



Assessment of
the Western upgraded
Catchment Action Plan

June 2013

Enquiries

Enquiries about this report should be directed to:

Name	Lauren Tapp
Phone	(02) 8227 4300
Fax	(02) 8227 4399
E-Mail	Lauren.Tapp@nrc.nsw.gov.au
Postal address	GPO Box 4206, Sydney NSW 2001

List of acronyms

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

This work is copyright. *The Copyright Act 1968* (Cth) permits fair dealing for study, research, news reporting, criticism and review. Selected passages, table or diagrams may be reproduced for such purposes provided acknowledgement of the source is included.

Document No.D13/1833

ISBN: 978 1 921050 86 2

Executive summary

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Western 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 following amalgamation.

The Western region is characterised by mostly arid and semi-arid rangeland that is unsuitable for intensive agriculture. Large distances between towns create unique complexities for the CMA in engaging communities and other stakeholders. Economic prosperity in the region largely depends upon low-intensity agriculture, including wool and cattle, and localised mining.

Key findings

The upgraded Western CAP is a quality strategic plan, developed through a collaborative process that has enhanced the strategic capabilities of the CMA Board, staff and major stakeholders, and built new relationships with potential delivery partners. Successful implementation of the CAP is likely to **deliver improvements** in long-term landscape health and community well-being.

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

- presents a **clear vision and strategy for the region**, with a focus on 'resilient, viable communities and enterprises which are supported by and sustain diverse natural environments and cultural values'
- includes strategies that clearly **address most of the 'big issues'** for the region, such as total grazing pressure, invasive species, property viability and land manager resilience
- defines five sub-regional landscapes based on social, cultural and community identity factors that will guide **locally relevant** on-ground action
- aims to guide the CMA in **ongoing improvement** through its goal of improved adaptive governance, decision-making and management
- presents strategies that integrate economic, social and environmental factors to **deliver better outcomes**
- lists a range of lead delivery partners committed to collaborative CAP implementation, which **promotes accountability and shared ownership**
- is aligned with local, state and Australian government plans and policies, providing opportunities for complementary actions to **increase the efficiency** of natural resource management (NRM) efforts in the region
- enhances the ability of landholders and other community members to **participate effectively in NRM**, through its strong focus on the **adaptive capacity and resilience** of land managers and communities.

To improve the upgraded CAP, the Catchment Management Authority (CMA) should:

- **develop baselines** against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured, to further **improve accountability** for delivering outcomes
- **strengthen relationships with local industries**, especially the mining industry, and explore opportunities for collaborative CAP implementation.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Western 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.

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Focus of assessment	1
2	Summary of assessment findings	2
2.1	Planning	2
2.2	Targets	3
2.3	Action and investment	4
3	Recommendation	6
3.1	Approval	6
3.2	Conditions of approval	6
3.3	Additional suggested actions for the CMA	6
3.1	Readiness for transition to Local Land Services	6
	Attachment 1 - Detailed assessment findings	
	Attachment 2 - About the assessment	
	Attachment 3 - About the region	

1 Introduction

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Western Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities.

The Western Catchment Management Authority (CMA) is the largest by area in NSW, covering approximately 250,000 square kilometres of arid and semi-arid rangeland in the north-west of the state. The towns are small – with the exception of Broken Hill which has a population of approximately 18,500 – and separated by large distances. The economic prosperity of the region depends on low-intensity agriculture, including wool and cattle with some irrigated crops along the Darling River. Mining has a strong influence on local economies in the Cobar and Broken Hill regions.

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. 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 recommend 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 consultation 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 Western CMA developed the CAP through a considered and collaborative strategic planning approach that included managing the amalgamation of part of the former Lower Murray Darling (LMD) CMA region. The CMA engaged in genuine consultation with community, government and agricultural industry stakeholders during the plan's development.

Strategic planning and capacity

Strong governance and leadership from the CMA Board throughout the CAP upgrade resulted in a CAP with a clear vision and strategy for the region. All members of the CMA and its Board were involved in various ways in developing the CAP, which enhanced the strategic capability of the organisation as a whole, and built a strong sense of CAP ownership within the CMA. This provides confidence that the CMA is in a good position to guide implementation of the CAP.

