A Resilient Queensland Landscape
Securing Queensland’s environment, food, fibre and energy

Summary
Queensland’s 14 Regional Natural Resource Management Bodies have been effective in helping governments secure environmental, food, fibre and energy objectives across the entire landscape for all communities.

The Queensland land mass and coastal waters are dependent on six drainage systems:

- South East Queensland (under significant population pressures);
- The Great Barrier Reef;
- The Gulf of Carpentaria;
- The Bulloo;
- Channel Country-Lake Eyre; and
- The Murray-Darling.

These systems and their diverse environments provide the water supply for the South East & regional communities, the soils for food and fibre production, energy, commercial and recreational fishing grounds and nurseries, the foundation of our entire tourism industry and our own lifestyle.

Critical to the continuing sustainability and enhancement of these catchments are partnerships between all levels of government, community, science and industry.

In turn these connect to the people who actually deliver the land and water outcomes and thus have the greatest capacity to improve sustainability: the people who manage the land on a daily basis. The management of these broad catchments, for the benefit of all, is largely dependent on the knowledge, commitment and practical skills of relatively few people who rely on well-targeted support, policies and programs from all levels of government.

Queensland’s Regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) Bodies increasingly provide the interface between all groups and have become an essential component of ensuring the take-up of world best practices. However, business as usual will not achieve the outcomes both community and governments are seeking.

To ensure the impressive gains of the past several years are not lost, the following must occur:

- A formalised mechanism to provide information and advice to Government;
- The setting of priorities through the development of appropriate community regional NRM plans;
- Sufficient additional funding to enhance community understanding of and involvement in NRM; and
- Support for research into improving practical land and water management knowledge and outcomes.

Queensland’s Regional NRM Bodies believe that these mechanisms and support structures are essential for the wider landscape to supply food, fibre, energy and environmental services for a growing population.
The model

Oversight

The communication and information flow between Regional NRM Bodies, Non Government Organisation’s, (NGO’s) Industry and Government is fundamental to better outcomes in the management of land and water and cannot be overstated.

While two or three government agencies are most involved with the wider regional NRM connection, the capacity for both positive and negative impact across the whole of government and community is real, thus a dialogue at the highest level is most important.

Regional NRM Bodies propose the setting up of a ‘NRM Advisory Council’ – ideally with legislation that also carries an NRM Framework model, chaired by the Minister or Departmental Head of either Premiers or Treasury and also involving the appropriate line agencies and NGO’s that actually participate in landscape planning and delivery. In this way an ‘NRM Plan’ based on regional plans, aiming for seamless connectivity, could also ensure recognition of specific knowledge and critical issues right down to the local level.

The proposed NRM Advisory Council would meet one to two times a year and provide recommendations to government on:

- The performance of Regional NRM Bodies generally in engagement, governance and delivery;
- Alignment of, and with, government policy, statutes and programs; and
- Resource condition monitoring, accountability and communication.

So far

Australia’s 56 NRM regions, some in existence for nearly 20 years, offer national, state and local governments the ability to partner with land managers and the community to improve the health of the entire natural and productive landscape.

This regional delivery approach is unique in the world, and is:

- Building trust between conservation and agricultural sectors, governments and their communities, small businesses through to large corporations, extractive industries, tourism and Indigenous people;
- Driving a rapidly growing land and water stewardship ethic;
- Setting regional priorities through development of regional plans, which bring together landcare, catchment and other conservation groups, urban communities, farmers and graziers, mining and industry research and development organisations, and other land users along with volunteers and governments; and
- Ensuring alignment of regional, state and national NRM priorities.
Australia’s regional NRM groups were established to assist Governments connect with communities. Regional NRM Bodies offer stability and demonstrated capacity to achieve on-ground outcomes.

