



Final Report

**Jurisdiction Report -
Queensland**

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

**Prepared for
Environment Australia
November 2000**

URS

in association with

Griffin NTFM ACN 008 471 121



URS Australia Pty Ltd
ACN 000-691-690

7 – 11 Barry Drive, TURNER ACT 2612, Australia
Tel: +61 (2) 6248 6936 • Fax: +61 (2) 6248 6999

© Commonwealth of Australia 2000

Published by the Department of Environment and Heritage

This work is copyright. Information presented in this document may be reproduced in whole or in part for study or training purposes, subject to the inclusion of acknowledgment of the source and provided no commercial usage or sale of the material occurs. Reproduction for purposes other than those given requires written permission from the Department of Environment and Heritage. Requests for permission should be addressed to Assistant Secretary, Corporate Relations and Information Branch, Environment Australia, GPO Box 787, Canberra, ACT, 2601.

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of the Commonwealth of Australia. The Commonwealth does not accept responsibility for any advice or information in relation to this material.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3
1.1	What is the National Vegetation Framework?.....	3
1.2	Purpose of the Evaluation.....	4
2	Evaluation Approach & Methodology	6
2.1	Evaluation Approach.....	6
2.2	Evaluation method.....	6
2.3	Queensland Workshop.....	8
3	Queensland Draft Work Plan Output	10
3.1	Setting the Scene.....	10
3.2	Linking the Draft Work Plan with Key Challenges.....	12
3.3	Measuring Draft Work Plan Success.....	16
3.4	Linking Draft Work Plan outputs with National Vegetation Framework Desired Outcomes.....	18
3.5	Best Management Practices.....	21
3.6	Evaluating Overall Progress and Long Term Impact.....	24
4	Evaluation of progress against Draft Work Plan Commitments and the National Framework	27
4.1	Assessment of the Queensland Draft Work Plan and Implementation	27
4.2	Improvements to Queensland Draft Work Plan.....	28
4.3	Queensland Progress against the National Vegetation Framework....	28
4.4	Ongoing Independent Evaluation Arrangements.....	30
5	Conclusions and Recommendations	31

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Actions rated against key challenges.....	13
Table 2	Summary of progress against success measures.....	16
Table 3	Assessing Draft Work Plan Actions against NVF Desired Outcomes..	20
Table 4	Progress against long term NVF goals.....	25

LIST OF ANNEXES

1	Queensland Draft Work Plan
---	----------------------------

2 Key Challenges for Queensland

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 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 Draft Work Plans by ANZECC in December 1999, each jurisdiction continued preparation of an interim Draft Work Plan that is considered to be the principal means of implementing the National Vegetation Framework. The Draft 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 private 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 Queensland Draft Work Plan are described in section 3 below.

At the ANZECC July 2000 meeting it was agreed to publicly release the Draft Work Plans. At the commencement of the evaluation in October 2000, the Commonwealth and ACT had publicly

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

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

released their final version of the Draft Work Plan, with interim work plans available from other jurisdictions.

1.2 Purpose of the Evaluation

At the December 1999 meeting, the ANZEC SCC noted that an independent evaluation of progress against the National Vegetation Framework and the fulfilment of Draft Work Plan Commitments should commence mid 2000, with the report presented to the Council at the December 2000 meeting.

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 Draft 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 Draft 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 Draft Work Plans and their Implementation

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

B. Propose Improvements

4. Propose improvements to Draft 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 Draft 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 Draft 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 Draft 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 Draft 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 Draft 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 Queensland Draft 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. A list of participants involved in this jurisdiction review is provided in Section 2.3 below.

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 Draft 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 Draft Work Plans.

The approach to the evaluation consisted of the following :

- **Team meeting to confirm evaluation approach** – all members of the 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** – managers of each Jurisdiction evaluation directly contacted agency stakeholders to inform them of the NVF evaluation process and invite participation. A time for a stakeholder meeting to be undertaken to discuss the Draft Work Plan was confirmed.
- **Pre-meeting Preparation** – Due to time limitations, a preliminary desktop analysis was undertaken by the consultant team, reviewing the Queensland Draft Work Plan against a number of criteria. This information was circulated to all participants prior to the Draft Work Plan evaluation meeting to allow for stakeholder review.
- **Jurisdiction Meeting** – a jurisdiction meeting was conducted to discuss progress of Draft 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 Queensland Draft Work Plan evaluation meeting for comment.
- **Jurisdiction Final Report** Comments were then incorporated into the Queensland 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 Draft Work Plan against Key Challenges

Key Challenges were identified for each jurisdiction in the Dore Report. As these were developed prior to the Draft Work Plans, they were presumed to be drivers for the Draft Work Plan Actions. Therefore, to determine the effectiveness of the Draft Work Plans, the Actions were reviewed to determine how well they address the challenges. A matrix was prepared that compared Queensland

key challenges with Draft 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 Key Challenge for that mechanism.

Following discussions with the primary Queensland Draft 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 Jurisdiction. 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 Draft Work Plan.

Session B. Assessment of Draft Work Plan Success Measures

In order to evaluate Draft Work Plan progress, quantification of achievements was provided against the Success Measures (or Performance Indicators) for each Draft 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 (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 Draft Work Plan Activities against the NVF Management and Monitoring Outcomes

Our initial reading of the NVF, the Dore report and the individual Draft Work Plans suggested that the relationship between the management mechanisms in the Draft 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 Draft Work Plans contributed to the Desired Outcomes using another matrix.

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 desktop 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 BMPs 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 MMM's. 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 Queensland, the BMP of Monitoring and evaluation was used as the Case Study example. The ANZECC framework BMPs were used as the main guide to discuss monitoring and evaluation during the Queensland meeting. 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 Draft 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.

2.3 Queensland Workshop

The workshop was attended by:

1. Adrian Jeffries DNR.
2. Louise Coleman DNR.
3. Claudia Baldwin DNR.
4. Tony Roberts EPA.
5. Kate Duggan and Bill Thompson from the review team.

The review team met with vegetation managers from key Queensland agencies in Brisbane for a one-day workshop on 10 October 2000. Preliminary assessments of the draft Queensland Draft Work Plan against key challenges, desired outcomes and success measures were circulated for comment prior to the workshop. These, together with an assessment of progress against NVF longer-term goals, and a case study of vegetation monitoring and evaluation, formed the core

agenda for the workshop. The agenda also included a discussion to update the 1999 stocktake report and a discussion about the NVF and review process generally.

