



## Making successful investments in NRM practice change

Research project number HAS13 of the Social and Institutional Research Program of Land & Water Australia.

Commencement Date: April 2006

Anticipated Completion Date: May 2010

### Background

Much of the investment by the 56 NRM regional bodies around Australia is targeted towards fostering change in practice by landholders. There is therefore value in the regions having good tools and processes to help them understand the dynamics of this change within their regions and how they can best foster the desired change. This understanding, coupled with a culture of continuous learning, will help them to effectively plan, implement, review and adapt their investment in practice change. There is also opportunity to influence future policy for regional NRM so as to enable and support successful investment in NRM practice change at a regional level.

### Project objective

The objective of the project is to enable better informed and more effective investments in NRM practice change through NRM regional bodies. It is intended that the project will deliver two key outcomes:

- improved capacity of participating NRM regional bodies to plan, manage, review and adapt their investments and strategies for NRM practice change leading to improved natural resource condition; and
- lessons learnt from the project passed to policy makers (through their involvement in the project, briefings and other means) to enable continuous program and policy improvement for targeted and effective regional investment in NRM practice change.

### Key research questions

This is an action learning project which continues to evolve as we work together with the participating NRM regional bodies. Detailed research questions arise and are considered through the course of the project.

### Study areas

The NRM regional bodies participating in the project in 2007 were Desert Channels Queensland, Fitzroy Basin Association (Qld), Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority (NSW), Lachlan Catchment Management Authority (NSW), West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (Vic), North East Catchment Management Authority (Vic), South East NRM Board (SA), South Coast NRM Inc. (WA), and NRM North Tasmania.

In 2008, Desert Channels Queensland and South East NRM Board pulled out but South Australian Arid Lands NRM Board (SA) came on board.

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## Target audience/s for project findings:

Key audiences are the participating regions - particularly the staff who are co-researchers, the executives and board members - and policy makers at State and Australian Government levels.

## Progress to date

Thirty-five NRM regional bodies submitted an expression of interest to participate in the project. From this, the participating regions were selected based on their areas of interest, their willingness to contribute staff time and funds, and the distribution of geography and land use types. A workshop held in each region identified the NRM regional body's current approach to practice change and their key challenges and needs.

A practice change planning framework was developed in close collaboration with the participating regions (see attached) and this continues to be tested and refined. It helps NRM regional bodies to identify how they will achieve their local vision for NRM, with a particular focus on the people aspects of change.

The first annual forum was held in Melbourne in April 2007. Each of the participating regions gave a presentation about an approach that they had adopted and that they felt may be useful for other regions to consider. In addition to providing an opportunity for exchange of information, the forum also enabled networks to be built and a community of practice to be developed amongst all project participants.

The forum also enabled the regions to more clearly identify specific areas where they were interested in working with the project team to develop new tools or approaches. As a result, work with the regions for 2007 concentrated on five key themes:

Implementation models – comparing approaches for supporting regional NRM implementation groups and identifying suitable mechanisms for fostering change.  
Planning – developing and testing a process for planning a program, including better understanding of the 'customers' in order to engage with people who haven't engaged in the past.

Community engagement planning – identifying key considerations in developing a community engagement plan to ensure that: all obligations are met; the plan is used within the organisation; and it is effective in engaging with the community.

Strategic review – providing regions with a process to investigate their current approaches to investing in practice change and the success of these approaches in achieving targets identified in regional catchment strategies.

Business planning – considering ways to incorporate practice change into standard business practice/planning.

The practice change planning framework provided the basis for several of these

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themes. Tools and information resources that help NRM regional bodies to understand and plan for practice change have been sourced or developed as required for each of the themes and made available via the project website. At the end of 2007, learnings from the five themes were reviewed and synthesised and plans initiated for the next annual learning cycle.

The second annual forum took place in Adelaide in February 2008 and workplans were subsequently developed for the four themes which are the focus of the 2008 action learning cycle. Work on all these themes is now underway:

*Approaches to implementation – developing a form of decision support for how to best choose/support/evolve implementation mechanisms.*

To date the regions have completed an initial scoping survey to form a picture of what implementation looks like in each region. The regions have compared findings and formulated some further questions (which they are currently completing) to complete this analysis. The stocktake is looking at individual implementation mechanisms and also how mechanisms are used in a mix. This is helping to develop a comparative picture of what is used around Australia, as well as a decision support tool for choosing implementation mechanisms.

*Community engagement – developing a better understanding of the elements to be considered in planning for community engagement that facilitates effective investments in practice change*

The regions have been carrying out a stocktake of current community engagement activities. A matrix tool was developed to assist the regions reflect on their current activities. Key questions included: What do we currently do? Who was involved in planning the activity? What was the objective or purpose of the engagement? Who did we engage with in this activity? What element of the Planning Framework does it relate to? Did the results or lessons learned of the activity feed into other processes, activities or decisions? How effective was the activity in meeting its purpose or objective? How effective was the activity in interacting with the target audience?

The regions are now going to focus on one or two programs and define what a successful community engagement plan will look like for those programs.

*Monitoring and evaluation – building regions' internal capacity for M&E; improving their capacity to choose the best way to learn about what worked; and improving their systems for retention of corporate learning*

The regions are drafting a region-specific program logic for their PMP programs and identifying the most important practice change assumptions to test. The next task is the scoping of M&E tools. The regions will identify their existing M&E tools with respect to practice change so that gaps can be identified. The regions do not need to have

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finalised their program logics for this task, so this is already underway.

Program logic and the planning framework – *trailing Program Logic and the Practice Change Planning Framework as a basis for review of RIS / RCIP etc.*

The regions are about to embark on the design of programs (using program logic) under Caring for Our Country. They are using the planning framework, to help test their assumptions and to encourage staff and other stakeholders to consider the social aspects of changes in practice. The regions are currently designing the draft process and tools for this planning that will work for them. A starting point for each of the regions is the "Planning for NRM Practice Change Programs" process.

The regions are then aiming to trial the process and tools with their programs in late July and August.

## Key outputs

Key outputs of the project to date include:

- A Practice Change Planning Framework which has been refined several times and is proving a useful tool for prompting consideration of the people aspects of change.
- A Practice Change Planning Process that presents a step-wise approach for program planning by a regional NRM body, using program logic and the practice change planning framework.
- A modified NRM Program Logic
- An explanation of how Program Logic and the Practice Change Planning Framework fit together as program planning tools. In short, program logic helps to identify what you aim to achieve while the practice change planning framework then helps to identify how this will be achieved.
- A Strategic Review Process for taking a rear-vision look at past investments and how these have considered and fostered practice change.
- A guide to strategies for Supporting Regional NRM Implementation Groups
- Case studies of how four different regions support regional NRM implementation groups and foster change.
- An outline of Key Considerations for Community Engagement Planning
- A policy briefing paper outlining some early implications from the project.
- A project website that includes: as 'works in progress' the tools and processes being developed by the project; a page with links to a range of suitable tools and information to help in understanding and fostering practice change; and details of the participating regions.
- Linkages between participating regions - two forums involving all participating NRM regional bodies; workshops held in each region; teleconferences with regions; communication by the GHD Hassall team; and the shared focus of the project have all helped to enable sharing of ideas across the regions.



## Principal researcher

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For more information and tools:

[http://www.hassall.com.au/australian\\_division/index\\_000.html](http://www.hassall.com.au/australian_division/index_000.html)

