



COOPER'S CREEK CATCHMENT

STRATEGIC PLAN



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FOREWORD



Cooper's Creek catchment is filled with a diversity of landscapes, plants and animals. The people making up the catchment communities are no less diverse. They represent many interests, industries, needs and aspirations, and create a rich tapestry reflecting the colour and vibrancy of our unique area of the world.

We have a lot to be proud of and a lot to learn. Many of us rely on the catchment for our livelihoods and, at the same time, we appreciate the intrinsic value of our natural environment. We are lucky to be living in a relatively undamaged catchment, to be in a position to take advantage of the lessons learned in other catchments, and to have this opportunity to plan a sustainable future for ourselves, our descendants and our natural environment.

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That we need to support ourselves and maintain the health of our landscape is widely accepted. How we manage this balance is often a hotly debated topic. This Strategic Plan is, to a large extent, a product of this debate, but it is also based on a shared Vision. It is a living document that will reflect changing perceptions and increasing knowledge.

The Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee is extremely grateful to all the people who have contributed to this plan by submitting written and verbal responses and by attending the public meetings held throughout the catchment. The debates that have helped shape this document will continue to shape its future as the Committee and the community address the issues and opportunities facing the Cooper's Creek catchment.

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The Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group is supported by the Commonwealth Government's Natural Heritage Trust and the South Australian and Queensland Governments.



Natural Heritage Trust
Helping Communities Helping Australia



Cooper's Creek Catchment



THE COOPER'S CREEK CATCHMENT



Biophysical

The Cooper's Creek catchment is a small but significant part of this planet – and a vital portion of this continent. It makes up almost one quarter of the Lake Eyre Basin, approximately 297,000 square km.

The Cooper begins in the far north near Hughenden, where the Great Divide turns a network of streams south. The Landsborough, Towerhill, Torrens and Aramac Creeks drain areas of the Desert Uplands and the northern Mitchell Grass Downs and run together with numerous other streams and rivers to become the Thomson River. To the east, the Barcoo gathers water from the Alice River and a network of creeks including the Patrick, Ravensbourne, Talundilly, Pemberly and Douglas Ponds.

These two drainage systems pass through a band of rugged mulga country before joining near Windorah to become Cooper's Creek, an enormous area of braided channels – part of the Channel Country. If the flows from the north have been large enough, these waters make their way across the stony gibber plains, through the bioregion defined as the Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields, to Lake Eyre.

The low rainfall in the lower section of the catchment means that water flow there is almost totally dependent on rainfall to the north. Annual rainfall averages range from 400-600 mm in the far north to 50-100 mm in the south. The environment has evolved a delicate balance of survival between an arid to semi-arid existence and infrequent inundation by floodwaters. These inundations may be years apart and may bear little relation to local rainfalls.

The climate is harsh. Summer temperatures are extreme (mean daily high temperatures around 37 degrees). Winter daytime temperatures can be pleasant, but nights can be bitterly cold (mean daily low temperatures around 7 degrees). Seasonal conditions are variable and difficult to predict with drought a constant preoccupation and water a constant issue.

Industry and land use

The population and variety of land use that the area supports today is putting a far greater demand on its resource base than it has ever had to cope with before. By any scale the population is small but, in resource use, more and more demanding.

The most extensive land use across the catchment is pastoral. The wide open spaces and highly nourishing native pastures, which for thousands of years maintained a balanced population of native fauna, have proven ideal for grazing sheep and cattle.

Mining is a major contributor to the economy of the region as a whole, especially with oil and natural gas in the Cooper-Eromanga Basin, and the scattered opal deposits.

Tourism is rapidly developing as a major industry, significant in both its economic and environmental impact. The Longreach Shire Council, for example, estimates tourism has overtaken pastoralism as the major industry within its shire.



The people and their communities

The people involved in these industries and those who live in the towns that become their service centres, have increasingly high expectations of access to infrastructure that is readily available to less isolated, more populated areas of the nation. The largest settlement is Longreach in the north-east of the catchment. Other significant centres are scattered predominantly in the northern half of the catchment area – Muttaburra, Aramac, Barcaldine, Blackall, Tambo, Isisford, Jundah, Stonehenge, Yaraka, and then south and west to Windorah, Eromanga and Innamincka.

