



RECOMMENDATION

BORDER RIVERS-GWYDIR
CATCHMENT ACTION PLAN

September 2006



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BORDER RIVERS-GWYDIR CATCHMENT ACTION PLAN

Enquiries

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List of acronyms

CAP	Catchment Action Plan
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
DEC	Department of Environment and Conservation
DNR	Department of Natural Resources
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
NRC	Natural Resources Commission
NRM	Natural Resource Management
NSW	New South Wales
PVP	Property Vegetation Plan

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1 Introduction and overview

The Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has reviewed the Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan (CAP) and recommends that this CAP be approved. The NRC further recommends that the Minister require the CMA to undertake a review of the Catchment Action Plan within 18 months of approval to incorporate its progress on the specific actions identified in this report.

CAPs are an important component of the new institutional model for delivering natural resource management (NRM) in NSW. Under this model, 13 Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) are responsible for planning and investing in NRM within their catchments. Each CMA has developed a CAP to use as a 10-year strategic plan or 'investment portfolio' for NRM in its region. These CAPs should set clear directions for all NRM activities in their regions and should integrate other NRM plans, including regional strategies, water sharing plans and regional conservation plans. Ultimately, the CAPs should set the direction for an integrated, whole-of-government approach to achieving catchment and state-wide targets, and should become the primary vehicle for public and private investment in NRM.

The NRC is required to advise the Minister for Natural Resources on whether or not to approve the CAP prepared by each CMA. Specifically, the NRC must determine whether each CAP complies with the *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*¹ (the standard) and promotes the state-wide targets for natural resource management.²

In addition, the NRC agreed to consider whether each CAP fulfils other specific requirements nominated by the NSW Government and Joint Steering Committee (JSC).³

1.1 Overview of findings

The NRC's recommendation is based on its findings that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP:

- demonstrates a reasonable level of compliance with the standard at this point in time
- provides a high degree of confidence that the targets will promote the achievement of the state-wide targets over time.

The CAP fulfils all legislative and most other specific government requirements, however many of the targets are not yet completely SMART.⁴

¹ Natural Resources Commission (2005) *Standard for Quality Natural Resource Management*. Available at <<http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/module.aspx?id=3>>.

² Natural Resources Commission (2005) *Recommendations: state-wide standard and targets*. Available at <<http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/module.aspx?id=3>>.

³ These include the Australian Government and NSW Government Natural Resource Management Joint Steering Committee, NSW Department of Natural Resources, NSW Department of Environment and Conservation and NSW Department of Primary Industries.

⁴ 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound' (SMART), see below for further details.

The NRC believes that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA can continue to refine its CAP and targets and successfully work with its community to implement the CAP as:

- it has good plans to improve its compliance with the standard, refine its CAP targets, and increase its organisational capabilities
- the recommended actions will focus the CMA on the key areas that require improvement
- the NRC will periodically review the CMA's progress.

The NRC considers that to successfully implement the CAP, the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will require support from the government. This support will be necessary to:

- develop an effective monitoring and evaluation program, given the limited funding available and historic lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation in NSW
- enable the CMA to enhance its internal knowledge and information management systems
- provide flexibility in funding programs to improve the ability of the CMA to deliver NRM outcomes on priority issues
- ensure the CMA has the resources it needs to operate at full capacity, given the difficulty it has experienced in attracting additional staff to the region.

1.2 NRC's recommendation

In accordance with Section 13 (b) of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*, the NRC recommends that the Minister approve the Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan without alteration.⁵

The NRC further recommends that the Minister require the CMA⁶ to undertake a review of the Catchment Action Plan within 18 months of approval to incorporate its progress on the following actions:

- a) developing and implementing a risk management strategy
- b) developing and implementing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy⁷
- c) applying the standard to develop a framework for transparent decision-making and investment priority-setting
- d) continuing to develop business systems to support strategic planning and help staff apply all components of the standard.

Successful completion of these actions should enable the CMA to prepare and publish a revised CAP that will more fully comply with the standard and significantly increase the likelihood of the CAP promoting achievement of the state-wide targets.

⁵ Under Section 23 (1) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

⁶ Under Section 26 (1) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

⁷ The development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy should ensure the CMA develops targets which are more 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound' (SMART). See Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (2002) National Framework for Natural Resource Management (NRM) Standards and Targets. Available at <http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/standards/index/html>.

