



Assessment of the Lachlan upgraded Catchment Action Plan

June 2013

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

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

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Executive summary

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

The Lachlan region comprises diverse landscapes within central NSW. The region supports twelve per cent of the state's agricultural businesses, including sheep and cattle grazing, irrigated and dry land cropping and horticulture. There is an increase in mining and corporate agriculture in the region, bringing new economic opportunity, and social and land management challenges.

Key findings

The upgraded Lachlan CAP is a sound strategic plan, founded on **genuine and inclusive consultation** with farmers, local businesses, landholders and community groups. The CAP strongly reflects the values of the local community and its priorities for management of the region's resources. The CAP has been developed from solid analysis that considered the social, economic and environmental factors in the region.

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

- incorporates social, economic and environmental information to identify **key issues and risks** in the region
- identifies five **local landscapes** and outlines **goals and targets** for each, directed towards priority issues
- aligns its objectives with those of the community and local, State and Australian Governments, to increase the **efficiency** of natural resource management in the region
- presents strategies, goals and targets that are supported by analysis to achieve **integrated economic, social and environmental outcomes**.

The Local Land Services restructure in January 2014 will see the Lachlan catchment divided among five separate organisations. The following recommendations are designed to reflect this high level of change, in comparison to other CMAs, and to assist the transition.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Lachlan CAP with the following conditions:

- **Confirm the roles** of delivery partners and that they are committed to collaborative delivery of integrated actions across the catchment. This will assist the continuation of existing relationships during the transition to Local Land Services.
- Consider how the CAP and its supporting analysis can be used to **inform the five relevant Local Land Services** responsible for the Lachlan catchment.

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1 Introduction

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

The Lachlan region encompasses diverse landscapes which vary from east to west, including tablelands, slopes, plains, rangelands and floodplains. Economic prosperity of the region is largely dependent on agriculture, including sheep and cattle grazing, cropping and irrigation including horticulture. There is an increase in mining and corporate agriculture in the region, bringing new economic opportunity, and social and land management challenges.

1.1 Background

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

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

1.2 Focus of assessment

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Summary of assessment findings

2.1 Planning

The CMA conducted a collaborative CAP planning process, building strong relationships with key stakeholders in community, industry and government. The CAP is based on a thorough assessment of the current and future issues and risks within the region.

Strategic planning and capacity

Through involvement in the CAP development, the CMA Board and staff members have increased their understanding of how the region functions, and the priority issues to be managed. The CAP upgrade occurred in a period of several CMA leadership changes, including the Chair, Board members, General Manager, and senior management and this may have constrained strategic input to some degree.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

A key strength of the Lachlan CAP is its foundation on genuine and inclusive community consultation. Numerous surveys, workshops and one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders occurred at multiple stages throughout the CAP upgrade. A local government member confirmed the CMA's good relationships indicating, 'All the councils in the region have a good relationship and regular contact with the CMA. They [the CMA] hold a regular six-monthly planning forum where we all get together and discuss project opportunities'.

This commitment to community and stakeholder engagement is likely to foster shared CAP ownership and provide a strong basis for collaborative implementation. Some stakeholders also indicated an improvement in their own strategic capacity or ability to participate in NRM as a result of the inclusive CAP upgrade approach.

Adaptability

The upgraded CAP includes a clear plan to manage change and ensure the CAP's ongoing relevance. This includes information on when and how the CAP, and the associated implementation and business plans, will be reviewed and adapted to respond to changes and the availability of new information.

CAP strategies were informed by a consideration of external risks and changes within the region. These risks and changes related to social, economic, environmental, political and technological factors, at a range of scales, identified through local community consultation and technical panel workshops. This approach to identifying key issues affecting the region provides a good foundation for future planning and CAP implementation.

2.2 Targets

The CAP analysis incorporates social, economic and environmental information to identify and address the key issues for the region. The analysis of natural and social systems was strong, but would have been improved by further analysis at the regional scale.

