

Protocol for reviewing regional natural resource management plans (including targets) accredited with the NHT and NAPSWQ bilateral agreements.

Background and purpose

Queensland's regional NRM bodies prepared regional natural resource management (NRM) plans through a comprehensive process involving technical and scientific input; strategic prioritisation; and consultation with interested stakeholders, including government, industry, peak bodies and the regional community.

Guidelines for regional natural resource management planning in Queensland¹, Guidelines for target setting in regional NRM planning² and Three-year NAPSWQ/Trust regional investment strategy guidelines³ were developed to support regional NRM bodies in their initial planning endeavours. Attachments E and F of the Bilateral Agreement to deliver the Natural Heritage Trust Extension between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Queensland (the Bilateral)⁴ also provided the protocol for community engagement in NRM planning and implementation.

This protocol supersedes the *Protocol for changing management action and resource condition targets⁵* prepared by the MAT & RCT Review Steering Committee in November 2005. The principles, triggers, roles and approval process contained in that document have been incorporated into this document.

The aim of this protocol is to promote and support flexible and innovative planning, decision-making and investment while ensuring rigor, consistency and transparency in regional NRM planning processes. This protocol forms the agreed process for governments and regional bodies in undertaking a review of the region's NRM plan.

The protocol details:

- *principles* to guide the plan review process.
- *potential triggers* that would create the need for a plan review.
- *process matters* regional bodies should consider (where relevant) when reviewing plans.
- *roles and steps of key players* in the plan review approval process.

Principles

The principles that underpin the protocol are:

1. *supporting adaptive management* – the protocol should not restrict planners' and managers' ability to practice real-time adaptive management or benefit from the lessons of implementing plans and/or new research findings and stakeholder knowledge.
2. *flexible timeframes* – regions are able to undertake plan reviews at different times, depending on their stage in the planning cycle and particular regional circumstances.
3. *building on existing processes* – the plan review process should use or build-on existing communication, reporting or agreed decision-making processes.
4. *greater collaboration to ensure better alignment* – the plan review process should improve stakeholder involvement in planning and implementation to ensure maximum benefit is achieved through cohesive and integrated collaboration and investment in natural resource outcomes.
5. *proportional effort* – the level of justification required for a proposed review is proportional to the scope and scale of the proposed review (e.g. level of consultation, technical advice, costs and time expended).

6. *negotiation* – significant changes to the plan must be negotiated between key stakeholders.

Plan review triggers

The range of triggers relevant to each region at a particular time will influence the scope and/or scale of the plan review. While there is no set term cycle for the review of regional NRM plans, regional bodies need to be cognisant of the fact that many of the above triggers may be operating at any particular time and together or individually may be sufficient to warrant a full review of the plan. Some examples of circumstances that may lead to a review are:

1. Alignment

The need to ensure alignment of matters or mechanisms relating to managing natural resources within a region may trigger a plan review. For example, changes in a region's planning frameworks, with the approval of a new regional land use or environment-related plan, may require a review of the issues, targets and management mechanisms within the regional NRM plan and their priority for regional body investment.

Example: The development and endorsement of the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005–2026* has validated new natural resource management issues for south-east Queensland (SEQ) that were not recognised in the original SEQ regional NRM plan. These issues relate to peri-urban development impacts and climate change adaptation in rural areas. It is timely to include these issues and undertake a consultative reprioritisation process as part of the plan review to inform future investment through the regional investment strategy (RIS).

Alignment across regional boundaries continues to be important. Collaboration between regional organisations across catchment or state boundaries has been identified as a way for regional bodies to ensure greater investment efficiencies and maximisation of outcomes. Neighbouring regions working together on common natural resource assets or threats could result in changed delivery mechanisms or a reprioritisation of investment to improve outcomes.

Example: Two regional bodies operate within a large catchment area. Some aspects of the water quality targets and management actions of the regional body in the upper part of the catchment are relevant and impact on the achievement of water quality measures in the regional body further downstream. The regional bodies address the alignment of targets and activities as part of their plan reviews to improve consistency across regional boundaries.

