

# Hunter Catchment Community Reference Group

## Information for Applicants and Terms of Reference

### 1. Background

The Hunter-Central Rivers Catchment Management Authority is one of thirteen CMAs established by the NSW Government to carry out a range of functions, as set out in the *Catchment Management Authorities Act 2003* (the Act). General functions include:

- carrying out or funding catchment activities,
- other functions as are conferred or imposed on it by the Act or any other Act (including any environmental planning instrument).

(Note: CMAs are, for example, to have the functions under the *Native Vegetation Act 2003* and may have threatened species or other functions conferred in future under other Acts. CMAs have the capacity to be appointed as the consent authority for development under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.)

Specific functions are:

- to develop Catchment Action Plans and to give effect to approved plans through Annual Implementation Programs,
- to provide loans, grants, subsidies or other financial assistance for the purposes of the catchment activities it is authorised to fund,
- to enter contracts or do any work for the purposes of the catchment activities it is authorised to carry out,
- to assist landholders to further the objectives of its Catchment Action Plan (including providing information about native vegetation),
- to provide educational and training courses and materials in connection with natural resource management.

The Act requires CMAs to have a board of up to seven members, including the chairman, to be selected on a merit/skills basis. Hunter-Central Rivers CMA members are WEJ Paradise (Chairman), John Asquith, Arthur Burns, Julia Imrie, Neil Rose, Chris Scott and John Weate.

The geographic area covered by the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA extends from Gosford to Taree and from Newcastle to Ulan: a total of 37,000 km<sup>2</sup>. A population of 1 million people live, work and play in this area.

### 2. What is a Community Reference Group?

To assist the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA Board remain ‘in touch’ with its catchment communities, it has established a Community Reference Group (CRG) in the Hunter catchment, and has approved the establishment of similar structures for the Central Coast (comprising Brisbane Water, Tuggerah Lakes and Lake Macquarie catchments) and Lower North Coast (comprising Manning, Karuah, Wallis and Myall Lakes catchments).

The Hunter CRG has been established since September 2005 and is chaired by CMA Board members and supported by CMA staff. The roles of the CRG are to advise the CMA Board on priority issues within the Hunter catchment, and to act as a conduit for the exchange of information between the CMA and the broader community.

### **3. Catchment Action Plan and Annual Implementation Program**

Under the Catchment Management Act 2003, CMAs are required to prepare Catchment Action Plans (CAPs) which will identify a 10-year program of activities to achieve measurable targets. The Hunter-Central Rivers CAP was completed in January 2007 and provides the framework within which the CMA operates. The CAP sets out targets and priorities for investment of funds from a range of sources including Caring for our Country (Australian Government) and Hunter Catchment Contributions (a levy collected from Hunter ratepayers).

The CAP has five natural resource management (NRM) theme areas:

- Biodiversity
- Aquatic health
- Soils
- Estuarine health
- Marine health

Established under each of these themes is a series of Management Targets (MTs) which set out specific and measurable targets for actions to improve the condition of the natural resources relevant to the MT. There are 31 MTs in total; each of these will potentially drive a series of Catchment Activities which describe projects, outcomes, budgets and related information which will translate to on-ground works and outcomes measurable against the CAP targets.

It is anticipated that in selecting membership of the CRG, each of the CAP themes will be addressed by the skills and experience of those selected.

The Act also requires CMAs to prepare Annual Implementation Programs (AIPs) to guide annual expenditure which gives effect to the CAP. The AIP will identify all funding sources: Australian and NSW Governments, Local government, industry, community cash and in-kind contributions, and catchment contributions (at present, collected only in the Hunter catchment).

The CRG will have a role in providing advice to the CMA on implementation of the CAP and on the AIP.

### **4. Membership**

Membership of the CRG and the process for appointment, are as follows:

- members will be appointed by the Hunter-Central Rivers CMA Board, following assessment of applications by a selection panel,
- membership will be drawn from people with the following interests:
  - primary producers,
  - water users,
  - other natural resource users,
  - industry interests,
  - socio-economic interest,

- community / NRM volunteer interests
- environmental interests,
- local government.

CRG membership will be selected to provide a range of relevant skills, experience, knowledge and geographic spread, with specific reference to addressing CAP themes. Candidates should have expertise in one or more of the following fields:

- sustainable natural resource management, including sustainable agriculture
- catchment management planning,
- community networking
- flood mitigation,
- local government,
- business management,
- asset management, or
- community perspectives and group processes relating to natural resource use.

Membership of the CRG will be from 7 to 15 community members. In addition, the CRG will include up to two CMA Board members, who will act as joint chairs of the CRG.

A selection panel will recommend to the Board those candidates who will best ensure that the CRG collectively possesses an appropriate balance of skills.

Additionally, to assist the selection panel, candidates may indicate their expertise in one or more of the following fields;

- strategic planning including analysing complex issues,
- communication, both written and oral,
- investment decision making,
- understanding of potential socio-economic impacts of natural resource management decisions,
- conflict resolution, facilitation and negotiation,
- leadership and teamwork.

As part of the Government's commitment to gender equity, applications are particularly encouraged from women to achieve greater participation by women in natural resource management decision making.

## **5. Member Responsibility**

Members will be responsible for carrying out the roles of the CRG, as delegated by the CMA Board and described in section 2, and to carry out the following functions:

- attending CRG meetings,
- informing the CMA and the CRG about local and regional issues and plans which relate to the CRG's area of interest,
- providing other groups within the catchment with accurate information on the CMA, the CRG, the Catchment Action Plan, and natural resource issues generally,
- contributing to the development of priorities for resource allocation,
- providing strategic advice at CRG meetings,
- participating in the implementation of activities which lead to improved natural resources management within the catchment,

- leading by example in their use and management of natural resources.

The term of appointment to the CRG will be for three years, at which point members will be required to reapply.

Members will be expected to attend and contribute to CRG meetings to be held approximately quarterly (2-3 hr meetings preferably during business hours, or as determined by the CRG). From time to time, the CRG may establish task groups to deal with specific issues. Meetings may be held at various locations throughout the Hunter catchment.

The CRG will operate in an advisory capacity by providing information and recommendations to the CMA. The CMA will remain responsible for any public announcements or other media contact relating to activities of the CRG, unless the CRG Chair and the General Manager of the CMA specifically authorise another member/s to carry out this function.

CRG membership will be based on skills, not on representation from any particular organisation, agency or company. CRG members will be expected at all times to act and to make recommendations to the CMA for the benefit of the catchment community and environment as a whole, not for the benefit either direct or indirect of any organisation, agency or company of which they are a member or employee.

Members, from time to time, may be provided with information of a confidential nature, (e.g. verbal reports or draft documents), which is not for general circulation in the broader community at that time. Members must be prepared to maintain this confidentiality until the CMA approves the release of material for community comment.

Membership of a CRG will be in an honorary capacity only. The CMA will assist CRG members meet reasonable travel costs.

Hunter-Central Rivers CMA  
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