

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- At past meetings, Forum members have been advised that opportunity exists for greater involvement by individual councils and Local Government generally in the planning and delivery of Natural Resource Management given their existing statutory roles, direct links to their communities, local knowledge, local infrastructure and local management of important NRM assets.
- A working group established to consider options for promoting greater collaboration between Local Government and NRM Boards and to provide high level leadership in the planning and delivery of NRM. The working group comprises representatives from the Local Government Association of South Australia (chair), the NRM Council, Kangaroo Island NRM Board, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC), and the Office for State/Local Government Relations (observer).
- Some concern has been expressed by councils and regional NRM Boards about the lack of connectivity in relation to their roles and responsibilities, particularly in the areas of community engagement on the NRM levy, the alignment of council and NRM board strategic regional investment priorities, and the influence of the regional NRM Boards on council Development Plans.
- At the LGA's Annual General Meeting held in October 2007, councils endorsed the establishment of a forum comprising of Regional NRM Board Chairs and General Managers, Departmental officers and Local Government representatives. The main objective of the forum would be to make high level recommendations to the Minister for Environment and Conservation and the LGA President on significant issues of concern regarding the implementation of NRM arrangements across the State. The LGA President's Forum on NRM was held on 28 February 2008.
- The key areas of concern arising from the Forum are a perceived reduction in the level of NRM on-ground service delivery to communities following the establishment of Regional NRM Boards, the role of Local Government in the collection of the NRM levy, differing views on the calculation of the NRM levy on a region by region basis, and greater Local Government involvement on NRM Regional Boards.
- At its 20 March 2008 meeting, the LGA State Executive Committee considered a report relating to the outcomes of the President's Forum. The report made recommendations further to the outcomes of the Forum that seek to improve relationships between Councils and regional NRM bodies and better engage Councils in regional NRM arrangements. The recommendations support the LGA's NRM strategy and are summarised:
 - LGA Secretariat to commission independent research and advice on the feasibility of alternative NRM levy collection options and arrangements;
 - LGA to progress the Local Government NRM Partnerships Project and the NRM Strategic Planning with Elected Members project;
 - Hosting of regionally based Local Government NRM Forums to identify 'region specific' issues and actions;
 - LGA Secretariat to work with DWLBC in the implementation of the recommendations;

- LGA to commence dialogue with Planning SA for the purpose of undertaking a joint investigation of the effectiveness of NRM provision in the State Planning Strategy and its implications for Local Government development plans; and
 - LGA President to write to the Minister for Environment and Conservation regarding the key recommendations of the State Executive report and seek the Minister's support for the recommendations.
- The LGA will use the outcomes of the Presidents Forum to support and refine its NRM strategy with the view to action the recommendations as a priority.
 - It is envisaged that outcomes arising from the President's Forum will provide a basis to progress the LGA NRM Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines the protocols for engagement between Councils and the NRM Boards to encourage the development of a more robust relationship. Forum members have been previously advised of the development of a MOU template.
 - ALGA President, Cr Paul Bell, recently wrote to Prime Minister regarding the continuing uncertainty of funding for national natural resource management programs. Funding for the current Natural Heritage Trust Program (NHT3) concludes on 30 June this year, and community groups, regional organisations, councils and many others are seeking urgent advice on the proposed future arrangements.
 - Media reports say that the Federal Government is considering at least \$400 million in cuts to NHT programs. ALGA emphasised the need for strong continued Federal Government investment in national environmental and natural resource management, which supports economically resilient local and regional communities.