If the urban population of Alice Springs in the Desert Rivers Region of the Lake Eyre Basin is disregarded, the Cooper ranks as the most settled of the basin catchments with a total population of around 12,000. The density of this population decreases markedly from north to south as rainfall decreases. While the permanent population has probably declined considerably in recent years, the transient population has increased enormously. This population, and its activities, is placing more and more pressure on a natural environment that is amazingly complex and has dramatic and rapid seasonal contrast.

Natural resource management

Awareness of the need for careful management of the area is growing. It has become apparent that the knowledge base of this unique area must be expanded far beyond economics, which has dominated thinking for much of the last 200 years. Pastoralists, miners, and local and state agencies are showing increasing awareness that economic viability and maintenance of a healthy biodiversity are inextricably linked.

Numerous conservation areas have been, and are being, established across the region, and an increasing number of projects involving field work and research have been implemented.

Visitors want to see and experience the ‘whole’ area – pre-history, Aboriginal culture and natural ecosystems as well as the ‘stockman’ culture both past and present. Aboriginal people are striving to protect and preserve their cultural heritage. Small town communities are working at building positive patterns of growth to ensure their survival.

The Cooper’s Creek catchment forms an integral part of the Lake Eyre Basin, recognised as one of the last remaining, relatively undamaged catchment systems in the world. The beginning of the new millennium is an ideal opportunity to take stock; to look at the past with its mystery, its mistakes, its wisdom, its never-ending pattern of change; to learn from that and define the issues that are going to impact on all who live in the catchment; and to take up the challenge of dealing with those issues with a sense of unity, optimism and creativity.

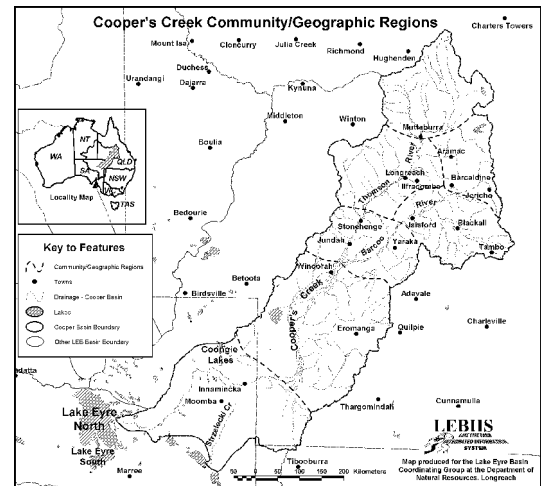
THE COOPER'S CREEK CATCHMENT COMMITTEE



Members of the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee come from:

- the seven community/geographic regions within the catchment (see map) including people from the pastoral industry
- urban communities
- Aboriginal people
- mining and petroleum industry
- tourism industry
- science
- conservation
- local government
- Queensland and South Australian government.

Community/Geographic Regions	
Regions	Area (sq km)
Muttaburra	36,289
Longreach	35,433
Barcaldine	20,715
Blackall	31,048
Jundah	29,522
Windorah	76,268
Innaminka	67,432



SOME FACTS AND FIGURES

Bioregions within the catchment



Bioregions	
Name	Area (sq km)
Channel Country	114,845
Desert Uplands	44,507
Mitchell Grass Downs	66,880
Mulga Lands	32,889
Simpson-Strzelecki Dunefields	31,319
South Brigalow	4,876
Stony Plains	1,387



