



**Australian Government**

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



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

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**Findings from developing and testing a method for cost-effective investment in building capacities for community-based collaborative natural resource management**

The project aimed to strengthen the economic accountability of investment decisions by community-based collaborative NRM bodies in two ways, in respect of: (i) on-ground investment decisions; and (ii) decisions to invest in building the capacities needed for feasible on-ground investments.

The purpose of this bulletin is to publicise the release of a working paper that reports on project achievements in relation to (ii). This working paper, available from <http://www.ruralfutures.une.edu.au/downloads/WP4.pdf>, documents the method developed for strengthening the economic accountability of decisions to invest in capacity-building activities, as well as the trials of this method by three Catchment Management Authorities in New South Wales, Australia. The method is called the Capacity Building Project Development Framework (CBPDF).

CMA participants in trials of the CBPDF recognised in workshop discussions the need for a more accountable approach to investing in capacity-building activities. They valued the contribution of this framework by way of providing a platform for integrating the planning and implementation of their various capacity-building activities. They recognised that planning of general capacity-building activities (typically within a CMA's 'community' program) had typically been isolated from planning of on-ground projects and the (project-specific) capacity-building activities required to support these projects.

The importance to CMAs of the criterion of user-friendliness in choosing a method of developing capacity-building projects was strongly emphasised in both workshop discussions and questionnaire responses, as was the perceived poor performance of the CBPDF against this criterion. (This was the only criterion in the questionnaire against which the performance of the CBPDF was rated lower than that of their current approaches to developing capacity-building projects.) Hence, less progress was achieved than hoped in achieving part (ii) of the aim of the project, which was to formulate and trial methods of strengthening economic accountability of NRM investment decisions that are within the capacity of collaborative community-based organisations (specifically regional NRM organisations) to apply proficiently.

There is more that could be done with the CBPDF (e.g. running training events, offering help-desk support, developing a web-based version, and/or embedding the framework in management systems that regional NRM bodies are already using) beyond the present project to overcome perceptions by CMA staff that it is currently impractical to apply routinely given the time and skills they currently have available. Ultimately, however, significant changes in the institutional and governance context of regional and other community-based NRM bodies are needed to create incentives (both upwards from their constituents, downwards from governments, and sideways from other organisations) strong enough for them to embrace investment decision-making frameworks that are more rigorous and comprehensive than those currently in use.

**Contact**

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