

PROGRESS TOWARDS HEALTHY RESILIENT LANDSCAPES

IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARD, TARGETS AND CATCHMENT ACTION PLANS



A comprehensive review of the pioneering steps taken by NSW in 2003 to reform natural resource management clearly shows the model is delivering results.

The review concluded that the NSW model for natural resource management is achieving significant success in supporting private landholders to more sustainably manage their

land for their own and everyone else's long term benefit.

However, despite the successes we are not going to turn the tide of landscape degradation until we harmonise other government plans, programs and regulatory settings so that they all support each other.



The review

2010 is a milestone year for natural resource management in NSW – it is the mid-point for implementation of the 10 year state-wide targets and the 10 year Catchment Action Plans. To track how the model is working, the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has undertaken a mid-term review in accordance with its statutory role of providing independent advice to the NSW Government.

The review was based on:

- the NRC’s comprehensive audits of how effectively Catchment Action Plans are being implemented
- available resource condition data from the NSW Monitoring Evaluation and Reporting program, and
- best available knowledge on how well the institutional framework of Catchment Action Plans, the Standard, targets, state-wide policies, plans and investments are all supporting each other.

The business of natural resource management

Australians are acutely aware of how our past use of natural resources has affected their current condition. How we manage the landscape influences its ability to provide our food and fibre, support industries and communities, and sustain our quality of life.

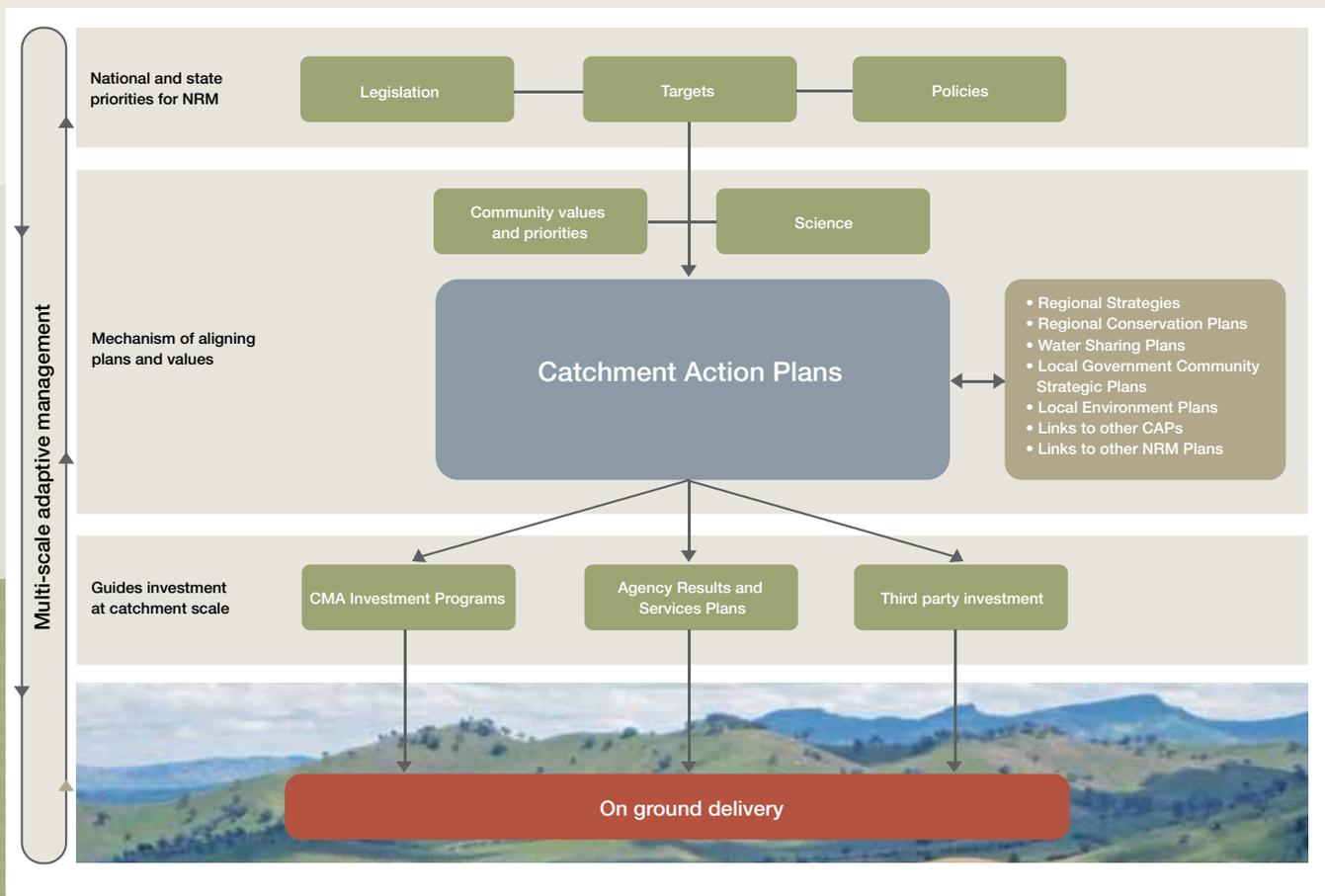
Natural resource management is about managing the way in which people and natural landscapes interact. It is about improving production, conservation and community outcomes. With 89% of NSW privately managed, the health of our diverse natural landscapes depends on private stewardship of environmental assets.

The framework for managing natural resources in NSW

Since 2003, 13 regionally-based Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have been responsible for engaging communities and delivering professional, outcomes-based natural resource management programs.