Local administrative areas & their populations

ADMINISTRATIVE AREA	POPULATION (change)	SHIRE/BOARD SIZE (sq km)	POSITIONING IN CATCHMENT
Aramac Shire	815 (-16)	23,290	totally within catchment
Barcaldine Shire	1,742 (-11)	8,426	totally within catchment
Barcoo Shire	474 (+9)	61,855	approx 1/2 within catchment
Blackall Shire	1,763 (-29)	16,349	almost totally within catchment
Bulloo Shire	510 (+2)	73,738	approx 1/2 within catchment
Dalrymple Shire	3,465 (-35)	68,166	marginal area within catchment
Flinders Shire	2,099 (-23)	41,422	approx 1/2 within catchment
Ilfracombe Shire	314 (-4)	6,562	totally within catchment
Isisford Shire	277 (-7)	10,482	totally within catchment
Jericho Shire	1,013 (-1)	21,825	approx 1/3 within catchment
Longreach Shire	3,808 (-1)	23,504	totally within catchment
Marree Soil Cons. Board	approx 150 (n/a)	67,432	partially within catchment
Quilpie Shire	1,268 (+2)	67,488	approx 1/2 within catchment
Tambo Shire	583 (-9)	14,008	approx 1/2 within catchment

Sources: Shire Information: Office of Economic and Statistical Research

Marree Soil Conservation Board – Marree Soil Conservation District Plan 1997, Maree Morton, Innamincka Station.

(Figures in brackets indicate change in population, June 1998 to June 1999.)

Lengths and areas

Cooper's Creek is over 1,250 km long.

Cooper's Creek catchment is approximately 297,000 sq km in area. It lies across three states with 243,000 sq km in Queensland, 630 sq km in New South Wales and 53,000 sq km in South Australia.

ABOUT THIS STRATEGIC PLAN



This Strategic Plan addresses the major natural resource management issues identified by the community. It is a tool that can be used by the community, stakeholders, government, policy makers and, of course, by the Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee itself. It is also a living document, responding to changes in understanding, knowledge and to new opportunities. Views on natural resource management vary throughout the catchment. The differing values and priorities have provided and will continue to provide a stimulating framework for discussion, understanding and respect.

The issues have been grouped into Programs (Information, Natural Resources, Industry Viability, and Environment), which are then grouped into Subprograms (Information Management, Networking and Learning Opportunities etc). Some issues are applicable to more than one program. In the table below the issues have been placed in order of the number of meetings at which they were identified (eg weeds were identified more often than wildlife use/harvesting). The table also shows the placement of the issues in the four Programs.

