

## WHAT IS THE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (NRM) PROCESS AND HOW DOES IT INVOLVE AND BENEFIT YOU IN THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY?

*NRM: the more we share and care now,  
the more we have for the future!*

NRM is another step forward in the world's strategic plan for changing attitudes and behaviour to enable the protection, maintenance and/or enhancement, along with sustainable use and development, of natural and physical resources for the benefit of all - including future generations.

The Australian seafood industry has made some great steps forward to ensure sustainability, but clearly – we need to do more...

*“Coastal zone condition is not significantly improving....  
Pressures on the coastal resource are increasing at a rate exceeding the  
time necessary for damaged environments to stabilise and be repaired.”*  
(NRM Ministerial Council, October 2003)

The Seafood Industry has an opportunity as NRM is much more than a government-funding programme with conditions attached.

More and more of our customers both overseas and locally are requiring greater evidence that our production systems are consistent with NRM principles. The benefits of contributing to the NRM process for industry translate into direct marketing advantages and continued and increased access to resources.

### **The opportunity for the Seafood Industry**

- The process needs your knowledge and practical experience as nature neither complies with nor conforms to political/bureaucratic boundaries;
- Raise environmental or natural resource issues of concern that affect you in your region and have them addressed;
- Help ensure integrated decision making and management of natural resources;
- Help define the targets, priorities and investment strategies;
- Draw on the knowledge generated from the process through sharing and caring;
- Identify opportunities, form partnerships and bid for R&D funding;
- Demonstrate your progress (or the seafood industry's) toward sustainability to others;
- Identify training needs; develop and review management systems, EMS's, COP etc.;
- Become aware of the NRM targets and collective progress toward the objectives;
- Form contacts, friendships, and partnerships with other resource users;
- Have your say and help focus on *needs* not *wants*;
- Help develop a position on issues that will benefit the majority of participants;
- Invest in you and your families' future and benefit the community in your region;
- Help ensure your security and our future;
- Access assistance from NRM facilitators in your region, make yourself known;
- We cannot all be leaders so make sure your region has adequate representation from your industry;
- Feed into and from your industry body - they cannot do it all for you; and
- You cannot afford not to be involved - **it is your future.**

## **Developing Integrated Regional Natural Resource Management Plans**

Bilateral Agreements between the Australian Government and each State and Territory have been negotiated to implement the framework for the extension of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP). 56 regions (36 with coastal areas) have been identified across Australia for the purpose of determining NRM and sustainable agricultural priorities. Each of the regions has an integrated NRM regional strategy and plan.

Regional plans are the basis for regional investment from both the NHT and the NAP, removing the need for individual project plans or applications in order to access Government funding.

Each region has a 'regional body' formed to undertake the important job of managing and protecting their region's natural resources. There is an interactive process of feedback and advice from all levels of Government and specialist advisory bodies leading up to accreditation of a plan by Australian and State or Territory Ministers.

Regional Plans work towards identifying and achieving the region's natural resource management targets. These plans are agreed by governments and the community and, together with investment strategies for implementing the plan, define the goals and contributions that all parties will undertake. The plans detail catchment-wide activities addressing a range of natural resource management issues including land and water management, biodiversity and agricultural and fishing practices.

Consultation and negotiation between 'regional bodies' and key stakeholders is crucial. Key stakeholders include communities, indigenous people, academic/scientific communities, environmental groups, industry, local governments and State/Territory and Australian Government agencies.

Regional plans should be:

- Based on a 'whole of region' approach and address significant natural resource management issues incorporating environmental, social and economic aspects;
- Developed by an organised 'catchment' or 'regional body' representing the local community and are accountable for expenditure of public monies;
- Based on meeting agreed targets and outcomes that reflect good science; and
- Based on meeting a firm timetable that all parties have agreed to.

## **The National Standards and Targets Framework**

The NRM Ministerial Council has agreed to a National Framework for Standards and Targets to provide a consistent basis for the development of regional NRM Plans and desired national natural resource outcomes.

One of the criteria for accreditation of an NRM Plan is that it sets, or has commenced the process to set, targets for the resource condition outcomes that the plan aims to achieve. Plans also need to ensure that adequate provision is made for monitoring and evaluating progress in reaching targets.

