



Assessment of
the Border Rivers-Gwydir
upgraded
Catchment Action Plan

March 2013

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

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

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Executive summary

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

The Border Rivers-Gwydir region comprises three broad landscapes: tablelands, slopes and plains. Its main industry is agriculture, primarily grazing on the tablelands and cropping on the slopes and plains. The Catchment Management Authority's (CMA's) challenge is to balance the shorter term social and economic interests of local farmers and communities with longer term environmental issues associated with wetland management, riverine stability and soil management, which threaten the resilience and future productivity of the region's landscapes.

Key findings

The upgraded Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP is a high-quality strategic plan, developed through a comprehensive planning process and close collaboration with local farmers, landholders, industry representatives and community groups. Successful implementation of the CAP is very 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:

- clearly **articulates a vision** for the region that is supported by community and government, 'Sustainable productive lands, balanced hydrological systems, connected biodiverse landscapes and resilient adaptive communities'
- identifies eight **local landscapes** valued by farmers, local businesses, landholders and community groups, and the key natural resource management (NRM) issues for these landscapes
- clearly prioritises strategies to **direct investment** across the region that take account of key issues
- **aligns** CAP objectives with objectives of the local, state and Australian governments and community-based and industry-based organisations, to increase the **efficiency** of NRM efforts in the region
- details targets and actions that will **guide on-ground activity** to deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes
- justifies the logical selection of strategies, targets and actions by reference to **best available information** and community input
- clearly explains how the CAP will **adapt to change** and stay relevant
- establishes a strong **framework for accountability** whereby responsibilities for investment, planning, decision-making and implementation are placed in the shared hands of the CMA and delivery partners, including government.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP with the following condition to:

- **review and adapt the CAP**, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, pending the final decision of the Minister.

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1 Introduction

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

The Border Rivers-Gwydir region is located in inland northern NSW and includes, from east to west, landscapes of tablelands, slopes and plains. The total population of around 65,000 is centred mainly around the rural towns of Inverell, Moree, Glen Innes and Tenterfield. The economic prosperity of the region is largely dependent on agriculture, including hay, cereal and legume crops, cotton, fruit, beef, lamb and wool.

1.1 Background

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

Under the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* (NSW), the NRC is required to assess CAPs and 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, 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 Standard, 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 Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP has benefited from a high quality strategic planning process that supports collaborative implementation of an adaptable CAP. The NRC has a high level of confidence that by following this comprehensive strategic planning process, the CMA will be successful in creating positive social, economic and environmental changes in the region.

Strategic planning and capacity

The CMA has demonstrated clear strengths in leadership and strategic planning throughout CAP development. This was reflected in the organisation's recent strategic shift towards working as a facilitator of NRM delivery in the region and devolving implementation to delivery partners. This shift is supported by the CMA's well-developed collaborative governance model, which will contribute to the CAP's aim of building adaptive and resilient communities that can tackle challenges and ensure ongoing prosperity.

The CMA demonstrated strategic-level collaboration by developing a consistent strategy with Northern Rivers CMA for managing the common northern tablelands region. This thorough cross-border coordination – which is based on joint community and industry consultation and some combined Board and CAP team meetings – also shows forethought in increasing the adaptability of the CAP in response to potential future management regions.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

The CMA conducted an effective community and industry consultation program, targeting a representative group of stakeholders across the region. This included 20 community workshops - of which three were targeted solely at the Aboriginal community - with surveys conducted for community members unable to attend workshops. In addition, 31 targeted group sessions were held with 64 attendees from government, community and industry. The CMA also held individual meetings with representatives from local council, agencies and other organisations. Engagement methods were varied, and targeted at individual stakeholders. This program strengthened its relationships with stakeholders as confirmed by interviews, with one local government representative stating, *'Council and the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA have developed a strong relationship through the development and completion of partnership projects. Involvement in the CAP upgrade process has helped maintain this relationship.'*

The majority of stakeholders found the consultation to be meaningful and some felt that it increased their ability to participate in NRM in the region. This increases the ability of these partners to engage in future NRM planning, decision-making and actions. A potential gap was raised in Aboriginal stakeholder consultation; however, the CMA has committed to addressing this issue and it is not likely to impact the implementation.

