

14th August 2014.

Mr Ian Hunter MLC
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation.

Dear Mr Hunter,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the current Premier's Review of Boards & Committees on behalf of the Lower South East NRM Group. I have been involved with NRM Groups since my appointment as Chair of the Southern Group in 2010.

My response is in 4 parts;

Part 1. SE NRM Group achievements since 2010.

Part 2. The value of members of Groups as a conduit for community issues to the NRM Board.

Part 3. Group members don't often get public recognition for Group projects, but are very much value adding to their meeting sitting fees.

Part 4. Recent and possible changes which may or may not improve Group function going forward.

1. Southern then Lower SE NRM Group achievements (2009 – Current).

Highlights in 2010 include;

- Supported and financially covered the establishment of two deep pools in Drain M of the southern drainage system to provide continual habitat for the Critically Endangered fish species, Yarra Pygmy Perch. Media promotion received on the project.
- With the backing of the SE NRM Board, the Group, together with the Central NRM Group, provided a working party and finance to revise and reprint a local plant identification guide written by local author, Neville Bonney. Book titled, "*What South East Native Plant is this?*" was published in March and sales have been promoted through the media with the intent to assist the community with the identification of native plants, shrubs and grasses in the South East of South Australia.
- Members participated in the launch of the South East NRM Regional Plan Community Consultation throughout the region.
- Members provided written and verbal feedback on the draft South East Pest Strategy.
- Member presented urban bio diversity recommendations at the City of Mt Gambier Sustainability Working Group to encourage the Council to consider native plantings.

Highlighted Projects and Activities in 2011 include:-

- The reprint last year of a local plant identification guide written by local author, Neville Bonney, titled, "*What South East Native Plant is this?*" was followed up this year by the author showing participants at a workshop at

Glencoe how to use the book to identify native plants, shrubs and grasses in the South East of South Australia.

- Members participated in the launch of the South East NRM Business Plan community consultation throughout the region.
- Members provided written and verbal feedback on the draft South East Pest Strategy.
- Two members registered for and attended the 'Weed Spotters' training workshops.
- Member met with staff of the City of Mt Gambier to consider native water wise plantings in specific gardens.
- Members met with Wattle Range Council gardens supervisor re biodiversity.
- Members participated in the Orange Bellied Parrot and Red tailed Black Cockatoo surveys.
- A member participated in the CRC Weed Management 'What does your garden grow?' course.
- The Group assisted with the staging of an Orange Bellied Parrot Photo Exhibition in Mt Gambier, attracting 160 attendees.
- Members attended several conferences and workshops pertaining to natural resource management.
- The group contributed towards the reprinting of the Coastal Gardens booklet as well as supporting a landholder wishing to fence and establish a small block of coastal vegetation.
- The Group also contributed to the reprint of the Wetland Plants and Wetland Birds brochures
- The Group assisted in the promotion of environmental and NRM events within the South East, including assistance with advertising of the DENR Autumn Biodiversity seminar series, with a group member presenting one of the seminars.
- Members provided expertise for a number of the Board's Program Logic workshops
- The Southern Group's evaluation of previous Vehicle Hygiene workshops was used to inform delivery of this workshop again in the region

Highlighted Projects and Activities in 2012 include:-

- Providing a series of four Small Farms workshops around Mount Gambier for people who did not make their primary income from farming was the highlight of the group's year. It is the first time any NRM Activities have been specifically directed towards this community, and it was highly successful with all sessions being booked out, and extremely positive feedback. The group will be aiming to expand and improve on its program next year, and it has also inspired other NRM Groups to consider whether they may need a similar program in their area.
- For the first time the group ran a workshop specific to teachers. The Group asked Neville Bonney to run a session explaining how to use his book "*What South East Native Plant is that?*" Teachers that attended then received a copy of the book to use with students at their school.
- Members participated in the launch of the South East NRM Business Plan community consultation throughout the region.

- Members participated in the Orange Bellied Parrot and Red tailed Black Cockatoo surveys.
- Group members assisted with the Coordination of Coastal Gardens workshops promoting the SE Coastal Gardens Booklet.
- Members attended several conferences and workshops pertaining to natural resource management.
- Along with the Northern & Central groups the Southern NRM Group has provided information on local issues to the SE NRM Board
- The Group contributed towards the development of SE specific flora and fauna identification brochures.
- Members attended several conferences and workshops pertaining to natural resource management.
- The Group worked with the Northern and Central NRM Groups to host Fox Fortnight promoting the spring baiting of foxes.
- The Group assisted in the promotion of environmental and NRM events within the South East.

