

ACCREDITATION OF INTEGRATED CATCHMENT/REGIONAL NRM PLANS

- The following process, details and criteria are agreed for accrediting catchment/regional natural resource management (NRM) plans that are developed through an interactive process between catchments/regions, relevant State/Territory governments and the Commonwealth.
- The Commonwealth and the relevant State/Territory governments will be responsible for accrediting the plans. Plans will be accredited on the basis of their goals and objectives, analytical base, strategic planning, priority actions, proposed targets and outcomes, and accountability and performance monitoring and reporting arrangements.

Integrated catchment/regional natural resource management plans

- Bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and each State and Territory will:
 - define boundaries for the agreed region; and
 - identify or establish appropriate regional bodies to be responsible for developing catchment/regional NRM plans through a community consultation process for the region.
- Integrated catchment/regional NRM plans will need to be implemented within bilaterally agreed arrangements for management and accountability applying to regional bodies. Accountability arrangements must integrate with the broader accountability framework of the relevant funding program. For regions covered by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, arrangements must be consistent with those outlined in the Intergovernmental Agreement. The Natural Heritage Trust bilateral agreements with each State and Territory will determine the arrangements for the other regions. The significant management role of local government in the coastal zone will be addressed in this manner.
- Bilateral and/or regional agreements will allow for different circumstances, steps or timelines for accreditation in each jurisdiction and region.
- Communities will be involved in the development of targets and outcomes for each integrated catchment/regional NRM plans that advance natural resources management issues within the agreed National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets.
- Catchment/regional NRM plans will cover the full range of NRM issues – across terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, estuarine and marine ecosystems where relevant. Government investment in accredited NRM plans will be consistent with the goals and objectives of the relevant program:
 - investment under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality will focus on action to prevent, stabilise and reverse trends in salinity and to improve water quality and reliability that affects sustainable production, biodiversity and infrastructure;
 - investment under the Natural Heritage Trust will focus on actions which are consistent with the Trust's objectives relating to biodiversity conservation, sustainable natural resource use, and capacity building and institutional change.
- Consistent with a precautionary approach to addressing NRM issues, plans will be accredited and actions undertaken on information available providing adaptive management approaches are adopted and an appropriate process for continuous improvement of the plan exists.
- Funding will be directed to implementing accredited plans through a rolling investment strategy/business plan, which will be used to assess on-going performance-based payments. Funding will be provided:
 - for well planned or time critical actions to achieve priority NRM outcomes, particularly in the context of the minimum required set of targets (consistent with the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets); and
 - to support the development or refinement of plans through information gathering, modelling of strategies and the development of targets, and community involvement.
- Funding for priority actions prior to final accreditation may be provided where:
 - the agreed framework for an integrated catchment / regional NRM plan exists;

- the actions are a priority from a national, regional or basin-wide perspective; or
- as otherwise agreed in a bilateral agreement.

Accreditation criteria for integrated catchment/regional natural resource management plans

- Plans will be based on the principles of conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. Scientific analysis of natural resource conditions, problems and priorities carried out at the catchment/regional level will underpin plans. Plans should include:
 - an overview of the region's environmental, social and economic resources including a description of the upstream inputs to the region and how these operate together as a system;
 - identification of regional natural resource assets of international, national or state value; and
 - identification of impacts of resource use and management on environment, social, and economic assets within and external to the region.
- Effective participation by all key stakeholders is required to ensure plans are based on a community process, are accurate, comprehensive, well coordinated and able to be implemented.
 - Indigenous communities, local government, state agencies, resource managers, industry and communities, academic/scientific community and environmental groups should be involved where relevant.
 - Stakeholders' roles, responsibilities and capacity to implement actions to achieve the targets will be identified.
- Plans will focus on the causes rather than symptoms of problems.
 - Plans will incorporate any improved policy frameworks agreed in bilateral agreements, to protect the natural resource base of sustainable production, to protect environmental values and to ameliorate negative impacts arising from proposed strategies and actions.
 - Where caps on extractive use of water or measures to improve environmental flows, or limits on the use of other natural resources are agreed as part of bilateral agreements, strategies to implement these measures that take account of natural resource management targets and regional social and economic goals will be outlined.
- Integrated catchment/regional NRM plans will demonstrate consistency with other planning processes and legislative requirements, agreed national and state outcomes and strategies and targets that have been collectively agreed by relevant jurisdictions in other forums.
- Strategic, prioritised and achievable actions will address the range of NRM issues that are identified as priorities in the region, including issues of national, state or regional significance.
 - The range of possible actions to address the priority issues and the social, economic, environmental impacts of these actions will be evaluated (quantifying, where appropriate, the costs and benefits of options, as well as the implications of taking no action).
 - Economic, social and environmental impacts and associated trade-offs will be clearly outlined.
 - Regional targets and milestones consistent with the agreed National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets, and strategies to meet these targets should be detailed.
- Continuous development and improvement of the plan involving all relevant stakeholders is expected. Evaluation processes for reviewing the plan, evaluating actions under the plan, and reporting on progress will meet the requirements of the National NRM Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.
 - The plan will identify processes to assess effectiveness in achieving intended results and identify who is accountable for delivering on commitments, financial management, and performance monitoring and reporting arrangements.
 - The process for developing and refining integrated catchment/regional NRM plans must include clear requirements for periodic review against agreed milestones and updating to take account of new information.