



Fitzgerald Biosphere Banksia.

PHOTO: South Coast NRM.

SOUTHERN PROSPECTS 2011-2016

About this Strategy

ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

1.1 Development of the strategy

This strategy builds on *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004), which established a strategic framework for natural resource management (NRM) for the South Coast NRM Region and provided guiding principles, strategic objectives and prioritised actions. *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) detailed eight aspirational goals, 50 outcomes, 22 resource condition targets and 100 management actions targets in five themes and was developed following extensive community consultation. Previous versions of *Southern Prospects* prepared in 1996 and 2000 have also formed a strong basis for current planning (South Coast Regional Assessment Panel & SCRIPT, 1996 and SCRIPT, 2000, respectively).

Southern Prospects 2011-2016 is based on current knowledge, previous and existing work, and has been developed with extensive community consultation. It is intended to strengthen the region's ability to work effectively to protect natural resources by:

- reviewing the Vision, Goals and Outcomes for NRM in the region
- recognising that strong community capacity is an overarching requirement to achieve NRM outcomes
- ensuring that five theme areas (land, water, biodiversity, coastal and marine and cultural heritage) and the overarching consideration of regional capacity are integrated and considered holistically
- re-examining long standing NRM issues such as salinity, poor practices and lack of resources
- identifying emerging threats and other issues
- analysing the values and conditions of the region's natural resources
- re-examining cooperative involvement between the community, local, State and the Australian Government and other stakeholders
- providing guiding principles, aspirational targets, goals and outcomes
- developing a framework with an emphasis on partnerships between stakeholders.

An Investment Plan will be developed at the completion of this strategy that identifies the specific projects, actions and resourcing required.

1.2 The need for *Southern Prospects 2011-2016*

The community's strategic response to NRM in the South Coast region outlined in *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) is being revisited to ensure that the strategies pursued in the past continue to be relevant in the face of changing pressures and that new strategies are developed to mitigate emerging threats.

Southern Prospects 2011-2016 will build on the previous strategy by continuing to provide a framework for the:

- priority allocation of limited resources
- development of strategic partnerships between government, industry and community stakeholders
- development of synergies in areas where management of natural assets will deliver broader benefits to the community
- development of investment partnerships
- continue past work associated with high priority NRM activities.

People want to maintain and improve the values of natural resources in the South Coast NRM Region in the future. However, many people recognise that some issues that we face are challenging and will be difficult to overcome. In many areas, fundamental changes will be required to sustainably manage our resources in the medium to long term. Many threats will challenge us to an extent that we will be unable to rely on 'business as usual'. 'More of the same' will not be enough for us to meet our vision for a sustainable South Coast region. In this context, energy and resources need to be focused on priority areas and activities, based on strong support and consensus across the South Coast NRM Region. Progress will not be made without innovation and lasting partnerships.

1.3 Guiding principles

The guiding principles used in the development of *Southern Prospects 2011-2016* are based on those developed for *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) and reflect the principles guiding NRM in Western Australia.

The principles are primarily concerned with the integration of environmental, social and economic outcomes, the importance of working in partnership with all stakeholders, and achieving effective outcomes. The principles also recognise that there are inevitable trade-offs with some goals and actions.

The overarching principles are:

1. people rely on the functioning of natural assets for all aspects of our life and wellbeing and we strive to protect and enhance those values for ourselves and for future generations
2. integrated planning and management of natural resources will produce the most effective outcomes
3. a 'whole of landscape' approach to planning and management will assist in integrating actions across different resources, issues and interests
4. the wider community has the right to be consulted on decisions and actions that affect them. With this comes the responsibility for the community, land owners and land managers to take the prime responsibility for management of their natural resources.

5. prevention is better than cure
6. the underlying causes of threats to natural resources should be addressed wherever possible, rather than the symptoms
7. partnerships between and amongst non-government and government bodies based on equity and accountability provide the best basis for planning and actions
8. planning and management of natural resources should be based on the best available information. A precautionary approach is wise, but considered action must proceed even where there is only limited information available on prevailing environmental, social and economic circumstances.
9. public investment in NRM must target those actions from which the greatest public benefits will be gained
10. investment in improving community capacity and recognising achievement of organisations and individuals is essential.

To manage precious resources wisely into the future, we must be prepared to learn lessons from past and present experiences and be prepared to adapt our thinking and actions accordingly.

