



knowledge for managing Australian landscapes

how to have excellent natural resource management partnerships with local government

Research project number ANU43 of the Social and Institutional Research Program of Land & Water Australia. 2003-2007

This Land & Water Australia project aims to help resolve natural resource management (NRM) problems by improving our understanding of local government (LG) contributions. The results here include a checklist showing how Australian, state, territory and regional agencies can work better with LGs.

LGs play important roles in managing Australia's natural resources. Regional, state, territory and Australian NRM agencies all recognise LGs as key stakeholders. They work to engage LGs in NRM initiatives. This research shows how agencies based outside of a local area can more successfully harness LGs efforts to achieve strategic NRM solutions.

The research has involved 28 LGs – 4 from each state and the Northern Territory, selected according to a combination of two factors. All participating LGs face significant, overlapping NRM challenges, and they have varying levels of engagement with NRM programs. 19 regional NRM agencies have also participated in the project.

In-depth interviews undertaken throughout Australia focused on the potential for LG and other agencies to work effectively together to solve NRM problems. The results were analysed to identify key constraints and opportunities for improving LG contributions to NRM.

The challenges that local practitioners care about most are presented in '**the inside information**'. These are grouped into five core themes and expressed as positive actions. Agencies that take these actions are most likely to enjoy excellent NRM partnerships with LGs.

Full details of the research leading to these results are available online, and in an interactive CD-Rom.

Order the CD Rom at <http://www.lwa.gov.au/products.asp>

or visit www.wild-river.com.au/research/resilience/full_reports.

The reports contain detailed methodology and analysis as well as direct quotes from the participating practitioners.



the inside information the challenges that local operators care about

Share valuable knowledge

LGs have access to detailed local environmental knowledge. In contrast, scientists and outsiders have valuable insights about broad NRM features. Optimal sharing of this information between all agencies is rare. The strategies here ensure that people and processes are proactive in moving information around to those who need it. Applying the strategies will help everyone to operate with the knowledge that they need to be effective

Strategies

- ☐ Engage LG representatives on regional NRM committees.
- ☐ Seek local insights about local priorities and landscape features.
- ☐ Provide for LG access to expert advice and useful data sets.

Take strategic action

On-ground practitioners see historical legacies in their local landscapes. Some problems with invasive species, soil degradation and water wastage are the result of past imperfect scientific knowledge and resulting policy advice. Hence, the focus at the local level is on wise and strategic actions that cause no new problems while offering new benefits.

Strategies

- ☐ Work to solve pressing local problems, consistent with the goals for long-term priorities.
- ☐ Clarify how larger-scale issues are significant in the local area.
- ☐ Prevent mistakes and harness support by carefully testing innovations in the local area.

Provide proper resources

LGs are the poorest sphere of government and make a disproportionately high investment in environmental work. They have little potential to increase their environmental commitment. LGs resist moves to increase workloads unless proper resources are guaranteed. For example, LGs generally avoid declaring weeds of local significance because they then become legally obliged to fund weed recovery programs.

Strategies

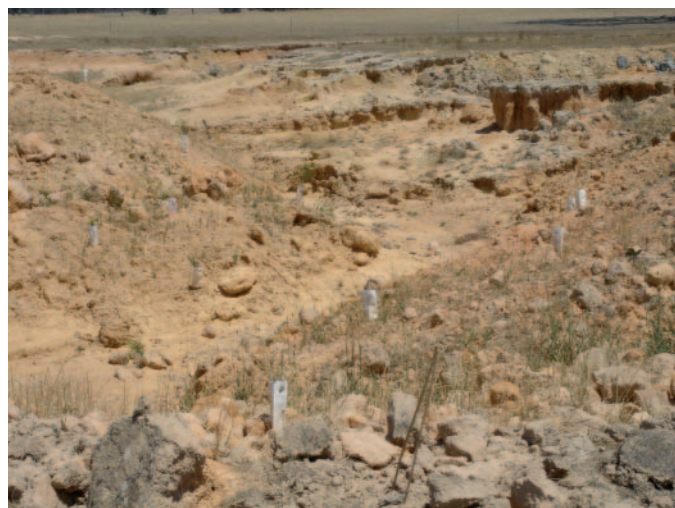
- ☐ Provide a long-term budget for any new NRM work asked of local government.
- ☐ Establish the statutory, or other formal authority for local government to fulfil its roles.
- ☐ Remove hidden costs of diligent NRM work by local governments.



Local waters have social and spiritual significance, in addition to the features shown in NRM maps.
North Western Australia.



A road edge suffering from weed invasion.
Central Tasmania.



Erosion control through tree planting.
Western Victoria.

Coordinate between spheres

Coordination has been hampered in several ways. Many NRM roles are not allocated to any sphere while others are covered by multiple agencies. Similarly, LGs and NRM regional agencies produce plans for improving NRM but timeframes and contents have rarely been aligned. Inconsistencies remain and integration is elusive. In the absence of perfect coordination, flexibility is a practical solution. This means supporting individuals and agencies in grouping together as needed to fix novel problems or harness unexpected opportunities.

Strategies

- ☐ Clarify roles and responsibilities between agencies. Remove gaps, overlaps and confusion.
- ☐ Develop arrangements that require and support consistent planning between spheres.
- ☐ Design flexible arrangements that support cooperation for solving novel problems.



There are overlaps and gaps in rural waterway management
North Queensland.

Help sustain communities

LGs are fundamentally connected to their physical and social landscapes. NRM problems have taken scores of years to emerge, and community relationships have built up over decades. Regional NRM initiatives need to recognise this context for their work. Long-term commitment of human and other resources is needed to ensure that NRM initiatives help to sustain, and not undermine communities.

Strategies

- ☐ Acknowledge that NRM problems have taken time to emerge, and will take time to fix.
- ☐ Make enduring commitments with LGs to work together for NRM outcomes.
- ☐ Provide secure tenure and attractive packages to retain skilled people in the regions.



Communities are long term features of the landscape.
Central New South Wales.



Contact

Principal researcher

Dr Su Wild-River

The Australian National University

Phone: (02) 6125 4277

Fax: (02) 6125 0767

Email: su@wild-river.com.au

Website: www.wild-river.com.au/research

Contact Land & Water Australia

Social and Institutional Research Program

Land & Water Australia

GPO Box 2182

Canberra ACT 2601

Phone: 02 6263 6069

Website: www.lwa.gov.au

checklist for achieving excellent NRM partnerships with LG

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Disclaimer:

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