



Assessment of
the Southern Rivers upgraded
Catchment Action Plan

March 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 Southern Rivers Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and assessed its potential to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities.

The Southern Rivers region encompasses diverse landscapes that range from coastal shores and estuaries to alpine and sub-alpine areas. The economic prosperity of the region is dependent on natural resources, which support agriculture, aquaculture, fishing and nature-based tourism.

Key findings

The Southern Rivers CAP is a high-quality, succinct strategic plan developed in close collaboration with a broad range of local and regional stakeholders. Successful implementation of the CAP is very likely to **deliver improvements** in long-term landscape health and community well-being.

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

- clearly **articulates a vision** for the region as an area of 'sustainable communities, profitable industries and resilient landscapes'
- has **strong community support and ownership** due to effective consultation with farmers, local businesses, landholders, Aboriginal groups and other interested community groups
- is **aligned** with local, state and Australian government plans and policies, including proposed integration with the four-year local government planning cycle
- is **accessible and has increased the capacity** of stakeholders to make decisions and take action in their local landscapes and areas
- **prioritises areas for investment** that will deliver better social, economic and environmental **outcomes** for the region and higher returns for investors
- details three **local landscapes and associated targets** that can inform localised on-ground activity now, while also being flexible enough to deal with future uncertainty
- selects strategies, targets and actions based on comprehensive coverage of **best-available social, economic and environmental information** and community input.

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

- **develop reference points** against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured, to further **improve accountability** for delivering outcomes.

Recommendation

The NRC recommends that the Minister approve the upgraded Southern Rivers CAP with the following condition to:

- **review and adapt** the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, pending the final decision of the Minister.

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1 Introduction

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

The Southern Rivers region is located in south-east NSW covering a coastal and tablelands area that extends along 40 per cent of the NSW coast from the Victorian border. The region has a population of 460,000. The economic prosperity of the region is dependent on natural resources, which support agriculture, aquaculture, fishing and nature-based tourism. Landscapes range from coastal shores and estuaries to alpine and sub-alpine areas.

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 natural resource management (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 Southern Rivers CMA implemented a comprehensive and well-planned approach to develop its upgraded CAP. The CMA applied lessons learned from implementing the first CAP and development was directed by strong project objectives.

Strategic planning and capacity

The CAP demonstrates rigorous application of new concepts, including resilience thinking and systems analysis to better coordinate investment in NRM. The CMA has thoroughly explored these concepts, building on its existing knowledge and analysis of the region. This new methodology was strengthened by the identification of major issues for the region, through evaluating the internal and external operating environments.

The CMA Board demonstrated high-level strategic planning capability in its leadership of and involvement in the CAP development process. The CAP upgrade significantly developed the strategic capacity among CMA staff members and regional stakeholders by engaging them in extensive training and consultation. The Southern Rivers CMA led the Coastal CMAs' state-level CAP development workshops, which facilitated information sharing and cross-region collaboration between the five coastal CMAs.

Collaborative CAP upgrade

The CMA effectively consulted with a broad range of community representatives, including industry; landholders; and local, state and Australian governments. This thorough consultation approach built on existing strong foundations with delivery partners and developed new relationships, using tailored techniques to suit different partners' needs. The CMA used a comprehensive approach to capturing community values and providing information about the CAP upgrade. This included nine workshops throughout the region (attended by over 250 community members), social benchmarking surveys, online feedback and other community events. The CMA also held one-on-one meetings with specific interest groups such as dairy industry representatives, Landcare, oyster farmers, local government, graziers and Aboriginal stakeholders.

The extensive consultation process resulted in consistently positive feedback from stakeholders about the CMA's approach, and strong support from partners for the upgraded CAP. Stakeholders also reported a sound understanding of the CAP's strategic approach to NRM. This will support local decision making and stakeholder participation in implementation.

