



Ref: N02 41

Hon Ian Hunter MLC
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Dear Minister Hunter,

Re: Reform of South Australian Government Boards and Committees

I refer to the recent letter from the Premier dated 8th July 2014, regarding the reform of South Australian Government Boards and Committees. Thank you for your subsequent letter of 1 August requesting that our Board provides a direct response to you on this matter. The Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board (the Board) submits this letter in support of its continuation.

Essentially the Board is a doer and a connector. It delivers a regional perspective and prioritisation process to support on-ground projects and works in partnership with a wide range of community and industry groups as well as individual landholders.

The Board has an essential role in managing natural resources and combines the approaches and tools that underpin sustainability and conservation ideologies. This critical role is not covered by any other regional entity. The Board's work implements elements of Government policies, strategies and plans. The Board also provides a focal point for community and industry on a range of issues that impact on the health of the environment and regional communities.

Key strengths of the EP NRM Board and justification for retention

Connection to community

Board members come from communities across the region from Whyalla to Coorabie (about 1.5 hours west of Ceduna). Our current membership also represents a range of sectors including agriculture, seafood, local government, education and conservation. Board members are passionate about the region, believe in the Board's programs and strive to produce outcomes that build the resilience of EP's natural resources and communities.

Community engagement is central to the Board's role and modus operandi, and it takes this role very seriously. An example the Board's commitment in this area is demonstrated by recently running a series of open community workshops across the region to gather information on what is important to community and their concerns for the places and things they value. This information will inform the revision of the EP NRM Plan.

The Board plays a pivotal role in connecting industry and government sectors and community groups. The EP NRM Board has a strong working relationship with EP Local Government Association and RDA Whyalla and Eyre Peninsula. This is formalized through the EP Integrated Climate Change Agreement (EPICCA), which is convened by the Board. The SA Government through DEWNR is also a key member of EPICCA. EPICCA brings together organisations with strengths in environmental management, social outcomes and economic development.

Minister, you may recall launching the EP Climate Change Adaptation Plan in February this year. This was the first adaptation plan developed by and for a region. The plan would not have been possible without the leadership and social networks of the Board. The project brought together community leaders, science and local knowledge to make a plan to adapt to a different climate future.

Aboriginal involvement in NRM

The Board has a strong program that successfully involves Aboriginal people in on-ground projects. These projects provide training and life skills that have positive social, economic and environmental outcomes for those involved and their extended families. We are proud to say that the Natural Resources EP workforce is 10% Aboriginal. (Also see section on board committees on next page).

Ability to leverage external funding

The Board also leverages funds from a range of sources. The NRM and water levies are raised in the region and strategically re-invested in the region. The core and reliable funding provided by the levies allows leveraging of funding from other sources.

EP is one of 56 regions across Australia that receives funding directly from Australian Government Programs, especially the National Landcare Program (formerly Caring for Our Country). Since the withdrawal this year of the annual regional allocation to EP from the SA Government, Australian Government funding now accounts for 55% of the Board's budget. The Board devolves a significant proportion of this funding as well as levy funds to community groups and landholders to implement projects that improve production and environmental conditions.

Local employment

The Board currently funds 36 staff (equating to 38 full time equivalents), and thereby makes a significant contribution to employment and economic development in the region. Staff are located in offices across EP and they are active and valued members of the communities in which they live and work.

The management and directions of NRM boards have undergone large changes from their inception, when they were responsible for: managing an organisation and staff; raising revenue from various sources; and setting natural resource management priorities within the scope of their legislated responsibilities. The integration of the board's state agency and parks and wildlife was a natural evolution to maximize the potential to manage across the landscape, incorporating private and public land management policies and practices.

The fundamental value of boards as a regional mechanism for management of natural resources is in their distinct level of responsibility and autonomy in their role as a part of the regional community and in developing local priorities for natural resources management.

Board committees

The Board currently administers three committees to support its work.

1. Risk and Audit Committee

The role of the Risk and Audit Committee is to evaluate and support financial, risk management and internal controls of the Board to ensure that the organisation operates with integrity and meets its statutory obligations in delivering an accountable, ethical, progressive and honest service to the community.

The existence of the Committee provides assurance to the Eyre Peninsula community that the levies collected are controlled and monitored by community representatives.

The committee meets five times per year. Membership consists of three EPNRM Board Members (who are community members), the Regional Manager and a Non-Board community member. Members were selected for their skills and experience in corporate governance.

This committee's functions are required under the NRM Act and if this committee didn't exist, these functions would be required to be performed by the complete Board, leading to inefficiencies and increased cost.

2. Aboriginal Advisory Committee

This committee has recently been reformed and will hold its first meeting in late August. The Committee consists of eight Aboriginal Community members from across the region, representing both Aboriginal Community organizations and Native Title interests, as well as one EP NRM Board member.

The Broader EP Aboriginal community requested a formal mechanism and recommended a Committee be developed for them to have input into NRM Planning and Aboriginal Engagement and participation in natural resources management. The committee provides a critical link between the EP NRM Board and the Aboriginal communities of Eyre Peninsula.

Current priority NRM Planning tasks require strategic input and advice from this group. The quality of the NRM Plan and the NRM Board's reputation would suffer if this key stakeholder group were not appropriately engaged.

Partnering with Aboriginal community organisations, native title interests and service providers on the planning and delivery of mutually beneficial programs and employment and training initiatives is currently working well on the EP. Abolishing this Committee would place significant pressure on the continued and increased success of Aboriginal involvement in land and sea management in the region.

3. Water Resources Advisory Committee (WRAC)

The role of the WRAC is to provide advice to the Board on matters regarding water resources management on Eyre Peninsula that are relevant to the business of the Board. The Committee consists predominantly of community members with an interest in water management and two Board members, one of whom is the chair.

The Board's recent review of committees concluded that the contribution of the WRAC to the deliberations of the Board may not be sufficient to warrant its retention. However, the Board resolved

to retain the WRAC until the completion of public consultation on the Draft EP Water Allocation Plan (WAP) and to then review the need for the committee's continuation.

With the advent of the Premier's initiative to review state boards and committees, the Board has reconsidered its position on the WRAC. Community consultation on the draft WAP can be more effectively achieved through other more focused arrangements.

Therefore, the Board would agree to abolish the WRAC at the end of October, in line with the Premier's timeframe.

Yours sincerely



Heather Baldock
Presiding Member
Eyre Peninsula Natural Resources Management Board
11/08/2014

