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Community Skills Knowledge and
Engagement in Regional NRM:
Drivers of Performance &
Developing Australian Government
Investment Strategy

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Disclaimer

The information contained in this report has been compiled from the findings of a national survey of staff and stakeholders in regional NRM, case studies of four regional NRM organisations, data and other materials supplied by Australian Government Land and Coasts and publicly available information.

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Executive Summary

Sources of Value from Regional Baseline Investment

In supporting regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations with baseline funding, the Australian Government is securing three assets that can be harnessed in the achievement of national policy and Program outcomes:

1. Regional level resource management planning and prioritisation which complements national plans and priorities and provides coherence for regional activities.
2. A specialist and strategically focussed NRM organisation with staff and other resources leading regional level change.
3. A suite of relationships between the regional NRM organisations and local NRM organisations and land managers that can be leveraged to translate national priorities and investment into on-ground change.

The importance of these assets to the Australian Government is captured in the Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement (CSKE) five year outcomes for the Caring for Our Country Program and in the description of the value of partnerships in successive business plans.

With the move by the Australian Government to become more targeted in its investment approach through Caring for Our Country, these assets have become more important to facilitating longer term change in NRM and ensuring that the targeted investment approach can be delivered efficiently over time.

The National Review of Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement in Regional Natural Resource Management

This project has reviewed the status of regional CSKE, particularly focussing on the extent to which regional NRM organisations are maintaining healthy relationships with organisations working on NRM issues at the local scale (Asset 3) and providing valued knowledge, information and leadership in regional NRM (Asset 2).

The review included a national survey of staff and stakeholders in 43 regions with detailed telephone interviews completed by 147 staff of regional NRM organisations and 659 stakeholders (drawn from a variety of Landcare, community groups, local government and others). The staff sample included a mixture of management (CEO and CSKE line managers) and operational CSKE staff with interviewees selected based on the advice of the CEO. Stakeholder interviewees were a mixture of applicants for Caring for Our Country funding, contacts sourced from regional NRM organisations and recommendations made by stakeholder interviewees about whom else in the region should participate in the survey. This ensured that the stakeholder sample was both representative of the key groups involved in regional and local NRM and not overly reliant on a single source of contact information.

In addition to the national survey, in depth case studies of the CSKE approach being implemented by four regional NRM organisations were completed. Insights for the case studies were developed through interviews with staff and the review of desktop information.

The four regions are representative of the diversity of contexts and approaches in regional NRM and assist in understanding the drivers of performance at the organisational level.

This overarching report provides a summary of the findings of each review process and an analysis of the key drivers of performance in regional CSKE. Its aim is to distil the most important information from a policy and Program development perspective that has arisen from the review process.

Two companion reports on the national survey provide significant additional information that supports more detailed reporting of regional CSKE performance and better understanding the practical challenges faced by regional NRM organisations in delivering CSKE outcomes for the Australian Government.

Key findings of the review

The project has demonstrated that, from a national perspective, regional NRM organisations are currently doing a good job in establishing relationships with key organisations involved in NRM. They are also providing leadership, valuable knowledge and ongoing engagement of stakeholders in regional prioritisation and decision-making.

The status of relationships with key organisations such as Landcare and community groups, local governments and partnerships with Australian and state governments appear overall to be in good health. This is underpinning the ability of the Australian Government to realise its five year outcomes for CSKE and continue to successfully pursue national priorities through Caring for Our Country Program and other policy initiatives.

Importantly, the research has identified that regional NRM organisations have established themselves as the most important source of information, knowledge and skills for stakeholder organisations involved in regional NRM. Given the rapidly evolving information environment and diversity of information needs for successfully resolving NRM issues, this is a significant achievement.

Together this serves to emphasise the significant value that regional NRM offers to the achievement of national policy and Program objectives. Given the need to engage volunteer effort, leverage co-investment and influence substantial change on private land with limited government investment, the regions should be seen as a crucial asset to the national policy agenda.

The value described by the reviews is the result of significant effort and investment over the last ten years. Maintaining and building on this value enables the Commonwealth to continue to refine and improve its investment in national NRM priorities over time. It also provides confidence that the Australian Government can actively influence and engage with a variety of stakeholders as necessary to achieve targeted outcomes by leveraging its ongoing partnership with regional NRM organisations.

However, while the results are very good at a national level, they do not indicate that the performance of regional NRM organisations is universally excellent or that continuous effort and improvement is not necessary in the coming years.

While most organisations are doing well in forming and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, there are organisations performing at different levels. The quality of CSKE

strategy and implementation, the capacity of the region in terms of staff and budget and contextual factors such as the size of a region, its population density and the jurisdiction it operates within all impact upon individual performance.

As the major investor in regional organisations and CSKE, the Commonwealth should satisfy itself that each organisation has appropriate management structures in place for CSKE and that these are implemented to a high standard. The systems for managing the investment of baseline funding in the regions provide a mechanism for achieving this.

The research has demonstrated that strategy, skill sets and systems for measuring performance and continuous improvement are common drivers of performance. These aspects of organisational approach can be further improved and better applied by each organisation.

There are also likely to be opportunities for the Australian Government to help regions in different jurisdictions with similar challenges (such as having a smaller organisation, seeking to engage a population spread over a large region or collaborating with local governments in urban areas) to better understand their performance potential and ways it can be achieved. Facilitating the sharing of knowledge, approaches and insights between regions, alongside monitoring each region's performance effectively provides a basis for further developing regional CSKE performance.

Recommendations

That the Australian Government:

- *review the incentive structures in the national-regional partnership against the information about drivers of CSKE performance to identify ways to encourage continuous improvement amongst regional NRM organisations; and*
- *develop and implement a CSKE capacity building strategy for regional NRM organisations with a focus on those operating either in remote areas or urban environments.*

Contents

Executive Summary	iii
Policy Context	1
Status of Regional CSKE	6
Overview of Findings from the National Survey	6
Overview of Findings from the Organisational Case Studies	12
Value of Current Performance and Opportunities for the Future.....	19
Drivers of Regional NRM CSKE Performance	19
Enhancing the Value of Australian Government - Regional NRM Organisation Partnerships for CSKE Outcomes	32
Appendix: About the National Survey	35
Methodology and Sample Description.....	35
Summary of Responses.....	38

Tables and Figures

Tables

<i>Table 1: Comparison of CSKE contexts for the case study regions</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Table 2: Summary of the strategies underpinning the CSKE initiatives described in the case studies</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Table 3: Relative capacity of regional organisation for size and population groups.....</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Table 4: Mean CSKE performance ratings by staff compared across size and population density categories</i>	<i>20</i>
<i>Table 5: Overview of regional NRM organisation models.....</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Table 6: Comparison of mean performance ratings of regional NRM performance (stakeholder survey).....</i>	<i>24</i>
<i>Table 7: Distribution of the survey sample by state</i>	<i>38</i>

Figures

Figure 1: Project report structure 1

Figure 2: Institutional systems perspective on regional approaches to CSKE 5

Figure 3: The most important sources of information for stakeholder interviewed 6

Figure 4 Communication channel preferences 7

Figure 5: Does the organisation have a stakeholder engagement strategy?..... 7

Figure 6: Approaches to provision of advisory services provided by regional organisations 8

Figure 7: Type of advice and input accessed by stakeholders from regional NRM organisations 9

Figure 8: Stakeholder perception of their level of participation in regional NRM organisation activities.10

Figure 9: Effectiveness of regional NRM organisations in encouraging additional investment by stakeholders.....10

Figure 10: Level of agreement that the regional NRM organisation is providing leadership....11

Figure 11: Relationships between Landcare groups and regional NRM organisations26

Figure 12: Links between staff perceptions of organisational capability and performance and status of CSKE and stakeholder relationships30

Figure 13: Overview of the staff sample, according to job title39

Figure 14: Distribution of stakeholder responses according to the type of organisation40

Figure 15: Significance of NRM for stakeholder organisations.....40

Figure 16: Stakeholder organisation NRM focus41

Figure 17: Nature of stakeholder relationships with their regional NRM organisation42

Figure 18: Frequency of Caring for Our Country Funding Applications42

Policy Context

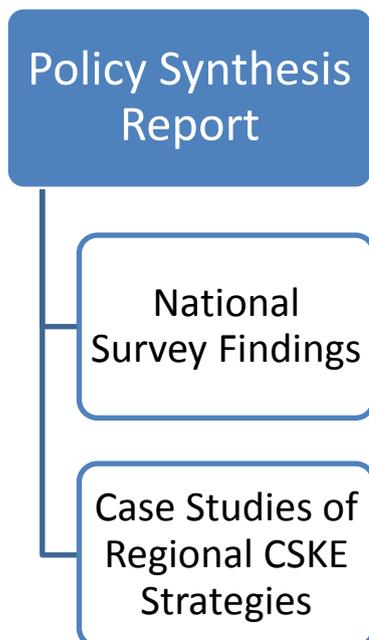
Evaluation of the effectiveness of government strategy and investment supports better decision-making and organisational learning about what works. It also provides the foundation for communication of the outcomes of government programs to key stakeholder groups.

This project reviews the contribution of regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations to the effectiveness of Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement (CSKE) strategies against the five year outcomes for the Caring for Our Country Program.

This report provides a synthesis and policy focussed analysis of the findings of a national review of Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement. The project's objectives are to:

- conduct a national survey and a series of interviews with NRM organisations and then analysis, to provide information that will enable Australian Government Land and Coasts (AGLC) to report on Caring for our Country CSKE achievements and progress towards five year outcomes
- inform the review of the Caring for our Country program regarding CSKE
- assist the development of a stakeholder strategy by AGLC, and
- generate policy-accessible information in a report that will inform refinement of CSKE targets and future investment, including implications for policy.

This overarching report is one of a compendium of three reports (*Figure 1*) from a project commissioned by the Australian Government Land and Coasts team in 2010-11.



The companion reports include:

- a national survey report, and
- a set of detailed case studies of the CSKE strategies of high performing regional organisations.

The report is structured into four chapters:

- Executive Summary
- Policy Context
-

Status of Regional CSKE

- Enhancing the Value of Australian Government - Regional NRM Organisation Partnerships for CSKE Outcomes

Figure 1: Project report structure

The Relative Importance of Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement for Achieving NRM Outcomes

Given the significant investment made by the Australian Government in base funding to regions, Caring for Our Country is the key stakeholder (alongside state governments and the broader community) in the operations of regional NRM organisations.

Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement is one of the six National Priority Areas for Caring for Our Country. This priority area captures the value that the Australian Government is seeking from its baseline investment. The box below includes the five year outcomes for the CSKE National Priority Area.

Caring for Our Country goals for Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement (2008 to 2013):

- 1. Improve the access to knowledge and skills of urban and regional communities in managing natural resources sustainably and helping protect the environment.*
- 2. Increase the engagement and participation rates of urban and regional communities in activities to manage natural resources and to help protect the environment.*
- 3. Position all regional natural resource management organisations to deliver best practice landscape conservation and sustainable land use planning to communities and land managers within their regions.*
- 4. Ensure the continued use, support, and reinvigoration of traditional ecological knowledge to underpin biodiversity conservation.*

A Key Area of Risk and Opportunity

While CSKE investment could be perceived by some as an area of lesser significance compared to direct investments in measurable on-ground change, this is not the case. Alongside effective resource management planning and prioritisation, supporting effective CSKE is fundamental to achieving and maintaining efficient and effective natural resource management.

Guidance provided to regions in engaging the community identifies the factors that make effective community engagement and skill and knowledge development so valuable in achieving NRM outcomes¹. The following factors were noted as drivers of the need for CSKE investment in this 2002 advice to regional NRM organisations:

- Private land title is responsible for management of 70% of the landscape.
- Private–public partnerships for NRM are critical for integrating personal values and aspirations with NRM goals and to engage market drivers in change where possible
- Private investment alongside government funding can mean that 6-10 times the public investment is made in a program if it motivates land managers

¹ Regional NRM Community Engagement guidelines 2002, Australian Government

From a governance perspective, there are two significant strategic risks for the implementation of NRM policy which CSKE outcomes effectively mitigate:

1. The risk that policy success at a landscape level will be undermined by insufficient voluntary action amongst the diffuse groups who participate in NRM
2. The risk that government investment is unable to leverage the required co-investment by organisations and individuals to achieve landscape scale change

The consequences of institutions not managing these strategic risks is an effective limitation of the influence of government sponsored NRM and policy objectives not being achieved. Short-term investments in priority issues are less effective if they cannot motivate sufficient participation and co-investment. Longer-term changes to landscape management also cannot be effectively influenced and driven by NRM agencies alone.

The Contribution of Regional Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement activities to national Natural Resource Management

The 56 regional NRM organisations have managed substantial public investment in protecting the environment and the sustainable use of natural resources since they were established nearly a decade ago.

The effectiveness of this investment is underpinned by strategic regional NRM planning and programs and the direct links to communities that regional NRM organisations maintain. Caring for Our Country explicitly recognises and captures this role within its business planning and funding structure (Box)².

The links regional NRM organisations form with the community can be through intermediary organisations, local government or through key individuals. Partnerships may be contractual or by general agreement. These partnerships and

Caring for Our Country on the Role of Regional NRM organisations

“Regional NRM organisations play a central role in delivering Caring for our Country at the regional scale. The identified regional organisations in the 56 NRM regions work in partnership with farmers, landholders and community groups, non-government and Indigenous organisations, governments and businesses to secure both our farming resource base and our unique environment into the future.

They provide support and access to knowledge and skills for landholders, Coastcare and Landcare groups and the broader community. They also work with local and state governments to deliver region-wide solutions and maintain the capacity of the regional community to address the Australian Government's targets.

Regional NRM organisations can coordinate the local community, facilitate partnerships with private sector investors and provide linkages for non-government organisations and other parties that will add significant value to the Australian Government's investments.

They are an important potential partner for a large number of interested stakeholder groups and organisations in delivering Caring for our Country, and have responsibilities under Caring for our Country to provide support to community groups and organisations.

We encourage groups and organisations to contact their regional NRM organisation to discuss potential project partnerships or other funding opportunities.

Under Caring for our Country the identified regional organisations in the 56 NRM regions have been provided with an annual base-level allocation of \$138 million. Multi-year base-level allocations provide them with the certainty to plan and undertake longer term activities consistent with Caring for our Country targets and outcomes.” (Caring for Our Country Business Plan 2010-11)

² Source: Caring for Our Country Business Plan 2010-11

relationships are a key asset to the NRM body and provide the basis for boards to mitigate major strategic risks.

