



Final Report

**Jurisdiction Report -
The Commonwealth**

**National Framework
for the
Management and
Monitoring of
Australia's Native
Vegetation**

**Prepared for
Environment Australia
November 2000**

URS

in association with

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is the National Vegetation Framework?

In June 1998, ANZECC agreed to the development and implementation of the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation (National Vegetation Framework). The intention of this policy initiative was to provide a unified, multilateral forum through which to pursue improvements to native vegetation management and monitoring.¹

In February 1999, ANZECC Standing Committee on Conservation (SCC) agreed that it would be appropriate to engage an independent consultant to conduct a preliminary assessment of the jurisdictions against the draft National Vegetation Framework. A report was subsequently produced - "Native Vegetation National Overview" - which documented the key challenges for vegetation management and monitoring within each jurisdiction.

For the purpose of the National Vegetation Framework (NVF), eight jurisdictions were identified in Australia comprising the 7 states and territories, and the Commonwealth. Following endorsement of the NVF and the jurisdiction interim Work Plans by ANZECC in December 1999, each jurisdiction continued preparation of an interim Work Plan that is considered to be the principal means of implementing the National Vegetation Framework. The Work Plans identified the vegetation management and monitoring activities, time frames for when each activity was to occur, responsibility for implementation of the activities and indicators for measurement of success.

The native vegetation outcomes being sought in the Framework are:²

- a reversal in the long-term decline in the extent and quality of Australia's native vegetation cover by:
 - conserving native vegetation, and substantially reducing land clearing;
 - conserving Australia's biodiversity; and
 - restoring, by means of substantially increased revegetation, the environmental values and productive capacity of Australia's degraded land and water;
- conservation and, where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on privately managed land for agriculture, forestry and urban development;
- retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels; and
- an improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation.

The more specific vegetation outcomes being sought within the context of integrated natural resource management for the Commonwealth Work Plan are described in Section 3 below.

¹ Environment Australia, n.d , *Consultancy Brief*, Canberra.

² ANZECC, 1999, National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia's Native Vegetation, ACT.

1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

ANZECC identified the purpose of the evaluation was ‘to assess progress against the National Framework for the Monitoring of Australia’s Native Vegetation and fulfilment of the Work Plan commitments’ (that were developed by each jurisdiction). Incorporated into the evaluation process was the additional focus of evaluating the appropriateness and effectiveness of the Work Plans for achieving long term sustainable vegetation management. The Terms of Reference for the Evaluation are provided below.

Terms of Reference

A. Assessment of Effectiveness of Work Plans and their Implementation

1. Assess current vegetation management and monitoring practices in jurisdictions against those set out in the respective Work Plans and against best practice.
2. Assess anticipated long term vegetation management and monitoring outcomes against the Work Plans.
3. Assess progress by jurisdictions in meeting the Work Plan success measures within the identified timeframes.

B. Propose Improvements

4. Propose improvements to Work Plan management mechanisms that are feasible, practical and relevant to jurisdictions and take into account best practice. Proposed improvements should be within the context of National Framework objectives.
5. Suggest a process for jurisdictions to review and refine Work Plans on a continuing basis, to provide, amongst other things, for improvements in understanding of how best to achieve best practice native vegetation management.

C. Propose suitable ongoing independent evaluation arrangements

Propose a mechanism and time frame for independent evaluation of Work Plans on an ongoing basis, noting that vegetation management and monitoring activities are to be evaluated against agreed native vegetation outcomes and identified best practice.

D. Assess progress against the National Framework for the Management and Monitoring of Australia’s Native Vegetation

Evaluate how far actions in Work Plans enable each jurisdiction to achieve the vision and principles underpinning the National Framework especially the national goal to reverse the long-term decline of native vegetation in Australia.

The evaluation examined the performance of the jurisdiction Work Plans, from the release of NVF by ANZECC in December 1999, until September 2000. Our work examined the vegetation management and monitoring activities undertaken by the lead agencies in each jurisdiction that contribute to the progress of the Work Plan.

The review was implemented within a tight time frame to meet the reporting requirements of ANZECC. State agencies were the primary contributor to the Commonwealth Work Plan evaluation. Other non-government stakeholders’ views were also sought to

contribute to the evaluation, but the timetable contributed to a reduced level of interaction by some stakeholders.

2 Evaluation Approach & Methodology

2.1 Evaluation Approach

A central component of the evaluation was to devise an effective method that would allow evaluation of the eight jurisdictions Work Plans in a restricted time frame, while still allowing for jurisdiction input and discussion. The following provides a description of the approach employed for the evaluation, and method used to evaluate the jurisdiction Work Plans. Copies of the supporting documents used for the evaluation are available in Annex 1 - 5.

The approach to the evaluation consisted of the following :

- **Team meeting to confirm evaluation approach** – all members of the URS team that were leading the evaluation in the various jurisdictions met over a two day period, shortly after signing of the contract. The purpose of this meeting was to ensure an evaluation approach was devised that addressed the Terms of Reference and ensure that all members of the team had an opportunity to input and understand the agreed approach to ensure consistency in data-gathering and familiarity with process.
- **Contact with Jurisdictions** – URS managers for each Jurisdiction evaluation directly contacted agency stakeholders (via the SCC working group members) to inform them of the NVF evaluation process and invite participation. A time for a stakeholder meeting to be undertaken to discuss the Work Plan was confirmed.
- **Pre-meeting Preparation** – Due to time limitations, a preliminary desk-top analysis was undertaken by the consultant team, reviewing the Commonwealth Work Plan against a number of criteria. This information was circulated to all participants prior to the Work Plan evaluation meeting to allow for stakeholder review.
- **Jurisdiction Meeting** – a jurisdiction meeting was conducted to discuss progress of Work Plan and identify opportunities for improvement. The process used during the meeting is described in Section 2.2.
- **Draft Jurisdiction Report** - the manager for each jurisdiction evaluation prepared a draft report that documented the outcomes from the jurisdiction meeting and included points made during consultation with other stakeholders such as non-Government agencies and select interest groups external to the formal jurisdiction evaluation meeting.
- **Jurisdiction Review** –the draft jurisdiction report was then sent to all participants in the Commonwealth Work Plan evaluation meeting for comment.
- **Jurisdiction Final Report** Comments were then incorporated into the Commonwealth jurisdiction report and presented to Environment Australia as the Final Jurisdiction Report.

