Evaluation of the Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC Partnership

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ACRONYMS

BMP  Best Management Practices
CAP  Catchment Action Plan
CMA  Catchment Management Authority
Cotton CRC  Cotton Catchment Communities Cooperative Research Centre
CRC  Cooperative Research Centre
ICM  Integrated Catchment Management
Namoi CMA  Namoi Catchment Management Authority
NRM  Natural Resource Management
RCS  Regional Catchment Strategy
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Namoi Catchment Management Authority (Namoi CMA) has been delivering natural resource management outcomes in the Namoi Catchment since 2004. To achieve the vision of vibrant communities and landscapes for the future, partnerships are seen as crucial to expanding the influence of the organisation to achieve the outcomes of the Namoi Blueprint, the Namoi Catchment Action Plan (CAP), and the Namoi Investment Strategy. Specifically, the Cotton Catchment Communities Cooperative Research Centre (Cotton CRC) partnership has been a core component of Namoi CMA’s partnership activities, a key partner in engaging the cotton industry and improving natural resource management outcomes. This review seeks to evaluate the Cotton CRC and Namoi CMA partnership, and provide lessons learned for this partnership and future endeavours for both organisations.

The evaluation considered the investments that were made to achieve outcomes. The five areas targeted for investment under the partnership as specified in Schedule 1 provided the basis for determining the achievements that had been made against those areas. The areas are:

- **Schedule 1.1** Building natural resource management capacity in the Namoi cotton districts
- **Schedule 1.2** Supporting the adoption of best management practice in the cotton industry in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.3** Information collation to support the delivery of best management practice in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.4** Implementation of natural resource management on-ground incentive projects in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.5** Advancing water management in NSW

Activities

The activities that have been undertaken to achieve outcomes in these areas include: workshops to build skills and distribute information, the employment of a project officer, the implementation of best management practices among cotton growers, and the funding of on-ground incentive and water use efficiency projects. This evaluation did not focus on the outcomes of the partnership per se, but rather on the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of the partnership as a conduit to achieving outcomes and the lessons for this and future partnership arrangements for the Namoi CMA.

Appropriateness of the partnership

The appropriateness of the partnership of the Namoi CMA with the Cotton CRC was examined to determine how closely the partnership aligns with key documents including strategic and action plans, agreements, partnership policies and reports, as well as with other NRM stakeholders with whom the Namoi CMA engages. Evidence from documents showed that there are mutual objectives between the Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC. It was evident that there was a high level of synergy in that both organisations addressed similar issues.

The relationship between the individuals in the two organisations and how this was managed was a significant factor of the strong success. Success began with a key staff member of Namoi CMA who initiated the formation of the partnership. This person was also on the advisory board of the Cotton CRC and provided the foundation for the strong relationship. In addition, the negotiation period to
develop the operational detail of the partnership, while difficult, drew together the staff of both organisations. The negotiations resulted in a high level of motivation, shared experiences and mutual objectives in achieving a good outcome.

**Effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership**
The effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership was considered by examining the increased ability of both organisations to achieve outcomes. It was found that the partnership had expanded the range of delivery methods of both organisations because they had access to each other's resources. More importantly, the partnership was able to maximise the reach and impact of both organisations and to increase the scope of their target audiences. The increase in reach, impact and scope was because the Namoi CMA could now reach cotton growers it would not have otherwise been able to reach with the same level of credibility; and the Cotton CRC's capacity and credibility was built in terms of managing natural resources. This partnership proved to be more cost effective and efficient than the Namoi CMA using alternative partners or directly implementing the Schedules themselves. Without the partnership, neither organisation would have been able to achieve the same level of NRM outcome which resulted from better management practices, improved use of resources, conservation and revegetation.

**Other impacts of the partnership**
In addition to the direct benefits of the partnership, there were other broader impacts to both organisations in achieving NRM outcomes, in particular, to the perceptions of the staff directly involved and to the landholders who benefited from some of the programs. Staff pointed to the contacts they had made with other potential partners, the positive nature of the partnership provided a model and a marketing tool for any future partnerships the Namoi CMA may be interested in, and the landholders now had a more positive view of the Namoi CMA. The partnership was characterised by an open and trusting relationship that was based on goodwill. Goodwill made the implementation and management more effective.

**The design of the partnership**
Lessons learned from the evaluation about the design of the partnership include:

- The value of clearly defined investment targets as specified in Schedule 1
- The importance of the relationship and goodwill between the partner members from the level of CEO to the operations level
- Each level must have roles and responsibilities that, while not always written or defined, can be described and measured
- The partnership was appropriate in that objectives and plans of both organisations overlapped
- The partnership was effective and efficient in that the objectives of both organisations could be met with less resources and effort.

**Summary**
This evaluation highlights the usefulness of the partnership between the Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC and recommends an ongoing relationship between the two organisations to build on the strengths and investments already made. It is recognised that due to funding changes and organisational shifts that any future partnership between the organisations will differ. However, there are still benefits to be gained from industry and management bodies delivering the same NRM messages to growers, as well as having one point of contact for growers in regards to NRM issues, which can be achieved through collaborations.
SECTION I – INTRODUCTION

The Namoi Catchment Management Authority (Namoi CMA) entered into a partnership with the Cotton Catchment Communities CRC (the Cotton CRC) in 2005 with the objective that the Cotton CRC would deliver on a range of the Namoi CMA Management targets in return for a sum of $2.4m provided by the Namoi CMA over the period 2005-2008. The projects undertaken within this partnership essentially fall into two main categories: the delivery of on-ground works in the cotton growing areas of the catchment and a range of allied activities dealing with facilitation, training, capacity building and education.

Five areas are targeted for investment under the partnership:

- **Schedule 1.1** Building natural resource management capacity in the Namoi cotton districts
- **Schedule 1.2** Supporting the adoption of best management practice in the cotton industry in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.3** Information collation to support the delivery of best management practice in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.4** Implementation of natural resource management on-ground incentive projects in the Namoi Catchment
- **Schedule 1.5** Advancing water management in NSW

The activities that have been undertaken to achieve outcomes in these areas include: workshops to build skills and distribute information, the employment of a project officer, the implementation of best management practices among cotton growers, and the funding of on-ground incentive and water use efficiency projects. The first term of the partnership has come to an end and it is considered timely to review this arrangement. The evaluation objectives are:

1. An evaluation of the efficiency of the model used by Namoi CMA in partnering with the Cotton CRC
2. The effectiveness of the partnership in terms of achieving intermediate outcomes as per the five schedules
3. The appropriateness of the partnership between Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC
4. Provide a comparison of the effectiveness of a partnership program such as this compared to effecting on ground change directly using current Namoi CMA resources, and
5. Provide lessons learned for the partnership between Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC, as well as future partnership arrangements for Namoi CMA.
SECTION II – METHODOLOGY

To meet the objectives of the study the following was carried out:

1. A literature review that sought to identify the key characteristics of successful partnerships, criteria used for evaluating partnerships, as well as factors that influence the cost effectiveness of partnerships relative to direct intervention;
2. A document review to improve understanding of the partnership, in particular its alignment with organisational objectives, strategies, plans, etc.
3. Program logic workshop and focus group with staff to identify the causal links between the objectives of the partnership and outcomes, to improve understanding of how the partnership added value, as well as risks.
4. Interview of key stakeholders, particularly Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC staff, to understand outcomes, achievements, and potential for improving the partnership, and
5. A follow up workshop was held in which the results and findings were presented to provide opportunity for greater feedback.

Literature Review

The literature review considered the definition of partnerships; partnership characteristics influencing effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness; the cost effectiveness of partnerships; adaptive management of partnerships; the use of partnerships in NRM; and case studies of pest practice partnership strategies within NRM (See Appendix 1). This report does not summarise the literature review. However this section outlines the key characteristics and criteria used in evaluating the Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC partnership, as well as being embodied in the analysis section.

Firstly, it is worthwhile defining effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness. **Effectiveness** is a measure of the ability of a program, project or task to produce a specific desired effect or result that can be measured. It is governed by the objectives set for the initiative in question. By contrast, **efficiency** is the ability to achieve the objectives with the least amount of energy or waste (financial, administrative, human resource, etc). It focuses on the volume of output achieved for the input used and hence, is closely related to productivity. In the context of this study, we take **appropriateness** to be related to the concept of Caring for our Country’s concept of appropriateness in partnership delivery – that is, that the partnerships are aligned in their plans, investments and actions; promote coordination and inter-dependence; and are able to leverage from each other’s comparative advantage to achieve the outcomes sought. For example, the appropriateness of the partnership is dependent on whether the organisation is best placed to deliver the outcomes relative to other agencies or methods. This aspect of the study has particular relevance to the comparative aspect of the study (Objective 4).

This report considered the following characteristics when evaluating the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the partnership (Oliver, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 2002):

- Achievement of goals
- Shared power and responsibility
- Outsider perception
- Social capital building processes
- Good communication
- Social learning
- Shared values
- Shared intent
- Shared risk taking
- High levels of motivation
- Realistic expectations
In evaluating the partnership we applied the tool of cost-effectiveness analysis, a particular method within the broader theory of cost effective analysis. This tool is specifically applied to the partnership framework with criteria (see below) that select partnerships according to their ability to achieve the greatest outcomes (effects) relative to expenditures (costs). Benefits are identified not in monetary terms, but rather in outcomes and are sought to be maximised relative to alternative methods (i.e. considering synergies, value adding, etc).

The criteria that we used to evaluate the partnership took account of its ability to:

- Expand on the range of delivery methods used by Namoi CMA (i.e. appropriateness of new products and services)
- Maximise reach and impact (i.e. improving efficiency of existing resources)
- Increase the scope of target audience (i.e. effectiveness in reaching the cotton industry)
- Improve the value to stakeholder base (i.e. efficiency and value adding)
- Remain attractive to the cotton industry to achieving outcomes
- Provide a comparative advantage through the Cotton CRC (relative to others) in the ability to achieve outcomes
- Engage and involve stakeholders.

