

Proposal for New Arrangements for Natural Resource Management in Southern Queensland



A Proposal for Community Feedback

Drafted by a joint Working Group consisting of Condamine Alliance, QMDC and South West NRM

South West NRM
Achieving sustainable landscapes
for rural communities

For Action

Please provide comments on this proposal by Friday, March 16, 2018.

Comments can be provided by email to feedback@swnrm.org.au or by online survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NLVTPYL>

1. Background

The proposal in this paper is being put forward for community feedback jointly by Condamine Alliance, the Queensland Murray Darling Committee and South West Natural Resource Management. It is the result of a process to investigate various options for improved NRM arrangements in the region jointly supported by the three organisations. The proposal involves two aspects:

1. The establishment of a new community-based natural resource management (NRM) organisation to coordinate and deliver NRM activities across Southern Queensland. It would replace the existing regional bodies – Condamine Alliance, QMDC and South West NRM.
2. The concurrent development of a more strategic and responsive approach to NRM in the region. This aims to make community-based NRM delivery more sustainable, position NRM as an integral part of regional vitality, and better demonstrate the full environmental, social and economic value of NRM activities.

Importantly, it involves not just changes to organisational arrangements. It also includes the second aspect of redeveloping NRM and helping to reinvigorate community involvement in it.

The proposal has been the result of extensive deliberation by a working group made of the chairs and another board member from each organisation. The working group is Jim Cavaye, Noel Strohfled, Graham Cooke, Mark O'Brien, Karen Tully and George Moore. The role of the working group has been to:

- Explore options for improved NRM arrangements that will enhance the long-term future of community-based NRM in the region.
- Develop suggested ways to reinvigorate NRM at the grassroots in the region.

The working group has put forward the following proposal to each organisation in the region and they are now engaging stakeholders in their respective regions to gain feedback on the proposal.

Please provide comments about this proposal by Friday, March 16, 2018.

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All feedback will be considered by the working group in developing a final proposal to then be formally put to all three organisations by Friday, April 27, 2018. This proposal will be in the form of a recommendation for existing organisations to formally consider and decide about. No change will be made unless each existing organisation formally agrees to change arrangements.

2. The Rationale for Change

The regional body model in Queensland has generally worked well for the last 25 years. Regional bodies have developed detailed catchment plans, engaged with local community organisations and coordinated a wide range of projects that have led to NRM improvements. However, regional bodies in Queensland, and across the nation, have been facing considerable change for some time. This is not new - funding and community expectations have been changing for several years and pressure to respond to these changes is mounting. Key changes in federal and state funding are:

- Governments are moving to fully competitive procurement of NRM services, not necessarily in partnership with regional bodies. Other organisations, such as Greening Australia and consultancy companies, are now open to tender for federal funding for regional NRM delivery,
- Governments have less available money for NRM and want to see structures that produce the same, and often more, outcomes with less money. They are questioning whether having 14 NRM bodies in Queensland is the most efficient way to deliver NRM services.
- There needs to be more demonstration from regional bodies of leveraging of federal funding in co-funding arrangements and long-term sustainable funding options beyond dependence on federal grants,
- Entities are able to deliver NRM in more than one region,
- Governments are wanting higher demonstrated standards of governance whilst also seeing improvements in community engagement.

NRM activities in the region need to be more attractive not only to the federal government but to other potential investors such as the non-profit and private sectors. These additional possible funders need to be “cultivated” through, in part, attractive and efficient business models.

NRM bodies struggle to consistently provide detailed quantitative evaluations and evidence of the NRM and community outcomes of their work. This is partly due to the long lag period between doing an activity and seeing an improved soil, water or biodiversity result. Also, while NRM actions contribute to social and economic outcomes in regions, these have been difficult to quantify and provide evidence of this. NRM benefits are often described in terms of somewhat piecemeal biophysical outcomes such as hectares of weeds controlled, rather than broader community-based efforts that improve overall capacity to better manage NRM condition.

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This has led to a perception by key funders of diminishing returns from NRM funding and loss of confidence in current NRM bodies achieving clear quantifiable benefits from NRM investment. In an environment of extremely competitive public and private funding, NRM is losing priority to more pressing issues which have more quantifiable outcomes and greater community profile, such as investment in regional infrastructure.

