



Submission on: Queensland Plan

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Introduction

SEQ Catchments is a natural resource management organisation, which works with the community, the corporate sector and all levels of Government to ensure the long term sustainability of our natural assets in South East Queensland. The importance of these assets to the region's economy and social stability is well documented and increasingly understood¹.

SEQ Catchments congratulates the Qld Government on coordinating such an important discussion on the future of the State. The SEQ Region faces unique challenges and opportunities which will form the basis of this submission however much of the discussion will relate to all regions in Qld.

The SEQ Region

Three million residents in South East Queensland depend on the region's natural assets to supply clean water, clean air, fruit, vegetables, meat, fish and other specialty foods, energy, landscape amenity, tourism, healthy flora and fauna, jobs and economic outcomes and abatement for development impacts. The regional population relies heavily on its catchments and the landscapes within South East Queensland to provide these services without diminution. Again, research indicates that the people of South East Queensland do not want to see the environment and liveability of the region to deteriorate any further².

While the region has been modified to the stage where the provision of natural asset services is increasingly challenging, SEQ Catchments understands and supports the need for planned, considered and appropriate development of the region to encourage economic growth. SEQ Catchments believes that continued growth to support the economy while supporting and enhancing the natural assets of the region which underpin it is feasible and certainly desirable.

The SEQ Natural Resource Management Plan

The SEQ NRM Plan articulates measurable targets for the condition and extent of natural assets.

SEQ continues to experience the fastest urban growth rate in Australia. By 2031, the population is expected to reach around four million people—an increase of more than one million people over two decades. The SEQ NRM Plan responds to the challenges of population growth and the accompanying economic pressures.

Developed in partnership with local and state government, Traditional Owners, industry, conservation groups and the research and education sector, the SEQ NRM Plan provides, for the first time, an agreed set of priorities and targets for planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting of NRM activities across the entire SEQ region.

Natural Assets

Natural Assets are the interconnected network of natural areas and other open spaces that provide services or benefits to people.

The term assets are often associated with the key elements of the built environment that support human habitation, such as the road and rail networks, and the electrical and water delivery mechanisms.

Recent work being undertaken worldwide is recognising that these elements of built infrastructure do not work in isolation to support human wellbeing and economic prosperity. The SEQ Ecosystem Services Framework <http://www.ecosystemserviceseq.com/> has established the connectivity between community wellbeing, and the services provided by natural systems, such as clean air and water, food and recreational opportunities.

¹ Marsden Jacob and Associates (April 2010), Managing what matters: The cost of environmental decline in South East Queensland, Brisbane.

² See note 1

Identifying the natural assets of SEQ allows us to more readily understand what is required to achieve the targets in the SEQ NRM Plan and along the way ensure services are continually supplied to the community and economy.

Living in my community

In the context of living in the community, how do we move our focus from me to we?

To create a sense of community that facilitates the move from the individual to a mindset focussed on what is best for the community we need to ensure the key constituents of wellbeing are being provided to individuals in the community. For this to occur we need to invest in the supply of clean water, food production and provide the natural infrastructure that allows the community to come together safely in areas that promote recreational opportunities and provide the amenity that fosters mental well being. These areas include our large areas of bushland that provide habitat for wildlife, our beaches our waterways, bays, lakes and wetlands.

Ideas: In planning for the future we need to ensure these natural assets continue to provide the benefits to the community and the economy of the state.

Volunteerism is an important part of living in a community. SEQ Catchments Members Association represents the interests of volunteer groups who are working to improve our environment in SEQ. These efforts are guided and given effect through the SEQ Regional Natural Resource Management Plan (currently under review), and SEQC's Strategic Investment Plan.

Ideas: Strengthen support for networks that assist these environment groups to prosper.

Education and research

How do we create and foster an education culture that teaches skills and values to meet global challenges and optimises regional strengths?

The SEQ Region has the diversity of natural assets to support a culture of education and knowledge expansion with a large range of ecosystems, landscapes, raw materials and genetic and pharmaceutical resources. The SEQ Region is the administrative and investment hub of the state and the state's gateway to the world. Planning and investment should be aimed at maintaining and enhancing this diversity that exists on the doorstep of a world class capital city.

