

# **Swan Region Strategy**

**for**

# **Natural Resource Management**

**Appendix 1**

**Accreditation Guidelines**



# NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR THE ACCREDITATION OF INTEGRATED CATCHMENT/REGIONAL NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLANS

## 1. Introduction

The Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments have developed criteria for the accreditation of Integrated Catchment/Regional Management Plans (at Attachment A). The Criteria outline the key processes and elements that plans should include in order to be accredited and to receive government investment through natural resource management related programs, including the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT).

These guidelines have been prepared to provide catchment/regional bodies with more detailed information about what is required in developing a plan in order to meet the accreditation criteria. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the criteria.

### **Rationale for the Regional Approach to Natural Resource Management (NRM)**

Government support for natural resource management is moving from a project based approach to strategic investment at a regional scale. The major thrust of initiatives such as the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality and the extension of the Natural Heritage Trust is delivery at the regional level in recognition of:

- the strong interrelationships between the various resource and environmental degradation issues occurring in regions that call for integrated management responses;
- regional planning as an effective way to engage all stakeholders and to build on activity at the property and local levels, while also complementing state and national activity;
- an approach that can be adapted to suit specific circumstances – enabling social, economic and environmental dimensions of a region to be considered in an integrated way; and
- the regional scale as an appropriate scale for negotiating trade-offs, resolving conflict and for determining priorities and shared investment arrangements.
- regional communities responsibilities for sustainable natural resources are management. The regional planning process provides a framework in which regional communities can identify issues, develop management responses that reflect their aspirations, achieve ownership of the solutions, and convince potential investors that proposed results will be achieved.

Regional plans are most effective when they are developed and overseen by regional communities. However, governments can play a role in providing guidance and support so that regions can become self sufficient in managing their natural resources in the longer term. Governments are therefore interested in investing in activities which will lead to improvements in natural resource management practices and contribute to the long term sustainability of the natural resource base.

### **What does accreditation mean?**

Accreditation, put simply, is an agreement between the Commonwealth, relevant State/Territory Government, and the regional body that, at a particular point in time, a regional plan is sufficiently comprehensive and based on an inclusive community process so as to provide a sound basis on which investments may be made. No plan can be static however, and as new information and knowledge comes to hand, or as community aspirations change, it is expected that plans will be revised in light of this new information or changes.

Governments understand that regional bodies will be at various stages of development in relation to planning and development capability. The availability of factual information and analysis on which to prepare and base a regional plan will also vary across regions. Regional plans may therefore vary in the level of analysis and scientific data they contain when they are accredited.

Governments also recognise that significant planning has already occurred in many regions. To meet the criteria, regions may need to: (a) refine existing plans where these provide an adequate base and appropriate regional coverage; (b) develop new 'overarching' plans to coordinate, reference, update and fill gaps in existing plans; or (c) prepare new plans. A regional plan can therefore be a framework that brings together a series of planning documents covering different issues, themes and geographical areas.

### **What is the process for accrediting regional plans?**

Regional bodies that have the authority and capacity to develop an integrated plan and to oversee its implementation will develop plans. Details of these bodies will be agreed through bilateral negotiations between the Commonwealth and relevant State/Territory Governments. Plans will be assessed against the accreditation criteria and accredited by the Commonwealth and relevant State/Territory Governments. This will be done through an iterative process with government representatives available to assist regional bodies throughout the plan's development to ensure groups are aware of government requirements for investment. Diagram 1 provides a summary of the broad process of regional plan development and accreditation and the preparation of an investment strategy. The flowchart at Attachment B illustrates in broad terms the Commonwealth and the States involvement in the development, assessment and accreditation of regional integrated NRM plans.

Regional agreements between the Commonwealth, relevant State/Territory Governments, and relevant regional bodies will describe the management and accountability arrangements to apply to the implementation of an accredited plan and investment strategy. The agreement will also identify responsibility for implementing the different components of the plan.