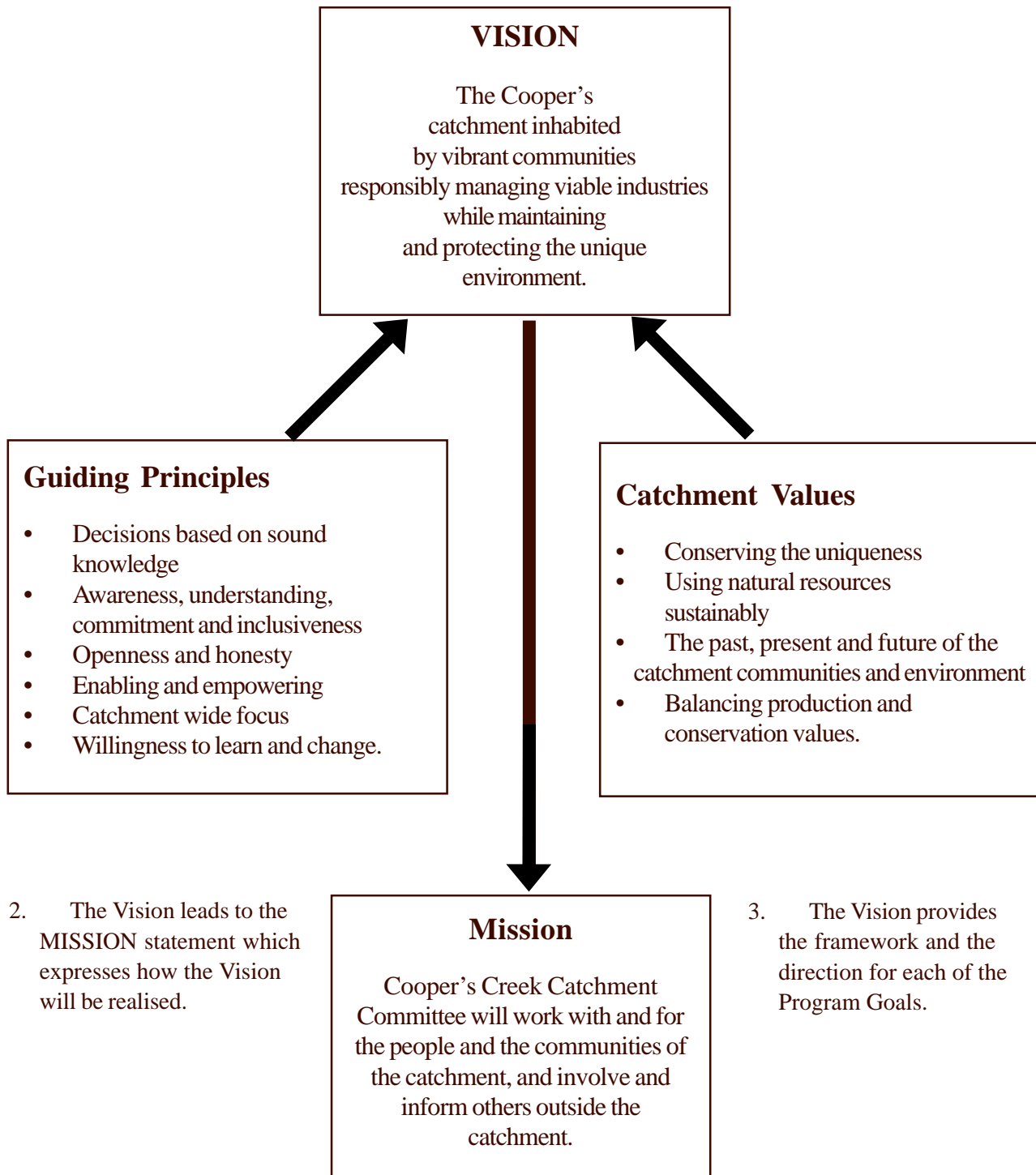
Community identified issues

ISSUES	PROGRAM IN DRAFT STRATEGY			
	Information	Natural Resources	Industry Viability	Environment
Weeds				✓
Feral Animals				✓
Surface Water Management		✓		
Tourism			✓	
Viability/Economics			✓	
Grazing Pressure / Pasture Management		✓	✓	
Great Artesian Basin		✓		
Climate Viability and Drought Management			✓	
Security of Tenure			✓	
Education / Awareness	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chemical Contamination				✓
Salinity		✓		
Vegetation Management		✓	✓	
Biodiversity Conservation/Endangered Species				✓
Waste Management/Effluent				✓
Mining (and Petroleum)			✓	
Lack of Existing Data/Information	✓			
Diversification			✓	
Wildlife Use/Harvesting			✓	