2.2 Evaluation method

A consistent approach was employed in each jurisdiction meeting to address the Terms of Reference. Each section is briefly described below.

Session A Review Work Plan against Key Challenges

Key Challenges were identified for each jurisdiction in the Dore *et al.* 1999 report (Dore Report). As these were developed prior to the Work Plans, they were presumed to be drivers for the Work Plan Actions. Therefore, to determine the effectiveness of the Work Plans, the Actions were reviewed to determine how well they address the challenges. A matrix was prepared that compared the Commonwealth Key Challenges identified in the Dore Report with Work Plan actions and level of influence. For each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (MMM), a rating was given for the level of influence each action could have in addressing the Commonwealth Key Challenge for that mechanism. The matrix template is shown in Annex 2.

Following discussions with the primary Commonwealth Work Plan contact, the draft matrix was presented at the Jurisdiction meeting and revised for its validity and for the individual and collective impact of the action(s) in addressing all the key challenges listed for the Commonwealth. Modifications to the list of Actions was made to increase the beneficial impact on the Key Challenges and applicability of the Key Challenges for their current relevance to the achievement of the outcomes listed in the NVF. Where Key Challenges have become less relevant – i.e. they have been addressed or the program has moved in a different direction; the need for contributing actions was reviewed. Where new challenges were identified these were incorporated into the Work Plan.

Session B. Assessment of Work Plan Success Measures

In order to evaluate Work Plan progress, quantification of achievements was provided against the Success Measures (or Performance Indicators) for each Work Plan activity. For each listed Success Measure, quantified information on the achievement to date was provided by the jurisdiction and further discussed during the evaluation meeting. If no progress was made, this was also noted and discussed during the meeting (ie. what was the reason for lack of progress, what needed to change etc.) Where performance indicators were deemed inappropriate, these were reviewed and amended during the evaluation meeting.

Session C Appropriateness of Work Plan Activities against the NVF Management and Monitoring Outcomes

Our initial reading of the NVF, the Dore Report and the individual Work Plans suggested that the relationship between the management mechanisms in the Work Plans and the Key Challenges is generally straightforward. However the relationship with the Desired Outcomes in the NVF was less so.

Our approach to assessing this relationship was to test how well the individual actions in the Work Plans contributed to the Desired Outcomes using another matrix. A template for the matrix is shown in Annex 3. Each action for each Management and Monitoring Mechanism (listed across the X-axis) was assessed in regards to contribution to the NVF Desired Outcome, listed on the Y-axis. The rating criteria used in Section A (High/Medium/Low Influence) was applied in Section C.

Recognising that a desk-top assessment was undertaken subjectively, and relying on limited information, the jurisdiction evaluation meeting was used to review the matrix for its validity and the implications for achievement of the NVF outcomes. The jurisdiction

meeting was then used to modify the list of Actions to improve contribution to the achievement of the NVF Desired Outcomes where necessary.

Session D Best Management Practices

A key criteria of the Terms of Reference was to determine if and how Best Management Practices (BMP) are being applied when undertaking vegetation Management and Monitoring Mechanisms and Activities in each jurisdiction.

The National Vegetation Framework identifies a range of BMP against the seven Management and Monitoring Mechanisms. Due to the time limitations associated with the evaluation, the URS/Griffin nrm team nominated one Management and Monitoring Mechanism per jurisdiction that will be investigated in depth from a Best Management Practice perspective during the jurisdiction meeting, rather than the entire set of MMMs. This process will, across the jurisdictions, address the range of BMPs identified in the ANZECC framework for the nominated mechanism, and be reported as a Case Study in the relevant jurisdiction report.

For the Commonwealth, the BMP of Communication and Capacity Building was used as the Case Study example. The ANZECC framework BMP's was used as the main guide to analyse the BMP. This information was then compiled into a 'snap shot' of BMP for inclusion into the Jurisdiction report.

Session E Visioning - evaluation of overall progress and likely long term impact of the National Vegetation Framework

This session in the Jurisdiction evaluation meeting looked collectively at the Visions in the Work Plans to assess how effectively the mechanisms being implemented now, will achieve those Visions in future. Plausible process methods were used for this assessment. In using plausible process, you work back from a major goal or vision to identify what would be needed now to achieve the goal or vision within anticipated timeframes.

For instance, if an overall goal is to better integrate management of native vegetation management, you might expect the work plans to include management and monitoring measures which will effectively support integrated management. If an overall goal is to attain a net gain in extent and quality of native vegetation, then the work plans ought to include measures which are likely to have the effect of controlling clearing and/or compensating with equivalent plantings within the anticipated timeframe of the Framework. From this type of assessment, number of key indicators of overall progress were identified and analysed to evaluate the likely long-term impact of the National Vegetation Framework.

3 Commonwealth Work Plan Output

3.1 Commonwealth Work Plan – Setting the Scene

Legal, Institutional and Policy Context

Commonwealth legislation with significant potential to impact on native vegetation include the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC) which came into force in July 2000. This Act replaced the following previous Acts: *Environment Protection (Impact of Proposals) Act 1974*, *National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1975*, *World Heritage (Properties Conservation) Act 1983*, *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*, and the *Whale Protection Act 1980*.

This Act strengthens the Commonwealth role in matters of national environmental significance for World Heritage Property, Ramsar Wetland, nationally threatened species, migratory species and Commonwealth Marine Areas. Critical habitat is protected as well as individual species.

Other relevant Acts that effect native vegetation include: *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975*, *Australian Quarantine Act 1908*, *Natural Heritage Trust Act 1997*, *Natural Resources Management (Financial Assistance) Act 1992*, *Primary Industries Research and Development Act 1989*, and *Regional Forest Agreement Act*.