Over the past four years, Queensland’s Regional NRM Bodies have worked to achieve:
- 1,784,451 hectares of native vegetation protection, enhancement, rehabilitation and revegetation;
- 4,471,504 hectares of pest plant and animal control;
- 1,304 conservation agreements protecting more than 890,000 hectares of land; and
- 5,975 awareness raising events for more than 850,000 participants.

The Queensland Regional NRM Groups Collective (RGC) was formed in 2004 to act as a lead body for the 14 regional organisations in Queensland charged with planning for natural resource management investment and action across the landscape. The RGC’s membership encompasses:
- SEQ Catchments (South East Queensland)
- Condamine Alliance (Condamine Catchment)
- Queensland Murray Darling Committee (Central Southern Queensland)
- South West NRM (South West Queensland)
- Desert Channels Queensland (Central West Queensland)
- Southern Gulf Catchments (North West Queensland)
- Northern Gulf Resource Management Group (Northern Gulf of Carpentaria)
- Terrain NRM (North Queensland Wet Tropics)
- NQ Dry Tropics (North Queensland Dry Tropics)
- Reef Catchments Mackay Whitsunday Isaac (Coastal Northern Central Queensland)
- Fitzroy Basin Association (Central Queensland)
- Burnett Mary Regional Group (Wide Bay)
- Cape York Regional NRM Group (Cape York Peninsular)

These entities are not for profit organisations: either Incorporated Associations or Companies Limited by Guarantee. The Torres Strait Regional Authority is an associate member and is a statutory body formed under Commonwealth legislation.

Regional NRM Bodies make investment decisions based on a Regional NRM Plan, developed in consultation with their communities and government. They invest to ensure that communities are well engaged in natural resource management. Collectively, Regional NRM Bodies engage:
- 320 Landcare Groups;
- 70 Local Governments (many of the Local Governments are engaged by more than one Regional Body);
- 105 Indigenous Groups;
- 75 Rural Industry Groups; and
- 53 Environmental Groups.

These sectors are represented through Regional NRM Bodies and are often contracted to deliver services and projects. These projects range from on-ground activities such as fencing to supporting research activities through to recording Traditional knowledge.
The mechanisms

The model is a whole of landscape approach to securing Queensland’s biodiversity, food security, clean water and healthy landscapes.

Queensland’s future is underpinned by its land and water resources and the way they are used. A resilient Queensland will continue to prosper under an increasingly variable climate. Healthy landscapes ensure the wellbeing of the entire community, providing ecosystem services, including food and water, economic prosperity and access to recreation and leisure pursuits.

A Resilient Queensland requires an increased investment in sustainable natural resource management across Queensland, delivered by Regional NRM Bodies, through programs which focus on:

- Resilient regions
- Healthy landscapes
- Clean water catchments
- Secure food
- Strategic pest management
- Filling priority knowledge gaps

Resilient regions
- Regional natural resource management plans identifying carbon and biodiversity opportunities;
- Identifying core landscape features for increased capacity to manage for drought, flood, fire and cyclones;
- Critical planning, extension and spatial imagery (GIS) support services as well as an experienced environmental workforce;
- Coordination and support for landcare and other community groups, industry, traditional owners and local government;
- State NRM framework is recognised appropriately through existing legislation and through agencies at a central and regional level;
- Policy and program delivery by acting as a conduit between governments and their communities;
- Responding to community needs, such as disaster recovery work, as they occur.

Healthy landscapes
- Investing in biodiversity protection and maintenance as guided by the Queensland Biodiversity Strategy;
- Delivering the Australian Government Land Sector Package in Queensland, including biodiversity, carbon and energy initiatives;
- Working with land managers to improve on-farm nature conservation; and
- Improving the health of coastal and marine landscapes.