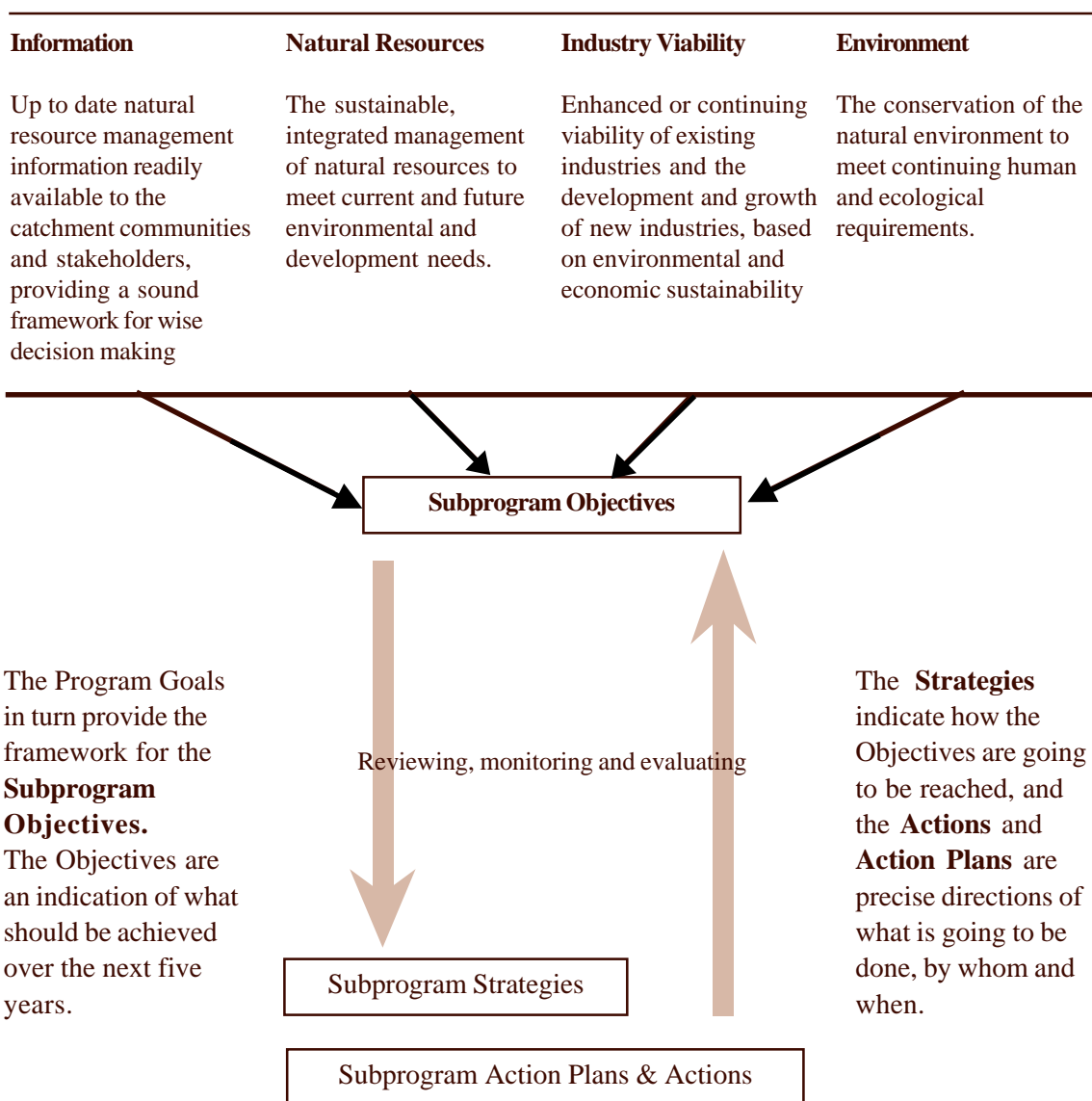
Hierarchy within the Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan

1. The VISION is a simple expression of what the community wants for the catchment by the year 2020. This Vision is based on community input throughout the consultation process, and is supported by guiding principles and catchment values. The intention of the Strategic Plan is not to redefine the Vision but to continually revisit the Objectives and Strategies to embrace fresh opportunities in achieving the Vision.





Program Goals





INFORMATION PROGRAM

Goal Up to date natural resource management information readily available to the catchment communities and stakeholders, providing a sound framework for wise decision making.

Community Identified Issues to be addressed in this Program

Education/Awareness

Lack of Existing Data/Information



Subprogram: Information Management

Objective

Readily accessible information, with the collation and management of information on natural resource management issues and the Catchment/Lake Eyre Basin process, providing a sound base for decision making.

Strategy for Direct Actions

- Facilitate the sourcing, storage and effective, user-friendly retrieval of information and make this available to the catchment communities.

Actions

Work with Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group and Georgina/Diamantina Coordinating Committee to:

- identify data management needs *Commenced and Continuing*
- create a database of existing information and research projects

Commenced and Continuing

- develop and record data on the Lake Eyre Basin Integrated Information System (LEBIIS). *Commenced and Continuing*
- create links between other information sources and the LEB web page

Commenced and Continuing

- identify information gaps. *Commenced and Continuing*



Subprogram: Networking and Learning Opportunities

Objective

Increased use of new and existing information by the community, other stakeholders and policy makers in decision making.