Adaptability

The CAP highlights the importance of dealing with uncertainty, complexity and information gaps when managing natural resources. This is evident in one of the three CAP goals - 'adaptive management and devolved decision making' - which aims to enable effective and responsive decision making, a key issue the community raised during consultation. A technical reviewer confirmed this, noting 'adaptive cycles are built into the planning framework and system connectivity is recognised'. Actions to address this goal include monitoring risks, evaluating programs and identifying key knowledge gaps as information improves or circumstances change. The adaptive management process is supported by the identification of primary triggers of change and high-level shocks to landscapes that require flexible management to ensure the CAP's ongoing relevance.

2.2 Targets

The Southern Rivers CAP sets clear strategic directions and targets by considering social, economic and environmental knowledge to inform NRM. The strategic priorities for the region aim to improve the long-term health and productivity of local landscapes and communities.

Best-available information

The CMA sourced best-available information through extensive consultation with stakeholders, accessing technical expertise, leveraging the CMA's existing planning experience and using conceptual models. This was confirmed by an independent technical review which found that the CAP 'draws on an extensive knowledge base...including data held by state agencies as well as local knowledge'. The CMA also used clear maps and conceptual diagrams to very effectively communicate CAP strategies and priorities.

Analysis of social, economic and environmental information

The upgraded CAP focusses on analysing the resilience of the region by assessing its social, economic and environmental values. The CAP identifies three logical social-ecological landscapes using sound spatial analysis of institutional, economic, social and biophysical boundaries. The CMA identified these landscapes based on its existing sub-regional planning system, enabling the continuation of well-established community reference groups. Stakeholders support the identification of the three landscapes which are based on the amalgamation of six sub-regions. The landscapes have considered cross-border areas, in particular the tablelands landscape links to areas in the Murrumbidgee CMA that share common attributes.

The CMA carried out strategy development for the CAP in stages. It analysed regional theme-based information (for example water, land and community) to identify the key drivers of change and controlling variables for each theme. The CAP effectively summarised the high level drivers of change and took a balanced approach to dealing with the complexities and diversity in addressing social, economic and environmental issues, with a technical reviewer confirming the plan 'presents comprehensive coverage of key socio-economic issues'. The CMA developed its knowledge of state-scale systems during the Coastal CMAs' state-level CAP development workshops. The CMA then applied this knowledge at the regional scale and used it to identify the key issues for the region. This 'theme-based' knowledge was then integrated with the local knowledge gathered during the multi-stage consultation process, and applied to the three landscapes, to help the CMA determine the key issues for each landscape.

The CAP goals, strategies and outcomes-focussed targets flow logically from the CMA's analysis. However, this analysis was largely based on the separate assessment of social, economic and ecological themes at the regional level, rather than assessment of the landscapes as systems. As such, there is a risk that the CAP may not fully explore links within and between landscapes, reducing confidence that it has identified the most effective strategies for achieving social, economic and environmental outcomes. The CAP includes plans to continue developing integrated analysis during the implementation stage, and to ensure equal detail is available across the social, economic and ecological elements of the landscapes.

Hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets

The CAP's clear hierarchy of goals, strategies and targets provides guidance for delivery partners and confidence for investors, reflecting the CAP's overarching vision of 'sustainable communities, profitable industries and resilient landscapes'. A technical review commended

the CAPs 'informative and well-defined overview of strategic directions', with the targets focussed on achieving outcomes.

The highest CAP priority relates to those targets that aim to increase the capacity of land and water managers to effectively manage natural resources. The CMA determined this priority by analysing the most significant functions and relationships that affect the likelihood of achieving the CAP's vision. While the strategies and priorities are clear, the CAP defers the process of quantifying actions until the implementation stage. This approach recognises the inherent tension between the CAP being specific enough to guide investment, and ensuring it remains relevant in a changing environment (a key learning from the CMA's review of the first CAP).

Accountability

If the CAP is successfully implemented it is very likely that it will deliver outcomes that contribute to the *NSW 2021* goals³ and the state-wide targets for NRM. However, the specific quantification of CAP targets will be set in the implementation stage. The lack of a baseline or reference points against which to measure progress compromises the auditability of the targets which could potentially weaken accountability.

