



Natural Resources Commission

A Review of the Standard for Natural Resource
Management by Four Catchment Management
Authorities




Final Report



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1. Introduction

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) developed a Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management¹ to apply to all agencies involved natural resource management in New South Wales. It is specifically applied to Catchment Management Authorities who must comply with The Standard (hereafter referred to as TS) under the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*. The NRC commissioned Hyder Consulting to undertake a review of how four selected Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) are using TS. The review is based on interviews with senior staff and Board members of the four CMAs. They are:

- Hawkesbury Nepean
- Hunter Central
- Central West
- Western

The purpose of the review is about TS – how it is understood, how it is implemented and whether it is ‘user-friendly’ and how it might be improved or communicated differently. A critical issue is the role of TS in helping CMAs with their NRC Audit. This means that this review takes a case study approach rather than an evaluation of the CMAs. Any evaluative perspective is focussed on TS and how it is used and how it might be further developed. Inevitably, there are also findings on how the NRC relates to the CMAs and how this relationship can be developed to enhance TS.

2. Method

An interview schedule was developed in consultation with the NRC and covered a broad range of issues associated with the understanding and implementation of TS. A total of 13 interviews were conducted with each interview lasting from one to one and a half hours. The interview questions were qualitative as the total number of interviews and their spread across different CMAs did not provide sufficient basis for either accurate or meaningful quantitative analysis. A qualitative analysis suits the nature of the information required and provides the opportunity for open-ended responses. This approach allowed respondents to integrate different issues in an answer to a specific question. Some issues were raised often enough to warrant a frequency analysis. The interview schedule is shown in Appendix A and the respondents in Appendix B.

The NRC contacted the Chair and General Manager of each of the CMAs and explained the purpose of the review and sought their cooperation. Once given, Hyder Consulting contacted Board members and senior staff of each of the CMAs by telephone and email. The aim was to interview three to four people from each CMA. A combination of face to face individual and group meetings and telephone interviews was used. There was a clear preference for face to face meetings but time, logistics and the availability of people did not make this possible for all interviews.

¹ <http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/>

3. Results

The interview schedule was designed to cover the broad range of issues associated with the use of TS by the four CMAs. Consequently, the individual questions and the possible answers are not mutually exclusive. A response to one question might readily cover a later question or more than one question. For example, the issue of State Government agencies not being compelled to apply TS was mentioned on numerous occasions and in response to different questions.

Part A: How is the standard integrated into CMA systems?

4. How would you describe your CMAs knowledge and use of the Standard?

The Catchment Action Plans (CAP) for the CMAs were developed before the introduction of TS which was released in September 2005. All of the CMAs involved in this review are in the process of reviewing their CAP and TS is being incorporated in the revisions.

However, there are various strategy documents and investment plans in each of the CMAs that have been developed as a consequence of the CAP and these have incorporated TS. Another example is how TS has been included in new project initiation and management arising from the original CAP. This is the most common method used in applying TS without doing a major revision of the CAP.

Knowledge and understanding of TS was consistent throughout the four CMAs. There were no highly critical comments made in response to this question. Some concern was expressed, but not by many, that care needs to be taken to avoid TS becoming too process driven rather than outcome focussed. There are components of TS such as 'Scale' with which the CMAs are still developing an understanding and with which they require more assistance and this is taken up again below. Overall there is a high level of support for TS in these CMAs. It is regarded as a helpful and supportive business planning document that is applied within the CMA and with outside partners. The following comments are indicative of the responses:

"We have ensured that the Standard is embedded in our systems. All project management is made consistent including those with outside partners."

"The Standard is quite a lovely document - it sets the principles and context of our work"

"There could be better integration of knowledge and resource management"

"We are used to the Standard but need to work with others to lead them through it. We like it as a way of making sure we include all aspects"

"It covers all the business we engage in and our Vision fits the goals of the Standard"

"Our annual report is based on the Standard where it is used as a performance indicator"

“The audit process was good for the organisation and as a result we have a very good understanding of the Standard and enshrine it in everything we do”

“The Standard is built into governance and is used to check project delivery and if things go wrong it is easy check why and correct things”

“All our Board briefing notes, Board agenda items and papers have explicit inclusions of the Standard”

2. How is it applied to your decision making? Does it help you drive your business?

A number of respondents stated that the most helpful aspect of TS is in knowledge management and community engagement. It is regarded as a quality assurance process, used as a checklist to make sure that all aspects of project management have been considered and implemented. Sometimes TS has been used to drive business. For example, HN CMA used it as criteria for pointing out that all hanging swamps of a certain ecological type fall within their catchment. CMAs have established committees where the agenda is set according to TS and they report on its implementation.