Strategies for Direct Actions

- Provide forums (including workshops, field days and public meetings) for spreading information and local knowledge, and for enabling discussion among stakeholders (including catchment communities and policy makers) on catchment management issues.
- Promote the catchment focus and process through appropriate media.



Actions

- Inform the catchment community and stakeholders on relevant issues by providing information through the catchment newsletter incorporated in the quarterly Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group News. ***Commenced and Continuing***
- Attend meetings, workshops, shows etc to communicate with the wider community on the catchment process. ***Commenced and Continuing***

Strategies for Influence

- Identify current and past research projects and areas where information gaps exist.
- Support, encourage and, where appropriate, instigate research projects to fill information gaps and as indicated in other programs within this Strategic Plan.
- Encourage and enable liaisons between projects and the community, and use local knowledge and experience in these projects.

Actions

- Invite project participants to make presentations and discuss their work at Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee meetings (eg Flood Plain Grazing Project, Arid Flow Project, Habitat Case Studies Project). ***Commenced and Continuing***
- Encourage the introduction of sustainable natural resource management in curricula of schools, agricultural/pastoral colleges and other tertiary institutions.
- Approach government agencies and service providers for equitable internet and email access to all areas.
- Identify and use communication methods appropriate to the target audience and the topic.
- Encourage the exchange of information and ideas covering all Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan programs.



NATURAL RESOURCES PROGRAM

Goal The sustainable, integrated management of natural resources to meet current and future environmental and development needs.

Community Identified Issues to be addressed in this Program

Education/Awareness

Grazing Pressure/Pasture Management

Great Artesian Basin

Salinity

Surface Water Management

Vegetation Management

Wildlife Use/Harvesting



Subprogram: Soil

Objective

Increased knowledge of soil types within the catchment and appropriate management options for them.

Strategy for Direct Actions and Influence

- Identify gaps in information on catchment soils and encourage the development of research projects to fill these gaps.

Strategies for Influence

- Encourage the use and acknowledgment in research projects of local knowledge on soil management techniques being used throughout the catchment.
- Encourage or instigate research projects that:
 - determine the extent of soil salinity within the catchment
 - identify management techniques to avoid salinity, erosion and poor water retention
 - incorporate soil monitoring as a component in land management
 - prevent land and water degradation caused by soil loss
 - determine the extent of post-European runoff.



Subprogram: Vegetation (native)

Objective

Increased knowledge of the role of vegetation and vegetation types in maintaining environmental health and economic viability.

Strategy for Direct Actions

Provide forums for the dissemination of information and discussion on vegetation management issues.



Strategies for Influence

- Help develop regional vegetation management plans that incorporate high levels of community consultation and input.
- Encourage or instigate research projects that:
 - identify appropriate vegetation management options on different land types
 - identify any linkages between vegetation and salinity within the catchment
 - document changing vegetation patterns including loss of vegetation and vegetation thickening and invasion
 - increase understanding of the positive and negative role of vegetation in maintaining biodiversity viability
 - identify positive and negative linkages between vegetation and productivity
 - enable harvesting of native vegetation where this is environmentally and economically sustainable.
- Investigate the possibility of governments allowing carbon credits on freehold and leasehold land where vegetation clearing is a major issue and where a new use could include credit arrangements.



Subprogram: Water

Objective

Sustainable and equitable management of surface and ground water ensuring the health of associated ecosystems while allowing economic development and acknowledging the unique ecological character of the Cooper's Creek catchment.

Strategy for Direct Actions

- Provide a catchment-wide forum for discussion on sustainable water use under South Australian and Queensland legislation and the Queensland Water Management (Cooper Creek) Plan 2000.

Strategies for Influence

Achieve a coordinated and workable approach to attaining a near-natural flow and quality of the entire Cooper's Creek system.

- Encourage:
 - regulatory control of floodplain flows within the context of river management
 - best practice management in the use of surface and ground water in both urban and rural environments
 - efficient use of sustainable small-scale development within the catchment water resources
 - a cross-state border forum for collaboration and consistency in water policy and legislation
 - adequate monitoring of surface and ground water.