The NRC will undertake an audit within 2 years of approval.⁸ To support this, the NRC will require a letter from the CMA to report their progress on the actions on a 6-monthly basis.⁹ If reasonable progress in completing the recommended actions is not evident from these letters, the NRC will consider bringing the audit forward.

1.3 Process to develop this advice

The NRC developed its recommendation using a rigorous process developed in consultation with NSW Government agencies and the JSC, and subsequently endorsed by the CMA Chairs. The process included:

- identifying the needs of all government stakeholders and developing a single process to meet all of these needs
- meeting with the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA to help it prepare for the CAP review, and undertaking a formal review of the CMA's business systems (the 'Systems Review') to identify what changes to these systems were needed to comply with the standard
- providing follow-up support to the CMA to help it make the necessary changes to its business systems
- evaluating the draft CAP and supporting documents for compliance with the standard, likelihood of promoting achievement of the state-wide targets, and fulfilment of NSW legislative requirements and other government requirements
- discussing the NRC's initial findings and recommendation with the CMA and relevant government agencies; evaluating the final Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP, supporting documents, and plans for improvement with relevant agencies; and finalising this advice.

In evaluating all CMAs' CAPs and formulating its advice, the NRC took into account that the CMAs are relatively new organisations, and that many aspects of the new institutional model for NRM are still developing. When the CMAs were established in late 2003, they were responsible for implementing on-ground activities in accordance with pre-existing Catchment Blueprints.¹⁰ In May 2005, the NSW Government adopted the standard and a set of state-wide targets for NRM.¹¹ The CMAs have been required to modify their operations according to the new standard, and to develop their CAPs in accordance with this.

The NRC also acknowledges that there will be variations between the CMAs' CAPs. This is because the new institutional model promotes regional decision-making and allows flexibility and innovation. It is also due to the fact that each CMA is at a different stage of organisational development. Given this, the NRC assessed the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP with regard to the CMA's unique characteristics and current stage of development. Over time, application of the standard should underpin continuous improvement in all CMAs and their CAPs.

⁸ Under Section 13 (c) of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*.

⁹ Under Section 16 (3) of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*.

¹⁰ These 21 Catchment Blueprints were developed in 2002 by advisory Catchment Management Boards.

¹¹ Natural Resources Commission (2005) *Recommendations: state-wide standard and targets*. Available at <<http://www.nrc.nsw.gov.au/module.aspx?id=3>>.

1.4 Structure of this document

The rest of this document explains the NRC's recommendation in more detail:

- Chapter 2 sets out the NRC's assessment of the CAP against all requirements
- Chapter 3 sets out the NRC's assessment of whether the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will improve its CAP and its compliance with the standard and likelihood of promoting the state-wide targets over time.

2 NRC's assessment of the CAP

The NRC assessed the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP to determine whether it is a good strategic plan that complies with the standard and will guide the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA in promoting achievement of the state-wide targets. In particular, it:

- examined the process the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA used to develop the CAP, and the resulting CAP, and evaluated these against the standard
- assessed the CAP targets to determine whether they promote achievement of the state-wide targets
- assessed whether the CAP fulfils NSW legislative requirements and reflects other specific government requirements.

Overall, the NRC considers that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP contains many elements of a good strategic plan. The NRC is satisfied that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA followed a reasonable process to develop the CAP and that the CAP demonstrates a reasonable level of compliance with the standard for this point in time. The NRC has a high degree of confidence that it will promote the state-wide targets.

It is also satisfied that the CAP fulfils all legislative and most other government requirements. However, many of the targets are not yet completely SMART.

The NRC has identified some areas of the CAP that require improvement to more fully comply with the standard, including determination of scale, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation. It also identified that the CMA needs to develop a framework for transparent decision-making and investment priority-setting. However, it believes that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will refine the CAP and CAP targets over time, and improve its organisational capabilities, to address these areas. The CMA has demonstrated that it has good plans in place to achieve improvement. These plans indicate that the CMA will progressively develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system that will encourage continual improvement, both in the CAP document and its implementation. In addition, the actions the NRC has recommended will help the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA to focus on the key areas requiring improvement.

The sections below discuss in detail the NRC's assessment of the process used to develop the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP, whether the targets within the CAP will promote achievement of the state-wide targets, and whether the CAP fulfils the legislative requirements and reflects other specific government requirements.

