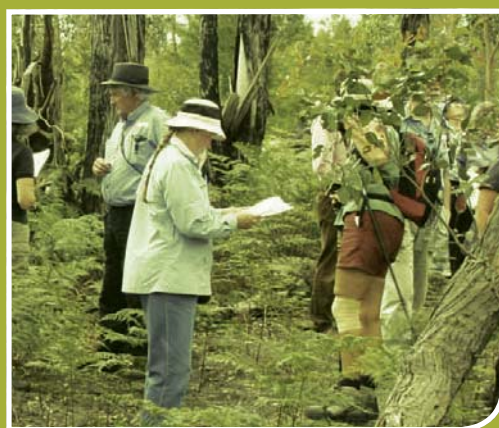




CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT NETWORKS VICTORIA

strategic plan



working together

to protect biodiversity



This plan has been published by Context P/L on behalf of:

Broken-Boosey CMN
East Gippsland Rainforest CMN
Gippsland Plains CMN
Mid-Loddon CMN
Northern Plains CMN
Wedderburn CMN
Whroo Goldfields CMN

Department of Sustainability and Environment
Parks Victoria
Trust for Nature
East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority
Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority
North Central Catchment Management Authority
West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority



Department of
Sustainability
and Environment



EAST GIPPSLAND
CATCHMENT
MANAGEMENT
AUTHORITY



CONTEXT

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Contact details

To find out more about Conservation Management Networks in your area, contact the regional office of your Catchment Management Authority or of Trust for Nature, Parks Victoria or the Department of Sustainability and Environment. You can also link to several CMNs via www.dse.vic.gov.au/cmnn.

Minister's foreword

It is a great pleasure to introduce the Strategic Plan for Conservation Management Networks.

Conservation Management Networks operate on both public and private land to increase the level of protection afforded to important biodiversity assets. The Networks help government agencies to work in conjunction with community members, to achieve improved results across a landscape.

Conservation Management Networks have added to the great work undertaken by organisations like Friends groups and Landcare in restoring our natural environment. Victoria's seven Networks have been operating for less than a decade but have achieved much in that time.

This Strategic Plan is the product of co-operation between Conservation Management Networks and the seven government agencies that support them directly - the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria, Trust for Nature and four Catchment Management Authorities (East Gippsland, Goulburn-Broken, North-Central and West Gippsland).

In setting out key directions for the future, the Strategic Plan will guide the efforts of all involved. It will also provide guidance to new Networks that are established in the coming years.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gavin Jennings". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

GAVIN JENNINGS
Minister for Environment and Climate Change

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AIM OF THIS STRATEGY

This aim of this strategy is to strengthen the role and direction of Conservation Management Networks (CMNs) in Victoria for the medium term. It has been developed with input from CMNs and their partners and proposes a set of key directions that encourages the shared potential of CMNs, but also supports continued diversity between the different networks.

The strategy positions CMNs as important players in achieving biodiversity outcomes in Victoria, and suggests that they have an important future role in protecting some of our most valuable biodiversity assets. It provides a focus for effort into the future. Specifically the plan aims to:

- Channel the learnings of CMNs since establishment at various times over the last 10 years into a set of shared directions for the future
- Provide a snapshot of the major challenges and strengths across key aspects of CMN's community engagement, partnerships, on-ground works, planning and governance
- Clarify the role of CMNs with reference to other community based, conservation oriented organisations such as Landcare
- Place CMNs clearly within the context of current federal, state and local policy frameworks for biodiversity and NRM
- Improve the profile of and coordination between CMNs at a state and national level

The plan seeks to consolidate the CMN model in general as an appropriate vehicle for the delivery of biodiversity programs, and to support individual CMNs in the work they are currently doing. The voluntary nature and goodwill of participating agencies and community has been the basis of CMNs' success to date. While the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) initiated the development of this plan, it has been developed for all agencies with a role in fostering CMNs. To the extent possible, the objectives and actions outlined in this plan have been developed, discussed and agreed with all CMNs and agencies. The actions under each direction included were generated at a stakeholder workshop, where agencies were asked to identify tasks that they thought were achievable in the medium term. The draft strategy was then reviewed at two further agency meetings, after wide circulation.

The original purpose of this project was to develop an agreed strategic plan for the management of the Box-Ironbark CMN program. Subsequent to that, however, an opportunity was seen to extend the work to cover CMNs throughout the state. The strategy has been developed in consultation with all CMNs and it is our intent that it will bring together the range of experiences across the state. It is not intended as an evaluation of the individual CMNs or the CMN model, although existing evaluations have been considered in its preparation. The emphasis of the plan is on the identification of strategic issues and development of shared directions. It is not intended to inform funding decisions, or provide a template for detailed planning. It is, primarily, a shared narrative.

The primary source of information for the plan has been a series of interviews with CMNs and agencies and a review of the literature. Over 25 people from CMNs and associated organisations were interviewed, and a stakeholder workshop was held on July 16, 2007. Two further agency meetings were held on 15 October 2007 and 28 November 2007 to review and comment on drafts of this strategy. In addition to the five Victorian CMNs, the following agencies provided valuable input to this process: Trust for Nature (TFN), DSE, East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EG CMA), Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority (GB CMA), North Central Catchment Management Authority (NC CMA), Department of Primary Industry (DPI) and Parks Victoria (PV). This plan builds on the earlier work of Shaw (2005) and EWR (2006), and other thinkers in the field.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The experience of the last ten years has generated a body of experience around the operation of CMNs to date. This project has gone some way toward documenting this and identifying the strengths and challenges facing CMNs collectively. Overall, it suggests that CMNs make an important contribution to the achievement of improved biodiversity outcomes, through their unique cross-tenure, multi-stakeholder approach.

Eight strategic directions have been developed through a process of consultation with all CMNs and partner organisations. They are intended as a high level focus for CMNs across the state. Different CMNs are at different stages of evolution, and so will be positioned differently in relation to these directions. The important thing however, is that they represent a collective sense of direction, and can be used at a strategic level as a focus for thinking and future effort.

- **Articulate a clear role for CMNs in achieving improved biodiversity outcomes at a local, state and national level:** CMNs to add value across a range of policy areas, local integration a key strength, focus on biodiversity differentiates from Landcare, value add also in integrating across tenure
- **Planning to support implementation of local biodiversity objectives:** CMN planning to support existing local, regional and state frameworks, increased consistency in planning approaches
- **Nurture and formalise relationships with key partners to achieve improved biodiversity outcomes:** relationships nurtured, mutual obligations and level of commitment clearly articulated
- **Support CMNs to engage and empower a diverse cross section of community in biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale:** facilitator a key driver, develop resources to support facilitator and transfer knowledge to community
- **Implement programs to increase the number, quality and connectivity of sites within the CMN network:** improved protection and management, continuity of programs
- **Demonstrate the effectiveness of CMNs in delivering biodiversity outcomes at a landscape level:** develop appropriate frameworks, share knowledge and techniques across networks
- **Implement appropriate governance & explore sustainable resourcing for existing and new CMNs:** existing governance arrangements appropriate for scale and nature of organisations, funding to move to a sustainable footing, more work to be done to understand funding needs
- **Improve linkages between CMNs at a state and national level: continue and expand current networking activities:** continue and expand current networking activities, establishment of a Victorian CMN advisory group

Each of these directions is designed to both support the continued function of existing CMNs and to lay the groundwork for the establishment of new networks. There are 40 actions outlined in the document – most of which are designed to be implemented by CMNs and their partners. A few key tasks however, are proposed to come under the stewardship of a Victorian CMN Advisory Group (VCAG). It is suggested that this group be based on the existing Project Control Board (PCB) for Box-Ironbark CMNs, and include representation from all Victorian CMNs.

While maintaining the diversity of CMNs is viewed as important to their continued viability as community oriented networks, the consultation underpinning this plan identified a desire for

greater consistency and knowledge sharing between CMNs in some strategic areas, including – policy integration, establishment of new CMNs, consistency of CMN planning, monitoring and evaluation, and investigation into a sustainable funding model for CMNs. It is proposed that VCAG provide leadership on these matters.

Looking ahead to the next few years, the objective must be for each CMN to flourish and succeed, making a positive contribution to biodiversity outcomes. In the medium term this will require consolidation of effort to date, and attention to emerging strategic issues. This will assist CMNs to develop the necessary capacity to be effective vehicles for biodiversity conservation to community and government stakeholders alike.

ORIGIN OF CMNS

Conservation Management Networks (CMNs) were the brainchild of botanists Suzanne Prober and Kevin Thiele, and of environmental economists Carl Binning and Mike Young. They are intended to bring together the social and scientific side of biodiversity conservation and can be defined as both:

- A land-based network of remnant areas of a particular ecological community (usually threatened, and/or under-represented in the reserve system) or a group of related communities; and
- A human network of the land owners (public and private), land managers and other interested individuals and agencies

There are currently nine established CMNs in Victoria and NSW, each with a different conservation focus.

- Victoria: Gippsland Plains, East Gippsland Rainforest, Broken-Boosey, Wedderburn, Northern Plains
- NSW: Grassy Box Woodlands, Southern Tablelands, Monaro Grasslands, Bega Valley

Another two are currently being initiated in Victoria – Whroo and Mid-Loddon.

It is likely that CMNs will continue to be established as the need arises, and the community impetus is there to support them. The box below outlines the common social and biodiversity objectives to which all CMNs ascribe and that will form the foundation for any new CMNs that are established in the future.

CMN OBJECTIVES

Biodiversity objectives of CMNs

1. To optimise conservation of the biological diversity of ecological communities across the landscape
2. To maintain or enhance viable remnants of the ecological communities throughout their distribution on public and private land
3. To protect, restore and re-establish threatened ecological communities
4. To contribute to the maintenance of ecological processes and the dynamics of the ecological community across the landscape
5. To increase the protection status of sites within the CMN, in particular for those with threatened ecological communities that are under-represented in the public reserve system
6. To promote sustainable land management that protects biodiversity

Social objectives of CMNs

7. To enhance community ownership and encourage ownership of the local environment
8. To provide a network for all land managers and to bring together other managers and stakeholders
9. To integrate conservation into management by empowerment with knowledge and resources
10. To share knowledge between landholders, scientists and conservation planners and managers
11. To encourage consistent and/or complimentary management across sites

* Adapted from: Thiele, K.R., Prober, S.M., Higginson, E. & Bell, L. (2002)

In addition to these, each CMN develops a set of unique objectives based on local environment and community conditions that are broadly consistent with state and federal biodiversity objectives.

