



# project in progress summary

*knowledge for managing Australian landscapes*

## Engaging stakeholders in NRM practice change

*Research project number UQL25 of the Social and Institutional Research Program of Land & Water Australia.  
Commencement date: January 2005; Anticipated completion: October 2005.*

### Background

The study was commissioned by Land & Water Australia and the Natural Heritage Trust as to distil lessons from investment in stakeholder engagement for regional natural resource management (NRM) practice change.

Four case-study regions agreed to participate in the project as a social-learning experience. The project was designed to assist regional NRM bodies enhance their understanding of:

- Effective strategies for practice change;
- Evaluating whether particular strategies affect practice change;
- How they monitor and learn to manage adaptively (eg improve regional planning approaches and investment strategies) to enhance their ability to influence practice change.

### Objectives

The project aims to identify:

- the range of stakeholders relevant to regional NRM delivery;
- the drivers and barriers to engagement of the stakeholder groups;
- the strategies and tactics for practice change being utilised by regional NRM bodies;
- strengths and weaknesses in the regional delivery of NRM for both the regional bodies and stakeholders.



## Key research questions

- How can regional NRM bodies improve their ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of the regional stakeholders and what drives or inhibits practice change?
- What are the key lessons from the various institutional arrangements for NRM and how can these support improved planning for and evaluation of investments for NRM practice change?

## Study areas

The four regions participating in the project are:

- North East Catchment Management Authority (VIC)
- Southern Gulf Catchments Limited (QLD)
- Southern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (NSW)
- Swan Catchment Council (WA)

## Target audiences for project findings

### Regional NRM bodies

- An enhanced method of analysing 'stakeholders' is proposed using the dimensions of 'power' (to influence) and 'alignment' (of interest).
- Five characteristics of 'good stakeholder engagement' were identified: Good stakeholder engagement is: purposeful, mutually beneficial, open, strategic and sustainable.
- The study revealed a range of practice change strategies beyond the more 'traditional' approaches, and these have considerable potential given the limited resources of NRM bodies.
- Practice change strategies can be considered and 'mapped' on two dimensions (regulation to self-empowerment; on-ground work to systems influence).

- The study revealed a need for a more deliberative approach to match practice change strategies to stakeholder groups, to ensure greater impact.
- There is a need for improved systems infrastructure to underpin regional delivery.
- Monitoring and evaluation needs to be imbedded within the planning and delivery process to facilitate adaptive management.
- There is a particular need for skills and capabilities in social analysis and 'process' skills (negotiation, facilitation, leadership, governance).

### Federal NRM policy makers

- There is an awareness about and preparedness among regions to measure the outcomes of the investment in regional NRM.
- Regions would like an assured funding stream to enable an assessment of impact.
- Regions would like a budget allocation for strategic investment to increase their business management skills including planning, investment and partnership building;
- The regions have refined their strategies as awareness levels increase about 'leverage value' of new kinds of partnerships at regional, state and national levels (e.g. local government, industry bodies).

### Progress to date

- An action-learning project within each region is completed.
- An overview of the four catchments completed, outlining the particularities of the 'place' and the institutional arrangements underpinning regional NRM delivery in the case-study regions.
- An analysis of the stakeholder engagement strategies in each region;
- A knowledge exchange workshop with case-study catchments to reflect, consider, validate findings was held in August, 2005.

## Project reference group

- The project reference group is comprised of representatives from:
- Land & Water Australia, Social and Institutional Research Program
- Australian Government Joint NRM Team – Capacity Building Team.
- Australian Government Joint NRM Team – Communications Team

## Contact the SIRP team

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