2. Changes in policy, legislation or regulation

A successful NRM plan embodies shared ownership of the priorities expressed in the plan. The Australian and Queensland Governments are significant investors in natural resource management; over time, government priorities may change for a number of reasons. Such changes may impact on regional NRM plans. A review of the regional NRM plan provides an opportunity for a region's communities and stakeholders to renegotiate the priorities and its strategic investment profiles.

Example: The development of a new drought policy initiative and new supporting programs to adapt to long term climate changes need to be reflected in changes to long term aspirational or resource condition targets or the consideration of new themes for inclusion in the regional NRM plan and hence the investment priorities.

Changes in state and national policy or planning priorities, new regulatory frameworks or legislation may trigger changes to targets (e.g. actions in the Reef Water Quality Protection Plan take effect, a new environmental protection policy for wetlands is prepared, or a leasehold land review strategy is finalised).

Example: A new (or amended) regional water resource plan is released for a major catchment, raising environmental flow requirements. A regional NRM plan review

determines if flow-related resource condition targets (RCTs) are in line with the requirements, and their impacts on investment programs and projects.

3. New knowledge, information and improvement

Good adaptive management processes would include a periodic review to take account of new data such as Census results, new research findings, the results of monitoring, modelling and evaluation of past activities, or other new information. These could affect the strategic approach and types of interventions to achieve targets, and could warrant changes in the targets themselves. In addition, adaptive management processes should consider preferred practices or actions for improvement. This ensures there is proactive consideration of proposed actions to address the outcomes from the evaluation.

Example: Emerging research results and local knowledge are suggesting the regional NRM plan be reviewed to take account of new science and information about resource conditions and likely trends. Various stakeholders in the community also see a need for a plan review to take account of these developments.

4. Emergence of a new regional issue

A new regional NRM issue has been identified and needs to be addressed in the regional NRM plan. The scale and nature of the issue is such that it requires recognition, targeted action and significant investment. In this circumstance, background technical/scientific information, prioritisation with other issues, target/s development and RIS program investment would be required.

Example: Changes in global commodity markets has increased demand for a particular product, which is driving land use change in a region.

5. Making targets S.M.A.R.Ter⁶

Improved baseline data collection, understanding of regional natural, economic and social systems, and access to local knowledge and experience (e.g. from monitoring effectiveness of actions) provide a basis for setting new targets or updating existing targets. This includes some underlying assumptions; such as whether the target is achievable, less effective or inappropriate in its current form, and whether an adequate monitoring and evaluation process exists to track the effects of the change.

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

Example (MATs): 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.

Determining the scope of the plan review

The scope of the plan review should ensure the review is timely and appropriate to the region's needs and aspirations.

There are two levels of plan amendments – refinements and significant changes:

- *Level 1* (refinements) – editorial changes, changes for readability, changes to the mix of actions in relation to targets (e.g. workshops to field days) but no net change in effort or intent of actual MAT or RCT itself, change of context (e.g. regional profile, assets and/or threats), changes to monitoring and evaluation strategies.
- *Level 2* (significant changes) – changes that involve a change in focus or vision and result in fundamental changes to the plan and its strategic direction, and impacts on the balance of the investment profiles (e.g. significant changes to Aspirational Targets, developing new or deleting existing Resource Condition Targets (RCTs), new assets or threats and new themes).

Significant changes are any changes likely to have a major impact on government investment, specified resource condition outcomes, or the region's communities or stakeholders. **Refinements** are changes that do not have a major impact on government investment, specified resource condition outcomes or the region's communities or stakeholders.

The scope should also determine the level of stakeholder engagement and approval required (see the *Roles in plan review* section for more information). **Significant changes** to plans require Ministerial accreditation in the same way that the plans were initially accredited by Ministers, as required by the Trust Bilateral⁷. Some **refinements** of plans will require the approval of the JSC. These are shown in Table 2.

Regional bodies are encouraged to determine the scope of the review before commencing, in consultation with stakeholders. The scope should include the level that process matters will be addressed at. Some fundamental questions include:

- are the natural assets and issues affecting these assets still relevant and current?
- are there any new and/or emerging issues (including process matters) that need to be recognised and addressed?
- have the priorities for investment changed?
- based on an evaluation undertaken by a regional body of the outcomes of investment to date, is there a need to change the way issues are being addressed?
- are there any changes to the regional profile as stated in the plan?

