

1. Introduction

1. Background

The Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management (BMRG) was established following bilateral agreements between the State and Commonwealth for National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and Natural Heritage Trust funding. The Burnett-Mary region comprises a diverse make-up of stakeholder groups with respect to natural resource management (NRM). Stakeholder groups, described as sectors by BMRG and in this report, represented on the BMRG Board include local government (representing 27 local government authorities), catchment bodies, landcare groups, conservation or environment groups, coastal management, Traditional Owners, primary industry and secondary-tertiary industries. Other key stakeholders include infrastructure corporations, research and development bodies and educational institutions. This diversity posed some serious challenges for achieving negotiated partnerships that achieve the 'targeted' investment required in an Investment Strategy for the regional Natural Resource Management Plan.

Following a successful application for State Investment Program SEO3 funding (Social and Economic Research) in 2003, the Burnett Mary Regional Group established a partnership with the University of Queensland for a project aiming to identify appropriate partnering strategies and develop approaches to partnership agreements that would see all players understanding and accepting their roles and responsibilities and striving to operate in an integrated manner towards an coordinated investment strategy for the region. The project received limited funds in 2004 for a scoping stage and further funding in 2005.

At inception, the benefits of undertaking this research were seen to be:

- A clearer understanding of key stakeholder roles and responsibilities including acceptance and willingness to operate in an integrated manner;
- A coordinated investment strategy supported by key partners; and
- Additional funding through private and philanthropic sectors flowing on from demonstrated stakeholder commitments to the objectives of the regional NRM Plan.

2 Objectives

Specific aims for the first (scoping) year were:

1. Establish a partnership between the Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG), the School of Natural and Rural Systems Management (NRSM) at University of Queensland (UQ) and the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation (CRRIQ) to investigate most effective ways of establishing cooperative agreements between stakeholders and the BMRG to achieve NRM targets.
2. Clarify the range of stakeholders, their methods of operation and their perspectives on opportunities and constraints for contribution to regional NRM targets.
3. Identify methods of negotiating and formalising agreed contributions that are likely to suit different stakeholder groups according to findings from aim 2.
4. Identify some alternatives with a view to trying out the most prospective methods in the following year.
5. Prepare another SEO3 funding submission for trial of alternative arrangements for gaining firm commitment to the Regional Investment Strategy throughout 2005 and

development of capacity building processes needed for successfully managed partnerships.

Second year aims were to:

6. Continue the partnership between the Burnett Mary Regional Group (BMRG) and the University of Queensland (UQ) to investigate most effective ways of establishing cooperative agreements between stakeholders and the BMRG to achieve NRM targets.
7. Continue interviews with the range of stakeholders, sector by sector, to understand their methods of operation and their perspectives on opportunities and constraints for contribution to regional NRM targets.
8. Identify and pilot test methods of negotiating and formalising agreed contributions that are likely to suit different sectors according to findings from aim 2.
9. Identify, design and pilot test capacity building activities for the sectors studied in 2004, including building trust and creating or strengthening intra-sector and inter-sector relationships.
10. Prepare external funding submissions for pilot testing forms of agreement suited to particular sectors studied in 2005, and further exploration and development of capacity building strategies.
11. Network among SE03 project teams under clusters 1 and 2, to compare findings and strategies across regions and provide guidance for other regional bodies.

2. Methods

The first year project was based on partnership building and scoping to develop a more intensive research proposal for the next round of funding (i.e. the 2004 submission). The research team firstly needed to become familiar with current progress in NRM planning and then needed to keep up with the rapid progress as BMRG drove towards a NRM plan. As well as telephone and face to face project team meetings, familiarisation was through (a) observation at three Board meetings, (b) attendance at four Roundtables scheduled with members to gain feedback on issues related to development of the NRM Plan and determine priority investments, and (c) consultation with BMRG staff coordinating this project and community support officers running meetings with various sector and locality groups.

Stakeholder analysis and selection of interviewees

Stakeholder analysis involves identification of the parties which affect, or are affected by, the achievement of an organisation's objectives or an issue (Freeman 1984). It traditionally identifies the parties, their interests, and the influence and importance they have with regard to achieving objectives of an activity or project. *Influence* refers to how powerful a stakeholder is (to wield positive or negative effects on the project); *importance* is about how important is the cooperation of this stakeholder for the success of the project. Other classifications (Mitchell et al. 1997, Elias et al. 2002) classify stakeholders according to their degrees of power, legitimacy, and the urgency of their interests. Stakeholder analyses can be tiered: identifying broad categories, perhaps sub-categories, then perhaps organisations and individuals within those categories if direct contact will be needed. Confusion can sometimes arise from the use of the term 'stakeholder' to refer either to the main category, or to the individuals and groups comprising it.

By the time this study commenced the BMRG had already undertaken some preliminary stakeholder analysis, identifying the major stakeholder groupings or 'sectors' concerned with natural resource management and its consequences in the Burnett and Mary catchments. We therefore used the BMRG membership list as the foundation for further stakeholder analysis and identification of interviewees. We followed the lead set by BMRG in classifying individual and organisation members into sector (stakeholder) categories. Catchment bodies form a sector by themselves, as do landcare groups and local government authorities. The conservation sector includes advocacy-focused groups, local environmental action groups and environmental interest groups such as the Society for Growing Australian Plants. Individuals expressing interest in conservation are also included in this sector. The coastal management sector includes tourism interests, environmental management groups and fishing industry, as well as related management agencies. The primary industries sector contains both industry groups and individuals representing the grazing, cropping, horticulture, dairying, sugarcane and forestry industries. The Traditional Owner sector mainly comprises elders from the 10 Aboriginal groups in the region, although it also has some members from Aboriginal support organisations.