The NRC recommends approval of the Southern Rivers CAP with the following **suggested action**:

- to develop reference points against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

2.3 Action and investment

The Southern Rivers CMA has effectively built on strong community, industry and government relationships to develop a CAP that can guide collaborative action and investment in NRM. The CAP is accessible, with clearly presented messages and aims. Delivery partners have overwhelmingly agreed that they will use the CAP to guide their actions and have committed to being involved in the subsequent implementation planning.

Alignment with partner plans and strategies

The proposed alignment of CAP implementation planning with the four-year local government planning cycle is an effective approach to improve the efficiency of NRM planning and on-ground action. The analysis of local government Community Strategic Plans is also an effective way of capturing community views for inclusion in the CAP.

The CMA comprehensively considered the CAP's alignment with NSW Government and Australian Government policies. 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 natural resource management policies, plans and strategies'. The CMA analysed the challenges of aligning with the complex policy framework and the CAP contains objectives to continue alignment activities with key delivery partners. The CAP goals contribute to the *NSW 2021* goals and the state-wide targets for NRM.

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

Roles and responsibilities

The CAP is a quality plan for guiding collaborative action and investment in NRM. Supporting this aim, the CAP specifies the delivery partners expected to be involved in delivering the strategies; however, the specification of detailed roles and responsibilities is deferred until the implementation stage. The CAP therefore represents a 'point-in-time' outcome negotiated with delivery partners that have agreed to be involved in future implementation planning. This approach aims to overcome the conflict in seeking accountability from partners when they are unable to commit to specific actions outside of their funding and decision-making cycles.

Stakeholders have expressed that they understand the need for flexibility that this approach provides, and that they understand the relationship between the CAP and subsequent implementation plans. Despite the deferral of determining specific roles and responsibilities, one delivery partner stated that the CAP 'provides essential tools to be able to determine the state of natural resource management systems and then decide what actions are required on a macro level'.

Implementation

The CAP provides clear strategic-level guidance for implementation planning by defining the desired outcomes and specifying actions that can contribute to achieving these outcomes. The CAP has received broad support from stakeholders and delivery partners who agree it is an effective guide for NRM action in the region. Industry organisations stated they were pleased that the 'CAP will continue to support profitable industries, and partnerships with industry and community' and that 'this partnership [with the CMA] has assisted the industry to transition towards sustainable production'.

The CAP identifies high-level opportunities for coordinated delivery of projects with partners to maximise outcomes. This includes coordination with organisations not traditionally involved in NRM (such as health and cultural organisations) who appreciated the CAP's 'new, people-centred approach to natural resource management'. An Australian Government representative said that the CAP 'is a good tool for identifying opportunities for partners to engage in collaborative projects or activities'. Industry and community organisations also predominantly agreed that the CAP was a good tool for guiding collaborative NRM actions.

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 Southern Rivers Catchment Action Plan with one condition.

3.2 Conditions of approval

The NRC recommends approval of the Southern Rivers upgraded CAP with the following condition to:

- review and adapt the CAP, if required, to fit with Local Land Services boundaries, pending the final decision of the Minister.

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 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:

- to develop reference points against which progress towards CAP targets will be measured to further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

3.4 Readiness for transition to Local Land Services

The Southern Rivers CAP upgrade has positioned the CMA well to transition to the new Local Land Services structure as:

- The CMA Board and staff have demonstrated strong strategic planning capability and understanding that would inform future strategic planning.
- The CAP vision, strategies and priorities would provide clear direction to a new Board.
- Community and stakeholder views are already sufficiently captured and reflected in the CAP. Consequently, extensive community consultation would not be required in order to reflect potential Local Land Services boundary changes.
- The sub-regionalisation of Southern Rivers CMA is logical. In particular, the tablelands landscape links to areas in the Murrumbidgee CMA which have common attributes.
- The scientific, industry, and community knowledge supporting the CAP is a valuable resource for new regional organisations.

