

2004

## **Guidelines for community engagement by regional NRM bodies**



## Context

The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ) and the extended round of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) embody a new approach to community-based, integrated regional natural resource management (NRM). This approach fundamentally depends on effective processes for communication, involvement and engagement between Regional NRM Bodies and their clients, stakeholders and general public in the region.

This Guideline is part of the suite of information products emanating from the NRM Ministerial Council process to guide Regional NRM Bodies and State Government agencies involved in the NAPSWQ and NHT programs. It provides information about how these bodies should be expected to involve regional communities and stakeholders beyond their organisation. The Guideline encourages a consistent approach to community engagement by Regional NRM Bodies and for the jurisdictions and Commonwealth to use as the basis for developing more specific, detailed guidelines or resources. The Guideline sets out:

- National and State Government expectations for a planned and documented approach to community engagement by the Regional NRM Bodies; and
- minimum areas to be addressed regarding engagement during the phases of the planning cycle, which need to be met and documented for funding and accreditation purposes.

## Background

On 3 May 2002, the NRM Ministerial Council agreed on criteria for the accreditation of regional NRM plans. One relates particularly to community engagement:

*“Effective participation by all key stakeholders is required to ensure that plans are based on a community process, are accurate, comprehensive, well coordinated and able to be implemented. Indigenous communities, local government, state agencies, resource managers, industry & communities, academic/scientific community and environmental groups should be involved where relevant. Stakeholder’s roles, responsibilities and capacity to implement actions to achieve targets will be identified.”*

This criterion clearly highlights the need for plans to be **based on** engagement with communities, involve the **full range** of key stakeholders, **understand their capacities**, and **build commitment** to implementation. In addition, some states may have other minimum consultation requirements set out in statutes, policies, or agreements with Regional NRM Bodies.

## The continuum of engagement

There are many ways in which people can be engaged in integrated regional NRM activities, ranging from information provision, representation on committees and consultation through to participation and full engagement through partnership approaches. These activities can be thought of as a continuum providing for varying levels of stakeholder influence. The different activities are all useful and appropriate in different scenarios and phases of planning and management, and can be used in various combinations.

## A planned approach to community engagement

All Regional NRM Bodies should plan, design and document their approach to community and stakeholder engagement within their region. The approach should ideally be developed early in the planning process. In regions where Regional NRM Bodies and plans are already

more advanced, engagement activities can still be planned and incorporated in plan implementation, monitoring and review phases.

Proposed engagement activities may be documented in different ways. Some options are to:

- have a communication plan (e.g. covering information provision and public education strategies), and a separate public involvement plan documenting strategies for more participatory forms of engagement; or
- have a single public engagement plan which covers all aspects of community involvement and engagement on NRM that they will carry out in their region; or
- integrate engagement activities into regional NRM Investment or Business Plans, in those regions who have already completed a final draft NRM plan.

Whichever approach is adopted, it is expected that the documented engagement plan will:

- demonstrate that involvement with the community and relevant NRM stakeholders (inc. local and state government agencies) will be coordinated to maximise efficiency & consistency, reduce duplication, and demonstrate a willingness to adopt a collaborative approach;
- clearly describe the principles for engagement to be adopted by the Regional NRM Body, including principles of fairness, equity of opportunity for involvement, inclusiveness, cultural sensitivity, relevance, and early and ongoing involvement in the whole planning and implementation cycle;
- be based on an understanding and current profile of the range of stakeholders, community groups and sectors with interests in NRM in the region (including their roles, responsibilities, and capacity to implement);
- outline the range of proposed engagement activities in each NRM planning phase, including responsibilities and timeframes consistent with State and Commonwealth timeframes; and
- outline the Regional NRM Body's organisational development activities that will support effective engagement practice (such as training in community engagement skills, development of client database, evaluation process).

The Joint Steering Committee in each State will work with the regional NRM Bodies to ensure that the engagement plan will meet the standards required under plan accreditation processes and relevant Bilateral Agreements.

