

Submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the Carbon Credits (Carbon Farming Initiative) Bill 2011 and related bills

Mike Berwick, Chair, Terrain Natural Resource Management, Wet Tropics Region;
Chair, Qld Regional NRM Groups Collective

Further to submissions from Australian NRM regional bodies and from Degree Celsius, which has been working on their behalf and given the Committee's ongoing deliberations, this supplementary submission addresses the role of regional NRM plans.

The third object of the Bill is: to increase carbon abatement in a manner that:

(a) is consistent with the protection of Australia's natural environment; and

(b) improves resilience to the effects of climate change. As recognized by the Bill, regional natural resource management plans are a critical instrument for helping ensure that projects contribute to this third object. Regional natural resource management (NRM) plans provide the appropriate framework for evaluating projects so as to identify and minimise perverse outcomes and maximise co-benefits. However, to ensure they play an effective role in giving adequate effect to this objective, the references to regional plans in the Bill should be clarified and strengthened.

We recommend that regional NRM plans be defined in the Bill in terms of the key characteristics needed to ensure they will be fit for purpose, including that:

A plan identifies the (i) values, (ii) assets, (iii) risks, (iv) opportunities and (v) resilience status of a defined region.

A plan is developed (i) using a participatory and inclusive process, (ii) making the best possible use of available evidence, and (iii) with a spatial basis; and

A plan reflects the region's circumstances and local context.

It follows that resources need to be provided to regional bodies to ensure that all regional NRM plans meet these characteristics and are upgraded as necessary and as soon as possible. These resources may include assistance at a national scale through the provision of systems that support and strengthen evidence-based decision-making and access to the best possible evidence.

3. It may be necessary to have a "go" and "no-go" list to identify co-benefits and perverse outcomes as an interim measure until regional NRM plans are made fit for purpose.

4. Standards defining that a regional NRM plan is fit for purpose will need to be developed.