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 Southern Rivers CAP upgrade was driven by a clear strategic direction. The CMA applied lessons learned from its first CAP, implementing a well-planned and well-governed process to achieve the desired outcomes. The application of new concepts, including resilience thinking and systems analysis, allowed the CMA to take a structured approach to the way it views the region, building on its existing knowledge and analysis. This new approach was strengthened by the CMA's identification of major issues in the region by effectively scanning and analysing the internal and external operating environment. The CAP upgrade significantly developed the strategic capacity of the CMA and regional stakeholders by engaging them in extensive training and engagement.

Strengths:

- CAP development was guided by a clear strategic direction with a strong focus on whole-of-government and whole-of-community engagement.
- Training for all Southern Rivers CMA staff and Board members – and workshops for stakeholders – increased the strategic capacity of participants in CAP development.
- The CMA led strategic planning collaboration between Coastal CMAs and government stakeholders.

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

The CMA's engagement approach built on existing relationships with delivery partners and also developed new relationships. This resulted in predominantly positive feedback from stakeholders about the CMA's approach to engagement and the upgraded CAP. Stakeholders were also positive about the value of the CAP as a guide for their NRM planning and investment decisions. Where organisations did not see the CAP as being relevant to their operations this was due to the broader scale of the CAP relative to their organisation's scope. Despite some minor disagreement, those involved in the CAP engagement were overwhelmingly supportive of the CMA's approach and are committed to collaborating on CAP delivery.

Strengths:

- The CMA effectively consulted with a broad range of community representatives including industry and landholders, using techniques tailored to best suit stakeholders.
- The targeted approach to engagement helped establish new relationships or improve relationships, including with some Aboriginal groups and the Southern Councils Group.
- The CMA utilised the information in local government Community Strategic Plans to analyse community values.

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 CMA used lessons learned from evaluating the first CAP, including its performance against targets, to inform the CAP upgrade. The specificity of targets in the first CAP meant that it was quickly out of date, so the CMA took a high-level approach to setting targets in the upgraded CAP, which allows for adaptive management. The adaptive planning process is identified in the CAP as one of three key 20 year goals. This goal aims to enable effective and responsive decision making, which was a key issue raised by the community during the CAP engagement process. The CAP's adaptive management approach is supported by its identification of primary drivers of change and high-level shocks that will require flexible management to ensure the CAP remains relevant.

Strengths:

- The principles underpinning adaptive management are foundational to the upgraded CAP. These principles have guided the CAP upgrade and are a core focus of CAP implementation, ensuring the CAP's ongoing relevance.
- The CMA has identified potential triggers for CAP review, including high-level shocks and broader drivers of change.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- The CMA has not yet developed a specific process for how it will conduct future reviews of the CAP in response to triggers.
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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 upgraded CAP identifies the key issues for the region, focussing on the link between NRM and productive agricultural systems. Strong supporting documentation details the information used and the processes followed in developing the CAP. The CMA has built on its comprehensive knowledge base by sourcing best-available technical expertise and undertaking thorough community engagement. The CMA has listed the ongoing need to identify and address knowledge gaps as a key implementation action. The CMA successfully incorporated science and community values in developing the CAP goals and strategies. The CMA used its existing sub-regional planning system to identify three landscapes (social-ecological systems). These landscapes, though logically identified, could be better utilised in the CAP's presentation of spatial information.

Strengths:

- The CAP clearly identifies the key issues for the region, presenting a strong focus on the interactions between people and the natural environment.
- The CMA logically identified three landscapes (social-ecological systems) through sound spatial analysis that considered institutional, economic, social and biophysical boundaries.
- The upgraded CAP and the strong supporting documentation show the application of best-available information and community knowledge sourced through extensive consultation and access to technical expertise.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- The upgraded CAP would have benefited from greater use of spatial data when describing and analysing the social-ecological systems.
 - The CAP requires further work to address knowledge gaps, which the CMA plans to address in the CAP implementation stage.
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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 analysis presents comprehensive coverage of social, economic and environmental issues. The high level drivers of change have been effectively summarised and the CMA took a balanced approach to dealing with the complexities and diversity in addressing social, economic and environmental issues. The CAP analysis is primarily based on assessing system components in isolation, and includes state and transition modelling. Although the analysis later integrates the components at the landscape scale there are risks that all the interactions between the social, economic and environmental components may not have been fully explored. The CMA plans to address knowledge gaps, including in the economic data, during the CAP implementation stage. The CAP logically sets out well-structured strategies and targets, demonstrating the CAP's focus on its vision of sustainable communities, profitable industries and resilient landscapes.

