

## annex b: summary of the review of the 1997 RCS

(see also separate review document)

review of the 1997 RCS

review methodology

history, vision and scope

establishment of priorities

progress and achievements

water resources program

land and sustainable production

biodiversity

monitoring and evaluation

integration with other NRM agencies

relationships with the community

capacity to meet new arrangements for regional management

areas for improvement

## review methodology

Resource Economics Unit and its Associates independently reviewed the 1997 Corangamite Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) between February and May 2002. The review was carried out by means of desk research, workshops attended by Board members, CCMA staff and key stakeholders, and meetings with stakeholder groups. A separate report has been published by the CCMA.

## history, vision and scope

The Corangamite Catchment and Land Protection Board developed the 1997 Strategy, immediately prior to the creation of the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority. The stated objective of the RCS was to provide a “*blueprint for achieving integration and delivery of the land and water management programs in the Region into the next century*”. This emphasis on integrating programs underlines the fact that the RCS concentrated on bringing together existing efforts, and did not attempt to work from first principles.

The 1997 Strategy, and its subsequent evolution through the annual Management Plans and Supporting Strategies developed by the CCMA, provided a substantial basis for catchment management in the Region from 1997 to the present. It was compiled within a short space of time by a small team working with limited resources. It integrated pre-existing natural resource management activities into six programs and targeted priorities with regional significance. This was the first time that all of the issues facing natural resources and the environment of the Region were presented in a single coherent document.

The RCS outlined six Programs, based on assessment of threats, community expectations and existing natural resource management activity:

- Sustainable Production
- Water Resources
- Biodiversity Conservation
- Catchment Amenity
- Community Education, and
- Monitoring and Evaluation

The Programs embraced a number of on-going strategies such as the *Corangamite Salinity Strategy – Restoring the Balance (1992)*. Actions selected on their regional significance were then presented as “Focus Activities:”

- Pest plant control
- Municipal co-operation
- Water quality enhancement
- Grasslands conservation
- Soil management
- Pest animal control

## establishment of priorities

A system for rating priority issues was developed, based on (i) level of impact of the issue; (ii) whether existing efforts were adequate; and (iii) whether a benefit-cost analysis would be likely to demonstrate (or had already demonstrated) economic efficiency of projects addressing the issue.

High priority issues included (i) integration of natural resource management with municipal planning policies and practices; (ii) community action; (iii) pest animals and plants; and (iv) enhancement of biodiversity provisions. Water resources were given selective additional emphasis, particularly in relation to (a) flow management; (b) nutrients and eutrophication; (c) turbidity; (d) waterway health; and (e) groundwater.

Issues that were kept at previous levels of activity included salinity management and waterlogging, with more emphasis being sought on hot-spot identification and improved process knowledge. A relatively low level of strategic activity was chosen for soil-related issues, largely because of perceived low impact of these issues.

## progress and achievements

### *overview*

A list of the actions from the 1997 Strategy were circulated amongst CCMA and NRE staff who had detailed knowledge of each Program area. They rated each action according to the degree of implementation. Overall, some 79 per cent of actions in the 1997 RCS were completed either successfully or were partly completed with a successful outcome. Some 21 per cent of actions were not completed.

There has been a high level of implementation of Strategy actions in the pest control area, both plants and animals. Major improvements were also achieved in the strategy development for water quality and waterways management, and in continuing the *Corangamite Salinity Strategy*.

Most of the actions that have not been implemented had a relatively high priority rating in the 1997 RCS:

- Review of the Noxious Weeds list.
- Catchment management plans for 14 proclaimed water catchments.
- Soil management planning.
- Modelling of waterlogging discharge process.
- Local drainage planning controls and guidelines for drainage planning.
- Ensuring planning and development decisions considered streamflow impacts.

Moderate progress has been made in improving the involvement of municipalities in catchment strategy development and implementation through planning policies.