### **What is the difference between a regional plan and an investment strategy?**

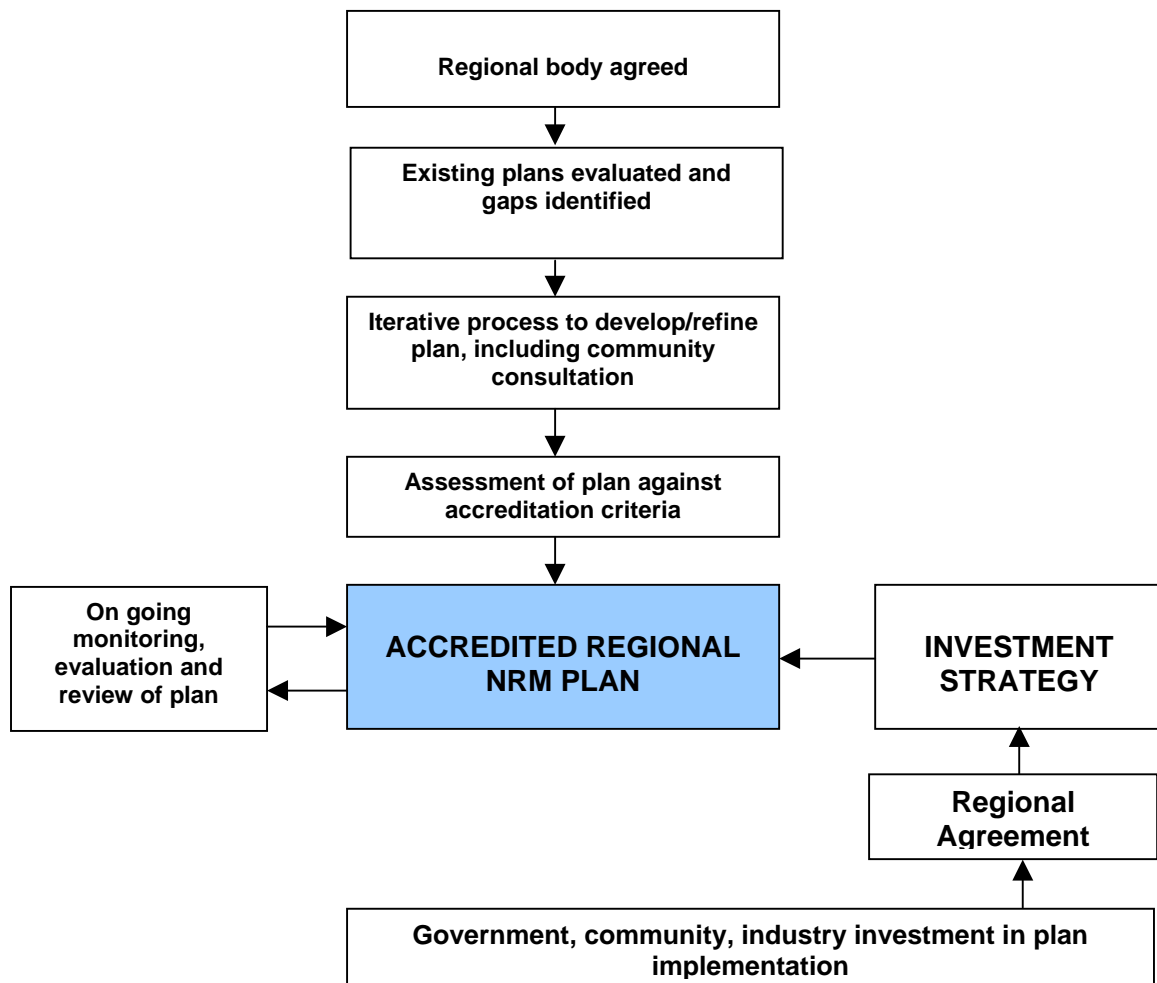
A regional plan provides a strategic framework through which regional communities can identify natural resource management issues in their region, assess the social, economic and biophysical drivers, develop regional targets, and identify actions to achieve these targets. A regional plan is, in effect, the 'blueprint' for identifying and achieving the region's natural resource management targets.

An investment strategy is essentially a business prospectus that is developed to attract external investment in priority actions that are identified in the regional plan. An investment strategy outlines the funding required to implement an accredited plan and identifies the returns for the investment of the respective contributors. It will provide the basis for devolved funding and for assessing performance against which ongoing payments will be made.

The actions to be funded through the investment strategy will generally address short-term management action targets, but contribute to achieving the longer-term resource condition targets of the regional plan. Over time, new investment strategies will be developed as particular issues identified in the regional plan are addressed and investment priorities change.

It is expected that regional bodies will develop investment strategies alongside regional plans. These strategies will provide a basis for investments by governments under NRM programs such as the NAP and the NHT. Governments may invest in those public good elements of investment strategies that accord with the objectives of the relevant funding programs and which contribute to the agreed national outcomes. Section 3 contains further guidance on investment strategies.

**Figure 1: Summary of the process of regional plan development and accreditation and preparation of an investment strategy**



### The Practical Application of the Accreditation Criteria

In developing NRM plans, regions should be guided by the complete 2-page set of accreditation criteria endorsed by Ministers at the NRM Ministerial Council meeting in May 2002. The summarised key elements of the accreditation criteria require regional bodies to demonstrate that their plans:

- cover the full range of natural resource management (NRM) issues;
- are underpinned by scientific analysis of natural resource conditions, problems and priorities;
- have effective involvement of all key stakeholders in plan development and implementation;
- focus on addressing the underlying causes rather than symptoms of problems;
- include strategies to implement agreed NRM policies to protect the natural resource base;
- demonstrate consistency with other planning processes and legislative requirements applicable to the region;
- set targets at the regional scale, consistent with the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets;
- identify strategic, prioritised and achievable actions to address the range of NRM issues and achieve the regional targets: this includes an evaluation of the wider social, economic and environmental impacts of such actions, and of any actions needed to address such impacts; and
- provide for continuous development, monitoring, review and improvement of the plan.