In evaluating the partnership we examined each of the five schedules, the sub-projects and their components to see whether they have been fulfilled. Then, taken as a whole, we looked at how effective, efficient and appropriate the partnership is. In dealing with each of the schedules, notice is taken of the budget allocations and the relative outcomes for each one. It was recognised that, in some cases, making a judgement on matters such as increased capacity (e.g. Schedule 1.1) is not easy.

In addition, a simplified cost effective analysis was conducted to compare the partnership with direct implementation methods by Namoi CMA. This comparison is built on the evaluation conducted above which identified the strengths and weaknesses of the existing partnership. But here we included the strengths and weaknesses of the direct methods, what is lost by one method or gained by another. Another element was to address the counterfactual. What would have happened if the partnership was not in place?

We examined the ability to address short and intermediate outcomes. The potential to address longer term goals and other requirements of the Namoi CMA is dependent on whether such information and benchmarking is available or whether it required for foundational activities.

Set out below was the starting point for a framework to guide this aspect of the study.
Document Review

The document review contributed secondary data towards the evaluation of the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness to achieve intermediate outcomes of the partnership program. Specifically, it provided a focus on the partnership delivery model employed and the fit for purpose given the objectives of the two organisations involved, as well as detailed project related information. The review consisted of:

- Constituent documents of the Namoi CMA including the Namoi Blueprint, the Namoi CAP, the Namoi Investment Strategy, as well as the Partnership Policy and Engagement Strategy.

### Framework for analysis: Comparison of Partnerships to Alternative Delivery Methods

- **Cost Effective Analysis of Partnerships**
  - What are the costs for partnerships to achieve the outcomes (including transaction costs, such as bargaining, negotiations, etc)?
  - How well have partnerships achieved those outcomes? (i.e. benefits/effects)
  - What alternative methods are there for achieving those outcomes?
  - What are the costs of those alternative methods to achieve those outcomes?
  - What are the potential benefits/effects of those alternative methods?
  - Which method can most effectively and efficiently achieve the outcomes desired?

- **What are the strengths of partnerships?**
  - Ability to expand capacity of existing methodologies (i.e. appropriateness of products and services offered by Namoi CMA)
  - Ability to expand the range of delivery methods used by Namoi CMA (i.e. appropriateness of new products and services)
  - Maximising reach and impact (i.e. improving efficiency of existing resources (leveraging))
  - Increasing scope of target audience (i.e. effectiveness in reaching Cotton industry)
  - Improving value to stakeholder base (i.e. efficiency and value adding)
  - Achieve cost effective on-ground outcomes across a large diverse area
  - Develop and enhance relationships with the communities
  - Ability to identify priorities at grass roots level
  - Able to better identify and capitalise on funding opportunities
  - Provide a conduit for development of a voice for community
  - Dedicate resources on a whole of region basis
  - Marketing, communication and other expertise

- **What are Strengths of Direct Methods**
  - Fewer transaction costs (i.e. no search, negotiation, bargaining, information, communication, etc costs)
  - Immediate alignment of objectives without the need for consideration of mutual interests

- **Other considerations**
  - What are other CMAs doing?
  - What can be learned from other partnerships programs by CMAs?
  - How does Namoi CMA’s partnership program compare with other the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of other CMAs and NRM bodies partnerships program?
From these documents we identify the broader objectives of the organisation, the alignment with the partnership and the specific Management Targets addressed by the partnership.

- Strategic documents of the Cotton CRC, including the Strategic Plan, Mission and Outcomes, and program documents. These provided an understanding of the organisation’s direction and *modus operandi*, and how the partnership’s objectives align with the organisations values and direction.
- Partnership documents such as the agreement were also reviewed to provide an understanding of the structure and delivery model of the partnership.
- Finally, progress reports and project related documents were reviewed to provide input regarding the implementation of the partnership. This included other data and records showing completion of milestones and the achievement of outcomes.

**Program logic workshop with staff**

The program logic workshop was held with staff to gather feedback about the activities of the partnership and the outcomes of those activities. Staff were also asked about the partnership itself. The workshop was held at Gunnedah on 28 April 2009. There were five participants: three managers from the Namoi CMA, one manager and one project officer from the Cotton CRC. All are directly involved in this partnership.

At this workshop participants were asked about the program logic and the value of the partnership:

- What are the causal links between the objective and activities?
- What were the expected outcomes?
- How was the partnership expected to add value?
- Were sufficient resources provided?
- What risks / assumptions are built into this?

The value of the partnership was measured by the following criteria:

- Comparative Advantage of Namoi CMA & Cotton CRC
- Alternatives to Partnership
- Partnership Characteristics
- Effectiveness of Outcomes
- Adaptive Management
- Strengths and Weaknesses

**Interviews with staff**

All but one of the workshop participants were interviewed in more detail. In addition, the CEO and the Adoption Program Manager of the Cotton CRC were also interviewed. Interviews took place in Narrabri on 29 April 2009. Participants were asked the questions attached as an appendix of this report. In summary, these questions were about:

1. What makes you think that Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC are suitable partners?
2. Broadly, how effective do you believe the partnership has been in terms of:
   a. Achievement of goals (see schedules)
   b. Indirect benefits
   c. Formation, implementation and evaluation of the partnership (i.e. process management)
   d. Compared to alternative mechanisms of partnership outcomes?
3. Do you feel there has been shared power and responsibility?
4. What contextual issues outside the scope of either organisation has affected the partnership (i.e. movements in agriculture, NRM, etc)
5. Do you feel that there has been a good social relationship between the organisations?
6. Do you feel that the partnership is able to adapt and adopt new directions and practices? Is there continuous improvement?
7. What recommendations would you make for improving the partnership?

Workshop with staff

A workshop for senior staff and board members was held on 9 June 2009 in Tamworth to discuss the findings of the evaluation and the options suggested for the future. This workshop contributed to the development of a strategy and planning options and was also a valuable opportunity for us to collect data to support any modifications to the suggested strategies. It also provided an opportunity for staff to take more “ownership” of the process.
SECTION III – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section highlights the results of the evaluation of the partnership. It is structured as follows: evaluation of the objectives of the partnership; appropriateness of the Namoi CMA partnership with the Cotton CRC; effectiveness and efficiency in achieving outcomes; cost effective analysis of the partnership; and finally a summary of the lessons learned and recommendations.

Objectives and Activities of the Partnership

The five objectives of the partnerships were set out in Schedule 1. In addition to the objectives, this section outlines the method used for implementing them (Jones, 2009):

Schedule 1.1 Building natural resource management capacity in the Namoi cotton districts

This was implemented through the employment of a full time Catchment Officer. The position acted as a Namoi CMA Catchment Officer for this part of the Catchment and was responsible for rolling out the incentive funds in the same way that other Namoi CMA Catchment Officers do in their respective regions. The position was located at the Australia Cotton Research Station and through the Cotton CRC the Officer had access to cotton researchers and production extension staff. The Namoi CMA funded the salary, on-costs and education resources component of the position and the Cotton CRC funded the office, vehicle, etc.

Schedule 1.2 Supporting the adoption of best management practice in the cotton industry in the Namoi Catchment

This was implemented through the employment of a BMP Officer for the Namoi Catchment. The cost of the position was shared between the Namoi CMA, Cotton CRC and Cotton Australia. The position assisted growers in fulfilling the necessary requirements to successfully enter the Land and Water Management module of the BMP program. The type of activities covered in this module relate to the generation of farm maps, management of riparian corridors, native vegetation etc all of which are consistent with the aims of the Namoi CMA. As part of this role, the BMP Officer identified those growers that would be eligible for some assistance through Schedule 1.4 and Schedule 1.5.

Schedule 1.3 Information collation to support the delivery of best management practice in the Namoi Catchment

The information was sourced mainly from the Namoi CMA / Cotton CRC joint research projects. There were approximately 10 research projects varying from small summer scholarships to large groundwater quality projects delivered by independent consultants. The projects were a combination of investments from the Cotton CRC and other partners as well as solely Namoi CMA funds. Research topics covered included:

- A groundwater scoping study
- Groundwater / surface water interactions studies
- Groundwater quality benchmark
- Riparian vegetation condition assessment
- Aquatic biodiversity review
Implementation of natural resource management on-ground incentive projects in the Namoi Catchment

The on-ground incentive projects were delivered by the Cotton CRC on behalf of the Namoi CMA. The Cotton CRC entered into a contract with the grower and the on-ground projects were funded after consultation with the Namoi CMA to ensure that the proposed project is:

- Delivered against the Namoi CMA management targets,
- In their priority areas of the catchment, that
- The financial offer made was consistent with other Namoi CMA offers made to other similar projects, and
- The level of contribution made by the grower is appropriate.

The Catchment Officer (Schedule 1.1) was the lead manager of the on-ground project developed however, technical expertise in water use efficiency was provided by the Irrigation officer (Schedule 1.5) for the WUE projects and the BMP Officer (Schedule 1.2) also encouraged growers undertaking the BMP program to access the funds. The BMP Officer was also able to identify the type of projects that the grower could implement that would enable them to meet their BMP requirements. The Cotton CRC made the involvement in the BMP program an additional requirement for growers before they could access these funds which created a direct link to the Schedule 1.2 project.

Advancing water management in NSW

This project involved a number of partners including Namoi CMA, Cotton CRC, Border Rivers Gwydir CMA, Cotton RDC and NSW DPI. The project employed two Irrigation Officers, one in the Namoi and one in the Gwydir through NSW DPI. The aim of the project was to lift industry water use efficiency through a coordinated industry approach to advisory and education/training services in water use efficiency (WUE). This involved demonstrations, trials and the delivery of a modified Waterwise during the farm training course that incorporates Cotton industry's BMP guidelines. These are designed to assist CMAs achieve CAP and Investment Plan targets relevant to the cotton industry. This project aimed to contribute to a 15% increase in whole farm water use efficiency over the next five years by irrigation in the Namoi Valley and other valleys.

