



The Hunter - Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority

*Presentation at the
Hunter Environmental Institute Seminar*

June 2010

The Hunter-Central Rivers CMA region

- 37,000 km²
- 1,500 square kilometres of marine area to the NSW state limit, three nautical miles offshore.
- 1.2 million residents – 85% along the coast
- 17 State electorates
- 10 Federal electorates
- 21 local government areas



CMA roles

- The CMA is one of few government bodies left in the region providing extension services, technical advice and incentives to both public and private landholders.
- The CMA received funding for NRM from both the Australian Government and State Government.
- The CMA has a regulatory role at the State level in vegetation management.
- We are in the unique position of dealing directly with NR managers and community (all levels) 'on the ground'.
- Community stakeholders include; urban and rural landholders, community groups, NGOs, local and state government, and major industry groups as well as individual businesses.

CMA strengths

- The CMA works closely with both state agencies and local government in joint investment partnerships. Focus is on on-ground.
- We have a major coordination and facilitation role in providing links to major stakeholders, providing technical support for on-ground implementation and assisting with major education and awareness campaigns.



Challenges

Despite the CMA's strength and knowledge, some of our challenges include;

- Getting a 'seat at the table' in strategic planning discussions at both state and local government levels.
- Ensuring that at state level, local differences are recognised and there is acceptance that 'one size doesn't fit all'.
- Ensuring that the CMA's Catchment Action Plan (CAP) is recognised in planning and development, particularly the concept of 'improve or maintain'.
- Despite exemptions available under the Native Vegetation Act (NVA), the CMA can still provide technical support and best practice advice on vegetation management throughout the region.

Challenges

- Promoting and encouraging investment in NRM on private lands, particularly by local government and state agencies.
- Managing the expectations of both the community and all three levels of government, with limited financial and staffing resources.



History of NRM planning and community engagement

1990 – 2000;

- Increased activity in terms of managing natural resources at a regional level and increased involvement of the community in strategic planning of NRM.
- However, planning involved separate approaches to different aspects of NRM.
- Representative based community consultative committees were established under legislation, to develop regional Vegetation Management Plans and Water Sharing Plans.

History of NRM planning and community engagement

1990 – 2000 (continued);

- Meeting to discuss formation and development of Hunter Vegetation Plan held in 1998.
- The Manning Vegetation Plan was finalised and approved in 2003, the Hunter got to the final draft stage.
- Vegetation Plans were not gazetted in our CMA area, but were instead used by Catchment Management Boards to identify investment priorities and management actions.
- The Vegetation Plans also provided the basis for determining Regionally Significant Vegetation across the CMA region during the development of catchment blueprints.
- Water Sharing Plans (WSPs) largely identified rules for 'cease to pump' and allocated water to as a user. Consequently 10 year WSPs weren't gazetted until the 2000s.

History of NRM planning and community engagement

1990 – 2000 (continued);

- Community consultative committees were resourced by State agencies and the former Hunter Catchment Management Trust.
- As they were representative based, participants often had their own agendas and interest groups at heart.
- Agreement was by consensus and could be quite time consuming.
- There was a long time period between committee creation and gazettal or final drafting of plans.
- They were largely single NRM issue plans.



History of NRM planning and community engagement

1990 – 2000 (continued);

- The Decade of Landcare also commenced in 1990 and was well resourced financially and structurally by both the Australian and State Governments.
- Led to greater awareness of NRM issues and their management, a big increase in the environmental volunteer movement and locally based administrative and on-ground support at the sub-catchment and localised level.
- However, there has been reduced funding, particularly at the Federal level with institutional change.
- Landcare groups have been forced into being more strategic, more accountable and pushed towards partnerships to access limited government funding.

Integrated Catchment Management

- Catchment Committees were established and were the first steps involving the government and community working together in integrated, multidisciplinary NRM.
- These were also representative groups who were on a steep learning curve.
- They were obliged to look at the bigger picture, understand the knowledge and science in order to develop adequate plans to manage our ecosystems and natural resources in an integrated manner.
- The Hunter was in the unique position of already having a Catchment Management Committee in the form of the HCMT, which raised its own levy and had been in existence since the early 1950s.

Integrated Catchment Planning

- Catchment Management Committees were rationalised into Boards in 2001 with representatives from state and local government, landholders, the aboriginal community, industry and environmental interests.
- Tasked with developing integrated catchment management plans for their regions.
- 21 Catchment Blueprints developed across NSW – 10 year plans for catchment management.
- 10 year investment strategies were also developed to identify funding sources and priorities.

Integrated Catchment Planning

- The Blueprints were endorsed by both the Federal and State Governments in late 2002/ early 2003
- Reasonably good community ownership because of committee development of plans.
- Blueprints had outcomes based catchment targets and aspirational management actions.
- There was no overall State Plan or no clear state-wide vision as to what NRM should be trying achieve at the State level.