“We continually go back to the standard to look for evidence in project management that supports its implementation”

“The standard makes you think about think about things in different ways. It is no longer a local project or local issue”

“The Systems Audit Committee meets every two months and uses the Standard most often and consistently. The agenda is set out according to the seven components of the Standard so it drives the processes of that committee at a high strategic level”

“Once the Standard was signed-off we re-worked our corporate structure by setting up a Strategic Investment Committee and the Systems Audit Committee with both chaired by a Board member”

“We are now looking at ways to close the loop on projects through MERI”

3. How has the standard helped you in preparing for the various audits you are subject to?

TS helps clarify the expectations of the NRC and its Audit. A common response was that the CMAs have been closely associated with the development of TS and therefore understand it well and know where it fits into the NRC Audit process. The Monitoring and Evaluation component of TS was mentioned as being helpful in this regard.

“Yes. We responded to the Audit on the basis of applying the Standard”

“We do have internal audits at the strategic level to test business procedures against the Standard”

“Yes. Both internal and external audits”

“We worked hard at getting staff up to speed on using the Standard prior to the last Audit”

“We have a good information system and the Standard is referenced throughout right down to individual projects”

“Yes. Gives running order and makes sure that all procedures are followed”

“We had discussions with the NRC and they pointed out areas where we had not applied it appropriately. We will use it for future audits”

There was some comment on the need to keep the TS a positive and encouraging document with an auditing process that did not become a way of criticising CMAs. Related to this comment was a request for TS to have more clearly stated performance indicators to remove uncertainty about the data required for the NRC Audit. The following quote was made during that discussion:

“The Standard is all open-ended. If you were a detail person you could spend so much time on data and ignore outcomes”

“The problem with the NRC Audits is that there are no performance indicators”

There was a variety of responses to whether the TS helps respond to other audits. Some respondents stated that it did assist with other audits because it improved their business systems but others stated that the guidelines for financial audits are closely prescribed and fall outside the TS. They require data that is not collected to meet TS.

“It does not help us on other financial audits. For example, Premiers and Cabinet did an efficiency review and looked at our corporate overheads”

4. Has the standard helped/encouraged your CMA to design particular tools or select particular tools from the suite available?

It is clear that TS is a major influence on the way the CMAs collect and manage data associated with their CAP and subsequent investment strategies. The degree and speed with which this has occurred varies across the four CMAs. Some respondents stated that the CMAs across the State have not been provided with a consistent data management and reporting platform. It was mentioned by one respondent that TS could be used as a benchmark for State-wide reporting.

In the absence of a recognised State-wide system for data management, the four CMAs involved in this survey have, or are in the process of, implementing project management data systems consistent with the TS and NRC audit requirements.

The HN CMA has developed the Catchment Information Management System (CIMS) that is linked to the Land Use Management Database (LMD) so that projects can be reported across both platforms. CIMS is now being used by CW CMA and is currently being adapted by W CMA for its use.

“Absolutely. We tried developing our own data base but canned it in favour of adapting the HN CMA CIMS and we are just being trained to use it now”

“Yes. With our CAP review we are using INFER to make sure we are covering the Standard and the 13 State targets”

There was not any significant mention of the use or value of TOOLS 1 and 2 and the NRM Toolbar even though some of the respondents had been involved in their development.

5. How do you introduce the standard to new Board members and staff?

All four CMAs have a clearly defined path for introducing TS to new Board members, although this has not been necessary for HC CMA because there have been no new members. Respondents also stated that TS was well understood and implemented by senior staff and this was substantiated in the results of the interviews. Although, not a major issue there are gaps in the understanding and application of TS by the full range of field staff. Induction and training needs to adequately cover TS at the operational and project management staff levels across all the CMAs.

“The Standard gets talked about at team meetings and has been particularly helpful in dealing with the knowledge component”

“We probably don’t introduce it to new staff as well as we could”

“The Standard is constantly raised at Board meetings”

“As a new Board member I received a package that contained the Standard and how it is applied”

“There is a staff and Board induction process that also uses the results of the Audit and preparation for it. The Audit helped bring it all together”

6. How do you use the Standard for aspects such as quality assurance, best practice, prioritisation, covering the triple bottom line and continuous improvement?

The most frequent response to this question was that TS provided a quality assurance system that had an in-built check list. Many respondents also pointed out how TS encouraged them to develop a business culture in their CMA. This in turn put a greater focus on implementing MERI for adaptive management. One respondent pointed out that when business systems are integrated with TS then Best Management Practice follows. Another noted that it makes the CMAs think about components such as Scale. The Community Engagement component is also mentioned frequently as one of the benefits of TS.

“The NRC Audit process contributed to continuous improvement in performance”

“If other agencies see what we are doing it sets a high benchmark”

“The Standard provides a business-based directive”

“We continually go back to the Standard to look for evidence in project management that supports its implementation”

“The Standard was very useful in planning and implementation of a performance story in the Capertee Valley where it helped to ensure that social, economic and environment aspects as well as the underlying resource condition was included.”

