

# Developing and sharing information

## Key information in this section

- Analysing information to meet evaluation requirements
- Role of adaptive management in improving future NRM performance
- Reporting requirements for CMAs
- State-scale NRM reporting
- Learning from evaluations

## Analysis of information

Information is analysed against the evaluation questions and should be considered during evaluation design. In particular, consider:

- what analysis will be required to answer the evaluation questions
- what expertise and tools will be needed to undertake analysis and the relevant process in the evaluation plan to develop or access that skill base
- whether synergies in information types or performance measures may be needed to develop meaningful analyses – include this in the information needs section of the evaluation
- what form of assessment will be used to reach precise findings and recommendations.

The specific analysis required will depend on the type of information being assessed. The [evaluation tools](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/evaltools.htm) (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/evaltools.htm) contain a description of evaluation analysis tools which can be used in assessment.

For any evaluation, an understanding of the resource or theme under consideration will be invaluable, together with recently acquired knowledge in that field. Because of this, the use of a multiple lines and levels of evidence (MLLE) approach and an expert evaluation panel are recommended, particularly if the evaluation is associated with defining or reviewing targets. Organisation of these should be highlighted in the evaluation plan where necessary.

The recording assessment using MLLE criteria template is included as an [evaluation tool](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/evaltools.htm) (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/evaltools.htm).

For smaller projects, simple analysis will be adequate and the process can be restricted to the CMA's nominated project evaluation team.

## Using evaluation findings

### Adaptive management

Evaluation is not the end but the means by which informed decisions can be made about a program. Therefore, the greatest value that will come from investment in evaluation is the use of evaluation findings as part of an adaptive management framework.

Current reporting requirements for CMAs for each evaluation type are discussed later in this section.

Natural resource management (NRM) is based on an adaptive approach to resource planning, management and sustainable use of natural resources. The main issue is the complex nature of

resource management programs in achieving a balance between environmental, social and economic outcomes that are supported across different institutional arrangements. As well as these complex interactions are the spatial and temporal issues that influence resource management's longer term targets.

Therefore, while a CMA may have legislative and contractual reporting requirements, this information can also be used to inform its own internal adaptive management processes. An implementation of reliable evaluation systems helps inform the adaptive management process. This may lead to:

- improved design using lessons learnt from evaluation to strengthen new implementation activities
- improved implementation using lessons learnt from evaluation to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of new or revised implementation activities
- an ability to report change resulting from implementation, demonstrating returns from investment in NRM
- demonstration of the benefits of sustainable resource management in promoting current best practice.

Two critical elements are:

- giving consideration to the primary audience for the evaluation in the planning stages and how best to present the evaluation findings
- ensuring there is ongoing communication with key stakeholders so that by the time the evaluation is reported there are no surprises.

The evaluation system developed by each CMA should enable a systematic, strategic and transparent approach from which management and program management decisions can be made. An internationally recognised example of good adaptive management is available from the International Union for Conservation of Nature at [data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-014.pdf](http://data.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/PAG-014.pdf).

## Reporting evaluation findings

Reporting conveys information to assist in decision-making. As such, it is vital that the evaluation information presented is clear, concise and appropriate for the purpose of the communication.

A constant theme through a report will provide readers with an understanding of why the report has been written.

[Writing effective evaluation reports](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/tipsevalreports.htm) (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/4cmass/tipsevalreports.htm) has advice on preparing clear and concise reports.

## CMA reporting

Some of the information required for evaluations will already be covered in accountability reports and many CMAs use this information as part of their review process.

CMAs should use their evaluation findings to make decisions on the performance of their programs. This includes both externally and internally driven evaluations.

Some of the many benefits from reporting evaluation findings include:

- transparency
- a demonstration to funding bodies of how the outputs of projects are leading to the targets

- a way to communicate with the CMA community
- an assessment of the achievements of the CMA
- a demonstration of where change in management has been, or can be, made.

Communicating evaluation findings to different users will require information to be presented differently, depending on the primary audience.

### *Specific reporting on appropriateness*

For external reporting, the first major appropriateness evaluation by CMAs is the initial development of the CAP. This may have been done informally but an assessment of the pressures on resource condition and the activities needed to manage for improvement is essentially an appropriateness evaluation. A report of this assessment is provided for each CAP. Further appropriateness evaluations will underpin the development of investment strategies and will be required during review of the CAP and later investment strategy development.