2.1 Is the CAP consistent with the state-wide standard?

A CAP that is developed in accordance with the standard and state-wide targets should contain clear priorities that were determined using a rigorous and transparent process. The NRC evaluated CAPs against the following question to test this requirement:

- Was the CAP developed using a rigorous and transparent process?

The standard contains seven interdependent components which, when applied properly and together, should help CMAs make rigorous and transparent decisions and prioritise their NRM activities in a way that leads to sensible and integrated NRM outcomes at all scales.

Proper application of the standard in developing a CAP should help CMAs to:

- use the best available information
- take appropriate account of scale issues to maximise the net benefit of investments
- capture opportunities for collaboration to maximise gains
- engage the community in a meaningful way
- effectively manage risks
- establish monitoring and evaluation systems
- effectively manage information.

The NRC examined the process the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA used to develop its CAP, and evaluated this process and the resulting CAP against the standard. The NRC found that the process was reasonable and that the CAP demonstrates a reasonable level of compliance with the seven components of the standard. However, some aspects of the CMA's decision-making and prioritisation for the CAP are not completely transparent. The NRC's assessment takes into account the fact that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA is a relatively new organisation operating within a new regional model for NRM. Given this, the NRC does not expect the same level of compliance with the standard that it might reasonably expect from a more mature organisation.

The Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP describes the process the CMA used in developing the CAP, including the following key steps:

- **Reviewing Blueprints to develop draft targets:** The CMA developed draft targets for key thematic areas using the information and data contained in the Border Rivers and Gwydir Catchment Blueprints.
- **Establishing expert panels to further develop draft targets:** The CMA established expert working groups to review the draft targets, identify threats to the condition of natural resources and develop management actions to promote NRM outcomes. These working groups aimed to ensure that all relevant information and knowledge for each of the key thematic areas was factored into CAP development.
- **Consulting with key stakeholders:** The CMA consulted with most key stakeholders, including Aboriginal groups, to update them on the content of the CAP and to receive feedback on the relevance of targets in the CAP and any improvements required.
- **Submitting the CAP to the Minister and NRC:** The CMA submitted its final CAP to the Minister for Natural Resources and the NRC for approval in June 2006.

Table 2.1 summarises the NRC's assessment of the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP development process and the resulting CAP against the components of the standard. The table also lists selected evidence to support this assessment.

Table 2.1: NRC assessment of the CAP development process against the standard

Component	Assessment of process against this component	Selected evidence
Collection and use of knowledge	<p>The CMA followed a structured and transparent approach for collection and use of knowledge. It describes the CMA's process for gathering and assessing information from a number of sources, including scientific literature, local expertise and the broader community. It is well supported by best available knowledge.</p> <p>It also clearly identifies the uncertainty associated with NRM decision-making and implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CAP development process included reviewing and documenting information on the Border Rivers Blueprint and the Gwydir Blueprint. ▪ Chapter 2 of the CAP summarises the processes for information collection and use of knowledge, which included establishing expert panel groups for each theme to identify pressures on natural resources and appropriate targets. ▪ Examples of knowledge collection projects are identified for targets in each theme.
Determination of scale	<p>The CAP provides evidence that the CMA considered spatial, temporal and institutional scale when developing the CAP. However, it is not always clear how the CMA determined optimal scale for its investment.</p> <p>The next step for the CMA is to develop processes for systematic consideration of scale issues at program and operational levels and for determining optimal scale.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Institutional Context</i> section describes the relationship between the CMA and other institutions operating at different scales. ▪ The CAP explains the CMA's location in relation to other regional management areas in the Murray-Darling Basin and the need to ensure that NRM initiatives take into account the potential impacts on cross-border regions. ▪ The <i>Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting</i> chapter describes the CMA's decision-support tool, the <i>Project Assessment Tool</i>. This helps to consider some scale issues and to assess multiple benefits.
Opportunities for collaboration	<p>The CAP provides evidence that the CMA collaborated with key stakeholders, including local government, state agencies and community groups. The CMA stresses the importance of establishing and maintaining relationships with a range of stakeholders, to achieve NRM outcomes.</p> <p>The next step for the CMA is to develop a process for systematically analysing the costs and benefits of collaboration with existing and potential partners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CAP explains that the CMA used expert panels during CAP development and will continue to use these when refining the CAP. ▪ The CAP describes targeted consultation with NRM agencies in Queensland. ▪ The CAP describes the CMA's intention to form partnerships with industry groups, community bodies, individuals and other agencies involved in NRM.