Strengths:

- The CAP analysis presents comprehensive coverage of social, economic and environmental issues.
- Landscape-scale analysis has driven the logical prioritisation and selection of CAP strategies and objectives.
- The CAP effectively summarised the high level drivers of change and took a balanced approach to dealing with the complexities and diversity in addressing social, economic and environmental issues.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- Additional analysis of links between the landscape's social, economic and environmental elements would further improve CAP analysis. This is planned for the CAP implementation stage.

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

The upgraded CAP presents a logical hierarchy of goals and objectives with nested actions and targets. The targets focussed on achieving outcomes and are appropriately specific for strategic planning, flowing logically from the analysis. The actions contribute to achieving the CAP targets and are designed to inform implementation planning. Detailed prioritisation and quantification of targets will be determined in the subsequent implementation planning, to allow the CAP to remain relevant in a changing environment. The development of reference points against which to measure CAP targets would further improve accountability for achieving the CAP's targets.

Strengths:

- The upgraded CAP has a clear and logical strategy hierarchy with nested goals, targets and priority actions.
- Targets are focussed on achieving outcomes and are appropriately specific for a strategic plan.

Weaknesses/gaps:

- Development of reference points against which to measure CAP targets would further improve accountability for delivering outcomes.

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 relevant NSW Government agencies (The Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, the Office of Environment and Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs NSW) have endorsed the upgraded CAP and have confirmed that it is not inconsistent with the relevant policies, plans and strategies for which these agencies are responsible. The upgraded CAP aligns with relevant policies at the state and national scale and the CAP targets can contribute to these policy aims. The CAP also aligns with lower-level policies that are relevant to operational planning, but not the strategic-level CAP. The CMA evaluated the NRM policy framework and the CAP includes objectives to further advance the alignment process. The prioritisation of effort and investment is a key aim of the CAP, which has a strong focus on ensuring the consideration of regional issues as evidenced by positive community and industry feedback. The CAP meets all statutory requirements.

Strengths:

- The CAP aligns with relevant government plans and policies at state and national scales.
- The CMA evaluated the NSW NRM policy framework and identified objectives to advance future alignment by improving the framework.
- There is broad support from stakeholders for the CAP to act as a guide for NRM actions for the region.

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

The CAP identifies clear strategies for collaborative and coordinated NRM in the Southern Rivers region. It provides an informative and well-defined overview of strategic directions, effectively utilising spatial representation and diagrams. The high-level goals, objectives and targets provide priorities for action and investment for delivery partners, with industry, community and government predominantly agreeing that they will use the CAP to guide their actions. More specific responsibilities will be negotiated in developing the CAP implementation plans, which are designed to align with the four-year planning cycle of local government as a key delivery partner. There is a high level of confidence in the CMA's ability to effectively coordinate CAP delivery, as evidenced by substantial stakeholder support for the CAP and stakeholder's commitment to ongoing relationships with the CMA. The CAP has also identified areas for collaboration with non-NRM organisations.

Strengths:

- The CAP provides an informative and well-defined overview of strategic directions. The desired future states (the objectives of the CAP) are well-presented.
- The strategies and targets are logical and clear and supported by specific priorities for action and investment. The CAP can effectively guide implementation by government and community partners.
- The proposed integration of CAP implementation with the four-year local government planning cycle is an effective approach to increasing efficiency.