The external and institutional context for Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement activities by Regional NRM Organisations

This study has focussed its analysis on how regional NRM organisations do or do not achieve effective CSKE investment with the aim of identifying the outcomes of investment and opportunities for improvement.

There are a range of factors that will determine how a regional NRM organisation undertakes CSKE activities and the effectiveness of this approach. Key variables that need to be understood include:

- institutional and organisational attributes
- organisational capacity
- organisational systems & partnerships, and
- geographic and demographic attributes of the region.

Figure 2 describes these influences and the structures and processes that each regional NRM organisation requires to be effective in CSKE. The diagram highlights that:

- Regional NRM organisations CSKE strategy is informed and driven by
 - the stakeholder and community profile
 - biophysical context and
 - NRM priorities and policy and Program requirements.
- Once a strategy is in place, implementation of the CSKE strategy is dependent on:
 - the structure and funding of the regional NRM organisation,
 - staff capacity and
 - the implementation processes utilised.
- Feedback and review processes are essential to provide a basis for the organisation to learn from experience and refine the approach in response to its performance.
- The Australian Government and Caring for Our Country interacts with this system via:
 - the policy and Program requirements it sets at a national level,
 - the funding provided to regional NRM organisations that supports CSKE strategy implementation (baseline and competitive), and
 - through the provision of facilitator resources to build staff capacity and skill sets.

This systems perspective has underpinned the design of the national survey and individual regional NRM organisation case study research methodologies.

A systems perspective also underpins the policy analysis presented in the report. The aim is to examine how the Australian Government as an influencer of the system can act as a sophisticated investor and drive continuous improvement in regional CSKE.

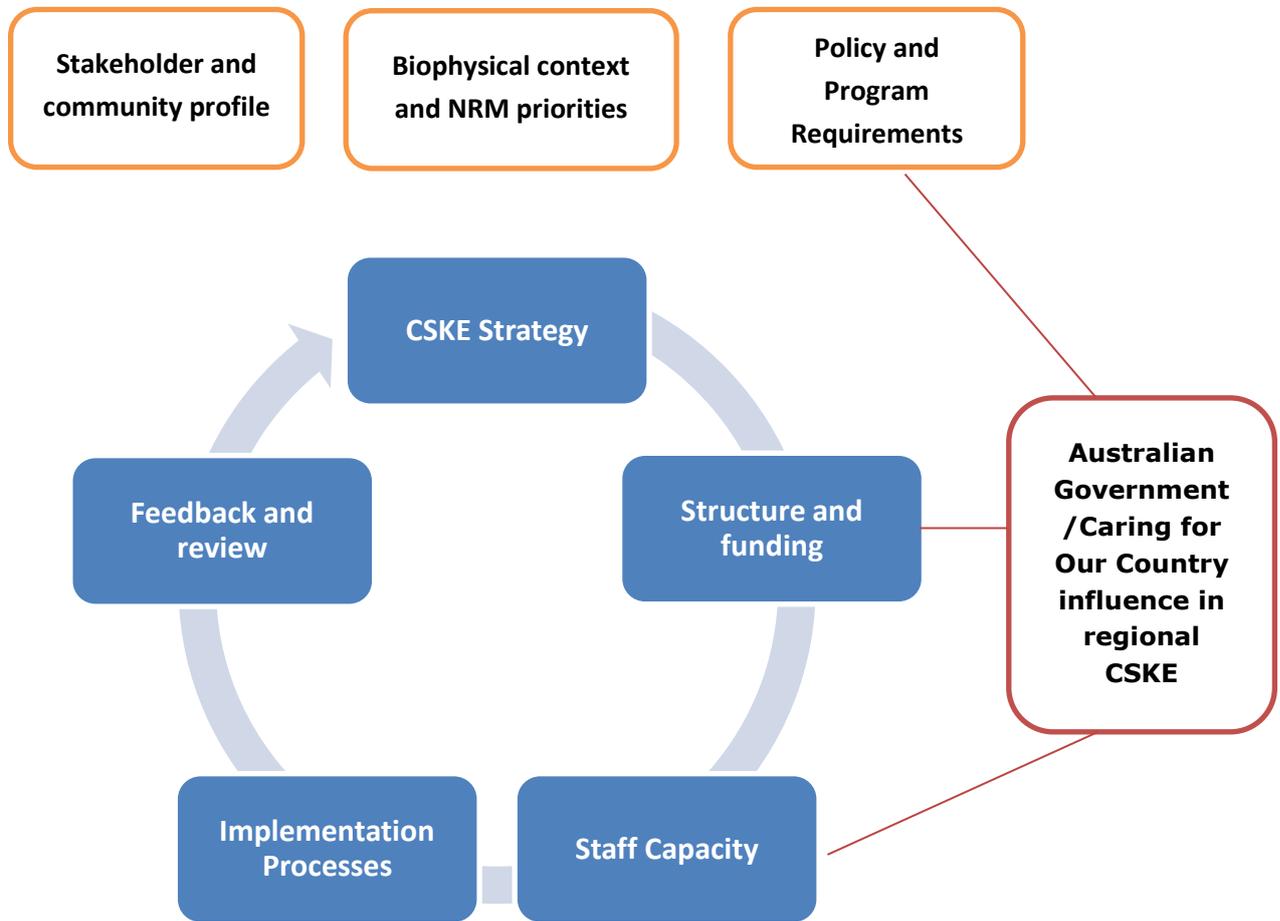


Figure 2: Institutional systems perspective on regional approaches to CSKE

Status of Regional CSKE

This section includes a copy of the overview section from each of the project’s companion reports which summarise the findings from each of the project research components. The findings of these processes provide background to the analysis of policy and program implications, which follows in the next section of the report. Readers who have already read the companion reports should skip to the next section.

Overview of Findings from the National Survey

Stakeholder Preferences for Accessing Knowledge and Information

Overall, the results show that regional NRM organisations are the most important source of knowledge and skills for stakeholder organisations (*Figure 3*). This supports the Australian Government strategy of investing in partnerships with regional NRM organisations to deliver CSKE outcomes.

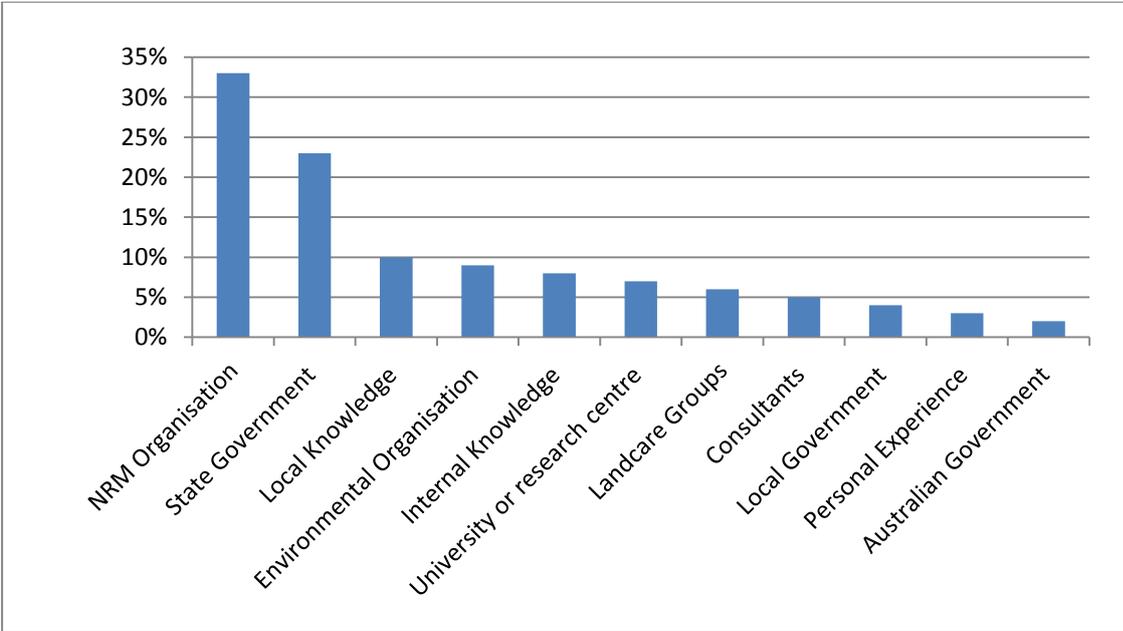


Figure 3: The most important sources of information for stakeholder interviewed

Stakeholder communication channel preferences (*Figure 4*) continue to be for a mixture of group or personal interaction supported by email driven information. This preference for personal and group interaction aligns closely with the services usually offered to stakeholders by regional NRM organisations. Social networking and online forums, once seen as nascent, at this stage, are only important for a small group of stakeholders; although this may grow over time as these forms of communication become more established in the NRM community.

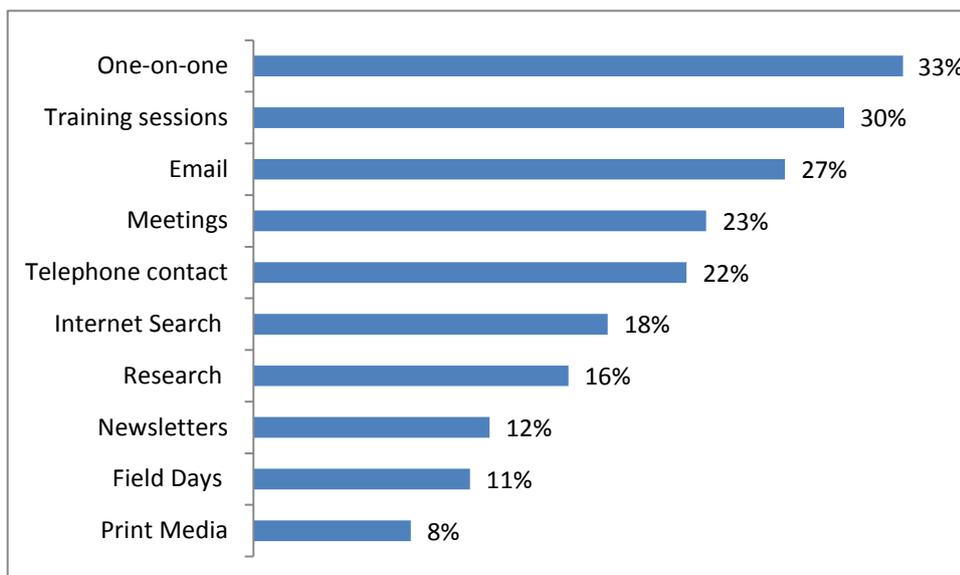


Figure 4 Communication channel preferences

Examples of the information needs of stakeholders were collected through the survey. The diversity of examples provided by stakeholders emphasises the range of individual and local issues that need to be met by the national CSKE effort. Stakeholders draw on a range of different sources and people to meet their specific information needs and will access different information providers depending on the issue they are engaged in.

Organisational Approaches to Service Delivery

The findings from the national survey, confirms that regional NRM organisations generally have relevant processes in place to meet the basic requirements for effective CSKE. This set of commonly applied processes includes:

- an approach to understanding stakeholders perspectives and needs
- a strategy for how they will interact and engage with them (*Figure 5*)
- a range of staff and skills devoted to CSKE activities
- a diversity of strategies for communicating and influencing stakeholder groups (*Figure 6*), and
- processes for reviewing and improving performance.

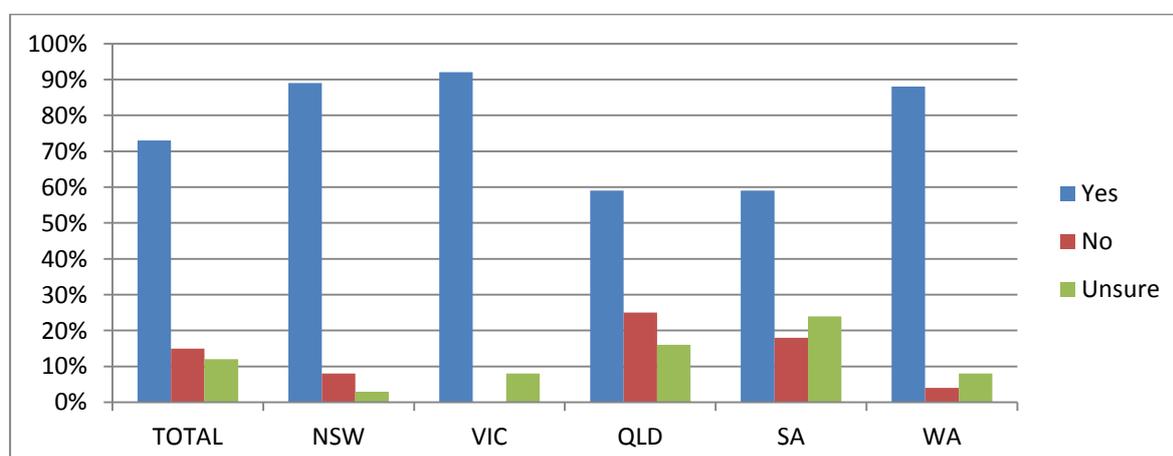


Figure 5: Does the organisation have a stakeholder engagement strategy?

