



# 2015 NRM Review

*Review of the Natural Resource Management Act 2002  
and the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Framework*

**FINAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

November 2015

Natural and Cultural Heritage Division  
Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment



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# Executive Summary

This report satisfies requirements to review the *Natural Resource Management Act 2002* and the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Framework by the end of 2015. It suggests improvements to strengthen Tasmania's NRM arrangements and ensure that our natural resources are managed effectively.

The Act must be reviewed at least every seven years. This review regards:

- the Framework as a whole
- the roles and functions of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council
- Tasmania's NRM principles
- Tasmania's NRM priorities
- the roles and functions of the regional committees
- the effectiveness of regional strategies
- the effectiveness of accreditation criteria.

Public comment was open for six weeks from 22 July 2015 to 31 August 2015. The Department invited comment from key stakeholders and met representatives from the Australian Government Department of Environment, Landcare Tasmania, Cradle Coast NRM, NRM North, NRM South, Tasmanian Conservation Trust, and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association. The Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council and the regional committees also provided valuable assistance.

Twelve written submissions were received in addition to stakeholder comments provided in person. All comments provided have informed the seven recommendations to improve Tasmania's NRM arrangements.

## Recommendations

- *Recommendation 1: That the Framework be updated to better reflect stakeholder relationships, include contemporary language, and remove references to programs no longer in operation.*
- *Recommendation 2: That the Framework's definition of natural resource management be expanded to emphasise the development of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations and the role of stewardship and sustainable management.*
- *Recommendation 3: That the value of reviewing the Act every four to seven years be assessed.*
- *Recommendation 4: That the Act and Framework be amended to remove the roles and functions of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council, and create the ability for the Minister to form a special purpose committee as required.*
- *Recommendation 5: That the natural resource management principles be reviewed more regularly; and updated to reflect that NRM includes all Tasmanians, that NRM should be based on sound decisions, that NRM arrangements should align with existing processes, and that NRM arrangements should be contemporary.*
- *Recommendation 6: That the priorities for natural resource management be reviewed more regularly, and updated to better reflect encouraging capacity building for better NRM outcomes; supporting the sustainable development and use of natural resources; managing current and emerging risks to natural resources; and promoting the value and role of NRM. Development of short-term focus priorities is recommended.*
- *Recommendation 7: That the Act and Framework be amended to remove the requirement for accreditation criteria.*

## Outline of the Review

Tasmania has two principal instruments related to the delivery of natural resource management: the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Framework (the Framework) and the *Natural Resource Management Act 2002* (the Act).

The Framework was developed in 2002 to provide greater coordination and integration of the State's natural resource management efforts.

The Act fulfils key aspects of the Framework and establishes NRM entities – the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council and the Regional Natural Resource Management Committees – as well as their respective functions, powers and operational requirements.

The Act prescribes processes for developing and accrediting regional NRM strategies, and determining State NRM principles and priorities.

### Requirement to undertake a review

The Act must be reviewed at least every seven years. In December 2014, the Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage requested that the Department undertake a review of the Act and the Framework and provide a report with recommendations.

This review regards section 20 of the Act and page 28 of the Framework, and specifically considers:

- (a) the NRM principles determined under section 17 of the Act and published on page 15 of the Framework; and
- (b) the NRM priorities determined under section 18 of the Act and published on pages 16–18 of the Framework; and
- (c) the effectiveness of the accreditation criteria, approved under section 15 of the Act, in terms of whether they continue to meet the needs of natural resource management in Tasmania, while maintaining consistency with

relevant national accreditation criteria, standards and targets; and

(d) the effectiveness of regional strategies in achieving natural resource management outcomes that are consistent with and promote the State and regional priorities; and

(e) whether the functions of the Council and the regional committees continue to be appropriate for the purpose of the Act; and

(f) any related matters deemed appropriate by the Secretary.

This is the second statutory review undertaken since Tasmania's NRM arrangements were first established. A previous review was conducted in 2007-2009 and its recommendations were implemented by minor amendments of the Act.

