

Suzanne Acret

Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority (181)

Date

Mr Peter Boyd
Area Co-ordinator (North)
Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
PO Box 618
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Dear Mr Boyd

Re: Review of CAP2 – Submission by Ballina Shire Council

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the revision of the Northern Rivers Catchment Action Plan (CAP). Council understands that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) has provided a guidance framework for the development of CAP2, part of which requires effective consultation and engagement with local government. This is designed to ensure that CAP2 reflects a whole of government and community approach to natural resource management (NRM) planning. Council also understands that the NRC is looking for a structured and collaborative plan that will allow an integrated approach to NRM within its area of influence.

Having regard for the context of the CAP review, Council has a number of observations relating to the implementation of the previous CAP which may help to inform the development of CAP2. These include:-

- a) The CAP incorporates goals which are, and have proven to be, difficult to measure. To date, the goals have not been reported against in terms of the required outcomes as set out in the CAP, and it would be difficult to do so. To date, reporting has included the outputs which have occurred as a result of investment as a substitute, which is useful but not optimal in relation to measuring the progress of the CAP. It is noted that the CMA is attempting to introduce SMART goals into CAP2. This approach is supported.
- b) As noted above, there has been a tendency to report on outputs as a result of investment. Whilst the numbers of people attending open days and information sessions is of some use, it is considered that this style of reporting alone is disappointing as it does not reflect the true return on investment. It reports on activity rather than outcomes. Again, introduction of SMART goals is supported.
- c) In terms of information reaching Council, it is felt the CMA could develop an improved method of engaging relevant staff. Council acknowledges that its own internal processes of disseminating information must also be effective. However, with the NRC's focus on a more collaborative approach to NRM management, it is suggested that it would be beneficial for the CMA to shift its focus from working mostly with landholders and landcare groups to also work strategically with local government. This approach is borne out by the NRC's discussion paper on the development of CAP2 where it specifically notes that the process needs to meaningfully engage with the community, government and other stakeholders.

- d) On a more specific note, Council has undertaken a review of projects funded by the CMA as reported on the CMA's website. It appears that the Ballina Shire and Lismore City Council areas received relatively less funding than larger northern and southern local government areas. Council would appreciate an opportunity to understand how it can work with the CMA to ensure NRM issues in the Ballina Shire and in relation to the Richmond River are recognised in terms of CMA investment and resourcing.
- e) As a general note and further to this issue, Ballina Shire Council has much lower rate income than other LGAs of comparable population size due to historically low rates before the introduction of rate pegging. It is noted there are also other smaller councils in a similar position. It is suggested that the CMA consider its investment strategy to ensure that councils that are relatively less well resourced are able to access CMA funding for projects that contribute to the achievement of significant local NRM outcomes and CAP goals.

In addition to the above, Council has also reviewed various background materials specific to the CAP2 project. The following comments are provided in response to the questions and comments throughout Discussion Paper No. 3 – New Directions for CAP2.

1. *Socio-ecological boundaries* – The research underlying this mapping is interesting in its application. However, Council is of the view that, in a social sense, the areas are probably a little too geographically extensive in terms of the coastal-hinterland breadth as well as the north-south extent. However, if the use of these socio-ecological landscapes allows a greater focus on land management issues in the Northern Socio-ecological Landscape with associated resourcing to begin to address these issues, this approach is strongly supported. As noted above, Council's impression has been to date that the Lismore-Ballina area has been less well-resourced in terms of natural resource projects during the first term of the CAP.
2. *Capacity mapping* – Council would like to have a clearer explanation of the mapping provided at Maps 2, 3 and 4 within the literature that supports to CAP2 process. If the rationale behind this mapping cannot be provided, it would be better for these maps to be withdrawn as the rationale for application of the information cannot be easily understood by reading the discussion paper. Whilst it is understood that the maps have been prepared as a benchmarking exercise, it is difficult for stakeholders to understand what they mean as the methodology and parameters used to prepare them are not explained in conjunction with the maps.
3. *Motivation to be involved in NRM activities* – the most comprehensive community consultation Council has undertaken occurred during 2008 and 2009 during the preparation of the document – "People, Place Prosperity – A framework for a more sustainable Ballina Shire 2025". Other generalist consultations have included a deliberative democracy consultation on climate change – "Climate Ballina – community responding to change" and both community surveys and as specific consultations on a variety of particular issues.

Although not specific to NRM, a substantial proportion of the Ballina Shire community has indicated that it wishes to be involved in decision-making and in social networks within the community. This indicates a willingness within the Ballina Shire community to be participatory. Ballina Shire is quite an urbanised population with 80% of the population living in an urban area. This is obviously quite different to more inland council areas (60% of Lismore's population for example resides in urban areas, and many of these are in decentralised villages). Differences in population should be considered when considering the issue of motivation.