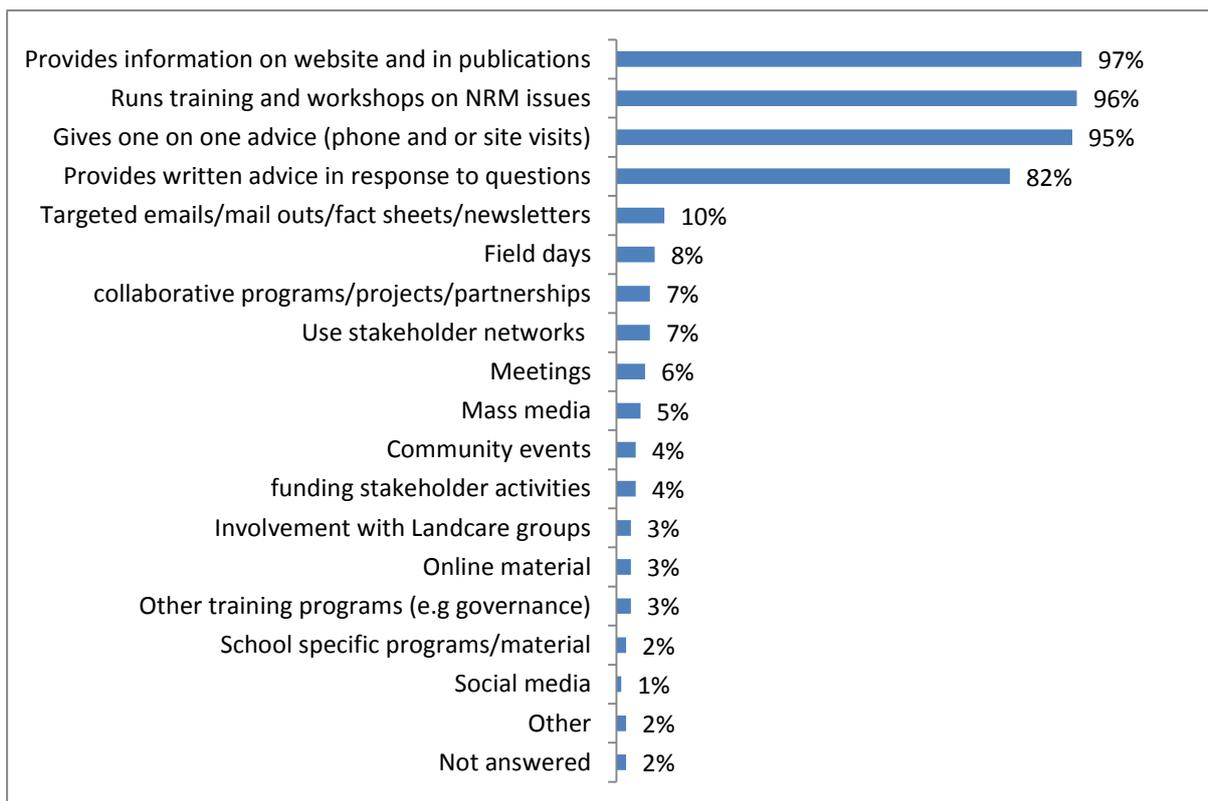


Figure 6: Approaches to provision of advisory services provided by regional organisations

The survey measured the effectiveness of these strategies and approaches against some indicators of success for the Caring for Our Country CSKE outcomes.

Findings in relation to the Caring for Our Country Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement Five Year Outcomes

Outcome One – Improve the access to knowledge and skills of urban and regional communities in managing natural resources sustainably and helping protect the environment.

The survey findings represent a strong result at the national level for regional NRM organisations in relation to this Caring for Our Country outcome.

The national survey suggests that regions have built a strong understanding of the knowledge and skills needs of stakeholder and are providing services that are used and valued by stakeholders. Figure 7 shows the areas of advice commonly accessed by stakeholders. A substantial majority (76%) of stakeholders found regions to be helpful in assisting them with resolving natural resource management issues and related challenges of planning, management and evaluation of NRM activities in the last 12 months.

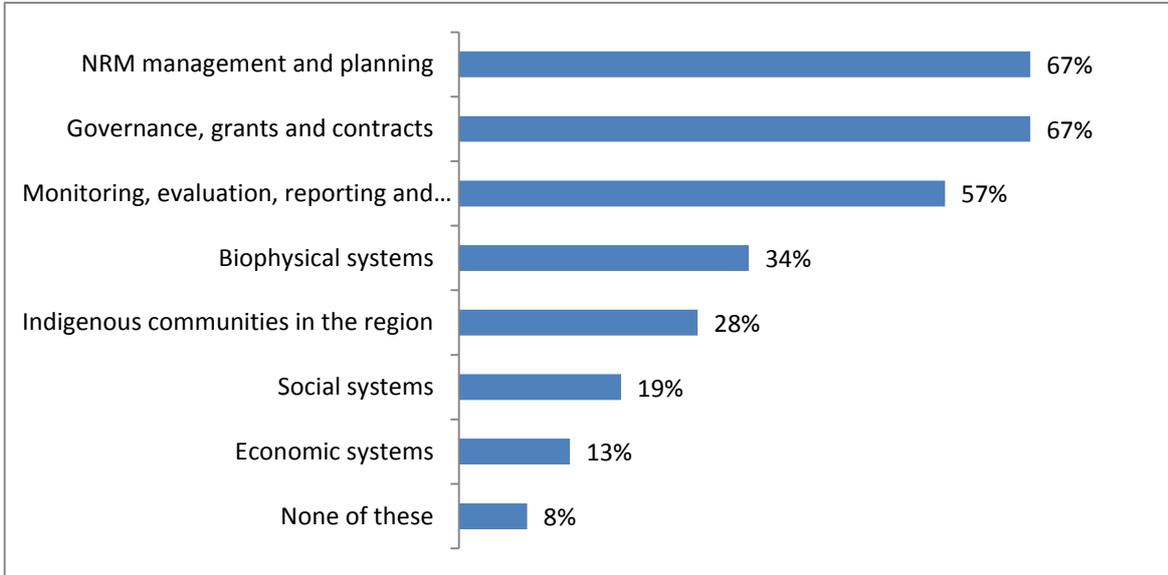


Figure 7: Type of advice and input accessed by stakeholders from regional NRM organisations

These findings, in combination with the identification of the importance of regions as a source of knowledge and skills for stakeholders, suggest that the regional base funding component of the CSKE investment strategy is providing a good return on investment in terms of reaching and positively influencing a diversity of stakeholders.

Outcome Two - Increase the engagement and participation rates of urban and regional communities in activities to manage natural resources and to help protect the environment.

Overall, the evidence suggests that regions are doing a good job of engaging a diversity of stakeholders and actively seeking to build their engagement within the wider community over time.

Stakeholders agree that sufficient engagement is occurring, that it is of a moderate to high quality (*Figure 8*) and that opportunities exist for stakeholders to participate in regional NRM processes.

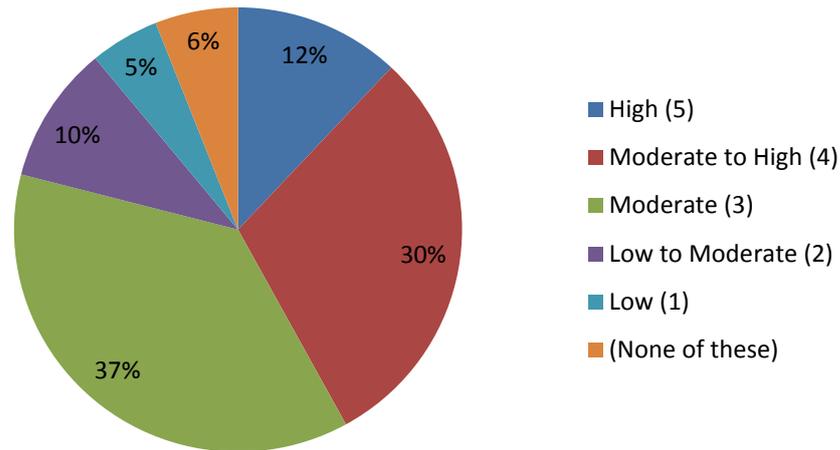


Figure 8: Stakeholder perception of their level of participation in regional NRM organisation activities.

Engagement between regional NRM and stakeholder organizations is also resulting in partnerships for funding and most stakeholders agree that engagement with regional organizations has had a moderate to high level of influence in encouraging them to invest more in their NRM activities (*Figure 9*).

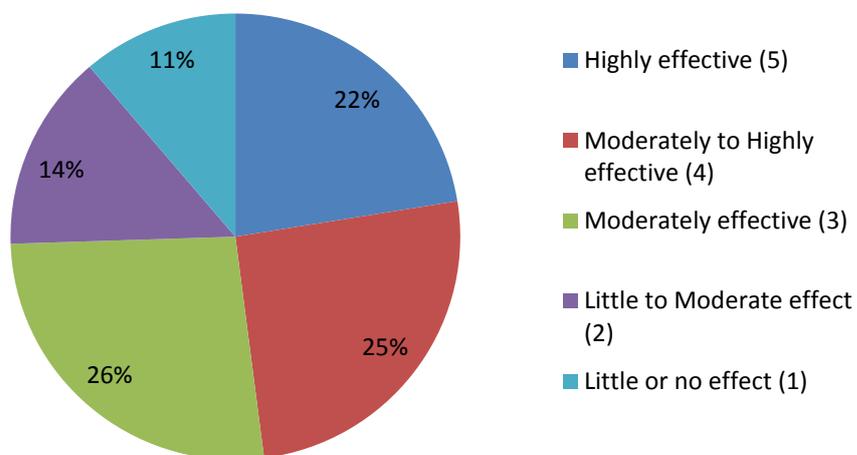


Figure 9: Effectiveness of regional NRM organisations in encouraging additional investment by stakeholders

Outcome Three - Position all regional natural resource management organisations to deliver best-practice landscape conservation and sustainable land use planning to communities and land managers within their regions.

The evidence from the national survey suggests that regional NRM organisations are well positioned to lead regional planning processes in cooperation with stakeholders.

NRM organizations are the most commonly preferred source of NRM information. They are generally seen as being adequately informed about regional issues, willing to listen to stakeholders and providing leadership in NRM (Figure 10).

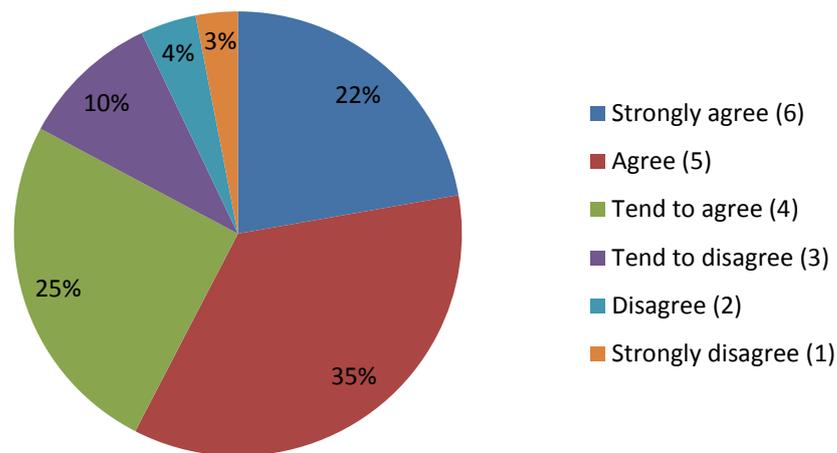


Figure 10: Level of agreement that the regional NRM organisation is providing leadership

Relationships between a majority of stakeholders and regional NRM organizations appear strong; on the whole, staff and stakeholders agreed that a moderate to high level of trust, transparency, inclusiveness and commitment exists between their organizations.

At a national level, most regional NRM organization staff also agreed that their organization had an effective relationship with the state and Australian governments and that they generally received consistent policy advice.

Outcome Four - Ensure the continued use, support, and reinvigoration of traditional ecological knowledge to underpin biodiversity conservation.³

The majority of indigenous organisations generally agreed that their regional bodies were adequately informed by stakeholders. However, the survey shows that regional organisations are less confident that they are effectively engaging indigenous stakeholders than they are about the effectiveness of their engagement processes for stakeholders as a whole.

³ NB: Comprehensive feedback on this outcome was not a target of the survey. This Outcome is being reviewed through other work. However, some questions were included to complement a wider review.

Overview of Findings from the Organisational Case Studies

This report presents a series of case studies describing and analysing the Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement (CSKE) approach of regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations.

The case study organisations include two organisations in New South Wales (Namoi and Sydney Metro Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs)) and two in Queensland (Desert Channels Inc. and Terrain NRM).

The case study regions include both community based regional NRM organisations and statutory structures. Their regions include some of the most sparsely populated areas of Australia and the most densely populated. They include regions where land management is dominated by agriculture, conservation reserves or an urban environment with a diversity of local governments and statutory authorities. They also have different capacities in terms of funding and staff. Table 1 provides a comparison of some of the key factors that influence the CSKE approach of each of the case study regions. These factors emphasise the divergent challenges faced by regional NRM organisations in designing and delivering successful CSKE initiatives and strategy. Together the case studies provide important insights about the differing approaches and challenges for regional NRM organisations in delivering effective CSKE.

Table 1: Comparison of CSKE contexts for the case study regions

	Budget	Staff	Region Area (km ²)	Population	Pop. Density (p/km ²)	Local Govts	% of region used for agriculture	% of region reserved
Namoi CMA	~\$7.8m	38	42,000	100,000	2.4	6	73%	6%
Desert Channels	~\$3.6m	16	509,933	14,500	0.03	7	94%	4%
Sydney Metro CMA	~\$6.5m	25	2,470	3,000,000	1215	39	5%	42%
Terrain NRM	~\$10m	62	22,000	200,000	9.1	8	15%	80%

Integrating community development approaches with corporate style management frameworks

While the national survey provides a picture of a regional NRM system that is performing well in creating and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, the case studies show the ongoing challenges and tensions that exist as organisations seek to build their engagement and influence on NRM knowledge and practice. In seeking an effective approach to CKSE at the regional level, the case studies show that there are two different perspectives that have driven thinking and strategy within regional NRM organisations; a community development model of engagement and an investor-provider model.

The community development model sees the development of community knowledge and skills as the primary challenge for NRM given the link between the current problems with resource health and resource management decisions across the community. A community development approach emphasises that everyone is important in NRM change and prioritises relationships and learning as the crucial short-term outcomes from CSKE. Understanding and responding to community identified needs is the driver for initiative implementation and design.

In many cases, the direct results of a community development approach may be harder to measure immediately as the causal link between learning and on-ground action is difficult to establish. However, in the longer term a focus on developing people is expected to result in a sustained improvement in NRM and less need for public investment to ameliorate biophysical problems. The influence of the Landcare movement on resource management in agriculture is one of the best and longest running examples of this kind of community development driven change.

The alternative emphasis is an investor-provider model which takes a business-like, results focussed perspective to CSKE. This approach is primarily focussed on achieving biophysical outcomes in the short-term and utilising corporate-style organisational structures and planning for Program design and decision-making. CSKE is positioned as a facilitator of efficiency and effectiveness in this process and is primarily used as one component of integrated Programs seeking to catalyse specific change. General engagement activities and capacity building may be incorporated in the suite of initiatives but at a lower level of priority. In this approach people are primarily seen as intermediaries in the change process and longer term attitudinal and broader practice changes as something that will flow from ongoing results focussed effort that catalyses and leads practical change.