Best-available information

The CMA effectively incorporated local knowledge and values, including locally-relevant technical knowledge. Community and industry values, visions and opinions, were regularly

collected through a variety of mechanisms. The use of these knowledge sources provides confidence that the CAP has identified the community's priorities for the region, and increases the likelihood that stakeholders will identify with the plan.

The CMA held workshops with a range of technical experts to collate scientific knowledge for the CAP analysis. These sources were local, relevant and generally current, and focused on understanding the key issues for the region. However, the use of scientific data or literature to inform the CAP is less evident. Despite the risks of using a narrower knowledge base, it is likely that the CMA has identified the key social, economic and environmental issues for the region. The CMA has a strategy to address identified knowledge gaps during CAP implementation.

The CAP identifies five logical socio-ecological landscapes (sub-regions) within the region, bringing together areas that have similar social, economic and environmental attributes. Current spatial data were used to consider geophysical and social factors relevant to the landscape boundaries. The process was commended by an independent technical reviewer who noted, 'The boundaries make intuitive sense, appear to be sufficiently homogenous within, and result in different sets of intervention strategies'. These landscapes are supported by the local communities and align well with the new Local Land Services boundaries, which divide the Lachlan catchment among five organisations.

Analysis of social, economic and ecological information

The CMA has invested considerable effort in a comprehensive analysis of the linked environmental and social systems in the region. This analysis was praised by an independent technical reviewer for addressing system function and integrating social and environmental variables particularly well. The CMA used technical panels to identify the system components that should be addressed in order to enhance the health of the system. This analysis was designed to direct investment towards components of the systems that are likely to bring the highest return. The analysis identified system drivers, thresholds, positive and negative feedbacks and possible interventions at the local scale and an appropriate level of this detail was included in the CAP.

However, as the regional-scale strategies and goals were then derived solely from the local scale analysis, there is a risk that additional important regional issues may have been underemphasised or missed. Undertaking a catchment-scale analysis would have provided greater confidence that the most effective strategies were selected. Also further streamlining the catchment goals could have improved the CAP hierarchy, providing greater clarity for stakeholders.

The NRC recommends approval of Lachlan CAP with the following **condition**:

- Consider how the CAP and its supporting analysis can be used to **inform the five relevant Local Land Services** responsible for the Lachlan catchment.

Logical hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The upgraded CAP presents a logical planning hierarchy with catchment goals, targets and actions to address priority issues. The CAP goals describe the desired catchment outcomes and the management targets describe the desired outcomes for the five local landscapes. These, combined with the CAP strategies, can direct actions to address locally relevant issues. Greater clarity could have been provided by more clearly identifying where in the catchment the CAP strategies are a priority.

The hierarchy could also be improved by providing more detail in the targets and actions. However the spatial information presented in the CAP provides guidance on where some key issues exist in the region and in some cases, where the priority actions are to occur.

Accountability

The CMA has chosen not to quantify targets in the CAP, to remain adaptable to changing circumstances. During the development of the annual implementation plans the CMA intends to work collaboratively with partners to focus priorities and assign responsibilities. This process will also provide additional detail to the targets and actions to describe how, where and when actions should occur. While the CAP includes examples of performance measures, specific reference points including baselines and benchmarks will need to be developed during implementation planning to improve accountability.

2.3 Action and investment

The upgraded Lachlan CAP provides a good foundation on which to base collaborative actions in the region. The CMA has developed strong relationships with existing and potential delivery partners, who are open to being involved in CAP implementation planning.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The upgraded CAP is aligned with the relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies at a range of scales, and the CAP lists the key internal and external strategies that are relevant to each CAP goal. This enables partners to identify how activity undertaken towards CAP targets can contribute to achieving targets in other plans or strategies, and vice versa. The CAP demonstrates strong alignment with the state-wide targets for NRM and *NSW 2021* goals³ and is consistent with the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW). It has been endorsed by the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, confirming that it is not inconsistent with their relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies.

