

4. Results for Cluster A (First phase sectors) (Landcare, Catchments, Conservation, Local government)

Results are given here for the sectors interviewed in 2004, covering responses to the strategic perspectives analysis (SPA) interviews and then interpretation of these responses in terms of readiness for partnership. Recommendations regarding partnership formation and capacity needs are given for each sector.

Perceived issues identify areas where organisations are likely to commit energy and in-kind contribution towards Plan targets. As well as providing information that could be added to other data collected by BMRG on issues, the issues question *'what do you consider to be the most important issues for the subcatchment [or area] in terms of management and use of the land, water and vegetation resources?'* provided a comfortable lead into the SPA process. As well as identifying natural resource management issues, interviewees also spoke about relationships, attitudes and support needs.

Interviewees took differing approaches to handling the aims and opportunities questions (*What then do you think should be the main aims in planning for natural resource management in the region? How do your organisation's aims relate to those we have just described for the catchment? What opportunities do you see for achieving these aims for the catchment? Why do these opportunities exist? Do you see other opportunities for better natural resource management in this catchment?*). This made it difficult to draw together themes within sectors. The extracts below show the different emphases between the sectors in their aims and in perceived opportunities offered by a regional approach.

Our attempt to identify readiness for partnership is developed in two ways. Firstly, direct responses to the questions exploring commitment to agreement and partnership opportunities during interviews provided some information, though interviewees were not at that time really geared to considering their own activities in relation to contents of the regional plan. Secondly, we have applied the information collected throughout the interviews to the questions offered by Felkins (2002) to analyse needs and opportunities, roles, relationships and cultural factors in an attempt to identify readiness to form agreement. Appendix 5 in the 2005 interim report (Keith & Ross 2005a) provides more answers to Felkin's questions than are shown in the following text.

4.1 Catchment and Landcare sectors

Issues:

Issues of a bio-physical nature (mainly falling within the water, land and biodiversity assets) raised by catchment and landcare groups are detailed in Appendix 3. Water (quantity and quality) and weeds were (as to be expected) frequently mentioned. For catchment groups, river issues were most important (environmental flows; impact on Great Sandy Strait; riverbank slippage in tidal areas; riparian zone). Another important biodiversity issue was the fractured pattern of remnant vegetation across the whole landscape. Land issues included rural production sustainability; soil structure decline, salinity and acidification.

Interviewees also raised issues about support and community attitudes. Support comments included: we have been cut off from traditional support from state agencies (loss of corporate

memory with loss of experienced government officers); need implementation tools but the science lies metres thick on shelves, no structure to implement; Councils are not taking the environmental action needed; need recognition of catchment group and strategy. Need for attitudinal change was identified in relation to: land and property rights; priority given to short-term development; community understanding of benefits of sustainability; and whole community involvement, investment and support (money is going to the coast).

Aims

Suggested regional aims to deal with natural resource management issues included:

- promote efficient water use to meet needs for cropping, city water supply and environmental flows; education on use of underground water
- on-ground work in the catchment; get implementation going on the ground; involve the community to help solve the problems – hands on planting, weeding, plant identification
- river management: reduce point sources from dairy farms, feedlots, sewage, urban development; get back the riparian zones; endangered species
- biodiversity conservation: strong focus on riparian areas and education about weeds
- weed management – cats claw, giant rats tail, lantana, parthenium, African love grass; weed awareness
- practices for sustainable grazing management; farmers have an entrepreneurial spirit but still a pioneer society
- work to triple bottom line for vitality of the community: target long term unemployment and socially disadvantaged
- close working relationship with landcare groups in the area; it is difficult to operate without each other
- assist existing producers to adjust to change e.g. dairy farmers
- education and training for new small landholders
- visits to farms that are doing something and bus trips to look at things in other districts
- education of the whole community, especially including recreational people
- influence government policy where we can.

Discussion of aims by catchment groups and most landcare groups was under-threaded by frustration that the aims and processes they had in place have been hampered by new planning activity, and non-availability of funds. (Comments about wanting to complete what ‘we’ already have started and opportunities for others to follow the approach ‘we’ have set up reflect this). However, mixed with this was some optimism that better attention to whole-of-catchment needs and linking of social, economic and environmental objectives might occur. Stated aims depended much on the stage of progress in integrated catchment management that the groups had achieved.

Opportunities

Opportunities through a regional approach mentioned during catchment and landcare interviews (2004) included:

- It gives scope for broader thinking – from inland to the coast – options to draw on wider volunteering interests. Realisation that whatever happens at the head of the river flows down
- Work towards three points of sustainability – economic, environmental, socially acceptable
- Opportunity with regional approach to transfer knowledge into projects that work
- Implement the EPBC Act and the Vegetation Management Act
- deal with causes not symptoms
- if we can rebuild the riparian areas, we can turn things around
- water supply improvements including desalination proposal
- preserve the natural features of the catchment

- attack giant rats tail grass – convince the community that it is going to affect them
- develop relationships (e.g. elderly people) to get people interested in, for example, weed program
- Use our model of training and partnerships with landholders
- We have expertise and could spread it over the whole region (frustrated about own knowledge not being used).

