

National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

Social and Economic



Regional Natural Resource Management in Queensland

State-level Investment Project SE02

Final Project Report

Coordination of Social and Economic Information for the Development of a Regional Information System

March 2006

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David Kraatz and Tim Draper

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The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ) is a joint Australian and Queensland Government initiative that encourages governments and regional communities to work together to address salinity and water quality issues in priority catchments throughout Queensland. This document has been produced under the NAPSWQ using Australian and Queensland Government financial support.

Project team

David Kraatz and Tim Draper

Contact details

For further information or copies, please contact:

David Kraatz

Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation

Telephone: (07) 4938 4469.

Email: David.Kraatz@dlgpsr.qld.gov.au

This document is also available for viewing and downloading from the regional NRM website:

www.regionalnrm.qld.gov.au/research_sips/sips/social_economic/assistance.html

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Final Report

for

SEO2 – Coordination of Social and Economic Information
for the Development of a Regional Information System

funded under

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR SALINITY AND WATER QUALITY (NAP)



Project Statement

The CQRIS Project is a web portal that will contribute to providing accurate, timely and reliable social and economic data on the Central Queensland region for the regions stakeholders.

The CQRIS is a completely non-profit service, administered by the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation (Planning Services, Western and Central Queensland Division). The CQRIS project was funded by the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality* (NAP), and the Queensland Government, through the Central Queensland regional planning project: Central Queensland a New Millennium (CQANM), with generous assistance from the *Department of Public Works*, and the *Office of Economic and Statistical Research* (OESR). The launch of CQRIS on 19 May 2005 realised one of the key priorities of the CQANM regional planning project.

The CQRIS is more than just the standard web site (which usually comprise a group of nested web pages only). The CQRIS is a web-based information **portal**, which in addition to an extensive group of information pages, includes its own searchable on-line database. CQRIS Member organisations continually review existing data and upload new information, reports or data the database as information on the region is collected, analysed and reported.

The goal of CQRIS is to act as web-based information portal that draws together a range of documents, data and other resources, sourced from a wide variety of information providers, to facilitate access to timely accurate regional information to all government and non-government groups and community members. To this end, the project has already made significant progress by including 244 Studies, 307 links and 155 other documents to date. The service is free to portal members as well as members of the public. There are two types of CQRIS portal users (excluding administrators). The first type of portal user is the general public, who have access to most of the information on the CQRIS, but are excluded from the members area. The second type is for members only. Members comprise various government agencies, community groups and others who have an especial interest in the development of the CQ region. Members have a responsibility to contribute information to the CQRIS.

Since the portal was launched in May 2005, over 100,000 hits have been received to the site (measured as visits to the home page only). Shortly after the launch, the rate of visits to the site numbered about 175 per day whereas the rate in the present week has been over 500 per day. As people become aware of the features of the CQRIS, the rate of visits continue to increase.

You can view the site here: www.cqris.com.au

Membership is applied for via the registration button on the Home Page of the portal. At present, David Kraatz and Tim Draper have been visiting prospective members to deliver information sessions.

We are happy to answer any questions that can be put to the CQRIS team via the Feedback feature on the portal or by emailing David.Kraatz@dlgpsr.qld.gov.au or Tim.Draper@dlgpsr.qld.gov.au, or alternately by telephone (07) 49384469.

1. Introduction –

Basic Outline:

The aims and objectives of SEO2 (CQRIS) are to provide stakeholders with a range of data and information such as the following:

(i) Economic and Social data

A range of economic and social data has been sourced through reliable agencies such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Queensland Treasury, and Planning and Forecasting Unit, Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. Data sets uploaded relate to most sub-catchment areas within the Fitzroy Basin Association's region. Data accessible includes:

Demographic data including:

Estimated resident population figures, age characteristics, indigenous profiles, migration data, population change data and population projections.

Climate data

Economic data such as:

Labour force data

Income

Median Household prices

Building approvals data

Agricultural production

Commodity exports

Major regional projects

Tourism data

Social data including:

Health services information

Internet usage

Education data such as school enrolments, highest level of schooling, types of non-school qualifications

Household type data

Family type data, and

Relationships in household data.