Both approaches have some important similarities in that they:

- require the fostering of a strong learning culture supported by a robust internal evaluation protocol and feedback process;
- focus on achieving results that are valued by stakeholders as well as investors;
- recognise the value of people in NRM (in the organisation, as operational intermediaries and on the action front in the community); and
- require that the NRM body become a central hub or connector of information for NRM practitioners as well as the custodian of regional NRM planning responsibilities.

The case studies demonstrate that both of these perspectives are being applied by regional NRM organisations. In each case study, elements of both perspectives are evident in the organisation's strategy and initiatives. The relative emphasis of each organisation's approach is driven by its leadership, regional context and organisational history. All of the case study organisations are actively seeking a middle ground that balances the advantages of both approaches with the community development orientated organisations seeking to be more business-like and results focussed in the future and the more business-like seeking to develop their mechanisms for broader engagement and inclusiveness.

While all regional NRM organisations are seeking to create a balance between community development and the investor-provider model, the national survey demonstrates the importance of a well-developed governance framework and strategy to guide CSKE investment regardless of the emphasis taken.

Each case study organisation is continuing to develop and refine the quality of their CSKE systems. Given the strong foundation of relationships regional NRM organisations have established, it is in refining and further developing organisational approaches to CSKE that the big gains in return on investment are likely to be made for the Caring for Our Country Program.

In developing the national-regional partnership it is also important to note that the Caring for Our Country program has moved national investment significantly towards the investor-provider perspective. For regional NRM organisations that have primarily pursued a community development strategy, this transition is more difficult compared to those whose structures and approaches were already more aligned to an investor-provider approach.

For example, the requirement to link CSKE investment to specific on-ground outcomes is much easier to accommodate for regions with a history of an investor-provider approach compared to those that have focussed on broader capacity building strategies. As can be seen in the case studies, these organisations are still translating their systems and knowledge bases to support a more business-like approach to CSKE. In the context of a system that is performing well (as identified by the national survey), this makes continuity of the national investment strategy important to ensuring regional NRM organisations can complete the transition to the new investment framework and begin to learn and refine their approaches to CSKE strategy and initiatives.

Importance of strategy, prioritisation, staff and relationships

Regardless of the community development/investor-provider emphasis of an organisations approach, the case studies reflect the findings of the national survey in terms of what is required for success at an organisational level.

This recipe for success begins with a clearly defined strategy that is built upon a clear understanding of the organisations mission (regional priorities) and knowledge and insight about the group(s) of stakeholders that the organisation is seeking to influence. Within the strategy, clear prioritisation of focus, effort and approach with different stakeholder groups is essential so that limited resources can have the greatest influence.

In the Namoi this prioritisation of effort has led to the CMA targeting CSKE and investment to larger innovative farmers who can achieve more significant outcomes at a landscape scale and also lead change within the farming community. In contrast, Sydney CMA has a focus on cooperative programs to facilitate changes in the way local governments manage stormwater and urban catchments. Terrain's strategy is driven by the overwhelming priority need to manage impacts from land management on the Great Barrier Reef while Desert Channels is focussed on building a range of connections, relationships and influence with the small number of land managers who have responsibility for managing most of the regions relatively unaltered natural systems.

Alongside targeted initiatives designed to influence landscape changes, each region is seeking to develop ongoing relationships with key stakeholders. These relationships are a basis for development of the organisations profile and for engagement and ownership of the regional NRM strategy. Each region must do this if it is to assume and maintain a leadership position in regional NRM.

A continuing challenge for each region in forming these relationships is translating the objectives of the organisation into something that is relevant for stakeholder groups who usually do not operate or engage in NRM at a landscape scale. An emerging opportunity to better communicate regional mission and priorities is flowing from the adoption of a resilience framework for prioritisation and decision-making. Each case study organisation is moving in this direction.

The advantage of the resilience framework for CSKE is that it translates regional priorities into a risk management framework and identifies a set of landscape thresholds for key resources. These thresholds provide a more tangible rationale for prioritisation of effort within the region and the risk management approach with defined targets can be more readily communicated to stakeholders. While it is early days, this resilience framework may help regions better frame and communicate their broader role and objectives.

Once an organisational approach and priorities are in place, specific CSKE solutions are developed at a Program or project level to meet the objectives of the organisations strategic initiatives. The

case studies reinforce that successful implementation is dependent on the application of good quality processes for initiative design and committed staff with the right mix of skills, knowledge and relationships. Each organisation has developed its own approach based on the background and experience of its leadership and the internal learnings from previous CSKE initiatives about how best to work in their region. Across these approaches are three key types of strategies that are worth noting in considering the system as a whole and the investment approach taken by the Australian Government.

Three strategies for CSKE initiatives

At the initiative level, CSKE strategies are essentially fit-for-purpose and there is no single approach that can guarantee a good result across the diversity of areas in which regional NRM organisations seek to influence. However, across the range of initiatives reviewed, the case studies identify three core strategies for achieving CSKE impact at the regional level:

1. Direct engagement of a smaller number of key influencers to develop skills and knowledge that can be immediately applied in on-ground change.
2. Development of interactive forums for discussion and agreement on priorities and action as a foundation for relationships and alignment of objectives between organisations, often leading to longer term co-investment and collaboration.
3. Broader awareness raising and profile development to provide a foundation of goodwill, confront attitudes that maintain poor practices and build community engagement and willingness to invest in NRM.

To be successful, a regional NRM organisation must be capable of effectively implementing each of these strategies. All three are implemented by each case study organisation with the approach taken for particular stakeholders shaped by the context and scope of the initiative (*Table 2*).

Table 2: Summary of the strategies underpinning the CSKE initiatives described in the case studies

Example	Summary (CSKE component)	Direct engagement	Interactive forums	Awareness and profile
<i>Native Grasslands Program (Namoi CMA)</i>	A significant initiative to reduce the critical threats to the EPBC listed grasslands	Integrated with funding for on-ground change on private land	Namoi Grasslands Network Field days	Distribution of a CD containing maps, monitoring techniques and other information.
<i>Urban Sustainability Initiative (Namoi CMA)</i>	Meet community demand for information on urban sustainability issues		Open house days Community gardening	
<i>Indigenous engagement (Namoi CMA)</i>	Develop the role of Indigenous people in regional NRM	Training programs	Events on country	TV ads to raise wider community awareness of Indigenous role in NRM
<i>Cooks River Urban Water Initiative (Sydney CMA)</i>	Improve Cooks River water quality and wetland health			Cooks River Community Forum Urban Streams email group

Example	Summary (CSKE component)	Direct engagement	Interactive forums	Awareness and profile
<i>Botany Bay Water Quality Improvement (Sydney CMA)</i>	Better manage polluted run-off into the Bay	Development and training to implement a decision support system for councils	Project reference committee	Presentation to councils and community groups Newsletters to network of stakeholders
<i>Community Forums (Desert Channels)</i>	Maintain connections to disparate communities in the region		Interactive forums for information sharing and communication	
<i>Re-engaging Indigenous communities (Desert Channels)</i>	Reinstate a relationship between local groups and the landscape	Engage with elders and others to collect and preserve traditional knowledge	Regular Indigenous forums.	
<i>ABCD Framework (Terrain NRM)</i>	A structured process for investing in on-farm practice changes	Engagement with extension officers and others to implement		
<i>Reef Rescue (Terrain NRM)</i>	Reduce impacts on reef from agricultural run-off	Targeted training and development for farmers who agree to lead change in the broader industry		
<i>Urban Rivers (Terrain NRM)</i>	Water Quality Improvement Plan development and implementation		Ecological values workshops with stakeholders to guide planning Steering Committee	

Case Study Insights

Namoi Catchment Management Authority

Namoi Catchment Management Authority (Namoi CMA) operates in an environment dominated by productive agricultural land use and the associated legacies of past land management practices. Namoi CMA approaches CSKE with an investor-provider approach that is built on strong structures and procedures, clear prioritisation of activity and quality information on both socio-economic and environmental issues. Its key clients are businesses, particularly large and influential agricultural businesses that lead change in the region. Namoi CMA has balanced this investor-provider approach with development of a strong regional profile and a broader stakeholder engagement strategy.

Namoi CMA presents a strong case study of the effectiveness of an investor-provider approach to CSKE. However their strategy is also balanced and increasingly inclusive of the community development perspective. This is achieved through investment in broader engagement activities, awareness building and attitudinal change. The current challenge for the organisation is in building two-way communication and extending its scope of influence beyond its key clients. This is recognised both internally and in external reviews as crucial to ongoing success for Namoi CMA.

The Namoi CMA case provides some relevant insights for the future of the current Caring for Our Country program approach, particularly the:

- attributes for success of this investor-provider investment approach (clarity of objectives, quality of information and strong relationships)
- need for balance and a diversity of approaches as well as focussed investment in short-term results
- time required to achieve momentum in key regional issues that have substantial barriers created by attitudes and historical practices, and
- trade-offs and tensions between a direct or indirect approach to influencing on-ground change.

Desert Channels Inc.

DCQ NRM operates in a remote environment with a sparse population, complex Indigenous lineages, changeable climate and high levels of private land management. DCQ is a small organisation of less than 20 people, but is required to deliver big landscape outcomes across 510,000 square kilometres. This challenge is offset to some extent by land management being mainly in the hands of only 1000 private land managers.

The context for DCQ requires the development of efficiencies in service delivery, layering of relationships to enable multiplier effects, innovation in programs for engagement and flexibility in program design and delivery.

The key insights from the case study include the:

- importance of a small number of relationships to achieving impact in sparsely populated regions. These relationships need to be established and managed effectively over time. There is not a lot of choice for the region in terms of who can deliver on-ground outcomes and so continuity of engagement and maintaining trust is crucial.
- need for CSKE to achieve cultural change amongst land managers by better socialising environmental problems and finding ways to privatise benefits of better NRM.
- different approaches to engaging with a small number of people over a large area. This is particularly important in considering the transaction costs in sparsely populated landscapes with large distances between centres of activity, where every individual manages large portions of the land and has critical impact on NRM.

Sydney Metro CMA

Sydney Metro CMA (SMCMA) is one of the smallest and newest regional NRM organisations. It operates in an environment that is highly urbanised and one which features many established government organisations who have the key responsibility for NRM in the region including 39 local governments. The population is large, transient and mostly disconnected from the natural environment. This context drives the CSKE approach for SMCMA.

The organisation is highly focussed on facilitation of collaboration between local governments and provision of regional level NRM information to support collective decision-making and innovative action. SMCMA also sees developing community connection to environment as a way of reinforcing volunteerism in the region.

Its CSKE strategy remains developmental and is being progressively refined as the foundations of regional planning and relationships become more established for Sydney Metro CMA. Important insights from the case study include:

- In regions with more complex institutional environments, inter-organisational relationships are the key to success. Appropriate investment in developing personal relationships between staff through informal contact as well as more formal collaborations through projects and engagement forums is vital to long-term success.
- In a crowded institutional environment the role of the region is very different to areas where the regional NRM organisation is the peak regional interest and source of funding. While direct change is difficult, effective collaboration can lead to long lasting outcomes and significant leveraging of investment.
- An urban-nature disconnect is potentially a significant barrier to long-term NRM improvements. Consequently programs that focus on re-connection with nature and explore community attitudes and the potential to mobilise increased volunteer activity are an important part of achieving change in the long-term.

Terrain NRM

In a region which is highly conserved and features some of Australia's most important World Heritage areas, Terrain NRM has been effective in carving an essential role in the institutional landscape of Far North Queensland (FNQ). The organisation is delivering on nationally significant NRM outcomes as part of the initiatives to reduce the impacts of land use on the Great Barrier Reef.

Terrain NRM has a strong ethos of community participation and consulting widely with experts and partners for implementation of programs. Its strategic focus is shaped by its membership structure and a mission to act as an effective facilitator across the matrix of stakeholders and interests in the region. Terrain NRM primarily works to develop an effective coalition for action on priority NRM issues using a community development approach.

The organisation faced a confronting time in its early years when other organisations were confused or threatened by its presence. Terrain NRM has learned to be a facilitator, a resource and a coach for change. It is now moving into a more deliberative stage where experience is showing how to work with other agencies, how to get value for money from investments and how to drive and measure change on the ground. This is bearing fruit through success in implementation of the Reef Rescue initiative.

Value of Current Performance and Opportunities for the Future

The national survey and case studies have demonstrated that at a national level, regional NRM organizations are performing relatively well in supporting the achievement of Caring for Our Country Outcomes. However not every organization is performing to its potential and there are opportunities for improvements for all organisations.

This section examines the evidence about the underlying drivers of regional NRM performance and identifies how these insights could be translated into more effective outcomes for regional CSKE with the support and investment of the Australian Government.

Drivers of Regional NRM CSKE Performance

The findings of the survey and case studies suggest that the key drivers of performance for CSKE include:

- the relative capacity of the region, particularly basic resources of time and money
- the physical size of a region and its population density
- the institutional operating environment in each jurisdiction
- key relationships with stakeholder groups such as Landcare and local government, and
- the approach taken by a regional NRM organization through its strategy and structure.

The project has provided insights into the relative importance of these factors in current performance.

Relative capacity and the size and population characteristics of a region

Regional characteristics such as size and population density as well as the capacity of the regional NRM organisation in terms of staff and budget impact on the relative capacity of regional NRM organisations to deliver CSKE outcomes.

To examine the influence of these variables on the survey, staff responses were sorted into five categories determined by the relative size of the region and relative population density (*Table 3*).

Table 3: Relative capacity of regional organisation for size and population groups

Category (size of region/population density)	Number of staff interviews	Mean Full Time Equivalents	Mean Facilitators	Mean Budget (\$ mil)
1. Very small/very high	32	29.3	6.7	12.9
2. Small/high	23	57.0	13.1	7.8
3. Medium/medium	29	36.5	10.0	10.0
4. Large/low	17	38.0	3.8	6.9
5. Very large/very low	33	36.2	3.6	3.2
TOTAL	134	38.4	121.9	8.3

Reported staff capacity also aligned with this categorisation of regions according to size and population density. Organisations in small and very highly populated regions reported the lowest staff numbers, while those in the regions that would be somewhat larger but not include a major capital city had the highest.