These results support the CMA's collaborative governance model and provide a strong foundation for effective CAP implementation.

Adaptability

The upgraded CAP is likely to continue guiding NRM through change, due to the strong focus on adaptability. A thorough assessment of opportunities and risks, including allocation of individual staff members to manage and track them, ensures the CAP's ongoing relevance. There is a clear strategy for annually reviewing and adapting the CAP as circumstances change

or new information comes to light. This approach to managing uncertainty provides confidence that the CAP will remain flexible and responsive to change.

2.2 Targets

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA used a balanced mix of community values and relevant science to identify and analyse local natural and community systems. As a result, the CAP includes a sound, logical set of targets and actions that consider the desired social, economic and environmental futures for the region.

Best-available information

The CAP appropriately combines community and industry values with scientific information to develop its approach to improving the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities. The CAP is grounded in robust evidence-based analysis, providing confidence to investors and allowing stakeholders to relate to it. Data relating to almost 500 local assets were collected through 17 community workshops and three Aboriginal community meetings across the region. Scientific information was regularly collected through technical advisory groups which comprised members of agencies, consultants, academics and other specialists.

Analysis of social, economic and environmental information

An important strength of the upgraded CAP is its comprehensive and transparent systems assessment. The CMA analysed a substantial knowledge base, including current spatial data, to describe varying biophysical, production and social characteristics of the catchment and the different scales at which these operate. It identified three different but overlapping socio-ecological landscapes, and within those, eight smaller-scale landscapes that allow the CAP activities to be implemented effectively. This analysis included working with neighbouring CMAs to identify landscape systems extending across borders. In its clear explanation of these landscapes and of how actions in one can impact others, the CMA demonstrated a strong understanding of socio-ecological systems. This particular strength was further demonstrated through the CAP's clear and informative overview of community capacity and how it relates to resilience building within the region.

For each broad landscape (plains, slopes and tablelands) the CAP identifies critical system drivers and priority controlling variables. These provide focus for management and have enabled the CMA to develop strategies, targets and priority actions for each landscape that flow from the analysis. The CMA also undertook an informal strategy prioritisation process to consider the feasibility, cost-effectiveness and risk of potential strategies, increasing the likelihood that the CMA has selected the most appropriate strategies. This comprehensive analytical approach focuses the CAP on the issues that matter most in strengthening the resilience of industry, community and the environment.

Hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The CAP presents a logical hierarchy of a vision and goals at a regional scale, supported by a strategy, targets and priority actions for each landscape. This provides a high level of confidence that proposed actions will help to achieve the vision and goals described.

Accountability

The CAP targets balance the inherent tension between being specific but also flexible, and are guided by the adaptive management plan within the CAP. This mitigates the risk of the CMA

being held to rigid targets that may become unrealistic as the operating environment changes. The targets are also measurable and time-bound, allowing for future auditing and performance reporting to investors and stakeholders. This, along with stakeholder and government support, improves the CAP's legitimacy as a strategic NRM plan for the region and facilitates accountability to investors.

2.3 Action and investment

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA is building strong relationships with key stakeholders and has developed a clear and defensible CAP that aligns community and industry values and government priorities. Its implementation should encourage collaborative action and investment across all levels of government and by the entire community.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The CAP is designed to increase the efficiency of NRM efforts in the region, so that desired outcomes can be achieved despite limited resources. One way the CMA has worked to achieve this is by aligning the CAP's objectives with the high-level objectives of other organisations working in NRM in the region. This includes local, state and Australian governments and community-based and industry-based organisations. This alignment has increased the likelihood that actions undertaken to implement the CAP will contribute towards targets in other plans and strategies, and vice versa.

The CAP has been endorsed by State Government agencies including the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, confirming that it is not inconsistent with relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies. As the CAP targets are aligned with state-wide targets for NRM and the *NSW 2021* goals³, CAP actions will also contribute to these.