## **Engagement in all phases of planning and implementation**

There are effectively six phases of the planning cycle, all of which require community and stakeholder engagement. While it is up to each Regional NRM Body to determine how they will manage these activities, certain areas should be addressed in the documented approach to community involvement. These phases of the planning cycle are shown in the following table, along with areas to be addressed for each phase.

Planning phase	Areas to be addressed by regional NRM bodies	Possible examples
1. Publication of intent to undertake NRM planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General public and key stakeholders notified of the planning process, timeframe, and range of opportunities for involvement, in a proactive manner that makes this information accessible and readily available; and</li> <li>Information on regional NRM status and trends gathered and provided (eg. social, environmental, economic, community profile)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advertisements in local and regional and state newspapers, radio programs, local venues</li> <li>publication of a Regional NRM Discussion Paper, (could be called information paper, catchment profile, background paper etc)</li> <li>terms of ref, operating agreements developed and publicised</li> </ul>
2. Planning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General public and stakeholders provided with adequate opportunities to participate in defining the problems, setting the region's vision and targets, aligning with existing planning, developing solutions and designing monitoring and evaluation systems</li> <li>The commitment and support of stakeholders who are critical to the implementation of particular actions secured and documented.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback on Discussion Paper</li> <li>'Visioning' or 'Sustainable Futures' Workshop</li> <li>Formation of a stakeholder reference panel</li> <li>Formation of technical panels, issue based focus groups or geographic based focus groups.</li> <li>Publication of technical papers.</li> </ul>
3. Consultation regarding draft planning documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft Plan sufficiently advertised and promoted so that community and stakeholders are informed about regional NRM status and trends (social, environmental, economic, community profile), the proposed vision, priorities, targets, strategies, implications, outcomes, evaluation process, and how to provide comment</li> <li>Copies of the draft Plan made freely available and accessible to all residing in, or with an interest in NRM in the region, for a minimum of six weeks in duration, but preferably longer (this should not span the Christmas / New Year or Easter periods), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Government, State agencies and Commonwealth agencies</li> <li>Industry, environmental, and general community groups</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>advertisements in local and regional and state newspapers, radio programs, local venues notifying where the draft can be obtained</li> <li>Public meetings to explain the draft plan</li> <li>Workshop with stakeholder reference panel</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Indigenous communities;</li> <li>- relevant NRM community groups</li> <li>- relevant academic/scientific communities.</li> <li>• Providing opportunity for community and stakeholders to raise concerns through written submissions and, where necessary to meet fairness, cultural and equity needs, other means of input</li> </ul>	
<p>4. Finalisation of planning documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Processes for those who do not support elements of the plan to offer alternative solutions and views are provided and documented.</li> <li>• Adequate feedback provided to people who made submissions.</li> <li>• How issues raised during consultation processes have been taken into account in the final plan.</li> <li>• The levels of support and commitment from key stakeholders and the general community for (and any disagreements with) the strategies targets, actions and priorities in the plan and investment strategy documented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roundtables</li> <li>• Facilitated negotiation sessions</li> </ul>
<p>5. Plan implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation partnerships and agreements for implementation with NRM sectors, local governments, sub-regional groups, landholders, industry and community groups, education institutions and indigenous groups established and promoted.</li> <li>• Provision of opportunities for regional groups and individuals not usually involved to participate or invest in implementation</li> <li>• Annual public reporting on natural resource condition and trends, giving opportunities for feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negotiations with community, industry, private sector and philanthropic organisations</li> <li>• Workshops and discussions with wide range regional community and industry groups</li> <li>• Publish annual progress report</li> </ul>
<p>6. Review of the regional NRM plan (3- 5 yrs)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities as per requirements for phases 1 – 5, provided although less extensive processes may be used, depending on the scale of review of priorities, or proposed changes to targets.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As for other stages</li> <li>• Engage community in evaluation process</li> <li>• Make finding of review freely available</li> </ul>