Community expectations are also changing such as:

- Community members want reassurance that the delivery model maximises on-ground outcomes and minimises administration/operational costs.
- Volunteering is changing and many grassroots NRM groups, that are partners with regional bodies, are struggling to build members and remain vibrant.
- NRM bodies do not necessarily have a high community profile in their region. While stakeholder groups are aware and engaged, broader community presence and value is often limited.
- While regional bodies aim to enable grassroots organisations such as Landcare groups, regional bodies are often perceived only as a conduit to funding for these organisations, rather than a broader coordinator of NRM investment and community effort. With this rather narrow perception of regional bodies, local organisations are often frustrated by not getting enough funding or attention from regional bodies. This model of dependence needs to become more enabling with genuine partnership.

More strategic, relevant and responsive

Changes in funding and expectations have been telegraphed for some years, and regional bodies have had detailed discussions about them. However, the response to these pressures have been somewhat traditional and defensive. Amalgamation has often been framed as the answer with brinkmanship around “who will amalgamate with who” and concern about who will benefit and who may not. A more entrepreneurial approach is needed to NRM with greater engagement and support for the “grassroots”.

More than amalgamation

Any change needs to be more than amalgamation of existing regional bodies. This option is attractive because it achieves some efficiencies and maintains the current structures and models of delivery. However, it does not adequately respond to the major changes that are occurring. It comes from the “supply” side of NRM where the structures that deliver NRM are modified. Yet, what is needed is a focus on the “demand” side where a detailed understanding is needed of what is required in the field to best achieve lasting NRM outcomes given changing community and funder expectations. This response to, and anticipation of changes in the “demand” side of NRM should determine the best structure for delivery, not necessarily current structures.

Re positioning NRM

NRM is losing relevance. Its public image is largely that of “controlling weeds” or “planting trees”. Whilst this work remains important, it is a common perception of NRM that is often unattractive to many people in 2018 and many grassroots organisations struggle to attract and retain volunteers.

It is important to create a new perception of modern NRM as a key contributor to healthy, diverse ecosystems that support sustainable food production, ecosystem services, carbon management and strong regional communities and economies. This allows NRM investment to be valued in terms of its full real benefits to the community. It also aligns NRM delivery with the *Living Landscapes, Local Livelihoods* approach that aims to reposition NRM in the state and nationally (www.nrmrqa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Living-Landscapes-Local-Livelihoods.pdf). This demonstration of NRM benefits to the broader community is critical to ongoing relevance and funding support.

Grassroots Engagement

Funding also needs to better connect with the grassroots with greater engagement of people in local organisations and in the broader community. This involves improved ways for people to be involved in NRM activities and to have a say in NRM regional bodies. It also means NRM regional bodies continuing to engage with local people, not just through existing organisations, but also through broader community networks.

First Mover

There is an opportunity for southern Queensland to make the “first move” on developing new ways to manage NRM. This would demonstrate to governments and other investors that we are able to take initiatives ourselves to respond to the changing funding and community situation, rather than sit back and wait for decisions to be made for us.

Evaluation of Benefits

Demonstrating the benefits of NRM beyond biophysical improvements, involves providing clear and consistent evidence of the full benefits of NRM investments. This means not just having appropriate indicators of change, but also having the capacity to gather meaningful information about impact, cooperation from stakeholders in providing information, and being able to convey the long term and often qualitative nature of NRM work.

3. What Would Improved NRM Look Like?

How might we then re-develop NRM in southern Queensland to embrace change and be entrepreneurial? The working group approached its consideration of NRM options by taking a “nil tenure” approach i.e. removing all the existing arrangements, history, organisations and boundaries and then considering what excellent NRM would be like across the region “starting from scratch”. The following points described this situation.