The CAP identifies some examples of high-level opportunities for coordinated project delivery with other organisations. One such example is to promote the links between wise land use and community resilience with local councils, local Aboriginal Land Councils and local education and health organisations, all of which aspire to build social and/or environmental resilience. These examples demonstrate to delivery partners that there is a wide range of potential projects that could bring about combined CMA and delivery partner benefits.

The CMA aligned CAP community consultation processes and strategies with those of neighbouring management organisations, which should facilitate the achievement of larger scale outcomes. The Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA collaborated with the Northern Rivers CMA during all stages of the CAP upgrade, including joint Board and CAP team meetings, and combined community, industry and local government consultation in the common northern tablelands region. Importantly, this allows the northern tablelands to be largely managed as one region, rather than as two separate regions with an arbitrary boundary line. There was also strong alignment with the management priorities of the Namoi CMA to the south, and the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee and the relevant Border Rivers stakeholder groups to the north.

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

Roles and responsibilities

A majority of potential delivery partners have expressed willingness to be involved in CAP implementation, and some have committed to working on specific goals. This provides assurance that the CMA will be successful in bringing together the appropriate organisations for implementation. The CAP lists government, community and industry delivery partners that are likely to contribute to the achievement of each broad goal, while detailed roles and responsibilities will be agreed on during implementation planning.

Implementation

The CAP presents a clear and comprehensive implementation planning strategy that describes how the CMA and partners will work together to design projects and programs to achieve the CAP targets. This strategy strikes an appropriate balance of providing sufficient detail, yet remaining open to potential changes or delivery partner preferences. For each goal it outlines the key broad steps and their timeframes, for example, 'in year one, an analysis of the top 20 threats of invasive species will determine the invasive species control strategies operating in years two to six'. This strategy is well supported by the CMA's collaborative governance model, which states that roles and responsibilities will be decided according to the individual strengths, resources and interest of delivery partners.

This implementation planning strategy inspires a high level of confidence that the CAP will be able to guide whole-of-government and whole-of-community NRM to bring about tangible improvements in the region.

Communicating the plan

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP is particularly strong in its logical, accessible presentation. It has been written for key target audiences, clearly communicating technically complex concepts, and contains clearly presented strategies, specific targets and high-level priority actions. This makes it easy for delivery partners to identify the key issues in the region and how they can contribute to addressing them.

3 Recommendation

3.1 Approval

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

3.2 Conditions of approval

The NRC recommends approval of the Border Rivers-Gwydir upgraded CAP with the following condition to:

- review and adapt the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, pending the final decision of the Minister.

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

3.3 Additional suggested actions for the CMA

There are no suggested actions for this CAP.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

The Border Rivers-Gwydir 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 would inform future strategic planning processes
- the CAP vision, strategies and priorities would provide clear direction to a new Board
- there is strong cross-border alignment with adjacent CMAs and other cross-border management organisations, including some joint community and industry consultation
- there is a specific plan for transition to the new Local Land Services boundary structure, supported by the identification of local landscapes, each with their own strategies, targets and actions
- the scientific, industry, and community knowledge supporting the CAP is a valuable resource for new regional organisations.

Attachment 1 - Detailed assessment findings

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

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

Available evidence demonstrates the presence of a strong, engaged Board that provides strategic leadership to the CMA. The new collaborative governance model supports a shift towards devolving responsibilities to delivery partners, which will increase community participation in NRM planning and implementation. This is reflected in the upgraded CAP. The CMA's strengths in comprehensive and transparent planning filter down to the project level, as demonstrated by the CAP upgrade project plan. The CAP development has included full assessments of future opportunities and risks, including risk characterisation and mitigation, allocation of risks to staff members and a process to track risks. There is evidence from interviews that the CAP upgrade process has enhanced the strategic capabilities not just of the Board, but among all CMA staff.

Strengths:

- Strategic shifts culminating in a new collaborative governance model demonstrate strong leadership by the Board.
- There is increased strategic capability among CMA staff and Board members, demonstrated through confident and consistent explanation of the role of the CAP and the benefits of using new frameworks and tools in its development.
- The CAP development process includes an assessment of future opportunities and risks, primarily in the form of stakeholder workshops and resilience analyses, the results of which can be seen in the CAP.