Healthy and active

How do we empower and educate individuals, communities and institutions to embrace responsibility for an active and healthy lifestyle?

Survey after survey concludes that people move to and invest in Queensland because of the favourable weather, the clean air, the outdoor lifestyle and the diversity of landscapes, plants and animals; something long term residents might take for granted. To provide the right conditions for a healthy and active lifestyle, planning and investment must ensure we maintain and enhance the extent and condition of natural assets such as bushland, parks, waterways, lakes, beaches and bays; places people identify as recreational hot spots.

Annual health costs directly related to insufficient physical activity in SEQ are estimated at around \$63 million per annum. Our regional landscapes provide space for outdoor recreation and provide inspiration and mental and physical wellbeing. Where outdoor recreation opportunities are lost, participation rates will decline, and the health costs associated with inactivity will increase. Even a very modest decline in outdoor recreation participation rates of 1% would increase health costs by \$10 million over the life of the Plan.

Much of the volunteer work undertaken by SEQCMA member organisations involves physical effort in an outdoors setting. Some of these activities involve, weeding, tree planting, rubbish removal, water quality monitoring, sea grass and mangrove monitoring, seeding growth, seed collection, fencing, spraying etc.

Jobs, participating and the economy

How do we structure our economy to ensure our children inherit a resilient future?

The resilience of a community and the economy is directly related to the resilience of the natural assets that provide the services required for the wellbeing of the community and the raw materials for the economy.

It is well known that a healthy community is more resilient to sudden shocks like the natural disasters we have experienced over the last couple of years. A healthy community that has a secure supply of services that provide for wellbeing is much better placed to rebound from the impacts of extreme events than an unhealthy community.

Our natural assets also buffer the community and the economy from extremes of weather and other events such as storm surges.

Considerable economic value is generated through existing networks providing contemporary advice to those seeking to undertake landscape improvement works. This takes the form of shaping projects, finding likeminded project aspirants, finding funding partners, and sources of both contract and volunteer labour to deliver outcomes.

For every dollar realised in project outcomes, SEQC can attest to a 2:1 leverage of funds, be it in direct cash/material contributions, or in the value of work performed.

Idea: The environment could benefit from a reintroduction of the Work Outreach Centre scheme that was run by Corrective Services some years ago. The concept should be further extended with a much better organised system of community corrections working on ongoing landscape projects.

Sustainable landscapes

How do we strengthen our economic future and achieve sustainable landscapes?

Sustainable landscapes are the product of sound scientifically based natural resource management. This is the basic interest of the SEQCMA membership, and the core business of SEQC. It involves good planning, sound science, easy availability of information, community engagement, encouragement, support and project funding.

It also is a sub regional and regional issue that frequently crosses administrative boundaries, and requires a clear vision by all levels of government on what can be achieved.

The NRM Plan contains targets aimed at providing sustainable landscapes that will strengthen our economic future. The costs to society and industry if we do not achieve the targets in the NRM Plan are substantial as documented in the following extract from *Managing what matters: The cost of environmental decline in SEQ*. SEQ Catchments commissioned Marsden Jacob Associates to undertake research to analyse the targets established in the SEQ NRM Plan, and then identify, scope and assess the potential economic cost of environmental degradation if the targets are not achieved.

The quality of the SEQ natural resource base is expected to decline in the next 20 years, driven by factors such as population growth, climate change, uncoordinated planning and investment, increasing household consumption and waste. This is despite the current efforts to protect our natural assets by governments at all levels, industry and the community.

The social costs to the community of a 'do nothing more' scenario and the loss of resource condition are very significant (in excess of \$5.2 billion between 2009 and 2031). The greatest costs relate to losses in river and stream and coastal condition. An investment now of up to an additional \$150 million per annum in today's terms is justified based on avoiding the social costs alone of damage to our natural assets.

The survey results indicate that SEQ households would be prepared to pay almost \$300 per annum via higher rates, taxes and costs for goods and services to maintain the current extent and condition of our natural assets. This clearly shows that the community wants to avoid further declines in condition from current levels.