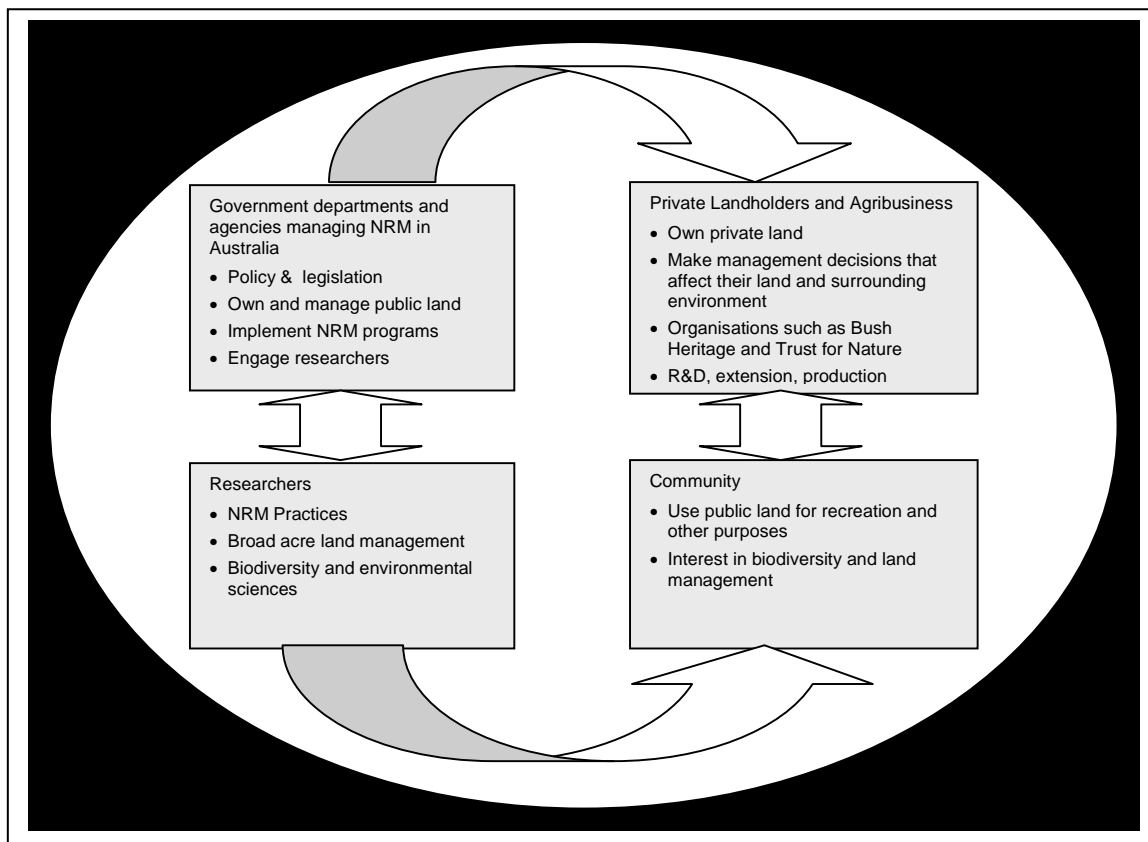
WHAT IS A CMN?

Physical network

The CMN is a physical network of fragmented remnants focused on a particular ecological vegetation community (threatened or under represented in the reserve system). It operates at a landscape scale and is based on, or aims toward developing, a critical mass of both publicly and privately owned land that is protected in some way (eg, park status, covenants). Importantly, the network often contains a significant parcel or parcels of public land. By increasing the critical mass of land available for biodiversity conservation, the CMN creates important opportunities for the protection of biodiversity and improved land management practices. CMNs develop and assist in the delivery of a range of on-ground works, and participate/carry out trials, research and planning.

Social network

The CMN is also a social network that sits across the biophysical space bringing together dominant groups that have the capacity to affect land management and biodiversity outcomes. These groups include agribusiness, government departments, government agencies, individual landholders, researchers, NRM practitioners and the general community. The linkages between government agencies and researchers are traditionally strong, as are those between agribusiness and private landholders. The link between researchers and the broader community, however, is often weak. The CMN provides an opportunity for all these relationships to be strengthened as ideas, experiences and resources are shared within the network.



Specifically CMNs have an important role in:

- Increasing community interest and capacity to protect and manage biodiversity & encouraging landholders to voluntarily contribute remnant parcels to the protected area networks
- Improving the flow of knowledge between researchers, government agencies, private landholders and community
- Strengthening cooperation between private landholders and the community at large through participation in joint projects and on-ground management
- Strengthening the linkages between private and public land managers through planning and land management
- Providing feedback from community to land managers and researchers

Diverse institutional arrangements

There are two organisational models of CMNs in Victoria. First, there are those that are housed by a lead agency, currently these are Wedderburn CMN, Broken-Boosey CMN and Northern Plains CMN, and the new Whroo and Mid-Loddon CMNs. Second, there are those CMNs that are independent entities under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Vic), these currently are East Gippsland Rainforest CMN and Gippsland Plains CMN. Those CMNs that are housed by agencies have generally been government initiatives, while the 'independents' have arisen out of grass roots community action. The strength of this arrangement is that no one central agency has responsibility for or control over all CMNs, devolving decision making to those with an understanding of local conditions and community. The approach also supports a culture of independence, and a broad outward looking focus. This makes CMNs more flexible and able to respond to changes in their institutional environment.

The East Gippsland CMNs are community based initiatives strongly affiliated with Trust for Nature. As noted above, they operate under the Associations Incorporation Act (1981) which provides a basic legal and financial framework. It should be noted that the Rainforest CMN having just been established does not currently have a facilitator, and is solely reliant on community and informal support from agencies in the region. The Gippsland Plains CMN is similarly under-resourced, with two day a week funding for a facilitator due to end soon. This CMN also employs a ranger.

The Broken-Boosey CMN is housed by Goulburn Broken CMA. Under new arrangements, the Northern plains CMN is now housed in DSE rather than North Central CMA, which continues to provide funding support. An inter-agency committee has been established to guide all three CMNs in the North-West.

Facilitators for these CMNs are employees of the CMA, and accountable to the CMA board (appointed under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*). While the facilitator is employed by the CMA, funding for the role is provided by DSE. The CMN itself consists of a number of agency and community representatives who are informally committed to the network through a common interest in biodiversity conservation. Agencies do not pay a fee to be a member of the CMN, nor does the CMN receive funding in its own right. Under this arrangement, agencies are not accountable to the CMN via any formal mechanism.

The Wedderburn CMN is housed in the DSE Northern Regional Office, where its facilitator is based. The facilitator is funded directly by DSE. In this case, the CMN itself is an informal affiliation between community and government agencies in the region, coordinated by DSE. It has no legal status in its own right, and therefore operates as part of DSE. In terms of governance, the CMN 'borrows' the processes and protocols of the Department, and is directly accountable to DSE.

The two new Whroo and Mid-Loddon CMNs are housed respectively by the Goulburn-Broken CMA and DSE.

Membership of a CMN

Active and broad membership is the lifeblood of a CMN. Membership of a CMN varies depending on need and local conditions. The most important thing is that as many land managers as possible within the CMN area are included, and that other groups with an interest in biodiversity are also involved. Depending on local conditions, membership of a CMN may be drawn from the following groups:

- **Owners and managers of private properties within the CMN area:** Trust for Nature, agribusiness, individual farmers, and conservation organisations (eg. Bush Heritage)
- **Owners and managers of public land within the CMN area:** Parks Victoria, Committees of Management, local government, DSE
- **Local NRM agencies working within and around the CMN area:** CMA, regional DSE, DPI, local government
- **Local community groups within and around the CMN area:** Landcare, naturalists societies, friends groups

It is the relationships facilitated between these groups by the CMN that is the key to improved biodiversity outcomes in the CMN area – both in terms of improved on-ground outcomes and increased community capacity.

It is suggested that, at a minimum, members must demonstrate an ongoing commitment to the achievement of CMN objectives, contributing time, energy and expertise in an ongoing way. For land managers, this means inclusion of properties into the site network and a commitment to improved management. For organisations who do not manage sites, it involves a clear commitment from the management team and allocation of resources at a regional level to support the CMN.

As noted above, the institutional arrangements for CMNs are diverse. Where a CMN is an incorporated entity, membership has an additional meaning, under the *Associations and Incorporations Act 1981*. This Act creates an independent legal entity to of which members are a part. In this case, membership also involves payment of a membership fee.

Relationship framework

CMNs foster a range of different relationships to assist them to achieve their goals. A range of terms are used across the network. The terms used in this document are explained below:

- **Partner:** a person or organisation with similar or complementary objectives to the CMN, with whom the CMN collaborates at some level, may provide resources (eg CMA, TFN)
- **Sponsor:** a person or organisation with complementary objectives to the CMN, who provides funding or in kind resources to the CMN (eg. local clubs, businesses, untied grants)
- **Investor:** an organisation with similar or complementary objectives to the CMN, who provides ongoing funding or in kind resources to the CMN within a clearly defined investment framework (eg. DSE, Envirofund, DEWR)
- **Lead agency;** a member of the CMN, investor and partner, the lead agency provides corporate support to the CMN (office space, IT etc) (eg. GB CMA for BB CMN). In some cases this role may be shared by more than one organisation, or change over time.

CMN relationship to Landcare

As a community based NRM initiative, the objectives of a CMN are strongly aligned with those of Landcare. Both have an important role in mobilising the broader community in the task of biodiversity conservation and moving toward more sustainable land management. Landcare groups are often part of a CMN and the two groups have a history of working closely. Maintaining close relationships with Landcare is a priority for CMNs.

It's important to remember, however, that CMNs have a very specific focus on the protection, management and enhancement of specific threatened ecological vegetation communities within a particular landscape. Their main focus is the protection, enhancement and management of high value biodiversity assets. The physical basis of the CMN is a network of public and private land with some level of conservation protection, such as a covenant or park status. Often the physical network contains a significant park or parcel of protected public land. CMNs are also social networks of the individuals and organisations who own, manage or in some other way influence biodiversity outcomes within the CMN area. Membership of the CMN consists of landowners, land managing agencies and other groups and organisations with an interest in biodiversity in the area.

