

What are the key NRM issues facing NSW Local Government?



Photo courtesy of Dubbo City Council



What are the key NRM issues?

A recent Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW survey, *Capacity of NSW Local Government to engage and participate in Natural Resource Management* (www.lgsa.org.au/nrm), identified the following as among the leading NRM issues facing local councils in NSW:

- Native plant conservation
- Water quality and quantity issues
- Weed management
- Development pressures

The *Australian National Land and Water Resources Audit* (www.nlwra.gov.au) has also examined natural resource management across Australia and identified a range of issues within each NRM Stream. The key NRM issues identified by the Audit include:

- Land: Increase in soil erosion; salinity and sodicity; acid sulfate soils
- Water: Decline in river health; water quantity and quality; contamination; groundwater
- Biodiversity: Species and community loss; weeds; fire; climate change; clearing



What are the key NRM issues in your Local Government area?

Information on key NRM issues can be found within Council's State of Environment Report or the local Catchment Management Authority's Catchment Action Plan (www.cma.nsw.gov.au). State agencies also have relevant information on local NRM issues. In addition, there are many useful websites available for reviewing natural resource information including:

- *Australian Natural Resource Atlas* – www.anra.gov.au – designed to provide online access to natural resource information collected during the Audit
- *The NRM Toolbar* – www.nrmtoolbar.net.au – an information exchange website for NRM professionals
- *NSW Natural Resource Atlas* – www.nratlas.nsw.gov.au – a state Government initiative to provide a single entry point to natural resource information within NSW
- *Regional Knowledge Resource Kit* – www.rkrk.net.au – an excellent community resource that can be used to collate local information



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What are the key challenges?

Councils need to be aware of a number of challenges when developing and implementing effective NRM programs.

The LGSA Survey identified the main limiting factors preventing local government from implementing effective NRM programs and translating CMA Catchment Action Plan priorities and targets into their current management practices:

- Lack of funding and resources
- Reliance on external funding/grants
- Need for political support within council
- Lack of NRM expertise/skills

How can Local Government tackle some of the key challenges?

- **Consider the drivers for local government involvement in NRM,** including increased community expectation; healthy landscapes create healthy communities; benefits to the local economy (e.g. tourism, farmers); leading by example; and council legal responsibilities.
- **Many significant NRM gains can also be made without any direct funding.** Amendments to process and practice, enhancements to policy and the more effective application of guidelines are just some of the things that have been done in councils across NSW to generate significant NRM outcomes.
- **Review Council's corporate plan to see how it currently supports the local community's long term goals for NRM.** Additionally, review links between national, state and regional NRM priorities within Council's corporate plan to ensure Council is working towards a coordinated and efficient approach to NRM.
- **Work in partnership** with other councils, Catchment Management Authorities, community volunteer organisations, and other catchment stakeholders to optimise strengths and maximum results from resources invested.
- **Seek funding and support, but make sure that core funding is allocated to the things council considers a key direction.** Major external funding sources for councils are the Australian Government's 'Caring for our Country' program, the NSW Environmental Trust program and at a regional level CMAs often have funding for projects with councils.
- **The best NRM decisions are multi-disciplinary, crossing across many areas of technical expertise.** Seek out skilled and professional staff support within other councils, government agencies, Catchment Management Authorities, and the LGSA to help your council make more informed decisions.
- **Most NRM problems are not unique to one council.** Being involved in networks allows councils to share experiences and tap into specialist expertise and resources. Why not join the LGSA's "nrm_localgovt" electronic network and email with other NRM practitioners in councils? For more information visit: www.lgsa.org.au/nrm