

Next Generation NRM Plans and Emerging Ecosystem Service Markets in Northern Australia

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Opportunities for Northern Australia

- Emerging market-based Greenhouse Gas Abatement programs provide a real opportunity for Northern Australia to secure adaptation to climate change through enhanced landscape resilience.
- Landholders, specifically agricultural (pastoral and cropping) indigenous and conservation landholders, will be required to mitigate Australia's greenhouse gas emissions.
- They will also enable transformation in these landscapes and in the communities that rely on them.
- NRM governance arrangements are suited to landscape-scale mitigation and climate adaptation.
- We discuss reforms in NRM planning and governance to maximise the impact of emerging-market based programs for Northern Australia.

How regional NRM Planning can shape climate adaptation

- Australia's collaborative regional NRM planning:
 - is a flexible mechanism for planning and governance;
 - is framed within a strong continuous improvement framework;
 - Has a strong focus on reaching collective agreement about the efforts required to preserve and restore landscapes, manage natural assets, and undertake resource condition monitoring;
 - has the potential to mediate landscape changes in the face of the multiple and regionally diverse pressures in the Australian landscape.
- These characteristics of NRM approaches make it ideal for building landscape resilience and guiding landscape-scale approaches to climate change adaptation.

A renewed role for NRM Plans

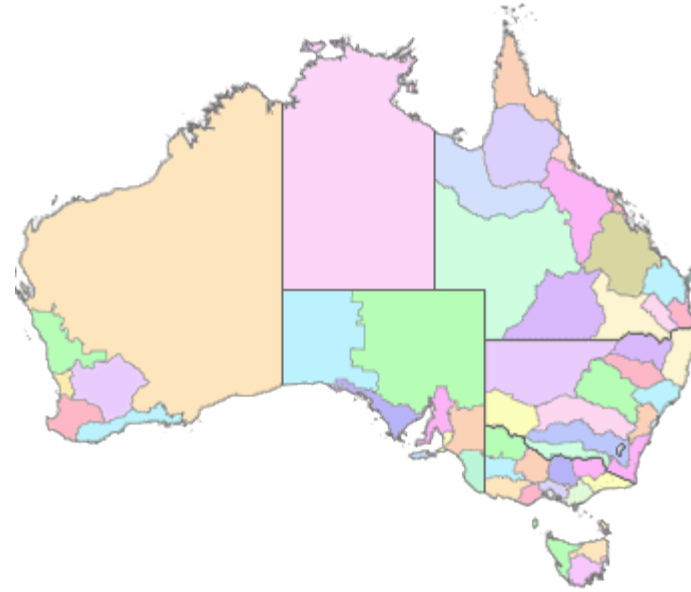
- The Australian Government has recognised the nation-building role of regional NRM plans through its review of natural resource programs and as a key plank in the Clean Energy Future (CEF) initiative.
 - This includes \$44 million to revitalise the nation's regional NRM plans to support landscape scale adaptation and guide the emergence of the nation's land-sector based carbon market.
 - There are opportunities for regional NRM plans to spatially identify those parts of the landscape where market-based greenhouse sequestration and abatement activities should be targeted to deliver the most effective multiple benefits.
- The Australian government has made it clear that the role of NRM plans in the roll out of the CEF package sits within a wider national framework for NRM management.

Carbon Farming Initiative (CFI)

- First national greenhouse gas offsetting program, enabling market investment in a very wide range of NRM practices that achieve carbon bio-sequestration and greenhouse gas emission avoidance.
- Using nationally accepted scientific methodologies, projects that aggregate greenhouse benefits emerging from good NRM activities across different properties can be accepted for trading under the mechanisms established under the Australian *Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Act 2011*.
- Regional NRM plans will guide GGA market investment in mitigation efforts towards activities that will also enhance landscape adaptation.
- Projects need to make a statement about their consistency with the relevant regional NRM plan(s), or that notification be made if projects become inconsistent with such plans.
- **NRM Plans have an important role in guiding the CFI.**

Contemporary Regional NRM Planning Arrangements

- From 2001 onwards Regional NRM bodies were introduced across 56 NRM regions in Australia in a bi-lateral arrangement between the Commonwealth and State Governments.
- NRM Bodies develop and maintain NRM plans that were built around nationally consistent targets, but flexible enough to address regional priorities and the plans have since formed the basis for investment in implementation of identified strategic actions from governments, philanthropic, community and private sectors.



Map 1: Australia's 56 NRM region's, each supported by regional NRM bodies.

First Generation(s) NRM Plans

- Contemporary NRM plans were driven by water quality, salinity and biodiversity loss and other national drivers.
- The current state and general direction of NRM planning varies across all Australian states and territories.
- GGA in the land sector now has become an increasingly important driver; both as an opportunity for investment and because of the need to avoid potentially perverse outcomes from abatement schemes.
- Need to build national consensus on the purpose and shape of the next generation of regional NRM planning processes and activities over the next five years. A higher level of national coordination is needed on emerging reform issues.
- What are the most appropriate planning principles, tools and implementation mechanisms to govern natural resource use at a regional scale?

Next Generation Regional NRM Planning

While the characteristics of NRM approaches make them ideal for building landscape resilience and guiding landscape-scale approaches to climate change adaptation, we suggest there are 10 things that the next generation of NRM Plans might need to achieve meaningful outcomes:

1. A focus on landscape resilience
2. Adaptive planning: collaborative, evidence-based continuous improvement

Next Generation Regional NRM Planning...cont'd

3. Overtly collaborative decision-making and monitoring
4. A strong evidence base and community/science partnerships
5. Monitoring and evaluation to review thresholds
6. Improved spatial analysis to guide the carbon market

Next Generation Regional NRM Planning...cont'd

7. Defining regional practices frameworks
8. Connectivity with regulatory planning instruments
9. Integration with broader regional planning agenda
10. Social and community development and building regional GGA literacy.

Thoughts on the future of NRM

- National policy setting provides renewed opportunities for regional bodies and regional NRM plans beyond just the delivery of a limited number of policy and program outcomes.
- There is a real opportunity to link the strategic and integrative role of regional bodies (eg planning and effort alignment) and the coordination of effective management of regional delivery systems (eg major program management and monitoring).
- This presents the potential to return to some of the original intent and potential of regional NRM plans – more strategic and integrated NRM efforts based on current science and well articulated community values.
- With effective relationships in place between all governments and regional NRM bodies, this more devolved approach to planning and delivery could raise confidence in the longer-term achievement of national policy and program outcomes.

Challenges in making this work

- Regional NRM plans will need to:
 - address greater complexity while delivering outcomes in a simpler way;
 - integrate rapidly emerging and new expectations and values around climate change and land sector based GGA;
 - become more explicit (spatially and in practice terms) in communicating and debating landscape values and preferred landscape outcomes;
 - be more sensitive and responsive to changing science and community values, particularly in respect of GGA and connectivity of spaces; and
 - better integrate with other processes (land use planning) and other significant strategic players in regions (Local Government/RDA etc).

Thank-you!

This presentation is based on a forthcoming Paper:

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