

'Enhancing and targeting the roles for Capacity-building in regional natural resource management'



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Project background

This 2-year project worked with the North Central CMA in Victoria and South Coast NRM in Western Australia to assess capacity needs within regional NRM bodies to plan and implement regional NRM. The research consisted of two parts:

1. Understanding the needs for capacity-building within CMAs/Catchment Councils themselves in relation to technical analysis and decision analysis needs.
2. Understanding the capacities of organisations and agencies within regions to develop and deliver the desired capacity-building activities for land managers.

Methodology

The research consisted of 3 components:

- Capacity-building case study of the North Central CMA in Victoria
- Capacity-building case study of South Coast NRM in WA
- Study of 18 catchment management organisations to assess capacity for technical analysis and decision-making

What we found

North Central case study

A series of focus groups were held in 2006 in the North Central CMA region with representatives of the CMA Board, staff and Implementation Committees), the Department of Primary Industries Catchment Agricultural Services (extension providers), local government staff, Landcare coordinators and research providers.

The study highlighted a number of key areas that are important for increasing the capacity of the North Central CMA for technical analysis and decision-making. These included the abilities to commission research based on strategic needs, integrate information from a range of scientific/technical areas, have staff with the ability to work across disciplines, identify which parts of research are important for decision-making, incorporate research into decision-making and apply evaluation processes. Community consultation was identified as a complex process that should be used appropriately and judiciously to foster strong community involvement. Adaptive management and evaluation was found to be a significant gap. There was an overall need for the CMA to make better use of science to underpin strategic decisions, and also to become a more critical purchaser of research and extension.

South Coast NRM case study

Qualitative interviews were held with focus groups from within the SCNRM itself (staff and various working groups) and their partner agencies and groups (forestry, natural resource management officers, Department of Agriculture and Food WA, Department of Environment and Conservation, Department of Water, a landholder group, indigenous group, local government and a 'wildcard' group of other interested NRM stakeholders).

The study highlighted a number of key areas that are important for increasing the capacity of SCNRM for technical analysis and decision-making: obtaining and using socio-economic information, integrating different types of information, addressing research gaps and applying effective evaluation processes. Effective collaboration and partnerships for regional NRM on the South Coast was a major strength identified by this study. The need to make better use of economic and social information in decision-making was suggested. Other conclusions highlighted in the study included the need for succession planning of working group members, the importance of communicating the rationale for funding priorities to landholders and the need for government to develop guidelines to assist in planning and monitoring processes.

Survey of 18 catchment management organisations

The study of 18 CMOs from around Australia had the aim of identifying ways in which CMOs could make better use of technical and socio-economic information for NRM decision-making; and how government can support them in doing so. We found that CMOs largely use biophysical information and they have good relationships with State agencies and universities. They have a tendency to rely on local contacts and networks for information. We found a lack of awareness of issues around research quality. All CMOs integrate different types of information to some extent but there is considerable scope for more formal approaches. Most evaluation processes are based on accounting for on-ground activities. Boards and committee structures appear to be an effective way to engage a wide range of community members, however, burnout is common.

What can CMOs do to make better use of technical information in NRM decision-making?

- Make better use of science to underpin strategic decisions and become more critical purchasers of research.
- Make greater use of economics and social science throughout their planning and prioritisation processes.
- Make routine use of modelling to estimate likely NRM outcomes from investments, and to embed this in the planning and prioritisation process.
- CMOs work together to develop and clarify the roles for community consultation within the decision making process, and establish processes for how community and scientific knowledge can be brought together.
- Develop and implement succession planning processes for community-based committees.
- At least once/year, or at key times when major pieces of work are complete, CMO staff and key working group members to meet and discuss outcomes, reflect on lessons learnt, and areas for improvement.
- Communicate clearly to landholders and implementation staff regarding the rationale behind and processes for prioritisation of funding.

What can governments do to better support regional NRM?

- Provide guidelines on roles for social science and economics in CMO planning and prioritisation.
- Invest in making suitable models and quality-assured data sets available to all CMOs.
- Work with regions to develop practical decision-making frameworks, focused on outcomes, to enhance integration, evaluation and thinking about community consultation.
- Reduce pressures on CMOs to act with a short-term focus. Develop more realistic timetables for investigation, planning and prioritisation prior to commencement of on-ground investments.
- Governments to review reporting processes and planning timelines with a view to reducing barriers to good integration by CMOs.
- In consultation with CMOs develop guidelines for processes such as collection and use of information, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation (such as NSW NRC Standard).

Where can I find out more?

The technical reports from this project can be found at: www.sif3.org



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