5. Sustaining successful engagement: a case study of responding to demographic changes in the Lake Eyre Basin

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<td>Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics</td>
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<td>DKCRC</td>
<td>Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre</td>
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<td>DCQ</td>
<td>Desert Channels Queensland</td>
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<td>ERP</td>
<td>Estimated Resident Population</td>
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<td>ILUA</td>
<td>Indigenous Land Use Agreement</td>
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<td>LEB</td>
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<td>NHT</td>
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<td>NRM</td>
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This case study is one of two case studies conducted as part of the ‘People, communities and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin’ project funded by the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre (DKCRC) and the Australian Government. The project addresses the role and functions of Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations operating in the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) that act as the ‘interface’ between governments and communities involved in NRM. The purpose of the project is to identify the factors that underpin successful NRM organisations in the LEB and how the functioning of NRM organisations can be monitored in the future. Following discussions with the research team, the Project Steering Committee and the CEOs of Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) and the South Australian Arid Lands NRM (SAAL NRM) Board, this case study focused on helping interface organisations understand and adapt to changes in the demographic and economic profiles of the LEB.

The LEB covers approximately 1.2 million square kilometres across Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), the Northern Territory (NT) and New South Wales (NSW). The LEB is sparsely populated with 60 000 people. It is characterised by arid and semi-arid landscapes, with groundwater being the main water source for residents and industry.

With assistance and guidance from the project steering committee, the case study focused on two key NRM institutions in the LEB, namely DCQ and the SAAL NRM Board. The methods involved four stages. The first stage involved preparing and synthesising regional forecast materials for the industry and demographic characteristics of the two NRM regions explored in the study. The purpose of this stage was to provide prompts for discussion in the second stage of the methods. The second stage involved discussing these industry and demographic changes with the participating NRM regional organisations through workshops with staff and managers of these organisations. Following the main focus of the workshop, a third stage involved considering how to monitor the effectiveness of NRM engagement in remote regions. Finally, a series of follow-up in-depth interviews were conducted with staff from one of the NRM organisations to consider some of the workshop findings in greater detail and to consider detailed examples of how effective engagement occurs.

The research found differences in how forecast changes may play out depending on the sector and the region. In SA, it was generally perceived that most future NRM issues would be largely the same as those today. For example, land holders would still be focused on day-to-day survival but with the main difference being one of recognition: that NRM would be given a higher priority. By contrast in Qld, it was considered that climate change may place extra pressure on the region, and that global demographic trends may trigger increased population which would lead to new issues for this region. In both regions, it was considered that the increase of mining and petroleum activities would bring a considerable increase in population to the region, but one with relatively little connection to the land and limited long-term commitment to the LEB. In both Qld and SA, the factors influencing successful engagement into the future were seen to be largely the same as those that operate in the present. It was thought that future generations would be more educated about NRM issues, providing a base on which to build more elaborate knowledge of effective NRM. In addition, the importance of expanding partnerships and building relationships with private industry, research organisations and private conservation companies was emphasised.

The forecast sketches presented and discussed in the workshops show that the expansion of the mining and energy sectors will be a crucial issue for NRM in the LEB into the future. Yet, from an engagement point of view, it was evident that the NRM interface organisations are not currently engaged with the mining sector. Funded by Australian and State Governments, the NRM organisations are affected by a broader governance context which tends to distinguish between mining and energy on the one hand and...
the otherwise broadly defined notion of NRM on the other: a family of issues relating to agriculture, biodiversity, weeds, and water resources, and the Ministers and Departments responsible for these domains.

The in-depth interviews provided additional insight into the workshop findings and emphasised the issue of the long timeframes required for effective NRM engagement to occur. The shorter-term nature of funding support for NRM organisations is largely incompatible with the timeframes required for longer-term NRM processes. In addition, the in-depth interviews provided some detailed examples of engagement initiatives, some of which have been summarised for the purposes of illustration of effective engagement strategies.

Importantly, both organisations that took part in the case study provided valuable feedback on findings from the previous stage of the research project. This feedback was used to refine the ‘Tools for Successful NRM’ report and toolkit summary (Measham et al. 2009a; see also Appendix 5) and also reinforced the validity and relevance of findings.

There are four conclusions from this case study. First, there is widespread perception that the nature of the engagement challenges for NRM organisations in the LEB over the next 20 years or so are likely to be very similar to those of today. However, it was considered that the intensity of those challenges will generally be much greater than today. Second, effective management of remote regions requires respect for desert timelines, which are currently under-acknowledged by policy makers located exterior to the LEB. Third, the regional NRM groups in the LEB currently have very limited engagement with the mining and energy sectors, which reflects a dichotomy between NRM on the one hand, and mining and energy industries on the other, which needs addressing through public policy and discussion. Finally, the case study reinforces the importance of taking advantage of infrequent opportunities which characterise remote regions. This final conclusion is particularly worthy of consideration in relation to the new Caring for our Country policy environment, which lists remote regions as a priority area, thereby providing a potential opportunity for remote regional organisations. The question for regional NRM groups is how best to take advantage of this opportunity.
1. Introduction

This case study is one of two case studies conducted as part of the ‘People, communities and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin’ project funded by Desert Knowledge CRC (DKCRC) and the Australian Government. The project is concerned with the role and functions of natural resources management (NRM) organisations operating in the Lake Eyre Basin (LEB) that act as the ‘interface’ between governments and communities involved in NRM. The purpose of the project is to identify the factors that underpin successful NRM organisations in the LEB and how the engagement of NRM organisations with their stakeholders can be monitored in the future.

This report is one chapter in a research report, all components of which are available from the DKCRC website. The project was conducted in four stages, leading to an integrated set of findings and outputs.

The first phase of the project involved developing a broad profile of the LEB, which brings together existing knowledge about the region in a series of maps (Herr et al. 2009). An analysis of the institutional context of NRM in the LEB was also conducted and provides a useful summary of the operating environment in which the government–community interface occurs (Larson 2009).

This was followed by a series of interviews with community residents and government liaison officers on the key characteristics of successful engagement processes for an arid region such as the LEB. This stage of the work led to a set of ‘Tools for successful NRM Engagement in the Lake Eyre Basin’ (Measham et al. 2009a).

Two case studies were then conducted to test and refine previous findings and as ground work for the final stage of the project. These case studies include this report, focusing on the responses to demographic and industry changes over the medium term; and the second case study report focusing specifically on Aboriginal NRM facilitators and how to support people in these key roles (Robinson et al. 2009).

The final stage of the research is concerned with the development of a monitoring framework for engagement processes (Larson & Williams 2008).

1.1 A focus on engagement

By their very nature, regional NRM organisations are at the interface between, on the one hand, the resident communities of their respective regions, and on the other, the state and federal policy arena that gives them their mandate to act. Given the importance of this interface, this project focuses on the process of engagement that characterises the success (or otherwise) of regional NRM. Careful attention to these processes is particularly important in remote dryland regions where resources tend to be scarce and variable, and inherent challenges exist in conducting NRM due to a suite of key factors, including the sparseness of the populations and the distance to the decision-making arenas of the Australian and State Governments (Reynolds et al. 2007, Stafford Smith 2008). The topic of civic, business and government engagement has been widely embraced from a range of different perspectives and disciplinary areas (for example see Leach et al. 2005, Boxelaar et al. 2006), although perhaps with more emphasis on ‘engaging communities’ rather than looking critically at how all parties can effectively collaborate. The importance of fostering and harnessing community engagement has been identified as crucial to building a prosperous future for rural and remote regions in Australia and is a key dimension of regional NRM in general (Fenton 2004, McDonald et al. 2005, Rogers 2005, Smith et al. 2005).

The case study presented in this report was developed following discussions with the research team, the Project Steering Committee and the CEOs of Desert Channels Queensland (DCQ) and the South Australian Arid Lands (SAAL) NRM Board, who all agreed on the relevance of helping interface organisations understand and adapt to changes in the demographic and economic profiles of the LEB.
The focus of this case study was on:

- reviewing existing mechanisms to address the issue of effective NRM engagement processes
- identifying how changing economies/communities affect existing NRM engagement processes
- considering alternative options for maintaining and enhancing capacity for engagement across sectors as economies and communities change, by building on the success factors identified earlier in the project
- examining how monitoring may help NRM organisations identify and adjust to critical changes in regional economies/communities.

It is important to emphasise that this case study is part of the wider program of research that constitutes the ‘People, communities and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin’ project. A crucial dimension to this is to confirm and disseminate findings from earlier stages of the project, which provides the rationale for seeking feedback on the ‘tools of successful engagement’ developed in an earlier component of the study (Measham et al. 2009a, see Appendix 5). Equally important has been the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, which was designed to provide input into a subsequent component of the research, concerned with developing a monitoring system for engagement processes in remote regions (Larson & Williams 2009).

1.2 Snapshot of the Lake Eyre Basin

A detailed profile of the LEB is presented elsewhere (Herr et al. 2009, see also [http://lebmf.gov.au/basin/index.html](http://lebmf.gov.au/basin/index.html)). For the purpose of this report we present the following summary of key characteristics relevant to this project.

The LEB covers approximately 1.2 million square kilometres (one sixth of the Australian landmass) across Queensland (Qld), South Australia (SA), the Northern Territory (NT) and New South Wales (NSW) (Figure 1). It is characterised by arid and semi-arid landscapes with ground water the main water source for residents and industry.

**Figure 1: Lake Eyre Basin showing state-based NRM authorities**

Source: Herr et al. 2009

Home to around 60 000 people and with a population density that rarely reaches over one person per square kilometre, the LEB is sparsely populated. Most towns occur at its fringe, with some exceptions around the Maltilda Highway in north-eastern Qld. While the majority of the population is non-Aboriginal, SA and the NT have the highest proportion of Aboriginal residents, ranging from 60% to 90% in some areas.
The main land use in the LEB is grazing (82%), followed by conservation (11%). Other economically important industries include mining and tourism.

1.2.1 Institutional arrangements for NRM

A detailed review of institutional arrangements for NRM is presented by Larson (2009). A summary of relevant background information is provided below.