The review team consulted with key non-government agencies on 11 October. These agencies had already submitted detailed comment on the draft Draft Work Plan to DNR. DNR provided the team with these submissions. Many of the queries raised in the submissions have been addressed to the satisfaction of the non-government agencies, through the ongoing consultation process that is an integral part of vegetation management reforms in Queensland.

The non-government agencies consulted were:

- Queensland Farmer's Federation- Brianna Casey
- Local Government Association of Queensland- Peta Jamieson
- Queensland Conservation Council- Kate Lecchi

3 Queensland Draft Work Plan Output

3.1 Setting the Scene

Major advances in native vegetation management have taken place in Queensland since the National Overview stocktake report was prepared for ANZECC in August 1999³. In the past 12 months, Queensland has developed and is implementing a statewide framework for vegetation management driven by biodiversity and land capability objectives (see section 3.5.2 for a more detailed discussion). The framework facilitates implementation of State policies for vegetation management across all land tenures, thereby offering a comprehensive system for management of remnant vegetation⁴. It comprises:

- Legislation
 - *Vegetation Management Act 1999* which makes vegetation clearing on freehold land assessable under the *Integrated Planning Act 1997*.
 - *The Land Act 1994* which governs vegetation management on leasehold and other state land.
- State policies for vegetation management on freehold and leasehold land, including codes for clearing.
- Regional Vegetation Management Plans, bringing together practical local experience and current scientific knowledge.
- Community information sharing which recognises and promotes good vegetation management.

A key element of the framework is the *Vegetation Management Act 1999* which for the first time enables regulation of tree clearing in the freehold estate (comprising around 14% of the land area but accounting for a large proportion of threatened ecosystems and close to half total clearing from 1995-97).

The framework is underpinned by a state of the art monitoring system (State-wide Landcover and Trees Study- SLATS). SLATS provides comprehensive monitoring of land cover and will feed in to a system for on line assessment of the impact of clearing proposals on biodiversity status using criteria developed under each of the State policies (see section 3.5.2).

A broad consultation process was undertaken during the development of the framework. The process included the development of Local Tree Clearing Guidelines (LTCG) for local level implementation of the state tree clearing policies. A Vegetation Management Advisory Committee (VMAC) consisting of key stakeholders was also established to provide advice on vegetation management policy in Queensland and the development of the regulatory framework. There is a large agenda for further public consultation to support the implementation of the vegetation management reforms including the regional vegetation management planning process.

³ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

⁴ There are two policies: the "State Policy for vegetation management on freehold land" & the "Broad scale tree clearing policy for leasehold land" BTCPLL. The BTCPLL was reviewed in light of the regulatory framework for freehold land. It now complements the freehold policy for vegetation management in approach, however it also provides greater protection for RV in protecting "of concern" regional ecosystems from clearing as well as "endangered" regional ecosystems

The Queensland government has allocated additional resources for administration of the new framework. DNR has an additional \$23M (\$6M over 3 years and \$5M thereafter) allocated to:

- 35-40 additional vegetation officers.
- GIS support for vegetation management.
- 6 enforcement officers.
- Consultation and education programs to support the new legislation.
- Regional Vegetation Management Planning (probably over 2 year timeframe).

The EPA, whose role was queried in the 1999 stocktake⁵, now has an integrated role and additional funding of:

- \$1.1M pa. allocated to the Herbarium for updating mapping.
- \$1.67M in the last budget for:
 - Biodiversity assessment on a bioregional basis (to inform regional vegetation planning and provide information on areas of high nature conservation value areas).
 - Policy and ecosystems classification advice.
 - Assessment of high conservation value areas in clearing applications.
 - Bolster capacity of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in extension work- 3-4 people allocated to land holder extension work.

The new funding allocations probably represent the largest single commitment of additional resources to vegetation management of all jurisdictions in recent times. Queensland vegetation management agencies are disappointed that funding requested from the Commonwealth to support the new legislation (to fund adjustment and incentive packages for freehold landowners that were significantly affected by the new legislation) did not eventuate. This is seen as a key requirement for comprehensive implementation of the new legislation in the freehold estate. The funding shortfall means that only *Endangered* ecosystems are automatically protected. In the less threatened ecosystems of the freehold estate, vegetation is only protected upon consideration of land degradation and wildlife habitat issues.

The following summary of achievements stemming from the vegetation reforms in Queensland, updates the 1999 stocktake:

- 'Endangered' and 'of concern' regional ecosystems on leasehold land are now protected in Queensland, by legislation and a review of the BTCPLL. Remaining work relates to the freehold estate, of which only a part is automatically protected under the new legislation and vegetation management framework.
- Major biodiversity outcomes will be met by implementing the new policies and the regional vegetation management planning process.
- The leasehold vegetation protection process directly resulted in a stabilisation of clearing on leased land, with clearing now expected to decline in the leasehold estate.
- Vegetation mapping and monitoring systems is of a very high standard. Linking this with ecosystem mapping will enable accurate and up to date assessments of the impact of clearing in Regional Ecosystems.

⁵ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

3.2 Linking the Draft Work Plan with Key Challenges

This part of the evaluation assessed the impact of the Draft Work Plan actions on the key challenges as identified in the stocktake report⁶. A reasonably strong relationship between the actions and key challenges was expected because the key challenges were a major driver in the formulation of the Work plans.

Table 1 outlines the results of the assessment. Table 1 was reviewed during the workshop and amended as required. In most instances, key challenges are met by Work plan actions that are likely to have a direct relationship and high impact. Particular strengths are in the Planning and Assessment and Regulatory Arrangements categories. Nine of the 21 key challenges do not have actions linked to them that are likely to have a high impact and a direct relationship. These apparent gaps can be explained by:

- The key challenges under Monitoring and Evaluation have largely been met through ongoing SLATS work and the development of administration systems for the BTCP and new legislation. They will be further addressed through the proposed linking of SLATS and regional ecosystem mapping.
- Queensland has focused on the new regulatory system and associated administrative arrangements over the past 12 months. Hence the large number of high impact actions under Planning and Assessment and Regulatory Arrangements. There are insufficient resources to allocate each challenge this level of priority.
- The Queensland Draft Work Plan will be revised to increase its scope across the range of vegetation management issues. This will allow actions to be brought in that are currently addressing some of the key challenges but are broader than vegetation protection.