The CAP reflects the CMA's thorough understanding of community and industry values and visions, which increases the likelihood of these stakeholders contributing to implementation planning. However, there is little evidence of efforts by the CMA to align CAP strategies with those of neighbouring CMAs. This may limit the effectiveness of broader scale CAP goals and strategies such as those aimed at protecting and enhancing primary vegetation corridors across the landscape.

Roles and responsibilities

A majority of potential delivery partners have expressed their interest in being involved in implementation. For example, a local government representative who was asked about the council's interest in working with the CMA to implement the CAP, answered, 'Yes, definitely. We're very open to working with the CMA and seeing how our projects can overlap. We are a small council with limited resources so this can help us too.' The CMAs well established relationships with partners' suggests that they are likely to be successful in engaging suitable partners during implementation.

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

The NRC recommends approval of the Lachlan CAP with the following **condition**:

- **Confirm the roles** of delivery partners and that they are committed to collaborative delivery of integrated actions across the catchment. This will assist the continuation of existing relationships during the transition to Local Land Services.

Implementation

The CAP clearly describes an implementation planning process which is designed to be adaptable over time as new information becomes available. This will guide the CMA during implementation. Due to CAP development timeframes, most delivery partners are unlikely to have seen the final CAP, including the implementation planning details. If the continued support of a majority of delivery partners is confirmed, this will increase confidence in the successful collaborative implementation of the CAP's aims.

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 Lachlan Catchment Action Plan with conditions.

3.2 Conditions of approval

The Local Land Services restructure in January 2014 will see the Lachlan catchment incorporated into five separate organisations. The following recommendations are designed to reflect this high level of change, in comparison to other CMAs, and assist the transition.

The NRC recommends approval of the upgraded Lachlan CAP with the following conditions to:

- Confirm the roles of delivery partners and that they are committed to collaborative delivery of integrated actions across the catchment. This will assist the continuation of existing relationships during the transition to Local Land Services.
- Consider how the CAP and its supporting analysis can be used to inform the five relevant Local Land Services responsible for the Lachlan catchment.

The CMA should report to the NRC on progress, or how it has met these conditions of approval in a Strategic Progress Letter in September 2013.

3.3 Additional suggested actions for the CMA

There are no suggested actions for this CMA.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

Several aspects of the Lachlan CAP upgrade will assist the CMA to manage the transition to the new Local Land Services structure:

- The local landscapes identified by the CMA map closely to the new Local Land Services boundaries and will benefit the transition.
- A strong consultative approach means community and stakeholder views are already sufficiently captured and reflected in the CAP. Consequently, extensive community consultation would not be required in order to reflect the Local Land Services boundaries.
- Identification and analysis of the five local landscapes has led to localised targets and goals that could be adopted into future strategic planning in the region.

However, there may be some challenges in managing the transition to the new Local Land Services structure, including:

- Insufficient cross-border engagement or alignment with neighbouring CMAs during the CAP upgrade process.

Attachment 1 - Detailed assessment findings

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

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

The Board was regularly involved in the CAP upgrade despite several role changes occurring during the process, and there is a generally consistent understanding of the strategic role of the CAP. The CMA employed a new systems approach to strategic NRM planning and the capacity of CMA staff was developed to support this. Consideration was given to the potential changes and risks to landscapes and these have guided CAP development. It is worth noting that Lachlan CAP upgrade occurred in a period of several leadership changes including the Chair, Board members, General Manager, and senior management, and this may have constrained the planning to some degree.

Strengths:

- Through the CAP development the CMA Board and staff have increased their understanding of how the region's landscapes function, and what key risks and drivers are a priority for management.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- The CAP upgrade occurred during a time of leadership change within the CMA and Board, which impacted the continuity of strategic leadership.