Funding availability does affect the way TS is used:

“We have to use it more now with the funding cuts”

“Planning is around funding availability rather than the Standard”

One comment indicates that TS is not always seen as a single standard

“The Standard is a set of parameters not an integrating process”

There was concern about TS not being implemented by State Government agencies:

“Everyone is looking at things differently. There is a great gap between the State Government and the CMAs. Formal mechanisms for integrating the two are required. The legislation needs to be reviewed and their needs to be effective leadership”

7. Where do you find the standard most helpful?

One of the most common benefits of TS is that it provides a benchmark for assessing the value of entering partnerships and subsequent management of projects under a partnership. This is another example of how TS has become internalised by the CMAs as a method of quality assurance and risk management’.

“Best practice NRM and investment planning”

“Quality assurance leads to best practice through collaboration and community engagement”

“The whole process is a cycle. By applying TS it goes right throughout the organisation – CAP, Programs, Landscapes, Projects”

“Where we use the Standard the most is for knowledge and collaboration and stakeholder engagement”

“The planning and strategic level by providing a planning and procedure check list”

8. Does the standard help in clarifying State Government expectations of your CMA?

Every respondent raised the issue that even though it is meant to be a State-wide Standard for Quality NRM it is only being implemented by CMAs. They noted that they are compelled to apply it under the relevant legislation but this received less comment than the actual benefits of having a standard to work to. Now that they have integrated TS into their systems and thinking they have become advocates for its wider use, particularly State Government agencies. There is a major gap in applying TS to water management. Some respondents made the point very strongly that water management is a major part of catchment management yet their role is very circumscribed. They believe that if the TS was applied to those agencies dealing with major water issues such as Water Sharing Plans then the role of the CMAs would be made easier as well as result in quality NRM. Typical comments were:

“The Standard does not clarify our relationship to other agencies because it is not enshrined within them. For us it has become second-nature but it would be good for other agencies to adopt it”

“We are currently trying to get other land managers in our catchment to use it”

“There needs to be a seamless approach across all those involved in catchment management”

“We know what Government expects of CMAs but if it is good enough for CMAs then it should be good enough for Government”

“It is not on the tip of the tongue of the peak environmental groups”

“There are a lot of demands from Government agencies that make it difficult to implement the Standard in a balanced way”

9. Is the relationship between the 13 State-wide targets and the standard clear and relevant to your CMA?

There was a fairly wide-ranging response to this question. At least two respondents see a close relationship and made the point:

“If you are addressing the Standard then you are addressing the State targets by default”

“Yes. There is a clear relationship between the Standard and the 13 State-wide targets because the Standard is built into everything”

However, the majority of respondents said they could see a relationship even if it is a bit blurred but the relevance of the State-wide targets to their day to day work at the CMA is not strong.

“However, if the State Government agencies and local government had an understanding of the 13 targets then it would be much easier to address them”

“We can interpret the 13 State-wide targets through our investment program and link them to the Standard”

“The relationship can be drawn but it could be made clearer”

“They are different in a way but the Standard is a good way of addressing them”

“The State targets are very broad. We get caned for not using the SMART process but the State targets are so broad”

“Rangeland systems sometimes fall outside the common language for State-wide and national targets”

Part B How can the accessibility of the standard be improved?

10. Do you find the standard easy to understand?

Respondents reported that TS is easy to read and understand and appreciate its intent. There were some original and some continuing difficulties with the Scale component. Combining both the spatial and temporal aspects of this component across the CAP and keeping it applied right down to the individual projects has proven difficult.

“Yes. We have been in that planning process for a number of years”

“Yes. With use it gets easier. Particularly through discussion”

“Yes. Pretty good. Some confusion and overlap between collaboration and engagement”

“Yes. Except we found the issue of scale the most difficult”

“Scale is the most difficult to grasp”

“Determining scale is the dodgy one. It is hard to explain but can then make a lot of sense”

“The hardest part for a Board member is that you are not using it very often”

“It is easy to understand but not easy to understand how to meet it”

11 & 12. Do you use the Guide to support the standard and is it useful?

The Guide is used but not frequently. Two respondents noted that there was a companion document to the guide titled “Applying it on a day-to-day basis”. They regretted its withdrawal having found it a useful document.

13. Would another format or approach for the standard and Guide be more user friendly?

There is a general level of satisfaction with the Guide but it is apparent that it is not used very frequently. One of the CMAs has:

“Played around with it to make it more concise. We developed a matrix and played with different ways of conveying it to people. We re-formatted it to help introduce it to staff who would be working with it every day”

Some suggestions were made for additions. They are:

- TS needs to be made current with climate change and indigenous issues added to the present seven components and these will need coverage in the Guide
- A website with scientific information that supports TS with case studies showing how that information can be used.