Compared to the previous CAP, the upgraded CAP has an increased strategic focus on people, communities and local economies, and acknowledges the relationships between the health of these systems and healthy natural resources. The upgraded CAP reflects this more integrated focus in its goals and targets, which promote social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

The CMA conducted a generally inclusive and representative community engagement program, with a proactive approach to involve community members in a very large and remote region where engagement is often difficult. This included a total of 36 community meetings throughout the CAP development, covering 16 towns across the region and involving considerable travel and meeting facilitation by CMA staff and Board members. The CMA also made initial efforts in the short period of time available to build relationships in the region previously managed by the LMD CMA. This has met with predominantly positive feedback; however, the CMA has acknowledged that further work in this area will be required.

A majority of surveyed stakeholders reported that involvement in the CAP development enhanced their strategic capability and their relationships with the CMA. This provides a framework for meaningful shared decision-making and collaborative action in the region. The CMA demonstrated best practice in Aboriginal engagement through a targeted program with good attendance rates that brought a high level of Aboriginal community involvement in subsequent meetings. This created new relationships and has increased Aboriginal community support for the CMA and CAP.

While there was some industry involvement in the CAP development, greater engagement of the mining industry could increase mutual understanding of collaborative opportunities. This would be particularly useful for social and community well-being, as adapting to the social and economic effects of mining is a key challenge for local communities.

The NRC recommends approval of the Western CAP with the following **suggested action**:

- strengthen relationships with industry, especially mining, and explore opportunities for collaborative CAP implementation.

Adaptability

The CMA's strong approach to managing uncertainty allows for effective interventions in an uncertain operating environment. The CMA demonstrated a commitment to adaptive management throughout its development of the upgraded CAP, by ensuring that one of the six CAP goals, and several targets and actions, are aimed at adaptive governance, decision-making and management. The CAP clearly communicates the reason for this focus – complexities caused by the Western region's highly variable climate. The CAP identifies and addresses a comprehensive list of internal and external risks and threats at a range of scales, increasing its relevance and its adaptive potential. The CMA immediately incorporated lessons learned throughout the CAP development process into the next stages, which allowed the CMA to continually improve effectiveness.

2.2 Targets

The CMA thoroughly analysed knowledge gathered from communities, local technical specialists and CMA staff to produce a logical set of strategies and 'indicators of success' (targets). This provides confidence that the strategies and targets, if successfully implemented, will address the big issues in the Western region.

Best-available information

Most of the NRM issues in the Western region are long standing, and methods for addressing them are well-known by natural resource managers. In this context, the CMA focused on understanding these established issues, rather than employing science-based evidence to test conventional wisdom as it applies to future potential scenarios. The CMA listed and discussed the issues and potential methods for addressing them, looked for published data if available, and then largely adopted standard management practices in its goals and targets.

The focus on community and CMA knowledge over best-available science poses some risk that the upgraded CAP might have missed potential new issues, improved techniques or innovation opportunities. However, due to the slow-moving nature of the Western landscapes, technical specialists have indicated that this risk is not high and that the CMA is likely to have arrived at sound strategies through this method. The NRC considers the CMA's decision not to direct limited resources towards a more complex data collection and assessment process appropriate in these circumstances.

The CAP highlights key gaps in available information that will need to be addressed to provide baseline data or to inform detailed prioritisation for CAP investment. The CAP prioritises actions to address these key gaps.

Analysis of social, economic and environmental information

The CMA has divided the amalgamated region into five sub-regional landscapes using logical criteria that reflect the unique social, economic and environmental characteristics of the Western region. This approach has resulted in general community acceptance of the landscapes.

The CMA developed and used a number of causal loop diagrams to understand the links between various social, economic and environmental elements of identified key issues, at various scales. This approach allowed the CMA to identify the key drivers of the landscapes and focus strategies and targets on the key drivers that the CMA can influence or manage, to maximise returns on investment. This holistic systems analysis provides confidence that the

CMA designed the CAP strategies and targets to optimise social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Logical hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The CAP presents a logical hierarchy of vision, goals, strategies, targets and priority initiatives. This allows the CMA, potential investors and delivery partners to see links between each level of the hierarchy, providing confidence that implementation of the priority initiatives will contribute to the CAP goals and vision. Program logics presented in supporting documentation outline the assumptions made in linking strategies to goals, and then to actions.