Commitments to action

Catchment groups sector comments (2004) on what the organisation would be committed to (or conditions for commitment):

- communication is most important
- interest in participation in NRM plan goals would depend on the practicality for the people in this area – regional flexibility is needed so that methods can be adapted to suit different areas
- devolvement of funds for catchment association to implement ‘how we see fit’
- there was some interest in a true partnership; others thought that would not be an equal partnership but that more consultation is needed
- want BMRG to assist with development of a communication strategy
- reference to MOU already in place; we have an MOU with BMRG, it is very loose – words on paper
- Catchment Association could administer projects in cooperation with councils
- Catchment Association has demonstrated capacity but has been ignored
- strategy needs a way to channel money to catchment groups – to disperse to people on the ground for on-ground work
- BMRG employs consultants while groups could do the work – high cost of bureaucracy
- mistakes were made in the tendering process re the water quality monitoring but it is time to get on with it - need to keep in sight what the real aim is rather than concentrating on battles.

Landcare sector comments (2004) on what the organisation would be committed to (or conditions for commitment):

- this will depend on what is in the Plan – will have a look at the Plan and see what problems it tackles and if we would like to get involved in them
- we need to see that problems in areas of our interest are going to be addressed – a need for us to be listened to rather than slotted in and expected to do something
- we don’t have a problem with working to agreed outcomes if outcomes are clearly defined and we think achievable and realistic
- would like a regional body that provides funds to work on strategic priorities and helps facilitate better outcomes
- there is too much to be done; the only way is through effective partnerships: want equal partner role
- have current partnerships with the shire but horizons are too short
- the partnership agreement approach used for the Sustainable Grazing Project across all landcare groups seems OK.
- present funding is good – know exactly what we have to work on; but it is only for one year – needs to be ongoing – need to be able to plan and work it through
- BMRG appears to be trying to ensure we are not snowed under with paperwork
- hope it produces some really good 3-5 year projects; there has to be money for on-ground maintenance

Regional Partnership Agreements Burnett Mary, July 2006

- hope for open and clear communication and consultation; with trust to do what needs to be done
- we would like to partner in a biodiversity scheme, baseline data audit and ground truthing, property management planning extension for practical NRM outcomes, forestry extension, urban stormwater infrastructure.

Some catchment groups felt at the time that they should be provided funds to carry out the catchment management strategies that they have already developed. They would be responsible for dispersing money to subgroups. They would also maintain strong links with Councils and carry out projects jointly with Council. Catchment groups felt they did not have appropriate project management roles under the regional system and this hindered further partnership formation. Some landcare groups seemed to be in 'wait and see' mode at the time of interviews, and it needs to be noted that when some interviews were carried out, the regional offer of support funding for landcare groups was not fully in place.

Readiness for partnership

The following tables show our comments about readiness for catchment groups and landcare groups to form partnerships; based on a selection of questions posed for consideration by Felkins (2002) and information from interviews held in 2004.

Catchment groups

Felkins readiness criteria	Estimated state: catchment groups in 2004
<p>Need or opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why is the agreement needed at this time</i> • <i>Is it related to a specific crisis or problem</i> • <i>What responsiveness or readiness do people have for making this agreement</i> • <i>What are stories being told about need for agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement is needed to enable catchment groups to resume effective functioning with access to funds for priority projects. - The crisis has been restriction of access to funding over the past two years, causing decline in progress and increase in frustration. - Readiness for agreement is high though some resentment probably makes establishment of agreement difficult. - A story about water quality tenders not being accepted is a sticking point.
<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the specific roles related to the agreement</i> • <i>Are these roles formally written or based on informal norms</i> • <i>Is this a short term or long term relationship</i> • <i>How are individual roles defined in this agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage projects to meet targeted outcomes for NRM in the catchment. - MOU established with two groups; may need to be reviewed. - Long term. - Individual roles of catchment groups and BMRG set out in MOU.
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the level of trust among the people making this agreement</i> • <i>What past history and shared experiences influence relationships</i> • <i>What are the common values that participants share</i> • <i>What stories and narratives characterise relationships in this organisation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - currently low on the part of catchment groups. - Past history in terms of formation of BMRG covering diverse catchments has meant that some catchments have felt their worth is not recognised sufficiently. - Common values are belief in importance of land ethic and use of community catchment management approach. - Stories are of reinventing the wheel, unwillingness to recognise capabilities and lack of communication.
<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the values and ideology related to making and keeping agreements</i> • <i>What stories do people tell in terms of past agreements</i> • <i>How effective is the organisation in collaborative problem solving</i> • <i>Does the organisation encourage more formal or informal agreements</i> 	<p>More information on each catchment group seems needed to answer these questions.</p>

