



TROPICAL SAVANNAS CRC

Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Savannas Management

Bioregional planning in Australia's savannas

Many community and government resources are now being invested in regional natural resource management, growth management, land-use or conservation plans across the savannas. However, there is no consistent approach for evaluating a plan's capacity to deliver against its targets. A project now under way by the Tropical Savannas CRC, the University of Queensland and the Queensland Department of Natural Resources & Mines will develop that evaluation framework and apply it to a range of regional and bioregional plans across the north.

What makes for good regional planning?

Planning for sustainable resource management in the tropical savannas (pictured right) is increasingly occurring at a regional scale. These Natural Resource Management (NRM) and related plans aim to improve water and soil quality, biodiversity, and landscape health while maintaining and supporting the region's communities and industries.

By assessing the current regional and bioregional plans under development, this new CRC project will help ensure that these plans meet targets set by the community and government. The project will assess both individual plans as well as bioregional planning in northern Australia overall.

Developing the evaluation framework

First a framework to evaluate NRM and related plans needs to be developed. To do this the project will:

- Identify core issues and indicators of savanna health;
- Develop criteria to evaluate natural resource management plans;
- Establish standard methods for evaluating the plans; and
- Use the ISO 14000 Standard (the international standard for Environmental Management Systems) to assess regional plan development.

Benefits

Once these evaluation tools and assessments have been developed they can be used by the regional planning organisations to support and inform their own evaluation requirements and processes.

Study areas

When the evaluation framework is ready, it will be applied to current regional NRM and related plans across the savannas.



■ Australia's tropical savannas

The focus bioregions are:

Queensland: • Fitzroy • Burdekin • Mackay • Desert Uplands • Cape York • northern and southern Gulf • Lake Eyre

Northern Territory: • Darwin • Katherine • Ti Tree • Alice Springs

Western Australia: • Ord-Bonaparte • Kimberley

Who is involved in the project

The project team will work with regional planning organisations, ranging from community-based catchment organisations to state government statutory planning initiatives.

The project is funded through the Tropical Savannas CRC, with researchers based at the University of Queensland and the Queensland Department of Natural Resources & Mines.

Contact: Project Leader, Prof. Geoff McDonald
Department of Geographical Sciences & Planning
University of Queensland, St Lucia Qld 4072
Tel: (07) 3365 6536
Email: g.mcdonald@uq.edu.au

MISSION
To achieve sustainable use and conservation of Australia's tropical savannas through excellence in collaborative research, communication and education

CONTACT
Chief Executive Officer,
Tropical Savannas CRC
Northern Territory University
Darwin NT 0909
Tel: (08) 8946 6834
Fax: (08) 8946 7107
Email: savanna@ntu.edu.au

Townsville Office
Tropical Savannas CRC
James Cook University
Townsville Qld 4811
Tel: (07) 4781 5967
Fax: (07) 4781 5515
Email: crcsavanna@jcu.edu.au

Visit us online at savanna.ntu.edu.au





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Improving vegetation and water resource planning

Vegetation and water resource planning for Queensland's Fitzroy and Burdekin regions is currently under way, and it is the communities in those regions that are helping to develop and implement those plans. A new Tropical Savannas CRC project aims to evaluate and improve the processes supporting community involvement in this government-based regional planning.

Both the Fitzroy (144,000 km²) and the Burdekin (140,000 km²) basins have large areas of semi-arid rangelands with nodes of intensive irrigated cropping. Recent conflicts in both regions over resource allocation and management have meant a more community-based approach to resource management is now being explored.

Integrated regional planning: out of the too-hard-basket

Both the community and industry are heavily involved in both developing and implementing these processes. Community groups are also trying to engage government in community-driven regional Natural Resource Management planning processes such as those presented by the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

Planning for regional vegetation and water management

By evaluating the processes used to develop regional vegetation and water management plans (such as stakeholder participation, negotiation, use of Natural Resource Management information) the project hopes to identify opportunities that will better integrate statutory planning with community-based regional NRM planning initiatives.

The project aims to develop models that incorporate improved processes for community participation in vegetation and water management planning. It will also lead to greater understanding of how this form of resource use planning can be integrated with other regional planning processes. The study will look to influence policy development in this area and support the development of planning and evaluation tools by stakeholders and government agencies.

Project overview

The project will observe planning processes in action, assess process techniques and the roles played by various community and government groups. The project team will 'check-in' with participants at the outset and 'check-out' towards the end of the project.

On both occasions participants will be asked to share their perspectives on their involvement in the planning processes, expectations, and their thoughts on what needs to be improved and on integrating the range of regional planning.

Participant feedback together with a critical analysis of the planning approach will be used to evaluate regional planning processes in both catchments.

Who is involved

The project is funded through the Tropical Savannas Management Cooperative Research Centre with the project team based at the University of Qld and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines.

The project team will work with the regional planning organisations responsible for plan development. These range from community-based catchment organisations to state government statutory planning initiatives.

Contact: Project Leader
Pat Lyons
Department of Natural Resources and Mines
Phone: (07) 4987 9303
Email: Pat.Lyons@dnr.qld.gov.au

Project Manager: Bruce Taylor
Tropical Savannas CRC
Phone: (07) 3896 3473
Email: Bruce.Taylor@dnr.qld.gov.au

- CRC PARTNER
- ORGANISATIONS
- CSIRO
- Land & Water
- Sustainable Ecosystems
- Dept. Agriculture WA
- Dept. Conservation WA
- Director of National Parks
- James Cook University
- Meat and Livestock Australia
- North Australia Beef Research Council
- North Australia Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance
- NT Primary Industry & Fisheries
- NT Dept of Lands Planning & Environment
- Northern Territory University
- Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT
- Qld Dept Natural Resources & Mines
- Qld Dept Primary Industries
- Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service
- University of Queensland