In line with Queensland's priorities in vegetation management, the majority of key challenges are appropriately addressed by actions in the Draft Work Plan. Further, there are several proposed actions in categories that seem to be less well addressed in the current Draft Work Plan. eg in Communications and Capacity Building and Incentives categories. These proposed actions logically follow on from and will build on the work carried out over the past 12 months in the Regulatory and Planning and Assessment categories. Over a series of years, Queensland will add to and amend actions in the Draft Work Plan to reflect achievements and changes in emphasis in their ongoing long-term vegetation management programs.

⁶ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

Table 1 : Actions rated against key challenges

Key Challenge	Management and Monitoring Mechanism			
	High influence	Medium influence	Low influence	No influence
4.2 Planning and Assessment				
Completing the vegetation inventory and overcoming other gaps in mapping	Action 4.2.1			
Formulating biodiversity strategy, identifying and mapping critical habitats at finer scales where required (1:25,000) and broadening the assessment to include algae, fungi and invertebrates	Action 4.2.2 Action 4.2.5 Action 4.2.6 Action 4.2.7			
Bedding down the range of new initiatives in regional planning and applying an integrated approach to NRM which incorporates vegetation management	Action 4.2.5 Action 4.2.3 Action 4.2.4 Action 4.2.7	Action 4.2.6		
Defining the state interests which local government needs to be taking into account in its planning process	Action 4.2.4			
4.3 Reserves				
Designing and operating a program to monitor the impact of pressures on native vegetation and how this relates to the extent and condition of regional ecosystems. This would be in addition to current efforts to measure impact on change in tree cover		Action 4.3.1		
Establishing effective off-reserve schemes in those areas that are not adequately represented in the formal reserve system. This will require working with industry to convince them that their industry is not clean and green if it is resulting in a loss of biodiversity and other less obvious values	Action 4.3.3	Action 4.3.2		
Finding the resources needed to manage the existing reserve system effectively				

Key Challenge	Management and Monitoring Mechanism			
	High influence	Medium influence	Low influence	No influence
Developing a system that documents the benefits of national parks				
4.4 Communication & capacity building				
Convincing land managers of the need to control vegetation management in situations where the regional ecosystems have not yet reached the endangered threshold status	Action 4.4.1 Action 4.4.5	Action 4.4.2		
Developing a coordinated extension program for vegetation management across all agencies. This will require the ability to deliver a message about vegetation management that is consistent with other productivity and resource management messages	Action 4.4.4 New EPA extension role compliments DNR			
Striking the appropriate balance of funding between R&D and other activities to support better vegetation management outcomes		Action 4.4.3		
4.5 Incentives				
Bringing about change of view so that there is no longer the expectation that any loss of “rights” over vegetation management should result in some form of financial compensation		Action 4.5.2		
Finding a basis on which a practical and affordable incentive scheme could be developed to suit broadscale farming and grazing in Queensland	Action 4.5.1	Action 4.5.2		
4.6 Regulatory arrangements				
Implementing effective follow up programs for listed endangered species	Action 4.2.2 Action 4.2.5 Action 4.2.6 Action 4.2.7			

Key Challenge	Management and Monitoring Mechanism			
	High influence	Medium influence	Low influence	No influence
Developing an effective and acceptable basis for regulating land clearing which ensures that it is limited to situations where the regional biodiversity objectives are not compromised	Action 4.6.1			
Having funds and trained staff to administer a clearing regulatory program efficiently and effectively	Action 4.6.1			
Developing and having accepted codes of practice guidelines that are effective in bringing about appropriate management of native vegetation		Action 4.6.3		
4.7 Monitoring and evaluation				
Further improving monitoring efforts through better and more extensive analysis of data to take out background noise associated with old data	Action 4.7.1			
Making appropriate use of all data sources- at present it is suggested that some of the best monitoring information from TRAPS and Q graze is not used		Action 4.7.1		
Ensuring that all monitoring activities are coordinated and complimentary		Activity 4.7.2		
Ensuring that monitoring data are accessible and fed back into management (adaptive systems)				

3.3 Measuring Draft Work Plan Success

In this section of the evaluation, the Queensland agency vegetation managers were asked to nominate levels of achievement against the success measures identified in the Draft Work Plan. These were then reviewed during the workshop. The workshop also provided an opportunity to update and amend the success measures. The revised success measures and levels of achievement are outlined in Annex 1.

Queensland has focused effort over the past 12 months on preparing for implementation of the vegetation management framework and the new Vegetation Management Act 1999. Progress against success measures set out in the Queensland Draft Work Plan reflects this emphasis. A summary is provided in Table 2.

Table 2 : Summary of progress against success measures

Management mechanism	Progress relevant to success measures
Roles and responsibilities of government	<p>Implementation of the new vegetation management framework required a redefinition of roles, development of new administrative procedures and growth in the number of vegetation officers. Progress includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative procedures 70% complete and will be in place by end 2001 • RVMPs has begun – will be complete late 2002 • Additional programs initiated by EPA to complement DNR are funded • Additional staff resources are funded • DNR inputs to local planning schemes on vegetation are in place • 20-25 local Integrated Planning Act schemes will be completed within 18 months- rest in by 2003 • A process for declaration 40% established
Planning and Assessment	<p>New administrative procedures for the Vegetation Framework required vegetation and regional ecosystems mapping (1:100,000) and linking with SLATS to provide real time assessments of clearing applications; local level vegetation mapping (1:50,000)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Ecosystem mapping covers 70% of the State with the remainder mapped according to its remnant or non-remnant status • 80% of amendments to update maps complete • vegetation mapping at local government level completed for SE Qld and most coastal shires • all but 1 local government planning proposals for regional vegetation management submitted to Minister <p>Progress was also recorded for other core areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recovery plan for one threatened plant published • 100% of regional NRM strategies have goals and objectives for vegetation management • Draft Nature Conservation Strategy for SE Qld finalised for consultation
Reserves	<i>Checking with EPA</i>
Communication and Capacity Building	<p>The new Framework required expansion and integration of the State extension system for vegetation management:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional EPA, NDR and DPI extension officers coordinated for vegetation management
R&D and extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Native vegetation clearing and retention rates will be monitored by SLATS
Incentives	Incentives for supporting implementation of the new vegetation management framework are the subject of negotiations with the Commonwealth

Regulatory mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broad scale tree clearing policy for leasehold land implemented, protecting endangered and of concern regional ecosystems • Vegetation management Act 1999 implemented, protecting only endangered regional ecosystems • Land Protection Bill 1999 proposed; local governments are preparing weed and pest management plans in preparation for this legislation
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLATS figures on land use change, vegetation loss released for 1997-99 • GIS and information support services for the new vegetation management framework are in place

Several success measures were amended or updated during the workshop to reflect achievement of particular success measures or to provide a better basis for measuring progress.