## water resources program

The 1997 RCS grouped its Water Resources Program into three core projects:

- Water quality and waterway management
- Floodplain management
- Groundwater and river health

There have been significant achievements in respect of (i) waterways planning; (ii) development of a nutrient strategy; (iii) continued attention to salinity; (iv) establishment of the Index of Stream Condition monitoring program; (v) development of the Barwon River Flood Warning System and Emergency Response Plan; (vi) completion of regional floodplain risk mapping, and subsequent development of the *Draft Floodplain Management Strategy*; (vii) completion of the Corangamite Crown Frontage Review; and (viii) development of *Stormwater Management Plans* by all shires. Other aspects, including land management plans in water supply catchments and riparian re-vegetation, were not implemented to the hoped-for degree.

Separate projects have been developing on nutrients and salinity. There are now moves to re-integrate and take a wider view of water quality. This would appear to be a good move, not only because separate aspects of water quality often require the same remedial actions, but because priorities can be more comprehensively addressable and other aspects of quality will get consideration such as bacteriological quality for health of drinking water supplies and recreational lakes. Such re-integration may need to more deliberately link with the *State Environment Protection Policy* (SEPP) beneficial use schedule, which articulates the values associated with water.

Considerable work has taken place to improve waterways condition. Reaches of the Barwon and Leigh Rivers and some coastal streams, previously degraded by weeds, are now "partly stabilized" or "recovering".

The 1997 RCS did not give full recognition to underground water or lakes. In this Region flows are often perennial, and underground water has tended to be seen more as an agent.

Integrated catchment management for lakes was apparently overlooked within the RCS document. This may be more a matter of expression than actuality. The development by Parks Victoria of the *Western District Lakes Management Plan* concentrated on Ramsar wetlands and has led to a major contribution of funding between NHT, the CCMA, Parks Victoria and more recently Greening Australia. There has also been considerable Landcare activity in the catchment of Lake Corangamite. Economic and recreational aspects of water aspirations did not gain very complete consideration in the 1997 RCS, although considerable recognition has been given in subsequent detailed strategies, in particular the *Nutrient Management Strategy*. A widening range of water assets and their values has been taken up in the *Draft Corangamite River Health Strategy*.

## land and sustainable production

The aim of the Sustainable Production Program was "to increase production in the Region while ensuring that resources... will support the needs of future generations". In assessing threats, the Strategy considered: (i) soil characteristics (salinity, acidity, contamination, fertility, structural decline, erosion, waterlogging, eutrophication of waterways, and mass movement); (ii) impacts of changed land use; and (iii) plant and animal pests.

Most of the issues identified against the soil category were ranked low to medium in terms of impact, and much of this work remains to be done.

In relation to changed land use, the CCMA Board has provided considerable input to the Blue Gum expansion program and raised-bed cropping initiative. The philosophy has been to ensure that changes in land use do not have adverse direct or indirect environmental and sustainability impacts. However, this overarching philosophy has not been worked through to an understanding of how best to combine regulation, incentives and innovation to achieve sustainable practice for new land uses.

Pest control strategies published by the CCMA and (the then) NRE since the 1997 RCS now provide a pest management framework that support the mechanism of local action. Weed control strategies were translated into community-driven species action plans for Serrated Tussock, Ragwort and Gorse. An action plan for rabbits was developed. Contributors to the review suggested that the *Weed Action Plan* and the *Rabbit Action Plan* have surpassed the 1997 RCS because: they are relatively easy to understand/ read and useable; have clearly identified roles and responsibilities of stakeholders and interest groups; have been effective in achieving a sense of community ownership; are flexible and adaptable enough to accommodate changing circumstances (i.e. living documents); have been realistic, in terms of budgets available to fund actions required to meet regional priorities; and have provided a key link between the major regional strategies.

The level of resourcing for pest management activities continues a long-term trend downward, despite increased expenditure on revegetation activities that are directly threatened by pest and weeds. The Region does not have a research and development program in relation to social science aspects of pest management, other than ad-hoc projects when funds are available.

## biodiversity

The 1997 RCS Biodiversity Conservation Program activities were primarily focused on inter-agency coordination, strategy development, management planning, mapping, and community education. Since 1997, major policy and funding has developed around biodiversity, and the RCS has acted as a source document for funding applications and a starting point for sub-ordinate plans. A biodiversity team has been established within the CCMA, and has produced a *Regional Native Vegetation Plan*.

