



Australian Government
Land & Water Australia

Department of the Environment,
Water, Heritage and the Arts

Supporting Regional NRM Implementation Groups

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Background

Working with groups of people has been a critical part of fostering natural resource management (NRM) in Australia. Following is a summary of different ways by which four regional NRM bodies: Fitzroy Basin Association, Desert Channels Queensland, NRM North (Tasmania) and South Coast NRM (WA) support groups in their region and the benefits and risks associated with these strategies.

Why work with groups?

Regional NRM bodies have evolved a range of different ways to work with groups in their region. The main reasons for working with groups include:

- ▶ Finding the best model for the region
- ▶ Being able to engage with a broader sector of people who can do works in the region
- ▶ Building new relationships and strengthening existing ones
- ▶ Accountability and transparency

- ▶ Simpler project contracting
- ▶ Communication
- ▶ Stakeholder preference
- ▶ Providing a conduit for local knowledge
- ▶ Engaging subregional stakeholders
- ▶ Providing a mechanism for indigenous involvement in the process
- ▶ Logistical needs
- ▶ Working with what already exists - pre-existing arrangements and institutional history are sometimes inherited and used because they are well-established, well-engaged with the local community and very active in implementation.

An advantage of working with existing groups is that they generally have a long term interest, an existing group identity and are an avenue for engaging with a different set of people.

Groups may have varied objectives and expectations of their relationship with the regional NRM body. For some it may be primarily to receive advice and/or funding to enable their local activities, while others may wish to have broader input to the direction that is being taken for NRM across the region.

The nature of these groups directly influences the investment models being used within a region. For example, Fitzroy Basin Association, NRM North and South Coast NRM do much of their activity through strong sub-regional groups who have become their major delivery partners. They fund staff for these groups and regard them to be one of their major mechanisms for local engagement. Desert Channels Queensland have a similar approach with one group in their region, while in the other sub-regions the catchment committees have been less focused on implementation and DCQ has worked directly with individuals and Landcare groups in those areas.

Case Study and Fact Sheet

When to use

Implementation groups can be useful in planning, implementation and review stages.

Other tools for similar situations

Steering Committees
Community Advisory Groups
Technical or Expert Panels
Community Meetings

Companion Tools

Ongoing Advisory Panel fact sheet
NRM practice change planning framework



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Making Successful Investments in NRM Practice Change

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Characteristics of NRM Groups

Types of groups

There are many different types of formal and informal community groups involved with regional NRM. These have many forms and many names. Some of the main types are broadly described below.

Sub-regional groups (also referred to as catchment committees, NRM groups) often have a formal relationship with the regional NRM body in an advisory and/or implementation capacity. Sub-regional groups and catchment committees operate under a range of models which influence the way in which they are supported. These include incorporated group structures, groups hosted by the regional NRM body and groups which are supported within Local Government structures. They are generally supported by staff that are either directly employed by the group, another partner or the regional NRM body.

Advisory or consultative committees generally focus on an issue that affects the whole catchment. They have a specific role to advise the regional NRM body that usually arranges and hosts these committees.

'Local' implementation groups refers to the wide range of groups in the community that focus on 'doing the action'. These are often locally based and include 'care' groups (Landcare, Bushcare, Coastcare), WaterWatch, and 'friends of' groups. They are usually autonomous from the regional NRM body and generally receive less formal support from them for their general functioning. They often focus on on-ground activities rather than meetings.

Industry groups may implement NRM activities or undertake projects with the regional NRM body, perhaps through an existing NRM initiative they have in place such as a Best Management Practices program. They may also have an advisory role or have members on advisory committees.

Clusters of people who are not formally a group may come together for specific issues or projects to work with the regional NRM body. For example, these may be neighbours or people with a common interest. There may be an advantage for a collective effort, e.g. to do works along a riparian zone that passes through several properties, or to manage a weed problem.

Membership and Succession

The membership of a group may vary significantly. Local and industry groups tend to be open to all people with an interest in that group, its goals or locality. Sub-regional groups tend to have 6-20 members who represent the larger group of the community.

The term of membership for sub-regional groups tends to be around 3 years, and in many cases people stay on for several terms. Members are usually required to live in the sub-region and there is often an aim to have representatives from a range of sectors.

