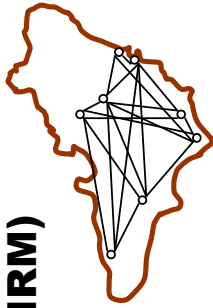


**Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional
Local Government Network (NRM)**



**Burdekin Dry Tropics
Region Local
Government Network
(NRM) Initiative**

Summary History

June 2005

The Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM)

1.1 Background

The Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM) is a relatively new network consisting of the local governments in the Burdekin Dry Tropics (BDT) natural resource management (NRM) region. The NRM regions are defined by the Commonwealth and State government for the purposes of delivering NRM support and funding under various programs and especially the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality (NAP) and the Natural Heritage Trust (NHT). A map of the BDT region showing the local government areas is provided as Figure 1.

1.2 NRM Planning in the Burdekin Dry Tropics Region

Local community action through voluntary arrangements is the most desirable pathway to deliver sustainable NRM outcomes. In the Burdekin Dry Tropics Region a number of community groups and organisations are working towards sustainable outcomes in a changing NRM environment. The Burdekin Dry Tropics Board was formed following the announcement of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality in October 2000 and subsequently took on the task of developing a Regional NRM Plan as required under the NAP and NHT funding arrangements.

Although the importance of local government in the delivery of NRM outcomes is recognised by regional groups in most cases local government is not effectively engaged in community based NRM planning at the regional level due to a variety of factors and process issues.

The Burdekin Dry Tropics is a large region (approximately 133,400 square kilometres) and it was deemed necessary to adopt a sub regional consultative approach to develop the NRM Plan to ensure wide community participation and input. Sub regional groups were already in existence from the previous NRM Strategy development process under NHT (Stage 1) and these were groups were subsequently recruited to provide the sub regional input. The emphasis placed on the sub regional approach, along with a substantial Indigenous engagement program, reduced the potential support for engaging local government in the planning process. Local government was expected to engage of its own accord, through the sub regional groups, with limited capacity and little understanding of the processes, objectives and potential opportunities.

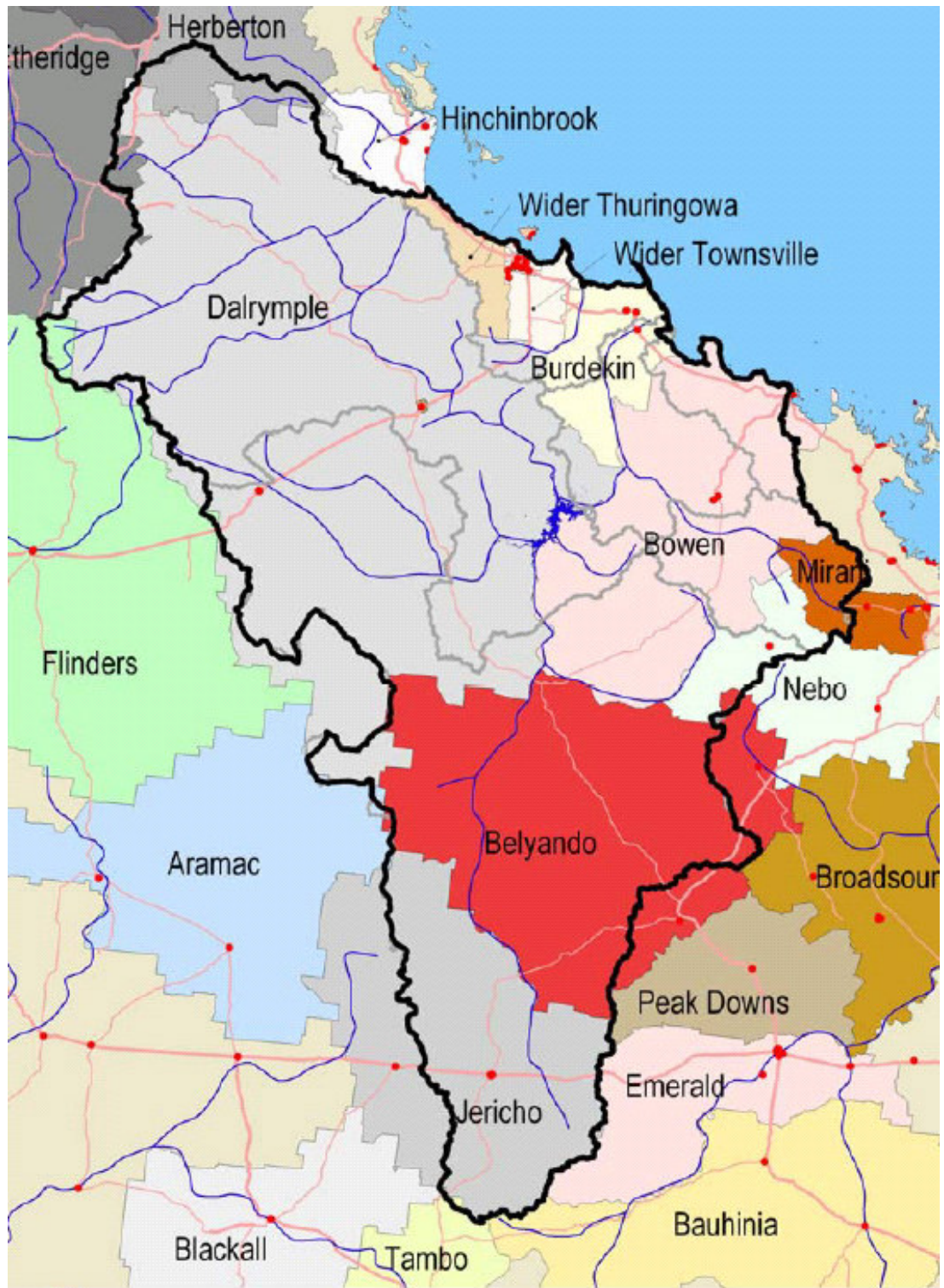
To improve local government capacity to be involved in regional NRM planning and subsequent implementation activities the Health and Environmental Services Regional Organisation of Councils - North Queensland (HESROC) developed a capacity building project proposal and presented it to the newly formed Burdekin Dry Tropics Board (BDTB) in 2002. The project proposal was not endorsed by the BDTB at that stage. HESROC continued to lobby for assistance to build local government capacity including the submission of further funding proposals to the BDTB for consideration in the various NAP and NHT funding rounds between 2002 and 2004.