Landcare groups

Felkins readiness criteria	Estimated state: Landcare in 2004
<p>Need or opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why is the agreement needed at this time</i> • <i>Is it related to a specific crisis or problem</i> • <i>What responsiveness or readiness do people have for making this agreement</i> • <i>What are stories being told about need for agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement is needed to enable landcare groups to function effectively with access to funds for priority local projects. - Lack of access to funding over the past two years (decline in progress, increase in frustration and loss of social capital). - Readiness for agreement is high; recent successful agreement arrangements will raise expectations of further cooperative funding. - Recent agreement made in partnership between all landcare groups is seen favourably.
<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the specific roles related to the agreement</i> • <i>Are these roles formally written or based on informal norms</i> • <i>Is this a short term or long term relationship</i> • <i>How are individual roles defined in this agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manage projects to meet targeted outcomes for NRM in the local area. - Most likely informal, although roles might be spelt out formally for specific project agreements. - Long term. - Specific to agreement.
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the level of trust among the people making this agreement</i> • <i>What are the common values that participants share</i> • <i>What stories and narratives characterise relationships in this organisation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust appears to be rebuilding from a fairly low baseline. - Common values are belief in importance of land ethic and use of community-based approach. - Information not collected about this.
<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the values and ideology related to making and keeping agreements</i> • <i>What stories do people tell in terms of past agreements</i> • <i>How effective is the organisation in collaborative problem solving</i> • <i>Does the organisation encourage more formal or informal agreements</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More information on each landcare group seems needed to answer these questions.

Many landcare groups went through the experience of being subsumed under a broader-reaching body when ICM came to the catchments. Regionalisation has not affected them in terms of roles, but they suffered from the loss of finance and other resources with the change from NHT1 to NHT2. A recent partnership process with BMRG established sound communication links and supporting funds. This provides a model for larger and longer-term associations between the landcare groups as a collective sector and BMRG. Roles should not be a problem, as landcare groups clearly see themselves as local awareness raisers, good practice educators and on-ground works facilitators – roles that are recognised by BMRG as needed for action targets to be reached.

Catchment sector update and discussion 2006

Many of the dissatisfactions and uncertainties over the role of catchment bodies mentioned above appear to be still unresolved. Although funds have been available with approval of the NRM Plan, catchment groups are still in something of a quandary about their role under the regional

structure. Some groups see themselves as catchment coordinators but currently positioned as another competitor for project funds.

The Burnett Mary Region typifies differences in formality of catchment groups, a factor that makes prescriptions for sector partnership formation rather difficult. The Mary River catchment (one of five pilot ICM catchments established in 1991) has a Catchment Coordinating Committee (MRCCC) with representation by the various natural resource management stakeholders: for instance landcare groups, rural industry, environmental groups, extractive industry and local government. Catchment Coordinating Committees such as the MRCCC were established to identify and prioritise interrelated land and water issues and develop catchment management strategies that address priority issues. The Burnett Catchment has four subcatchment groups represented on the Burnett Catchment Care Association, which has a strategic plan and attempts whole of catchment coordination, but perhaps does not have the sector-based structure of the MRCCC. Most other groups in the catchments sector appear to be closer to the more informal Catchment Care Groups provided for in the Queensland Government's 1991 Integrated Catchment Management Strategy (see further discussions on the ICM model in chapter 6, section 6.3).

With this disparity in formality and experience in project management, it is difficult for the regional body to establish a unified subcatchment management system. Different levels of readiness to coordinate and manage have posed a problem that may have contributed to BMRG's decision to establish subregional cluster areas based on local government boundaries.

The regional investment in local government clusters adds to uncertainty about the place for catchment bodies. We believe that there will be limits to the extent to which local governments are in a position to adopt a coordinating role, and that there is an argument for having project coordination at a catchment level as well as the regional level. However the differences in organisational structure and capabilities of the catchment groups do pose problems in achieving a cohesive approach to coordination. We believe that, rather than forfeit the social capital (developed and potential) generated through catchment group coordination, steps could be taken to enhance the role and enrich capacity to do it. This is discussed further in chapter 6, sections 6.3 and 6.4.

Landcare sector update and discussion 2006

Landcare groups achieved sufficient success through the networks and resources available in the first year of joint funding to make continuation of the concept a priority. The second year with extended funding has put more certainty into the working of the groups and the network, resulting in a renewed enthusiasm for education and awareness activities in sustainable farming, particularly grazing land management.

Expansion of landcare group influence is important for the region and recent activities by some groups could generate increased interest in landcare group membership and in formation of more groups. The expansion of groups without funding allowance for this poses some problems. The current level of support for each group might not be sustainable unless groups are able to generate self-supporting funds. Alternative partnership directions are discussed in chapter 6 Section 6.2. We believe some options discussed, linked with some concepts from Section 6.6 (Business – community partnerships) provide opportunity to gain wider partnership support, particularly if landcare groups form cluster-based networks.