(ii) Links to existing services and data relevant to the region

Through the establishment of collaborative arrangements with a range of government, industry and community and CQRIS member organisations, the portal framework facilitates links to websites providing information about existing services, regional events and alternative sources of information.

The Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) utilises this feature by providing a link from the portal to the FBA website. The portal provides alternative access point for people looking for information on FBA and the Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability (CQSS) network. (FBA response)

(iii) Information including community newsletters, statistical brochures and reports on major issues

As indicated in the previous statement, the establishment of collaborative partnerships with various government and non-government organisations, access to various newsletters, statistical brochures and reports are easily accessible through the CQRIS portal. Currently community newsletters such as newsletters: 60s and better, CQANM newsletters, CQRIS newsletters, News items are accessible through the portal. Similarly, statistical brochures such as Local Government Area profiles, Regional Development Economic profiles and various other profiles are also available. Further to this, publications such as the State of the Environment, State of the Region and other reports on major issues impacting on the communities with the Central Queensland area are available.

Background/Issues

Social and economic issues will play a greater role in NRM decision-making. Social and economic assessments need to be integrated into planning and investment decisions if the social and economic considerations associated with the establishment of NRM targets are to be taken into account and good investment decisions are to be made. Regional Bodies and fund providers will be interested in maximising the benefits from investments in NRM strategies from available resources.

The project's aims are:

- integration of social and economic assessment at various stages of NRM planning within the NAP framework including plan making, impact assessment of key investment proposals, social and economic criteria for funds allocation and appropriate indicators for monitoring;
- support for regions to implement their planning frameworks through identification, development and promotion of a range of economic and social indicators for improved land management practices for salinity and water quality outcomes that regions may seek to apply as part of their NRM strategies;
- development of mechanisms (with particular emphasis on local government) to integrate existing national, state and regional social and economic data sets into NAP planning strategies through emerging regional information systems such as CQRIS for online access, data protocols and management standards;
- assist in building effective relationships between regional bodies and key stakeholders by providing a 'one stop shop' for information sharing

Regional planning frameworks will need to be supported by mechanisms which encourage property by property decision making and actions which, contribute towards a desired outcome. This will require an understanding of the key economic and social drivers and indicators leading to natural resource management degradation at the regional and catchment scale.

This in turn means obtaining a greater understanding of key economic and social pressures on the users and managers of land and other resources and the nature of incentives and disincentives that currently influence NRM behaviour or limit best practice.

There is a need to explore and develop the types of mechanisms that have the potential to deliver more cost-effective natural resource and environmental outcomes. The aim of CQRIS is to have an effective information 'shop' that regional NRM bodies, local government and other stakeholders can apply at the regional level to supplement other policy and legislative mechanisms as part of regional strategies to target NRM issues.

In the context of protecting and improving water quality and avoiding salinity arising, regional NRM bodies and local governments need relevant and timely information with which to make decisions on a daily basis. This information needs to be provided at the regional or catchment level and be relevant to the local dimension. The need to provide mechanisms to integrate existing social and economic data sets at a regional scale into NAP planning activities through emerging regional information systems such as CQRIS is essential.

Development of the Fitzroy NRM Plan (CQSS2) meant the need for information. Fitzroy Basin Association spent over a year carrying out community consultation to develop biophysical targets for the plan. However, FBA was not able to establish socio-economic targets that could indicate condition due to the lack of knowledge and data. State Investment Projects such as the incorporation of social and economic considerations (SEO) provided FBA with this opportunity. Developing social and economic targets is a very high priority because targets will give an indication about the social and economic changes occurring. Changes in natural resource management can also impact on the social and economic condition of a community. *(FBA response)*

The CQRIS project was to focus on a case study area (Fitzroy Basin area) in the first instance but look to extend the knowledge learned to other NAP regions. This has already been achieved with documentation from the CQRIS project being made available to the FNQ RIMS Project so as to help that region launch its own RIS. Testimonial from FNQ Regional Information Management System is below.

'The North Queensland Planning Division's (NQPDP) Regional Planning Unit in Cairns was given the responsibility earlier this year to re-invigorate the Far North Queensland Regional Plan. This process involved coordinating the implementation of Priority Projects, as identified by the region's ICG (Implementation Coordination Group). The Far North Queensland Regional Information Management System (FNQ RIMS) was considered to be of the highest priority amongst regional planning projects in Far North Queensland. In researching this project, NQPDP learnt that we (Central Queensland) had just recently completed the development of our own information system, the Central Queensland Regional Information System (CQ RIS).