Bringing together this specific mixture of people and places around the common goal of biodiversity conservation is the value add of the CMN. Each CMN has this common focus. In this way, the role and function of CMNs is complementary to that of Landcare groups, but more specifically focussed on biodiversity. Ideally, local Landcare groups will be members of the CMN, and work closely together at a practical level.

What makes a successful CMN?

Successful networks

These factors focus on the creation and maintenance of an effective network. The main attributes of a thriving network are suggested to be:

- Robust partnership arrangements
- Involvement of community members and local groups
- Accessible scientific knowledge
- Adequate resourcing
- The number and area of protected sites that are part of a network

Factors that are necessary pre-conditions to maximise the probability of a CMN succeeding are considered to be:

- Identified biodiversity conservation need
- Pre-existing community capacity and interest
- Sound links between existing organisations with an interest in land management in the area

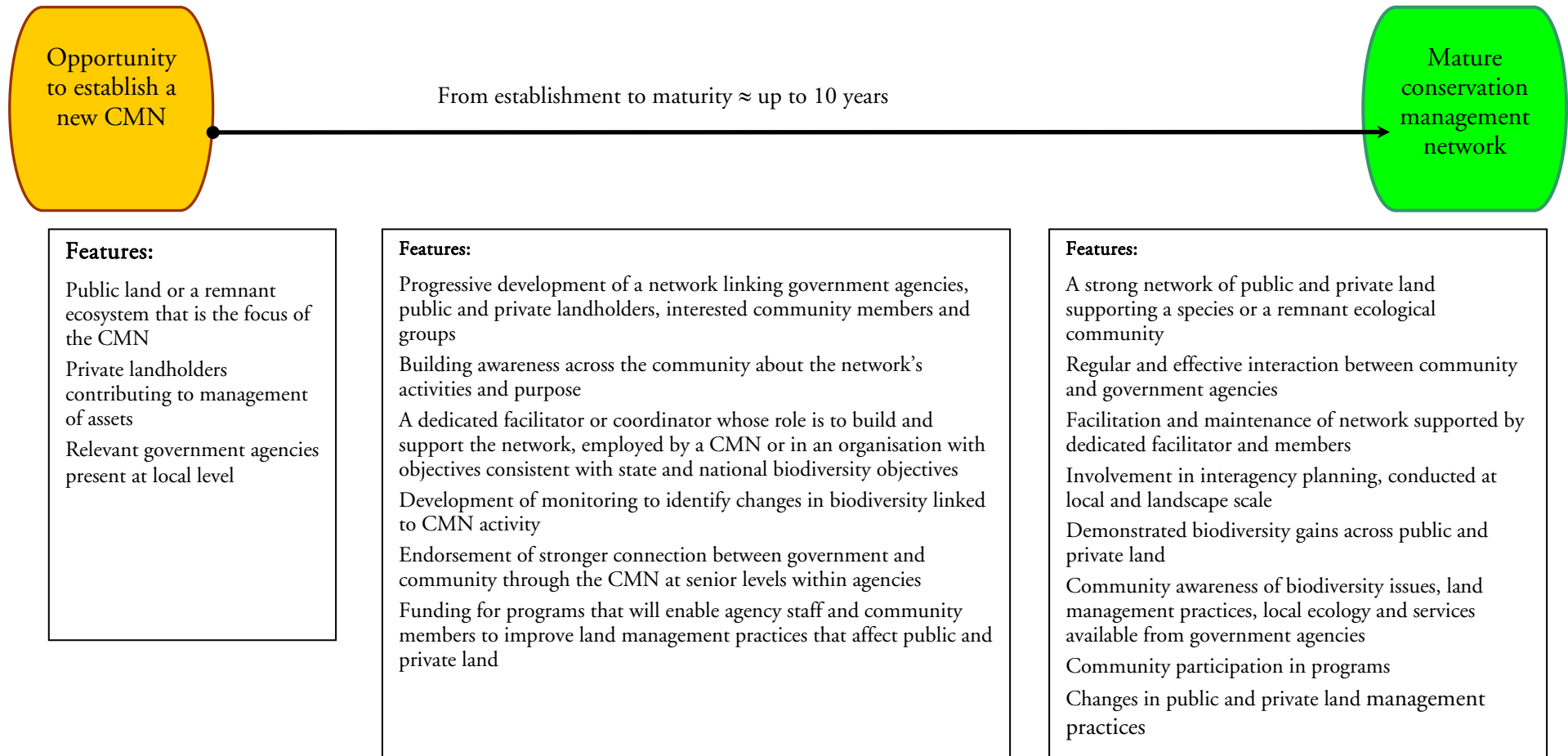
Successful biodiversity outcomes

Given that the purpose of a CMN is to achieve biodiversity outcomes, CMN success must also be considered with regard to their success in this respect. CMNs have been demonstrably successful in implementing programs such as fox baiting that can be assumed to have an impact on biodiversity. However, there needs to be more work done in establishing appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes for CMNs, so that their contribution can be properly understood.

EVOLUTION OF A CMN

Each of the CMNs operates in a specific social and environmental context and faces different challenges. CMNs are intended to be a long term intervention with both biodiversity and social outcomes. A suggested model for thinking about the ‘life’ of a CMN is outlined below.

As CMNs evolve, they will display varying degrees of the elements shown along this continuum as the capacity of the network gradually increases:



ACHIEVEMENTS & STRENGTHS

In the short time since establishment, Victorian CMNs have steadily increased their contribution to biodiversity outcomes through community engagement, research, planning and on-ground management interventions. The main achievements and strengths identified by CMNs in the consultations underpinning this plan are outlined below. This list summarises these at a general level, many more specific examples exist. As noted earlier, these strengths have been identified through discussions with CMNs and partners, they are not intended to be a comprehensive assessment.

Working across tenure & landscape perspective

Working across tenure: Working across tenures was noted by all as being one of the greatest strengths of CMNs.

The CMN is able to link remnant blocks of land involving multiple public and private tenures. Through the encouragement of use of instruments such as covenants on private titles, the CMN is also able to achieve protection of land through a succession of owners of a single remnant.

Landscape Perspective: CMNs allow for a landscape perspective that is not limited by the boundaries of specific public or private land holdings. CMN members can be recruited from across an entire landscape to link important parcels of public and private land to ensure more effective protection of biodiversity or ecosystem services.

Contributing to the bigger picture: Membership in the CMN enables community members to see the bigger landscape picture and their role in this. Through the CMN, they are able to change the way they manage their land, and contribute to biodiversity outcomes at a scale larger than their own property.

Skilled in achieving multiple outcomes: To meet their objectives, CMNs draw on diverse programs funded by a range of agencies. As a result, CMNs have developed an ability to bring together the resources of multiple agencies to achieve multiple outcomes.

Making biodiversity relevant to the broader community

Finding common interests: CMNs are finding that they are able to connect with landholders on a range of interests. Many landholders are not motivated by the notion of protecting biodiversity. Biodiversity can be seen as a broad environmental approach or issue that has no interest to them.

However, by focusing on specific issues that have local relevance (such as fox management) or iconic species that are valued at a local level (e.g. the stone curlew or broilga), a broad range of community members including those that have in the past shown little interest in environmental activities may be engaged.

Because they work at a local level, the CMN is able to interact with community members to identify issues of local common interest. Programs that support broader biodiversity goals can then be built around these interests.

Combining social with biodiversity gains: Through awareness raising and education, the CMNs achieve changes in social attitudes over the long term. The social changes that are achieved are critical to supporting biophysical outcomes over time.

Improving understanding and cooperation between community and government agencies

Breaking down traditional barriers: By creating a network in which all stakeholders work together, many traditional barriers have been overcome. Parks Victoria staff noted that they were traditionally seen by community members as enforcement officers. As they have built links with the community, they are now viewed more as collaborators and sources of information.

Better access to community: The CMNs have provided agencies with good access to the community. Working with the CMN, agencies have been able to gain greater insight into community concerns and interests. As a result, policies and programs have been more acceptable to community, and have achieved better outcomes.

In particular, CMNs have enabled access to community members who are often difficult to reach and challenging to engage such as hunters, fishers and private landholders.

Disseminating information: The CMNs have also provided a vital network for disseminating information to the community and building understanding and skills in biodiversity conservation.

Better local understanding of land management and legislation: Community members develop a stronger understanding of legislation and regulations that affect them in how they manage their own land, and they have a better understanding of how they can manage their land to support biodiversity.

Building trust: By involving community members in planning, there is a higher level of awareness amongst community members about commitments made by an agency. It was noted that this awareness created an additional pressure on agencies to keep their commitments and to perform as expected by the community.

This pressure improves the effectiveness of agencies, and builds community trust in the organisation's capacity to deliver what is promised.

Strengthening relationships between stakeholders

All stakeholders are involved: CMNs involve all of the stakeholders who are critical to achieving biodiversity outcomes on the ground across both public and privately owned land tenures.

The Box-Ironbark CMNs include representatives from DSE, Parks Victoria, CMAs, Trust for Nature, local landholders, local government and interest groups such as shooters and fishers.

Agencies working together: Agencies that have previously co-existed note that the CMN provides a mechanism that ensures they work more closely and effectively. As a result of working more closely, agency staff have better knowledge of the capacity and skills held within other agencies and are able to access these to support their work.

Facilitating healthy land outcomes

Encouraging protection for assets that are not included in the national reserve system:

Protection is extended to include assets that are found on private land. Protection on private land is achieved through changing land management practices and protection through mechanisms such as covenants.

Focussing on improved land management:

Improved land management is achieved through education, information and collaboration between partners and community.

Compatible with other interventions:

CMNs are able to work with Landcare and other conservation groups, and can implement a range of interventions depending on issues associated with the area.

Effective governance and facilitation

Coordinator or facilitator: The role of the CMN coordinator or facilitator (both terms are used interchangeably to describe this role) has been highlighted as one of the key strengths of the current approach. Aspects of this role that have ensured CMN success are that the coordinator:

- Builds and maintains the momentum of the CMN
- Provides skills and knowledge that are essential to the viability of the CMN, such as knowing the roles and functions of the diverse agencies, how to access support from these agencies, and how to secure funding for programs
- Provides a central point of contact for the CMN
- Provides continuity over time
- Builds and sustains relationships with agencies and with community

Harnessing community resources to achieve biodiversity outcomes: The CMNs can secure the involvement of community members to undertake work on private land that has an impact on public land biodiversity outcomes.