### The consultation process

Public comment was open for six weeks from 22 July 2015 to 31 August 2015. Public Notices were placed in the regional newspapers, and a Discussion Paper was available on the Department's website. Letters inviting comment were sent to 28 stakeholders and face-to-face meetings were held with representatives from the Australian Government Department of Environment, Landcare Tasmania, Cradle Coast NRM, NRM North, NRM South, Tasmanian Conservation Trust, and the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association.

Stakeholders were advised that submissions were to be provided in writing and that individual submissions would not be published.

### Submissions

Twelve written submissions were received in addition to stakeholder comments provided in person.

### Recommendations

Seven recommendations are made to improve the Act and Framework.

# The Framework as a whole

The Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Framework outlines Tasmania's NRM arrangements and aims to coordinate and integrate the State's NRM efforts.

## Submissions

Stakeholders supported the Framework and were keen to see it utilised to its greatest potential. An update of the Framework was supported to reflect contemporary arrangements and promote the benefit of productive stakeholder relationships.

Stakeholders wanted the Framework to be a contemporary, active document relevant to the broad range of NRM activities in the State. This included NRM stewardship and the sustainable management and development of natural resources.

The objectives of the Framework were strongly supported and all stakeholders recognised the importance of NRM and its benefits to the State. There was support for ensuring consistency, efficiency and improved natural resource outcomes for Tasmania.

## Discussion

The Framework guides the management of natural resources across the State. It was developed at the introduction of Tasmania's NRM arrangements, and substantial achievements and developments have since been made. The regional model for delivery has matured, stakeholder partnerships have

developed, and many functions have been refined over time.

It is recommended that the Framework is updated to better reflect current arrangements and highlight the value of stakeholder relationships. There have been changes in the delivery and implementation of NRM, particularly at the national level, and it is recommended that the Framework be updated to remove references to programs no longer in operation, and reflect contemporary language and terminology.

NRM presents opportunities and benefits, and supports the management of resources for present and future generations. It is recommended that the Framework's definition of natural resource management be updated to emphasise the development of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations. It is also recommended that this definition reflect the role of stewardship and sustainable management.

The Act is reviewed every four to seven years to ensure the arrangements are operating as intended. Thirteen years have passed since the Act commenced and NRM entities have demonstrated the clear ability to perform their roles and functions. This is the second review to identify that the Framework is operating as intended and it is recommended that the value of reviewing the Act every four to seven years be assessed.

## Recommendations

- *Recommendation 1: That the Framework be updated to better reflect stakeholder relationships, include contemporary language, and remove references to programs no longer in operation.*
- *Recommendation 2: That the Framework's definition of natural resource management be expanded to emphasise the development of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations and the role of stewardship and sustainable management.*
- *Recommendation 3: That the value of reviewing the Act every four to seven years be assessed.*

# The roles and functions of the Council

The Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council is to advise the Minister on natural resource management issues as per section 7 of the Act.

## Submissions

Stakeholders recognised the importance of the Minister receiving NRM advice from a range of sources and indicated that the advice should be timely and respond to current and emerging NRM issues.

Stakeholders valued the early role of the Council in the establishment of Tasmania's NRM arrangements but noted that this role has diminished as Tasmania's NRM system has matured. Many questioned the usefulness of the Council's current role, and the majority recognised a need to change the Council and its functions to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Improved communication of the Council's performance was sought to provide confidence that the Council is fulfilling its requirements. Broader representation from a range of NRM stakeholders and interests were suggested to provide meaningful advice on timely NRM issues. Stakeholders supported the creation of a taskforce-style group of experts convened to consider specific NRM issues as they arise.

## Discussion

The Council is an advisory body that provided sought-after advice during the introduction of Tasmania's natural resource management

arrangements and it has fulfilled an important oversight function as the regional committees and regional bodies have developed.