Our CQ RIS proved to be a valuable resource for the North Queensland Planning Division in the development of their FNQ RIMS. The Regional Planning Unit benefited substantially from the CQ RIS, as the FNQ team was able to dramatically reduce their development costs and the estimated timeframe of the project by leveraging off the work done by us (Central Queensland). We (Central Queensland) consented to the NQPDP utilising the information employed in the development of the RIS, including everything from the projects requirements specification document and design elements, to documentation on its implementation process and communications plan.

Owing to the development of the CQ RIS, NQPDP were informed of the potential pitfalls and shortcuts involved in creating a regional information system. They were also able to engage the services of the same I.T. consultants, who by then had become familiar with the process and what was expected. Throughout the development of the RIMS, we (Central Queensland) were able to offer the NQPDP advice and suggestions based on our own experience with the RIS. The Regional Planning Unit in Cairns has expressed their gratitude to Central Queensland for all their assistance and involvement throughout the preparation and development of the RIMS project and likewise, has offered their support where possible in future endeavours.'

2. Achievements against Objectives

- Adopt professional business principles by drawing upon partner skills/knowledge;
Achieved

Through the planning, development and implementation phases of the CQRIS Portal project, the steering committee has established strong collaborative partnerships with other government, industry and community stakeholders. For instance, CQRIS steering committee has utilised the skills and resources of the Office of Economic and Statistical Research, the expertise of Central Queensland University's Population Research Lab and the Planning and Forecasting Unit, Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation. These collaborative partnerships have been formalised through service agreements and consultancies.

- Consult with internet service and information providers to ascertain requirements to establish a portal

Completed – portal designed and launched – cqrisk.com.au

Prior to the design and development of the portal framework, extensive research was undertaken to identify and evaluate existing portal structures, identify potential developers, determine approximate development costs and charges, evaluate the quality and usability of their products and determine the IT infrastructure and maintenance arrangements required to sustain the portal post the conclusion of the project. Stakeholder groups were canvassed extensively during this period. Needs of each group were determined and a range of options that could facilitate these needs were considered. Given one of the driving issues for most stakeholder groups was the sustainability of a regional information system, the services and ongoing support available through GOVNET were considered and determine the most feasible, to ensure the long-term sustainability of the portal product.

- Establish priorities of data requirements with governments, local business, community groups and individuals

Achieved

An extensive stakeholder consultation phase was undertaken prior to the design and development of the portal framework. This involved face-to-face meetings with representatives of interested agencies, the provision of two planning workshops and the engagement of a consultant to analyse the diversity of stakeholder needs and to develop appropriate technical specifications to meet the needs of stakeholders. In addition to the partnerships with the ABS, OESR, FBA and Members of CQRIS were formalised through service agreements and Memorandums of Understandings.

FBA attended the CQRIS Workshop in August 2003. FBA joined a number of stakeholders in discussing several components of the project:

- How socio-economic data is used in NRM planning
- Appropriate socio-economic indicators
- Current collection and analysis methodologies
- Identify basic socio-economic datasets
- Tying CQRIS project with other information SIPS (SEO1 and IMO1)

FBA was also invited to be on the CQRIS Project Team to assist the project with community NRM data requirements. FBA provided the following data requirements:

- Data sets that indicate social viability and business resilience will be used to set and monitor social and economic targets set forward in the Fitzroy NRM Plan – Central Queensland Strategy for Sustainability 2 – 2004 and Beyond.
- Information has to be linked spatially on three levels – catchment, property and local government.

- Provision of data obtained from past FBA consultation activities carried out to develop FBA's NRM plan (CQSS 2).

➤ Adopt a project management methodology for application and infrastructure development
Completed – Refer Appendix 2

➤ Identify and support community ownership using expertise from the wider community
In progress

The portal infrastructure facilitates the involvement and expertise of the wider community through collaborative partnership arrangements member registration processes. For instance, through collaborative partnership arrangements with organisations such as the Office of Economic and Statistical Research and Central Queensland University a range of statistical reports, survey analysis and regional research findings has been sourced for dissemination through the portal structure. Similarly, individuals and organisations alike can register as a member of the CQRIS portal network—as a member, organisations/ individuals can then access specific types of data through the 'members' section, upload data, record details in events calendars, and promote the conduct/ findings of research etc.