These questions are likely to vary between regions. In some instances, only a review and improvement of the existing targets of a particular biophysical theme may be required. Alternatively, additional natural assets, and issues affecting those assets, could be identified. This type of review would entail the development of new chapters and targets, and new investment programs being included in the RIS.

This information will be valuable to determine the likely timeframe and associated costs to undertake the plan review.

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Regional body can justify the scope of the plan review.
- Stakeholders agree with the scope of the plan review.
- Key phases and milestones are identified.
- Timelines and costs are identified and agreed to by the regional body and key stakeholders.

If regional bodies have any doubts about the level of significance of the proposed plan review, then JSC advice should be sought.

Process matters

Several process matters requiring attention in the plan review were identified through evaluations of regional NRM planning and institutional arrangements (e.g. Tropical Savannahs CRC evaluation – see Appendix 2 – and the targets review undertaken by the Queensland Murray-Darling Committee).

The process matters which should be addressed (where relevant) are:

- improving engagement and consultation processes.
- collecting, managing, exchanging and using best available knowledge.
- improving alignment of effort by adopting collaborative approaches and factoring natural resource condition into other planning processes.

- implementing an appropriate monitoring, evaluation and reporting and improvement system.
- managing risks.

The purpose of addressing these process matters is to continuously improve Queensland's community-based approach to planning and investing in NRM. This improvement will be enhanced by ensuring the approach is inclusive, cost effective and protects and improves the region's natural resource assets while maximising benefits through actions that contribute to integrated, collaborative outcomes. Table 1 outlines the intended outcomes of addressing process matters.

These process considerations are not intended to be prescriptive, but represent improvements regional bodies are likely to be aware of and have either addressed, or are intending to address, in the future.

Table 1: Intended outcomes of addressing process matters

Process matters	Intended outcomes
Improving engagement and consultation processes	Implementation of consultation processes that engage stakeholders in the planning, implementation and review of regional NRM plans and RISs. Meets the protocol for community engagement in attachments E and F of the Natural Heritage Trust Bilateral.
Collection, management and use of best available knowledge	Best available knowledge is managed and used to inform decision-making in an appropriate and transparent way.
Improving alignment of effort by adopting collaborative approaches and factoring natural resource condition into other planning processes	Alignment opportunities are maximised to facilitate effective and cooperative action.
Managing risk	Identified risks are managed to maximise effectiveness and efficiency, strive for success and avoid or control negative impacts.
Implementing an appropriate monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement system	Progress towards targets is assessed by a monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvements (MERI) framework that incorporates adaptive management principles for continuous improvement and makes use of best available knowledge to inform the assessment.

Further guidance on processes and information to consider achieving the intended outcomes are outlined in Appendix 1.

Roles in the plan review process

The review scope and nature of plan changes will influence the level of stakeholder engagement and approval processes required by the regional body, the Joint Queensland-Australian Government NRM Steering Committee (JSC), or re-accreditation by Ministers. This will determine the level of justification, engagement and collaboration required for the changes to be endorsed.

Table 2 outlines the description of change, minimum stakeholder engagement requirements and the roles and responsibilities of those who provide advice or decide on the changes to the regional plan. These roles and responsibilities have been placed in their process step context in a flow diagram in Figure 1.