1.3 HESROC / BDTB Project

While HESROC and components of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Board (BDTB) recognised the need for greater involvement of local government in the regional NRM planning process it was not until Townsville City Council engaged an experienced NRM consultant (June 2003) to facilitate the process that significant progress was made.

In August 2003 HESROC endorsed a review of local government NRM partnerships and projects to gather relevant information and garner support from constituent Councils. Following this review (December 2003) HESROC unanimously supported an initiative to increase the capacity of local government to be involved in NRM and as an interim measure approved a proposal to approach the BDTB for financial support to improve engagement of local government in the NRM planning process in the BDT region. HESROC and Townsville City Council both committed funds to the initiative.

Figure 1 Burdekin Dry Tropics Local Government areas



CSIRO, Sustainable Ecosystems, 2002

At a BDTB meeting (4 February 2004) the HESROC proposal to facilitate local government involvement in regional natural resource management (NRM) planning was presented to the Board. The outcome was a commitment by the Board to support the project conceptually and financially.

The project was a sub component of the broader capacity building initiative for local government in the Burdekin Dry Tropics region which included the establishment of the ***Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM)*** (the Network).

The concept was to build relationships with all the Councils in the region and develop processes for effective engagement and involvement of Councils in NRM, principally at the regional and sub regional levels. This involved the establishment of an 'informal' network based on the existing HESROC network and subsequently incorporating the non-HESROC Councils within the Burdekin Dry Tropics NRM region.

The HESROC – BDTB joint venture was titled ***Local Government Involvement in the Burdekin Dry Tropics Accredited Regional Natural Resource Management Plan Project*** and officially commenced in late February 2004. At that stage the majority of sub regional planning activity had already taken place. It was also the lead up period to the local government elections held in March 2004. From a local government perspective, political and administrative, the focus of attention was in a completely different direction with regional NRM planning low on the radar.

The focus for the Project Manager (John Gunn – Earth Environmental) included attendance at the two remaining sub regional group forums/workshops followed by the Regional Forum on 5 and 6 April 2004. The regional forum was held to consolidate sub regional inputs to form the basis for the regional NRM plan. Feedback from the regional forum was delivered to Councils in the BDT region through the formative Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM). Preliminary Regional Investment Strategy (RIS) development workshops followed and again the Project Manager attended and provided comment on local government matters and provided feedback to Councils on the workshops through the Network.