Appropriateness of the Namoi CMA partnership with the Cotton CRC

In this section the study considered:

- The alignment in of key documents investments and actions
- How the organisations promote coordination and interdependence through their strategies, agreements and partnership reports
- Mutual objectives of the Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC - whether the organisations are able to leverage from each other’s comparative advantage to achieve the outcomes sought.

This investigation looked at relevant documents from the Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC and questioned staff from both organisations for their views in relation to those three points.

Key documents relating to the partnership

This section reviews the key documents from Namoi CMA, the Cotton CRC and the Partnership. The following figure identifies the structure and relationship between the organisations and the key documents.
Strategies of Namoi CMA

The CAP is the ‘strategic framework which will guide natural resource management for the Namoi catchment over the next ten years’ (p.3). It is separated into two components, Part A which includes the policies and procedures for quality natural resource management, and Part B which includes the more tangible natural resource management plan. In comparison, the Investment Strategy provides the vehicle for implementing the vision of the CAP, moving beyond identifying outcomes to highlighting the activities and milestones that will achieve those outcomes.

The scope of the CAP is broader than the Investment Strategy, a reflection of the fact that the CAP is a long term strategic framework including strategic, operational, legislative, risk and review components while the Investment Strategy is a three year implementation document which guides the prioritisation of funding. The wide scope of the CAP with particular reference to the policies and procedures outlined in Part A has provided the necessary foundation for the creation and adoption of the Investment Strategy and the Decision Support Tools (DST) used by Namoi CMA.

Even though there is an aspect of the CAP that goes beyond the activities of the Namoi CMA, it is important to note that outputs are the effects that are directly related to the activities undertaken by Namoi CMA whereas the outcomes are the impacts of those activities to society, economy or the environment that can be attributed to the Namoi CMA’s activities. It is those impacts that are the ultimate goal for Namoi CMA.
The investment principle relating to outcomes as stated in the CAP (Part A p2) is that ‘Investment is to “buy outcomes” rather than ‘prescribe inputs’’. The intent of this statement flows throughout the document and subsequently underpins the program logic and the Investment Strategy. For example, monitoring and evaluation of MTW1 (Management Target Water1 - riverine ecosystems) is based on achieving the outcome of improved riverine ecosystems to a specified quality. Therefore, it is the health of the ecosystem that needs to be monitored and measured rather than the success of the works that were carried out to achieve it. That is to say that the restoration works on a riverine system will only show evidence of their contribution to the health of an ecosystem when the ecosystem is showing signs of becoming healthy.

While the actions and activities may be similar, the monitoring and evaluation of targets has shifted from achieving certain standards of outcomes to meeting the levels of outputs identified in the Investment Strategy. For example, to evaluate the achievement of the CAP it would be necessary to measure the outcomes or the standard of environment before and after. This would be commensurate with documents such as the State of the Environment Reports, the production of which is highlighted in the CAP. In contrast, to evaluate the Investment Strategy it is not necessary to measure the quality of the environmental outcomes, but rather to monitor the progress and achievement of outputs (i.e. the results of funding provided to landholders for activities such as hectares revegetated or fenced off).

**Partnership Policy**

The Namoi CMA Partnership Policy recognises that, for the organisation to achieve its objectives, it must operate in a strategic and collaborative way with industry groups, scientists, government agencies, the community and others. This is specifically identified to facilitate the delivery of the Catchment Action Plan and the related targets to increase the effectiveness of its investments and achieve natural resource outcomes. The policy document is designed to act as a guide for organisations and individuals during the development and delivery of Namoi CMA partnership opportunities.

Partnerships are expected to align with certain targets in the people, landscapes, water and native plants and animals section of the CAP.

The policy states that partnerships or collaborations are to be conducted in the spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit, specifically incorporating the principles of:

- **Planning and designing partnerships:**
  - Alignment with Namoi CMA objectives
  - Synergism and mutual benefit
  - Financial justification
  - Commitment and capacity
  - Partnership equity

- **Implementing partnerships:**
  - Financial criteria
  - Knowledge and information
  - Public relations and media
  - Deliverables and reporting

These have been used for the broad basis of the Partnership Strategy and reflect well the literature on the value of partnerships.
**Review of Partnerships and the Investment Strategy**

As recognised and stated in the Namoi CMA’s Catchment Action Plan (CAP) (January 2007), Engagement Strategy (March 2007), and Partnership Policy (May 2007), the vision of ‘vibrant communities and landscapes for the future’ is not one that can be reached by the Namoi CMA in isolation. Partnerships with other relevant agencies and organisations are critical to the achievement of improvements in environmental management and conditions in the Namoi catchment.

According to Roberts Evaluation (2008, p. 45), Namoi CMA has developed a range of partnerships to assist in achieving the objectives set out in the CAP:

> So far the CMA has developed and maintained strong and effective partnerships with the Cotton CRC, Tamworth Rural Lands Protection Board, to a lesser extent Greening Australia, and on a specific project, the Liverpool Plains Land Management Group. It has a good level of contact with local government through the Namoi Local Government Group, however, varied success in true collaboration with councils beyond this group. In an informal way, CMA staff are engaging well with a large range of stakeholders in the catchment, and many of the other industry and research bodies in the catchment think highly of the CMA.

Throughout the review of the investment strategy, Roberts Evaluation highlighted that partnerships with local councils have been perceived as variable – whereby some collaborations are extremely useful and could be further developed, whereas other individual projects have been less successful. However, the Cotton CRC and Tamworth Regional Lands Protection Board were considered the most formed partnerships, perceived as assisting with “promotion, strategic and better informed decisions, and more collaboration; [while] other organisations felt they could provide technical resources, research, aligning on farm outcomes to catchment targets, conduit to networks, reputation with landholders, and information sharing” (p. 68).

The review found that there is still room for improvement in the Namoi CMA’s approach to partnerships. Partnerships need to be prioritised and recognised for the cross-cutting and vital contribution that they make to achieving the Namoi CMA’s targets. Partnerships need to be actively sought, pursued, and strategically developed (as appropriate to the particular partner) by the Namoi CMA with a wider range of organisations involved in the Namoi catchment. Potential organisations to include are those with the capacity and a willingness to partner, such as Agforce, Cotton CRC, Dairy Australia, Liverpool Plains Land Management Committee, Meat and Livestock Australia, Northern Grain Alliance, Northern Regional Inland Development Board, and Tamworth Rural Lands Board.

This was also identified in the Ipsos report (2007), which highlights that there is a belief by the broader community that government agencies and community groups are defending their own territory and even existence, rather than working in partnership together for the good of the catchment (p.8). The report recommends that Namoi CMA take a leading role to overcome these differences and bridge the gaps between organisations to maximise local knowledge, expertise and NRM outcomes.

The Roberts Evaluation report highlights that cost benefit analysis or comparative models can be used to assess the costs/benefits of partnerships. Other criteria would also include alignment, synergies, capacity, influence and impact. It was recommended that these feature where possible in the partnership strategy.
Partners in Context

Following the recommendations for further developing partnerships and the identified need for partners in achieving the objectives of the CAP, Namoi CMA commissioned a study in 2008 to prepare a report identifying partners and potential partners within the Namoi catchment. A report was sought by the Namoi CMA to become better informed about:

- Partnership opportunities
- Current community based capacity and interest in conservation and natural resource management in the catchment

The report prepared for Namoi CMA featured a social network analysis methodology and sought to explore partnership opportunities with the Namoi CMA. The Cotton CRC was considered a well connected organisation that would be useful as a node within the Namoi CMA’s partnership network.

The Cotton Catchment Communities CRC

The Cotton CRC’s objective as per the relevant Commonwealth Agreement (p.3) is:

To enhance Australia’s industrial, commercial and economic growth through the development of sustained, user-driven, cooperative public-private research centres that achieve high levels of outcomes in adoption and commercialisation.

The Strategic Plan 2006-2012 is the overarching document of the Cotton CRC. It highlights the objective of the Cotton CRC to provide high quality collaborative research, education, and adoption activities which benefit the cotton industry, regional communities and the nation. This is undertaken in part through its focus on best management practices, research in yield and fibre improvements, and generating social and economic improvements. The Cotton CRC operates five program areas: the farm, the catchment, the community, the product and adoption.

Without detailing the Strategic Plan, it includes natural resource management targets that broadly align with the direction of the partnership and the interests of the Namoi CMA:

- To reduce potential environmental impacts of cotton pesticides by at least 50 percent;
- To reduce the irrigation water used per bale of cotton produced by at least 50 percent
- To improve the reliability of groundwater recharge estimates in cotton regions by at least ten percent, and
- Targets relating to extension, knowledge, education and training that apply to natural resource management indirectly though the partnership directly.

It is worthwhile acknowledging that this strategic move was purposefully made with the third phase of the Cotton CRC, as noted by the inclusion of communities and catchments. This has resulted in a stronger alignment of objectives between the Cotton CRC and Namoi CMA which previously may not have been apparent. Other works by the Cotton CRC have also been indirectly promoting outcomes (often through improved knowledge and education) of Namoi CMA.

For example, the study of The Impact of Drought on Small Businesses in Wee Waa highlighted the devastating nature of drought on the region. Drought contributes to significant contraction in the regional economic, leading to significant job losses, people moving out of the community, lower schooling attendance, and health issues such as depression. There are management strategies
growers can employ to help manage drought times. This research promotes some of the practice changes that are likely to lead to outcomes in alignment with the CAP targets.

In addition, a recent report by Roy Powell and Linden Chalmers (2008) prepared on behalf of the Cotton CRC and Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics considered the socio-economic impact of the cotton industry and the economic potential of cotton regions in NSW. This report highlighted that cotton contributed almost 20% or $520m per annum to the regional economy and that cotton research has had significant economic importance. Despite this however, the regional economic growth has been relatively slow and small, though alternative capital intensive and resourced-based opportunities exist in the area of energy development. The report states that there is a need for deriving additional value from existing natural resources, particularly those based on technology, knowledge and human capital. While the report focuses on general business development for communities, this emphasis on improving the use of natural resources can certainly be considered in a best management practice context for the cotton industry.

