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NRM plans and other regional planning processes: What are the links?



Purpose of this module:

This module supports *Guidelines for Developing a Regional Natural Resource Management Plan in Queensland*. It is intended to

- provide information to regional NRM bodies on other regional planning processes in Queensland
- provide information on how the regional NRM plan relates to these plans
- provide suggestions for better integration of the various planning processes. This will assist planners to adopt a 'triple bottom line' approach, through facilitating the alignment of ecological, social and economic planning for the region; and
- provide some guidance on how planners can demonstrate their plans and processes are linked in order to meet accreditation criteria.

Outline of this module

This module provides a general introduction to State regional planning processes and how the Regional NRM plan relates to these plans and planning processes.

This introductory module is followed by separate modules on:

- Regional Vegetation Management Planning under the *Vegetation Management Act 1997*
- Water Resource Planning under the *Water Act 2000 (being drafted)*
- the integrated planning and development assessment framework (IPDAF) established under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997 (being drafted)*
- Fisheries planning (*being drafted*)
- Regional Coastal Management Planning (*being drafted*. Note that information on the process and how it links to Regional NRM plans can be found in the EPA's Directory of Products and Services.)

It is proposed to add additional units on other planning processes as they become available.

Introduction

Queensland's regional NRM-related plans

In Queensland, there are at present several regional planning activities relating to natural resources management. These include (See Box A for more details):

- Statutory plans, including Regional Vegetation Management Plans, Regional Coastal Management Plans and water resource planning
- Non statutory plans, including the integrated regional planning frameworks developed by RPACs (Regional Planning Advisory Committees) and regional nature conservation, landscape, or water quality strategies
- Local government planning schemes, while not regional plans as such, are a key component of the IPDAF and play an important part in natural resource management in this State. A module is/will be provided on the integration with these plans. See also *Local Government's Role in Integrated Catchment Planning and Management* available from the Local Government Association in Queensland.

Box A: A 'short list' of NRM-related planning processes in Queensland.

This list makes no claim to being exhaustive.

Statutory

- Water management plans under the *Water Act 2000*;
 - o Resource Operation Plans
 - o Water Use Management Plans (Salinity areas only)
 - o Land and Water Management Plans (these are property level rather than regional plans)
- Regional Vegetation Management Plans under the *Vegetation Management Act 1999*;
- State and Regional Coastal Management Plans under the *Coastal Protection and Management Act 1995*
- Local Government Planning Schemes under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*
- Species recovery plans, and protected area or world heritage management plans under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Clth) and the *Nature Conservation Act ...*(Qld) may have relevant regional components
- management plans under the *Fisheries Act 1994*

Non-statutory

- Regional Planning Advisory Committee (RPAC) plans e.g. Regional Frameworks for Growth (note that RPACS have statutory acknowledgement, but the plans are not specifically mentioned in the legislation). These seek to achieve ecological sustainability at the regional level by coordinating and integrating wide range of economic, social and environmental (including NRM) considerations when developing regional strategies to manage development and change.
- The State Infrastructure Plan;
- Catchment management plans;
- Soil Conservation Project Area Plans;
- regional pest management plans
- Land Utilisation Strategy Plans;
- Regional water quality management strategies e.g. Brisbane River Management Group
- Regional Nature Conservation Plans
- Regional Landscape Strategies;
- Irrigation Area Management Plans;
- Fisheries Management Plans;
- Regional Forestry Agreements;
- Cultural Heritage Management Plans (as proposed under the *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Bill 2002*);
- Integrated Regional Transport Plans (may have some economic and social components of relevance to NRM issues)

What is the relevance and relationship of these regional plans to the Regional NRM plan?

A Regional NRM plan, as a community-driven plan, has a different role from other NRM plans, as outlined below under the heading 'Differing roles'. Nevertheless, the Regional NRM plan needs to be consistent with other key NRM plans, as outlined below in 'Need for consistency'. As well as this obligation, there are many **opportunities** to share information, combine development processes, and influence, complement or 'value add' to achieve common outcomes. These opportunities are further detailed in general terms under the heading 'Sharing resources'.

Plan scoping and developing a regional overview is the recommended first stage in development of Regional NRM plans. It is important that this includes developing an understanding of other planning processes that may be relevant and a review of potential links.

Other modules on individual planning process will provide more details on specific roles, components and the opportunities for working together.

(a) Differing roles

Statutory plans have specific roles set out in legislation. Regional NRM plans do not have a specific statutory role nor do NRM bodies have statutory powers. Regional NRM planning is only part of a broader regional planning system. The many individuals, groups, industries, sectors and agencies that make up a region all undertake planning of various forms, styles and scales, each with relevant roles.

Strategies in Regional NRM plans should not try to undertake the role given to Commonwealth, State or local government agencies under statute, for example, the Local government's role in making planning schemes or the State government's role in provisions for water allocation, regulatory restrictions, etc. Regional NRM plans can, however, develop complementary or supporting strategies and actions through on-ground actions, voluntary approaches, investment or negotiated agreements. The research, information gathering, monitoring, education and awareness, and extension processes associated with legislative responsibilities could potentially be shared between Governments and Regional NRM bodies pursuing similar outcomes.

For non-statutory plans, however, (including RPAC plans, Catchment Management Plans, regional nature conservation and landscape strategies etc), there is more opportunity for the Regional NRM plan to adopt 'existing' strategies or approaches, or to implement these using their investment funds. This could include, for example, strategies that are included in the NRM sections of integrated regional planning frameworks developed by RPACs. In some cases, Regional NRM bodies can simply refer to (or 'call up') strategies in existing plans. In others they may wish to negotiate to take over responsibility for some strategies. In other they may wish to work together on joint strategies. As with statutory plans, there may be opportunities for joint research, information gathering, monitoring, education, awareness and extension strategies.

