



Assessment of
the Hawkesbury-Nepean
upgraded
Catchment Action Plan

June 2013

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

CAP	Catchment Action Plan
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW	New South Wales

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Executive summary

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities. The CAP encompasses the former Sydney Metropolitan and Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment management regions after their amalgamation. The amalgamation was particularly difficult due to the significant differences between the two regions, and their previous approaches to CAP development.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean is a complex region, which faces challenges in maintaining landscape health, productivity and community well-being, while accommodating an expanding population. These challenges include conflicts over land use, retaining agricultural productivity in proximity to the Sydney market, and maintaining water supply and quality.

Key findings

The upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP is a satisfactory strategic plan. It is founded on sound consultation with landholders, government and interested community groups. However, it is unclear whether individual projects will achieve integrated biophysical and socio-economic goals, due to a lack of cohesive analysis. Specific targets need to be articulated with auditable milestones to clarify priorities and better guide investment decisions.

As a plan to **guide investment and on-ground activity**, the CAP:

- identifies **key issues and risks** in the region, including social, economic and environmental concerns
- reflects **an understanding of regional** government and community natural resource management activities based on input from stakeholders
- is strongly **supported by** several delivery partners as a result of good engagement with government and community stakeholders
- aligns CAP objectives with the objectives of local, State and Australian Governments to increase the **efficiency** of natural resource management in the region.

To improve the upgraded CAP, the Catchment Management Authority (CMA) should:

- ensure strategies are informed by analysis, based on **best available information**, and **integrate** social, economic and environmental aspects
- **develop and prioritise specific** actions to better guide delivery partners
- develop consistently auditable targets that support reporting against all goals to further improve **accountability** for delivering outcomes
- clarify the **linkages between CAP goals, strategies, targets and actions**, to ensure that actions achieve the desired outcomes
- develop clear strategies for **collaborative** governance to support plan implementation.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP with the following conditions:

- review and adapt the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, in accordance with the Minister's decision
- ensure strategies are informed by analysis, based on best available information, and integrate social, economic and environmental aspects
- develop and prioritise specific actions to better guide delivery partners
- develop consistently auditable targets that support reporting against all goals to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes
- clarify the linkages between CAP goals, strategies, targets and actions, to ensure that actions achieve the desired outcomes.

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1 Introduction

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities.

The Hawkesbury-Nepean region encompasses a diverse range of landscapes including coastal areas, highly urban areas, the Blue Mountains and southern tablelands and highlands. Natural resource management (NRM) concerns vary greatly with over four million people living in the highly urbanised Sydney area, and 100,000 living in the region outside of Sydney, which consists of large spans of natural protected areas. Natural resources in the region support a wide range of industries, lifestyles and recreational activities, and provide safe drinking water for the region. Industries supported include agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and market gardening serving the Sydney area.

1.1 Background

CAPs are strategic regional plans for improving the health, productivity and resilience of landscapes and communities. CAPs identify what the community, industry, and government value about these landscapes, and explain what needs to be done to ensure long-term, sustainable management of a region's natural resources. Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) have primary responsibility for effectively implementing the CAPs in collaboration with their partners.

Under the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* (NSW), the NRC is required to assess CAPs and recommends them to the Minister for approval.

1.2 Focus of assessment

The focus of the NRC's assessment is to determine whether a CAP is a quality strategic plan that promotes the state-wide targets for NRM and complies with the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*¹ (the Standard).

The *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans*² details the assessment criteria, attributes and process used. The NRC examined three key criteria in its assessment:

- 1 Was the plan developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process?
- 2 Does the plan use best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes?
- 3 Is the CAP a plan for collaborative action and investment between government, community and industry partners?

The NRC collected evidence through extensive analysis of available documentation, technical reviews, stakeholder surveys, interviews and assessment of the CMA's engagement with government, industry and community partners (see Attachment 2 for details).

¹ The NSW Government adopted the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*, which identifies seven components that are used to reach high-quality natural resource decisions. CMAs must comply with the Standard, using it as a quality assurance standard for all planning and implementation decisions.

² NRC, *Framework for assessing and recommending upgraded catchment action plans v2*, June 2012

2 Summary of assessment findings

2.1 Planning

The Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA faced significant challenges relating to the amalgamation with the Sydney Metropolitan CMA. This amalgamation created a very complex region with a diverse range of stakeholders and landscapes. The Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP discusses a new focus on landscape analysis and government and community involvement; however, it does not take full advantage of the opportunities for new strategic approaches that this focus provides.

Strategic planning and capacity

The CAP upgrade incorporated a whole-of-government and community approach to ensure input from key stakeholders and partners. As a result of thorough analysis with a broad range of inputs, the upgraded CAP reflects a good understanding of the region's NRM trends, key threats and drivers, and potential future scenarios. However, it is not clear how the selection of strategies and actions are tied to the most significant trends and drivers.