Current NRM institutions in Australia are based on the *Natural Heritage Trust of Australia Act 1997* and the *National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality 2000*. The LEB region NRM institutions are organised into four state-based bodies, the boundaries of which are also depicted in Figure 1:

- South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management (SAAL NRM) Board
- Western Catchment Management Authority in NSW
- Desert Channels Qld Inc. in Queensland (DCQ)
- Northern Territory Natural Resources Management Board.

Larson (2009) has identified the following threads as being common to all four legislative regions of the LEB, compared with Australia in general:

- High percentage of land under leasehold arrangements
- High percentage of land under native title claims
- High percentage of land in Aboriginal ownership
- High percentage of Aboriginal population
- Sparse population resulting in quantitatively low human capital
- Large physical areas under administration by a single NRM board.

A separate review of regional NRM bodies across Australia highlighted the varied capacity of NRM bodies generally (Robins & Dovers 2007). This review classed SAAL and DCQ as sitting in the ninth and tenth lowest (out of ten) classes of capacity respectively, due to a range of factors including remoteness and population density (Robins & Dovers 2007).

2. Methods

With assistance and guidance from the project steering committee, the case study focused on two key NRM institutions in the LEB, namely DCQ and the SAAL NRM Board. The methods involved four stages. These are discussed in detail below.

2.1 Stage 1: Present regional profile and population forecast of case study areas

In this stage of the case studies, the project team prepared background profiles of the changing regional populations and economies forecast over the next 20 years. The profile for each case study was based on the LEB overall profile (Herr et al. 2009). The purpose of the regional profiles was to guide discussion at the workshops. Profiles were developed from a literature review of available secondary data and were regionally specific. Profiles relating to agriculture, mining, tourism and population change were prepared for each region and, as much as possible, included information specific to each region.
2.2 Stage 2: Workshops on existing/future engagement processes

Based on the forecast profiles, workshops and interviews were conducted with members of regional NRM interface organisations and representatives from relevant state government agencies. The SAAL and DCQ workshops were conducted in November 2007 and included 11 and 6 participants respectively. The focus of the workshops was on:

- understanding and considering the forecast scenarios
- reviewing existing options for maintaining and enhancing engagement processes
- considering strategies to address future scenarios, including links across sectors (agriculture, mining, tourism, etc)
- developing principles that can be considered socially sustainable in terms of successful engagement processes
- discussion of potential indicators that could be monitored to inform subsequent phases of the research project on how to monitor adaptive responses to changing conditions.

Although the forecast scenarios presented information specific to SAAL and DCQ, the questions posed in the workshops were the same for each region, allowing for comparison between the workshops.

In terms of the second dot point on reviewing existing options for maintaining and enhancing engagement processes, one of the specified requirements of this research was to seek feedback on the success factors for NRM engagement developed in an earlier component of the ‘People, communities and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin’ project (Measham et al. 2009a). To extend this emphasis, the discussion section of this case study report relates the findings to the set of success factors (Appendix 5), and reports how participants viewed the relevance of success factors in the short to medium term.

2.3 Stage 3: Consideration of monitoring processes

The interviews and workshops for the case studies also included discussion on what it is possible and desirable to monitor that may make a difference to NRM in the LEB. Of central importance was to consider what is most useful and feasible in terms of what is most likely to be collected and acted upon beyond the duration of the research project. The purpose of this step was to provide context for the monitoring section of the final synthesis report (Measham et al. 2009b).

2.4 Stage 4: Interviews with regional interface staff

In order to relate the workshop findings and broader project objectives to the practical realities of on-ground engagement activities, a week-long visit was conducted in May 2008 with one of the organisations participating in the case study. Ideally, this would have been conducted over a longer timeframe in order to gain insight into a wider range of engagement processes; however, due to time constraints and demands placed on research participants one week was the maximum viable time.

During this timeframe, one of the research team members was able to discuss the engagement challenges in detail through a series of in-depth interviews conducted in situ. All NRM engagement staff present during this week were interviewed, providing a total of seven interviews (out of a total staff of 18). The remainder of staff were absent due to leave or work related travel. Of the seven interviews, six were carried out in the Port Augusta office of the NRM Board and one was conducted by telephone due to logistical constraints.
Of the seven interviewees, two had started working at SAAL within the last five months. Staff interviewed included project staff (covering geographically different areas of the region) and those in management positions. The interview protocol is provided in Appendix 4.

3. Trajectories of change in SAAL and DCQ regions

While a detailed quantitative analysis of demographic and industry change is beyond the scope of this project, sketches were prepared from available secondary data. These have been used to inform the case study, which focuses on considering how future trajectories may affect regional NRM groups in the LEB.

It is important to note that these are intended to facilitate discussion on how the future might look, and the following qualifications apply:

- Social and biophysical data referring to the LEB are distorted for a number of reasons. For example, the administrative boundaries of the collection districts (used to gather data) are inconsistent with the LEB biophysical boundary. In addition, available data often includes high numbers of visitors in population counts, distorting social and economic information about the resident population. For a detailed discussion of this, and other distortion issues, see Herr (2007).
- Sourcing meaningful population trends for the LEB is problematic, due to the distorted nature of data as discussed above. Trends were derived from population statistics from the Queensland Office of Economic and Statistical Research\(^1\) and Planning SA.\(^2\)
- Forecasting tourism trends is a complex process, with the industry influenced by several external factors (fuel prices, terrorist events, etc). Data relating to tourism is based on the definition of the ‘outback’ tourism region by both Qld and SA. In both states, these regions cover significantly larger areas than the LEB.

3.1 Population

Based on current trends, an overall decrease in the population in the LEB region is anticipated. The expansion of the mining industry will probably counteract some of this predicted population decrease; however, it will (disproportionately) increase the number of highly mobile, affluent, young males.

Taylor et al. (2006) have predicted an increase in the Aboriginal population with concurrent ageing of the population across arid Australia. Current trends suggest that while this may be the case in the South Australian areas of the LEB, the Qld areas may experience a slight overall decrease in the Aboriginal proportion of the population.

Estimated resident populations (ERP) and resident population changes for SAAL NRM and DCQ are presented in Figures 2 and 3, respectively.

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3.2 Pastoralism

Continuing drought and reduced beef export prices have had a detrimental impact on pastoralism across Australia (ABARE 2007). Best estimate climate change predictions indicate that adverse climate conditions are likely to continue, with areas of the LEB becoming hotter and drier (CSIRO & ABM...
2007). While there may be potential for the agricultural industry to benefit from Australian emission trading schemes or alternative technology (Hatfield Dodds et al. 2007), it is as yet unclear if these opportunities will extend to areas of the LEB.

3.3 Mining

While the mining sector is particularly prone to financial fluctuation, the long-term increase in demand and commodity prices suggests that the sector will continue to expand in the LEB and outback Australia in general. The sector is characterised by increasing investment in exploration and production, increased demand for resources (including low carbon emitters natural gas and uranium), and the presence of significant deposits of base metals and natural gas. Table 1 presents a selection of mining operations of significance to the case study.

Table 1: Selected mining operations in or neighbouring the Qld and SA areas of the LEB

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mine</th>
<th>Proposed or approved development as at November 2007</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moomba/Cooper and Eromanga Basins – SA and QLD</td>
<td>The Cooper Basin has been identified as a key strategic driver for Santos, with expanded production and exploration targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santos (gas &amp; oil)</td>
<td>Cooper Oil Exploitation Project across SA and Qld which expands oil exploration/production. In total it is estimated 1000 extra wells would be drilled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A proposal for large-scale (up to 1 billion tonnes) carbon storage in Moomba was put to the SA government in June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Isa – QLD Xstrata (zinc/lead)</td>
<td>Upgrade of zinc-lead concentrator (cost $US120 million). Project should be completed in first half 2008, increasing capacity of the site by 60% to 8 million tonnes of lead-zinc ore per year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olympic Dam – SA BHP Billiton (uranium, copper gold &amp; silver)</td>
<td>BHP is conducting environmental impact assessments in order to seek Australian and State government approval for the expansion of the Olympic Dam mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assuming approval from the Government and BHP board is given, the expansion would take around 7 years.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Expansion of the mining industry has the capacity to significantly influence NRM in the region: first, through reinforcing and increasing the presence of mining companies as a significant stakeholder in the region; second, by changing population characteristics as discussed; and third, by increasing pressure on water resources and power infrastructure.

3.4 Tourism

Based on recent trends in the Australian tourism industry, we would expect to see a decrease in visitor numbers across the case study regions. However, tourism is highly influenced by specific events (Tourism Forecast Committee 2007). For example, a flooding event in the LEB can trigger an influx of visitors for the duration of the event due to the impact on wildlife populations. Workshop participants suggested improved infrastructure has increased the accessibility of the region, which facilitates increased visitors, leading to increased interest in farm stays.
4. Results and discussion

This section presents an overview of results from two workshops conducted with staff from the SAAL NRM Board and DCQ. The formal records of the workshops are presented in Appendices 2 and 3.

4.1 SAAL workshop findings

4.1.1 Current priority issues for NRM

Current priority issues and challenges discussed in the workshop included:

- The impact of the expanding mining industry
- Drought and the continuing pressure it places on land holders
- Development of an understanding in the community of what ‘integrated NRM’ means for them
- Effective communication of projects and priorities
- The complexity of engaging with Aboriginal communities
- Recruiting and retaining staff over the long term
- The demands of working within programs and time frames that are perceived as constantly changing and are not appropriate to the needs and context of the region (i.e. are more relevant to other ecological areas).

The combined impact of the drought, mining industry, the volume of information sent to land holders and a perception of constant change in government representatives and programs means many land holders do not see NRM as a high priority. Moreover, they feel overloaded and are switching off to messages regarding NRM and available programs.

4.1.2 Future issues for NRM

It was felt that NRM issues would be largely the same in the future: land holders would still be focused on day-to-day survival, but with the significant difference that land holders would recognise NRM issues as a high priority. While the same issues (e.g. drought and staffing problems) would still be present, the predominance of each would shift in relation to changes in industry and land use.