The CAP priorities are clear, allowing potential investors or delivery partners, as well as the CMA, to see where funds and actions will be focused. Maps in the CAP clearly present high-priority areas for some targets such as biodiversity and wetland conservation. The CAP implementation section highlights the investment priorities for the first few years of implementation, providing guidance in the often difficult question of 'Where do we start?'

Accountability

While the upgraded CAP provides accountability to potential investors by establishing targets and priority initiatives, this area could be further strengthened. Many of the CAP targets are broadly appropriate but are either not sufficiently measurable or would require a baseline against which to measure progress. The CMA has identified these outstanding baselines as key knowledge gaps and has plans to address them during the implementation phase; however, accountability for delivering the CAP is potentially limited until these are developed.

The NRC recommends approval of the Western CAP with the following **suggested action**:

- to develop baselines against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured, to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

2.3 Action and investment

The Western CAP provides clear direction for NRM action and investment in the region, through its logical planning hierarchy, accessible language and presentation, lists of delivery partners and well-defined implementation process. The CAP's alignment with almost all relevant external plans and strategies ensures that CAP actions will contribute to these, increasing the efficiency of investment in delivering the CAP.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The CMA demonstrated a tailored approach to alignment with the relevant policy framework, aligning CAP priorities with the most relevant NRM plans, policies and strategies. The only gap in alignment – with the Draft Biodiversity Strategy – was justified. Instead of directly aligning the CAP priorities with this strategy, the CMA used an alternative biodiversity prioritisation approach, with the assistance of the Office of Environment and Heritage (OEH) which has responsibility for the strategy. The OEH has endorsed the CAP, indicating its agreement that the CAP is not inconsistent with the strategy.

The CAP strikes an appropriate balance between government policies, community values and best-available science. It meets all statutory requirements; it is aligned with *NSW 2021* goals³ and state-wide targets for NRM, and is consistent with the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW). The Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW have endorsed the CAP, agreeing that it is not inconsistent with the NRM policies, plans and strategies that these agencies are responsible for.

The CMA has identified opportunities for collaborative projects with other organisations. These will increase the efficiency of CAP investment in the region by achieving outcomes against multiple goals.

Roles and responsibilities

The CAP's capacity to guide implementation is strengthened by its comprehensive lists of lead and supporting delivery partners. These lists are presented for each of the six broad CAP goals, and include a range of delivery partners including local, state and Australian Government bodies, Landcare, community groups, health-based organisations, Aboriginal groups and industry groups. This technique allows these partners to see their broad role in implementing the CAP, and also guides potential individuals who may want to contribute, by outlining which organisations are involved in implementing each goal.

While all of the lead delivery partners have agreed, in principle, to their involvement, the supporting delivery partners are to be engaged further during the implementation phase. The CMA has good relationships with delivery partners, and a majority of the partners interviewed for this assessment (including some in the region previously managed by the LMD CMA) expressed interest in being involved. This provides sufficient confidence that the CMA will succeed in engaging the appropriate organisations to participate in CAP implementation planning and on-ground works. The CMA intends to discuss detailed roles and responsibilities during the CAP implementation planning phase.

Implementation

The CAP contains a well-defined collaborative implementation process that will guide the CMA and delivery partners in planning and managing projects together, increasing shared CAP ownership and accountability. This process includes the formation of an implementation group comprising key delivery partners and the CMA, which will meet regularly to develop and maintain an implementation plan.

The CAP also describes clear strategic priorities for the first one to three years, including the 'what', 'who' and 'how' of implementation, allowing partners and individuals to see how they can contribute. As a result, the CAP is in a strong position to meaningfully guide implementation by the CMA and partners in government, industry and the community.

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 Western Catchment Action Plan with one condition.

3.2 Condition of approval

The NRC recommends approval of the upgraded Western 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 this condition is met.

3.3 Additional suggested actions for the CMA

The following suggested actions should be considered by the CMA to strengthen the effective delivery of the CAP:

- strengthen relationships with industry, especially mining, and explore opportunities for collaborative CAP implementation
- develop baselines against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

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

- the CMA Board and staff have demonstrated strong strategic planning capability and understanding that will inform future strategic planning
- the CAP vision, strategies and priorities will provide clear direction to a new Board
- the community and specialist knowledge supporting the CAP is a valuable resource for new regional organisations
- the CAP has a strong focus on adaptive governance and management, allowing it to stay relevant under the new structure and with potential boundary changes
- the CAP already sufficiently captures and reflects community and stakeholder views; consequently, extensive community consultation will not be required in order to reflect potential Local Land Services boundary changes.

