



**Australian Government**

**Department of the Environment,  
Water, Heritage and the Arts**

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UNIVERSITY OF  
NEW ENGLAND



***IMPROVING ECONOMIC ACCOUNTABILITY WHEN USING DECENTRALISED,  
COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO ENVIRONMENTAL DECISIONS***

A project funded by the Australian Government's  
Commonwealth Environmental Research Facilities (CERF) program.

**BULLETIN NO. 2**

**October 2008**

**Understanding investment planning processes and issues in three Australian NRM regions**

This project seeks to develop and test a method that is feasible and useful for community-based natural resource management (NRM) organisations to apply in demonstrating the quality of their decisions from an economic perspective. It seeks to do so in partnership with three of the community-based regional NRM organisations in New South Wales (NSW) funded under Australia's regional delivery model. These three organisations are: Border Rivers – Gwydir Catchment Management Authority (CMA); Namoi CMA; and Northern Rivers CMA.

Given the emphasis of the project on developing a method that is feasible and useful for organisations like these to apply, an early step of the project was to understand the context of decision-making for each of these bodies and how each of them actually goes about making investment and related institutional decisions given this context. A working paper – entitled 'Investment Planning under Regional NRM Delivery: Current Processes and Issues in Three NSW Regions' – is now available which presents the findings from this 'scoping' exercise. This working paper can be downloaded from

<http://www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au/projects/3.php?nav=Environmental%20Impacts%20of%20Change&page=117>

The scoping exercise explored whether and how investment planning processes in the three regions have managed to deliver the kinds of advantages that community-based NRM was expected to deliver. Hence, particular attention was paid to how investment planning processes addressed needs for community capacity building and for integrated catchment management. In addition, the exercise explored how the three partner organisations have utilised structured decision-making frameworks, including those with economic content, in their investment planning processes to date.

These three regional organisations represent a small proportion of the 56 regional bodies funded under the regional delivery model, and they are located in one state. Nevertheless, the three partner organisations are quite diverse in respect of their contexts, experiences and approaches to investment planning, and it is expected that the findings will apply to an appreciably wider subset of regional NRM bodies, including in other states and territories. Readers' feedback on the validity of this assumption, or on any other issues discussed in this working paper, will of course be richly appreciated.

Each of the three partner organisations recognised the value of structured decision-making frameworks in helping to make their decisions about allocating available funds between themes, management targets, programs and projects more transparent and accountable. They see particular value in the present project's aim of incorporating an 'economic way of thinking' within such frameworks, especially if this way of thinking can help them justify more rigorously their investment allocations to community capacity building and partnership building, and help them think through trade offs between shorter-term efficiencies (e.g., from investing in fewer larger-scale projects rather than more smaller-scale projects) and longer-term considerations (e.g., developing community capacities and partnerships to a greater degree by investing in more smaller-scale projects rather than fewer larger-scale projects).

**Contact**

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