The following sections provide further guidance on the summarised key elements of the accreditation criteria.

### **Key Element: Covering the full range of NRM issues**

Plans are required to cover the full range of natural resource management issues – across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, estuarine and marine ecosystems as relevant – given the interconnected nature of natural resource issues and problems. Success in managing or preventing natural resource and environmental degradation will come from the development of better management systems that take account of the interrelationships between the various social, economic, biophysical and institutional factors. Plans should also consider and address impacts external to the region. This could include, for example, water quality impacts that a particular land use may be having downstream, or increased salinity levels outside the region because of land use in a recharge area.

As well as defining boundaries and coverage, plans should provide:

- an overview of the region's natural, cultural, social and economic resources including current management practices – a core suite of information could include:
  - regional biophysical characteristics: landscape, geology, soils, vegetation, biodiversity, hydrology, climate (including climate change projections and impacts) and reference data sources/maps as possible;
  - production/economic issues;
  - social/demographic characteristics;
  - land use and tenure;
  - identified environmental and heritage values, including regional natural resource assets of international, national or state value, such as sites of natural heritage significance (eg. Matters of national environmental significance defined in the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 such as Ramsar wetlands, threatened species and ecological communities, and migratory species) and sites of cultural heritage significance; and
  - infrastructure (such as roads) and sites of cultural heritage significance potentially at risk from land degradation problems such as salinity;
- an analysis of the biophysical, social, institutional and economic factors affecting environmental and resource degradation within the region, including a description of the upstream inputs to, and downstream impacts from the region.

Major descriptions and sources of information for the above items may be in a variety of forms and locations. To avoid overly large plans, background and source information may be referenced provided it is publicly available. Plans should also document major information sources relevant to the region, including other plans and strategies (for example, regional water or vegetation management plans, or threatened species recovery plans).

### **Key Element: Scientific analysis of natural resource conditions, problems and priorities**

An adequate scientific base to underpin plans is important to ensure that community and government investments are directed to the most effective actions aimed at achieving the best outcomes. Governments are therefore looking for regional plans to offer some assurance that:

- a range of options has been determined based on thorough technical analysis;
- all the environmental, heritage, social and economic implications of these options have been assessed as part of the cost benefit analysis;
- proposed actions have been determined based on best available knowledge and information; and
- proposed actions will achieve regional targets and contribute to nationally agreed natural resource management outcomes identified in the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets.

To achieve the above, plans should be based upon a thorough analysis, carried out at the catchment/regional level, of natural resource conditions, problems and priorities, and include:

- a review of existing regional science and information for adequacy;
- baselines from which to measure change, consistent with indicators developed under the National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and targets under the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets;
- an indication of actions required to fill identified information gaps;
- use of natural resource mapping such as of salinity, hydrology, vegetation cover/condition, biodiversity, land capability and terrain and modelling technologies where relevant;
- incorporation of Indigenous knowledge, where appropriate, in accordance with agreed protocols and with prior approval of the Indigenous custodians of the knowledge;
- analysis and where relevant modelling of proposed actions and their economic, social, environmental and heritage impacts, with trade-offs clearly outlined, and potential solutions to adverse social and economic consequences; and
- Indications of how proposed strategies/actions are explicitly related to modelling scenarios, where these have been adopted to assist decision-making or priority setting.

It is recognised that 'perfect' information for accrediting integrated catchment/regional plans may not exist and that action should not be unduly delayed in a quest for better and better data:

- where there is insufficient scientific information available to fully meet this criteria and where the timeframe does not allow for its collection, the gaps should be specified together with a strategy for future inclusion in the plan;
- consistent with a precautionary approach to addressing natural resource management issues, appropriate plans may be accredited and actions financed on information available. However, adaptive management approaches should be adopted and plans and strategies should be continually developed and improved as information and modelling techniques become available

### **Key Element: Effective involvement of all key stakeholders in plan development & implementation**

It is important that there is ownership of both the problem and the solutions if regional approaches to natural resource management are to be effective. The accreditation criteria therefore also aim to ensure that consultative community engagement processes are adopted in the development of the regional plan. If community members do not consider that they have had an opportunity to make adequate input to the plan's development, including the definition of the problems, the setting of priority actions and targets and the development of new management systems, then it is unlikely that the plan would be successfully implemented. Governments will want an indication of the consultative arrangements that led to the development and the conclusions of the plan.