The larger, less densely populated regions showed little difference in average staff numbers. However those in the large regions low populations regions had fewer NRM facilitators (perhaps related to smaller budgets or the difficulty of working efficiently in larger more dispersed regions), while category 3 regions had the most facilitators on staff. The large and sparsely populated category five regions had the lowest capacity across staff and budgetary measures.

This analysis of the relative capacity of regions identified some important trends in CSKE performance (from an internal staff perspective). These trends are described in Table 4 which presents the mean performance rating for questions and include many statistically significant differences in performance ratings. Higher means indicate relatively favourable responses compared to the expected mean.

Table 4: Mean CSKE performance ratings by staff compared across size and population density categories

Staff Survey Question (Range of responses, p)*	Category (area/population density)**				
	1	2	3	4	5
Q14 Integration of engagement strategy with planning & other strategies (1-6, .015)	4.38	4.72	4.73	3.73	3.80
Q21 Translation skill for technical NRM information (1-5, .031)	3.78	4.04	4.14	3.31	3.79
Q23 Decision-making adequately informed (1-6, .002)	5.03	5.00	5.28	4.24	4.64
Q24 Trust with stakeholders (1-5, .001)	4.03	3.87	4.18	3.29	3.64
Q25 Transparency with stakeholders (1-5, .003)	3.69	4.04	4.45	3.47	3.64
Q26 Inclusiveness of engagement process (1-5, .012)	4.13	4.30	4.75	3.88	4.27
Q30 NRM leadership (1-6, .009)	4.97	5.00	5.17	4.12	4.76
Q31 Contribution of community engagement to regional decision-making (1-5, .021)	3.58	3.96	4.00	3.18	3.67
Q32 Effectiveness of ATO engagement processes (1-5, .027)	3.32	3.30	3.86	3.13	3.82
Q37 Quality of community engagement process (1-5, .022)	4.03	3.96	4.14	3.35	3.87
Q39 Stakeholder demand for NRMO support (1-5 .019)	3.97	3.96	4.21	3.53	3.67
Q43 Capacity to update regional catchment plan or strategy (1-6, p=.023)	4.22	4.61	4.69	4.12	3.67

*NB: Some items were rated on scales from 1-5 and others on scales from 1-6.

**Categories as in Table 3. Red highlights indicate lower than expected mean ratings; green highlights indicate higher than expected mean ratings and no highlight indicates the result is not significantly different from the expectation.

The results indicate a general tendency for staff of NRMOs in category 4 (large area and low population density) to be rated less favourably than the staff of the other NRMOs (for all but one of items). Results for the staff of NRMOs in the largest regions with the lowest population density (i.e. the remote regions) were not consistent, but tended to be lower or in the middle of the score range. The only response amongst the higher mean scores related to the engagement of indigenous people which is necessarily an important focus of remote engagement strategies given the presence of large areas of indigenous land and communities in the remote areas of Australia.

Those in categories two and three (the more highly populated regions outside of capital cities) were consistently rated more favourably by their staff, suggesting a greater confidence in the CSKE approach exists in these regions. Staff of those NRMOs in the smaller and most urbanised regions exhibited a less consistent response, but on only one item were they at the low end of the range, on others being in the middle or high end of the distribution.

This integrated analysis of relative capacity suggests that it is useful to view the 56 regions as a series of groups with different resources, regional contexts and relative performance that align to the size of the region and population density. The underlying drivers for this relative performance are not immediately clear and may differ for each group. Available resources (staff and funding) are important however the drivers are more complex than this. Combining the results above with insights from the case studies suggests that there are other important strategic differences that drive performance, particularly for regions in remote areas or more highly populated areas.

In remote areas the challenges of distance and a much smaller pool of stakeholders means that individual relationships and direct influence are much more important and there is little choice about who to engage to seek on-ground change. In the highly urbanised regions local government relationships are much more important to CSKE success. These relationships are challenging as unlike community groups and landholders, NRM is usually a second order priority for local government compared to core concerns about 'roads and rates'.

In both the remote and urban context the 'standard' extension tools for NRM built on rural extension traditions and newer market based approaches are likely to be much less applicable than in smaller more populated rural and coastal regions where a relatively large group of landholders are the priority for CSKE efforts.

The Australian Government should recognise these differences in its policy approach and Program design and in building the capacity of the regions to deliver CSKE.

Institutional Environment – Policy, Programs and Regulation

Evolution in National Policy and Programs

The impact of Australian Government policy and program decision-making is the subject of significant discussion with regional NRM organisations and continues in the current Caring for Our Country review.

A fundamental shift in policy and program by the Australian Government occurred in 2007-08 from the former Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) approach. Driven by a desire to focus Australian Government investment more effectively towards national NRM policy priorities and the critique of the previous approach made by the Australian National Audit Office⁴, the Australian Government moved from an approach based on devolution of funding to regional NRM organisations for the pursuit of regional NRM priorities to investment in a set of national priorities utilising competitive processes.

The effect of this for regional organisations included a reduction in the scale of directly devolved funding for regional priorities and a reduction in the flexibility for regions in prioritising and allocating Australian Government resources. Under the Caring for Our Country approach regional NRM organisations may no longer be the key recipient of Australian Government NRM funding in

⁴ ANAO Audit Report No.21 2007–08 Regional Delivery Model for the Natural Heritage Trust and the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality

their region and other organisations working at local and landscape scales in the region have more direct access to Australian Government programs.

This has been a significant shift in role and influence for many regional NRM organisations. Being responsible for investment of a majority of funding in a region provided the regional NRM organisations with significant influence over regional activities and, for most of the stakeholders organisations in a region seeking funding for NRM and maintaining engagement with the regional NRM organisation was a must.

Many regions are likely to have found this transition to new program arrangements challenging and destabilising during the initial transition period. Case study participants discussed the significance of this change and the strategic challenge of maintaining influence in the region while no longer being the major funder of NRM activities. Under the new arrangements regions have had to work harder on relationship development and achieving influence through means other than funding. Coordination, advice and collaboration and being more proactive/responsive in engaging stakeholder organisations have become more important to success.

The results from the national survey examined in comparison to the previous 2008 survey suggests that regions have responded to this challenge and maintained a similar or slightly better quality of relationship with key stakeholder groups.

While it is difficult to assess objectively, the authors find it is reasonable to assume that this result can be linked to a combination of the following factors:

- Regional NRM organisations rising to the challenge of a different funding model and the need to compete for funding.
- Regional NRM organisations becoming more mature and established in local networks with many key relationships in place for 5-10 years.
- The maintenance of base level funding ensuring that change did not compromise the ability of regional NRM organisations to function effectively.

Importantly, most staff surveyed for this project indicated that they are comfortable with the consistency of the policy environment and the status of their relationship with the Australian Government.

Overall, the survey process has shown that while changes in NRM programs have been disruptive and challenging for regional NRM organisations, from a CSKE perspective the transition has been managed without significant long-term consequences for stakeholder relationships and regional capacity to provide advice and information. Changes in funding arrangements have challenged regions to become more sophisticated and efficient in delivering CSKE outcomes in their region.

Institutional differences between jurisdictions

A second important institutional driver of CSKE performance is the state government policy environment and the regional NRM organisational model employed by different jurisdictions. Major differences in context and approach arise from regional NRM organisations being either statutory organisations or community based and the extent to which their operations are separated from the resources and processes relevant state Departments. Differences in roles of organisations in regulatory processes and the extent to which regional NRM organisations in each state receive funding support from the jurisdiction also influence the operating environment for regional NRM.

Table 5 provides a summary of the nature of the organisational models used in each jurisdiction and whether there is currently a process of organisational transition in play which may be influencing stakeholder relationship status.

Table 5: Overview of regional NRM organisation models

Jurisdiction	Statutory	Regulatory Role*	Change in Progress
New South Wales	Yes, separate from agency	Property Vegetation Planning	No
Victoria	Yes, part of agency	Waterway management and river health	<i>Securing our Natural Future</i> (Institutional change process, halted by change of government)
Queensland	No	N/A	No
Western Australia	No	N/A	No
South Australia	Yes, separate from agency	No	<i>Regional Integration in Progress</i> (Institutional change process)
Tasmania	Yes, separate from agency	No	No
Northern Territory	No	N/A	No
Australian Capital Territory	No	N/A	No

*In addition to regional planning and general NRM responsibilities

A series of findings from the national survey suggest that some differences exist in the current quality of stakeholder relationships and CSKE performance between the jurisdictions (Table 6).

While no indicator mean for any state fell below a moderate rating (3), the data shows that performance does vary between states. This confirms that (as would be expected) the jurisdiction policy environment can have an important influence on regional CSKE performance. The trends described in this area of the analysis are not as strong as those related to relative capacity discussed above.

NSW had no relationship indicators where stakeholders rated them below the national average. NSW exhibited an above average performance in encouraging stakeholders to invest, developing trust and being an inclusive and transparent partner in NRM. Queensland is the next highest performing jurisdiction, with relatively higher ratings for cooperation, being well informed about stakeholder perspectives and providing leadership in the region. However, stakeholders were less confident of their ability to help them understand NRM issues than in other states.

South Australian regional NRM organisations performed most poorly relative to other jurisdictions with below average ratings across many of the relationship indicators. The exception to this related to assisting stakeholders to understand NRM issues and being helpful during engagement with stakeholders.

Western Australia and Victoria did not have any areas of above average performance. Victoria was perceived as being less helpful; having a relatively lower influence in encouraging investment and lower levels of agreement that adequate engagement is occurring. Western Australia performed less well in assisting stakeholders to understand NRM issues, helpfulness in providing services to stakeholders, cooperation, leadership and engagement adequacy.

Table 6: Comparison of mean performance ratings of regional NRM performance (stakeholder survey)

Relationship Indicator	National	NSW**	VIC**	QLD**	SA**	WA**
Importance of regional NRM organisation in identifying and understanding the regional NRM issues stakeholder organisations should get involved in trying to solve*	3.89	4.07	3.9	3.66	4.2	3.68
Importance of regional NRM organisation in developing effective solutions to regional NRM problems*	4.01	4.14	4.02	3.93	4.04	3.87
How much help has the regional NRM organisation and its staff been in solving NRM issues **	3.5	3.6	3.3	3.53	3.67	3.24
Has engagement with the regional NRM organisation encouraged you to invest more money, time, effort and resources in solving regional NRM issues?*	3.35	3.55	3.15	3.28	3.17	3.37
Your organisation's knowledge and understanding of regional NRM processes and programs undertaken by the regional body*	3.56	3.66	3.69	3.45	3.52	3.53
Level of trust between your organisation and the regional body in the engagement process*	3.96	4.13	3.89	3.97	3.7	3.86
Level of transparency in the engagement and decision-making processes between your organisation and the regional body*	3.71	3.88	3.71	3.65	3.29	3.75
Willingness of the regional body to be inclusive in the engagement process has been*	3.85	4.07	3.75	3.87	3.35	3.88
Level of cooperation amongst stakeholders, landholders and community in the engagement process*	3.58	3.67	3.55	3.76	3.17	3.49
Level of ongoing commitment by the regional body to maintaining the relationship with your organisation*	3.91	4.04	3.86	3.94	3.61	3.92
In the last 12 months the regional body has initiated or supported sufficient activities for community engagement***	4.5	4.59	4.38	4.61	4.36	4.35
In the last 12 months the level of participation by stakeholders, landholders and the community in these activities has mostly been*	3.37	3.49	3.35	3.44	3.17	3.21
When the regional body makes important NRM planning and investment decisions, would you say it is adequately informed by different sectors, stakeholders and interest groups***	4.21	4.28	4.1	4.48	3.87	4.13
"Within this region, the regional body provides leadership in relation to NRM"***	3.51	3.59	3.48	3.65	3.17	3.45
To what extent has the regional body listened to or drawn on the expertise and local knowledge of your organisation in developing and implementing its NRM plans and activities*	4.51	4.6	4.52	4.7	4.34	4.27

*Rating scale: (5- High, 1-Low); ** Rating scale: (1- little, 5- highly); Rating scale: (5 -strongly agree, 1- strongly disagree)

**Colours indicate above and below average performance, differences are not necessarily statistically significant

The results affirm the importance of state government relationships to regional NRM organisation performance. Staff in the states whose stakeholder performance ratings were weaker on relationship measures (*Table 6*) were more likely to identify a less effective relationship with state government. This link was most pronounced for Western Australia and South Australia where only 54% and 59% of staff agreed that they had an effective relationship with the state government compared to a national average of 80%.

Other factors in the approach taken by different states are also important for understanding the likely causes of these different levels of performance. For example, the staff survey for Victorian CMA's suggests that there is a reliance on more formal approaches to engagement (characterised by a use of committees) compared to other states. Victorian CMAs provided a copy of an October 2010 review of the Community Reference Committees (CRCs) to the project team⁵. This review affirms that CRCs are the key engagement mechanism used by all Victorian CMAs and also suggests that:

- engagement activities with less reliance on the use of explicit structures and greater use of targeted processes may be required to reach a broader range of people and community sectors, and
- committees need to be part of a whole of community engagement process.

Staff in Victoria were also more likely (44% compared to the national average of 28%) to identify that less than half of their staff had direct responsibility for stakeholder engagement. Staff of Victoria CMAs were also the least likely to agree that their stakeholder engagement strategy guides decision-making.

The implication of these findings is that the institutional model and operational environment for regional NRM organisations affects regional CSKE. In particular, the ability of regional NRM organisation's to form and maintain the strong relationships with stakeholder organisations may vary depending on the context within a jurisdiction. Changes of significance in state government funding or policy have the potential to substantially influence the impact of Australian Government Programs.

However, the results do not suggest that fundamental problems exist in any state or that a statutory or community model is necessarily more effective for developing relationships with stakeholders. The survey identified variants of both models in both categories as performing relatively well and relatively poorly compared to other states. This suggests that the relative capacity of a region and the implementation of CKSE approaches by individual organisations is a more important driver of performance.

The results also indicate that the history of regional NRM organisations and the relationship with state agencies including their statutory responsibilities, provision of guidance for operations and funding can influence how regional NRM organisations have approached stakeholder engagement. Processes of change at a state level may also compromise or enhance engagement and relationships with stakeholders. These factors should be taken into account in investing and setting performance expectations for regional NRM in the different jurisdictions.