The remaining and new challenges relating to progress against the success measures include:

- Maintaining cooperative implementation of the new vegetation management framework between State and local government, and the various agencies.
- Maintaining progress and consistent standards in vegetation mapping and Regional Vegetation Management Planning at local government level.
- Ensuring consistent and comprehensive implementation of the new vegetation management framework at local government level.
- Adequately linking goals and programs in protecting ecological function overall with threatened species, biodiversity/nature conservation strategies and reserves programs to achieve the best possible native vegetation and biodiversity outcomes.
- Linking regional NRM and regional vegetation planning and management.
- Resolving the issue of providing industry incentive and adjustment packages for the freehold estate.

3.4 Linking Draft Work Plan outputs with National Vegetation Framework Desired Outcomes

The Queensland actions were rated against the NVF desired outcomes according to how direct the relationship is likely to be, and the likely level of impact. Initial ratings by the review team were discussed during the workshop. The revised ratings are provided in Table 3.

The ratings highlighted strengths and apparent gaps in the way the Draft Work Plan addresses the desired outcomes. The strengths in the Queensland actions are in:

Desired outcomes:

- Biodiversity.
- Natural and cultural heritage.
- Sustainable land use.

Management and monitoring mechanisms:

- Regulatory arrangements.
- Monitoring & evaluation.
- Planning and assessment.

The apparent gaps largely reflect the current focus and status in Queensland on the new vegetation management framework. They are:

Desired outcomes:

- Hydrology.
- Land productivity.
- Climate change.

Hydrology

The workshop discussed the reasons for the lack of high impact activities addressing desired outcomes in hydrology. A number of issues emerged from this discussion:

- The NVF desired outcomes for hydrology relate exclusively to control of salinity and protection of water catchments. These issues have significantly higher profile in the southern jurisdictions, where they are primary drivers for vegetation management, than they do in northern Australia. While they are likely to become more important in parts of Queensland in future, they are not primary drivers at this point in time. Vegetation management in Queensland is driven by a policy to protect biodiversity and areas vulnerable to land degradation through retaining certain levels of native tree cover, and, as a consequence, prevent the development of southern-type salinity problems. The jury is still out on whether this approach will be sufficient to prevent land salinity problems in some areas. The Queensland policy is nonetheless underpinned by administrative and monitoring systems that could be readily adapted to accommodate other objectives. If Queensland decides to apply higher levels of

clearing protection in certain areas because research outcomes indicate a high salt risk associated with tree clearing, the systems currently being implemented seem robust enough to facilitate this. Salt risk areas, for instance, can be declared under legislation and would then become subject to special clearing controls (it is unclear whether this system could apply to large recharge areas). The administrative and monitoring systems could be readily adapted to adjustments in clearing targets.

- Current levels of resources for salinity in Queensland are commensurate with understanding the size of the problem. This may change as research into salinity risk proceeds and in that case, there would be an appropriate adjustment in priorities.
- Queensland is carrying out activities that contribute indirectly to the desired outcomes for hydrology. Actions in mapping and planning, for example, will provide the basis for identifying and monitoring salt risk.
- New development applications for vegetation clearing must include an assessment of salinity.
- Other activities aimed at retaining vegetation would contribute to a reduced salt risk

Land productivity

- The Queensland Draft Work Plan will be revised to include current activities such as the weed strategy to better reflect the extent to which Queensland is addressing land productivity as defined by the desired outcomes.
- Land protection processes in Queensland contribute to weed control, including biological weeds.
- Recovery plans for threatened species address threatening processes including weeds. Recovery plans are expected to be given more prominence under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.
- More resources are now going to management of reserves, including control of pests and weeds (eg good neighbour policy).

Climate change

- The potential impact of the new vegetation management framework was reduced by the rejection of a proposal for Commonwealth assistance in resourcing of clearing control incentives.
- Queensland is less able to offset clearing by tree planting because it is a less attractive jurisdiction for plantation investment (largely due to the ban on export of woodchips).

Table 3 : Assessing Draft Work Plan Actions against NVF Desired Outcomes

Desired outcome from NVF	Management and monitoring mechanisms														
	4.2 Planning & Assessment							4.3 Reserves			4.4 Communication & capacity building				
	4.2.1	4.2.2	4.2.3	4.2.4	4.2.5	4.2.6	4.2.7	4.3.1	4.3.2	4.3.3	4.4.1	4.4.2	4.4.3	4.4.4	4.4.5
Biodiversity	M	M	H	M	H	H	M	H	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Soil and water resources	M	L	M	M	H	L	L	H	L	M	M	M	M	M	L
Hydrology	L	L	M	M	L	L	L	L	L	L	M	M	M	M	L
Land productivity	M	L	M	M	M	M	L	H	L	L	M	M	M	M	M
Sustainable land use	L	L	M	M	M	L	M	H	L	L	M	M	M	M	M
Natural & cultural heritage	M	M	M	M	H	H	H	H	H	H	M	M	M	M	M
Indigenous peoples	L	L	M	M	M	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	M	M	M
Climate change	M	L	M	L	M	L	M	M	M	M	L	L	M	L	L

Desired outcome from NVF	Management and monitoring mechanisms							
	4.5 Incentives		4.6 Regulatory arrangements			4.7 Monitoring & evaluation		
	4.5.1	4.5.2	4.6.1	4.6.2	4.6.3	4.7.1	4.7.2	4.7.3
Biodiversity	M	H	H	H	H	H	M	M
Soil and water resources	M	M	H	L	M	M	L	L
Hydrology	M	M	H	L	M	M	L	L
Land productivity	M	H	H	L	H	H	L	M
Sustainable land use	M	H	M	M	M	H	L	M
Natural & cultural heritage	H	M	H	H	H	H	M	H
Indigenous peoples	M	M	M	M	M	M	L	M
Climate change	M	M	H	M	M	M	M	M

3.5 Best Management Practices

Queensland vegetation managers from DNR selected “monitoring and evaluation” for the case study, based on a comparative strength in best management practice in planning and mapping technologies. The review team decided to include an additional case study in “regulatory mechanisms” because this is an area of considerable focus and progress in Queensland over the past 12 months. The case studies together profile the two main approaches in vegetation management in Queensland at the present time - planning and regulation. The outcomes of the case studies are summarised in this section.