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 CAP development process was led by an involved and transparent Board. All members of the CMA and Board were involved in some way in the CAP planning process, which helped to build the strategic capacity of the organisation. The process also provided an opportunity for the CMA to increase the focus on local communities and economies in the CAP, and articulate the close links between economic, social and environmental systems in the catchment, which the CMA and community had long understood. This strengthened focus provides confidence that achieving CAP targets will contribute to triple-bottom line outcomes (economic, social and environmental) in the region.

Strengths:

- Strong governance and leadership from the Board resulted in a CAP that presents a clear vision and strategy for the region.
- The upgraded CAP demonstrates a shift in strategic focus towards considering the links between economic, community and natural resource health, promoting triple bottom-line outcomes.
- The strategic capability of the CMA's staff, management and Board has increased as a result of the CAP upgrade, through strategic planning and goal-setting activities.

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

The CMA conducted a generally inclusive and representative community engagement program, making strong attempts to involve community members in a very remote region where engagement is often difficult. The CMA demonstrated best practice in Aboriginal engagement through a targeted program that resulted in high attendance, and involvement in subsequent meetings. This created many new relationships with this stakeholder group and increased support of the CMA and CAP. Conversely, industry groups, particularly mining, were largely neglected. This generates risks that some social and economic threats are not appropriately addressed in the CAP. Overall the engagement process enhanced stakeholder strategic capability and CMA-stakeholder relationships, which paves the way for successful collaborative planning and implementation. Further effort is needed to build relationships in the new region that was previously managed by Lower Murray Darling CMA, which the CMA has acknowledged. However, initial efforts have been strong and CAP feedback from these stakeholders has been positive.

Strengths:

- Successful targeted Aboriginal engagement resulted in strong Aboriginal community involvement in the development process, which is likely to result in strong support for the CAP.
- Engagement was inclusive of government, community and agriculture stakeholders in both the original Western region and the amalgamated region.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- Poor engagement of industry organisations, particularly mining sectors, creates a risk that some key socio-economic threats and opportunities are not addressed through the CAP.

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 CMA demonstrated a strong commitment to adaptive management in the draft CAP, directing one CAP goal and several targets and actions towards adaptive governance, decision-making and management. The CAP clearly communicates the reason for this: complexities caused by the Western region's highly variable environment. This approach to managing uncertainty allows for effective interventions in an uncertain operating environment. The CAP identifies and addresses a comprehensive list of internal and external risks and threats on various scales, increasing its relevance and its adaptive potential. Lessons learned throughout the CAP process were immediately incorporated into next stages which allowed the CMA to continually improve the effectiveness of the CAP.

Strengths:

- The draft CAP has a strong adaptability theme to accommodate the Western region's highly variable climate; this provides very high confidence that the CAP will remain relevant and adapt to new information.
 - The draft CAP is informed by a thorough identification of relevant risks and threats to landscapes; these are clearly communicated in the draft CAP.
 - The CMA incorporated lessons learned during the CAP development process into the CAP, which promotes continual improvement and provides confidence in the CMA's ability to adaptively manage CAP implementation.
-

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 presents five sub-regional landscapes within the Western catchment, using logical criteria that reflect unique characteristics of the region and local community identities. The CMA evaluated community values early in the consultation process and these have clearly influenced CAP strategies, which maximises the likelihood that the local communities will support the CAP. Most of the NRM issues and techniques in the Western region are well established, and the CMA relied more heavily on this conventional wisdom and community knowledge than on best-available science. Although this approach poses a risk that the CAP may have missed emerging threats or management techniques, the NRC considers this risk to be low, and the CMA is likely to have arrived at the most appropriate strategies.

