quantification of targets will be determined in the subsequent implementation plans, which will allow the CAP to remain relevant despite changing circumstances. Reference points against which to measure CAP targets would further improve accountability for achieving the CAP's targets and the CMA has already begun developing these points.

Strengths:

- The CAP targets are focussed on outcomes and support the CAP's vision for the region.
- The CAP presents targets and goals in a logical hierarchy, providing confidence that they will contribute to achieving the CAP's aims.
- The CAP targets and actions are evidence-based and are supported by the CAP analysis. The targets describe the priorities for investment and can inform CAP implementation.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- The CMA has commenced developing reference points against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured, and which are required for

accountability, but these are not included in the CAP.

Criterion 3 - CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between Government, community and industry partners

Attribute 3A: Plan aligns with relevant policies and community aspirations

The CMA conducted an integrated systems analysis of its institutional operating environment. The CAP aligns with the relevant NSW government agency priorities (of the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure the Office of Environment and Heritage, and Aboriginal Affairs NSW). These agencies have endorsed the upgraded CAP, confirming that it is not inconsistent with the relevant policies, plans and strategies that they are responsible for. The CAP is aligned with community aspirations, prioritised at the local and catchment-scale to ensure community support. Delivery partners understand the CAP's role in guiding coordinated whole-of-government and whole-of-community NRM. The CAP outlines a collaborative delivery model for implementation. The CAP development process identified plans and policies relevant to the operational scale and has explained how alignment with these will occur during the implementation planning phase. The CAP aligns with relevant NSW 2021 goals and, the state-wide NRM targets and is consistent with the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW).

Strengths:

- The CMA has conducted effective analysis of policies and plans to align the CAP at the local, regional, state and national scales.
- There is broad support from the community and industry for the CAP to act as a guide for NRM actions for the region.
- The CAP aligns with relevant government plans and policies, including *NSW 2021*, as confirmed by key State Government agencies endorsing of the CAP.
- The CMA has undertaken consultation with Victorian NRM bodies to align cross-border NRM efforts.

Attribute 3B: Plan can meaningfully guide Governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region

The CAP outlines a clear plan for whole-of-government and whole-of-community collaborative NRM in the Murray region. The CAP goals identify high-level opportunities for collaboration between a range of organisations, including those not traditionally involved in NRM, to maximise outcomes. The CAP implementation planning hierarchy is clearly defined and can guide partners' actions. The CAP includes strategies to improve collaborative delivery, informed by the analysis of capacity constraints in the region. These strategies will help the CMA achieve efficiencies and returns on investment. To support effective CAP implementation, the CMA has analysed the prioritisation methods promoted by other government agencies and developed a customised approach suitable for implementing the systems-based CAP. This prioritisation approach allows for adaptation and the incorporation of community and industry priorities, and further demonstrates the CMA's strong governance and planning capabilities.

Strengths:

- The CAP identifies opportunities for collaboration with delivery partners, including with organisations not traditionally involved in NRM, such as health and community organisations.
- CAP targets and strategies are clear and can effectively guide whole-of-government and whole-of-community NRM.
- The CAP has a clear implementation planning hierarchy for collaborative and co-ordinated delivery. To support this, the CMA developed a project prioritisation framework that effectively guides operational decision-making.

Attribute 3C: Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment

To guide collaborative delivery, the CAP has identified key partners, including government, industry and other organisations, to deliver the catchment-scale goals. The CMA has established good relationships with delivery partners including key government agencies, which have endorsed the CAP and agreed to be involved in collaboratively delivering these goals. Other delivery partners support the CAP and have committed to be involved in the implementing it. Delivery partners understand the relationship between the CAP, the three-year business plans and the annual implementation plans (which will set out specific program and project details). The CMA developed relationships with delivery partners during the CAP upgrade and put in place strong governance structures that will support effective implementation.

Strengths:

- The CAP lists specific organisations and types of organisations that the CMA can support, collaborate and partner with to achieve the catchment-wide goals.
- Key delivery partners have committed to collaborate in delivering the CAP and understand the CAP implementation process.

Attachment 2 - About the assessment

Assessment objective

The objective of the NRC’s assessment is to determine whether a CAP is a quality strategic plan that promotes the state-wide targets for NRM and complies with the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*⁴ (the Standard).

Assessment criteria

Following extensive consultation the NRC developed the *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans*⁵ which was endorsed by the NSW Government Senior Officer Group for NRM. To define the criteria and expectations, the NRC examined the external context (institutional, spatial and temporal). It identified elements expected of a high quality strategic NRM planning process and final plan, within the context of the Standard. The NRC trialled and refined the criteria through a pilot process involving CMAs and agencies.

