



Submission by the South Australian Farmers Federation (SAFF)

in response to

The Government of South Australia Natural Resources Management Council

State Natural Resources Management Plan (Review)

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Comments:

SAFF supports the regular review of the State NRM Plan, and welcomes this opportunity to be involved in the process. SAFF would like to continue to be involved in further development of the Plan.

Lynda Forrest from DWLBC spoke at a SAFF Natural Resources Committee meeting in March 2010. It was a good opportunity for our committee members to speak directly with a department representative and get extra information when needed. SAFF have recently had some new members on the committee, so an opportunity for another meeting would be a good idea.

The State NRM Plan is an important document, but has not been valued and regarded as highly as it should.

- In most situations it is only referred to by name in other State level planning documents (Water for Good Plan and 30 Year Plan for Greater Adelaide), and links and shared objectives/targets are not clearly defined.
- In the draft version of some of the Regional NRM Plans, the Plans do not clearly link how they relate to the State NRM Plan. Regional priorities and actions that contribute to the State NRM Plan objectives were not clearly defined.
- The State NRM Plan needs stronger links with the South Australian Strategic Plan and local government planning. The NRM plan should inform other levels of planning that interacts with our environment.
- Government Departments involved in NRM should be supporting the State NRM Plan. DENR regional delivery should also be about supporting regional plans RCT's and MAT's, that link back to the State NRM Plan.

No Species Loss is a good example of how the State NRM Plan has been used successfully. The new State NRM Plan must maintain or increase these links, as these two documents strongly relate to each others goals.

The State NRM Plan must be the pinnacle of plans in the State. Without a healthy natural resource base, we have nothing that functions efficiently or effectively and will be a financial burden. E.g. we just need to look at the Murray River fiasco over the past decades. Short term financial gain but very long term pain and even collapse of local economies.

The current Plan 'identifies a 50-year vision for NRM in South Australia', yet the Plan is going to be 're-written' after 4 years. As NRM changes slowly, the Plan should be written in a way that it has a fixed part that won't change for at least 10 years, and then it should only be tweaked. Consistency in format will make it easier to follow. As Government withdraws funding, this also reduces cost in preparation, committee and stakeholder time costs, and printing costs. It also gives the community time to work towards a projected 'fixed' position, not like

now, we are starting to go one way and half way through the goal posts, we have shifted positions.

The current plan uses the phrase 'ecosystem services'. The Government should promote the context of ecosystem services to be the underpinning understanding of NRM function. E.g. when assessing development applications, understanding of what that the land system provides as a service before, and then after the development, must be an underlying consideration. This will show if the proposal is for the benefit of the community or detriment to the landscape. It is a way of putting all activities into a rank or scale on a level playing field.

If the plan was to be as clear as the objectives of the NRM Act, it would be much more powerful. Government would see the need to put more money into NRM for the better of the State, as opposed to what is happening now, withdrawing funding rapidly.

The current State NRM Plan lists strategies to achieve milestones, but does not detail how these strategies will be achieved and who will be the lead agencies. The strategies need to be more clearly defined, without words such as 'promote', 'pursue', 'encourage', which can not be clearly quantified. The strategies need to be more 'outcome driven'; less talk, more action. Measurements don't give outcomes, just more talk. Some measurement is OK if it is to assess progress.

The vision for the Plan is more of a 'desire' and not a picture of 'what the Government wants the landscape to look like in a set time'. The document must be strong. NRM is not like any other business. It is upside down. We do not manage and build on our strengths and opportunities. Our core business is about managing and fixing the weaknesses and threats. A healthy ecosystem is a strength and we really can't do anything to improve it, but need to protect it from threats. In other businesses, we build on our strengths and manage threats. This Plan must be strong to deal with threats and weaknesses and to instill a need for investment to rectify the problems for the betterment of people and biodiversity.

The current State NRM Plan does not detail how the NRM Boards operate and function.

