

# HEALTHY, PRODUCTIVE AND RESILIENT LANDSCAPES

## MANAGING NATURAL RESOURCES IN NEW SOUTH WALES



### Natural resource management in NSW

The NSW Government invests in natural resource management to strengthen our local environment and communities. We need rich and diverse land and water resources to sustainably support industries like agriculture, mining, tourism, fisheries and forestry.

In NSW, important decisions about natural resource management are made at the regional level so that local communities can have a direct say in how their landscapes are managed. This decision-making is guided by a well-established system of state-wide targets, a formal Standard to support high quality management, and independent audits of regional plans and progress.

This brochure explains how this system works in NSW, including the role of the independent Natural Resources Commission.

### What is natural resource management?

Natural resource management is about people managing landscapes to sustain the needs and values of communities, within the biophysical limits of our natural systems. This becomes a balance between maintaining, restoring and protecting landscapes and how we use them to support people's aspirations.

Almost 90 per cent of NSW's land is privately managed. The health of our diverse landscapes relies on private stewardship of environmental assets, such as soil, native vegetation, rivers and wetlands to improve production, conservation and community outcomes.

Natural resource management also recognises that environmental and social conditions are constantly changing. Therefore, we need to help communities adapt to change in ways that support their long-term social and economic well-being.

## Regional action

Since 2003, 13 regional catchment management authorities have been working with communities, industry and government agencies to deliver professional, outcomes-based natural resource management programs. Catchment management authorities have reported that from 2004-2009 their collective investment of around \$650 million resulted in 5 million hectares of land being protected, repaired, enhanced, or rehabilitated. This equates to about 6 per cent of the total area of NSW.

This regional approach gives communities the opportunity to have a direct say in how natural resources are managed in their catchments.

Before they invest on the ground, catchment management authorities develop whole-of-government catchment action plans in partnership with their communities, government agencies and industry. These plans bring together government priorities, best available science, and the values and knowledge of regional communities to describe how government, the community and industry can work together to build and maintain the resilience of landscapes across the state.

The *NSW 2021* plan commits to new catchment action plans by March 2013. Many of the new plans will use resilience thinking to better understand what is happening in each catchment. Catchment management authorities are investigating the thresholds, or tipping points, in their landscapes and the factors that are driving towards these thresholds. If we cross these thresholds, the decline in economic, social or environmental conditions may be significant or irreversible.

The state-wide standard and targets, plus regular independent auditing, underpin the regional approach. This allows regional flexibility and innovation so that local communities can make decisions that work for them, but also makes catchment management authorities accountable for achieving their planned commitments.





## The Standard

With so many people involved, it is important that natural resource management decisions support investment where it is most needed, aim for highest quality results, and stand up to public scrutiny.

The *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management* (the Standard) requires high quality natural resource management practice in NSW.

The Standard describes how good management depends upon the use of best available knowledge, collaboration and community engagement along with a good understanding of scale. It also focuses attention on risk management, monitoring and evaluation, and effective management of information.



The requirements of the Standard support high quality decision-making in all four phases of adaptive management: planning, implementation, audit and response.

In NSW, catchment management authorities are leading the way in meeting the Standard in all areas of their business. While the Standard is mandatory for catchment management authorities, it also provides a benchmark for everyone involved in natural resource management.

## Targets

The overall goal for all natural resource management in NSW is to achieve healthy, productive and resilient landscapes.

To help achieve this goal, the NSW Government has adopted 13 state-wide targets. These targets provide focus, coordination and a means for tracking progress in natural resource management. They cover biodiversity, water, land and community themes.

Guided by the state-wide targets, catchment management authorities develop regional targets that make practical and scientific sense for their individual catchments. In many cases, working towards one target will produce a range of benefits for other parts of the landscape – for example, improving native vegetation cover will have benefits for soil health, water quality and biodiversity.