The need for the Council has diminished as Tasmania's NRM Framework has matured. Its advisory capacity is not as heavily relied upon as it once was, particularly with the proven capacity of the regional committees, and its oversight function has reduced. The formal nature of the Council means that it does not have the ability to respond and advise the Minister on timely NRM issues.

The Department provides contemporary NRM advice to the Minister and actively liaises with NRM stakeholders during the course of its business. This identifies potential duplication of roles and effort. The Council is supported by the Department in order to undertake its functions, and this support could be alternatively invested in furthering NRM activities and priorities.

This review finds that the role of the Council has been fulfilled, and recommends that the Council and its associated functions under the Act and Framework be removed.

It is important that the Minister receives advice on emerging and topical NRM issues as required from a broad range of stakeholders. In recommending the removal of the Council, it is also recommended that the Act be amended create the capacity for the Minister to form a special advisory committee to advise on specific NRM issues as they arise.

## Recommendations

- *Recommendation 4: That the Act and Framework be amended to remove the roles and functions of the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council, and create the ability for the Minister to form a special purpose committee as required.*

# Tasmania's NRM principles

The Minister responsible for the Act determines Tasmania's NRM principles which inform decision making under the Framework. The current set of principles is: Ecosystem Approach; Balanced Decisions; Integrated Management; Priority Based; Prevention is Better than Cure; Partnerships; and We are all Responsible.

## Submissions

Stakeholders valued the role of Tasmania's NRM principles. Many recognised the appropriateness of the current principles and supported a regular review to ensure they remain consistent with contemporary NRM.

There was an identified need for the principles to better support adaption and emerging NRM issues, and to accommodate changing circumstances and community views.

Suggested changes to the principles included better promotion of good science and evidence-based decision making, as well as emphasising the importance of prevention being better than cure.

It was suggested that the principles should have greater relevance to significant NRM decisions. Ways in which the principles could be more effectively promoted and more widely understood were the inclusion of the principles in regional and local area strategies and promoting landscape scale approaches.

## Discussion

Tasmania's NRM principles underpin the delivery of the Framework and its objectives. They should be sufficiently high-level to cover the range of NRM activities in Tasmania. The principles should reflect the importance of NRM arrangements in

responding to the community's needs and expectations, and providing benefits to Tasmanians in perpetuity. The principles also need to support modern and flexible arrangements to ensure that NRM can adapt to changing or unforeseen conditions.

It is recommended that the principles be reviewed more regularly and updated to reflect that NRM arrangements should be contemporary, adaptive and continually improved.

NRM arrangements should support collaboration and strategic alignment, and contribute to integrated management for agreed purposes. The principle of NRM aligning and complementing existing processes and frameworks, including relevant strategies and resource management planning processes, is recommended.

NRM decisions should consider causes and effects at the landscape level, and should manage risks and implications for the short, medium and long term. It is recommended that the principles be updated to reflect that NRM should be based on sound decisions using evidence-based processes and the best available science.

NRM includes all Tasmanians and involves Government, the community and industry, and the inclusive nature of NRM has been a recurring theme of this review. NRM presents opportunities and benefits for the State, and all Tasmanians can participate in and contribute to the management of our natural resources. It is recommended that this be included as a principle.

## Recommendations

- *Recommendation 5: That the natural resource management principles be reviewed more regularly; and updated to reflect that NRM includes all Tasmanians, that NRM should be based on sound decisions, that NRM arrangements should align with existing processes, and that NRM arrangements should be contemporary.*

## Tasmania's NRM priorities

The Minister determines Tasmania's NRM priorities. Key priority areas for the future of NRM in Tasmania are capacity building, education/communication, and research. The high-level resource management priorities are water management; vegetation management (forest and non-forest), soil management; management of weeds, pests and diseases; and management of coastal/marine environment.

### Submissions

The role of State's NRM priorities was supported by stakeholders and considered useful to inform NRM activities and investment.

Stakeholders emphasised the need for the State's NRM priorities to be contemporary and represent current needs and expectations. Some considered the current priorities appropriate, while others suggested a range of possible priorities including recognition of climate change and its implications, adaptation responses, and greater focus on prevention in managing impacts to natural resources.