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

The CAP lists specific key delivery partners including government and other organisations. Delivery partners are specified at the objective/target level rather than at the more detailed action level, which would have provided greater accountability. The allocation of roles and responsibilities is planned for the implementation phase in order to facilitate adaptation and respond to investor preferences. The CMA has arranged a process to agree on implementation plans, which will consider resourcing availability and changing priorities. While this approach in the CAP does risk being too ‘high-level’ to provide guidance to delivery partners, partners have expressed their support for it, recognising the need for flexibility that this approach provides.

Strengths:

- The CAP specifies the types of organisations and specific government bodies expected to contribute to achieving CAP goals.
 - The CAP identifies high-level opportunities for coordinated delivery with partners to maximise outcomes, including organisations not traditionally involved in NRM (such as health and cultural organisations).
 - The CMA has secured stakeholder support for a process for agreeing to specific roles and responsibilities during the development of CAP implementation plans.
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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.

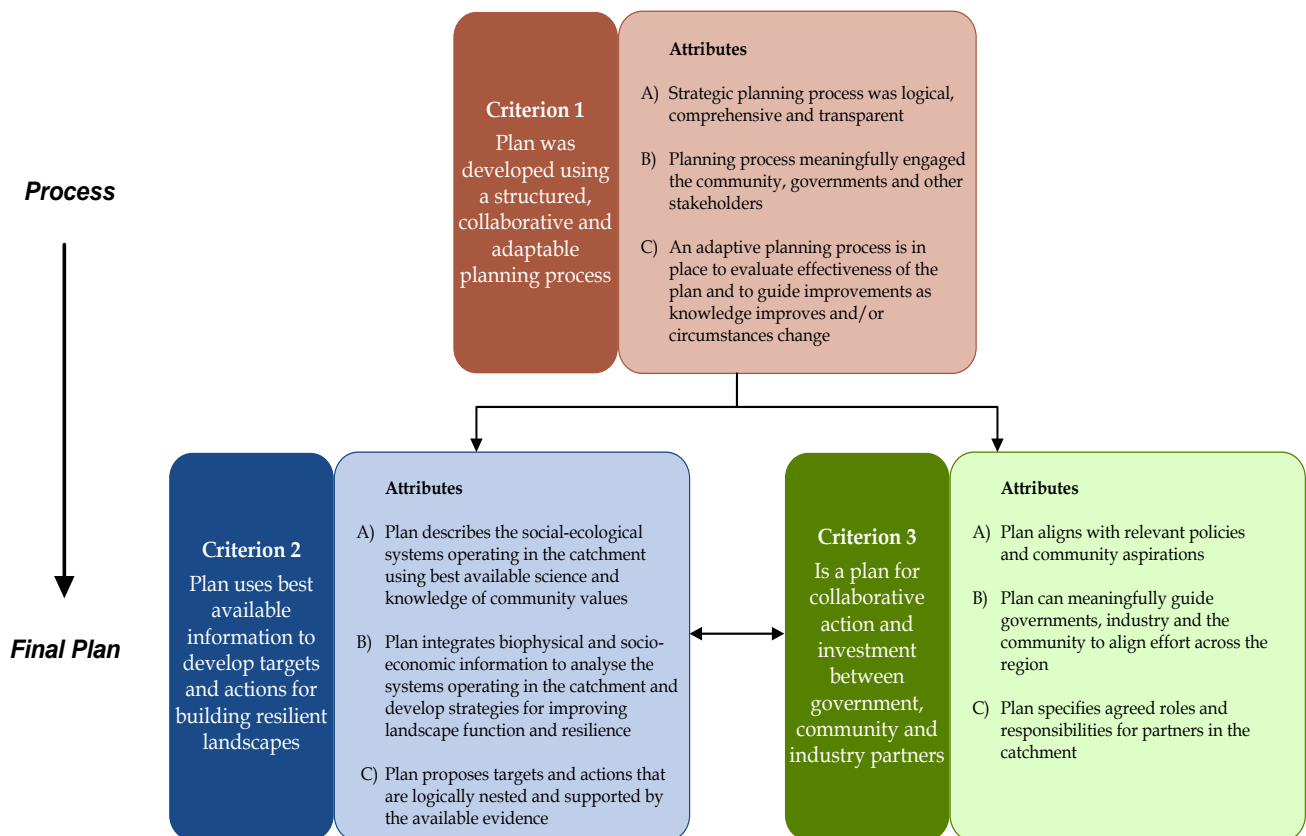


Figure 2.1: Criteria to assess whether the CAP is a quality, strategic natural resource management plan