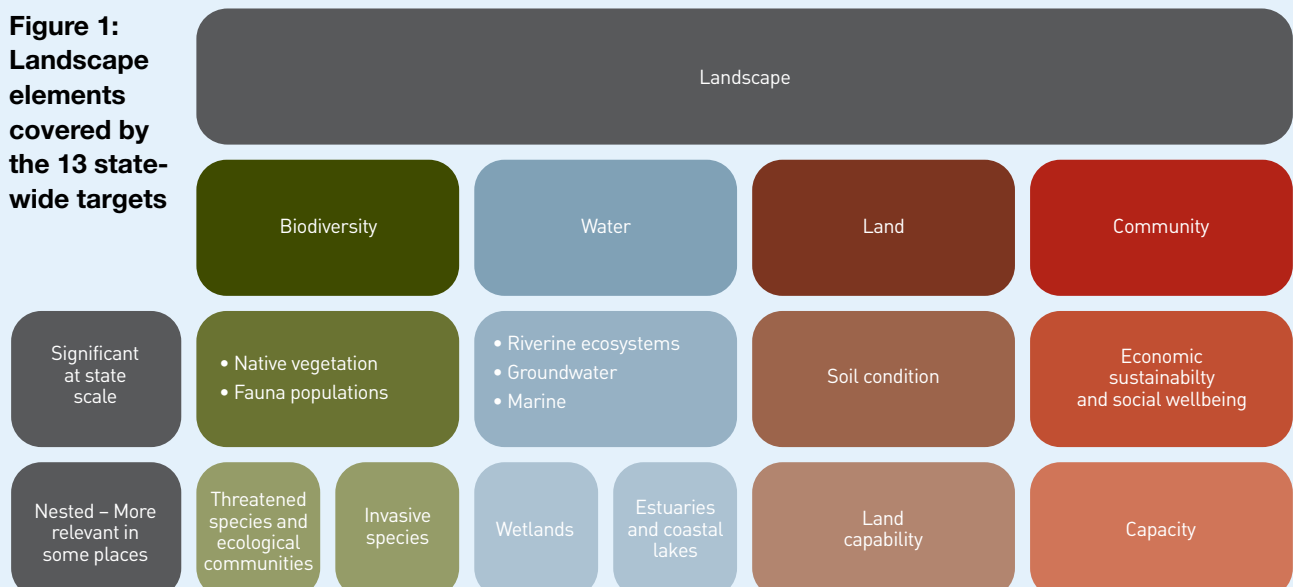
## Audits

The Natural Resources Commission independently audits how effectively catchment action plans are being implemented on the ground and the results that are being achieved.

These audits are an important part of the natural resource management in NSW, as they are designed to hold catchment management authorities accountable and improve their performance, as well as improve natural resource management in general.

Our past audits have shown that catchment management authorities are effectively delivering on-ground results. Over 90 per cent of audited projects achieved their expected short-term outputs, and despite prolonged drought, around 50 per cent of projects already showed evidence of local resource condition improvement. This gives everyone confidence that we are making progress, while ensuring we keep improving the way we do things.

**Figure 1:**  
**Landscape**  
**elements**  
**covered by**  
**the 13 state-**  
**wide targets**



## An independent Commission

The Natural Resources Commission provides independent advice to the NSW Government on what is working in natural resource management, what needs fixing and how it is tracking against its stated policies and targets. This helps the Government make better informed decisions on improving natural resource management plans and policies.

As a result of our early recommendations, the Government adopted the state-wide targets for natural resource management and the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*.

We review catchment action plans and recommend whether they should be approved. We then audit how effectively these plans are being implemented on the ground, and periodically report on progress NSW is making towards the state-wide targets.

We also conduct reviews of complex scientific and policy issues under legislation or as requested by the Government. For example, we conduct forest assessments, review assessment process for clearing native vegetation, supervise the Snowy Mountains Cloud Seeding Trial and review water sharing plans.



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