The landcare partnership discussion in Section 6.2 also gives some pros and cons for more formal partnership arrangements between groups and BMRG, suggesting the decision be left with the landcare groups.

Landcare network in action

Groups had a number of important decisions to make on the day, including support for the continuation of the partnership under the BMRG Regional Investment Strategy and identification of continued support to groups.

The Partnership framework continues to grow strongly, particularly in the revitalisation, formation and support offered to the most recent additions to the Landcare family in the Burnett Mary.

BMRG Newsletter, April 2006

Enabling (capacity enhancement) recommendations

To assess capacity needs for partnering, we selected several questions, based largely on Cavaye's (2005) Capacity Assessment Tool, which was developed in conjunction with selected regional bodies including BMRG. Key informants rate selected statements relevant to partnership formation and maintenance, on a 5 (high) to 1 scale. Low rating items are then discussed as to the capacity enhancement needed.

The selected statements or questions are:

1. Extent of networks and contact between groups
2. How much sharing of what they know?
3. How well do they trust and cooperate?
4. How clear are roles and responsibilities?
5. Participation in NRM activities
6. How well do they operate (in partnership):
 - a) Planning
 - b) Decision-making
 - c) Implementation
 - d) Reporting
 - e) Is level of formality appropriate?
7. Adequacy of in-kind investment for partnership activities
8. Time **not** perceived as an obstruction.

In preliminary use with BMRG staff, it seems that landcare groups have formed effective network linkages during regional meetings but networking to achieve targeted project outcomes could function better. There is also room for improvement in joint planning. Question 6e on the level of formality does need discussion with the groups, with presentation of alternatives and the advantages and disadvantages of each discussed. Some alternatives for consideration are given in chapter 6, section 6.2.

Teamwork and accountability in project planning and management seems to be an important capacity building need where groups are entering into formal multiple group projects.

It should be fairly easy to adjust this 'partnership capacity' tool slightly so that it can be used to gain landcare executive members' perceptions on the statements.

4.2 Local government sector

Issues identified in 2004

In terms of the bio-physical assets, water quantity (in relation to population expansion, farmland extraction), water quality (agricultural runoff, blue-green algae, sewage) and weeds (road reserves, aquatic weeds, giant rats tail in national parks) predominated. Other bio-physical issues included river issues (erosion, silting, sand extraction) and biodiversity (corridors and timber over-extraction), and development impacts on waterways, wetlands and coastal villages. However, local government interviewees were also concerned about capacity (ability to respond and engage, ability to meet responsibilities when they are at maximum capacity now; concern about environmental expertise and ability to review the NRM Plan) and improvement in community understanding (engagement of landholders, extension services, local group support, lack of understanding of biodiversity). Appendix 3 details the issues raised during the 2004 interviews.

Aims

Suggested regional aims to address natural resource management issues included:

- draw together the draft Planning Scheme (Integrated Planning Act), draft Pest Management Plan and the draft BMRG Plan
- be involved in the NRM planning process- it will have a major impact on local government.
- water quantity and water quality and salinity objectives
- river management; we want to be involved in having clean river and maintaining the catchment
- weeds: best to use our existing pest management strategy (just need a prioritised list of regional weeds); weed management in waterways
- urban development (being dealt with through IPA Planning Scheme); coastal management needs a good balance (developers will build on anything)
- one Council's emphasis has been on noxious weeds, storm water, monitoring sewage effluent – it is going to move on storm water quality, aquifer recharge, rain-water tanks, effluent reuse
- management plan for forestry.

Although local governments often challenged the NRM regional concept by saying that they can get on with the job if they have the money, there appears to be an underlying recognition that upstream and downstream impacts are important and some level of coordination is needed. Local governments recognise a need to link their shire planning, for example through the IPA Planning Scheme, with the Regional NRM plan, if only to ensure funding assistance for environmental responsibilities. Most also acknowledge a lack of technical skill to handle the increased environmental responsibilities thrust upon them in recent years, and see an opportunity for capacity building.

Opportunities

Perceived opportunities (2004) through a regional approach included:

- coordinated catchment wide monitoring program so that we can see the issues all along the way. This will give a clearer set of objectives
- have a long term strategy with priorities and then work towards it

- identify future investment – work out where future sponsorship will come from; we can use the plan for government funding opportunities
- technical data collection (will be able to get into recording the changes in landscape)
- technical skills support to help in everyday decision making
- we could bring forward the implementation of storm water management plans if we get some assistance
- this region promotes its lifestyle – need catchment that maintains that
- cultural heritage land issues need attention
- identify what can be done on ground – better implementation and outcomes
- tie development funding to certain environmental outcomes
- rate rebate for conservation areas could be expanded considerably, and could fund farm forestry.