Importantly, the Regional NRM plans have a specific '**integrating**' role in that they are intended to cover all NRM issues relevant to that region and to identify and consider social and economic impacts. This will include many 'single' issues covered by the above plans, for example, vegetation management or water use. There is an opportunity for the Regional NRM plan, particularly through the target setting process, to provide an overall view on how these aspects work together and where the regional priorities should be directed. The discussions and negotiation associated with developing these links and priorities will assist the government managers of 'other' planning processes in understanding regional priorities and consequently in allocation of regulatory and planning effort.

Existing NRM Regional Strategies are a particular case. These plans need to merge into, or form the basis of, any Regional NRM plans developed under the NAP/NHT (that is, in time, no two such strategies will coexist in one region). These strategies will be a valuable input into the Regional NRM plans.

(b) Need for consistency

A key criterion for accreditation of Regional NRM plans is that the plans 'demonstrate consistency with other planning processes, agreed national and State outcomes and basin-wide strategies and targets that have been collectively agreed by relevant jurisdictions in other forums such as the Murray-Darling Basin Commission.' (This criterion is included in the Commonwealth State bilateral agreements on the NAP and NHT2).

Regional NRM plans will therefore need to either incorporate or complement relevant objectives, targets and strategies from plans that have been endorsed under statute or agreed between Governments. It will be necessary to identify in the early stages of plan development any potential for inconsistency, in order to negotiate agreed approaches with Governments.

The principle of 'consistency' should work both ways. That is, in the long term, there is an opportunity for the Regional NRM plan to influence the objectives, targets and strategies in statutory plans, particularly at the time these plans are due for review. This 'influence' will be much easier if those people developing either type of plan are involved in the process, as discussed below.

Targets set in Regional NRM plans will be a key factor in this influence. Few other existing planning processes set quantitative targets: the effect of the Regional NRM plan's targets on other planning processes is likely to be far-reaching as they have the potential to shift planning out of generalised statements of policy or objective into real commitments to achieving results 'on the ground'.

Timing of plan development is an issue in ensuring consistency where other plans are in different development phases (see Box B).

Box B: Timing issues

The differing timetables for the rollout and review of various planning processes may be a constraint on coordinated NRM planning. While ideally planning processes should proceed in tandem so plans are complementary, in practice this may not be possible. Some statutory plans are already in place and others won't be completed until after the Regional NRM plans are developed. There is no compulsion on Regional Bodies to wait till statutory plans are completed to finalise their own plans although there are some requirements to review plans once this is done (see note below). In the absence of these plans in some regions, the Regional NRM plan may need to 'best guess' some targets and actions, for subsequent review.

All planning processes, statutory or otherwise, are iterative and plans evolve to adapt to changed circumstances and priorities. Statutory plans such as the Regional Vegetation Management Plans and Water Resources Plans are required to be reviewed and updated as set out in relevant legislation. Where plans have been completed, Regional NRM plans may be able to influence reviews or the 'second round' of plans.

Specifically:

The bilateral agreement contains commitments for two specific types of plans as follows:

20.3 'Queensland will use its best endeavours to ensure that **Regional Vegetation Management Plans** covering the Priority Investment Regions are completed to inform the development of NRM plans. In accordance with the accreditation criteria once Regional Vegetation Management Plans are completed, NRM plans (including vegetation targets and strategies for their achievement) will be reviewed and revised if necessary to ensure consistency.'

19.3 'It is noted that **Water Resource Plans** have been finalised for the Fitzroy and Burnett River systems and that planning processes have commenced in all remaining priority investment regions catchments.' In the NAP priority regions, the relevant Water Resource Plans for all four regions will be finalised by the end of 2004; and the Resource Operation Plans by end 2005.

Regional Coastal Management Plans are also being developed throughout the coastal areas of Queensland, with some drafts already released for public consultation. Where the regional plans don't yet exist then planners should refer to the State Coastal Management Plan.

In the case of **local government** planning schemes and corporate plans, planning cycles are prescribed under statute. Planning schemes are required to be reviewed to conform to IPA by 30 June 2004. Planning schemes must be reviewed at least every six years. However, there is nothing to prevent Regional NRM bodies negotiating with local governments to amend or review planning schemes earlier to reflect desired NRM outcomes.

(c) Sharing resources: Time, skills and information

Using and building on plans that are already available or being prepared will save time and resources.

Many statutory and non-statutory plans, for example, Regional Vegetation Management Plans and Coastal Management Plans and Integrated Regional Planning Frameworks, include **resource information and maps** that will be of use to the Regional NRM plans. They will also include information that may help set targets, develop appropriate strategies, and develop performance measurement processes.

Where plans are developing along the same approximate timetables, there is potential for **sharing of resources and processes**, particularly in terms of key stages of the planning process. There may be opportunities, for example, to:

- share information gathering and survey exercises
- combine aspects of public or stakeholder consultation processes;
- combine the work of technical advisory committees
- share the costs of mapping development and monitoring
- share work on social and economic assessments, particularly the development of a community profile
- undertake joint consultancies or leverage relevant research
- share monitoring procedures and costs
- combine educational or extension services etc.

Some possible approaches or mechanisms for sharing resources include:

- the established State and Commonwealth agency Regional NRM Coordination Groups
- sharing salary costs of planners
- joint technical panels and community reference panels
- regional science networks or planners forums (community, industry or agency) etc.

Interaction and discussion between planners as plans are developing should reveal these opportunities. Specific opportunities are outlined in each of the accompanying modules.

Checklists

Each of the following modules provides a checklist that may be of use when developing a Regional NRM plan to ensure the plan meets minimum requirements for demonstrating that the plan is consistent with other relevant regional NRM plans and links to other regional NRM planning processes.