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

The stakeholder consultation process has strengthened CMA-stakeholder relationships and enhanced the strategic capability of some stakeholders, providing a strong foundation for CAP implementation. Almost all surveyed stakeholders support the CMA and are interested in being involved in CAP implementation. Most felt that the CAP served as a good tool for identifying opportunities for collaboration in NRM projects. It is clear that the CMA values community and industry views and has made a substantial effort to ensure that meaningful and inclusive engagement of a representative group of stakeholders takes place, with a large number of community/industry workshops and targeted stakeholder workshops.

Strengths:

- There is an inclusive and thorough consultation process tailored to the needs of each stakeholder group.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- There is a communication gap relating to state-level Aboriginal consultation which led to a conditional CAP endorsement from Aboriginal Affairs NSW. This will be addressed during implementation.

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

The CMA staff and Board members demonstrated that the CAP is adaptable - and will be adapted as required - via a well-defined CAP review process. This includes annual structured reviews and a list of possible future changes or events that would trigger CAP adaptation. The implementation process, which includes annual project planning and project-level alignment, increases the potential for adaptation as these aspects are not fixed in the upgraded CAP. New initiatives such as the evidence library and technical advisory groups will provide mechanisms to capture and store new information as it becomes available. Lessons learned are regularly assessed, and changes implemented to reflect these. Detail relating to the way new information will be incorporated into the CAP and the process for regular reviews will be guided by the CMA's monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) strategy, the update of which has been deferred until the implementation phase.

Strengths:

- The CMA considered and documented a range of mechanisms for ensuring that the CAP is adaptable and responsive to changes.
- Lessons learned from implementing the 2006 CAP and from the early stages of the current CAP upgrade process are incorporated into the upgraded CAP.
- Mechanisms for identifying and capturing new evidence are documented in the upgraded CAP.

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

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

The CAP presents a logical set of eight socio-ecological landscapes (SELs) within the catchment, with boundaries that reflect broad social and biophysical borders. Boundaries for the tablelands SELs continue into the Northern Rivers CMA, demonstrating an understanding of the way regions with similar biophysical and social characteristics need to be managed consistently across borders. This SEL definition is the result of a comprehensive assessment of community and industry values and visions, which strongly guided the direction of the CAP upgrade process, and a range of robust scientific knowledge sources. The process of identifying SELs was transparent, used current spatial data and was consistent with community and industry values. Knowledge gaps and plans to address them through CAP implementation have been identified. The resulting SELs provided a framework for the CMA to develop an effective strategy that will address the key issues in the region at an appropriate scale.

Strengths:

- The CAP communicates logical socio-ecological systems that are transparently derived and backed by evidence.
- Wide-ranging assessments of community and industry values are reflected in the CAP strategies and targets. Community visions are synthesised to generate the vision for the upgraded CAP.
- The CAP is supported by effective evaluation and application of best-available science to address key knowledge requirements. Outstanding gaps and plans to address them have been identified.

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

The CMA began with an asset identification approach, which later supported an integrated systems analysis of each socio-ecological landscape (SEL). This analysis identified critical system drivers, priority controlling variables and critical thresholds that are relevant for each landscape, and determined the current state of the catchment as well as actions most likely to improve systems. The result was local strategies, targets and priority actions that reflect the big issues affecting the catchment that are likely to impact the key system drivers. This particular strength was further demonstrated through the CAP's clear and informative overview of community capacity and how it relates to resilience building within the region. The CMA's process was logical and transparent. The CMA also undertook an informal prioritisation process, considering feasibility, cost-effectiveness and risks posed by the potential strategies.

Strengths:

- The CMA transparently derived strategies based on systems analysis, logically flowing from system drivers, priority controlling variables and critical thresholds to strategies.
- The analysis and strategies reflect connections between different elements of the systems, particularly biophysical and social systems, resulting in integrated strategies that are likely to result in improved landscape function.
- The CMA made clever use of spatial data to analyse drivers and develop strategies and targets during systems analysis.