3.5.1 Monitoring and evaluation

The NVF sets out the following summary of best practice features in monitoring vegetation cover and condition:

- Repeatable and transparent.
- Protocols and standards for information collection and storage.
- Robust method that encompasses uncertainty.
- Commitment to sampling timeframe and incorporating outputs.

Queensland benefits enormously from a sophisticated land cover monitoring technology (SLATS) and high quality vegetation mapping. By linking SLATS and regional ecosystem mapping, Queensland has been able to develop a system for monitoring clearing and assessing new clearing applications, based on on-line calculations of the extent of native vegetation remaining in Res. The system will be refined by SLATS every two years.

The monitoring system provides a strong foundation for implementation of the new clearing legislation, and was a strong impetus in getting the necessary support for the legislative approach. The system has reasonably strong stakeholder support. As with any system that tries to translate landscape ecology into a regulatory system, there are ongoing issues to be addressed. The issues of effective surrogates (do regional ecosystems reflect true levels of biodiversity in the landscape?) and accuracy are being addressed by ongoing research and constant updating.

These monitoring and information support systems are examples of best practice in monitoring and evaluation of vegetation cover and clearing rates for the bulk of the state. As is the case across Australia, however, the system is not yet geared to monitoring condition. The NVF notes that monitoring of condition is difficult and that best practice is yet to be developed for this.

Queensland has the capacity to monitor other vegetation characteristics such as riparian vegetation, remnant strips and clumps, salinity, acid sulphate soils and soil erosion. While these are not actively measured at the present time, there is a legislative requirement that they be investigated, recorded and addressed in development decisions. The protection of these areas will collectively contribute to a reduction in rate of clearing.

The priorities in additional mapping are salinity, erosion (DEM), acid sulphate soils etc as inputs to regional mapping and planning.

3.5.2 Regulatory mechanisms

The regulatory mechanisms for delivering NVF outcomes in Queensland are largely related to the recent Vegetation Management Act 1999 and two scientific initiatives, which predate and support the basis for the legislation - the Statewide Land Cover and Trees Study (SLATS) and the Regional Ecosystem mapping of Remnant Vegetation.

Of a total state area of 1.7 million square km, the regional ecosystems mapping shows some 1.3 million km² as remnant vegetation, or approximately 75% of the state surface area. Of this remnant vegetation area, approximately 1% has an *Endangered* conservation status, 3% is listed as *Of Concern* with the remaining 96% listed as *Not of Concern*.⁷ Whilst less than 5% of the remnant vegetation area is considered threatened (ie either endangered or of concern status), almost one third of the just over 1000 regional ecosystems currently identified to date fall into the threatened categories⁸.

Land clearing within those parts of the state which are suited for either arable farming or higher value pastoral production (because of favourable soils and climate edaphics) has been recognised as a significant threat to both the extent of the remnant vegetation and its biodiversity. Until the advent of the Vegetation Management Act, land clearing on leasehold land was managed under the Land Act 1994, however clearing was generally an *as of right* use within the freehold estate. Data supplied by DNR to this study shows that the 1995-7 clearing rate in the categories of *Endangered* and *Of Concern*, was approximately 1,200 km² pa of which 650 km² pa was within the freehold land tenure areas. A further 1,400 km² of land was cleared annually in the not of concern categories, 630 km² of which was from the freehold estate.

The annualised clearing rate of both remnant vegetation areas and non remnant vegetation woody regrowth areas⁹ by the 1999 has been reported in the most recent SLATS report as some 4200 km² per year with 2510 km² of that from the freehold estate. The SLATS report estimates that approximately one third of the clearing in this period was regrowth – not remnant, one third coming from *Not Of Concern* status remnant vegetation regional ecosystems and one third from *Endangered* and *Of Concern* categories.

The recently proclaimed Vegetation Management Act 1999 effectively results in an upgrade of the regulations for land clearing. It puts controls in place across the freehold estate for the first time, complementing the controls already in place for clearing on leasehold land. Whilst there are procedural differences between the two tenure areas, the

7 Endangered regional ecosystem's include areas where less than 10% of pre-clearing regional ecosystem extent remains, Of Concern have between 10 and 30% remaining and not of concern have over 70% remaining.

8 Regional ecosystems which occurred in only small areas are also listed as endangered or of concern irrespective of the extent of clearing and this partly explains the high percentage of regional ecosystem in these threatened categories.

9 The SLATS report estimates that approximately one third of the clearing in this period was regrowth – not remnant

Act requires that land uses (and those planning and development mechanisms that regulate development in the state) involving clearing adhere to policy codes. These codes in effect will prevent¹⁰ clearing in currently *Endangered* categories and will condition clearing in the *Not Of Concern* and *Of Concern* categories such that:

- the cumulative effect of clearing does not cause an regional ecosystems to become *Endangered or Of Concern*;
- the extent of remnant vegetation coverage within each of the 13 identified bioregions will remain above 30%;
- preserves land cover in areas prone to land degradation or high biodiversity/habitat values; and
- the resultant land use is sustainable (for example areas to be cleared for pasture improvement will have been shown to be suited for such uses).

Implementation of the legislation will be supported by a four to five fold increase in field and regional staff dealing with vegetation management as well as an increase in vegetation inventory staff and the development of a coherent monitoring system that links approvals for clearing to the SLATS.

The Queensland Draft Work Plan reflects these relatively recent developments in the following aspects:

- The role of the State and Local Government has been clarified and codified with respect to land clearing where previously these had been unclear or where there had been no role firmly established.
- A seamless inventory of vegetation and its conservation status is essentially in place.
- A process for monitoring of changes in land cover capable of producing seamless results across the state is in place.

Within the context of the NVF, these essentially regulatory driven initiatives provide a state, regional and even property level (via the proposed permit system for clearing) framework for formally managing and monitoring changes in land cover in Queensland. The data presently available is able to clearly identify (at the regional ecosystems level) where the greatest threats from clearing exist in the state.

The regulatory system effectively embodies most of the principles of best practice for land clearing regulation as defined in the NVF. Remaining challenges in meeting best practice for regulatory mechanisms generally are:

- Strengthening the emphasis on duty of care and effective incentives and programs to encourage acceptance and adoption by landholders and rural communities.
- Accelerated emphasis on recovery planning and action.
- Critical habitat identification, protection and monitoring.

¹⁰ The code for assessing clearing applications is structure such that it would be very difficult to ever get an approval to clear 'endangered' regional ecosystems

3.6 Evaluating Overall Progress and Long Term Impact

The overall long-term impact of the Queensland Draft Work Plan was assessed against the long-term goals of the NVF using plausible process indicators (Table 4). Progress against these indicators was discussed and recorded during the workshop. The outcomes are summarised in Table 4.

