

# Protocol for changing management action and resource condition targets

Prepared by the MAT & RCT Review Steering Committee 24<sup>th</sup> November 2005

## Background and purpose

The complex task of preparing regional NRM plans and RISs has required considerable efforts in technical input, strategic thinking and community engagement. In light of tight planning timeframes and limitations of knowledge to inform the development of resource condition targets (RCTs) and management action targets (MATs), an adaptive management approach has been widely adopted as a desirable feature of target setting and review, and, more broadly of the regional planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation cycle.

The purpose of this protocol is to present a clear and agreed understanding amongst Regional NRM Bodies, Queensland and Australian governments on:

- Examples of different circumstances or *triggers* leading to target review;
- A working definition of *significant* changes to targets, the related process steps, roles and approval pathways where needed (see *Appendix 1*);
- Some regional level *good practice* considerations for target review (see *Appendix 2*) resulting implications for management;
- Some principles and assumptions underlying the protocol.

The *MAT & RCT Review Steering Committee* at the request of the Joint Qld/Australian Governments NRM Steering Committee (JSC) has guided this development of this protocol. This development process has involved consultation with Regional Coordination Groups, Regional NRM Groups Collective, Queensland and Australian Government Regional Liaison Officers and the Queensland Learning and Evaluation Team.

## Principles

Some overarching principles emerged from *MAT & RCT Review Steering Committee* discussions and the broader consultation process. These included:

1. *Supporting adaptive management* - the agreed protocol should not restrict planners' and managers' ability to practice real-time adaptive management or benefit from the lessons of implementing plans;
2. *Flexible timeframes* – regions will approach target review at different times, depending on the stage in their planning cycle and particular regional circumstances.
3. *Building on existing processes* - the target review process should use or build-on existing communication, reporting or agreed decision-making processes in regions where established
4. *Proportional effort* - the level of justification required for a proposed change is *proportional* to the scale of the proposed change (e.g. level of consultation, technical advice, costs and time expended in the review process)

5. *Negotiated* – proposed changes to targets must be negotiated between involved parties.

### **Likely triggers for target review**

Some examples of circumstances that may lead to a review of MATs or RCTs are presented below. It is also likely that the decision to change a target can arise from more than one trigger.

#### Making targets S.M.A.R.Ter

These triggers are likely to include improved baseline data collection to set new targets or update existing targets, improved understanding of regional natural and social systems or improved access to local knowledge and experience (e.g. from monitoring effectiveness of actions).

**RCT Example:** A new report is released on groundwater quality in a region, the data presented suggests that a region's RCTs linked to this asset are unrealistic or are focused in the wrong part of the catchment.

**MAT Example:** During the implementation of a grazing land management project, graziers' observations presents an opportunity to refine a MAT making it more locally relevant and its outcomes more measurable

Some key underlying assumptions here include the target is unachievable, less effective or inappropriate in its current form and/or a adequate regional monitoring and evaluation process exists to track the effects of the change.

#### Reviewing Regional Investment Strategies

A significant **change of focus**<sup>1</sup> to a Regional Investment Strategy by regional bodies as part of a RIS review may trigger a review of associated targets in NRM plans

**Example:** Removing an investment program or project entirely due to unforeseen challenges in implementation (e.g. prolonged drought) or new investment from other sources allowing funding to be re-allocated between programs.

#### Changes in policy, legislation or regulation

Changes in state and national policy or planning priorities, new regulatory frameworks or legislation may trigger changes to targets (e.g. actions in the RWQPP take affect, a new EPP for wetlands is prepared or leasehold land review strategy is finalised)

**RCT Example:** A new (or amended) water resource plan is released for a major catchment in your region, raising the bar on environmental flow requirements - are RCT flow related targets in step? Are there any flow-on impacts on investment programs and projects?

#### Feedback from stakeholders and the regional community

There may be several triggers for target change arising from working with stakeholders and the regional community. These may include stakeholder dissatisfaction with existing targets or changes in management needs of a key stakeholder group, industry investor or partner.