We rely on the functioning of natural assets.



PHOTO: South Coast NRM.

1.4 Our NRM future

Everyone in the South Coast region wants a healthy, prosperous future – surrounded by the natural beauty that drew many of us to this incredible area in the first place.

But what does our NRM future hold? Aside from the considerable challenges, can we see in our minds eye, the ideal outcome? Once we can picture it, we stand a better chance to share that vision and take steps towards it.

A view of our sustainable future is one in which:

- the South Coast community is renowned for its strong partnerships which lead to innovative outcomes and win-win situations for the natural environment, social enrichment and economic wellbeing
- the South Coast region works with other NRM regions, State and Australian Government on its own terms and is admired world-wide for its proactive and innovative approach to sustainability, turning challenges into opportunities and dependence into resilience
- the South Coast region has adapted to seasonal variability and climate change by adopting a variety of systems which benefit all sectors, has maintained or enhanced biodiversity, reversed oil dependence and created a community that provided the bulk of its own needs from within the region
- the South Coast region's vast landscape and seascape, intricate web of biodiversity and other natural resources are valued, conserved, managed and used sustainably for the common good. The community is involved in management and planning processes that are transparent and visionary.
- settlements on the South Coast are attractive, safe places to live and contain people who are aware of their surroundings, history and heritage. People seek innovation and are efficient in their use of resources and management of waste. Tolerance is the norm and everyone is included.
- business enterprises on the South Coast, large and small, are globally innovative and receptive, and have lead the way to resolving sustainability issues at home and further afield. All spheres of enterprise are prosperous and have a competitive advantage based on care for natural resources and the community.

1.5 The role of South Coast NRM

South Coast NRM leads partnership arrangements for targeted public investment in protecting or improving the condition of natural resources within the South Coast NRM Region of Western Australia. South Coast NRM's vision is one of resilient communities, achieved through its mission statement:

Through leadership in natural resource management, we advance the protection and preservation of natural assets in the South Coast region.

South Coast NRM began as the South Coast Regional Initiative Planning Team (SCRIPT) in 1994, a grass-roots regional partnership based on broad community consultation and support. It developed into an independent incorporated group that operates as the peak regional body to bring people, organisations and information together and help the community drive sustainable natural resource management with positive social and economic outcomes.

From this initial vision and strong leadership by key community members, a growing membership base dedicated considerable time to developing partnerships and wider community support that gave governments confidence in SCRIPT as a sound vehicle for NRM investment.

In 2007, a new name was adopted and SCRIPT became South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. The organisation transitioned from a management committee to a skills-based Board of Management with support from an NRM Committee. This streamlined governance structure is supported by reference groups based on theme asset areas. All committees and reference groups are comprised of a majority of community members, and are chaired by a community member.

South Coast NRM has continued to grow and expand the capability for planning, co-ordination, administrative and technical ability in the region. This growth and development directly reflects the needs of the region and demonstrates the growth and development in the emerging sector of NRM. It also reflects the positive impact NRM is having on our community across the region. In addition to providing technical and strategic direction,

South Coast NRM has supported community based project officers where a need for a local coordinating body exists and has fostered partnerships with community groups to assist with the management of field based project.

South Coast NRM has been responsible for facilitating and administering funding to deliver on targets set in *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004).

South Coast NRM, together with the other five regional NRM groups in Western Australia and 56 regional NRM groups in Australia works in partnership with all tiers of government, regional organisations, industry, landowners, researchers and environmental and community groups.

1.6 How the strategy has been developed

This strategy has been developed through:

- a review of *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004), including consideration of a summary status report of activities carried out and updated background papers
- a review of other strategies and studies that complement *Southern Prospects*
- extensive community input.

Community input has guided the review and rationalisation of aspirational targets, goals and outcomes. Terminology has been simplified to make it more accessible to NRM practitioners.

1.6.1 Other strategies and studies

In the past five years knowledge and baseline information about the region's natural resources has expanded. A significant amount of technical information, strategies and studies that complement and build on *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) have been developed including:

- The Western Australian South Coast Macro Corridor Network (Wilkins et al., 2006)
- Cultural Values of Western South Coast Waterways (Brad Goode and Associates, 2008)
- Ecological Values of Waterways in the South Coast Region (Cook et al., 2008)
- Climate Change: Whole of Landscape Analysis of the Impacts and Options for the South Coast Region (Coffey Environments et al., 2009)



PHOTO: South Coast NRM.

