



# Western Australian Government framework to assist in achieving sustainable natural resource management *in western australia*



**WATER AND RIVERS  
COMMISSION**



**Department of Conservation  
and Land Management**



**Department of  
Environmental Protection**



# natural resource management

*in western australia*

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framework to assist in  
achieving sustainable  
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## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to articulate the principles for engaging with community groups who deal with natural resource management at a regional level, and recognition of their strategies, in order to provide guidelines for both agencies and the community. It also establishes a framework for a coordinated and integrated approach to natural resource management in Western Australia by the four key agencies (Agriculture Western Australia, the Department of Conservation and Land Management, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Water and Rivers Commission).

While this document acknowledges the need for sustainable natural resource management and recognises that there are many stakeholders, it is not intended to represent the views of all those stakeholders. Rather, it provides a broad framework defining how the four agencies deal with the community while recognising that the agencies each have their own specific statutory responsibilities and policies.

## Definition

Natural resource management (NRM) in this statement is defined as the ecologically sustainable management of the land, water and biodiversity resources of the State for the benefit of existing and future generations, and for the maintenance of the life support capability of the biosphere. It does not include mineral or marine resources.

## Background

Western Australia has a remarkable diversity of natural landscapes, ecological communities and species. The State is rich in natural resources ranging from forests, water and minerals to vast agricultural and pastoral lands. The natural resources provide a strong economy, high standards of living and an amenity which is highly valued by the community. Protection and management of natural resources that underpin these values, diversity and prosperity are vital to the State's future.

However, it is recognised that there are a number of pressing land, water and biodiversity issues associated with the use of the State's natural resources that need to be addressed.

## State directions in natural resource management

- The Western Australian Government is committed to the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD), and seeks to integrate environmental considerations into decision-making processes at all levels. The Western Australian Municipal Association is working with Councils to achieve the Commonwealth Government commitment that local governments should adopt Agenda 21 by the end of 2000. Agenda 21 recognises the integration and balance of social, economic and environmental aspirations of any local community are essential to attain sustainability.
- The achievement of sustainable NRM requires the stakeholders and managers of natural resources to accept responsibility and interdependence. The future management of natural resources in Western Australia will depend on the development and implementation of effective partnerships between all stakeholders including the community, industry, and Local, State and Commonwealth Governments. These partnerships need to align all stakeholders towards agreed NRM goals.
- The Western Australian Government is committed to working with all levels of government and the community to ensure that development of the State's economy takes place in conjunction with the protection and management of all natural resources and the environment.
- Western Australia's NRM goal is:

*Conservation and sustainable management of the State's natural resources, with efficient and effective partnerships between all levels of Government, industry and the community as an important tool in achieving this.*

- NRM and protection of the environment in Western Australia is underpinned by the following guiding principles:

- Economic and social growth and environmental protection are interdependent and essential to society's long-term well being;
- Individual and community well-being and welfare should be enhanced while having regard for inter-generational equity;
- Management means seeking a sustainable balance between the competing socio-economic and ecological objectives for the use of natural resources. Balancing these factors requires knowledge and judgement that may require tradeoffs;
- The value that the community places on natural resources and the environment for current and future generations should be augmented;
- Biological diversity should be protected and ecological processes and systems restored and enhanced;
- Productive capacity of the land, through a variety and diversity of land uses, should be protected;
- Water quality and quantity should be maintained to support aquatic ecosystems and consumptive uses;
- Partnerships and understanding between government, industry and the community should be improved to achieve sustainable NRM;
- The prime responsibility for the management of natural resources lies with the land owner/manager. However restoration of the environment is a problem that must be universally shared in partnership arrangements.



## Government partnerships

The management of the State's natural resources is a responsibility shared by Government, industry and the community. The individual land owner / manager has prime responsibility. The various levels of government have differing roles specified in a variety of legislation, while a variety of community groups have an established role in a wide range of natural resource matters. To be effective, NRM must co-ordinate these shared responsibilities.

To sustainably manage our natural resources, ameliorate degradation and achieve restoration, all parties need to adopt an approach based on the principles of shared investment. To do this Government must involve community and interest groups in the setting of priorities and the development of strategies to address NRM issues. Government must also be prepared to direct resources towards priorities agreed in partnership with the community. In channelling its resources Government, in a spirit of cooperation, will seek to invest in areas where there is greatest public benefit, as well as ensuring its statutory responsibilities are met.

To play their part in this shared investment, community groups, landholders and other land managers must also see the need to invest resources, although it is recognised that many already invest significantly. While the focus may be on a local area or an individual property it is imperative that the investment be coordinated in a way that optimises its effectiveness.

