

Community Involvement in Mid North Riverine Planning

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SUMMARY: The poster will outline the three tiered consultation framework used for community involvement in riverine planning in the Mid North region of South Australia.

MAIN POINTS

- A three tiered consultation framework has been developed to involve the community and stakeholder groups in the development of planning tools for the Mid North Rivers

1. INTRODUCTION

The South Australian Mid North Rivers Management Planning project (Department for Environment, Heritage and Aboriginal Affairs) evolved from community concerns over water resource management issues. These concerns were expressed at community consultation meetings conducted in 1996 by the then Department for Environment and Natural Resources (Water Resources Group), in partnership with the Clare Valley Water Resources Committee. A three tiered consultation framework involves the community in the development of riverine planning tools for the Mid North rivers. These planning tools will be in the form of riverine management plans which include river reach action plans for the Wakefield, Broughton and Light Rivers.

2. CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

A three tiered consultation framework has been developed to involve the community and stakeholder groups. A Mid North Reference Group of key stakeholder organisations oversees the project and integrates riverine planning information into other catchment management related plans. Within each catchment, a catchment advisory group advises on the range of local watercourse issues that need to be addressed. Key landholders and local government representatives are recommended by the Reference Group to form the catchment advisory group which plays a key catchment level support role. The final tier in the consultation framework is the meetings to involve local landholders in riparian and environmental flows planning at a river reach level.

2.1 Developing The Framework

In developing the consultation framework, consideration was given to overcoming the potential barriers which can impact on the consultation process and maximising opportunities to strengthen community interest and involvement.

2.2 Opportunities

It was the local need for riverine planning which was the catalyst for the project and thus provides

momentum for involvement and support. Targeting local riverine management issues through meetings with the catchment advisory group and landholders at the river reach level ensures the riverine plans meet landholder needs and expectations. The plans have community ownership which heightens the prospect of plan implementation through on ground action. Long term community involvement in the implementation of the plans is essential if the outcome of healthy rivers is to be achieved.

2.3 Potential Barriers

The barriers identified for the Mid North were the:

- **Lack of a catchment management administrative framework**

Unlike some other catchment areas within SA, the catchments of the Mid North are not under a Catchment Board. These Boards implement water management plans and provide funding support for on-ground action via a catchment levy. In lieu of a catchment board in the Mid North, a Reference Group of representatives from key stakeholder groups was formed to oversee the project and facilitate the integration of riverine planning information into their organisation's plans.

- **Other water resource planning processes**

Approximately one tenth of the Mid North has been declared a prescribed area under the Water Resources Act 1997, requiring a Water Allocation Plan (WAP) to be produced by the Clare Valley Water Resources Committee. The consultation process for the WAP was already underway when the riverine planning process commenced. Care had to be taken to avoid landholder frustration and confusion with the two water resource planning initiatives. To overcome this, advice was sought from the Reference Group and catchment advisory group on the timing and approach for community involvement.

- **Community links with riverine assessments**

Assessments of the environmental flow requirements and riparian zone condition comprise the two information gathering components for the riverine

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management plans. At first glance, this process could be perceived by the community as a scientific data gathering exercise in which they play no role. However, in recognition of the fact that landholders can contribute vital local riverine information to bolster the survey information, their contribution was invited through river reach meetings.

For the riparian assessments, the consultation process involved landholders in action planning to identify riparian management issues and solutions. The assessment of environmental flows requirements was undertaken by a scientific panel. Community linkages were created through landholder meetings which invited input on stream flows and river health. This tier

of landholder involvement ensured a bottom up approach to the planning process.

CONCLUSION

Consultation frameworks must address potential barriers to community participation and seek opportunities for landholder involvement. At all levels of the three tiered framework for riverine planning in the Mid North, the emphasis is on producing riverine plans that will have relevance for the Mid North community. With this level of community involvement driving the planning process, community ownership of the plans is ensured which will maximise the opportunity for implementation.