⁵ The Regional Development Company Pty Ltd, 2010 Review of Community Reference Committee Models for Natural Resource Management Boards in Victoria: Recommendations Report Department of Sustainability and Environment Melbourne

Key Stakeholder Organisation Relationships

A common challenge for regional NRM organisations in implementing CSKE strategy is achieving a positive influence with landholders and managers. As well as interaction directly with private land managers (which was not directly measured in this study), three important organizational relationships are a common foundation for achieving influence in the way natural resources are managed in a region. This includes relationships with:

- Landcare groups
- other community organisations, and
- local Government.

The status of each of these relationships is described below.

Relationships between Regional NRM Organisations and Landcare

Landcare organizations are an important contributor to landholder engagement and practical on-ground NRM change. Seventy two Landcare groups contributed to the stakeholder survey.

Landcare groups are important in the success of regional CSKE because of their traditional focus on NRM within the context of sustainable agriculture. The national survey confirms this understanding of their role in NRM. The survey results show that Landcare groups are:

- significantly more likely to identify NRM as the main priority for their organization (alongside community and environmental groups)
- more likely than other stakeholder organizations (alongside primary producer and organisations) to nominate sustainable agriculture/land management as one of the main NRM issues they are focused on addressing, and
- significantly more likely (alongside primary producer organizations) to nominate a practical land management issue as the area in which knowledge and information had recently influenced their role in NRM.

Although the Landcare movement has broadened its focus to include urban and coastal NRM issues, Landcare group's traditional membership includes landholders, and their NRM focus is closely aligned to these groups. Landholders and farmers were identified by staff in the national survey as the groups of stakeholders which regional NRM's are currently most focused on improving engagement. Alliances and partnerships with Landcare are one way of seeking greater engagement and influence with landholders.

The survey indicates that Landcare organisations are engaging closely and productively with regional NRM organisations. Landcare groups have similar types of relationships to other stakeholders involved in the survey in terms of advice sought, but are more inclined to be an ad hoc contributor, funding recipient and beneficiary of advice than other groups (Figure 11).

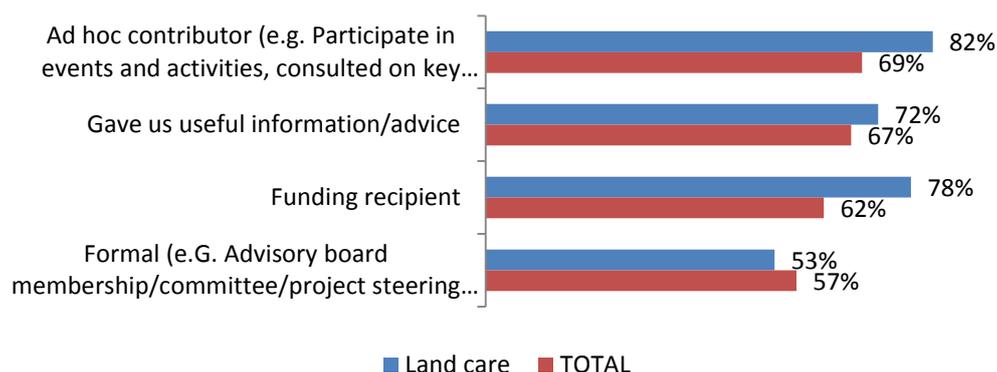


Figure 11: Relationships between Landcare groups and regional NRM organisations

July 2011

Regional NRM organizations are important to Landcare group success. Three quarters (75%) of Landcare groups identified that they sourced knowledge and skills from their regional organization. 38% of Landcare groups identified that their regional NRM organization was their main source of information and most important source of knowledge and skills. This was much higher than any other source of information identified by Landcare groups and suggests that regional NRM organizations are fundamental to Landcare operations. This is an important result given the investment in regional Landcare facilitators made by the Australian Government to facilitate this engagement and support.

In common with the broader sample of organizations, relationships between Landcare groups and regional NRM organisations are good. No relationship rating across the 15 indicators fell below a mean score of 3 (moderate to moderately-high performance rating), indicating that for all measures, Landcare groups are generally positive about their relationship with the regional NRM organization.

However, for most measures the ratings of regional NRM performance were slightly lower than the mean for the whole sample. In particular, Landcare groups were somewhat less positive about regional NRM organisations leadership, inclusiveness and whether there was sufficient community engagement being undertaken by the regional NRM organization. While none of these results were statistically significant, this suggests that Landcare organisations may see slightly more room for improvement in regional NRM organisations role in leading collaborative regional change than others who participated in the survey process.

The case studies demonstrate that while regions are generally closely engaged with Landcare groups, this is not a relationship that is universally important in every region. The importance of Landcare will depend on the history and current strength of Landcare groups in a region and the importance of the stakeholders who participate in Landcare group activities to achieving regional NRM priority outcomes.

Collaborations are common between Landcare and regional NRM organizations. 46% of Landcare respondents indicated that they had applied for Caring for Our Country funding in partnership with the region. However, while Landcare groups at the community level are important collaborators for regional NRM organizations, regional and state level Landcare organizations are generally a competitor for funding from Caring for Our Country and for influence with landholders and volunteers.

Overall the survey suggests that regional NRM organizations are engaging and informing Landcare organisations. They are forming partnerships in delivering Caring for Our Country outcomes and helping Landcare groups improve their NRM practice.

Relationships between Regional NRM Organisations and other Community Organisations

Landcare groups are not alone in bringing people together to voluntarily participate in NRM. A diversity of other local and environmental organizations play an important role in motivating and directing volunteer based NRM. Supporting the work of these groups is one way in which regional NRM organisations can achieve on-ground change, particularly in urban and coastal areas.

110 of these community organizations participated in the national stakeholder survey. These organizations were significantly more likely than other stakeholder groups (with the exception of Landcare groups) to indicate that they are focused on NRM issues as their main priority.

The respondents involved in the survey most commonly identified that their organization had a focus on biodiversity (78%). A large proportion also focused on sustainable land management (49%), water (39%), coastal (26%) and urban NRM issues (28%). This indicates that community organizations make a diverse contribution to regional NRM issues depending on the local situation and history of community action on NRM issues.

In common with other stakeholder organizations, regional NRM organizations are an important source of skills and advice for community groups. 72% of community groups identify them as an important source. Community groups were most likely to nominate their regional NRM organization as their most important source of knowledge and skills for understanding NRM issues (26%) and improving their NRM practice (36%).

The indicators of relationships with community organisations are also positive with all relationship indicators achieving a mean rating of moderate or better. Indicator means were similar to the broader sample except in relation to transparency where community organisations rated regional NRM performance slightly lower than other stakeholders (this was not a statistically significant difference). 42% of community organisations had sought Caring for Our Country funding in collaboration with the regional NRM organization.

Relationships between Regional NRM Organisations and Local Government

Local governments are an important manager of publicly owned land and resources and also have a local regulatory role which influences the sustainability of land use and management. In highly urbanized regions, local government rather than private landholders may be the key manager of natural resources and as a result are the main target for collaborations to achieve resource management change.

Fifty-eight local governments participated in the stakeholder survey. Local government interviewees were the least likely of any stakeholder group to indicate that NRM was the main focus of their organization. Local government respondents mostly identified that NRM was an 'important focus of the organisation' (41% of respondents) or a second rank priority (40%). Local government were the most likely to identify a focus on urban sustainability (57%) and biodiversity conservation/vegetation management (86%).

The national survey results suggest that local government and regional NRM organizations are engaged in regional NRM and that regional NRM organisations are providing CSKE support to local governments. Amongst a diversity of information sources, local government interviewees were most likely to identify that the regional NRM organization as the most important source of information for understanding NRM issues (36%) and for improving NRM practice (40%).

For local governments the indicators of relationships are also positive - with all relationship indicators achieving a mean rating of moderate or better. Indicator means were similar to the broader sample for all ratings. 74% of local governments had sought Caring for Our Country funding in collaboration with the regional NRM organization, suggesting a high level of cooperation in seeking funding compared to other stakeholder organisations.

The case studies indicate that formal forums for engagement such as regional local government groups or committees are often utilized by regional NRM organizations in engaging with local governments. The national survey supports this observation with 67% of local governments identifying a formal relationship with the region through participating in committees and other groups.

While relationships appear to be strong there is a significant challenge in achieving influence with local governments given that NRM is one of many competing priorities. The typical extension approaches used in NRM may not be relevant to achieving influence with local government staff and so other skills and approaches are needed. As the case studies identify, this relationship will be more or less important for a region depending on the level of urbanization and specific regional priorities.

Organisation Strategy, Structure and Function

Both the national survey and the case studies have demonstrated that the performance of regional NRM organisations in relation to CSKE and the confidence of staff about their organisation's performance is closely related to the organisations strategy, structure and function.

The organisational model for CSKE described in Figure 2 notes five areas of interest for understanding organisational performance:

- the development of strategy that:
 - reflects stakeholder context, the policy environment and regional NRM priorities, and
 - prioritises engagement approaches to suit specific goals and aspirations for stakeholder influence
- the structure and funding of an organisation
- staff capacity
- implementation processes, and
- monitoring of performance against the strategy to facilitate organisational learning.

A documented organisational strategy for CSKE provides a foundation for the approach, prioritisation of effort and across organisational integration of CSKE efforts into planning and programs. 27% of staff respondents indicated that their organisation either did not have a strategy or they were unsure as to whether a strategy existed. This group rated the quality and effectiveness of their community engagement and their organisations level of commitment, transparency and inclusiveness much lower than staff who were working with the support of an engagement strategy.

The capacity and ability of staff to translate technical information for use by a diversity of stakeholders is also important to CSKE success in regional NRM organisations. Staff were more confident about the performance of their organisation in developing and maintaining good relationships and influence with stakeholders (*Figure 12*) if they strongly agreed that their organisation had:

- the right skill sets for CSKE activities,
- a high level of technical translation skills, and/or
- a proper evaluation process.

This trend applied across the relationship measures with the strongest difference between ratings occurring for commitment trust transparency effective community engagement stakeholder participation, and demand for information and advisory services.

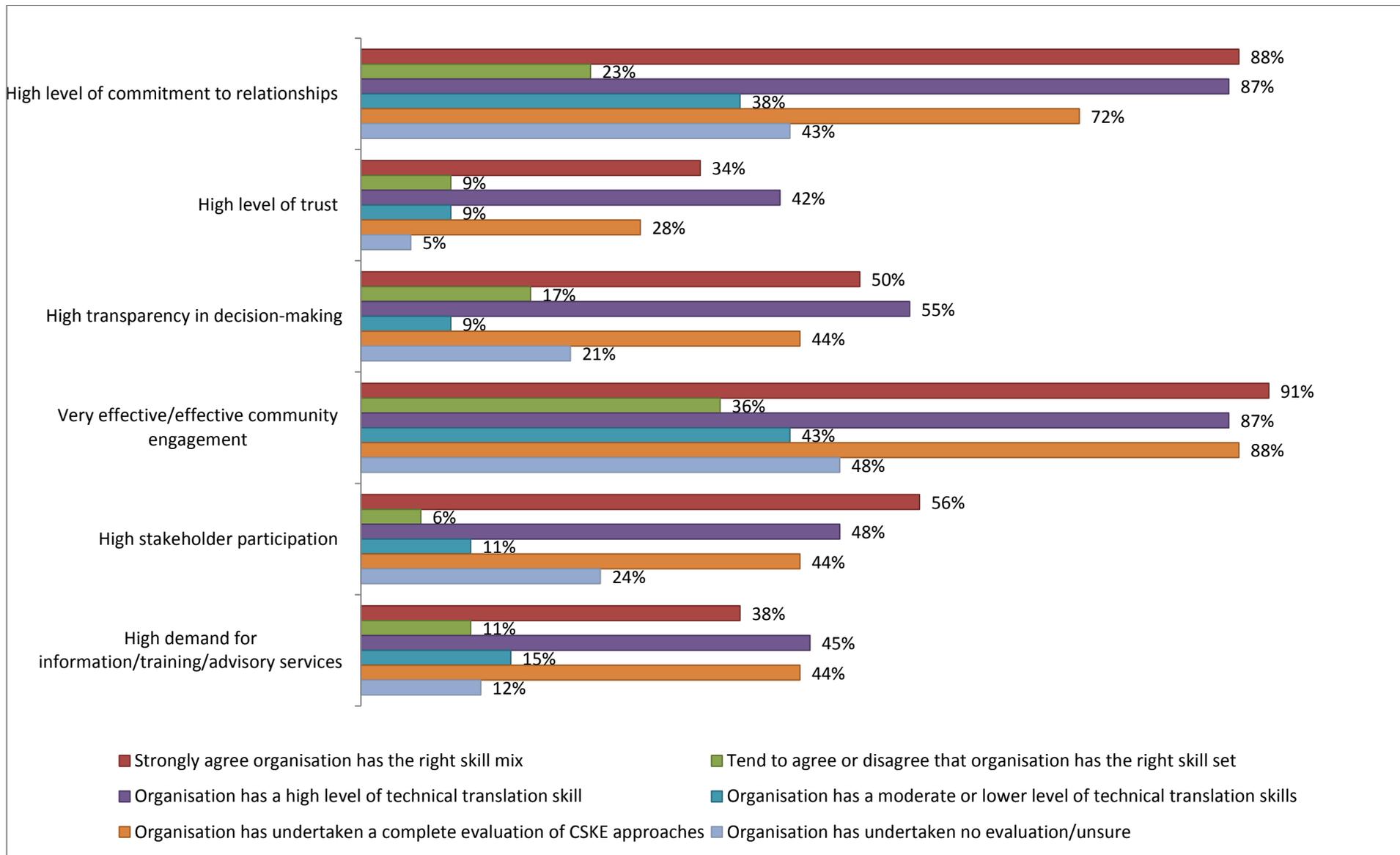


Figure 12: Links between staff perceptions of organisational capability and performance and status of CSKE and stakeholder relationships

The results suggest a relationship between staff confidence and perception of the impact that regional NRM organisations are having in CSKE - which is related to the approach taken by that organisation. Given the correlation between staff and stakeholder relationship perspectives on performance identified in the companion national survey report, these perspectives should be seen as a reflection of actual performance as measured by the stakeholder survey.

The results provide strong indicators of the reasons for different performance within the sample of regional organisations. The consistency of the results indicates that the quality and sophistication of organisational approach and strategy are crucial to the impact of CSKE initiatives and the quality of relationships with stakeholders. The results also indicate that there are groups of regional NRM organisations within the sample that are operating with much stronger levels of sophistication and success compared to others who have not developed their organisational approach sufficiently.