The Board elected to devolve responsibility for CAP development to CMA staff in order to increase participation and understanding of the CAP. The Board and staff were involved in the CAP upgrade through participation in a number of workshops, staff meetings, and reference groups such as the 'theme teams' and Community Reference Groups. However, the CAP strategies and actions appear to have been selected by a small number of staff, reducing confidence that the opportunity to increase staff capacity was fully realised.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

The Hawkesbury-Nepean and Sydney Metropolitan CMAs both carried out sound stakeholder consultation, providing a good foundation for implementing collaborative actions with those consulted. The Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA surveyed a wide range of stakeholders to identify community values, including a random survey of 604 respondents. It also established three Community Reference Groups to ensure ongoing engagement with the community, and feedback from group members has been very positive. The Community Reference Groups had limited membership, particularly among industry representatives, suggesting that the CMA has not significantly expanded the range of stakeholders it meaningfully engaged.

A Whole-of-Government Steering Committee and input from a Local Government Advisory Group ensured partner agency input. Prior to the amalgamation, the Sydney Metropolitan CMA conducted broad engagement activities including surveys, workshops with local and state agency partners, extensive meetings with local governments, newsletters and a community forum. Both CMAs engaged the Aboriginal community through established groups.

Adaptability

Hawkesbury-Nepean focused on the creation of Local Land Services as the immediate trigger point for adapting the CAP. It is expected that a thorough review of the plan's adaptability will occur as part of the development of a Local Land Services regional strategy.

2.2 Targets

Whilst the upgraded CAP used best available information in analysing the region, the CAP does not clearly present how the analysis of the region flows through to the strategies and actions.

Best-available information

Substantial analysis of NRM trends, and the current state of the region, was undertaken using best-available evidence, including scientific literature, local experts and community input. However, independent technical reviewers noted a gap in the logic flow between the supporting evidence used in the analysis and the upgraded CAP. The CAP strategies and actions are not linked to the analysis, leaving ambiguity as to how the analysis informed the selection of strategies and actions. Further, how the CMA and partners will adapt to or influence the significant issues identified for the region is not adequately addressed by the strategies.

The CMA has developed a good set of spatial priority maps to describe the region. Use of the maps in the CAP is limited, reducing their usefulness in communicating priorities to stakeholders. However, the spatial data the CMA has gathered could be a useful tool for prioritising actions if utilised more effectively in the future.

Analysis of social, economic and environmental information

The CMA took two separate approaches to analysis: an asset-based approach and a landscape-based approach. The asset-based analysis considered soil, water, vegetation and community themes in isolation. The landscape approach focused on the integrated management priorities in the three subregional landscapes identified. However, neither was thorough enough to determine the most effective strategies, interventions and targets required to achieve the CAP goals.

CMA staff members collated feedback, predominantly from asset-based 'theme teams', into general CAP strategies and 'CAP Actions', and circulated them to reference groups and the Board for review. The CMA indicated that the final strategies and actions selected for the CAP are intentionally broad enough to cover all strategies and actions identified by the reference groups, in order to maintain stakeholder support. Selection of actions was not based on an assessment of what was necessary to implement strategies. This reduces confidence that the CAP includes on-ground activities most likely to achieve the desired outcomes effectively with scarce resources.

The CAP discusses social, economic and environmental factors, but does not integrate these aspects. The Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA developed nine social-ecological systems for their region, and the Sydney Metropolitan CMA identified seven. Following the merger of the two CMAs, it was determined that the 16 social-ecological systems would be aggregated into three 'landscapes' based on commonalities, with the Sydney region viewed as one landscape. This was a logical way to develop the social-ecological systems, but the aggregation is not explained or justified in the CAP.

The CAP strategies were not derived from analysis at a landscape scale, so it is not evident that selected strategies will maximise social, economic and environmental outcomes for the region. In addition, technical reviewers noted weaknesses in the analysis of the socio-ecological systems. However, supporting evidence demonstrates that there has been significant work

undertaken to understand the range of socio-ecological issues for each landscape, which could form the basis for a more comprehensive set of locally meaningful strategies in the future.

The CAP includes numerous broad strategies and actions without clear prioritisation. The CAP includes five goals, 28 strategies, 11 targets, and 22 'CAP Actions'. In addition there are 15-20 'management actions' for each of the four assets. Several of the strategies and actions are vague, providing insufficient guidance, for instance 'understand and maintain the flow of ecosystem services'. There is no consistent difference in the specificity of CAP strategies and 'CAP Actions', so the difference between strategies and actions - and how they are related - is unclear.

Logical hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The CAP presents a hierarchy relating CAP goals, strategies, actions, and 'management actions', across a 20 year time-frame. However, this hierarchy is not consistently reflected in the CAP. Links between strategies, actions and targets are not clearly supported by evidence or analysis, and targets are not linked directly to goals.

The CAP does not clearly present priorities to help guide on-ground actions. The CAP indicates 'priority' ratings in several different tables, and presents separate 'management priorities' for each asset. The priority ratings are not supported by analysis or discussion in the CAP. As such, the CAP does not clearly identify priority actions or locations for actions.

