

Australian Government Performance Expectations for Regional NRM Organisations

This document provides guidance to regional NRM organisations to undertake an annual self assessment process on their governance and NRM delivery performance and compliance, including identifying any predicted or emerging gaps and risks to be addressed. The annual self assessment process will inform and support a rolling performance review process to be undertaken by the Australian Government.

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

Autonomy is balanced by accountability for NRM outcomes and community engagement. Regional NRM organisations will be expected to monitor their performance and capacity, be accountable for and transparent in decision making, and identify measures to achieve continuous improvement in both the delivery of Regional Funding and in organisational performance. Wherever possible the Australian Government will support and encourage the use of existing processes rather than developing new mechanisms to demonstrate NRM organisations accountability, performance and capacity.

The Australian Government has developed performance expectations (Table 1) and a self assessment form for governance and NRM delivery of Australian Government investment by regional NRM organisations. The performance expectations are a key quality assurance and risk management tool for the delivery of the NLP. They are intended to complement and draw on existing governance requirements including statutory and contractual obligations as well as voluntary governance review processes; and to build on previous standards and expectations provided by the Australian Government.

The performance expectations are comprised of the following:

- financial governance;
- organisational governance;
- regional NRM planning;
- community engagement; and
- monitoring and reporting.

Each performance expectation has a list of expected practices and advanced practices. The expected practices are those practices that all regional NRM organisations are expected to be demonstrating or have strategies in place to meet the expected practice. The advanced practices are those practices that may provide examples of best or advanced practice. It is recognised that these performance expectations are new and that in the first year of self assessment not all regions will have all expected practices in place. Regional NRM organisations are encouraged to identify these areas in the first self assessment as a demonstration of commitment to continuous improvement.

Regional NRM organisation annual self assessment

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

The self-assessment requires regional NRM organisations to consider the expected practices and advanced practices listed for each performance expectation and to make an assessment of their current level of practice against that performance expectation using the following scale:

- Developing;
- Meets all expected practices;
- Meets all expected practises and some advanced practices; and
- Meets all expected and advanced practices.

Where regional NRM organisations have identified areas where they are developing, they will be required to engage with their Australian Government Case Manager to identify strategies and/or evidence of processes underway to meet expected practices within defined timeframes.

During the subsequent review process, regional NRM organisations will be required to provide evidence in support of the self assessment. Participation in and inclusion of other review processes, such as statutory reviews or the Organisational Performance Excellence Review framework will be considered favourably in this context.

Australian Government annual performance expectation review

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

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

Following performance reviews, the Australian Government will work with regional NRM organisations to identify follow up actions for improvement and regional NRM organisations will be required to implement these actions. High-performing regional NRM organisations will also be reviewed to facilitate sharing of best practice.

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

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

In the context of the National Landcare Programme and the performance expectations, ‘landcare’ includes state and national Landcare networks but also refers more broadly to community groups and individuals involved in natural resource management including local Landcare groups, farmers and farmer groups, coastcare groups, ‘friends-of’ groups and Indigenous groups.

Table 1 Performance Expectations for Regional NRM Organisations

Regional NRM Organisation Governance		
Performance expectation	Expected practices	Advanced practices
Financial governance is strong	For the past two years, the regional NRM organisation has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complied with statutory or incorporation, legal and financial obligations; • complied with financial reporting on Australian Government NLP contractual obligations accurately and timely, including acquittal of funding as required; • annual financial reports are publicly available; • managed variations to Australian Government NLP contractual obligations to ensure potential delays to delivery are minimised. 	All expected practices have been met for the past two years and in addition the regional NRM organisation complies with accepted best practice in all areas of financial governance.
Organisational governance is strong	For the past two years, the regional NRM organisation has: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complied with statutory legal and governance obligations, including Work, Health and Safety obligations; • a process in place for formally reviewing the performance of the regional NRM organisation’s board of directors; • been accessible to, and communicates regularly and appropriately with the local community, including landcare, Indigenous and industry groups and land managers; • ensure staff and board of directors have appropriate Indigenous cultural awareness training; • appropriately documented partnerships or collaborations; • regularly communicated organisational and project performance achievements. 	All expected practices have been met for the past two years and in addition the regional NRM organisation has complied with at least two of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a current cultural competency framework in place that is reviewed and updated every three years; • capability or performance reviews or audits are regularly (minimum three years) conducted and improvements are implemented to address findings; • findings of all performance reviews or audits, and reporting on progress with addressing these, are made public in a manner which does not compromise regional NRM organisations confidentiality requirements and commitments.
Australian Government NRM Delivery		
Performance expectation	Expected practices	Advanced practices
Regional NRM plans are robust and deliverable	For the past two years, the regional NRM organisation has a regional NRM plan that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is based on appropriate and best available scientific, economic and social information and has been updated 	All expected practices have been met for the past two years and in addition the regional NRM organisation has complied with at least three of the following:

	<p>in the last three years;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • considers previous planning, is consistent with relevant jurisdiction-specific requirements and demonstrates strategic alignment with relevant Australian Government and state/territory NRM plans, policies, priorities and strategies and priority natural resource management issues identified by agricultural industries; • has been developed with comprehensive and documented engagement of the community, including landcare, Indigenous and Industry groups and land managers; • has been developed using a process for determining NRM priorities, includes a framework that clearly identifies public and private benefit and where government intervention is required; • clearly articulates Indigenous land and sea management aspirations and participation and identifies strategies to implement them; • includes goals which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound; • includes mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness and implementing the findings; • identifies and establishes suitable partnerships and opportunities for collaboration to achieve NRM outcomes, including, where appropriate, through collaboration with other regional NRM organisations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ongoing, regular mechanisms for active community participation and engagement in regional NRM plan implementation are established; • regional NRM plan supports relevant Indigenous land and sea management plans; • the regional NRM planning process includes an independent scientific review process; • mechanisms are included for ensuring that new information can be continually incorporated into implementation activities; • regional NRM plan demonstrates understanding of the socio-economic profile of the area; • clearly articulates measures to support Indigenous land and sea management aspirations and participation, including Indigenous employment and training opportunities; • the regional NRM Plan is underpinned by relevant theme-based Sub-Strategies (or Action Plans) that are scientifically rigorous with strong community and stakeholder input.
<p>The local landcare community is engaged and participate in the delivery of Australian Government NRM investment</p>	<p>For the past two years, the regional NRM organisation has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a current community participation plan and a current Indigenous participation strategy that identifies the stakeholder context for NRM in the region, appropriate engagement approaches and has been reviewed and updated in the last two years; • an established process in place that allows the local community, including landcare, Indigenous and Industry groups and land managers, to provide ongoing feedback and contributions to decision making and/or priority setting and has been reviewed and updated in the last two years; • directed a minimum of 20% of regional allocation to small, on ground projects and related activities that are delivered by, or directly engage with, the local community, including landcare, Indigenous and Industry groups and land managers; • provided support and training, including WHS, for the local community, including landcare, Indigenous and Industry groups and land managers, to undertake small projects and related activities; • included and provided support to increase the participation of Indigenous people in the planning and delivery of NRM projects. 	<p>All expected practices have been met for the past two years and in addition the regional NRM organisation has complied with at least two of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a Reconciliation Action Plan is in place; • a preferential procurement policy/strategy is in place to support local Indigenous businesses; • an Indigenous advisory group or similar that provides advice to the Board is in place. • the local community, including landcare, Indigenous and Industry groups and land managers, is represented in key investment and project decision making processes; • the local Indigenous community is represented in key investment decision making processes.
<p>Monitoring and Reporting is consistent and robust</p>	<p>For the past two years, the regional NRM organisation has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • complied with Australian Government NRM contractual reporting obligations timely and accurately, including any mandatory project MERI plan and MERIT reporting; • demonstrated and communicated progress towards NRM outcomes by means of regular monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement (MERI) of project performance and the use of the results to guide improved practice. 	<p>All expected practices have been met for the past two years and in addition the regional NRM organisation has complied with the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regularly reports on both mandatory and optional MERIT reporting; and • undertaken public reporting of monitoring findings and the impact that NRM activities are having on the resilience of the environment and production landscapes.