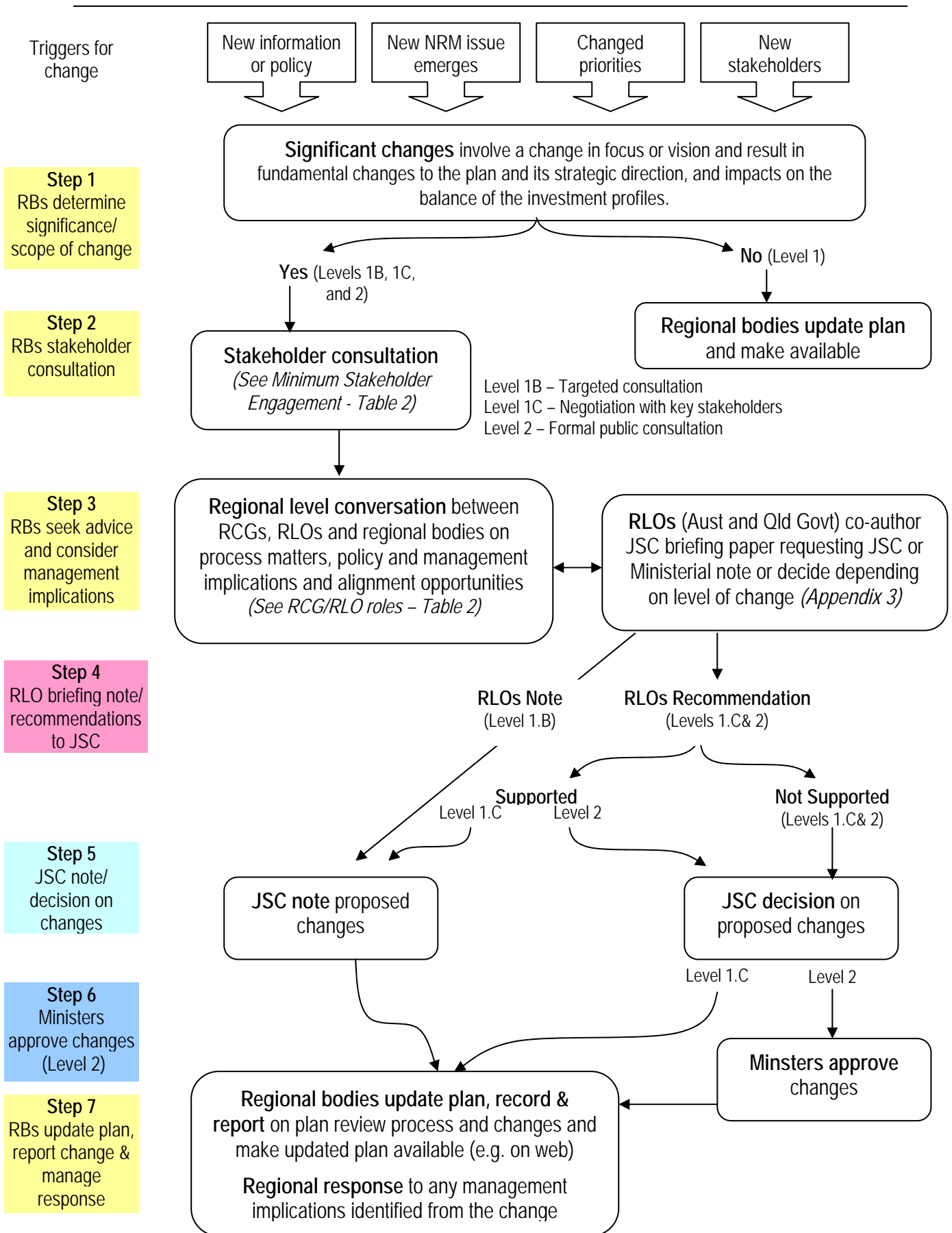
Regional bodies are strongly encouraged to liaise with their regional coordination group (RCG) for agency advice on policy and scientific issues, identify implications for agency alignment of effort in monitoring and implementation activities and share lessons between regional stakeholders and investment partners. Points for discussion between regional bodies and RCGs are incorporated into Appendix 1 Section 1 'Improving engagement and consultation processes'.

