AGRICULTURE AND NRM: WORKING TOGETHER

An Action Plan to improve how the Natural Resources Management system works with the agriculture sector in South Australia.

2013 - 2014

South Australian Government contribution:
Natural Resources Management Council, Natural Resources Management Boards of South Australia, Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources, Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA.
DECLARATION OF UNDERSTANDING AND INTENT

Primary producers own and manage 60% of the South Australian landscape and their support is essential for sustainable natural resource management. We acknowledge that:

- Agriculture depends on the sustainable use of natural resources for long term productivity and profitability.
- Agriculture makes a significant contribution to the South Australian economy, providing jobs and creating valuable export markets.
- Agriculture can impact on the condition of all natural resources.
- Agriculture, like all industries, relies on broad community support to operate. Sustainable natural resource management is important in maintaining that support.
- The South Australian Parliament has recognised the importance of our natural resources and passed the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 to help the community achieve sustainable use.
- The NRM system is evolving and improving, however there is an urgent need to respond to the farming community’s concerns about relevance, cost and effectiveness. Dialogue and a shared commitment will lead to greater improvements.

We undertake to improve the way the NRM system works with the agriculture sector in South Australia. We will do this through a series of actions addressing the following five themes:

- A common purpose and understanding of NRM.
- Improved relationships and communication between the parties.
- Improved function and design of the NRM system.
- Improved processes for deciding what work gets done in the regions and how it is done.
- Improved ways to resolve conflict over the allocation and use of natural resources and to minimise the cost of any regulation or compliance.

The action plan will be finalised August 2013 and reviewed annually.

Andrew Inglis for NRM Council
Signed………………………………………………………………………………

Rob Kerin for Primary Producers SA
Signed………………………………………………………………………………

Chris Daniels for NRM Boards
Signed………………………………………………………………………………

Allan Holmes for DEWNR
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Scott Ashby for PIRSA
Signed………………………………………………………………………………
INTRODUCTION

In early 2013 the State Natural Resources Management (NRM) Council recognised the need to improve the relationship between the NRM system and the agriculture sector and rural communities. The Council initiated a process to listen to the views of representatives of the agriculture sector. A critical component has been the involvement of the newly-formed Primary Producers SA.

This Action Plan is an outcome of that process. It provides a Declaration of Understanding and Intent, which sets out the beginnings of a process by the signatory organisations (the Partners) to commit to ongoing improvement in the relationships between the NRM system and the agriculture sector. This Action Plan sets out what the Partners will do over the next 12 months.
South Australia has a long history of interaction between agriculture and what we now call natural resource management. Within 20 years of European settlement, the need for pest control led to development of the first pieces of NRM legislation in South Australia - the Thistle Act 1952 and the Dog Act 1852.

Since the State’s first year of settlement in 1836 there have been several phases of agricultural development and associated NRM legislation, put in place to support and protect agricultural production. The period between the Federation Drought and World War 2 was one of agricultural expansion across the state, despite the limitations of soil and climate. This led to the degradation of natural resources such as soil and water. During this period, a number of separate Acts were passed dealing with camels, drought, soil erosion, noxious weeds, vermin, sandalwood and dogs.

During the post-World War 2 period the massive mechanisation of agriculture, improvements in agricultural science and an increasing demand for agricultural products led to the broadscale clearance of native vegetation and large increases in agricultural production. This same period saw the rise of community concerns about environmental issues.

From the 1990’s onwards, South Australian agriculture has become increasingly exposed to fluctuating commodity prices in a globalised economy, increasingly complex agricultural technology, regulatory arrangements and the changing expectations of consumers. Farm sizes, business structures and rural populations are all changing rapidly. This period has also seen the evolution of the Landcare movement and the increasing importance of soil conservation and property planning. It has also seen the rise of private sector agricultural extension services and the introduction of integrated arrangements for managing natural resources under the Natural Resources Management Act 2004. These arrangements are the “NRM system”.