A key issue discussed was the changing population due to the expanding mining industry. SAAL highlighted the challenges of engaging with an increasing number of mine employees who are unlikely to have any connection to their land, or long-term commitment to the area (and therefore little incentive to participate in NRM projects or activities).

Communication with land holders was highlighted as another key area of change. On one hand, there was recognition that changes in technology (e.g. increasing access to and use of internet and email services) have changed, and are likely to continue to change the possible mechanisms for communication with land holders. On the other hand, it was recognised there could be improvements to the current approach to communicating with land holders by developing a more targeted, focused and innovative approach.

4.1.3 Response to trends

Discussion of future trends highlighted participants’ frustration at the lack of accurate, relevant data available for the SAAL region. This led to scepticism of both the forecasts available from government information sources and those prepared as part of this project.
The issue of labour shortages was raised repeatedly throughout the discussion as potentially limiting the growth in the mining industry. The same issue is expected to affect land holder participation in NRM projects and initiatives developed by regional bodies throughout outback Australia. Increased engagement with Aboriginal communities, many of which have high unemployment rates, particularly since the dismantling of CDEP\(^3\) was seen as one opportunity to overcome these challenges.

Participants viewed the tourism industry as likely to increase, with improved infrastructure increasing accessibility and the influx of new people into the area (due to mining). This was supported by the increasing trend for pastoralists to diversify income sources through tourism on properties and the increasing presence of conservation companies as land holders in the region.

4.1.4 Current factors for successful engagement

Workshop participants discussed successful engagement in the SAAL region as requiring a different approach to other regions due to the small, sparse population.

Being seen as part of the community and developing strong relationships with the community was considered to be very important. This involved taking a personal approach: linking SAAL with community events and being seen as part of the community rather than as simply government representatives. Participants felt it was essential to have continuity of staff over the long term to allow for these relationships to build.

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects raised of successful engagement was balancing the nationally defined outcomes and administrative requirements of the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT) with regionally specific community priorities and emerging issues. Participants felt the national objectives of the NHT did not always reflect or allow for the integration of regional priorities into the NRM planning process. As such, there was a concern that SAAL would be seen as irrelevant by the community if it was unsuccessful in balancing national outcomes (in order to secure funding) with regional priorities (to address issues that were meaningful to land holders).

Designing programs with clear, transparent processes and reducing the administrative burden on land holders involved was considered to be important. A significant part of this was the ability to provide support at the local level in all stages of involvement with NRM programs (application, implementation, monitoring and reporting). The absence of any of these aspects was observed to limit the willingness of people to participate.

The importance of partnerships with agencies was recognised as being important, but was viewed as entrenched or conducted unconsciously by SAAL. A clear advantage of the SAAL region was direct access to decision makers (in contrast to densely populated regions, where a number of organisations would be competing for access) which allowed for more direct and effective engagement with government.

There was a clear indication from the workshop that greater flexibility was needed to maximise meaningful engagement and limit community disenfranchisement with NRM processes. Participants felt that the government-defined outcomes for the program and its time frames (for consultation, planning and project implementation) were often inappropriate for the needs of the region and therefore limited the success of engagement. It was suggested that Australian and State Governments need to place a greater degree of trust in regions to deliver programs. Allowing NRM Boards to commit to addressing outcomes without defining outputs in the funding process would allow for appropriate flexibility to deal with changing circumstances and emerging priorities, yet would not compromise (and would perhaps

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\(^3\) The Community Development and Employment Project (CDEP) was a government program designed to provide increased Aboriginal participation in the workforce. Established in 1977 as an alternative to welfare payments in remote Aboriginal communities, the program was criticised due to the low number of participants that made the transition to “real” jobs. Progressive replacement of CDEP with mainstream employment programs and Secured Training and Employment Projects commenced in 2007 and was due for completion in mid-2008.
even increase) environmental outcomes. The possibility of discretionary funding under NHT3 was also discussed as one way of supporting engagement and providing NRM agencies with the ability to respond to community needs as they emerge.

4.1.5 Future factors of successful engagement

Discussion of future factors for successful engagement related strongly to current success factors and how these could be built upon. There was clear recognition in the workshop that future success was linked to the continuing development of current strategies and the maturation of the SAAL NRM Board.

Generally, it was felt that SAAL could improve how they engaged the communities in the region by developing a more tailored approach through understanding and clearly identifying who they were engaging with, why and the best mechanisms or approaches to achieve this. The continuing development of the district NRM groups was seen as a key part of this process, providing a forum for community concerns to be voiced to the Board.

Engaging with and understanding the priorities of Aboriginal communities was identified as an important but challenging area for improvement. It was felt that in the future, district NRM groups would have clearer entry points to engage with Aboriginal communities, particularly as long processes relating to land rights and defining rightful spokespeople for particular areas were concluding.

4.1.6 Monitoring engagement processes

Participants felt the most valuable type of monitoring would enable self-evaluation and improvement rather than focusing on ‘tick-a-box’ compliance or justification of funding. Taking advantage of current processes, rather than creating entirely new frameworks, was preferred.

Participants felt it was possible for on-ground staff to gain an accurate sense of the effectiveness of engagement strategies through their close interaction with the community. This was thought to give a more accurate picture than a formal monitoring system, which may struggle to give a meaningful picture of qualitative data – particularly as it was felt that SAAL were still in the process of establishing themselves in the region. It was also recognised that, as the organisation became more established and things became more complex, the ability to monitor engagement through more formal processes may be of more value. Whatever form monitoring takes, it was felt that personal contact in data collection was essential.

SAAL have previously participated in a community capacity assessment (Raymond et al. 2006). The assessment used workshops with a range of stakeholders, including NRM volunteers, representatives from state government agencies and primary producers to measure and build the capacity of each of these groups in NRM. Participants felt this was a useful and valuable process that provided an indication of how well SAAL had engaged with various stakeholders.6

Participants’ concerns over any monitoring framework included:

- the costs and staff time involved
- difficulties in placing quantitative measures on qualitative data
- difficulties in attributing changes to the environment to actions by the SAAL exclusive of outside influences
- limits to resources and a preference that any extra funding go to NRM projects rather than monitoring
- scepticism regarding how government agencies would use and interpret monitoring data.

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4 The Natural Heritage Trust phase 2 (NHT2) finished in June 2008. At the time of conducting the workshops, the structure and processes under the next phase of the Trust were still undecided. With the election of the Rudd Labor Government in October 2007, the NHT has now been formally replaced by the Caring for our Country Program.

5 District NRM groups have recently been established by the SAAL NRM Board to represent and communicate community interests and perspectives to the Board.

6 As part of assessing capacity, the tool asks participants to comment on community engagement. For further information go to: http://nrm.sa.gov.au/nrmresearch/display.php?table=research_project&id=5929
4.2 DCQ workshop findings

4.2.1 Current priority issues for NRM
Discussion of current issues facing NRM covered a broad range of topics relating to environmental and strategic priorities. The main points covered included:

- vegetation management, including opportunities for carbon trading
- the impact of the leasehold land review and security of tenure for land holders
- consistency and coordination across government, including local government amalgamation, Australian and State Governments, NRM boards and private industry with regard to NRM policy, programs and implementation
- the lack of data on, and understanding of, the unique ecology of the LEB, and how this affects decisions surrounding resource use
- community engagement and education about the meaning and importance of natural resource management
- tourism, particularly as it can have a significant environmental impact but as yet sits outside the scope of the regional NRM boards.

4.2.2 Future issues for NRM
Discussion on future issues highlighted awareness within DCQ of the importance of considering the future issues in a lateral manner. For example, changing and emerging industries as a result of climate change and increasingly high standards for animal welfare (in transport, etc.) were discussed. In particular, the group drew attention to the following, which were likely to be issues in the future:

- Climate change may place extra pressure on the DCQ region
- Tourism may become a bigger market, but coordination between departments and industry is an issue, as is competition between regions
- Broader global demographic trends may push the region to open up in relation to national and global climate pressure. This could lead to changes in resource use and the sharing of wealth and resources
- The general (notably urban) population is less connected to the environment and less aware of the connection and impact of NRM
- Changes in energy use from shifting styles of industry, changes in agriculture, and changes to available services and infrastructure
- Potential for alternative sustainable energy sources in the LEB, and potential for the LEB to serve as a carbon sink, changes in energy production and delivery
- New technologies changing how NRM is carried out and how land holders use land (e.g. GPS, satellite, virtual fencing)
- Animal welfare and ethics concerns are likely to increase and direct attention to multiple areas of livestock management and transport
- Perceived push to more local production and sale
- Changing market demands for organic produce and characteristics of different markets
- Diversification of livestock farming, e.g. to kangaroo harvesting.

4.2.3 Response to trends
Lack of reliable data and the impact this has on the regional body’s ability to plan was also discussed by DCQ as part of future trends. In response to the projection information that was distributed by the workshop team, the group expanded the discussion on changes in the mining industry to emphasise that pressure from mining is likely to continue. Flow-on effects from mining expansion were also
discussed, such as significant pressure on housing availability and prices, employment prospects, increased commuting requirements and accident risk and the subsequent pressure placed on individuals and families. In particular, the group noted challenges in terms of skills shortages which affect other sectors (such as agriculture) and related increases in wage costs. Furthermore, it was noted that the mining sector tends to receive preferential treatment compared with other sectors in terms of resource allocation. While presenting many challenges, mining expansion also presented some key opportunities in terms of mining companies’ ability to fund or provide access to high quality data.

In some areas, DCQ anticipates increasing re-connection of Aboriginal communities and their land, providing an increased opportunity for DCQ to engage with these communities. A major challenge in terms of how DCQ engages with Aboriginal communities in the region is the sheer demand on these communities to engage with a range of education, heritage and other NRM processes. This demand, along with cultural protocols and requirements, influences how engagement can be conducted: in terms of timeframes, need for face-to-face discussion and ensuring culturally appropriate processes.

4.2.4 Current factors for successful engagement

Much of the discussion centred on the goal of engendering change in community attitudes, and the importance of supporting projects with strong community interest to create a space for further discussion on broader NRM issues. The devolved grants process was viewed as one of the most successful mechanisms for providing this ‘foot in the door’.