Table 2: Roles in the plan review process

Scale of change	Descriptions of examples of change	Minimum stakeholder engagement	Roles			
			Regional NRM board/body	Regional coordination group	Aust and Qld Govt RLOs	JSC and Ministers
Level 1 – Refinement of NRM plan changes	1A. Editorial changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ editorial ▪ grammatical 	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internal regional body decision. 	n/a	n/a	n/a
	1B. Change of context, including changes to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ regional profile. ▪ assets and/or threats. ▪ monitoring and evaluation strategy. 	Targeted stakeholder consultation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Board approves changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides policy/ technical support/ advice on the proposed changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Co-author a paper to JSC noting proposed change (Appendix 3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JSC notes changes
	1C. Changes to MATs and/or RCTs (where there is no net change to the effort or intent of the RCT/s).	Support from and/or negotiation with key stakeholders affected by the changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Board supports and approves changes to MATs and/or RCTs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides policy/ technical support/ advice on the proposed changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide policy/ technical support/ advice on the proposed changes. ▪ Co-author a paper indicating support/no support for proposed changes to JSC (Appendix 3). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JSC notes changes to MATs – if RLO indicates agreement. ▪ JSC approves changes to MATs – if RLO indicates non-agreement.
Level 2 – Significant changes to NRM plans	Significant changes to focus/vision including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ aspirational targets. ▪ RCTs. ▪ new assets and/or threats. ▪ new theme/s (e.g. peri-urban pressures, climate change adaptation). 	Formal advertised public consultation process including consideration of submission through documented process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Board supports changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides policy/ technical support/ advice on the proposed changes. ▪ Identifies alignment opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide policy/ technical support/advice on the proposed change/s. ▪ Co-author a paper (Appendix 3) indicating to JSC: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. support/no support for proposed changes. 2. level of approval required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ JSC recommends changes to Ministers. ▪ Ministers approve the changes and re-accredit the plan.

See Appendix 2 for a flow diagram of the process steps stated above.

Figure 1 – Flow Diagram of Context of Process Steps



Appendix 1 Additional information to help achieve the intended outcomes of process matters

Five process matters were identified to assist regional NRM bodies ensure their plan reviews are inclusive, cost effective, and protect and improve their natural resource assets while maximising benefits through actions that contribute to integrated, collaborative outcomes relevant in each region:

These process considerations are not intended to be prescriptive, but represent improvements regional bodies are likely to be aware of and have either addressed, or are intending to address in the future:

1. improving engagement and consultation processes;
2. collection, management and use of best available knowledge;
3. improving alignment of effort by adopting collaborative approaches;
4. managing risk; and
5. implementing an appropriate monitoring, evaluation reporting and improvement system.

1. Improving engagement and consultation processes

Intended outcome: implementation of consultation processes that engage all stakeholders in the planning, implementation and review of regional NRM plans and RISs.

Guidance

Successful engagement processes should encompass a region's existing consultation networks and build on existing community values, and increase awareness of the broader impacts of NRM actions. The extent of the engagement should be proportionate to the likely level of impact and investment.

Regional bodies are strongly encouraged to liaise with their regional coordination group (RCG) (and other relevant stakeholders) for agency advice on policy and information and knowledge issues, identify implications for agency alignment in monitoring and implementation activities, and help share lessons between regional stakeholders and investment partners. Agencies represented on the RCG endeavour to present a joint position when providing whole-of-government advice.

The outcome could be achieved by:

- seeking a balance of stakeholder participation between sectors and knowledge bases;
- targeting involvement from sectors poorly engaged previously;
- involving people from the original/ previous plan consultation process to provide context and history;
- seeking to involve 'experts' from inside and outside the region and adjoining regional bodies to explore other approaches and potential collaboration opportunities;
- documenting discussions; and
- developing a dispute resolution process.

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Identify the range of stakeholders engaged.
- Demonstrate how previously unengaged sectors have been engaged appropriately.
- Document the analysis and response to stakeholders' views and issues; especially where they may be diverse, competing, negative or obstructive.
- Demonstrate how conflicting views have been dealt with.
- Document stakeholder satisfaction with the engagement process.

2. Collection, management and use of best available knowledge

Intended outcome: best available knowledge is managed and used to inform decision-making in an appropriate and transparent way.

Guidance

A broad range of information is important to inform NRM planning, decision-making and implementation. The range of information could include:

- scientific research.;
- technical reports;
- social and economic profiles and impact assessments;
- local and experiential knowledge and expertise;
- traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledge;
- government legislation, policies, programs and strategies; and
- program evaluation findings/recommendations.

The best available information should be current and widely accepted. Any uncertainty about or lack of information should not restrict progress but concerns should be acknowledged, risks addressed and an adaptive approach adopted. It is appropriate for decisions to be based on local, traditional, Indigenous and /or industry knowledge.