4. *Greatest threats to natural resource health* – fragmentation and the increasing pressures of ‘appreciating the environment’ were seen as the biggest threats to Ballina’s natural environment by the participants of Council’s sustainability framework process. This includes local and visiting populations gaining access to natural areas and the impacts this has during usage.
5. *How should the subcatchment look in ten years?* – The community response to how it would like to see the environment look in 2025 from Council’s sustainability framework is reproduced as follows:- *“In 2025 we would like all aspects of our natural environment to be healthy. This includes natural habitat areas, waterways and beaches, as well as natural places within our urban environment. Some of the natural habitat areas are in good condition whilst all are under pressure and it is likely that these pressures will continue.*

In our urban areas we also want to have healthy natural places. This will influence where and how we build our houses and place our industry, how we manage and use water, what sorts of plants we put in our gardens, and much more. We want our communities to focus on their natural assets, like the Richmond River, rather than turning their back on them.

This vision is about recognizing that we live in a beautiful place with many natural assets. We wish for the people in 2025 that they have a healthy natural environment: something valuable in itself and for the benefits and enjoyment the community will get from it.”

Council has utilised the visioning undertaken during the sustainability framework consultation to inform its land use planning during the preparation of the draft Ballina LEP 2011 to consolidate areas of environmental value, whilst maintaining significant agricultural areas for food production.

6. *What are the things that help you care for the natural environment?
What prevents you from caring for the natural environment?
What do you think has the biggest effect on natural resource health?*

Council is not able to offer specific responses from the community on these questions. However, Council notes that there are decreasing numbers of volunteers for groups such as Landcare or Dunecare as the population becomes busier. Support for training programs, particularly in areas of ‘urban bush’, may assist local groups to attract more volunteers to help in their work, thereby building NRM networks and working groups.

Another consideration which would assist in helping Council to care for the natural environment is detailed mapping of natural resource assets. This has been identified both by community submissions and by professional staff. Resourcing for this mapping has proved difficult. Data capture through mapping is an area where there is opportunity for improvement in delivery of outcomes that can support NRM activities over the long term.

With regard to the general constraints faced by Council itself, resourcing the NRM outcomes identified as desirable is the most difficult. Council has default or actual management responsibility for substantial areas of public land and planning responsibility for private lands within the LGA. This stretches available NRM funds. Unfortunately, this means that many highly desirable services (such as but not only NRM) can fall short in terms of resourcing.

At the moment, Council leverages grant funding where it can within the scope of monies allocated to public land management, in particular for the Coastal

Reserves Plan of Management implementation. However, these amounts are relatively small when considering the broad range of issues for management.

Additionally, cost-shifting by the NSW Government means that Council is continually being asked to actively manage more areas with the same amount of money. At the same time, rate pegging has reduced Council's ability to require ratepayers to contribute additional resources to this management. Further, as a matter of principle, Council would be reluctant to raise rates to manage new areas which another level of government has previously managed. Cost-shifting from other levels of government without commensurate recompense is a significant issue in NRM management in Ballina Shire.

Whilst it is understood that the CMA is required to account for its funds as a matter of transparency and accountability, the wider picture must be appreciated in terms of how NRM is funded. A small regional Council with a growing population will have many competing issues with regard to its budget; all the more so where the rate base has been traditionally very low. In comparison to a metropolitan Council or a larger regional Council, the ability of such a Council to fund NRM is likely to be much less.

7. *What do you think should be guiding the delivery of natural resource management?* An overarching issue which is often implied but not always articulated is that the natural environment also has cultural importance to all members of the community. This is largely unrecognised except in relation to the Aboriginal community. An examination of why natural areas are valued is likely to answer many of the questions the CAP2 discussion paper has asked.
8. *How can we help you undertake natural resource management activities in your landscape?* The resourcing issues Council must work within are discussed above. However, Council's present view is that a 'one size fits all' approach is not working with regard to the different abilities of councils to be involved in the processes the CMA uses to disseminate its investment funds.

Improved communication between the CMA and local government would also be greatly appreciated across a range of issues.

As a final comment with regard to the management of the Richmond River catchment and estuary, Council notes that the recent gazettal of the Coastal Zone Management Plan for the Richmond River Estuary has identified a review of the estuary governance and administration as a priority issue. Co-ordination of action within both the catchment and estuary is important to ensure that issues can be dealt with effectively. In this regard, the CMA's offer to co-ordinate the Richmond River CZMP Implementation Committee is acknowledged. It is hoped that co-ordination of effort and investment will effect positive change within the Richmond River catchment and estuary.

If you have any enquiries in regard to this matter please telephone Suzanne Acret on 02 6686 1284.

Yours faithfully

Matthew Wood
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