

Appendix 1 Terms of Reference

Assess the alignment between NHT and NAPSWQ Sustainable Agricultural objectives and relevant regional NRM plans and funded regional investment strategies (*Sustainable Agriculture Evaluation*)

1. SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

The Department of Natural Resources and Water (NRW) is seeking offers from interested parties to enter into an Agreement for provision of services to identify and assess the impact of investment from the national programs under the NAPSWQ (National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality) and NHT (Natural Heritage Trust) in sustainable agriculture in Queensland since the inception of NHT2 in 2002. The sustainable use of natural resources, including agriculture, is a key objective of the NHT, and is influenced by the NAPSWQ. Under the Bilateral Agreements between the Australian and Queensland Governments for NHT and NAPSWQ, investment in sustainable agricultural systems has occurred via funding at the state-level, and at a regional NRM delivery level including cross-regional collaborative arrangements.

This evaluation will be useful to assist in guiding prioritisation and design of future sustainable agriculture initiatives under the NHT program post 2008.

Project objectives

To determine:

the level of investment, at both the regional and state scale, in activities directly related to sustainable agricultural outcomes of the NHT and NAPSWQ programs, the objectives of these activities, the location and extent of their operation and identification of gaps and overlap in investment and effort

- the mechanisms employed, partnerships formed, tools developed and processes applied to achieve NHT and NAPSWQ programs objectives
- the strength, nature and effectiveness of the relationships, partnerships and networks between the providers of various sustainable agriculture activities
- the change in attitude of targeted NRM personnel toward, and awareness of, sustainable agricultural practices and outcomes; and the application of sustainable agriculture systems thinking in land management decision-making by these key personnel as a result of these investments
- the effectiveness and efficiency of monitoring, evaluation and reporting (MER) strategies to measure, assess and report on the impacts of NHT and NAPSWQ investment in sustainable agriculture outcomes and how these approaches might be improved for future investment
- the major learnings from the design, conduct and reporting of both operational and strategic activities that should be used in future initiatives in relation to sustainable resource use and what actions may improve the outcomes in relation to sustainable resource use.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The NHT Bilateral Agreement between the Australian and Queensland Governments was signed on June 2004. Through this Agreement, the Australian and Queensland Governments reflect their intent to work as joint investment partners, with the community and other stakeholders, in natural resource management activities. In particular, the Commonwealth and the State jointly seek to fulfil the three overarching objectives of the Natural Heritage Trust extension endorsed by the NRM Ministerial Council on 3 May 2002, namely:

1. biodiversity conservation - the conservation of Australia's biodiversity through the protection and restoration of terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine and marine ecosystems and habitat for native plants and animals;
2. sustainable use of natural resources - the sustainable use and management of Australia's land, water and marine resources to maintain and improve the productivity and profitability of resource based industries; and

3. community capacity building and institutional change - support for individuals, land managers, communities, industry and organisations with skills, knowledge, information and institutional frameworks to increase capacity to implement biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource use and management.

The *Natural Heritage Trust Act 1997* defines 'sustainable agriculture' as: 'the use of agricultural practices and systems that maintain or improve the following:

- (a) the economic viability of agricultural production;
- (b) the social viability and well-being of rural communities;
- (c) the ecologically sustainable use of Australia's biodiversity;
- (d) the natural resource base; and
- (e) ecosystems that are influenced by agricultural activities.

The NAPSWQ Bilateral Agreement between the Australian and Queensland Governments was signed on March 2002.

The Commonwealth of Australia signed an agreement on the 2nd June 2005 to contribute to six State Level Evaluations. Four of these evaluations are now complete and include:

- Assess the alignment between the Reef plan and relevant regional NRM plans and regional investment strategies
- Extension of the Healthy Savanna Planning Systems Long-term Evaluation Project to all of Queensland
- Review and refinement of RIS development and approval process
- Science Gap Analysis between NHT/NAP objectives, regional NRM plans and funded regional investment strategy projects.

A fifth evaluation is currently being conducted:

- Review the Relevance and Value of Statewide Investment Programs (SIPs) to Regional NRM delivery.

This evaluation to:

- Assess the alignment between NHT and NAPSWQ Sustainable Agriculture objectives and relevant regional NRM plans and funded regional investment strategies (*Sustainable Agriculture Evaluation*)

is the final component of the State Level Evaluations and is scheduled to be completed by the end of June 2007.

The premise for investment in sustainable agriculture under the Bilateral Agreements is the achievement of the relevant Resource Condition Targets and Management Action Targets contained in Regional NRM plans. The activities to achieve these targets usually involve the development and adoption of better management practices and / or farming systems which are expected to maintain or enhance the resource base and related ecosystems both on and off the farm. This involves the engagement of land managers to build their understanding of natural resource management issues and create an environment that supports and influences them to make changes to the way in which they manage natural resources.

Such a process involves a number of key players including land use planning agencies, state agencies, agriculture and other research and development organisations, scientists, other land users and agribusiness. It also involves building the understanding within NRM regional bodies about agriculture and regional socio-economics to ensure that targets in regional NRM plans are pragmatic.

The Joint Queensland / Australian Government NRM Steering Committee (JSC) endorsed at its August 2006 meeting that the Statewide Sustainable Agriculture Evaluation have its terms of reference extended to identify linkages between the AgSIP, the Strategic Reserve Sustainable Ag project and the regional body efforts in this context.

The Australian Government commissioned a report with a national focus: **Evaluation of Sustainable Agricultural Outcomes from Regional Investment (NAP and NHT)**, finalised in March 2006, which sought to answer the question of whether the regional delivery model has been valuable to date in achieving sustainable agriculture outcomes. In short, the answer was – yes, however there is still a great deal of potential to be realised, particularly as the maturity and capacity of the regional delivery model grows. The evaluation involved an initial desktop review of the regional plans and investment strategies, supplemented with interviews with representatives of 15 regions, followed by a more detailed analysis for seven case study regions. In Queensland, the high level evaluation covered the Fitzroy, Condamine and Burdekin regions with the detailed evaluation being conducted in the Fitzroy.