(FBA response) Despite the benefits CQRIS portal provides to decision makers there is an obvious opportunity for the public to utilise this resource. FBA can see the value that a tool like this can offer to the community and it is imperative that community ownership is maintained otherwise it won't be used. This is the big difference between information systems such as Regional Information Service (IMO1) and Queensland Regional Information System - CQRIS is CQ local.

➤ Develop protocols to establish access requirements to data
Developed

Agreement signed with ABS and approvals granted with other providers of data. GIS access applications approvals held by Govnet (since handed over to Information Queensland)

➤ Establish and/or existing groups to provide input into the development of the site

The CQRIS working group was formed early in the planning and development phase to guide the structure and content of the system. Currently this working group meets fortnightly. In addition to this working group, CQRIS stakeholders participate in regional statistical networks and planning groups as a strategy to identify new data/information sources and negotiate access to these. Linkages with various sectors groups are also maintained to keep abreast of new data sources, regional events or research being undertaken, and also to inform the type and level of data appropriate for dissemination through the portal.

➤ Link establishment to other sites

Through various collaborative partnerships and regional network arrangements, access to a diverse range of sites managed by government, non-government and community organisations have been established where applicable. To ensure the integrity and reliability of data and information accessible through the portal is maintained at all times, a checklist criteria is utilised to determine the appropriateness of sites linked through the CQRIS framework.

3. Outcomes and Challenges

Outcomes

The project is to have a system that is designed to integrate and deliver a wide range of social and economic information drawn from a number of key sources that regional bodies can access from a common web browser, which will be the front-end of a robust back-end service. In addition the service will provide effective integration of spatial, textual and database information in a form that is readily usable by local government and regional bodies for the purposes of natural resource management.

Final Intended Outcomes of the development of a CQRIS web portal include:

- A distributed network providing a pathway to information from both public and private sources
- Provision of adequate infrastructure to support CQRIS across the region
- Equitable access to information across the region
- A service that will enable business and industry to make sound decisions in respect to their current activities or potential activities in the region
- Development of institutional arrangements to enable access to information
- A data interpretation service to enable the transfer of data into meaningful information
- Improved decision making based on accurate, timely and meaningful information
- Development of socio-economic profiles based on catchment boundaries
- SEO2 project developed CQRIS, a tool that could help FBA access the appropriate social and economic data to make informed decisions and select SMART socio-economic targets.

Unintended Outcomes

Unintended outcomes of the project included:

- Access to Govnet server provider
- Access to data sources located through Govnet provider that was not considered
- Collaborative partnership with Office of Economic and Statistical Research (OESR)
- Collaborative partnership with Central Queensland University for social data

Because the project was granted access to the GOVNET server site, it enabled the project to save costs that would have been associated with IT infrastructure of approximately \$50000. As a result, this project savings were directed towards building an interactive map page on the web portal as well as directing the savings to acquiring additional data for the site.

Challenges Encountered

A number of challenges were encountered over the duration of the project.

- Continual conflict between the operational agendas of collaborating organisations, resulted difficulties in coordinating working group meetings, securing organisational representation at stakeholder meetings and securing the provision of statistical and economic data from stakeholder organisations within a designated timeframe.
- Lack of participation by stakeholders, including NRM body and State Agencies
- Lack of commitment to the project by stakeholders
- Lack of response from external providers of data

4. Partnership Formation

The commencement of this project necessitated the formation of a collaborative partnership with the SEO1 project so as to identify and assist with making available to the Regional NRM Body, Fitzroy Basin Association, access to social and economic data needed by them.

In addition, an informal partnership was also established with the IMO1 project, mainly with the goal of avoiding duplication of work.

The essential partnership that was formed nearly from the beginning of the project was the alliance formed with the GOVNET personnel and the web designers engaged for the project. The alliance with GOVNET personnel was critical to the development of the web portal site on GOVNET facilities.