The current key policies associated with sustainable forest management include the National Forest Policy Statement (1992) and Regional Forest Agreements, Plantations for Australia: The 2020 Vision (1997), Regional Forest Agreement Bill (1998) and Action Agenda for Australia's Forest and Wood Products Industry (2000). Australia has also made a commitment to report on progress towards sustainable forest management through the International Montreal Process criteria and indicators. The National Forest Inventory coordinates the collection of information on Montreal Process criteria and indicators at a regional level. The nine Regional Forest Agreements, which are now in place in four states of Australia provide for continuous improvement in ecologically sustainable forest management and the establishment of a Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative (CAR) reserve system.

Commonwealth government portfolios are Environment Australia (EA); Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (AFFA); Industry, Science and Resources (DISR); and Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPM&C). There are additionally a number of government coordinating mechanisms (including ANZECC, MCFFA and ARMCANZ) and advisory bodies.

Key programs and policy initiatives for achieving the native vegetation vision include the NHT, which is the primary Commonwealth investment mechanism for cooperative partnerships in environment protection (including biodiversity conservation), sustainable agriculture and NRM outcomes consistent with national strategies. A summary of programs is provided in Table 1.

Table 1 : Commonwealth/national programs relevant to native vegetation³

<i>Program</i>	<i>Institutions with major role</i>	<i>\$ million</i>	<i>Duration</i>
Bushcare	EA	346.5	96/97-01/02
National Landcare Program	AFFA	341.555	96/97-01/02
Murray-Darling 2001	AFFA, MDBC	195.626	96/97-01/02
National Reserve System Program	EA	84.170	96/97-01/02
National Rivercare Program	AFFA	82.896	96/97-01/02
Farm Forestry Program (exc JVAP)	AFFA	42.207	97/98-01/02
Endangered Species Program	EA	27.833	96/97-01/02
National Land & Water Resources Audit (inc National Vegetation Information System)	NLWRA	44.400	96/97-01/02
Greenhouse Challenge	Australian Greenhouse Office	30.0	98/99-02/03
National Weeds Program	AFFA, EA	28.5	96/97-01/02
World Heritage	EA	52.508	
National Wetlands Program	EA	17.050	
National River Health Program	EA	15.844	
Cities for Climate Protection	Australian Greenhouse Office	13.0	98/99-02/03
Bush for Greenhouse	Australian Greenhouse Office	5.5	98/99-02/03
National Forest Inventory	AFFA	5.0	97/98-00/01
National Greenhouse Gas Inventory	Australian Greenhouse Office	1.223	96/97-01/02
National Remnant Vegetation R&D Program	EA, LWRRDC	5.0	94/95-99/00

The Commonwealth Jurisdiction's Role in Vegetation Management

The present role of the Commonwealth in managing and monitoring native vegetation is described in the Dore Report and Commonwealth Work Plan -which was further refined in the jurisdiction evaluation workshop for this consultancy. The key areas of responsibility are:

- *Setting standards.* Provision of advice on Best Management Practice and setting Codes of Practice to encourage application of best practice.
- *Funding national programs.* Providing catalytic funding that builds the capacity of the community to manage native vegetation and secures the institutional and structural changes required for jurisdictions and land managers to achieve self-sufficiency in native vegetation management.
- *Coordination, collaboration and integration.* The Commonwealth does not have a lead role in *implementing* programs, but does takes a leading role in *coordinating* and contributing to the development of many national strategies and approaches of direct

³ Dore, J. Binning C. & Hayes G. 1999. National Vegetation National Overview. Griffin nrm, ACT

relevance to native vegetation. The Commonwealth also has a role in integrating approaches at national, bioregional, state and territory and local levels.

- *Supporting innovation.* Being responsive to lessons learnt and to examples of innovation in vegetation and natural resource management.
- *Making information accessible to all Australians.* Providing data, analysis of research and progress in implementation of monitoring and management in an accessible and understandable form to all Australians.
- *Institutional support.* Developing legislation which complements that prepared by other jurisdictions; developing capacities to address emerging policy imperatives that involve native vegetation management, such as the response to climate change (the National Greenhouse Strategy); and facilitating the institutional and structural change that has been and still is required in various Australian jurisdictions if the nation is to meet the challenges posed by emerging NRM issues.
- *Meeting international obligations.* There is a Commonwealth responsibility to respond, on behalf of Australia, to international treaties and obligations, notably the biodiversity and climate change (greenhouse) conventions that arose from the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, subsequently revisited and developed in 1997 at Kyoto. The Commonwealth also has an obligation to report on progress towards sustainable forest management through the Montreal Process criteria and indicators.
- *The custodian of national level information.* Conducting M&E of the cover and condition of native vegetation from a national perspective, to meet both domestic and international policy and reporting requirements.
- *Agreeing priorities.* Working with State, Territory and local governments to formulate a unified approach to vegetation management.
- *Making sure that environmental services are understood,* managed and maintained in a healthy way to continue to maintain services required for biodiversity, human infrastructure and regional development. This includes undertaking and funding R&D that develops the basic understanding of the ecology of native vegetation, including the functional role of native vegetation in landscapes and the basic technologies required for successful retention, protection, use and general management.
- *Managing Commonwealth Estates.*

The Commonwealth Work Plan Vision

The overarching national native vegetation goal is to ‘reverse the long-term decline in the quality and extent of Australia’s native vegetation by June 2001’⁴.

This national goal is articulated in the National Strategy for the Conservation of Australia’s Biological Diversity and in each of the bilateral NHT Partnership Agreements that have been signed between the Commonwealth government and each State/Territory.

The Commonwealth released their Work Plan in July 2000 following a round of public consultation. This evaluation is the first review of the Commonwealth Jurisdiction Work Plan.

⁴ Commonwealth, 2000. Commonwealth Work Plan (July 2000), ACT.

3.2 Linking the Work Plan with Key Challenges

The purpose of linking the Work Plan with the Key Challenges (that were identified in the Dore report) was to:

- confirm that the key issues relating to native vegetation management and monitoring identified in the Commonwealth Work Plan were still relevant;
- incorporate any new issues into the Commonwealth Work Plan; and
- determine if all the key vegetation issues were being addressed by the Commonwealth vegetation management and monitoring mechanisms.