“The NRC does a terrific job in showing the timeline of the development of the Standard”

“No problem at the strategic level but maybe a different form could help get staff involved”

This question also provided responses that asked for more training in the use of TS:

“Could be some refresher workshops for new Board and staff members such as annual training. A one day workshop on the Standard similar to the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Skills based people also need training in corporate governance”

“What would useful is further readings, discussion groups, tele-conferencing and workshops to bring it more alive”

“In a morass of information you need clarity. It has to be clear, definite and solid because it is the basis of the Audit. It needs to be an inspiring and innovative tool that helps us be effective”

“Extension needs to be pushed and someone needs to do that”

Two respondents were very positive about previous training on developing project management systems.

“Originally it was a bit hard to deal with but got better with the NRC supplying consultancy support. Hyder Consulting was a big help”

14. What other mechanisms to build understanding and capacity do you think would be useful for CMAs?

Now that the Audits have been completed it would be good for the NRC to share some of the main overall findings. Case studies of the successful implementation of TS would be welcome.

“The CMAs and the Standard have now grown together but they now need to continue to develop together”

“A lot of things are not included in the Standard. For example, a sudden need to spend money before June 30. We know what we are doing but let’s not pretend. It would be good if everything we did was according to the Standard”

A number of respondents emphasised the importance of MERI

“MERI needs to be developed because without it we can’t prove our investments are worth it”

“We still don’t have a good MERI process that can capture data on a catchment-wide basis”

“Explaining it to people is difficult but getting the message out to the broader community and explaining results and positive messages are necessary. We need a mechanism for getting out the good stories”

One response to question 14 is a concern about the lack of sharing information between CMAs:

“One of the frustrating things about the CMAs is that we don’t share enough. Some competition is good because it encourages innovation. But we need to share stuff once the CMA who led it is fully acknowledged”

“There is a fundamental need for the NRC to host forums. They did this earlier on for program managers. We need a forum on ‘How can we work better individually and as a team of CMAs?’ The NRC could organise the event and venue. CMAs could make presentations on Best Management Practice on invitation”

One CMA expressed a concern that TS is being used to criticise:

“There is an attitude from the NRC that you tell us what you do and then we will judge how well you do it. They are holding all the cards. As a result of the Audits can the NRC specify what results they need to audit us? For example, financial auditing standards are well-set out and easy to follow”

15. Is the description of each of the components clear?

Most of the components of TS are clearly understood. However, the Scale component still causes some concerns :

“Yes. Scale is the most confusing one to get your head around. This is the one that the NRC could give more support to”

“Again, difficulty with Scale”

“Yes. Difficulties lie with Scale”

One response indicated that Scale had been an issue that was now resolved:

“Yes. No problems got Scale sorted out”

There is some indication of limits of the components to some respondents:

“Components are clear but what is required to meet them is not there”

“Clear, but from a CMA perspective we tend to concentrate on the seven headings”

16. Do the suggested evidence requirements provide adequate guidance to how you might build useful documentary support for your plans and projects?

The majority of respondents found the evidence requirements clear without any issues. Comments included:

“The Standard is great to clear up the grey areas”

“The NRC has been good at getting us to document what we do”

“Yes. Our CMA was able to provide material for their Audit because they had documentary evidence”

“Our strategy is reviewed annually, particularly overall analysis of the value of partners and the Standard is applied to help the review”

“Evidence becomes self-explanatory”

The issue of Scale did raise its head again:

“OK. Struggled mostly with Scale. The use of familiar language is good but scale, areal and temporal, was difficult”

But there was also a problem with the evidence requirements for one CMA:

“No. The evidence requirements should now be clarified as a result of the Audits”

“Our understanding of the documentary evidence has come more from the auditors than from the NRC”

“They (the NRC) may be sure but we as practitioners may understand them differently”

Part C: How can the NRC build on the use of the Standard?

17. Has the standard lead to any protocols shared with other CMAs? Has it helped promote a common language, culture and way of doing things?

There is no doubt that TS provides a common link between all CMAs in NSW. Some may use it more fully and more effectively than others as the Audit results testify. Many respondents stated that TS was discussed at various meetings such as GM meetings but one Chair stated that TS had never been discussed at Chairs meetings and that there was a filter that kept agenda items relevant to their priorities. If this is the case then the NRC may want to contact the Chairs of each CMA to ensure that it becomes an agenda item. Notwithstanding, TS is common to all and evoked the following statements:

“Yes. A lot of models are widely used and have become common parlance between VCMA’s”

“It has created opportunities but there are different levels of understanding and slightly different understandings”

“A real problem is cross-CMA working relationships. The Standard helps because we can appreciate each others pressures but there is competition between CMAs”

“It has become a common language and we are doing it at a level that agencies are not”

“Collectively there is a good understanding of the Standard by General Managers and all CMAs”

The four CMAs in this review all shared information with two of them adapting the HN CMA CIMS to their requirements. In total five CMAs have adopted all or part of CIMS and four CMAs have done the same with the HN CMA LMD.

