

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT BOARD COMMUNIQUE

Monday 17th March 2008

On Friday the 14th March the Australian Government released 'Caring For Our Country' – the new 5 year natural resource management program to replace NHT2, the National Landcare Program and parts of other NRM programs. All the available details can be found on [Natural Heritage Trust (National) website], and I would recommend everyone have a look.

You will see that the keystone of the new program consists of six national priorities to which all future funding is to be directed. These are:

- a national reserve system,
- biodiversity and natural icons,
- coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats,
- sustainable farm practices,
- natural resource management in remote and northern Australia, and
- community skills, knowledge and engagement.

The Board is very pleased that the NRMB's programs are already substantially aligned with these priorities, and is particularly pleased with the emphasis on natural resource management in remote and northern Australia, and on indigenous and other community skills, knowledge and engagement – both of which are key to implementation of the NT's Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan.

There is much about the new program that is still unclear. However what we do know is:

- The program confirms that "the highly-valued skills and expertise of regional NRM organisations will be very important in achieving the outcomes for Caring for Country..... It is likely that regional bodies will be well placed to bid for funds to undertake [further] activities...."
- NRMB (NT) is guaranteed \$3.6m in 2008-09, which is somewhat less than 60% of the NRMB's historical allocation; but this amount now includes all the expenses of running the Board and its staff including Regional Facilitators and probably leaves only about a third of the investment required to implement year two of the NRMB's Regional Investment Strategy for 2007-2010.
- All NRM organisations including NRMB (NT), the NT Government, and NGOs, can then compete for additional funds in 2008-09 and future years, to deliver specific projects consistent with the national priorities.

- The remaining four years of the program will also be made up of a guaranteed amount for NRMB (NT), and the opportunity to compete for program funds for activities that deliver national priorities. We don't yet know the balance between the guaranteed and competitive components.
- Revised Regional Investment Strategies (RIS) will probably continue to be the vehicle to bid for the additional funds.

It is early days yet, and the Board has much thinking and consulting and planning to do to determine how to proceed. However we can say that:

- The Board was only able to approve one year of funding for projects submitted as part of the RIS07-08 process. Nevertheless the Board acknowledges and respects the important NRM work proposed for years two and three of the successful projects, and will work hard, within the constraints of the much-reduced guaranteed funding, to as far as possible balance the needs of these projects with the need to now align with the new Caring For Our Country funding requirements.
- The Board has always seen the need for partnerships as a key principle in delivering NRM in the NT, and is committed to continuing this approach.



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Chairman, NRMB (NT) Inc