Encourage or instigate research projects that:

- define the natural flow regime
- identify patterns of runoff and river flows resulting from changes in land management and /or climate
- identify water requirements for the environment, community and industries within the catchment
- identify areas where salinity problems may arise from irrigation
- develop partnerships with resource managers
- determine the importance of flow quantity, quality and fluctuations for aquatic plants and animals
- determine the importance of overland flows in the catchment system
- determine likely impacts of reduced flows on the catchment
- identify main structures that affect natural flows in the catchment (eg levees, roads).

Objective and Strategies to be developed on Great Artesian Basin and Wildlife Use/Harvesting.

INDUSTRY VIABILITY PROGRAM



Goal Enhanced or continuing viability of existing industries and the development and growth of new industries, based on environmental and economic sustainability.

Community Identified Issues to be addressed in this program

Diversification

Education/Awareness

Grazing Pressure/Pasture Management

Security of Tenure

Tourism

Viability/Economics



Subprogram: Diversification

Objective

A broadened catchment industry base through the introduction of sustainable diversification options.

Strategy for Influence

- Work with existing and new groups to identify and present viable diversification options in rural and urban communities.



Subprogram: Mining and Petroleum

Objective

Increased adoption of low environmental impact techniques in mining and petroleum industry.

Strategy for Direct Actions

- Facilitate public forums for information sharing and discussion between the catchment community and mining and petroleum companies.

Action

- Submit response to the Future of Petroleum Activities in the Coongie Lakes Area of South Australia options paper. **Achieved**



Subprogram: Primary Production

Objective

Integrated natural resource management as an integral part of property management and regional planning.

Strategies for Influence

- Encourage integrated management that includes:
 - monitoring of soil and pastures as indicators of carrying capacity



- including native and exotic flora and fauna in assessments of carrying capacity and total grazing pressure
 - pest management
 - conserving biodiversity
 - developing property management plans
 - developing sustainable dryland and small scale irrigated agriculture.
- Encourage the development of best practice management guidelines for integrated resource management for the different pasture and land types throughout the catchment.
 - Encourage the documentation and promotion of sustainable management already being used in the catchment.

Objectives and Strategies to be developed on Security of Tenure. and Wildlife Use/Harvesting.



Subprogram: Tourism

Objective

Minimisation of adverse impacts of tourism on the natural environment and an enhanced tourist appreciation of the intrinsic values of the natural and developed environment within the Cooper's Creek catchment.

Strategy for Direct Actions and Influence

- Increase the awareness of and promote the ecological and man-made values of the catchment and the Lake Eyre Basin.

Action

- Produce signs for erection at the entry and exit points to indicate the catchment and Lake Eyre Basin boundaries (together with Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Committee). *Commenced*

Strategies for Influence

- Encourage low-impact tourism by tourists and tour operators.

Action

- Produce a traveller's 'protocol' guide to low impact tourism, and outline areas of interest and significance within the catchment. 2001
- Promote the basin and its catchments to the wider community (together with Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Committee and Lake Eyre Basin Coordinating Group).
- Encourage:
 - agri/eco/cultural-tourism where this is a viable and sustainable option
 - monitoring of impacts (negative and positive) of tourism in the catchment
 - more public facilities (eg toilets, information bays and signage, communication/safety facilities).

ENVIRONMENT PROGRAM



Goal The conservation of the natural environment to meet continuing human and ecological requirements.

Community Identified Issues to be addressed in this Program

Biodiversity Conservation/ Endangered Species

Chemical Contamination

Education/Awareness

Feral Animals

Waste Management/Effluent

Weeds



Subprogram: Biodiversity Conservation

Objective

The long-term conservation of native flora, fauna and ecosystems, and the implementation of biodiversity conservation principles on private and public land.

Strategies for Direct Actions

- Develop a devolved grant program to support biodiversity conservation projects on private and public land, and support existing similar programs throughout the catchment.
- Develop an award program to recognise good land management practices that balance production and biodiversity conservation.