During the course of the Commonwealth jurisdiction meeting, some participants indicated concerns with the Key Challenges identified in the Dore report. Participants determined that a slightly altered process was required. Stakeholders first determined what the role of the Commonwealth should be for implementing each management and monitoring mechanism. Redefined Key Challenges to address each mechanism were then identified. It was recognised that each of the Key Challenges needed to be written in terms of an active statement. Time did not permit this process to occur and will need to be revisited by Commonwealth stakeholders. The group then undertook a cursory review of the redefined challenges and assigned management actions appropriate to each challenge. The redefined roles, challenges and management actions are provided in a matrix form in Annex 2.

Using this refined process did not allow for a subsequent analysis of the effectiveness of existing Commonwealth Work Plan activities to address the new Key Challenges identified during the Commonwealth meeting, other than in defining new areas for actions. These actions have not been formally assessed and incorporated into the revised Commonwealth Work Plan, a point further addressed in Section 5. There was little opportunity to consider if the Work Plan was addressing all Commonwealth Key Challenges, or if gaps existed.

Undertaking a review of information obtained during the Commonwealth meeting (and also in discussion with the non-government stakeholder interviews) the *broad* Key Challenges that require attention include:

Planning and Assessment

- Clearly define the roles, responsibilities and priorities of the Commonwealth in the NVF process; and
- Identify coordination and communication mechanisms to ensure that a genuine partnership is developed between the States/Territories and the Commonwealth.

Communication & Capacity Building

- Recognition that there is a large amount of uncoordinated vegetation management and monitoring activity – uncertain of usefulness, effectiveness and if best management practices being applied

Incentives

- Belief that market-based mechanisms are important but there appears to be uncertainty relating to how best to progress this issue.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Development of an agreed approach between all jurisdictions to monitoring and evaluation vegetation activities that demonstrate progress and relationships with the National Vegetation Framework objectives.

A comprehensive list of key challenges that were identified during the stakeholder meeting is provided in Annex 2. These require review and clarification by the Commonwealth stakeholders before decisions relating to the future directions and priorities for vegetation management and monitoring initiatives in the Commonwealth Work Plan are finalised.

The procedural issues that arose from the Commonwealth meeting process and the need to further refine the broad Key Challenge areas have been incorporated in to the final recommendations in Section 5.

3.3 Measuring Work Plan Success

The Commonwealth provided information on progress against success measures for each action in the Work Plan and this table is included as a part of the revised Commonwealth Work Plan as Annex 4. In summary achievements are on target, based on the indicators provided. Comments on the nature of the success measures and actions are made in Sections 4 and 5.

3.4 Linking Work Plan outputs with National Vegetation Framework Desired Outcomes

The Commonwealth workshop participants were divided in opinion of the relevance of the Commonwealth role and impact on NVF outcomes. Some Commonwealth stakeholders perceived that the Commonwealth Work Plan activities were difficult to measure against NVF outcomes, as most vegetation management activities have multiple benefits/outcomes making it difficult to attribute impact to one specific outcome. In addition, the NVF desired vegetation outcomes were not adequately defined to allow for easy measurement. This has been reflected in different methods of response following the meeting, which have not allowed a consistent and coordinated assessment to be made of Commonwealth Work Plan influence on NVF outcomes.

There was general recognition that the Commonwealth activities were influencing most NVF desired vegetation outcomes, though some gaps exist and some influence will take place over a long (inter-generational) rather than short-term time frame. Most activities were seen as contributing only indirectly to outcomes, as the Commonwealth only has direct influence on implementation of vegetation activities on Commonwealth reserves, but generally not for off-reserve vegetation management activities.

The full presentation of results of the analysis Work Plan influence on outcomes is presented as Annex 3.

3.5 Best Management Practices – Communication and Capacity Building

A case study approach was used to assess Commonwealth response to the Best Practices documented in the NVF for Communication and Capacity Building. The following example (chosen and analysed by EA) is taken from the Commonwealth Work Plan:

Management Action	Responsibility	Timeframe	Success Measure	Progress
4.9 Implement NHT training initiative for extension officers and community leaders in natural resource management, consistent with the competency standards above.	AFFA, EA and State/Territory Partners and community organisations.	Pilot stage completed June 2000.	Extension network has access to training relevant to regional circumstances and individual needs.	<p>The pilot phase is almost completed and evaluation and analysis of the pilots is ongoing and adoption of future direction yet to be decided.</p> <p>The course have been successful with good attendance (info derived from evaluation forms)</p>

Background / Information

The Natural Heritage Ministerial Board approved funding from the Bushcare and National Landcare Programs for the development and implementation of a pilot NHT training initiative (*Building Regional Capacity: natural resource management short course*).

The aim of the initiative is to support and build on the skills of a range of people working on the ground to implement NHT programs. It is jointly managed by Environment Australia and Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia.

The pilot is being trialed in eight regions across Australia. Pilot regions are:

- QLD - North (a smaller region based around Charters Towers)
- NSW - Hunter-Central Coast
- ACT - ACT and Upper Murrumbidgee River Catchment
- VIC - Glenelg Hopkins
- TAS - All of Tasmania
- SA - South East
- NT - Alice Springs
- WA - Northern Agriculture Region.

Participants include coordinators and facilitators, volunteer community members, Regional and State Assessment Panel members, leaders of regional organisations and relevant local and State/Territory government officers. Participants have varied from region to region but include NHT coordinators and facilitators, volunteer community members, Regional and State Assessment Panel members, leaders of regional organisations and relevant local and State/Territory government officers.

The courses are of either 6 days (3 x 2) or 8 days (3 x 2, 2 x 1) duration. The course content has been developed based on needs analysis in each region. Participants complete evaluation forms at the end of each module to help direct the delivery of the following modules, and to help guide future decisions on delivery of the short course nationally. The Commonwealth also seeks feedback from Regional Steering Committees in evaluating outcomes and ways to improve delivery. Commonwealth officer has attended several of the State pilots and contributed to the evaluation and provided information on Commonwealth policy or programs if required.