Ensuring accountability and effective reporting – CMNs currently report against a range of program outputs, depending on the specific requirements of individual funding bodies. These arrangements are generally seen to be working well – they do not, however, necessarily provide a clear picture of the overall effectiveness of CMNs in improving biodiversity outcomes.

Diversity of approaches

Adaptive management that respond to community needs: The CMN model (or lack of a predetermined model) ensures that the CMN can develop in a way that recognises and responds to local community and environmental needs.

Bottom up community initiative – CMNs in Gippsland have emerged from community driven involvement in, and enthusiasm for, biodiversity conservation of local protected areas. This has resulted in a high level of community ownership of the CMN.

Government program – CMNs have been implemented as an intentional policy intervention in high priority conservation areas, for example Broken Boosey CMN and Wedderburn CMN.

CHALLENGES

There are a number of current and future challenges on the horizon for CMNs. These are both organisational and linked to broad social and environmental trends.

Climate change, urban development, native vegetation clearing, intensive agriculture, pest plants and animals, flood and fire are all pervasive threats to biodiversity across the Victorian landscape. These threats are compounded by social challenges faced by rural communities, including declining population and structural change in agricultural industries.

Working with these challenges in a way that protects and restores biodiversity is a fundamental challenge for CMNs. CMNs represent a small but important means of managing these threatening processes. They contribute to the collective effort of numerous government and non-government agencies concerned with the conservation of biodiversity.

Listed below are the specific challenges being faced by CMNs in their efforts to contribute effectively to this greater task.

Maintaining momentum

The limits of community resources: CMNs rely on community capacity to differing degrees, with some relying almost entirely on the skills and time of community members to function. The Gippsland Rainforest CMN, which has just been established, is an example of this. This CMN does not have a paid facilitator, so currently relies almost solely on community members and some in-kind support from TFN and EGCMA to operate. This arrangement is unsustainable in the medium term, as there are finite limits on the resources of community members, and the establishment phase for a CMN is resource intensive. In order for CMNs to maintain momentum, a balance must be struck between engaging willing community members, and establishing sustainable resource arrangements.

Concern about reporting requirements: There is a high level of concern that CMNs will be expected to meet higher reporting requirements than at present. The concern focuses on both the lack of time and the lack of skill community members have with regard to meeting administrative requirements.

Community resources: in general community resources are limited with regard to the wide range of administrative tasks that are associated with:

- Securing funding for programs
- Managing and reporting on programs
- Building and maintaining relationships with government agencies and community members
- Implementing programs with multiple stakeholders

Demonstrating the effectiveness of CMNs

Demonstrating the contribution CMNs make to biodiversity outcomes – there are a range of reporting frameworks currently in place for CMNs, linking to the programs they are funded to implement. These do not, however, provide a cohesive framework for demonstrating the effectiveness of CMNs in facilitating improved biodiversity outcomes. There is also a challenge in understanding the relationship between physical and social factors impacting on biodiversity outcomes.

Lack of on-ground monitoring – lack of systems of measuring and monitoring social and biophysical impacts of management actions.

Identifying individual CMN priorities

A range of planning needs – CMNs are at different stages in developing plans to guide their activities. There are a range of different planning approaches being trialled, depending on the needs of the individual CMN. The lack of an agreed approach, has however led to confusion in some circumstances regarding the most appropriate planning model to follow.

Raising the profile of CMNs with policy makers

CMNs are not well known – CMNs are understood only by a comparatively small pool of professionals with a role in developing and implementing biodiversity policy. The CMN model is potentially useful to a broad range of programs/policy areas that have a capacity to impact on biodiversity outcomes, including non-traditional areas such as health and community well being.

Linkages with policy makers and researchers – While there are some very effective links, the connections between CMNs, policy makers and researchers could be strengthened.

Consistent funding arrangements

Lack of a consistent funding model – work has been done on the development of a funding model for CMNs by EWR in 2006. However the extent to which it has been implemented is varied, and resourcing of CMNs is currently uneven. The implementation of consistent funding arrangements that provide the required level of support for CMNs to be effective is a challenge for CMNs.

Developing robust partnerships

Partnerships are critical to CMNs – developing ongoing relationships with funding bodies and organisations with a role in biodiversity management in the region is critical to the success of the CMN. Ideally these organisations will be members of the CMN. Ensuring these relationships are clearly in place and mutual obligations are clear is a key challenge for the sustainable operation on CMNs

Facilitating relationships with diverse groups

Trusting collaboration between agencies: Each agency has its own goals and objectives, and methods for achieving these. Although the goals and objectives across agencies are similar and often driven by the same legislation and policies, there is a challenge in building trusting collaboration between agencies.

Based on relationships: The success of a CMN depends on the strength of relationships between members. A facilitator is required who is able to build and maintain effective relationships with individuals who have a diverse range of interests. A considerable challenge to CMNs is with regard to how relationships are maintained over time. Turnover of facilitators and other key members pose a threat to the stability of relationships across the CMN.

KEY DIRECTIONS

The directions proposed below are intended to strengthen the role and direction of CMNs in Victoria for the medium term. They are designed to consolidate the existing strengths of CMNs and to address current and future challenges. They have been developed through consultation with each of the five current Victorian CMNs and people with a keen interest in CMNs in TFN, DSE, Parks Victoria and catchment management authorities.

The high level directions have been developed with the hope that they are applicable to all CMNs across the state. They are intended as statements that all CMNs can as a group, embrace and collectively aspire to. The actions are also proposed to apply broadly across CMNs. However, given the different stages of evolution of each of the CMNs, it is expected that each CMN will relate to them in a different way. Implementation of the actions will require a joint effort between CMNs and their key partners including DSE, CMAs and TFN.

1. Articulate a clear role for CMNs in achieving improved biodiversity outcomes at a local, state and national level

Introduction

While the work of academics such as Thiele, Prober and Fitzsimons has done much to put CMNs on the ‘policy map’, there is more work to do to integrate CMNs clearly into the relevant state and federal policy context. This involves both linking to high level policy objectives and raising awareness of the value of consulting CMNs in policy development. This section focused on these two issues, and suggests that CMNs be more closely integrated into policy frameworks, across a range of themes.

Biodiversity policy environment

The work of CMNs is broadly contextualised by a range of policy and legislation ranging from the (international) Convention on Biological Diversity to local biodiversity strategies. Broadly speaking these documents have in common the aim of protecting biological diversity (biodiversity) in a sustainable manner. The policies and laws of immediate relevance to CMNs in Victoria are:

- Environment Protection & Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwth)
- Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1999 (Vic)
- Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (Vic)
- Environment Protection Act 1997 (Vic)
- Wildlife Act 1975 (Vic)
- National Parks Act 1975 (Vic)
- Environment and Planning Act 1987 (Vic)

A summary of the relevant strategies and policies is shown below. CMNs have a contribution to make to the delivery of policy outcomes contained in these documents. Operating at a landscape scale, across tenure gives them particular potential to delivery multiple and integrated NRM outcomes.

National	National Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity Victorian Greenhouse Strategy
State	White Paper on Land and Biodiversity Our Environment Our Future DSE Outcomes: Healthy and Productive Land Victorian Greenhouse Strategy State Wetland Strategy (under development) Victorian Biodiversity Strategy (being renewed) Native Vegetation Management Framework Victorian River Health Strategy Our Forests Our Future

	<p>Our Water Our Future</p> <p>Victorian Coastal Strategy</p> <p>2nd Generation Landcare</p> <p>Victorian Pest Management Framework</p>
Regional	<p>Regional Catchment Strategy (East Gippsland, North Central, Goulburn Broken)</p> <p>Regional Native Vegetation and River Health Strategies</p> <p>Regional Biodiversity Action Plans</p>
Local	<p>Park Plans (eg. Broken Boosey State Park)</p> <p>Local Government Planning Schemes/ Native Vegetation Overlays / Biodiversity Action Plans</p>

The Victorian Government is currently reviewing its headline biodiversity and land health policy through the *White Paper on Land and Biodiversity in a Time of Climate Change*.

This process also involves renewal of the Victorian Biodiversity Strategy, which may have important implications for CMNs into the future.

Given their objectives and mode of operation, CMNs have a potentially major contribution to make to achievement of the state government’s *healthy and productive land outcome*. Specifically CMNs have the capacity to add value in the following areas:

- Integrated management of high value remnant vegetation communities at a landscape scale
- Integrated management of land with complex and multiple tenure and ownership arrangements (public and private land)
- Engagement of parties with a key role in managing land at a landscape level around the goal of biodiversity
- Community engagement of land managers who might not otherwise be involved in biodiversity conservation

While there is a need to develop more mechanisms to demonstrate the effectiveness of CMNs in delivering on the above, consultations underpinning this plan suggest that CMNs are clearly making an important contribution across a range of management areas. There are a number of important performance stories emerging from work undertaken to date that support this conclusion. An important part of integrating CMNs further into the existing policy framework will be to develop increasingly meaningful ways of measuring effectiveness, so that outcomes can be fed back into the policy process.

Contributing to a range of policy outcomes

Because of this capacity to operate in an integrated way, CMNs also contribute to policy outcomes beyond the simple protection of a specific species or ecological community. In addition to contributing to biodiversity outcomes, CMNs potentially contribute to the health of rivers and waterways, coastal and alpine

ecosystems. They also have a particularly important role in enhancing the values of public land, by managing threatening processes that surround it. This suggests that CMNs have an important role in delivering multiple outcome NRM programs.

Awareness raising

There have been some important initiatives organised to raise the policy profile of CMNs, including a delegation to Canberra in early 2007. In looking ahead, it is suggested that CMNs need to build on the work of those already engaged in the policy task, to spread the knowledge (and hence load) of policy engagement, and to articulate a clear role for CMNs in the biodiversity policy environment.

The next step in terms of profile-raising would appear to be to launch the CMN model more deliberately, clearly explaining the function and benefits of the model to key audiences. It is hoped that this document will go some way toward this. The support of partner agencies is also critical to raise the profile of CMNs generally, and to alert potential investors to the benefits of CMNs. In terms of policy, it is suggested that CMNs could be promoted as a potential delivery tool to a range of areas including: biodiversity, public land, river health, climate change and ecosystem services.