The NRC recommends approval of the Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP with the following **conditions**:

- ensure strategies are informed by analysis, based on best available information, and integrate social, economic and environmental aspects
- develop and prioritise specific actions to better guide delivery partners
- clarify the linkages between CAP goals, strategies, targets and actions, to ensure that actions achieve the desired outcomes.

Accountability

While the CAP presents satisfactory targets, it could be strengthened by consistently specific and measurable targets covering all of the identified goals. Many of the 11 targets are broad, for instance, 'by 2023, improve habitat condition and connectivity of foreshore, estuary, marine and in-stream habitat'. The CAP sets targets for each of the landscapes, which were derived from the analysis of the socio-ecological systems. However, no targets are included for the overall region or for the assets. As such, the targets do not cover some of the specified desired outcomes. For example, targets related to aquatic ecosystems are only set for the Sydney region, whereas the aquatic ecosystem assessment indicates other priority areas for action. Consistently developed targets would support better reporting on progress for stakeholders.

The NRC recommends approval of the Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP with the following **condition**:

- develop consistently auditable targets that support reporting against all goals to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

2.3 Action and investment

The Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA made good efforts to align with partner policies and plans.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The CAP demonstrates alignment with the plans and policies of the CMA's partner organisations. The CAP identifies 'key partners' as well as key policies and legislation for each of the 'CAP Actions'. The CMA engaged strongly with government agencies, through ongoing consultation with a Whole-of-Government Steering Committee. The committee assisted in identifying key plans and policies relevant to the CAP upgrade and assessing alignment with partners' goals. Three Community Reference Groups ensured alignment with community and industry plans, but alignment with industry priorities could have been strengthened by broader industry membership in these groups. The CAP would also be improved by considering cross-border alignment, which it does not address.

Alignment with local governments was complicated by the amalgamation of the Sydney Metropolitan and Hawkesbury-Nepean CMAs, and the limited time in which to engage them prior to the CAP release. Stakeholder feedback indicates that some stakeholders within the Sydney Metropolitan area may feel alienated due to the amalgamation of CMAs. The CMA recognises that local governments will play a critical role in implementing the CAP, and has begun to engage with the large number of local councils in this region. They have recently negotiated several large joint projects within the Sydney Metropolitan region, indicating that progress has been made in this area.

The Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage, and Aboriginal Affairs NSW have endorsed the CAP, confirming that it 'is not inconsistent with the relevant NRM policies, plans and strategies'. The CAP indicates which 'CAP Actions' align with the *NSW 2021*³ goals and is consistent with the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* (NSW). However, clear demonstration in the CAP of how actions will support the *NSW 2021* goals would improve confidence that the CAP can meaningfully contribute to achieving them.

Roles and responsibilities

The upgraded CAP identifies key delivery partners for each of the 'CAP Actions', providing a reasonable level of detail for a strategic plan. The CMA has indicated that the partners listed in the CAP have agreed to participate in the actions for which they are listed. However, partners are mostly listed for vaguely worded actions covering activities that they already perform, with little evidence of any commitment to coordinate these actions.

Implementation

The CAP defers several important steps to the implementation stage, including identifying specific actions, prioritising actions, and developing roles and responsibilities. Planning for CAP implementation appears to be in the early stages, and was deferred until after the final determination of Local Land Services boundaries. The CAP indicates the intent to develop a four-year implementation plan, using the Whole-of-Government Steering Committee to align actions with partner agencies. The four-year plan will also help coordinate CAP implementation with local government planning timeframes. The CMA did not provide details about how it would engage other delivery partners during the implementation phase.

³ www.2021.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/NSW2021_Plan%20Goals_0.pdf

The CAP outlines a general process for how actions might be prioritised during the implementation stage, but does not provide specific details. There is also minimal evidence of partners making specific commitments to the implementation process, reducing confidence that the CMA has a thorough implementation plan.

The NRC recommends approval of the Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP with the following **suggested action**:

- develop clear strategies for collaborative governance to support plan implementation

3 Recommendation

3.1 Approval

In accordance with section 13 (b) of *the Natural Resources Commission Act 2003* (NSW), the NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan with conditions.

3.2 Conditions of approval

The NRC recommends approval of the upgraded Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP with the following conditions to:

- review and adapt the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, in accordance with the Minister's decision
- ensure strategies are informed by analysis, based on best available information, and integrate social, economic and environmental aspects
- develop and prioritise specific actions to better guide delivery partners
- develop consistently auditable targets that support reporting against all goals to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes
- clarify the linkages between CAP goals, strategies, targets and actions, to ensure that actions achieve the desired outcomes.

The CMA should report to the NRC on how it has met these conditions of approval in its Strategic Progress Letters. Commencing September 2013, the CMA should provide the NRC with a Strategic Progress Letter annually, or more frequently as conditions are met.

3.3 Additional suggested actions for the CMA

The following suggested actions should be considered by the CMA to strengthen the effective delivery of the CAP:

- develop clear strategies for collaborative governance to support plan implementation.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

Some aspects of the Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP upgrade will assist the CMA to manage the transition to the new Local Land Services structure as:

- the scientific, industry, and community knowledge gathered for the CAP upgrade will provide a valuable resource for new regional organisations
- the analysis of social-ecological systems that was performed by each CMA prior to the merger can be used to develop locally relevant plans under the Local Land Services structure.