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

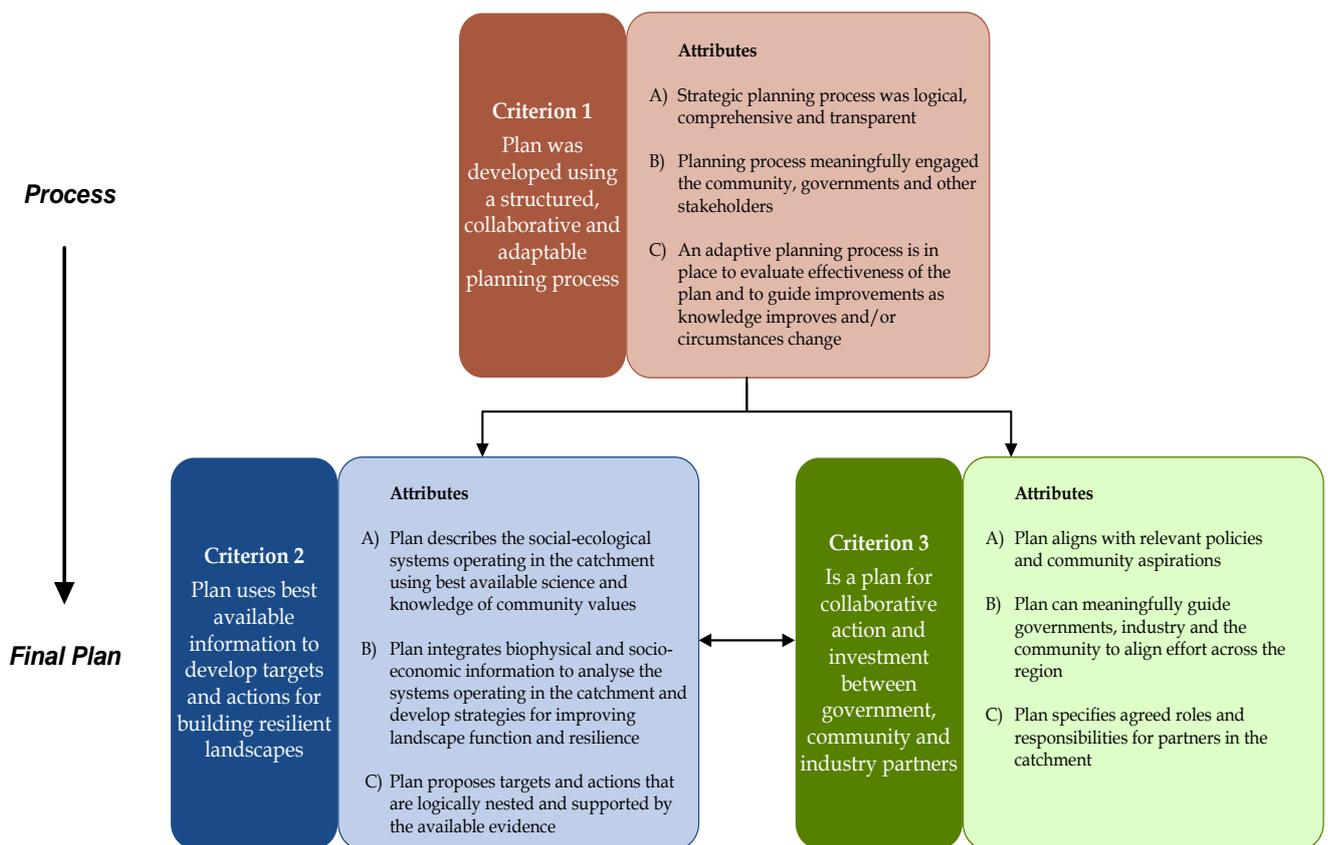


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

⁴ The NSW Government adopted the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*, which identifies seven components that are used to reach high-quality natural resource decisions. CMAs must comply with the Standard⁴, using it as a quality assurance standard for all planning and implementation decisions.

⁵ NRC, *Framework for assessing and recommending upgraded catchment action plans v2*, June 2012

Assessment methodology

The assessment team followed the methodologies set out in the *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans v2, June 2012*.

The CAPs were assessed in progressive phases, including preliminary assessment of evidence prior to formal submission and a full review when the CAP was formally submitted. The NRC sent the assessment reports to CMAs for consultation before they were finalised.