One respondent noted that coastal CMAs may have interests in common that they address between themselves:

“Protocols vary. Coastal CMAs have a group that meets regularly so there is a bit of a difference between coastal and western”

However, there is a view that the NRC has a role in promoting a common language and culture over and above the TS.

“An aspect the NRC could work on. Now that the NRC has done the Audits it could revisit the evidence requirements. Learnings could come from this”

“It is very important for the NRC to use the results of the Audits to share knowledge and lessons learned”

“The Audit process can exacerbate competition. The results can be very judgemental and the NRC has set up a process that encourages this”

“There needs to be some sophistication about what we can learn from each other”

“Information, support, case studies should come back from the Audit process”

18. What are the impediments to your use of the standard?

Changes in sources of funding and different reporting guidelines are the greatest impediment to implementing TS. Respondents gave the example of how Caring for our Country has set new priorities. They state that sudden changes in funding can derail a consistent application of TS across the CAP. Lack of recognition that CMAs can be required to spend funds within a very tight timeframe can interfere with consistent application of TS.

“Inconsistency in funding makes it difficult to apply the Standard consistently”

In external relationships, particularly with Government agencies:

“There is insufficient liaison with State agencies because they are not bound by the Standard”

“It would be more useful if more State agencies used the Standard. We have to educate other users”

“Other agencies are working outside the CAP. For example, DECC has bio-banking and we are talking to them about priorities to get them working to the Standard in our catchment”

“CMAs are using it in a vacuum – other agencies are not using it”

Within the CMA:

“We need to develop our MERI system so that it better reflects the implementation of the Standard”

“This is not an issue with the Standard but probably a competency gap”

“It depends on where you aim it in the organisation. At the strategic level it is OK but building understanding with operational staff working on a day to day basis is a challenge that needs addressing”

“Resourcing. Finding time to improve your systems. Sometimes this is not

appreciated. I can be quite wearing and tough on staff”

“Turnover of staff. Knowledge can easily be lost when senior staff leave. Staffing skills and knowledge are most important”

“We use it management level but I’m not sure how well it is used and thought about at general staff level”

“The only real impediment is about workload so our approach is to embed it in systems”

“No impediments”

“Not any. People will say lack of funds and resources but you have to manage with what you have”

“Not many impediments but a user manual would be helpful”

19. What would be the most useful ways of overcoming those impediments?

The issue of TS being confined to the CMAs and not being used by Government agencies was again seen as a major issue:

“Have a MERI strategy in place that includes our two major partners – State and Commonwealth Government agencies. These partners have been unclear about what their targets are and how they can be implemented. There needs to be seamless and coordinated reporting”

“The Standard needs a broader reach. The CMAs are only tiddlers”

“The Standard needs to be introduced to other agencies in a non-threatening way”

“There is no clear evidence to show that State agencies are using the Standard. A project was suggested to coordinate State and HN planning but it never happened. The NRC probably sees this as an issue”

“The NRC review of the efficiency of CMAs across the State showed that agencies needed to document how they were using the Standard. The CMAs are being audited and therefore have to show evidence”

“Help overcome the gridlock between agencies. The agencies have differences but CMAs are trying to manage holistically. For example our River Health Strategy contains a number of water sharing plans that are not coordinated under the Strategy and have inconsistencies within and between them”

A supportive extension/education/training role for the NRC was suggested:

“It needs to start at the induction level but this takes time and resources that are sometimes difficult to balance with other demands

“The NRC also needs to provide support at the CMA level as occurred when Hyder consultant Julian Long assisted in establishing systems”

“The NRC is an audit-based group but it is not strong on the extension component”

“Extension needs to be pushed and someone needs to do that”

“Training”

“Develop a user manual with clear and measurable evidence requirements with performance indicators”

20. What has facilitated uptake, (if any) of the Standard?

It is clear to the CMAs that TS is part of their operating environment:

“It came from top down to set the example”

“It is a legislative requirement”

“From day one it was made clear to the Board and staff the Standard would be applied”

“The NRC Audit has emphasised the need to focus on the Standard”

However, there are certain factors within a CMA that can enhance adoption of TS

“A recognition that it is good quality assurance”

“As a condition of partners getting any funds”

“A positive attitude by senior staff and the Board. They have always been innovative”

“Having Board, Chair and General Manager being advocates for it and championing it”

