

7. Conclusions and recommendations

This project arose out of the need for partnership strategies for the diverse stakeholders that BMRG needed to connect with to achieve targeted investment in the Regional Investment Strategy for implementation of the regional NRM Plan. The need to explore partnership strategies suited to different types of stakeholder is evident, with the affected stakeholders comprising 27 local governments, over 40 catchment management, landcare and conservation groups, a wide range of groups across primary, secondary and tertiary industry, up to 10 Traditional Owner (TO) groups, and other key stakeholders including educational institutions and private sector organisations. BMRG has a representative governance structure with Directors representing the following sectors: local government, landcare groups, catchment bodies, conservation, coastal management, Traditional Owners, Primary Industry and Secondary/Tertiary Industry. This clearly defined categories for the major stakeholders as a basis for investigating partnership alternatives. Other stakeholders not easily included in these sectors are state government agencies, Rand D organisations and utilities. Partnerships with these bodies are not as problematic as the diverse mix of community and industry stakeholders.

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 from demonstrated stakeholder commitments.

The project was originally funded for a six month period, with prospect of obtaining funds for a second year. The second submission outlined objectives requiring a two year period, being the time considered needed to effectively explore options with the full range of stakeholders and also identify and design capacity building activities (See Appendix 2). One objective became the seeking of funds from sources outside SEO3 for the unfunded second year. We were unsuccessful with two bids, and so the project is concluding with some unfinished business.

This conclusions and recommendations section comprises firstly a summary of outcomes in relation to objectives, then brief discussion and recommendations about partnership formation for each of the sectors studied and general comments or recommendations about models for partnership and processes for partnership formation.

7.1 Summary of outcomes in relation to objectives

The specific objectives for each year are provided in italics, followed by a brief statement of outcomes. Where the 2005 objective is a continuation of a 2004 theme, the objectives have been addressed together.

a. Establish a partnership to investigate the most effective ways of establishing cooperative agreements between stakeholders and the BMRG (2004); 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 (2005).

BMRG identified the need to assess stakeholder capacity and willingness to partner as a research project concept during the early days of the NRM Plan development processes. The importance

of this research was deemed paramount in preparation of Regional Investment Strategy (RIS) implementation approaches and successful partnership development. The University of Queensland's School of Natural and Rural Systems Management was identified as a suitable research partner to assist with the development of this proposal. Appropriate planning, communication and reporting processes were put in place. The initial funding support as a scoping project was disappointing for BMRG as they were obliged to proceed with Regional Investment Strategy implementation during that period, and hence needed to pursue partnership formation in some areas with minimal input from the researchers. However, the research has provided a broad perspective on factors to be considered in ongoing partnership formation beyond the initial flurry of initial partnership establishment with stakeholders who, in general, wanted to participate. A significant strength of the research partnership has been the preparedness of both partners to adapt and modify approaches to ensure ongoing success of the research. During the second year a researcher from the Centre for Rural and Regional Innovation, Queensland contributed to Traditional Owner partnership formation and identification of capacity needs.

b. Clarify the range of stakeholders, their methods of operation and their perspectives on opportunities and constraints for contribution to regional NRM targets (2004).

Stakeholder categories, referred to as 'sectors' had been defined by BMRG and members categorised into these sectors. By classifying these according to locality as well as sector, we developed a roughly representative list of potential interviewees. This was used to interview, using Strategic Perspective Analysis principles, representatives of the local government, catchment group, landcare group, conservation and coastal sectors across the catchments, thus obtaining perspectives on opportunities and constraints for contribution to NRM targets. For secondary and tertiary industry, we approached non-members, selecting from businesses associated with use of natural resources. Traditional Owner perspectives and methods of operating were emerging through fora arranged by BMRG's Community Support Officer.

c. Identify methods of negotiating and formalising agreed contributions that are likely to suit different stakeholder groups (2004); 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 (2005).

The literature revealed several principles for preparing for partnership, including identification of 'readiness to partner'. From this, a process for negotiating and formalising agreements emerged. Interviews from local government, catchment group, landcare, conservation and coastal management and secondary-tertiary industry sectors were then used to identify readiness for organisations in these sectors to move into partnership (see chapters 4 and 5 and section 7.2 below), and the types of partnership most likely to appeal to them. Information about readiness to partner for the primary industry sector was obtained from a very few producer interviews and information from contacts who had links with primary production, so results for this section need to be treated with caution.

d. Identify some alternatives with a view to trying out the most prospective methods in the following year (2004); Identify and pilot test methods of negotiating and formalising agreed contributions that are likely to suit different sectors according to findings from the previous objective (2005).