Strategies for Influence

- Encourage:
 - incentives for primary producers to facilitate and fund biodiversity conservation works
 - environmental surveying, mapping and monitoring for planning and public use
 - identification and protection of flora and fauna and regional ecosystem types that are endangered and unique to the catchment
 - sustainable management of regional ecosystems
 - increased understanding of the relationship between near-natural flows and biodiversity conservation
 - increased understanding of the relationships between grazing animals, grazing management and biodiversity conservation
 - increased understanding of the past, present, and future impact of humans on natural resources and the environment.
- Improve knowledge on the role of biodiversity in maintaining a healthy environment.
 - Encourage or instigate research projects and initiatives that:
 - determine the positive and negative roles of fire in integrated landscape management



- determine the extent of wetland areas dependent on flows
- determine the distribution and abundance of groundwater dependent ecosystems
- determine the positive and negative roles of mechanical treatment in integrated landscape management
- monitor flora and fauna populations.



Subprogram: Contamination and Waste Management

Objective

Environmentally appropriate waste and chemical management.

Strategy for Influence

- Encourage:
 - regular disposal services for unwanted farm and industrial chemicals
 - best practice management wherever chemicals are used or transported
 - best practice management waste disposal by local government, boards, industry and individuals.
- Encourage research and development on sustainable power sources to supplement traditional means that use non-renewable resources.



Subprogram: Pest Management

Objective

A cross-catchments, cross-state border approach to pest management which uses resources more efficiently to reduce exotic weed spread and infestation, and feral animal numbers.

Strategy for Direct Actions

- Coordinate the development of a cross-catchment and cross-state border weed initiative incorporating:
 - education (including identifying and managing weeds and preventing their introduction)
 - eradication, control and spread prevention (dependent on regions)
 - collaboration with and between existing and specially formed groups
 - effective use of existing resources
 - practical linkages between government departments in the same and different jurisdictions, shire councils and Marree Soil Conservation Board
 - seeking resources to extend on-ground work
 - mutual obligation agreements.

Actions

- Invite Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Committee to join Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee in a cross-catchments weed management partnership. ***Achieved***
- Liaise with all stakeholders in developing the Cooper's Creek and Georgina/Diamantina Cross-Catchments Weeds Initiative. ***Commenced and Continuing***



- Coordinate workshops to develop the Cross-Catchments Weeds Initiative. **Commenced and Continuing**
- Meet with the Queensland Ministers for the Environment and for Primary Industries to acquaint them with the Cross-Catchments Weeds Initiative. **Achieved**
- Provide a forum for the exchange of information and other resources between Queensland, Northern Territory and South Australian Government Departments, shire councils, Maree Soil Conservation Board and other stakeholders. **Commenced**
- Facilitate the establishment of a Central Queensland stock routes supervisors group. **Achieved**
- Work with stakeholders on the development of education and awareness material. **Commenced**
- Develop an action plan with Georgina/Diamantina Catchment Committee to support this strategy. **November 2000**

Strategies for Influence

- Encourage:
 - recognition of pest management as an important component in integrated natural resource management, including its incorporation into the Property Management Planning program
 - inclusion of pests in the assessment of stocking rates and safe carrying capacities
 - consistency in state and federal government policies, funding and support programs for pest management.
- Encourage new and continuing research into non-chemical methods of pest control.



MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Goal The Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan achieving its objectives.

Objective

To complete and implement the Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan.

Strategies

- Develop a monitoring and evaluation component for each subprogram within the Cooper's Creek Strategic Plan. **October 2000 and Continuing Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee**
- Evaluate progress on actions and action plans. **Every six months Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee**
- Review effectiveness of objectives and strategies in dealing with the issues. **Annually Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee**
- Identify and prioritise objectives and strategies and develop action plans, where necessary, for the following 12 months. **Annually Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee**
- Conduct annual committee reviews to ensure even and active participation. **Annually Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee**
- Provide forums and hold public meetings throughout the catchment to gauge and ensure continuing relevance and effectiveness of this strategic plan. **Commenced and Continuing Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee as a group and as Committee members individually; Cooper's Creek Catchment Committee Coordinator**