Clean water catchments
- Improving river and stream condition through a focus on integrated monitoring, water use efficiency education, riverine corridor habitat management and pest fish reduction;
- Work with fisheries and coastal management organisations to improve the health of coastal and marine ecosystems and raise community awareness; and
- Funding incentive programs for improving land management practices, and protection of wetlands and riparian areas in priority catchments.
Secure food
Regional NRM Bodies working with their communities to achieve sustainable agriculture and food security targets through:

- Maintaining and improving rangeland condition to reduce soil leaving the rangelands;
- Improving the condition of strategic agricultural lands;
- Developing partnerships with industry groups, land managers, local landcare and catchment groups to deliver education, on-farm research and increase innovative sustainable agriculture adoption rates; and
- Working with fisheries industries to support sustainable practices.

Strategic pest management

- Partnering with local government, and the community to manage significant pest threats;
- Coordinated implementation of local and regional Pest Management Plans;
- Effective systems for monitoring pest occurrence and control;
- Providing spatial services to enhance planning capacity for strategic pest management; and
- Supporting the application of applied pest control research.

Filling priority knowledge gaps

- Ongoing monitoring of our natural resources to measure effectiveness and return on investment;
- Improving scientific and community understanding of the need for changed practices;
- Contributing to State of Environment reporting and the National Environmental Accounts;
- Developing skills and career pathways in agriculture and environmental management; and
- Working with Indigenous communities to capture Traditional knowledge from living generations.

The cost and return on investment

With coordinated delivery across Queensland through 14 Regional NRM Bodies, supported by the Regional Groups’ Collective, it is anticipated that the Queensland Government will receive a return on investment in the area of 7.5 dollars for every dollar spent.

The concept of depreciating an asset is common in business. The principle of investing part of the income generated from that asset in order to maintain it is common. It is also a long-held landcare principle: investing in the maintenance of our natural resources. Protection and maintenance of natural assets is much more cost effective than rehabilitation and repair.

This investment package builds on that concept and seeks to invest in the land, water and biodiversity assets of Queensland. This investment ensures that those assets do not depreciate to a state that limits their capacity to be productive for agriculture, tourism and the community as a whole. Continued investment at the present level is not enough to prevent further decline.
**Investment history**
Since 2009, the Queensland Government has invested $17.2 million annually to community-based NRM through their Q2 Coasts to Country Program. Of this, $11 million is allocated to Regional NRM Bodies to support core operations and carry out high priority, on-ground projects. The remaining $6.2 million supports Q2 Coasts to Country administration and other Statewide projects managed by DERM or contracted out to other organisations. The Queensland Government also funds targeted initiatives such as the SEQ Healthy Waterways Strategy.

Regional NRM Bodies also recognise that Local Government makes a significant investment in NRM activities across Queensland. Research undertaken shows that Local Governments in Queensland invest more than 4 times the amount the State invests.

**The investment package**
The investment required from both the Queensland Government and Australian Government to leverage an additional $835 million over three years is outlined below.

An investment of $180 million from the Australian Government, which equates to less than 1.5% of Australia’s Gross Value of Agricultural Production is needed. The Queensland Government should be looking to direct an investment of a minimum of $152 million into NRM regional delivery. This equates to 2.5 % of mining sector royalties generated in Queensland. This level of investment will ensure sustainable land management and food security in Queensland over the next three years is maintained. This investment is less than 10% of the cost to upgrade 8 kilometres of Ipswich Road (Goodna-Dinmore Section).

This level of investment does not necessarily require a significant increase in funding from the budget. Innovative, smart and efficient policy options or changes have the capacity to generate much greater value for money from investment already being made through offsetting and other expenditure currently being made by the private sector and government utilities. This could either release significant funding for NRM purposes or foster multiple outcomes. As an example, it is generally cheaper to manage potable water health in the catchments than to build increasingly expensive engineering solutions which require ongoing operating and maintenance costs thus increasing the price of water to consumers.

To put the Queensland investment request into context, for the four-year period to 2010, the Victorian Government has invested an average of $91.6 million per year through their Regional NRM Bodies (Catchment Management Associations). New South Wales Regional NRM Bodies receive around $100 million per year from their State Government.

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