Coordination and Interdependence through Partnership Strategies and Agreements

The umbrella agreement between Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC states that NRM outcomes will be delivered through programs in return for cash and non-cash contributions based on the following NRM aspects:

- Delivery of Cotton BMP extension and advice in the Narrabri area;
- Provision of project and contract management for Namoi CMA in the Narrabri area;
- Delivery of NRM extension and advice to a range of agricultural industries in the Narrabri area;
- Development and maintenance of linkages between Cotton CRC and Namoi CMA programs, projects and activities.

This was later formalised into five schedules through an iteration process between key individuals in both organisations. See Objectives and Activities of the Partnership. Good relationship management between individuals and organisations tend to reduce the need for reliance on agreements and contracts. Whist these are needed, it will be shown later that this is what has been achieved by the organisations, in that their informal relationships have dominated the high level agreements.

Partnership Reports

The partnership progress and final reports (a.k.a. milestone reports) are not summarised here, however they have been directly and indirectly incorporated in the evaluation. It is worthwhile noting however, that the reports are presented on a routine basis, every six months in alignment with the Cotton CRC’s reporting requirements and the needs of the Namoi CMA. These are presented to both boards. In addition, informal reporting exists between project personnel.

In addition to formal partnership reporting requirements, external reports and conference proceedings have been published that highlight the activities and achievements of the partnership. A recent paper by Spanswick and Jones (2008) considered the partnership of Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC, considering how the partnership worked to improve water management to achieve industry and catchment outcomes. The partnership is identified as a co-investment with the research organisation to align their on-ground investment with the latest research while gaining access to technical specialists and providing confidence with the growers. Specifically the partnership provides technical resources and advice, training and education, as well as financial assistance to achieve best management practice on farm.
The paper states that using the multi-pronged approach, the partnership “has seen the water use efficiency skills and knowledge of growers and consultants increase through: access to technical information, participation in training and education programmes and financial assistance to implement on-ground changes” (p2). While uptake was originally slow, the technical support provided has assisted, as did the contextual issues of drought and water entitlement cutbacks.

In total, 8,464 hectares of irrigated land was improved through water use efficiency practices. On average, approximately 15% of water use efficiency improvements were made, a net saving of 4,733ML to irrigators. This cost Namoi CMA $598,185 directly in incentive funds, and a total contribution by growers and Namoi CMA of $1,318,352. The cost effective analysis below provides more detail regarding the relative costs. See Cost Effective Analysis of Partnership.

The outcome on the land has been decreased deep drainage, reduced water logging and reduced risk of salinisation; as well as increased production of bales of cotton per megalitre of water and compliance with best management practice. The report concludes that financial incentives with structured extension can lead to adoption of new and better practices, while the partnership improves the use of each organisation’s resources.

**Mutual Objectives of Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC**

To begin the investigation into whether the partnership was able to achieve its objectives, we asked participants at the workshop held 29 April 2009 to recall the logic behind how they thought objectives were going to be met. We found that the logic of the partnership was not developed to go progressively from activities to outcomes. However the activities of the projects funded by the Namoi CMA through the partnership are expected to contribute to the targets and outcomes of the Namoi CMA as the diagram above shows. Similarly, the activities of the partnership complement the goals and objectives of the Cotton CRC.

The partnership is expected to add value to both organisations in very specific ways by extending the capability of both to make it easier for them to achieve their goals and aspirations. For example, first, the Namoi CMA is a key end-user of Cotton CRC information, increasing the likelihood of uptake of research findings. Second, the partnership ensures that the funding and research is carried out in the catchment, where it is more applicable and aids local community. Third, two full time positions have been created because of the partnership. The individuals in these positions have almost full access to the resources of both organisations. Fourth, both organisations have been forced to embrace the three fundamentals areas of the social, economic and environmental and not fall back to their preferred areas. Fifth, all research results are freely available to both organisations as well as to landholders.

We also asked why the partnership was formed. The response we received from several spokespeople for the Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC was because the interests of the Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC overlapped. For example, both organisations:

- Are in the same catchment
- Deal with the same issues
- Deal with industry sustainability
- Have many similar targets

In addition, it was because of mutual benefit. The Namoi CMA now has access to clients it has not had in the past and it is able to invest in research. Further, both organisations have access to each other’s networks and expanded their stakeholder base.
The document review shows that the aims of Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC were shared in many respects. Specifically, Schedule 1 of the partnership agreement reflected the catchment and management targets well. However Schedule 1.3, Information Collation does not have any direct links with any of the Management Targets. This is because research could not be funded by the Namoi CMA. But, by its nature, the program indirectly affects outcomes through the promotion of awareness, acceptance and presumably adoption of practice change that leads to physical outcomes. If considering purely alignment of the partnership’s aims with Catchment and Management Targets, many more lines could be drawn. But, in order to keep the diagram clear, only the direct outcomes of the partnership actions were considered, rather than longer term (biophysical) outcomes which may result.

The figure below highlights the relationship between Namoi CMA’s vision, catchment action plans, management action targets, and the schedules of the partnership:
Figure 3: Alignment of Partnership with Namoi CMA’s Vision and targets

Cotton Catchment Communities CRC and Namoi CMA Partnership Outcomes

Schedule 1.1
Building NRM Capacity in the Namoi Cotton Districts

Schedule 1.2
Supporting the adoption of Best Practice (BMP) in the cotton industry in the Namoi Catchment

Schedule 1.3
Information Collation to Support the Delivery of BMP in the Namoi Catchment

Schedule 1.4
Implementation of NRM on-ground Incentive Projects in the Namoi Catchment

Vibrant Communities and Landscapes for the Future

People and Communities:
From 2006, there will be continual improvement in the ability of the people in the catchment to implement the Namoi Catchment Action Plan (CAP).

Landscape:
From 2006, there will be an increase in the extent of the landscape managed sustainably.

Surface and Groundwater Ecosystems:
From 2006, there is an improvement in the condition of surface and groundwater ecosystems.

Native Plants and Animals:
From 2006, there will be an improvement in the extent and condition of native plants and animals, and the environments in which they live, within each interim Bio-Regional Assessment (IBRA) sub-region of the Namoi.
Figure 4: Alignment of Partnership with the Cotton CRC’s objectives and programs
Effectiveness and Efficiency in Achieving Outcomes

This section looks at the effectiveness and efficiency of the partnership in terms of its ability to:

- Achieve the objectives (Schedule 1)
- Expand the range of delivery methods
- Maximise reach and impact
- Increase the scope of target audience
- Improve the value to stakeholder base
- Impact on risk to organisation and stakeholders
- Stakeholder engagement and involvement.
- Remain attractive to stakeholders to achieving outcomes
- Be of comparative advantage of partner relative to other organisations

Achievement against objectives

As mentioned above, a measure of effectiveness is the ability of the partnership to achieve its objectives. These objectives are set out in Schedule 1 (1.1 – 1.5). Following is what has been achieved against each schedule.

Schedule 1.1 Building natural resource management capacity in the Namoi cotton districts

The Catchment Officer was employed to assist the development of the NRM capacity of growers. Much of this was achieved through the workshops, events and field days held.

Schedule 1.2 Supporting the adoption of best management practice in the cotton industry in the Namoi Catchment

Schedule 1.2 funds the implementation officer for the BMP program of the Cotton CRC. The BMP is the Australian cotton industry’s voluntary farm management system that provides self-assessment mechanisms, practical tools and auditing processes to ensure that cotton is produced with best practice including the management of land and water resources. As such, it fits within Namoi CMA direct share investment to leverage funds. The program provided the opportunity to integrate BMP and NRM with Cotton and ensure the implementation of NRM was appropriately supported with technical knowledge and resources. The cotton industry lacked resources in this area, which is the Namoi CMAs area of expertise.

As a result, the capacity of the 45 landholders who took part in the BMP workshop has been increased. Of the 9 landholders interviewed for this review, 6 had made improvements that were deliberately aimed at improved the biodiversity on their properties.

The BMP Program is an industry driven scheme supported by the major industry bodies including Cotton CRC, Cotton Research and Development Corporation and Cotton Australia. The 7th module and latest addition to the program, is the ‘Land & Water Module’. The schedule was developed around the implementation of this module more specifically. Cotton producers needed support from extension officers of the Cotton CRC to implement the program, though not all were interested in pursuing certification.

The module was already established, and the schedule was defined around the existing program. Some landholders did not want the BMP verification, but still were willing to participate in the program. The project officer was able to build trust with the participants by not telling them what to do, though by providing assistance when they asked.
During the period of the project the BMP Program has been moved into a second phase using an online facility driven by growers. This allows them to benchmark on a regional and national basis, provides them with better access supporting information and allows them to undertake on-line interactive activities to support the implementation of best practice to their own enterprises.

**Schedule 1.3  Information collation to support the delivery of best management practice in the Namoi Catchment**

The Namoi CMA cannot invest in research, so Schedule 1.3 allowed the CMA to access research information by directing some of its research needs through the Cotton CRC and providing the Cotton CRC with much needed funds to expand its research. This complementarity has proved very valuable for both organisations. The CMA is an end user of this information and their involvement means that the resulting research is utilised. Also, the research was undertaken in the Namoi Catchment and is specific to the catchment.

**Schedule 1.4  Implementation of natural resource management on-ground incentive projects in the Namoi Catchment**

Funding of Schedule 1.4 was allocated, and the details of the scheduled and the implementation methodology appeared to be a good way to invest Namoi CMA funding. The targets came from the Namoi CMA. These were identified in the Investment Plan of Namoi 03/04. Mutual benefit was established and investment from both organisations maximised returns.

The roll-out of on-ground incentives by the Cotton CRC meant that:

- it could add additional grower requirements to the incentive monies that the Namoi CMA couldn’t i.e. had to be involved in the BMP program (Schedule 1.2), and
- the CRC was able to have a full integration of research from its development to extension to finally its adoption on ground.