Regional plans can address this by demonstrating:

- the key processes to ensure effective involvement of all key stakeholders in plan development and implementation; including local government, state agencies, land managers, industry, communities, indigenous people, academic/scientific sector and environmental groups;
- that a well-planned, comprehensive consultation process took place with broad public awareness of the process; and that there were adequate arrangements for involvement by individuals and groups, and clear timelines for comment. (Community participation programs should take into account and, where possible, build on previous or current consultation activities in each region);
- that the participation arrangements were appropriate to the region and the specific needs and nature of its community, including local government (for example, arrangements need to take account of population, distance, and any special needs of particular groups);
- that all relevant stakeholders are committed to targets and actions proposed in the catchment/regional plan; and
- that the commitment and support of specific stakeholders critical to the implementation of particular actions has been secured. The roles, responsibilities, capacity, specific commitments and cost-sharing arrangements of these stakeholders should be included in the plan:

- this would include securing local government commitment to implement the actions for which they have responsibility (eg. amendments to statutory planning schemes or changes to public land management practices);
- where relevant, plans should also provide evidence of effective liaison arrangements with management authorities responsible for conservation areas within the region (for example, national parks, World Heritage properties, and other protected areas).

Plans should include a commitment to develop and implement a communication strategy within an agreed timeframe, to raise awareness and engage the broader community in pursuing sustainable natural resource management in the region.

The plan should also provide evidence that the stakeholders responsible for undertaking actions, making changes and meeting targets are fully aware of what needs to be done and the full impact of these actions; and are committed to the proposed strategies contained in the plan to improve natural resource management. This is particularly important for local governments as they have land use planning responsibilities that can impact on the ability to meet targets and implement actions at the local level.

### **Key Element: Addressing the causes rather than symptoms of problems**

Actions identified in the plan should be primarily focussed on addressing the causes of natural resource degradation identified in the initial analysis of the region's problems. However, this should not preclude immediate action, where appropriate, on preventative, enhancement or restorative activities.

Plans should include strategies to achieve long term improvements in natural resource management practices. These could be pursued through the development and implementation of innovative mixes of activities and incentives – tailored to each region's social, economic and environmental circumstances. Strategies to conserve and enhance ecosystem structure and function will also be important, in order to maintain the ecosystem services which underpin biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource use.

Governments recognise that a range of policy and management responses will be required to achieve the outcomes sought from regional plans. Accordingly, governments are willing to explore a range of approaches and innovative solutions to bring about change.

Specific strategies could include:

- identifying key threats/threatening processes, and undertaking preventative action in areas of high risk to reduce the prospect of additional or future natural resource management problems;
- defining terms and conditions under which further development may occur within existing planning regimes; and
- introducing economic and market based incentives and motivational mechanisms to facilitate fundamental change in the management of land, water, and vegetation resources.

Plans should indicate how community support can be developed and maintained, thereby helping to guarantee effective implementation of the plan as well as achieve fundamental changes in resource use. This could be pursued through effective community involvement, communications programs, and recognition and consideration of community interests.

### **Key Element: Strategies to implement agreed NRM policies to protect the natural resource base**

Where regions have responsibilities under Commonwealth/State/Territory land, vegetation and water, marine and coastal policies and frameworks, governments will be looking at how these responsibilities are reflected in the regional plan. It is expected that actions proposed in the regional plan will contribute to these policies and frameworks and enable them to be taken forward and implemented at the regional level.

Bilateral agreements under government funding programs may commit the State/Territory and regions to specific improvements in policy frameworks or acceleration of actions under existing policy frameworks. Government expectations are that regional plans will show how these commitments will be met at the regional level. For example, for regions covered by the NAP Intergovernmental Agreement, requirements for water management will include meeting any caps on extractive use of water introduced by the States and Territories and implementing improvements in environmental flows in accordance with the COAG water

reforms. The NAP Intergovernmental Agreement also requires States and Territories to institute controls, which at a minimum prohibit land clearing in the priority regions where it would lead to unacceptable land or water degradation.

Governments are also interested in how the proposed strategies and actions in the regional plan are consistent with, and contribute to, other agreed national and state strategies and policies, such as:

- statewide environmental legislation and policies, including state water or vegetation management plans;
- the COAG Water Reform Framework;
- the National Water Quality Management Strategy, including agreement on water quality environmental values;
- vegetation/habitat policies, plans, instruments, including the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation;
- management strategies for weeds of national significance;
- recovery/threat abatement/conservation management plans for threatened species and ecological communities;
- coastal management policies, strategies and plans;
- strategies for greenhouse abatement and/or carbon sinks;
- regional and site specific Indigenous and historic heritage legislation, policies and plans.

Governments will work closely with the regions to ensure that plans are developed with consideration of key NRM policy requirements.

#### **Key Element: Consistency with other planning processes and legislative requirements**

The accreditation process will not over-ride the requirements of Commonwealth and State/Territory legislation. Regions should still comply with state/regional/local statutory and non-statutory planning frameworks and instruments, and any relevant Commonwealth legislation, including the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

For example, where World Heritage properties are located within the region, plans should take into account the Australian World Heritage management principles (under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000) and ensure that actions will not have a significant impact on the values of the World Heritage property.

Similarly, regional plans should also be consistent with other planning processes that have been collectively agreed by relevant jurisdictions.