Stakeholders were then also categorised by locality – upper, middle and lower Mary; north, central, south and lower Burnett; and Baffle Creek. Burrum River catchment falls between the Mary and Burnett catchments but was included with lower Mary. Interviewees were selected from the members list using this categorisation into sectors and localities for the Landcare, Catchment bodies, Conservation, Coastal management and Local government sectors. For the Secondary-tertiary sector, where non-members were interviewed, businesses linked to use of natural resources were selected from a list comprising all identifiable businesses from selected

categories in the Yellow Pages directories fitting the Region, with an attempt to cover relevant localities.

Strategic Perspectives Analysis

The Strategic Perspectives Analysis (SPA) approach (Dale and Lane 1994) offers a basis for systematically comparing a set of stakeholders in terms of their commonalities and opportunities for shared goal-attainment. It typically involves interviews structured according to objectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints, with repeat interviews to seek clarifications and confirmation. The analysis is qualitative, conceptually ‘mapping’ which stakeholders share interests, and how. It offers a useful theoretical basis and method for collaborative regional management and may lead to advice on negotiation.

For the SPA interviews in this project, it was decided to work towards objectives from familiar ground by discussing ‘issues’ – a topic that was at the time, subject to consultation between BMRG and the sectors.

After reviewing previous applications of Strategic Perspectives Analysis, we prepared a draft interview schedule aiming to identify each organisation’s visions and objectives, perceptions about natural resource management responsibilities, opportunities, constraints and investment options. The sequence of questions was altered after a pilot test with a BMRG Board member to focus firstly on issues rather than visions. The question schedule used for interviews is available at Appendix 1. This schedule was modified for the non-member secondary and tertiary interviews to obtain information about knowledge of BMRG and the NRM Plan. This modified schedule is also shown in Appendix 1.

An attempt was made to form ‘sector’ views about issues, opportunities and constraints by pooling comments by representatives from each sector. These were then applied to the readiness to partner questions extracted from sets proposed by Felkins (2002).

Search for alternatives

The search for principles for partnership formation and alternative arrangements to secure investment strategies included literature on partnerships for environmental management in Australia and overseas, as well as corporate business partnerships, alliances for delivery of social objectives and green alliances between companies and environmental organisations.

To further investigate alternative arrangements, we contacted Regional bodies in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia as well as Queensland regarding forms of partnership agreement they use, and on a visit to Victoria, met with managers or planning officers of six Catchment Management Authorities.

In the literature review, we looked for specific information about conditions for effective collaboration and agreements under certain conditions, such as the need for flexibility with accountability and the need for social as well as financial accountability.

Identifying readiness to form partnerships and associated capacity needs

Based on the readings, we created a classification of partnerships according to type of collaboration and commitment involved, ranging from outright objection to long-term community partnership. Drawing on principles developed by Felkins (2002), we explored the stage of readiness for each sector to form partnerships within the classification scale with BMRG and among themselves (primarily by asking questions about need, rules, relationships and culture).

Workshops were to be used as a means of paving the way for partnership agreements with each sector. Focus was to be on the *Responsiveness* and *Shared understanding* cues provided by Felkins, leading as far towards formal accountability as 'readiness' permitted. In practice, BMRG and other organisations' operational needs made this plan impracticable in many instances, although a workshop for the formation of a cross-sector water quality monitoring alliance provided a valuable trial of process.

To assess capacity building needs for partnerships, a series of statements or questions about capacity factors required for partnership formation and maintenance was extracted from the Capacity Assessment Tool (Cavaye 2005). Each statement was rated on a 5 (high capacity or achievement) to 1 scale by staff familiar with partnership activities by members of a particular cluster. Further discussion of the low-rated items provided a basis for designing capacity building activity.

Recommended partnership models.

Based on first first-hand observations and discussions within each sector, learnings from the literature and discussions with people in other NRM Regions, and past experiences and studies in social aspects of NRM, recommendations for future partnership development were made for each Burnett Mary Region sector. These recommendations were developed in conjunction with proposed models for consideration by BMRG and other regional bodies in relation to landcare groups, catchment bodies, local government, cross sector partnerships and business-community partnerships.

Sequence of activities

We had proposed two years for the second phase objectives, with emphasis on completing interviews and readiness to partner assessment, with some identification and design of capacity enhancement activities in the first year. In the second year emphasis was intended on testing capacity building activities, with some partnering negotiation (see the study plan shown in Appendix 2). Funding, although sought, was not obtained for a second year and so parts of the original aims were not completed.

The diagram also indicates two clusters of sector investigation. Cluster A sectors are those interviewed in 2004: catchment bodies, landcare groups, conservation groups and local government. Cluster B sectors, new to the project in 2005, were primary industry, secondary and tertiary industry, coastal management and Traditional Owners. Although R&D organisations and Infrastructure corporations are included in the diagram, they were not included in 2005 studies. Interviews were conducted with coastal and secondary/tertiary industry representatives. Interaction with Traditional Owners was by joint facilitation by a CRRI-Q staff member (Scott Gorrington) at fora organised by the BMRG support officer for the Traditional Owner sector.