It is a model designed to reconcile the needs and expectations of our communities with the biophysical realities of our natural systems.

Figure 1: The Catchment Action Plan as the mechanism for aligning plans and values at the regional level



The current approach to natural resource management has evolved over several decades from the principles of total catchment management, namely:

- integrating the management of land and water resources at the catchment scale
- involving communities in planning and managing their landscapes, and
- finding a balance between resource use and resource conservation.

Figure 1 illustrates a model where Catchment Action Plans are the mechanism for aligning and helping to deliver a range of state policies, non-statutory and statutory plans, and natural resource management-related Australian and NSW Government programs.

State agencies provide scientific, technical and policy development support to the CMAs. Other key investors include Australian and local governments.

Review findings

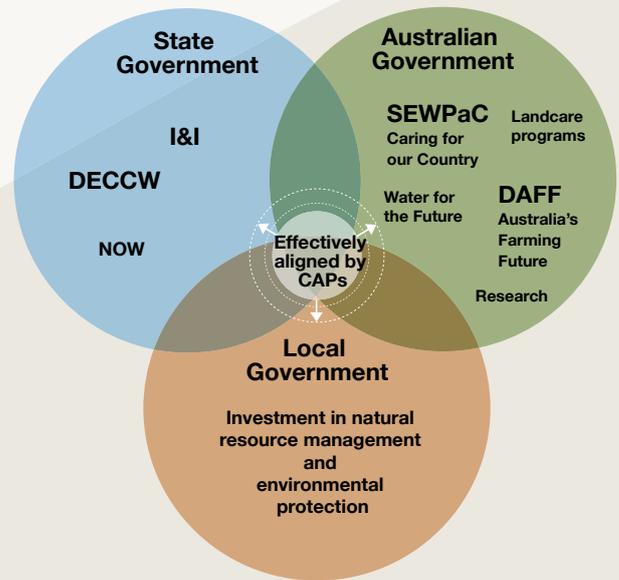
Overall, the NRC has found that the NSW regional model for natural resource management is an effective mechanism for supporting land managers to manage their land better.

CMAs are achieving on-ground results. Independent audits indicate that CMAs are effectively delivering projects with their communities and are progressing well in implementing their Catchment Action Plans. Notably:

- over 90% of all audited projects had achieved their expected short-term outputs
- nearly 90% had strong, logical links between activities undertaken and expected outcomes
- around 50% of the projects showed evidence of local improvements in resource condition
- CMAs have demonstrated strengths in community engagement
- CMAs are leveraging third party investment and attracting cash and in-kind contributions.

CMAs have separately reported that from 2004 to 2009, their collective investment of around \$650 million has resulted in 5 million hectares of land being protected, repaired, enhanced, treated or rehabilitated. This equates to 6 per cent of the total area of NSW.

Figure 2: Opportunities to improve alignment of government investment in natural resource management



A sound framework for natural resource management exists. The institutional elements are well established and are fostering an observable cultural shift in how natural resources are considered and managed. CMAs have had time to build their own capacity and that of their communities. The Standard, targets and audit framework support structured learning and improvement.

However, greater co-ordination and alignment would lead to better results. While CMAs are effectively working with landholders, they do not have the resources or scope to address other increasingly important landscape change drivers such as urban development, mining, climate change, and water availability.

The achievements of CMAs will not be enough unless we better align government planning and policies, make better use of robust, relevant science to inform decisions and more efficiently co-ordinate investment from all layers of government. Other government policies also need to complement voluntary action.

Figure 2 illustrates how there is scope to better co-ordinate more of the approximately \$2.7 billion state and local government investment and substantial Australian Government funding through community-driven and quality assured Catchment Action Plans.



Priorities for the future

The foundations of successful natural resource management have been established. Future directions should build on this success to pursue more cohesive and collaborative approaches across all of government. However, it is important to recognise that sustained effort and community involvement is required over a long timeframe for site-scale works to cumulatively lead to landscape-scale improvement.

The NRC makes seven recommendations for action that should form the foundation for ongoing improvement in NRM over the next period of Catchment Action Plan implementation. These recommendations build on the agency and CMA initiatives that are already in place to address the identified priorities.

The key recommendations for the NSW Government to improve progress are:

Implement whole-of-government and community catchment planning - for greater co-ordination and efficiency in delivering government policy at the regional scale

- 1** The NSW Government should prioritise development of upgraded, whole-of-government and community Catchment Action Plans, so that new plans are in place by the end of 2012
- 2** The NSW Government should seek greater coherence among state-wide plans and policies, focussing within NRM initially and working with other government policy areas in the longer term

Improve science and knowledge - to support decision making and collaboration at all scales

- 3** The NSW Government should support revision of the state-wide targets, to make them more relevant in guiding state-wide, regional and local action
- 4** The NSW Government should implement and effectively resource its Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Strategy 2010 – 2015 and further improve its decision making capacity at multiple scales

Implement adaptive management across government – to build-on and share lessons about what works

- 5** The NSW Government should institutionalise system-wide learning and improvement processes

Match funding to landscape need - to ensure clean water and air, food and biodiversity are provided now and for tomorrow

- 6** The NSW Government should better coordinate and increase funding in the health of NSW biodiversity, water, land and communities

Design sound policy to complement stewardship – to ensure voluntary NRM efforts are supported by other policy tools.

- 7** The NSW Government should promote design of regulatory and other policy tools to complement voluntary landscape stewardship.

The full report, including further details on the steps involved in these recommendations and individual snapshots of 13 regions across NSW is available at www.nrc.nsw.gov.au.



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natural
resources
commission

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