Queensland agency vegetation managers are confident that their current actions identified in the Draft Work Plan will lead in the long term to significant improvement in native vegetation management on the ground, and will set appropriate processes in train for achieving the NVF vision and goals. Clearly, they are on track to meet goals in relation to regulation of clearing across all tenures and have in place the appropriate monitoring systems to evaluate progress in this regard.

The current regulatory framework for Queensland does not guarantee ‘no net loss’ in native vegetation. Many in Queensland argue that the substantial remnant vegetation cover in Queensland provides them with the opportunity to implement a policy based on protecting biodiversity and land productivity values (and to a lesser extent climate change targets). They maintain that, perhaps unlike other jurisdictions where past clearing was more comprehensive, Queensland can achieve these goals without needing to resort to a no net loss policy and that it would in fact be inappropriate to do so. See section 4.3.1 for further discussion.

The risks involved in the current policy and approach to native vegetation management in Queensland are recognised by the relevant agencies. These risks include:

- That regional ecosystems adequately represent biodiversity in the landscape.
- That assumptions about clearing limits are correct and that these limits are sufficient to protect biodiversity and landscape function.
- That the clearing limits will also prevent the development of widespread salinity.
- That rural and regional communities will accept the clearing limits even though full compensation is now unlikely and incentives are not a prominent feature of the new vegetation management approach.

It would be unfair to suggest that these risks are not being addressed. The monitoring capabilities in Queensland should be sufficient to alert vegetation managers to cases where the clearing limits continue to be exceeded. Administrative systems are being put in place to act in these cases. However, the longer-term risks if clearing limits are inadequate to protect landscapes in some areas against the development of salinity problems, or are too low to prevent a gradual decline in biodiversity in some ecosystem types, are much more problematic. There is a compelling argument to increase the research effort directed at these issues.

Table 4 : Progress against long term NVF goals

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.	Legislation and administrative systems are in place across all tenures to regulate clearing of remnant vegetation.
	Plans resourced and being implemented	Adequate resources are available for planning and assessment (however, local authorities may give this varying priority)
	People with knowledge and skills required	Increase by 400% in vegetation management officers in DNR and a doubling of vegetation officers in EPA
	Monitoring and evaluation of all aspects leading to revision of plans	GIS and information management support systems are in place for regulation of clearing (including SLATS and line updating). More work is needed on monitoring condition and risks
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	The criteria for protection have been legislated for all tenures and a good monitoring system is in place to support this.
	Programs in place to restore, where appropriate, native vegetation to maintain/enhance biodiversity and protect land and water resources on private all land	Restoration is not a priority for Queensland. The emphasis is on protection of remnant vegetation. Queensland is an active partner in NHT, which deals with these issues and is undertaking significant restoration in riparian zones.
	Programs and measures in place to encourage development and adoption of best management practices for native vegetation management in agricultural, forest and urban enterprises	Regional Vegetation Management Planning is expected to achieve this, along with extension and R&D programs. Incentives such as industry adjustment and incentive packages need to be funded to increase the impact of the new legislation.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quantity and geographic extent	State of the art monitoring and information management systems are in place.
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	National level planning and regulatory systems are being implemented. Regional level planning and regulatory systems will be developed through the Regional Vegetation Management Planning process. The next step is to address broad scale threatening processes other than clearing, such as noxious weeds and at species level- to put recovery plans in place for threatened species.

NVF Goals	Plausible process indicators	Comments on Progress
	Biodiversity and native vegetation targets are set and measures are in place to achieve those targets at both regional and national levels	This is in place at the level of regional ecosystems (conditional on regional ecosystems link with biodiversity).
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation biodiversity	This is done at regional ecosystem level across the state and at species level in RFA areas.
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 etc	Do have some covenants and partnerships in place. Duty of care expressed in codes of practice- with greater potential impact on leasehold land. Duty of care on freehold land is linked with incentives and obligations (eg in riparian areas). No cohesive program but some site based programs to conserve condition.
	Policies and programs are in place to restore native vegetation quality where appropriate	Restoration is not a high priority except in some riparian areas.
	Appropriate monitoring and assessment programs are in place to detect change in native vegetation quality	No. Pest information and weed distributions are available at a course scale in the cleared estate but not for remnant vegetation.

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

4.1 Assessment of the Queensland Draft Work Plan and Implementation

The Queensland Draft Work Plan addresses the majority of key challenges outlined in the 1999 stocktake¹¹ with actions that are likely to have a high impact. Activities over the past 12 months have achieved the following:

- Native vegetation on leasehold land is substantially planned for in Queensland, by legislation and under the new administrative arrangements for the BTCPLL. Remaining work relates to the freehold estate, which receives only partial automatic protection under the new legislation and vegetation management framework.
- Major biodiversity outcomes will be met by implementing the complementary policies for vegetation management across all tenures.
- The leasehold vegetation protection process directly resulted in a stabilisation of clearing on leased land, and clearing is now expected to decline in the leasehold estate from now on.
- Vegetation mapping and monitoring systems are of a very high standard. Linking of these with ecosystems mapping will enable accurate and up to date assessment of the impact of clearing applications in Regional Ecosystems.
- Administrative and information support systems are in place at state government level for the implementation of the new legislation and vegetation management framework

While effectively meeting many of the challenges raised in the 1999 stocktake¹², the new Queensland vegetation management framework faces its own challenges:

- It requires commitment and resources from local government to manage the smaller patches of remnant vegetation in developed areas, through the Integrated Planning Act (1997).
- It is dependent on progress in development of Regional Vegetation Management Plans.
- The classification and mapping of Regional Ecosystems underpinning the implementation of the vegetation management framework assumes that the mapping surrogates represent biodiversity status.
- There is an assumed direct link between changes in cover (extent) and change in biodiversity status with no real capacity at this point in time to base these judgements on vegetation condition.
- Clearing limits are assumed to be sufficient to protect biodiversity and landscape function in the long term.
- It requires the support and cooperation of landowners, despite the failure of the industry adjustment and incentives package.

¹¹ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

¹² Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

The additional resources recently allocated through DNR and EPA to the administration and implementation of the new framework, will address some of these issues (see above), while others are the subjects of ongoing research (eg assessment and monitoring of vegetation condition). The capacity of local governments across Queensland to play their part and the acceptance and cooperation of landowners are possibly the most outstanding remaining risks¹³.