### *Specific reporting on efficiency*

CMAs are not currently required to undertake external reporting of efficiency evaluations. However, some CMAs have already instigated a regular internal review and reporting procedure, which is proving valuable.

A simple internal efficiency review and reporting process at a project or program scale can enhance CMA performance. Answers to the following five basic questions could form the basis for evaluating and modifying practices to improve efficiency:

- What was done?
- What worked well?
- What did not work so well?
- What could be done differently next time?
- What action should be taken now?

Consideration of information compiled for accountability reporting could be considered during assessment of efficiency. CMAs complete accountability requirements through financial and milestone reporting biannually. These reports relate to the source of funds for each activity and include:

- funds spent during the reporting period
- anticipated expenditure (contingent liabilities) over the next reporting period
- additional funds required for disbursement from the Joint Steering Committee's holding account to the CMA to cover contractual obligations over the following six months
- which milestones were achieved and in which quarter
- which milestones were not achieved
- any changes to milestones and delivery dates approved by the NSW and Commonwealth governments.

A partially populated report template for each activity is provided shortly to each CMA before the end of the reporting period.

## *Specific reporting on effectiveness*

Reporting on the findings of effectiveness evaluations will inform progress toward meeting the objectives or outcomes of projects and programs. CMAs, their funding partners and other stakeholders will better understand the natural resources being managed and knowledge of management practices can be shared and improved. It will also enable lessons learned to inform CAP and implementation review and planning. CMAs are required to report on the effectiveness of their activities using the reports below.

### **Annual reporting**

CMAs are currently required to provide annually a subjective score on effectiveness based on a rating developed by the Commonwealth agencies managing investment funds. This is not a true effectiveness evaluation but a determination of how a CMA believes it is putting processes in place to enable a more detailed evaluation to occur.

### **Mid-CAP and end-of-CAP reporting**

Under current legislation and bilateral agreement, CMAs are required to undertake five-yearly mid-term and end-of-term reviews of the effectiveness of their CAP implementation.

### **State of the Catchment**

State of the Catchment (SoC) Reports are being established to communicate changes in resource condition to the catchment community. Development of format, timing and a template for the reports is being led by NSW NRM agencies in collaboration with CMAs. The SoC will be a reporting vehicle for CMAs to inform stakeholders of progress toward CAP targets. CMAs will be responsible for publishing and distributing SoCs using information collected and developed by the state-wide monitoring, evaluation and reporting program and CMA regional programs.

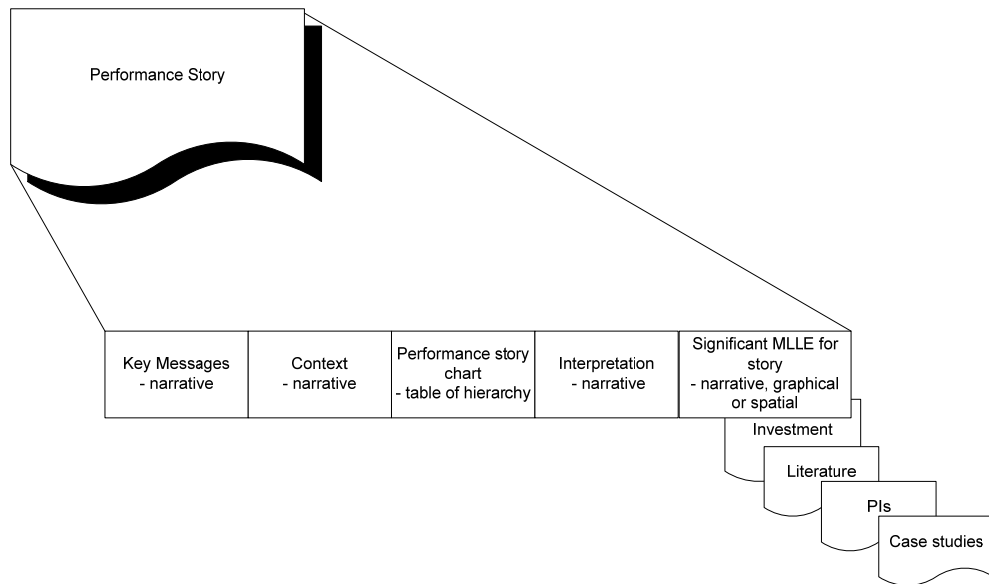
### **Performance Story Reporting**

Performance Story Reporting will be required by the Commonwealth agencies for NRM. The proposal for these reports identifies a need to give greater consideration to intermediate targets or management targets rather than only longer term catchment targets. The concept is that relevant lines of evidence are gathered from across the results hierarchy to evaluate progress towards catchment targets and that they are reported in an easily accessible format. This concept is currently being referred to as 'performance stories' which will be underpinned by the program logic framework and evaluation questions.