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 Southern Rivers 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 two CMA Board members, three senior managers and two staff members
- 16 surveys and three 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 audit team gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and assistance provided by the Southern Rivers CMA, and agencies and stakeholders in the region. In particular, we wish to thank the CMA Board, General Manager and staff.

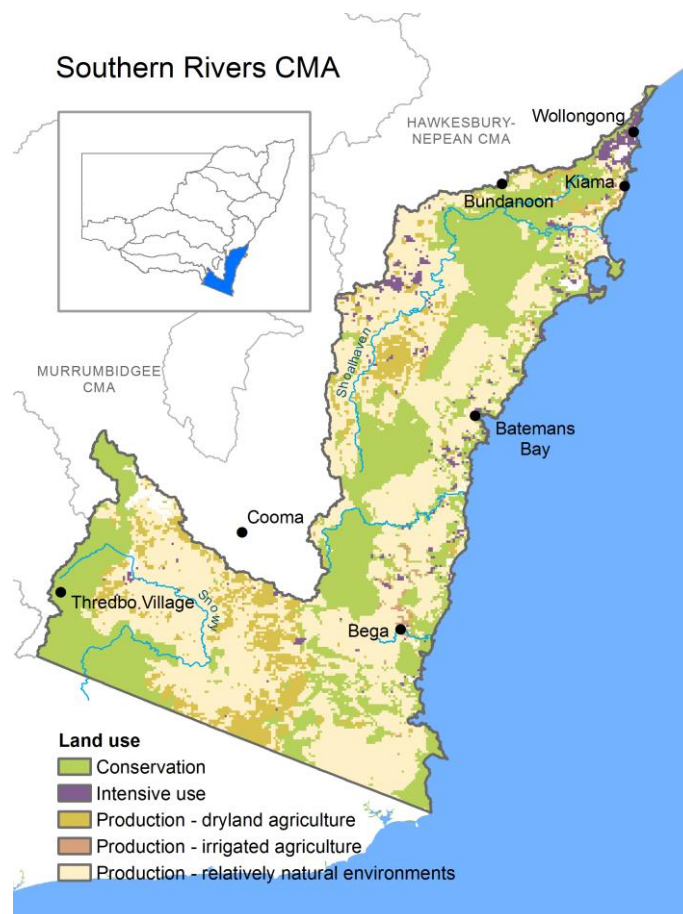
Attachment 3 - About the region

The Southern Rivers region is located in south-east NSW and covers an area of 32,000 square kilometres. This coastal region extends along 40 per cent of the NSW coast, extending from the Victorian border in the south, and has a population of 460,000 including almost 14,000 Indigenous Australians (ABS 2011).

The current economic prosperity of the Southern Rivers region is dependent on natural resources, which support agriculture, aquaculture, fishing and tourism.

Landscapes in the region range from coastal shores and estuaries to alpine and sub-alpine areas, including the plains and the high country of the Monaro. On the coast, land use is dominated by large tracts of public land, including national parks, state forests and crown lands that underpin nature-based tourism including the Snowy Mountains and associated snow fields. The coastal plains support a range of profitable agricultural enterprises, particularly oyster farming, fishing, and dairy and beef farming. By contrast the tablelands are dominated by grazing enterprises that support the wool, prime lamb and beef industries.

The majority of the Southern Rivers population reside in regional towns and centres along the coast, with Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama, Nowra, Bomaderry and Ulladulla being the largest. The tablelands tend to be more sparsely populated with a declining population base in some areas.⁶



⁶ Source: Southern Rivers Catchment Action Plan and the Southern Rivers CMA website, <http://www.southern.cma.nsw.gov.au/>, viewed 14 February 2013.