However, there may be some challenges in managing the transition to the new Local Land Services structure, including:

- the lack of specific and logically linked strategies and actions to provide meaningful guidance to stakeholders
- the lack of consistent and measurable targets.

Attachment 1 - Detailed assessment findings

Criterion 1 - Plan was developed using a structured, collaborative and adaptable planning process

Attribute 1A: Strategic planning process was logical, comprehensive and transparent

The CAP upgrade was underpinned by stakeholder input from a variety of advisory groups. A broad range of stakeholders provided input into describing the current trends, drivers and threats resulting in a good understanding of the big issues for the region and its landscapes. However, the CAP does not demonstrate effective use of the information gathered.

Several aspects of the CAP upgrade reduce confidence in the CMA's strategic planning capabilities. The upgraded CAP incorporates a new landscape-based analytical framework and demonstrates a greater commitment to whole-of-government and community alignment. However, significant changes to the CAP strategies are not evident; it is not clear if the decision to largely maintain the existing strategic direction (from the old CAP) was deliberate, or if it was based on an assessment of changes in the region and in the CMA's operating environment.

While the project plan is logically structured, several of the steps do not appear to have been fully carried out. During the CAP development phase, the Board changed its involvement from a directional role to more of a 'review' role, devolving CAP development to CMA staff members. This increased staff participation and understanding of the CAP, but it appears that only a very small number of people were involved in selecting the strategies and actions, and ultimately developing the CAP. This reduces confidence that the CAP development approach took full advantage of the opportunities to enhance the strategic capacity of the CMA overall.

Strengths:

- The CMA demonstrated efforts to implement a whole-of-government and community approach to the CAP upgrade.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- There was minimal demonstration of improved CMA strategic planning capabilities.

Attribute 1B: Planning process meaningfully engaged the community, Governments and other stakeholders

The CMA engaged a wide range of stakeholders through surveys (including a random survey) about community values, trends within the region, and the proposed social-ecological systems. The CMA established three Community Reference Groups, providing an opportunity for ongoing engagement with the community. Stakeholder surveys received from members of the Community Reference Groups are highly positive, indicating that their relationships with the CMA have improved.

Strengths:

- The CMA developed a Whole-of-Government Steering Committee to ensure that key agency partners were meaningfully engaged.
- The CMA used three regional Community Reference Groups to provide community input in the CAP upgrade process, providing a good foundation for collaborative delivery of actions with group members

The CMA demonstrated a commitment to the whole-of-government approach by creating a Whole-of-Government Steering Committee and work with the Local Government Advisory Group (within the former Hawkesbury-Nepean region), and local Aboriginal advisory groups. The Sydney Metropolitan CMA engaged extensively with stakeholders, particularly with local councils. This engagement included surveys, workshops, newsletters, and face-to-face meetings with a range of partners. The engagement processes put the CMA in a good position to deliver collaborative implementation with participating partner agencies and groups.

The CMA conducted meaningful engagement predominantly through the various reference groups. There is minimal evidence the CMA has expanded its range of stakeholders, which may limit the range of partners with which the CMA can facilitate collaborative delivery. In particular, industry representation in the Community Reference Groups was limited. The CMA was not able to substantially engage with the Department of Planning, and acknowledges this as an ongoing challenge. Additionally, feedback from local councils in the Sydney Metropolitan region indicates a lack of support for the amalgamated CAP. This may be due to the extensive engagement Sydney Metropolitan CMA had with local government and the limited time Hawkesbury-Nepean had to build on these relationships. The CMA has acknowledged that the integration was a major challenge, and has begun work to re-engage with local governments in the Sydney Metropolitan region.

Attribute 1C: An adaptive planning process is in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and to guide improvements as knowledge improves and/or circumstances change

The upgraded CAP discusses the importance of adaptability, but would be improved by greater detail regarding how adaptive management will be implemented. The CAP's discussion of adaptive management focuses on the adaptation that will soon be necessary due to the creation of Local Land Services. However, the CAP does not present details for adaptive management or monitoring plans. Interviews with the CMA staff indicate a general intent to continue with current practices, including the Whole-of-Government Steering Committee and current monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement programs to capture new information. The CMA reviewed the previous CAP and the lessons learned, but this review largely focused on accomplishment of targets. It is not evident how the previous CAP informed the upgrade. In interviews, CMA staff provided a wide range of responses when asked how lessons from the CAP review informed the upgraded CAP, suggesting a lack of clarity regarding the key lessons implemented from the CAP review.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- Evidence indicates that the CMA has not expanded the range of stakeholders with which it engages, which may limit the opportunities for collaborative implementation.
- There was limited industry representation in the Community Reference Groups, and evidence indicates that they were not otherwise consulted.