Integrated Catchment Planning

- The 'bottom up' catchment management approach did ensure good community ownership of the plans.
- The Boards had worked with communities to describe what they wanted to achieve but the systems and support were not in place and a change in government meant that direction changed.



Current Situation

- The CMA Act in 2003 introduced skills-based Boards and established Catchment Management Authorities as statutory bodies.
- The roles of CMAs and the skills-base of Board members was identified in the legislation.



Current Situation

- The NRC and NRAC were created.
- Hunter Catchment Management Trust (HCMT) became a CMA, but was unique in NSW as it retained its role in flood mitigation in the Hunter, and the ability to levy a Hunter Catchment Contribution under a regulation.
- Key roles of CMAs were to develop Catchment Action Plans, manage incentives to implement the Plans and managing native vegetation consents under the NVA 2003
- The CAP integrated existing regional vegetation management plans, blueprints and investment strategies.
- Five (5) resource condition targets relating to 'improve or maintain' were developed and 31 SMART management targets.
- In addition, guiding principles were developed to provide direction for all NR managers to achieve ESD and ensure whole community, including government, can work towards the same goal.

Government changes

- The first State Plan was developed in 2006 and reviewed in late 2009.
- It provided 13 Statewide NRM targets and after its review in 2009, two year priority actions.
- At the Federal level, there have also been a major change in NRM budgeting and targeting investment with the introduction of the Caring For Our Country (CFOC) program in 2008/09 with \$2.25 billion for five years.
- Focus is on on-ground outputs and long-term outcomes, greater accountability and Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) of investment.

Current Challenges

- The major challenge is bringing the community along with the broader strategic agenda.
- The current focus on landscape scale change and the difficulty in measuring outcomes change in the short term is a challenge in trying to keep the community engaged.



Current Situation

- Institutional change at the State level and the creation of 'super agencies' in 2009 has put further pressure on CMAs.
- **One size does not fit all.**



Looking Forward

- The CAP is up for review in 2010-11.
- In order to continue to promote 'bottom up' NRM planning, we need to obtain community feedback and input into the process.
- The challenge is how to get 'whole of government' ownership and implementation, despite the CAP not being a regulatory plan.
- Both State and Federal elections are due on 2010/11, which is likely to lead to further institutional change.

Looking Forward

- We need to ensure a whole of government approach to NRM.
- Development of Vegetation Mapping with DECCW and local government.
- Development of a State MER framework has involvement of Senior Officers from all major NRM agencies.



Looking Forward

Do we have the right tools?

- How do we balance the environmental, social and economic outcomes of the State Plan? When do environmental concerns override employment or economic outcomes?
- CAP – integrated regional strategies, relatively short-term
- Regional Plans – include conservation plans.
- LEPs – local level, not whole of landscape context
- WSPs – only one natural resource

Looking Forward

The CMAs challenges include;

- High level of scrutiny by both the NRC and State and Federal Governments
- For example - we need to provide six monthly financial expenditure and milestone reporting, annual reports to both levels of government and progress against CAP, State and Federal targets.
- In addition, CAP development and implementation, governance and business procedures and adaptive management are scrutinised regularly by the NRC, who report directly to the Minister.
- The CMA's overarching challenge is to balance the expectations of government and the community whilst maintaining the principles of the CAP.

Looking Forward

The CMAs strengths include;

- Bringing community passion and commitment to improved NRM.
- However, CMAs have limited statutory powers.
- There is a need for other government agencies to recognise CAP priorities.
- Need to overcome poor or counter productive alignment.



Community Engagement Programs

- The CMA continues to run major community engagement programs and provides financial incentives for change management to the urban and rural sectors.
- Education and awareness activities – flood education and awareness in Lower Hunter, Waterwatch (water quality monitoring), VegWatch.
- Knowledge and data collection – Veg mapping, marine monitoring, Hexham Swamp monitoring.
- Access to subsidised training
- Financial incentives to implement on-ground works – Partnerships and Incentives.

Community Engagement

- Greater community activism and awareness relating to NRM.
- Balancing the expectations of government and the community while maintaining the “improve or maintain” principle.
- All players need to work constructively together and respect the contributions from each party.

Looking Forward

Proposed model for the future;

- Community bring us environmental values and priorities, social engagement.
- NRC as an independent auditor will bring overarching targets and delivery requirements to all agencies and authorities.
- CMA brings the strength of its relationship with the community and the ability to deliver on-ground works.
- Local government brings local planning, development assessment and public land management.
- State Agencies bring policies. Knowledge, data support, regulation and in some cases, public land management.



Thank you

- Questions?

