



# policy sheet

*knowledge for managing Australian landscapes*

## Biodiversity conservation in regional NRM planning

*Research project number VRA1 of the Social and Institutional Research Program of Land & Water Australia. Completed: 2003.*

### **A research outcome that you can use**

This project looks at enhancing biodiversity conservation in regional NRM planning. It has produced practical guidelines that will be useful to a wide range of policy-makers and resource managers.

The requirement for biodiversity conservation is recognised in planning processes for NRM regions within Australian states and territories although it is often not attributed with high priority. This project set out to identify mechanisms to enhance the adoption of biodiversity conservation within regional NRM planning processes. The project was funded through the Natural Heritage Trust and managed by Land & Water Australia through the Social and Institutional Research Program.

### **How can you use the guidelines?**

- They provide an accessible list of key success factors for integration of biodiversity conservation in regional planning covering motivation, financial and regulatory factors and also identify barriers and limitations.
- They make practical recommendations for action by governments and on-ground resource managers.
- The recommendations and success factors/limitations will be instructive in regional planning policy development, target-setting and regional management action.
- The large number of case studies written in succinct, accessible language included in the final research report, provide real life context for lessons learned in regional planning.



## How was the knowledge developed?

This project identified where biodiversity has been effectively included within regional NRM planning processes and established an understanding of the critical success factors required for biodiversity conservation.

Information to assess opportunities and mechanisms for biodiversity conservation in NRM planning was derived from a 'project scan' including 150 projects, as well as semi-structured interviews with relevant people in each state or territory and a range of NRM regions. The assessment was used to assess key project initiatives in each jurisdiction, identify and document 16 case studies and to determine the critical success factors for biodiversity conservation in those areas.

## Can I rely on it?

The method of research adopted is appropriate for a national overview project with the intent of identifying general trends suitable for developing recommendations about future investment for biodiversity conservation outcomes. The significant number of regions scanned and multiple case studies provide a significant database from which characteristics of effective biodiversity conservation in different contexts can be drawn.

## Key findings

### Values, priorities and cultures

- The major issues of salinity and water quality are often considered ahead of biodiversity issues and the opportunities for integrated management to achieve multiple outcomes are not always adopted.
- Resources for biodiversity conservation should be targeted to regions with high conservation value. It has been common for resources to be placed with regions that have high community motivation but not necessarily high conservation value.

- Biodiversity conservation does not have a strong 'market-base'. There is strong interest in trials of market-based mechanisms, however there is also scepticism about whether these options will achieve the required change at the landscape scale and be maintained in perpetuity. Considering this, motivational and regulatory mechanisms will continue to be required. Building of community interest and values at the landscape scale will be an important prerequisite for achieving the required landscape-scale change in a 'non-market' environment as many community-based actions are site specific.
- A mix of mechanisms for biodiversity conservation will continue to be required, but there are increasing expectations that market mechanisms will become widely adopted. There is a need to clarify the benefits derived from biodiversity conservation and to better develop the market base for these benefits.
- There is an increasing number of private and commercial initiatives developing with benefits for biodiversity conservation, however many encounter disincentives or other administrative difficulties.

### Understanding biodiversity values and threats

- The concepts of biodiversity conservation are not clearly understood within regions. Most have a general understanding but not at a level that evokes the appropriate priorities for investment and management. State/territory agencies, research organisations and NGO's have well-developed skills and information that could assist with regional understanding of biodiversity conservation, especially regarding what it is, what can be done to protect/recover values, and what can be expected from investing in management.
- Threats to biodiversity conservation are considered to be reasonably well understood by most regions, however threat abatement is not often undertaken in a strategic way at the landscape scale.

## Managing landscapes and regional ecosystems

- Most information and many mechanisms currently encourage small-scale, site-specific management. While there is an expectation that biodiversity conservation management will be undertaken at a landscape scale, there is inadequate institutional support to do so. Information and assistance should be focused at this scale. Biodiversity conservation is more effective in regions where information is available and compatible with this scale.
- Many NRM regional boundaries do not correspond well with regional ecosystems. Most were formed on a surface water catchment basis but ecological boundaries differ. Most regions have not initiated cross-jurisdictional management.

## Information and knowledge management

- Most effective biodiversity conservation projects have integrated appropriate science with management. This requires associating science-based information with local knowledge and values. However, the success of integrating science with management is most often where there is a receptive community more than where there is a priority for biodiversity conservation management.
- Information required for integrated management of ecosystems is commonly not compatible and is derived from different sources. Strategic arrangements for biodiversity conservation need to be better correlated at international, state, regional and local scales. There is a requirement to identify the range of values within a region, from international to local, and to manage strategically to maximise benefit to the range of values.
- Most regions had limited knowledge or had made only limited use of national datasets and biodiversity conservation tools. The full value of national databases is not recognised and there would be benefit in improving understanding of these datasets by regional organisations for use in strategic regional planning.

## Capacity for regional biodiversity conservation

- Effective biodiversity conservation initiatives within NRM regions are well lead. Leadership can be effective at a range of levels, including from state/local governments.
- Performance measurement of projects focus on time efficiency rather than on outcomes efficiency. Most regions emphasised the importance of allowing time for trust to be built and projects to evolve. In addition, funding needs to be available when it is needed for the project, and this does not always coincide with periodic funding cycles.

## Further information

### To arrange a more detailed policy briefing contact:

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To obtain the full research report see:  
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