- There would be strong buy-in from local people with good ownership of NRM priorities and actions and good engagement and clear representation of people,
- NRM would be catchment based (but not necessarily always),
- There would be a stakeholder structure, for example, stakeholders may be NRM groups, local government, industry, conservation and Traditional Owners.
- An ongoing process of engagement would need to be actively funded and carried out.
- There would be distributed capacity – not centralised.
- Organisational arrangements would be efficient and shared.
- Staff would be maintained across the region.
- There would be good connections with organisations outside NRM such as local government.
- Current activities would be carried forward.
- NRM would be re-positioned in terms of sustaining natural assets. This involves a lot of education, incorporating “Living Landscapes, Local Livelihoods”, focusing on natural assets and incorporating agriculture as part of NRM.
- NRM would be attractive to a broad range of funders included “new” funders such as corporates and philanthropic organisations. This would involve being seen to be investable, selling ourselves and developing capacity to chase funding and being professional enough to attract funding.
- It would emphasise that people in the region are the custodians of the headwaters of the Murray Darling Basin which has iconic status and identity.
- NRM would enable place-based grassroots groups. This is crucial to NRM.

4. Alternative NRM Arrangements

The working group investigated alternative arrangements that would address the issues above. The alternatives are:

1. Stay the same

This would not address the issues of government funding, volunteering in communities, re-positioning NRM etc.

2. *Share services within existing organisations*

The implications of this are:

- It would save on corporate services but not on anything else,
- Three existing boards would need to be maintained,
- Performance on NRM issues would be similar,
- Doesn't broaden the membership base of regional bodies and
- This demonstrates efficiencies to government

3. *Set up a Shared Services Group*

The implications of this are:

- This would not address the key issues above e.g. changes in government funding etc.
- Additional management may lead to duplication,
- A CEO would be shared between three different organisations,
- There may be a risk of developing a "them and us" culture.

4. **Having existing delivery models but with a single "front of house"**

There would be a question about where the single front of house would be located.

- 5. **The proposition to establish a single NRM Group** (in conjunction with reinvigorating the grassroots)

5. The Proposal – Formation of a New Regional NRM Organisation

The proposal recommended by the working group is option 5, the formation of a single community-based organisation that would replace the current regional bodies in southern Queensland – Condamine Alliance, QMDC and South West NRM. This would also involve the development of a set of strategic directions that would address the issues discussed above. This is not an amalgamation, but rather a new organisation with a new focus for NRM. Each existing body would arrange for an appropriate way to wind up its existing structures and transition existing projects and staff positions into the new organisation

Name

The working group recommends that the name of the new organisation is “Queensland Murray Darling Catchments NRM” trading as “Queensland Murray Darling Catchments”. The name reflects the common stewardship of the Queensland Murray Darling Basin from the headwaters of the Condamine Catchment through to Balonne, Border Rivers and Warrego catchments. While it abbreviates to QMDC, the working group recommends that it be known as “QMD Catchments” to differentiate from the current QMDC.

Question: What name should the organisation have?

Purpose

The purpose of Queensland Murray Darling Catchments would be to engage and enable communities to enhance the condition of natural resources in the region as the basis for a healthy environment and more socially and economically resilient communities.

Roles

The key roles of QMD Catchments would be to:

- Engage closely with local NRM organisations, community members and other stakeholders and partner with them in designing and implementing NRM activities that maintain and enhance natural assets. It would also engage local NRM groups to assist and enable them in managing the changing NRM situation,
- Develop a coordinated strategic plan for NRM that not only incorporates existing catchment plans but also better anticipates change, is deliberately entrepreneurial and addresses key funding and community changes,
- Develop projects that are attractive to external funders and that leverage government funds with private sector, philanthropic funding and community in-kind support. These projects would address key current and emerging NRM issues,
- Develop and implement ways to consistently evaluate the full environmental, social and economic impacts of NRM investments. This would provide the best evidence possible of these impacts,
- Develop a strong regional profile and presence both in the region and with external stakeholders,
- Provide a single point of contact for community and government for NRM in the region,
- Provide a reliable and reputable manager of funds for government and other funders of NRM.