Strengths:

- The CMA identified the Local Land Services as the immediate trigger requiring adaptation of the CAP.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- There is little evidence that the CMA considered the range of possible events that should trigger a CAP review, or how the CAP would be adapted in response to them.
- The CAP includes no detail about how new information will be captured or assessed to inform potential revisions to the CAP strategies.
- There is minimal evidence that the review of the previous CAP meaningfully informed the CAP upgrade.

Criterion 2 - Plan uses best available information to develop targets and actions for building resilient landscapes

Attribute 2A: Plan describes the social-ecological systems operating in the catchment using best available science and knowledge of community values

The CMA followed a sound process for identifying social-ecological systems, incorporating socio-economic data and community input. Following the CMA merger, the nine Hawkesbury-Nepean social-ecological systems and seven Sydney Metropolitan social-ecological systems were aggregated into three landscapes for inclusion in the CAP. This aggregation process is not explained in the CAP, so there is a gap in logic between the analysis and the new CAP strategies. This ambiguity may alienate stakeholders involved in the systems development.

Evidence demonstrates the CMA developed a solid evidence base to support its analysis of the big issues, trends and drivers for the region. This evidence included scientific, agency and community input; however, how this analysis led to the selection of strategies in the CAP is not clear. Strategies are not directly linked to the 'big issues' identified such as competing land uses, poor development planning, and limited community capacity, reducing confidence that they have been systematically assessed. While the CMA has developed extensive spatial data to describe the landscapes, spatial data usage and explanation in the CAP is limited and could be improved to provide clearer guidance to stakeholders.

Strengths:

- The CMA used best-available information to identify the big issues, trends, and drivers for the region.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- The CAP discusses many of the big issues identified for the region -such as urbanisation, community capacity, and decline in farm viability but does not link strategies to these issues, reducing confidence that strategies will thoroughly address the big issues.
- The incorporation of spatial data into the CAP is very limited, and the spatial maps are not well explained, reducing their usefulness in communicating intent or guiding on-ground actions.
- While the CMA sourced considerable information regarding community values and used it to analyse the region, it is not evident that this input meaningfully informed the CAP strategies.

Attribute 2B: Plan integrates biophysical and socio-economic information to analyse the systems operating in the catchment and develop strategies for improving landscape function and resilience

The CAP does not present a cohesive analysis of the region as a whole. It takes two separate approaches to analysis – asset-based for the regional scale and systems-based for local social-ecological systems - without applying either of these in the logical selection of strategies, actions and targets. The asset-based analysis considered soil, water, vegetation and community themes in isolation. The landscape approach focused on the management priorities in the three subregional landscapes identified. The CAP presented a third framework to link the strategies to a set of five goals, but lacks analysis substantiating these links. These approaches are not well integrated, resulting in a confusing CAP. Additionally, there is no explanation of the links between the themes or between the landscapes, reducing confidence that the CMA understands the region as an integrated system.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- The CMA selected strategies and targets based on two separate analytical processes, which were not integrated into an assessment of social-economic and biophysical factors. This reduces confidence that the CMA has selected interventions that will produce the best outcomes.
- The CAP does not justify selection of strategies and actions, reducing confidence that the CAP strategies will maximise benefits and achieve goals and targets.
- The CAP indicates several different 'priority' rankings for strategies and actions, resulting in a lack of clear guidance regarding priorities.

The evidence does not demonstrate that the CMA has logically analysed and prioritised strategies and actions for improving landscape function. The CAP presents 'strategies, 'CAP Actions, 'management actions' and 'management priorities' without justifying their selection or how they are interrelated. It is not evident in the CAP why the CMA chose these particular strategies and actions. The CMA indicated that they chose broad strategies and actions intended to cover all of the feedback received from the various reference groups. Five different tables present various 'priorities' for themes, goals and landscapes. The lack of integrated analysis of the biophysical and social-economic information and lack of transparency regarding strategy selection reduce confidence that the CMA has chosen the most effective strategies.

Attribute 2C: Plan proposes targets and actions that are logically nested and supported by the available evidence

The CAP provides no justification for the hierarchical structure of the goals, strategies, actions and targets it presents. Although a series of tables indicate various links, these links are onerous to follow and are not substantiated by analysis. This lack of justification reduces confidence that the 'CAP Actions' are likely to achieve the identified targets, or that meeting these targets will achieve overall goals. The actions included are broad, and are not linked to the indicated spatial priorities, reducing the ability of the CAP to provide meaningful guidance to CAP users.

The targets set out in the CAP are not consistently auditable and the CMA has not indicated any intent to develop more specific targets or refine the current targets during the implementation phase. The CAP targets only cover a small range of the desired outcomes specified in the goals. As such, these targets do not facilitate thorough progress reporting. The targets for the landscapes are derived from the analysis of the socio-ecological systems completed prior to the CMA amalgamation.