Regional bodies are responsible for managing information provided to participants involved in the plan review process. Consideration should be given to the amount, language, form and timing of information to ensure it adds value to the participants' contribution to the process.

Government has a critical role in providing best available information. One way this has been provided is through regional coordination groups (RCGs). RCGs provide a whole-of-government approach to supporting regional bodies in their planning, information needs and implementation endeavours.

The outcome could be achieved by:

- identifying relevant information to inform decision making;
- ensuring the quantity and quality of information sought is balanced against the significance of each decision;
- using knowledge and information in a manner relative to its sensitivity, intellectual property protocols (especially indigenous knowledge), commercial confidentiality and reliability; and
- making information available to users in an easily assessable format and at a cost commensurate with the extent and importance of its use.
- RCGs providing a short briefing note to regional bodies on significant changes or additions to state government policy or legislation since last plans were accredited (e.g. Wild Rivers, State Rural Leasehold Land Strategy) and what these mean for regional assets or particular targets;
- establishing processes to include technical experts as well as individuals with local/regional and indigenous/cultural knowledge;
- including the use of regional social and economic profiles and assessments to determine the implications of individual decisions where relevant;
- incorporating findings from previous experiences and evaluations of past actions;
- documenting how information was used, including data analysis, modelling and interpretive tools;
- identifying, resolving and recording instances of inconsistencies or contradictions in information; and

- recording information gaps identified and determining opportunities to fill or supplement the gaps commensurate with the importance of the knowledge gaps.

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

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

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Decision-making processes were informed by:
 - appropriate information sources (including technical and knowledge experts);
 - social and economic profiles and assessments of the region; and
 - findings from previous experiences and evaluations of past actions.
- Record of how decisions were made is kept and available to stakeholders.
- Evidence of how inconsistencies and/or contradictions in information were addressed.
- Record of any information gaps identified and how opportunities to fill or supplement gaps were identified.
- Evidence that the information is being used in an appropriate way, is informing decision-making and reporting requirements.
- Participants feedback supports the information made available has been provided in a useful, timely form.

3. Improving alignment of effort by adopting collaborative approaches and factoring natural resource conditions into other planning processes

Intended outcome: Alignment opportunities are maximised to facilitate effective and cooperative action and longer term resource condition targets are factored into other planning processes.

Guidance

Regional bodies have demonstrated an increased effectiveness and ability to deliver multiple benefits by collaborating with stakeholders during all phases of the NRM planning and implementation cycle.

Alignment opportunities will vary in their scale and complexity but should always be a negotiated process mutually acceptable to all parties. Depending on the scale and complexity of individual collaborations, Memoranda of Understanding (MoU), agreements or contractual arrangements may be a worthwhile outcome formalising the relationship. A clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and comparative advantage of different partners can support this outcome.

Alignment should not only relate to effort and cooperative actions for on-ground activities, but also extend to developing natural resource planning objectives and desired environmental outcomes. Responsibility for aligning planning matters, especially targets and desired environmental outcomes, relevant to other planning processes occurring in a region is a shared responsibility among those leading discrete planning processes. Ensuring complementarity between planning processes needs to be progressed through negotiated effort.

It is in a community's best interests that relevant planning matters are taken into account when developing other plans, especially for growth management or significant landscape scale changes.

The outcome could be achieved by:

- involving stakeholders in determining opportunities for collaboration;
- negotiating areas of common interest and articulate desired outcomes;
- determining the parameters (including capacity to participate) of the common interest and roles and responsibilities of parties involved;
- analysing the benefits and costs of the area of common interest;
- determining arrangements for communication, information sharing, intellectual property, resolution of conflicts, evaluation and review processes;
- clearly indicating future/likely investment priorities or major expenditure proposed from all regional resource managers (e.g. including agencies via the RCG process); and
- negotiating with other planning agencies to consider incorporating resource condition targets into their planning processes, especially for growth management and significant landscape scale changes.