Business Case

The establishment of QMD Catchments is proactively meets the changing situation described above and sets up the region for the future. The specific business case is:

- The new organisation addresses many of the issues above. It would be a larger organisation that would be more attractive to government and other funders. A larger organisation can compete for more funding over a larger area. It is more able to approach private and philanthropic funders to leverage funds. At the same time, it retains a sub-catchment arrangement allowing local engagement and locally focused activities.
- Engagement of existing groups and stakeholders occurs through an organisational and individual membership model allowing input and influence from all members. Equal representation on the board is maintained from each the catchment areas i.e. 2 board members each are derived from the South West, Maranoa/Balonne and the Condamine Catchment. This means that the population in the east doesn't dominate the west.
- It can provide potential savings and efficiencies. For example, common functions such as finance and contract management can be managed across the whole region. Current joint arrangements between Condamine Alliance and SWNRM is an example of potential efficiencies. It also reduces governance and administration costs (i.e. fewer board members).
- It shows regional initiative in reducing the number of regional bodies that meet long-standing government requirements.
- Organisational changes go hand in hand with an emphasis on support and engagement with local groups.
- An organisational and individual member model broadens community involvement and maintains local involvement.
- It can better provide consistent messages about modern NRM. This will help create a new perception of NRM.
- It will better allow the region to link directly to NRM Regions Queensland (the former Regional Groups Collective) that is repositioning itself and leading an overall change in NRM delivery in the state.
- Existing projects and staff will be maintained and staff will be maintained across the region (i.e. not concentrated in one location)
- It would remove current debate and concern about work across the geographic boundaries of the current organisations.
- A single organisation would help to engage with stakeholders outside the region and with those not directly related to NRM.

Drawbacks

Potential drawbacks are:

- Strategic planning and program delivery needs to be quite adaptable to meet the diverse biophysical and community situations in the region. There is a need to maintain equity across the region so that issues in the west are considered with the same importance as issues in the east. There could easily be a perception of the west losing out to the east.
- The proposal could easily be mistakenly compared to council amalgamation and current staff and stakeholders may perceive a loss of power, involvement and ownership. Understandably, people have strong ownership of the current situation and it will take time for a new identity to develop.
- In the medium to long term, it may involve changes to the mix of staff and even reductions in staff numbers. If this were to occur, it would be managed carefully in line with all HR processes.
- The winding up of existing organisations, and the formation of the QMD Catchments may be difficult and incur costs. The transition of existing contracted work and legal arrangements may also be difficult initially.

Question: What other aspects are there to the business case – benefit or drawback?

“Identities”

The one organisation, QMD Catchments, would have three “identities”:

- South West Catchments,
- Maranoa Balonne Catchment (including Border Rivers),
- Condamine Catchment.

These are identities that staff and local people can relate to but there are no internal boundaries within the region. Staff would have on their shirt, for example, “Queensland Murray Darling Catchments – South West Catchments”.

Membership

QMD Catchments would have a broad base of organisational and individual members. Membership would be open to any organisation or individual in the region such as landcare groups, local government, Agforce branches etc. Only individuals may become voting members. No organisations would be written into the constitution as members.

This allows QMD Catchments to have a broad membership base that it can readily engage with, and that can readily provide input to it. A fee structure (including a no fee option) would be developed for membership for both organisations and individuals.

Questions

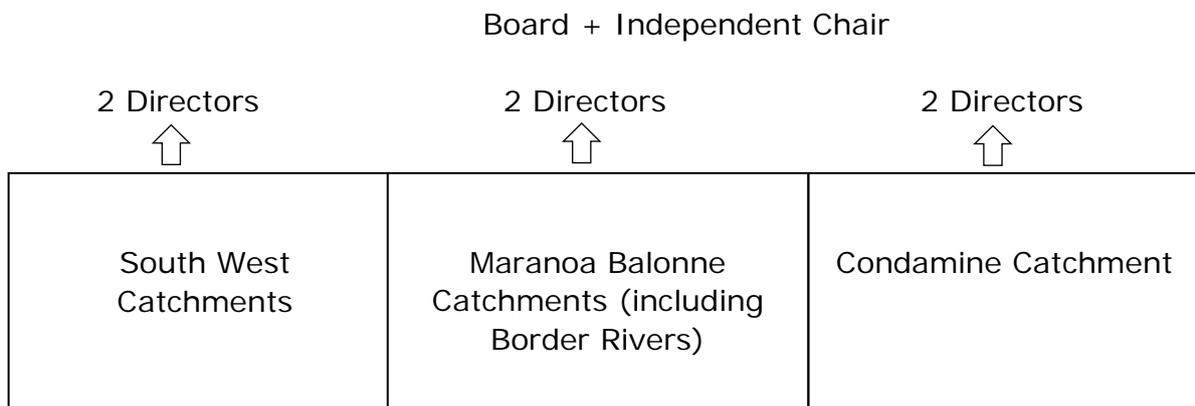
What members should QMD Catchments have?