Component	Assessment of process against this component	Selected evidence
Community engagement	<p>The CAP demonstrates that the CMA effectively engaged the community in the development of the CAP.</p> <p>The CMA has developed community targets which should ensure that it continues to involve the community during implementation of the CAP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CAP explains what stakeholders were consulted in CAP development, and how the issues and information raised were addressed. ▪ The CAP includes community as a specific theme, with targets for facilitating community engagement and collaboration. ▪ The CAP includes a strong emphasis on engaging Aboriginal communities, understanding how these communities wish to contribute to NRM in the region.
Risk Management	<p>The CAP provides confidence in the CMA's capacity to identify risks that may adversely impact on the implementation of the CAP and the achievement of desired outcomes. It contains a detailed risk assessment, including management strategies, for all catchment and management targets.</p> <p>The next step for the CMA is to develop a comprehensive risk management strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Risk Assessment</i> section describes general risks and management strategies associated with successful CAP implementation, as well as consideration of risks and management actions for catchment and management targets.
Monitoring and evaluation	<p>The CAP generates some confidence that the CMA will develop useful monitoring and evaluation systems. However, it does not reflect a very clear understanding of how monitoring and evaluation should support continuous improvement in the CAP document (including targets) and in implementation.</p> <p>The next step for the CMA is to develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting</i> chapter explains how the CMA sees a monitoring and evaluation framework feeding into its process of adaptive management. ▪ The CAP refers to the <i>Project Assessment Tool</i> as the basis for monitoring and evaluation at all levels of the CMA's operations. ▪ The <i>Reviewing the Catchment Action Plan</i> chapter outlines the CMA's intention to undertake a formal review of the CAP in June 2007, where targets may be revised to incorporate any lessons learned.
Information management	<p>The CAP shows that the CMA has effectively used and managed information in CAP development. Information is presented in a structured and transparent manner, with comprehensive references for each theme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA is developing a <i>Communications and Awareness Program</i>, to provide stakeholders with improved access to information. ▪ The CAP outlines the CMA's intention to form partnerships to facilitate information sharing between the CMA and stakeholders.

2.2 Is the CAP likely to promote the state-wide targets?

For the management and catchment targets within a CAP to promote the achievement of the state-wide targets they need to:

- have been developed using a rigorous and transparent process that was compliant with the standard
- provide a basis for assessing performance, which means they need to be measurable (including having timeframes, units of measure, clear target levels, and performance indicators)
- be supported by information that demonstrates that they are relevant and achievable
- demonstrate linkages between the different sets of targets, which means that management targets should clearly contribute to catchment targets and catchment targets should clearly contribute to the state-wide targets.¹²

The NRC has a high degree of confidence that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP targets will promote the state-wide targets. The NRC assessed the CAP and found that it meets most of the above requirements. The CMA followed a reasonable process to develop the targets which demonstrated a reasonable level of compliance with the standard for this point in time. Additionally, the CMA has good plans in place that will enable the CMA to improve its CAP over time, including developing and implementing a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework, and forming partnerships for information provision. The CMA intends to revise the CAP within 12 months of its approval to incorporate new information.

The NRC found that most targets in the CAP are measurable and will provide a good basis for performance assessment in the future. The targets generally include target levels, units of measurement and are timebound. Performance indicators are not explicitly defined, but these are generally implicit within the targets or in the supporting text. The CAP acknowledges baseline data gaps for each theme and outlines projects to fill these gaps. The CAP also outlines the CMA's monitoring, evaluation and reporting adaptive management scheme and demonstrates that the CMA has good plans to establish monitoring and evaluation programs that, if supported by state-level monitoring, will provide credible information to measure progress towards the targets.

The CAP contains useful supporting information for most targets, to explain why they are achievable and relevant. The introductory text for each theme explains the current condition of resources and the key pressures on resource condition. The CAP explains the intent of each target and provides examples of management actions that will help to achieve each management target. *Schedule 1* identifies some key stakeholders for collaboration, and provides justification for target levels.¹³ *Schedule 5* contains maps showing priority locations for investment for a number of key thematic areas. Chapter 14 of the CAP outlines specific risks and risk management strategies associated with targets.