It is believed that the main factors motivating people to join the groups tend to be: interest, personal philosophy, desire to share knowledge and have a voice, perception of NRM as a key influence on their particular sector, social aspect, loyalty and a genuine concern for the future.

However, it is often difficult to find people willing to be members of the groups. Time commitments are generally the major barrier. The community's perception of the group can also influence interest from potential new members. While there may be many willing hands for project work, groups often rely on the energy and enthusiasm of a few key people to keep the group functioning. Many community groups are increasingly facing burn-out, with declining membership numbers and difficulties in attracting people to take on office bearer roles.

As a community changes and/or the focus of NRM priorities shift, there may be a need to review whether the group membership is suitably representative of the community. For example, some NRM groups have traditionally been made up of farmers and lack representation of the peri-urban sector which may have grown substantially.

In Queensland there is no need for the groups to be formally endorsed, in Tasmania key stakeholder groups endorse the membership of sub-regional groups, while in South Australia the NRM group members are formally appointed by the minister.

Attracting new members to the group may be desirable to reinvigorate the group, keep it alive, gain suitable representation of the community or as part of a regular, transparent process. This may be arranged by the group itself or the regional NRM body, depending on the degree of autonomy or the help needed. This process can range from very formal to informal and is frequently done via: **direct approach** to individuals – most useful where a very specific skill set is needed that is held by only a few people.

Supporting NRM Groups

Support mechanisms

There are a number of ways by which regional NRM bodies support groups in their region. Some of this is directed specifically towards supporting the group's operation. This is most commonly the case for subregional groups which are the major investment partners in the region. In other cases, such as the local implementation or industry groups, the support may be directed towards enabling specific projects or outcomes. This is particularly the case with 'care' groups and 'friend of' groups.

Some mechanisms used by regional NRM bodies to support groups include:

- ▶ Secretarial support / staffing – providing regional NRM body staff or providing funds for groups to employ staff, either directly or with a partner organisation
- ▶ Assisting with, or undertaking, project administration
- ▶ Supporting group incorporation
- ▶ Funding meeting costs
- ▶ Training
- ▶ Technical input
- ▶ Providing a regular presence and contact at their activities
- ▶ Assisting with training and field days
- ▶ Including them in extension activities, often as a channel
- ▶ Funding projects
- ▶ Assisting with on-ground works.

The investment in these group support mechanisms varies significantly. For example, for the DCQ, FBA and NRM North regions, the cost of supporting groups ranges from \$12,000 to \$3 million/year. The costs covered also vary, as shown in Table 1. Table 2 summarises some of the benefits and risks of different support mechanisms, focused primarily on sub-regional groups.

Supporting individuals and clusters

For most regions it is much easier to work with an existing group, than to bring together individuals. There are a number of strategies being used to work with individuals or clusters of people who are not in a formal group, including:

- ▶ Having an NRM facilitator in local government to act as a 'referral service'
- ▶ Project contracts with individuals - in several regions individual project proposals are considered more favourably for funding if collaboration between neighbours can be demonstrated.

NRM North have a detailed property management planning (PMP) process where they contract consultants to develop detailed PMPs with landholders. Part of this process is done with groups of people, often neighbours. This often leads to proposals for other activities, either from individuals or the group of people. The sub-regional NRM facilitator will work with each farm to develop a 3 year investment package for NRM activities on each individual property.

Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) fund many projects directly with individuals and the application process is equally open to both individuals and groups. Their on-ground support team help to link people through discussions and suggestions, and projects receive higher merit scores during the assessment process for demonstrating collaboration. DCQ are considering moving to a simpler process to enable people within an area to work together on addressing agreed priorities.

Fitzroy Basin Association (FBA) use a Neighbourhood Catchment approach to identify key issues within localities and 'hotspots' for action. They find it easier to manage projects to address these issues where Landcare groups already exist, but they are also trying to work with other clusters of neighbours.