“Because it is logical staff are keen to take it up”

“Having the Standard as key part of one of our committees and making it the agenda”

21. What are the drivers (if any) for using the Standard?

It is a legal requirement:

“Funding depends on it so it is built into project design”

“The first driver is that it is a legal requirement”

“Applying the Standard can mean financial security for staff”

“It is part of the operating environment of CMAs”

It is a quality assurance tool:

“Achieve cost-effective NRM”

“Its use leads to organisational efficiency and effectiveness with good governance”

“It will become more evident when the CAP is reviewed. If there is a big improvement then that is the be all and end all”

“It gives you a holistic view of what you need to do to deliver quality outcomes”

It provides a systematic and transparent way of dealing with appeals:

“We have dealt with some appeals on incentive projects and the Standard has helped our response by staff explaining the Standard to landholders”

Compliance does get some negative responses:

“Government direction and demands at both State and Commonwealth level. CMAs are being watched by all and sundry”

“We are often reporting to people in different formats using the same information. This is getting worse, not better. For a while with NHT2 the State and Commonwealth were trying to report in the same way”

The issue of other agencies not using the Standard was raised again:

“If it was used more by the central agencies then it would work like a champ”

The benefit of the Standard in developing a common approach among CMAs was one answer to question 21 and adds to the responses to question 17:

“All regional organisations across Australia get together once a year and the thing

that sets the New South Wales CMAs apart is the Standard”

22. What are the most useful characteristics of the standard?

Flexibility to apply it to the needs of a particular CMA is seen as an advantage:

“The Standard has a flexible approach so procedures can be developed that suit the CMA”

“The guidance and evidence is not overly prescriptive”

“It has user-friendly language”

It provides a focus:

“It creates principles and context”

“A logic for project design and check list”

“It is concise with seven clear components covering a broad sweep of what one would be looking for in a Standard”

“It is useful for the planning cycle”

“Embedding adaptive management and quality into the organisation”

With some suggestions for improvement:

“It is clear and supported by the Guide but it would be good to have more background”

23. What would be the advantages of formalising the standard along the lines of, for example, ISO9000?

The concept of formalising TS did receive some support and serious consideration as shown in the Table 3-1 below. However, the greatest numbers of respondents clearly want the TS to stay as it is, or with minor adjustments rather than have it become a formalised standard such as ISO9000.

Table 3-1 Formalising the Standard

Leave TS as it is	Perhaps	Yes, formalising it would be good
"I like the current flexibility where Standard can be applied to the needs of different CMAs"	"If it was further formalised within the CMAs it would not be a problem but it could constrain other agencies using it"	"There would be an advantage in formalising it "It would give greater recognition"
"Implementation of the Standard and getting all CMAs to use it is the priority"	"Most agencies bypass the Standard so I am not sure who would take it up"	"The Standard would have more credibility if it was formally recognised nationally and internationally"
"Meeting a prescribed external standard would have staff and resourcing implications"	"It could have long-term advantages but we have all grown up with the present system"	"It could help securing private sector funding by showing accreditation"
"I can see the value for specific things such as OH&S but they can be very restrictive for broader activities. It may work against innovation"	"It could be useful if it was applied across government"	
"No. There is nothing to gain. Who would do the audits?"		
"The NRC is doing audits already. We do not need more auditing"		
"A formalised system would swamp the CMAs with paperwork with no outcome"		
"It would be bloody scary. That would put a burden on CMAs that would get in the way of what we need to do"		

24. How can we further develop adaptive management capacity in CMAs and across the NRM field?

Within the CMAs:

“Having the type of staff that can be flexible and can also adapt to new partnerships”

“Getting reporting on the longer term outcomes right is the major challenge”

“Avoid getting diverted by the latest ‘new thing’”

“We are putting a lot of effort into MERI over time. But we really run short of resources to record how we change things. At the end of the day it is more important to be doing it rather than recording it”

“There is little opportunity to get together at the CMA level to exchange information. We need to know at the staff operational level what developments are taking place because there is a lot of ‘reinventing the wheel’ going on”

For the NRC:

“Send messages out to the CMAs from the NRC that they need to be flexible and broad in their approach”

“At the heart of this question is innovation. At present the Standard allows innovation but if it is prescribed too much it becomes a ‘cook book’”

“The NRC would benefit from both an auditing and extension arm”

“We need the NRC to be the coaches. This is where the adaptive stuff comes in”

“The NRC should be looking at its processes. The Standard is a very loose document on which to base an Audit”

“The Audit process is a tragedy because it tends to be fault-finding rather than encouraging and working in a partnership”

“My big take on the Standard is that it does not say anything about corporate governance. You could apply the Standard but still have bad governance. It could appear that if you get a good NRC Audit report then you have good governance but this is not necessarily so. If the Government wants assurance about the CMAs then the NRC might need to get involved in governance”