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

Relationships built through genuine involvement of key stakeholders in the CAP upgrade process have provided a good foundation for effective CAP implementation. The CMA put a substantial amount of effort into community and stakeholder engagement, with a particular focus on previously unengaged stakeholders. The CMA also empowered community members by allowing them to play a strong role in CAP target setting through workshops and surveys. Stakeholders were positive about the engagement process, generally reporting that it was inclusive and that they have benefited from it. While there was only moderate support of the public consultation draft of the CAP, the final version has addressed stakeholder concerns and is likely to have improved support.

Strengths:

- Genuine community consultation that resulted in the effective integration of community views into the CAP.
- Concerted effort to involve previously unengaged stakeholders, e.g. agribusiness, mining, corporate landholders.
- General agreement by stakeholders that the process has benefited them through enhanced strategic capability and/or networking opportunities

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- Moderate support for the public consultation draft of the CAP may have isolated some stakeholders from the planning process.

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

The upgraded CAP has a plan for managing ongoing changes adaptively, including information on when and how the CAP and the associated implementation plans will be reviewed. While this could be further improved upon, it provides confidence that processes are in place to ensure the CAP's ongoing relevance and that it can respond to internal and external triggers. The CMA incorporated community input on potential future changes that would impact CAP delivery and a thorough review of the 2006 CAP and lessons learned informed the CAP development.

Strengths:

- The CAP has been informed by a risk assessment of factors which may influence CAP implementation.
- Detail is provided on when and how the CAP is to be reviewed in future, including a comprehensive list of potential triggers for review.

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 logically describes five social-ecological systems that were developed using a synthesis of spatial data, community values and existing administrative boundaries, and are supported by the community. The CAP analysis incorporates social, economic and environmental information to identify and address the key issues for each of the five systems. The CAP is informed by a range of knowledge sources: Community and industry values, visions and opinions were regularly collected and are reflected in the upgraded CAP. Workshops attended by technical experts were the principal method used to collate scientific knowledge. These sources are local, relevant and generally current; however there is a risk that other relevant scientific knowledge may have been overlooked. Despite this risk, it is likely that the CMA has identified the key issues for the region. Knowledge gaps and strategies to address them are outlined in the CAP.

Strengths:

- CAP strategies reflect community and industry values as a result of regular canvassing of community and industry desired outcomes, visions and opinions.
- The five social-ecological systems are logical, evidence-based and have strong community backing.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- The use of scientific data or literature to inform the CAP is less explicit in comparison to community and industry values.

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

The CMA has invested considerable effort in a comprehensive systems analysis which is substantially consistent with resilience practice. Their sound analysis has provided a strong understanding of landscape function and current condition at the local scale. The inclusion in the CAP of key outputs from this analysis, such as important thresholds, drivers and system condition, demonstrates a link between the identified issues and the CAP targets. However, as the strategies and goals were then derived from the local scale analysis rather than both a local and a catchment-scale analysis there is a risk that additional important regional issues may have been missed or underemphasised. Undertaking a catchment-scale analysis would provide greater confidence that the most effective strategies have been selected.

Strengths:

- The CAP adopted a social-ecological systems focus, demonstrating good integration of the economic, social and environmental components.
- Detailed, transparent resilience analysis identifying system drivers, thresholds, positive and negative feedbacks and possible interventions was undertaken at the local scale, with an appropriate level of detail included in the CAP.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- The strategies and goals are derived from analysis at the local scale rather than both a local and a catchment-scale analysis, increasing the risk that important additional issues and effective interactions for them have not been identified.

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

The upgraded CAP presents an evidence-based planning hierarchy that demonstrates a clear logic linking actions to goals. Further streamlining the catchment goals could have improved the CAP hierarchy, by combining strategies with the overlapping intent and providing greater clarity for stakeholders. The targets and actions can effectively guide implementation planning, with further detail deferred until implementation, to ensure the ongoing relevance of the plan. While the CAP targets have detailed performance measures, these are indicative and the inclusion of reference points such as baselines and benchmarks would provide greater accountability.