Identified local Registered Training Organisations assess those participants who wish to be assessed for a diploma under the Natural Resource Management (Community programs) Course. (This course forms part of the NHT Skills Tool Kit that has been developed jointly by AFFA and EA and accredited through the South Australian Accreditation Board).

Results

The Management and Monitoring Mechanism *Communication and Capacity Building* contain the following elements: Community Education; Research, Development and Extension and Vegetation Management Infrastructure. Each best practice attribute has been given a rating (in italics) as to how well the best practices is being incorporated / addressed through the activities of Management Action 4.9 in the Commonwealth Work Plan. This rating is based on the following criteria:

- *High influence* – The action has direct relationship to the key challenge and when implemented will have a high impact in addressing the Commonwealth vegetation;
- *Medium influence* – the action has a moderate to high relationship to the key challenge and when implemented will have a moderate impact in addressing the challenge;
- *Low influence* – the action has some relationship to the key challenge but when implemented will have only a low impact in addressing the challenge; and
- *No influence* – the action may have some relationship to the key challenge but when implemented it will have no effective impact in addressing the challenge.

(i) **Community Education.** Best management practice incorporates urban and rural communities and a range of engagement programs, emphasising diverse delivery means and activities closely tied to the values and aspirations of target groups. Attributes considered to constitute best practice approach are:

- comprehensiveness in terms of the range of community sectors targeted - for example, school students, households, service clubs, industry, public land managers, opinion leaders –*medium influence (NB schools, industry and public land managers given the greater focus)*;

- A strong foundation of market research to determine the information needs of each target audience - *high influence (a needs analysis was conducted in each regions and form the basis for the course focus)*;
- information prepared and presented for specific target audiences- both the type and content of information, and the mode of presentation - *high influence*;
- use of a range of different communication channels including publications, print and electronic media and direct involvement according to the needs of different sector – *high influence (education folders/newsletters/website)*;
- integration of community education and information materials and activities into existing structures, activities and media- eg. School curricula, community newsletters and functions, service clubs, industry groups – to complement stand alone activities and publications – *medium influence (mainly a focused target group but using registered training organisations for assessment (TAFE) and state training bodies for accreditation. There is the capacity to be used in the wider arena – school curricula)*; and
- wherever possible, use of action learning principles to involve people directly in activities which are meaningful to them in their own locality, on issues which affect them directly –*high influence (locally focus, adult learning principles)*.

(ii) Research and Development, and Extension. Incorporating the integration of research and practice; the provision of awareness, knowledge and skills and access to resources; and group approaches based on adult learning principles. Ratings against each best practice attribute are as follows:

- integration with extension, planning, monitoring and evaluation activities *medium influence (what the course delivered was based on core competence developed by consultants following extensive research)*;
- recognition that much practical knowledge in revegetation and management of remnant vegetation rests with landholders, and hence extension services need to be designed around sharing, extending and consolidating this knowledge and experience. Vegetation management extension should be based on two-way interaction and joint learning between professionals and land users, rather than models based on transferring the fruits of scientific endeavour to farmers - *medium influence*;
- constructive use and resourcing of non-government networks through for example, the conservation movement, field naturalists, bird observers and organisations such as the Society for Growing Australian Plants, Greening Australia, Trees for Life, Men of the Trees, Australian Forest Growers and the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers – *medium to high influence*;
- facilitation where appropriate and practical, of the engagement of enthusiastic ‘amateurs’ alongside scientists carrying out research projects – *low influence*;

- a hierarchical approach with different levels of extension from input into regional plans, through group facilitation, to individual site advisory services– *medium to low influence*;
- strong coordination between the levels and individual elements of the extension network– *medium influence (one aim of the course to increase communication, use of electronic discussion)*;
- a tailored approach to extension based on community and regional needs and issues - *medium influence*.

(iii) Vegetation Management Infrastructure. Incorporating ‘hard’ infrastructure such as seed banks and nurseries; and ‘soft’ infrastructure such as databases and knowledge systems. Ratings against each best practice attribute are as follows:

- seedbanks with the full suite of local provenance germplasm, appropriately stored, documented and labelled – *medium to low influence*;
- nurseries producing sufficient quantities of the full suite of local species and provenances – *medium to low influence*;
- revegetation equipment such as direct seeding machines, planters and sprayers – *medium influence*;
- specialist services for monitoring and management of remnant vegetation – *medium influence (Greening Australia attends the course and provided technical input)*.

Analysis of these results is incorporated into Section 4.

3.6 Evaluating against NVF Vision and Goals

The final session of the Commonwealth workshop comprised of a discussion over the Commonwealth’s overall progress in meeting the outcomes of the NVF, through an analysis of Plausible Process Indicators. The results are shown as Table 2 as presented by the Commonwealth participants.

This process was also undertaken with the National Farmers Federation, Australian Conservation Foundation, Australian Local Government Association and World Wide Fund for Nature representatives. The data sets are further examined in Sections 4 and 5.

A number of additional organisations were approached for involvement in the Commonwealth Work Plan review. For various reasons, representatives were not able to participate in the review – primarily due to the small time-frame available within which to participate. It was also apparent during interviews with non-Commonwealth representatives that it was very difficult for representatives to comment on the performance of specific Commonwealth activities in the Work Plan as representatives are generally not directly involved with implementation and reporting of these individual activities. The complete list of stakeholders invited to participate, and how those representatives chose to participate in the Commonwealth Work Plan review is provided

in Annex 5. Appropriate mechanisms for incorporating non-Commonwealth participant input in future reviews is addressed in the Recommendations.