This demonstrated ability for on-ground change was not considered a previous core requirement of the Cotton CRC, though it was something it wanted to do.

**Schedule 1.5  Advancing water management in NSW**

Specific change in understanding, attitude and management practices was measured throughout.

The water use efficiency program was oversubscribed, whereas revegetation projects needed proactive engagement to meet its targets. Prior to the advent of technology such as BT cotton, agronomists were predominantly focussed on insect monitoring and management. Now they have the opportunity to expand their businesses and become involved in a range of other resource management issues as well.

The Schedules finish June 09 based on existing funding. The partner organisations are currently renegotiating, however the potential for future work is restricted by funding availability within both organisations.

**Expand the range of delivery methods**

The partnership has expanded the range of delivery methods open to the CMA by now being able to use the Cotton CRC delivery methods as well as its own. These other methods include established information delivery channels, the BMP program, by tapping into other cotton projects and the National Extension Team to bring relevant additional resources or information products to the Namoi.
As well as expanding the range of delivery methods, both organisations also have access to each other’s resources. The Cotton CRC staff now have access to the Namoi CMA’s NRM knowledge and support and the Namoi CMA has access to the Cotton CRC’s researchers, extension specialists, growers, consultants and relevant programs. The partnership has given the Namoi CMA more exposure and it has come from a source that is credible with growers.

A comment was made by a participant to the workshop at the Namoi CMA office in Gunnedah that the partnership made it easier to better engage and involve stakeholders. The partnership gave better exposure to each other. It raised the profile of the environmental aspects of the catchment management program within the Cotton CRC and the Namoi CMA became more industry sympathetic. As a result the Namoi CMA was gaining recognition in the catchment and both organisations now had access to each other’s stakeholders and networks.

Maximise reach and impact

The value adding of the partnership was most significant in the form of maximising the reach and impact of Namoi CMA’s influence. There was general agreement among senior managers at the CMA and the CRC to whom we spoke that the partnership has enabled the CMA to engage with the cotton growers, and would not have been able to achieve the extent of this engagement without the CRC. The partnership has given the CMA credibility among cotton growers it could not have achieved without the partnership.

Comments were made by those involved in the partnership and interacting with the cotton growers that they do not believe the CMA could have implemented best management practices, information programs, incentive funds, or water use efficiency programs without the one on one extension work of the CRC (paid by the Partnership). The reach was a significant component of value adding as the CMA did not have networks existing with the cotton growers, and it is unlikely there are other regionally based organisations that had those networks either. In addition, not only is the CMA gaining access to cotton growers and to the cotton industry but the CRC is getting its environmental message across and getting access to conservation organisations.

The growers have little knowledge of the partnership but seem to be aware that the project officer is somehow closely associated with the CMA. The lack of branding of the partnership may have improved the reach and ultimately the impact of the partnership, as it was felt that initially the cotton growers would have had some trepidation about engaging with the CMA.

With regard to the impact, the CRC had a base of information and research that was valuable for the cotton growers. This was incorporated into the programs as previously mentioned, which increased the value to the CMA in terms of the scope of their projects influence, and the landholders in terms of the integrated natural resource management issues with other on farm issues.

The comment was made by a project officer that she could see the gradual increases in growers being more comfortable about taking on environmental issues and she was clear that this was largely because the environmental message was coming from the Cotton CRC rather than the CMA. This comment is supported by what the landholders themselves imply. Through their interviews, they stated that the CMA is a valuable source of information and important to their future.

Increase the scope of target audience

As mentioned above, the target audience had limited access to the technical support and information in order to employ best management practice regarding natural resources on their
individual properties. The partnership has increased this opportunity and introduced them to facilitators and project officers who present the concepts in ways that they are comfortable with.

**Improve the value to stakeholder base**

Similarly, the value to the landholder stakeholders is that they have greater access to information on how to manage their natural resources. The comments through interview in this regard have been positive and the information has been well accepted.

**Impact on risk to organisation and stakeholders**

The focus of the partnership was to improve the natural resource management in the cotton sector such as biodiversity, riparian vegetation management, water efficiency and *et cetera*. It was recognised that the objective was not to return the water efficiency improvements to the environment, but rather the water savings are retained by the landholders who could then increase production – as it is land, not water, that is the limited factor. This clearly has socio-economic benefits for the community, but may also have environmental impacts. In particular, it was mentioned that this could affect the ground water systems, an issue that both Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC are monitoring and researching further. The perception of this potential perverse outcome could create a risk to the perceptions of both organisations.

**Stakeholder engagement and involvement**

Stakeholders were engaged through the BMP workshops and through various events hosted by the Namoi CMA, the Cotton CRC, the Department of Primary Industries or other organisations. Mention was also made farmers and others attending meetings and forums.

**Remain attractive to stakeholders to achieving outcomes**

The partnership has been attractive to both organisations on several counts. Some have already been listed. The partnership has been cost effective with regard to access to new information because of the Cotton CRC’s ability to use PhD and other students. This has extended the funds of the Namoi CMA because to find this information themselves would have cost much more. All relevant information is freely available to both organisations.

As already mentioned, the structure of the financial systems of the Cotton CRC has allowed the Namoi CMA to disperse funds in practical timeframes to useful projects with the help of the Cotton CRC. The scrutiny of both organisations with regard to projects ensures that each project has to be of value to both parties in the partnership and spreads the risk of inappropriate projects.

The point was made by a project officer that the BMP goals could not have been achieved if the Namoi CMA did not step in and obtain materials such as aerial property maps. This project officer works together with Namoi CMA deliverers at workshops and field days. She stated that this helps to break down the negative perception that growers have about the Namoi CMA if they see the staff working together and being respectful of each other. This project officer feels that her relationship with the growers is now strong enough that she can ask them to help with environmental monitoring and they do it willingly.

A senior Manager of the Cotton CRC made the point that the partnership is very effective at achieving the Cotton CRC goals and the Namoi CMA requirements through the combined funds for research and development, education and practice change. The on-farm best practices application
provides the opportunity for growers to showcase appropriate resource management, to build better recognition of this in their communities.

**Comparative advantage of partner relative to other organisations**

The general consensus among the individuals who made comment to this review was that while partnerships can be difficult, this is not the case here even though several challenges were faced. However, the Namoi CMA would like to make some changes to the structure and expectations of the agreement that are largely to do with funding.

A comparison was made about how the Cotton CRC works with other CMAs but the feeling was that, although others were effective, none works as well as the partnership with the Namoi CMA and again it was to do with the distribution of funding. It seems that the efforts involved in working closely in order to work out how funding would be distributed and accounted for, commissioning and managing projects has lifted the capacity of the Cotton CRC to manage the process and the ability of the Namoi CMA to distribute the funds.

**Cost Effective Analysis of Partnership**

A cost effective analysis of the partnership considers the method used relative to alternatives, such as direct methods of implementation. The objective is to compare the opportunity cost (i.e. what is the next best alternative) of using partnerships in terms of achieving outcomes. The following considerations are drawn from the literature:

- What are the costs of partnerships to achieving the outcomes (including transaction costs, such as bargaining, negotiations, etc)?
- How well have partnerships achieved those outcomes? (i.e. benefits/effects)
- What alternative methods are there for achieving those outcomes?
- What are the costs of those alternative methods to achieve those outcomes?
- What are the potential benefits/effects of those alternative methods?
- Which method can most effectively and efficiently achieve the outcomes desired?

**Costs and Outcomes of Partnership with Cotton CRC**

The cost of the partnership is $2.4million over its lifetime. This includes hiring two full time equivalent staff as part of best management practice and irrigation practice engagement. In addition there are program-orientated costs (i.e. incentive funds, information provision, etc). However, the costs associated with implementing the program – the two staff members – by and large is considered relatively low for the nature of this program.

However, there are management costs that have been borne by both organisations in terms of using resources and staff to manage the partnership. This was substantial in the initial bargaining, negotiations and in particular defining the schedules that would guide the partnership. The search and information costs associated with finding partners in this case were not prohibitive or substantial in this case, as one of the key members of the Namoi CMA that drove the initial phases had in fact been on the advisory board of the Cotton CRC.

While the costs associated with the schedules were substantial due to the negotiations required, this actually had the contradictory outcome of promoting motivation and improving attitudes to one and other. The adversity that the middle-management staff went through during this tough process increased the drive to succeed due to the professional reputation for the staff being on the line. This
strengthened their relationship as individuals as well as at the organisational level, creating a lot of trust. Anecdotally, respondents from both organisations have noted that this led to improved outcomes for the partnership in the longer term. Moreover, ongoing maintenance of the partnership, such as reporting, has also required time and resources to be invested by both partners, though this has been relatively small considering the strong relationship forged between the individuals of the organisation. While the costs are over and above the $2.4million allocated and the in-kind contribution of the Cotton CRC, this needs to be considered in the context of the outcomes achieve. This has been identified above, and is summarised as follows:

- Ability to expand capacity of existing methodologies (i.e. appropriateness of products and services offered by Namoi CMA)
- Ability to expand the range of delivery methods used by Namoi CMA (i.e. appropriateness of new products and services)
- Maximising reach and impact (i.e. improving efficiency of existing resources and leveraging resources)
- Increasing scope of target audience (i.e. effectiveness in reaching Cotton industry)
- Improving value to stakeholder base (i.e. efficiency and value adding to landholders through integrated approaches of cotton practices to include NRM)
- Achieve cost effective on ground outcomes across a large diverse area (See below for example on water use efficiency)
- Develop and enhance relationships with the communities
- Ability to identify priorities at grass roots level
- Able to better identify and capitalise on funding opportunities
- Provide a conduit for development of a voice for community
- Dedicate resources on a whole of region basis
- Marketing, communication and other expertise

All of these factors have been a positive gain for both organisations. However, it can be difficult to quantify all of these outcomes and contrast them quantitatively with alternative methods of delivery. At the outcome level, the following data exists:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Area</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Outcomes Achieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native vegetation conserved</td>
<td>365 ha</td>
<td>440 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native vegetation enhanced</td>
<td>33 ha</td>
<td>540 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian in stream structures</td>
<td>6 structures</td>
<td>12 structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian re-vegetated</td>
<td>10 km (1 side)</td>
<td>16.6 km (1 side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian areas conserved</td>
<td>40 km (1 side)</td>
<td>65.4 km (1 side)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigated land farmed sustainably (WUE and salinity)</td>
<td>2520 ha</td>
<td>5111 ha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water use efficiency improvements</td>
<td>15% WUE improvement</td>
<td>15% WUE improvement over 8464ha, equating to 4733ML</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Outcomes of Partnership

There are several caveats we should consider. Firstly, the above table reflects the outcomes of the partnership in terms of natural resource management. The cost effective analysis relies on outcomes, not outputs (i.e. x number of best management practices or whole farm plans) nor impacts (i.e. x number of species protected or $x of socioeconomic benefits from water use efficiency improved).
Secondly, the outcomes cannot be disaggregated according to the individual schedules, even though much of the funding for achieving these outcomes came from the on-ground incentives. This is because the schedules are interrelated and interdependent. Prior to receiving on-ground incentive funds, whole farm plans related to best management practices were required.