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Evidence that collaborative opportunities have been pursued and are appropriate to manage issues and maximise alignment of effort.
- Evidence that involved stakeholders have mutually agreed to the scope and scale of the common interest, roles and responsibilities and level and type of contribution/s.
- Documentation of the collaborative arrangements developed by the parties commensurate with the scope, scale and complexity of the arrangement (i.e. MoU, agreement, contract).
- Inclusion of relevant stakeholders on advisory panels, working groups, etc.

4. Managing risk

Intended outcome: identified risks associated with plan priorities are considered and managed to maximise effectiveness and efficiency, strive for success and avoid or control negative impacts.

Guidance

Risk associated with natural resource management can be biophysical, economic, social, cultural, spiritual, technical, institutional and financial.

Regional bodies generally undertake some form of risk assessment for aspects of the activities managed. Adopting a structured, systematic approach will contribute to achieving timely outcomes.

Where risk is determined to be high this should not stifle action but rather determine the need for a risk management strategy and an appropriate monitoring and evaluation process.

The outcome could be achieved by:

- identifying and assessing risks based on likelihood, scale, frequency and severity of impacts;
- undertaking a social and economic assessment of activities⁸;
- developing risk management strategies relative to the type and amount of risk and investment;
- reviewing strategies where unintended or unidentified impacts surface; and
- developing monitoring and evaluation processes that encapsulate the consideration of identified risks.

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Documentation of the risk identification and assessment process.
- Evidence that a social and economic assessment has been undertaken where significant socio-economic risks are identified.
- Documentation of appropriate risk management strategies relative to the type and amount of risk and investment.
- Evidence of regular reviews of risk management strategies commensurate with type and amount of risk and investment.
- Evidence that this process matter has informed, and been informed by, other process matters.

5. Implementing an appropriate monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) system

Intended outcome: progress towards targets is assessed by an MERI framework that incorporates adaptive management principles for continuous improvement and uses best available knowledge to guide assessment.

Guidance

The intention for existing MERI systems in the plan review process is to adopt an adaptive approach to continuously improve and inform decision-making processes. Guidance material including the *National Natural Resource Management Monitoring and Evaluation Framework*⁹ and the *Queensland Monitoring and Evaluation Implementation Plan for the national (Australian and State) programs*¹⁰ were produced to assist regional bodies develop or refine systems to monitor and evaluate progress in achieving targets.

If the plan review includes changes to targets it is important to consider if the targets are supported by existing monitoring and assessment programs and if the proposed changes will impact on commitments or agreements for specific monitoring responsibilities relating to measuring progress towards the targets in the future.

Commitment to MERI systems is essential to track progress and refine adopted approaches. Additionally, it provides opportunities for collaboration with other natural resource managers. Ideally, robust MERI systems will meet the needs of multiple parties relying on the use of data to contribute to decision-making.

The outcome could be achieved by:

- identifying appropriate performance indicators and information needs required to assess program/project success and progress towards targets;
- employing appropriate conceptual models to ensure relevant and monitored indicators are linked to NRM targets;
- incorporating an adaptive management approach to continuously improve MERI systems to deliver the desired outcomes;
- collaborating with other stakeholders to ensure MERI systems meet multiple needs to inform decision-making; and
- collaborating with other stakeholders to ensure respective roles and responsibilities in the MERI system is determined to enable appropriate resourcing, maintenance, review and improvement.

Has the outcome been achieved?

- Documentation of the MERI system for all programs, projects and organisational activities.
- Evidence that a continuous improvement approach has been adopted to existing MERI systems commensurate with type of program/project and amount of investment.
- Evidence that existing program/project investment has a MERI component that is regularly reviewed and improved commensurate with the type and level of investment (in lieu of the above).
- Evidence of collaboration with other stakeholders to ensure MERI systems meet multiple needs to inform decision-making.
- Evidence that the MERI system meets the needs of the regional body and relevant stakeholders.
- Evidence that the MERI system is being used to inform corrective and preventative action.
- Evidence that this process matter has informed and been informed by other process matters.