The role of State priorities and the need for closer interactions and alignment with national, regional and local priorities was also recognised, with the goal of supporting consistency and greater NRM outcomes.

Stakeholders supported the contribution of Statewide priorities to NRM objectives, and proposed clearer differentiation between priorities that are regionally-specific versus high-level Statewide priorities.

There was a need expressed for the priorities to be flexible and accommodating of change,

and stakeholders supported more regular review to ensure the priorities remain relevant and reflect community expectations.

### Discussion

The guiding nature of Tasmania's NRM priorities highlights the importance of them reflecting current needs. It is recommended that the priorities are reviewed more regularly to ensure they remain relevant and contemporary.

Stakeholders identified the need for the priorities to align with national, regional and local priorities and contribute to broader NRM outcomes. It is recommended that the priorities be updated to reflect broad, high-level matters that can apply to the State as a whole and are suitably flexible to adapt to change. This includes updates to better reflect:

- encouraging capacity building for better NRM outcomes;
- supporting the sustainable development and use of natural resources consistent with the objectives of the Tasmanian Resource Management and Planning System;
- managing current and emerging risks to natural resources and enhancing mechanisms to prioritise and manage effort; and
- promoting the value and role of NRM to Tasmanian tourism, industry, and sustainable development.

It is also recommended that a small number of short-term focus priorities are developed to reflect the immediate focus of NRM activities.

### Recommendations

- *Recommendation 6: That the priorities for natural resource management be reviewed more regularly, and updated to better reflect encouraging capacity building for better NRM outcomes; supporting the sustainable development and use of natural resources; managing current and emerging risks to natural resources; and promoting the value and role of NRM. Development of short-term focus priorities is recommended.*

# The roles and functions of the regional committees

Tasmania's three regional committees for natural resource management have functions and powers as prescribed in section 10 of the Act, and the Framework highlights their role in the integration and coordination of regional NRM activities.

## Submissions

Stakeholders recognised the important role of the regional committees and noted their active role in engaging with Councils, local industries and the community, and their ability to secure substantial funding for the region.

Stakeholders had different views on configuration of regional delivery. Many stakeholders supported the three region approach and thought Tasmania was sufficiently diverse to warrant three regions given geographic, social and economic differences. They considered that the three-region approach supports greater on-ground partnerships, locally-adapted service delivery, and greater engagement with the community.

Other stakeholders recognised potential administrative and financial efficiencies of combining the three regions into a single statewide entity. They cited existing duplication and inefficiency between the regions; the burden of engaging with all three regions; and competition with external NRM groups.

Stakeholders agreed that the membership of regional committees should represent the broad range of NRM stakeholders, but did not indicate a need to change the current membership requirements.

The legislated functions of the regional committee were considered appropriate and suitably flexible to adapt to change. Other suggestions included assigning regulatory powers to regional committees; promoting knowledge brokering; and encouraging

collaboration with knowledge-sharing organisations.

## Discussion

Each regional committee oversees the delivery and implementation of NRM in that region. The regional committees provide integration and coordination of activities at the regional scale and link local and State arrangements for NRM.

Community engagement and input is critical to the delivery of NRM and it is important that the communities throughout Tasmania have access to resources and support.

The regional model of delivery accommodates regional differences. It identifies regional NRM priorities and emerging issues, and facilitates the integration of local level management and planning activities.

Although some cost-savings may be made by combining the three regional committees into a single entity, these benefits are unlikely to result in substantial efficiencies and may be counter-productive in terms of regional delivery and engagement. Centralising NRM may reduce resources within the regions and be detrimental to local partnerships with industry and other important stakeholders. It may also lead to overall reduced resources for the delivery of NRM in Tasmania.

Since they were established, the regional committees have performed an important function, as demonstrated in their reporting requirements. They have evolved since Tasmania's NRM arrangements were created and have responded well to community needs and expectations.