This result, alongside the relative capacity analysis, is the most important for reviewing and developing future policy approaches. While jurisdiction, size of an organisation, relationships with groups such as Landcare or local government can influence the level of success an organisation, the research indicates that the quality of organisational strategy and approach is a more important driver of performance. The ability of the Australian Government and regional NRM organisations to work in partnership to improve strategic alignment and refine CSKE approaches will be essential if future investment outcomes are to be enhanced.

Enhancing the Value of Australian Government - Regional NRM Organisation Partnerships for CSKE Outcomes

Value of Regional NRM Partnerships

The Australian Government has created an enduring asset in regional NRM organizations through nearly ten years of support and investment. In supporting regional NRM organisations with baseline funding, the Australian Government is securing three assets that can be harnessed in the achievement of national policy and Program outcomes:

1. Regional level resource management planning and prioritisation which complements national plans and priorities and provides coherence for regional activities.
2. A specialist and strategically focussed NRM organisation with staff and other resources leading regional level change.
3. A suite of relationships between the regional NRM organisations and local NRM organisations and land managers that can be leveraged to translate national priorities and investment into on-ground change.

These assets for future policy and NRM change are an important legacy of the reform and investment made through the NHT and NAP initiatives to establish the nation-wide regional NRM system.

The successful transition to Caring for Our Country means that the Australian Government has been able to significantly alter arrangements from the NHT and NAP initiatives while avoiding substantially compromising the underlying asset and capability that regions offer for the achievement of national NRM policy objectives.

The case studies identify some examples of the strategic value of this approach where a region is performing well as an organization and in its CSKE strategy and implementation. For example, the Namoi CMA in partnership with Caring for Our Country has been able to deliver targeted Brigalow conservation activities on private land. Their capability is based on their detailed knowledge of where Brigalow is located in the catchment and having staff on board who can identify who is the owner/manager of each piece of important vegetation and draw on their landholder relationships to approach these individuals and seek their involvement in conservation activities.

Alongside this focused on-ground approach, Namoi CMA is focused on longer term change. Leveraging its local knowledge, Namoi CMA recognizes the existence of a traditional view that sees Brigalow as a weed to be removed. Namoi CMA is taking broader steps to challenge this view and change the perception of the species over time. In this way national priorities are translated into a strategic regional action plan that is capable of both short and long-term impacts.

The example of the partnership for better management of the Botany Bay catchment in Sydney is another which exemplifies the value of regional NRM CSKE capabilities. In this example the CMA is leveraging relationships with local government.

Without the regional system in place and working well, the strategic risks for achievement of national NRM policy goals described above are more likely to be realised. As discussed above, these risks include:

1. The risk that policy success at a landscape level will be undermined by insufficient voluntary action amongst the diffuse groups who participate in NRM.
2. The risk that government investment is unable to leverage the required co-investment by organisations and individuals to achieve landscape scale change.

In addition, given the opportunities for further improvement in regional performance and national region partnership under Caring for Our Country, further outcomes and efficiencies can be leveraged from regional partnerships.

Improving the Effectiveness of National-Regional NRM Partnerships

Recognising the Challenge for Regional NRM Organisations

To be successful, regional NRM organisations need to understand their partners and target audiences as well as the NRM issues they are trying to address. This includes understanding the latest scientific information, the social and institutional profile of their community, the values and aspirations of those they wish to influence in the community, knowledge levels and need for capacity building.

Regional NRM organisations act as an information hub, regional facilitator and an enabler for capacity building and in regional investment programs. This can be a tall order, especially in complex stakeholder landscapes such as the highly urbanised regions. The process of community engagement is therefore critical at the operational and governance levels of the organisation.

The results of the research suggest that while performance at a national level is strong, there is variability across the national-regional partnership in terms of knowledge levels, capacity to engage and long-term commitment to the effort to drive change in NRM.

The capacity to evaluate scientific information and prioritise issues in ways that are meaningful to the landscape can also be variable. There is a risk that naive plans can arise if the regional NRM organisation is not in a position of orchestrating the planning and delivery process from a meaningful regional leadership position.

At the same time, the NRM bodies have limited core funding, are required to apply for grants for programs (that may not succeed in gaining funds), while maintaining relationships in anticipation of working together and seeking to leverage funds available and gain co-investment at all levels.

Enhancing the Program Partnership

The review has demonstrated that from the perspective of CSKE outcomes and baseline funding, the Commonwealth is achieving a good level of outcomes from its investment. The level of performance being achieved by regional NRM organisations as a group indicates that no fundamental change is necessary to ameliorate serious systemic performance issues.

The task then for the Commonwealth is how to enhance its role as a sophisticated investor in regional NRM organisations and support and drive better organisational performance. The

different of regional priorities and relative organisational capacity means that a prescriptive approach to organisational strategy is not a viable way in which to further develop organisational performance.

Providing clear and deliberate incentives for performance to each regional NRM organisation is an important part of facilitating enhanced performance. The incentive structures relevant to the national regional partnership are linked to the ways in which the Australian Government influences CSKE performance as described in Figure 2. These include:

- the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement associated with baseline funding allocations
- the requirement that organisations compete for funding for CSKE initiatives not resourced by baseline funding
- the provision and oversight of facilitator positions
- the need for alignment between regional and national CSKE priorities

It was outside of the scope of this project to review the way in which the Australian Government currently manages these relationships and exercises influence on regional NRM organisations under current contractual and associated Monitoring Evaluation Reporting Improvement frameworks. However, based on the findings of the review it is recommended that the Australian Government consider how these structures can be further developed to monitor and promote the development and implementation of good practice organisational approaches.

The findings also suggest that there are regions which are struggling more than others with developing and implementing good strategy. In particular, approaches that work in more sparsely populated and larger regions and in very densely populated areas are likely to differ from those being applied in other regional contexts. There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to look at ways in which the performance of regions can be improved through sharing of information and a focus on what strong organisational strategy means for organisations working in these contexts.

Recommendations

That the Australian Government:

- *review the incentive structures in the national-regional partnership against the information about drivers of CSKE performance to identify ways to encourage continuous improvement amongst regional NRM organisations*
- *develop and implement a CSKE capacity building strategy for regional NRM organisations with a focus on those operating either in remote areas or urban environments*

Appendix: About the National Survey

Methodology and Sample Description

Overview

Two separate surveys were conducted to develop an understanding of regional CSKE; one survey interviewed stakeholder organisations involved in NRM and the other interviewed key staff involved in CSKE within regional NRM organisations. In total 652 people participated in the survey including 512 stakeholders and 147 staff.

The stakeholder sample is segmented into categories based on state, the focus of the organisation, the priority of NRM within the organisation and the relationship between the regional organisation and levels of funding provided.

Copies of the survey questionnaires are provided in the appendix.

To measure the progress of CSKE against its five year outcomes, a national survey was conducted to collect a 'snapshot' of data that describes key attributes of the regional NRM system as it relates to CSKE issues.

Interview results combine factual information and expert individual perspectives on the effectiveness of CSKE activities at a regional level. Interviews were conducted using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) methodology. All interviews were conducted according to the international standard for market and social research (ISO20252).

The survey approach has been adapted from earlier work completed by the Department in 2007⁶. This approach enables a level of continuity, facilitating benchmarking of results from earlier work, while evolving and focussing the survey to align with the context of a new Program structure and current policy issues.

The survey involved interviewing two key groups of people:

- staff from regional NRM organisations, and
- stakeholder organisations from within each region.

The approach taken with each group is described below.

⁶ Fenton M and Rickert A (2008) A national baseline of the social and institutional foundations of natural resource management programs, NLWRA, Canberra.

Staff Interviews

Each regional NRM organisation was invited to participate in the survey.

Key staff from regional organisations were targeted to gather the perspectives of the people leading CSKE activities at a regional level. Interviews lasting around 45 minutes were sought from up to four staff members from each participating organisation.

As in previous surveys, the text of the questionnaire was emailed to respondents, and they were encouraged to review the questions and consider their answers. Some chose to submit their responses as self-completed questionnaires by email or fax, while others went through the questionnaire with an interviewer by telephone. All had a copy of the questionnaire during the interview, and questions or reply options were only read out where required to clarify the response. Telephone interviews typically took around 20-30 minutes. Some respondents who self-completed reported they spent over an hour completing the questionnaire.

In particular, interviews were sought from individuals responsible for setting the NRM organisation's strategic direction, implementing CSKE programs and activities and monitoring its performance. Organisations were given the opportunity to nominate three staff participants in addition to the CEO.

Some nominated more than four (up to 16 for one region) while others were only able to nominate 2 or 3 due to the small number of staff in the organisation. Some CEOs completed the questionnaire but did not nominate staff or staff did not complete the survey within the field work time frame. For a small number 5 or 6 questionnaires were completed as faxed and emailed completed surveys were received while others were being completed by telephone.

The interviews provided a structured evaluation of the status of CSKE within the organisation based on the knowledge, judgments and perspectives of staff. Questions were framed to gather information about:

- the types of stakeholders that the NRM body engages with;
- how the organisation engages with stakeholders;
- the internal capacity and implementation of strategies;
- the perceived successes and challenges experienced by the organisation in achieving CKSE; and
- the role of state and federal government.

A copy of the questionnaire is provided in the Appendix of the companion National Survey Report for reference.

Stakeholder Interviews

The stakeholder survey consisted of interviews with up to 14 organisations involved in NRM within each participating region.

The survey particularly targeted how the regional organisations engage with and develop the knowledge and skills of organisations working 'on the ground' in NRM. Organisations included community groups, Landcare groups, local councils, businesses and other organisations that are particularly influential in NRM in their respective regions. Other stakeholders that the organisation is responsible to (such as governments and politicians) were not a priority for the survey unless there was a tangible link to practical NRM, for example through outcomes or activities.

Stakeholder contacts were drawn from:

- a list of the organizations that applied for funding under Caring for Our Country
- lists of up to 25 nominations from regional NRM organizations and
- additional local contacts provided by stakeholders themselves in response to the final survey question:
 - Who else would you recommend we contact for their views about the activities of the regional body and its relationships with others concerned about NRM in this region?

The sample includes a mixture of people identified by the regional NRM organisation and sourced independently by the review team. This diversity of sources for stakeholder contacts ensures that the national stakeholder sample is balanced and representative of the groups involved in Caring for Our Country and regional NRM.

The stakeholder questionnaire sought to understand:

- the importance of knowledge and skill development to stakeholder NRM practice
- key sources and formats of information and skills
- the relative influence of different types and sources of information on their NRM practice
- recent examples where knowledge and skills have supported practice improvement
- the nature of the relationship they hold with regional NRM organizations
- the benefits of regional NRM organization relationships, and
- stakeholder involvement in developing and implementing regional NRM strategies and activities in their region.

A copy of the stakeholder interview questionnaire is provided in the Appendix. It was found that taking stakeholders through the questions in a traditional telephone interview styles took around half an hour. To streamline data collection and improve data quality, all stakeholders who consented to interview were provided with a copy of the questionnaire to review before being interviewed and had the copy to hand during the interview. As with NRM staff, questions or response options were only read out as required to clarify which response was intended.

Summary of Responses

Interviews were conducted in 52 of the 56 NRM regions across Australia. 43 regional NRM organisations provided contacts and completed staff interviews. All regions were provided with the opportunity to participate. The majority of the 13 regions who did not directly participate in the review agreed to participate but did not provide information in time to be included in the survey. The two Cape York organisations were excluded at their request based on the process not being applicable to their situation.

In total, of the 659 people who participated in the survey, 512 were stakeholders and 147 staff. Table 7 provides an overview of the sample by state. A more detailed profile of each of the samples is provided below.

Table 7: Distribution of the survey sample by state

	Staff Interviews	% of sample	Stakeholder Interviews	% of sample
NSW	38	26	146	30
VIC	25	17	84	16
QLD	32	26	97	19
SA	17	12	71	14
WA	24	16	78	15
TAS	5*	3	23	4
ACT	3*	2	6*	1
NT	3*	2	7*	1
Total	147	100	512	100

*NB: The small sample sizes for these groups means that this data has not been reported separately to the national average. Figures for ACT and NT responses are not reported and Tasmanian results are only reported for the stakeholder survey.

Characteristics of the Staff Sample

Staff from 43 regions were interviewed. From these regions, a total of 147 staff were interviewed from the organisations including 31 CEOs and 116 other staff. Table 7 shows the distribution of respondents by state, with NSW making the largest contribution.

Figure 13 provides the distribution of respondents according to their job title. Organisations were asked to nominate three staff in addition to the CEO who held key responsibility for CSKE activities. This distribution indicates that a diversity of people from regional NRM organisations are involved in CSKE. Program Managers form the largest group, followed by staff involved with responsibility for communication, information or education and catchment coordinators.

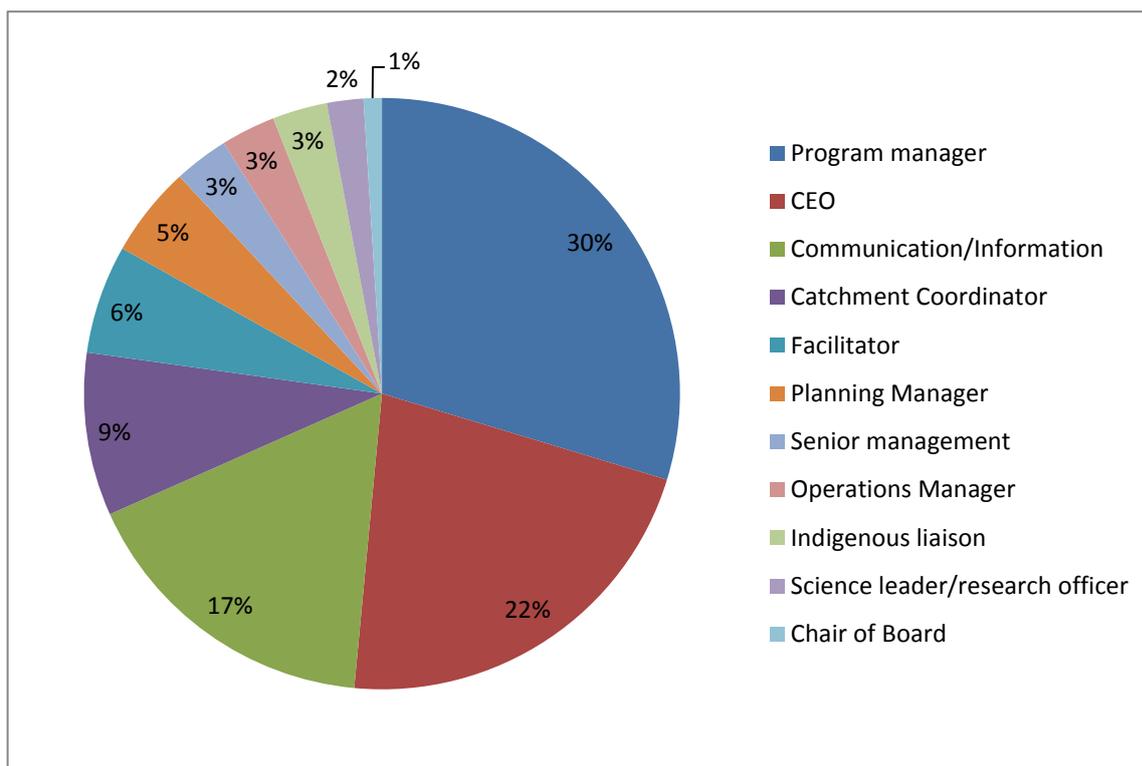


Figure 13: Overview of the staff sample, according to job title

Characteristics and Analysis of the Stakeholder Sample

Distribution by State

Stakeholders were drawn from all States and Territories (see *Table 7*). NSW provided the largest response with 146 participants, with comparable contributions other larger states, with each contributing between 70 and 100 participants. These samples provide a useful basis for identifying trends and differences between stakeholders according to the state they are in.

