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## Community-based Regional Delivery of Natural Resource Management

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Since the 1980s, community-based natural resource Management (NRM) in rural areas of Australia has evolved from its origins with small groups of farmers to the present situation, under the 'regional delivery model', where regional bodies are expected to foster community ownership and voluntary cooperation from the large and diverse populations inhabiting their regions. This scaling up of expectations regarding community-based approaches has brought with it substantial challenges. Dr Graham Marshall from UNE's Institute for Rural Futures recently completed the three-year project

'Nesting Community-based Natural Resource Management for Regional Accountability and Grassroots Cooperation' which aimed to help policy-makers at all levels deal with these challenges. This project was supported by a grant from the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building in Rural Industries. The final project report – 'Community-based Regional Delivery of Natural Resource management: Building System-wide Capacities to Motivate Voluntary Farmer Adoption of Conservation Practices' – has been published by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation.



The focus of the project was on the potential of nested multi-level systems of community-based NRM to help address these challenges. On the basis of case studies in three NRM regions – in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia, respectively – Dr Marshall identified eight guidelines for leaders and decision-makers at all levels of the regional delivery model to apply in adaptively designing systems of this kind that are capable of motivating farmers' cooperation and thereby sustaining the natural resources under their management. Central to these guidelines is the 'principle of subsidiarity' which recommends that each task of governance should be allocated to the lowest level of governance with capacity to conduct that task effectively.

The findings of the project suggest that community-based approaches are capable of succeeding under the regional delivery model

in motivating greater voluntary cooperation from farmers than would otherwise be possible. Nevertheless, Dr Marshall cautioned, "Success of this kind cannot be taken for granted. The findings highlight the importance of farmers coming to adopt reciprocity strategies in their key relationships under this model. And leading farmers to practise reciprocity with higher authorities is no easy matter when paternalistic governance of generations of farmers has tended in many settings to entrench dependency or even opposition as an ongoing norm". Only when farmers come to trust community-based organisations to reciprocate their cooperation – by valuing their input, rather than dismissing it, taking it for granted or using it against them – can we expect them to practise reciprocity themselves.



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### **Project Details**

**Project Title:** Nesting community-based NRM for regional accountability and grassroots cooperation

**Supported by:** Cooperative Venture for Capacity Building in Rural Industries

**Budget:** \$120,000

**Completion Date:** January 2008

### **Contact**

Dr Graham Marshall

02 6773 3250

gmarshall@une.edu.au

**Institute for Rural Futures**

UNE, Armidale, NSW, 2351