Highlighted Projects and Activities in 2013 include:-

- Assistance with ongoing bird surveys at Piccaninnie Ponds RAMSAR site with volunteer costs.
- Investigation into sediment and water management around Lake George outlet.
- Biodiversity Seminars in conjunction with Nature Glenelg Trust.
- Small Farms Workshop series continuation.
- Teacher Environmental training continued.
- Plant ID days targeting general public.
- Penola Show NRM stand attendance, sponsorship of children's weeds competitions.
- Weed Awareness days at Kincaig Plaza Naracoorte.
- Support and involvement in 'Friends of Shorebirds' Dogs Breakfasts.

Highlights for the 2014 reporting period include;

- Continuing the highly successful Small Farms Workshops in Mt Gambier.
- Initiated production of a Legislation Booklet as a quick reference guide for landowners.
- Greenrise Lake arboretum signage of 120 tree species.
- Workshops to promote best practise irrigation to viticulture and dairy industries.
- Local Show and weed awareness day involvement.
- Assisted NRM staff with public information stands at SE Field Days.
- Assisted with reprinting of Coastal Gardens Booklet.
- Teacher Environmental training continued.
- Group members assisted in the promotion of regional environmental and NRM events via their networks.
- Members regularly updated on local animal and plant pest issues, also feedback to weed declaration process.

A number of projects are ongoing year to year, building on previous success. While some projects or programs would exist without NRM Groups, many of the

projects over those four years were either initiated or the idea was raised by the group or its members. Members of Groups are involved in many local natural resource organisations, enabling meshing of much of the daily workings of natural resource staff and volunteers.

Part 2: The value of members of Groups as a conduit for community issues to the NRM Board.

Group members are selected through a process that requires a broad cross-section of the community. The Lower South East Group at present has members from each of the represented Council areas, those members involved in farming, viticulture, dairying, public health, soil consulting, and community organisations. Group members are active members of their chosen industry/organisation, and are able to use their high level of involvement to 'sell' NRM programs to their peers. For example, I am currently Chair of the Limestone Coast Grape and Wine Council, having also been Chair from 2008 to 2010.

This 'conduit' works both ways, as Group meeting agendas include reports from local Animal & Plant Control Officers and Natural Resources SE Community Engagement staff, so events and issues are able to be circulated via members' networks in a timely manner.

Our Group members sit on various community based organisations, and have often needed to be a visible link to the NRM Board for those organisations. Sometimes members of the public will approach a Group member to raise an issue, preferring to do that than to the more formally structured Board, as many landowners see the Board as being part of state government now. If Groups are dispensed with, in favour of some other arrangement, that community trust will have to start from scratch again.

Part 3. Group members are very much value adding to their meeting sitting fees.

You will have noted in Part 1 of this response, that Groups are involved in a vast array of issues within the region, and the cost of administering the Groups fees and travel costs are a mere drop in the ocean, compared to the time spent by Group members outside of formal meetings. Group members are all experts in their field of endeavour, and if one was to calculate the value of the free consultancy advice that the Board and our regions natural resources receive from Group members each year, it would be many times the cost of NRM Groups. As a Group member, value lies also in what I can take out to the community, which in many cases are simply conversations between like-minded people. Group membership has also proved to be a good grounding for Board nomination, as three of the current NRM Board had previously been Group members, so again we see value being added.

Part 4. Recent and possible changes which may or may not improve Group function going forward.

Since I became involved in NRM Groups in 2010, we have seemed to be in a continual state of review. Staffing changes also kept Groups from being able to settle down and get on with the job. Last year the three NRM Groups in the SE went through a boundary review process, culminating in a reduction to two Groups. This resulted in a budget saving, as Group membership was reduced from

21 to 14. This small saving has diluted the connection between community and the Board, and it remains to be seen if the connection can be strengthened again. During the review of Group boundaries, the question was also asked if Groups could take on the role of advising on government and crown lands, with the view to reducing committee numbers also. Our members felt this could be done, but agreed Group membership would have to change to include people with strengths in public and crown land management. I believe the current Groups have a good working relationship with the SE NRM Board, aided in no small way by a Board member attending our meetings. Our Group meetings are open to the public, yet few members of the public attend. The declaration of understanding and intent signed by NRM and primary producers last year agrees to improved relationships and communication, improved function and design of the NRM system, and improved processes for deciding what and how work gets done. There is much work to be done yet, to improve the relationship between Natural Resources and landowners, especially pertinent in the rural areas of South Australia, so I acknowledge the need for continual review and improvement. But I also know that retaining our NRM Groups should be part of the answer, and I am happy to work with you to that end.

Due to time restraints, I was not able to discuss this response in depth with the other Lower South East NRM Group members; however I believe I have the support of all Group members with my comments.

Yours Sincerely
Brendan Provis
Chair
Lower South East NRM Group.