4.2 Improvements to Queensland Draft Work Plan

In the forth coming revision of their NVF Draft Work Plan, Queensland plans to broaden the scope beyond the current focus on native vegetation protection, and take a more integrating approach, incorporating other elements of vegetation management in Queensland such as the RFA process and land protection initiatives. This revision will strengthen key areas including Communication and Capacity Building, Planning and Assessment and Incentives.

Queensland vegetation managers in the key government agencies were fully committed during the past 12 months to meeting their obligations in implementation of the new legislation and vegetation management planning, including an extensive consultation program. They could not also meet the public consultation timeframe for the NVF process. In common with other jurisdictions, Queensland agencies feel that the NVF process would benefit from more consultation and negotiation of timeframes.

The format of the Draft Work Plans does not systematically link actions with NVF outcomes or best practice. In formulating the Draft Work Plans, the actions stem from key challenges but these are not functionally linked with NVF outcomes or best practice principles. A more direct link is required to ensure that outcomes and best practice influence the actions.

4.3 Queensland Progress against the National Vegetation Framework

The focus of the vegetation management reforms in Queensland is on management of remnant vegetation to retain critical cover and thereby protect biodiversity status and prevent land degradation at a regional level. Queensland, in common with northern Australia generally, retains a substantial cover of native vegetation (both remnant and regrowth) over large tracts of potentially productive agricultural land, and has not yet seen the widespread development of land degradation problems (especially salinity) associated with broadscale tree clearing in southern mainland states. While hoping to prevent these problems, the new vegetation reforms in Queensland do not aim to prevent clearing per se, except in cases where further clearing will degrade the biodiversity status of the regional ecosystem.

¹³ The State interest in protecting native vegetation is achieved through the regulatory framework in place. The role that Local Government would play is in providing additional protection for native vegetation including smaller remnant patches (smaller than 5ha) that are not protected at the broader level and the loss of vegetation associated with incremental development.

4.3.1 Effectiveness of the Regulatory process in achieving NVF vision and goals

Despite the relatively tight regulatory framework developed in Queensland, its powerful monitoring processes, and its relevance to a number of key NVF themes and outcomes, scope does exist for clearing to continue in the *Not of Concern* and *Of Concern* categories. The actual extent to which this scope is realised is heavily dependent on the extent to which remnant vegetated land is also classed as prone to land degradation¹⁴ or is ranked as high nature conservation value. These rankings are largely to be an output from the Regional Vegetation Management Plans, which will not be finalised until 2002. These data sources combined with data on minimum thresholds of area for each regional ecosystem are presently not available and it is therefore impossible at this stage to estimate the long term extent of remnant vegetation cover in the state¹⁵. Without such an estimate, it is not possible at this stage to determine whether the current Queensland Draft Work Plan will reach the NVF objective of a reversal in the long term decline in the extent of remnant vegetation. What is clear is that Queensland is well placed in terms of regulatory process and planning to realistically approach such an objective.

The focus on protecting the extent of 'what is left', is clearly demonstrated by the above discussion. Partly this reflects the relatively large areas of remnant vegetation that remain in the state and the more recent land development history of Queensland when compared with the southern states. To these must be added the very different land, soil, climate and settlement patterns that characterise Queensland and in particular those areas in Central and Southern Queensland where broadscale land clearing of either remnant vegetation or regrowth woody vegetation capable of relatively high levels of grain or pastoral production has occurred.

The other aspect of the NVF objectives relate to quality of remnant vegetation and to components of vegetated landscape that are seen as critical to landscape and hydrological processes. With respect to the latter, the regulatory/planning mechanisms discussed above do target these areas, once they have been identified.

With respect to the condition aspect, the picture is less clear. Amendments are proposed to the Land Protection Act to include environmental weeds alongside of the current pest (noxious and hazardous) weeds classifications and there have been significant increases in resourcing for Protected Areas – both for management planning (as reflected in the current Draft Work Plan) and on ground management. Assessing levels of achievement (and indeed even the current situation) with respect to condition of remnant vegetation is limited by the lack of condition status information for mapping units. Such data is notoriously expensive to derive and is not readily obtained by the broad scale remote sensing type procedures used in Queensland.

14 The relatively large area of not of concern regional ecosystem includes significant proportions of the leasehold pastoral areas – including large areas of land types and vegetation which under more relaxed attitudes to land clearing prevalent in the last 50 years have not been able to economically cleared. This fact combined with the areas of Not of Concern within the reserve system would suggest that there may be limited scope for large scale clearing in the Not of Concern Categories.

15 Such assessments should however be able to be projected at the time of the next Queensland State of Environment Report.

4.3.2 Non Regulatory Initiatives

The Queensland Draft Work Plan also includes a number of initiatives, which are not couched in a regulatory setting. These initiatives include activities such as recovery planning for species covered by the Commonwealth Endangered Species Protection Act and increasing the number of regional ecosystem's covered by formal reserves and National Parks. It is however too early to assess the level of achievement in these areas. Until the advent of the regional ecosystem and SLATS mapping it was not possible to adequately prioritise activities in these areas.

Community level initiatives under the Queensland Draft Work Plan include regional attempts to reconfigure land ownership and enterprise activity at a regional level where excessive land degradation is of concern (Build Up and Development Strategy Schemes in the South West and Desert Uplands). More locally targeted demand driven approaches include voluntary conservation agreements sponsored by the EPA and local authorities under a variety of incentive arrangements. Data on the extent of such agreements and their impact on the extent, condition or biodiversity priorities is however not available at this stage. As in the case of the south west strategy, there may be scope for improving the effectiveness of such approaches by better targeting of programs to custodial land owner requirements.

4.4 Ongoing Independent Evaluation Arrangements

Regular independent evaluation could be an important part of the evaluation process for NVF overall, not least because it enables a consistent review across jurisdictions. An independent evaluation process would be strengthened by:

- Better negotiation and consultation with the key agencies on timeframes and scope.
- Adequate lead times to enable preparation and to facilitate input by busy, senior officers in key agencies.
- Adequate time for review of the outcomes of the independent evaluation.
- Mechanisms to facilitate sharing of experience and knowledge with other jurisdictions in a constructive manner.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Native vegetation management is a high profile issue in Queensland. Against a background of hostile criticism and strong competing interests, the key government agencies have made significant progress in the past 12 months in development and implementation of a new statewide vegetation management framework. The foundation of the new framework is a *regulatory approach* based on a substantial background of *planning and assessment* and supported by a sophisticated *monitoring system*.