Therefore, the costs associated with achieving the outcomes are the combined costs of the partnership including the cash and in-kind contributions from both Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC. This evaluation is a reflection of Namoi CMA’s investments however, and the added contributions are considered the benefits of leveraging from the partnership.

We shall consider the alternative methods to partnering with the Cotton CRC, specifically direct intervention by Namoi CMA or alternative partners. This will be followed by a quantitative cost effective analysis of comparing the cost of achieving outcomes with the next best alternatives (where data is available).

**Alternative Methods to Partnering with Cotton CRC (Direct Intervention)**

During the workshop with Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC staff, the question was asked about what alternatives exist for achieving the desired outcomes as identified in the schedules. It was noted that few if any alternatives exist, and in particular, it is unlikely that any alternative would be as effective or efficient as the existing partnership.

An alternative was to consider other partner organisations within the cotton industry in the Namoi catchment. One could reasonably argue that it would be possible for Namoi CMA to seek these outcomes from different industries; however with the range of other programs in the catchment the objective for this funding was specifically to target the socio-economic important cotton industry where there was scope and potential for adopting better NRM related management practices.

The Cotton CRC is the main industry body within the region that has some degree of mutual objectives. Specifically, the Cotton CRC now includes ‘catchment’ and ‘communities’, which reflects well on Namoi CMA’s objectives. The alternatives from an industry perspective include three grower groups in the region, however these are volunteer-based and do not have a well formed management structure. This would make it more difficult to achieve the type of outcomes that Namoi CMA was seeking. Moreover, with three organisations there would be significantly higher transaction costs for Namoi CMA in maintaining the partnership. Finally, the grower groups did not have existing capacity and capabilities – that is, were not “investment ready” – and thus would have taken significant amount of effort to prepare the organisations for Namoi CMA’s needs.

There are other industry bodies. However these either operate at a higher level (i.e. Australia wide) without representation in the region, or do not incorporate natural resource management within their objective. Therefore, from Namoi CMA’s perspective, the alternative would be to not partner and directly deliver the programs internally.

From the Cotton CRC’s perspective, the next best alternative partner would be the New South Wales’ Department of Primary Industries. However, the Department is not a strong funding source for the Cotton CRC and does not have a core focus on natural resource management like Namoi CMA. It should however be noted that the Cotton CRC had many partners prior to Namoi CMA, and this program did not reduce their ability to partner with other organisations but in fact was in addition. While Namoi CMA had funding constraints, Cotton CRC was investment ready and thus the ‘alternative’ was not to partner with Namoi CMA.
Therefore, the next best alternative is direct implementation by Namoi CMA. This would most likely involve Namoi CMA recruiting cotton specific engagement personnel, as well as incorporating cotton specific objectives into existing Namoi CMA staff. The strengths of direct methods are:

- Fewer transaction costs (i.e., no search, negotiation, bargaining, information, communication, etc.
costs)
- Immediate alignment of objectives without the need for consideration of mutual interests

In addition, Namoi CMA would need to pay for other infrastructure costs, such as cars, administrative, managers, etc. The belief of respondents is that it would be possible to recruit more personnel, though it is likely that the ongoing management and other associated costs would be greater than the start-up costs of the partnership.

More significant than the cost of implementing the programs however are the benefits that could be achieved. The Cotton CRC had existing networks with the cotton growers and was considered investment ready in terms of the capacity and capability to implement the program. Namoi CMA did not have the contacts with the cotton growers, and it is believed would find it very difficult to engage with the target stakeholders. Therefore, the belief is that the outcomes would not have been achievable without the partnership of the Cotton CRC, and in particular, it would not have been possible to have achieved the outcomes within the same timeframe. Nor would it have been possible to allocate and disburse of the funds in such a rapid manner, an objective of Namoi CMA to meet its targets and budgetary requirements.

At this stage the costs of the partnership are not great and the objectives that govern the activities relevant to the partnership with the Cotton CRC align without much negotiation. The reality of the funding cycles and opportunities however affect the ongoing ability of the Namoi CMA to fund the current level of activity. The data suggests that the partnership is achieving the intended outcomes which would have been a lot more difficult to achieve had the Namoi CMA tried to without the help of the Cotton CRC. Therefore, on a cost effectiveness analysis, the partnership at this stage seems to be the better option than any direct methods.

Comparing Costs of Achieving Outcomes

This section aims to compare the costs associated with achieving outcomes in the partnership with the next best alternative. Data is restricted in terms of cost per unit of outcome for the partnership and for the next best alternative.

Progress reports on the partnership have been used to identify outcomes achieved. The cost per unit of outcome have been calculated based on the on-ground incentives paid per investment area plus a pro-rata costing of other costs associated with the partnership. Specifically, this refers to the costs associated with building NRM capacity, supporting the adoption of BMP and information related costs.

The next best alternative has been identified as direct investment by Namoi CMA in achieving the desired outcomes in the investment area. The costs have been calculated based on the current costs for direct investments by Namoi CMA based on the 2006-09 Investment Plan. It is acknowledged that there are limitations to the accuracy of these figures, particularly due to the costs of engaging cotton growers would be more expensive than others due to there being no established networks, and because irrigation costs may differ from dryland croppers or alternative landholders.
However, the cost effective analysis provides a useful benchmark for comparing the cost of the partnership to Namoi CMA – not the entire cost of delivering the program – and highlights the benefits of leveraging from the Cotton CRC. The table below provides a summary of the cost effective analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Area</th>
<th>Outcomes Achieved</th>
<th>Namoi CMA Partnership Cost&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Namoi CMA Direct Costs&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native vegetation conserved</td>
<td>440 ha</td>
<td>$69,536</td>
<td>$359,333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native vegetation enhanced</td>
<td>540 ha</td>
<td>$86,920</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian in stream structures</td>
<td>12 structures</td>
<td>$182,532</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian re-vegetated</td>
<td>16.6 km (1 side)</td>
<td>$278,144</td>
<td>$476,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riparian areas conserved</td>
<td>65.4 km (1 side)</td>
<td>$304,220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrigated land farmed sustainably (WUE and salinity)</td>
<td>5111 ha</td>
<td>$438,946</td>
<td>$928,764&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water use efficiency improvements</td>
<td>15% WUE improvement over 8464ha, equating to 4733ML</td>
<td>$1,039,884</td>
<td>Unknown ($8,637,725 on open water markets&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Cost of Outcomes

**Cost Effectiveness Comparisons**

It can be seen that native vegetation conservation and improvement has been achieved at a substantially lower price relative to direct investments by Namoi CMA. This is a reflection of the established networks of the Cotton CRC and ability to leverage funds and relationships from the cotton growers to implement better practices.

The leveraging achieved in this partnership is quite substantial. Across the five schedules, Namoi CMA contributed $2.4m in cash and in-kind contributions – not including the management and transaction costs. This was supported through cash and in-kind contributions of Cotton CRC to the

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1 The partnership costs are related to the financial outlays of Namoi CMA and exclude the leveraging benefits from the Cotton CRC and partners. The figures for the outcomes relate to Namoi CMA’s contribution to the on-ground incentive funds provided, with remaining partnership costs (c.42%) such as best management practice, capacity building and information collation being apportioned on a pro-rata basis. Pro-rata basis is defined as per unit dollar of incentive funds, such that for every $1 provided as an incentive an extra $0.73c is allocated for “support” costs. It is acknowledged that the costs are only approximates and are only estimates at best.

2 Direct implementation costs are related to the actual costs allocated and expended by Namoi CMA in achieving related catchment targets, as per the 2006-9 Investment Strategy, table 2.2, table 2.3, and table 2.4. The costs associated are pro-rated on an outcome basis to calculate the cost per unit of outcome, multiplied by the units achieved within the partnership. It is acknowledged that the costs are only approximates and are only estimates at best.

3 This figure is based on irrigated cropping, dryland cropping and perennial pastures. There may be some cost differentials, though this is believed to be a conservative estimate.

4 Current price of water is $1,825 per ML for March quarter 2008/09 ([www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au)). However, it is worth noting that only 40ML of water traded in that period, well short of the desired amount of water. Moreover, the price would be expected to fluctuate, and in fact increase substantially if a request for 4733ML was put in to the water markets due to the ‘thin’ amount of trades.
value of approximately $1.5m. The net leveraging rate was therefore 60%, or for every $1 invested by Namoi CMA a total of $1.60 was invested in achieving the outcomes.

With regards to riparian related outcomes, it is not known what the cost of in-stream structures would be to Namoi CMA directly. However, it can be stated that Namoi CMA would be able to achieve riparian revegetation and conservation areas more cost effectively through their established arrangements. Information was collected in terms of riparian vegetation condition assessments, and relatively higher contributions by the Namoi CMA were required for on-ground incentives for the revegetation and conservation. This is likely to be due to the cost of action and the few private benefits to cotton growers, while Namoi CMA seems better equipped to more cheaply implement riparian works using their networks, skills and resources.