Commitment to action (or requirements for)

- It is too difficult to deal with all councils individually, so deal with the ROCs (Regional Organisations of Councils) – form a smaller working group within the ROC on NRM issues.
- Satisfied with devolved grants with report-back process (LG likes NHT process – funds guaranteed up front then drawn over a three-year term).
- Need longer-term projects (3-5) years. Short-term projects consume a lot of money for the extra staff needed just to get the job done.
- Need to keep amount of reporting work down.
- With PAPs would like to see the job split up with money devolved to multiple contributors rather than to a single successful tenderer as project manager (e.g. could devolve funds for LG part direct to council rather than going to a manager such as Greening Australia who then gets council involved).
- There needs to be some consideration of LG financial years.
- Like to see more local government representation on Board.
- Need for some mechanisms to achieve consultative meetings – rather than communicating by letters and forms.
- Community groups are well connected with the shire council. Funds from the region could go through the shire as council can integrate their progress to ensure they are not cutting across each other.
- Most can be achieved locally. Regional coordination is only needed for some infrastructure issues and national issues such as RAMSAR.
- For regional issues such as water quality objectives, BMRG could fund local authorities to achieve this on ground. Council could sign up for an agreed outcome in 10-15 years e.g. for streambank protection.

Regarding commitment to action, some *Local governments* with positive outlook suggested that BMRG work with a grouping of local governments through ROCs (Regional Organisation of Councils) or some other aggregation rather than individually; bearing in mind the overlapping nature (shire-wise) of most issues. They were keen to have long-term project agreements, accountable but with minimal paperwork. The NHT devolved grants system suited some. Direct engagement with BMRG was preferred to being brought into a project by a consulting tenderer. A wish to administer funds to local groups was also expressed, apparently as a means of maintaining some oversighting role on resource management activities within the shire – there was a feeling that most can be achieved locally.

Readiness for partnership

Felkins readiness criteria	Estimated state: local government in 2004
<p>Need or opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why is the agreement needed at this time</i> • <i>Is it related to a specific crisis or problem</i> • <i>What responsiveness or readiness do people have for making this agreement</i> • <i>Do people recognise a need for new ways of working together</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement is needed to link local government's NRM policy and actions to overall regional targets. - Two problems are local government parochial approach (varies), and LG need for technical and financial support to achieve integrated actions within the shire. - Readiness for agreement is high for some shires, recognising their need for expertise; while others would prefer to do the job independently if they had the money. - Appears to be limited recognition of need for new ways of working together – recognition that upstream and downstream actions need to be linked, but some believe can do most themselves.
<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the specific roles related to the agreement</i> • <i>Are these roles formally written or based on informal norms</i> • <i>Is this a short term or long term relationship</i> • <i>How are individual roles defined in this agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet LG responsibilities in a way that fits the Regional strategy and links with bordering shires - Formal contracts - Long term - Individual roles of LG and BMRG are set out in contract.
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the level of trust among the people making this agreement</i> • <i>What past history and shared experiences influence relationships</i> • <i>What are the common values that participants share</i> • <i>What stories and narratives characterise relationships in this organisation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trust level between LG and BMRG should be relatively high. - BMRG a new body and hence little shared experience, but LG is represented on BMRG. - Common values would include interest in conservative use of natural resources and respect for accountability.
<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the values and ideology related to making and keeping agreements</i> • <i>What stories do people tell in terms of past agreements</i> • <i>How effective is the organisation in collaborative problem solving</i> • <i>Does the organisation encourage more formal or informal agreements</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nil established? - None available, but high ownership with pre-existing partnership with Mary River Catchment Association - BMRG has had little experience; not usually a strong feature of LG approach - Formal agreements.

The increasing responsibility of local government for environmental management and the wish for integration between the NRM Plan and the Shire Planning Schemes (under IPA) make need obvious in this case. (Opportunity for this existed with the finalisation of Planning Schemes, and the development of NRM Plans and investment strategies running in parallel). Roles and relationships do not appear to pose significant problems for local government bodies with BMRG. They are used to formal contracts with accountability and time requirements.

Local government sector update and discussion 2006

The signals that BMRG needed to work with groups of shires rather than with the 27 shires individually have progressed to a key structural change in the region, with four clusters of shires having formed, signed MOUs, met to identify priority issues and developed projects to deal with those issues. Each cluster has a coordinator to progress project development, liaise with potential partners, facilitate meetings and ensure adequate communication, for example through newsletters. Partnerships between BMRG and each cluster appear to be well underway. This should facilitate the achievement of many of the aims, opportunities and commitments distilled from the interviews with local government representatives.

The commitments section indicated that some local government interviewees believe they are best suited to coordinating projects involving themselves and community groups. This perhaps becomes more feasible with clusters; however, we have some doubts as to how well local government will do this given their multiple functions and management style. It also needs to be recognised that while local government is lead agent for some NRM issues, there are others that local government would not see as a high priority, or would not have the resources to lead. Further recommendations regarding these issues are discussed in chapter 6 section 6.4.