The South Coast has an intricate web of biodiversity.

- Southern Shores 2009 – 2030 - Planning and Management Principles and Objectives for the South Coast Coastal Zone (Coffey Environments and South Coast Management Group, 2009)
- Phytophthora Dieback Management Plan for the South Coast 2010 - 2017 (Steady State Consulting, unpublished)
- Western South Coast Water Resources Assessment (Department of Water, 2010a)
- South Coast Draft Regional Marine Strategic Plan (Government of WA, 2010a)
- Water Forever: Lower Great Southern (Water Corporation, 2010)
- South Coast Biodiversity (Department of Environment and Conservation, 2011)
- Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement Strategy 2010-2014 (Cook, in preparation)
- Identification and Conservation of Fire Sensitive Ecosystems and Species of the South Coast Natural Resource Management Region (Barrett et al., 2009)
- South Coast Threatened Species and Ecological Communities Strategic Management Plan (Gilfillan et al., 2009)



PHOTO: South Coast NRM

The South Coast has a pristine coastal environment.

At a State level, a number of documents have been released in recent years detailing the State’s approach to NRM which are relevant to *Southern Prospects 2011-2016* including:

- A Natural Resource Management Plan for Western Australia Consultation Draft (Department of Agriculture and Food [DAFWA], 2008)
- NRM for WA – A Draft Strategy for Managing and Using Western Australia’s Land, Water and Ecosystems (State NRM Office, 2010a)
- NRM for WA – A Draft Statement of Program Investment Priorities for 2010/2011 – 2013/14 (State NRM Office, 2010b).

1.6.2 Community input

Activities to capture and incorporate information from stakeholders have included:

- workshops with South Coast NRM Reference Groups, key stakeholders and program leaders
- review by Steering Group, NRM Committee and South Coast NRM Board
- consultation and meetings with stakeholders

- community information and consultation sessions
- two public review periods
- public comment on the draft strategy.

Public meetings were held in Esperance, Ravensthorpe, Jerramungup and Albany to obtain input from interested community members with other meetings held where opportunities were presented.

South Coast NRM has a Board of Management made up of people with the appropriate skills to guide NRM in the region. The Board is supported by committees and reference groups which enables an inclusive approach to community engagement, efficient use of time and input of technical advice.

The South Coast NRM Committee is charged with the development, implementation and review of this South Coast NRM regional strategy. They oversee the development of NRM projects, funding applications and manage regional funding. Membership consists of representatives from the reference groups, government agencies, Local Government Authorities and sub regional groups.

South Coast NRM has established skills based reference groups based on theme areas, consisting of community members and people who have technical expertise to provide input on the strategic direction of NRM activities undertaken in the region. The six reference groups, listed below, reflect the assets and theme framework adopted in *Southern Prospects 2011-2016*:

- Land Reference Group
- Biodiversity Reference Group
- Water and Marine Reference Group
- Aboriginal Reference Group
- Community Involvement and Change Reference Group
- Coastal Reference Group.

The Board, NRM Committee and reference groups meet regularly to review progress of NRM activities to ensure that outcomes reflect the goals of *Southern Prospects*.

1.7 Review of past performance

1.7.1 Investment in natural resource management to date

Investment in alleviating the threats and improving the condition of the natural resources in the South Coast NRM Region has been strategically directed by the *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004).

Following accreditation of *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004), the South Coast region was allocated approximately \$47.5 million for the period 2005-June 2008 through National Heritage Trust (NHT) and National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAPSWQ). Funds from these programs were released following accreditation of three investment plans which detailed specific activities to meet the targets set out in *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004).

In 2008 the NHT and NAPSWQ programs were replaced by the Australian Government Caring for our Country initiative.

South Coast NRM has worked with its partners to deliver 539 contracts and projects and \$60 million of investment directed by *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) between 2004 and 2010 through NHT, NAPSWQ, Caring for our Country and other sources. The focus of activities to date has generally been on identifying assets and their

threatening processes, building base line information sets, developing robust management plans and then implementing on-ground actions. Implementation and on-ground works are occurring through community and government engagement processes but are reliant on securing future funding.

Investment has achieved significant outcomes since 2005. It is important to note however that many initiatives are ongoing. While more details are outlined in other sections of this document, some major achievements to date include:

• Regional Capacity

- Increased regional capacity for NRM (e.g. engagement of thousands of volunteers)
- Risk assessment and adaptation planning for climate change impacts.