Strengths:

- The CMA defined sub-regional landscapes using logical criteria that reflect unique Western region characteristics; this has resulted in general community acceptance of the landscapes.
- The CAP identifies knowledge gaps, and flags some actions to address priority gaps, providing confidence that these will be addressed in the CAP implementation phase.
- Community values and visions described in the CAP have influenced CAP indicators of success and priority initiatives.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- There was a weaker demonstration of how scientific data or literature was used to inform identification of key underlying drivers for specified threats, compared to specialist knowledge and community values.
-

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

Due to the Western region's relatively homogenous landscape, land uses and

Strengths:

primary threats, the CMA opted to present one set of strategies, indicators of success and priority initiatives across the entire catchment. Differentiation between different sub-regional landscapes within the catchment is to occur at implementation stage, with implementation mechanisms that reflect social differences within the catchment. The CMA used causal loop diagrams to identify the causal links between elements within systems. Using these diagrams, the CMA can target the key controlling variables it is in a position to influence. The diagrams demonstrate that the CMA has confidently integrated social, economic and environmental systems, providing a framework for CAP strategies to address the important controlling variables to improve the resilience of all three systems. The CMA's analysis is clear and logical, with several clear links from threats to indicators of success.

- The CMA comprehensively integrated social, economic and environmental system components, allowing for a holistic analysis of the systems.
- The systems analysis identified controlling variables, allowing the CMA to focus effort in areas that maximise returns.

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

The CAP presents a logical hierarchy of vision, goals, strategies, targets and priority initiatives. While there could be several improvements in terms of specificity and baseline references, they are broadly appropriate and allow readers to see links between each level of the hierarchy. This provides confidence that implementation of priority initiatives will contribute to the CAP goals and vision. Program logics presented in supporting documentation outline the assumptions made in linking strategies to actions, and provide links to supporting documentation where available. The CMA has given some thought to potential delivery mechanisms and specific programs, which, though not detailed in the CAP, will guide the CMA during implementation.

Strengths:

- The CAP presents a logical, hierarchical structure of vision, goals, indicators of success and priority initiatives, providing confidence that implementing priority initiatives would contribute to vision achievement.
- The CMA has already considered delivery mechanisms and potential programs for implementation, increasing confidence that CAP targets will be met.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- Some indicators of success are not measurable, and others require baseline references to be developed to allow measurability; this reduces the accountability of CAP implementation until baselines are developed.

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 demonstrated a tailored approach to aligning the CAP with the relevant policy framework, by aligning CAP priorities with most of the relevant plans, policies and strategies, and providing sound justification for one situation where this was not appropriate. Regular, meaningful involvement of government agency staff in developing the CAP served to further align the CAP with state government priorities. Despite low levels of local government involvement in the upgrade

Strengths:

- The CMA has thoroughly considered relevant policies and plans for alignment, providing confidence that CAP actions will contribute to the achievement of other plans and policies. This increases the effectiveness of CAP investment.

process, there is general local government support for the CAP. The CAP considers community values and visions, and strikes an appropriate balance between the influences of community values, government policies and best available science. The CAP meets all statutory requirements; it has been endorsed by the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, it is aligned with NSW 2021 goals and state-wide targets for NRM, and is consistent with the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW).

- There is close alignment between the CAP and NSW 2021 goal 23 as well as state-wide target 13, as demonstrated through the CAP's strong focus on the adaptive capacity of land managers. This will enhance the ability of organisations and individuals to participate in NRM in the region.

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

The CAP provides clear direction for NRM in the region through its logical hierarchy, accessible language, lists of delivery partners and detailed implementation planning process. It sets out clear priorities for the first years of implementation, and as a result, the CAP will be a strong implementation guide for partners in government, industry and the community. It also allows any other potential delivery partners to identify how they can undertake actions that will contribute to the CAP goals and vision. The CMA has also identified some additional opportunities for collaborative projects, although these are not presented in the CAP. These will increase the effectiveness of investment in the CAP by maximising outcomes and/or sharing costs. Delivery partners' involvement in the implementation planning process is very likely to increase CAP ownership and maximise accountability for implementation.

Strengths:

- The CAP contains a well-defined collaborative implementation process that will guide the CMA and delivery partners in planning and managing projects together, increasing CAP ownership and accountability.
- The CAP clearly communicates 'what', 'who' and 'how' of CAP implementation, allowing partners and individuals to see how they can contribute.
- The CMA has identified some opportunities for collaborative on-ground projects, with potential for others. These will increase the efficiency of investment by achieving multiple outcomes.

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

The CAP lists a comprehensive range of lead and supporting delivery partners next to each of the six broad goals. Detailed roles and responsibilities are to be negotiated during the implementation planning process. While all of the lead delivery partners have agreed in principle to their involvement, the supporting delivery partners had not all been asked explicitly, creating risks that some may not be willing to participate. However, the CMA has good relationships with most delivery partners, and a majority interviewed for this assessment expressed interest in being involved. This provides confidence that the CMA will succeed in engaging the appropriate organisations to participate in CAP implementation planning and on-ground works.