Contributors to the review suggested that biodiversity issues needing more consideration in the new RCS, specifically were: better understanding of biodiversity assets and bio-regions; use of regional LGA maps of biodiversity assets

and bioregional plans; integration of farm forestry, commercial forestry, agro-forestry with biodiversity conservation; biodiversity community education programs; integration of nutrient management and agricultural management; integration of pest management with native vegetation management; integration of salinity control on land and water bodies; native grassland values need to be re-emphasised; estuary management plans and coastal plans need to find a "home".

### monitoring and evaluation

The 1997 RCS did not lay out a clear reporting framework. Development of Supporting Strategies since 1997 has rectified this to some extent, but not across all program areas of the 1997 RCS. Groups dealing with biodiversity expressed the view that existing resources were inadequate for satisfactory monitoring.

The information base for the 1997 RCS itself can only be described as elementary and fragmented. The past few years have seen major strides in rectifying this deficiency, particularly in the area of flood hydrology, waterway assessment, pest animals and plants assessments and geographical information systems.

### integration with other NRM agencies

To the extent that the 1997 RCS incorporated several pre-existing programs and strategies, its recommended directions were broadly consistent with those of other natural resource management agencies. However, since 1997 there has been rapid development of other strategies and plans. In the absence of overarching goals within the RCS document, these plans have each set their own direction, with the result that few natural resource management programs within the Region are now *strategically* aligned with the 1997 RCS.

In response to the diffusion of powers and responsibilities across state and local government agencies, the 1997 Strategy set out to improve working relationships between such agencies and the CCMA, and to embody RCS policies into companion agencies' policies, which are often statutory responsibilities. There has, however, been slow progress in this regard.

### relationships with the community

The CCMA Board has been active in implementing the direction set by the 1997 RCS, and in communicating with the community. The CCMA has established partnerships and projects with the water utilities, agricultural groups and through scholarships, grants and sponsorships. Landcare groups receive particular attention. This includes funding for on-ground works and co-ordinators, strengthening networks, and advice and help in completing funding applications.

Feedback from stakeholders rated relationships between the CCMA and Landcare groups among the strongest and most successful of CCMA interactions with other catchment bodies, but nonetheless an area that needs further development. There was wide agreement that the CCMA's relationship with industry groups (agricultural, forestry and processing industries, but also major enterprises like Alcoa) needs particular attention and is an enormous area of potential.

Respondents reported that knowledge and understanding about both the CCMA and the RCS were either minimal or non-existent outside CCMA/ (the then) NRE and Landcare circles. It appears that outside of Colac, the base of the CCMA, awareness is limited. Furthermore, mere provision of information about the CCMA is seen as insufficient – rather, it was asserted that strategies that engaged a wider set of stakeholders were needed. This includes establishing consultation processes that give opportunity for everyone to have input into plans and programs, and fostering “grass roots action”.

Community groups resented perceived excessive administrative demands and “delayed decision-making” by the CCMA. Overload of voluntary participants is a major problem. The support provided for funding applications may act to slightly counter this, and education about administrative processes is important.

### capacity to meet new arrangements for regional management

The demands on Regional Catchment Strategies have now changed at both the Australian and Victorian Government level. Both jurisdictions have promulgated guidelines that are broadly consistent in terms of information base, asset identification and valuation, investment and prioritisation frameworks, monitoring, and reporting.

Regional stakeholders expressed concern that support to build capacity to meet devolved roles and responsibilities was inadequate. They stressed: the need for better information management across providers and users; and, the need to clarify and reach agreement on roles and responsibilities between parties, because confusion and lack of coordination are significant impediments to delivery of plans.

### areas for improvement

The conclusions of the review of the 1997 Regional Catchment Strategy were that the new RCS should:

- Adopt a simple and common framework of assessment, investment prioritisation and performance monitoring based on a triple bottom line approach.
- Solicit, act upon and rejuvenate grass-roots inputs.
- Clarify the linkages between different dimensions of catchment management (location, process, dynamics, socio-economics, governance).
- Strengthen cross-institutional and multi-level relationships in strategy formulation and implementation, and
- Establish clear lines of commitment, accountability, reporting and evaluation, while making the most of action by each organisation in their own field and with their specific stakeholders.