Appendix 2: Insights on making better plans: planners' views and plan reviews

During the first phase of plan-making under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the Natural Heritage Trust Extension, a workshop was held in Brisbane in March 2005 that canvassed the experiences of fifteen regional planners from Queensland's NRM regions, Northern Territory and the Kimberley sub-region of Western Australia. This workshop formed part of a broader, longer-term evaluation of regional NRM planning through the Tropical Savannas CRC. In addition, the research team completed a desktop review of nine Queensland regional NRM plans. A summary of some of the key insights from these two processes¹ is presented below.

Key insights included:

1. **reducing the number and complexity of regional targets** – fewer targets in revised NRM plans could improve the focus and effort on priority assets or pressures in regions. This would support more efficient use of implementation resources and result in a tighter focus for monitoring and adaptive management responses.
2. **improve understanding of cause-effect relationships for MAT design** – within existing plans an understanding of the relationship between management actions, MATs and resource condition outcomes is poor. In many cases, much of the science available to inform target setting – particularly for assets such as water quality – was not suitable for the task. Planners called for greater alignment between the funding and design of research activity with regional scale planning and management needs; especially to improve understanding of the contribution of local actions to regional level targets.
3. **making better use of stakeholder knowledge** – information on regional communities and economic activity used to inform plan development often failed to capture how different targets or actions would affect those communities or industries. One option discussed by planners was to more effectively apply stakeholder knowledge gathered through existing and future consultation process to help inform target review, assess likely impacts of actions and select indicators for monitoring progress.
4. **improve priority setting and assessment of options** – more work is needed to identify appropriate 'return on investment' criteria for regional planning and implementation. Planners also highlighted the need for improved use of cost-benefit type analyses, involving more explanation and explicit treatment of social and economic costs and benefits in the priority setting process.
5. **reporting progress towards targets in a meaningful way** – planners agreed that communicating progress on targets in a meaningful way to the wider community, partners and investors was a major challenge. Part of the difficulty was the different information needs or stories needed for each of these groups. One suggestion discussed at the workshop was to adopt a process whereby regional bodies co-developed measures of success with different stakeholders at different scales (e.g. state agencies, landholders etc.) in order to measure and communicate that change in the most appropriate way.

¹ For more information see the following documents:

McDonald, G., Taylor, B & Robinson, C (2005) eds. *Findings from a review of regional NRM plans*, Healthy Savanna Planning Systems Project 3.3.5, Tropical Savannas Management CRC

<http://savanna.cdu.edu.au/downloads/Findings%20from%20a%20review%20of%20regional%20plans.pdf>

Anon. (2005) *Experiences and lessons: Regional NRM Planners Workshop Report*, 9 March 2005, CSIRO, St Lucia. Healthy Savanna Planning Systems Project, Tropical Savannas CRC

<http://savanna.cdu.edu.au/downloads/Regional%20NRM%20Planners%20Workshop%20Report.pdf>

Appendix 3:

JSC Summary – Significant Changes to Regional NRM Plan

(adapted from the Protocol for changing management action and resource condition targets)

Regional Body	<input type="text"/>	Qld RLO	<input type="text"/>	Agreed	<input type="text"/>
		AG RLO	<input type="text"/>	Agreed	<input type="text"/>

HIGHLIGHTS FOR JSC ATTENTION: Including significant changes to Plan that may require consideration and level of stakeholder consultation and support.

- 1

- 2

- 3

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES to Plan for approval

Original Plan Reference	Proposed change	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

References

¹http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/planning_guidance_docs/guidelines_nrm_planning.pdf

²http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/planning_guidance_docs/tgt_setting_final.pdf

³http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/planning_guidance_docs/ris_guidelines.pdf

⁴ http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/policies_strategies/trust_pdfs.html

⁵http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/planning_guidance_docs/protocol_changing_mats_rcts.pdf

⁶ S.M.A.R.T targets – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound

⁷ Clause 82 of the Trust Bilateral June 2004. <http://www.nht.gov.au/bilaterals/qld/index.html>

⁸http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/research_sips/sips/social_economic/impact_assessment.html;

http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/research_sips/sips/social_economic/monitoring_evaluation.html

⁹ <http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/evaluation/pubs/me-framework.pdf>

¹⁰http://www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/policies_plans_legislation/planning_guidance_docs/me_framework.pdf