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

The upgraded CAP presents targets for each socio-ecological system. These targets are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, and are sufficiently detailed so that delivery partners can plan actions that will contribute to the CMA's catchment goals. By being measurable and specific, the CAP targets also support future auditing and performance reporting. They are designed to specifically address the threats and drivers most relevant to each socio-ecological system, and exist within a logical hierarchy that provides confidence that meeting a target will contribute to addressing catchment goals and the CMA's vision.

Strengths:

- The CAP is auditable as it contains targets that are specific, measurable and time-bound.
- Targets are presented in a logical hierarchy. They are supported by rational prioritised actions and have been shown to contribute to catchment goals and the CMA's vision.

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 considered alignment with all relevant plans, policies and strategies from an early stage, prioritising based on set criteria and aligning conceptually with almost all of these. However, the choice to defer a full detailed alignment until implementation the stage may pose a risk to smooth implementation. The CMA aligned its CAP planning and stakeholder engagement processes at multiple levels with the Northern Rivers CMA in the northern tablelands region, demonstrating strong cross-border alignment. Additionally, the CMA Chair and General Manager demonstrated forethought and leadership by recognising that strong cross-border alignment will allow the CAP to stay relevant given new institutional arrangements. The CAP meets all statutory requirements, and aligns particularly well with *NSW 2021* goal 23⁴ through its collaborative governance model.

Strengths:

- The CAP upgrade followed an effective criteria-based process for selecting priority policies and plans for alignment.
- From the beginning of the CAP upgrade process there was well-considered cross-border alignment with all adjoining CMAs, particularly Northern Rivers CMA for the northern tablelands region.
- The CAP includes a highly developed collaborative governance model that strengthens alignment of the CAP with *NSW 2021* goal 23⁴.

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

The CMA's collaborative governance model - which is well developed and clearly communicated in the upgraded CAP - will allow the CAP to guide whole-of-government and whole-of-community collaborative investment, planning, consultation and implementation across the region. This is reinforced by stakeholder support of the CMA. The collaborative governance model will also contribute to the CAP's aim of building adaptive and resilient communities that can tackle challenges and ensure ongoing prosperity. The CMA has considered opportunities for maximising outcomes through coordinated NRM delivery in priority areas, and the upgraded CAP communicates some examples. Many CAP targets are also designed to promote multiple outcomes for each action. In conjunction with proposed project-level implementation plans, the upgraded CAP inspires a high level of confidence that it will be able to guide whole-of-government and whole-of-community on-ground action in the region.

Strengths:

- The upgraded CAP identifies high-level opportunities for coordinated delivery with other NRM and/or community and health organisations in the region.
- CAP targets are designed to contribute to multiple outcomes, increasing efficiency of investments.
- The upgraded CAP clearly communicates targets and high-level priority actions, guiding other bodies to undertake complementary NRM activities.
- The strong collaborative governance model outlines process for shared investment, planning, consultation and implementation according to delivery partners' strengths.

⁴ *NSW 2021* goal 23 is to 'Increase opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments'.

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

The CMA has listed key delivery partners for each of the eight catchment goals in the upgraded CAP, and has indicated that all named parties have agreed and committed to working with the CMA on these goals. An implementation plan, to be developed early in 2013 in collaboration with key delivery partners, will contain further detail on individual project roles and responsibilities, and cost-sharing arrangements. The CAP has the required support of all implementing parties and, given strong strategic guidance by the Board and upper management, is likely to support the transition to a Local Land Services framework.

Strengths:

- The CAP lists organisations that are expected to contribute to each catchment-level goal.
 - Key delivery partners have demonstrated a commitment to work with the CMA to implement the CAP.
 - The CMA's Board Chair and General Manager have already considered the logistics of CAP adaptation and implementation in a changing management framework.
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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*⁵ (the Standard).