Engaging with Aboriginal communities has influenced how DCQ approaches the broader community. Workshop participants noted how the lessons they had learnt in engaging with Aboriginal communities (e.g. the importance of allowing longer timeframes, communicating face to face, developing relationships and communicating in ways that are culturally appropriate) had helped them better engage with other community groups.

A crucial factor for NRM bodies, including DCQ, is how to successfully engage with government. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many features of successful community engagement, such as developing strong relationships and understanding diverse perspectives, are equally important in the government sphere. Understanding the rationale and context for government policy and processes was seen as key to negotiating meaningfully and avoiding becoming stuck in an adversarial situation. Maintaining a good relationship with government was seen to be important, and one proposed method to achieve this is through hosting visits from government representatives, thus building their understanding of the region and its NRM issues. While maintaining a strong relationship with government was important, workshop participants noted that standing up to government is important in some situations. Another success factor was the ability to discuss issues without polarising positions.

4.2.5 Success factors in the future

The factors influencing successful engagement into the future were seen to be largely the same as those that operate in the present. In addition, there were several key changes that were considered. First, it was hoped that future generations will be more aware and educated about the environment and NRM issues, so the focus of community engagement would need to shift from introducing basic concepts to knowledge building.

Building on the previous discussion on taking advantage of opportunity, participants emphasised the importance of expanding partnerships and building relationships with private industry, research organisations and conservation companies (such as the Australian Bush Heritage Fund).

Finally, it was thought that there would be an increasingly complex operating environment for regional bodies, which could make transparency harder to achieve.
4.2.6 Monitoring engagement
DCQ were already conducting monitoring of the social environment, having undertaken a survey of both local government and community members to gain some baseline data on, for example, community priorities, public awareness of and involvement with DCQ, and examples of what projects or approaches had ‘worked’ in the past. Despite concerns over the rigour of the survey and the small sample size, the information was seen as useful and was taken into consideration by DCQ in decision making.

When asked how monitoring processes could be better supported, participants emphasised the need for the content of any monitoring or reporting activities to be locally relevant. Participants felt that decisions made at the government level were based on reporting requirements that did not capture outcomes of engagement processes in a meaningful way. Current reporting requirements required collection of ‘good news’ stories; however, participants perceived this type of information was not considered in government decision making. Participants stressed both the difficulties and importance of capturing rich and meaningful data that can serve the needs of government agencies and regional bodies.

4.3 Feedback on success factors toolkit
As part of both workshops, feedback was requested on the Success Factors for Engagement Toolkit summary as developed in Phase 2 of the ‘People, communities and economies of the Lake Eyre Basin’ project (Measham et al. 2009a, see Appendix 5 for a summary). These factors were developed and refined based on an extensive series of interviews with both government and community representatives. However, the project team considered it crucial to incorporate feedback from staff of NRM regional organisations such as SAAL and DCQ as part of a dialogue towards refining the tools and making them useful and relevant to interface organisations.

Workshops with both SAAL and DCQ staff confirmed the relevance and value of the success factors summary as an accessible outline of mechanisms to achieve effective engagement. Some refinements were discussed and subsequently incorporated into the toolkit summary. In the case of the SAAL workshop, planning ahead for engagement opportunities was identified as an important issue that was not on the list, particularly planning that meaningfully involves the community and smooths over the perceived disconnection between the regions and national administrators of the NHT. The other significant insight related to the participants’ perception of the success factor ‘Work strategically in the system’. While the relevance of this issue was confirmed and the value of working strategically was recognised, some participants noted that it should not occur at the expense of maintaining trust and credibility with community residents.

In the case of the DCQ workshop, feedback on the toolkit summary was also very positive and emphasised the need to be adaptive: posing questions around issues (rather than stating outright positions) in order to engender community ownership and allow diverse approaches to achieve mutual goals rather than galvanising people around sides. Furthermore, participants felt that being able to take advantage of opportunities was crucial. However, in addition to being able to identify opportunities, being ready and able to act was also important. It was suggested that being able to take advantage of future opportunities in funding environments requires flexibility to respond to emerging priorities. At the same time, it was considered important to have developed ideas for potential portfolios of projects or ‘wish lists’ and where necessary to look at alternative funding sources, such as through private industry and research organisations, to address these. Finally, it was noted that maintaining successful engagement processes into the future requires ‘succession planning’ or at least thinking long term in order to address challenges of short-term funding and staff turnover. This included recognising the need to pass on corporate knowledge and established relationships that otherwise might be lost when individuals change roles. After synthesising the feedback across the workshops, the success factors toolkit summary was revised.
4.4 In-depth interviews

As discussed in the methods section, interviews were conducted with seven staff from the SAAL NRM Board, the regional interface organisation responsible for the South Australian portion of the LEB. The interview findings are presented below in relation to Measham et al. 2009a.

4.4.1 Focus on desert timeframes

Representing just under a third of SAAL staff, five of the interviewees discussed the impact or importance of timeframes in their work. Their comments highlighted the existence of multiple (and often conflicting) timeframes and the difficulties in effectively navigating them. First, they emphasised the lengthy timeframes required both to build up relationships with members of the community and to see evidence of ecological outcomes for project work. This was in conflict with funding and reporting cycles that required results sooner than desert social and ecological timeframes allowed for:

*Plant and weed populations, pest animal populations, don’t fit into a 12-month cycle. Changes in feral camel populations across the arid zone is not going to be investigated in a 12-month cycle ... and you’re never going to get community engagement in a 12-month cycle. It just simply won’t happen.*

In an extreme but poignant example, the Board was asked to re-write the SAAL region investment strategy to fit to the new Caring for our Country program with one day’s notice. Although this was extended by a week, such extremely short timeframes do not allow for any sort of consultation or involvement from the communities in the region.

Importantly, however, the interviews highlighted that sometimes the opposite was true: long government administrative timeframes jeopardised community support. In the case of establishing the district representative groups, the legislative requirements to appoint group members slowed the process to such an extent that there was a risk of losing community enthusiasm and support:

*They [community members] don’t have [the representative group] yet and it’s really hard because we have this legislative process that we have to follow because they want it now, in fact they wanted it six months ago and there was half a dozen [people] who put up their hand and said ‘oh yeah, I’d be interested’, but because we had to get the area gazetted – the district has to be gazetted first, and ... then you have to do a nomination process... and then that has to go up to the minister ... and then the group members have to be gazetted ... It’s a drawn-out process.*

The effect of these delays was that residents became frustrated or occupied with other priorities. Above all, it made it difficult to maintain the recently established trust and goodwill with residents due to the limitations imposed by the policy environment. As summarised by one participant:

*... and that’s where we’re losing enthusiasm and impetus to do something because they are going ‘what’s going on? Why can’t ... what’s going on?’ and we’re like, well, we’re stuck – the Minister still has to sign off on this ...*

It is also clear from the comments that maintaining enthusiasm despite the inherent challenges involved is a crucial ingredient to achieving successful engagement over the long term.

4.4.2 Effective use of partnerships: links with agencies, research and industry

The importance of creating strong and meaningful links with industry, particularly mining, was recognised; however, it was felt there were limits to the capacity of SAAL to do this effectively. SAAL board members had direct links with mining company Santos and had also initiated discussions with BHP regarding an Olympic Dam mine site visit and presentation as part of their next Board meeting. SAAL had also run well-attended information sessions for land holders with representatives from the mining industry and relevant government departments (see also Box 1, below).
Creating links with the tourism industry was seen as more of a challenge; while some support had been given to projects providing information to visitors in the region, the focus remained heavily on land managers.

*We don’t have strong links with tourism, but we’re trying to build them. From my perspective I think it is a little harder because of the type of work that we’re doing ... we’re mostly working with the land managers – but we have recognised that there are things that need to happen.*

**Taking advantage of opportunities**

While travelling, Tim*, a SAAL staff member, started chatting to the person sitting next to him who turned out to be a Member of Parliament. The minister became interested in the project Tim was working on and arranged for a group of parliamentarians to be shown around the region.

The tour included a range of activities: seeing the environment and resources protected and managed by Tim’s project; seeing conservation land and endangered species; touring mine sites and learning about future development; learning about hydrology of the LEB and water allocation planning into the future. Not only were the parliamentarians learning about all these issues, but they were seeing them first hand.

The aim was to give the parliamentarians a concrete understanding of the significance of the area, so next time the LEB is discussed they would be aware of the issues and have a better understanding of the significance of these unique water resources.

This story highlights the importance of taking advantage of opportunities when they present themselves; for example, from turning a friendly conversation while travelling into hosting a visit of interested stakeholders who are keen to know more about the unique features of remote areas and their management.

*Name has been changed

**Box 1: Example of successful engagement: Taking advantage of opportunities**

4.4.3 Being adaptive: working in a changing funding environment

The importance of effective communication was emphasised throughout the interviews, and in particular in the context of the new Caring for our Country program (which replaces the Natural Heritage Trust).

At the time of the interviews, limited information had been released in relation to the Caring for our Country program, and communication with the Australian Government about the new program was in early stages. Staff with strategic or oversight roles were more aware of the implications, but they stressed considerable uncertainty over how the program would affect regional NRM organisations.

Under the new program, rather than applying to the regional body for funds to carry out projects, applicants will apply directly to the Australian Government. One participant noted this may present a challenge for SAAL, resulting in a fragmented or uncoordinated approach to NRM in the region. However, the same participant also felt that SAAL’s strong relationships with other organisations in the region would serve as a good safeguard against this.

Since the change of government in 2007, remote and northern Australia has been identified as a priority area for NRM investment. Participants identified this as a potential opportunity; however, this was qualified with statements regarding the lack of information available at the time of the interview on what the priorities mean in practice:

*Maybe that will fit that target ... but it’s a bit hard because at the moment all we know is that it’s remote and far northern Australia ... there’s been no discussion on what that means ... we just don’t know and it makes it difficult.*

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7 Under the South Australian structure, most communication comes through the State Government (see Larson 2007 for a more detailed discussion). In this instance the State Government had also received limited information regarding the new program.
For staff working at the project level, the most common response was that they did not know much about the new funding arrangements other than there was to be a reduction in funding to regional bodies. They emphasised the dangers in losing the hard-won ground in building relationships and trust within their community through funding cuts or community perceptions of constant change.