However, the benefits noted in terms of kilometres of riparian affected does not incorporate the benefits of awareness and action by landholders nor the potential cost savings in not needing to maintain those areas. Therefore, it is likely a holistic cost effective analysis with a long term perspective may not have the same result.

Irrigated land farmed sustainably aligns with the Namoi CMA landscape management target. It can be seen that operating through a partner such as the Cotton CRC – which also has other partners it relies upon – is more cost effective than Namoi CMA in this instance. This once again highlights the added benefit of leveraging and relying upon established networks.

**Water Use Efficiency Case Study**

Water use efficiency and achieving water savings provides an interesting case study, as there are significant socio-economic equity considerations in terms of what the water is used for and how savings are generated. The partnership was able to achieve 4,733ML water savings at a total cost to Namoi CMA of $1.04m. This is a cost of $219 per ML to Namoi CMA, and a total cost for the partnership including all contributions of approximately $351 per ML. This is substantially less than the $1,825 per ML on the open water markets, the next best alternative for cotton growers or Namoi CMA in terms of buying/selling water rights. Moreover, the open market is considered ‘thin’ in terms of limited water availability, and it is unlikely the quantity of water could be purchased without significantly distorting the market and driving up the price for water.

However, the water savings in the water use efficiency schedule in this instance are retained by the cotton growers. That is, the water rights are retained by the cotton growers and are expected to be used in expanding land under irrigation for cotton production (or other mixed cropping). Therefore, it is expected that the cost to Namoi CMA and the partnership ought to be substantially less than the market rates, as there are significant private benefits to the cotton grower. The public benefits of such a program are limited to less drainage in to groundwater systems for example, and socio-economic benefits to the regional economy through a more productive and profitable agribusiness sector. The Roy Powell and Linden Chalmers (2008) report highlights the socio-economic influence of the cotton industry.

In comparison, if water rights were purchased by Namoi CMA from the open water markets for example, this would reduce the productive capacity of the region. This may have natural resource management benefits through less land under cultivation (i.e. less fertiliser use, aerial spraying, etc). However, it would also reduce the socio-economic capacity of the region by removing natural assets. The priority of the environmental impacts relative to the social and economic impacts is a debate that is currently being undertaken by State and Federal Governments and is outside the scope of this review.
Regardless of the beneficiary of the water savings, what is interesting is that the cost of water use efficiency is considerably cheaper than alternatives. Generally, the cost of water use efficiency improvements on farm or through water supply mechanisms approximate the open market price for water – as an efficient market should operate.

Using Victoria as an example, channel automation and other infrastructure upgrades have yielded water efficiency improvements at approximately $2,000 per ML (Roberts Evaluation, 2009b). The Food Bowl Modernisation Project for example divides irrigation efficiency upgrade water into thirds between Melbourne, irrigators and the environment. This initially cost around $1,600 per ML, though has increased to $2,000-$2,500 per ML as upgrades become more difficult to achieve. This is comparable with Victorian water market prices of $1,700 to $2,500 in the Murray, Goulburn and Macalister regions (Roberts Evaluation, 2009b).

The comparison with infrastructure upgrades is more accurate than water markets for the purpose of Namoi CMA, Cotton CRC and the partnership. Infrastructure upgrades and on-farm upgrades increases the investment in water as an asset, and lead to more efficient productivity and ultimately profitability improvements. Rather than reducing the natural and physical assets of a community, the investments seek to increase the carrying capacity of an industry and improve its sustainability. However, the difference is that on-farm upgrades have private benefits which ought to be funded through grower contributions – as undertaken through direct and in-kind contributions by cotton growers in these schedules.

Finally it is worthwhile mentioning that not all comparable options have the same cost associated with implementing the models (i.e. transaction costs). While this has not been factored in to the cost effective analysis – only the cost of water is considered - it is worth noting that the partnership is expected to have the greatest transaction costs in terms of staff resources and the financial cost of conducting the program. This is likely to be similar to the Food Bowl Modernisation Project’s overhead, though this has already been factored in to the cost per ML. Finally, purchasing water rights off the open market is a relatively simple process, though as noted this has social and equity implications.

Perceptions of the Partnership

Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC staff

The views of these two groups have been combined because staff from both organisations were in a workshop together and were largely interviewed together.

Some of the unexpected benefits of the partnership as stated by a Namoi CMA manager were:

- Not expected to have such a good ally and the partnership is held up as a good example.
- Increased contact with other organisations through the Cotton CRC e.g. Namoi Water; through Namoi CMA e.g. Greening Australia.
- Use as model for other partnerships
- Confidence now with forming other partnerships
- Learned about designing partnerships and how to change others

Comments from the Cotton CRC about unexpected benefits were that the partners were flexible and able to adapt with each other largely because there were good interpersonal relationships at all

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levels of the partnership. In addition, the Cotton CRC had an ability to vary how they deliver and achieve outcomes when needed and this flexibility allowed the Namoi CMA to disperse funds to useful projects.

The Cotton CRC has been able to showcases benefits of NRM to industry and through the partnership it now has more NRM partners like Greening Australia. The partnership has highlighted how a really good partnership works and shows up where others do not work well. The Namoi CMA partnership will be used as example for Cotton CRC’s reporting (i.e. a pilot, champion).

**Landholders**

We had in mind to interview landholders who had been involved with the adoption of the cotton industry’s best management practice guidelines either through a BMP workshop or by using the manual without this help of a workshop. Forty five landholders were in this category and of these 14 gave permission for us to call them and a further 14 were available in that they had not said ‘no’. Only nine of the twenty eight landholders could be interviewed in the time allowed. They were difficult to reach because they were in the paddock from early in the day until late and out of range of contact through mobile phone.

All of the landholders contacted for this review were from mixed farming operations having both dryland and irrigated crops. Views of the Cotton CRC were varied amongst landholders (not all grew cotton) although 6/9 felt that the research results were relevant and valuable. Others did not grow cotton but had been part of the BMP workshops.

All nine landholders interviewed knew something about the Namoi CMA and all felt that it was relevant to what they were doing. Only three, particularly the ones who are growing cotton, knew about the partnership. Eight of the nine landholders have been involved in BMP workshops at some stage and spoke about them very positively. Comments were made by nearly all landholders about how beneficial the back up and support was from field officers who came and helped with the implementation. Adoption and implementation of BMP was occurring for all nine landholders and thought to be occurring for the majority of landholders’ neighbours.

Suggestions for modifications to the BMP NRM module centred on the need for a greater focus on improved native species in the area and more research being required into soil and water health and their relationships. NRM grants and incentives had been used by landholders in this review on farm over several years.

Incentives and grants were used for:

- Fencing off river banks to improve bank stability, reduce erosion, revegetation, etc
- Fencing off of dams and implementing pipe works to improve water quality, stock health and reduce traffic and land degradation on the river bank
- Implementation of contour like banks and planting of saltbush for alternative stock feed
- Fencing off of remnant vegetation for enhancing biodiversity and trees on farm and improve productive grazing areas on farm
- Tree planting for increased stock protection and biodiversity
- Improved water use efficiency for production and the environment

Comments in relation to Catchment officers were very positive. Landholders also preferred communicating with the one officer and building a relationship with them – particularly the older style operators.
All landholder respondents stated that their involvement with the Cotton CRC and the Namoi CMA had been valuable. It had opened their minds, given them access to resources and increased their networks. A telling comment was:

*I now tell my wife about the CMA meetings in town and she loves coming to them with me - it is great that she can understand and is interested in what is happening. It has brought the community together as a group in many ways to really focus on local issues - please continue to do this.*

**Implementing and Managing the Relationship**

What we found with regard to managing the implementation and managing the relationship was that there were three clear levels at which the partnership operated. These were at the level of:

- CEO/General manager
- Senior and middle management
- Project officer/implementation staff

There were clear expectations and roles for each level even if these were not written. At the highest level, individuals were expected to support and give consent for the partnership. The middle levels of management are where the work goes into setting up and maintaining the partnership and at the implementation level, officers are expected to implement the activities of the partnership. Participants to this review provided clues as to what made this partnership successful by what they mentioned worked well. For example, all participants to the review spoke candidly of the partnership and the individuals involved and these remarks were always positive. This is a testament to the individuals involved in the partnership who have worked hard to develop goodwill. Also, if issues occur that affect the partnership they are resolved quickly. The relationship is open and trusting and mention was made on several occasions that there is a lot of goodwill among individuals on which they can rely.

The partnership agreement also incorporates the following components which are useful for managing the partnership:

- Cash and non-cash contributions. The non-cash contribution comes in the form of sharing office space and equipment, sharing networks and providing positive introductions, supporting each other at events and gaining access to restricted materials such as aerial maps.
- Specified personnel. Personnel at both the Namoi CMA and the Cotton CRC have roles that are specific to supporting the partnership.
- Provision of information to and by the organisations. Information that is created by either partner or to which either partner has access is made freely available.
- Intellectual property rights. These are defined in the Umbrella Agreement.
- Allocation of risk. Risk is shared by the partners by having a sound system that disperses funds to good projects, carries out relevant research and manages staff.
- Conflict resolution. Conflict or issues that could cause conflict are resolved quickly.

All these aspects are covered in the information below although not in this order. For example, implementing and managing a partnership involves the management of relationships between individuals which brings up the question of power. When Cotton CRC and Namoi CMA relevant staff were asked at the workshop and later through interview, if power was shared equally they all commented that it was. They all spoke very positively about the relationships within the partnership. Staff feel comfortable about going into each other’s office space. For example, the
comment was made by the project officer that even though she is not an employee of the Namoi CMA (only paid by them) she feels very comfortable about using Namoi CMA resources. The staff are welcoming, she said.