The agreed National Framework requires each plan to contain three sets of targets

- Aspirational Targets ( with a longer 50-year timeframe vision )
- Resource Condition Targets ( with a medium 10 to 20-year timeframe)
- Management Action Targets ( with a short 1 to 5-year timeframe )

*(See attached table for a snapshot of the agreed matters for which targets will be set against)*

### Aspirational Targets

There are eight nationally agreed statements about the desired natural resource outcome for Aspirational Targets. These are:

1. The impact of salinity on land and water resources is minimised, avoided or reduced;
2. Biodiversity and the extent, diversity and condition of native ecosystems are maintained or rehabilitated;
3. Populations of significant species and ecological communities are maintained or rehabilitated;
4. Ecosystem services and functions are maintained or rehabilitated;
5. Surface and groundwater quality is maintained or enhanced;
6. The impact of threatening processes on locations and systems which are critical for conservation of biodiversity, agricultural production, towns, infrastructure and cultural and social values, is avoided or minimised;
7. Surface water and groundwater is securely allocated for sustainable production purposes and to support human uses and the environment, within the sustainable capacity of the water resource; and
8. Sustainable production systems are developed and management practices are in place, which maintain or rehabilitate biodiversity and ecosystem services, maintain or enhance resource quality, maintain productive capacity and prevent and manage degradation.

### Resource Condition Targets

There are ten nationally agreed Resource Condition “Matters for Targets”, which must be set for each regional plan (where applicable). These are:

1. Land salinity;
2. Soil condition;
3. Native vegetation communities’ integrity;
4. Inland aquatic ecosystems integrity (rivers and other wetlands);
5. Estuarine, coastal and marine habitats integrity;
6. Nutrients in aquatic environments;
7. Turbidity / suspended particulate matter in aquatic environments;
8. Surface water salinity in freshwater aquatic environments;
9. Significant native species and ecological communities; and
10. Ecologically significant invasive species.

These measurable targets must be pragmatic and achievable, and should be developed interactively, including through a cost/benefit analysis.

There have been a number of ‘headings’ developed under which resource condition is to be measured. They may, over time, include more than one indicator, or a number of complementary ways of measuring the same outcome.

Setting targets requires baseline information - the level against which progress will be measured. Where possible baselines should be quantified and relate to trends going back several years rather than a single point-in-time measurement.

### Management Action Targets

There are only three nationally agreed Management Action Matters for Targets, which must be set for each regional plan. These are:

1. Critical assets identified and protected;
2. Water allocation plans developed and implemented; and
3. Improved land and water management practices adopted.

Only three targets have been set because the relevant management solutions for reversing resource degradation are likely to vary substantially between regions. Management action or capacity-building targets must contribute to progress toward the longer-term resource condition targets.

## **Investments and Funding**

### National/State Investments.

This investment/funding covers matters best dealt with at a broader National, State or interstate scale including those relating to Commonwealth waters. For example, it covers resource assessment, research, industry strategies, innovative approaches to managing NRM issues such as weeds, invasive marine species and protected areas, reserve acquisition, training and information, and national coordination/facilitation.

### Regional Investment

Once a Plan has been accredited and an investment strategy agreed to implement priority management action in keeping with targets, funding and implementation partnerships are established with Governments, industry and communities.

The Australian, State and Territory Governments direct the majority of funds from the NAP and NHT to this purpose.

### Envirofund

The Australian Government, through the NHT, also funds local level projects in partnership with incorporated community groups and sponsored unincorporated community groups to undertake small projects aimed at conserving biodiversity and promoting sustainable resource use for projects costing up to \$50,000.

## **How do the international targets fit with regional NRM plans?**

The United Nations clearly defined the importance for international and Australian Government involvement regarding regional NRM plans through “Agenda 21”:

*“Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own: but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development.”*

AGENDA 21

(United Nations Global Blueprint for Ecologically Sustainable Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 1992)

The successful implementation of AGENDA 21 (and other International Agreements, Conventions, Treaties and Law) is first and foremost the responsibility of the Australian Government through National strategies, plans, policies, agreements, processes, and the provision of substantial new and additional financial resources, including:

- The Australian Constitution, through the division of constitutional powers between Australian, State and Territory governments, prevents the Australian Government directly making law for the States and Territories.
- To enable demonstration that Australia’s international obligations are being met across all of Australia equitably and consistently, and to ensure the desired on-ground outcomes, various arrangements/mechanisms are used by and between the Australian, State and Territory Governments. These include:

- **Council of Australian Governments (COAG)**, and subsequent agreements reached. (COAG is the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association – three tiers of government.) COAG agreements (often) require States and Territories to enact legislation (which may be peculiar to each) demonstrable of meeting Australia’s international obligations.
- **Ministerial Councils** - Over 40 Commonwealth-State Ministerial Councils and fora facilitate consultation and cooperation between the Australian Government and state and territory governments in specific policy areas. The councils initiate, develop and monitor policy reform jointly in these areas, and take joint action in the resolution of issues that arise between governments. In particular, Ministerial Councils develop policy reforms for consideration by COAG, and oversee the implementation of policy reforms agreed by COAG.
- The **NRM Ministerial Council** was established in 2001 by COAG agreement. The Council is the peak government forum for consultation, coordination and, where appropriate, integration of action by governments on natural resource management issues (for example, through the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Environment 1992 [IGAE], developed in parallel with Agenda 21).

**Further information:**

National Aquaculture Council:

P: 02 6281 0383      W: [www.australian-aquacultureportal.com](http://www.australian-aquacultureportal.com)

Australian Seafood Industry Council:

P: 02 6281 0383      W: [www.asic.org.au](http://www.asic.org.au)

Seafood Services Australia:

P: 1300 130 321      W: [www.seafoodservices.com.au](http://www.seafoodservices.com.au)

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation:

P: 02 6285 0400      W: [www.frdc.com.au](http://www.frdc.com.au)

Australian Government “Natural Resource Management” Portal

W: [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au)

Australian Government “Environment” Portal

W: [www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)

Australian Government funding sources:

W: [www.grantslink.gov.au](http://www.grantslink.gov.au)

*This information has been provided to help clarify the complex and often confusing concepts and practices around Natural Resource Management Plans.*

*Collated by Mr Colin Dyke (Vice Chair of the National Aquaculture Council, Chair of the Tasmanian Aquaculture Council) - 2006*

**Table 1:**

***NRM National Outcomes and Matters for Target***

| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>National Outcomes</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The national outcomes are aspirational statements about desired national natural resource outcomes</p>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Matters for which Regional Targets must be set</b></p>  |
|---|---|
|   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Resource Condition Matters for Targets</b></p>  |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The impact of salinity on land and water resources is minimised, avoided or reduced.</li> <li>2. Biodiversity and the extent, diversity and condition of native ecosystems are maintained or rehabilitated</li> <li>3. Populations of significant species and ecological communities are maintained or rehabilitated.</li> <li>4. Ecosystem services and functions are maintained or rehabilitated.</li> <li>5. Surface and groundwater quality is maintained or enhanced.</li> <li>6. The impact of threatening processes on locations and systems which are critical for conservation of biodiversity, agricultural production, towns, infrastructure and cultural and social values, is avoided or minimised.</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Land salinity.</li> <li>2. Soil condition.</li> <li>3. Native vegetation communities' integrity.</li> <li>4. Inland aquatic ecosystems integrity (rivers and other wetlands).</li> <li>5. Estuarine, coastal and marine habitats integrity.</li> <li>6. Nutrients in aquatic environments.</li> <li>7. Turbidity / suspended particulate matter in aquatic environments.</li> <li>8. Surface water salinity in freshwater aquatic environments.</li> <li>9. Significant native species and ecological communities.</li> <li>10. Ecologically significant invasive species.</li> </ol> |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Surface water and groundwater is securely allocated for sustainable production purposes and to support human uses and the environment, within the sustainable capacity of the water resource.</li> <li>8. Sustainable production systems are developed and management practices are in place, which maintain or rehabilitate biodiversity and ecosystem services, maintain or enhance resource quality, maintain productive capacity and prevent and manage degradation.</li> </ol>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Management Action Matters for Targets</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Critical assets identified and protected.</li> <li>2. Water allocation plans developed and implemented.</li> <li>3. Improved land and water management practices adopted</li> </ol>   |

Progress towards achieving the Resource Condition and Management Action Targets is to be measured by a set of Indicators, also agreed nationally, although it is not necessary to use every indicator to measure progress.