The foundation partnership for the duration of the project however was the formation of the 'Working Group' for the web portal site. Even though this group was only a small group, it was this group that kept the project on track. This group comprised of officers from the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation, Office of Economic and Statistical Research, Fitzroy Basin Association and Rockhampton Regional Development.

5. Learnings

Key learnings

- Length of time taken to create and maintain relationships with various stakeholder groups.
- Identifying the need for and moulding an inter-organisational communication protocol to ensure all stakeholders are continually engaged in the development of the portal and the selection of content through regular communications—a monthly newsletter and email mailing list were introduced as one strategy to meet this need.
- Time usage of 'web' developer (conflicting projects)—need to specify timelines such as product delivery deadlines for each stage of the development process.
- Operation/ development processes of 'web' developers. ie Need to set parameters for various stages of the development process with well defined specifications to contain and control development costs, given the tendency of web developers to charging by an hourly rate rather than contract arrangement.
- Making 'web' developer/designer understand and identify with the shared vision of the portal working group.
- Nurturing a shared vision of the portal to stimulate proactive, rather than reactive participation of working group members and other collaborative stakeholders.

Information gaps

- Region-specific social well-being data hard to identify and capture.
- Small-area economic data not produced for all communities within focus regions. This was particularly an issue in the context of agricultural data that has not been produced at the small-area level since 2002. This was a pertinent issue given that high degree of agricultural production in many of the focus regions.

Risks

- Collaborative stakeholders not monitoring and updating their areas of the web portal.
- Host site availability.
- Policy change by government erodes support for project.
- Access to required ABS data without restrictions.
- Continuing of project funding post NAP funding. This is an important issue as it will influence the maintenance and enhancement of portal in the future.
- Lack of commitment to the project by stakeholders over time—if stakeholders do not regularly maintain their portal links or update data as required, the currency and validity of the portal as source of regional information will be compromised.
- Unavailability of personnel at key times, such as web designer.
- Loss of key members of project team—it is important to encourage stakeholders to take responsibility for the ongoing upload of new data and information, and administer aspects of the

site which relate to their core business, so that the success and maintenance of the portal is not solely reliant on the availability and assignment of project personnel to manage the framework.

- Loss of delegations within stakeholder organisations—each organisation needs to ensure that at least one staff member (position) is delegated responsibility for maintaining the currency of that organisation's information and data uploaded to the portal.
- Reliance on external partners for specialist skills – eg. IT development

6. Implications for the Plan, RIS and future direction of the regional NRM body

Further questions to be answered, e.g. research required, data needed

Consultation with member organizations and key stakeholders is ongoing, so that data needs are identified and responded to through the portal. Working Group members are also continuing to secure new data, access to research and contributing to the collection of data across the region through the development of new collaborative partnerships with various corporate, government and academic entities.

CQRIS has been chosen as the focus topic of a PhD study due to commence in early 2006. Factors influencing information seekers choice of information source, and the value of a region-specific information portal, are just two research questions to be considered. Member organisations will be surveyed at various intervals to determine usage trends, including the number of return visits to the site, change in the use of the portal, and on-line questionnaires will also be utilised to capture feedback on the value and relevance of the portal to users information needs. Findings of the PhD study will be used to inform the future development and refinement of the information system.

Where to now – Recommendations for action

The success and sustainability of the portal is dependent upon the commitment of the local NRM regional body and the collaborating stakeholders. It is in the interest of the regional body in this region, as the key stakeholder, to ensure the continued viability of the web portal by promoting the system to its members and encouraging its use as the first source of information in decision making processes, strategic planning and the development of future natural resource management programs.

Documentation for the RIS web portal has also been produced to facilitate the implementation of this web portal framework by other regional NRM bodies throughout the State. A package of the documentation has been developed for distribution. In this package there are the Requirements Specification documentation and the Technical Specification documentation that will assist regional NRM bodies develop their own web portals. It is envisioned that the development of other information portals, will facilitate the linking up of subsequent portals to develop a comprehensive regional information framework for all communities and NRM bodies across Queensland.

Strategies for progressing these issues and a proposed timeline for action

It is essential that the portal information system is included in their Regional Body's investment strategy, as one strategy to address the issue of ongoing funding for the maintenance of the technology infrastructure and the currency and relevance of the data and information accessible through the site.