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<sup>1</sup> RIS review guidelines 2005-6, section 12

## Significant and non-significant change to targets

Significant change to a MAT or RCT relates to the nature of the change and its likely impact. It also dictates the level of approval required by the regional NRM board and/or JSC. It therefore indicates the level of justification and consultation required for the change to be approved.

### ***A general definition of significant change:***

Significant change is any change likely to have a major impact on government investment, specified resource condition outcome, and/or a serious impact on the regions communities or stakeholders.

**Significant changes to MATs** can include changes to *intent* of targets, extension of target dates, change in unit of measurement or measurable change in output specified.

**Significant change to RCTs** can include developing new or deleting existing RCTs, change to target date, the unit of measurement, geographic focus, or desired condition (outcome) specified.

**Non-significant change** includes changes for readability, changes to the mix of actions (e.g. workshops to field days) but no net change in effort or intent of actual MAT or RCT itself. Includes modification of targets resulting from previously agreed or negotiated changes to planning framework (e.g. splitting or lumping of plans and regions).

## Who can initiate a change to targets?

Any of the four major parties (i.e. stakeholders, regional bodies, Australian or Queensland governments) can prompt a review or proposed change to targets in a region. In the majority of cases regional bodies would initiate a change to MATs or RCTs. In more exceptional cases, State and Australian governments may trigger a change resulting from major shifts in policy or program objectives. These government-initiated changes should, by-and-large, be undertaken as part of a medium to longer-term major reviews of plans and RISs themselves.

## Roles in the target change process

The following table outlines the agreed roles and responsibilities for all parties regardless of which of the parties initiates the target change process. These roles are also placed in their process step context in *Appendix 1*.

**Table 1: Roles in the target change process**

<b>Significance</b>	<b>Stakeholders / regional community</b>	<b>Regional NRM Board</b>	<b>Regional coordination group</b>	<b>Aust &amp; Qld Govt Regional Liaison Officers</b>	<b>JSC</b>
Non-significant change	Advise / check where necessary	Note	-	-	-
<b>Significant changes to MATs</b>	Requires support of / negotiation with key stakeholders affected by MAT	Board to approve	Provide policy and/or technical advice on proposed change (see Appendix 2)	Provide policy and/or technical advice on proposed change – indicate agreement or non agreement of proposed change to JSC (see Appendix 3)	JSC Note - If agreement reported by RLOs
		May seek independent technical review and liaise with RCG			JSC respond – if RLOs report on no agreement
<b>Significant changes to RCTs</b>	Requires support of / negotiation with key stakeholders affected by RCT	Board to approve progress to JSC  May seek independent technical review and liaise with RCG	Provide policy and/or technical advice on proposed change (see Appendix 2)  Provide letter of support to JSC if requested	Provide policy and/or technical advice on proposed change (see Appendix 3)	Approve

**‘Good practice’ considerations when changing targets**

Several ‘good practice’ considerations underpinning target review have been identified. These are not intended to be prescriptive, however they do encapsulate some key principles and **existing requirements** within the *target setting guidelines*<sup>2</sup> and *RIS review guidelines*<sup>3</sup>. Regional Bodies and investment partners would be familiar with these requirements, for example, using inclusive and iterative approaches, and, demonstrating consideration of social and economic implications of targets.

Both the *National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (2002)*, and, *Queensland Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation Plan* offer guidance on how target review sits within a broader monitoring and evaluation framework. Regional

<sup>2</sup> Module 5a NR&M July 2004

<sup>3</sup> Guidelines for RIS review 2005-6

NRM Bodies have also developed or are currently in the process of developing *regional monitoring and evaluation strategies* that should outline and support the process of target review.

Several points for discussion between regional bodies and RCGs have been suggested in Appendix 2. These points reflect the good practice considerations for significant changes to targets.