The following points highlight how a performance story might be developed using the tools within this framework:

- identify evaluation questions and information required to address these questions based on the logic
- using the MLLE approach described, monitoring programs for qualitative and quantitative information are implemented
- use an evaluation panel to test the information across the levels of evidence for each evaluation question
- the results of this panel process can be summarised in a Performance Story Chart.

A performance story should be documented based on the proposed layout in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Components of the performance story report  
(adapted from Clear Horizon 2007)**

Reporting requirements for CMAs are outlined in the *NSW Natural Resources Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Strategy* (DNR 2006) and the bilateral agreements between the NSW and Commonwealth Governments and its associated documents (Commonwealth of Australia and State of NSW 2003a and 2003b).

## Reporting effectiveness at a state scale

The results of monitoring natural resource condition will be reported at the state-wide scale by NRM agencies in the *NSW State of the Environment* report. The information reported will provide the broader context for CMA reporting and may be referenced to provide additional value or understanding of resource condition at the wider state-wide scale. However, to successfully achieve this, reporting for state-wide targets needs to adopt the following concepts:

- delivery of information on both resource condition and trend, as well as an indication of confidence around the information presented
- use of the pressure-state-response model in the framework, ensuring consistency with state of the environment reporting conventions
- the collection of indicators for four themes: biodiversity, land, water and socio-economics
- provision of opportunities for links to further information for those who want to explore the supporting information
- ability for users of the report to drill down to different levels of detail (e.g. state-wide targets, CMA) depending on needs
- delivery of information in an accessible manner using a combination of text, graphics and symbols
- a consistent look and feel of reporting documents for all CMAs and the state.

The state-wide reporting process does not aim to produce a technical report or evaluation report but to provide a summary of condition and trend at the state-wide target scale.

## Learning from evaluations

Reflecting critically on what has been done in any program and learning from success and failure allows the identification and adoption of improved ways of doing things. This applies just as essentially to an evaluation process.

On completion of an evaluation, the evaluation process should be evaluated. This need not be arduous and as always the effort should reflect the significance of the evaluation. The simplest approach would be for the relevant people to discuss openly their responses to the following questions:

- What was done?
- What was done well and why?
- What could be done better and why?
- What could be done differently (and why) next time?
- How can what has been learnt be used next time?

For a more significant evaluation, a more rigorous review of the activities and processes of the evaluation should be undertaken. This may include considering:

- the tools and information used
- whether the evaluation questions were well-formulated
- if information management practices and processes were efficient
- whether the information that was generated answered the evaluation questions adequately
- whether there was sufficient NRM and evaluation capacity available to rigorously complete evaluation
- if the CMA officers involved in the evaluation found any problems with the evaluation process
- whether adequate information was developed to fulfil reporting requirements
- whether a formal process was used to enable evaluation findings to influence future practices.

Sometimes a CMA may seek external review of its evaluation design prior to implementation. This may be required if an evaluation is considered contentious, or complex, or requires significant new resources.

The conclusions from evaluation experiences should be documented and included in the portfolio of evaluations discussed in '[Evaluation design](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/4cmas/0946evaldesign.pdf)' (www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/4cmas/0946evaldesign.pdf) as a formal record of findings and to ensure actions are implemented.

## References

Clear Horizon 2007, 'Performance stories', notes from the workshop presented to NSW CMAs and agencies, 12–13 July, Sydney.

Commonwealth of Australia and State of New South Wales 2003a, Former 'Bilateral agreement to deliver the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality' available at [www.napswq.gov.au/publications/agreements/bilateral-nsw.html](http://www.napswq.gov.au/publications/agreements/bilateral-nsw.html).

Commonwealth of Australia and State of New South Wales 2003b, Former 'Bilateral agreement to deliver the Natural Heritage Trust', available at [www.nht.gov.au/publications/agreements/bilateral-nsw.html](http://www.nht.gov.au/publications/agreements/bilateral-nsw.html).

DNR 2006, *NSW Natural Resources Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Strategy*, NSW Natural Resources and Environment CEO Cluster Group, Department of Natural Resources, Sydney.