While all CMNs prioritise keeping the community informed with the distribution of regular newsletters such as the Call of the Curlew, awareness of CMNs appears to be varied in local communities. This depends on the length of time the network has been operating and the extent to which it has become part of community life. In addition to policy makers, awareness raising activities also need to focus on the broader community, including those who might not otherwise be involved in conservation activities.

1. Articulate a clear role for CMNs in achieving improved biodiversity outcomes at a federal, state and local scale		
Actions		Who
	CMNs put forward as a viable policy option for consideration in the <i>Land and Biodiversity White Paper</i>	DSE
	<p>Engage policy and program areas at all levels of government to raise awareness of the potential contribution of CMNs across a range of policy areas (and for Multiple Outcome Projects)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biodiversity (<i>Green Paper and Biodiversity Strategy renewal</i>) • Public Land, including stream frontages, roadsides and reserves • Climate Change • River Health • Melbourne 2030 (Green Wedges) <p>Before this proceeds, clarify the approach to key strategic issues, including funding and performance reporting</p>	DSE, TFN, Parks Vic, CMAs, CMNs
	Raise awareness and improve understanding of CMN members about policy objectives and programs, and regulatory frameworks	Individual CMNs with support from agencies
	<p>Identify suitable landscapes for future establishment of CMNs taking into consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State-wide priorities for the establishment of reserves • TFN critical engagement landscapes • Other relevant information relating to landscape condition • Community capacity including potential partners and community networks • Long-term scenario for CMN to become self-sustaining 	Advisory Group

2. Planning to support implementation of local biodiversity objectives

Introduction

While CMNs subscribe to common broad objectives, each network deals with a specific area, a local set of management issues and different local community. Planning is generally seen as a useful process to clarify objectives, provide direction and state priorities. The main thrust of this direction is that each CMN develop a plan that suits its particular situation, sets clear priorities and does not duplicate existing regional or bio-regional planning processes.

Fit for purpose planning approach

CMNs are in different positions with regard to planning, with some having undertaken strategic planning exercises, such as Wedderburn CMN, and others operating with no clear planning framework at all. In some cases, such as Broken Boosey CMN, plans have been developed for particularly important sites, but there is no overarching plan for the network. It appears that all CMNs have at a minimum a set of objectives in place and some sense of management priorities.

In general, given their size and intended scope, there is an expectation that in the first instance CMNs will lever off existing planning frameworks. Given that CMNs are established to protect and improve high value biodiversity assets, there will usually be a fairly well developed existing planning framework. In regions where there is an existing Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) much of the thinking around local biodiversity priorities has already been done. BAPs have been developed in a number of parts of Victoria, including the Gippsland Plains and a number of bioregions in north and north central Victoria. They identify biodiversity assets and priorities at a bio-regional scale. In some cases, local area plans that support implementation of the BAP have been developed. In others, there is a need to develop a more detailed plan that translates bio-regional priorities into the local context.

The other key planning document for CMNs is the Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS). Although these documents deal with biodiversity in varying degrees of depth, they are a critical reference point for regional biodiversity priorities. The RCS also provides the high level basis for monitoring resource condition at a catchment level.

In most cases, these two planning documents will provide useful guidance for CMNs in understanding biodiversity assets in their area, and priorities for action. It is suggested that, at a minimum, all CMNs take on board the priorities set out in these documents, in tandem with the CMN specific biodiversity objectives. The mechanism for doing this could be the development of a simple plan that articulates CMN objectives, states regional priorities and any relevant local actions. It is suggested, that the CMN would only undertake a more extensive planning exercise where there was a significant gap in existing planning frameworks, and where the capacity of the CMN to add value in this regard could be demonstrated. One example of this may be the development of a *landscape scale plan* to cover the CMN area. As discussed in more detail below, however, mostly CMNs will participate in the planning processes of other agencies.

CMN involvement in related planning processes

There are a number of organisations with specific mandates to undertake planning that may influence biodiversity outcomes in the CMN area. These include CMAs', water authorities, local government and Parks Victoria. These organisations

develop park plans, regional plans and local area plans that may be relevant to the success of the CMN. In some cases, CMNs have been deeply involved in planning processes run by these agencies. In the case of Broken-Boosey State Park, for example, the CMN played a key role in developing the park plan.

In other cases, the experience has been quite different as it appears local agencies have had a limited awareness of the existence and potential value add of the CMN. As CMNs mature they become important vessels for local knowledge about biodiversity, and have excellent networks with groups interested in biodiversity conservation. It is suggested that agencies be encouraged to involve CMNs in their planning processes where these may impact on the CMN. The role and potential value adding of CMNs needs to be clearly communicated to agencies involved in planning as part of a general awareness raising process. Ideally, as a result of this communication, relevant organisations would commit to consulting with CMNs whenever undertaking relevant planning processes.

Greater consistency in planning approaches

The implementation of some kind of consistent planning framework for CMNs was discussed at length during the consultation, mainly by partner agencies and investors concerned to direct funds to greatest areas of need and ensure accountability. The requirement for a plan was often linked also to discussion around the need for a consistent framework to measure the effectiveness of CMNs.

While the general sentiment of improving consistency of planning approach is supported in the actions below, it has been interpreted in the most minimal way possible. That is, it is proposed that a minimum requirement for CMNs be that they have in place a statement of objectives and priorities, rather than a fully developed plan. It is suggested the CMN should only engage in a more sophisticated planning exercise where there is a clearly identified need and value add. Cases where this might occur may be where the local biodiversity planning frameworks are weak or not sufficiently developed to guide CMNs in determining their priorities. In these cases, there may be an argument for CMNs to undertake, or be involved in, a dedicated landscape scale planning process.

In terms of organisational planning, some CMNs, for example Wedderburn, have developed a five year strategic plan. Being a relatively mature CMN, this exercise appears timely. There is no expectation, however, that CMNs would undertake this kind of exercise unless properly resourced to do so.

A number of other issues were raised in relation to CMN planning including consultation, and the balance between community and investor priorities. In relation to consultation, the view was that the extent be relative to the scale of planning undertaken by the CMN. Where the CMN undertook landscape scale planning, engagement with local agencies, Traditional Owners and other groups, was seen as critical.

The fit between community determined and government policy objectives in the setting of CMN was also discussed. The main concern was that community interests and passions be taken into consideration in setting priorities to the extent possible. There was a general feeling, however, that given the overall focus of the CMN on biodiversity, that the priorities of members would be generally consistent with this. It was seen as the role of the facilitator to ensure the CMN remained 'biodiversity focused'.

2. Planning to support achievement of local biodiversity objectives	
Actions	Who
Where appropriate CMNs to develop plans that translate agreed CMN biodiversity objectives at national, state and regional levels into the local context	CMNs
Explore more consistent approach to CMN planning including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with community and stakeholders • Alignment with local, regional, federal and state policies and plans • Development of basic planning template 	Advisory Group/Individual CMNs
Local agencies undertaking biodiversity relevant planning to involve CMNs in relevant processes	Agencies, eg. Parks Victoria, DSE, CMAs

3. Nurture and formalise relationships to improve biodiversity outcomes

Introduction

The CMN is in essence a network of relationships between public and private land managers and local organisations with a role in biodiversity conservation.

Community members are local land owners with an interest in and ability to impact on biodiversity outcomes. They are often members of other groups such as Landcare or the Country Fire Authority (CFA), so act as a conduit between the CMN and other community groups. The friendship and family networks of community members are also critical to embedding the CMN in the living dynamic of local communities.

Government agencies and other organisations are involved as land managers and on the basis of their role in biodiversity conservation. As noted earlier these organisations include PV, DSE, DPI, CMAs, DPI, water authorities and potentially local government. As discussed earlier, depending on the particular context, these organisations are either members, partners or both. The importance of involvement by a range of community groups cannot be underestimated, in particular relationships with Landcare. These were discussed in the introductory section, and some relevant actions are included below.

Institutional context

The quality of relationships within CMNs, and between CMNs is impacted on by a number of factors. These include the length of time the CMN has been established, local community capacity and pre-existing agency networks in the area. Broken Boosey CMN is an example where there is a high degree of agency engagement and community involvement. The strength of pre-existing agency relationships, prior to the establishment of the CMN are seen as a key success factor in this situation. Goulburn Broken CMA which is the lead agency for this CMN has a strong presence in the region and well established networks. The continuation and further development of these relationships has been fostered by a dedicated facilitator with the time and means to maintain them.

In other regions, the pre-existing institutional context has not been as well developed, and therefore not so supportive of CMN relationships. In some cases, CMNs have struggled to form effective relationships with key agencies, and have not necessarily enjoyed a great deal of support from all relevant local agencies. A meaningful commitment to ongoing involvement in the CMN is critical if relationships are to operate effectively. There may be some mechanisms that could be employed to facilitate this, for example the development of formal partnership agreements. These mechanisms cannot somehow 'force' a good relationship, however, the process of developing them may be very useful in teasing out the mutual obligations between parties.

The value of agency membership

The involvement of agencies is critical to the success of a CMN for a number of reasons including integration in terms of planning, on-ground works, access to knowledge, in kind and funding support.

In addition to better integration with other agencies and programs, CMNs offer an additional avenue of engagement with landowners and communities. Given that a major proportion of CMN members are local landowners, involvement in the CMN gives agencies a direct link to this group and their networks. Agencies are able to work with the community through the CMN, which is perceived as a

relatively neutral community based group, rather than government. This has been quite critical to the development of good relationships in and around the Broken-Boosey State Park, particularly between local landowners and Parks Victoria.

Unlike an asset such as a building or vehicle, the CMN is made useful through participation rather than through ownership. Organisations that wish to reap the benefits of a CMN need to consider what they can do to support the function of the CMN.

For an organisation or agency to support and maintain a CMN it is necessary to have:

- A nominated person whose role it is to bring the CMN together (facilitator)
- An organisation that houses the facilitator which has objectives and values that are consistent with state and national biodiversity objectives
- Understanding of the value of the CMN at all levels of the organisation
- Definite commitment from the highest level of the organisation to the establishment of the CMN
- Capacity to support, or clear arrangements for sharing, the ongoing operational costs of the CMN

These capacity issues should be considered well in advance of establishing new CMNs, as should the strength of pre-existing relationships between the lead agency and other agencies in the area.

Organisations considering becoming a CMN member should be clear about the ways in which a CMN can assist them to achieve their objectives, and the contribution that they will make to the CMN.

