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CARING
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COUNTRY

Sustainable Investments through Capacity Building

Community Skills, Knowledge and Engagement – building capacity to achieve Caring for our Country outcomes

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Caring for our Country

Caring for our Country is the Australian Government's new environmental management initiative. It aims to achieve an environment that is healthier, better protected, well managed, resilient, and provides essential ecosystem services in a changing climate.

In its first five years (from July 2008 to June 2013), the Australian Government will invest \$2.25 billion through Caring for our Country to secure improved strategic outcomes across six national priority areas:

- the National Reserve System;
- biodiversity and natural icons;
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats;
- sustainable farm practices;
- natural resource management in northern and remote Australia; and
- community skills, knowledge and engagement.

Caring for our Country will be delivered in partnership with regional natural resource management groups, local, state and territory governments, Indigenous groups, industry bodies, land managers, farmers, landcare groups and communities.

Outcomes and targets for the national priority areas are described in the Caring for our Country outcomes statements (Australian Government 2008) available at www.nrm.gov.au.

Activities undertaken under the Community Skills Knowledge and Engagement priority area will build community capacity to contribute to the achievement of outcomes under the other five priority areas.

Guiding principles for capacity building

(Programs Committee 2002)

Capacity building:

- should ensure that the key stakeholders and priority issues are targeted to meet the priority NRM outcomes;
- should encourage partnerships between stakeholders;
- should value and build on existing capacity involving local expertise and knowledge;
- should be based on learning from each other through sharing resources, experience and expertise;
- should be based on principles of trust, mutual reciprocity and norms of action;

- should encompass 'learning by doing' and other appropriate learning styles;
- should value and utilise indigenous expertise and knowledge;
- should be accessible to the entire community, including people of non-English speaking backgrounds;
- should be based on access to accurate, scientific and technical information; and
- should contribute to building human and social capital.

Program logic

Program logic can assist in project design and implementation to ensure that a project has the necessary links between capacity building outcomes and other Caring for our Country outcomes and targets, and in particular, on-ground outcomes. A useful guide to program logic is available at

http://www.hassall.com.au/_lib/doc/Fact_Sheet_5_Program_Logic_002.pdf.

Case Studies

The following projects are examples of how building community capacity can contribute to on-ground outcomes.

Bringing Back the Beach Scrub - Conservation and Management of Microphyll/ Notophyll vine forest on coastal dunes between Thuringowa and Rockhampton, Queensland

Bringing Back the Beach Scrub features comprehensive grass roots community engagement, capacity building and participation. Project achievements include:

- Assessment of the distribution, condition and conservation significance of microphyll/ notophyll vine forest on coastal dunes (beach scrub);
- development and implementation of strategies to ensure the conservation of representative areas of beach scrub; and
- increasing the awareness of the biodiversity values of these threatened habitats.

Building the capacity of Wagiman Rangers through sustainable land and business management, Pine Creek, Northern Territory

This project uses a culturally driven business management approach to build Indigenous community capacity. Activities include:

- developing a sustainable pastoral enterprise on a self development block;
- developing sustainable plant harvest for a soap making enterprise;
- monitoring, control and management of declared weed and feral animal populations;
- development of management plans for threatened, endemic and rare species; and
- developing fire management and utilisation plans.

Victorian Volcanic Plains 'PlainsTender'

PlainsTender raises community awareness about the Volcanic Plains and has changed landholder attitudes and practices. The project comprises three main elements:

- research that aims to provide a better understanding of the ecosystems on the Victorian Volcanic Plain, and appropriate practices which can encourage conservation on productive properties;
- community engagement to raise awareness of the uniqueness of the Victorian Volcanic Plains and its ecosystem and encourage landholders and communities to help in its conservation; and,

- an auction based incentive scheme to support landholders on the Victorian Volcanic Plain to manage and conserve remnant native vegetation.

Community Group Action Planning, Tasmania

This project was developed in response to an identified need within the community to develop a simple and easy-to-use action planning model to guide and support community groups with yearly work or action plans. Action planning for on-ground activities assists groups in clarifying what they need to do, when they need to do it, who will do it and to identify any support they may need. Action planning helps groups to determine their key goals and to fit these goals into the 'bigger regional picture'. Groups prioritise their goals accordingly, establish a schedule and budget for work and identify options for funding and resources. Finally, this process outlines mechanisms for monitoring the progress and results of the action plan. An action planning 'how to' booklet has been produced and assistance continues to be provided to groups to undertake action planning.

Mid North Native Grasslands Grazing Trials, South Australia

This project was 'landholder driven' - influential landholders were engaged in the project from the beginning and key stakeholder partnerships were brokered. The project features demonstration sites, ongoing facilitation and communication, a mandatory training program and rigorous site assessments and monitoring. The project aims are:

- to raise community awareness about benefits of conserving native perennial grasses and their role in sustainable grazing;
- to demonstrate how planned and controlled grazing systems contribute to diversity, health, and productivity of native grasslands in the area;
- establish demonstration and research sites across region; and
- demonstrate the benefits of best practice rotational grazing systems.

Rare Wildflowers Consortium, Queensland.

The Rare Wildflowers Consortium is a group of wildflower enthusiasts from a range of organisations sharing a common goal to increase the awareness of the local and threatened flora of the Stanthorpe Plateau. The Group's achievements include:

- the development of a recovery plan for nine of the Stanthorpe Plateau's rare and threatened species;
- The Stanthorpe Nine Management Manual;
- Stanthorpe Wildflower Walks;
- 'Wildflowers of the Granite Belt' identification guide; and
- The 'Flutes and Flowers at Felsburg' community event.

Conclusion

Capacity building activities undertaken through Caring for our Country are a means to an end - developing the understanding, ability and motivation of individuals, groups and communities to undertake effective on ground actions and improved practices - to contribute to Caring for our Country outcomes.

References

Australian Government 2008, Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008-2013.

Programs Committee (Predecessor, with the Land, Water and Biodiversity Committee, to the Natural Resource Policies and Programs Committee, an advisory committee to the NRM Standing Committee) 2002, National Natural Resource Management Capacity Building Framework, endorsed 25 July 2002. Available at www.nrm.gov.au/publications/frameworks/capacity-building-framework.html

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