The first local government clusters

Weeds are a large concern for the community as they have social, economic and environmental consequences and are considered top priority for most Councils, including the South Inland Burnett Local Government Cluster which met on November 4 in Murgon.

Key common issues identified by Kilkivan, Murgon, Wondai, Kingaroy and Nanango Councils related to water quality, coordinated weed management, biodiversity conservation and aquatic weeds. The Burnett Inland South LGA Cluster (BISLGAC) has committed to progressing action to address these common issues in a joint manner.

With the assistance of the BMRG, it is anticipated a number of outcomes will be achieved within the next 12 months.

BMRG Newsletter Dec 2005

Enabling (capacity enhancement) recommendations

When the statements of the 'partnership capacity' tool described in the landcare section above were applied to local government (again as a trial with BMRG staff), the main area needing attention was 'clarification of roles and responsibilities for cluster oriented projects'. Other opportunities for development were participation in NRM activities, sharing information, and time allocated to cluster project development.

Lack of NRM technical knowledge within shire councils was a concern expressed in interviews. The best capacity enhancement here is probably for shire councils to employ qualified NRM Officers (with skills in community engagement as well as technical understanding of NRM

processes and management); alternatively technical NRM staff employed by catchment committees or the recently appointed NRM Cluster Support Officers can assist.

Wider concern has been expressed about readiness of local government to take on the natural resource management responsibilities devolved to them; particularly in integrating natural resource management into planning schemes. In a media release, June 2004, announcing an \$875 000 allocation to engage Queensland local councils in natural resource management, Federal MPs the Hon Warren Truss and Senator Ian Macdonald pointed to survey data that showed that 47 per cent of councils interviewed did not demonstrate a clear understanding of natural resource management issues in a local and regional context, and that 71 per cent of councils interviewed did not consider local or regional natural resource management goals when developing council corporate and planning schemes. Senator Macdonald was quoted as saying, 'we must ensure that there is effective integration between regional natural resource management goals and local government planning. When all these processes are aligned, then we can get make greater progress' (Commonwealth of Australia 2004). Recent workshops in the Burnett Mary region, organised by the Local Government Association, Queensland (LGAQ), on the topic *Integrating Natural Resource Management (NRM) into Local Government Corporate, Strategic and Operational Plans* are presumably an output from this funding.

The need for an understanding of the links between NRM Plans and local government planning processes needs to go beyond the shire council officers to the planning consultants called in to help draw up planning schemes and operational plans. Without this, plans will continue to be plagued with lack of connection and inadequate public participation in solutions to NRM planning issues. This may require considerable joint activity between the regional body, shire clusters and town planners to bring the language of the NRM Plan into line with local government planning processes (as was achieved in liaison between the Fitzroy Basin Association and the Local Government Association, Central Queensland to develop IPA assessment protocols for water quality [Meecham 2003]).

4.3 Conservation sector

Issues

Conservation sector interviewees raised a range of water and land issues including protection of habitat to protect water quality, nutrient inputs from grazing and aquaculture, and water use efficiency to reduce demands on infrastructure. Biodiversity issues included land clearing issues still of concern, loss of threatened species through dams, damage to sea grass beds, inappropriate fire regimes and weeds.

The interview responses also emphasised non bio-physical issues such as attitudes, relationships, government action and support as follows:

- *Attitudes and perceptions* - apathy and short term view (inability to appreciate the big picture); reducing margins suggests a need to restructure so that farmers can be viable while achieving NRM; a problem is lack of trust between farmers and government; need an ecosystem services approach with government providing a market.
- *Relationships* - a divide between long term residents and the growth economy (coastal); a need to engage agricultural and grazing industry in a better way to inform on sustainable land management practices; structural issues concerning representation of conservation sector on BMRG.

- *Government action:* government encourages continuance of old grazing practices with perverse incentives like drought relief; lack of support for RAMSAR sites – lack of policing by EPA; pro-development councils; councils encouraging rural residential subdivision in marginal lands.
- *Support* - inadequate incentive packages for landholders (state government is just giving lip service on rural adjustment); need training in quality assurance and best practice; local government councillors and technical staff are unskilled in natural resource management (don't see issues and don't know how to deal with them); 'by keeping coastal people connected we could maintain quality of life, while providing most reliable long term income by maintaining the conditions that attract people to the place'.

Aims

Suggested regional aims raised during interviews included:

- conserve – rehabilitate the river system; maintain fish habitat
- document key species; establish conservation plans for these species
- thorough observance of pests – need an 'inspector' continually looking for pest re-infestations and new potential
- provide local expertise and local solutions
- conservation in own back yard
- careful watch on prevention of salination right down the catchment
- corridor orientation
- on ground help
- support the idea of agricultural production incentives to get sustainable outcomes.