Constructively and persistently engage new partners

It also suggested that there may be relationship opportunities beyond the traditional set of stakeholders normally involved in natural resource management that CMNs have yet to tap into. The health sector may be one area in which new partners, sponsors and investors might be identified given the health benefits that are known to flow from active involvement in maintaining and caring for the natural environment. Local government is another and some efforts have been made in this regard. Some education about the function of the CMN may be a necessary precursor to approaching these organisations. The broad awareness raising activities that are suggested in subsequent parts of this plan will support CMNs in this regard. The development of a Partnership Map or similar tool may be useful at a strategic level.

3. CMNs to nurture and formalise relationships to improve biodiversity outcomes		
Actions		Who
	Each CMN to develop a Partnership Map to identify key relationships for that CMN (including potential partners, sponsor and investors that are not currently engaged)	CMNs
	Explore the development of partnership agreements (or similar tool) that clarify mutual obligations between CMN members	CMNs
	Consider relationship needs when proposing new CMNs with reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate lead agency and possible members • Responsibilities and capacity of lead agency • Capacity of members to provide support across the range of CMN activities 	Advisory Group
	CMNs to maintain strong linkages with Landcare to maximise coordination of activities and cooperation. Specifically, the following is suggested: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular communication between CMN facilitators and regional Landcare coordinator • Landcare members to be encouraged to be CMN members also • CMNs and Landcare groups actively cooperating in a range of activities • Advisory group to invite Landcare representation when appropriate 	CMNs/ Advisory Group

4. Support CMNs to engage and empower a diverse cross section of community in biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale

Introduction

The social objectives of a CMN include enhancing and encouraging community ownership of the local environment, and integrating conservation into management by empowering community members with knowledge and resources and access to a network of land managers that provides a forum for information sharing and mutual support.

There are a number of existing strengths that support CMNs to engage and empower community members in the task of biodiversity conservation. The capacity of CMNs to make biodiversity relevant to diverse groups is particularly important. This has been achieved through the design of programs that deliver benefits beyond biodiversity, and working collaboratively with land managers. Other strengths include improving the flow of information between researchers, government and community, building local knowledge of biodiversity conservation, and informing the broader community about important biodiversity assets in their area.

A number of challenges also need to be met in engaging community. These include facilitating groups with diverse membership, community burnout and the weakness of connection with some government groups.

Knowledge transfer

The essence of the CMN is that it supports and encourages community engagement, however it must be emphasised that biodiversity conservation is the objective, not community engagement itself.

The objective of community engagement through the CMN is to facilitate interaction between groups of stakeholders that are essential to the achievement of biodiversity goals across public and private tenures across a landscape. Many stakeholders have described CMNs as the glue that holds people together to enable them to learn, work and plan together to achieve biodiversity aims. Through community engagement, the CMN empowers members by transferring knowledge between them and stakeholder groups, and links biodiversity programs to community interests. An important outcome of this process is encouraging private landowners to increase levels of protection on their land, and to better manage it with biodiversity in mind.

Encouraging diversity

The CMN creates a space in which all of the right people come together to jointly address biodiversity issues. The characteristics of effective community engagement in a CMN have been identified by stakeholders as:

- The right people (all of those who can affect the outcome) come together;
- All views are represented and listened to. Differing and often conflicting views can all be expressed and heard
- Opportunities are created for all members to learn
- Relationships are valued and time is invested in building and maintaining relationships within the network
- Community interests are identified
- Community members are empowered to participate

- Information sharing is actively encouraged and supported

Linking to existing community networks

There are many existing community networks that can be drawn on by a CMN, such as Landcare, Country Women's Association (CWA), CFA, and Sporting Shooters Association.

Each of these networks offers its own strengths and value, yet the value of an existing network to a CMN must be considered in terms of the objectives of the CMN.

To determine which existing networks must be involved in a CMN, it is first necessary to identify:

1. What land is important to achieve biodiversity outcomes
2. What biodiversity objectives are being targeted
3. How these objectives will be achieved
4. Who must be involved to meet these objectives

Answering these questions will make it clear for each CMN which existing networks need to be involved in the CMN. Preparing a prescriptive list of networks that must be involved is inappropriate; each CMN should focus on establishing links with groups that will support their specific local objectives.

Indigenous engagement

Activities of the CMN may call for consultation with Traditional Owners and other relevant indigenous groups. Organisations such as DSE, CMAs and Parks Victoria have invested significant energy in attempting to build better relationships with Traditional Owners and other relevant indigenous groups. CMNs should consider drawing on these agencies to gain support in engaging with the Traditional Owners and other relevant Indigenous groups, to understand when it may be necessary, and to ensure it is done in an appropriate manner. Planning processes would be a likely instance in which Traditional Owners and other relevant Indigenous community groups would need to be contacted. DSE, CMAs and Parks Victoria may be able to assist in facilitating contact with the relevant group.

Building community and facilitator capacity

Most CMNs have a person employed in a role variously known as the facilitator or coordinator. In every case, this role has been identified as the lynch-pin vital to the success of the network.

In this role facilitators undertake a broad range of tasks including:

- Promoting the CMN, and raising its profile in the community
- Recruiting members to the CMN, using a range of techniques including direct approaches to potential members
- Convening CMN committee and other meetings
- Representing the CMN to government agencies
- Planning and coordinating CMN activities
- Securing funding for CMN activities

- Reporting on CMN activities to funding agencies
- Preparing and distributing information
- Creating links between the CMN and essential sources of information
- Participating in CMN activities on the ground
- Servicing and maintaining the relationships that are essential to the network
- Learning from the experience of other CMNs in Australia
- Establishment and maintenance of a site register
- Obtaining more sites into the network, and improving the quality of management and level of protection
- Facilitating solutions to landscape problems

The energy and capability that facilitators bring to their role, and their ability to encourage the involvement and development of CMN members, is a key factor in the success of a CMN.

4. Support CMNs to engage and empower a diverse cross section of community in biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale	
Action	Who
Build member capacity in community engagement (training, conferences, mentoring)	CMN
Develop a communications plan that helps to raise community awareness of the CMN at a regional level.	CMN/Partners
Seek participation where appropriate of Indigenous communities, drawing on support from DSE and CMA Indigenous facilitators	CMN
Continue to link in with a broad range of existing formal and informal community groups and networks that will assist the purpose of the CMN	CMN
Continue to directly engage (face to face approaches, meetings, working together) with a diverse range of community members with an ability to affect land management	CMN
Build community capacity in key knowledge areas through field days, seminars and the development of resources (eg the Rainforest CMN Restoration Manual)	CMN/Partners
Each CMN to prepare and distribute regular newsletters	CMNs

5. Implement programs to increase the number, quality and connectivity of sites within the CMN network

Introduction

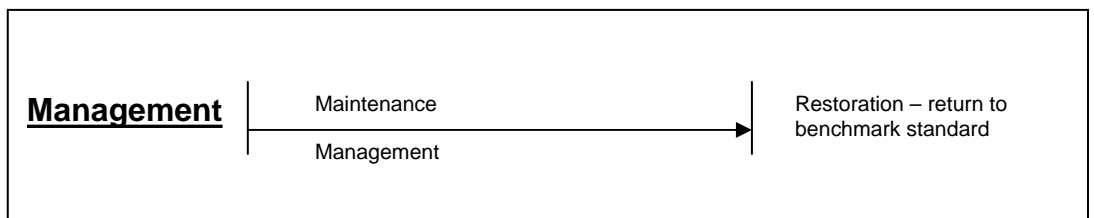
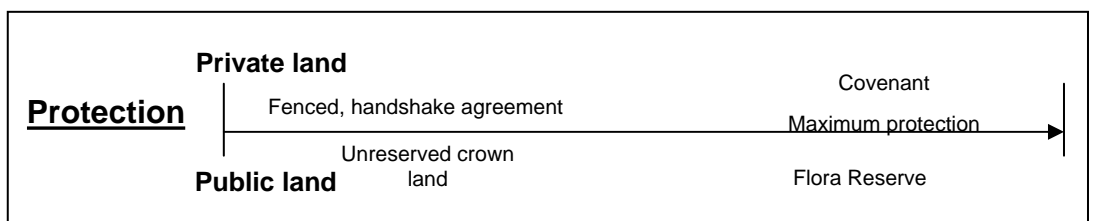
As noted earlier, CMNs are networks of both physical sites and groups of people. The overarching objective of CMNs, however, is to improve on-ground biodiversity outcomes. This requires activity at the individual site level. This could range from an action as simple as fencing, to a complex research trial or restoration project. The emphasis of this direction is on improving the number, quality and connectivity of sites within the network, through protection and continuity of programs.

Evolution of the protected area network

As discussed earlier, CMNs are based on physical networks of sites linking remnants of particular ecological communities. The intent is that sites are able to join the network regardless of their condition, and that through inclusion in the CMN, they will gradually improve in terms of protection and management.

In most cases the network of physical sites has evolved gradually, with the process starting well before the CMN itself was established. The number and quality of sites contained in the network increases as local land managers became increasingly aware of the biodiversity values of the area, the CMN's existence and operation.

In terms of site protection, it is useful to think along a continuum. At one end there is a very loose form of protection, perhaps only a simple hand shake agreement on private land. At the other end of the spectrum the land may be fully covenanted, or in the case of public land, a permanent reserve. A site may enter the CMN at any point on the continuum and there is no obligation for it to move – but the CMN aims to move sites to maximum protection and restoration. The diagrams below, provided by Robyn Edwards (TFN, East Gippsland), show the continuum:



Commitment to progress

A site may enter a CMN with no formal protection apart from perhaps a fence to exclude or control stock grazing. It may proceed step by step through the spectrum of protection, or jump from no protection at all to full conservation covenant. The owners and managers proceed at their own pace or stay at one end of the spectrum. The quality of a remnant may improve and get to a point of being high quality with full legal protection and be worthy of Natural Reserve System (NRS) status. Some sites may not progress at all.

While it is understood that landowners must be enabled to progress at their own pace, it has been suggested that a mechanism such as a site register might be a useful tool to trace progression and encourage improvement. Registration on the site list (or a similar mechanism), would require a commitment from the land manager to manage the site primarily for conservation and to improve protection and management overtime. It may also assist in decision making regarding funding.

On-ground works and management programs

In addition to the implementation of programs to improve protection, CMNs also focus on the improved management of sites within the network. They undertake a broad range of management activities depending on the particular threats and dynamics operating in the landscape. These could range from very simple activities to complex management interventions or research trials. Examples of some of the programs implemented by CMNs include fox-baiting, scattered tree protection, predator proof fencing and development of management approaches for important wetlands and associated vegetation.