Strengths:

- The upgraded CAP provides a logical planning hierarchy, with goals, targets and actions focused on addressing priority issues.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- A table indicating the priority landscapes for the application of strategies may have improved the plan.
 - The management targets and performance measures require reference points including baselines and benchmarks to promote accountability.
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Criteria 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 upgraded CAP is aligned with the relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies through the use of shared data, regular agency engagement and specific alignment of priorities. This has resulted in a CAP that is designed to incorporate the shared directions and priorities of other organisations. The high level of involvement by state government agencies in particular has strengthened relationships for implementation. Through its extensive community consultation, the CMA has developed the CAP in alignment with community aspirations. However, the absence of strong efforts to align the CAP priorities with those of neighbouring CMAs' could potentially limit the effectiveness of regional-scale actions. The CAP meets all statutory requirements including alignment with *NSW 2021* goals, the state-wide targets for NRM and the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW). It has been endorsed by the relevant state government agencies confirming that it is not inconsistent with their relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies.

Strengths:

- Relevant strategies, plans and opportunities for alignment are highlighted in the CAP.
- Regular contact with agency representatives and shared data use assisted CAP alignment with relevant state government NRM policies, plans and strategies.
- The CAP goals and targets are aligned with community and industry aspirations for the region.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- The CMA's engagement with neighbouring CMAs was limited, reducing cross-boundary collaboration.
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Attribute 3B. Plan can meaningfully guide Governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region

The CAP presents a logical planning hierarchy of strategies, goals and targets which provides delivery partners with direction on the priority issues for the region. The CAP outlines a collaborative implementation planning process which provides for further adaptation and refinements of actions. While the CAP includes governance principles for collaborative implementation, delivery partners' support has not been established. Key priorities are clearly identified spatially which could guide delivery partners and investors actions during CAP implementation.

Strengths:

- The upgraded CAP presents a plan to guide coordinated NRM actions in the region.
- The CAP uses clear and appropriate spatial information to highlight key priority areas at the SES scale, which can guide potential partners and investors.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- There is currently no evidence that delivery partners support the governance framework proposed for implementing the plan.
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Attribute 3C: Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment

The CAP lists key delivery partners that are expected to contribute to the implementation of the goals. This includes government and community partners; however the list is limited, particularly in the industry sector. While industry partners are listed elsewhere, this reduces clarity and therefore confidence in the CAP's ability to guide the full range of stakeholders in NRM planning in the region. The upgraded CAP has changed substantially from the early public consultation draft, though it utilises the same analysis, and potential delivery partners have not yet seen the final version, therefore it is not possible to gauge the level of support. However, the CMA has good relationships with most delivery partners who have expressed their interest in being involved in implementation, and this suggests that the CMA is likely to be successful in engaging suitable partners for implementation.

Strengths:

- Strong stakeholder support of the CMA indicates that it is likely to be successful in engaging appropriate delivery partners during CAP implementation.
- Government and community delivery partners are listed for each CAP goal, allowing these partners to identify opportunities for collaboration.

Weaknesses /or gaps:

- Industry partners are not consistently identified against the CAP goals, so their role in implementing each goal is less clear than other partners.
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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*⁴ (the Standard).