Table 1 Annual investment and types of costs associated with supporting sub-regional groups

Costs	NRM North subregional groups	DCQ Georgina Diamantina and Cooper's Creek Catchment Committees	DCQ - Desert Uplands Committee*	DCQ Indigenous Advisory Panel	FBA Sub-regional Groups
Annual Investment excl projects	\$86,000	\$20,000	\$155,000	\$12,000	\$3 million
Sitting Fees	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes
Travel Costs	Sometimes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Sometimes
Meeting costs (eg catering)	Sometimes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secretarial support [^]	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Training	Sometimes	Sometimes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Projects #	Sometimes	Yes	Sometimes	No	Yes
Which costs are the largest?	Varies	Sitting costs	Secretarial support	Meeting costs	Staff

* DCQ funds a half share of costs - matched by the Burdekin Dry Tropics region in which part of the Desert Uplands falls

[^] Secretarial support is part of a full time coordinator position that DCQ funds while for the other groups DCQ staff provide the secretarial support

May be required to apply for competitive project funds like other stakeholders do

Challenges and Learnings

Key challenges

There are a number of challenges that can face groups and the regional NRM bodies working with them. Described below are some of these challenges, followed by approaches used in some regions to overcome these.

Diversity of groups can be challenging at times

Identify which groups people connect with and recognise these. Value the diversity and maintain an understanding of it.

Group is not incorporated, so cannot manage large project funds or employ staff

Form partnership arrangements with other groups (e.g. Local Government) or an 'umbrella group' (e.g. sub-regional body) that can host the projects, and provide the project management and employment infrastructure. This can enable the group to focus on activities without needing to undertake the procedures, meetings and paperwork of an incorporated body.

Only a small proportion of people are involved with groups and interested in the formalised group process

Also work on 'one-off' activities that engage others – even if for a few days, as there are usually more people interested in being involved in a specific activity rather than committing to a group for the long term. 'Umbrella groups' or partners who can manage project funds and administration can allow the group to focus on on-ground action rather than formal processes.

Mis-alignment of goals of regional NRM and other stakeholders such as Local Government

Draw alignments between views and roles by effectively targeting activities of the NRM group towards those of Local Government.

Communication – getting consistent messages across all groups

Have a communication officer, clear roles and responsibilities, and do not let mixed messages get too out of hand.

Motivation and empowerment towards action

Identify and understand – what do people get from being involved in the group? Why are they there/not there? What triggers can be worked on? What can be done?

Mis-fit between cultural perceptions of what 'group' involvement means and needs of regional NRM, eg balance of meetings and advisory role vs activity

Recognise social values, agree on objectives and roles and revisit these regularly, provide suitable support processes, and encourage group to engage a broad cross-section of community.

Group lacks direction, losing motivation

Work through a process of group reinvigoration to set priorities, roles and focus. Recognise and understand the stages of group development. Accept that the group may choose to cease.

Maintaining community relevance, eg group no longer regarded as relevant by broader stakeholders

Work through a process of group reinvigoration. Promote activities and direction, then call for nominations for new members. Provide support with on-ground teams that frequently travel in the region.

Some key learnings about fostering NRM change

In working with groups or individuals, the regional NRM bodies have identified that:

- ▶ The participants must own the change and find the need for it themselves
- ▶ Policy and legislation is the 'elephant in the room'
- ▶ There is a need to improve information management and documentation systems.