While community members may have a role in assisting the implementation of these programs, they also require the support of dedicated, trained staff, whether employed by the member agencies of the CMN, or directly by the CMN. In East Gippsland the CMA Bushcare Crew make an important contribution to bush regeneration in the Rainforest CMN areas, and in the Goulburn Broken area, the CMA plays an important role in providing research support to the Broken-Boosey CMN in wetland management. The ranger employed by Gippsland Plains CMN plays a key role in on-ground management and setting up research trials.

A key concern that arose during consultation was that the continuity of these programs be maintained, and the support of member agencies consolidated. It was felt that even though social networks are critical to the operation of CMNs, the focus on on-ground outcomes needs to be maintained. The actions below are in many cases the core business of CMNs and in most cases implementation will involve consolidating and bolstering existing activities.

5. Implement programs to increase the number, quality and connectivity of sites within the CMN network		
Actions		Who
	Consider the establishment and maintenance of a site register or similar mechanism	CMN
	Promote and encourage registration of new sites into the network	CMN
	Rangers and members to undertake works that improve the quality of sites	CMN
	Source funding for incentives to encourage protection of sites	CMN
	Continue to fund programs that underpin protection, covenants, revolving fund etc	TFN/Partners
	Bushcare to support on-ground staff through training, demonstrations and monitoring	CMAs/Partners
	Support CMN training in the areas of on-ground works, demonstrations, monitoring, planning and governance	Members/Partners
	Encourage academic researchers who are known to be doing research in nearby parks to incorporate CMN sites where possible	Members/Partners

6. Demonstrate the effectiveness of CMNs in delivering biodiversity outcomes at a landscape level

Introduction

Developing sensible and useful approaches to measuring the effectiveness of CMNs is an issue that received a great deal of attention from all stakeholders involved in the preparation of this plan. Understanding the effectiveness of CMNs in achieving their biodiversity and social objectives is critical from the perspectives of both adaptive management and accountability. Having monitoring systems in place that provide information about the effectiveness of on-ground interventions provides the kind of feedback that is necessary to better understand the dynamics at play in the landscape, and to adjust management approaches accordingly. The information also helps to show the outcomes of public investment in the CMN.

The role of CMNs in delivering biodiversity outcomes is not as simple as one that can be readily measured with one particular index of biodiversity outcomes. This is because CMNs are networks of sites, people and institutions. There are many specific outputs and intermediate outcomes that are important, that would be missed if measured only against big picture resource condition targets. Examples of these important 'intermediate' outcomes include the role played by the Broken Boosey CMN in developing the Broken Boosey Parks Plan, and Wedderburn CMN's role in Bush Heritage purchases in the region. In the case of Wedderburn, the CMN was instrumental in the purchase of a major tract of land with high biodiversity values by Bush Heritage.

Increased consistency

There was much discussion in the development of this plan about increasing the uniformity of approaches to monitoring and evaluation. It was felt that developing a more standard approach will both help CMNs to understand the overall impacts of their efforts and help communicate the value of CMNs clearly to investors and community.

As with the issue of planning, there was discussion about the different situations of individual CMNs and agreement that standardisation should not be imposed.

Work has been done to develop a structured reporting framework for the Box-Ironbark CMNs – which includes the social and ecological objectives. Further work is currently underway in other CMNs, which will be shared in due course.

A major theme that came through was the need for any measuring to take into account both the biophysical and social effectiveness of the CMN. The complexity in developing measures for both was acknowledged. A number of quite detailed suggestions were made in regard to measurement – many of which are not appropriate for inclusion in the actions in a plan of this nature. The main resolution was that this would be a key issue for a state-wide representative group consider. Some of the detailed suggestions are noted below, as a starting point for further discussion:

- Recording of "inputs" (i.e. actions by land managers at each location over a period of time) as the basis for determining results for level of effort
- Recording site-based information (EVC, current habitat condition, control of threats), and if feasible, estimating biodiversity outcomes expected as a result of actions (eg. scoring net gain using habitat hectares, expected recruitment of threatened species' juveniles as a result of fox control)

- Encouraging landholders to record actions and results, for example by drawing a polygon on a map with a list of actions that could then be verified by an appropriate agency officer. Simple records, for example observations of a fledging rate can also help.
- Note GBCMA are currently looking at ways in which to better capture the "volunteer" actions by landholders across the landscape.

6. Demonstrate the effectiveness of CMNs in delivering biodiversity outcomes at a landscape level (edit this further)		
Actions		Who
	<p>CMNs to continue to develop mechanisms for demonstrating effectiveness including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Stories • Ecological and Social Indicators 	CMNs
	Improve reporting of good new stories to investors and partners (eg media, reports to boards)	CMNs, Partners
	<p>Explore the development of a more uniform framework for demonstrating the effectiveness of CMNs including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording of assets, threats, actions, expected outcomes and, as far as practicable, results • Measurement of social outcomes. <p>The framework should be based on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging landholder involvement in recording information and monitoring change • Maintaining consistency with state and federal environmental reporting frameworks (current and emerging) • User friendliness and ease of implementation for CMNs and investors • Linking with existing monitoring, evaluation and reporting frameworks of partner agencies • Adding value to existing monitoring programs and adaptive management of sites • Being accountable to investors for expenditure of funds 	DSE/Partners
	Establishment of research partnerships to assist in the assessment of program effectiveness	CMNs/Partners

7. Implement appropriate governance & explore sustainable resourcing for existing and new CMNs

Introduction

As outlined at the start of this document, there are two different organisational models for CMNs. First, those that are ‘housed’ directly by a lead agency such as DSE or a CMA. Secondly, those that are independent entities under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Vic)*. While it is important to be aware of differences in organisational arrangements, all CMNs have a common need for effective governance and sustainable funding. This direction explores these issues and recommends a number of actions accordingly. The main emphasis is on securing sufficient ‘base funding’ for a facilitator, operating costs and potentially a ranger. It also talks about the range of approaches CMNs are taking to source program funding, and some important considerations in terms of accountability and governance.

Resourcing of CMNs

Resourcing was not intended as the major focus of this strategy, however, it has been raised consistently during the consultation process, so warrants some discussion. Building the capacity of CMNs to achieve their objectives is an issue relevant to each of the strategic directions outlined in this plan, and so it has been implicitly considered in development of actions and in some cases addressed in the commentary. This section focuses on funding arrangements for the role of the facilitator, on-going operating costs and program funding.

Role of the facilitator

In their report on self maintenance, EWR (2006) analysed the different levels of support required by CMNs relative to the level of individual network maturity. Specifically, the report recommended employing a full-time facilitator in the start up phase of a CMN. As the capacity of the network increased, the role of the facilitator could be reduced – they suggested that a fully mature CMN would require at least half-time support¹, the idea being that the demand on the facilitator would reduce as the capacity built up within the CMN network itself, both in terms of relationships, knowledge and skills.

While this recommendation is seen as a useful guide, it is important to emphasise, that there is no suggestion that resources be withdrawn from the CMN where they are still needed to support the proper functioning of the network. Doing so would amount to community de-capacitating, rather than community capacity building. In consultations to prepare this document, the commonly held view was that a dedicated facilitator, and in some cases ranger, is critical to the effective function of a CMN. It was felt that while a full-time facilitator is needed more during the start up phase of a CMN, decisions regarding whether or not positions are full or part-time need to be made with reference to local conditions and demands.

¹ The EWR report recommended that there be, “Minimum funding of \$100,000/year for the transition phase and a minimum of \$55,000/year for the self-maintaining phase for each of the CMNs. This should include funding for a facilitator, full-time through the establishment and transition phases, and at least half-time during the self-maintaining phase” (EWR 2006: p. 5)

It should be noted that currently the East Gippsland Rainforest CMN is operating without a dedicated facilitator. The presence of an existing well-established CMN with a facilitator can make it easier to establish new CMNs – Whroo and Mid-Loddon CMNs are being established by facilitators who are diverting part of their time to the new CMNs. However, as a CMN expands and incorporates more sites requiring management, the demands on the time of the facilitator or ranger may also increase.

Role of the Ranger

Some CMNs, such as the Gippsland Plains CMN, employ rangers who play an important part in the effective function of the CMN as do facilitators. Rangers are generally employed in areas where there is no park ranger or similar to provide on-ground expertise and presence in the protected area network. In these cases, the ranger has a critical role as an ecosystem specialist developing on-ground solutions to issues in the field. The ranger also provides specialist training to land managers and carries out hands on work tailored to land managers' needs. Currently funding for the ranger is determined on the basis of local need.

Clear arrangements for ongoing costs

Having clear arrangements in place for ongoing costs to the CMN such as accommodation, IT, HR and equipment, was identified as an important pre-requisite for continuity of operation and viability of the network. Secure 'base-line' funding was seen as providing an important level of certainty to the CMN, and helpful for planning staff and programs. While arrangements for ongoing costs are working well in most cases, there was concern that where responsibilities are not crystal clear, that this may pose a 'sleeping threat' to the continued viability of the CMN.

It appeared that arrangements are most clear for those CMNs that are housed by a lead agency. It was the general view that gaining a commitment from a lead agency, or a collective of agencies, was an important step in securing the base-line funding required to support a viable CMN, and a pre-requisite for establishment.

Program funding

A major focus of the CMN is on implementing programs to achieve improved biodiversity outcomes – this is underpinned by program funding which is seen as separate from the base funds CMNs require to 'open up shop' and cover basic ongoing costs.

CMNs are highly creative in sourcing program funding and derive income from a range of sources including state and federal programs (NHT, NAP, Envirofund) and grants provided by non-government organisations such as TFN.

CMNs have also had success in securing program funding from a range of community, commercial and 'non-traditional' sources – such as health programs and local businesses of all kinds. Members often bring important linkages to local business or knowledge of funding opportunities. The role of the facilitator in preparing grant applications and working with partner organisations to source funding was noted by many as critical to securing program funding.

Accountability for investment

All CMNs have processes in place for financial reporting and accountability to funders, although the requirements vary depending on the particular funding arrangement. Where income is derived from philanthropic trusts or businesses that are not operating within a defined policy framework, there may be very few requirements at all.

Government funding, however, is always linked to particular policy or program outcomes and so reporting is mandatory. Reporting of this kind is currently one of the main tasks of facilitators, usually via their lead agency, e.g. DSE or the CMN.