¹² These characteristics of targets correspond to the requirement of the Australian and NSW Government Joint Steering Committee that targets be 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound' (SMART). See Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (2002) National Framework for Natural Resource Management (NRM) Standards and Targets. Available at <http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/standards/index/html>.

¹³ The CMA used the 2004-2007 investment strategy funding as the basis for determining target levels.

The CAP provides some explanation of the relationship between different sets of targets. The tables provided for each theme summarise the relationship between the CAP catchment and management targets and the state-wide targets. However, the CAP does not clearly demonstrate the links between targets in different themes. The NRC considers that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will be able to provide a better description of the links between different sets of targets once it has developed a framework to support monitoring and evaluation (discussed in Chapter 3).

2.3 Does the CAP fulfil specific government requirements?

CAPs need to fulfil a range of legislative requirements, including those under the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*, the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* and the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. CAPs also need to reflect other specific requirements nominated by the NSW Government and JSC.

The NRC has assessed the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP against each of these requirements and priorities. It found that the CAP satisfactorily fulfils all legislative requirements (see Table 2.2). It also found that the CAP satisfactorily reflects most other government requirements.

However, the management and catchment targets included in the CAP are not completely SMART at this stage (see Table 2.3), but as section 2.2 discussed, the NRC believes that the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will work towards improving targets over time.

In developing its findings, the NRC has consulted with the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Environment and Conservation, the Department of Primary Industries and the JSC.

Table 2.2: NRC assessment of the CAP against legislative requirements

Legislative requirement	Finding
Biodiversity certification	The NRC considers the CAP, and the systems that underpin it, meet the requirements for biodiversity certification. The CAP contains management targets for biodiversity, water and soils and land use that aim to maintain and improve habitat for threatened species, populations and communities. The CAP includes targets and actions for biodiversity conservation in both terrestrial and aquatic habitats. The CAP also describes how the CMA will strengthen existing partnerships and develop opportunities for new collaborative ventures through a Communications and Awareness Program.
Environmental planning instruments and other natural resource plans	In developing its CAP, the CMA has considered the provisions of environmental planning instruments and other natural resource plans. Section 1.4 of the CAP states that the CAP provides a vehicle for implementing elements of existing strategies and plans at regional level. The CMA also describes the relationship of the CAP with existing NRM plans, policy and legislation.
Environmental Water Trust Fund	Not applicable.

Table 2.3: NRC assessment of the CAP against state and national priorities

State/national priority	Finding
JSC Investor Preferences	Section 1.2 states that the 'CAP will deliver against investor preferences'. Each thematic area includes a summary table that shows which management targets contribute to the fulfilment of investor preferences.
SMART targets	The majority of targets in the CAP are measurable, with timeframes for implementation, units of measurement and target levels. Performance indicators are not explicitly defined, although they are generally implicit within the targets or in the supporting text. The CMA plans to refine targets in the CAP as more data become available.
Native vegetation management priorities and programs	The NRC considers that the native vegetation management priorities and targets contained in the CAP are consistent with the <i>Native Vegetation Act 2003</i> . For example, biodiversity targets (CT1, MT B1, and MT B2) aim to promote management of native vegetation on a regional basis. The CAP identifies priority locations for investment and management initiatives (examples include remnant vegetation and eroded or salt affected land). The CAP indicates that the CMA has used the Property Vegetation Plan (PVP) Developer to assist in identifying priority locations for management actions.
Salinity targets	The CAP states that the target <i>MT6</i> is 'drawn directly from the NSW Salinity Report of 2001'. ¹⁴ This implies that it is consistent with the MDBC salinity strategy. The CAP states that the target may be amended following the review of this strategy.
National framework for NRM standards and targets	The NRC considers that the CAP targets are consistent with all 10 of the relevant National Matters for Targets, as specified in the National Framework for NRM Standards and Targets.
Blueprint evaluation	The CMA established expert working groups to evaluate the Border Rivers Catchment Blueprint and the Gwydir Catchment Blueprint and to begin developing the CAP targets. The CMA undertook extensive community consultation to identify additional issues and to account for all relevant knowledge.
NSW Government Statements of Intent	Not applicable.

¹⁴ Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA (2006) *Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan*, p. 97.