Consequences if recommendations are not progressed

The key consequence of the Regional Body not taking up this issue is that the data currently accessible through the RIS will quickly become outdated and irrelevant to the information needs of stakeholder groups and communities within the catchment area. Currently, alternative funding options from other sources such as through CQRIS stakeholder organisations such as the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation are being investigated to ensure the sustainability of the site.

Communication Strategy

How will the site be promoted in Central Queensland following the launch.

- Investigate the feasibility of outdoor advertising, such as billboards or banners.
- Publicise the portal website in stakeholder newsletters.
- Negotiate with stakeholder organisations to have a CQRIS 'banner' at the top of key regional websites.
- A mobile display used for promotion of portal website.
- 'Roadshow' to promote and train stakeholders in the use of the web portal.
- Ask partners and stakeholders to create linkages on their home page of their websites to the portal site.
- Word of mouth – a significant innovative aspect of the CQRIS is that it is community driven, and as such will act as a conduit to the community on the aims of CQRIS.
- Portal link distributed by email to all schools and the Central Queensland University.
- Negotiate with CQU library to promote the use of CQRIS for statistical data during orientation sessions at the start of each University semester.
- Negotiate for promotional materials to be displayed at local libraries.
- Negotiate with local libraries to have CQRIS page as home page on their community access internet stations.
- Negotiate with Queensland Education, Department of Education and Training, Catholic Education and Non-Government Schools to install CQRIS as default Internet Screen.
- Establish links with Member web sites to promote use of the portal.
- Media releases through Minister's office.
- Promotion of site through Statistical Liaison Officers network (OESR Chair)
- Promotion of site through CQRIS newsletter.
- Promotion of site at Beef 2006 International Event Rockhampton
- Project briefs to the CQ A New Millennium Steering Committee.

How will site be promoted to other Regional Bodies in the State?

- Linkages setup to other SIP created web sites.
- SIPS Newsletter updates.
- Other Regional Bodies invited to attend training / promotional workshops.
- CQRIS Newsletter.

How will success of strategy be measured?

- Number of 'hits' to the portal web site 'Home Page'.
- Response/feedback from online questionnaires and stakeholder surveys.
- Number of new collaborating partners willing to contribute to the enhancement of the portal through provision of new information and data.
- Frequency of information and data updates administered by Portal member organisations and stakeholder groups.
- Change in diversity of portal content.

Recommendations for the future

- Sustainability of the web portal. Future funding will be required to maintain the currency of data on the site. To this end it will be necessary to register the CQRIS site as a Business Name in its own right so as to maximise its potential to funding sources as a not for profit entity. Its sustainability will also be examined as part of the Position Description of the Project Officer through the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation.

- The RIS is a strategy of the Regional Growth Management Framework that forms part of the CQ A New Millennium Regional Planning Project and as such its sustainability for the future will be maintained.
- Continued promotion and enhancement of the site for information delivery across Central Queensland will be required.

7. Total Project or Activity funding details including leverage

Funding for the SEO2 project is outlined in the table below.

In-kind contributions from the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation for this project accounted for \$55 000 for each year of the project. This in-kind support to the RIS will be ongoing after the completion of the NAP funded project.

	Proponent Funds	Other Leverage Contributions 1*	Other Leverage Contributions 2*	NHT/NAP/NLP Funds	Total Project Funds
Approved	NIL	NIL	NIL	500000.00	500000.00
Received	NIL	NIL	NIL		

	Proponent Funds	Other Leverage Contributions 1*	Other Leverage Contributions 2*	NHT/NAP/NLP Funds	Total Project Funds
Expended	NIL	NIL	NIL	500000.00	500000.00
Unspent	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
TOTAL				500000.00	500000.00

* Provide names of other organisations contributing. You should be aware that not all potential contributors' funds are eligible to be matched with NHT funds. Other contributor funds may need clarifying as well.

8. Appendices

- Appendix 1 December 31 2005 Final Quarter Report
- Appendix 2 Project Process Overview
- Appendix 3 Final Audit Report
- Appendix 4 Sample Site links
- Appendix 5 Sample Testimonials
- Appendix 6 Statistics Report