• Land

- Research and development of sustainable land use systems (e.g. a series of projects for Sustainable Agricultural Systems)
- Catchment management planning and implementation (e.g. the Healthy Catchments Initiative with seven strategic catchments)
- Support of innovation through the Southern Incentive 3 devolved grant funding (e.g. the NRM Innovation project that provides support in soil health and perennial based agricultural systems)
- Extensive establishment of commercial and conservation-value woody perennials within the region (e.g. a strategic tree farming project that established 3,758 ha of pine, eucalypt and sandalwood tree crops).

• Biodiversity

- Survey to provide baseline information (e.g. survey of fungi, short range endemic invertebrate fauna and sub regional vegetation analysis)
- Mapping and monitoring of threats (e.g. mapping floristic values in areas with high species diversity and endemism)
- Recovery planning and implementation (e.g. for endangered species and ecological communities)
- Partnership program (e.g. the Gondwana Link project)
- Cross regional projects (e.g. State-wide Seed Conservation Strategy)

- Risk assessment (e.g. risk assessment of *Phytophthora dieback*)
- Support for community-based action groups (e.g. Lake Muir/Denbarker Community Feral Pig Eradication Group and the North Mallee Declared Animal Species Group).
- **Water**
 - Development of knowledge and information (e.g. for wetlands across the region)
 - Development of tools and services to support implementation (e.g. waterways rehabilitation)
 - Evaluation of ecological and cultural values of waterways
 - Resource condition monitoring programs (e.g. for estuaries, wetlands and rivers).
- **Coast and Marine**
 - Research and inventory (e.g. the Estuarine Fisheries Research Project)
 - Support for on-ground activities through the South Coast Management Group.
- **Cultural Heritage**
 - Indigenous employment
 - Education and awareness (e.g. the indigenous environmental practices through schools project)
 - Linking cultural heritage to NRM (e.g. through the Restoring Connections project).

1.7.2 Deficiencies and gaps

In every sector of NRM, theme areas are stretched to the limit in terms of capacity. Each area reports that they often feel under resourced and/or undervalued. The important role of South Coast NRM is to balance resources through this strategy across theme areas. In addition, South Coast NRM is the common link between the different themes and has an important role to ensure there is 'cross pollination' and greater understanding between different sectors.

A number of gaps in the delivery of targeted outcomes were identified by South Coast NRM and key stakeholders. The review (South Coast NRM, 2011) of NRM activities and outcomes resulting from *Southern Prospects 2004-2009* (SCRIPT, 2004) identified:

- the relative priority of assets to be treated needs revision
- planning for changes associated with adaptation to climate change and seasonal variability needs to be undertaken
- an assessment of the impact of high population growth in coastal areas, including the impact of recreation on estuaries and rivers needs to be undertaken
- NRM needs to be more fully adopted in strategic and statutory planning processes

A landscape approach is needed to address many issues.



PHOTO: South Coast NRM.

- NRM needs to continue to incorporate cultural significance and ensure that there is consistent engagement of Aboriginal people
- inefficiencies in information management (e.g. different systems for managing information about conservation values in the South Coast region) needs to be addressed
- management guidelines for coastal drainage areas need to be developed
- issues that currently have a lower profile, such as potential invasive species need proactive management
- enterprises that add value to NRM options (such as timber and mill waste processing for tree crops) need to be developed
- skills and capacity within the region needs to be maintained and/or increased, and the loss of staff due to short-term contracts needs to be addressed
- there is a perception of a 'top down' approach between funding bodies and some of the 'grassroots' community
- the need for greater engagement of urban and peri-urban people in NRM activities
- excessive dependence on volunteers who have limited capacity needs to be recognised
- engagement of local government especially in non coastal areas needs to be enhanced
- the coordination and quantification of resource condition monitoring needs to be addressed
- successes, project outcomes and documentation need to be communicated to the wider community, especially to focus and reinforce key NRM issues.

1.8 Strategic issues and threats

There are many influences beyond our region which affect our ability to undertake NRM. These include global influences such as world trade, international markets, energy availability and cost. While many aspects of these issues are outside our direct control – if we are aware of them we can minimise negative impacts.