For funding bodies:

“Have secure and consistent funding. Now Caring for our Country has a new set of conditions and way of working”

“Because of changes in funding, management is often ‘stop-start’ and there could easily be community backlash by not giving continuing support for programs and projects”

“Avoiding fixed deadlines for funding projects will provide more flexibility for using the Standard”

Some broader issues:

“There should be further capacity building for our landholders”

“Getting urban communities involved in NRM by getting them aware of what it is”

5. Frequency analysis of issues

Table 4-2 below shows the number of times a particular issue was mentioned during the interviews. An issue is defined in this case is an aspect of the TS that arose because it was mentioned by numerous respondents in answering different questions. For example, the problems the CMAs face in dealing with Government agencies that do not apply TS was mentioned on numerous occasions in response to very different questions. The overall strength of this issue would easily be lost if it was only reported in the previous section under individual questions.

Table 5-2 Frequency analysis of response to interview

Issue mentioned by respondent in order of frequency of mention by each individual during the interview	Catchment Management Authority				Total
	Hawkesbury Nepean	Hunter Central	Central West	Western	
A major impediment to the implementation of the Standard by CMAs is that it is not used by State agencies and particularly water managers.	8	5	8	2	30
The Scale component still causes some difficulties and could use more clarification and examples of how it should be applied at both temporal and spatial levels.	2	4	1	2	7
The NRC should be given a much stronger education/extension/training role. There is a need for the NRC to disseminate learnings from the Audits.	5	1	3	1	10
Changes in funding priorities are an impediment to applying the Standard.	3	1	1	1	7
The Standard can be perceived as a method of criticising the CMAs and needs to avoid being unnecessarily judgemental.		1	2	3	6
The Standard needs new components to deal with emerging issues such as climate change.	1		1	3	5

6. Conclusion

The value of the Standard

The Standard is well-accepted within these four CMAs. It provides a unifying theme and a consistent method of dealing with NRM and reporting on actions included in each CAP and the investment strategies that follow. At its best, the Standard is embedded in all project management systems and acts as an in-built quality assurance system and check list. Progress towards the Standard also becomes an agenda item for Board meetings or in one case, the focus of a dedicated CMA sub-committee. The Standard has provided a common language and approach between all NSW CMAs although there were comments that some are implementing it more than others.

How well is it understood?

The Standard is generally well-understood and supported by the guide. There were some minor comments about clarity but they were not considered significant. There were comments that an earlier companion users manual to the Guide that was very helpful and may be worth publishing again. The Guide is not referred to on a regular basis.

Scale requires further clarification

The only component of the Standard that respondents found difficult to understand is that of Scale. It is the consideration of the areal and temporal dimensions and drilling them down from the high CAP and strategic level to the project level and providing evidence that Scale has been considered that causes problems.

The relationship of Government agencies to the Standard

The failure of Government agencies to apply the Standard was one of the most frequent complaints made by respondents in the interviews. This issue arose under widely different questions. It is a major impediment to consistent whole-of-catchment management. Water management is a major aspect of catchment management yet its management tends to fall outside the CMA and by agencies that do not apply TS. It is clear that the CMAs take some pride in implementing TS and believe that they are managing NRM with a higher degree of consistency and exactitude than many Government agencies.

The relationship between the Standard, the CMAs and the 13 State-wide targets

The State-wide targets are broad aspirational goals and consequently there is an overlap between the Vision statements of each CMA and the management and action targets in their CAPs. However, there are no measurable performance indicators attached to the State-wide targets that the CMAs can directly relate to their regional priorities and subsequent management targets. As a consequence there is a disconnect between the State-wide targets and CAPs and this may be exacerbated by the number of complaints from the CMAs that State agencies do not implement TS.

The evidence requirements for NRC Audits

There was some criticism that the evidence requirements for each of the components of TS are not expressed as performance indicators and are too broad. This criticism does conflict with other statements that commend TS for allowing innovation and flexibility.

Can the NRC be a mentor as well as an Auditor?

Some respondents felt that the NRC tended to be judgemental in its approach to the Audits rather than use the process to work in a partnership role with the CMAs. This is a difficult issue given the legislative responsibilities of the NRC but there may be scope for working more closely with the CMAs in preparing them for the Audits and in post-Audit de-briefings.

An expanded role for the NRC

Many respondents appreciated the help that they had been given by the NRC and there were absolutely no comments alluding to any distancing between the CMAs and the NRC. On the contrary, many responses showed some pride in working with the NRC to develop TS. It was this involvement that led many to ask for a greater extension/education/training role for the NRC. They particularly want the NRC to work with them to develop the learnings from the first round of Audits into training modules such as case studies of successful implementation of TS. Respondents frequently mentioned the value of being informed and included in the results of the Audits. There is also a strong leadership role for the NRC in reducing competition between CMAs.