Likewise, plans for regions located within the Murray Darling Basin need to be consistent with the Basin Sustainability Plan and other Murray Darling Basin initiatives and should explicitly demonstrate how actions will contribute to agreed Murray Darling Basin targets.

If any significant inconsistencies occur between regional natural resource management and other planning processes, plans should explain the rationale for the inconsistency and include appropriate measures to address negative impacts arising from proposed strategies and actions.

## **Key Element: Setting targets at the regional scale, consistent with the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets**

The Commonwealth and States/Territories have developed a National Framework for Natural Resource Management Standards and Targets.

The Framework specifies the minimum set of matters for which all regions must set measurable and achievable regional targets. Targets will be a core element of each regional plan, and may relate to absolute improvement in resource condition or decreases in the rate of degradation. The Framework does not specify the level for the targets in any region. In recognition of the relationship between standards and targets and monitoring and evaluation requirements, multilaterally agreed indicators applicable to each region's context for natural resource outcomes and management actions (including capacity building) will be required to be included in each plan. Further information on monitoring and evaluation indicator requirements will be prepared separate to these guidelines..

Governments will require all regions to undertake an initial assessment of all matters identified in the minimum set of required targets, as part of their integrated NRM planning process. If there are no significant NRM issues raised with regard to a particular matter, a statement that a target is not applicable and the evidence for this conclusion should be included in the plan. The need to set a target should be considered at any review of the accredited plan.

Targets can be characterised as aspirational targets, achievable resource condition targets, and targets for management actions. Aspirational targets set a long-term vision, providing a direction for setting the costed and achievable resource condition targets. Management action targets identify short-term, specific activities or results, which will contribute to achieving the desired changes in resource condition.

In many cases, a reasonable period of monitoring will be required to establish baselines or trends. Hence, many regions will not be in a position to set natural resource condition targets at the time their regional plans are put forward for accreditation. To address this situation, for accreditation, a regional plan will need to contain:

- i. management action targets, which will result in progress towards the minimum set of matters identified for regional targets;
- ii. resource condition targets consistent with the National Standards and Targets Framework, where they can be set, noting the availability of such tools as the Water Quality Targets database;
- iii. resource condition targets which have been agreed by relevant jurisdictions, including affected jurisdictions, through other processes, including Murray Darling Basin end-of-valley salinity targets;
- iv. commitment to the early establishment of monitoring systems to collect/analyse baseline and trend information, to enable setting of resource condition targets against the minimum set of matters;
- v. proposals and a timetable for undertaking the target-setting process; and
- vi. a commitment to have in place, within 3 years of signing of the relevant Bilateral Agreement(s), the minimum set of regional resource condition targets, or have demonstrated significant progress towards their establishment (including performance against points iii and iv above).

Some regions may have existing resource condition targets for matters in the minimum set that are specified differently from those in the National Framework, but which meet the requirements and priorities determined by the regions and the State. Providing the regional plan includes the requirements identified in points (i) to (vi) above, then the arrangements for addressing these differences and transition to the National Framework will be agreed between the Commonwealth and the relevant state.

## **Key Element: Strategic, prioritised and achievable actions necessary to address the range of NRM issues and achieve the regional targets**

Sufficient resources will rarely be available to immediately implement all actions and needs identified. As a result, regions will need to identify and prioritise the strategies and actions necessary to achieve the regional targets.

Regional plans should describe and evaluate the range of possible actions to address the issues and their social, economic and environmental impacts. This would include:

- quantifying, where appropriate, the costs and benefits of options, as well as the implications of taking no action;
- where relevant, modelling proposed actions and their economic, social and environmental impacts;
- outlining trade-offs and solutions or mitigation strategies;
- identifying the circumstances in which regions may need structural adjustment assistance as a result of the plan's implementation; and
- identifying community capacity building activities necessary to promote sustainable resource management and biodiversity conservation.

On the basis on the above analysis, plans should then describe preferred options and actions, and their impacts. These would include actions to:

- protect the natural resource base which underpins sustainable production and promote more efficient resource use (for example, by managing soil acidification, soil structure, water resources);
- protect environmental values (for example, by conserving biological diversity, habitats and ecosystem functioning); and
- ameliorate negative impacts arising from proposed strategies and actions.

Each proposed action or strategy will need to contribute to the achievement of the specific targets. For this reason the plan will need to include an analysis of:

- the mechanism or process through which the action will achieve or contribute to the target/milestone;
- the assumptions underlying the mechanism or process through which it is believed the action will achieve the target/milestone;
- the possible risks (e.g. possible external influences) that might adversely impact on the achievement of the target/milestone.

The assumptions will be the basis for developing evaluation questions for the action or strategy. The identified risks will be the basis for a risk management strategy by which the plan will manage potential risks to the achievement of targets/milestones.