Usually, as a condition of receiving government funding the CMN is required to report on the delivery of program outputs. Program outputs are designed so that they link to, or are at least consistent with, the biodiversity outcomes outlined in state, federal and regional policy. Linkages to the relevant Regional Catchment Strategy are particularly important. This reporting provides a major source of accountability to those agencies that invest in the CMN. It does not necessarily, however, provide complete information regarding the effectiveness of the CMN in achieving biodiversity outcomes. (See Direction 6, pg. 31).

Governance, diversity and identity

The accountability arrangements discussed above are critical to the effective governance of CMNs. Governance, however, goes beyond reporting and financial accountability. In a broader sense it is about the way an organisation operates and understands itself.

The diversity of institutional arrangements among CMNs was identified as a strength in the consultation undertaken to prepare this plan. Diverse governance arrangements necessarily follow. Consultation also revealed a strong level of awareness of the need for CMNs to have effective governance, and systems in place to ensure this. The following points summarise the approach to governance that CMNs are currently taking:

- Financially and legally prudent
- Streamlined and responsive to community needs
- Accountable to stakeholders and community
- Consistent with funding body requirements

While there was a strong awareness of the need for effective governance, members also stressed the need to keep 'red tape' to a minimum.

Community orientation

Consultation to prepare this strategy has consistently revealed the importance of community acceptance and ownership to the success of CMNs. The perception that CMNs are non-government, community driven organisations is critical to the way CMNs self-identify and are seen by others. In the words of one member, "CMNs are able to go places, and achieve outcomes that government agencies can't, because they are seen as part of the community, not an arm of government". This comment referred to the high level of community acceptance one CMN had within a particular community, which enabled the member agencies to work closer than ever before to solve pressing land management issues.

Linked to this sense of being 'close to community', is the idea that CMNs have a degree of independence from government and are responsive and responsible to the communities of their members. Responsiveness and accountability to community

was identified as important in consultations. Mechanisms for achieving community accountability might include providing reports on activity and performance on CMN websites or newsletters.

Another important element of operating effectively at a community level that was identified as an advantage of being separate from mainstream agencies, is the capacity of CMNs to be responsive to community needs, and comparatively free of 'red tape'. Despite the different governance models, it appears that CMNs currently operate in a comparatively streamlined manner. While some CMNs are under-resourced, the general view is that governance requirements are currently set at a reasonable level. There was concern not to increase the governance burden placed on CMNs, should it become so great as to discourage membership and detract from the focus of the network.

7. Implement appropriate governance & explore sustainable resourcing for existing and new CMNs		
Actions		Who
	<p>Explore the development of a state-wide level funding model for CMNs taking into consideration minimum funding requirements for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing operating costs (office, computer etc) • Facilitator (full to part-time depending on local capacity needs) • Ranger (depending on local needs) • Start up funding for new CMNs 	Advisory Group
	Members to continue to assist in sourcing funding for facilitators/rangers and provide project management/governance support at a regional level	CMN/Partners
	Facilitators and members to undergo training to improve understanding of funding frameworks, processes and opportunities, where appropriate	CMNs
	Clarify arrangements for carriage of operating costs between CMNs and partners	Advisory Group/CMNs
	Seek resources to support CMNs through corporate volunteerism, pro bono contributions, partnership funds at a regional level	CMNs
	<p>Continue to promote CMNs at a state-wide level as a network of sites for investment to both the public and private sector including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Reserves System Program • Philanthropic trusts, corporate sector, other conservation donors • State/Federal/local government programs (River Health, Biodiversity, Climate Change) 	CMNs/Partners/Advisory Group

8. Improve linkages between CMNs at a state and national level

Introduction

CMNs have evolved in Victoria over the last ten years from different starting points. Some have been primarily driven by community action, others have been government led. CMNs have in common, however, the biodiversity and social goals outlined at the start of this plan – and the same cross-tenure, multi-stakeholder focus. Since establishment CMNs have worked together across the state and nationally. The Project Control Board for the Box-Ironbark CMN has had a leadership role, but there has been no overarching body representing all CMNs with a mandate to address strategic issues. The focus of this direction is the establishment of such a group, and the strengthening of linkages between CMNs across the state and nationally.

State-wide Representative Body and Coordination with other agencies

The national CMN conference in Bairnsdale in late 2006 was an important event for CMNs, bringing together people involved in CMNs from across Australia, facilitating the sharing of ideas, experiences and aspirations. One of the important outcomes of the conference was agreement on the need for CMNs to have a greater presence at a national and state policy level, and for stronger collaboration at this level between states. A subsequent visit to senior officials in the Australian Government by CMN facilitators from NSW and Victoria was an important follow up activity. These activities form part of an on-going effort to raise the profile of CMNs at all levels of government.

In terms of linking CMNs within Victoria, and providing a stronger focus on policy and strategy, the establishment of a state-wide representative body based on the existing Box-Ironbark Project Control Board is suggested. The consultation to prepare this plan revealed a strong level of consensus around the usefulness of such an approach.

It is suggested that a Victorian CMN Advisory Group (VCAG) would focus on key strategic issues – such as capacity building and resourcing - and continue to have a special role in regard to Box-Ironbark CMNs. This group would also serve an important function in consolidating relationships between CMN partner agencies and policy integration at a state-wide and national level. A number of other actions are suggested below to enhance the level of connectedness between CMNs. These build on the actions already identified in Direction 2:(pg.19).

8. Improve linkages between CMNs at a state and national level		
Actions		Who
	Facilitators and committee members to continue to participate in a national CMN conference held at least once every two years	CMNs
	Strengthen linkages between regional CMN facilitators and committee members (eg. invite to meetings, email lists, create web-links on member sites)	CMNs
	DSE to convene an annual meeting of all Victorian CMN facilitators and partner representatives (as per meeting at Atwood on 16 July 2007)	DSE
	<p>Explore options for the establishment of a state-wide advisory group for CMNs to lead thinking on issues that would benefit from a state-wide, strategic perspective in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of CMNs with the broader policy context • Establishment of new CMNs • Consistency of CMN planning • Consistency of monitoring and evaluation <p>Investigation into a sustainable funding model for CMNs.</p>	CMN member agencies

IMPLEMENTATION

This document is a blend of both strategy and action. It provides an overarching narrative that describes the situation of CMNs currently, articulates a number of key directions, and identifies some specific actions. It suggests a number of actions for CMNs to focus on individually, but also some important integrating tasks – under the stewardship of a collective body, with state-wide representation.

The document was developed with considerable input from CMNs and partners and so most actions included have been identified as potentially implementable in the medium term. The extent to which individual CMNs implement these actions, however, will depend on local resourcing and priorities. While this document is intended to provide information and strategic direction across the state, it is for each CMN to determine its priorities within this context.

The actions are intended to further the stated objectives of this plan. Specifically they are designed to consolidate and strengthen existing arrangements, and lay the groundwork for success into the future. As noted earlier, it is proposed that a Victorian CMN advisory group provide leadership on the key strategic issues identified in the plan, namely policy integration, establishment of new CMNs, consistency of CMN planning, monitoring and evaluation and investigation into a sustainable funding model. It is intended that progress on these key issues will result in:

- Better integration of CMNs into the biodiversity policy framework
- Effective planning and implementation for the establishment of new CMNs
- Increased capacity across all CMNs in the areas of planning, monitoring and evaluation
- Sustainable resourcing – improved continuity of staffing, programs that translates into better on-ground results

By attending to these issues at this time, and injecting the necessary resources to boost capacity in strategic areas, it is intended that the state-wide body will support CMNs to become increasingly effective and self-sustaining in their own right. The intent is to build capacity of CMNs individually and as a collective of networks. An important part of the approach is building links between CMNs, sharing knowledge and experience.

While there is already goodwill and cooperation between CMNs and with partner organisations, it is hoped that this document will provide some focus for the continued development of collaborative working arrangements, and additional direction to support collective efforts.

INTERVIEWEES

Name	Role	Purpose
Tim Barlow	Biodiversity Manager, GB CMA	To provide input from the perspective of GB CMA
Jim Castles	Broken Boosey CMN Coordinator	To provide input from the perspective of BB CMN
Robyn Edwards	Vic 'founder' of CMNs Gippsland Plains CMN	To provide a broad and historical view of CMNs
Peter Morison	Wedderburn CMN coordinator	To provide input from the perspective of WCMN
Alison Opperman	Wedderburn CMN	To provide input from the perspective of DSE NW region
Jane Greacen	Chair, Rainforest CMN	To provide input from the perspective of a CMN outside the Box-Ironbark CMNs
Chris McCormack	Chief Ranger, Parks Vic	To provide input from the perspective of Parks Vic
Alistair Phillips	Mgr, Land Policy, DSE	To provide input from the perspective of DSE and how CMNs fit with current and planned policy
Paul Smith	Director, Biodiversity policy and projects, DSE	To provide input from the perspective of DSE and how CMNs fit with current and planned policy
Vanessa Walsh	Public Land and protected areas, DSE	To provide input from the perspective of public land management and CMNs role in relation to this
Toni McLeish	Coordinator, Grassy Box Woodland CMN, NSW	To provide input from the perspective of GBWCMN
Andy McDougall	Parks Victoria	To provide input from the perspective of Parks Victoria
Lanie Pearce	BB CMN Implementation Committee	To provide input from the perspective of an implementation committee member
Wayne Tennant	Waterways Manager, GB CMA	To provide input on riparian interface and wetland issues from the perspective of GBCMA
Jim Crosthwaite		Project Manager
David Lucas	Landcare Network Readiness	To identify linkages with the Landcare experience
Ben Wearn	Landcare, Community Engagement	To identify linkages with the Landcare experience
Nina Cullen	Director, Public Lands	Public Land perspective

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT NETWORK STRATEGY

Vivienne Clare	Manager, Parks and Protected Areas	Head office parks perspective
Bill Peel	EGCMA Bushcare Facilitator	Gippsland Rainforest expertise, and involvement with CMN
Brett Mills	Gippsland Plains Ranger	R&D and management for Gippsland Plains CMN
Max James	Facilitator, Gippsland Plains	Strong knowledge and involvement of CMN
Peter Murrell	Secretary Gippsland Rainforest CMN	Community member of CMN
James Fitzsimons	VEAC CMN “expert”	To provide input from an academic and research perspective

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