Strengths:

- The CAP lists lead and supporting delivery partners next to each CAP goal, which increases CAP accountability.
- The majority of stakeholders support the CMA and are open to being involved in CAP implementation, providing confidence that the CMA will be able to engage the appropriate partners for the implementation phase.

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 in 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 the comparative performance of other CMAs.

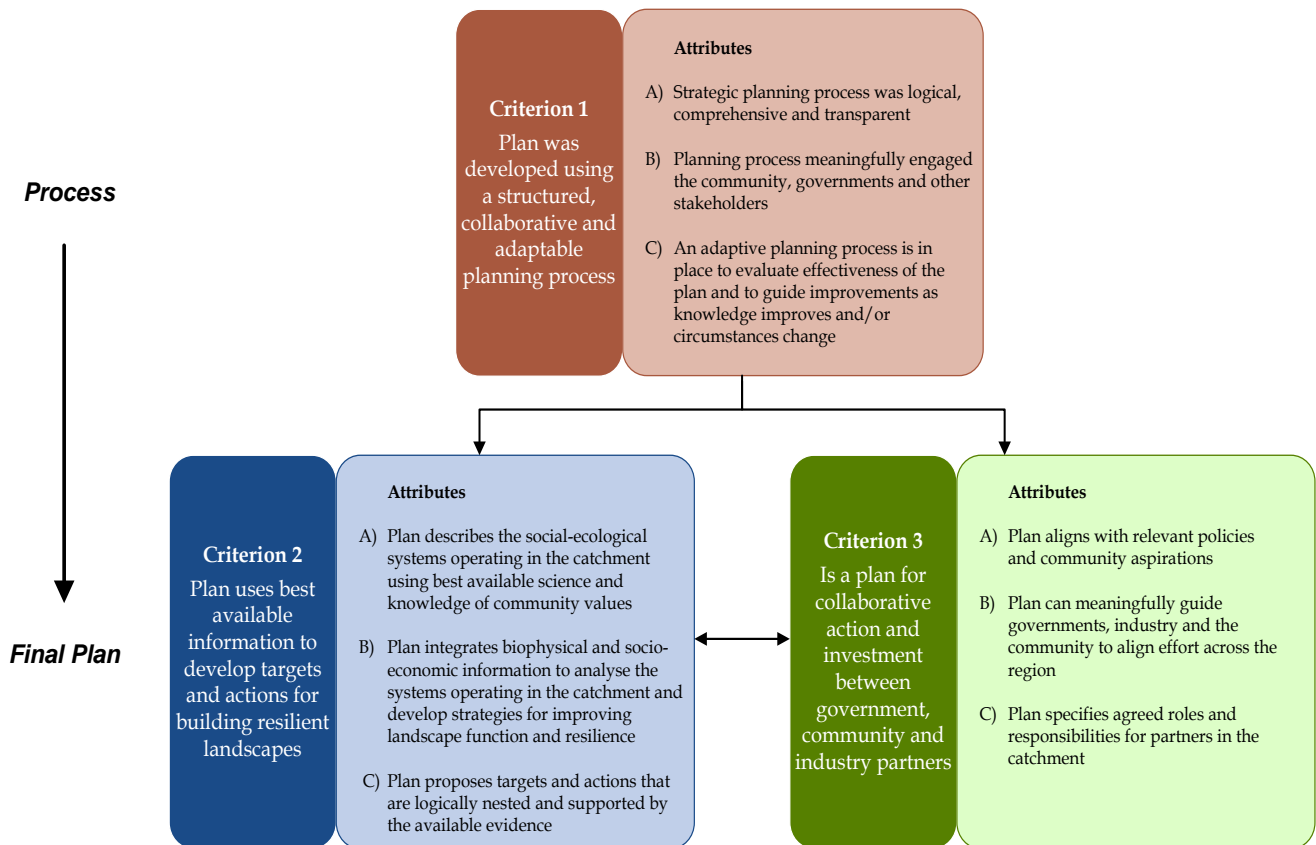


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

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 NRC 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 Western 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 used in developing the plan
- interviews with two CMA Board members, three senior managers and three staff members
- 11 surveys and 10 interviews with stakeholders including representatives of industry, local government, landholders and non-government groups
- government agency consultation
- three external reviews on 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 Western CMA, and agencies and stakeholders in the region. In particular, we wish to thank the Western CMA Board, General Manager and staff.