The project did what was possible using a fledgling Network and encouraged local government to be actively involved at a period when capacity to be involved in such a process was probably at its lowest point i.e. during and immediately following local government elections. The main task of the project during the first few months was to attend relevant NRM planning activities on behalf of local government and provide appropriate input to the planning process. Information associated with the planning process was 'filtered' so that only relevant and necessary information was relayed back to Councils via the Network.

Through meetings and various forms of consultation local government comments and perspectives on the draft plan were documented and feedback provided to the BDTB. Feedback was in the form of written submissions as well as input at meetings and workshops held as part of the plan development process.

1.4 CB07 Continuing and Developing Capacity

Support was provided to continue to support the capacity building efforts initiated by the BDTB HESROC project. The funding avenue for the ***Building Capacity of Local Governments to Participate in Regional NRM in the Burdekin Dry Tropics (and neighbouring regions)*** project was through CB07, a State-level Investment Project. The Burdekin Dry Tropics Board (BDTB) subsequently engaged HESROC via Townsville City Council, to manage and deliver the project. Part of the project has involved the continued provision of feedback to the BDTB on behalf of the BDT Regional Local Government Network (NRM) as the Regional Investment Strategy (RIS) was being finalised in early 2005.

In an ideal situation developing the capacity of local government to be involved in regional NRM would have been done prior to and as a parallel process to the development of the regional NRM Plan and RIS. The funds supplied via CB07 have been used to remedy this situation to some degree with the intent to increase local government capacity to engage in NRM while providing the support necessary to fill the capacity gaps in the interim.

Along with the need to develop relevant capacity building material and programs the project was designed to fill some information gaps. The gaps include situation assessment components to inform regional NRM planning processes and especially potential pathways for delivery of projects and programs under the RIS in association with groupings of local government i.e. regional and sub regional.

This situation assessment need became even more evident at the regional RIS stakeholders workshop in March 2005. One of the initial exercises was to determine what was happening in the region and what needs to be delivered through the RIS. The original local government skills inventory proposed as part of the CB07 project has subsequently been expanded to include local government NRM activities and associated education resources as well as the skills inventory of the people in local government who are involved, or potentially involved, in NRM and sustainability initiatives.

1.5 Continued BDT Regional Local Government Network (NRM) Support

At the most recent HESROC meeting (1 June 2005) ongoing support for the Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM) was discussed, as was the Burdekin Dry Tropics component of the State-level Investment Project CB07. With the CB07 component of the Burdekin Dry Tropics local government capacity support initiative drawing to a close the need to affirm future delivery arrangements to support local government engagement in regional NRM activities was recognised.

HESROC Council representatives unanimously supported the proposal that the delivery model used for the previous HESROC BDTB joint venture projects be adopted for ongoing delivery of support to local government in the BDT region (see Figure 2). Both HESROC and Townsville City Council have affirmed their commitment to provision of in-kind and financial support to increase the capacity of the Network Councils to participate in NRM initiatives. Further funding to support the Network is expected through the Regional Investment Strategy.

HESROC is currently negotiating with the BDTB for the continued support of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Local Government Network (NRM) through the BDT Regional Investment Strategy as part of the *Engagement and Knowledge* component of the Regional NRM Plan.

The same delivery arrangement is also proposed for other initiatives (Local Government Landcare/Catchment/Biodiversity and Pest Management) where the coordinated efforts of local government are required at the regional and sub regional levels. Such activities may include provision of support administrative services to the Board (e.g. holding workshops, broad community consultation, NRM project auspicing), and delivery of regional pest management planning and implementation for biodiversity outcomes, coastal/catchment management activities, NRM extension services, and development and dissemination of awareness raising and capacity building products.

In addition to the support expressed by the HESROC Councils all the non-HESROC Councils approached through the NRM Inventory workshops (Belyando, Nebo and Mirani) have expressed their support for the delivery model. Documented confirmation of this support will be obtained in the near future.

The delivery model primarily consists of:

- The provision of a legal entity for contractual arrangements
- Administration support and services; and
- Project management component.

The administration component consists of HESROC with Townsville City Council acting as the legal entity on behalf of HESROC Councils for the purpose of contractual arrangements and provision of administrative support as it does for other HESROC matters. Townsville City Council through Environmental Management Services provides in-kind project supervision, administration and project support services with regular reporting back to HESROC and the BDTB on project progress.

HESROC out sources the project management component including the employment of project staff as required to effectively deliver the subject project. The combination of in-house project administration and supervision by Townsville City Council and the employment of a skilful NRM Project Manager/Facilitator has been extremely successful and highly cost effective.

Figure 2 Proposed Local Government Capacity Delivery Model