The CAP outlines an implementation planning process involving a continuation of the Whole-of-Government Steering Committee. This process should help guide alignment between local government, and major delivery partners in delivering the CAP. However, the CAP provides few other details of the implementation process, reducing confidence that the CMA has sufficiently considered this process and the risks involved.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- The CAP does not logically link the goals, targets and actions so the relationships between them are unclear, reducing the likelihood that the CAP strategies and actions will achieve identified goals.
- The large number and breadth of actions identified reduces the ability of the upgraded CAP to provide clear guidance for operational planning purposes.
- The CAP targets only cover a small number of the desired outcomes indicated in the goals. As such, they do not facilitate meaningful reporting of progress against goals.
- Targets are not consistently measurable and there is no evidence of intent to develop more specific targets during the implementation phase, reducing accountability.

Criterion 3 - CAP is a plan for collaborative action and investment between Government, community and industry partners

Attribute 3A: Plan aligns with relevant policies and community aspirations

The CMA followed a logical process for identifying the relevant plans and policies of partner organisations, which included significant consultation with partners. This was facilitated by input from the community reference groups, 'theme team' representatives and the Whole-of-Government Steering Committee. Each of the 'CAP Actions' identifies key legislation, policies and partners. The CMA acknowledged in interviews that there are areas where government policies and community aspirations conflict, although these are largely unaddressed by the strategies and actions in the CAP.

The CAP should contribute to the objectives of the *Threatened Species Act 1995* (NSW). The CAP sets out which 'CAP Actions' are intended to align with the *NSW 2021* goals; however, it does not explain how these actions will contribute to reaching the goals. Evidence indicates minimal consideration of cross-border alignment other than participation in the Coastal CMA group.

Strengths:

- The CAP includes a table identifying how 'CAP Actions' align with relevant government plans and policies.
- The Whole-of-Government Committee, Community Reference Groups and 'Theme Teams' all provided guidance on relevant plans and policies ensuring partner input in developing a CAP that aligns with various stakeholders aspirations.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- Evidence indicates that there was minimal consideration of cross-border alignment between the CAP's strategies and actions and those of neighbouring CMAs.

Attribute 3B. Plan can meaningfully guide Governments, industry and the community to align effort across the region

The upgraded CAP incorporates broad strategies and actions, but defers further prioritisation, and identification of more specific interventions to the implementation stage. The CAP includes a proposed prioritisation process that could be used to guide investment and alignment among partners. This process would apply during the development of the four-year business plan, which will align with the local government planning timeframes. The CAP identifies partner organisations that the CMA indicates have agreed to participate in implementing each of the 'CAP Actions'; however, evidence indicates that these partner organisations have not yet agreed to the implementation or prioritisation processes. The CMA indicated that partners are predominantly listed for general actions that they already perform, reducing confidence that the CAP includes a clear plan for collaborative delivery.

The upgraded CAP would be better if it more clearly and logically linked its goals, targets, strategies and actions. At present, the links are unsubstantiated and difficult to follow, which may reduce the ability of the CAP to meaningfully guide actions that will increase efficiencies. However, stakeholders who participated in the Community Reference Groups and Whole-of-Government Steering Committee have indicated that the CAP is a good tool for identifying opportunities for partners to engage in collaborative projects or activities.

Strengths:

- Proposed integration of CAP implementation with the four-year local government planning cycle is an effective approach to increase efficiency of efforts across the region.

Weaknesses/or gaps:

- The CAP goals, targets, strategies and actions are not logically linked, reducing the ability of the CAP to guide actions or deliver increased efficiencies.
- The majority of the strategies, 'CAP Actions', and 'management actions' are too broadly worded to effectively guide implementation by government and community partners.

Attribute 3C: Plan specifies agreed roles and responsibilities for partners in the catchment

The CMA made considerable efforts to undertake a whole-of-government and community approach, but there is little evidence of how this will be carried through in the implementation phase. The upgraded CAP identifies delivery partners for each 'CAP Action'. These actions are quite broad and the CAP does not specify strategies or actions relating to coordinating actions. Definition and prioritisation of specific roles and responsibilities is deferred to the implementation stage. Planning for the implementation stage appears to be in the early stages, and has been deferred until the Local Land Services boundaries are announced. The CMA developed a Whole-of-Government Steering Committee and the intent is to continue this as a method for aligning various partner agencies. There is little evidence that the CMA has thoroughly considered other delivery. In addition, while some survey respondents have indicated their roles and responsibilities are clear, the CMA has indicated that partners have not yet committed to the implementation process outlined in the CAP. This reduces confidence that the roles and responsibilities for collaborative action will be successfully defined as proposed in the final draft CAP.

Strengths:

- The CAP lists key partners for each 'CAP Action'.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- There is minimal evidence of a clear plan for how collaborative implementation will actually be carried out.
- The CMA has not discussed roles and responsibilities with delivery partners, creating a risk that they will not agree to assist with implementation.

Attachment 2 - About the assessment

Assessment objective

The objective of the NRC’s assessment is to determine whether a CAP is a quality strategic plan that promotes the state-wide targets for NRM and complies with the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*⁴ (the Standard).