Plans should reflect the interrelated as well as the broad nature of natural resource management issues. Specific strategies and actions could include, for example:

- maintaining and improving the condition of existing native vegetation, including threatened communities;
- establishing multiple purpose perennial vegetation (focussed on agriculture, forests, biodiversity and greenhouse outcomes) in targeted areas, identified through salinity, vegetation and hydrology mapping, and groundwater modelling;
- implementing recovery and action plans for threatened species that occur within the region;
- implementing threat abatement plans for key threatening processes within the region;
- protecting and rehabilitating priority waterways, floodplains, wetlands, and estuaries;
- improving stream water quality, for example, through activities in the riparian zone or through using engineering works, where appropriate, in critical areas (eg. salt interception devices and groundwater pumping, removal of weirs and redundant structures, fish ladders, artificial wetlands);
- improving the management of environmental allocations;
- using water more efficiently (eg. through activities which harness private investment in storage and distribution systems);
- improving water quality through best management practices, for example by minimising nutrient discharges and water sensitive urban design;
- installing drainage in catchments/regions where agreed by affected land managers, the downstream impacts are positive, and the overall benefits of the scheme provide substantial long-term results over other approaches;

- improving planning frameworks to reduce the rate of habitat clearance;
- improving capital works planning and coordination to minimise to best direct effort and resources to mitigate downstream impacts;
- stimulating landholders to implement improved biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management;
- assessing, identifying and addressing training needs;
- developing capacity building strategies to be adopted within the region;
- addressing adjustment and property amalgamation issues including the impact on farmers, landholders, rural industries and flow on effects to regional communities;
- identifying and addressing natural resource management causes of rural/urban infrastructure degradation (buildings, roads, etc.);
- identifying strategies to deal with significant adverse social and economic impacts arising from changes to natural resource management.
- identifying opportunities for the implementation of market based mechanisms, such as markets for ecosystem services.

For priority regions under the NAP, plans should include specific actions to:

- prevent, stabilise and reverse trends in dryland salinity affecting the sustainability of production, the conservation of biological diversity and the viability of regional infrastructure; and
- improve water quality and secure reliable allocations for human uses, industry and the environment:
  - this could include, for example, strategies for reallocating water and projects that result in more efficient delivery, use and recycling of water.

In some areas it will be technically and economically unfeasible to do anything but learn to live with the effects of salinity. Therefore the development of a shared vision that incorporates features such as salinity risk areas and sites that may have structural adjustment issues or other regional development opportunities is vital.

### **Key Element: Continuous development, monitoring, review and improvement of the plan**

To provide a sound basis for investment, plans must include clear requirements for ongoing monitoring and review to reflect new information and ensure continuous development and improvement of the plan over time. This should include a process for continuing to engage all stakeholders in reviewing and updating plans. Plans should also identify accountability, monitoring, and reporting arrangements, and performance milestones (based on management action targets) linked to the achievement of regional targets.

Accountability arrangements for implementing plans will need to integrate with broader accountability frameworks of relevant funding programs. For those regions covered by the NAP, accountability arrangements should integrate with the framework outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement that includes:

- a) plans including adequate monitoring of short to medium-term implementation of actions and a commitment to long-term effective monitoring of the biophysical, social and economic impacts of investments;
- b) regions reporting annually to the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments on progress and investment proposals on a three year running basis; and
- c) Commonwealth and State/Territory governments reporting annually on a national and state basis through the NRM Ministerial Council, with the reports being publicly available.

The National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and the National NRM Standards and Targets Framework establish common structures and requirements for monitoring and evaluation within NRM programs. There will be some mandatory information that will be required for national processes.

Plans should contain a monitoring and evaluation component that is consistent with the National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and include the key elements outlined below. Where these elements do not appear, there should be a clearly documented process to establish these elements within required timeframes.

*Program Logic:*

- An explanation of how the plan is intended to bring about long term resource condition outcomes, including the core strategies to be employed, the stages in each process, the change mechanisms and the assumptions that underlie them? (Note that the Plan should contain a comprehensive outline of the general processes by which the resource condition objectives will be achieved. The Investment Strategy should set these out in greater detail for individual funded actions.)
- Processes to test these assumptions and revise the plan when necessary.
- A performance information and evaluation strategy that is consistent with, and relevant to, this rationale and these assumptions.

*Existing Monitoring:*

- Details of the processes that are currently in place to monitor those aspects of natural resource condition identified as significant in the plan.
- An explanation of how these will be incorporated into an overall monitoring strategy for the plan.

*Performance Indicators:*

- Indicators and measures consistent with the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to be used to measure and report on the minimum set of matters for targets established under the Standards and Targets Framework.
- Indicators and measures which will be used in measuring and reporting on management action targets within 2 years of commencing activities and at the end of the program.
- Processes to review these targets periodically in the light of monitoring and evaluation findings, new research, or improved models.
- All other indicators pertinent to the strategies or actions employed to achieve the goals of the Plan (e.g. measures of outputs or of institutional or behavioural change).
- Details of the processes for data collection, which ensure that necessary performance data is current and timely.
- A satisfactory process of validation and quality control for performance data at the point of collection.