Should members pay a fee?

A membership database would be maintained and emails, newsletters and social media can be readily sent to members who subscribe to receiving information from QMD Catchments. The membership database would include details such as name, address, organisational affiliation, and “identity” catchment in line with privacy legislation. This means it can be appropriately searched and information better targeted.

Governance

It is proposed that QMD Catchments would have a single board of directors made up of 2 directors from each “identity” catchment in the region (i.e. Condamine, Maranoa/Balonne and South West) plus an independent chair. The two board members from each catchment would be elected by individual members within each catchment. This aims to provide equity across the region. For example, say, 50 members in the South West would elect 2 directors and 500 members in the Condamine catchment would also elect 2 directors as follows:



Only individual members would have voting rights. That is, organisational members, such as CCMA would not vote for directors as an organisation. However, its individual members, who are also members of QMD Catchments, would have an individual vote.

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The chair would be independent and there are three main options to select a chair as follows:

1. Election by all members across the region,
2. Appointment by the board using an appropriate competitive selection process,
3. Appointment by an “eminent” group of well-respected NRM leaders in the region.

The working group recommends option 2 (appointment by the board) as the most workable and equitable way of appointing a board chair.

Questions
How should board members be selected/elected?
How should the chair be selected/elected?
What should the term be for Directors and the Chair?

The board would include people with a mixture of skills and people’s “merit” in standing for the board will be broadly interpreted. This does not mean “academic” achievements but rather motivation, practical experience, being connected to community, commitment to NRM and having skills to offer.

Engagement

All stakeholders in the region will have an opportunity to consider and provide feedback on this proposal. Each existing NRM regional body will engage its own stakeholders in their own region. The process to engage stakeholders is proposed as follows:

Stakeholders to be Engaged	Engagement Actions
Members of current organisations	Face to face meetings with organisations by existing NRM bodies
	A communique with key points of the proposal will be circulated in February 2018.
	This draft proposal will be circulated via email and any person or stakeholder is welcome to provide feedback by Friday March 16, 2018.
	Specific webinars will be held in February and March 2018
Managers and staff of current organisations	Internal feedback from managers and staff will be arranged via Board Chairs and CEOs during February
Federal and state government departments and relevant political representatives, local government, and organisations such as SWRED	The final proposal (after feedback from NRM stakeholders is incorporated) will be provided to government departments, politicians etc. Personal briefings will be given by a delegation of 3 Working Group representatives (one from each organisation)
NRM Regions Queensland	Chairs will personally brief NRM Regions Queensland

This proposal document allows consistent information about the proposal to be provided.

The working group will consider all feedback when it is received by March 16 2018. It will then prepare a final draft to be formally put to each current NRM body for consideration and decision. This will be circulated to existing organisations by the end of April 2018.

6. Transition Process

If the existing NRM bodies agree on forming QMD Catchments, a transition process will be planned and implemented. This would include:

- All projects, contracts and staff appointments would continue,
- Funding applications would proceed as usual,
- A winding up process for each organisation would commence, planned and managed by each organisation,
- Concurrent with the winding up process, the establishment of the new organisation would proceed. This would include arrangements to transfer assets and staff to the QMD Catchments,
- A transitional CEO would be appointed and a transitional board would also be formed to oversee the setting up of the organisation.

Professional advice will be sought about the legal entity of the new organisation and to draft a constitution. Possible options are a company limited by guarantee or an incorporated association.

South West NRM invites you to provide your feedback on this proposal by Friday, March 16, 2018.

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