1.8.1 Ongoing issues for natural resource management

While it is desirable to be optimistic when working towards NRM goals, many practitioners have also said that the community needs to be realistic about what can be achieved. This means that priorities need to be carefully chosen and funding used wisely. It is extremely important to note that while NRM alone is not going to cure all problems overnight, without it our region would almost certainly experience an accelerated decline of resource conditions. There is no doubt that NRM is a long term activity, with measurable outcomes sometimes only apparent after a considerable period of time. The fact that a landscape approach is needed to address many issues further compounds the complexity of addressing the most significant threats.

The most significant threats to the natural resources of the South Coast region include:

- altered hydrology/salinity
- soil degradation
- habitat loss
- dieback
- introduction and spread of weeds and feral animals
- altered fire regimes
- degradation of waterways and wetlands
- the detrimental impacts of climate change and seasonal variability (Coffey Environments, Marsden Jacob Associates, MP Rogers and Associates & Gaia Resources, 2009).

Some of the social and economic threats include:

- an increasing reliance on a decreasing number of volunteers for on-ground actions
- community/champion burnout
- withdrawal and uncertainty of government resources (skills and funds)
- institutional, legislative and market arrangements that either undervalue or actively degrade natural resources.

These challenges are significant and many issues have reached crisis point in the relatively short time since the South Coast has been settled by Europeans (i.e. since 1829). For example, for salinity and modified hydrology to be addressed, it is estimated that at least 50% revegetation of a catchment would be needed to result in measurable salinity benefits



PHOTO: South Coast NRM.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are key risks to biodiversity.

and that the amount of vegetation required to mitigate salinity would usually be five times larger than the area affected (George & Bennett, 2004). For many issues there is no silver bullet. Rather, an integrated and long term approach is needed where a combination of solutions are implemented.

To illustrate, it is considered that the following combination of solutions would be required to address salinity and would also apply to some of the other NRM issues that are faced (CSIRO, 2008):

- development of commercial tree production systems and/or native or alternative tree species for large areas of our current crop and pasture zones - these include trees for fruit, nuts, oils, medicines, bush foods, specialty timbers, charcoal and energy
- farming systems that combine the best current annual and perennial plants, the best agronomy, companion plantings, rotations and combinations
- new types of cereals, pulses, oilseeds and forages especially bred to reduce nitrogen leakage and the need for deep drainage
- ways to pinpoint the best locations for tree crops, other perennial plants and high-value annuals to meet targets for water quantity and quality
- new tools to help land managers monitor effectiveness and change their land use
- engineering solutions such as deep open drains, subsurface drains, siphons, windmill and solar pumping in areas that are already salinised
- integration of plant based and engineering solutions in areas where one solution alone is insufficient.

1.8.2 Emerging risks

A number of issues are emerging as potential risks to the implementation of NRM in the South Coast region. These include decreasing regional capacity, the loss of indigenous knowledge about the region and changing funding priorities from Government.

1.8.2.1 Challenges for regional capacity

Regional capacity is challenged as a result of inadequate or unstable funding for developing and maintaining community capacity and is emerging as a serious threat to NRM in the region. Experience, knowledge and skills are lost where people with specialist technical expertise are unable to remain in stable employment or when volunteers are 'burnt out'. Adding to these difficulties are the small (and decreasing) populations in many regional areas, resulting in a small number of people having to take responsibility for a range of voluntary activities to maintain their communities.

In addition, regional capacity needs to extend to the whole community so that the entire 'social landscape' can relate to and carry out sustainable practices.

1.8.2.2 Loss of indigenous knowledge from the region

An emerging threat is the passing of Aboriginal Elders, resulting in the loss of Aboriginal knowledge of the South Coast NRM Region at an alarming rate. There are only limited resources to carry out cultural heritage surveys which would preserve knowledge and contribute to the protection of significant sites.

1.8.2.3 Changing funding priorities

Achievement of the objectives outlined in this strategy will require individual organisations to deliver the actions outlined in an implementation plan. Given the dynamic nature of many of the organisations and funding priorities, it is likely that strategic directions will change over the five year period, which may result in an altered emphasis or loss of focus of some of the core actions identified in the strategy. For this reason, this strategy has been designed with a defined set of strategic directions to be supported by a 'live' investment plan. This will allow the investment plan to be adjusted in accordance with changing priorities and/or emphasis of partner organisations, thus ensuring the strategy remains relevant.



PHOTO: South Coast NRM

This serene image belies the devastating impact of water logging.