

**Response to Natural Resource Commission's
Draft State-wide Standards and Targets Consultation Paper**

From: AAEE, NSW Chapter

This submission is written on behalf of the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE), the peak professional body for environmental education in Australia. AAEE has been in existence for over 20 years and aims to promote co-ordination among bodies engaged in environmental education and training and co-operate and/or affiliate with any other bodies with similar aims for the more effective furtherance of these aims

AAEE operates through a council, a national executive and state chapters. At the state level a Committee is set up to provide state input into the directions of the AAEE and to facilitate activity in the state. I write to you as the convener of the NSW Chapter on behalf of the organization. AAEE is an interested stakeholder in Natural Resource Management in NSW. We see education as a critical process for delivering sound and sustainable NRM.

Objects in the NSW Waster management Act 2000 identify the role of the community as a key partner in the management of water resources. From our investigations, principles included in the National NRM framework also identify capacity building and enhancing knowledge and information as critical components for the delivery of NRM. We regard education to increase public awareness, knowledge sharing mechanisms and training to build capacity as components on a continuum that builds informed and supportive communities with the required skills for participation.

According to the Consultation paper, one of the major goals for NRM in NSW is Facilitating the adoption of statewide standards that support best practice NRM and that enhance the quality of NRM data and knowledge available to regional communities.

However, in reviewing the actual standards and targets, the value of education as a critical process is only implied. Capacity building is included under the community statewide targets but the audience is narrow and the communication is very much one way. Nor is there any recognition that local communities right across NSW, including indigenous land managers, may hold relevant and valuable knowledge that also needs to be shared.

The Standards and Targets have good potential to add value to the planning, investment and delivery of NRM in NSW since they represent a mandatory framework for the investment strategies of all CMA's in NSW and can therefore guide the investment dollars towards higher quality outcomes.

However, AAEE believes that without a more explicit inclusion, education work will not be seen by CMA's as a valid and valuable area for their investment dollar. This could result in Catchment Action Plans with ambitious NRM objectives but lacking in the investment required for building a supportive and informed community to help in achieving those objectives.

AAEE commends the NRC on the inclusion and content of the Statewide aspirational goal: *Resilient sustainable landscapes functioning effectively at all scales and supporting the environmental, economic, social and cultural values of the community.*

The concept of a long-term goal is a good one, reinforcing the reality that NRM is a long-term work-in-progress. The content is going in the right direction and introduces the key concepts of sustainability. AAEE proposes that an explicit inclusion of the concept of "informed communities" and "knowledge sharing" would strengthen this goal. The statement, below, for example, could be **added as a dot point** under the aspirational goal, building in education and knowledge sharing as a critical processes.

A resilient landscape is supported by communities that understand and support the requirements for healthy catchments and that have the skills and knowledge to participate.

The components featured in the socio-economic assessment standard table on page 22 represent stakeholder groups as those who will be affected, and so mentions “impacts on stakeholders” and recommends socio-economic profiles, further studies and monitoring of impacts on affected stakeholders.

What is lacking here is a directive to identify and implement mechanisms that might diminish any real or perceived negative impacts on said stakeholders and in turn increase support for NRM targets. For instance, with regard to the state-wide condition targets for land, water and biodiversity, AAEE recommends building in additional indicators that recognize education as a process that can mitigate threats to NRM objectives.

We suggest that the value of education as a critical process be made more explicit in Target 4. The Community state-wide targets section states that “communities are critical to achieving natural resource outcomes” and mentions “the need for investment in activities that build community capacity and ownership of natural resource issues”. AAEE strongly reinforces this statement and would like to suggest that the implications that follow from this statement point squarely at education as a major “activity” for building community capacity.

However, the indicators in their current form are narrowly focused on a few sectors and are very top down. We suggest that education and knowledge sharing could feature more explicitly in the indicators in the Community State-wide targets. AAEE also recommends a multi-sector approach for raising awareness of and support for catchment NRM objectives. All sectors use resources and all sectors can impact on resources through their activities.

In closing AAEE would like to state its interest in assisting the NRC in the further development of this framework through access to its network of environmental educators in NSW and through contributions from specialists in a range of sectors. We look forward to participating in the upcoming workshops.

Sincerely,

Christine Prietto, Convener
AAEE, NSW Chapter