Assessment criteria

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

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

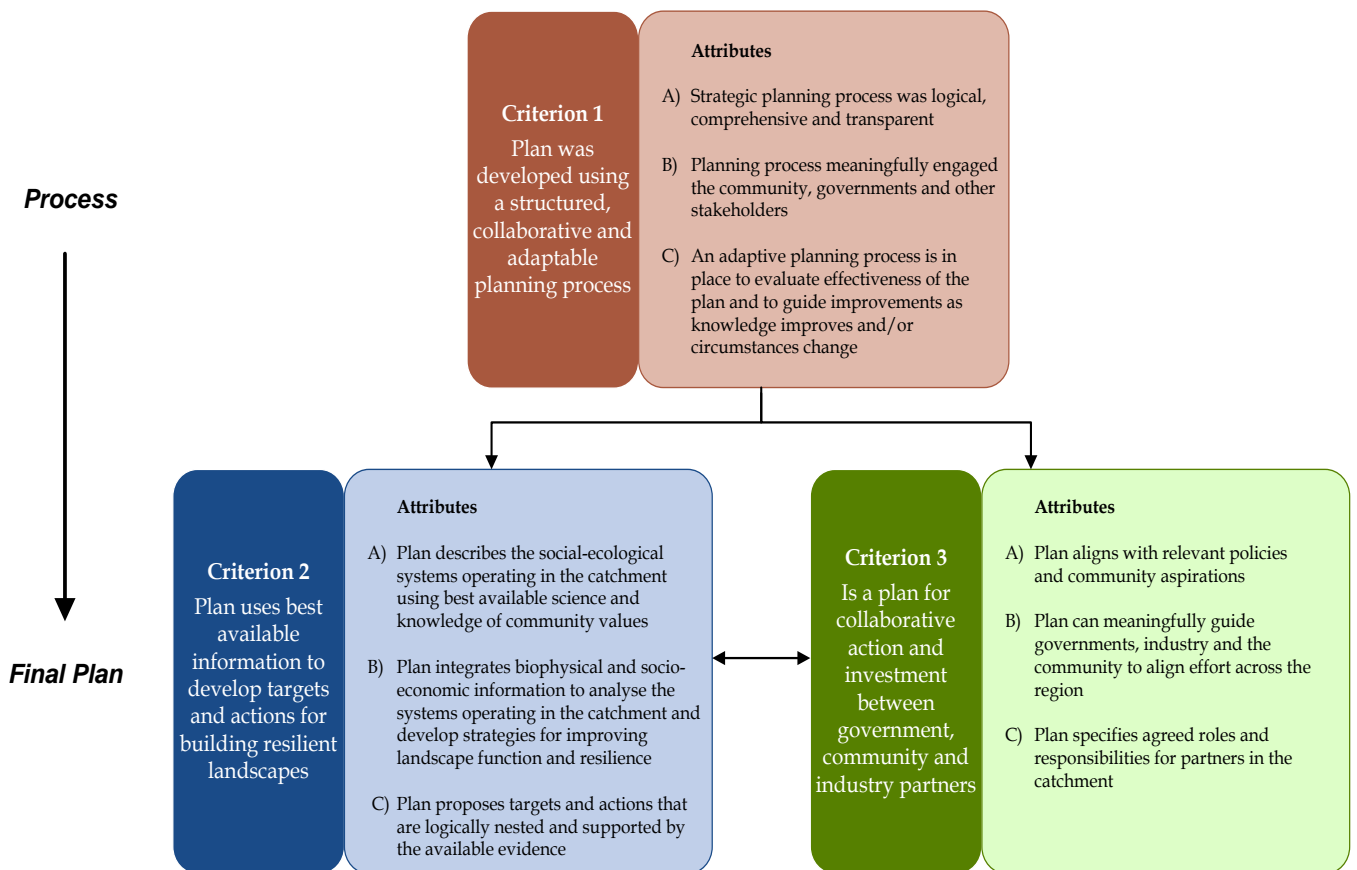


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

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

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

Assessment methodology

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

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

Assessment approach

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

- pre-assessment engagement with the CMAs to identify characteristics of the region that influence CAP development, such as major issues and institutional structures
- desktop analysis of the plan, planning approach, community consultation and scientific knowledge in developing the plan
- interviews with two CMA Board members, three senior managers and three staff members
- three surveys and 10 interview with stakeholders including representatives of industry, local government, landholders and non-government groups
- government agency consultation
- four external reviews of the analysis underpinning the targets, conducted by consultants with expertise in ecology and environmental science, social science and environmental economics.