3 NRC's assessment of the CMA's capacity to improve the CAP over time

The NRC assessed whether the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will continue to improve the CAP's compliance with the standard and likelihood of promoting achievement of the state-wide targets. The NRC believes that the CMA will continue to improve, for the following reasons:

- the CMA has demonstrated that it generally has good plans in place to improve compliance against each component of the standard, to refine the catchment and management targets, and to increase its organisational capabilities
- the actions the NRC has recommended will encourage the CMA to focus on the key areas that require improvement and will promote accountability to the NRC, other CMAs, investors and the broader NSW community
- the NRC will regularly review the CMA's progress of the recommended actions, which will provide an additional incentive for the CMA to address key issues and demonstrate progress within reasonable timeframes.

3.1 The CMA's plans to improve the CAP

The NRC has assessed the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA's plans for improving the CAP over time, based on its discussions with the CMA during the CAP review process and its evaluation of the CAP. The NRC is satisfied that the CMA generally has good plans and processes in place for improving its CAP and its compliance with the standard. It notes that some of these plans are explained in the CAP, so that they are clear to investors and the broader community.

Table 3.1 summarises the NRC's assessment of the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA's plans to improve its CAP against each component of the standard. The NRC believes it is important that the CMA implements, reviews and refines all of these plans and processes, and then updates the CAP within 18 months. It believes the CMA should give particular attention to improving determination of scale, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the CMA should focus on developing a framework for transparent decision-making and investment priority-setting. Improvements in these areas will be crucial to the ongoing success of the CMA as an organisation.

Table 3.1: NRC assessment of the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA's plans to improve

Component	Plans to improve
Collection and use of knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA is in the process of identifying knowledge gaps and developing a strategy to address these gaps, primarily through its <i>Interim Priority Projects</i>. ▪ It plans to evaluate the currency and accuracy of knowledge and information currently used to make investment decisions and report findings to its Board.
Determination of scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The <i>Project Assessment Tool</i> identified in Section 15 of the CAP should help the CMA to consider spatial, temporal and institutional scale issues and to determine appropriate management actions. ▪ The CMA is developing a template to help staff determine optimal scale in CMA activities at all levels.
Opportunities for collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA is currently developing a <i>Communication and Awareness Program</i> to implement its <i>Communications Strategy</i> (Section 2.4). The aim of this strategy is to 'strengthen existing partnerships and develop opportunities for new collaborative ventures'. ▪ The CMA intends to review feedback from public meetings to identify additional opportunities for further collaboration, and to establish a checklist of issues to consider when negotiating collaborative opportunities (e.g. information sharing, cost sharing, communication and shared risk management). ▪ The CAP states that the CMA will build on the stakeholder analysis it has already done, to assess the benefits and risks of possible collaborations.¹⁵
Community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CAP describes plans for the formation of an <i>Aboriginal Reference Group</i> to facilitate engaging the Aboriginal community in NRM initiatives. ▪ The CMA plans to develop a project-specific communication plan for all future projects.
Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA plans to develop a risk management strategy to cover all CMA activities. ▪ The CMA will assess the relevance and applicability of a risk management assessment conducted by Deloitte, and will use the expertise of its probity auditor to contribute to its risk management planning.
Monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA plans to review the CAP in June 2007 (or within 12 months of approval) and to modify targets and management actions in response to lessons learned. ▪ The CMA intends to further develop its <i>Project Assessment Tool</i> to better assess linkages between on-ground initiatives and resources condition outcomes. The CMA will also consider other decision support tools. ▪ The CMA plans to capture spatial data for all new projects, to better account for NRM investment, and to appoint a monitoring and evaluation officer to be responsible for building its internal capacity.
Information management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The CMA is developing a <i>Communications and Awareness Program</i> and intends to develop partnerships with key information custodians to facilitate improved information sharing between the CMA and its stakeholders. ▪ It is also developing an internal information management system.

¹⁵ Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA (2006) *Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan*, p. 11.

3.2 NRC's recommendation

In accordance with Section 13 (b) of the *Natural Resources Commission Act 2003*, the NRC recommends that the Minister approve the Border Rivers-Gwydir Catchment Action Plan without alteration.¹⁶

The NRC further recommends that the Minister require the CMA¹⁷ to undertake a review of the Catchment Action Plan within 18 months of approval to incorporate its progress on the following actions:

- a) developing and implementing a risk management strategy
- b) developing and implementing a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy¹⁸
- c) applying the standard to develop a framework for transparent decision-making and investment priority-setting
- d) continuing to develop business systems to support strategic planning and help staff apply all components of the standard.