Additional components for the Standard

Some respondents suggested additional components to the seven already embraced in the Standard. They were:

- Indigenous issues
- Climate change
- Corporate governance
- Adaptive management.

There was also a request for clarification of definitions for terms such as “resilient landscapes”. It is accepted that TS is not an NRM management manual with a component for all NRM issues. There is only one TS and it is a principles- based analytical document. However, these additional aspects were mentioned by respondents and may encourage a response by the NRC for further discussions. A few respondents did mention that they had been part of the growth and development of TS and saw it as a continuing and evolving process that they wanted to be involved in.

Changes in funding sources and the June 30th cut-off date

Comments made relating to this issue do mirror those made regarding the failure of Government agencies – both State and Commonwealth – to implement TS. However, those relating to the failure of funding agencies and to some extent, the NRC, to appreciate that the implementation of TS can be compromised if there is a sudden influx of funds with a similar sudden cut-off date for spending them.

Staff induction and training

It is apparent that TS is well-introduced to senior staff and Board members. This introduction is then reinforced at this level by the decision-making process at these senior levels. It is apparent that familiarity with TS may stop there and not extend to operational and field staff. Obviously, this will vary between CMAs and some staff induction processes will deal with TS more thoroughly than others. There is a need for training materials and other resources to support staff induction.

The case for formalising the Standard is not strong

Some respondent did see a role for formalising TS. They see it as a good basis for implementing a consistent approach to NRM and any enhanced credibility might increase its acceptance. However, a quantitative expression of the responses to question 23 shows that there is a clear preference for the status quo. The major orientation in all responses whether for change or retaining the existing status is how to get other agencies to implement TS.

Appendix A

Interview respondents

CMA	Name	Position	Type of interview	Date of interview
Hawkesbury- Nepean	John Verhoven	Board member	Meeting	23/07/09
	Kathy Ridge	Board member	Meeting	23/07/09
	Bill Dixon	Catchment Coordinator	Meeting	24/07/09
	Bernie Bugden	General Manager	Meeting	5/08/09
Hunter Central	Dean Chapman	Program Manager	Meeting	24/07/09
	Cal Cotter	Catchment Coordinator	Telephone	7/08/09
	Wej Paradice	Chair	Telephone	10/08/09
	Fiona Marshall	Business Manager Incentives	Telephone	10/08/09
Central West	Jane Chrystal	Program Manager Implementation	Meeting	11/08/09
	Tim Ferraro	General Manager	Meeting	11/08/09
	Tom Gavel	Chair	Meeting	11/08/09
Western	Rory Treweke	Chair	Joint Meeting	12/08/09
	Andrew Mosely	Board member and Deputy Chair		
	Daryl Green	General Manager	Joint Meeting	12/08/09
	Ken Harrison	Planning and Investment Manager		
	Russell Grant	Operations Manager		

Appendix B

Interview schedule

How is the standard integrated into your systems?

- 1 How would you describe your CMA's knowledge and use of the standard?
- 2 How is it applied to your decision making? Does it help you drive your business?
- 3 How has the standard helped you in preparing for the various audits you are subject to?
- 4 Has the standard helped/encouraged your CMA to design particular tools or select particular tools from the suite available?
- 5 How do you introduce the standard to new Board members and staff?
- 6 How do you use the standard :
- 7 Where do you find the standard most helpful?
- 8 Does the standard help in clarifying State Government expectations of your CMA?
- 9 Is the relationship between the 13 State-wide targets and the standard clear and relevant to your CMA?

How can the accessibility of the standard be improved?

- 10 Do you find the standard easy to understand?
- 11 Do you use the Guide to support the standard?
- 12 Is the guide useful?
- 13 Would another format or approach for the standard and Guide be more user friendly?
- 14 What other mechanisms to build understanding and capacity do you think would be useful for CMAs?
- 15 Is the description of each of the components of the standard clear?
- 16 Do the suggested evidence requirements provide adequate guidance to how you might build useful documentary support for your plans and projects?

How can the NRC build on the use of the Standard?

- 17 Has the standard lead to any protocols shared with other CMAs? Has it helped promote a common language, culture and way of doing things?
- 18 What are the impediments to your use of the standard?
- 19 What would be the most useful ways of overcoming those impediments?
- 20 What has facilitated uptake, (if any) of the Standard?
- 21 What are the drivers (if any) for using the Standard?
- 22 What are the most useful characteristics of the standard?
- 23 What would be the advantages of formalising the standard along the lines of, for example, ISO9000?
- 24 How can we further develop adaptive management capacity in CMAs and across the NRM field?