Acknowledgements

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

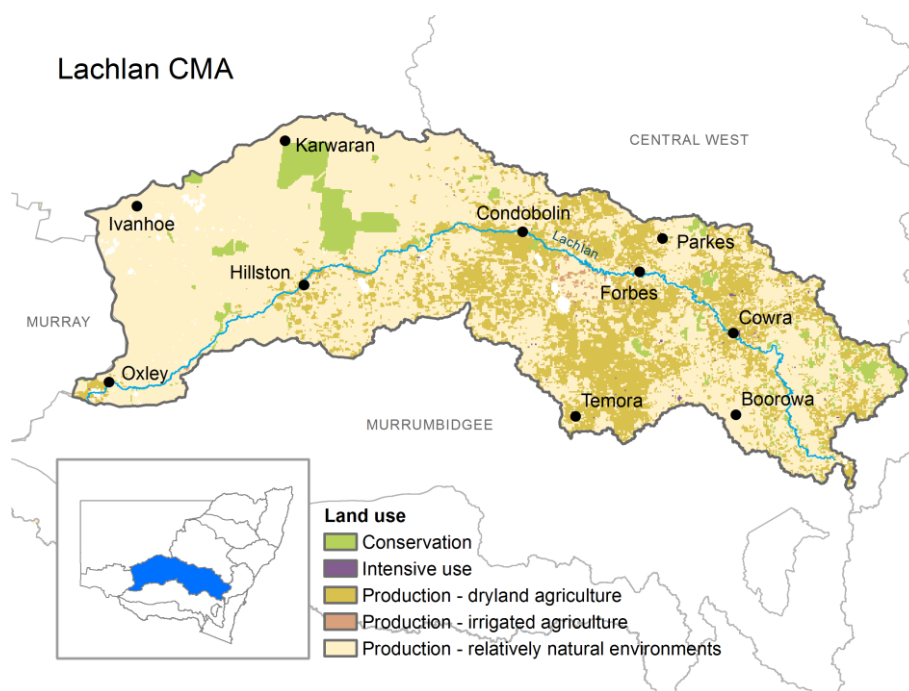
Attachment 3 - About the region

The Lachlan catchment is located in central western NSW covering an area of approximately 84,700 square kilometres. The catchment extends westwards from the Great Dividing Range, flanked by the Macquarie and Bogan Catchments to the north, the Darling to the west, the Murrumbidgee to the south, and the Sydney and Shoalhaven Basin to the east.

The Lachlan catchment has a population of over 100,000 people and is part of the Murray-Darling Basin. Industry in the catchment is predominately agriculture which accounts for 22 per cent of employment. Dryland cereal production and grazing enterprises are the main industries. Other major enterprises include wool and beef production, horticulture, dairy, feedlots, piggeries and viticulture as well as a significant irrigated crop industry. Whilst the Lachlan Catchment covers only 10 per cent of the state's area, it is estimated to produce 14 per cent of state agricultural production. Mining, tourism, manufacturing, timber production, food processing and fishing are also important industries.

The Lachlan Catchment is a terminal system. It is only connected to the Murray-Darling Basin when both the Lachlan and Murrumbidgee Rivers are in flood, resulting in a relatively closed aquatic system. The Lachlan River is not fed by winter snow which reduces the natural seasonality of flow. It is the only river in NSW with significant wetlands along its length, with nine wetlands of national significance.

The Lachlan River which dissects the catchment has its headwaters on the Breadalbane Plain near Goulburn and the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range flowing west to the plains of the Riverina. The eastern part of the catchment spans natural climatic and altitudinal gradients between the dryer temperate woodlands of the inland slopes, the alpine landscapes of southern NSW and the ACT, and the forests of the Great Divide.⁶



⁶ Source: Lachlan CMA website, <http://www.lachlan.cma.nsw.gov.au/about.aspx>, viewed 21 February 2013 and the upgraded Lachlan CAP.