Table 2 : Plausible indicators for the NVF Vision and Commonwealth Work Plan

NVF Goals	Plausible Process Indicators	Comments On Progress
A reversal in the long term decline in the extent and quality of native vegetation	Planning undertaken.	Some plans in place at the regional level, supported by the States and Commonwealth through the NHT. through the NHT. Implementation is the responsibility of the States and Territories, with variable progress noted.. The importance of planning has been recognised by the Commonwealth under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, with substantial emphasis and resources directed towards it.
	Plans resourced and being implemented	Refer above
	People with required knowledge and skills	High level of funding available through government programs. Further integration required between programs. - Provision of skills and knowledge is a critical input into the identification of cost-effective options. Landcare and extension networks greatly assist communities to develop skills and coordinate effort on shared priorities. However, the ongoing needs of sector require enhanced and expanded skills development of public and private sector trainers. Security of funding needed to attract and retain highly skilled personnel remains an issue.
	Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects leading to revision of plans	While some progress has been achieved through the NLWRA in identifying a range of methodologies, significant work remains in obtaining sectoral agreement in identifying appropriate outcomes, the methodologies to assess them and the analysis of results. This is particularly an issue at the regional scale. The National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality emphasises decision support systems and presents a substantial opportunity to pilot monitoring and evaluation methodologies.
Conservation and where appropriate, restoration of native vegetation to maintain and enhance biodiversity, protect water quality and conserve soil resources, including on private land managed for agriculture, forestry and urban development	Native vegetation is protected by effective clearing controls on all land	Clearing controls are present on public and private lands. The Commonwealth is seeking to improve vegetation management regimes in concert with key stakeholders particularly on private lands where native vegetation communities are not available in conservation reserves on public land.
	Programs in place to restore, where appropriate, native vegetation to maintain/enhance biodiversity and protect land and water resources on all land	Despite some very significant Commonwealth investment, outcomes overall are somewhat dependant on landholder capacity to pay. Not everyone has access to funding and the funding is catalytic – costs are shared impeding outcomes in regions where landholders have little capacity to pay.
	Programs and measures in place to encourage development and adoption of best management practices for native vegetation management in agricultural, forest and urban enterprises	The Commonwealth consistently encourages implementation of best practice management, although outcomes are variable. The development of Best Management Practice for native vegetation is on track. Difficulties include the absence of incentives to adopt BMP, e.g. due to cultural factors or perverse incentives.

NVF Goals	Plausible Process Indicators	Comments On Progress
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quality and geographic extent	Woody perennials but not non woody. On track, but slow.
Retention and enhancement of biodiversity and native vegetation at both regional and national levels	Appropriate environment protection policies and measures are in place to protect biodiversity at regional and national levels	Policies for vegetation protection are variable – the identification of forest management outcomes for biodiversity and sustainable production/use have improved markedly in the last decade but this success has generally not been repeated for other vegetation types. Policies are often not well understood by private landholders.
	Biodiversity and native vegetation targets are set and measures are in place to achieve those targets at both regional and national levels	Only for forests. Initial stages for other vegetation types. Endangered species targets are in place.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change for biodiversity and native vegetation	Activities are in place through the RFAs, but not right across the landscape –Monitoring in other ecosystem types is generally in the initial stages only, although progress is being achieved in relation to rangelands.
An improvement in the condition of existing native vegetation	Policies and programs are in place to manage native vegetation to conserve condition as well as cover- through duty of care; native vegetation covenants, partnerships, education/training activities in silvicultural management techniques, etc	Each NHT program dealing with vegetation has projects to conserve or improve condition. Coordination and monitoring of these activities would be assisted by a common understanding /agreement on how condition is defined. (See below)
	Policies and programs are in place to restore native vegetation condition where appropriate	Limited understanding of landscape level processes in relation to vegetation condition. Program funding access is variable. There is a lack of a strategic approach to its interpretation and to the application of funding. Some access to funds for weed management. Funding is diminishing for research but transborder issues e.g. fire are not well understood.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation condition	Work has been done as a spin off from the RFA process (remote sensing techniques). Potential is good, but under-resourced. Growth area for the future, as greater recognition is required that “condition” is defined by the purpose of native vegetation and hence is multi-dimensional, encompassing the role of vegetation in the landscape (in terms of hydrology, soil erosion, salinity, water quality), it’s productive capacity and biodiversity. Further work is required to define these uses and their attributes. To date some of this work has been progressed though the Montreal process.

4 Evaluation of progress against Work Plan Commitments and the National Framework

4.1 Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Commonwealth Work Plan and Implementation

Overall, the Actions outlined in the Work Plan are being achieved within suggested timeframes. The effectiveness of the Work Plan is, however, limited by three main factors:

- *The Commonwealth Vision is not clearly articulated and does not represent a strategic vision for the Commonwealth* - The national vegetation goal is unlikely to be achieved due to a number of factors outside the control of the Commonwealth. The Vision may be better re-phrased as a concise statement of Commonwealth Role; Stakeholders; Challenges/strategic gaps; overall realistic Goal, Values (principles and guidelines for implementation) and Strategies (key result areas to help achieve the goal). The formulation of these statements requires a coordinated approach and one based on consensus with other primary stakeholders.
- *Commonwealth indicators (success measures) on the whole are not verifiable* - making detailed analysis of achievement against success measures difficult for most Work Plan actions. In the short-time frame, some success measures were strengthened by the Commonwealth agency representatives, however many still require additional review to ensure that they are focused on measuring a change (ie use of a website does not mean that any change in activity or attitude will occur). This is difficult as many of the Commonwealth activities are focused on providing the tools, knowledge or funding resources to facilitate change rather than actually deliver on-ground change. However, there is still scope to ensure indicators are developed that are easily measured and verifiable, and ensure that the flow-on effects of actions are realised.
- *Coordination of primary stakeholders in the NVF at Commonwealth level could be improved* - this was exacerbated by the tight deadlines for the evaluation, resulting in different response structures, variable timing of responses and divided opinion on key issues.

These points are taken forward in Section 4.2 and as Recommendations under Section 5.

Are Management and Monitoring Mechanisms in Work Plans Effective?

On closer examination of the Work Plan Actions a number of points arise. In recognition of the Commonwealth's key role in coordination, institutional support, funding of national programs and in the development and provision of advice on best practice, there is recognition that the Commonwealth is achieving a high level of influence in vegetation management through:

- *Planning and Assessment* - NVIS is expected to make a substantial contribution to vegetation management through informing decision-makers about the status of vegetation (includes all native vegetation) cover and condition. The Commonwealth is making a substantial contribution to the funding of national programs for vegetation management, particularly through the NHT.
- *Reserves* - The CAR framework provides a strategic framework for vegetation conservation in Commonwealth and State/Territory Reserves.