#### Meeting technical advisory and information needs

Regional NRM Bodies will need to consider the scope of technical advice required and this may vary depending on the complexity of the target and/or the magnitude of the proposed change.

##### **Some key issues:**

Does the change affect other MATs or RCTs? What are the implications for a more or less **integrated management approach** in the region?

*Note:* The **effectiveness** of proposed management actions underpinning targets should also be considered in these discussions.

As with the plan development and accreditation process, for significant changes to targets regional bodies are strongly encouraged to **liaise with regional coordination groups** to seek agency advice at the regional level on policy and scientific issues. In this role agencies endeavour to present a joint position. This may also help identify implications for **agency alignment of effort** in monitoring and implementation activities and help share lessons between regional stakeholders and investment partners.

It is also important to consider if an existing target is supported by **existing monitoring and assessment programs**, and, if the proposed change will impact on commitments or agreements for specific monitoring responsibilities in the region relating to measuring progress towards the target into the future.

Liaising with RCGs may also provide vital information to support the rationale and justification for proposed changes to targets. This is even more important where the proposed change relates to an area where science/knowledge base is unclear or contested. Where regional NRM bodies perceive additional technical advice is required, seeking independent scientific advice is encouraged. This could include use of technical advisory panels or regional science coordination networks currently working with regional bodies.

Where scientific information is not available or appropriate to inform proposed target changes, the use of local, traditional, Indigenous and industry knowledge is valuable in supporting the justification for the change.

#### Identifying stakeholder involvement requirements

Regional bodies need to consider and identify who was involved in the target's initial development, and more importantly, whom the proposed target change/s may affect. This informs which stakeholders need to be involved in revising a target. As with the NRM plan development process, the level of engagement and demonstration of involvement and ownership over that change should again reflect the magnitude or likely impacts of the change. This is essentially the Board's responsibility to ensure this is done appropriately and documented sufficiently.

**Key issue:**

What **social and economic costs and benefits** are likely to occur from implementing the changed target? Can these costs be mitigated and benefits enhanced?

Meeting 'business' and reporting requirements

There is a need to ensure target review occurs at a time that compliments evaluation, funding and implementation timelines of regional NRM bodies e.g. links with the annual performance and financial reporting process. However, the target review / approval process is not dependent upon or a requirement for annual budget approval. It would also be beneficial for regional bodies and other parties to consider target change in a "whole of region" investment context (i.e. broader than just NAPSWQ and NHT investment sources).

Regional bodies may also weigh-up the benefit of the proposed change in light of a reduced ability to track progress towards a 'steady' target over the course of an investment program or theme cycle.