Assessment criteria

Following extensive consultation the NRC developed the *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans*⁶ which was endorsed by the NSW Government Senior Officer Group for NRM. To define the criteria and expectations, the NRC examined the external context (institutional, spatial and temporal). It identified elements expected of a high quality strategic NRM planning process and final plan, within the context of the Standard. The NRC trialled and refined the criteria through a pilot process involving CMAs and agencies.

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

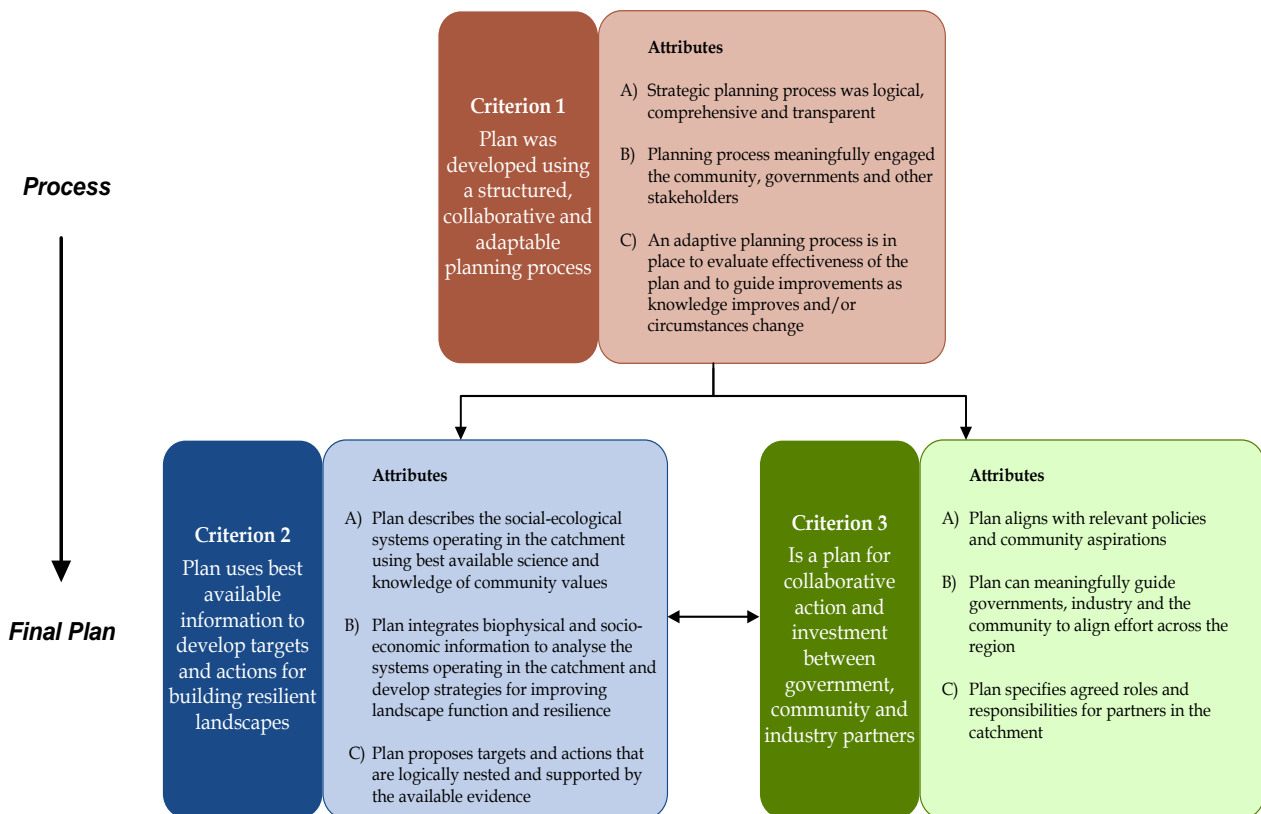


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

⁵ 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 Standard, using it as a quality assurance standard for all planning and implementation decisions.