The State Government will develop partnerships with industry and community groups to achieve agreed outcomes that promote the principles enunciated in this framework. The following principles will guide the development of partnerships between Government and natural resource organisations and groups:

For an effective partnership with Government, such groups should:

- have a demonstrated commitment to the principles of NRM;
- be representative of all relevant stakeholder interests;
- be inclusive and operate under democratic principles;
- operate as a continuing open, accessible organisation to the community in their region or subject where all can take part in the decision-making process;
- be able to demonstrate that they are responsible and accountable for their decisions and actions.

It is recognised that in the case of groups set up for more specific or localised purposes, these principles may be varied.

## Partnership agreements

In the event of an agency or the Government forming a partnership with a group, a formal agreement may be required. The following principles will generally apply to partnerships, with or without a formal agreement:

- compatibility with goals and policies of the Western Australian Government;
- agreed goals, purpose and plans;
- agreed target outcomes;
- recognition of a partnership and the responsibilities of the community and agency partners;
- appropriate accountability measures being put in place;
- openness and transparency, with any joint activities being compatible with the principles of sound corporate governance.
- a business plan, which includes a strategy for self sufficiency, being put in place.

## Implementation

Implementation of this framework will evolve as challenges are met and new approaches developed. Therefore, it is essential that a flexible, rather than regimented, approach to implementation be followed. However, several key elements to implementation can be identified to act as a guide. These are:

1. Where NRM activities are to be undertaken in partnership between a community group and Government, there is a process of formal recognition of the group.
2. Regional strategies should (with collaboration between a regional group and government) identify priority resource management issues, focus localities, key actions, levels of investment required over time and a funding strategy which incorporates self-sufficiency targets and a role for industry.

3. Government and regional groups should develop Partnership Agreements specifying the roles each party will take in implementing the regional strategy.
4. Agreements between Government and other players (other community groups and/or individuals) should be consistent with regional strategies and may be determined on a case-by-case basis.

## Review

The framework will be developed and enhanced as discussion and consultation occur. A review will be performed in 12 months to evaluate progress made and the effectiveness and efficiency of the NRM framework.



# Attachment 1

## Recognition of natural resource management groups

Both community groups and governments have taken on roles and responsibilities in natural resource management (NRM), either by desire or due to statutory responsibility or obligations. While there may not always be a need or desire for community groups to work formally in partnership with Government, at times such a partnership would be advantageous, particularly where both community and Government objectives are similar. However, in these cases there will be a process of recognition of the group.

The criteria that should be met by a group prior to the development of any partnership agreement with Government, unless other processes are established in legislation, are:

- the group must have a demonstrated commitment to the principles of NRM;
- the group must be representative of all relevant stakeholder interests;
- the group must be inclusive and operate under democratic principles;
- the group must operate as a continuing, open, accessible organisation to the community in their region or subject of interest where all can take part in the decision-making process;
- the group must demonstrate that it is responsible and accountable for its decisions and actions.

It is recognised that in the case of groups set up for more specific or localised purposes, these principles may be varied.

## Types of groups

The types of groups that have NRM issues in their mandate vary widely and cannot be listed in full here, particularly as some can be ephemeral and others may deal with very specific, single issues. The objective here is to provide an outline of the types of groups with whom Government either has or could have partnership arrangements.

### 1. Statutory bodies

There are a number of statutory bodies that have a large “community” focus to their NRM activities. These include the Soil and Land Conservation Council (SLCC), the National Parks and Nature Conservation Authority (NPNCA) and the Pastoral Lands Board (PLB).

AGWEST and WRC have particular responsibilities as they each administer legislation, the Soil and Land Conservation Act and the Waterways Conservation Act respectively, that allow the formation of statutory community-based groups (such as Land Conservation District Committees and Waterways Management Authorities) with interests in NRM. Both agencies provide support to such groups. However, at the same time, these groups have certain statutory obligations and responsibilities they must meet. These are set out in legislation and through policy adopted by Government. The Water and Rivers Commission can also establish committees of the Board under the Water and Rivers Commission Act, such as Geocatch and water allocation committees, which manage some natural resources.

### 2. Non-statutory boards/councils

Organisations such as the State Salinity Council, the Natural Heritage Trust Regional and State Assessment Panels and the WA Greenhouse Council have non-statutory functions but work closely with Government.

### 3. Local government

Local government has a key responsibility, as defined in the Local Government Act and the Town Planning and Development Act. The main responsibilities relate to land use, zoning and development approvals. Local government also has operational responsibilities such as road building and maintenance and the management of local government lands. These activities can have significant on and off-site effects on natural resources.