Conservation interviewees showed genuine interest in contributing to the science of effective environmental management and to on-ground achievement. They also appeared mindful of the financial problems for farmers who are expected to bear the brunt of sustainable land management, although farmers were perceived to still follow pioneering instincts rather than resource conservation practices. However some in the conservation sector had not participated in the NRM planning process.

Opportunities through a regional management approach

- Tap into national and international interest in the case studies provided by this area.
- Take a more global perspective e.g. with Cooloola Straits.
- More focused at addressing causes rather than symptoms (a lot of NHT1 money was thrown at symptoms).
- Start coordinated weed control at the top of the catchment; people downstream will have to tackle in sequence – will have the benefit of the upper job being done thoroughly.

Commitment to action (or obstacles to)

- It is not easy to see how to form partnerships with the conservation sector; conservation as a sector is a fragmented selection of groups and individuals.
- Unite true conservation groups under a better system of membership to give a united approach ... an alliance across the region; all in the alliance would sign to deliver certain outcomes.
- There are structural problems within environment groups - bickering between each other destroys credibility.
- Would like to see an Inland Burnett Conservation Council branch.

Regional Partnership Agreements Burnett Mary, July 2006

- The wrong catchments are together – Burnett and Mary linked together does not work. Mary is a unique catchment.
- Environmental Council can contribute by trying to ensure integrity and accountability of process but needs more internal capacity.
- Concerned at duplication of effort – state, local government and BMRG. Duplication is occurring through not talking but then have to have meetings to resolve problems.
- Need to work towards measurable outcomes.
- Definitely like to be involved, don't believe in working in isolation.
- Need engagement in planning - working together; proper partnership; get broadest technical, social and economic policy frames and look at opportunities (at the moment are creating another tier of bureaucracy).

Although they have skills and high interest in a wide range of environmental issues, the *conservation sector* lacks capacity to become heavily involved in time-consuming scientific or on-ground action. Conservation sector members were candid about structural problems within the sector – a fragmented array of groups and individuals with often differing objectives and insufficient communication. Ease of BMRG membership entry to this sector extended the fragmentation.

Readiness for partnership

Felkins readiness criteria	Estimated state: Conservation sector in 2004
<p>Need or opportunity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why is the agreement needed at this time</i> • <i>Is it related to a specific crisis or problem</i> • <i>What responsiveness or readiness do people have for making this agreement</i> • <i>What are stories being told about need for agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agreement is needed to enable environmental group emphasis to be heard and considered in regional decision-making. - The main crisis has been in the non-participation by some environmental groups in the planning process. - Readiness for negotiation appears high for BMRG, but some conservation groups remain wary; others feel that their own sector needs to be drawn together before effective engagement is possible. - Stories about membership being open to people who are not truly conservation members, thus interfering with the partnership process.
<p>Roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the specific roles related to the agreement</i> • <i>Are these roles formally written or based on informal norms</i> • <i>Is this a short term or long term relationship</i> • <i>How are individual roles defined in this agreement</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The environmental groups probably need to find their own alliance and expected role before this can be put to BMRG (e.g. policy, lobby, scientific support or on-ground action). - They are not currently formal. A formal MOU with key environmental groups may be needed to establish general agreement regarding cooperation and participation. - Long term. - Need to customise general agreement provisions for individual groups with differing agendas.
<p>Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the level of trust among the people making this agreement</i> • <i>What past history and shared experiences influence relationships</i> • <i>What are the common values that participants share</i> • <i>What stories and narratives characterise relationships in this organisation</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Currently low trust; conservation groups believe that industry controls the BMRG agenda. - Conservation groups seen as non negotiable/unwilling to compromise. - A common value is belief that action to improve natural resources is needed. - Insufficient information on this.
<p>Culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What are the values and ideology related to making and keeping agreements</i> • <i>What stories do people tell in terms of past agreements</i> • <i>How effective is the organisation in collaborative problem solving</i> • <i>Does the organisation encourage more formal or informal agreements</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More information on each conservation group seems needed to handle these questions.

Lack of clarity within the environmental movement about roles and capacity makes it difficult for BMRG to move directly into sector agreements. Conversely, the conservation sector believed BMRG is too industry-dominated.

Conservation sector update and discussion 2006

The conservation sector is so diverse that it is unlikely that a regional network as has been successfully set up amongst landcare groups would succeed. Seventy percent are individual registrations rather than group representatives and group representatives include environmental advocacy groups, environmental monitoring or action groups, heritage protection groups, 'research' groups, institutions, community committees (e.g. residents committee; neighbourhood watch). Within the monitoring and action groups, interests are again quite diverse and usually quite localised. Interests are not only diverse but often unknown (e.g. a Neighbourhood Watch or individual's environmental interest). BMRG has tried to encourage members to indicate their interests in the range of activities covered in the Regional Investment Strategy but reportedly few from the sector initially did so. Reasons might include lack of match between group goals and management Actions, a belief that their interest was too localised to relate to regional actions, perhaps disagreement with BMRG's approach to the issues, perhaps they did not understand the opportunity presented to them. A brief survey of that sector could find answers. Subsequently some have taken a more positive approach, participating in monitoring and care type projects.