The functions of regional committees are considered appropriate for the purpose of the Act, and no recommendations are made to modify their existing roles and functions.

# The effectiveness of regional strategies

A regional strategy is drafted by each regional committee to guide that region's delivery of NRM. The strategies detail regional priorities for natural resource management and include processes for encouraging community participation.

## Submissions

Stakeholders supported the important role of the regional strategies in guiding the delivery and implementation of NRM in the regions.

The ability of regional strategies to identify priorities for action and direct investment was noted. Initiatives to improve regionally-strategic approaches were supported, particularly efforts to ensure that the strategies support state-wide consistency.

Greater strategic alignment and integration of regional strategies was identified. Stakeholders noted the relevance of regional strategies to other planning processes such as the strategies and plans of State, regional or local organisations. Greater recognition and promotion of the plans was supported.

Stakeholders valued consistency in measuring and reporting NRM performance, and recognised the need for regional strategies to encourage statewide consistency at the regional level, particularly in relation to investment priorities.

Not burdening NRM organisations with additional reporting requirements was considered important. Stakeholders highlighted the extensive reporting that regional bodies provide to the Australian Government, and regional bodies were considered well-placed to inform discussions about reporting requirements.

## Discussion

The regional strategies account for regional differences and guide the delivery of natural resource management. The regional strategies take account of State priorities for natural resource management; existing policies, plans and strategies relevant to natural resource management in the region; and the social, economic and environmental circumstances of the region.

Regional committees draft a regional strategy in consultation with the community, State and local governments, public land managers and industries in the region. Regional committees facilitate the integration of natural resource planning activities for the region, and monitor and evaluate implementation of the regional strategy.

The regional committees are required to review their regional strategies at least once every five years or sooner if required by the Minister. Regional committees are this year reviewing their strategies and preparing new strategies for 2015-2020. This will be third iteration of regional strategies. The first strategies were accredited in 2005 following the establishment of Tasmania's NRM arrangements.

The regional strategies have fulfilled an important function in guiding the regional delivery of NRM. The regional strategies guide the activities of each regional body and have contributed to building community engagement and encouraging community participation.

The regional strategies have been effective in achieving natural resource management outcomes that are consistent with and promote the State and regional priorities. No recommendations are made to modify the arrangements regarding regional strategies.

# The effectiveness of the accreditation criteria

Accreditation criteria are used by the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council to assess draft regional strategies and advise the Minister on whether the strategies should be accredited.

## Submissions

The Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council and the three NRM Regions endorsed recent changes to the draft accreditation criteria.

The Department coordinated a review of the accreditation criteria in April 2015, and proposed amendments to the accreditation criteria to reflect some important changes. Updates were proposed to more closely reflect the Act's requirements for regional strategies; to better reflect contemporary terminology; and to represent recent changes in National and State NRM arrangements.

The Council endorsed the draft accreditation criteria and recommended that the Minister approve the accreditation criteria in accordance with provisions of the *Natural Resource Management Act 2002*.

The Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage approved the updated accreditation criteria in May 2015.

## Discussion

This review considers the effectiveness of the accreditation criteria and whether they continue to meet the needs of natural resource management in Tasmania.

The accreditation criteria are used by the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council to evaluate draft regional strategies. The Minister may approve any accreditation criteria after considering the advice of the Council.

The Act prescribes that in advising the Minister as to the accreditation criteria, the Council is to take account of national accreditation criteria as determined by the Ministerial Council (the Ministerial Council established by the Council of Australian Governments with respect to natural resource management). The Ministerial Council no longer operates, although regional committees actively ensure that their regional strategies conform to national criteria and targets.

The accreditation criteria are an evaluation tool used by the Tasmanian Natural Resource Management Council and inform the Council's advice to the Minister. This review recommends that the Council be removed, and as a tool of the Council, it is recommended that the Act and Framework also be amended to remove the requirement for accreditation criteria.

## Recommendations

- *Recommendation 7: That the Act and Framework be amended to remove the requirement for accreditation criteria.*



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