**Key issue:**

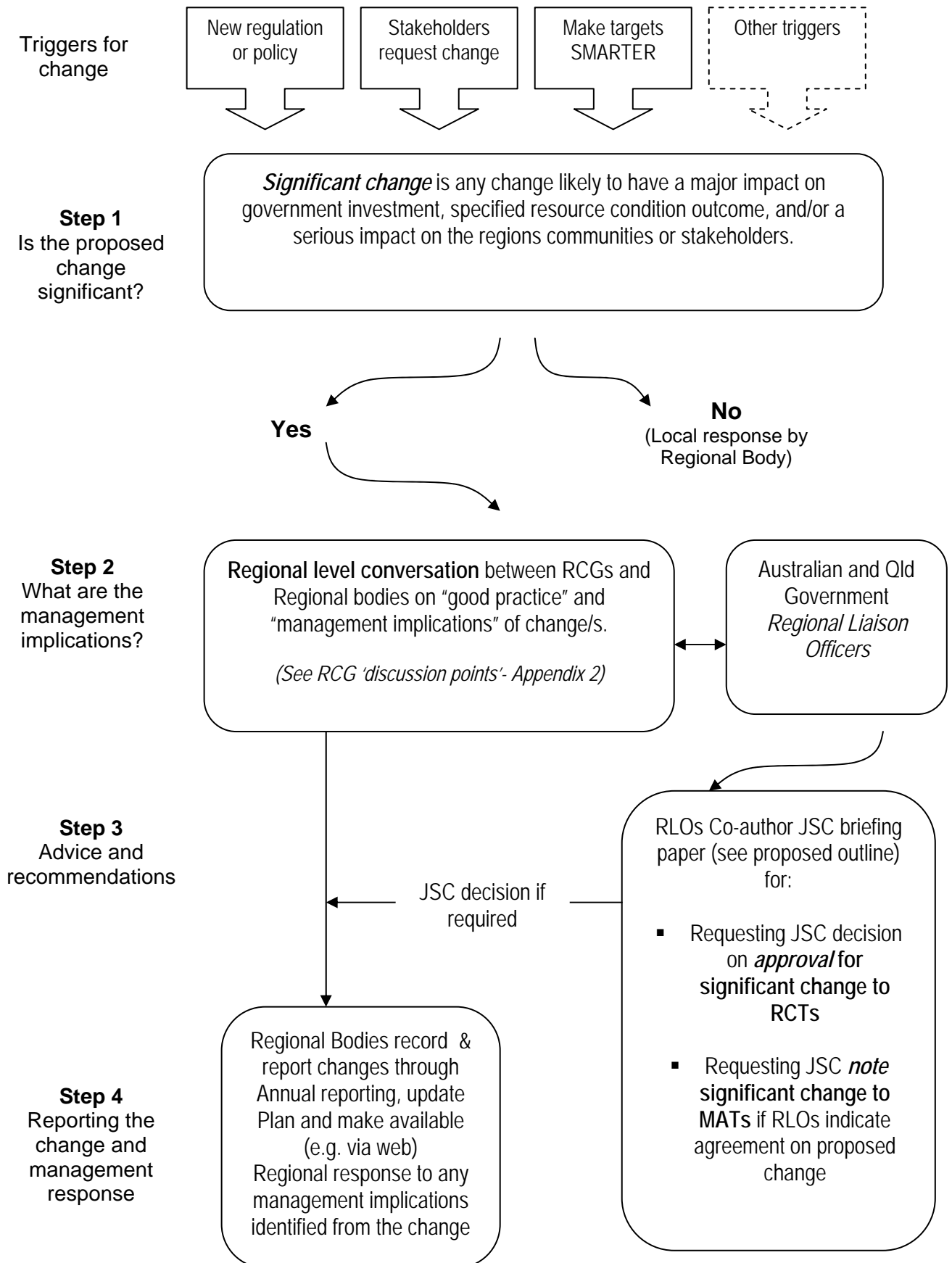
What are the **contractual/financial implications and risks** of changing MATs and RCTs?

Tracking and documenting changes

Regional bodies will be responsible for maintaining a traceable record of significant changes to targets linked to the rationale for change. A **new section has been created within the annual performance and financial report (June 2006)** in which regional bodies are required to report on significant changes made to MATs or RCTs during the course of the year.

It is essential that a latest version of the NRM plan, incorporating changes be publicly available.

# Appendix 1: Protocol for changing MATs and RCTs







The outcomes from the above discussion guides Queensland and Australian Government Regional Liaison Officers when preparing a joint briefing paper to JSC on the proposed changes.

### Appendix 3: JSC Summary - Significant Changes to Management Action Targets (MATs) and Resource Condition Targets (RCTs)

Regional Body		QLD RLO		Agreed	
		AG RLO		Agreed	

**HIGHLIGHTS FOR JSC ATTENTION: Including significant changes to MATs that may require consideration**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO MATs for noting**

original MAT	changed MAT	Justification

**SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO RCTs for approval**

original RCT	changed RCT	Justification

**Key implications for changes (e.g. to contracts, resource outcomes, key stakeholders, NRM delivery)**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Actions considered to ensure changes improve regional NRM (e.g summary of RCG discussions)**

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_