*Baseline Data:*

- Details of all of the available baseline data including measures of resource condition, attitude and behaviours where relevant to the Plan.
- An assessment of its usefulness and applicability

*Actions to Address Data Gaps:*

- Identification of any data gaps including baseline data or deficiencies in existing monitoring arrangements that need to be filled to meet performance information requirements for the plan
- A plan to develop appropriate measures to fill these gaps

*Data Management:*

Include details of the:

- proposed information management system and an assessment of its adequacy for the collection, storage, analysis and reporting of all performance information, including a costing
- systems capability of cooperative data-sharing arrangements where possible to minimise duplication and maximise efficient use of data.
- access arrangements for the information that is collected
- systems conformity to the multilateral Data Management Agreement / ANZLIC

*Evaluation:*

- An evaluation strategy that establishes processes for the review of the plan and its evaluation needs, at both regional and project levels.
- Details of the structures and processes for the management of the schedule of evaluations and the implementation of their recommendations
- An agreement for the evaluations to be utilised within the National M&E Framework

*Communication and Reporting:*

- Details of a comprehensive reporting structure tailored to the needs of all stakeholder groups including its ability to transmit complete and accurate information in the agreed format to the required stakeholders in time for it to be used for the purposes for which it was collected

*Roles and Responsibilities:*

- Details of the organisational and institutional arrangements and responsibilities for:
  - the collection, storage, analysis and reporting of performance information
  - the management of the performance information management system.
  - ensuring relevant evaluations are undertaken at appropriate times, and that findings are reported and utilised as appropriate.

*Adequate Resources:*

- An assessment of the adequacy of the resources allocated for on-going maintenance of systems for the collection of monitoring data, including storage, analysis and reporting; the conduct of evaluations; and establishment of baseline information (Note that resources include Dollars, Capacity, Institutions and Structures)
- A realistically costed proposal for any additional requirements.

## **Investing in Regional Plans**

### **1.1 The purpose and scope of investments**

In addition to developing and accrediting a regional plan, governments (and other potential investors) and regional communities will need to agree on investments in priority actions arising from accredited regional plans.

Investment proposals are a continuation of the regional planning process – for accreditation, Governments require a description of the regional NRM condition, targets and actions to improve it, while for investments Governments will require details of specific actions to address NRM problems identified in the plan, including the cost and specific impact on particular NRM outcomes. Governments will invest in these overall NRM outcomes rather than individual projects.

### **1.2 What information would investors need?**

Potential investors will require certain information to inform their investment decision-making. In preparing investment proposals, regions should focus initially on those actions deemed to be most important (except where, for example, the bilateral agreement requires investment proposals to be prepared for *all* actions in the regional plan). The minimum information that Governments are likely to require to assist their investment decision-making would be:

1. detail of the specific actions/projects proposed to be undertaken
2. costings of the actions and proposed sources of investment;
3. details of the proposed monitoring and evaluation strategy for individual actions;
4. the expected returns on investment—in particular, a summary of what the proposed actions will deliver in relation to the targets outlined in the accredited regional plan;
5. identification of the primary beneficiaries of the investment (public good versus private);
6. urgency/significance/critical nature of the action, and the consequences of not doing the action

7. relationship with existing Government policies/programs;
8. risk factors and how these will be managed;
9. assumptions for chosen actions; and
10. timelines, milestones and performance indicators for each action.

Where relevant, the investment proposals should also identify (and provide costings for) strategies to address those social and economic consequences of NRM actions.

Against the minimum information requirements, it is recognised that different investors will require different levels of detail. For this reason, investment proposals will need to be prepared cooperatively between the region and potential investors - likely to be an iterative process to provide the information required and also to ensure the best opportunity of proposals being funded.

### 1.3 Process for selecting regional plan investments

As the Commonwealth and the States will be joint investors in regional plans, they will need to decide on the process for selecting preferred investments for NAP and NHT funding, including, for example, an agreement on the decision-making criteria to be used in each jurisdiction. As investment proposals build on the regional plan, the investment decision-making criteria will need to have continuity with the accreditation criteria. As well as connecting with the accreditation criteria, Governments' investment decision-making criteria will need to flow directly from the minimum information requirements.

### Glossary

**Achievable resource condition targets:** Within regional plans, regional bodies will be required to set specific, timebound and measurable targets, relating largely to resource condition, against the minimum set of matters for regional targets set out in the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets. The timeframe for achievement of these targets is likely to be 10-20 years. These targets must be pragmatic and achievable. They would be developed iteratively, including through a benefit/cost analysis. Examples could include: average salinity of X ECs at specific end-of-valley site by year Y; X hectares of specific native vegetation type within region at year Y; X stream sites within region in specific river health category by year Y. Within their regional plans, regional bodies may also wish to set targets for matters that are additional to the minimum set.