Comments about improvements to the partnership included: tightening the monitoring and evaluation systems, looking at a contribution of funds from both organisations, focussing on intermediate outcomes, looking at the possibility of a less formal arrangement than currently exists, and identifying and reconfirming or modifying what each wants out of the partnership.

When asked how an outsider would view the partnership, all replied that an outsider would not be aware of the partnership. It has not been particularly promoted. However, they stated that if they did know, some may be sceptical about why it was created but would see that it is working well.

The partnership is used as a success story to highlight what an effective partnership looks like although one person commented that the partnership is at a point where it needs to be reinvigorated but without too much change. A lot of trust has been developed between the two organisations and it may be an opportune time to make the partnership agreement less formal.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations: Best design for this partnership

What is valuable about the design of the partnership with the Cotton CRC is:

- The detail of the requirements in Schedule 1
- The relationship and goodwill between the partner members from the highest level of CEO to the operative level of implementation officers
- Each level had roles and responsibilities that while not written or defined, could be described and measured
- The partnership was appropriate in that objectives and plans overlapped
- The partnership was effective and efficient in that the objectives of both organisations could be met with less resources and effort. Much was achieved against each of the sub programs in Schedule 1. For example:
  - 1.1. NRM capacity was built in the landholders contacted for this review (9 of the 45 possible) and many others have been made aware of NRM issue by attending field days and other events where members of both organisations delivered together.
  - 1.2. The NRM module of the cotton BMP manual was delivered to 45 growers
  - 1.3 delivered much needed research for the Namoi CMA and delivered much need funds for research to the Cotton CRC
  - 1.4. Funds were dispersed to carry out on-ground works through projects of great value to both organisations
  - 1.5. Work on water use efficiency begins with the BMP module and ends with growers carrying out their own measurements and evaluations.

There are some changes that influenced both organisations that will have an effect on the partnership. With regard to the Namoi CMA, it is that funding from the Commonwealth Government has been reduced by 40% and this will in turn decrease the funds available to the partnership. The effect of fewer funds may mean that the relationship between the two partners will become more even where funds are concerned. With regard to the Cotton CRC, its members are now much more aware of environmental issues. There are still benefits to be gained from industry and management bodies delivering the same NRM messages to growers, as well as having one point of contact for growers in regards to NRM issues.
SECTION IV – APPENDICES

References


Namoi Catchment Management Authority (2007b). *Partnership Policy*. Tamworth, NSW.
Namoi CMA (n.d.). *Cotton Catchment Communities CRC and Namoi CMA Partnership Outcomes.* Gunnedah: Namoi CMA.


Literature Review: The Use of Partnerships in Natural Resource Management

Within the natural resource management sector in Australia, the activities of each regional body are undertaken within a partnership agreement that has been established with both the Australian government and the relevant state or territory government. The formation of these overarching partnership agreements in the sector are importantly linked to the formal release of investment funds. As such, these partnership agreements define:

- “Funding amounts for salinity and water quality actions identified in the investment strategy
- Responsibilities for undertaking the activities
- Cost-sharing arrangements
- Agreed outcomes to be achieved
- Performance measures, targets and milestones
- Monitoring and evaluation processes” (Australian Government 2008).

It is widely accepted that the action required to address threats to natural assets will necessarily rely upon strong partnerships (Australian Government 2008; Cotton Catchment Communities CRC 2008; Corangamite CMA 2003; Keith, Ross & Gorringe 2006; Namoi CMA n.d.). “The growth in partnerships is also a result of a much wider range of stimuli, including the need to deliver more seamless services, and to provide greater choice for service users, as well as more general improvements in service delivery” (Harlow Council 2005, p.3). For these reasons, partnership arrangements have become increasingly common as organisations seek to respond to the array of complex challenges they face.

Keith, Ross and Gorringe (2006) have identified that in establishing partnerships in the NRM sector, the lessons from the reviews of the Integrated Catchment Management (ICM) process are also pertinent to regional bodies attempting to establish partnerships with multiple stakeholders. This forms the basis of the visions and criteria for partnerships in the partnership strategies. The following is a list of structural and process issues important for successful regional body planning:

- “Agreement on roles of stakeholders and functions of horizontal and vertical linkages
- Sufficient resources to empower collaborative and adaptive governance
- Recognition that stakeholder collaboration is the heart of policy formulation
- Respect for varying ‘ways of thinking’
- Authentic indigenous involvement
- Flexibility to facilitate engagement of different operational styles” (Bellamy et al. 2002 cited in Keith, Ross & Gorringe 2006, p.22).

This is supported by the findings put forward in a report to Namoi CMA on future opportunities for partnerships within the region. Specifically, all partnerships the NAMOI CMA currently held or established in the future would be dependent on a range of factors including:

- Strength of relationships between individuals and groups
- Capacity of other individuals/groups/organisations to partner effectively – namely available expertise and resources
- Previous experience in partnership projects and programs
- Synergies in NRM focus.

Thus effective management of natural resources relies upon a network of actors with a variety of skills and resources (Moynihan 2005). The critical management aspects related to leveraging these networks have been identified as:
• **Activation** – identifying participants and stakeholders, arranging, stabilising, nurturing, and integrating the network structure

• **Framing** – establishing and influencing the operating rules of the network, influencing its values and norms, altering the perceptions of participations

• **Mobilising** – creating a perception of the network as a strategic whole and identifying a common set of objectives; involves mobilizing organizations and coalitions, forging agreement on operations and the role of the network, motivating members and inspiring commitment

• **Synthesising** - creating conditions for favourable, productive interaction among network participants that lowers the cost of interaction; changing incentives, rules, and roles for the purposes of establishing a pattern of relationships that facilitates interaction, enables information exchange, creates cooperation, and minimizes disruption (Agranoff & McGuire in Moynihan 2005, p.7).

There is however, a key difference between networks and partnerships and this has been described as follows:

*Networks operate through links between individuals and shared interests. They are informal arrangements with indistinct boundaries and fluid memberships. Partnerships involve links between organisations and are formally constituted with fixed memberships and clearer boundaries. Networks and partnerships exist alongside each other. Sometimes a network is formalised and becomes a partnership. Often informal networks continue to operate in parallel with partnerships* (McCabe, Lowndes & Skelcher 1997, p. 39).

However in recognising the critical difference between informal networks and formal partnerships, the identification of the core characteristics of successful partnership strategies might still be understood as a framing activity. This is because the focus is on identifying and defining the key operating rules and requirements (including the priorities and values of both the Namoi CMA and potential partner organisations) for successful partnership arrangements. While successful partnerships necessarily rely on a range of factors including the commitment, participation and available resources of each partner, establishing these operating rules can provide a useful framework for understanding and enabling those successes, including identifying where there are opportunities to leverage informal networks into more formal partnership arrangements.

As identified by the study, various groups and organisations have commented on the tendency toward more informal working relationships in the region. However, as these arrangements are not formalised they are consequently viewed as being less stable. The recommendation put to Namoi CMA was that working partnerships should be formalised wherever possible and the formalisation of partnerships may be further reinforced through the Namoi Catchment Action Plan (CAP). As a result, developing a strong partnership strategy is useful in terms of aligning the growth and development of partnership arrangements with the need to deliver against the objectives in the Namoi Blueprint, the Namoi CAP and the Namoi Investment Strategy.

**Literature Review: Case Studies of Best Practice Partnership Strategies**

In considering best practice partnership strategies, a range of examples of different kinds of approaches to partnership undertaken by CMAs in New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria are profiled below. These examples provide evidence of the various ways partnership strategies can be developed in regional NRM. These lessons are summarised in the table below:

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7 The Victorian examples are drawn from a review of NRM partnerships by Keith, Ross and Gorringe (2006).
## Evaluation of Namoi CMA and Cotton CRC Partnership

**Prepared for Namoi CMA**  
*July 2009*

### Ways of leveraging off partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways of leveraging off partnership</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Potential benefits</th>
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</table>
| **Organising a major regional event such as a conference or workshop series** | Southern Rivers CMA used a regional conference and workshop format to bring potential partners together to share stories and identify opportunities in their region.  
North East CMA adapted this approach through an EOI process to attract submissions from partners, supported by a series of workshops to identify project and partnership opportunities in their region. | Attracting potential partners or project development opportunities that exist outside current networks and enabling cross sectoral partnership opportunities. |
| **Identifying priority activities within the framework of a key regional partnership** | NRM South developed their strong partnership with local government through strategic, on-ground and research projects of relevance. This allowed the partnership to develop and be active at a variety of levels (i.e. regional management & coordination, project implementation and information sharing). | As demonstrated by NRM South this approach can be useful for building partnership at various levels with a key sector (e.g. local government). Strong links at the strategic level might be leveraged into strong levels of activity and commitment at the project level and Namoi CMA might consider whether such an approach would be helpful in addressing geographical disparities in their current partnership activities with local government bodies through regional partnership workshops. |
| **Recognising the value of long term partnerships** | Corangamite CMA recognised the value of Landcare within their region by developing a comprehensive and systematic support strategy around that partnership with a view to enhancing long term performance. | Long term commitment supports partnerships that are sustainable and can outlast personnel changes or other factors that can destabilise such arrangements. |
| **Using governance arrangements to support partnership** | Goulburn-Broken CMA used the Implementation Committee framework to support on-ground works and facilitate community action.  
North Central CMA identified the use of a Partnership Steering Committee as a valuable way of supporting an agency partnership in their region. | This approach adapts current governance arrangements being used within the Namoi CMA and directs them toward enhancing the Namoi CMA’s Partnership Strategy. |
| **Participation in large scale coalitions and NRM networks** | Glenelg Hopkins joined a partnership of 14 organisations to support sustainability more broadly within their region.  
East and West Gippsland CMAs also joined a large scale coalition to enable and support strategic dialogue. | This approach can be useful where dialogue is limited or with establishing higher level connection between organisations which might be leveraged into formalised partnership arrangements and shared activities. |

**Table 3: Key Learnings from Partnerships in Regional NRM**