- *Regulation* - The impact of the new EPBC Act will improve Commonwealth authority over environmental matters of national significance.
- *Communication and Capacity Building* - Significant funding has been targeted at media and educational programs, which has improved community understanding of the role of vegetation in the landscape (cf. the case study in Section 3.5).

There are, however, a number of areas where opportunities exist for improvement within the role of the Commonwealth:

- *Planning and Assessment* - opportunities to improve the focus on Regional Planning, where data for NVIS can be collected at larger scales (e.g. 1:50,000), and authority for program development and implementation can be devolved through the block funding of regional grants.
- *Reserves* - there is a lack of funds to buy back sites for nature Reserves and for conservation, because of the need for cost sharing with the States and Territories;
- *Communication and Capacity Building* - There are opportunities to improve the overall coordination of programs for an integrated approach at the landscape level. There is also a shortage of vegetation infrastructure, both in terms of 'hard' infrastructure (indigenous nursery and planting infrastructure) and soft infrastructure, the knowledge systems and networks. The latter is highlighted by the lack of skilled and knowledgeable people at the local level. The withdrawal of state extension officers has not always been adequately addressed through NHT facilitators, who are often young and inexperienced. We are therefore not addressing best practice locally.
- *Regulatory* - there are issues related to land clearing controls and property rights requiring clarification to provide a consistent approach across jurisdictions.

Does the Commonwealth Work Plan address the long-term national vegetation outcomes?

Like other jurisdiction Work Plans, at the inception of the Work Plan there was not an attempt to explicitly link the Commonwealth Work Plan to the NVF outcomes. There was an overall lack of Commonwealth coordination and agreement on the validity of the evaluation process in this area, making a consistent and complete analysis impossible. Significant concern was expressed relating to the clarity of the NVF Desired Outcomes and the relationship with the Commonwealth Work Plan. Due to these concerns, the information sought from the various Commonwealth agencies is incomplete. The information provided is available in Annex 3. The table 'Assessing Commonwealth Work Plan Actions against NVF Desired Outcomes' synthesises the current data.

There is recognition in this analysis of long term nature of vegetation outcomes (most management actions and plans are directed at short-term outcomes), of the Commonwealth's role in coordination, rather than implementation (other than within Commonwealth Estates). There is also recognition, therefore, that many factors influencing NVF outcomes are outside direct Commonwealth control. However, it can be argued that in many areas the Commonwealth is making a significant contribution through:

- the development of information systems, like NVIS, which makes a positive contribution to biodiversity, soil and water resources, land use and climate change outcomes;
- funding programs like Bushcare, Rivercare and Landcare, which are making a significant contribution to the conservation of soil and water resources, sustainable land use and catchment hydrology;

- appropriate communication, capacity building and catalytic incentive funding, landholders are contributing significant time and resources for the public good;
- The positive impact of CAR Reserve management and program funding incentives on conserving natural heritage.

The opportunities for improved effects on vegetation outcomes are in the following areas:

- recognition of the potential of market based mechanisms to influence vegetation outcomes, but as yet activities in this area are limited;
- the difficulty of funding for critical long term monitoring (e.g. NVIS) beyond political cycles, and its emphasis on woody vegetation; and
- the low impact of many programs on indigenous peoples and cultural heritage.

Management and Monitoring Mechanisms - are they best practice?

A case study approach has its limitations (a comprehensive analysis of work plan responses to best management practice has not been undertaken) but it does provide an opportunity for in-depth analysis of program implementation in one strategic area, in this case communication and capacity building.

- The activity had a strong positive influence on communication and capacity building outcomes through strong market research, comprehensive identification of stakeholder groups and use of an action learning methodology.
- The activity had weaknesses in the areas of vegetation infrastructure; the use of local resource persons as local experts for training; the use of an integrated, nationally coordinated approach. These latter points may be considered for future actions under further revisions of the Commonwealth Work Plan and the need for an integrated, coordinated approach is considered further in this report in Section 5.

The example did not suit an examination of research and development criteria under this Management and Monitoring Mechanism.

In the longer term, part of the monitoring and evaluation component of the Commonwealth Work Plan will need a criteria built in to the Success Measure to allow easy measurement of application of Best Management Practices.

4.2 Proposed Improvements to Commonwealth Work Plan

What improvements need to be put in place to improve the Commonwealth Work Plan?

The Commonwealth Work Plan went through a useful process of review during the evaluation. A revised copy of the Work Plan is provided as Annex 4. Time did not, however, allow a full revision of the Work Plan to incorporate all the lessons learnt from the evaluation. An additional period of review is recommended with attention to the following:

- clear articulation of the Commonwealth Vision;
- revision of Key Challenge statements;
- verification of Actions as reflecting all issues (challenges) and all future desired (NVF) outcomes; and
- revision of success measures to enable them to be verifiable for future evaluations.

These points are taken further in Recommendations as Section 5.

4.3 Commonwealth Progress assessed against the National Vegetation Framework

Will the current Commonwealth Work Plan achieve the National Vegetation Framework Vision?

Reference is made to Table 2 in this Section, in assessing the Commonwealth Work Plan against the NVF overall goals.

In terms of progress towards a reversal in decline (and subsequent improvement in condition of native vegetation), the Commonwealth felt that a greater emphasis on understanding landscape level processes was required. Concomitant with this would be a more strategic and integrated approach to funding (possibly through block funding of regional programs) and program delivery.

In terms of the conservation, restoration and enhancement of native vegetation, the Commonwealth participants felt that they were working towards a best practice approaches on public land. However, initiatives on private land were confounded by inconsistencies in the regulation framework (particularly with respect to clearing controls).