*We haven’t been told anything about it, only that we’re going to get less money.*

*You need a lot of time to build up rapport and engage people and get them committed to a project, and then funding changes or priorities change, or it just gets left in a pile of paper somewhere and forgotten.*

*It takes a lot of time to build up people’s trust, particularly people on pastoral properties ... I think that’s a bit of a challenge to try and make sure the good work that’s been done isn’t all lost by funding cuts or whatever.*

4.4.4 District groups: developing community ownership, recognising desert champions

A key strategy to achieve effective regional engagement is to work through district or sub-regional groups, which have a higher level of face-to-face community interaction. Interview participants had varied opinions over the role of district groups. While most staff saw district groups as key to successful engagement and an important link between the Board and the community, one staff member perceived a trade-off between strengthening the groups and securing on-ground projects on individual properties:

*[District groups are] good, they’re representative and you get a bit of a local flavour of what’s going on but I think you really have to do both. You have to approach them individually and sort of on a district basis through the group. A lot of pastoralists ... are very private people, especially when it comes to ... a financial matter to do with their business, they don’t want to go to the group about it.*

To support the district groups, SAAL have recently begun to implement a project called *Building Future Leaders for NRM*, which is focused on supporting people involved in the district groups. The project aims to develop the capacity of group members, particularly the Chairs, to carry out their roles effectively. The project recognises champions and attempts to prevent burn out by providing skills and training in key areas.

4.4.5 Signals of success: knowing when you’re engaging successfully in remote communities

Staff were asked how they knew when they were engaging successfully. Almost all staff interviewed said they knew they were successful when community members were contacting SAAL staff for information, advice or just to keep in touch. Others suggested that behavioural change or the number of people who were participating in projects provided an indication of success. This emphasises the importance of good personal relationships and trust building in remote regions with sparse populations, as described in the following quote:

*If they’re ringing me, engaging with the Board, then you’ve got them. If you are having to ring them then it’s always a battle.*

An interesting example of building successful relationships was when a member of the community encountered an animal they had never seen before and contacted SAAL to help identify if it was a threatened species. In response to the inquiry, staff undertook a trapping exercise with direct involvement of the community member who sighted the animal. Although they had difficulty locating the animal, the activity demonstrated to SAAL staff that the public were keen to engage with them, and messages around endangered and threatened species were getting through successfully.

Finally, the interviews demonstrated that hard work and good intentions go a long way, but remote NRM organisations are heavily constrained by limited resources, as demonstrated by the following quote:
There’s probably a whole heap that could be done but it’s just the Board’s capacity to do it ... we’re pretty much fully occupied with what we’re doing. Like I said, the majority of the staff are project related so they are bound to what they’re delivering and we can’t pull them off and [allocate them to] do something else.

In particular, being heavily committed to existing projects makes it very difficult for remote NRM organisations to have the time to seek out opportunities. In the story presented in Box 1, the opportunity was serendipitous. The story presented in Box 2, below, represents a targeted investment into maintaining and building relationships with stakeholders, but these investments are difficult to make due to existing pressure on staff.

**Developing and building relationships: the importance of perspective**

A significant agreement between a group of pastoralists and Aboriginal communities in the SAAL region was reached in 2008 in the form of an Aboriginal Land Use Agreement (ILUA). Two SAAL staff members attended the signing ceremony, one whose day-to-day role primarily involved engaging with the pastoral community and another whose role primarily involved engaging with Aboriginal land managers and communities. Neither of the SAAL staff were directly involved in the process of negotiating the Agreement. Rather, they attended to build understanding and links that are relevant to their engagement roles with pastoralists, Aboriginal communities and state agencies. In describing the event, the two staff presented different perspectives. The perspective of one participant focused on officially representing SAAL as part of maintaining pre-existing relationships and being a visible member of the community in the region in which he worked. The perspective of the other representative focused on seeking to develop and strengthen ties with Aboriginal land managers and communities as part of his role as Aboriginal Engagement Officer.

This experience highlights two key dimensions to effective engagement in remote NRM contexts. The first of these is the importance of being involved in major activities outside of one’s immediate area of focus. Just by being there, the SAAL staff were building understanding and developing links with their communities of interest. Second, it highlights that engagement brings together different interests, and SAAL’s being represented by multiple staff was an effective way to engage with different interests at the same time without giving priority to one or the other.

**Box 2: Example of successful engagement – building relationships**

### 4.5 Comparison of workshop results

Workshop results showed differences in how forecast changes may play out depending on the sector and the region. In SA, it was generally perceived that future NRM issues would be largely the same as those today. For example, land holders would still be focused on day-to-day survival but the main difference would be one of recognition: NRM would be given a higher priority. By contrast in Qld, it was considered that climate change may place extra pressure on the region, and that global demographic trends might trigger increased population which would influence natural resource management leading to new issues for DCQ. In both SAAL and DCQ, it was considered that the increase of mining and petroleum industries would bring a considerable increase in population, but one with relatively little connection to the land and limited long-term commitment to the area. This would raise significant challenges for NRM and in particular for water resources; however, it could also bring advantages in terms of improved infrastructure.

The lack of reliable data on which to base projections was raised as a key concern in both regions due to the impact this has on the ability to plan for future change. In both regions, it was thought that the tourism industry is likely to increase with improved infrastructure. The increasing accessibility would not only encourage visitors to the region, it would also increase intra-regional tourism visitations by local (mainly mining) populations. This was supported by the trend for pastoralists to diversify income sources through running tourism ventures on their properties, and the increasing presence of conservation companies as land holders in the region.

Workshop participants from SAAL emphasised that successful engagement in their region currently requires a different approach from other regions in the state due to their small, sparse population. Being seen as part of the community and developing strong relationships with the community was very important. This involved taking a personal approach: linking SAAL with community events and being seen as members of the community rather than simply as government representatives living in the
region temporarily. An intrinsic part of this was having continuity of staff over the longer term to allow for these relationships to build. Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of successful engagement raised was balancing the (nationally defined) outcomes and administrative requirements of the NHT with regionally specific community priorities and emerging issues.

Participants in both regions felt greater flexibility was needed to maximise meaningful engagement and limit community disenfranchisement with the process. In many cases, government-defined outcomes and timeframes of the program were inappropriate for the needs of desert regions and therefore limited the success of engagement. It was suggested that governments need to place a greater degree of trust in regions to deliver programs. NRM Boards should be able to apply for funding in such a way that allows flexibility regarding outputs so they can respond to changing circumstances and emerging priorities without compromising environmental outcomes. A degree of discretionary funding for regional NRM organisations would facilitate the ability to respond to community needs.

In the case of the DCQ workshop, a crucial factor affecting current engagement was how to successfully interact with government. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many features of good community engagement, such as developing strong relationships and understanding diverse perspectives, are equally important in the government sphere. Understanding the rationale and context for government policy and processes was seen as a key to negotiating meaningfully and avoid being stuck in an adversarial position. Maintaining a good relationship with government was seen to be important, and one way to achieve this is through hosting visits from government representatives and building their understanding of the region and its NRM issues. While maintaining a strong relationship with government was important, it was also noted that standing up to government is important in some situations. Another success factor was to discuss issues without polarising positions.

In both Qld and SA, the factors influencing the successful engagement into the future were seen to be largely the same as those that operate in the present. The changes that were thought to be relevant were that future generations will probably be more aware and educated about the environment and NRM issues, making the focus of engagement the building of knowledge rather than introducing basic concepts of NRM. In addition, the importance of expanding partnerships and building relationships with private industry, research organisations and private conservation companies was emphasised. In terms of engaging with the policy environment, participants felt that there would be an increasingly complex operating context for regional bodies, which makes transparency more challenging. DCQ noted that their experience of engaging with Aboriginal communities is influencing how they approach engagement more broadly, now and into the future. For example, they noted the importance of allowing adequate timeframes, communicating face to face and developing relationships and communicating in ways that are culturally appropriate.

The SAAL Board emphasised the need for a more tailored approach to engagement in the future through better defining and understanding who they were engaging with, why and the best mechanisms or approaches to achieve this. They were already attempting to achieve this through the development of the district groups which provide a forum for community concerns to be voiced to the Board. They also identified the need for clearer entry points to engage with Aboriginal communities in the future, along with the importance of understanding the priorities of Aboriginal communities.

4.5.1 Mining, energy and future engagement

Considering the forecast sketches presented and discussed in the workshops, the expansion of the mining and energy sectors represents a crucial issue for NRM in the LEB into the future. Yet, from an engagement point of view, it was evident that the NRM interface organisations are not currently engaged with the mining sector. Funded by the Australian and State Governments, the NRM organisations are affected by a broader governance context which tends to distinguish between mining and energy on the one hand; and on the other hand a broadly defined notion of NRM as issues relating
to agriculture, biodiversity, weeds, and water resources, and the Ministers and Departments responsible for these domains. For organisations that are already stretched to achieve the existing policy and community objectives, engaging with the mining sector represents a real challenge. Importantly, the in-depth interviews demonstrated that regional interface groups are attempting to engage, such as holding discussions with BHP and Santos; however, they had a limited capacity to extend these efforts. This is a crucial area for further consideration, given that the mining and energy sectors already play a huge role in the LEB economy and social profile and are likely to do more so in the future.

4.5.2 Monitoring engagement

Both organisations were conducting monitoring of their engagement process, such as commissioning surveys of community perspectives on NRM and the role of the Boards. At one level, the fact that these organisations commissioned their own monitoring and evaluation processes relating to engagement demonstrates the inherent value in these exercises for regional NRM organisations. However, these organisations emphasised that this value was strongly tied to making sure that survey questions reflected local information needs that helped them better target their activities. In contrast, both organisations had recently taken part in nationwide evaluations of NRM bodies organised by the National Land and Water Resources Audit, among others, and both noted their scepticism as to the relevance of these national studies to the local needs of remote NRM organisations.