Throughout all this change, one constant has been the importance of agriculture to the South Australian economy. Today, the food and wine sectors contribute $15.4 billion in revenue annually, employ one in five workers and account for around 45% of South Australia’s total merchandise exports. The global demand for food is expected to increase by 70% by 2050. South Australia’s agricultural industries will inevitably continue to grow in coming decades. Effective and efficient NRM must be an integral part of this growth to ensure that natural resources are protected and used sustainably; that bio-security standards are maintained; that markets for quality produce continue to grow; and that South Australians continue to support the agriculture sector.

The strength and nature of the relationship between the NRM system and the agriculture sector is fundamental to achieving these goals. This relationship is critical at all levels, from the local to the State-wide, however for most people involved in farming communities and businesses the emphasis is at the local level. Sharing information, advocating for their industry and taking pride in what they do is important on a farmer-to-farmer level. For rural communities the “NRM system” is often local production groups, Landcare groups and their regional NRM Boards.
AN AGREEMENT TO IMPROVE

The NRM Council, NRM Boards, State Government agencies and Primary Producers SA (the Partners) have committed to work together to improve how the NRM system works with the agriculture sector in South Australia.

The Declaration of Understanding and Intent identifies the following five themes that underlie the relationship between the two sectors:

1. **What is NRM?**
   A common purpose, understanding of, and interpretation of NRM.

2. **Relationships**
   Improved relationships, understanding and communication, between the parties.

3. **The NRM system**
   Improved function and design of the NRM system.

4. **What gets done**
   Improved processes for deciding what work gets done in the regions and how it is done.

5. **Difficult decisions**
   Improved ways to resolve conflict over the allocation and use of natural resources.

A STRATEGY TO IMPROVE

The Partners also agree that there must be tangible actions that make a difference and show real improvements. State-wide actions are necessary to deal with improvements in legislation, state policy and agency practices and procedures. Actions need to make a demonstrable difference to the way in which the NRM system and the agriculture sector see each other and relate to one another. Actions also need to clearly demonstrate that NRM and agriculture will both benefit from a constructive and engaging relationship.

Many of the issues identified by people in both sectors are location or industry specific and manifest themselves in different parts of the State; these need specific regional and local work to ensure that the right solutions are agreed and implemented.

This action plan will be reviewed by the Partners in 12 months to identify the next set of actions; to ensure new actions build on the work already done and to address the issues and opportunities that are identified along the way.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>LEAD / PARTNERS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Communications and messaging</strong></td>
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<td>Improve the communication of good news stories about NRM and farming through all media channels regionally and centrally – each region and the engagement branch will review their communications plans to substantially improve their effectiveness in sharing stories with farmers about NRM benefits</td>
<td>NRM Boards / DEWNR / PPSA / PIRSA</td>
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<td>Use the Primary Producers SA (PPSA) gateway initiative to connect and explain the NRM service offered to farmers and also provide a farmer to NRM channel for communication</td>
<td>PPSA / DEWNR / PIRSA</td>
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<td>Fund a part-time liaison officer to facilitate the interaction between PPSA and the NRM agencies</td>
<td>DEWNR / PPSA</td>
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<td><strong>Regional connections</strong></td>
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<td>Each region will review their relationship with farmer stakeholders at a regional level and take at least one concrete action to improve the relationships. This could take the form of a “90 day change project”</td>
<td>NRM Boards / DEWNR (regions) / PPSA / PIRSA</td>
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<td><strong>System improvement</strong></td>
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<td>Complete the review of the administration of the water allocation planning process and make the necessary changes to streamline the process</td>
<td>DEWNR / NRMC / NRM Boards / PPSA</td>
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<td>Develop a guide to the minimum NRM Act requirements expected of Boards.</td>
<td>DEWNR / NRM Boards / PPSA</td>
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*NRM Council* has an overarching role in monitoring progress of the Action Plan.