4.4 Proposed Ongoing Independent Evaluation Arrangements

Given the need to undertake further work to revise and improve the Commonwealth Work Plan, we would recommend a further independent assessment in two years. It is envisaged that an internal review would be undertaken in 12 months. An ongoing evaluation process should incorporate the following principles:

- *Adequate lead time for preparation of the review* – The current process has demonstrated that agency staff and other key stakeholders do need adequate notice to prepare and participate in an evaluation of this scale. As vegetation management and monitoring is spread amongst more than one agency, more time is required to allow for notification, coordination and preparation.
- *Use of desktop review and on-ground audit* – undertaking an evaluation purely based on review of information provided by agencies can result in an incomplete evaluation. While the Work Plan is primarily an agency document, there is an assumption that a number of the activities implemented through the Work Plan will result in vegetation management changes implemented by other stakeholders (ie Landcare Groups, farmers, community groups). It is important that those delivering the end outcomes are incorporated into the evaluation process. An ongoing review process should incorporate a combination of -direct stakeholder interaction and desktop review.
- *In the longer-term implement independent reviews biannually* - given the level of energy required by all stakeholders to undertake an efficient review, it would be appropriate that independent reviews are taken on a biannual basis. Due to the incomplete state of the current Work Plan, it is advised that for the next review phase that an additional review of the Jurisdiction Plan be undertaken twelve months time. There is no reason why an internal review – particularly assessment of key issues, progress against success measured could not be incorporated by the jurisdiction into annual management and monitoring activities.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

A broad range of vegetation activities is being implemented by the Commonwealth agencies that are at various stages of completion. Level of success is difficult to determine for a variety of reasons discussed in the preceding sections. A number of opportunities exist to improve the performance (or ability to measure performance) of Commonwealth vegetation management and monitoring mechanisms.

An opportunity exists to improve the articulation of the Commonwealth Vision in the Work Plan, in order to provide a more coordinated and strategic framework to the Commonwealth's response to the NVF. There is evidence that the coordination within the Commonwealth as a jurisdiction could be improved, in terms of involving key stakeholders outside government (e.g. the NFF, WWF) in a more inclusive way; and also in terms of inculcating ownership of the NVF framework as means to providing a strategic vision for Commonwealth activity.

The Commonwealth Work Plan lacks a combined strategic direction - The Commonwealth Work Plan in its current form is a useful statement of Commonwealth activities in vegetation management. It does not however allow future evaluations to be able to objectively verify progress in the Work Plan. It is not a strategic document that is focussed on achieving the goals and outcomes of the NVF. Rather, it is a loose collection of vegetation-related activities currently being undertaken by various Commonwealth agencies. The Commonwealth stakeholders need to determine their roles, responsibilities and how to maximise commitment to the NVF from a consolidated perspective, rather than as independent Commonwealth agencies.

Recommendation 1 : The Commonwealth needs to develop a strategic vegetation plan that addresses the requirements of the Commonwealth and links with the NVF. Ideally, this would comprise of a concise statement of Commonwealth Role; Stakeholders; Challenges/strategic gaps; overall realistic Goal, Values (principles and guidelines for implementation) and Strategies (key result areas to help achieve the goal). This should be a consultative process that includes NGOs and other stakeholders that sets the long term strategic goals for Commonwealth vegetation management, with the Work Plan prepared underneath this strategy.

Recommendation 2 : Following the development of a Commonwealth Vegetation Strategy (implementation of recommendation one) the Commonwealth Work Plan needs to be reviewed in the context of the new Commonwealth Vegetation Strategy. Specific activities that should occur as a consequence of this activity include:

- ***New Work Plan challenge statements (Annex 2) to be reviewed for each Management and Monitoring Mechanism ensuring validity and phrasing as a problem statement;***
- ***Commonwealth Work Plan Actions to be assessed against challenges, strategic gaps in outcomes (Annex 3) and with respect to the re-defined role of the Commonwealth;***
- ***Action success measures to be reviewed in order to have verifiable indicators for periodic monitoring and evaluation. Success measures should have elements of***

Quality, Quantity and Time (QQT) associated with them and fulfil the SMART criteria and be:

- ***Sensitive (pick up changes in the time period of interest);***
 - ***Measurable (be measured in quantitative or qualitative terms);***
 - ***Accurate and relevant (reflect what is being measured in an accurate way);***
 - ***Responsive (be sensitive to changes over the time period of interest); and***
 - ***Timely (provide information in a timely manner).***
- ***NVF Desired Outcomes to be reviewed and clearly defined with respect to the Commonwealth Role to ensure that performance (Plan outputs and outcomes) can be easily measured against them***

Defining roles and mechanism to integrate activities with the jurisdictions at a State, Territory and regional level - As part of the review it was acknowledged by the Commonwealth that it attempts to influence on-ground activities through funding and policy development. In many instances the Commonwealth has little direct responsibility for implementing on-ground activities but tries to influence attitudes and behaviour. The Commonwealth is reliant on State/Territory and local jurisdictions to deliver effective and appropriate on-ground vegetation management and monitoring. Therefore strong and workable partnership arrangements are required. Deficiencies related to this underlying issue of jurisdiction communication and coordination is reflected in most of the management mechanisms. For example, monitoring and evaluation information that accurately reflects on-ground activities is often not available, unknown or limited in terms of directly relating to achieving vegetation outcomes.

Recommendation 3 : Develop strategic partnership agreements with the States and Territories to clarify roles of communication, regulatory, program management and monitoring and evaluation to build on existing partnership arrangements and deliver stronger vegetation management arrangements, particularly define and facilitate the role of the Commonwealth in management of bio-regions.

Glossary

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
AFFA	Agriculture Fisheries Forestry - Australia
AGO	Australian Greenhouse Office
ANZECC	Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council
BRS	Bureau of Resource Sciences
CAR	Comprehensive, Adequate and Representative
EA	Environment Australia
EPBC	Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (Act)
MMM	Management and Monitoring Mechanisms
NVF	National Vegetation Framework
SCC	Standing Committee on Conservation
TOR	Terms of Reference
WP	Work Plan

See attached pdf files for ANNEX
Annex 1

**Commonwealth
Work Plan
(July 2000)**

Annex 2

Key Challenges for Commonwealth

Annex 3

NVF Desired Outcomes

Annex 4

Commonwealth Work Plan (October 2000)

Annex 5

Stakeholders invited to participate in NVF Evaluation