The community is also prepared to pay for the achievement of targets in the Plan which seek enhancement in resource condition from current levels. The value of the investment the community is prepared to make is as high as \$1.9 billion over the life of the SEQ NRM Plan.

Taking these benefits in conjunction, a total of \$7.1 billion of overall social benefit can be realised through the implementation of the targets in the SEQ NRM Plan.

The survey shows that the community wishes to avoid declines in condition from current levels much more so than gaining marginal enhancements of the same magnitude.

Costs to Key Sectors

The costs of a decline in the natural resource condition or extent of our natural assets over the period 2009-2031 to key sectors was considered as part of the research undertaken by Marsden Jacob.

Tourism

Approximately 28% of tourism in SEQ is attributable to visitation to natural areas. Continued threats to the natural resource would place this tourism at risk, particularly in coastal communities. The region's ability to continue to attract tourism activity and investment is highly reliant on the condition of the state of the natural resource base. Studies undertaken elsewhere (such as the Great Barrier Reef) have shown significant downturns in activity where resource condition declines.

The research suggests that decline in the condition of the natural assets which a considerable amount of tourism is based could result in an \$8 billion reduction in turnover in tourism over the life of the SEQ NRM Plan. Even a very modest decline in outdoor recreation participation rates by SEQ residents of 2% would result in a \$200 million decline in expenditure in that sector.

Agriculture

Agriculture is an important contributor to the economic and society in SEQ. The total direct value of crops and livestock (2007-08) was in excess of \$1.2 billion.

The region's ability to maintain agricultural productivity and competitiveness is highly reliant on maintaining a quality natural resource base (highly productive soils and agricultural lands maintained in close proximity to markets) to underpin production. A loss in the capacity to produce food and fibre for the region would jeopardise the resilience of the society and economy to shocks such as climate change, peak oil and global food shortages. Threats to agricultural production and the NRM Plan targets include;

- Increasing salinity
- Declining soil health
- Loss of agricultural land to urban and industrial development
- Soil erosion
- Lack of access to secure water supply

The SEQ Rural Futures Strategy (DIP 2009) recognises that a fall in agricultural production will have a serious impact on regional SEQ impacting on employment, social character and downstream logistics and manufacturing.

Other Industry to be seriously effected

Recreational fishing

An estimated 475,000 people in SEQ participate in recreational fishing each year (a participation rate of 22.6%). These figures show an annual total expenditure by SEQ resident anglers of approximately \$194.2 million; 98% occurring in the coastal local government areas. It is estimated that waterways degradation and the impact on fish stocks could lead to a reduction in recreational fishing.

Water

There are significant savings in water treatment costs that could be realised through improved water quality through catchment management. Water-based ecosystems, particularly

wetlands and their components, alter impurities such as excess nutrients and sediments. The filtering of water aids in controlling pollution and improving water quality. There is significant experience worldwide that supports catchment management as the primary and first barrier in ensuring water quality for human consumption. Treatment savings can be substantial.

Commercial Fishing

The commercial fishing sector is highly reliant on the natural resource base for its ongoing livelihood.

Analysis of historical fishing effort and catch data indicates a potential downward trend in catch rates in recent years. Some of this decline is likely to be attributable to declining resource condition including the wild fishery stock condition.

Wildcard

How do we attract and retain the brightest minds and ideas where they are most needed?

While it is often lamented that those young people with the brightest minds are often lost to other countries, it is equally true that there is a wealth of talent at our doorstep with the recently retired. 37% of Qld public servants will retire over the next 8yrs. Then there are the retirees that come from interstate attracted by the liveability of Qld. The question should be how to be able to tap this pool of talent.

In terms of attracting and retaining people we must go back to why people chose to live in Queensland – the weather and the accessibility of natural assets like open spaces and beaches is the key to the liveability of the state. Regional NRM Plans exist across Queensland and represent a commitment from governments, industry and the community to work together to create the conditions that will attract and retain the brightest minds including those who are retiring and wish to remain engaged in community and economic pursuits.