Workshop participants in both regions were proud of their connection to the community and clearly understood the advantage this gave them in facilitating community interest and participation in their programs. The sparse population across both regions provided some challenges, but also gave staff the ability to develop strong relationships and pursue the face-to-face interaction that ensured success, as well as forging stronger relationships with other agencies and their staff.

4.5.3 Changes required to support successful engagement

Across both workshops, it was clear that flexibility in how to go about engagement processes is a crucial element to achieving meaningful engagement in different regional contexts. In some instances, the requirement to meeting narrowly defined outcomes prescribed by agency funding sources was inappropriate to the needs of the region. Effective engagement with land holders, and between NRM bodies and government agencies relies on trust, and it was suggested that funding programs need to place a greater degree of trust in regional organisations to deliver programs. The possibility of more discretionary funding in emerging funding environments would allow for more effective engagement processes and provide NRM bodies with the ability to respond to community needs as they change.

4.5.4 Additional insights from interviews

Due to the strong focus in the workshops on conceptualising future NRM engagement challenges as being very similar to those of today (except more intense), the individual follow-up interviews did not dwell on these future challenges so much as consider them in relation to current NRM engagement processes. In considering the interview results, one of the key themes was the lengthy timeframes required both to build up relationships with members of the community and to see evidence of environmental outcomes for a project. This strongly reinforces the issue outlined in the success factors concerned with respecting desert timeframes (Measham et al. 2009a).

Another theme arising from the interviews was that the LEB has had a highly varied history and this was perceived to have influenced the nature of engagement in NRM. For example, more remote areas that were opened up to settlement later and which are further away from regional centres tend to have fewer environmental problems, so there is less pressure or impetus for residents to engage with the NRM Board regarding the management of these areas. This reflects an overall lower level of engagement with
government agencies in these areas and lower community expectations for government support (c.f. Yelland & Brake 2008). Interviewees felt this history explained the lower level of awareness of publicly funded NRM programs and lower project participation rates in the more remote areas.

Specifically in terms of future NRM engagement challenges, the main findings of the follow-up interviews were focused on the short to medium term, rather than the medium- to long-term focus taken in the workshops. Given the changed policy environment since the workshops took place, it was not surprising that the main consideration for future NRM engagement processes was on the new Caring for our Country program, which recognises remote regions as priority areas. This was recognised as a potential opportunity, but what it means in practice was not clear at the time of the interviews.

The two stories presented in Boxes 1 and 2 demonstrate different examples of effective engagement in practice and highlight the importance of in-depth interviews to provide greater insight than the workshops alone. Box 1 clearly demonstrates the importance of taking advantage of situations as they arise. However, it is important to note three co-requisite factors for taking advantage of such opportunities. The first is being in an appropriate context where opportunities may arise. The second is recognising a potential opportunity that is present; in this case the staff member showed initiative and engaged with the situation effectively. The third is acting upon the opportunity, which includes having the capacity and resources to respond. The story in Box 2, by contrast, represents a targeted investment in engagement with current and potential collaborators. As demonstrated in the story, the event the staff attended was not one they were directly involved with; rather, they chose it as suitable context to maintain and build networks with targeted groups of stakeholders. The story also demonstrates the importance of acknowledging multiple perspectives in given NRM contexts and the need to act strategically.

5. Conclusions

Four conclusions can be drawn from the research presented in this case study. The first two conclusions are specifically relevant to the policy environment in which engagement processes take place. The third conclusion is of general relevance to NRM groups, and the fourth is specifically relevant to the staff and Boards of regional NRM interface organisations.

The first conclusion refers to the resources required for future engagement. The findings show that there is a widespread perception that over the next 20 years or so, engagement challenges for NRM organisations in the LEB are likely to be the same or very similar to those of today. However, it is considered that the intensity of those challenges will generally increase. This predicted increase relates to increasing pressures from mining and energy industries and the associated increase in population to service these industries. NRM organisations in remote areas are already stretched in terms of their capacity (to both engage and consider future engagement needs), so this increase in intensity would pose a major challenge in terms of the resources of NRM organisations to achieve effective engagement. Therefore, there is a need to maintain and increase resources for these organisations to allow them to achieve their objectives in the future.

Second, the report reinforces the findings that have been demonstrated elsewhere, namely that effective management of remote regions requires respect for these time lines, which are currently under-acknowledged by policy makers located exterior to the LEB. The data presented in this report provide an example of the inherent limitations in attempting to address long-term problems (such as feral animal control) with short-term programs. On the other hand, long administrative time frames (for example to appoint members of district groups) are at odds with community expectations and have the effect of draining momentum from community engagement.
Third, regional NRM groups currently have very limited engagement with tourism, mining and energy sectors. In part, this stems from differences in their operating contexts, where a dualism is maintained between the political environments for these domains. Different industries, different Ministers, different agencies, and different projects all serve to inhibit interaction between NRM organisations and the mining/energy sectors. However, overcoming this dualism is of crucial importance for managing the LEB in an integrated way.

The final conclusion reinforces one of the key ‘success factors’ from an earlier report in this project series, namely the importance of taking advantage of opportunities. However, upon closer examination, it is important to draw attention to three factors that assist the conversion of opportunities into outcomes. The first factor is context: it is only possible to be exposed to an opportunity by being in an appropriate context where an opportunity can present itself. This can be either serendipitous (as was the example presented in Box 1) or designed. The second factor is recognition: acknowledging an opportunity when it is there. The third factor is strategy: in order to take advantage of an opportunity, it is crucial to have a strategy and resources to respond to potential opportunities as they arise. These co-determinants of converting opportunities are particularly worthy of consideration in relation to the new Caring for our Country policy environment. This environment provides a potential opportunity for remote regional organisations by listing remote regions as a priority area. The question for regional NRM groups is how best to take advantage of this opportunity.
References


Appendix 1: A sample of workshop materials

SAAL Workshop

Industry Outlook: Tourism

“South Australia should seek to position itself as the leader in sustainable tourism in arid environments.”

SATC and DEH 2003 p21

Industry trends

- Vulnerable to fluctuations due to factors such as fuel pricing and terrorism.
- Nationally anticipated decrease in domestic market with only slight increase in international market.
- Domestic market is main contributor to visitors in the region.
- Economic benefit largely outside the LEB.

Numbers of overnight visitors to Flinders Ranges and Outback Regions 2002-06 with projections to 2021.

![Graph showing visitor numbers](image1)


Australian and international overnight visitors to Flinders Ranges and Outback SA 2005-06 with projection to 2021.

![Graph showing visitor numbers](image2)

Industry Outlook: Mining

“The Olympic Dam expansion is the mothership of the mining boom that is coming”

- SA Premier Mike Rann,
- The West Australian 26 Sep 2007

Industry trends
- Increasing commodity prices
- Growing demand for uranium and gas
- Increasing market in China, Russia and India
- Increasing exploration and significant proposed investment in mining in region.

Olympic Dam Expansion:
- Currently one of the world’s largest copper mines
- More than doubling copper and uranium production by 2013.
- Open pit mine
- Expansion of processing plant
- Relocation of airport
- 6,000 extra jobs
- Increased energy and water demands
- Possible desalination plant in Point Lowly, upper Spencer Gulf.

Prominent Hill Construction:
- off-site facilities for power and water supply
- loading facilities onsite
- accommodation village and services
- access and site roads
- airstrip and tailings dam
- employment of up to 800 staff.

Moomba:
- Proposed $700 million development to allow large scale carbon storage

“[The Olympic Dam Expansion] project base case is an open pit mining operation that will be larger than any existing open pit mine operation in Australia and will rival BHP Billiton’s giant Escondida copper mine in northern Chile.”
- BHP Billiton

Index of base metals commodity price, 1991-92 to 2005-06.

Source: adapted from RBA (2007)

Employment in mining in LEB (Herr et al 2007).

Source: BHP Billiton
DCQ Workshop

Pastoralism

“[Farmers] must be better equipped to deal with drought today, safeguard against climate change and future droughts, and lessen the severity of drought impacts on Australia – economically, environmentally and socially.”

- David Crombie, NFF President

Industry trends

- A significant proportion of the population of the LEB is employed in agriculture.
- Average 2006-07 farm income in Queensland predicted to be $21,101.
- Average farm business profit this year is estimated at -$50,279.
- Predicted increases in annual temperature and decreases in annual rainfall due to climate change.
- Likely increase in heat waves and areas affected by drought:
  - Increased threat of livestock suffering heat stress
  - Reduction in pasture growth
- Possibility for benefits through participation in emissions trading, however it is unclear to what extent these opportunities will extend to the LEB.

Best estimate projected rainfall change (%) for 2030 relative to 1990. (mid-range emissions scenario).

Source: CSIRO & ABM 2007

“...development and maintenance of key public infrastructure vulnerable to climate change relating to water storage, public lands and transport and storage will also be key to enhancing the adaptive capacity of regional communities.”

- ABARE

Best estimate projected average warming (°C) by 2030 relative to 1990. (mid range emissions).

Source: CSIRO & ABM 2007
 Population: DCQ Workshop Nov 2007

"Over the last 20 years there’s been a steady decline in rural and remote communities with populations falling as governments and the private sector have adopted policies to centralise many basic services."

- Benet, van Bueren and Whitten 2004

- Estimated resident population likely to vary over the years to 2026.

- On average, the population is projected to increase slightly.

- Slight overall decrease in proportion of Indigenous population although this varies from shire to shire.

- Taylor, Brown and Bell predict an increase in Indigenous populations across arid and semi-arid Australia.

- Diamantina, Boulia and Cloncurry have the highest Indigenous populations.

"...a restructuring of the one that is predominantly youthful and non-Indigenous to one that is gradually ageing and increasingly Indigenous."

- Taylor, Brown and Bell 2006.
Appendix 2: SAAL NRM Workshop notes

These notes are the formal record of the workshop typed up from the butchers’ paper notes.

Part 1: Issues

What are the big issues in NRM today?