Assessment criteria

Following extensive consultation, the NRC developed the *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans*⁵ which was endorsed by the NSW Government Senior Officer Group for NRM. To define the criteria and expectations, the NRC examined the external context (institutional, spatial and temporal). It identified elements expected of a high quality strategic NRM planning process and final plan, within the context of the Standard. The NRC trialled and refined the criteria through a pilot process involving CMAs and agencies.

The NRC then determined what represents an acceptable level of performance against the criteria at a specific point in time, considering factors and risks specific to the CAP and the region it covers as well as the maturity and development of the regional model as a whole, including the comparative performance of other CMAs.

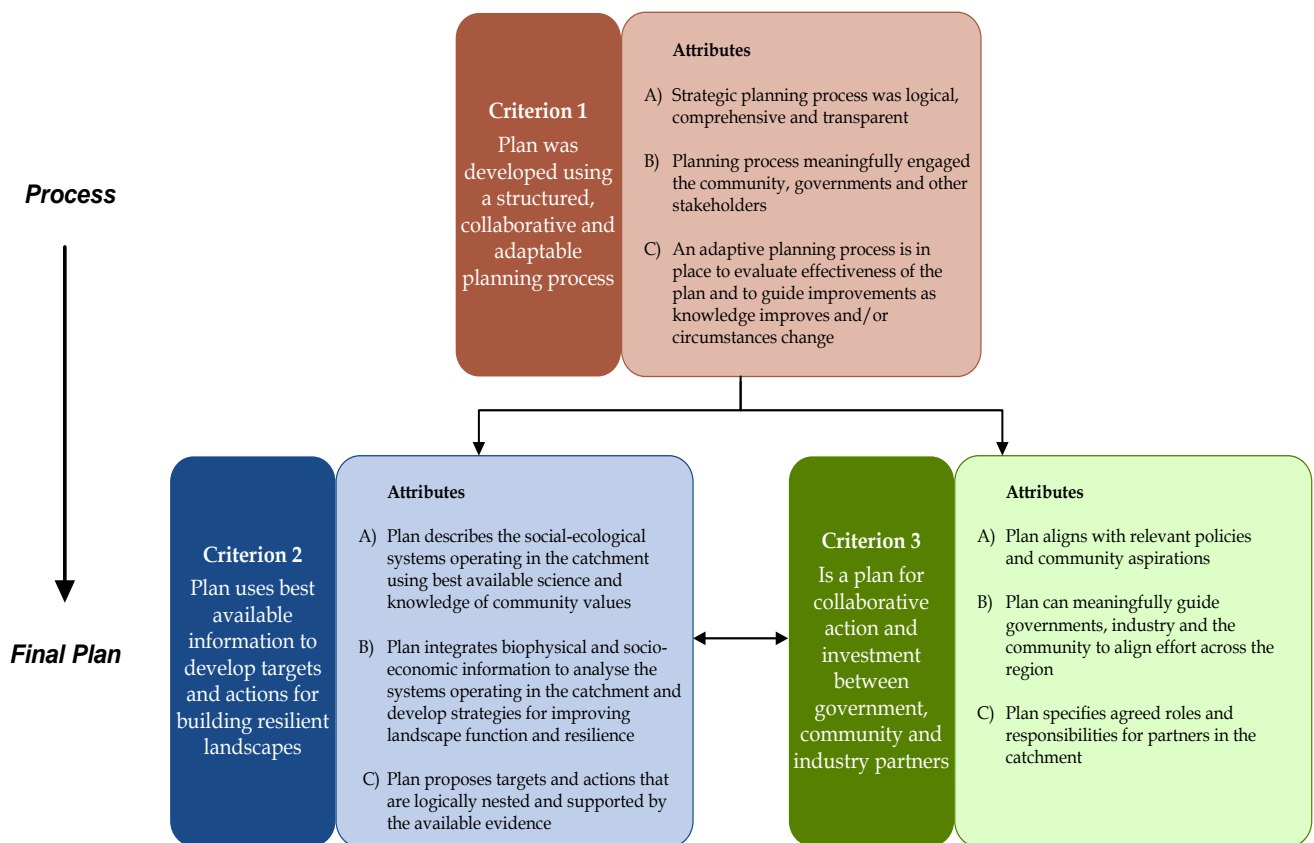


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

⁴ The NSW Government adopted the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*, which identifies seven components that are used to reach high-quality natural resource decisions. CMAs must comply with the Standard using it as a quality assurance standard for all planning and implementation decisions.

⁵ NRC, *Framework for assessing and recommending upgraded catchment action plans v2*, June 2012

Assessment methodology

The NRC assessment team followed the methodologies set out in the *Framework for assessing and recommending catchment action plans v2, June 2012*.

The CAPs were assessed in progressive phases, including preliminary assessment of evidence prior to formal submission and a full review when the CAP was formally submitted. The NRC sent the assessment reports to CMAs for consultation before they were finalised.