The Queensland Draft Work Plan reflects these recent developments in the following aspects:

- The roles of the State and local governments have been clarified and codified with respect to land clearing where previously these were unclear or where there was no role firmly established.
- A regulatory framework is in place across all land tenures to limit clearing.
- A seamless inventory of vegetation and its conservation status is essentially in place.
- A process for monitoring of changes in land cover capable of producing seamless results across the state is in place.

The review process provided a good opportunity for revision and updating of the Draft Work Plan prepared by Queensland for the NVF, to reflect progress and evolving priorities in vegetation management. Native vegetation management continues to be a controversial issue in this jurisdiction and the key agencies now face new challenges in grounding and building on their achievements of the past 12 months.

Key challenges- are they effectively addressed?

The Queensland Draft Work Plan addresses most of the key challenges set out in the 1999 stocktake¹⁶. Particular strengths are in the Planning and Assessment and Regulatory Arrangements categories. Nine of the 21 key challenges do not have actions linked to them that are likely to have a high impact and a direct relationship. These apparent gaps can be explained by the immediate focus of government on the regulatory, planning and monitoring measures, and by the narrow focus of the current draft on actions specifically relating to protection of vegetation.

- **Work Plans reflect priorities at a particular point in time.** The Queensland Draft Work Plan clearly reflects recent priorities on regulatory approaches and supporting systems. In this regard, some of the apparent gaps are a reflection of current priorities. There is an intention that, once the regulatory framework is implemented, the focus will logically shift to other mechanisms of the Work Plan- eg capacity building; and on other themes- eg salinity and vegetation condition mapping and monitoring.

Recommendation 1 : It is recommended that the Queensland Draft Work Plan be revised to incorporate the range of activities and evolving priorities in vegetation management.

¹⁶ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

New challenges

While effectively meeting many of the challenges raised in the 1999 stocktake¹⁷, the new Queensland vegetation management framework faces its own challenges:

- It requires commitment and resources from local government to contribute to the management of vegetation through the Integrated Planning Act (1997) and is dependent on progress in development of Regional Vegetation Management Plans.
- The classification and mapping of Regional Ecosystems underpinning the implementation of the State Policies for vegetation management assumes that the mapping surrogates represent biodiversity status.
- There is an assumed direct link between changes in cover (extent) and change in biodiversity status with no real capacity at this point in time to base these judgements on vegetation condition.
- Clearing limits are assumed to be sufficient to protect biodiversity and landscape function in the long term
- It requires the support and cooperation of landowners, despite the failure of the industry adjustment and incentive package.

Recommendation 2 : It is recommended that the Queensland Draft Work Plan is revised to update challenges and to incorporate activities to address these challenges.

Progress against success measures

Queensland has made considerable progress in many Work Plan activities in 2000. Several success measures were amended or updated during the workshop to reflect achievements or to provide a better basis for measuring progress. The challenges relating to progress against the success measures include:

- Maintaining cooperative implementation of the new vegetation management framework between State and local government and the various agencies
- Maintaining progress and consistent standards in vegetation mapping and Regional Vegetation Management Planning at local government level
- Ensuring consistent and comprehensive implementation of the new vegetation management framework at local government level
- Adequately linking goals and programs in protecting ecological function overall with threatened species, biodiversity/nature conservation strategies and reserves programs to achieve the best possible native vegetation and biodiversity outcomes
- Linking regional NRM and regional vegetation planning and management
- Resolving compensation issues in the freehold estate

Recommendation 3 : It is recommended that the Queensland Draft Work Plan is updated to include the revised success measures.

Best practice- is it being met?

¹⁷ Griffin nrm Pty Ltd, 1999

The Queensland Draft Work Plan embodies a number of best practice principles for planning and assessment, regulatory approaches and monitoring and evaluation. Remaining challenges in meeting best practice for regulatory mechanisms generally are:

- Strengthening the emphasis on duty of care and effective incentives and programs to encourage acceptance and adoption by landholders and rural communities
- Accelerated emphasis on recovery planning and action
- Critical habitat identification, protection and monitoring
- Encouraging, measuring and monitoring adoption of best practice in native vegetation
- Addressing broad scale threatening processes other than clearing.

NVF desired outcomes- are they being met?

The NVF process does not drive native vegetation management in Queensland, and the Draft Work Plan is not a comprehensive representation of all of the activities being implemented in relation to vegetation management in the State. This partly reflects the fact that the NVF is new to the scene and is just one element of an evolving government response to sustainable development challenges, including vegetation management. It also stems from a perception that NVF underlying principles and desired outcomes do not apply as readily to northern Australia as they do to southern jurisdictions.

- **Desired outcomes are biased to southern Australia.** It is apparent that the range of goals and desired outcomes expressed in the NVF, are biased to the southern context and more explicitly reflect southern drivers. The NVF, with its strong focus on protection and enhancement of remnant vegetation, needs to be sufficiently broad to accommodate the northern Australian situation, if it is to be a useful and driving framework for cooperative vegetation management across all jurisdictions. In particular, because many of the desired outcomes and best practice codes expressed in the NVF apply more directly to southern jurisdictions, there is a perceived (and potentially real) risk that northern Australia will be inaccurately assessed in relation to progress towards meeting NVF goals overall.

Recommendation 4 : It is recommended that the NVF more specifically reflect the differing circumstances across Australia by including desired outcomes which are relevant to northern Australia

Progress towards NVF goals

The Draft Work Plan demonstrates positive progress against indicators of NVF goals. Queensland does not subscribe to a no net loss position on native vegetation arguing that its extensive remnant vegetation cover allows it more scope for land development. The counter argument, based on precautionary principles, warns that if Queensland continues down its current track, it could eventually be forced to respond to the same driving forces as southern Australia- salinity and species loss. This argument is not widely accepted in Queensland. Vegetation managers in state government agencies contend that R&D is in place to examine these issues, and that there is capacity within the new vegetation management system to implement revised clearing limits if R&D begins to indicate that current protection is inadequate.

Glossary

Abbreviation/Acronym	Definition
AFFA	Agriculture Fisheries Forestry - Australia
ANZECC	Australia New Zealand Environment and Conservation Council
BMP	Best Management Practice
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
EA	Environment Australia
EPA	Environment Protection Authority
MMM	Management and Monitoring Mechanism
NRM	National Resource Management
NVF	National Vegetation Framework
RFA	Regional Forest Agreement
R&D	Research and Development
SCC	Standing Committee on Conservation
SLATS	State-wide Landcover and Trees Study
TOR	Terms of Reference
WP	Work Plan