- Personalities
- Mining (exploration, uncertainty, trust, information provision)
- Faceless individuals/reps from agencies
- Drought
- Economic and emotional impacts making it hard to get participation in projects
- Survival mode – NRM not a high priority
- Differences in towns/populations > shift from industries to mining
- Communication and information dissemination
- Misinformation > resistance to projects
- Extra work to build up respect
- Turn over of management
- Aboriginal NRM – identifying who to talk to (esp. off parks), time to build relationships in short funding timeframes
- Long term on ground staff
- Trend for contractual work > difficult to build relationships and understand what’s going on
- Selling concept of NRM to land holders and how it relates to them
- Information overload
- Opportunity in size of community
- Attracting and retaining staff > less opportunity for change and staff development
  - Impact of mining on costs of living, etc.
- Community understanding of agencies and programs (constantly changing)
- Funding
- Burnout
- Design of programs doesn’t allow for different parameters/needs of region.

What are the big issues affecting NRM in the future (over the next 10 years)?

- Same, drought, more mines, less staff
- Social issues different
- Different pressures due to different industries
- More people but less land managers
- Fly-in/fly-out/phantom populations
- New populations with little/no connection to land
- Personalities
- Mining (exploration, uncertainty, trust, information provision)
- Faceless individuals/reps from agencies
- Drought?
- Economic and emotional impacts making it hard to get participation in projects
- Survival mode – NRM will be a high priority
- Differences in towns/populations > shift from industries to mining
- Communication and information dissemination will be targeted differently and use different types of communication
- Misinformation > resistance to projects
Present sketch of the big picture trends

What does this mean to the regional body? Feedback on big picture trends – challenges and opportunities.

- Availability of water/infrastructure key (questionable) assumptions to limit mining
  - Workforce
- Improvement in infrastructure opening region to new market
- Diversification of income sources
- Difficulty in employment/staff shortages
- Opportunities for employment restricted by other systems (cultural/welfare) (close of CDEP/Aboriginal)
- People leaving to mines not necessarily permanent or by choice
- Difficulty getting accurate information to know what is going on

Part 2: Engagement in regional NRM

What are the keys to successful NRM engagement at present?

- Need for long term staff
- Face-to-face/on ground
- Determination given amount of pressure
- Clear processes
  - Providing assistance to cut down bureaucratic work
  - Supporting through process
- Appropriate program design
- Manipulating projects to get project funding (Envirofund) > discourages participation/trust issues and resistance
- Availability of local assistance (currently limited)
- Difficulty of workshops compared to more densely populated regions > need different approach
- Need meaningful involvement of state government
- [taking advantage of] high profile pressure, for example, big name mining companies, etc.
- Personal approach to doing business
  - Link to community events etc
  - Talking same language
  - Interest beyond immediate NRM concern
  - Human being rather than government representative
  - Demonstrate commitment to community
- One on one
- Officers in regions able to tackle head on
- Understanding the outcomes required by government
- Access to government/decision makers
  - Targeted funding
Comparison against ‘success factors’ from research

- Partnerships as assumed knowledge/background noise
  - Changing roles but keeping relationships
  - Personal relationships and networks
- Tapping into youth and education system
- Connections with local on ground staff flowing back to institutional level
- Knowing what other agencies are doing to get complimentary programs/projects, etc.
- Relationships at local level and office level (physical location)
  - To maximise resources and ensure programs work rather than against each other > mutual benefit
- Transparency: where it is lacking, acts as reason for disengagement. Need to have understanding/access to decision making process
  - Both in what external (government) agencies are funding and the Board
- Understanding what you can control and getting on with it
- Linking NRM issues with production for community
- Listening to landholders and developing their ideas (into projects)
- Large effort often with little direct benefit but worthwhile flow on effect
  - Strength of government to do this
- Finding different ways to communicate to ensure community representation
- [community champions] Using community interest to advantage (as starting point)
- [community champions] Perceptions of roles/people in community works both ways (lead or switch people off)
- Time to understand local workings > to listen
- Funding tied to (Australian Government) project > difficult to respond to regional issues but does assist in community perceptions of NRM Board as non-biased.

Which of the keys/issues could you deal with given current arrangements?

What would need to change in order to maintain successful NRM engagement in the future (focus on barriers and opportunities)?

- Discretionary funding for Board
  - Resources to respond to community needs
- Greater degree of trust from government in region to deliver
- Outcome emphasis rather than output
  - Flexibility to respond to community and NRM issues
    - Allows for negotiation with landholders
    - Greater ability/opportunity to incorporate learning from past projects
    - Board ability to respond in timely manner
- PLANNING
  - recognising different levels
  - who is planning for:
    - community
    - challenges in consultation and value of input
    - importance and impact of document
Part 3: Reflection and feedback

What will be the success factors for engagement in the future?

- Holistic approach  } Providing advice in
- Genuine integration  } ways that can be used
- District NRM Groups
  - Voice for the community
  - Vehicle for Board
- Tailored/marketed but not onerous
- Greater use of media especially radio (local) Email? Follow trends of community
- Links to education
- Consistency of message
- Staffing/resourcing
- Tailoring engagement process to region/community
- Working [the] system is a constant
- Trust in future depends on current actions
- Identify why engage with community and then targeting approach
- Need to get smarter with how we do it (organisational life, behavioural change)
- Continuity of positions and arrangements
- Learning from past engagement
- Increasing Aboriginal Land Use Agreements/parks arrangements
  - Increasing engagement/identification of people to talk to – difficult in short term funding
- Levels, that is, getting in at effective level in community
- Hampered by bulky framework > streamline in future?
- Use of experts to maintain community participation (knowledge of benefits)
- Simple on ground funding process.

What sort of monitoring would be useful (and what would you prefer to avoid)?

- So that know what can be improved or done differently
- Measuring community capacity to indicate engagement needs
- Practical rather than knowledge base
- Role of district and NRM boards
- Behavioural indicators
- **WHY** key question
  - For improvement of practices
  - To prove effectiveness of actions (justification) > limits the data given
- Tailored/marketed but not onerous
- [Indicators that would suggest successful engagement]
- Requests for more information
- Personal contact (more achievable in this area)
- Attendance/participation over time
- Personal feedback.
Appendix 3: DCQ NRM Workshop Notes

These notes are the formal record of the workshop typed up from the butchers’ paper notes.

**Big issues in NRM today**

- Vegetation management
  - Pasture management
- Weed management
- Carbon trading
- Total grazing pressure
- Control and access to water
- Inconsistency between government departments with policy
- Community engagement
  - Getting more people on board
  - Understanding NRM concepts
  - Trust
  - Hurdle to wider results
- Climate variability and change
  - Sustainable land/water management
  - Cost to people (social/economic) struggling with managing unsustainably (newcomers)
- Shifting goal posts (intra agency and across agency policy)
  - Political guidelines changing as process is being developed > community frustration
- Security of tenure for landholders
  - Impacts on long term viability
  - Leasehold land review
- Local government amalgamation
- Dryland aquatic ecosystems
  - Knowledge and perceptions
  - Understanding of uniqueness
- Balancing production and ecological values within inconsistent policy environment
- Possibility of high pressure projects (e.g. mining)
- Lack of data impacting on decision making across board.
- Understanding biodiversity (community and scientific) not considered as part of or related to other aspects (e.g. weed management)
- Level of coordination between regional bodies, government agencies (Australian and State)
  - How funding is released
  - How strategies and projects fit/work together
- Links with commercial industries, for example, nursery selling weed species
- Tourism
- Ferals (dog, cat, fox)
- Long timeframe for environmental feedback loop
- Shift in energy/energy use.

Shift in perspectives from restriction to benefits [in] landholders and community.
Big issues in 10–20 years

- Climate change and extra pressure on region from other regions
- Tourism
  - Little coordination across departments and industry
  - Competition across regions
  - Increased market
- Opening of region and nation to global pressure (climate, population)
  - Population pressure
  - Changes in resource use (sharing of wealth and resources)
- People less connected to environment and less aware of connection/impact NRM
- Increased population and development pressure
- Energy use
  - Shift in styles of industry
  - Change to agriculture/grazing lands
  - Services and infrastructure – changes in delivery and decision making
  - Alternative sustainable energy sources in LEB
  - LEB become carbon sink area with change in energy
  - Carbon trading
- New technology changing how things are done and how land holders use land (e.g. GBS, satellite, virtual fencing).
- Animal welfare and ethics methods (e.g. livestock transport)
  - Push to more local production and sale
  - Market demands (Europe, organic etc.)
  - Diversification to other animals (e.g. kangaroo)

Projections’ distributed

- Mining – companies looking now for the next big thing
  - Housing (pricing) – placement of employment due to housing restriction
  - Increasing population commuting
  - Workforce (pastoralism, local government) on top of skills shortage
  - Wages
  - Flow on effect/upward pressure
  - Positive diversification during drought (income)
  - Increase risk on roads
  - Mining companies getting preferential treatment with regard to environment (resource allocation etc)
  - Can fund/provide good data as required monitoring
  - ‘out clause’ negates total responsibility
- Aboriginal population change
  - Increase
  - Variability within regions
- Aboriginal communities facing many (high level social) issues
  - NRM not high priority
- Areas with lower population focus on cultural re-connection
• Significant demand on Aboriginal community – everyone is required to engage
• Influenced how engagement is conducted
  • Time
  • Face to face
  • Culturally appropriate
  • Product tailored to audience.