A November 2005 report by Queensland Conservation Council's Natural Resource Management Policy Partnership Officer reveals widespread concern about the composition of regional bodies and unsatisfactory relationships.

In some regions, mutual misunderstandings and apparent lack of common ground has resulted in some conservation councils having little trust and faith that regional NRM process will deliver biodiversity and conservation outcomes. The general perception of the conservation sector is that regional NRM boards generally favour production/development interests and that conservation is often a solitary voice that struggles to be heard (Queensland Conservation Council, 2005).

The report makes the point that the conservation sector is a major stakeholder in NRM with conservation groups active in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of natural resources and community capacity building, with professional expertise, first hand experience and long term engagement of regional environmental management issues. They believe that conservation interests should be more genuinely represented on NRM Boards than currently.

We believe that effective regional management for NRM does require the participation of the conservation sector, including peak advocacy bodies. In cases where environmental groups are sceptical about the ability of regional bodies to deliver biodiversity and conservation outcomes, dialogue appears urgently needed to find the common ground in the NRM Plan objectives and the conservation organisation's ideals. The 'negotiation space' process discussed in chapter 6 section 6.5 might usefully find the common ground that would allow at least partial collaborative decision making to take place.

While advocating a conflict management planning process that works with the common ground and deferral of debate on contested issues, we note Poncelet's (2001, p. 23) criticism that 'a kiss here and a kiss there' processes that avoid 'genuine and vigorous debate between alternative approaches' might never get to the crucial structural and philosophical issues – the key issues that peak environmental bodies want to keep alive.

This reluctance to participate is discussed in more depth in Whelan and Oliver's report *The place, limits and practice of collaboration* (2005), where seven reasons for community groups to choose not to participate are listed and the following further explanation offered:

Conservationist's decision to withdraw from or boycott regional NRM arrangements in some regions can be explained through reference to Fung and Wright's (2003) discussion of empowered participatory governance and use of countervailing power ... Despite clear indications that the regional arrangements were based on this ideal, the Australian and State governments have in fact maintained elements of top-down governance arrangements. ... Conservationist's boycotts of regional NRM processes demonstrate adversarial countervailing power because decisions reached without their involvement will lack legitimacy and be harder to implement (Whelan & Oliver, 2005, p. 34).

It is possible that early doubts about the sustainability of regional bodies could trigger such an attempt to discredit their efforts. However, it now appears that the Plan has achieved legitimacy and therefore it is in the best interests of conservation organisations to get as close to the decisions and action as possible.

Other more pragmatic reasons given for lack of participation by the conservation sector include the recent federal government's elimination of grants to environmental organisations unless involved in on-ground activities (seriously depleting capacity) and the large distances some conservationists have to travel to take their seat around a participatory governance table. We consider the elimination of grants to organisations with the measure of environmental management experience as held in conservation advocacy groups to be unfortunate; their contribution to policy and strategy debate is surely important.

Enabling (capacity enhancement) recommendations

Capacity enhancement to generate effective partnerships between regional bodies and the conservation sector appear to hinge on

- a) establishment of trust or at least respect.
- b) appreciation by other sectors of the potential contribution of the conservation sector to the decision table.
- c) engagement in a way that enables conservation groups to make well-researched contributions to the decisions and planning without crippling drain on scarce resources.

For a) we recommend dialogue which emphasises the appreciation of culture and vision of each party, then moves forward to discuss relationships and roles through a process for finding common ground, such as the 'negotiation space' strategy for finding common ground described in chapter 6, section 6.5.

For b), one option would be for the conservation sector to draw up a 'prospectus' of what it has to offer NRM and then distribute it widely and talk about it. The emphasis for this might be in inland areas, where there are few members of conservation organisations and very little exposure (except for fiercely contested issues such as tree clearing). This awareness can be important for both balanced governance (greater weight to conservation representation) and the opportunity to identify potential partnership links. This should first entail some kind of unifying forum to generate consensus within the conservation organisations regarding what they are prepared to 'offer'. Although valuable to do this in the Burnett Mary, it could possibly become a cross-region activity with resources provided collectively through the Regional Groups Collective. The NRM Policy Partnership Officer's report (Queensland Conservation Council 2005) contains material that could form a foundation for a prospectus.

For c) we recommend that for some projects where knowledge of local biodiversity is key, and a conservation group can provide that knowledge, the partnership agreement requirements for in-kind contribution be softened so that the group can cope with this activity without suffering 'burn-out' (see also the discussion on triple line tendering in chapter 6, section 6.8).