Assessment approach

The NRC's assessment of the CAP involved collecting evidence and consulting with government agencies, CMAs and other stakeholders. The methods and activities used to collect and analyse evidence against the criteria for the Hawkesbury-Nepean CAP included:

- pre-assessment engagement with the CMAs to identify characteristics of the region that influence CAP development, such as major issues and institutional structures
- desktop analysis of the plan, planning approach, community consultation and scientific knowledge used in developing the plan
- interviews with three CMA Board members, three senior managers and two staff members
- nine surveys and two interviews with stakeholders, including representatives of industry, local government, landholders and non-government groups
- government agency consultation
- four external reviews of the analysis underpinning the targets, conducted by consultants with expertise in ecology and environmental science, social science and environmental economics.

Acknowledgements

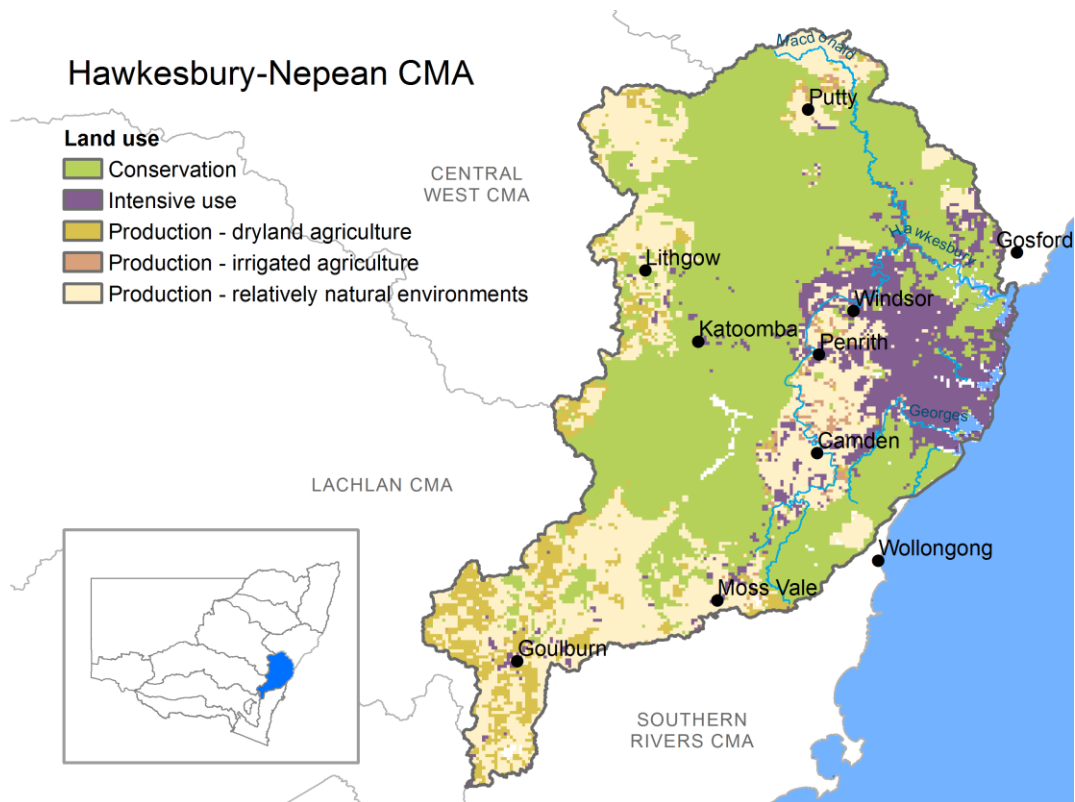
The assessment team gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance provided by the Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA, and agencies and stakeholders in the region. In particular, we wish to thank the Hawkesbury-Nepean CMA Board, General Manager and staff.

Attachment 3 - About the region

The Hawkesbury–Nepean catchment covers 23,870 square kilometres. It includes the coastal reaches from Turimetta Headland to Barrenjoey near its mouth; the Sydney metropolitan region; and the catchments for Warragamba, the Upper Nepean and the Mangrove Creek dams, which are the main water supply reservoirs for the Sydney Metropolitan area. In the Sydney region, elongated estuarine waterways penetrate deep into the urban and bushland catchments. The region consists of complex natural landscapes and a wide range of landforms including coastal plains, sandstone gorges and ridges, highlands and tablelands.

The diversity of landscapes is matched by the complex cultural, social and economic setting of the region; Sydney is the most populated, culturally diverse, and economically important city in Australia. This is complemented by the towns and rural areas located through the remainder of the region. In 2011, more than 60 per cent of the population of NSW lived in the Hawkesbury–Nepean region. Natural resources in the region support a diverse range of livelihoods and lifestyles. Industries supported include fisheries, power generation, tourism, agriculture, viticulture and market gardening.

The Sydney region of the CMA is a particularly complex, highly urbanised environment and faces unique challenges: multi-institutional resource management interests (including 39 local government areas); intensive urban, industrial, transport and recreational land use pressures; the demands of four million residents and millions of visitors; and national and international scrutiny.⁶



⁶ Sources: Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan 2007–20016; Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Action Plan 2009; Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Action Plan 2013–2023; NRC Audit Report Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Action Plan Implementation September 2012.