Assessment approach

The NRC's assessment of the CAP involved collecting evidence and consulting with government agencies, CMAs and other stakeholders. The methods and activities used to collect and analyse evidence against the criteria for the Murray CAP included:

- pre-assessment engagement with the CMAs to identify characteristics of the region that influence CAP development, such as major issues and institutional structures
- desktop analysis of the plan, planning approach, community consultation and scientific knowledge in developing the plan
- interviews with two CMA Board members, three senior managers and one staff member
- 21 surveys and one interview with stakeholders including representatives of industry, local government, landholders and non-government groups
- government agency consultation
- four external reviews of the analysis underpinning the targets, conducted by consultants with expertise in ecology and environmental science, social science and environmental economics.

Acknowledgements

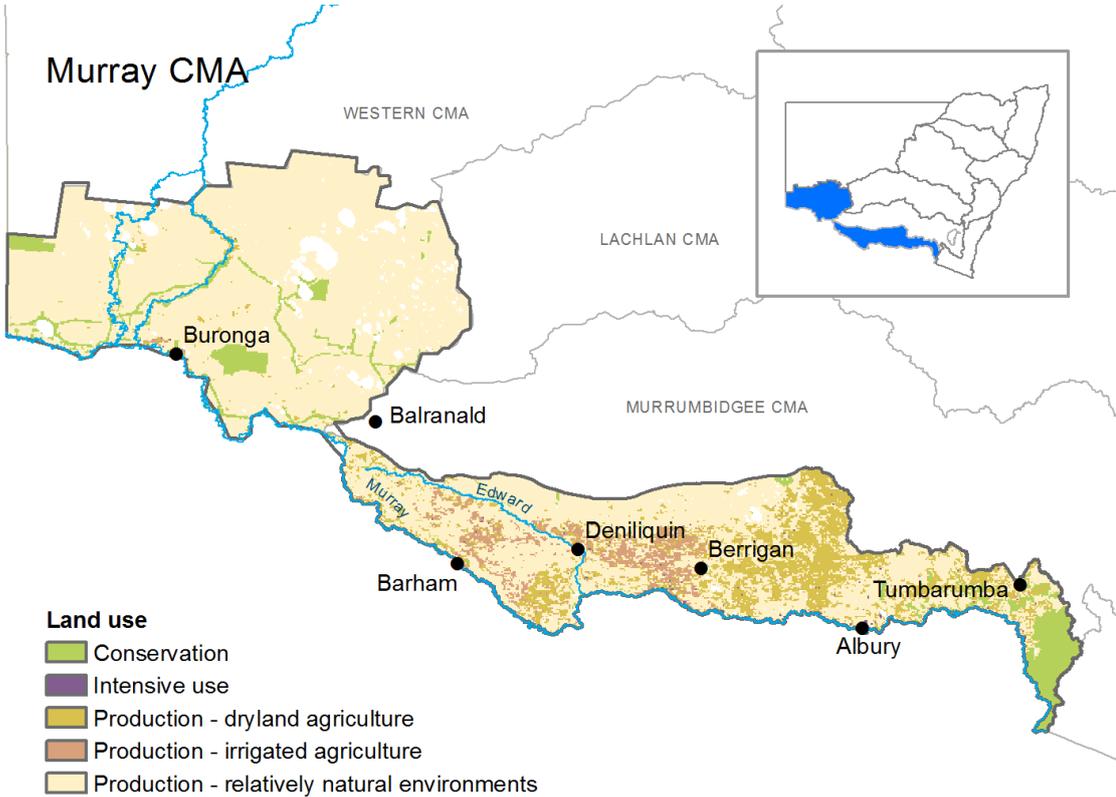
The assessment team gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance provided by the Murray CMA, and agencies and stakeholders in the region. In particular, we wish to thank the CMA Board, General Manager and staff.

Attachment 3 - About the region

The Murray catchment spans more than 77,000 square kilometres of south-western NSW, along the border with Victoria. The diverse catchment includes alpine slopes in the east, and native grasslands, rangelands and riverine floodplains to the west.

The catchment’s population of 114,000 people is concentrated along the Murray, Edward-Kolety and Darling River systems. The land and water resources within the Murray catchment support diverse agricultural enterprises including cropping, grazing and horticulture. There is also increasing interest in mineral and coal deposits. Extensive water supply infrastructure – including Australia’s largest irrigation network and the Snowy Mountain Hydro-Electric Scheme – supplements-low rainfall areas to support viable towns and industries.

Most of the catchment’s multibillion-dollar economy depends on continuing access to - and the productivity of - its natural resources. Approximately one-third of residents are directly involved in the agriculture industry.⁶



⁶ Source: Murray Catchment Action Plan 2013-2023

