

Regional plans- an underutilized tool in our conservation toolbox?

HELENE MARSH JCU



EPBC S176 Bioregional plans

- ▶ Minister may prepare plan for bioregion within Commonwealth area *or*
- ▶ Cooperate with State/Territory or their agencies or any other person to create plan for bioregion that is not wholly within Commonwealth area
- ▶ Bioregional Plan is not a legislative instrument but Minister must have regard to a Bioregional Plan in making any decision under EPBC Act to which the plan relevant

S176

- ▶ Plan may include provisions for:
 - ▶ **Components of biodiversity**, distribution, conservation status
 - ▶ **Objectives relating to biodiversity** and other values
 - ▶ Important **economic and social values**
 - ▶ **Heritage** values of places
 - ▶ Mechanisms for **community involvement**
 - ▶ Measures for **monitoring and reviewing** plan

Limitations

- ▶ To meet S270 a Bioregional Plan needs to contain specific and detailed information on all the listed species and ecological communities for which it will be adopted.
- ▶ If Bioregional Plan does **not** contain this information, including all relevant actions for each species, and the sites in which they should occur, then it **cannot** be adopted as a Regional Recovery Plan (RRP).
- ▶ While some EPBC-listed threatened species or ECs restricted to the area covered by a RRP, many are not. Some may also be covered by existing single or multi-species recovery plans.

Questions?

- ▶ Q1 *Is it possible for a species or EC to be covered by more than one recovery plan under the EPBC Act – for example, a single species plan and a Bioregional Plan?*
- ▶ Answer: Yes.

- ▶ Q2 *Can a Bioregional Plan be made or adopted for a threatened species or EC if only part of the range of that entity occurs within the region?*
- ▶ Answer: Yes

History under EPBC

Following Ministerial approval in 2002, plans developed for:

- ▶ Adelaide and Mount Lofty Ranges,
 - ▶ South Coast of Western Australia
 - ▶ New South Wales Northern Rivers regions,
 - ▶ Border Ranges,
 - ▶ Lord Howe Island,
 - ▶ Norfolk Island,
 - ▶ King Island
 - ▶ Christmas Island.
- ▶ 2009 national workshop to review progress on Regional Recovery Planning as the basis for developing a Regional Recovery Planning model

Lessons learned from trials

- ▶ \$ for planning and implementation must be in place for exercise to be worthwhile
- ▶ Appropriate spatial scale needs to be identified
- ▶ Community engagement crucial
- ▶ Information management critical

Hawke Review of EPBC Act 2009 recommended:

- ▶ expansion of the role of Bioregional Plans
- ▶ strengthening the process for creating such plans, so they are more substantial and robust as part of a strengthened package of strategic measures to conserve protected matters at a range of appropriate scales.
- ▶ that EPBC Act be amended to:
 - (i) change the terminology from 'Bioregional Plans' to 'Regional Plans'
 - (ii) allow the Commonwealth to unilaterally develop Regional Plans; and
 - (iii) ensure that the process for delineating a region for the purpose of the Act is flexible.

Advantages

Potential to:

1. Integrate with other planning processes
 2. Prioritise and integrate management of threatened species/communities and threat abatement with other biodiversity and land management considerations
 3. Manage for biodiversity at multiple scales- a systems landscape approach
- ▶ Wentworth Group has recently done considerable work on this approach including estimating potential for job creation in regional areas

Questions

1. Should Regional Plans:
 - a) be revived as another tool in the biodiversity conservation toolbox?
 - b) be used to invigorate NRM at regional scales?
 - c) become legislative instruments with the regulatory status of recovery plans?

2. What would be required to:
 - a) implement such an approach with appropriate Quality Standards?
 - b) generate the required political will for long-term investment?