NRM engagement today
• Engagement through money > first step devolved grant process to connect with community and ensure organisation is known
  • Questioning if that is getting towards fundamental value/understanding goals
  • Provides ‘foot in door’ to talk about other issues (biodiversity, etc.)
  • Will get info/keep in contact with DCQ after grant, that provides scope for change in values (limited landscape change)
• Locally grown leadership
  • Sell to others in own terms (not in DCQ language)
• Other engaged people engaging others (neighbours > cluster > snowball effect) (Peer group pressure)
• Providing solutions to local community addressing their local issues in their language
• Financial incentive to participate due to geographic area
• Visibility in community (e.g. Board meeting)
• Effective negotiation with government
  • Mediation entity
  • Maturation of relationship with government to get beyond adversity
  • Knowing/understanding needs of both government and community
• Community need to have capacity and desire to do NRM
• Using attitudinal change to support project (market strategies on where to invest)
• Educational strategy (longer term)

Dialogue with government
• Being prepared to stand up to government but continue good working relationship
• Build relationships (e.g. tour of region)
  • Allows for personal level of contact to smooth over differences
  • Not getting caught up in smaller issues
  • Ethos of organisation > putting people first
• Retaining staff by creating good place to work (environmental and workplace)
• Consistent leadership and Board membership
• Talking around questions > not polarising around positions
  • Ambiguous
  • Allows for negation and adaptation
  • Allows for diversity of views and operation in environment that isn’t able to measure work
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------
• Diversity of vision
• Finding clear, consistent business, for example, sustainability, and finding best pathway with community
• Recognition of organisational limits and contribution of community to finding answer
• Ownership and discussion of issues
  • Invest in program without being judgemental > flexibility and finding mechanisms that mean something to people
  • Clear, professional, innovative ways of selling organisation and programs
• Ability to talk and maintain staff relationships across agencies/NRM
• General consistency of vision across agencies (with own key areas)
• Negative impact of Commonwealth withdrawal from RCG (impact of understanding)
• Trust
  • Consistency/time to build trust within community and keep in sync with community
• Build trust relationships with individuals and government/organisations
• Taking advantage of opportunity
• Extension work constrained by other requirements (Ministerial/accountability)
• Challenge to maintain outside influence and not get engrossed in internal
• Maintaining good networks (external and other)
• Understanding the culture that you are engaging with
• Differentiating DCQ from government
  • Improving community relationships and perception
  • Still, perceptions based on funding/institutional set ups
  • Differences between states > different levels of constraint
  • Perceived as community not government
• Trust can overcome government/non-government perceptions
• One on one dealing with people > much more possible in this region
• Creative solutions
  • Communication
  • Value of culture in region
  • Bridging across different backgrounds
  • Creating environment that community feel comfortable in
  • Involvement in community outside work > way of drawing people in
  • Become individual
  • Participation in community
• [establishment of private, cost for service companies that are] Providing assistance to landholders (external business) in application/monitoring, etc.
  • Landholders must see purpose as worthwhile
• Longevity
  • People must see organisation as long term to be able to build trust
  • Particularly in Aboriginal community
• Transparency/accountability starting ethic of organisation
  • Upfront about costs – not hidden/acknowledge real costs of compliance
  • Manipulation to fit government requirements
  • Transparency facilitates trust with government and community
• Integrity and honesty as core process
  • Part of understanding organisation
  • Finding organisational benefit in process/compliance
• Continuity in programs possible (due to shift to region – buffer from politics)
  • Back to trust building.

Supporting community champions

• Friend Festival
  • Recognition of those who’ve helped/what they’ve been doing
  • Celebration of achievement/activity
• Sitting fee for Board.

Taking advantage of opportunity

• Maximising benefits to community and DCQ > most areas in DCQ faced difficulties since [DCQs] inception
• Targeted to plan outcomes
• Strategic wish list/‘hot spot’ > clear vision to take up opportunity (e.g. Santos, portfolio, mutual benefit)
• Keeping on top of what’s happening (e.g. land tenure)
  • Potential to show independence
  • Good media, etc.
• Broader investment strategy (beyond NHT)
  • Finding links; positioning body with important regional issues
• Potential flexibility in contract variation
  • Better responsive capacity
  • Funding 3 years rather than 1 year buckets
• Seeing > vision planning parts to opportunity
• Responding
  • Flexibility
  • Better ability under NHT3
• Recognition of when to let opportunities go
• Finding alternative funding sources
  • Aligning with other areas (e.g. Aboriginal culture)
  • Spin off projects >building on current projects (leadership across regions)
• Leadership and Succession
  • Key risk/vulnerability in successful organisation
  • Articulating and recording what works
  • Embedding in corporate process/knowledge/structure and thinking

Future engagement/timeframes

• Time frame of:
  • Desert environment
  • Community engagement
• Desert timeframe won’t change
• Changes in how you engage with changing
  • Expanding towns
  • Shrinking rural population > big private companies
  • Expanding transient population
• Will depend on different scenarios
• Corporate and research collaborations appropriate with emerging industry (e.g. mining)
  • Capturing all levels (big and small companies)
• Emerging leaders with environmental education
  • Generational change
  • Better engaged
  • Downside = generic environmental not region specific
• Offer real financial incentive relevant to issues
• Inability of government to respond to longer timeframes
  • Must take advantage of a variety of external funding opportunities
  • External input into corporate strategy
  • Engage with external conservation groups (e.g. ABHF) > stewardship opportunity
  • Positioning to take advantage of opportunity (partnerships for carbon trading, stewardship, etc.)
• Communication of issues regarding time lag of environmental degradation
• Devolved grant
  • Creates dependency
  • Shifts responsibility (e.g. Qld soil conservation)
    • How is this avoided?
  • Future engagement wont rely so much [on devolved grant] as community already switched on
    • Can engage on different level
  • Input into project/management/outcomes may mitigate risks of shifting responsibility
  • Higher environmental awareness etc. built into ownership
  • Building pressure [act as] safe guard/encouragement
• Regional planning timeframes present challenge committing resources before plan
  • Negotiating flexibility key
  • Foresee problems to provide space to negotiate

**Future list**

• Pretty much the same
• Desert timeframes may change, for example, timeframe to engage increase with population increase
• Refocus engagement process to target properties that are sold regularly > more at risk environmentally
• Bigger, more complex operating environment and organisational structure
  • Significantly more difficult to demonstrate transparency
• Changing issues to address with community
  • ‘brown issues’ (dump burning, water management, etc.)
• Knowledge building rather than starting from scratch
  • Change is gradual.
Opportunities in 10–20 years (that can be planned for now/soon)

- Emerging energy
  - Solar
  - geothermal
- Clean green primary produce (organics)
- Carbon trading.

Partnerships

- Very important and will change with emerging industry
  - Big energy
  - Resource companies
  - Tourism
  - Local or regional governments
  - ABHF/Private conservation groups
  - Companies controlling pest species/monitoring
  - Technology companies (e.g. virtual fencing etc.)
Appendix 4: Interview protocol

Interview Guide: People, communities and economies of LEB project
12–16 May 2008

Background
This research is part of a case study conducted for the ‘People, communities and economies of Lake Eyre Basin’ project funded by DKCRC and the NHT. The project is about regional bodies and other organisations which act as the ‘interface’ between governments and community involved in NRM in the LEB. The purpose of this interview is to follow up on a workshop in November 2007 on the demographic and industry changes affecting the Basin and how this may influence successful engagement processes.

Information from these interviews will be grouped and reported thematically. Any direct quotes will be reported anonymously. To assist us with keeping a record of the discussion, we would like to record the interview. Please note that any recorded information will only be used for the purposes of research. If at any time you would like the recording stopped, please advise us to do so. Please also advise us of any information you would like to be kept out of the research process due to its sensitivity.

Do you agree to the interview being recorded?
Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions
1. Can you tell me about your current role?
2. In what ways are you currently engaging with residents of the SAAL region?
3. In what ways are you currently engaging with other organisations/agencies?
4. Could you provide some examples of using the ‘engagement success factors’? (referring to handout)
5. How do you know when you’re engaging successfully in remote regions?
6. What do you see as the challenges and opportunities in the new NRM funding environment?
7. What do you think will be the key features of successful engagement over the next 10 years?

Do you have any other questions or comments?

Thanks for your time.
Appendix 5: Tools for Successful NRM Engagement in LEB
Source: Measham et al. 2009a, p. 4

1. **Work strategically in the system**

Successful NRM engagement relies on maintaining community trust while carefully navigating governance processes.

**Learn how the system works**
- Understand the rules and cultures and know how and when to use them.
- Ask about the meaning between the lines when policy is ambiguous.
- Be strategic: look for the right mix of regional independence and fitting in with federal and state government priorities.

**Be adaptive**
- Over time community perspectives and priorities change.
- Adapt to changing governments and processes.

**Use partnerships effectively**
- Recognise the value of long-term collaborations.
- Link with agencies, research and industry.
- Meaningful inputs require meaningful outputs.

**Maintain transparency**
- Let the public know about decisions taken.
- Publicise outcomes effectively e.g. online.
- Maintain necessary documentation.
- Keep people informed: knowledge is power.

2. **People play multiple roles in sparse populations**

**Recognise the different roles you play**
- Interface organisations have different roles, from delivering government programs to eliciting community views.
- Wear the right hat for the job.

**Develop community ownership**
- If possible, avoid acting just as ‘another arm of government’.
- Listen to community perspectives and be mindful of community concerns.
- Engage community sectors in meaningful decisions that affect their interests.

3. **Build and maintain trust**

- Acknowledge, accept and respect different perspectives and interests.
- Negotiate fairly and openly.

**Desert talk**
- Face-to-face communication is best but expensive across large distances.
- Be flexible with technology when face to face is not an option.
- Plan to make communication inclusive.

4. **Recognise desert champions**

Remote NRM depends on key individuals. Recognising and supporting these people is crucial to successful engagement.

- Individuals can make or break NRM projects in remote regions.
- Build and support community advocates.
- Long-term staff are more likely to have the experience, respect and credibility.
- Encourage people who are good on the ground, natural communicators.

5. **Take advantage of opportunities**

Opportunities can be unpredictable and infrequent in remote regions. Like with desert rain, take advantage of circumstances when they come.

**Access resources when you can**
- Look out for changes in funding environments.
- Take advantage of visits – a friendly talk can make a big difference with the right people.

6. **Focus on desert time frames**

Thinking ahead and maintaining commitment are crucial to long-term survival.

**Think of long-term results from short-term initiatives**
- Work towards an agreed vision.
- Plan for future opportunities.
- Call in a favour when you need to.

**Be determined**
- In remote regions, maintaining enthusiasm and commitment is crucial.
- Initiative and perseverance help get access to information and resources.