With only 3 regions, Tasmania contributed 23 responses. This provides a good indication of current trends, and perspectives. The two territories, the ACT and the Northern Territory, produced 6 and 7 responses respectively. These responses do not provide a sufficient sample to accurately infer differences compared to other states but ensure a proportionate contribution from these single region jurisdictions to the national sample.

Distribution of the Sample According to Stakeholder Type

The stakeholder sample includes a diverse selection of organisations who are involved in NRM at the regional level.

Figure 14 provides a breakdown of the sample on the basis of organisation type based on the nominations made by respondents themselves. The largest proportions of respondents come from community groups at 22% of the sample. This includes people from Coastcare and other NRM focussed organisations. Landcare organisations, environmental representative organisations, local councils and farmer's organisations also contributed between 10-15% of responses. The remaining groups provide the survey with a snapshot of the diversity of organisations engaged in regional NRM.

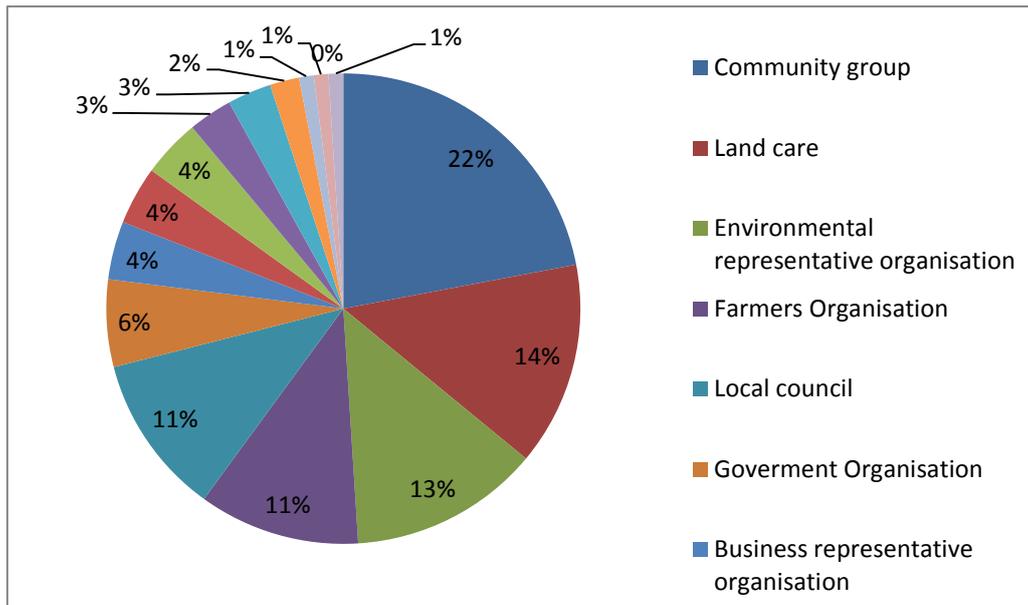


Figure 14: Distribution of stakeholder responses according to the type of organisation

NRM Focus of Participating Organisations

Stakeholders were asked about the extent to which NRM was the key focus of their organisation. 77% of those surveyed stated that NRM issues were an important focus of the organisation, whilst 23% state that NRM issues were a lower priority area. Figure 15 shows a further breakdown of responses according to the significance of NRM for their organisation.

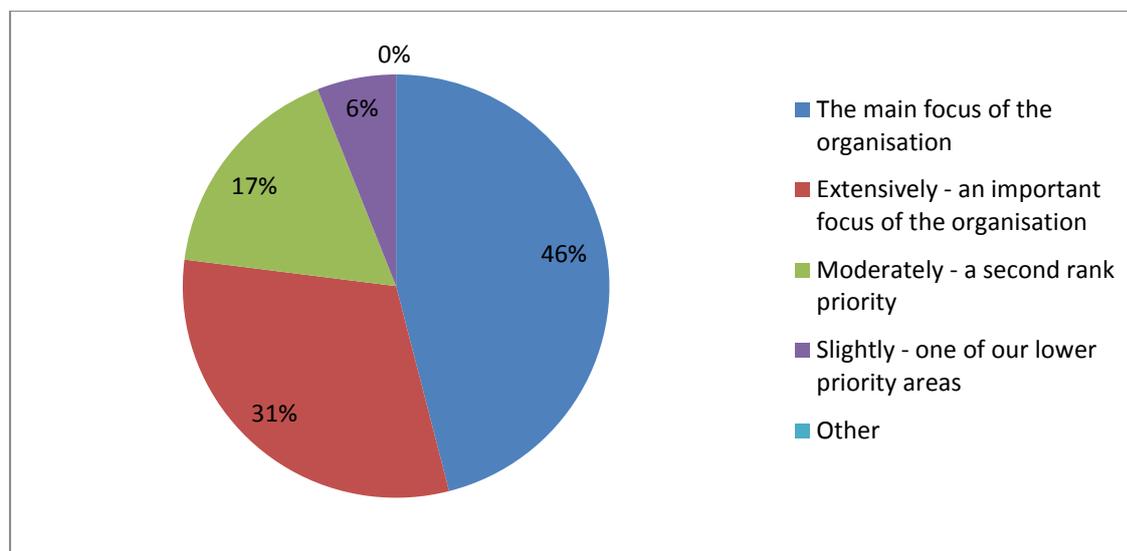


Figure 15: Significance of NRM for stakeholder organisations

The groups that most commonly identified that NRM was their main focus included Landcare groups (78%), other community groups (70%) and environmental representative organisations (67%). Primary producer organisations, business groups, indigenous groups and other government organisations mostly saw NRM as an important

focus for their organisations while local government was the least likely to nominate NRM as a main focus (7%) with 40% describing NRM as a second rank priority for their organisation.

NRM Issues

Stakeholders were asked to identify the selection of NRM issues that they were mostly involved in managing. At a national level, biodiversity conservation and sustainable land management were the two most significant focuses for NRM organisations. Respondents were nearly twice as likely to nominate these issues as the focus of the NRM compared to inland water management, coastal and marine management or urban conservation (Figure 16).

A diverse range of other NRM issues significant to the organisations was stated, including community education, renewable energy and mining, salinity, food security, waste management and heritage, with each mentioned by only a small proportion of the respondents (4%).

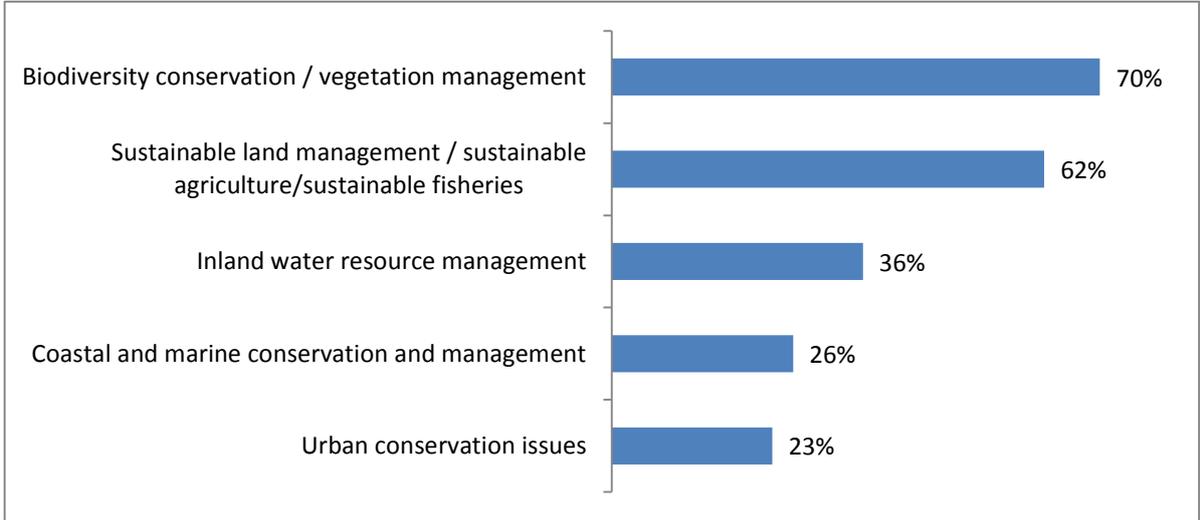


Figure 16: Stakeholder organisation NRM focus

Relationship with the regional NRM organisation

Stakeholders identified four key ways in which they maintain a relationship with their regional NRM organisation (Figure 17). Most common was an ad hoc contribution and engagement in regional activities as well as benefiting from information and advice, engagement and advice being a key part of the relationship. Receiving funding and participating in formal engagement activities (such as advisory boards) were also important ways in which the stakeholders involved in the survey were involved with the regional organisation.

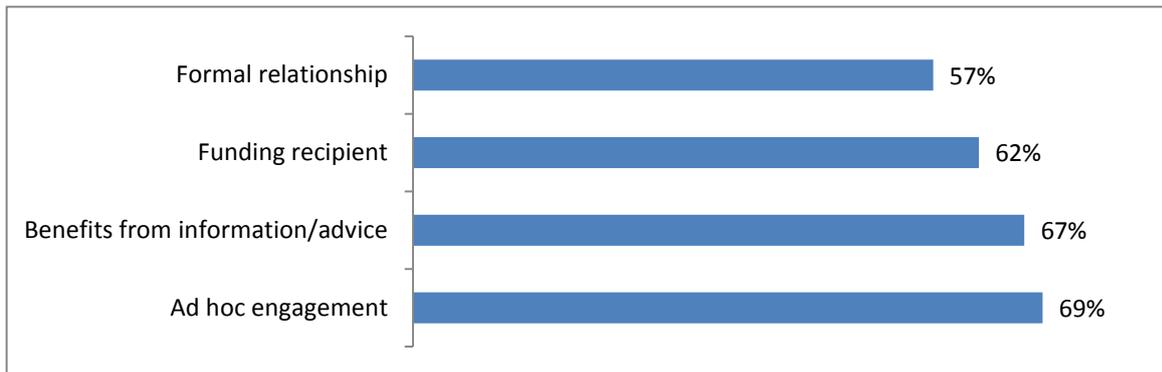


Figure 17: Nature of stakeholder relationships with their regional NRM organisation

Funding

The survey confirms the importance of Caring for Our Country funding to the operation of natural resource management at a regional level (*Figure 18*). Across the sample, 68% of the stakeholders interviewed reported they had sought funding from the program. Stakeholders from metropolitan regions were less likely to have sought investment, with just over half (54%) of the metropolitan groups reporting they had made an attempt to secure investment.

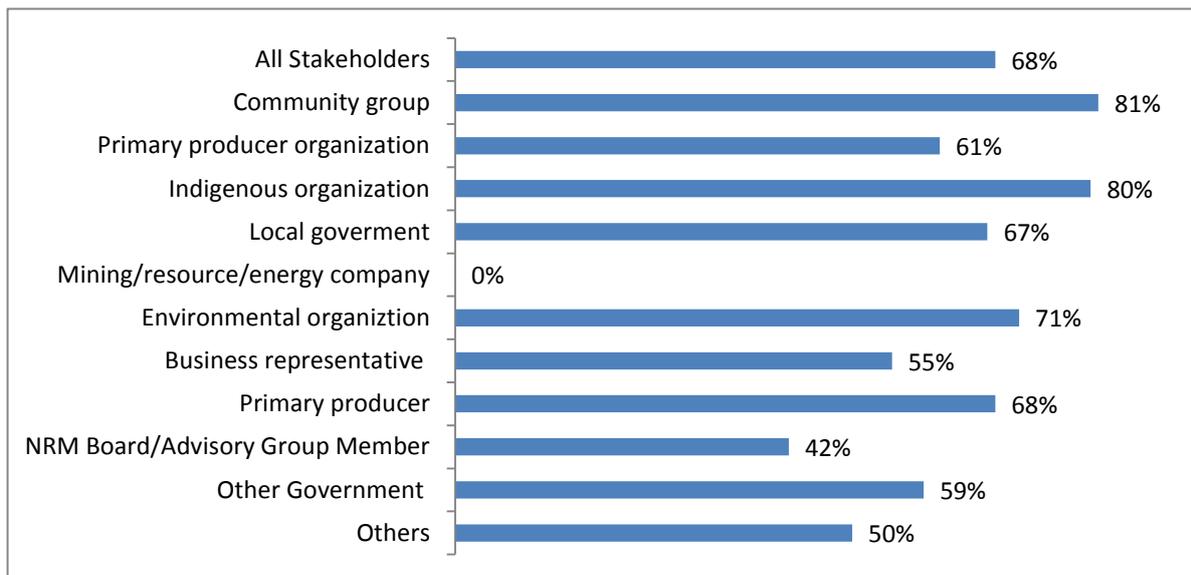


Figure 18: Frequency of Caring for Our Country Funding Applications