Attachment 3 - About the region

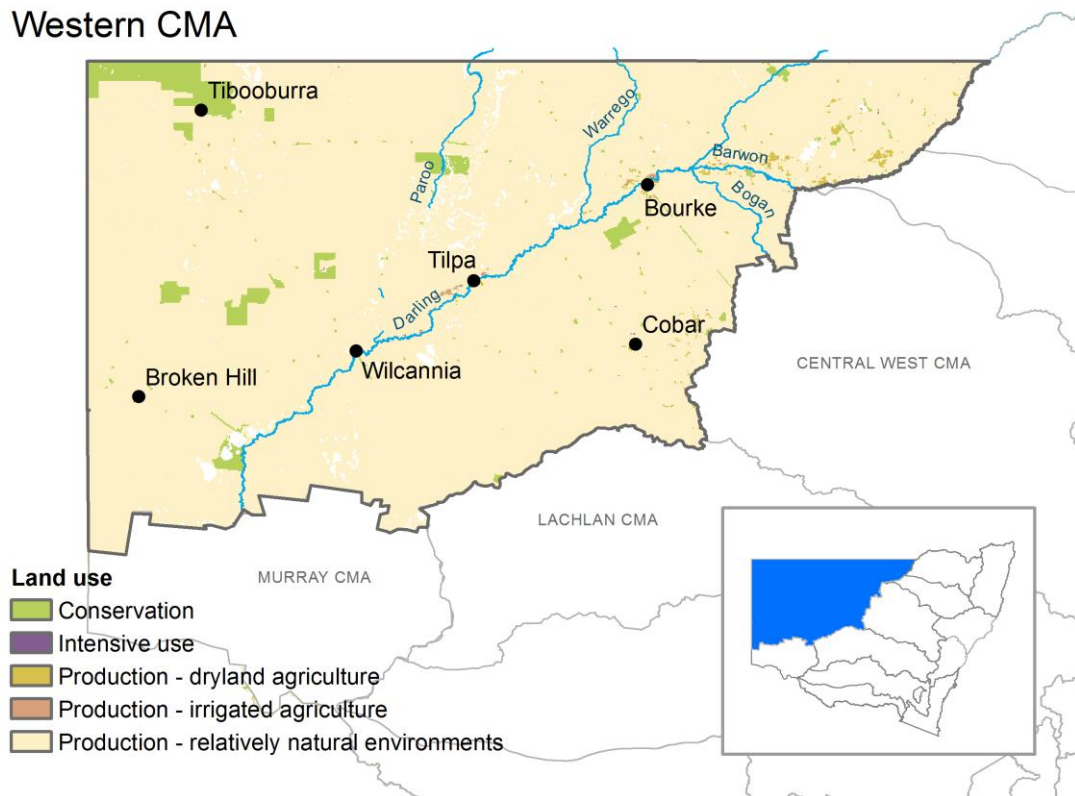
The Western region is the largest natural resource management region in NSW by area, covering approximately 250,000 square kilometres in the north-west of the state. The majority of the land in the region is arid or semi-arid rangeland, unsuitable for intensive agriculture. Most of this land is leasehold land administered under the *Western Lands Act 1901*.

Rainfall is low and highly variable in the region. The major river system is the Barwon-Darling, running from the north-east to the south-west. Most of the region is within the Murray-Darling Basin, with the exception of the north-west corner which drains to the Lake Eyre Basin. The Great Artesian Basin groundwater system underlies the northern section of the catchment.

The economic prosperity of the region depends upon low-intensity agriculture, including wool and cattle with some irrigated crops along the Darling River. Mining has a strong influence on local economies in the Cobar and Broken Hill regions.

The city of Broken Hill holds over half of the region's population of 33,000. The remainder live in or around small towns separated by large distances. These distances create unique challenges for the Western CMA in engaging communities and other stakeholders. Key issues in the region include grazing pressure (from a combination of pest animals, managed stock and wildlife), invasive animals and plants, and in localised areas, decreasing property viability and the social and economic effects of mining⁶.

Western CMA



⁶ Source: Western Catchment Action Plan