Members of local government are also part of the community and have close contact with industry and community groups involved in NRM. Land Conservation District Committees all have local government representation on them and they frequently work together with the local Shire or Shires, which assists in developing and maintaining close communication networks between the community and local government.

### 4. Regional Groups

A number of non-statutory regional NRM groups, with agency representation, have been formed, such as the Swan-Avon Integrated Catchment Management Coordinating Group (SAICMCG) which covers the Avon Working Group (AWG) and the Swan Catchment Council (SCC), the South Coast Regional Initiative Partnership Team (SCRIPT), the Northern Agricultural Integrated Management Strategy Team (NAIMS) and the South West Catchment Council, incorporating the Blackwood Basin Group. These groups may have the responsibility of coordinating efforts between smaller, more localised community groups in their regional areas, as well as developing priorities and strategies and securing resources. The approaches taken by these regional groups vary.

### 5. Catchment groups

Government works closely with catchment groups on a number of issues. For example, the State Salinity Action Plan incorporates work with “focus catchments” and “recovery catchments” in priority areas.

### 6. Other groups

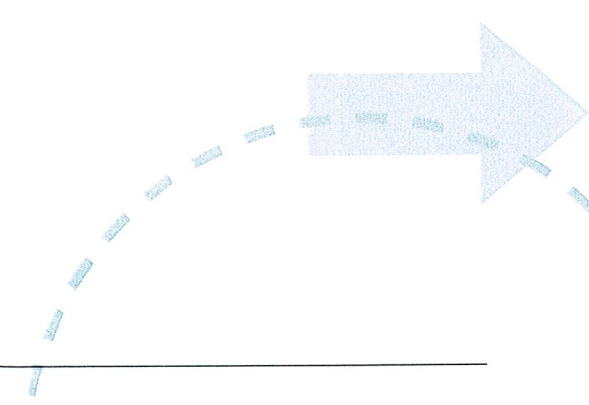
There are a significant number of other types of groups that Government may work with, including organisations like the Conservation Council and Greening Australia (WA), and peak primary producer groups such as the Western Australian Farmers’ Federation and the Pastoralists’ and Graziers’ Association.

CALM works with a wide range of groups with specific interests in particular conservation reserves (eg national parks), native forests, plantations and in the conservation and use of biodiversity. AGWEST works with groups to develop and implement best management practices (for example, through “Better Business”) which, while having a production focus, include the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The Sustainable Rural Development Program of AGWEST has a number of partnership groups consisting of community representatives to help guide the direction of the program.

## Partnership Agreements

Government may choose to develop partnership agreements with some of these groups as part of the process of improving NRM in Western Australia.





# Attachment 2

## Criteria for Endorsement of Regional Strategies

It is important to have effective coordination and integration, not only between agencies but between Government and community groups. The strategies of these groups, especially the regional strategies, are a very important part of this process. Therefore, it is crucial to have guidelines for the recognition and endorsement of these strategies.

In order for the State Government to consider endorsement, regional strategies will need to meet the following criteria:

- the strategy is committed to achieving goals that are compatible with Government natural resource management (NRM) objectives;
- the development of the strategy involves most and remains open to stakeholders in the region;
- the strategy adopts objectives of NRM consistent with those provided in this framework;
- the strategy demonstrates that its activities are to be undertaken in an integrated manner, with Government, industry and community involvement;
- the regional boundaries of the strategy are defined, for example along bioregional, major drainage basin or catchment lines;
- there is recognition of, and building on, local community values and visions.

An effective strategy needs to be visionary, inclusive, integrated, outcome focused, adaptive, communicative and credible. These are the underlying principles that should be considered in developing a strategy:

- the strategy should be developed through a consultative process involving the community and relevant Government Agencies;
- the strategy should be driven by the group's shared values;
- it should include long-term direction, vision and goals;
- it should be realistic, action-oriented and easily understood;
- it should involve ongoing monitoring and evaluation;
- it should be consistent with the aims of other relevant strategies (eg. State strategies such as the Salinity Action Plan);
- it should review the state of the resources in the area and then establish agreed priorities for action;
- it should contain, or refer to, an action plan;
- it should contain, or refer to, a mechanism to "roll down" the strategy and engage all relevant stakeholders;
- it should effectively cover the full range of land, water and biodiversity issues (guidelines on aspects to be covered will be provided by the agencies);
- the strategy should be capable of being part of Western Australia's overall NRM strategy.

## Endorsement

*Following consultative assessment, the four Agencies and the regional NRM groups will sign-off on the regional strategies and submit them to the Cabinet Standing Committee on either Salinity Management or Rangelands.*