Table 2 Benefits and risks of different ways of supporting groups

SUPPORT STRATEGY	BENEFITS	RISKS
General support of sub-regional groups	<p>Establishment of, and access to, local networks</p> <p>Maintaining local relevance of NRM investments</p> <p>Effective implementation with an engaged community</p> <p>Greater ability to contact landholders and raise awareness of NRM issues in an area, including the benefits of using sustainable production methods for long term profitability and an improved environment</p> <p>Board membership with genuine representation</p> <p>Enable sub-regional residents to deal with a local face</p> <p>Add to NRM body's investments</p> <p>Take some of the workload off NRM body's staff by managing their own projects</p> <p>An entry into indigenous communities at the onground project level</p> <p>Understanding that NRM is important</p>	<p>Raising subregional expectations beyond a level that can be resourced by the organisation</p> <p>Consistent communication</p> <p>Wasted resources</p> <p>Groups do not see themselves as part of the NRM body's region and would rather compete for funds than apply in partnership</p> <p>Groups fail to deliver Board representation that is acceptable to their communities</p> <p>NRM body's profile is diminished and hence the capacity to represent the regional interests collectively could be diminished</p> <p>Risks of not supporting the groups</p> <p>Losing access to local networks and not maintaining relevance to subregional issues</p> <p>Sub-regional groups would fold and any group claiming to represent the catchments could demand a seat on the Board</p> <p>Board would lack indigenous representation</p> <p>NRM body would require extra staff resources to maintain the close engagement of the community</p> <p>There is a risk of less uptake of incentives, and less trialling of new methods by landholders through doing projects, if sub-regional organisations are not used</p> <p>Reduce NRM body's ability to relate to the people it is trying to engage with</p>
Fund projects by the groups	<p>Sub-regional issues are prioritised; local knowledge provides insight into local and individual capacity to do projects</p> <p>Maximise the reach of the investment for the minimum outlay of time</p> <p>Sub-regional groups can focus on engagement and development of projects with landholders</p>	<p>Subjective judgements are made on some aspects but the process for decision making is greatly influenced by the regional NRM body</p> <p>Less ability for the sub-regional groups to coerce the landholder into completing the project than if it is a direct contract with the landholder</p> <p>Can limit the profile of the regional NRM body</p>
Support organisation or incorporation of groups	<p>Groups can employ their own staff</p> <p>Commitment from group</p> <p>Ability to access funds</p> <p>Strong group identity has positive flow on effects in community</p>	<p>Added burden to volunteers</p> <p>Staff may be isolated, or not appropriately supervised/managed</p>
Umbrella group or organisation administers projects and manages staff for smaller groups	<p>Frees group from the need to be incorporated and have formal meeting processes</p> <p>Reduces administrative burden on group</p> <p>May provide more suitable employment arrangements for staff management and teams</p> <p>Provides access to resources, knowledge and team members in the host organisation</p>	<p>Relies on good relationships and projects being completed to an agreed standard</p> <p>May add additional cost unless the partner organisation co-contributes or does it as 'goodwill'</p> <p>Ownership may be less clear</p>

Table 2 Benefits and risks of different ways of supporting groups - CONTINUED

SUPPORT STRATEGY	BENEFITS	RISKS
Provide administrative support for group meetings	Provides dedicated staff time Relieves administrative burden on volunteers	Resource intensive Group does not take responsibility
Staff member sets meeting dates and organises logistics	Prompts meeting to occur	Group may take less responsibility Needs to be collaborative, to find a suitable date
Dedicated support staff	Keeps momentum going Builds and strengthens relationships with community and local government Engagement mechanism Provides a 'face' for the nexus of different interests Allows face to face engagement – which most people prefer	Group falls apart due to staff turnover Communication less effective
Team support from NRM body (no dedicated subregional staff roles)	Better support Draw on pool of skills as required Better internal communication	Lack of local ownership
Support staff (eg sub-regional NRM facilitator) positioned within the sub-regions (employed by regional NRM body or by a partner group / agency)	Connection with people in region Local factors make it possible to engage with a broader pool of other people Empowering Enables the needs of individuals to be serviced	Accountability Staff become more localised rather than catchment based Staff miss organisational culture and may feel isolated Limits operational planning Uses more budget Less diversity of skills across the staff team Individual staff member needs to be a self starter and work to a plan Limits the profile of the regional NRM body
Partnerships with local government for sub-regional facilitator	Leverage additional funding Access to local government information / resources Engagement with local government Local government employs and houses the subregional facilitator Local government offers the 'formalities' and structure for contracting, which means local groups do not need to do this	Perception of being a 'government' agency Staff role may not 'fit' easily in local government – risk of isolation within an office
Relationships	Enables linkages, projects, activities, information flow, and joint planning	Relies on relationships rather than structure Activities and plans at risk when staff turnover occurs
Providing childcare for meetings	Enables a younger sector of the community to participate	NB. This is not provided by any of the NRM bodies involved in the project but is provided in some remote regions, such as SA Arid Lands, and has been found to be effective

For further information

This fact sheet is one of a series prepared for the Making Successful Investments in NRM Practice Change project.

For further fact sheets and information visit the NRM Practice Change website:

www.hassall.com.au/australian_division

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