

**Mr Ian Hunter MLC**  
**Minister for sustainability, Environment and Conservation**  
**Minister for Water, and the River Murray**  
**Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation**

I refer to your letter on 01/ 08/ 2014 regarding the process to review State Government boards and committees. Some members of the Yorke Peninsula Group of the Northern & Yorke NRM Board have discussed the effectiveness of the delivery of the management of natural resources since changes were implemented under the NRM Act ten years ago.

I offer the following comments as the Chair of the Group and the views expressed are mine and not necessarily those of the group, although some members of the group may agree with some of the points being made.

I understood and supported the rationalization of the large number of small soil, pest plant and animal and water boards into a larger more efficient body. Unfortunately the system implemented has failed to deliver better management of our natural resources for the cost to the State and the land holders who pay the NRM levy.

The formation of regional boards has developed a hierarchy of duplicity and protocols that has swallowed up funds and left very little capital for important and essential ground works that are expected by those who pay this levy. However the introduction of the Conservation Action Planning process (CAP) has been a valuable and important highlight of visionary planning that should be retained.

The inability of NRM to enforce any control programs for weed infestations, feral animal control and new incursions of pests of weeds, animal and invertebrate pests are difficult to manage given the existing methods of definition and planning. My concerns have been taken to the N&Y NRM Board and have failed to progress a definite review or audit of the effectiveness of the hierarchy, methodology and protocols in place to manage the budget and deliver properly broadly based management and delivery of the services formerly actioned by the previous system.

The following proposals are offered without prejudice to either the NRM boards, the recent integration process that shifted NRM into the new department of DEWNR and the long suffering and hardworking staff that are unfortunately the silent victims of the State and Federal Government cost cutting schedule. It takes into account two vital aspects of the question whether NRM Boards and their committees should continue in their present form.

#### **The NRM Act 2004**

The NRM Act must either be repealed or more importantly amended to change the methodology, hierarchy and delivery of services to the community. It is not our role to become involved in that process as it is a function of government and the parliament. However the following indicates where we believe changes are necessary for return of efficiency and value to the community.

It is absolutely necessary for changes to take place that a parliamentary bipartisan approach to set up the basic framework be the start of the process and then followed by a meeting of critical and informed persons derived from all stakeholder groups convened to reconstruct the delivery of NRM in South Australia. It is NOT a political problem it is a problem of efficiency and ownership of NRM.

### **Reconstruction of NRM**

*It is essential that the NRM Levy remain and continue to be collected by local government as the most efficient method of taxing land owners. It is a problem of efficient delivery and cost effective management.*

An effective mechanism already exists in South Australia to manage, oversee and deliver some of the services provided by NRM, *i.e. in local government*. At present there is duplication of assessment and planning for management of NRM's key roles.

Formerly these roles were provided through the District Council system (*by Animal and Pest Plant Control*) and this was taken away and a new hierarchy of management was installed. This meant the community's vital ownership was removed and placed into an unfamiliar and remote body. It failed to garner community and public support which has not been able to be established under the new system.

It is my proposal that the NRM Boards as they are presently constituted should be disbanded and be replaced with another body made up of nominees with conservation credentials by local governing bodies within the NRMs regions. The Natural Resources Council of SA should evaluate the credentials of the nominees and recommend those successful applicants to the minister for appointment.

The new regional bodies should have voting members of DEWNR staff appointed to them as well. There should be a clear maximum number of personnel appointed to each new board with desirably no more than seven. *The Chairperson should be appointed by the Natural Resources Council or the Board and not by the Minister.*

The reasoning and key factors are:

- Local Government are represented in all areas of the state except arid lands and they need to be dealt with on a special basis
- Councils have offices, collect the levy and *existing NRM (DEWNR)* staff could be seamlessly slotted into their management and local staff to deal with local as well as regional issues
- Local government already have regional and state structures, *i.e. Central Local Government Region* to oversee and manage NRM issues as a matter of significance as they arise
- Councils have existing infrastructure to carry pesticides, conduct control programs and have inspectors and trained personnel that all can be expanded to meet the needs of NRM
- Councils have the ability to install local by-laws and other governance controls

- There is a very effective audit system within the council budget system to monitor the collection and the use of the NRM levy and the results generated
- Councils would, of course, need to be cognizant of any state or federal acts, laws or protocols

*Funding under the new NRM model should embrace this basic element:*

- *Levies collected in a local government area should be spent within that local government area with this variation.*
- *State funds through DEWNR should be used to leverage local government levies into important regional NRM issues as identified by the new board.*

○ Finally it is my understanding that the peak body, *the Natural Resources Council of SA must be retained* from a state perspective to oversee the delivery of NRM on behalf of government and the public.

*Its role should include but not be restricted to the following;*

- *Receive and review an annual or biennial audit of performance and expenditure from each designated NRM region as the amended act determines*
- *Prepare an annual report for the relevant Minister that outlines the results, management techniques and programs used by NRM*
- *Receive submissions from Councils for changes to the management of NRM they see as necessary*
- *Regularly liaise with all other regulatory bodies within government for effective delivery of NRM management, performance for any current or emerging problems*

○ Grantley H Dodd,  
August 18 2014