The NRC considers that this approach will allow the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA to 'get on with business', while also ensuring continuous improvement in the CAP document and implementation. The actions above are discussed in detail below.

a) should encourage the CMA to build on the risk assessment conducted by Deloitte to develop a comprehensive system for identifying, assessing, prioritising and managing risks. The strategy should encompass the risks listed in the CAP, and ensure that these are reviewed and managed as part of an ongoing process. The CMA should apply the strategy to all of its activities.

b) should encourage the CMA to build on the *Model CMA Monitoring Strategy* it developed in 2004, as well as the *Monitoring and Evaluation Framework* developed by the Department of Natural Resources. The CMA's monitoring and evaluation strategy should enable it to clearly map the catchment priorities, the catchment and management targets that deliver on these priorities, the relationships and assumptions between these targets, and the monitoring and evaluation required to show progress. Development of the strategy should help the CMA to obtain the information necessary to refine targets – including making targets more measurable and better demonstrating that they are relevant and achievable, thereby improving promotion of the state-wide targets. It should also help the CMA improve targets by clarifying the difference between catchment targets, management targets and management actions, and by reducing the complexity of some targets which may contain multiple outcomes or outputs. Implementation of this strategy will allow the CMA to directly link investment to priorities and monitoring of targets, and will provide investors with a clear picture of CMA expenditure and progress.

¹⁶ Under Section 23 (1) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

¹⁷ Under Section 26 (1) of the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003*.

¹⁸ The development of a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation strategy should ensure the CMA develops targets which are more 'Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound' (SMART). See Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council (2002) National Framework for Natural Resource Management (NRM) Standards and Targets. Available at <http://www.nrm.gov.au/publications/standards/index/html>.

c) should ensure the CMA builds on its existing decision-making processes and makes them more robust, transparent and consistent with the standard. A robust decision-making framework will help the CMA to clearly record, communicate and justify its future decisions about NRM investment. The CMA should consider the range of existing tools and collaborate with other CMAs, state agencies and research organisations to determine an appropriate framework. This should help the CMA to make its consideration of scale issues more explicit and to identify the optimal scale for its activities.

d) should encourage the CMA to continue to develop business systems it described in the CAP, the Systems Review and through other communication with the NRC. Robust business systems help the CMA to properly apply all components of the standard. They should help the CMA to improve the underdeveloped areas of the CAP and to implement it efficiently.

3.3 How should the CMA demonstrate progress?

The NRC will require the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA to report 6-monthly, in a letter, on its progress in undertaking the actions detailed above. This will require the CMA to assess and report on its own progress at regular intervals.

This kind of regular self-assessment is important for the CMA's own adaptive management, and will also create opportunities for it to seek guidance or support where necessary.

3.4 How will progress be monitored?

Regular review of the CMA's progress should assist the CMA in achieving and demonstrating continuous improvement. It should also highlight any additional obstacles to the CMA's progress. In addition, it should provide investors with increased confidence as they move beyond 2008/09 and into the next funding cycle.

The NRC will:

- require the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA to report 6-monthly, in a letter to the NRC, on its progress in taking the actions listed in Section 3.2
- undertake an audit if progress in taking the actions is not adequate
- audit the effectiveness of the implementation of the most recent version of the Border Rivers-Gwydir CAP within 2 years of the date of approval
- undertake a mid-term review of this CAP in 2011. This will be a formal audit of the CMA's compliance with the standard and promotion of the state-wide targets.

3.5 What can the government do to support this CMA?

The NRC considers that to successfully implement the CAP, the Border Rivers-Gwydir CMA will require support from the government to:

- develop an effective monitoring and evaluation program, given the limited funding available and historic lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities for monitoring and evaluation in NSW
- enable the CMA to enhance its internal knowledge and information management systems

- provide flexibility in funding programs to improve the ability of the CMA to deliver NRM outcomes on priority issues
- ensure the CMA has the resources it needs to operate at full capacity, given the difficulty it has experienced in attracting additional staff to the region.

These issues are also relevant to other CMAs, and are more fully explained in the NRC's consolidated report on all CAPs.