From a SAFF perspective, the primary industry community is not recognised or valued highly enough for the contribution it makes to the environment. The State NRM Plan needs to acknowledge the good work that has been done by the farming community, and in particular highlight the work of some farmers who have achieved environmental success on their property. This will demonstrate the Plan and NRM is not just about conservation groups and biodiversity protection, which is what some landholders believe it to be. Farmers not only manage over 70% of our natural resources, but they financially support it along with financially supporting crown land by paying for pest control of

roadsides. In management, their knowledge must be valued. At the same time, farmers are creating a major economy for this state. In all, they underpin the whole Plan and would probably be the major contributors to NRM. The State NRM Plan must be less 'green' focused and be seen to support 'productive and sustainable land management'.

Population growth needs to be listed as a key risk to natural resource condition. Agricultural land with highly productive soils and high biodiversity value, in regions such as the Mount Lofty Ranges, is under threat from urban expansion. How could the Greater Adelaide Plan get anywhere if the State NRM Plan was strong? When looking at current and future development proposals, how can the State afford to take out complete ecosystems in some of our most productive soils and reliable rainfall areas? When looking at the expanding housing developments – towns and rural living - around various parts of the State, how can it be acceptable to have so much land where houses and human activity on such a large scale can interfere with landscape function? From a SAFF perspective, how equitable is it for people or developers to clear nearly whole land systems for housing – this means destruction of all creatures there - whilst primary producers are not allowed to manipulate their landscape to improve productivity? E.g. it seems to be quite acceptable to knock down 250 year old red gums for housing, but not to improve productivity. With the conversion of land to housing, more restrictions will be placed on other agricultural landholders to maintain and improve natural resources; whilst trying to feed a growing population. The State NRM Plan needs to have very strong links with all regional development planning documents, as a matter of urgency.

The State NRM Plan needs to help drive on-ground investment to priority NRM issues.

The State NRM Plan should, at the start, define what NRM is and what it 'looks like' in South Australia, why we should value our natural resources and why they are so special/unique.

Most landholders have never heard of the State NRM Plan. It would be good to continue to produce a fact sheet that showed the links between individual property owners, the Regional NRM Plans and State level NRM Plan; so individuals can see how, through working on their patch of land, they are working towards the NRM goals of the State Government.

The State NRM Plan needs to develop a comprehensive MERI process in conjunction with the Regional NRM Boards to give an accurate State report, which will highlight the successes and the areas where we can do better.

NRM needs to improve engagement with regional communities. In some sectors, the NRM levy is seen as an unwelcome burden. Many landholders still don't know what NRM Boards are and what they do. Landholders continually compare back to when Soil Conservation Boards and Animal Plant Control Boards were around, and how they saw them 'out and about' on the roads

doing their job. They miss the local feel and connection they had with the previous staff. Some landholders are probably still confused even with the term 'natural resources management' and what it means. SAFF acknowledges that it is a challenge to get the NRM message out to the rural community, It is vital that SAFF is involved with all levels of state and regional NRM discussion and planning. SAFF is another avenue, independent and non-government, to assist in getting the NRM message to farming communities.

Issues for NRM beyond 2010:

- SAFF would like to see a target developed around environmental stewardship. This will encourage landholders to get involved in natural resource management. A lot of landholders would like to do environmental work on their properties, but with all the financial pressures on them, are unable to. Any stewardship programs must invest in long term sustainable land management programs.
- It is quite noticeable that a lot of State NRM funding is biased towards community groups. Very little funding is seen to be available for individual landholders. SAFF would like more funding opportunities available for individual landholders.
- SAFF would also like to see a target that protects prime agricultural land, which in some areas, have high levels of biodiversity. With climate change, some areas of the state will not be able to be used for agricultural purposes, putting pressure on more productive areas, which themselves are facing pressure from urban development.
- We need to seriously consider how we manage sensitive or unique land systems. We can't keep buying and locking up land for conservation. It is often not good long term, as it can go backwards. You usually end up with lots of little high value land systems, with less money to manage more larger lands. When the land manager leaves, valuable knowledge is lost. This ties in with the stewardship program.