

Australian Government Performance Framework for Regional NRM Organisations – 2016 Revision

Under the Regional stream of the National Landcare Programme (NLP), regional natural resource management (NRM) organisations have greater autonomy in decision making for NRM activities, including identifying the best ways to achieve local NRM priorities and deliver on the NLP Strategic Objectives and Outcomes.

Autonomy is balanced by accountability for NRM outcomes and community participation. Regional NRM organisations are expected to monitor their performance and governance, be accountable for and transparent in decision making, and identify measures to achieve continuous improvement in both the delivery of NRM outcomes and in organisational performance.

In 2014, the Australian Government introduced a performance framework as a key quality assurance and risk management tool for the delivery of the NLP. The Australian Government has recently undertaken a revision of the 2014 performance framework and its performance expectations have been updated (see Table 1). All regional NRM organisations should be meeting the performance expectations or have strategies in place to meet them.

The performance framework is intended to complement and draw on existing governance requirements including statutory and contractual obligations as well as voluntary governance review processes. Rather than developing new mechanisms, the performance framework seeks to utilise existing governance and performance frameworks where possible. For example, if applicable and appropriate, a regional NRM organisation can use an existing governance and performance review mechanism that has already been undertaken and is still current (e.g. the Organisational Performance Excellence Framework) as a source of evidence in demonstrating performance against one or more of the performance expectations.

The five performance expectations are:

- ✓ Organisational governance;
- ✓ Financial governance;
- ✓ Regional NRM plans;
- ✓ Local community participation and engagement; and
- ✓ Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement.

Regional NRM organisation annual self assessment

Regional NRM organisations are required to complete an annual self assessment of their performance against the performance expectations to allow the collection of comparative data over time and to promote continuous improvement. The self assessments will help regional NRM organisations to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement, and regional NRM organisations are encouraged to consult with their stakeholders in undertaking their self-assessment. Best practice would be to consult widely in completing the self-assessment.

The self-assessment requires regional NRM organisations to consider each expected practice listed for each performance expectation and to make an assessment of their current level of practice against that expected practice. As a result of the assessment, an overall rating will be given, based on the following scale:

- Still to meet all expected practices;
- Meets all expected practices; and
- Meets all expected practices and has additional practices.

It is recognised that with these revised performance expectations, not all regions will meet the expected practices in their 2016 self assessment. Regional NRM organisations are encouraged to identify these areas in the 2016 self assessment as a demonstration of commitment to continuous improvement.

Australian Government annual performance expectation review

The Australian Government will undertake a review of the self assessments each year to measure regional NRM organisation performance and improvement over time. During the review process, regional NRM organisations may be required to provide evidence in support of the self assessment. The Australian Government has put together an implementation manual and a document which includes details of what evidence or compliance it would expect to see if a regional NRM organisation is required to show how it has met an expected practice. These documents are available at <http://www.nrm.gov.au/regional/regional-funding>.

The self assessments will also inform a rolling two year performance review schedule. These performance reviews will be undertaken by a review team comprising Australian Government officers and may include a regional NRM officer nominated by NRM Regions Australia. Other information sources may also be taken into account in determining the annual performance review schedule such as:

- performance and compliance, including the timeliness and quality of reports provided to the Australian Government;
- the Australian Government's risk assessment of regional NRM organisations Regional stream delivery; and
- information about regional NRM organisations delivery of Regional stream funding, such as third party stakeholder feedback where this can be verified as credible and relevant.

Following the performance reviews, the Australian Government will work with regional NRM organisations to identify follow up actions for improvement and implementation by regional NRM organisations. High-performing regional NRM organisations may also be reviewed and where appropriate, may be encouraged to facilitate sharing of best practice.

Where a performance review finds that improvements are necessary in the way in which a regional NRM organisation is operating in delivering its NLP Regional stream funding, the Australian Government may implement a range of approaches, ranging from providing advice and feedback where performance is generally high, through to imposing additional obligations or terminating funding agreements where performance is significantly or persistently poor.

To maximise the benefits of the performance reviews, and be accountable and transparent, the findings of reviews may be made available to the public in a manner which does not compromise regional NRM organisations confidentiality requirements and commitments. This will also allow other regional NRM organisations to consider the findings and, where appropriate, address similar situations within their own organisations.

Table 1 - Performance Expectations for Regional NRM Organisations

<i>Regional NRM Organisation Governance</i>	
<i>Performance expectation</i>	<i>Expected practices and additional practices</i>
Organisational governance	<p>The regional NRM organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is complying with governance responsibilities according to its statutory/incorporation or other legal obligations, including Work, Health and Safety obligations; • has a process in place for formally reviewing the performance and composition of the regional NRM organisation's board of directors; • has organisational decision making processes that are transparent and communicated regularly with the local community; • ensures all staff and board of directors demonstrate Indigenous cultural awareness; • has structures and processes in place to regularly communicate organisational and project performance achievements; and • has met all the expected practices and has additional practices in place.

Financial governance	<p>The regional NRM organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is complying with financial responsibilities according to its statutory/incorporation or other legal obligations; • is complying with Australian Government NRM contractual obligations for project financial reporting and management, accurately and on time, including acquittal of funding as required; and • has annual corporate financial reports that are publicly available; and • has met all the expected practices and has additional practices in place.
<i>Australian Government NRM Delivery</i>	
<i>Performance expectation</i>	<i>Expected practices and additional practices</i>
Regional NRM plans	<p>The regional NRM organisation has a regional NRM plan that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides the strategic direction to NRM activity within the region based on best available scientific, economic and social information; • demonstrates strategic alignment with Australian Government and state/territory NRM policies and priorities; • has been developed with comprehensive and documented participation of the local community; • with clear priorities, outcomes and activities to achieve those outcomes; • clearly articulates Indigenous land and sea management aspirations and participation and identifies strategies to implement them; and • has met all the expected practices and has additional practices in place.
Local community participation and engagement	<p>The regional NRM organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has a current community participation plan and a current Indigenous participation plan; • has an established process in place that allows the local community to participate in priority setting and/or decision making; • is actively building the capacity of the local community to participate in NRM through funding support for training, on ground projects and related activities; • is actively supporting increased participation of Indigenous people in the planning and delivery of NRM projects and investment; and • has met all the expected practices and has additional practices in place.
Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement	<p>The regional NRM organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is providing comprehensive, accurate and timely project MERI plans and MERIT reporting; • is implementing processes to ensure that MERI activities are adequately resourced by appropriately skilled and informed staff; • is demonstrating and communicating progress towards NRM project outcomes through regular monitoring, evaluation and reporting of project performance and the use of the results to guide improved practice; and • has met all the expected practices and has additional practices in place.