**Aspirational targets:** As part of the regional planning process, it may be valuable for regions to set out a vision or goals for NRM in their region, which could include long-term "targets" which are aspirational statements about the desired condition of their natural resources in the longer term (eg 50+ years). These goals or "targets" would guide regional planning, and set a context for the measurable and achievable targets required under this Framework. Examples could include: regional extent of native vegetation to be increased to 30% cover; decrease in average salinity in regional streams.

**Bilateral agreement:** is an agreement between two parties, usually the Commonwealth and relevant State/Territory Government. The nature and title of bilateral agreements may vary, depending on their purpose or related funding program. For example, the current bilateral agreements for funding under the Natural Heritage Trust are called 'NHT Partnership Agreements'.

**Heritage value:** of a place includes the place's natural and cultural environment having aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance for current and future generations of Australians.

**Investment strategy:** is the 'prospectus' or 'business plan' that is developed to attract external investment in the regional plan. The investment strategy identifies the specific actions, costs, time frames required to implement the regional plan and achieve the regional targets, as well as the expected returns on investment.

**Management action targets:** Regional bodies will be required, as part of their regional plans, to set short-term targets (1-5 years), relating mainly to management actions or capacity-building. These targets must contribute to progress towards the longer-term resource condition targets. The matters for these targets are not specified, as the relevant management solutions to reversing resource degradation are likely to vary substantially between regions. Examples include: X hectares of recharge zones within region to be revegetated by year Y; X km of riparian zone to be fenced and managed, X% of farms within region with whole farm plans.

**National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality:** the National Action Plan was endorsed by the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers at the Council of Australian Governments on 3 November 2000 with governments committing a total of \$1.4 billion over seven year to implement the plan. Key objectives of the National Action Plan are to:

- prevent, stabilise and reverse trends in salinity, particularly dryland salinity, affecting the sustainability of production, the conservation of biological diversity and the viability of our infrastructure; and
- improve water quality and secure reliable allocations for human uses, industry and the environment.

Further details can be found at: [www.affa.gov.au/actionsalinityandwater](http://www.affa.gov.au/actionsalinityandwater).

**National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets:** is an agreed approach to achieving change in natural resource condition and management, by establishing a set of desired national natural resource outcomes, and a minimum set of matters for which regional targets must be set, to make progress towards these outcomes. Agreed guidelines and protocols for establishing these targets will form a component of the Framework. Principles and an approach to best practice management of natural resources will also be developed under the Framework.

**National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework:** is a framework prepared to support the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council in assessing progress towards improved natural resource condition and the assessment of the performance of national natural resource management programs, strategies and policies.

**National Standards:** will be agreed between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories and comprise two elements:

1. the desired condition of Australia's natural resources and an approach to setting regional targets to achieve this; and
2. principles for best practice management of natural resources by governments, including legislative, policy, process and institutional systems.

**National Outcomes:** the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets identifies agreed national outcomes, which are aspirational statements about desired national natural resource condition.

**Natural Heritage Trust:** was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1996, with \$1.5 billion invested in Australia's natural heritage over the six years to 30 June 2002. The goal of the Trust is to stimulate activities in the national interest to achieve the conservation, sustainable use and repair of Australia's natural environment. The Trust is a partnership of all Australians, bringing together the efforts of individuals, communities and governments, targeting our environmental problems at their source. In May 2001, the Commonwealth Government committed \$1 billion to extend the Natural Heritage Trust for a further five years, commencing in 2002-03. Further details can be found at: [www.nht.gov.au](http://www.nht.gov.au).

**Regions:** will be agreed and the boundaries described in bilateral agreements. They can be based on a range of different scales. For example, some regions may be defined on a biophysical basis (such as catchment or sub-catchment scale) while other may be based on administrative boundaries (for example, local government boundaries or state agency regional boundaries). A region may also cross state/territory borders.

**Regional agreement:** is an agreement between the Commonwealth, relevant State/Territory Governments, and relevant regional bodies. The agreement will describe the management and accountability arrangements to apply to the implementation of an accredited plan and investment strategy. The agreement will also identify responsibility for implementing the different components of the plan.

**Regional body:** is the organisation agreed between the Commonwealth and relevant State/Territory Government as being responsible for overseeing the development and implementation of a regional plan. The nature of regional bodies will vary from state to state, depending on the legislative and policy frameworks within each jurisdiction. For example, in South Australia regional bodies are known as Integrated Natural Resource Management Groups, while in Victoria, Catchment Management Authorities are the agreed regional bodies.

**Regional Targets:** will assist regional communities to define what they want to achieve within their regional NRM plans. Targets will also help the regions to measure the success of their efforts and their contribution to national improvements in resource condition and management. Regional targets will set out desired outcomes and timeframes for reaching them. Regional targets fall into three categories:

1. aspirational targets;
2. achievable natural resource condition targets; and
3. management action targets.