Attempts to try the 'progression in partnership' model and the suggested formation process were made difficult by the precedence for BMRG of the Regional Investment Strategy implementation activities: research team participation in processes commenced and 'owned' by BMRG and some sector stakeholders was seldom practical. Meanwhile with some sectors, fragmentation of

organisations within a sector or dialogue between BMRG and organisations within a sector meant that partnership interventions were inappropriate. Principles from the process were applied in the establishment of a water quality monitoring alliance in the Lower Mary and Burrum River systems. Observations of progress towards partnership between BMRG and organisations within various sectors, combined with learnings from other NRM studies, other Regions and the literature led to recommendations for future partnership action, with some alternative approaches provided for consideration.

e. 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 (2005)

A partnership capacity assessment tool was developed to bring to a focus the questions or statements in Cavaye's (2005) Capacity Assessment Tool that influence partnership formation. This has been used with some BMRG staff to provide preliminary needs identification. Design and trial of capacity enhancement initiatives have not yet taken place.

f. Prepare SEO3 funding submission for trial of alternative arrangements for gaining firm commitment to the Regional Investment Strategy and development of capacity building processes needed for successfully managed partnerships (2004); 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 (2005).

The funding proposal for SEO3 funding for 2005 was successful. Applications to Land and Water Australia and to the Sugar Research Development Corporation for funding through 2006 were not successful.

g. Network among SEO3 project teams under clusters 1 and 2, to compare findings and strategies across regions and provide guidance for other regional bodies.

This proposal led to the SEO3 Symposia held in June 2005 and April 2006. These have filled the purpose of this objective reasonably well.

7.2 Sector-based conclusions and recommendations

One purpose of the study is to identify suitable pathways to partnership for each sector. Key points and recommendations from earlier discussions for each sector follow.

Landcare

Landcare groups have responded well to BMRG's regional approach to group support. The process has displayed some of the important features of developing partnership relationships discussed in Chapter 3 in drawing together principles from the literature. Through face-to-face negotiation as a complete regional network of landcare groups a unified project was developed that had sufficient flexibility for groups to adapt to local needs.

This approach with like-minded groups agreeing to link together has great potential. The groups will at some stage need to decide how far to take that potential; how accountable to be to each other. Options outlined in Chapter 6 are to remain as a loose network of allies, assisting each other where each group sees benefit in doing so, or move into more formal relationships as small syndicates of a few groups with common goals, or as larger clusters with stronger bargaining power when it comes to seeking support or funding. In keeping with the philosophy of landcare

groups as grassroots organisations deciding on their local priorities and acting on them, we do not make a recommendation other than that the network consider the benefits of options that pool resources to deal with common issues. This need not threaten the acknowledged ‘freedom’ of local groups if the following characteristics of linked communities (outlined in Chapter 3) are in place:

- Coordination with a shared leadership team
- Consent rather than control
- Shared reciprocal trust
- Motivation from common values
- Ongoing dialogue
- Space for disagreement and debate
- Recognition of independence as well as interdependence.

Catchment bodies

Catchment bodies in the region vary considerably in structure and management experience. Referring to the principles of integrated catchment management that led to the formation of catchment bodies, and a national review of ICM (Bellamy et.al. 2002), we have pointed out some advantages in having catchment bodies operate as subregional coordinating groups, difficulties in achieving this due to some weaknesses in the ICM concept and the variability in coordination experience within this region, and some ways in which catchment bodies can link in with the local government partnership clusters.

If catchment bodies are to exercise coordination functions, some of them need to build better cross-sector representation and increase management capacity. Capacity building to enable a common approach to partnering with catchment bodies would benefit BMRG as well as the groups themselves.

Local government

With 27 shires in the region, efficiency of communication and planning demanded some form of working with Shires as a group. BMRG’s decision to work with four clusters rather than the whole group that make up the Wide Bay ROC (Regional Organisation of Councils) seems an appropriate way to maximise communication and planning on issues relevant to homogeneous social and environmental local areas while going beyond shire boundaries. A cluster approach to implementation of NRM measures is sure to be more cost effective and environmentally effective than working as individual shires. The question arises as to whether there needs to be another step of integration across clusters with similar issues, or whether joint cluster planning and implementation is too cumbersome.