⁶ 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 Border Rivers-Gwydir 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 and planning approach, community consultation and scientific knowledge used in developing the plan
- interviews with two CMA Board members, two senior managers and four staff members
- eight surveys and six interviews with stakeholders including representatives of industry, local government, landholders and non-government groups
- government agency consultation
- four external reviews of the analysis underpinning the targets, conducted by consultants with expertise in ecology and environmental science, social science and environmental economics.

Acknowledgements

The audit team gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance provided by the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA and agencies and stakeholders in the region. In particular, we wish to thank the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA Board, General Manager and staff.

Attachment 3 - About the region

The NSW Border Rivers and Gwydir catchments are situated in northern inland NSW. They are part of the upper reaches of the Murray–Darling Basin, encompassing an area of approximately 50,000 square kilometres. The ‘Border Rivers’ catchment extends into Queensland, with the Macintyre River forming the state border.

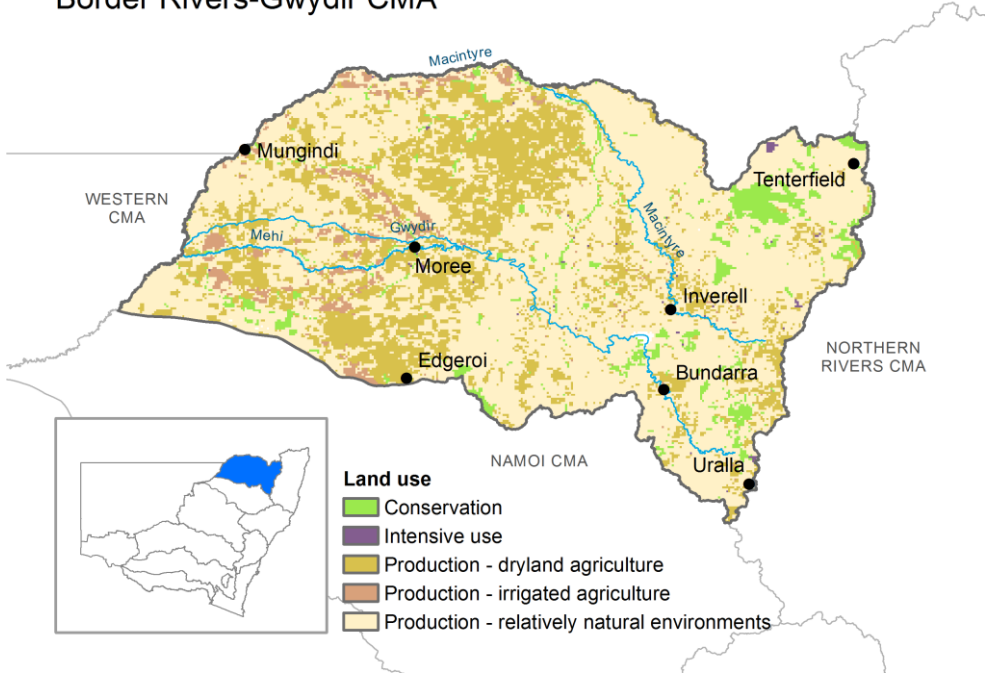
The region has a diverse climate, ranging from temperate to sub-tropical, with considerable gradation between the east (cooler and wetter) and the west (hotter and drier), and great variety of landforms, hydrology, vegetation, and soils. The catchments include three distinct landscapes: tablelands, slopes, and plains.

The total population of the catchments is around 65,000, concentrated in and around Glen Innes, Tenterfield and Uralla in the tablelands, Inverell and Bingara on the slopes, and Moree and Mungindi on the plains. Like most rural areas west of the Great Dividing Range, the population density is low.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has calculated the gross value of agricultural production in the catchments at over \$1.4 billion. Commodities contributing to this estimate include hay, cereal and legume crops for human and animal consumption; oilseeds, nuts, cotton and fruit including wine grapes; turf, cut flowers and nursery production; and livestock production and products.

Natural resources in the region also reflect the climatic and geographic influences. Vegetation varies with altitude, climate, geology and soil type, leading to a great diversity of plant and animal species.⁷

Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA



⁷ Source: Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan.
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