The cluster areas appear to have been well-chosen, as they correspond quite closely with the catchments or subcatchments of the region – an important consideration when planning for natural resource management. This raises the question of how the cluster-based local government activities affect the role of the catchment groups in the region. Who coordinates and devolves funds to cooperating organisations where activities have several interested stakeholders? Is it the catchment group (as in some regions) or is it the cluster of local government authorities, or is it BMRG, or is it all three depending on the NRM issue and level of local government responsibility for the issue? As stated above we believe that there is value, particularly with a large region, in retaining a role for subcatchment coordinating committees; but with Councils having greater responsibility for NRM implementation thrust upon them by state government, and with training programs and staff now being put in place to equip local government to deal with its

responsibilities, they might be in better position to coordinate much of the sub-regional (or sub-catchment) implementation activity than they have in the past.

Conservation

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. One alternative approach is to choose a priority issue for a locality, then invite all conservation members from that locality to a planning session. Those interested in that particular issue for that locality have opportunity to submit their expression of interest for consideration in developing a multi-stakeholder project. Another approach is to conduct a forum for a locality (or sub region) on several issues of concern to the conservation sector, with speakers and discussion to clarify the issues; and then invite participants to enter a workshop process similar to the activity summarised in the cross-sector section of Chapter 6, in which special interest working groups form to develop responsibilities for various aspects of an issue. These processes would begin to generate a sense of the linked community in the conservation sector. To do this across the region has a heavy staff resource cost: this is a coordination activity that may be well-suited to catchment or subcatchment bodies to run.

Coastal management

The Lower Mary-Burrum River water quality monitoring alliance established over the past year provides a model for bringing coastal management members interested in specific activities into a partnership arrangement (together with interested parties from other sectors). There are prospects of similar alliances for monitoring projects elsewhere along the coast.

While coastcare and other monitoring and action groups make up the majority of the coastal management sector, this small sector also includes amateur fishing and residents' group interests as well as a government agency and port authority. Other organisations, some registered in different sectors and some non-members are also significant stakeholders in coastal management. These include commercial seafood interests, tourism enterprises and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. There is, across these groups, a diversity of values, goals and views on appropriate management. While common ground was easily found on the need for water quality monitoring, it will be more difficult to establish working partnerships on other matters. The 'negotiation space' approach to planning (see Chapter 6), with focus on points of common ground rather than the issues that create separation could enable progress towards joint activity on some issues while 'non-negotiable' differences are kept aside from the dialogue (apart from acknowledging and explaining them).

Many businesses along the coastal strip appear unaware of their impact on future use of the resources, that is, that they may be coastal managers in a negative way. Awareness or educational activities appear to be important. We suggest that particular target audiences might be planners and developers, resort owners and fishing charter operators. Some of these might become allies in creating awareness amongst visitors to coastal areas.

Traditional Owners

BMRG and Traditional Owners are working together to establish protocols and processes of operation and communication through patient and comprehensive discussions and willingness to try and adapt rather than prescribe a process that may cause tension within Traditional Owner communities. A consultative approach modelled partly on the Sea Forum dialogue towards co-

management of the Great Barrier Reef (see chapter 5) has informed the process. Once governance processes are agreed upon, attention will be given to capacity enhancement.

Meanwhile positive partnership activity is taking place as BMRG provides enabling support for natural resource management activity initiated by Traditional Owners. These partnerships on local initiative projects are extremely valuable in establishing understanding, trust and common ground between BMRG and various Traditional Owner groups, forming a basis for longer-term collaborative partnerships, and for fruitful negotiation when views on proposed land use or management differ.

Primary industry

Although producer involvement in government funded NRM programs or in landcare involvement was low in this region in 2004, this appears to be changing, or at least there are new drivers for change – the new impetus given to landcare groups enabling more producers to gain exposure to sustainable management recommendations, partnership with rural producer organisations to try new incentive programs, and possibly more positive attitudes to government with the recent supports announced through the Blueprint for the Bush. Workshop programs being developed and delivered by Agforward, a relatively new wing of Agforce, offer potential for collaborative delivery of NRM objectives through a trusted source. This is particularly relevant in this region where grazing land management affects the greatest land area.

As partnerships develop, it is useful to consider the questions about readiness to partner set out in Chapter 3. As well as establishing effective relationships between BMRG and industry bodies, it could be appropriate to consider readiness for partnership among industry bodies on issues of overlapping concern. This could include approaches to NRM where coordination between properties or enterprises is involved.

Secondary and tertiary industry.

Businesses lacked knowledge of BMRG and the NRM plan. A first step in engaging them is an awareness campaign that drives home the links between business and natural resource management. This means that information needs to be tailored to the type of industry, and needs to be delivered personally where possible in order to catch the attention of busy people.

The first level of business interest in the NRM Plan is usually to find if there is some business to be won. This needs to be converted to an interest in the aspirations for long-term sustainability and the contribution that this will make to business sustainability. We believe that the Prime Ministers Community Business partnership thrust is modifying business culture, so that it is realistic to expect Government-Community-Business partnerships for NHT2 and NAP programs will become a reality. Although Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is becoming the accepted norm and built into the structure of big business, it may be some time before the small- medium businesses build it into their business plans. Well crafted talks to Chambers of Commerce and Tourism Board meetings could begin to sheet home the appropriateness of supporting the aspirations of the NRM Plan.

Before engaging with businesses about possible partnership activity, it is important to be able to identify benefits for the organisation, know the range of types of partnership contribution that would be useful, check through the readiness to partner criteria, and prepare a sound strategy to approach the business.

7.3 Transferable tools

One underlying premise of this project was that it might produce partnership strategies that could be used by other regional bodies. This section lists some of the tools for partnership developed throughout this study by linking literature with observation, interviews and, where possible, trialing the approaches identified.

Models for partnership include the BMRG partnerships with landcare groups and local government authorities. The landcare linkage through a partnership project and the ongoing communication as part of that demonstrate principles of linked communities outlined in the literature summary (chapter 3). Options for further progression into partnership are offered in chapter 6. The local government cluster approach with an MOU for a group of six or seven shires with overlapping NRM issues is time and cost effective, as well as making sense from a natural resource management point of view. Options for the role of the cluster in subregional coordination and linkage with catchment bodies are discussed briefly in chapter 6.

Following our reading of the literature and early observations we proposed a model for progression through partnership from resistance or minimal cooperation to cross-sector long-term partnership. Steps in the progression moving from low social capital to high social capital are:

- Accepted obligation
- Competitive tender
- Triple bottom line tender
- Institutional alliance
- Collaborative project contract
- Sector based collaborative partnership
- Collaborative community partnership (cross-sector) (Chapters 3 and 6).

Tools or processes that we have used or recommended, which might have wider application include:

1. Use of Strategic Perspectives Analysis to identify readiness to partner based on Felkins' questions about needs, roles, relationships and culture (chapters 2 and 4).
2. A proposed process for partnership formation between a regional body and organisations in a particular sector (chapter 3).
3. Processes for initial formation stages in cross-sector partnerships (chapter 6).
4. The 'negotiation space' process for negotiating joint action through finding common ground (chapter 6).
5. A process for developing partnerships within communities of place (chapter 6).
6. A process for staff to identify capacity needs for each sector by applying ratings to a list of statements refined from the capacity assessment tool (chapter 4).

7.4 Concluding comments

This study focused on a very pragmatic question for BMRG, how to fulfil its obligations to develop a Regional Investment Strategy based on partnerships. This study in itself illustrates a partnership - combining the regional body's information and strategy needs with a University's mandate to produce new knowledge for the public good. Rapidly changing government expectations of 'research quality' in universities are taken by some to imply that universities should engage much less in research activities that result in technical reports such as this one and far more publishing – probably on different types of question – for the more highly respected international journals.

The authors take the view that starting from a problem such as that presented by BMRG can challenge us all to produce new public good knowledge through a less-linear process than conventional scientific knowledge building. In this project, a challenging question has taken us to the business management literature to find useful theoretical underpinnings to interpret and organise what we were learning from our interviews with sector representatives and observations of BMRG's activities. One of the methods, Strategic Perspectives Analysis (Dale & Lane 1994) also has influence from the business management literature but is primarily used and recognised in NRM. The thoughts inspired by the 'readiness to partner' literature leading to the processes suggested here are complemented by the conclusions of other recent NRM literature.

The result, we hope, offers strong outcomes for our sectors. BMRG has well-informed options for moving forward. Queensland and other Australian regional bodies have processes and comparative information, that they can draw upon or modify to suit their circumstances. This research team has enjoyed the type of research it believes in: working collaboratively with the users of knowledge to produce insights and useful results, with fresh academic insights in promise. The research adds to the university sector's broader learnings about partnering within the complex NRM collaborative planning and management content, while the Australian and Queensland governments have their expectations met through relevant and practical knowledge building.

The 'sponsor' of this opportunity to bring such interests together has been the innovative SEO3 (Social and Economic State Investment Program No. 3), a model surely worth promoting for public good research.